



Insights on Reconciliation and Action:

**TRC92 INDIGENOUS YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT SOCIAL
INNOVATION LAB**



United Way
Winnipeg



Insights on Reconciliation and Action:

TRC92 INDIGENOUS YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SOCIAL
INNOVATION LAB

We respectfully acknowledge the land on which we gathered for the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative work is the ancestral lands of Treaty One Territory—original land of the Cree, Ojibway, Dene, and Dakota peoples, and Homeland of the Métis Nation.

We acknowledge the clean water we drink comes from Shoal Lake 39 and 40 First Nations, on Treaty 3 Territory, and we acknowledge and honour Treaty 5 Territory, where our electricity is produced.

We acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, a legacy still with us today, and we commit to continuing our meaningful connection, to building and maintaining respectful and reciprocal relationships, and to moving forward in a spirit of collaboration.

Celebrating Our Team

Cameron Adams	Entrepreneur / Educator
Crystal Anderson	NFI Group
Jill Andres	Creating Value
Dave Angus	Johnston Group
Jordan Berens	Indigenous Youth Participant
Caryn Birch	Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)
Jenna Buckley	Wawanesa
Charli Champagne	NFI Group*
Melanie Ching	MB Government - Department of Families
Kimber Corthey	The Momentum Centre
Alana Cuma	Johnston Group
Jamie Dumont	Independent Consultant
Rhonda Forgues	Independent Consultant
Craig Goldstein	Birchwood Automotive Group*
Sabrina Govier	Assiniboine Credit Union
Kimberley Gray	Wawanesa
Justin Huntinghawk	Indigenous Youth Participant/SEED Winnipeg*
Marnie Jackson	Johnston Group
Kaila Johnston	National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
Sherman Kong	AMIK
Kathleen Kulik	The Link*
K.T. Monkman	Indigenous Youth Participant
Sandra Oakley	Union Representative
Frank Parkes	Red River College Polytechnic* and Community Advocate
Andrew Proux-Courchene	Indigenous Youth Participant/SEED Winnipeg
Rob Read	Bison Fire
Loren Remillard	Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce
Cassy Regier	Graphic Designer
Laksha "Lucky" Sannasganna	The Link*
Clayton Sandy	Indigenous Knowledge Keeper
Nicole Stewart	Payworks
Kailee Still	Johnston Group
Joe Thompson	Indigenous Knowledge Keeper
Kristin Tooth	Bank of Montreal
Joel Waterman	Inn At the Forks / Sparrow Hotels
Misty Woodhouse	Indigenous Youth Participant

**Participant now works for a different organization.*

***We'd like to acknowledge Leading4impact's contributions to the evaluation components of this initiative which are included in this report.*

Contents

Executive Summary	6
Introduction	7
I. Indigenous Youth Employment	7
II. Call to Action #92	8
III. The Business Case for Reconciliation	8
Our Approach	9
What is a Social Innovation Lab?	10
I. TRC92 Youth Employment Lab	11
II. TRC92 Youth Employment Lab Areas of Focus	16
III. TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment: Evaluation Framework	18
IV. TRC92 Youth Employment Social Innovation Lab Approach: Key Takeaways	18
The Work	20
I. Understanding the Challenge	20
II. Identifying Solutions to the Challenge	20
III. TRC92 Youth Employment Lab Prototype Summary	23
Prototype Testing and Discussions	24
I. Testing the Not Your Typical Job Fair (NYTJF) Prototype	24
II. Recommendations & Potential Solutions	27
III. Not Your Typical Job Fair Prototype Testing: Key Takeaways	28
IV. Prototype Discussion: Human Resource Policy Collaboration	29
V. Human Resource Policy Collaboration: Key Takeaways:	29
VI. Other Prototype Opportunities	29
Lab Evaluation and Participant Feedback	31
I. Individual and Group Changes	31
II. Youth Voices	32
III. Workshop Evaluations	32
Conclusion & Ongoing Efforts	34
Additional Resources	35

We focus on youth employment through an Indigenous lens as a vital step towards reconciliation and a key driver for lasting change.

Executive Summary

Established in 2007, the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC), an initiative of United Way Winnipeg, brings together leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to tackle the root causes of poverty in Winnipeg.

More recently, the WPRC sought to help Winnipeggers find opportunities for meaningful, permanent work—a critical leverage point for breaking the cycle of poverty.

With the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, particularly Call to Action #92, the WPRC launched the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative.

This initiative sought to transform the employment landscape for young Indigenous job seekers by helping them find and maintain a steady income, creating more supportive and inclusive workplaces, offering transitional support for new hires, and exploring financial support models to bridge the gap between pre-employment and employment.

By bringing stakeholders together to co-create solutions to the complex challenges faced by young Indigenous job seekers, we discovered these key insights:

- Indigenous young people face challenges that employers are often unaware of, impacting their job search and retention in the workplace.
- Young job seekers experience feelings of overwhelm, uncertainty, and shame due to the challenges they face. Wraparound supports at both the community and workplace levels are essential during the transition to employment and afterward.
- Creating culturally safe workplaces—where Indigenous people feel comfortable, respected, and valued—requires comprehensive efforts. It must go beyond merely educating staff on Truth and Reconciliation to providing safe physical spaces, supportive policies, Indigenous mentors, flexible working hours, and more.

Because the success of Indigenous youth and Manitoba companies are interconnected, the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative demonstrates how collective efforts are necessary to transform employment barriers and work towards reconciliation.

While this work began in 2018, this report summarizes our past two years of social innovation lab work, the approaches we used, and the context of Winnipeg at the time. It offers a valuable business case for reconciliation and key insights for organizations seeking collective impact and action.

Lastly, it sheds light on the challenges faced by young Indigenous people during their transition into employment, how communities and businesses can provide additional support, and the vision for moving this critical work forward.

Introduction

United Way Winnipeg uniquely understands the value of collective impact thanks to its long-standing practice of convening leaders across all sectors. The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC), initiated by United Way Winnipeg and led by a dedicated group of volunteers, has been a critical and collaborative force for tackling the root causes of poverty and other complex social challenges to transform our community.

Most recently, and in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #92, the WPRC worked closely with corporate sector leaders to take action focused on equitable access to jobs, training, and educational opportunities for Indigenous youth. Beginning in 2018, the WPRC convened educational opportunities for organizations representing a broad range of business sectors. These opportunities included conversations with Indigenous young people, community leaders, and government officials. The intent was to establish a shared understanding of "why" reconciliation is important that would facilitate a collaborative move forward to informed and actionable steps that spark lasting change.

Over the last two years, the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative used a Social Innovation Lab approach—an action-oriented, hands-on method of driving change. Through this approach, stakeholders worked together to develop high-potential solutions to the complex challenges faced by Indigenous youth seeking employment. This report summarizes our past two years of work.

Overall, the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative is a vital step towards tackling poverty by creating inclusive, supportive, and sustainable employment opportunities for Indigenous youth in Winnipeg—which has a real, positive, cascading effect on our entire community.

Research and Context

I. INDIGENOUS YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Manitoba has the largest gap in employment rates between non-Indigenous and First Nations populations of all the provinces and territories.

According to Statistics Canada (2020), the non-Indigenous employment rate in Manitoba in 2016 was 79.6 percent, whereas the employment rate for Indigenous people living off reserve was 52.4 percent. This gap in employment (as well as gaps in early childhood opportunities and housing) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Manitoba is a symptom of a much deeper systemic challenge.

¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Retrieved from http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf

² Schrumm, A., Bell, S., & Smith, T. (2021, July 13). Building Bandwidth: Preparing Indigenous youth for a digital future. RBC Thought Leadership. Retrieved from https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/building-bandwidth-preparing-indigenous-youth-for-a-digital-future/?_ga=2.224400669.687214898.1629339993-969167662.1629339993

³ Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Population. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/Page.cfm?lang=E&topic=8&dguid=2021A00054611040>

⁴ Government of Canada. (2022, September 21). Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed. The Daily- https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm?utm_source=cst&utm_medium=smo&utm_campaign=statcan-2021census-diss-R5-22-23-en

⁵ Schrumm, A., Bell, S., & Smith, T. (2021, July 13). Building Bandwidth: Preparing Indigenous youth for a digital future. RBC Thought Leadership. Retrieved from https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/building-bandwidth-preparing-indigenous-youth-for-a-digital-future/?_ga=2.224400669.687214898.1629339993-969167662.1629339993

II. CALL TO ACTION #92

Call to Action #92 addresses the role of the corporate sector in reconciliation:

[The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls] upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

- iii. *Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.*
- iv. *Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.*
- v. *Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism (p.306)*¹

III. THE BUSINESS CASE FOR RECONCILIATION

Beyond the moral imperative of narrowing the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, this work also has a strong business imperative.

At the time of this project, the 2016 census data stated that at 12 percent, Winnipeg has the largest Indigenous population of all major cities in Canada – a figure that will continue to increase, as the Indigenous population is growing significantly faster than the non-Indigenous population. Census data between 2011 and 2016 shows that the Indigenous population in Winnipeg grew by 16.5 percent compared to a 4.9 percent increase in the non-Indigenous population.

Canadian figures indicate that over the next decade, 750,000 Indigenous youth will move through the education system and into early careers². The 2021 census data shows that these numbers are holding strong and that Winnipeg continues to have the largest urban Indigenous population of any city across the country, making up 12.4% of the population³. Provincially, Manitoba’s population had the highest share of Indigenous people of any province at 18.1%⁴.

Moreover, Indigenous youth are the fastest-growing cohort of Canadian youth, expanding at a rate four times that of the non-Indigenous population. Here in Manitoba, nearly one-third of all youth are Indigenous⁵ and, in general, are much younger than the non-Indigenous population.

With existing labour shortages in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and hospitality, there is vast potential for companies committed to understanding the truth of our shared history to actively engage in reconciliation in a way that specifically benefits Indigenous young people. Winnipeg’s success and the success of Indigenous youth are inextricably linked.

It is not enough for companies to only focus on increasing recruitment. Companies must also work to create workplaces that support the retention and advancement of Indigenous young people within a context that aligns with Indigenous values, perspectives, and worldviews. After all, companies that hire Indigenous young people without doing the work to create culturally safe environments can cause real harm—both to employees and the company’s brand and reputation.

To deeply understand challenges like these, we need to learn from people with lived experience and knowledge. For this initiative, that meant fostering authentic and respectful relationships between business leaders, government, community trainers, Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous youth. It also meant creating spaces and capacities to understand, reimagine, and take action to transform barriers to employment.

Our Approach

Strategies

The work of the United Way Winnipeg was guided by three integrated strategies shaped by Call to Action #92. These strategies include: Workplace Education, Workplace Transformation, and Transition to Employment.

a. Workplace Education

Members of the Employer Consortium* were taught about our nation’s legacy of colonization, outlining how strategies like residential school triggered a cascade of intersecting oppressions for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people—such as intergenerational trauma, compromised health outcomes, disproportionate poverty, and barriers to basic human rights like employment and housing.

Additionally, workplaces learned about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, treaties, Indigenous rights and law, conflict resolution, anti-racism, and more.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada’s Final Report, “Education must remedy the gaps in historical knowledge that perpetuate ignorance and racism. ... Canadians must learn about the history and legacy of residential schools in ways that change both minds and hearts.” (p. 234). That’s why United Way Winnipeg and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) partnered to develop an experiential learning journey for members of the Employer Consortium, shared with corporations across Canada to amplify the impact of these efforts beyond Winnipeg.

Indigenous employment is a complex opportunity—one that requires employers to go beyond surface-level solutions to transform underlying structural barriers to employment.

* Learn more about the Employer Consortium on [page 13](#).

Culturally safe workplaces are free from discrimination and actively promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice. In this context, that means listening to and learning from Indigenous young people so they feel seen, respected, and valued. It also involves taking meaningful action to eliminate the barriers they may face, embrace their values, and create opportunities for them to thrive.

Building culturally safe workplaces is a meaningful way of working toward reconciliation, helping to identify, reduce and eliminate barriers and foster diversity, equity and inclusion in our relationships and systemic practices.

Social Innovation Labs are a collaborative, action-oriented, hands-on approach to creating change.

b. Workplace Transformation

Striving for transformational change is difficult. That’s why it requires us to work united with a community of like-minded people from different backgrounds with shared values and visions.

Companies joining the Employer Consortium came from different points in their journeys toward Truth and Reconciliation. Each asked critical questions, shared their successes and lessons from what has not worked, listened and learned from each other, and walked away with new ideas and ways of thinking.

These engaging workshop experiences and learnings translated into a practical corporate context. For example, when employers learned that sacred ceremonies at the heart of Indigenous cultures, law, and political life were outlawed by the federal government, participants discussed ways to support Indigenous employees who wished to participate in ceremonies and the internal policies needed.

c. Transition to Employment

Informed by the language of Call to Action #92, this third strategy focuses on connecting Indigenous young people aged 18 to 29 with jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector. It also considers the various supports required to find, transition successfully into, and maintain meaningful work.

For example, starting a new job can be expensive. At a minimum, most new jobs require some type of uniform or office attire that must be purchased before an employee’s first paycheque—which can feel impossible for someone struggling to put food on the table and pay their rent.

Additional barriers could include finding reliable child care, accessing transportation, and navigating a new workplace and culture without the proper guidance and support.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB?

Social Innovation Labs connect individual efforts with collective action.

Participants come together to deeply understand a challenge from multiple perspectives, carefully listen to all those affected, identify patterns and structures that create barriers, and then generate, test, and implement high-potential solutions.

The collaborative, cross-sectoral relationships built and the knowledge, capacities and skills developed are just as important as the solutions generated.

Below, you will find the different groups that formed the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab and how their roles contributed to the overall process.

I. TRC92 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LAB

The TRC92 Youth Employment Lab consisted of three key groups, each playing essential roles in the lab process:

Indigenous Young People:

Indigenous young people were at the heart of the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab. As the primary stakeholders, their lived experiences, perspectives, and voices were central to the lab’s work. Their input and feedback provided invaluable insights into the challenges they face when seeking employment and navigating the transition into the workforce.

Stakeholders from Community, Business, and Government:

Representatives from various sectors, including community organizations, businesses, and government agencies, brought their expertise, resources, and diverse perspectives to the lab. Their active participation ensured that the solutions developed were well-rounded and responsive to the complex challenges faced by Indigenous youth in the job market.

United Way Winnipeg Facilitators and Organizers:

United Way Winnipeg facilitated and guided the lab process, ensuring that all key groups were effectively engaged and objectives were met. United Way Winnipeg brought their knowledge and experience in addressing poverty-related issues and collective impact approaches to support the lab’s activities.

By fostering a space for meaningful dialogue and collaboration, these three key groups co-created solutions to the unique challenges faced by Indigenous youth and developed actionable plans to promote their successful employment journeys.

These three key groups were members of one or more of the following teams: the guide group, youth circles, and the co-creation team. The groups are defined as:

a. Guide Group

A predominately Indigenous group, comprised of Indigenous young people, community trainers, employers, and Indigenous people with experience related to the TRC’s Call to Action #92 and/or Indigenous employment. The group’s role was to ensure the lab remained grounded in its purpose and values, providing insights, advice, and direction to the work emerging from the lab.

b. Youth Circles

Convened through community trainers, youth circles engaged young Indigenous job seekers currently enrolled in an employment program and made sure the work emerging from the lab process was reflective of realities facing Indigenous job seekers.

c. Co-Creation Team

The lab’s core team, comprised of Indigenous young people, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, community trainers, government representatives, employers, and subject matter experts, met frequently to iterate potential solutions.

What is a community trainer?

A community trainer is someone at a community-based organization that offers pre-employment and employment support to youth. The community trainers we worked with also offer wraparound supports, including housing, mental health, and transportation.

⁶McKercher, K.A. (2020). Beyond Sticky Notes: Doing Co-design for Real: Mindsets, Methods & Movements. Sydney, Australia: Beyond Sticky Notes.

Youth Engagement

While working alongside young people who face multiple barriers, it is essential to recognize the importance of creating a safe space and using a trauma-informed approach. Each co-creation workshop, guide group meeting, and youth circle created a culturally safe space, built relationships and trust, gave the option to participate and different methods of participation, and provided food—all while being aware of power differentials and the use of inclusive and safe language.

A trauma-informed lens and actively working to reduce barriers for young people means taking into account our colonial history and context. This includes acknowledging the history of academia and institutions engaging with Indigenous communities in an extractive manner and treating Indigenous people as “sources” of data.

Therefore, every meeting began with practicing reciprocity, including providing a meal for the group to share. Food helps reduce barriers and is part of our ongoing commitment to reconciliation and valuing each person’s unique perspective, knowledge, and lived experience. Youth were also provided honoraria, daycare expenses, and travel compensation for each meeting and workshop they attended.

How We Worked Together

MODEL OF CARE

The TRC92 Youth Employment Lab was guided by Kelly Ann McKercher’s book, Beyond Sticky Notes: Doing Co-design for Real: Mindsets, Methods & Movements. McKercher’s book outlines how to care for one another and create meaningful, authentic, and collaborative spaces.

McKercher explains that “co-design is more than a process. It is a social movement focused on challenging and changing inequitable power structures. Designing with, not for people.”⁶ These principles were applied throughout the lab process, as well as our engagement approaches.

The Initial Step: Partnering with NFI Group

NFI Group is one of the world’s largest bus and coach manufacturers located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As a private sector member in the Employer Consortium, they recognized the significance of their role in contributing to the three guiding strategies of the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative.

1. Building Respectful Relationships

NFI demonstrated a commitment to building respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and individuals. This involved engaging in open and honest communication, actively listening to the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous youth, and acknowledging historical and systemic challenges.

2. Equitable Access to Jobs and Training

NFI pledged to ensure Indigenous youth have equitable access to job opportunities and training within their organization. This means actively working to remove barriers that may prevent Indigenous youth from entering the workforce and providing them with the necessary resources and support to thrive in their roles.

3. Developing Intercultural Competencies

Recognizing the importance of intercultural understanding and cooperation, NFI committed to fostering a workplace culture that values diversity, promotes inclusivity, and encourages learning and understanding across different cultural backgrounds.

NFI’s participation demonstrated their eagerness to move beyond passive awareness of reconciliation issues and take meaningful action to address the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. They dedicated the necessary resources to support the lab’s initiatives and were committed to making a lasting impact.

Additionally, NFI shows the essential role companies play in advancing Truth and Reconciliation. By actively participating in efforts to create equitable and inclusive workplaces, they contribute to broader societal changes and pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future for Indigenous youth in Manitoba.

Employer Consortium

This diverse, cross-sectoral group of over 30 companies, known as the Employer Consortium, provided various entry points into employment and opportunities for job seekers.

These companies learned about reconciliation, systems change, and the structural challenges faced by Indigenous young people in finding and maintaining employment, including the reasons that led them to leave a workplace.

By listening to and understanding the perspectives of Indigenous youth, consortium members could develop informed strategies and action plans within their own companies so they can become more inclusive and supportive workplaces offering Indigenous youth equitable access to job opportunities and resources to thrive.

In coming together for the lab process, the Employer Consortium demonstrated a commitment to taking real action in pursuit of reconciliation. Their collective efforts exemplify the transformative power of cross-sector collaboration and the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for Indigenous youth in the workforce.

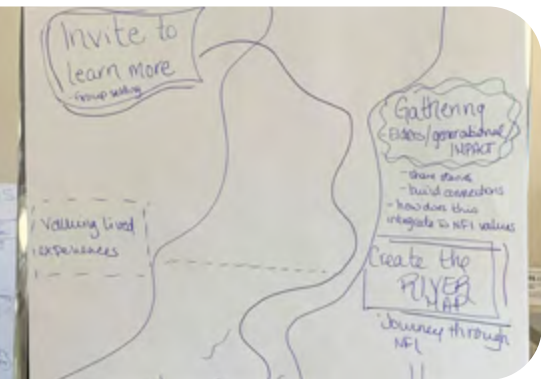
Guide Group

Forming the guide group was an essential step in the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab. The members of this group were chosen based on their diverse perspectives and experiences with employing Indigenous young people, as well as their evident leadership roles in the community. The guide group provided invaluable insights and helped ground the initiative in the needs and experiences of Indigenous youth.



By involving the guide group, the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab demonstrated its commitment to inclusion, respect, meaningful compensation, and genuine collaboration with Indigenous youth and community leaders.

Engaging the co-creation team in a collaborative and inclusive way showed the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab’s commitment to meaningful engagement and partnership, ultimately leading to well-informed and culturally responsive strategies.



Building trust and connection within the guide group was a priority during the initial meetings. Strategies to build trust and connection included organizing small group discussions, icebreaker activities, and sharing meals and stories together. These activities helped create a safe and supportive environment where difficult conversations could take place openly and respectfully.

The guide group met after each co-creation workshop, allowing them to debrief on the outcomes, receive feedback on the progress of the initiative, and plan for future workshops or activities. Their active involvement throughout the lab process ensured their perspectives were embedded in the development of strategies and solutions.

The involvement of youth in the guide group was particularly valuable. To acknowledge their contributions and commitment, the youth members received honoraria for their time after each meeting. Additionally, they were compensated for any travel expenses incurred to and from the meetings, recognizing the importance of ensuring their meaningful participation in the process.

Co-Creation Team

The co-creation team was responsible for driving the lab process forward by collaboratively shaping the strategies and solutions to address the challenges faced by Indigenous youth seeking employment. Comprised of individuals intentionally selected for their unique perspectives, diverse experiences, and skillsets, this team ensured a well-rounded approach to the work.

Co-creation team meetings were structured in a workshop format, incorporating a mix of small group discussions, group activities, and team-building exercises. This format promoted active engagement and equal opportunities for members to contribute their ideas and insights.

Within a safe and open space for feedback, participants were invited to share their thoughts and reflections at the end of each workshop, which fostered transparency and allowed for adjustments based on the input shared.

Each workshop was assessed by a third-party organization, Leading4impact, to impartially evaluate the process, including the effectiveness of the workshops and opportunities for improvement.

United Way Winnipeg played a supportive and convening role throughout the workshops. They provided the necessary resources and coordination to facilitate the smooth functioning of the co-creation team meetings.

To establish a sense of connection and cultural safety within the team, each workshop was initiated and concluded by Indigenous youth co-facilitators. These co-facilitators built connections among the team members before diving into the work, and they closed each workshop with reflections on the time spent together.

Including Indigenous youth co-facilitators in this way emphasized the significance of Indigenous leadership and perspectives in the lab process, grounding the co-creation team in cultural understanding and sensitivity.

Both groups had additional check-ins and smaller planning sessions in between to work on specific tasks or to receive insights related to a specific area of focus.

Prototyping

A key part of the lab process is prototyping—a way to develop, test and improve promising ideas at an early stage before committing a lot of resources to implementation.

Prototypes can range in scope and scale to include short-term ideas designed to generate early wins, helping build enthusiasm and momentum towards the larger, longer-term solutions aimed at organizational and systems change. These can take different forms, such as a video, sketch, story, or model.

Once we had outlined our prototypes, we chose to test our ideas. United Way Winnipeg identified promising solutions that could be shared and scaled by others. A number of prototypes emerged throughout the lab, which can be found in the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab Prototype Summary on page 19.

Participant Engagement

Engagement with participants throughout the lab process focused on centring Indigenous young people, valuing lived experience, ensuring diverse perspectives were being heard, capacity building, and prioritizing relationships through respect and reciprocity. Both youth and non-youth participants highlighted the ways this was accomplished.

: “I have never been in anything like this. The fact that I can go meet
: with these people, and they listen.”
: -YOUTH PARTICIPANT

Youth Circles

Five youth circles were convened through NorWest Co-op Community Health’s Youth Employment Supports for Success Program (YESS). The circles connected young Indigenous job seekers around solutions emerging from the lab.

Youth circles created space for young job seekers to share insights and feedback about the lab and whether the emerging solutions reflected the reality they face navigating employment. Each youth circle had a different cohort of job seekers representing diverse perspectives and experiences.

Youth circles were designed to be barrier-free to allow engagement to be as accessible as possible. Some approaches to reducing barriers included human-centred design activities, fostering different modes of engagement through a variety of methods (e.g., building, speaking, writing, drawing) and inviting a young Indigenous co-facilitator to lead a Youth Circle.

Capacity building is another important element of the work. Indigenous co-facilitators were invited to join each youth circle as an opportunity to exercise leadership roles, strengthen facilitation skills, share personal experiences, and co-create solutions to challenges they face.

We valued this way of working as it fostered a sense of ownership among young people while also minimizing tokenism. Indigenous co-facilitators were provided honoraria for each youth circle they attended as a sign of respect and recognition for the time, knowledge, and skills they bring.



II. TRC92 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LAB AREAS OF FOCUS

The TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative focused on three areas that emerged through extensive consultation and co-creation sessions with the lab participants (Indigenous job seekers, community trainers, employers, and government). These were:

- a. **Culturally Safe Companies**
Goal: Culturally safe companies where Indigenous young people (aged 18-29) have equitable access to jobs, training, and advancement opportunities.
- b. **Transition Support**
Goal: Indigenous young people have the wraparound supports required to transition successfully into a job.
- c. **Bridging Finances**
Goal: The financial gap that exists between pre-employment and employment is bridged so that starting and keeping a job is affordable.

TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative’s Theory of Change

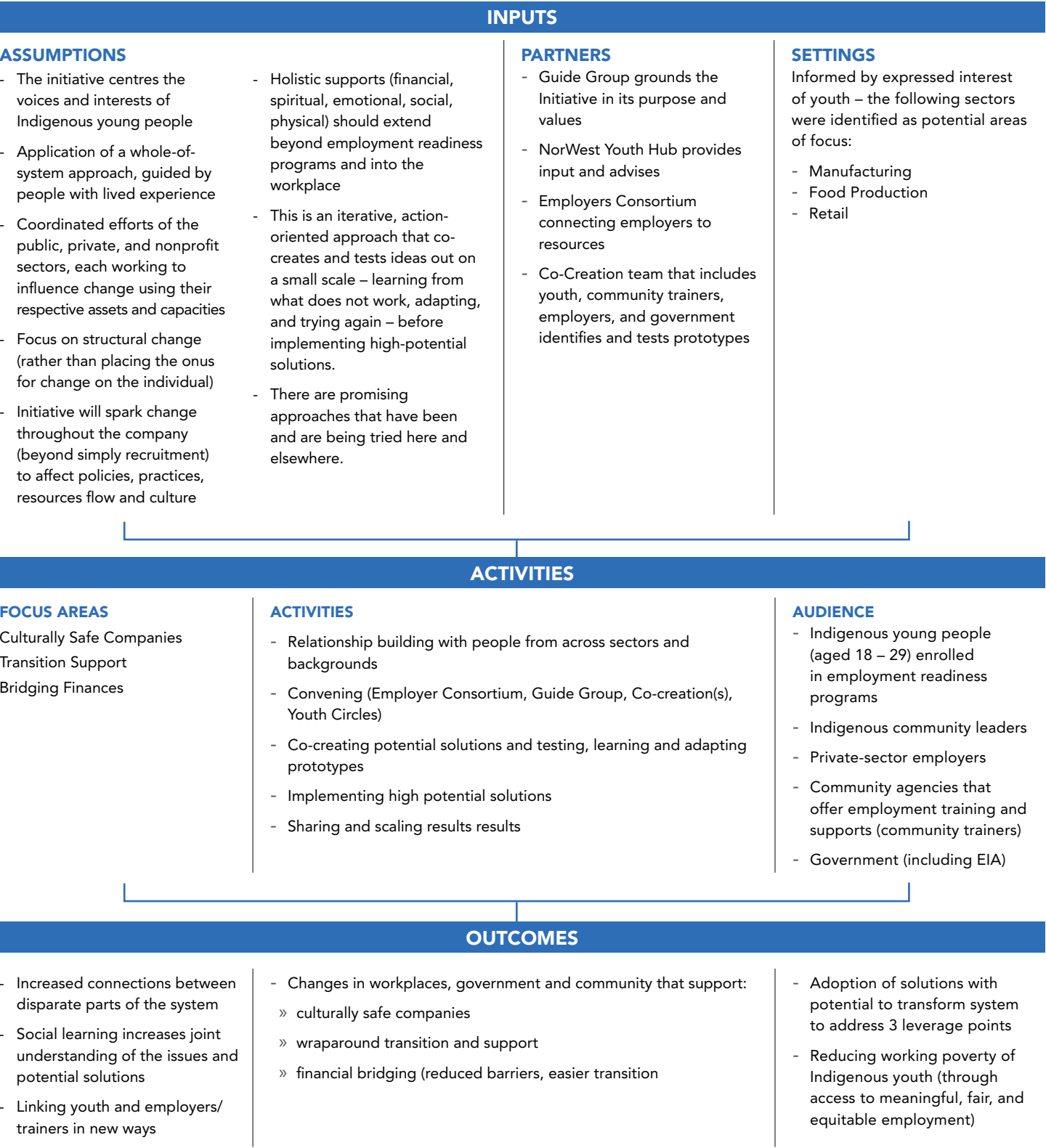
The TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative’s Theory of Change (below) was developed through consultations with the community, business, and government prior to the start of the lab.

The TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative’s theory of change describes our three areas of focus and how a given intervention, or set of interventions, can lead to a specific change. These focus areas were then reaffirmed by the co-creation and the guide group.

As simple as this may seem, there are significant structural barriers (policies, practices, resource flows) that contribute to the complexity of this challenge.

Theory of Change

Goal: To eliminate structural employment barriers facing Indigenous by creating workplaces that attract, retain, and advance Indigenous young people in their careers, using a social innovation lab process.



III. TRC92 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LAB EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Leading4impact developed this evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of this initiative and its process. It provides criteria and methodologies used to evaluate the lab process.

AREA OF FOCUS	DATA SOURCES AND METHODS
Social Innovation Lab Process - Co-creation team engagement - Meaningful youth engagement - Key takeaways	- Youth stories and experiences shared - Workshop evaluations - Reflective practice - Observation
Individual and Group Outcomes - Knowledge and awareness gained - Relationships with and across groups - Policy and practice changes	- Participant surveys - Workshop evaluations - Reflective practice - Observation
Prototype Evaluation - Use developmental evaluation to assess prototype implementation process and outcomes	- Various approaches depending on prototype. Will include surveys, interviews, document review.

IV. TRC92 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LAB APPROACH: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Relationships and Collective Impact

Establishing authentic relationships and building trust was fundamental to the success of the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab. The focus on relationship-building from the outset of the lab process created an environment of collaboration and collective effort. Both the Guide Group and the Co-Creation Team worked together towards their shared goal of addressing the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.

Building strong connections within and between the groups fostered a sense of community and mutual understanding, empowering participants to openly share their experiences. As a result, participants not only achieved the lab’s objectives but also formed new friendships and professional relationships that extended beyond the duration of the initiative.

Using a collective impact lens made a lasting impact on the participants and the communities they represent. Within this framework, stakeholders from different sectors and backgrounds worked together effectively to align their efforts and resources towards a common goal, resulting in a more comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing the issue of Indigenous youth employment.

Youth-Centred Focus

Distinguishing between youth-centred and youth-led was a crucial aspect of the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative from the very beginning. This distinction helps clarify the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in the process.

Youth-Centred:
When the initiative is described as youth-centred, it means the perspectives, needs, and experiences of young people were at the heart of the decision-making and planning processes. Voices of Indigenous youth were actively heard and taken into account throughout the lab process. Companies and stakeholders participating in the lab were encouraged to prioritize the perspectives of young people when co-creating solutions and strategies.

Youth-Led:
While the initiative is youth-centred, it may not necessarily be entirely youth-led. “Youth-led” typically implies young people have direct control and decision-making authority over the entire process. In this context, the distinction meant that while young people’s perspectives were central and their input was highly valued, they were collaborating with other stakeholders—including companies, community trainers, and government representatives—who also played active roles in driving the initiative forward.

Being youth-centred underscored the importance of respecting and valuing the lived experiences and expertise of Indigenous youth. By centring their perspectives, the initiative aimed to create more inclusive and effective solutions that truly reflected the needs and aspirations of young Indigenous job seekers.

The commitment to Call to Action #92 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission demonstrated the initiative’s dedication to advancing reconciliation efforts and addressing the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.

By working collaboratively and centring the perspectives of young people, the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative demonstrated its commitment to reconciliation, seeking to create meaningful and sustainable change in the workforce, narrow the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, and help build a more inclusive and equitable society.

By cultivating a sense of trust, openness, and authentic collaboration, Indigenous youth felt safe and comfortable sharing diverse perspectives and helping co-create valuable and innovative solutions to the barriers they face when seeking employment.

The Work

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

To better understand the journey young people experience completing a pre-employment program up until they find a job, the youth involved in the Youth Circles and Co-Creation Team helped develop the *Youth Journey Map* (Figure 1).

This journey map traced the challenges and barriers facing youth and guided the Co-Creation Team as they explored opportunities to enhance supports in finding employment.

NorWest’s YESS (Youth Employment Supports for Success) program participants helped shape the Youth Journey Map in the following ways:

- provided valuable insights and feedback on expectations, barriers, and desires around employment;
- participated in a journey mapping exercise exploring young people’s experiences at each stage of their employment journey;
- co-created ideas related to the ‘Not Your Typical Job Fair Prototype’;
- shared insights with two human resource managers from NFI Group related to a digital platform prototype connecting young job seekers, community trainers, and employers committed to culturally safe workspaces.

“...actually working alongside [youth] and hearing the barriers and struggles they face, it gives you a different perspective around the type of help that the youth need. When we were in our very first co-creation meeting, we had broken up into two groups. When we came back together and just hearing about the stressors and struggles of the youth, it really made a huge impact on me and changed the work that I wanted to do.”

II. IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGE

Once the challenges and barriers were identified, we moved into workshops that focused on ideating potential solutions. The outcomes are listed in the prototype summary below.

Co-creation team members captured a range of potential prototypes or ideas, working each of these through various stages of design and development. Key to this process was a focus on learning what may or may not work, identifying and fixing potential problems early on, and connecting scalable ideas to those with the capacity to implement them more fully.



The prototypes described on the following page and illustrated in Figure 2 represent potential approaches designed to shift patterns in the three interconnected areas: Culturally Safe Workplaces, Transition Supports, and Bridging Finances. Some of these prototypes are more incremental (“quick wins”), while others aim for longer-term, systemic change that tackles root causes.

TRC92 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE
Prototype Ecosystem



Culturally Safe
Workplaces

Goal: Culturally safe companies where Indigenous young people (aged 18-29) have equitable access to jobs, training, and advancement opportunities.



Transition
Support

Goal: Indigenous young people have the wraparound supports required to transition successfully from pre-employment into employment.



Bridging
Finances

Goal: The financial gap that exists between pre-employment and employment is bridged so that starting and keeping a job is affordable.

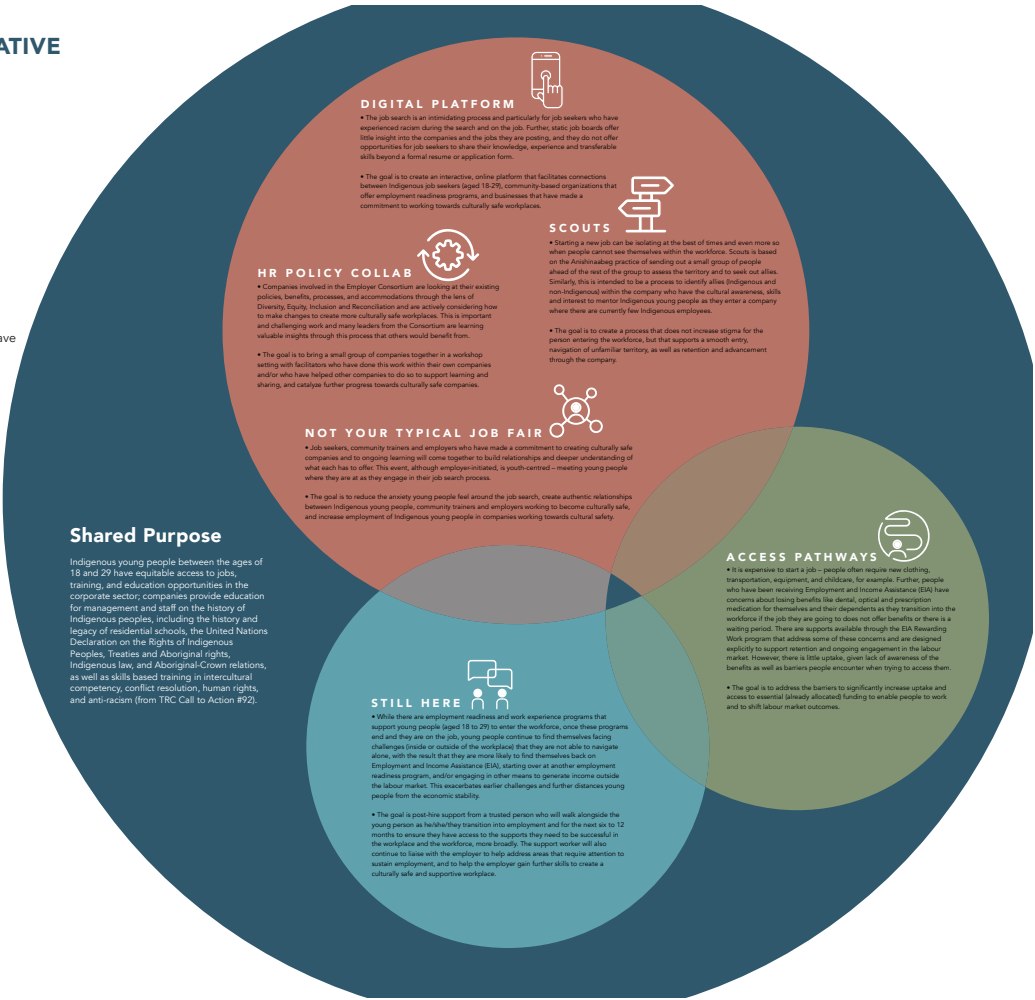


Figure 2 Youth Employment Lab
Prototype Ecosystem

III. TRC92 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LAB PROTOTYPE SUMMARY

This table summarizes the prototypes that emerged during the workshops.

PROTOTYPE	BARRIERS/NEEDS	GOAL	SCALE
Digital Platform	The job search is an intimidating process—particularly for people who have experienced racism during the search and on the job. Static job boards also offer little insight into the companies and the jobs they are posting and don’t offer opportunities for job seekers to share their knowledge, experience, and transferable skills beyond a formal resume or application form.	To create an interactive, online platform that facilitates connections between Indigenous job seekers (aged 18-29), community-based organizations that offer employment readiness programs, and businesses that have committed to working towards culturally safe workplaces.	Long term
Scouts	Starting a new job can be isolating at the best of times—even more so when people don’t see themselves represented within the workforce. Scouts is based on the Anishinaabeg practice of sending out a small group of people ahead of the rest of the group to assess the territory and to seek out allies. In this context, Scouts is intended to be a process to identify allies (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) within the company who have the cultural awareness, skills, and interest to mentor Indigenous young people as they enter a company where there are currently few Indigenous employees.	To create a process that doesn’t stigmatize the person entering the workforce, but helps them smoothly navigate unfamiliar territory, as well as supporting retention and advancement through the company.	Long term
HR Policy Collab	Companies involved in the Employer Consortium are looking at their existing policies, benefits, processes, and accommodations through the lens of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Reconciliation and are actively considering how to make changes to create more culturally safe workplaces. This is important and challenging work, and many leaders from the Consortium are learning valuable insights through this process that others would benefit from.	To bring a small group of companies together in a workshop setting with facilitators who have done this work within their own companies or who have helped other companies to do so to support learning and sharing and catalyze further progress towards culturally safe companies.	Short to Medium term
Not Your Typical Job Fair	Bringing together job seekers, community trainers, and employers who committed to creating culturally safe companies and to ongoing learning so they can build relationships and have a deeper understanding of what each has to offer. This event, although employer-initiated, is youth-centred—meeting young people where they are at as they engage in their job search process.	To reduce the anxiety young people feel around the job search, create authentic relationships between Indigenous young people, community trainers, and employers working to become culturally safe, and increase employment of Indigenous young people in companies working towards cultural safety.	Short term
Still Here	When traditional employment readiness and work experience programs for people aged 18 to 29 end, young people continue to find themselves facing challenges (inside or outside the workplace) that may lead to them going back on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), starting over at another employment readiness program, or engaging in other means to generate income outside the labour market—making economic stability even further out of reach.	Post-hire support from a trusted person who will walk alongside the young person as they transition into employment and for the next six to twelve months, making sure they have the supports they need to be successful in the workplace and beyond. The support worker will also connect with the employer to help sustain employment and strengthen the employer’s skills to create a culturally safe and supportive workplace.	Medium term
Access Pathways	New clothing, transportation, equipment, child care—it’s expensive to start a job. Further, people on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) are concerned about losing benefits like dental, optical, and prescription medication for themselves and their dependents if their new job doesn’t offer benefits or there is a waiting period. While support is available through the EIA Rewarding Work program to support retention and ongoing engagement in the labour market, there is little uptake—given the lack of awareness of the benefits and the barriers people encounter when trying to access them.	To address the current barriers and significantly increase uptake and access to essential (already allocated) funding to enable people to work and to shift labour market outcomes.	Long term

At the job fair, these strategies were used to create an environment where youth would feel comfortable and respected:

- A welcome video, shared before the event, which gave job seekers a sense of what they could expect, including a tour of the space.
- Prior to the job fair, youth were provided with a description of the employers who would be present. To appeal to varying interests, the job fair included a diverse range of industries and employment opportunities.
- Youth were provided with bus tickets in advance.
- Co-hosts, including two young hosts from SEED, helped people feel comfortable throughout the event.
- Employers and job seekers were seated in small groups of 5–6 chairs with no booths or tables so young people could engage in conversation.
- The focus was on connecting with the young people, building relationships, and putting them at ease. Employers did not give any formal presentations or pitches.

Prototype Testing and Discussions

I. TESTING THE NOT YOUR TYPICAL JOB FAIR (NYTJF) PROTOTYPE

Creating culturally safe workplaces is one of three pillars of the TRC92 initiative. It seeks to generate opportunities for Indigenous young people to have equitable access to jobs, training, and advancement opportunities.

Envisioned as an innovative, youth-centred approach to connect youth, employers, and community trainers, the NYTJF prototype was conceived and tested to:

- reduce the anxiety young people feel around the job search;
- forge authentic relationships between Indigenous young people, community trainers and employers working to become culturally safe; and
- increase employment of Indigenous young people in companies working towards cultural safety.

The Co-Creation Team began by visioning, modeling, and critiquing the prototype idea of NYTJF. Through consulting with members of the NorWest Co-op Youth Circle, community trainers, and employers, a vision for the job fair emerged, involving:

- inviting young Indigenous job seekers through existing relationships with community trainers and community organizations.
- inviting young people to bring a friend or family member along to the job fair as support.
- Asking employers to apply to participate by answering the following:
 - » Who is your company?
 - » What actions is your company taking to create a culturally safe workplace?
 - » What positions and benefits do you offer that may draw young people?
 - » How is your company addressing potential barriers to employment (e.g., transportation, childcare, etc.)?



Figure 2: Brainstorming prototype with Lego

- Sharing employer responses with community trainers and the young people prior to the job fair so they could learn more about the companies.
- A mandatory check-in with employers clearly outlining expectations and dress code (casual dress was mandatory).
- A mandatory check-in with community trainers indicating the expectation of employers, what young people could expect, and to answer questions.

The event was held Dec 6, 2022, on the Long Plains First Nation (Urban Reserve) at the Odé Aki (Wyndham Garden) Hotel, with 14 employers representing different industries. All were briefed prior to the event to prepare them for the casual, youth-centred approach (e.g., what to wear, what to expect, who to send, what to prepare). Six community-based youth employment programs and two post-secondary institutions supported 30 young job seekers to attend the event and connect with potential employers.

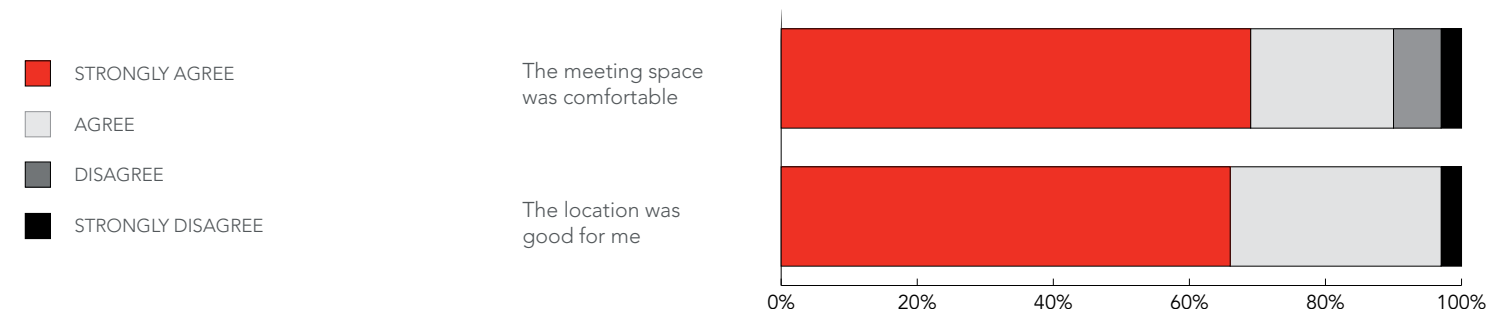


Feedback on the NYTJF from the Youth Participants

All 30 youth completed a post-event survey providing overwhelmingly positive feedback about their experience at the job fair. All youth (100%) strongly agreed or agreed that the event was a positive experience. The highest ratings related to feeling treated with respect (79% strongly agreed, 21% agreed).



A small number of participants (n = 3) reported that they did not feel comfortable in the space, and one felt the location was inconvenient.



Feedback on the NYTJF from Employers and Community Trainers

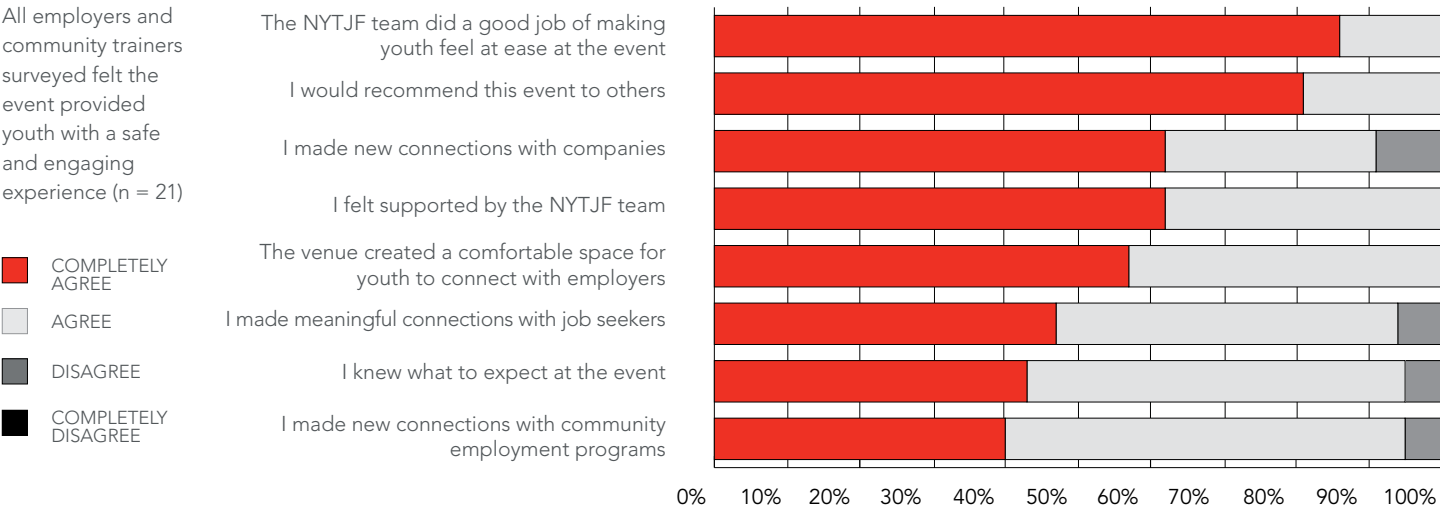
Employers and community trainers also expressed a high level of satisfaction with the event. When asked what they liked best, the most common responses spoke to the welcoming, informal atmosphere, describing the job fair as “relaxed,” “inviting,” and “comfortable.” Both community trainers and employers noted that the event’s structure was conducive to establishing open communication and bridging relationships with youth.

- : “The team from Resource Assistance for Youth who attended said this was one of the safest and well put together, and participants left feeling much more empowered about the experience of looking for work.”
- : “I liked the way the job seekers were greeted and provided an orientation. The staff were easy to identify and very active in engaging the youth. Food was great. The informal approach was clearly an improvement over a more conventional job fair, I could see the connections being made between employers and attendees.”

Employers noted the way the event prepared and empowered youth to take part, sharing information and ‘levelling the playing field’ to reduce barriers between employers and youth.

- : “I enjoyed the informal setup (no barriers). I liked that the job seekers were given information about each company ahead of time I think this helped them prepare questions, and they seemed more engaged.”

When asked what they would change, several employers noted a larger room would make it feel less crowded during peak times. Many employers also requested that future events provide a small side table where they could place a few items and a small sign or banner with their company name. One respondent suggested that in addition to having employers present, community trainers could come prepared to share information about pathways to self-employment as an alternative employment option.



Follow-up NYTJF Discussion with Employers and Community Trainers

Following the job fair, employers expressed challenges connecting with the young job seekers who had specifically identified interest in their workplace. This prompted the need for another session with employers, youth, and community trainers to discuss potential solutions based on the feedback below.

Seven out of 14 employers responded to a request for a follow-up interview. All had contacted interested youth, one youth had scheduled an interview, and a few had returned calls and emails but declined interviews. Many youth did not answer or respond when employers reached out. It was suggested that, where youth are connected to a community organization, follow up be facilitated through community trainers to continue building relationships between youth and employers.

- : “If they are working currently with a community trainer /partner, could there be a way we could reach out to them? A second touch point. We talk about wraparound services so much... and this event was great because it was independent [for the youth] – but a wraparound approach here would be useful as well. Someone to reach out to, to make sure we have the right information or that people are still interested in working with us? We just really don’t want to miss out on someone who wants a job opportunity. So, if there was a way to facilitate that convo [and make it] a little easier.”

Other ways to facilitate and support follow-up connections with youth may include follow-up emails and tips for keeping in touch with employers.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS & POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Below are some ideas for enhancing opportunities for connecting youth and employers post-event. Each suggestion focuses on removing barriers and improving the connections between employers and young job seekers.

1. Strengthening Partnerships between Employers and Community Trainers:

By fostering these relationships, both parties can collaborate to provide more meaningful work placements and employment opportunities for young people. Community trainers can help prepare youth for the workforce, and close cooperation with employers can lead to better alignment of skills and training with the needs of the job market.

2. Alternative Ways of Connecting with Youth:

Employers should consider using alternative communication methods, such as text messaging or social media apps like Facebook or LinkedIn to connect with youth. Many young people may not have access to traditional communication tools like email or phone, and using popular social media platforms can help bridge that gap.

3. **Support Agencies at Job Fairs:**

Job fair organizers could invite representatives from support agencies to be present on-site to support youth attending the fair, helping them navigate challenges and barriers they may encounter during the job-seeking process—a potential game-changer in helping youth access relevant opportunities.

4. **Scheduling Interviews at Job Fairs:**

To simplify the application process and encourage immediate follow up, employers could schedule interviews on-site during job fairs. Private spaces would need to be available for interviews, along with support for youth to prepare in advance. Additionally, providing computers and assistance for online applications could help youth complete the application process efficiently.

By implementing these ideas, employers can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for connecting with youth, ultimately improving the employment prospects for young jobseekers, enhancing the overall effectiveness of job fairs and recruitment events, and demonstrating a commitment to reconciliation through an Indigenous youth employment lens.

III. NOT YOUR TYPICAL JOB FAIR PROTOTYPE TESTING: KEY TAKEAWAYS

To keep youth participants' perspectives at the centre and provide them with comprehensive support during and after job fairs, the following points should be considered:

1. **Redesigning Job Fairs with Youth Perspectives in Mind**

Job fairs should be reimagined to prioritize the needs of youth participants. This includes considering what supports are in place to address the barriers they may encounter once employed. This may involve providing Indigenous cultural education and awareness training for staff, mentorship opportunities from Indigenous leaders within the organization, and spaces to practice cultural ceremonies.

Additionally, putting in place HR policies and wrap-around supports like transportation, daycare, and leaves of absence can help mitigate barriers and help youth successfully transition into the workforce.

2. **Collaborative Efforts between Employers and Community Trainers**

By working closely together, employers and community trainers can provide comprehensive support to youth during their job search and for 3-to-6 months after starting a job so they can more readily navigate the challenges that may arise in the early stages of employment.

3. **Follow Up by Community Organizations**

Community organizations can take the initiative to follow up directly with youth after job fairs to encourage them to maintain contact with employers. This follow up helps foster ongoing engagement and support for youth as they progress in their employment journey.

4. **Communication via Text or Social Media Apps**

Overcoming communication barriers and challenges may require employers to reach out to youth through text or social media apps like Facebook or LinkedIn. These platforms are often more accessible to youth and can facilitate easier and more direct communication.

5. **Providing Additional Support**

Employers should be aware that some youth may lack knowledge about the job search process and may require additional support when connecting with potential employers. Being patient, understanding, and providing the necessary guidance can help bridge this knowledge gap and empower youth to navigate the employment process more effectively.

IV. PROTOTYPE DISCUSSION: HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY COLLABORATION

The roundtable discussion with employers, youth, and community trainers recognized the value of meaningful human resource policies that foster culturally safe and inclusive workplaces. The broad-ranging discussion covered several key areas related to policy development, reconciliation, and the realities of different work environments.

V. HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY COLLABORATION: KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Transportation Barriers and Attendance Policies**

Employees who rely on public transit may face challenges getting to work on time, especially for shift work or jobs in remote locations.

To ensure employees facing transportation barriers are not unfairly penalized or pushed out of the workplace, flexible policies around attendance may be needed. Managers should be encouraged to inquire about transportation needs early in the hiring process and work together to address challenges or provide accommodations for employees who use public transit.

2. **Leaves to Accommodate Cultural Ceremonies and Travel**

Paid and unpaid leaves should recognize and accommodate the need for individuals to travel to their home communities to attend cultural ceremonies and special events.

3. **Equity Lens in Decision-Making**

Adopting an equity lens involves taking into account individual needs and circumstances, rather than managing all situations equally (an equality lens). Employers should train managers and empower them to make decisions guided by organizational vision and values, allowing for more flexible and people-focused approaches.

VI. OTHER PROTOTYPE OPPORTUNITIES

The lab process generated several prototype ideas with the potential for significant impact on employment incomes.

These prototype ideas emerged through conversations and co-creation workshops involving Indigenous young people, community trainers, employers, government, and subject matter experts. United Way Winnipeg’s role has been to facilitate, convene, and provide process design support. The intention is to share these learnings with others and encourage the testing and scaling of these prototypes by different organizations and stakeholders.

Through the implementation and testing of these prototypes, it is expected that they will contribute to creating more equitable and culturally safe workplaces, have a positive impact on employment incomes, and advance the goals of the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative.

The lab's focus on creating actionable and impactful prototypes reflects a commitment to promoting reconciliation and improving employment opportunities for Indigenous youth. The collaborative and inclusive approach employed in the lab process opens doors for innovative solutions and meaningful change in the workforce.

PROTOTYPE	GOAL	STATUS / OPPORTUNITY
Digital Platform	To create an interactive online platform that facilitates connections between Indigenous job seekers (aged 18-29), community-based organizations that offer employment readiness programs, and businesses that have committed to working towards culturally safe workplaces.	Idea shared with AMIK and Our Children’s Medicine as a potential host for the platform. Both organizations currently support Indigenous people in finding employment. A platform similar to Horizon (found here: https://horizonmap.ca/) was recommended but with a focus on employment and wraparound supports for pre- and post-employment.
Scouts	To create a process that does not worsen stigma for the person entering the workforce, but supports a smooth entry as they navigate unfamiliar territory, as well as retention and advancement through the company.	This program would ideally have Indigenous leaders in place at a company to act as mentors. This would require full leadership support from the organizations as well as cultural understanding and practices in place to support Indigenous youth.
Still Here	Post-hire support from a trusted person who will walk alongside the young person as they transition into employment and for the next six-to-12 months to ensure they have access to the support they need to be successful in the workplace and beyond. The support worker will also liaise with the employer to help sustain employment and strengthen the employer’s skills to create a culturally safe and supportive workplace.	The Link: Youth and Family Supports and The Momentum Centre jointly submitted a proposal to the Manitoba Government’s Journey to Independence Fund for funding to test the impact of post-hire support on employment outcomes for young people. A funding decision is pending.
Access Pathways	To address the barriers to significantly increase uptake and access to essential (already allocated) funding to enable people to work and to shift labour market outcomes.	There are supports available through the EIA’s Rewarding Work program addresses employment barriers and is designed explicitly to support retention and ongoing engagement in the labour market. Employers could work with community partners like SEED to learn about the program to share information with new employees.

Lab Evaluation and Participant Feedback

I. INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CHANGES

As active co-creation team members, youth made new connections, gained knowledge and skills, and increased their confidence. By connecting with community agencies (including the Link, RaY, Momentum Centre, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, as well as local business leaders), youth expanded their networks and enhanced opportunities for growth.

- : “Everybody in the office and my home life know that I’m passionate about it, my voice gets higher, I stand taller.”
- : “I’m just really grateful to be a part of this. I was always the type of person that wanted to leave a mark on the world, and this is my mark.”
- : -YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Community trainers and employers unanimously spoke of the insights and knowledge gained, describing the opportunity to “listen to Indigenous youth” as the most significant takeaway. Participants have started to form powerful connections—in one case, jointly securing new funding to implement transition supports beyond employment training and into the workplace.

- : “One of the things we have always done is we really hold our employers responsible for partnering with us and for educating themselves about our youth who come into their work. We work to build those relationships and cross-cultural competencies. This has confirmed that [our organization] is on the right track. We are fierce about that stuff and not scared to speak up. What helped me the most is seeing that there is great support out there and we are all kindred spirits—all working together for something that’s really important.”

In the workplace, NFI has begun to use the co-creation team process as a starting point to change policy and practices, including developing a new anti-racism policy based on examples shared at workshops and reviewing Human Resource policies to reflect the principles of reconciliation.

In consultation with other co-creation team members and employers, NFI is currently working towards more inclusive and culturally informed practices that will benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers. For example, adopting bereavement policies that recognize different approaches to grieving and loss.

NFI has also implemented cultural safety training for leadership. They are actively sharing what they've learned within the NFI group of companies as well as with industry partners.

Having come to the table with a strong commitment and desire to implement changes, NFI's involvement has resulted in connections to youth, Elders, community partners, and resources that have enabled them to affect change.

- : "10% of this would have occurred without the project. Having the
- : Elders, youth voices in the room – we didn't have to go out and
- : find folks."

II. YOUTH VOICES

On post-session evaluations, participants frequently highlighted the strength and value of the youth voices in the room. Similarly, all interviewed participants stressed the importance of grounding action around the experiences and interests of the youth.

- : "Really seeing Indigenous youth at the centre of the whole process.
- : That's the most important thing to me, putting youth participants
- : at the centre – their leadership, voice, thoughts, and insights are
- : what we're there to take action on."
- : "It was a respectful process. Usually, as an older, more experienced
- : person in the room, we take up a lot of the oxygen. The
- : leadership team showed a lot of respect to the youth and created
- : an environment where everybody understood that."

III. WORKSHOP EVALUATIONS

Workshop evaluations indicate participants felt comfortable and welcomed throughout the process, unanimously stating that they felt safe sharing ideas and almost always feeling safe to ask questions.

In follow-up interviews, participants further elaborated on the sense of safety afforded through the co-creation team process. Feeling comfortable and at ease fostered a sense of creativity, encouraging participants to share and explore innovative ideas together. A shared sense of purpose also contributed to the process and progress made.

- : "It was a really supportive environment to create and have
- : safe and meaningful discussions on things that are working
- : and things that aren't."
- : "I'm just really grateful to be a part of this. I was always the
- : type of person that wanted to leave a mark on the world,
- : and this is my mark."

The critical role played by NFI on the co-creation team was noted during interviews. The level of commitment and buy-in demonstrates a willingness to adopt ideas and make positive changes.

- : "Best part: The willingness of employers – I know community
- : trainers and organizations are interested, and I know the UWW
- : folks are really committed, but, to me, the employers are what
- : encourage me the most."

Participants also recognized the key role the facilitators played in leading the process, acknowledging the coordination efforts, the value of bringing key stakeholders together in one place, and amplifying youth voices. Several participants noted that this group felt "different from other groups" in its focus on putting ideas into action.

- : "We are putting words into action. Instead of being part of a
- : group that meets and has discussions, the social innovation lab is
- : a chance to walk the walk and put out tangible outcomes."

Conclusion & Ongoing Efforts

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council's approach to the TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative has illuminated the complexity of poverty and unemployment challenges.

Tackling these issues requires diverse perspectives and active involvement from various sectors, communities, and backgrounds. United Way Winnipeg's unique position enabled meaningful engagement with these groups to envision potential solutions that address the barriers faced by youth.

Supporting Indigenous youth in their transition into paid work is not only a moral imperative but also a business necessity. The initiative identified barriers that hinder this transition while revealing how organizations can support youth on their journey. The collective impact approach fostered connections and alignment of efforts and resources, revealing areas that could transform employment conditions.

The TRC92 Indigenous Youth Employment Initiative recognized the significance of the lab process itself. This involved fostering authentic and respectful relationships among business leaders, government, community trainers, Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous youth. Creating spaces for understanding, reimagining, and taking action to transform barriers in the private sector was key to the lab process.

The Social Innovation Lab achieved positive outcomes by effectively connecting youth, employers, government, and community trainers to to innovate solutions collaboratively. Six brilliant prototypes have been identified, including short-term 'quick wins' and longer-term solutions. United Way Winnipeg continues to support implementation, either as a hands-on partner (e.g., Not Your Typical Job Fair) or by facilitating others in adopting and implementing potential solutions (e.g., Still Here).

Outcomes of the initiative include increased connections, enhanced joint understanding of issues and potential solutions through social learning, and new linkages between youth and employers/trainers.

The work will persist in creating culturally safe companies, providing wraparound and transition supports, and bridging financial gaps for Indigenous youth in workplaces, government, and communities.

We are pleased to share the results of the TRC92 Youth Employment Lab, inviting others to learn and potentially scale the emerging prototypes. Together with the community, we can strengthen our community by improving employment opportunities for Indigenous young people.

Our sincere gratitude extends to everyone who contributed to this report.

Additional Resources

Beyond Sticky Notes, Co-design for Real: Mindsets, Methods and Movements- Kelly Ann McKercher 2020

Celebrating a holiday and 'true inclusion' Winnipeg Free Press <https://unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Celebrating-a-holiday-and-'true-inclusion-Winnipeg-Free-Press.pdf>

Guide to Developing Indigenous Inclusion Policies-Local Employment Planning Council https://unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IW_-The_Inclusion_Policy_Development_Guideonline.pdf

Manitoba Harm Reduction Network. Application and Action: TRC Reading Guide for Non-Indigenous Organizations. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/561d5888e4b0830a0f1ed08b/t/5a9dbe91085229900a9237b8/1520287391654/2018-MRHN-TRCGUIDE-FINAL->

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation <https://nctr.ca>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

TRC#92 Employer Consortium Learning Summary <https://unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/EC-Learning-Summary.pdf>

United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

Voices of Indigenous Youth Leaders on Reconciliation V.2 Bridging Study and Work for Long Term Success-Deloitte https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ca/Documents/fcc/ca-FutureOfCanada-Catalyst_Indigenous_youth_leaders_on_reconciliation_Volume_1-en.pdf?icid=volume-2-article

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Truth and Reconciliation Roadmap <https://winnipeg-chamber.com/trr/>

Winnipeg's Indigenous Accord <https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/indigenous/wia>

