

The Purdy Crawford Chair

In Aboriginal Business Studies

Case Studies in Aboriginal Business

Expanding Nahmah Miigwan Services

Nina Kent



Cape
Breton
University
Happen.

**Shannon School
of Business**

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Aboriginal Business Studies**

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The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies was established at Cape Breton University in 2010 in response to Aboriginal community leaders' expression of the need for entrepreneurship, business investment, and corporate skills training for the purpose of creating a model of self-reliance.

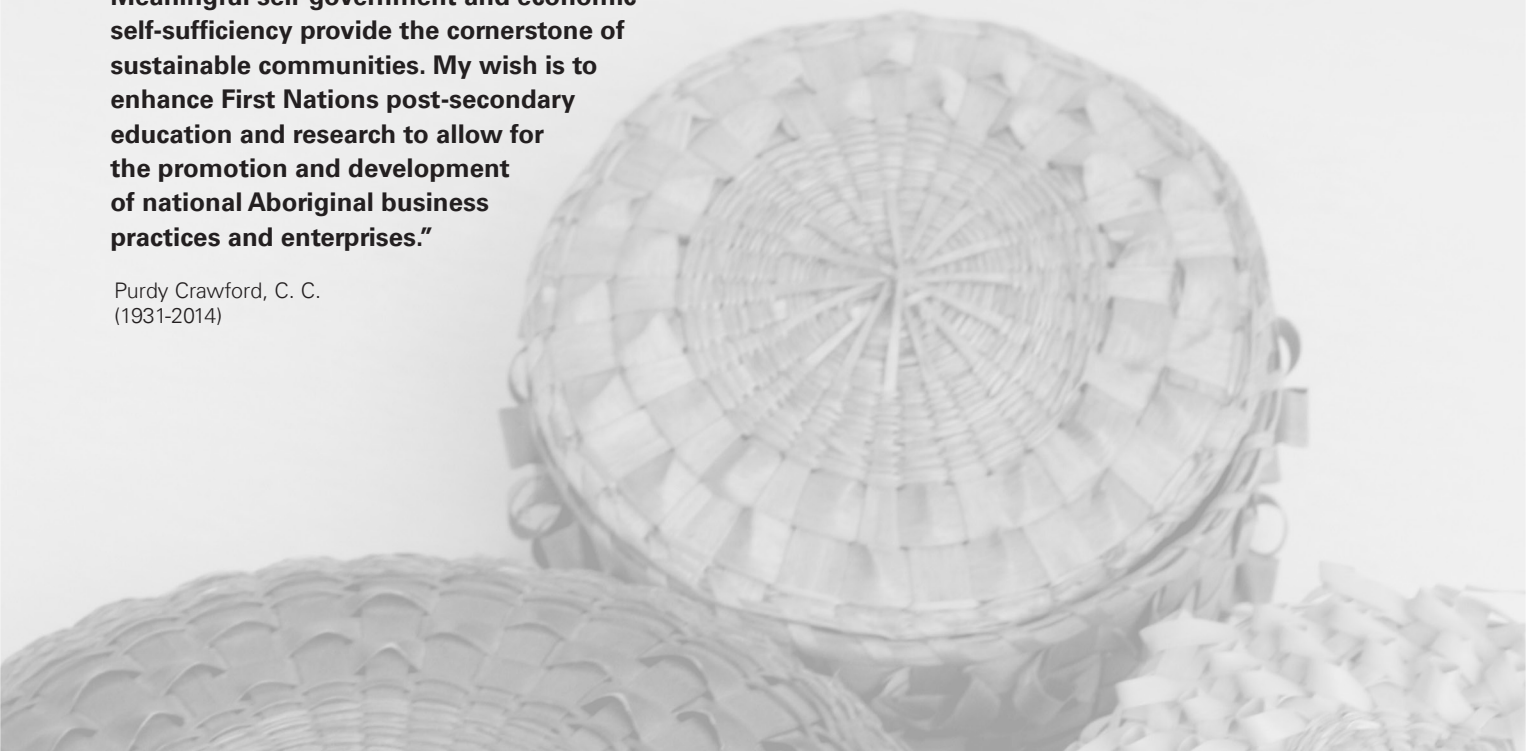
Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada's Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.

The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies focuses its work in four areas:

- Research on what "drives" success in Aboriginal Business
- National student recruitment in the area of post-secondary Aboriginal business education
- Enhancement of the post-secondary Aboriginal business curriculum
- Mentorship at high school and post-secondary levels

"Meaningful self-government and economic self-sufficiency provide the cornerstone of sustainable communities. My wish is to enhance First Nations post-secondary education and research to allow for the promotion and development of national Aboriginal business practices and enterprises."

Purdy Crawford, C. C.
(1931-2014)



EXPANDING NAHMAH MIIGWAN SERVICES

Patrick Kent was at times overworked and unable to meet the growing demand for his consultation services in First Nation communities throughout Ontario. He believed he could grow Nahmah Miigwan Services into a leading professional development organization and had received financial offers to facilitate its growth and expansion for several months within the last year. Although content with the status quo, it was time for Patrick to seriously consider how to proceed with his business.

NAHMAH MIIGWAN SERVICES

Nahmah Miigwan Services (NMS) is a consulting company that has worked exclusively with First Nation communities in the Ontario Works (OW) field for the past fourteen years. Located in the community of Garden River First Nation, Ontario, the overall goal of NMS is to build resilience in communities through strong OW programming that responds to the unique needs and situations in First Nation contexts. Patrick has a vision for a future where every First Nation community has a proactive employment support program that provides the required skill and knowledge development to OW clients.

To make this vision a reality, Patrick works with the service delivery offices to do just that in a manner that takes into consideration the external environmental trends, as well as demographic and geographic factors (i.e. population, income, mobility, accessibility, etc.). NMS offers three primary categories of services: organizational development, professional development (both client and staff), and special projects. Most of Patrick's work falls into the area of employment support. He also assists First Nation communities in developing and implementing service training. In the past year, the majority of his work has been located in fly-in northern First Nation communities. Previously, these areas primarily received financial services through OW; however, with recent interest in resource development which is expected to create new employment opportunities, training and employment services are now also needed (see Exhibit 1 and 2).

Patrick never sought to craft a formal business plan; however, he does have an informal system of managing ongoing business development and the issues facing his clientele. That is, the wheels are always turning within his mind regarding what needs to be completed at different points and times of the year. For example, there are certain services required toward the end of each fiscal year and so Patrick must keep himself available during that time.

PATRICK KENT

Many small business owners find themselves wearing multiple hats within their venture as they anticipate growth and expansion. This is the case for Patrick Kent who is the owner, operator, workshop developer, strategic planner, facilitator, and service plan writer.

Patrick grew up in Obashkaandagaang First Nation, although he is a registered band member of Wabaseemoong Independent Nations. He was raised primarily by his grandparents. As a young adult, Patrick struggled with securing employment and was in receipt of social assistance. Patrick started a family of his own and by the young age of eighteen had three children. At that age he was also offered full-time employment in the Social Service (Welfare) Department with the Obashkaandagaang Band Council.

Prior to opening his own business, Patrick was exposed to the clients he now serves today through his previous employment, first as a trainer and then later as the executive director of a professional development not-for-profit organization known as the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association (ONWAA). In those capacities, he developed a nuanced understanding of the gaps in services, as well as the market potential for responding to these needs.

While maintaining full-time employment, Patrick has also been a part-time student. He graduated from Algoma University with a triple major in Political Science, Sociology, and Community Economic and Social Development. He is currently completing an MBA in Community Economic Development at Cape Breton University.

ONTARIO WORKS

Ontario Works is a provincial government social assistance program (formerly known as general welfare). The requirements set out by OW standards and policies generally state that the OW program will provide financial and employment assistance to eligible individuals who find themselves in temporary financial need due to inability to secure employment. First Nation communities in Ontario wanting to offer employment assistance services must submit a Service Plan to the provincial government that indicates how the community intends to prepare individuals for entry into the labour market through an Employment Support Program (i.e. job search, training, literacy, upgrading, etc.).

Upon approval from the provincial government, individual communities gain local control of their employment support program through cost sharing agreements between the Province of Ontario and the First Nation. Provincial allocations to this program in 2014 were more than \$32.6 million, with First Nations contributions of approximately \$24.5 million. The total annual program funding exceeds \$57 million.

Each community's share of the provincial funding is based on the population of the community and the number of clients who are unemployed. The percentage of the budget allocated to training, workshops, and professional development (i.e. employment services provided by NMS) is dependent upon a number of variable factors. Employment support programs can allocate \$2,200 per case (per year) towards their overall employment support operating budget. For example, if a community has a caseload of 100, their overall budget is \$220,000. A portion of that \$220,000 goes toward workshops and training. Patrick estimates the amount allocated to workshops and training to be about 5-15% of total OW provincial funding in a fiscal year.

Many First Nation communities in Ontario experience higher than average unemployment rates (in comparison to the rest of Canada) due to a variety of factors on both a community and individual level. These factors include accessibility, transportation, distance from nearest town/city, remoteness of community, lack of economic activity, family and lateral violence, lasting impacts of the residential school system, addictions, literacy, education attainment levels, and personal motivation. Like their municipal counterparts, many First Nation communities and those clients that are receiving OW are not able to successfully secure employment due to physical and mental disabilities. There is however, an expectation that all able clients are to continuously seek out employment and they must complete and sign a participation agreement outlining their program eligibility responsibilities over a set time period.

DIFFERENTIATION

While other consulting firms provide similar employment workshop and training services to First Nation communities, it is clear from client feedback that NMS possesses many key elements that make it distinct and unparalleled. For example, Patrick relates his life story and experiences in each workshop, connecting with individuals who may struggle with the topics at hand and ensuring the workshop is pertinent to their situation and needs. Rather than just being theoretical, Patrick adds fun and energizing factors to each workshop and relates challenging topics to simple day-to-day concepts, which really resonates with clients. He also speaks the Anishinaabe language, which is commonly spoken among many First Nation communities in Northern and some of Central Ontario (see Exhibit 3); many people admire and appreciate this.

As previously mentioned, Patrick grew up in a First Nation community and understands the cycle of dependency that has been created by the welfare program (social assistance). Until the day he himself was offered a job, he believed that he was entitled to welfare dollars despite the fact that such services are intended to provide a safety net and give clients assistance to regain independence. Now that he provides training programs in communities throughout Ontario, he realizes that this is not an uncommon

attitude and mindset. He draws on his own personal experience to help motivate individuals to strive and to achieve their potential.

TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN RESOURCES

NMS has launched a website with a new logo that encompasses services, mandate, and slogan (Exhibit 4). The company's slogan is 'Always Striving for Mino-Biimatiziiwin.' Mino-Biimatiziiwin in the Anishinaabe language means to live a 'good life' and is a teaching shared amongst First Nations people. This teaching focusses on the importance of living a balanced life through personal maintenance in the four areas of well-being (mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional).

Patrick communicates with recurrent clients on a regular basis, primarily via telephone and email, while potential clients tend to contact Patrick through submissions made on his website or via telephone based on word of mouth marketing. In the early years of Patrick's business venture, he struggled to secure clients; however, now that he is more established, he doesn't need to advertise his business as much as he once did.

NMS has hired two additional employees within the last five years on a contract fee for service basis. Patrick has hired family and friends depending on the nature of the job at hand and the expertise required. For example, Anthony Kent (Patrick's son) has a background in information technology and a keen sense of computer programming, and has been hired on multiple occasions to assist with installing programs and networks for OW offices, and occasionally writing service plans. Through Patrick's educational pursuits, he has met many competent and capable First Nation people, and he is not concerned regarding recruitment should he pursue expansion opportunities. He sees the potential for establishing internships in the form of 3-6 month contract positions by partnering with educational institutions. He also sees these educational institutions that have programs relevant to his field of work as potential recruitment grounds.

MARKET SHARE INFORMATION

There are 135 First Nations in Ontario and within the past 14 years Patrick has worked with approximately 90% of those communities. As previously mentioned, as community needs change, Patrick is increasingly receiving requests for services in northern fly-in communities. As a result, he has focussed much of his work in this region in the past few years. The market is conducive to the type of service NMS offers as long as the provincial government continues to offer Employment Support delivery within OW program. NMS intends to continue creating and tailoring existing professional development programs and opportunities for the changing needs of the marketplace in order to assist First Nation communities in meeting the requirements set out by provincial OW standards and policies.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

NMS does not currently have any holdings in terms of financial investments that can be utilized to finance expansion. NMS also experiences some delays in cash flow from time to time due to the fact that some First Nation communities require additional time to process payments. The reasons for this additional time to process payments differ from community to community; however, in some cases cheque requisitions have to be approved by Chief and Council, who can at times require additional justification for payment requests. Despite the fact that payment from communities can be delayed by up to 4-6 weeks, Patrick does not charge any interest on late payments because he wants to maintain good relationships by being flexible with each community. Patrick does not require a minimum balance be paid in advance in order to carry out requested work and submits an invoice upon completion.

CONCLUSION

Patrick Kent believed he could grow Nahmah Miigwan Services into a leading professional development organization. He'd even received financial offers to facilitate its growth and expansion. It was now time for Patrick to decide whether and how to expand his consulting services to meet the growing demand in First Nation communities throughout Ontario.

EXHIBIT 1
Services Rendered

| Service Type | (2013-2014) | (2014-2015) |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Organizational Development | 27 | 29 |
| Client Professional Development | 115 | 120 |
| Special Projects | 11 | 15 |
| <p><u>Organizational Development</u> - service planning, job descriptions, organizational chart & structure, etc.</p> <p><u>Client Professional Development</u> - workshops/training covering various topics offered to OW clients and OW staff.</p> <p><u>Special Projects</u> - conference planning, networking sessions, videography, mediations and/or negotiations, etc.</p> | | |

EXHIBIT 2
Breakdown of Services by Region

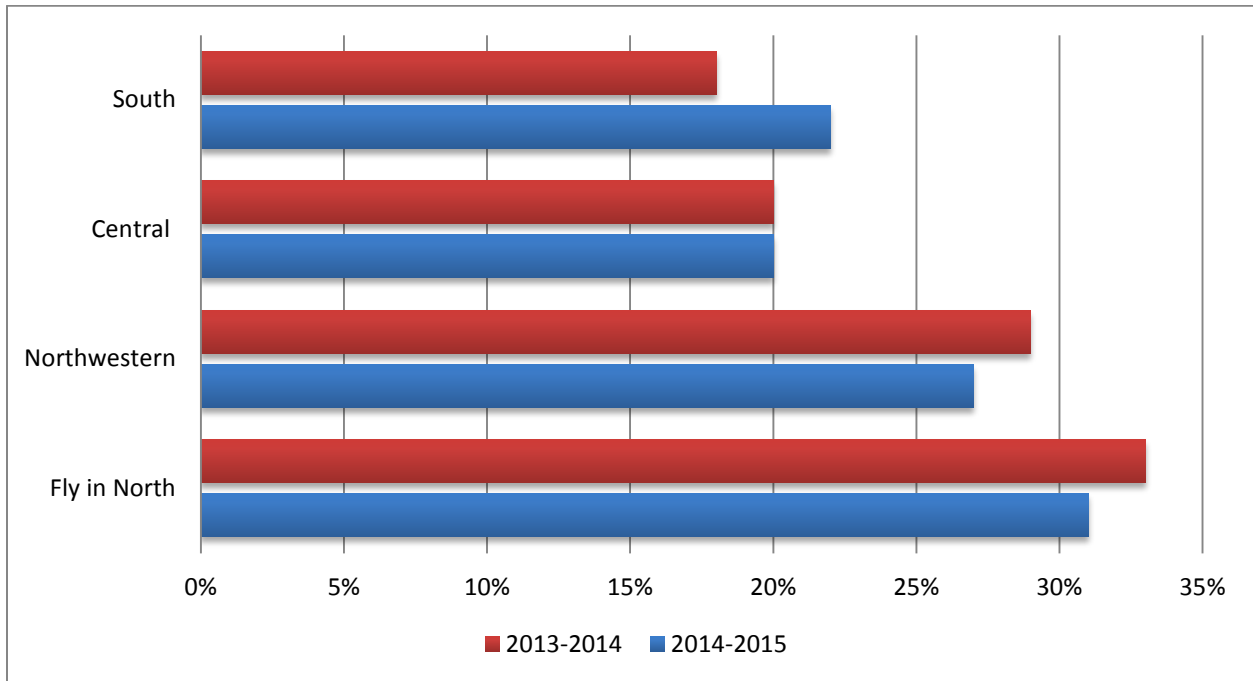


EXHIBIT 3
Regional Map

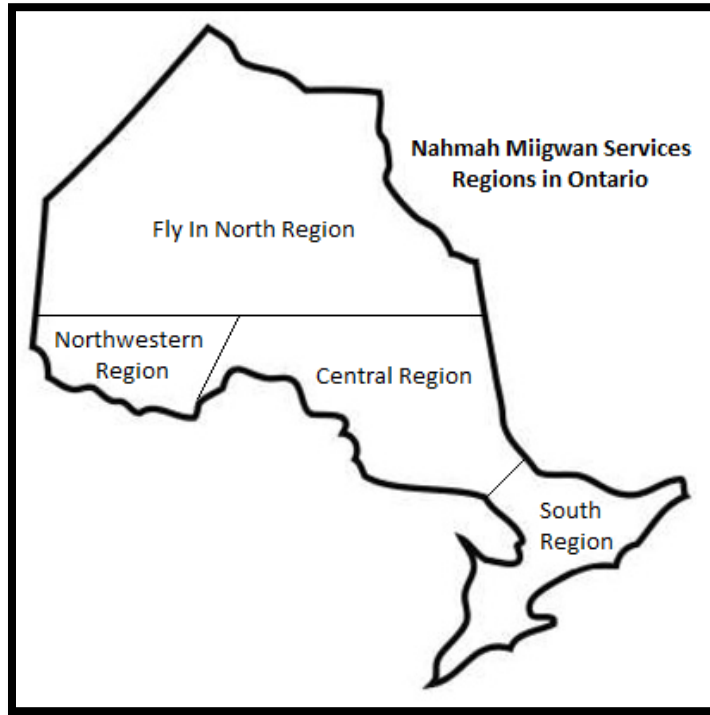


EXHIBIT 4
Branding



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