Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network's (UAKN)
National Project:

Phase 2: The Urban Aboriginal Service Delivery Landscape:
Themes, Trends, Gaps and Prospects

Final Report

Key Findings and Regional Summaries

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Executive Summary

The urban Indigenous population in Canada has grown substantially since the 1950s. Currently, more than fifty percent of Indigenous peoples live in urban areas and these diverse communities have instigated a growth in organizations to meet their needs. Today, a multitude of urban organizations stretch across every sector and help to support vibrant urban Indigenous communities.

The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, in partnership with the National Association of Friendship Centres, completed a multi-site research project to assess the urban Indigenous service delivery landscape. This large research project had two phases: the first was national overview of the existing services and organizations for urban Indigenous communities and the second is an in depth examination of urban Indigenous organizations and services done by each region.

This report is the overview of phase two and summarizes the reports submitted by each UAKN region, Western, Prairie, Central and Atlantic. Each region consists of two provinces, with the exception of the Atlantic region. The project's main goals were to:

1.   Examine the invisible infrastructure of urban Indigenous service delivery organizations by developing an inventory of organizations and their service areas with a view toward identifying gaps for increased service improvement;

2.   Examine organizations that facilitate urban Indigenous people's participation in the economy;

3.   Explore improvement options for urban Indigenous economic participation, for enhanced services in underserviced areas and enriched relationships between urban Indigenous organizations, non - Indigenous organizations and First Nations, Métis, Inuit organizations;

4.   Highlight services that enhance participation in the economy, innovative partnerships, and positive relationships between various stakeholders.

Each regional report tells the story of the challenges, innovations and successes of urban Indigenous organizations. Though the regions vary in their histories, landscapes and context, there are many findings that are common among all of them. Though urban Indigenous organizations have been successfully meeting the needs of the community, many gaps in service remain. All of the regional reports stated that without improvement in these service needs, full economic participation would not be realized. Many urban Indigenous organizations recognize the value of economic participation for the Indigenous community. Education and training are part of the core suite of programs provided by many organizations. The research completed across the four UAKN regions has shared much about the different relationships formed in order to achieve their visions. The regional reports returned deep and thoughtful commentary on the nature of these relationships and the challenges that lie within them.

Introduction

The urban Indigenous population in Canada has grown substantially since the 1950s. Currently, more than fifty percent of Indigenous peoples live in urban areas. These diverse communities have instigated a growth in organizations to meet their needs. The urban Indigenous services landscape has changed drastically from a lone Friendship Centre. Today, a multitude of urban organizations stretch across every sector and help to support vibrant urban Indigenous communities.

The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, in partnership with the National Association of Friendship Centres, completed a multi-site research project to assess the urban Indigenous service delivery landscape.   This large research project had two phases: the first was national overview of the existing services and organizations for urban Indigenous communities and the second is an in depth examination of urban Indigenous organizations and services done by each region.

This report is the overview of phase two and summarizes the reports submitted by each UAKN region, Western, Prairie, Central and Atlantic. Each region consists of two provinces, with the exception of the Atlantic region. It should be noted that the Prairie region submitted two reports, one for each province. The goal of this research was to understand this vast and complex terrain, reporting on service gaps, innovations, economic participation, and organizational relationships. The committee for each region organized their own research project, based upon the suggested themes, and proceeded to interview individuals representing different Indigenous service organizations in their area. The specifics of these research projects are contained within the regional reports.

The stories told by the regional research projects are captivating. Each regional report tells the story of the challenges, innovations and successes of urban Indigenous organizations. Though the regions vary in their histories, landscapes and context, there are many findings that are common among all of them. Relationships, of all kinds, are a central theme to all reports, as they have been a major source of support and also fraught with challenges. Relationships with the community, other organizations, industry and government are certainly the core of all urban Indigenous organizations. The nature of these relationships, including their challenges and benefits, are a tremendous contribution to the economics and well-being of urban centres. In this era of reconciliation, the centrality of relationships to these organizations ensures the growth of inclusive urban communities.

Methodology

Each region undertook their research using similar methodologies and ethics. Though there were slight regional variations, the research was conducted using qualitative research methods. These took the form of interviews, conducted either on the phone, through skype or in person, approximately an hour long. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and returned to the participants for their approval.

The researchers followed multiple ethical and Indigenous protocols before conducting interviews. The research was passed through the Research Ethics Boards at the "host" university for each UAKN region. Each region encompasses at least two provinces and sometimes many different nations and communities. The researchers adhered to local community protocols and urban Indigenous organizations were given the opportunity to review their words after interview transcription.

The selection of organizations varied throughout the regions. Some regions catalogued all Indigenous service organizations in their designated area, ensured all parts of their region were represented, and sent out an introductory letter and information about the research. Some regions ensured that various service areas were represented, in order to provide a complete picture of the Indigenous service landscape. In smaller areas, all of the representative organizations were contacted for potential interviews. Interview numbers ranged from sixteen to fifty-four per UAKN region. In total, one hundred and eighteen people were interviewed about the urban Indigenous services landscape.

The questions asked in the interviews were variations on the project themes and questions proposed by the National Association of Friendship Centres. These questions are listed within each regional report.

After data collection, the researchers of each region undertook a thematic analysis based upon the over-arching themes provided by the project authority.

Key Findings

Economic Participation

There is a continuing need for the funding of economic participation initiatives for urban Indigenous communities that would meet the growing need of unemployment and enhance Aboriginal peoples, particularly youth employment; build better and positive relations with non-Aboriginal communities and improve the socio-economic status of urban Aboriginal peoples.

Friendship Centres play a central role in the economic life of urban centres. Not only do they contribute to tourism but they have a significant impact on the local workforce.

Every region indicated that programming and services designed to address barriers to economic participation in the form of housing, mental health services, child care services and transportation were at least as important as employment and training programs. Until basic social services offered are adequate, the employment and training programs will be underused and less effective.

Though economic participation is a necessity, all of the regions indicated that the heart of Aboriginal organizations should continue to be culture and Indigenous knowledge. Many people shared that successful economic participation would be achieved if urban Indigenous communities were strong in their identity and cultural foundations.

Relationships

The regions shared a general perception that there is an imbalance of power, with much of the power located outside of the urban Aboriginal community. They feel that the power and decision making needs equitable for true reconciliation.

The regions observed that when engaging in various multi-level partnerships, the lack of effective communication and respect between government, funding agencies and Aboriginal organizations is common.   It is often the case where, despite having similar objectives, the approach of non-Indigenous organizations and governments is focused on communicating their own ideas rather than working with urban Indigenous organizations towards a shared goal.

Most urban Indigenous organizations have mixed feelings about engagement with industry. Although most of the work on industrial projects is occurring on traditional territory, many of the urban Aboriginal organizations feel that they are not included in these discussions.

Building relationships with industry can be challenging, as industry does not always possess awareness around Indigenous issues and have difficulty with the social services mandate of urban Indigenous organizations. Research revealed that many urban Indigenous organizations doubt the motivation of industry to build true partnerships with urban Indigenous communities.

The most effective way for urban Indigenous organizations to access new and innovative relationships and funding opportunities is through maintaining a strong working core: that is, by ensuring the organization itself is reliable and accessible to potential partners. This means having secure staff but the inability to provide competitive wages and benefits at the same level as mainstream organizations is a huge concern for many urban Indigenous organizations.

Programs are proposal driven and require much time and effort. Funding from government is directly tied to these programs and organizations feel as though they are in a continuous battle trying to secure funds when their focus could be delivering services. Many programs are contingent upon annual funding, which is uncertain, and if a program is suspended there are real consequences in the urban Indigenous community. Not all Indigenous organizations possess the development capacity to network and easily access project grants to secure funding.

All regions reported that urban Indigenous organizations are under-funded and over-reported compared to non-Indigenous organizations providing similar programs and services. Urban Aboriginal organizations are constantly having to prove their credibility to government and funding agencies, this is especially true if the service and/or program is based on Indigenous practices.

Urban Indigenous organizations often find themselves in competition with one another when trying to secure funding from government, organizations and funding agencies. This can create a negative context, particularly in smaller areas, in which to deliver the necessary programs and services to the Indigenous community.

There continues to be a misconception about Indigenous peoples and their rights. Urban Indigenous organizations find themselves doing a great deal of education while trying to build relationships with various partners. Existing prejudice has posed challenges for effective engagement and the creation of safe spaces for the dialogue needed in order to break down barriers and move forward.

Building trust is an important part of relationship building and it takes time for this trust to be established, particularly with all levels of government, industry and faith-based organizations. Urban Indigenous organizations have been challenged by the time commitment required to engage in these partnerships. These organizations must perform a multitude of tasks to ensure the smooth delivery of programs and services, as well as maintain a relationship with the community, and find themselves with limited capacity to accommodate meetings and consultation with potential partners.

All regions shared that relationships between industry, governments, and other organizations can benefit from creating formal relationships. The use of protocols, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, has proven useful, in that all parties are clear on their rights in responsibilities within the relationship. These relationships are not universal, as there are different kinds of relationships that require different

commitments. It is important that partner organizations, funders and different levels of government understand and respect the mandate of the urban Indigenous organizations.

Improving Services

Overall, the regions reported many gaps in services. In particular, they see gaps in services related to mental health, youth who 'age out' of care, programming for men, housing, and health care. Each region has identified the gaps noted by the research in their reports.

It has been reported that there has been little or no increase in government funding to organizations, while the target population accessing these services continues to grow. For non-profit organizations, the funding is mostly project-based, which means it is tied to delivery of a particular program within a specific timeline between one to three years.

It is recognized among the regions that the provision of smooth flow of funds based on strong and positive relationships between urban Indigenous organizations and funders will improve services. Access to secure funding would allow more long-term planning for programming and prevent service disruption.

Sustainability

Urban Indigenous organizations understand the necessity for listening to the community and knowing their challenges. Working with the community in this way allows them to design and deliver programs and set success criteria that meet the current needs of urban Indigenous peoples. Urban Aboriginal peoples are faced with unique challenges and the programs and services of urban Indigenous organizations are designed to maximize *the retention of people in a best possible way*.

Community participation is an important factor to organizational sustainability, as organizations engage volunteers to continue on-going programs and services. This is particularly true when there is a termination of services due to scarcity of funds. Just because the program ends does mean the need is met and volunteers and staff members frequently go above and beyond the services administered to ensure the community is being served in the best way possible.

This vision is founded on the cultural mandate of the individual Friendship Centre and based upon the land and people that it serves. All reports indicated the importance of the centrality of this vision and to set smaller goals in order to achieve it.

Regional Summaries

Atlantic

The Urban Aboriginal service delivery landscape has developed over the last half century to address the unique and changing needs of Aboriginal people living off-reserve and in urban settings. In Atlantic Canada, a constellation of Aboriginal organizations exists with varying purposes and mandates to

collectively offer a wide range of services to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities in the region. These organizations do not provide services in isolation. A crucial, and often over-looked aspect of these organizations, is that they provide the invaluable service of social service navigation to those who access their services. Within every organization there are individuals who act as connectors, directing people to the organizations and agencies who can best meet their needs.

Though greater numbers of Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada are living off-reserve than on-reserve (Source: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) Indian Registry System (IRS), "Indian Register Population affiliated with First Nations by Gender and Residency", December 31, 2014.), Aboriginal-specific organizations offering services off-reserve and/or in urban areas are challenged by a continuing decline in governmental core or core-like funding. In addition to this, organizations may be confined to a very specific framework for service delivery depending on the type of organization and its organizational capacity. Aboriginal-specific organizations may be competing with non-Aboriginal organizations for funding. Funding stream changes and/or funding termination have intensified gaps within the service delivery landscape.

Aboriginal organizations, their partners and stakeholders have created a grass-roots infrastructure that is continually evolving to offer social services and advocacy to urban and off-reserve Aboriginal communities. Despite this, the organizational infrastructure is widely unknown by those who do not directly use or support the services. This timely study seeks to examine this organizational infrastructure through the development of an inventory of organizations and their service areas with a view towards the identification of gaps or areas requiring additional attention or development.

Central Region

Over the last half century, an urban Indigenous service delivery landscape has emerged in response to identified urban Indigenous needs including language and culture, economic development, education, art, and health. As the Urban Indigenous Knowledge Network (UAKN) notes, "…the growth of this infrastructure has been organic—driven by community needs and desires, the availability of funding from governments, and local capacity for organizational development and management" (2014). Because of this organic and multi-faceted growth and diversity in urban Indigenous communities, the face of urban Indigenous service delivery is not readily defined. To better understand this new landscape, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCCAQ) conducted the regional phase of a larger study concerning Indigenous service delivery in collaboration with the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN).

This project included two phases, a national phase and a regional phase. The national phase, conducted by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN) Secretariat, consisted of developing a national inventory of urban Aboriginal organisations. The regional phase, conducted by each of the four research centres of the UAKN in collaboration with local Indigenous organisations, explored community perspectives in terms of service delivery. These two phases will be consolidated in order to provide a national overview of the landscape while identifying the gaps and the opportunities for more programs/services as well as for research at the local, regional and national levels.

In Ontario, the OFIFC has twenty-eight Friendship Centres located throughout the province and, for this project, conducted nineteen interviews in the Central Ontario Region of the UAKN. The OFIFC chose a four different Friendship Centres, in order to gain a regional sampling of the participants. In Québec, the RCCAQ oversees nine Friendship Centres and, for this project, eight interviews were conducted by RCCAQ from eight of the nine Friendship Centres.

The reports of Ontario and Québec provide a picture of the current realities of the Friendship Centres in the Central region. Both reports tell stories of the centrality of relationships with external organizations to the everyday life of Friendship Centres and describe the benefits, challenges, and strategies that surround pursuing and maintaining these relationships. In addition, the research also revealed the importance of advocacy and education, particularly in light of the reconciliation movement, in the everyday work of Friendship Centres. The Friendship Centres are a vibrant part of the economic life of the Central region and operate within a successful business model which, in turn, ensures the Centres are strong and reliable. Overall, the Friendship Centres of the Central region adhere to their visions, founded upon a cultural mandate to serve both the land and the people, and in doing so are able to create and maintain effective relationships.

Saskatchewan (Prairie Region)

In the context of an increasingly urbanized and mobile population of Aboriginal people in Canada, an "invisible infrastructure" of urban Aboriginal service delivery organizations has emerged to meet identified needs in such sectors as social services, language and culture, economic development, employment, education, and health. Yet Aboriginal people face gaps and lags in service delivery because of a range of systemic and other factors related to the history of colonization and ongoing marginalization. This research project, the Saskatchewan portion of phase two of a larger Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network national study, examines this organizational infrastructure to identify gaps or areas requiring attention or development.

Based on a literature review and 35 interviews with urban Aboriginal service delivery organizations across all treaty territories and 11 of 13 health regions in Saskatchewan, this report discusses findings on opportunities and challenges associated with service delivery to urban Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan, many of which confirm themes, trends, and challenges observed elsewhere in Canada. The interviewed organizations face unusual burdens of not only meeting diverse Aboriginal community needs but also navigating cultural expectations of their own communities and mainstream society and, in the absence of federal and provincial government leadership, educating newcomers and mainstream Canadians on Aboriginal and treaty rights. In fulfilling these tasks, organizations can depend on the passion and commitment of staff, boards, chief and council, and other leadership to Aboriginal control of services, a proven facilitator of urban Aboriginal economic participation, to education and cultural transfer of knowledge for sustainability and social medicine.

Quality of life improvement emerged as an overarching theme related to everything from food security to meeting the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs of community members. At the organizational level this is expresses by interrelated goals of equity in education, economics, and health with each organization focusing on a different balance. Although cultural services were viewed as essential to quality of life, too often they were sacrificed to reductive views of value. Common sense

views of the economic bottom line, or employment numbers, as the primary and even only indicator of how communities are faring, however well intentioned, violate traditional principles of community organization and self-sustainment. Culture is no less necessary than food on the table and opportunity at hand.

Services that enhance economic participation of urban Aboriginal people include business development, Aboriginal-controlled organizations, sports and culture, as well as education and skills training to reduce dependency, build on capacities, and help Aboriginal youth understand who they are so they can effectively participate in the workforce.

To reach their goals, urban Aboriginal organizations continue to support the journey toward self-determination, assessing and addressing needs, while focusing on the long term, understanding their place in the story of self-determination and celebrating their commitment and ability to support future generations.

While there are limited funding opportunities from the governments and funding agencies to institute services to meet levels of quality of life enjoyed by non-Aboriginal peoples, there are opportunities for re-imagining and reorienting the many and complex urban Aboriginal organizations that offer services to an ever-growing population. The report discusses issues of access, ongoing barriers, and initiatives to give urban Aboriginal people voice and choice, visibility and authority, to draw on networks and partnerships and to stretch dollars to serve their own communities, to close educational and employment gaps, to include all treaty people, and to build bridges across communities to the benefit of all Canadians.

Manitoba (Prairie Region)

Urban Aboriginal people in Canada have a long tradition of relying on public-private and non-profit sector to meet their needs. Between 1960 and 1990, a number of organizations, particularly, Aboriginal establishments have emerged from the Friendship Centre movement to support Aboriginal population living in the urban areas across Canada. (NAFC, 2013). Education, employment, skill development, health and healing, justice and reconciliation, culture and language and sports and recreation are some of the areas where most Aboriginal organizations are delivering services alongside the government (Newhouse and Peters, 2003). In 1997, the government of Canada developed the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) to provide flexible funding and partnership with other levels of government, Aboriginal, non-government, community-based organizations, and the private sector to support initiatives that increase the economic participation of Aboriginal people living in urban centres (AADNC, 2014).

Despite, the intention to uplift urban Aboriginal people socio-economic condition and to uphold and promote indigenous culture, there have been many barriers and gaps in service delivery. Some of these challenges are of fascial nature and include limited, stagnant and short-term funding for Aboriginal organizations to operate administrative activities, pay staff salaries, acquire technical resource to develop and implement programs and services (UATF, 2007). Other gaps are due to more historical factors such as systemic colonial discrimination and prejudice against Aboriginal people and devaluing and negation of Aboriginal organizations credibility to provide cultural responsive services based on indigenous teachings and practices (ibid.).

The intention of this research report has been to understand the development of the urban Aboriginal service delivery infrastructure in Manitoba. This objective is achieved through interviewing selected urban Aboriginal organizations service provides in Manitoba through exploring their organizational mandate and goals; programs and services particularly which aim to improve economic participation of the people, funding resources and gaps in the service and facilitating factors and threats to organizational sustainability. Together with an analysis on multi-level, stakeholder engagement to improve service delivery; the best practices and challenges and the some of the emerging partnerships in the last decade. The report also pointed out the ways to improve relationships between urban Aboriginal organizations, non-Aboriginal organizations, organizations and future areas where partnerships are needed.

Western Region

This report is one of four regional reports commissioned by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN). With over 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population in Canada now residing in urban areas, the provision of services and service gaps through urban Aboriginal organizations is an issue of considerable importance to the well-being of that population. Reviews of service provision and service gaps were undertaken in the four regional UAKN research centres, Western, Prairies, Ontario and Atlantic. This is a stand-alone report for the Western region.

A total of twenty-two organizations participated in this research, thirteen in British Columbia and nine in Alberta. The major theme that emerged from the interviews was the centrality of relationships in the provision of services. Primarily this means building effective relationships with clients in order to provide the services that address their specific needs. But in order for this to be achieved other relationships are also important: internal organization relationships; relationships with other organizations, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal; relationships with government; and relationships with industry. The research identified many areas in which Aboriginal organizations have been successful, such as the community-based and holistic approach by which these organizations operate. Concerns and policy gaps were also identified and one of the most obvious concerns mentioned was the current proposal-based funding model which has not changed with the growth of the Aboriginal population in the Western region. By examining overarching themes, as well as identifiable gaps, this research was able to ascertain many of the challenges faced by Aboriginal organizations in the Western region and explore their continuing ability to provide a strong support system for the urban Aboriginal community.

Recommendations

- Economic development initiatives designed for Aboriginal people – individual and collective – are only effective if the basic needs of the target group are being met. Funding agencies must ensure that basic needs are being addressed to increase the effectiveness of economic development and employment programs.
- Funding agencies must move from short-term funding to multi-year funding to enable Aboriginal organizations to develop more effective long-term linkages with key stakeholders, partners, and community members.

- The burden of proposal writing and heavy reporting requirements of governments and funding agencies take a toll on the capacity and staff of urban Indigenous organizations. These funding and reporting guidelines should be streamlined to not only encourage quick submissions but to ensure key staff members are not wholly taken away from their role in urban Indigenous organizations.

- In order to build positive and respectful relationships with urban Indigenous organizations, government, industry and non-Indigenous organizations must listen first. Rather than pushing their own agenda, long-lasting relationships can be created by approaching urban Indigenous organizations as co-creators of solutions.

- Urban Indigenous organizations can be strong partners to government, industry and other organizations when they are strong themselves. Consistent and comparable funding must be made available to urban Indigenous organizations so that they are able to have a core staff that can realize the long term visions of a given organization.

- Relationships between urban Indigenous organizations and their partners must be formalized using both Indigenous and non-Indigenous protocols. Formalizing the relationship in this way ensures that all parties are aware of the responsibilities they have to one another.

- There continues to be a lack of awareness concerning Indigenous rights, history, and issues, which immediately impacts the ability of urban Indigenous organizations to form respectful relationships with potential partners. Cultural competency is a reasonable expectation when working with different levels of government, industry and funding agencies. There must be mandatory competency courses concerning Indigenous peoples available for all sectors that enter into relationships with Indigenous peoples.

- At the heart of urban Indigenous organizations is Indigenous knowledge, culture and community. These important aspects must be respected as contributing to the unique programming that urban Indigenous organizations seek to fund and should be supported as such.

- Policy makers have a duty to implement recommended changes to ensure gaps in services are being addressed. Further, policy makers must engage in regular review of implemented changes to adjust for successful service delivery outcomes.

Conclusion

Across the country, the urban Indigenous services landscape has grown in size and complexity over the past forty years to meet the needs of the urban community. In the past, the urban Indigenous community has seen as issue-ridden and maladjusted, but this is no longer the case. These diverse populations/communities are pivotal to the cities in which they live, as are the organizations which/that serve them.

Though urban Indigenous organizations have been successfully meeting the needs of the community, many gaps in service remain. The cracks in this service delivery landscape are consistently identified and much discussed. Issues such as funding for mental health, programming for men, housing and many other health challenges remain at the forefront of community concerns. Urban Indigenous

organizations have front-line experience with these challenges and community-based ideas of how to improve these services. All of the regional reports stated that without improvement in these service needs, full economic participation would not be realized. Using the principle of holism, urban Indigenous organizations in every city interviewed expressed the need to ensure that the health and social necessities of the urban Indigenous community are viewed as integral to economic participation.

Many urban Indigenous organizations recognize the value of economic participation for the Indigenous community. Education and training are part of the core suite of programs provided by many organizations. These programs have successfully provided or improved skills that enabled community members to better participate in the economic life of urban centres. Over time, these organizations have made an impact upon the economic life of the community themselves. Through growth, diversification and valuable partnerships, many of these organizations have become substantial employers of community members.

The research completed across the four UAKN regions has shared much about the different relationships formed by urban Indigenous organizations. In order to achieve their visions, Indigenous organizations must enter into a multitude of diverse partnerships. The regional reports returned deep and thoughtful commentary on the nature of these relationships and the challenges that lie within them. Organizational relationships frequently have challenges, however, the regions shared that particular challenges faced by urban Indigenous organizations can have real consequences for service delivery. Primary among these is the nature of the funding relationship with government and other funding agencies, where onerous reporting and application processes overwhelm employees.   The norm of short-term funding creates a reality where the life of programming can be tenuous and the loss of programs in these organizations can be detrimental to the urban Indigenous community.   When building relationships with government and industry, many urban Indigenous organizations face prejudice and a continued lack of awareness of Indigenous rights and histories. Though, through building relationships across different sectors allows urban Indigenous organizations to educate and remove barriers, this takes a great deal of time and effort.   Organizations reported that it is through the establishment of protocols and respect that give these relationships a chance for success.