

# High-tech jobs for native kids

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## Gov't, industry tapping huge resource

They're moving, hopefully, into the well-paid wired and digital world — and could drive up the prosperity of Manitoba's high-tech economy.

Aboriginal youth are targeted under a new industry-government partnership, which has begun casting a wide net for potential trainees for an information technology sector begging for skilled help.

The province and the Information and Communications Technology Association of Manitoba (ICTAM) yesterday announced that the plan is aimed at beefing up the industry with the largely untapped resource of aboriginals, Metis and others who are growing in num-

ber in Winnipeg.

"It's all about helping people help kids get to work," Chemawawin Cree Nation Chief Clarence Easter told a crowd of supporters at Main Street's Thunderbird House.

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The Doer government has thrown in nearly \$100,000 for a study that has found opportunities for natives in the IT field which could get them into "lucrative, high-paying and sustainable" jobs, said ICTAM executive director Kathy Knight.

With chosen "role models" in the industry, the project will promote high-tech careers and work with companies and training institu-

tions to find the best ways to bring aboriginals in.

Justin Richard, a 31-year-old IT director for the Manitoba Metis Federation, is among the players spreading the message.

### Employable

"We need initiatives like this to help us identify people who are able to perform the work, and secondly to get them certified and make them employable," Richard said. "There are a lot out there — we just have to catch them young."

Winnipeg's I.D. Fusion Software is considered a role model for the future. About 45% of the firm's employees are aboriginal.

"We want to draw more business from outside Manitoba to Manitoba, very much in the model of certain

countries that decided to make change and needed a competitive presence," said Christian Dandeneau, I.D.'s president.

Much of the project, including funding sources, has yet to be mapped out.

Because of the training needed at private institutions or mainstream colleges and universities, organizers say, bringing aboriginals into such careers won't be accomplished quickly.

"But the possibilities are endless," Richard said. "With this strategy and initiative, we're going to identify thousands of candidates who are able to perform the work. It's just a matter of recognizing them and cultivating their skills."

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