PRO-CURE OR FAUX-CURE?

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ABORIGINAL PROCUREMENT INITIATIVES

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Amanda Hocking

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Pro-Cure or Faux-Cure? A Comparative Analysis of Aboriginal Procurement Initiatives

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Amanda Hocking, Ryerson University

Abstract

In this paper, I seek to answer whether Aboriginal procurement initiatives are valuable to governments and Indigenous businesses. I posit that Aboriginal procurement initiatives are partially effective because they provide opportunities to some Aboriginal businesses, however they are imperfect because not all Aboriginal businesses are able to benefit from them. I present a brief literature review, a jurisdictional scan of these initiatives in Canada and Australia, and a comparative analysis. I find that these initiatives are not meeting the needs of businessowners, especially in building capacity. Aboriginal procurement initiatives are adequately providing employment and capacity-building opportunities for established Aboriginal businesses through experience and networking but are not supporting growth or development of new Aboriginal businesses that lack capacity. Future initiatives should consider working to better address the needs of Aboriginal businesspeople and their communities and addressing the underlying socioeconomic problems that create the economic disparity that necessitates these initiatives.

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“There are very few countries that can say for nearly 150 years they’ve had the same political system without any social breakdown, political upheaval or invasion. We are unique in that regard. **We also have no history of colonialism.** So, we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers, but none of the things that threaten or bother them about the great powers.”

- Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper at the 2009 G20 Summit

~

“The murders of Indigenous men, women and children, and even those yet unborn, were all committed in the colonial pursuit of unearned power and wealth: the theft of lands and natural resources, and control over new trading routes. **The powerful state-propagated myth that colonization was benign**, well-intentioned, inevitable and in the past has not only erased from history the culpability of states for genocidal policies aimed at eliminating “Indians,” but also **renders invisible our collective suffering in the present.**”

- Dr. Pamela Palmater, Mi’kmaw citizen, lawyer, professor in

A Manual for Decolonization

Introduction

Programs and policies known as Aboriginal procurement initiatives have been developed to assist in the growth of Indigenous businesses in Canada over the last quarter century. Though they differ between governments, Aboriginal procurement initiatives can be generally understood as government programs or policies that have been put in place in order to increase the access Aboriginal businesses have to government contract opportunities. Canada was the first country to implement such a program in 1996. Despite their long lifespan and a body of existing research on the economic wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples, there is a gap in the research that fails to evaluate how successful these programs really are and whether or not Aboriginal businesses are benefiting from them. Evidence-based policy-making is becoming the standard of “good governance” in Canada, so it is crucial that programs like Aboriginal procurement initiatives be evaluated in order to either prove their value to the government of the day or to demonstrate the need for a new initiative to be developed.

I posit that Aboriginal procurement initiatives are partially effective because they provide opportunities to some Aboriginal businesses, however they are imperfect because not all Aboriginal businesses are able to benefit from them. In order to explore my hypothesis, I will review the Aboriginal procurement initiatives in Canada at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels where they exist in the form of policies, guidelines, or mandatory procurement initiatives and use a comparative program analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for policy development. An overview of Australia’s relevant initiative will also be included to provide contrast to the Canadian initiatives, as the shared colonial history and comparable Indigenous populations (though the Indigenous populations are very different in their makeup) provide an opportunity to observe the differing approaches of the two governments.

The optional and subjective nature of the majority of initiatives across Canada rely on the government procurer's ability to identify when they should be implemented, who should benefit, and who is "deserving" of the contracts or invitations to competition. Indigenous perspectives are nowhere to be found in government documents, and the goals of Aboriginal procurement initiatives are developed to meet government priorities, which are not necessarily in line with the needs of Indigenous peoples. There are gaps in the information and research around these initiatives, especially from the non-governmental perspective; evaluations of the programs are rare and the reasoning behind the programs are not published. The patchwork nature of funding, grants, and supports offered to businesses that are often working in tandem with the procurement initiatives can mean that the lines of causation are hard to draw at a broad scale; there are many case studies in this area of research, but few generalizable sources of information. Without research that is broadly applicable, it is difficult to come to conclusions about the value of these programs; in the absence of research that addresses the needs and wants of Indigenous businesspeople, the space is occupied by the reports of the governments evaluating their ability to meet their own priorities.

Context

The exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the economy and the realm of academic study is not a new phenomenon. It was not until the 1970s that researchers began to acknowledge the destructive nature of Western capitalism and its impact on Indigenous peoples; this was the beginning of researchers admitting that Indigeneity and Indigenous ways of living did not inherently cause Indigenous peoples to experience such poor socioeconomic outcomes (Tada, 2012, p. 79). Since the arrival of settlers, Indigenous peoples have been chronically exploited by and excluded from the Canadian economy. Derogatory and uninformed beliefs guided (and continue to guide) policies that have had a traumatic, multigenerational effect on Indigenous peoples. This persists today and is seen in the higher rates of homelessness, poverty, suicide, poor mental and physical health, and over-incarceration faced by Indigenous peoples compared to their non-Indigenous peers (Allan and Smylie, 2015, p. 3). Despite the assertion of former Prime Minister Harper that Canada has no colonial past, it is colonial violence, racism, and genocidal intent under a thin veil of Christian missionary work that serve as the foundation on which Canada was built; in the 150 years since Canada came to be as a country, there has been little progress in righting the wrongs perpetrated against Indigenous peoples.

Former chief and council member of the Xat'sull First Nation, Bev Sellars, describes the early relationship between settlers and the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island: “We freely and generously shared our knowledge of the land to help the newcomers adapt to their new life. They would have died without our help, as many of them did.” (McFarlane and Shabus, 2017, p. 6). In return for this friendship and kindness, Canada created and imposed a system in which Indigenous peoples would be forced to become dependant on the government as reserve systems entirely disrupted their ways of life, or watch their families go hungry. Even in these conditions,

Indigenous peoples managed to farm a surplus to sell, but the settler farmers lobbied for a change in the laws that forbade this threatening new competition (McFarlane and Shabus, 2017, p. 19). Under the paternalistic thumb of the *Indian Act*, First Nations peoples on reserves face insufficient resources and outdated frameworks that still serve as barriers to economic growth today (National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, 2013, p 5). The *Indian Act* included within it ways to oppress the political and economic participation of Indians by banning livestock slaughter and mechanized farming tools, and barring them from seeking legal representation; the aggressive sexism in the *Indian Act* would redefine the lives of Indigenous women for the rest of history by removing their property rights and strictly regulating their status as Indian women (Allan and Smylie, 2015, p. 10). The professions which Indians could enter were regulated, and the paternalistic government management of land, resources, and education fed into “dependency, cultural loss, dispiritedness, and a profound sense of disengagement from the national political system” (Coates, 2008, p. 4-5)

The inequality in the economy and workforce for Indigenous peoples has repeatedly been acknowledged by the Canadian government, though it remains unresolved. Reports in the 1980s, such as the “Equality in Employment” Abella Commission report, resulted in the creation of the *Federal Employment Equity Act* which identified Aboriginal peoples (as well as women, people with disabilities, and visible minorities) as encountering “significant difficulties in participating in employment on an equal basis” (Erridge and Fee, 2001, p. 56). The Federal Employment Equity Act was revised again in 1995 to mandate employers to collect and report data on the diversity of their employees. Though imperfect and in their own ways problematic, these attempts to diversify the workplace were firm acknowledgement by the government that

Indigenous peoples were not being given the same opportunities and that the solution needed to come at a systemic policy level.

Canada's Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), as well as the former North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) both contain provisions and exceptions within them that allow for the "setting-aside" of open bid requirements in order to allow competition among an identified group (Kallwitz, 2011, p. 16). As a result, the federal Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business (PSAB) was established in 1996 as part of an effort to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people in Canada by improving and increasing access to economic opportunities through setting aside government contracts for Aboriginal businesses. (Aboriginal Affairs, 2014). The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) is highly respected as having high quality responses to their surveys, as the Indigenous-owned non-governmental organization is trusted by Indigenous business-owners (Bélanger Baur, 2019, p. 6). CCAB found a recent 15 percent increase in profitable Indigenous businesses, as well as increase of overall profitability of Aboriginal businesses and believes that setting the annual federal procurement budget for the PSAB at 5 percent is a highly attainable goal (CCAB, 2019, p. 1). With Aboriginal businesses growing and expanding in addition to the significant population growth in Indigenous communities, it is important to understand the value of Aboriginal procurement programs in the Canadian economy and to examine how effective the programs are. This requires research into the statistics, literature, and existing programs that exist in order to test whether or not they are effective.

Methods

In order to explore my hypothesis that Aboriginal procurement initiatives are valuable but not the ideal solution to solving economic disadvantages, I will first review the literature on Aboriginal business and economic development in Canada including a review of statistics on the present economic status of Indigenous peoples in Canada, using secondary sources which include scholarly sources and government documents. I will follow this with a jurisdictional scan of existing Aboriginal procurement initiatives within Canada and examine the Australian and New Zealand contexts as well. I will then use a comparative analysis of these programs and policies in order to examine the differences between them, identify strengths, and scrutinize the weaknesses and failings within them. Based on this analysis, I will finish by discussing the apparent successes and failures of Aboriginal procurement initiatives as a whole and critically examining potential policy options for the future.

In this paper, the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted. The terms “Indian”, “Métis”, and “Inuit” refer to three broad but distinct groups of peoples who are collectively recognized as Aboriginal peoples in section 35 of Canada’s Constitution Act, 1982. Outside of legal contexts, the term “First Nations” largely replaces “Indian” which is both blatantly incorrect and dated terminology. The Indian Act, 1985 does not recognize Inuit or Métis peoples as being Indians, thus they are not regulated by it. Both “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” are used as collective identifiers. The term “Indigenous” came into popular usage in the 1970s as Aboriginal groups began organizing to seek international recognition outside of Canada, and is more inclusive of those whose identities do not necessarily fit neatly into the standard definitions (e.g. people of mixed identity, those who were stripped of their status, children who were adopted out of their communities, etc.) (University of British

Columbia, n.d.). The search terms used in the research were primarily “Aboriginal” in light of the Canadian and provincial governments still using the term in place of “Indigenous.”

The research was done primarily through online databases to which Ryerson University provides access. Additional resources were sourced by reviewing the resources in relevant articles. Database searches were limited to English language books, book chapters, data sets, journals, dissertations, theses, market research, newspapers, and reports in order to ensure a wide variety of research and data would be available. News articles were included in hopes of identifying projects that had gained public attention, as well as in an effort to hear the voice of diverse Indigenous communities that are not always captured in peer-reviewed academic work. The focus was on reports describing Aboriginal procurement initiatives, stories of success and failure, and especially on any evaluative reports of these programs.

Date parameters were set in the search, with more recent resources being preferred over older ones to ensure data and information were up to date. Articles written before 2000 were not considered on the basis of being significantly out of date. Articles written before the 2008 economic downturn were scrutinised to ensure they were still relevant in the post-recession context. Searches were performed using the Ryerson University Library and Archives online database (RULA), the ProQuest Research Library database, the ProQuest Sociology database, the ProQuest Canadian Business and Current Affairs database, Project MUSE database, CPI.Q Canadian Periodicals, and JSTOR database. The Canadian Journal of Native Studies and Wicazo Sa Review were also specifically reviewed for relevant articles, but none were found.

The initial search term used was “Aboriginal procurement”, which was then expanded to “Aboriginal business” in order to capture the non-governmental side of the discussion. Additionally, “Aboriginal businesses Canada” was used in order to filter out Australian results at

this stage. Likely due to the fact that the primary initiative in Australia is named the “Indigenous Procurement Program”, the “Canada” filter was not required when using the “Aboriginal procurement” search term, however there were a number of articles discussing medical and food procurement in relation to Aboriginal peoples that were not considered, especially in the RULA and ProQuest Sociology databases. It would appear that many researchers in this area rely on the Canadian legal definition of Aboriginal in place of the broader Indigenous identifier. The vast majority of the news articles that were returned through the CPI.Q Canadian Periodicals were public tender notices and solicitations containing a line querying whether or not it the tender is eligible for a set-aside through the PSAB and were disregarded due to the fact they did not provide any information about Aboriginal procurement. Many of the other news stories were notices of a business signing on to become an Aboriginal Procurement Champion with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Businesses. Utilizing the “Aboriginal business” search yielded more useful results focused on investments and initiatives being launched.

There are limitations to this research. The author is not Indigenous and therefore is unable to speak from a firsthand perspective. The smaller scale of this project only allowed for the collection and use of secondary sources and did not allow for interviewing Indigenous businessowners, who hold key, firsthand insights and perspectives on Aboriginal procurement initiatives. Additionally, because the author is a student of public policy with a background in social work and not a student of economics or business, this research does not feature an in-depth economic analysis that could potentially offer new insights beyond the existing research. The assumption was made that most up-to-date resources would be included online in digital form, but by limiting the scope to online databases some print resources may not have been considered. Due to the diversity between Indigenous communities, not all research is applicable to all

communities; even within a group such as First Nations peoples, there are significant differences between on-reserve and off-reserve experiences. Descriptive statistics as they are used here are a starting place, and though they may not paint the entire picture of where the general community stands, they do provide some insight into the current status of Indigenous peoples. Examining the socioeconomic status of Indigenous peoples in Canada provides a baseline understanding as the challenges Indigenous businessowners are facing.

Review of Literature

In order to do an examination of the socioeconomic status of Indigenous peoples, it is important to understand the literature related to Aboriginal business and economics in order to understand the context in which procurement initiatives are being used as a social policy option. Studies of economic activities as they pertain to Aboriginal people has a fairly short history because, as Tada (2012, p. 78) explains, the assumption was that Aboriginal people would be assimilated into “civilized society” sooner rather than later, which would render their identity irrelevant and unnecessary to study. It has only been in the last few decades that the unique challenges faced by Indigenous people have been researched in the realm of business. At present, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to concrete data about Indigenous businesses, indicating that Canada is failing to adequately and accurately measure Indigenous people’s contributions to the economy (Bélanger Baur, 2019, p. 4, 9). The recent interest in the state of the Aboriginal economy coincides with an increase in socially responsible governance. Socially responsible public procurement has come into consideration over the last few decades, especially as progressive governments lean into the rhetoric of equality and inclusion (Tang, 2017). “In this context, contracting authorities are increasingly permitted to better take social aspects into account when awarding procurement contracts.” (Cravero, 2017, p. 195)

Cravero describes a concept that they refer to as “purely economic best value for money” (2017, p. 175). The addition of “purely economic” differentiates economic dollar value from other potential values (such as social value). In light of public procurement being funded by taxpayers, there are high standards of ensuring the purchasing is ethical and efficient; requiring that the best purely economic value for money be obtained is an easy accountability measure. However, Cravero also explains that governments have long used their purchasing power in

order to drive political goals, such as when the US implemented the *Buy American Act* in 1933 in order to protect American labour and jobs by prohibiting the purchase of foreign goods by federal agencies (2017, p. 176). The move towards recognizing values outside of purely economic best value for money reflects this change. Aligning with governmental moves towards social procurement, the Assembly of First Nations indicated in their 2018 Annual Report that identifying opportunities for First Nations-focused procurement approaches and investments is one of the next steps for moving First Nations peoples forward in the economic sector (Assembly of First Nations, 2018, p. 60)

The barriers that the PSAB is meant to address do not necessarily align with the challenges being faced by Aboriginal businesses. (Canada, 2014, p. 16). A strong theme in the literature is the need for capacity building for Aboriginal businesses. Capacity can be understood as the “interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital” within a given community, business, or other group that can be utilized “to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being” of the group (Swanson and Zhang, 2011, p. 3). Swanson and Zhang’s comparison of northern Canada and Scandinavia identified that even when valuable natural resources are abundant in a community, communities that lack the financial and human capital will see the wealth of the northern regions be transferred to the south when the financial and human capital return home. “This implies that a key to northern development is to build the local capacity... to achieve the goals of reducing the level of income disparity” (Swanson and Zhang, 2011, p. 2). Existing programs fail to provide the funding and support for capacity-building that is essential to bolstering the economic development of a community. (NAEDB, 2013, p. 5). Working in partnership with more established firms is an opportunity for Aboriginal businesses to learn and grow their networks, thereby building their capacity; because of their

stabilizing effect, joint ventures with Aboriginal communities or businesses can be seen as a “vehicle to keep the Aboriginal community/nation moving towards the ultimate goal of self-reliance and self-governance” while providing benefits to both involved parties (Boyd and Trosper, 2010, p. 53) For businesses participating in a joint venture, Skudra and Geipel speak to the benefit of improving relationships, building local support, and preventing conflict, which can all lead to a productive working environment (2017, pp. 7).

Ownership of lands and resources is not always clear, creating additional hurdles for businesses to overcome (Roness and Collier, 2012, p. 45). Section 89 of the Indian Act prevents the seizure of personal property on reserves, limiting what banks will accept as collateral on a loan from an Aboriginal business or entrepreneur, which has historically limited the ability of these businesses to access capital; Inuit and Métis business owners face the same restrictions on using settlement land as collateral (Sisco and Stewart, 2009, p. 5). This challenge is reiterated by Sisco and Stewart (2009) who further include the challenges of access to both human and material capital for businesses located remotely. Further complicating the challenge of securing capital is the perception based on stereotyping from both banks and buyers that working with Aboriginal businesses is more complicated or higher risk than working with non-Aboriginal firms. (Canada, 2014, p. 15-16; Sisco and Stewart, 2009, p. 5).

In response to the challenges in acquiring capital, a growing number of Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFIs) have appeared since the 1980s, providing over \$1.5 billion in financing to the Aboriginal economy (NAEDB, 2011, p.11). There are still key challenges that remain despite the successes of AFIs. Growth-focused and start-up firms still cite access to capital and equity as being a significant challenge in their prosperity and expansion (CCAB, 2016, p. 7). Government assistance is decreasing (as opposed to increasing to match population

growth) and has not been updated “for more than a generation” leaving gaps in its ability to be applied in modern capital needs (Collin and Rice, 2019, p. 17). There is also a gap in capital and funding options for businesses that are neither small start-ups, nor large-scale community ventures, and lending restrictions from the Indian Act remain an issue (p. 18). The system of funding options has been described as a “patchwork” that is primarily spread through word of mouth to other businessowners, and multiple programs are drawn from (CCAB, 2016, p. 7). Positively, First Nations and Inuit businesses have seen a tenfold increase in high-risk venture capital support between 2003 and 2013, and the level of capital accessed and at work for these businesses has more than doubled in the same time period (Collin and Rice, 2019, p. 9-10). Market capital used to support First Nations and Inuit ventures increased 111.6 percent, two and a half times the rate for Canada, and as of 2013, 53.8 percent of capital being disbursed to First Nations and Inuit firms is market capital (p. 10). This has coincided with a decrease in funding from grants and contributions from 52.1 percent to 35.5 percent (Collin and Rice, 2019, p. 11).

While it is positive that First Nations and Inuit businesses are accessing more capital, it is less diverse than the financial tools other businesses are using. First Nations and Inuit businesses show that nearly 60 percent of capital comes from bank loans, and just under 40 percent comes from owner equity and earnings (Collin and Rice, 2019, p. 12). By comparison, bank loans represent less than 10 percent of capital for Canadian businesses and other tools such as venture capital, bonds, equity IPO or banker acceptance which make up over 50 percent of their capital (Collin and Rice, 2019, p. 11-12) “Indigenous businesses have yet to secure access to the financial instruments used by Canadian corporations to raise half of the capital at work supporting our economy” (p. 12, pp. 2)

The high cost and large scale of many government projects can overwhelm the smaller size and capacity of new Aboriginal businesses, and there is a need for coaching, mentoring, and access to skills training for Aboriginal workers, as well as a need for more education on how to respond to request for proposals according to a 2014 evaluation of the PSAB (Canada, 2014, p. 16). Clarity and plain language are not abundant in procurement documents and policies. There is a need for greater dissemination about PSAB both for the businesses and for the government personnel procuring them. Kallwitz speaks to the fact that since the PSAB's implementation in 1996, retirement and staff movement could play a role in reducing the usage of PSAB initiatives if efforts are not undertaken to keep it in the forefront of people's minds; to mitigate this, she recommends conferences, awareness sessions, and the mixing of businesspeople and government personnel at these events (Kallwitz, 2011, p. 17).

The Conference Board of Canada, the foremost evidence-based applied research organization in the country, notes that the advantages provided to Aboriginal businesses (such as set-asides and taxation exemptions) are far outweighed by the challenges they face navigating the world as both an Aboriginal-owned business and a small or medium enterprise (Sisco and Stewart, 2009, p. 5). Age, gender, and location (urban, rural, or reserve) will logically have an impact on the challenges that an Indigenous businessperson will face; Aboriginal people and businesses are not a homogenous group and addressing the challenges of one business does not guarantee the problem is solved for another. However, Roness and Collier's review of relevant literature finds that many in the field believe that developing sustainable revenue streams and economic stability can move Aboriginal communities towards greater self-determination and away from dependency (2012, p. 44) This is echoed by the Centre for Canadian Policy Alternatives' assertion that improved educational outcomes that lead to increased market

outcomes are the root of sustainable economic development for Indigenous peoples (Macdonald and Wilson, 2013, p. 29).

The National Aboriginal Economic Development Board (NAEDB), in line with the work of the Centre for Canadian Policy Alternatives and Roness and Collier, has identified multiple related factors for poorer economic outcomes for Aboriginal people, such as: “remoteness of location, lower educational attainment, insufficient training, lower proficiency in one of the two official languages, lone parenthood, increased geographic movements, and discrimination. Inadequate infrastructure is also associated with poorer economic outcomes, particularly in more isolated First Nations and Inuit communities.” (NAEDB, Aboriginal Economic Progress Report 2015, p. 12). Viewed through a systems theory lens, Indigenous businesses are relying on more than just the contracts they get to sustain their business; they are relying on the system around them being sustainable, as well. While not explicitly related to the success of Aboriginal businesses, there is a relationship between the success of the people in the community around the business and the success of the business; if a community is experiencing a shortage of educated and trained workers, the business will struggle to employ locals. Inversely, if individuals are educated and desperate for employment where none is available, young people may start to leave the area to seek employment elsewhere.

The 2016 Census shows that the median age of all Aboriginal respondents is 29.1, compared to 41.3 for non-Aboriginal people, indicating a young population in general that is poised to enter the workforce (Statistics Canada, 2018). Education continues to play a role in the national employment rate of Indigenous peoples, which will impact Indigenous businesses. Those over the age of 25 without a high school diploma had an employment rate of 44 percent if they identified as Indigenous, compared to 62 percent for their non-Indigenous peers; non-

indigenous high school graduates have an employment rate 11 percent higher than Indigenous high school graduates (77 percent versus 66 percent) indicating that there is a systemic difference in the experiences of Indigenous peoples and there is a relationship between Indigeneity and employment. (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Table 14*).

According to the Census, just under one half (49 percent) of Inuit over the age of 15 were employed, with 6 percent reporting self-employment (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Inuit*). It is important to note that for those who were self-employed, 72 percent indicated that they did not receive outside assistance which included procurement programs indicating that there is either a lack of awareness of these programs, or that there are barriers preventing Inuit businesspeople from accessing the programs (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Inuit*). Job shortages were the most common reason cited for unemployment, and additional causes were a lack of knowing where to find work, lack of training and education, and lack of work experience (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Inuit*). These factors will play into each other, as Inuit-owner businesses may not be able to employ Inuit people who lack training, education, or work experience, which in turn prevents those people from obtaining training and work experience. According to the 2016 Census, the average income for Inuit was \$ 37,871; though this figure approaches the mean income for non-Aboriginal people (\$47,981), this should be considered in the context of much higher costs of living in the North (Statistics Canada, 2018). Additionally, average income does not necessarily demonstrate the range of incomes from very low to very high that could be present in the areas surrounding extractive industries.

In 2015, the average income of Métis was \$42,187 (Statistics Canada, 2018). Six in ten Métis were found to be employed, and 46 percent had completed postsecondary education (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Métis*). Of those working, 85 percent had a full-time job and 14 percent

were self-employed. Only 9 percent of Métis business owners utilized outside assistance, which could be for the same reasons that Inuit businessowners are not utilizing the programs, or it could be because Métis businessowners have higher average incomes and more access to capital (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Métis*). Nearly half of unemployed Métis men cited that a lack of work experience was a barrier to finding more work, whereas Métis women felt that more access to education would help them find work (Statistics Canada, 2018, *Métis*). It is interesting that, despite having higher rates of completed education compared to Inuit and First Nations people, Métis people are still citing education as a barrier.

Statistics Canada reports that 52 percent of off-reserve First Nations peoples are employed, with a greater number of men (54 percent) than women (50 percent) being employed which speaks to a gendered issue (Statistics Canada, 2018, *First Nations*). If women are less employed than men, they are disadvantaged within the community and have fewer resources; they may be forced to seek work elsewhere, and access to transportation can be challenging. Indigenous businesses working within their communities offer the potential of employment without having to leave the community, but only if they can be made sustainable and only if employees with adequate training and education can be found.

First Nations people with a university degree had an employment rate of 77 percent, compared to 29 percent for those without a high school diploma, indicating that a university education is a very powerful tool for increasing the economic wellbeing of First Nations people (Statistics Canada, 2018, *First Nations*). Self-employment had a rate of 11 percent, with a majority (88 percent) not receiving outside assistance (Statistics Canada, 2018, *First Nations*). Once again, lack of jobs was cited as the main reason for unemployment, and the need for more skills training was identified as being helpful for increasing job prospects (Statistics Canada,

2018, *First Nations*). On-reserve First Nations had a mean income of \$31,519 according to the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2018). Because the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) excludes on-reserve First Nations, data must be taken from elsewhere such as the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). Data from the NHS indicates that on-reserve First Nations have an employment rate of 47 percent (Statistics Canada, 2017, *Table 8*). It is unfortunate that the APS excludes on-reserve First Nations as this prevents a comprehensive comparison of the experiences people face living on or off of reserves, which is important to see as reserves have been recognized as areas of poor socioeconomic wellbeing. Despite Canada's record of ranking in the top five most comfortable countries in the world for citizens, the score on reserves was ranked below Malaysia, Mexico, and Romania (Cooke et al., 2004 as cited in Tada, 2012, p. 77). The 2018 Report 5 of the Auditor General additionally found that the Indigenous Services Canada resoundingly failed to satisfactorily, accurately, or completely measure socioeconomic gaps on First Nations reserves and information such as the education rates were blatantly incorrect when reported (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2018). Research relies on the government reports to illustrate the success (or shortcomings) of the programs they run.

One such report is the Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business Annual Report which has not been published since 2014. This report found that in 2014, the value of set aside contracts hit an all time high of \$227.05 million, accounting for approximately 0.8 percent of the \$28 billion government spending (Business Development Directorate, 2014). Health and social services made up just under 75 percent of the total spending at \$170 million. The next greatest sector was information management/information technology at \$16.38 million, followed by professional and management services at \$13.19 million (Business Development Directorate, 2014). Construction and the purchasing or leasing of goods were close, with the total spending

being \$7.24 million and \$7.98 million respectively (Business Development Directorate, 2014). It is somewhat surprising that forestry and other extractive industries did not receive enough spending to make it out of the “other” category. Manitoba saw the most federal spending on set aside contracts at \$91.4 million, followed by Ontario at \$62.7 million and Quebec at \$33.3 million; these three provinces together make up 83 percent of all PSAB contracts (Business Development Directorate, 2014). This is less surprising, as Health Canada put forward a \$120 million procurement in 2014 that covered these three provinces; additionally, Manitoba and Ontario both have strong procurement programs at the provincial levels (Business Development Directorate, 2014). Not all province in Canada have an Aboriginal procurement program, and no existing programs are exactly alike. Though many of them follow the PSAB model as an outline, none are exactly identical.

Jurisdictional Scan and Comparison of Aboriginal Procurement Initiatives

The variety in the structures of Aboriginal procurement programs offers an opportunity to compare the different methods and identify which elements make the programs stronger or weaker. There are nearly no evaluative resources on Aboriginal procurement initiatives, and almost all of the information available is through secondary government sources. The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business is one of the only voices for Indigenous peoples in this area that is evaluating and recommending new ideas; even still, CCAB is focused at the federal level and does not represent every single Aboriginal business.

As the first country to develop an Aboriginal procurement initiative, Canada is the inspiration for many programs both within Canada and internationally. In light of this, I will outline and critique the Canadian PSAB in detail before doing a comparative analysis against Australia and the Canadian provincial/territorial programs. The PSAB is a policy built into the procurement standards of the federal government. When a government procurement will primarily serve an Aboriginal population and is worth more than \$5,000 it is designated as a mandatory set-aside for competition amongst only Aboriginal businesses (Aboriginal Affairs, 2014). This immediately raises questions such as who decides when a population is “primarily” served, and how “Aboriginal population” is defined. As noted previously, the PSAB is making up less than 1 percent of federal spending and the \$3.3 billion it has spent in its lifespan only averages to approximately \$183 million annually. Each federal department that spends greater than \$1 million on procurement annually was required to develop PSAB objectives and these departments are encouraged to utilize voluntary set-asides to help them meet their goals. (Aboriginal Affairs, 2014). Federal bodies are encouraged to do this when there is belief that an Aboriginal business with the appropriate skills and abilities exists to fill the need; this again

raises questions around who makes the decisions around defining “appropriate skills” and on whose belief is this decision based. The program does include restrictions that help to define who is eligible for the procurement initiative. Companies must be 51 percent owned and operated by Aboriginal people, and in cases where six or more full-time staff are employed, at least one third of them must be Aboriginal people (Aboriginal Affairs, 2014). The 51 percent ownership standard is maintained in joint ventures, which has positives and negatives; while it does guarantee the Aboriginal business is being treated as an equal partner, it also runs the risk of smaller firms not being able to participate in joint ventures if they lack the capacity to hold 51 percent ownership. The one-third employment criteria may encourage the employment of other Indigenous people but can itself become a barrier as it has the potential to put an employer in the awkward position of either over-hiring what they can afford in order to meet the one-third requirement, or not hiring additional staff members in order to maintain their Indigenous business status. This could become particularly challenging in the area of skilled trades, especially outside of city centres, as there may be limited options for hiring.

The shared history of genocidal colonization of Indigenous peoples in what are now Canada and Australia results in frequent comparisons being made between the two countries in the outcomes and research for Indigenous peoples. It is important to note that in Canada the term “Aboriginal” has a different meaning than the term in Australia. The two distinct groups recognized in Australia are Torres Strait Islanders, traditionally from the Torres Strait Islands north of Cape York in Queensland, and Aboriginal people are those who can trace their ancestral origins to all other parts of Australia (Australians Together, n.d.) “Indigenous” is used the same way in both places, as a broad collective descriptor that the community has generally adopted. Much like in Canada, the determination of one’s Indigenous status is based on their self-

identification, their decent, and their acceptance by the community they claim to be from. The shared story of Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia is not only historic; the devastating impacts of colonialism that resonate and continue today in Canada do so as well in Australia. Indigenous Australians face lower earnings, even in the same occupations as non-Indigenous Australians, and employment rates 19 percent lower than non-Indigenous people of the same age (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2006). Like Canada, Indigenous women fare worse than their male counterparts in employment and earning outcomes (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2006).

As a result, Australia has also developed an Indigenous procurement initiative as part of their reconciliation process. The first phase of Australia's Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) rolled out in July 2015. Since then, 11,933 contracts have been awarded to Indigenous businesses for a total of over \$1.83 billion in goods and services procured, averaging to \$457.5 million per year – far greater than what Canada is spending (Australia, 2019). The IPP allows government purchasing from small and medium Indigenous businesses with a simplified quoting process to demonstrate value for money. Unlike Canada's \$5,000 minimum, contracts of any size and value may be awarded, the result of which has been both beneficial and contentious as Indigenous businesses were primarily winning low-value contracts. The IPP sets a target of 3 percent of contracts for government procurement for Indigenous businesses and requires Indigenous participation through employment and/or contracting as a supplier in contracts valued at or over \$7.5 million. Not only does the IPP clearly define when participation is mandatory, it also offers flexibility in the participation requirements. The minimum participation requirements may be based on a contract and set at 4 percent, or set for the organization at 3 percent, and the values increase in remote areas in proportion to the Indigenous population there (Australia,

2018). If a vendor is managing multiple contracts with minimum requirements, it is often less burdensome for them to request the 3 percent organization-wide standard than to manage each project individually. Australia also mandates the set-aside of contracts valued between \$80,000 to \$200,000 and all remote contracts (Australia, 2018). The mandatory set-aside process is unique to all others in Canada. Before approaching the open market, procurer must begin with a search of Indigenous small and medium enterprises who may be able to provide the service. If, after a value for money investigation finds it is cost effective, the contract must be offered to the Indigenous enterprise. Only if there are no Indigenous businesses that provide best value for money may the procurement move to the open market process.

As of July 1, 2019, targets based on the value of contracts were introduced; it will start at a 1 percent increase in the first year and increase by 0.25 percent until it reaches 3 percent (Australia, 2019). This is similar to the required targets for Canadian departments, though the Canadian model allows for self-selection of the targets. Having a set number for all departments has the benefit of ensuring it is easy to measure, however it additionally runs the risk of some departments only offering low-value bids if their overall spending is comparatively low-value. The Indigenous Business Sector Strategy has also been adjusted to ensure that capital and supports are provided to allow Indigenous businesses to benefit from these new opportunities (Australia, 2019). Further, it applies to all non-corporate entities in the Australian government that follow the normal procurement rules, and all other entities are advised to treat this as a best practice. By adjusting other policies to create a network of support, Australia is setting this program up for success. The broad range of the mandatory set-asides will ideally provide high-dollar contracts to Indigenous businesses and help them grow, but it is the non-IPP initiative of

networking outside supports to provide capacity-building support that sets Australia apart from Canada and makes the IPP program the most progressive initiative.

While these clear-cut standards help the procurer meet the goals of having more Indigenous people winning contracts and being employed, it does not prescribe what the Indigenous employees have to be doing. The 3 percent of staff who are Indigenous could be low-level, low-paid employees with no job security, and their place in the company could be tokenised. Additionally, the new set-aside prescriptions may result in smaller or new Indigenous businesses being overlooked because they lack the capacity to do larger scale projects; in an attempt to drive up the value of these procurements, the new changes to the IPP may have effectively squeezed smaller businesses out so that only established businesses can win contracts.

Much like Australia, the Indigenous people in New Zealand, the Māori people, were colonized by the British (New Zealand Immigration, n.d.). The Māori people faced the same violence and land theft that Indigenous people in Australia and Canada faced, and today face similar negative outcomes because of it, though they do fare better than their North American counterparts (Stats NZ, 2019) The Minister of Māori Development is expecting a report in 2019 on the benefits of Indigenous procurement policies, indicating that these programs are being looked to as a solution by governments seeking to remedy socioeconomic disparity . This is the first foray of the New Zealand government into a procurement-based initiative, but at present the Ministry of Pacific Peoples is involved in a collaborative initiative called He Waka Eka Noa, an intermediary connecting Māori-owned businesses to buyers, including the public sector (He Waka Eka Noa, 2018). The initiative is based on Australia's APP and is inspired by other supplier diversity programs around the world, including Canada. It is unclear at this time if New Zealand will implement a mandatory policy or if the changes will come in the form of

guidelines. With Canada and Australia as living case studies, New Zealand has the opportunity to combine all of the best parts of the existing initiatives. If New Zealand elects to use a less mandatory, guidelines-based approach, it would likely be similar to that of British Columbia.

British Columbia has what could be considered the least effective version of an Aboriginal procurement initiative aside from not using one at all. The Aboriginal Procurement and Contract Management Guidelines (APGs) are intentionally as non-prescriptive as possible, which, according to the document, is done in order to offer broader application than strict rules (Government of BC, 2013, p. 9). The Guidelines view each procurement as being an individual and unique process, and therefore there are opportunities to learn and apply new rules in each case. It is suggested that the Guidelines are implemented when the service, program, or goods will be delivered for the benefit of Aboriginal peoples, or may impact the policies, programs, or communities of Aboriginal people, but there are no firm “yes or no” questions than can be asked to determine if a business or project is appropriate (Government of BC, 2013, p. 9). While this holistic approach sounds good in theory, in practice it requires that all government procurers value the participation of Aboriginal businesses. Like the PSAB, there is no prescription for who makes the decision on what “benefit” and “impact” actually mean. The optional nature of these guidelines without any strict parameters appears to result in a lack of implementation. Since the development of the guidelines, no publicly available reports on their effectiveness, outcomes, or rate of implementation have been released despite yearly amendments to the procurement guidelines every year since 2003. The BC Ministry of Citizens’ Services released a 2018 Procurement Strategy that indicated a plan to “develop a coordinated government approach to Indigenous procurement” in 2018/2019 implying that the Guidelines are either no longer in use, or not being used widely across the BC government due to lack of information (2018, p. 7).

There is no evidence that the APGs are having an impact on the growth of Indigenous businesses, and the fact that one of the ministries is pushing for the development of a strategy speaks volumes about the success (or lack thereof) for the Guidelines..

Nunavut is a unique case, both within Canada and globally. The population of Nunavut is primarily Inuit; thus, the procurement initiative is focused on the employment of Inuit people and businesses as opposed to the broader Aboriginal population. The initiative is called Nunavummi Nangminiaqtunik Ikajuuti or NNI and uses a blend of set-asides, mandatory participation, and bid adjustments. If a business is 51 percent Inuit-owned, the face value of their bid on a project is adjusted down by 5 percent; an additional 5 percent is reduced at 76 percent ownership, and once again at 100 percent ownership to a maximum of 15 percent (Government of Nunavut, 2016). When a contract is valued over \$1 million, the contract is required to include Inuit employment and training opportunities (Government of Nunavut, 2016). The use of Inuit labour also provides additional points to Inuit and non-Inuit businesses alike; not only does this system encourage non-Inuit businesses to hire Inuit people, it also gives a leg up to small Inuit businesses whose reduced capacity may push their bids higher than their more established competition. By reducing the face value to that of a competitor, this system creates space for small businesses to participate and build capacity from a much lower level. This program has not been formally evaluated, so its usage is unclear, but on paper the NNI offers significant potential for capacity-building that Canada and Australia are lacking in their initiatives.

By comparison, Manitoba's Indigenous Procurement Initiative (IPI) is a case study in missed potential. The framework of the program itself is based on the PSAB and is fairly strong, but the restrictions within it make it nearly impossible to use. The IPI is mandatory when a project is either culturally specific to Indigenous people, or primarily designated for Indigenous

people, with specific examples of Indigenous art, cultural workshops, or a study of Indigenous people being indicated (Manitoba Finance Central Services Division, 2017, p. 5). The 51 percent ownership and “one-third of employees” standard is identical to the PSAB. Four procurement options are built into the IPI that can be used when the project meets its criteria. Set-asides, mandatory and desired participation options with added points for Indigenous business participation, and Indigenous Business Standard which encourages participation but does not require it and offers no additional points for it. At the point where participation of Indigenous people is no longer mandatory, the policy in effect stops being a policy and becomes a recommendation, but the procurement options that incentivise businesses to work with Indigenous people and businesses is positive. However, a government procurer may find it easier to “desire” Indigenous participation without requiring it and limiting their pool of vendors and potentially increasing the price of the procurement bids. One of the most disappointing aspects of the IPI is that the policy specifically outlines commodities that are not applicable, which includes construction and capital projects such as buildings (Manitoba Finance Central Services Division, 2017, p. 2). The additional firm rule that any good or service that serves the general public will not meet the criteria is both othering and restrictive (Manitoba Finance Central Services Division, 2017, p. 5). It is questionable how the government expects any capacity growth to occur when the IPI is so restrictive. An artist, workshop developer, or researcher is unlikely to enter into a joint venture to provide services or subcontract work unless there is a significantly large project to work on. Even if the project is large enough to merit a joint venture or subcontractor, the IPI fails to provide guidance on where the line between serving Indigenous peoples and serving the general population lies, which gives rise to significant potential for conflict. There are examples of partnerships with Indigenous communities in Manitoba outside

of the IPI, such as the construction of the Keeyask hydroelectric generating station. Tataskweyak Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation, York Factory First Nation, and Fox Lake Cree Nation have partnered with Crown corporation Manitoba Hydro to develop and operate the project. With extensive and expensive training initiatives implemented before the project began, the project estimated 40 percent of those employed would be Indigenous at the high end. The policy document offers no insight as to why the IPI is locked to culture-based procurements; removing this restriction and the restrictions on the types of projects would make the program very similar to the PSAB and provide better opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to take advantage of it.

Ontario is another example of a program that has potential that it is not meeting. Ontario's Aboriginal Procurement Program (APP) is an exception within its Procurement Directive and is not a mandatory policy. In cases where goods and services benefit Indigenous peoples or communities, are culturally specific to Indigenous people, or serve the needs of Indigenous people through policies or programs, ministries are encouraged- but not required- to purchase from Indigenous-owned businesses in an effort to improve the economic well-being of Indigenous peoples (Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, 2019). The APP utilizes both set-asides and tenders with participation requirements (Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, 2019). The government evaluates the partnered supplier or vendor based on their record of partnering with Indigenous peoples, communities, and businesses, as well as their record of training and employing Indigenous people, and Ontario is the only Aboriginal procurement initiative that indicates it reviews the track record of a vendor when evaluating a joint venture or a non-Indigenous business seeking a contract with participation requirements (Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, 2019). Ontario's APP has the openness in its applicability that Manitoba's IPI lacks, but it also

has the lack of enforceability or guidelines of British Columbia's APGs. If Ontario was to move towards set parameters like Australia, there is potential that this program could be successful.

As part of Ontario's Aboriginal Procurement Program pilot in 2012-2014, Red Rock Indian Band (RRIB) created a partnership with Taranis Contracting Group to bid on a contract near their community (Garrick, 2015). A \$2.8 million project was proposed on Highway 11 at Smith Bay to straighten the road- which required blasting a rock face out of the way (Garrick, 2015). The leftover rock, or aggregate, was valued at approximately \$500,000 and was provided to RRIB at no cost on the condition that they remove it from the site. RRIB took the plunge and purchased trucks and aggregate processing equipment in order to move the material to a corner of their lands that had recently been acquired through a land settlement with the Ministry of Natural Resources. The band served as the project's general contractor, earning over \$200,000 in revenue and hiring 13 community members; Taranis Contracting then went on to hire five of the band's construction workers as full-time staff at the end of the project. By participating in the APP pilot, RRIB increased their capacity to participate in the aggregate and mining economy. In 2016, RRIB successfully applied for an amendment to an area of Crown land to extract from a marble deposit, expanding their capacity and business. While this is a success story, it is also an example of the necessity of pre-existing capacity in order to participate in Aboriginal procurement initiatives; if RRIB did not have the capacity to purchase the trucks and equipment, they would not have been able to take part in this venture and would not have been able to build their capacity further. A small aggregate processing company with one small truck would have benefitted from working with Taranis Contracting, but they would have been unable to get their foot in the door on this project due to lack of capacity. This is emblematic of Aboriginal

procurement initiatives: they work well enough to meet the goals of the government but may not be as effective as they could be.

Successes and Failures of Existing Programs

The PSAB does seem to be working, as Indigenous businesses are winning more contracts over time, but its real effectiveness is questionable. Since its inception, it has only accounted for an average of 0.3 percent of federal government spending (CCAB, 2019, p. 1). Data collection has been poorly done, and the progress for Indigenous businesses- if it exists in a large-scale sense- has not been documented. Crucial to discussing the value of the PSAB is addressing that its goal is not to create new businesses, but to provide opportunities to businesses that already exist. These larger and more established Indigenous firms have a competitive edge over smaller Indigenous businesses in their ability to offer more staff, shorter work times, or lower bids, in a sense replicating the disadvantages that Indigenous businesses face in open competition against non-Indigenous businesses. Businessowners who already have the funds and capacity are given the opportunity to grow further, and new entrepreneurs still face the same challenges. In this sense, the PSAB's goal of simply "procuring more Aboriginal services" can border on tokenism; buying from any Aboriginal-owned business counts as a win, even if that company could be competing on the open market and a small business that could have benefited more from the contract is edged out. As noted, the size and scale of projects can be far beyond the capacity of a small business, making it impossible for them to compete. However, building the capacity of existing companies is still a benefit of Aboriginal procurement initiatives, as these businesses do grow as a result of their participation such as the example of Red Rock Indian Band.

The issue of capacity comes up across all aspects of the literature, and only Nunavut's NNI is addressing capacity-building. The capacity of a company dictates not only the type of contracts they can apply for, but also whether or not they can even apply. Existing procurement

initiatives are not designed to build capacity for new or young businesses, nor are they working towards providing opportunities for education, training, skills development, or the creation of permanent jobs- all needs that have been identified as the keys to increasing the overall economic success of Indigenous peoples. Though the jobs created through government contracts are most likely not permanent positions, they are still valuable as Indigenous employees are given an opportunity to build their skills and resume while earning an income. Nunavut's mandatory training and education for large contracts effectively fills this need, and Australia's mandatory 3 percent Indigenous staffing comes close by creating jobs for Indigenous people. With a lack of work experience being cited by Aboriginal people as a barrier to their continued employment, this is an important and valuable aspect of Aboriginal procurement initiatives that absolutely cannot be overlooked. Ontario has the right idea in reviewing the track record of a non-Aboriginal company to see how well they work with Indigenous communities and how often they employ Indigenous people in their projects.

There are opportunities to improve Aboriginal procurement initiatives to better meet the needs of businesses. This should start with broad, cross-country outreach with Indigenous businesses and their trusted associations, such as the Canadian Council on Aboriginal Business, to establish a deep understanding of their needs. A culture shift of natural inclusion for Indigenous businesses in procurement is necessary to change perceptions about Indigenous businesses being riskier or more challenging partners, and this may require strict guidelines to begin the change. There is a spectrum from British Columbia-style to Manitoba-style of how strict Aboriginal procurement initiatives are. British Columbia's failure to make their Guidelines enforceable, trackable, or even clearly understood makes them ineffective. On the other hand, Manitoba's heavy-handed over-restriction leaves so few opportunities that it is almost as

ineffective as British Columbia. Canada and Ontario rest somewhere in the middle, offering more freedom of interpretation of how the initiatives are applied without being overly-broad, but not being always-mandatory (Canada) or not mandatory at all (Ontario) they may not be implemented as often as they should. Nunavut and Australia's programs, though very different, both occupy the sweet spot of being highly prescriptive in the guidelines for application, being mandatory policies, and addressing existing problems.

Conclusion

Aboriginal procurement does not by itself address the creation of legislative, regulatory, and financial obstacles that stand in the way of economic success for Indigenous peoples, nor does it do anything to assist businesses overcome those obstacles. It does not offer protection of values for Indigenous businesses, nor does it provide the opportunity for communities to guarantee involvement in projects that are directly impacting them. Governments utilizing or considering Aboriginal procurement initiatives should consider ways of streamlining funding supports and connecting them to the procurement process; if a small business does not have the capacity to apply for a procurement opportunity, they can perhaps build that capacity by accessing funding if it is easily accessible (such as a direct link to the most appropriate funding opportunity right on the webpage where the request for proposal is located).

I suggest that the ideal Aboriginal procurement initiative would be a Frankenstein of the existing programs. Like Manitoba, the documents would be written in plain language and easily, publicly accessible. Like Canada, any procurement over \$10,000 would be set aside, with the lower dollar limit being kept, ensuring smaller businesses would not be overwhelmed. Like Australia, this would be the mandatory standard for all procurements, not just ones deemed to be serving Indigenous peoples. Like Nunavut, points would be awarded for Indigenous participation and Indigenous businesses would have bids adjusted based on their ownership; medium and larger contracts would include mandatory training and education, as well. And like Ontario, joint venture partners would be expected to demonstrate a track record of partnership and employment.

Further research is needed to identify long-term effects of Aboriginal procurement initiatives in the realms of employment, capacity-building, and ongoing business success. This

area of policy is perhaps too niche to encourage broader study of its effectiveness; with less than 1 percent of federal spending dedicated towards Aboriginal procurement initiatives, it is neither a priority nor an expensive line item that needs to be questioned. Performing evaluations of programs, especially when trying to track long-term outcomes for non-governmental bodies such as small businesses, is expensive and burdensome and realistically has very little upfront value to the government. In cases where causation is unclear between other funding and support and the Aboriginal procurement initiative, the government may not even have conclusive results from doing such a study. Nonetheless, it is critical that these initiatives be evaluated. The government at all levels must be held responsible for providing a program that is valuable and that is actually helping Aboriginal businesses instead of meeting their own goals.

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