

# **Painting a Picture of The Métis Homeland:**

## **Synthesizing Knowledge About Métis Education, Employment, and Training**

Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt  
Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

Dr. Chris Andersen  
Director, Rupertsland Centre For Métis Research  
Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta

Guido Contreras  
Rupertsland Institute

Kelsey Dokis-Jansen  
University of Alberta

## KEY MESSAGES

- **It's a First Nations policy world:** Political jurisdictional realities continue to reproduce an unfair playing field for Métis in comparison to First Nations issues. Provincial policies with respect to the Métis remain sectorial, piecemeal and usually pan-Aboriginal. In this context, policies tend to favour First Nations issues and agendas.
- **The Métis policy field is provincially shaped:** Provincial policy fields are powerfully shaped by their internal dynamics, meaning that, at least at present, any external policies or programs (in the form of, for example, federal programs) will be shaped by the dynamics of their entry into those provincial fields.
- **In relative terms, Métis policy actors hold comparatively little power to develop a stable framework based on consultation, negotiation and accommodation:** Métis policy actors have had to become opportunistic because they have little ability to shape government priorities. When government priorities change, Métis are forced to adapt. This means they have little ability to produce long-term, predictable policies around social development.
- **For obvious reasons, federally funded programs provide the strongest basis for interprovincial knowledge sharing:** The most successful example of interprovincial information sharing occurs in the context of the federally funded ASETS program, through the MHRDA working group. This successful model can and should be built upon. We suggest, however, the creation of an arm's-length, purely technical working group to reduce the potential for political interference.
- **Métis policy knowledge needs to be “democratized”:** Given the limited knowledge around Métis-specific interprovincial programs, the creation of a “crowd-sourced” database (akin to Wikipedia) is essential to the provision of relevant information on Métis training/employment, education, and research, as well as other relevant areas (including health, community services, etc.). We envision this as an online open-source tool. This initiative could be housed at the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research, given the proper funding support, where it would operate within academic parameters.
- **Métis learners don't discriminate in terms of which funding programs they attempt to access:** Although education and labour-market training are funded by separate budgets and according to different political and economic priorities, these two areas of social investment are inseparable from one another, as evidenced by the overlap of client access.
- **Culturally appropriate training, employment and education programs are the most successful:** The ability of communities to design and deliver their own programs and services based on community priorities is, demonstrably, the key to success. Nearly all of our research informants pointed to the Gabriel Dumont Institute as an example of “best practice.”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada is facing, and will continue to face, a labour shortage for the foreseeable future. The country's young and growing Aboriginal population has frequently been identified as an important part of a national solution. We know that the Métis represent a substantial proportion of the Aboriginal population across Canada and, in many cases, are producing nationally recognized labour outcomes and best practices in labour market programming, despite a barrage of political, and in some cases bureaucratic barriers. What we don't know is how Canada can more effectively support the Métis to realize their potential more fully, not only in the labour force but also in terms of closing the gap between their general quality of life and that of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Our original intent in this research study was to synthesize knowledge on Métis employment, training and education frameworks, and policies and programs across the Métis homeland – an area that historically extended from the upper Great Lakes of Ontario to the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, and that today services Métis living in coastal British Columbia through to southern Ontario. We wanted to talk to people within Métis organizations as well as the governmental actors with whom they engaged to gain a better understanding of how the various training, employment, and education programs are executed. We discovered very early on that training and employment programs are significantly better supported, through the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) program, than educational programs, which, being under provincial jurisdiction, are at the discretion of provincial policy priorities.

In this initial context, our study has produced a number of important findings. The first crucial finding will come as little surprise: Métis employment, training and educational policy lives within a larger ambit of Aboriginal policy. What may come as a surprise is that Aboriginal policies are not based on Métis needs; instead, they are circumscribed by First Nations realities. Scholars have long noted the fact that the federal government has not, until recently, positioned Métis issues as a federal responsibility. As a result, some provinces have entered a jurisdictional vacuum in order to create various policy frameworks for dealing with Métis living in their provinces, whether engaging with them as Aboriginals or as provincial citizens. Because different provinces – and different ministries and departments within each province – have taken up these policy concerns in distinctive ways, provincial policies with respect to the Métis remain sectorial, piecemeal, and short-term. In turn, Métis employment, training, and educational policy is powerfully shaped by the provincial contexts within which it exists.

It must also be said that while provincial governments have engaged with Métis partners in different ways, this is usually accomplished in the context of a larger pan-Aboriginal ethos. Within the provinces themselves, to make use of a poker analogy, the governments hold the high cards and the biggest pile of chips. One important effect of this reality is that Métis partners have been forced to become opportunistic in terms of their own priorities, mandates and policies, since they hold comparatively few and lower-ranked cards to shape government priorities, or to raise the bid. Several interviewees – both in the provincial government and in Métis organizations – noted the role that government priorities play in determining the kinds of relationships they engage in, and, ultimately, the kinds of outcomes produced in employment, training, and education.

Even in instances in which Métis partners are able to engage in interprovincial discussions – for example, around the ASETS agreements – their ability to shape policy is effectively limited by the priorities of the federal government. To date, although the ASETS framework has proven useful for Aboriginal

communities in general and for Métis communities in particular, no mechanisms exist to hold the federal government accountable for current funding arrangements. For example, Aboriginal ASETS agreement holders are currently engaged with the federal government in consultations for what could be a new round of labour-market strategies. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that the Aboriginal agreement holders have made their initial desires and positions known to the federal government, no mechanism exists to compel the government to agree to a new round of programs – let alone one to determine what a new accountability framework governing those programs would look like. To give one example of the effects of these power inequities, funding for ASETS and its predecessors has essentially been frozen since 1996, the effects of which are made all the more stark by the explosive growth in the Aboriginal population over the past fifteen years. This issue, while deeply concerning, is one about which Aboriginal ASETS holders (including the Métis) can do little. Given the proven success of the ASETS holders to meet inter-provincially and produce a coordinated position in their negotiations with the federal government, we feel that this same architecture lends itself to things like the development of a coordinated approach to engagement with the Council of the Federation (a national group of provincial premiers and territorial leaders who coordinate their responses to federal concerns). In this context, Métis leaders and senior policy advisors could use this forum to meet with premiers and ministers from Ontario and provinces west, and discuss and coordinate policy with them.

Interprovincial venues like ASETS are rare, a rarity that is evidenced by the lack of research on interprovincial Métis policy issues. The provincially based character of the Métis policy field has produced a form of isolationism in which various government departments and ministries, as well as various non-governmental stakeholders (Métis or not), have produced a wealth of research reports that, by and large, remain internal to their institutions. In the appendices, we have provided a list of some of the major research reports undertaken within each provincial context, but our list is doubtless only partial (see appendix 3). No effective mechanism exists at this time to build a more complete list. Such isolationism is not conducive to a long-term, coordinated Métis policy approach. In short, Métis policy actors are not even in a position to know what they don't know. Because of this, they tend to work to a shorter "policy horizon" than would be the case if they had a better sense of what was going on in other jurisdictions – federally, provincially, and even municipally. Nearly all of our research informants agreed on the importance of knowing what is going on elsewhere across the homeland, but nearly all also explained that building this knowledge base is virtually impossible given their limited capacities to "take on yet another task." An unintended but very real effect of this isolationism is that Métis policymakers are often condemned to "reinvent the policy wheel."

One of our key messages – a message that bears repeating here – is the importance of centralizing and making easily available the vast amount of knowledge contained within these institutions. Indeed, given the amount of "grey" literature that likely exists, a central mechanism – we have suggested a crowd-sourced database – will prove a vital first step in broadening these policy actors' knowledge and providing a broader context for how various provinces do business when it comes to Métis people. A secondary effect of this mechanism, though one that is in many ways equally important, is that a central knowledge-gathering place may provide information that will allow for more coordinated, cross-provincial or even cross-regional policy development approaches. As with ASETS, MHRDA holders have been able to use interprovincial meetings to produce a single, coordinated position able to reflect the diverse realities of Métis communities within the Métis homeland. This position has then been presented to the federal government. Critically, these meetings are conducted face-to-face. Ultimately, there is strength in numbers, but MHRDA clearly demonstrates that there is also strength in unity and coordination.

Although Métis policy with respect to employment, training, and education has tended to be formulated in a sectorial and piecemeal fashion, our research informants emphasize the fact that, unlike the different jurisdictions, Métis clients do not discriminate in terms of seeking funding sources for their programs. In other words, although academics in particular have been guilty of reproducing in their scholarship the supposed “split” between federal and provincial mandates, the reality is that when it comes to the actual practice of formulating (at least these sets of) Métis policies, programs often make use of multiple streams of funding that cross these boundaries. Consider the following example: although post-secondary education is a provincial responsibility, students who apply for Métis funding (whether in the form of scholarships or through ASETS agreements) rarely ask who has jurisdiction over funding for those programs, let alone who is funding them. What matters is that they get the money resources they need to pursue their life’s goals. In this case, the success of these programs demonstrates that results can trump jurisdictional squabbles when the will exists to implement policy. A forthcoming report by economist Eric Howe (2013) reveals just how important improving educational outcomes can be. Using Rupertsland Institute client data, Howe demonstrates that, compared to Métis high school dropouts, Métis men with Bachelor’s degrees can more than triple their lifetime earnings. The same scenario increases the lifetime earnings for women by a factor of seven. This positive outcome – positive not just for the learner but also for federal and provincial priorities related to providing targeted social investment – is possible only when policy outcomes trump potential jurisdictional limitations.

Finally, the “best practice” examples we have offered at the beginning of each “results” section make it exceedingly clear that policies, strategies, and frameworks work best when produced in a context of sincere collaboration between government and Métis partners. In other words, the Rupertsland Institute, the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and the Louis Riel Institute are all the result of Métis communities taking ownership of their own institutions and the governing processes that shape their direction. According to respondents, the best practices in the field of employment, training, and education have come about as a result of community members and their representatives taking strategic control. Notwithstanding the current trend for provincial and federal policy actors to express targeted support for community ownership, this has rarely translated into policy support for Aboriginal (and more specifically, Métis) policies, programs, or institutions. This remains the case despite the fact that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) recommended the devolution of Aboriginal programs and services to Aboriginal peoples. In most provincial jurisdictions, provincial policy actors are increasingly demonstrating goodwill and a willingness to participate in Métis-specific outcomes – at least as they relate to training, employment, and education. But they do so in a context that continues to be inequitable for Métis in terms of how policy is prioritized, produced, and disseminated. Good relationships require mutual respect and trust – but this must be accompanied by real power-sharing mechanisms. To return to our poker analogy, all players must be at the table and willing to keep a hand in the game. The stakes are simply too high – not just for Métis, but for all Canadians – to walk away.

# Painting a Picture of the Métis Homeland: Synthesizing Knowledge About Métis Education, Employment, and Training

## I. CONTEXT

- What are the broader contexts within which Métis education, training, and employment policies have been produced?
- What subsequent events or broader policies have shaped these policies?
- What do the policies themselves consist of?

Although the Métis are formally recognized in Canada's 1982 *Constitution Act* as one of Canada's three Aboriginal peoples, First Nations (formerly termed "Indians") have received the lion's share of the policy attention with respect to "closing the gap" between their (lower) quality of life and that of non-Aboriginal Canadians (RCAP 1996).<sup>1</sup> This lack of policy attention has resulted partly from the fact that the Canadian federal government has long considered the Métis a provincial responsibility, while, with one notable exception in Alberta, provincial policy actors across the Métis homeland have tended to perceive Métis individually as citizens rather than collectively as a distinctive group worthy of policy attention. In the last decade, however, this has begun to change. Spurred on by a number of highly publicized court victories and changing priorities within various levels of government, the Métis have increasingly found themselves on federal, provincial, and even municipal policy radars. Consequently, the soaring Métis population is increasingly drawing the attention of policymakers. While some regard this radical increase in self-identifying Métis with alarm and others view it as a long-awaited historical reclamation of identity (see Andersen, 2008; Walter and Andersen, 2013), what should be apparent is that the Métis, whichever count is used, represent an increasingly more important part of Canada's social fabric and the future labour force.

As part of this historical context, Métis are represented politically by provincial Métis organizations, largely under the umbrella of the Métis National Council (Métisnation.ca). These include the Métis Nation of Ontario (Métisnation.org), the Manitoba Métis Federation (mmf.mb.ca), the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (mn-s.ca), the Métis Nation of Alberta (albertaMétis.com) and the Métis Nation of British Columbia (mnbc.ca). Additionally, the Métis Settlements General Council represents approximately 5,000 members of the Métis Settlements in Alberta (less than half of whose members live on the settlements). As each of these provincial organizations has grown over the past four decades, and with the increase in their internal capacity to produce policy and to partner with other organizations, they have begun to take on distinctive roles with respect to producing data and informing social policy regarding Métis education, employment, and training, among other areas. Likewise, as provincial governments have become increasingly invested in Aboriginal issues, the kinds of expertise required in Métis organizations has been provincially specific as well.

Because Métis relationships with government are largely provincially based, their political organizations – tasked with economic and social delivery services – have tended to operate in the context of *provincially specific* mandates. And while each province has begun to build knowledge about Métis living in that province – regarding, in particular, employment and training – we know next to nothing about educational, training, and employment information *inter-provincially*. This research project seeks to rectify this important gap in policy actors' knowledge in the government and non-governmental sectors.



In particular, the project will undertake a secondary literature, archival, and interview analysis to get a better sense of “best practices” that exist within each province: To what extent are jurisdictional issues (including those related to federal, provincial, and Métis organizations) presenting barriers to realizing greater gains in Métis employment and training programs, and overall Métis learner support, if at all? Which programs have been most successful, and which have failed? What educational opportunities and support mechanisms exist for the Métis in each province, and how does each province collaborate with the Métis in the areas of our research focus? Based on the years of federal support for Métis employment and training services, does this investment make sound financial sense in terms of supporting educational programming for the Métis? This project is the first of its kind to explore these interprovincial issues in a comparative fashion and will certainly be of interest to policy actors in numerous sectors that deal with employment, training, and education, particularly within the Aboriginal realm and, more specifically, within the Métis policy world.

Certainly, Métis policy in Canada is driven by a number of broader structural changes. In particular, although the “Aboriginal rights” era began with the 1973 *Calder* decision, not until the last decade has the federal government been forced to recognize Métis rights more specifically, beginning with the success of the 2003 *Powley* decision. Ostensibly about the right to hunt for food in and around Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, the case was viewed more broadly as a litmus test for Métis rights in non-court contexts, shaping subsequent Métis policy development in other social contexts. Courts have proven a major driver of Aboriginal policy in Canada, and as the Métis continue their success in the courts (most recently demonstrated in the 2013 Supreme Court of Canada case *MMF v. the Queen*), significant policy implications are likely to ensue. Likewise, in the absence of a concerted legislative effort, Métis have been placed at the mercy of programs and actors that have often exercised their authority irrespective of Métis interests. As such, this project is very timely, and is also the first of its kind. In particular, given that Métis employment has proven less-durable in times of austerity and downsizing, getting a clearer picture of what *does* work and whether it is transferrable to other provincial contexts is vitally important to ensuring the employment resilience and overall well-being of the Métis community.

## II. IMPLICATIONS

The outcomes from our research will provide Métis organizations, both provincial and national, as well as provincial governments, with an initial snapshot of current Métis employment, training, and educational policies and programs, and the extent to which each province has conducted research and program implementation to address goals around improving these policies’ outcomes for Métis people. Informed by the firsthand experiences of those directly involved in the delivery of training-to-employment programs as well as educational objectives, this project moves beyond reporting on programs to draw on the collective wisdom and experiences of key stakeholders in these specialized areas. Thus, the final product of this assessment provides a glimpse into existing “best practices” and a place to look for guidance when developing new programming. It provides an overview of existing programming and of the barriers and solutions proposed across the Métis homeland. As Canada’s general population ages and a shortage of skilled workers available to replace retiring baby boomers threatens national productivity and, given the extent to which the current federal government is relying on temporary foreign workers, possibly national cohesion as well. An important element of the solution to this labour-market challenge will be assessing how Aboriginal people are engaged provincially.

We will have more to say in the “research gaps” section below about the issues pertaining to centralizing and synthesizing information pertaining to a wide array of Métis policies on employment, training, and education. For now, we wish to highlight the fact that at present, no centralization mechanism exists (whether online or in person) and that this has a negative impact on the ability of Métis, provincial, and federal policy actors to share best practices (or any practices, for that matter) within their provinces. A sharing mechanism constitutes an important first step to producing a broader interprovincial policy horizon.

### III. APPROACH

- Policy field approach
- Primary and grey literature search
- Interviews with policy actors

The project’s methodology is based on what is known as a stakeholder or “policy field” approach (see Andersen and Strachan 2012). A *policy field* approach is a research approach that allows researchers to conceptualize the policy and programming process, and the actors involved, in terms of their *relationships*. Those involved in a policy field usually believe deeply in its values (in this case, “closing the gap” between Métis and non-Aboriginal quality of life). They possess specific, learned technical competencies, and operate according to accepted rules and conventions in the context of those longstanding relationships. However, as in many cases, the Métis policy field is not a level one – different policy actors sit in different positions of power and thus have better access to resources that they may choose to deliver (or withhold). And, like all social fields, the Métis policy field has its own history and its own set of relationships. In a Métis policy context relating to employment, training, and education, government departments hold the bulk of the power and the decision-making resources, while Métis policy actors tend to sit in less-powerful positions. The Métis policy field’s dynamics must be understood in light of the relationships of conflict and coordination, of *struggle*, among the social actors involved in it. This report explores the contours of this field in the specific context of three major classes of players involved in its dynamics: 1) provincial actors; 2) federal actors; and 3) Métis actors.

In the context of understanding these dynamics, three distinct methodological approaches were used: secondary literature searches, primary document “archival” searches, and semi-structured interviews (see appendix 2 for a list of the interview questions). The literature review was conducted using a number of online search methods. Each of the provincial and the national Métis organization websites was accessed, and searches of the education, training, and employment administration, programs, and services were conducted. A similar review of the provincial and federal government websites was conducted, and any available online reports or publications found were included for review. A search of academic databases was also undertaken using both the Web of Knowledge and the ProQuest Online Thesis database. A general online search using Google was also conducted. All of the online database searches used terms such as *Métis education*, *Métis training*, *Métis employment*, and *Métis programs and services*. Researchers sent requests to professional contacts at the various Métis organizations and provincial governments to review this initial list of publications and, if possible, to provide any work that was not already included. Comprehensive listings of all publications were created at the national level and by each province, and a copy of these listings can be found in Appendix 3. It should be noted that while this report generated a relatively large list of publications, it is anticipated that a greater number of archived publications not readily available online will be found as this work progresses to future stages. This is



especially true at the Métis organizational level, where internal research studies may be housed in print versions and not available online.

The purpose of this study is to determine if *inter*provincial best practices can be developed in relation to Métis employment, training, and education programs, and to discuss the variability among provincial mandates and work to date. The first section will summarize the findings of this literature review, providing a sense of what the provincial and national organizations have developed in an effort to address the concerns of improving education and employment outcomes across the Métis homeland. The review will then highlight some common themes discussed among the various organizations, addressing common barriers and solutions meant to resolve the inequities between Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal education and employment outcomes. We will draw, where possible, on Métis-specific examples. Note that with respect to each of the provincial policy fields, we highlight a specific piece of policy and a best practice to orient the reader in terms of the discussion that follows.

#### **IV: RESULTS**

- Provincial specificity
- Sectorial (as opposed to province-wide) policies
- Limited Métis-specific policies
- Common barriers to success and to sharing across provincial borders

This section maps out a general overview of the current programming and institutional frameworks meant to support advancement in training, employment, and education outcomes across the Métis homeland. This review is not a comprehensive summary of all of the existing work that has been completed within each provincial context on this topic, as that would exceed the scope of this exploratory project—and in any case, it would prove incredibly difficult to compile, given that most of these documents are internal and, in certain cases, confidential. The intent here is to provide a snapshot of existing provincial Métis organizations and their mandates around education, training, and employment, and evaluate the extent to which knowledge sharing may support the attainment of goals regarding the improvement of outcomes of ongoing and future work in this field. Just as importantly, we will identify the main barriers that seem to diminish knowledge sharing across provincial boundaries. Table 1.0 provides a summary of publications on a national level, and Tables 2.0–2.4 highlight some key documents identified, and in some cases created, by the various provincial organizations that focus directly on Métis education, employment, and training (see appendix 3).

#### **National Policies**

The major policy conduit between the federal government and Métis employment, training, and education policy actors is encapsulated in federal Aboriginal labour-market policy. This policy has been in place since the mid-1990s, and at present includes three national programs (Strategic Partnership Fund – SPF, Urban Aboriginal Strategy – UAS, and the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, or ASETS), which together represent a \$2 billion dollar investment in Aboriginal labour-market programming. With a \$1.6 billion funding allocation, ASETS is by far the largest of the three programs, and the only one in which Aboriginal policy actors have been accorded some decision-making authority over program design and delivery.

The National Aboriginal Resource Allocation Model, or NARAM, represents the tool by which the Government of Canada distributes funding to 81 ASETS agreements across Canada. NARAM is comprised of nine variables, each one accorded a different weight proportionate to the others in the formula. Though ASETS is a pan-Aboriginal program, its architecture allows the three constitutional groups – “Indians” (now termed First Nations), Inuit and the Métis – a direct relationship with federal authorities. As with the two other Aboriginal groups, a Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the Métis National Council and the federal government ensures that Métis agreement holders meet regularly with federal authorities and share best practices from Ontario to British Columbia. It is at this table that the Métis negotiate the renewal of the Aboriginal labour-market development process, an event that takes place every five years.

## *Provinces*

### *a) British Columbia*

- Home to approximately 70,000 Métis (National Household Survey, 2011)
- Example of enabling legislation or policy: 2006 Métis Nation Relationship Accord
- Example of a best practice (program or relationship): *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Section Plan – 2020 Vision for the Future* (2013)
- Métis-specific policy environment: No

British Columbia has one official Métis organization, the Métis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC), initially incorporated in 1996 as the Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia (MPCBC). The MNBC represents, to all levels of governments, the political, legal, social, and economic interests of Métis people in British Columbia, and provides a conduit between funding agencies and other related bodies. Specifically, their mandate states:

MNBC undertakes an advocacy, coordination and policy-making role on behalf of Métis people in B.C. on matters related to Provincial and Federal programs and services. MNBC acts to protect and preserve Métis history, promote and develop Métis culture, ensure Métis rights are understood and protected, and coordinate or facilitate local activities of Métis communities (MNBC website, 2013).

In terms of training-to-employment programming, MNBC administers the Métis Employment and Training Program (METP), with the aim of improving the employment potential, earning capacity, and self-sufficiency of Métis people across the province (MNBC website, 2013). The Métis Skills and Employment Center (MSEC) located in Abbotsford is staffed by a small but dedicated group that works primarily within the ASETS program but that liaises closely with the MNBC’s Education Director to ensure that both programs align with the provincial organization’s overall mandate. The ASETS program is delivered through seven regional offices spread throughout the province, which can include up to as many as five communities, including large metropolitan areas such as Vancouver. The regional offices are staffed with two employees, a program coordinator, and a client support worker, who offer clients training programs in such areas as essential skills, entry into skilled worker/trades programs, and tutoring.

Through the interview process, we learned that in the last two years, MNBC undertook a major overhaul of its labour-market program, a restructuring largely due to previous operational and accounting deficiencies. In addition to a large-scale recruitment of new staff and the repositioning of experienced

staff members, this restructuring also aimed actively to rebuild connections among a network of remotely situated employees. Regular communication via a weekly telephone call with remote staff members has allowed the current ASETS Director to answer questions around the newly instituted policies and practices, and to rebuild alliances. This verbal communication is supplemented by face-to-face visits to each of the seven regions at least once a year and by *in-situ* gatherings of the regional staff, where they share efficiencies and best practices in processing, and set targets for operational plans based on the three elements of the ASETS program: partnerships, accountability, and demand-driven markets. Through these activities, employees are supported during a major transition, but are also inspired to move forward as community trust is rebuilt in the overall Métis organization.

Not surprisingly, MNBC also reports an “intense” relationship with their provincially appointed Senior Development Officer (SDO), whose continual and in-depth monitoring of their day-to-day operations is viewed by MNBC as a form of mentoring. While this unfortunate scenario is not unfamiliar to many Aboriginal organizations, the interviewees articulated that MNBC had lost its *raison d'être*: to undertake effective advocacy for its Métis constituency (Interviewee C, p. 11).<sup>2</sup> Interviewees indicated that hiring external consultants to solve internal issues was not effective. Rather, the solution had to come from within.

Provincially, the Government of British Columbia’s Ministry of Advanced Education has created a policy framework aimed at improving education and training outcomes entitled the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Section Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future* (2013). This new policy document offers an overview of the vision, principles, and goals meant to address systemic barriers and to support institutional change to help advance Aboriginal learner outcomes in the province of British Columbia. Recommendations are made to address achievement gaps and to improve overall outcomes for Aboriginal people in education and employment attainment. This provincial vision identifies social, cultural, and economic well-being as priorities and identifies five goals to help Aboriginal learners succeed in the post-secondary education system: i) systemic change that is relevant, responsive, respectful, and receptive to Aboriginal learners and communities; ii) community-based programs supported through partnerships among post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal organizations and communities; iii) addressing financial barriers to accessing and completing post-secondary education and training; iv) ensuring seamless transition from K–12 to post-secondary education; and v) continuous improvement that is based on research, data-tracking, and sharing of leading practices (Government of British Columbia website, 2013). This forward-looking policy document is representative of a province that is moving towards best practices and collaborating with its Métis partners.

This new policy document stems from a 1995 Aboriginal policy framework in which two primary initiatives yielded positive outcomes for Aboriginal learners enrolled in advanced studies throughout the province: i) Aboriginal coordinators were funded at each of the post-secondary institutions, and ii) Aboriginal advisory councils operated in each college sector (Interviewee D, p. 3). In 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Ministry of Advanced Education, the federal government, MNBC, and First Nations groups “to work together to improve success for Aboriginal learners” (Interviewee D, p. 4). This MOU resulted in two main initiatives supplemented by other outcomes. One initiative allocated funding for the creation of 25 Aboriginal Gathering Places across the province that now support Aboriginal student learner needs through a dedicated space that is highly reflective of local Aboriginal traditions. An external evaluation of this initiative revealed that “it [is] so important for [Aboriginal] students to see their culture reflected in the institutions in such a significant way and it’s a place where they go to be grounded” (Interviewee D, p. 8). The other initiative resulted in the investment of a \$10 million endow-

ment to support Aboriginal post-secondary students at post-secondary institutions across the province, an initiative that has recently received more funding.

Since then, other program outcomes have included an Aboriginal Teacher Education Award as well as an Aboriginal Graduate Student Award. These awards are meant to attract more Aboriginal educators whose presence will support Aboriginal learners within K-12 and eventually lead these students into advanced studies. In addition, the BC government has implemented an Aboriginal Emergency Assistance Fund for students in acute need of short-term funding. Finally, the BC Government plans to increase Aboriginal involvement on the various governing boards – Aboriginal representation has risen from 11 to 20 boards since policy implementation. The government's goal is 90% implementation (Interviewee D, p. 9). In 2011, the Aboriginal Education Partners Table asked for an evaluation of the various provincial strategies. While the previous initiatives were government-led, the development of a new policy framework derives from an inclusive dialogue between the government and Aboriginal communities.

From an MNBC standpoint on education, unity among the partner organizations is essential. So while involvement in such organizations as the Canadian Colleges Consortium keeps the MNBC Education Director connected to the national education scene, she sees a corresponding connection to her Métis cultural roots as integral. As a result, she was excited to receive an invitation to a national education working group for the Métis several years ago; unfortunately, this attempt was short-lived due to lack of funding and limited staff capacity to assume the additional responsibility of organizing national events. It was suggested that having a lead organizer, or chairperson, dedicated to this task would be one way to keep the momentum going on this important initiative. For this respondent, “There is no better way of accomplishing national unity than through education” (Interviewee C, p. 25).

With others, this provincial organization contributes to the national publication *Métis Works*. MNBC takes this work one step farther by leveraging the client success stories gathered from this publication to distribute at provincial roundtable meetings as evidence of labour-market success. Another community-based effort is the production of an information/guidebook on MNBC widely distributed to government, potential industry partners, and other interested stakeholders. This small publication explains how the Métis differ from First Nations and Inuit because, in their words, people tend to be either uninformed or misinformed with regard to the Métis (Interviewee C, p. 26-27). Additionally, the registered Métis population receives a bimonthly MNBC newsletter via an e-mail distribution list. This exchange of information is facilitated by a dedicated communications staff member who updates the MNBC website regularly and sets up social media networks, such as Facebook pages, for regional staff (Interviewee E, p. 33). Finally, in keeping with their SDO's advice, MNBC is also creating a visible presence throughout BC by placing posters regarding the training available through their regional offices in community shelters, food banks, laundromats, churches, libraries, and Service Canada offices – places beyond Aboriginal-specific sites – that Métis may frequent.

From an educational angle, the MNBC Education Director shared some recent publications on the topic of Métis education within the province of BC. The first document, “An Evaluation of the MNBC Curriculum Project” (Raham, 2011) was prepared for the (then) Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and represents an evaluation of two pilot projects that “provide cross-curricular Métis units to be used in Grade 4 and 7 classrooms across the province” (Raham, 2011, p. 3). The second document shared with us, “Environmental Scan Report: An In-depth Look into Métis Representation in BC School Districts” (Hodgson, 2011), represents an in-house research study that explores “the need for increased awareness of the Métis in school districts throughout the province” through a quanti-



tative exploration of whether the term or a visible representation of Métis appears in such documents as school district agreements and websites (Interviewee C, p. 50). These documents evidence the MNBC's active participation in the knowledge domain, either through their own curriculum programming or through their own research studies.

While MNBC is an active participant in the national MHRDA working group, they see information gathering in this venue as somewhat limited. As our research informants saw it, a national and open exchange of information on the various provincially run ASETS programs could provide for greater consistency in policy application, benchmarking, overall efficiencies and fairness – especially since there is a shared goal of helping fellow Métis across the homeland. Moreover, inconsistencies in how some SDOs conveyed information to their provincial representatives on policy application can produce vastly different applications across the provinces (Interviewee E, p. 36). In terms of organizational involvement, our interviewees felt that the development of individual relationships among provincial directors might be useful as a trust-building mechanism, and preferable to reliance on the MHRDA Working Group table as the one place to share best practices. Another suggested improvement in cross-provincial communication could take place by restricting the MHRDA Working Group attendees to technicians only, as political agendas can often silence attendees, or stall forward movement on programming issues. Yet another suggestion put forward by MNBC is to have an external evaluation of the MHRDA Working Group undertaken to assess its overall impact and efficiency (Interviewee C, p. 45).

From a BC provincial government standpoint, there was little awareness of what other provinces are doing with Métis issues. Interestingly, one of our research informants said, “I think it's important [to know what other provincial governments do], but sometimes not. If they are charging ahead and doing great things, I'd like to know. But mostly what I've seen is that British Columbia is ahead of most provinces in all of the things that they do with Aboriginal people” (Interviewee B, p. 12). When asked about coordinating policies across provincial boundaries, the same interviewee stated that this will become increasingly important as Aboriginal court cases move forward (as evidenced by the situation in BC), but that for the moment, he/she felt that the province had its own momentum and didn't require comparisons with projects undertaken in other provincial jurisdictions. Though MNBC was likely on a tight leash with the federal government given their previous auditing difficulties, a renewed relationship of trust between provincial government officials and the MNBC was evident on the policy front that we witnessed – evidenced in large part by their familiarity with one another, both on a professional and personal level.

In terms of knowledge sharing with respect to education across the Métis homeland, MNBC reported that our research study was the first time since 2009 that they had been formally asked to share information on Métis education with other provincial Métis organizations. Despite this limitation, they were still able to cite huge inconsistencies in federal and provincial support of Métis education across the homeland based on information they had gleaned from informal sharing (usually accomplished at MHRDA Working Group meetings). For instance, MNBC received federal monies in the past to support their education program (this has now moved to project-based funding only), while other provinces during the same time period received no monies. Still others, such as the Métis Nation of Ontario, were thought to have received significant provincial funding for their efforts (Interviewee C, p. 50). By and large, this inconsistency in funding practices is representative of governments that continue to rely on jurisdictional disputes as a means of postponing meaningful involvement of the Métis in education. As MNBC employees saw it, interprovincial sharing of information on Métis education could help resolve the issue of accountability from federal and/or provincial funders in terms of fair compensation for Métis organizational workplans that are often underfunded. Still, a number of MNBC educational programs are



supported by “provincial government funding through our Aboriginal training for employment program” (Interviewee D, p. 9), and this support is well ahead of that of several other provinces. Moreover, in the particular case of BC, the Métis are included in emerging BC provincial policy and strategies on education because of the presence of a single Métis representative at the education policy table. The risk is enormous – without at least one person at the table, the Métis would be left out of future provincial strategies and programming in Aboriginal education (Interviewee C, p. 55). Compare the single Métis staff person dedicated to the education portfolio in BC with the nearly 200 First Nations members who are working in similar roles within education across the province (Interviewee C, p. 52).

#### *b) Alberta*

- Home to approximately 97,000 Métis (National Household Survey, 2011)
- Example of enabling legislation or policy: Government of Alberta/Métis Nation of Alberta Association Framework Agreement, 2008
- Example of best practice: Rupertsland Institute, Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research
- Métis-specific policy environment: No

In 2010, and with the help of a \$300,000 grant from the (then) Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) established the Rupertsland Institute (RLI), which is mandated to provide education, training, and Métis-directed research in Alberta (RLI website, 2013). As an affiliate of the Métis Nation of Alberta, RLI is incorporated as a non-profit corporation whose organizational direction is set by a Board of Governors (comprised of Métis business leaders, University of Alberta academics, government, industry, and the Métis community) rather than the political body of the Métis Nation of Alberta (RLI website, 2013). The previous Labour Market Development (LMD) program was moved under the new RLI umbrella organization and renamed the Métis Training to Employment (MTE) program. Its primary vision is to assist Métis people in becoming self-sufficient and self-determining through long-term employment, assisted by its education, training, and research mandates (Interviewee H, p. 4-5). In 2012, the Métis Nation of Alberta granted RLI a full mandate on Métis education, spanning initiatives from early childhood and K-12 learning through to post-secondary and adult learning. One of RLI’s proudest accomplishments, the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research (RCMR), was created in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta through an affiliation agreement with that university. This research entity is unique across the Métis homeland because it is an academic centre with a Métis-specific focus. While Professor Frank Tough, who specializes in Métis scrip and historical Métis mobility practices, began the RCMR operations as its first Director, the RCMR is now led by Métis academic Chris Andersen, who has been appointed its official Director. Dr. Andersen works alongside an Executive Council appointed to the RCMR and comprised of fellow Métis academics, senior university administrators, and Métis community members (RLI website, 2013). So while our interviews revealed that RLI has created several internal documents over the years, primarily focused on the current state of Métis employment and training through detailed labour-market analyses and relevant policy briefings, the hope is that the RCMR will create a vehicle for wider distribution of Métis research – by, with, and for the Métis.

The province of Alberta has limited involvement in the area of Métis training to employment, evidenced by a recent Government of Alberta report (“Connecting the Dots: Progress Highlights”) released in late October 2013. The report, which includes updates on priorities elaborated by the province

of Alberta, other than highlighting the accomplishments of a Métis woman who accessed a \$6000 northern bursary, makes no mention of off-Settlement Métis, even though this population comprises 96% of the Métis population in Alberta. As such, RLI reports its staff participation on the provincial Aboriginal Workforce Strategy Steering Committee (AWSSC) as its sole involvement with the provincial government in the area of employment and training (Interviewee H, p. 6). As of 2013, “there really is no provincial government policy that supports Métis training specifically” (Interviewee H, p. 15). Contrast this with the numerous provincial government supports for First Nations training-to-employment initiatives. In a strange twist of Canada’s existing jurisdictional policy, RLI operations within the province are funded primarily through the *federal* ASETS program to work with Métis who are “ready, willing, and able to undertake some form of training” (Interviewee H, p. 8). With some 14 years of experience in this specialized area and a network of ten MTE offices situated throughout Alberta, RLI matches its programming to the economic development opportunities present within the various regions. These regional activities are coordinated through an Edmonton-based head office that includes the CEO and the Director of Operations, as well as a senior management team and support staff that conduct their operations based on five-year business plans, annual operating plans, and individual workplans. Located in a resource-based province heavily involved in the oil and gas industry, RLI’s programming works to meet the labour needs of various sectors of the resource industry, the health industry, and several other sectors. The various training programs and projects offered by RLI are informed by current labour-market trend analyses that are conducted on an annual basis by the associate director of research and professional development (Interviewee H, p. 8). Over the years, RLI has earned a solid reputation with federal ASETS officials, who cite the Alberta-based organization as a leader among ASETS holders. Interestingly, at a recent meeting, federal officials touted the ASETS program as “doing quite well in terms of achievement from that agreement...[and furthermore] a strong accountability framework has been developed” (Interviewee I, p. 11). Of even greater interest:

A similar mainstream program that is offered under the provincial government is not faring as well in terms of recorded outcomes or results, and has been known to carry-forward millions of dollars in unspent funds – the success of provincial labour-market programming seems to lack in [terms of] meeting its accountability requirements in comparison to Aboriginal labour-market programming, and it seems the ASETS accountability framework has set the example on how federal training dollars can be accounted for. (Interviewee I, p. 11).

In keeping with this recognition by the federal authorities, RLI is also seen by many of its governing-member counterparts as a leader at the MHRDA Working Group table (Interviewee I, p. 9). As a result, several governing members have asked to look through RLI’s detailed policy and procedures manual, a tribute to their many years of successful operations. RLI believes in the sharing of best practices with others, and a fitting example of this knowledge sharing has been the creation and development of a Métis-specific information database developed specifically for the training and employment program (named after a mentor who worked within HRSDC, Jeff Keto). The KETO database is a front-runner among comparable systems offered across the country, and RLI offers both a discounted rate and training workshops to any Aboriginal groups (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit) that opt to buy a license and make use of this database. As RLI is the creator and owner of this database, the advice of RLI staff is often sought by HRSDC/ESDC and the MHRDA Working Group around the specific and detailed reporting information captured on KETO. The information can be used for analyses, further reporting, and planning purposes. Specifically, staff are often asked how KETO can help other organizations meet the needs of clients in the labour market through targeted projects and training (Interviewee I, p. 9). While the

MHRDA Working Group currently represents the most-cited venue for sharing information on Métis training and employment, mention was made during the RLI interview of similar groups that have formed over the course of several funding periods – typically during times of negotiation when gaps in accountability frameworks are emphasized (Interview I, p. 10). Currently, the role of the MHRDA is seen by RLI as “bringing forward labour-market-related activities or challenges to members of the Working Group and forming a collective approach to selected issues or challenges as part of a national strategy or as part of MNC’s participation at the negotiating table with government” (Interviewee H, p. 10). Sharing a similar message, one RLI respondent noted that the MHRDA Working Group was established “because Métis feel they want to share that information, so they created that (working) group to share information” (Interviewee I, p. 19). While MHRDA is seen as a tool to link the provincial siloes in terms of labour-market programming, RLI also noted that the MHRDA Working Group is at times restricted in terms of information sharing – any information perceived to be politically sensitive for member organizations is generally absent from this table, as is any specific reference to education (Interviewee F, p. 19). One RLI representative stated that “each ASETS administration is designed to accommodate the needs and wishes of the governing member and is driven by the agenda of the elected body within that province” (Interviewee H, p. 10). Other governing-member representatives interviewed made similar comments.

Accessing knowledge about other provinces is an important consideration for RLI’s strategic planning, and just as important is determining how other provinces are supporting related initiatives outside of ASETS, such as those under education. Interestingly, the sharing of best practices in programming and policies, among other things, would be viewed as particularly important “if we were a unified Métis Nation; however, political divisions can often impact programs and administrations underneath the ASETS” (Interviewee H, p. 20). As noted previously, only specific information is shared at the MHRDA working group table. Similarly, coordinating policies across provinces could prove challenging in cases in which political divisions exist between the provincial and national levels.

Moving further into the realm of the government’s (perhaps political) involvement, RLI depicts its relationship with Alberta government line departments as sporadic and even distant. In the words of one of their employees, “we don’t have a great working relationship with the provincial government – what we do have are examples of RLI engaging a particular unit within a department or particular set of individuals within a unit under a division of that department” (Interviewee H, p. 12). RLI is generally left on its own to form relationships with industry, and the province has played little or no role in facilitating industry engagement with RLI as a potential source of Aboriginal labour. Rather, industry initiative prompts the provincial government to make connections with Aboriginal organizations such as RLI (Interviewee I, p. 12-13). Since RLI operates without a dedicated staff to engage industry – a situation further exacerbated by the conflation of “Aboriginal” with First Nations – it is a rare event to have industry approach RLI. Still, occasional training projects, mostly in northeastern Alberta, are undertaken by RLI to meet the needs of industry. But many of these initiatives “have gone by the wayside due to lack of funding or due to a lack of effort or commitment from the side of government” (Interviewee H, p. 15).<sup>3</sup>

From a provincial perspective, the role of Métis Relations, housed within Aboriginal Relations, seems directed toward managing the relationship between the province and Métis communities (including Settlement Métis, represented by the Métis Settlements General Council [MSGC], and Métis represented by the MNA), though in one instance this includes a non-status Indian community. As with all provincial organizations, their management consists of responsibility for administering agreements with their Métis constituents. While Alberta might be viewed as progressive in terms of the eight Métis set-

tlements scattered across the northern half of Alberta that are now owned under fee simple title held by the Métis – a phenomenon unique to Alberta – it is also true that these lands were set aside for the most destitute of the “Half-breeds” (to use the term of the day) only after lengthy negotiations with the Ewing Commission in the early 1930s and the 1989 conclusion of Métis Settlements litigation against the province.

The Alberta government’s 2013 mandate around Métis employment, training, and education was described by one of our research informants as interest-based rather than as a positional-based approach. In other words, the government seems less interested in jurisdictional boundaries and more focused on treating the Métis, particularly off-Settlement Métis, like any other Albertans, a position that has long characterized the relationship between provincial governments and Métis communities elsewhere. This way of thinking may help explain some of the rationale behind the apparent inaction of the Alberta government over the past several years. Having said this, what relationship the province *does* have with Métis communities seems to be focused on Settlement-specific interests and relationships. Given that Settlement Métis comprise only about ten percent of the total Alberta Métis population (including its off-settlement members), this is somewhat puzzling.

Métis organizations in the various provinces are at different stages in their working relationships with their provincial counterparts. While other provincial Métis organizations and provincial governments have collaborated as partners toward common goals – for example, joint conferences and public events – this is currently not the case in Alberta. For example, one Métis policy actor stated during an interview that at a recent Métis Economic Development Symposium, he “was extremely surprised to see a...joint presentation by the Government of Ontario and the Métis Nation of Ontario in relation to economic development, education, and labour-market support” (Interviewee F, p. 21). Further contrast the Alberta situation with the level of support apparent in the relationship between the Saskatchewan government and the Gabriel Dumont Institute or Manitoba’s support of the Manitoba Métis Federation’s Pemmican Publications organization. These partnerships contrast sharply with Alberta’s current level of funding commitments to off-settlement Métis, as provincial support of Métis education currently stands at zero dollars, despite the fact that, from time to time the provincial government provides limited support to specific initiatives, such as the grant to assist in creating the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research at the University of Alberta.

In 2009, the First Nations, Métis, Inuit (FNMI) Collaborative Framework was introduced in Alberta to help improve Aboriginal student achievement levels for all three Aboriginal groups. Through a variety of supports and resources, this policy represents the current provincial strategy for addressing issues in Aboriginal education (Interviewee J, p. 12). Like many other provinces, Alberta adopts a so-called inclusive approach to Aboriginal education; however, as one policy actor explained, Métis-specific issues simply aren’t talked about, nor does publicly available disaggregated data exist to facilitate such a discussion. Under this inclusive Aboriginal education policy, the one area that is identified as a Métis-specific strategy is the provincial government’s liaison with RLI. From 1987 to the time of the transition to RLI, various efforts to support Métis education took place under the Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement. However, these largely took the form of short-term projects such as community-based handbooks – *Métis Nation of Alberta Handbook of Awards, Scholarships and Bursaries* (2010) and the *Métis Nation of Alberta Métis Parent Guide* (2010-11) – rather than long-term influence within policy structures.

The move to transfer the education mandate from the MNA to RLI was meant to address this deficit. The education mandate was transferred to RLI in 2011 with the support of both the MNA Pro-



vincial Council and the Alberta Ministry of Education, and an Associate Director position for Métis Education requiring an advanced degree was posted in early 2012. Importantly, RLI believes that if Métis influence in the educational realm is to be meaningful, “we must become more visible at the policymaking tables within Alberta Education jurisdiction” (Interviewee H, p. 6). As noted earlier, the Alberta government cut Métis education funding by 100 percent in June 2013 as part of a larger set of cuts to provincial post-secondary education. Its specific impact on Métis education was disastrous: “We don’t have the access, the capacity, or the ability to participate in a meaningful way [in education], despite the ongoing invitations that we receive to participate on provincial government committees [and we] are unable to engage the provincial government as a result of having lost the funding” (Interviewee H, p. 6). A series of follow-up letters from the MNA President and the Chair of the RLI Board of Governors to the Minister of Education yielded no response.

Outside the K-12 realm, RLI has made significant progress. Through the addition of a Métis-specific clause in past contribution agreements and the most recent version of the ASETS agreement, RLI has managed to set up a total of 11 endowments with post-secondary institutions across Alberta to support Métis learners enrolled in advanced studies. This endowment program is housed under the MNA’s Métis Education Foundation, which is administered and managed by RLI. Since 2009, the endowments have totaled more than \$14 million and have supported a total of 392 Métis students through more than \$1,000,000 in interest earnings. The majority of the post-secondary partners in these endowments drew their matching-contribution funds from Alberta’s *Access to the Future Fund* prior to its hibernation in 2012. Others simply drew from existing resources. To meet the challenge of marketing MEF endowments to Métis students, RLI has published an in-house booklet entitled “MEF Métis Scholar Awards” that outlines the selection criteria for each of these post-secondary awards. The booklets are distributed widely across the province at post-secondary institutions and K-12 schools, and through Métis community organizations and gatherings. Likewise, RLI holds an annual awards gala to publicly recognize Métis recipients of these funding opportunities.

### c) Saskatchewan

- Home to approximately 52,000 Métis
- Example of enabling legislation or policy: Saskatchewan Plan for Growth
- Example of best practice: Gabriel Dumont Institute
- Métis-specific policy environment: No

The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MN-S) has represented the Métis people of Saskatchewan provincially since the 1970s. Legislatively, in 2001 the Government of Saskatchewan passed into law the *Métis Act*, which recognized “the leadership role of Métis institutions in providing educational, social and health services to Métis people, and the contribution of those institutions to the delivery of those services” (*Métis Act*, 2001). This leadership role was evident long before the passing into law of this Act, however. In 1980, the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis Studies and Applied Research (GDI) was incorporated as a non-profit organization, funded through the provincial government, to act as the education arm of the political entity (Pelletier, Cottrell & Hardie, 2013). GDI is governed by a Board of Directors, comprised of twelve representatives from each of the MN-S regions, that is responsible for decision-making within the organization (Pelletier, Cottrell & Hardie, 2013, p. 29). GDI is currently mandated to provide educational and cultural services to Métis people throughout Saskatchewan (Pelletier, Cottrell & Hardie, 2013). As part of this mandate, specific goals around improving education and employment



outcomes for both Métis and Non-Status Indians have been developed and implemented through a number of educational and training programs. GDI works in partnership with provincial post-secondary institutions by offering accredited educational, vocational, and skills training, and also cooperates with local industry partners who offer on-the-job learning experiences (Pelletier, Cottrell & Hardie, 2013, p. 52). Envisioned as a full-service delivery agent, GDI offers educational programming through both the Dumont Technical Institute (DTI) and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP). While DTI provides basic education and skills training for those looking for technical or vocational careers, SUNTEP has earned a strong national reputation for providing culturally relevant university training to Métis and non-Status Indian students who wish to become teachers (Pelletier, Cottrell & Hardie, 2013, p. 179). In fact, the enduring and positive impact of the SUNTEP program is evidenced by its many graduates who go on to assume leadership roles, and by the community-wide and intergenerational endorsement of this unique program (Interviewee K, p. 1). GDI is widely recognized throughout, and beyond, the Métis nation as a “best practice” in Métis education, training, and employment, in terms of its multi-level access and programming for Métis learners as well as its effective and sustained partnership with the province of Saskatchewan.

Of interest is the fact that GDI enjoys a strong collaborative working relationship with Saskatchewan. This close working relationship with the province is maintained through a series of meetings, committees, and business planning initiatives aimed at ensuring that GDI and the province stay on the same page. Through this active partnership, Aboriginal education and other relevant training initiatives are viewed as more than an issue or a gap: they are positioned as a matter of policy, something that everyone in the province needs to support if provincial residents want to move forward collectively as a province. While the GDI example has been largely successful – especially in terms of education and training – it must be noted that Saskatchewan continues to operate under a pan-Aboriginal model of education in which First Nations issues continue to grab the lion’s share of the attention and funding. Despite this ongoing challenge of recognition – a challenge shared across provinces – Saskatchewan presents, through action and ongoing support, an excellent example of shared provincial responsibility for *all* Aboriginal outcomes, including those of the Métis.

A hallmark of the Gabriel Dumont Institute is its publishing department, in which (both print and online) Métis-specific resources are created for use in K-12 settings. These resources arrive complete with lesson and unit plans, and are used throughout Saskatchewan, in schools as well as by anyone seeking general information on the Métis. One Métis organizational interviewee in another province confided that much of their educational and curriculum material was modeled on GDI’s work and advice. The importance of a publishing venue lies in the fact that GDI tells a Métis story using a Métis voice. GDI’s publishing department has become a “go-to” publishing house for Métis individuals attempting to publish fiction or non-fiction works through a reputable and Métis-supportive institution. An ethos of extending a helping hand applies equally to sharing information around GDI programming/ services with their provincial counterparts throughout the Métis homeland. Other provinces, including BC, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario, have informally approached GDI and asked how to replicate their program, thus reinforcing a widespread recognition of GDI as an “institution of choice.”

Saskatchewan interviewees agreed that sharing information and best practices with other provinces in the realm of training and employment becomes particularly important when issues of national relevance arise, such as the fact that current ASETS funding levels remain at historical levels. As one interviewee explained, learning from one another and sharing best practices can result in “keeping Métis issues high on the radar, both federally and provincially” (Interviewee K, p. 9). Improving the current

standard of communication among the Métis organizations will require a dedicated person or staff member, because “when it’s everyone’s job, it’s nobody’s job” (Interviewee K, p. 9). Similarly, at the federal level, “you need to have an office that takes the lead, has responsibility and is able to pull people together for forums or conferences, that sort of thing” (Interviewee K, p. 9). This message is vitally important, particularly in a Métis context, where the importance of Métis issues can easily get lost among a myriad of other provincial concerns – in a national gathering of provinces, or otherwise – not the least of which are First Nations concerns.

From a provincial perspective, for quite some time Saskatchewan has been focused on strengthening outcomes for First Nations *and* Métis people in employment and education. Provincial initiatives include the “Saskatchewan Plan for Growth” (2012), followed by a progress report (now in a second, updated version) that reports on “how we support those who have challenges to get connected to the labour market” (Interviewee L, p. 4). This plan lays out very specific expectations for this area (Interviewee L, p. 4). Significant investment in programming and income support is made by the Government of Saskatchewan to help First Nations and Métis people achieve parity with the rest of Canada (Interviewee L, p. 4), most evident in their support of a “separate institution [that] delivers programs to Métis people in a culturally relevant way” (Interviewee L, p. 5). Provincial government support extends to SUNTEP, DTI, the GDI library, and other cultural maintenance projects, prompting one of our interview respondents to assert: “I was celebrating the fact that there seems to be some interest and some commitment from the [Saskatchewan] provincial government to support Métis people in retaining their culture” (Interviewee L, p. 5). Indeed, this interviewee seemed somewhat taken aback by the fact that other provinces did not have similar institutions dedicated to addressing Métis needs. Because of this, the interviewee felt it was even more important to encourage interprovincial sharing, primarily to identify lessons learned from the Saskatchewan experience (Interviewee L, p. 5). Having said that, he/she was well aware that legitimate and competing priorities existing within and among provinces, as well as variations in jurisdictional practices, make the *practice* of interprovincial sharing a very real challenge (Interviewee L, p. 7-8).

Additionally, another provincial strategy entitled 2E focuses on closing the gap for both K-12 and post-secondary Aboriginal learners in the province. Interestingly, Saskatchewan seems to have placed issues of jurisdictional responsibility on the back burner; as one provincial government representative asserted in the interview, “Our premier will publicly say that we’re not going to get into a jurisdictional debate with the federal government over who is responsible for First Nations education, because we have an interest in the employment outcomes for both First Nations and Métis people, and our educational completion rates are improving – not only in K-12 but in post-secondary education” (Interviewee L, p. 4).

Of some consequence is the fact that various Saskatchewan interviewees considered knowledge of other provinces’ dealings in Métis issues important to share with their Minister (Interviewee L, p. 9). Saskatchewan has a unique post-secondary learning system that could offer real insights to other provinces in terms of their non-credit-granting institutions, which act as brokering institutions outside of academic boundaries. These learning models, which provide alternatives to traditional institutions, should be viewed as a top priority for policymakers because of their value-added component, especially for non-traditional learners (Interviewee L, p. 10). In much the same way, providing evidence of GDI’s success through a more in-depth analysis could strengthen its overall position. Since Saskatchewan has a relatively high proportion of Métis citizens, there is significant political interest in supporting this population (Interviewee L, p. 12). Saskatchewan has demonstrated a “stronger appetite on the part of decision-makers to bring attention to outcomes for First Nations and Métis people” (Interviewee L, p. 14). It

was also suggested that those provinces with a proportionately smaller Métis population, such as Ontario, may not be as supportive of the Métis. This observation, while logical, is actually not the case, but it does demonstrate the extent to which provincial policy actors remain unaware of what's going on in other jurisdictions.

The report for use by the Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People (JTF) is entitled *Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People* (Pelletier, Cottrell & Hardie, 2013). This report investigates the state of Métis and Aboriginal education and employment in Saskatchewan, reviews existing programs, and evaluates successes. This 200-page document provides a comprehensive literature review on the history and current status of First Nations and Métis education in Saskatchewan and, more generally, in Canada; employment and education statistics from Statistics Canada; and an overview of best practices in improving Aboriginal education outcomes at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, and transitioning into the labour force. There is discussion of the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in education attainment, employment, and annual income, and, as a result, statistical and economic arguments for improving education outcomes for Aboriginal learners are made.

*Voice, Vision and Leadership: A Place for All* was also released in 2013 directly by the Joint Task Force noted above, and focuses on 25 recommendations developed through 16 community meetings and 67 meetings with individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions, for a total of 83 meetings with over 1000 participants. Two recommendations are overarching: the recognition of First Nations and Métis languages; and a holistic approach to actions and outcomes. Twenty-three recommendations are made across the four mandated areas: i) early childhood, ii) prekindergarten to grade 12, iii) post-secondary education, and iv) labour-force attachment. Recommendations address a broad range of issues including an early-childhood development strategy; literacy; funding; ancillary supports; First Nations and Métis content, perspectives and ways of knowing; youth engagement; high school credits; technology; driver education; adult basic education; student supports; seamless credit transfer; leadership programming; education-labour alignment; inclusive workplaces; sector planning; and quick skills training. Other resources related to achieving Aboriginal education goals have been produced, most notably the *Aboriginal Student Success Strategy: Final Report* (2009) compiled by Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), and a review of Aboriginal student participation in health education programs in the province has been undertaken by Wilson and Sarson (2008). With a successful history of launching Métis-specific programming, Saskatchewan has proven that focusing on cultural distinctions within an inclusive-programming model does not have to be problematic. Instead, a specific population's needs are seen to extend out to others rather than nullify them.

#### d) Manitoba

- Home to approximately 79,000 Métis
- Example of enabling legislation or policy: Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan
- Example of best practice: Louis Riel Institute
- Métis-specific policy environment: No

Located in the geographical core of the Métis Nation, the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) represents, to all levels of governments, the Métis people of Manitoba. As a political entity, the MMF seeks to meet the political, social, cultural, and economic interests and rights of the Métis in Manitoba through targeted programs and services, including child and family services, justice, housing, youth, education,

human resources, economic development, and natural resources. With a wide range of objectives within its mandate, the MMF is the signatory to the ASETS labour-market program agreement. This arrangement is quite distinct from that of the First Nations agreement holders who hold several sub-agreements across the province. Also distinctive is the way in which MMF structures program delivery. As they described it,

(We have) volunteer committees in each of our southern regions...(who) provide that direction and support, and that decision-making on the programs, and the employment and training programs that they want to support for their region because they are in the regions and they know what's happening. And then we also have [a] provincial committee that's responsible for the oversight of our department and that committee is a sub-committee of the MMF board of directors. (Interviewee N, p. 9)

According to one interviewee, MMF delivers the mandate of the ASETS agreement through

Employer incentive programs which are wage subsidies, job opportunities – subsidies where we provide wage incentives for our employers to hire Métis, non-status and Inuit people to train on the job. We also do project based training initiatives where we contract with specific training institutions to deliver training to meet a specific demand and partner with the employers so that they'll come in as employment. They're trained to directly meet industry demand (Interviewee N, p. 2).

Their delivery to Aboriginal individuals other than Métis is distinctive among the MHRDA agreements.

In addition to the labour-market programming, MMF is also responsible for “single-seat sponsorships” that fund students for either their final two years of training or for the final year of university. To complement the labour-market programming, MMF also provides career exploration and employment preparation programming, in addition to more holistic activities, including wellness and healthy living programming.

An arm of the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Louis Riel Institute (LRI) was created by an Act of the Manitoba Legislature that received royal assent on November 3, 1995. The work to establish this institute started back in 1985, when a feasibility study was undertaken on the educational concerns and aspirations of the Métis people of Manitoba. As the educational and cultural arm of MMF, LRI is responsible for promoting awareness of the values, culture, heritage and history of the Métis people in the province to *all* people (LRI website, 2011; Interviewee O, p. 11-12). Six responsibilities are seen as key to fulfilling its mandate: i) promotion and support of research on Manitoba history and the culture, education and languages of the Métis people; ii) establishment, support, and provision of education and training programs; iii) advocacy for the Métis people and others in the area of education; iv) provision of scholarship programs for Métis students; v) provision of advice and reports to the Government of Manitoba about education and cultural matters relating to the Métis people; and vi) acting as a resource centre and archive for materials concerning Métis education, history, heritage, culture, and languages (LRI website, 2011). Its board structure includes representatives from each of the post-secondary institutions across Manitoba, which keeps the Métis highly visible on the educational radar. In turn, LRI sits on multiple education boards, including the Premier's Advisory Council for Education, to “ensure that the Métis voice is heard regardless of where you are in the province” (Interviewee O, p. 14).



LRI's work encompasses early childhood, early literacy, youth programming with cultural relevance, creation of school resources, Michif language, post-secondary endowments, and adult learning. The endowment program currently sits at \$14 million, and some 2600 students have applied for scholarships/bursaries through RLI; approximately half of these applications receive funding. It is worth noting here that applicants' information is captured in a skills inventory database that can be used to match employer needs with future potential Métis employees. The institute also serves as a service provider to the MET staff by providing culturally relevant employment-counsellor training. In keeping with a strong Métis-specific mandate, one of the interviewees also spoke of a vocational school that they plan to open soon to provide labour-market training with a Métis perspective. Together, these programs offer continuous service delivery that supports clients/students throughout their learning journey, a support service that attempts to lessen the chances of people dropping out of their studies or even the labour market.

In an emerging best practice, MMF/LRI is currently exploring its future direction with a “gap” analysis of its own operations as well as a broad overview and analysis of provincial counterparts. This study has allowed them to draw out best practices as well as identify some of their own shortcomings in program delivery (Interviewee O, p. 13). They plan to release a Métis education policy study in the near future that will examine issues within Métis education. Unlike the training-to-employment program funded through federal ASETS dollars, education is subject to “provincial constraints. [So,] when you talk about the Métis, [there's] a fiduciary struggle...[the federal and provincial governments] fight over who is *not* going to look after us when it comes to education” (Interviewee O, 9)...[F]ederal transfer payments are under the purview of provincial officials, who decide how these dollars will be allotted, and if a Métis presence is not visible by way of policy or presence, then Métis can easily be overlooked.

One interviewee suggested that MMF's partnership with the province is strained largely because the provincial government offers its own labour-market initiatives that may conflict with MMF's. As such, MMF has had to approach employers and industry directly to assess future labour market needs, rather than rely on government to provide this information. Many times, MMF has no idea who will be hiring for large infrastructure projects until well after the fact, especially when these projects are sub-contracted out at multiple levels.<sup>4</sup> From the MMF perspective, this lack of government facilitation is not only seen as a missed opportunity but also as the provincial government's breach of a “duty to consult” with Aboriginal governments.

The LRI prioritizes the gathering of information from across the different provincial organizations, especially in the realm of education—so much so that one interviewee undertook a concerted effort to travel across the Métis homeland to gather relevant information. Knowing that a federally funded and more formalized study by a partner organization was to be undertaken soon after, the interviewee's hope was that this information would be shared across provinces. Unfortunately, this turned out not to be the case. Without access to this national study, the interviewee was kept from a source of information that would have been important in planning for the coming years effectively. In 2009, another attempt to bring together provincial Métis stakeholders around the topic of education was attempted with a face-to-face gathering. While several interviewees across the homeland were part of this initial gathering, it was a one-time event. Limited time, lack of dedicated financial resources, and political involvement were cited as preventing future meetings (Interviewee O, p. 18). In the realm of training and employment, MMF relies primarily on the MHRDA Working Group to get the information they need from their provincial counterparts. While they expressed a desire to seek out more cross-provincial information, the burden of reporting requirements in which “you get lost in the management of details” distracts them from looking at the bigger national picture (Interviewee N, p. 4).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the lack of a place (whether online or



in a workshop) where relevant general labour-market information could be located is seen as an extra challenge – relevant information is scattered throughout numerous sites – adding considerable time and effort to their (i.e. MMF staff’s) primary duties of planning responses to labour needs.

In terms of producing their own reports and studies, informants mentioned a desire to replicate the Gabriel Dumont Institute study that examined the issue of bridging the Aboriginal education gap in Saskatchewan (see Howe 2012). While recognizing the importance of this work from a policy perspective in terms of validating the work that the informants’ organizations undertake, one interviewee stressed that their capacity to undertake this type of work, however important, was limited, and thus, although seriously considered, such projects were never started. In terms of training and employment, the MMF, like similar provincial organizations, reiterated that they were contributors to the national publication of *Métis Works*. On a cross-provincial level, they were also involved as working-group members in providing direction to a 2012 Calgary Chamber of Commerce study on the Métis (see *Closing the Gap: Partnering for Métis Labour Market Success*). One interviewee disclosed that although very little of their information is shared online, they are now beginning to make use of social media networks such as Twitter to improve communication with interested stakeholders (Interviewee N, p. 8).

An interviewee from Manitoba’s Ministry of Aboriginal Education noted that they are supportive of a holistic and community-based approach to removing “systemic barriers to Aboriginal students’ success,” both in K-12 and in advanced education (Interviewee P, p. 2). Some of their programs include the “Community Schools Partnership Initiative” and “Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents.” This interviewee noted that some of these barriers are financial, and so the Manitoba government has seen fit to support LRI’s Adult Learning Centres and Adult Literacy Projects. A working group supports the work of the Louis Riel Institute in realizing its organizational objectives. These education councils have held fundraisers to support adult learners who would not be eligible for regular scholarships and who may just need enough money to buy small extras like bus passes or a laptop. As a result, policy is now being developed to address these needs (Interviewee P, p. 3). These various efforts supplement the *Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan (2005-08)*, which is regularly updated and concentrates on increasing the high school graduation rate, increasing access to post-secondary education and training, and moving people into meaningful work.

The Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, in place since 1994, was mentioned by one interviewee as an example of a cross-provincial collaborative effort on curriculum. A group called the First Nations Métis and Inuit Education Directors’ Table meets several times a year and has been involved in a number of projects, including the Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs (in K-12) and the *Our Way is a Valid Way* teacher resource. While most interviewees cited knowledge of other provincial programs as important for their own purposes, one interviewee saw another benefit realized when people move to find employment – thus, knowing about other provinces’ programs can be important to a person’s future. A provincial interviewee also saw a real opportunity in terms of moving a client from an EI lineup to sustainable training and employment.

#### e) Ontario

- Home to approximately 86,000 Métis
- Example of enabling legislation or policy: Government of Ontario-Métis Nation of Ontario Framework Agreement

- Example of best practice: Aboriginal Skills and Employment Strategy (ASETS)
- Métis-specific policy environment: No

The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) was established in 1993 (MNO website, 2013). MNO's *Statement of Prime Purpose* identifies a key objective of the organization as "to encourage academic and skills development and to enable citizens of the Métis Nation to attain their educational aspirations" (MNO website, 2013). With that objective in mind, initial work focused on providing training and employment opportunities to qualified Métis candidates, and the branch evolved to include educational programming. This became known as the Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training Branch (MNOET) (MNO website, 2013). This branch provides a wide range of programming options from early childhood development through K-12 and post-secondary education as well as adult learning.

As another example of an organization well-supported by its province, MNO has developed an education plan and a series of education reports. The *Métis Education Action Plan* (MNO 2008) sets out the goals and objectives of the MNO related to overall education outcomes from early childhood through to post-secondary. The Government of Ontario has created the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) and the *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* (2011). In 2012, a comprehensive assessment of the state of Métis education in Ontario was conducted through a review of published and unpublished literature from across Canada, and specific to Ontario, as was an online survey and interviews with key members of the provincial education and Métis organizations (see Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns). This report identifies challenges, promising practices, and recommendations for the various bodies responsible for providing Métis education across the province. Another review, *Our Place in the Circle: A Review of Métis Content in Ontario Faculties of Education* (see Dion 2012), documents the extent to which Métis educational programming is being incorporated into post-secondary programs focused on education. The MNO has also been involved in other reports related to education and labour-market outcomes (see Stone Circle 2011).

The province of Ontario's recent focus on engagement with Aboriginal communities in education, training, and employment has come to be reflected in the MNO's organizational priorities. As one interviewee explained, the existing frameworks include specific policies regarding Aboriginal education tied to specific outcomes, all geared toward "eliminat[ing] the gaps when they occur between Aboriginal student attainment and other student attainment across both sectors." (Interviewee R, p. 3) Note here Ontario's intention to "eliminate" rather than "reduce," "address," or "lessen." Also in this context, Ontario's goals have included cross-ministerial links, in which, as the same interviewee explained, "we reach across the employment and training division to ensure that their programs and services are inclusive and, in some cases, quite targeted" (Interviewee R, p. 3).

Thus, while employment and training continue to act as drivers of change, education has also come to sit at the centre of MNO organizational priorities. As such, the MNO has come to be seen as a "go-to" place for Métis educational resources that reflect the history of the Métis in Ontario, a resource centre that becomes all the more valuable when we bear in mind that the Province of Ontario has made deliberate efforts *not* to lump all Aboriginal histories into a single narrative, but rather to understand the distinctive histories of different regions (Interviewee S, p. 3). The focus in education on distinctive histories and peoples differs from the approach to training and employment, where training services are delivered largely through mainstream non-Aboriginal infrastructures (Interviewee S, p. 3). A specific focus on K-12 learners likewise reflects a strong synergy between the MNO and the provincial government – the development of a *Métis Education Kit* has been one of their more popular ventures.

The more nation-specific focus of Aboriginal education in Ontario likely reflects the strong working relationships between the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Ontario provincial government. One interviewee spoke quite favourably about the organization's relationship to the current government:

This current provincial government has been a very good friend I would say and I can recall previous years where it wasn't as friendly, it was very difficult to get meetings, we wouldn't have been engaged around policy development as we are now... I think Powley [a 2003 Supreme Court of Canada Métis rights case] certainly contributed to governments having to pay a bit more attention but it's also quite frankly [the fact that] the priorities of this government are different and part of their priorities include aboriginal people. So if you have a government that actually thinks that way, then they're a lot more willing to listen to your priorities and your concern and try to find some ways to collaborate. And that has certainly been the case over the last number of years (Interviewee S, p. 4).<sup>6</sup>

This narrative seems to fit with the Government of Ontario's own stance (or at least, that of several of its ministries). One government interviewee agreed that the government had made deliberate efforts in previous years to build trust with its Métis stakeholder partners. Another government interviewee thought the presence of MOUs with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities had helped the process by producing a document that clarified expectations and outcomes. The creation of MOUs and frameworks allowed each party to lay out goals clearly and to ask questions about how each could support one another in the context of those goals. Prior to the framework being created, what was eligible for funding (or not) was more ambiguous. Building a clear relationship was also assisted greatly, from a Government of Ontario perspective, by the fact that the Métis Nation of Ontario seemed to have a clear idea of its goals and strategies: "they [the MNO] have a very good idea of where they want to go and what they want to do, and we've been able to agree on a lot of it" (Interviewee R, p. 5).

This relationship has been built in a context within which various government ministries in Ontario have allowed the MNO to undertake their own research regarding employment, training, and education. Generally, when the MNO is able to identify specific projects with specific outcomes (like its recent research study on the labour-market skills gap), the Province of Ontario has been able to support many of these initiatives. This remains the case despite the fact that the MNO receives part of its funding from the federal government in the form of ASETS monies. As a provincial interviewee explained, Aboriginal organizations like the MNO do not share with the province information on the level of funding that they receive from the federal government, and "we can't really ask them how much [they receive]... for training from the feds. That's their business..." (Interviewee S, p. 3-4). As such, the government of Ontario remains largely unaware of federal funding contribution levels.

The increasingly collaborative relationship that both the MNO and the province of Ontario believe they share has led to increased participation in educational arenas that may not have been envisioned in the original relationship, such as an increased MNO presence on the post-secondary councils of various colleges and universities, a move that allows the MNO to participate in the changes occurring in policy and practice within universities themselves. The growing relationship between the MNO and the colleges and universities is also anchored in the provincial Ministry of Education's mandated policy to include participation from individual stakeholders, including Aboriginal representatives.

As with other provincial policy contexts, the Ontario policy actors we interviewed felt that more

could be done to connect with other provinces, but that it wasn't critical to the policy frameworks and mandates within which they worked within the province. As one interviewee explained, producing a common position with other Métis organizations only becomes necessary in instances in which a national position is required. In order for this to occur, it usually needs to be attached to a national pot of funding. So for example, most of the Métis policy interviewees spoke about the ASETS and MHRDA system as instances within which more collaborative discussion might take place. Even here, however, one interviewee explained that such means were largely informal in the sense that little follow-up was required from the meetings themselves. Instead, they were largely understood in terms of their ability to enhance information sharing. Even in terms of receiving useful information, however, the interviewee explained that "even if we were to make the case nationally for labor-market agreements should we sign between the federal government and the Métis nation, it really would have to be done...bilaterally [with the province]" (Interviewee S, p. 6). Nonetheless, a government employee saw the gathering and sharing of information across provincial borders as important "in terms of what the government response is to the initiatives from organizations like the MNO" (Interviewee S, p. 6). The interest of this particular interviewee was "how the government has funded or changed their policy, or changed government direction on something as a result of their work with their local organizations" (Interviewee R, p. 6).

### **Commonly Identified Barriers to Interprovincial Participation**

Interprovincially, we found a number of synergies and conflicts among various provincial mandates that, in turn, shaped the dynamics of the policy field within which Métis policy actors operate. Indeed, a significant amount of overlap among provinces continues to shape the challenges associated with improving education and employment outcomes for Métis peoples. Specific challenges associated with particular industries may be unique to each region, but the overarching goals outlined by each provincial mandate are quite similar. Alberta, for example, has developed industry-specific assessments and programs targeted at resource extraction industries and trades programs. Education seems to be the starting point for nearly all organizations: this is not unexpected, as one would expect that entry into the labour market or job-specific training can only come after minimum education requirements are achieved.

It is rare to find unanimity on any topic in the realm of public policy. When it comes to Aboriginal education, however, the now overwhelming consensus [is] that improving educational outcomes is absolutely critical to the future of individual Aboriginal learners, their families and children, their communities, and the broader Canadian society as a whole (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p.2)

## **V. FURTHER RESEARCH**

What our research has made clear is that we have only scratched the surface of the kinds of research projects to which Canada's current Métis policy environment lends itself. In the context of this rich and, to date, largely untapped mine of research, we would suggest two immediate and three longer-term research gaps that future research will assist in clarifying.

## Short Term

### 1. *Online “crowd sourcing” database*

An immediate research need includes an online database that can centralize existing information on Métis policy at a provincial and federal level. Various research informants from across the policy spectrum noted that part of their inability to build interprovincial synergies stems from the fact that they have little access to the information available in other jurisdictions. A stable platform – perhaps housed within an arm’s-length university setting like RCMR – is one possible solution to this issue. A centralized database that can be “crowd sourced” – that is, to which individuals can upload their own documents with an explanation of what they are and how they fit into a larger set of categories – will go a long way toward expanding the policy horizons not only of Métis policy actors across Canada but of other stakeholders or researchers interested in the database’s content. This is not so much a research recommendation as it is a suggestion for a “library” through which future research projects can be undertaken more efficiently.

### 2. *Fuller analysis of the Métis employment, training, and education policy field in Canada*

Our research project clearly demonstrates that the sectorial character of much Métis-oriented policy means that more research informants are needed to provide a richer and more complex understanding of Métis policymaking in Canada. We originally hoped for 20 interviewees in this study, but ended up interviewing 19. Luckily, most of these informants were “leaders” in their respective policy fields. Nonetheless, numerous (further) questions emerged in the interviews that they were unable to answer – either because they didn’t have the specifics of how policies translated into practice or, more often, simply because of the changing character of the provincial policy fields; many things simply happened before their time in their positions (as opposed to Métis organizational representatives, who at a senior level usually have a better understanding of the corporate history). A future research project would use the current research project as a base upon which to build a fuller understanding of these provincial fields’ policy relations, as well as a fuller exploration of their relationship with federal and non-governmental actors.

## Longer Term

### 1. *Funding equity among provinces*

Although the existing NARAM formula provides roughly proportionate federal funding for ASETS project holders, determining provincial and even municipal levels of funding for Métis policy programs is far more difficult. Not only are provincial actors not aware of what is going on in other provinces in terms of policy and programming, they have even less sense of how the levels of funding shape relations within the policy fields of each province. How equitable is provincially and even municipally based funding by province, and in what ways does this shape the kinds of policy activity that *all* Métis policy actors are able to engage in? For example, Saskatchewan is widely viewed as a “best practices” province – is this because of the strength of relationships among participants, or is it the result of long-term policies with stable funding attached? Or is it the result of particular governments’ ideologies, which in turn shape funding levels and policy directions?



## *2. Educational support (including data disaggregation)*

The previous suggestion for a long-term project suggested that policy fields are shaped by internal financial dynamics. More specifically, various policy actors also explained that currently, what – and how – Métis funding is allocated provincially is extremely difficult to discern (if this is even possible at all). Moreover, data on Métis learners is not disaggregated at a level that allows Métis policy actors to determine, on a regional basis or within provinces, how well their policies and programs work. That is, the absence of this disaggregated data complicates the ability to raise arguments at a disaggregated level. The lack of data complicates the ability to track Métis learner achievement levels and future work paths.

## *3. More formal mechanisms to compel provincial and interprovincial participation*

Currently, part of the reason why provincial policy fields are so distinctive is the relative absence of the federal government in provincial and municipal policy and program delivery for Aboriginal clientele. As such, different provinces have stepped up in different ways, and over several generations these “home-grown” solutions have congealed and eventually cemented into distinctive policy environments. In turn, these policy-specific environments have hampered the ability or willingness to work toward interprovincial mechanisms for knowledge sharing and policy coordination.

Moreover, as much as most provinces are to be lauded for their work in Aboriginal policy creation and delivery, no current mechanisms exist for compelling provincial participation when the will to participate is absent. This contrasts sharply with First Nations relationships that, though not without their own problems, are often based within a rubric of a duty to consult and accommodate. Future research into knowledge sharing and even cross-provincial policies around Métis policy may wish to explore avenues and processes through which a formal mechanism can be created to compel provincial governments to follow through on well-intended broader policies and memorandums of understanding. This would include follow-up and accountability for all parties involved, including a clear agenda, specific goals, and measurable outcomes. Such a formal mechanism would produce a more robust, long-standing, and stable policy platform for, as an example, Council of Federation meetings (in which Premiers of the provinces meet to discuss issues of concern to the provinces as a whole in their relationship with the federal government).

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix 1 for a list of acronyms used in this report.

<sup>2</sup> We have assigned the interviewees a random letter to protect, as much as possible, their anonymity.

<sup>3</sup> The Alberta government’s support of Métis education has been equally unimpressive. In June of 2013, the Alberta government cut 100% of RLI’s education budget. “The cut affects all policy-related activity, including K-12 initiatives, and basically speaks to the provincial government’s [lack of] support of Métis education” (Interviewee H, p. 15).

<sup>4</sup> The MMF interviewee mentioned that the launch of a major northern school expansion project on a former residential school (that represented 216 positions) was recently attended by both the Premier of Manitoba and senior administrators, yet MMF was neither informed of nor involved in this announcement – despite the fact the many First Nations and Métis attended these institutions as children, often to their extreme detriment.

<sup>5</sup> As this study is taking place during the pre-negotiation phase of the next ASETS, governing members

are making more.

contact than usual as they prepare documentation and their collective positioning.

<sup>6</sup> *R. v. Powley* was a 2003 decision that recognized the Métis right to hunt in the Sault Ste. Marie, ON region of Canada. However, it was also regarded as a litmus test for the legitimacy of Métis Aboriginality. Its inception has spurred a number of policy relationships in various policy areas.

**Appendix I**  
**Listing of Acronyms**

## Acronyms

AWSSC - Aboriginal Workforce Strategy Steering Committee (Alberta)

ASETS - Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy

AANDC – Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada

FNMI - First Nations, Métis, Inuit

GDI - Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis Studies and Applied Research

HRSDC/ESDC - Human Resource and Skill Development Canada / Employment and Social Development Canada

JTF - Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People

KETO - Database named after Jeff Keto

LRI - Louis Riel Institute

MHRDA - Métis Human Resource Development Agreement

MSEC - Métis Skills and Employment Center (British Columbia)

MET - Métis Employment and Training (Ontario)

METP - Métis Employment and Training Program (British Columbia)

MNA - Métis Nation of Alberta

MNBC - Métis Nation British Columbia

MMF - Manitoba Métis Federation

MNC - Métis National Council

MNO - Métis Nation of Ontario

MNOET - Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training Branch

MN-S - Métis Nation of Saskatchewan

MPCBC - Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia

MSGC - Métis Settlements General Council

MTE - Métis Training to Employment Program (Alberta)

NARAM - National Aboriginal Resource Allocation Model

RCAP - Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

RCMR - Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research

RLI - Rupertsland Institute

SDO - Senior Development Officer

SIAS - Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

SPF - Strategic Partnership Fund

SUNTEP - Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program

UAS - Urban Aboriginal Strategy

**Appendix II**  
**Interveiw Questions**



### **Interview Questions: Basic Work History**

1. Can you talk about your education and training history?
2. What brought you to this job?
3. How long have you been employed in this position?
4. What are your main duties and responsibilities?
5. What is the organization's mandate regarding employment, training and education?
6. In what way does your position support the provincial mandate on Métis employment, training and education?
7. What are your current policies on Métis employment, training and education? Are these sectorial policies, or do they form part of an overall provincial strategy? In the same vein, are there cross-provincial support and delivery mechanisms in the area of employment, training and education?
8. As far as you know, what publications has your organization produced with respect to Métis employment, training and education? Are they publicly available or used only in-house?
9. Are provincial government's policies supportive of Métis efforts in employment, training and education?

### **Interview Questions: Knowledge Sharing**

1. What do you know about the policies and publications regarding Métis employment, training and education in other provinces or in the federal government?
2. How important do you think it is to know what's going on in other provinces? How important is it to coordinate policies across provincial boundaries?
3. Why or why not?
4. What steps do you think could be taken (by Métis organizations – provincial/national, by the province and by the feds) to improve communication?
5. What barriers (policies, politics, etc.) do you see as making this kind of communication and information sharing less likely?
6. Who else would I talk to, to get more information on these issues?

## **Appendix III**

### **Tables**

**Table 1.0. National Publications Related to Métis Education, Training, and Employment**

Organization	Publication Name	Publication Date
R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. For Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC)	Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates	2002
R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. For Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, CMEC and the Canadian Education Statistics Council	Factors Affecting the Use of Student Financial Assistance Programs by Aboriginal Youth	2008
Canadian Council on Learning (University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Knowledge Learning Centre)	Métis Post-Secondary Education Systems: Literature Review	2009
Métis National Council	Métis Education Report. A Special Report on Métis Education Prepared by the Métis National Council for the Summit on Aboriginal Education	2009
Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC)	Strengthening Aboriginal Success Summary Report	2009
Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC)	Improved Data, Better Outcomes: Strengthening Pan-Canadian Aboriginal Data, Technical Workshop on Pan-Canadian Aboriginal Data	2011
Council of Ministers of Education Canada	Literature Review on Factors Affecting the Transition of Aboriginal Youth from School to Work	2012
Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC)	Key Policy Issues in Aboriginal Education: An Evidence Based Approach	2012
Canada, Statistics Canada, National Household Survey	Educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada	2012
Suzanne Klinga. Canadian Career Development Foundation	Literature Review State of Practice: Essential Skills Applications with First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada	2012
Conference Board of Canada	Understanding the Value, Challenges and Opportunities of Engaging Métis, Inuit and First Nations Workers	2012
Centre for the Study of Living Standards	Labour Market Prospects for the Métis in the Canadian Mining Industry	2013

**Table 2.0 Existing Publications Related to Métis Education, Training, and Employment for British Columbia**

Organization/Author(s)	Publication Name	Publication Date
Government of British Columbia/ Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation	Government Standard for Aboriginal Administrative Data v. 1.0	2007
Helen Raham/Prepared for the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians	An Evaluation of the MNBC Curriculum Project	2011
Colleen Hodgson/Métis Nation of BC	Environmental Scan Report: An In-depth Look into Métis Representation in BC School Districts	2011
Government of British Columbia	Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Section Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future	2012
Métis Nation British Columbia	Information Handbook	Ongoing

**Table 2.1. Existing Publications Related to Métis Education, Training, and Employment for Alberta**

Organization/Author(s)	Publication Name	Publication Date
Government of Alberta	Strengthening Relations	2000
Alberta Human Resources and Employment	Defining the Path - Alberta Human Resources and Employment Aboriginal Strategy	2002
Government of Alberta. Alberta Learning	First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework. A Progress Report	2003
Alberta Human Resources and Employment	Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce - Alberta's 10 Year Strategy	2006
Alberta Teachers' Association	Education is our Buffalo: a Teachers' Resource for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education in Alberta.	2008
Canadian Policy Research Networks. Alison Taylor, Tracy L. Friedel, Lois Edge. Department of Educational Policy Studies University of Alberta	Pathways for First Nation and Métis Youth in the Oil Sands	2009
Government of Alberta	Connecting the Dots	2010
Government of Alberta	GoA Response to Connecting the Dots	2011
Calgary Chamber of Commerce	Closing the Gap: Partnering for Métis Labour Market Success	2012
Calgary Chamber of Commerce	Building the workforce of tomorrow: Employment and career directions for the Métis	2013



**Table 2.2. Existing Publications Related to Métis Education, Training, and Employment for Saskatchewan**

Organization/Author(s)	Publication Name	Publication Date
Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment	Indian and Métis Education Policy from Kindergarten to Grade 12	1995
Alex Wilson, EdM, EdD. Janet Sarson, BA. Aboriginal Education Research Centre University of Saskatchewan. Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health 6(3) 2008	Literature Review on Participation of Aboriginal Students in Postsecondary Health Education Programs in Saskatchewan	2008
The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology	Aboriginal Student Success Strategy: Final Report	2009
Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes in Saskatchewan.	Agreement between The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and The Government of Saskatchewan.	2011
Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People	Voice, Vision and Leadership: A Place for All	2013
Terrance Pelletier, Michael Cottrell, Rosalind Hardie. Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit Department of Educational Administration College of Education University of Saskatchewan	Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People	2013

**Table 2.3 Existing Publications Related to Métis Education, Training, and Employment for Manitoba**

Organization/Author(s)	Publication Name	Publication Date
Bear Spirit Consulting	The Consultation on Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and Métis Students in Southern Manitoba. Final Report	2007
Sharon Conway, Manitoba Métis Federation	Standing Tall: The Pilot Project Final Research Report	2009
Georgine Liberty, Director TSN, Manitoba Métis Federation (Internal Document - Hard copy provided by Sharon Conway)	Strategic Gap Analysis Report - Louis Riel Institute	2012
Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. and Service Canada	Métis Employment & Training Partnerships	n/a
Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. and Service Canada	Métis Employment and Training	n/a

**Table 2.4 Existing Publications Related to Métis Education, Training, and Employment for Ontario**

Organization/Author(s)	Publication Name	Publication Date
Ontario Ministry of Education - Aboriginal Education Office	Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework	2007
Métis Nation of Ontario - Education and Training Branch	A Métis Education Plan	2008
Métis Nation of Ontario	Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training Branch Program Policies	2010
Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities	Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework	2011
Produced by Stone Circle - for Dr. Chris Paci, Métis Nation of Ontario	Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learners Achievement and Self-Identification Project	2011
Jonathan Anuik and Laura-Lee Bellehumeur-Kearns. University of Alberta and St. Francis-Xavier University	Report on Métis Education in Ontario's K-12 Schools	2012
Susan D. Dion, Faculty of Education, York University	Our Place in the Circle: A Review of Métis Content in Ontario Faculties of Education	2012
Métis Nation of Ontario	2013 Labour Market Youth Think Tanks Discussion Paper & Report	2013
Ontario Government	Ontario Early Years Policy Framework	2013

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