

# Choosing the Margins

## Re-building the Metis economy in BC

Building economic  
development



- LOUIS DE JAEGER MBA *ECONOMIC MINISTER METIS NATION BRITISH COLUMBIA*

Politics, relationships, and effective governance is at the forefront of successful Indigenous economies. The Harvard Project on American Indian economic development and the Native Nations Institute uncovered that economic development is first and foremost a political problem. Successful community and economic development rely on a solid foundation of governance. Governance is the fundamental rules, oral or written, that nations depend on to coordinate actions and achieve their goals. Once you have your “political house” in order, then the economic assets and opportunities can begin to pay off. With the road to self-government now a reality for the citizens of MNBC, the hard work begins on examining where that road should lead us. Metis economies are more than just service providers and service agencies, though that is just a portion of what they do. The underfunding of ministries has been the achilles heel to sustainable growth and service delivery for years. MNBC’s debt and questionable past decision-making practices has also created long term financial challenges in which the effects are still being felt in budgets today. Decision makers must ensure that long-term planning is backed up with the long-term commitment needed for re-building our

institutions. Taking the time to develop a solid strategic plan with benchmarks will help achieve these long-term goals. According to Miriam Jorgensen, research director of the Native Nations Institute in Arizona, the 5 core principles of Nation building are:

**Sovereignty in practice** - *It is not just governments but Indigenous peoples that embrace their own crucial role in making self-determination a reality.*

**Capable governing institutions** - *When a Native nation has strong, effective, capable institutions, they have the capacity to turn the desires of the community into concrete actions.*

**Cultural match** - *Legitimate institutions need to be rooted in the culture and values of the community they represent.*

**Strategic orientation** - *What kind of society or community are we trying to build?*

**Public-spirited leadership** - *A lack of effective leadership results in little, if anything, getting done. As this work unfolds, it is important to remember that economic systems are only as good as the values, responsibilities and community agreements that govern them. The only policy shown to improve the lives and socioeconomic conditions of individuals is one of self-determination. There is a role for everyone and everyone has a role.*

### Entrepreneurship and trade run in our blood

*Honoring our past, creating our future*

It is always important when moving forward with innovative approaches in business development to know who you are and where you come from when telling your story. The Metis were the intermediaries between European and Indian cultures working as guides, fur traders, interpreters and provisioners. Our success is built on the relationships that we create. The Northwest Company (NWC) itself was a partnership of 9 separate fur trading groups. It was clear then that the traders influence would be greater if they worked together. Not only would they have more clout, but they could pool resources, minimize risks and share in the profits.

### Two Fur Trade Giants

The Hudson's Bay  
Company



The Northwest  
Company



The NWC was different from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in several significant ways. Based in North America, it was owned and operated by men who were active in the business. Many of the partners had themselves travelled into the interior and traded there. These *hivernants* or wintering partners knew the business intimately and had a personal stake in the company's success. In contrast, the Hudson Bay Company's (HBC) directors and investors were primarily English noblemen and financiers, who governed the company from afar. Their interests in the business was overwhelmingly financial and their actual knowledge of the trade was second hand at best. This is our story, it is our advantage and our opportunity.





“In order to move a canoe forward we all have to be pulling together in the same direction.” - Louis De Jaeger Minister of Economic Development and Natural Resources MNBC.

# Metis Business Alliance

*Are there advantages in creating a business association?*

With over 368 Businesses registered on MNBC’s online database the time has never been better to work together to foster opportunity and growth. Led by a cooperative partnership between MNBC’s Economic Development agency and the Metis Financial Corporation of BC, the association will focus on:

- *Creating networking opportunities*
- *Serving as an advocate for Indigenous entrepreneurs/businesses*
- *Foster business supporting business/buy local programs*
- *Helps with marketing and promoting Metis businesses and Metis entrepreneurs*
- *Advocates for educational supports working with MNBC agencies*
- *Host/co-host Tradeshows for regional Metis businesses*
- *Promotes Metis business growth/employee/owner benefits*
- *Advocates for ‘women in business’*
- *Host/co-host business networking sessions*
- *Works with the awards committee on bringing recommendations forward*
- *Developing a business mentorship program*

It would be rare for any entrepreneur to succeed without help, though all face challenges not all entrepreneurs face the same challenges. That hill can be a mountain to climb and for some Metis women and youth, the dream of bringing their business to life might never become a reality. Metis entrepreneurs lack equal access to qualified Metis employees, business training, investment networks, financial and technical business know-how and mentoring. These business and social challenges are best understood by our own people. Support is crucial in helping develop and grow their business ideas. There is a role for a business association to advocate for the delivery of enhanced entrepreneurial training or by organizing Metis business connect events inviting guest speakers and industry professionals to meet with Metis owners directly. A Metis business Trideshow or Business-match might be something that could be planned in the future. Regional business clusters when deployed create a competitive advantage for bidding on projects. Creating ‘Certified Metis Business’ branding can expedite procurement hoops for business owners.

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 Congratulations Keenan Beavis, Métis founder of Longhouse Media, for winning the 2020 Indigenous Young Entrepreneur of the Year award.  
 Beavis is proud of his Métis heritage.





## Metis Business Directory

**Members drive economic data needed for good decision-making**

Statistics are powerful persuaders! Work continues connecting with over 368 Metis Businesses and entrepreneurs listed in our Metis Business Directory. Engaging with Metis entrepreneurs and businesses has been a priority for Senior Director of Economic Development Paul Pasco. The big challenge for us will be:  
 1) to generate reliable and secure data from all MNBC information systems  
 2) compile a complete and thorough business survey



## Metis Business Advisory Committee

MNBC has put the call out for accomplished Metis business professionals to be part of the newly formed Metis Business Advisory Committee (MBAC). We are looking for business professionals from trades to artists, entrepreneurs to industry managers. Our goal is to build an economic eco-system from the ground up, prioritizing business ‘needs.’ MBAC will act as the voice for Metis business in BC, developing opportunity and shaping our future. The committee’s shared expert advice and cultural wisdom will help us develop a business network that includes close ties with financial, educational and community partners. It will build on sustainable business success respecting our values of respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth. Their written recommendations will become part of our business planning.



# Creating economic sustainability

*“Economics is the management of our home” ~ David Suzuki*



THE BEST INVESTMENT DECISION THAT WE CAN MAKE IS INVESTING IN OURSELVES AND OUR INSTITUTIONS

Healthy economies build healthy nations. Community owned businesses and their entrepreneurs must be given the tools they need to be successful. Governments can help by creating an eco-system that fosters economic development. If you want to create a sustainable economy Government can invest in resource inputs such as knowledge, skills, experience and the financial capital to make it happen. Business tools such as analytics, strategic planning and sound Management can be delivered by other MNBC agencies but all need to be working together in an economic partnership playing to each of their strengths. Coordinating agencies to deliver can be tricky but if we are going

to invest in large projects, we have to have sound management that knows where we are going with our strategic plan. Do the proposals make sense? Many challenges faced by entrepreneurs and Metis businesses can be remedied by Governments. Tools for governing play into all of this as well. The ability to resolve disputes, a justice system that works and accountability to the overall strategic direction that commits to moving the nation forward. Supporting capable governing institutions and following resolutions that pass must be in force and the rule of law must be followed. The kind of government that we have has to be something that our communities believe in, a cultural match. Infighting and instability impedes prosperity. We have to resist the forces of internalized aggression. The Harvard Project on American Indian economic development is first and foremost a political problem. Successful community and economic development rely on a solid foundation of

governance based on the fundamental rules, written or oral, that nations depend on to coordinate actions and achieve goals. Once you have your “political house” in order, then the economic assets and opportunities can begin to pay off. Adopting policies and mechanisms of accountability, responsibility and transparency will further increase the confidence of investors and partners to do business with our agencies, businesses and entrepreneurs. Keeping the political, business and operational part of governance separated takes a constant commitment by all... managers and leaders. We must keep reconfirming our commitment to defend the constitution and consistently be updating our legislative and governance documents so that they remain a reflection of our culture and values.



## Metis Financial Corporation of British Columbia (MFCBC)

Developing new and dynamic programs and loans that meet the needs of our entrepreneurs and communities is crucial to Nation building. The Metis Financial Corporation of BC (MFCBC) was established by MNBC as a result of an agreement with the department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. MNBC is the sole shareholder of MFCBC.

Access to capital remains one of the biggest hurdles to new start-up businesses. MFCBC’s mission is to provide trusted financial services for Metis entrepreneurs with a vision to position Metis entrepreneurs and businesses to be able to fully participate in new and future economic opportunities. MFCBC can provide loans to Metis entrepreneurs that commercial lenders such as banks and credit unions may not be able to provide. MFCBC is positioned to expand into areas such as first-time homeowners purchasing program, providing community loans, developing youth entrepreneurship programs, social enterprise and advocating for supports focused on Metis women in business. Expanding services such as planning and development, business advisory and

working with MNBC’s employment and training agency will contribute to better successful outcomes. By participating on the newly formed Business Advisory Committee, MFCBC will be at the table with Metis business leaders, combining our expertise in business financing with the growing needs of our businesses. We must be ready as new opportunities emerge by collaborating with other Metis Capital Corporations, private partners, community enterprises and commercial banks. By advocating for delivery of the First Citizens Fund and distinction-based funding, MFCBC must be seen as the vehicle of choice to deliver economic opportunity to Metis entrepreneurs. By working together will we be able to turn what we have into what we want to get what we need.



Metis Economic Development and Natural Resources Minister Louis De Jaeger with Simon Fraser University's cohort Chief Lara Mussell (Skwah First Nation), ISPARC Chair, and Candice Charlie, Sts'ailes lands, Community engagement and planning. Strengthening the relationships and partnerships with BC First Nations is crucial to MNBC's Economic opportunity.

## Re-building relationships

### Turning our challenges into Metis economic growth...

There has never been a better time to assist entrepreneurs, community enterprises and our Nation in a way that reflects who we are. What we don't have, we can build, what we don't know, we can learn. We are late to the game in getting serious about building our economic wealth but that is not necessarily a bad thing. There are many good lessons out there that can be adopted and there are many more pitfalls in which to avoid. The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska established an independent economic development corporation that financed the infrastructure necessary to attract investors, businesses and to create jobs. We can do exactly that and by using our own Aboriginal Financial Corporation, the Metis Financial Corporation of BC, we can leverage what wealth we do have to do more. By using available data (Metis Business Census/survey) we can identify the gaps in our economic growth, where we are performing or underperforming region by region within the larger BC economy. To be agents of change, we must constantly be identifying the barriers that exist in developing our competitive advantage whether that be education, training, partnerships or employment readiness. Those gaps include the building and re-building of our relationships with the Provincial Government, First Nations and the other Metis Regional Governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. It should be acknowledged that other Metis Governing Members are growing significant assets of their own and by partnering on certain projects we can start building our capacity in new areas of economic activity while increasing our own revenue streams.

*When the government of Canada presented itself at our doors it found us at peace. It found that the Metis people of the North-West could not only live well without it...but that it had a government of its own, free, peaceful, well-functioning, contributing to the work of civilization in a way that the Company from England could never have done without thousands of soldiers. It was a government with an organized constitution whose junction was more legitimate and worthy of respect, because it was exercised over a country that belonged to it." - Louis Riel*

My goal remains to work with all of our agencies on an economic development strategy that engages our government partners in economic reconciliation within all of our Regions. No one Community's story is the same, so consultation through regional forums is an important part self-governance and helps to develop trust. Just because it hasn't been done doesn't mean that we cannot do it. Among the accomplishments in the relatively short time since the election we have established a Business Advisory Council made up of some of the best Metis achievers representing Industry, Social Enterprise, Entrepreneurship, Youth, Artisans, Small Business, Community co-ops, Agriculture, Oil & gas sector, Forest and Natural Resources and a strong representation of Women in Business. Work continues to increase our presence in the rich economic regions of the north and expand MNBC's economic opportunity in cooperation with other Metis Financial Institutions. What we will continue looking for are willing partner to help us get that work done. In closing, I would like to leave you with 3 examples of how good planning can lead to economic success despite huge barriers. These Nations had huge hurdles to overcome. I am adding them here as I have studied each one over the years and have actually travelled and met with the Executive Officers and Economic Development Managers. Each example has a unique set of challenges and similarities to what is possible at Metis Nation BC. With good consultation and by working together these Nations turned those challenges into opportunity. After all, isn't that what economic development is all about?

**Kanaka Bar Creek** is one of the smallest FN's in BC located in the Fraser Canyon.

<https://www.kanakabarband.ca/files/community-economic-development-plan-pdf.pdf>

**West Bank First Nation** is one of the most successful economies in BC

<https://www.wfn.ca/docs/community-economic-development-plan.pdf>

**Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians** (Palm Springs)

<https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/section-14>



