



**Strategic Mandate Agreement
Submission
September 30th, 2012**

Executive Summary

Priority 1: Aboriginal Learning will be supported through the implementation of **The Centre for Policy and Research in Aboriginal Learning** in 2013. In creating The Centre with an Applied Research Chair, we are reconciling our past with our future. We are advancing a vision of aboriginal education whereby Indigenous knowledge, practice and principles are shared with all learners enabling a renewed dialogue in Canada. As Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy stated "... I am well advised that your College has made concerted efforts to address the needs of our students and communities. ...This collaboration is critical if we are to continue to build capacity in/among First Nations....gaining greater autonomy and control over our futures."¹

Priority 2: The **Virtual College** will be the premier hybrid online college in Canada. Building on our current success in creative, flexible program delivery and excellent student support, the Virtual College will expand the delivery of certificate, diploma and post-graduate programs that will be offered regionally, provincially, nationally and internationally. We are the "go to" providers for delivering high-quality credentials to geographically bound, time constrained learners needing support through hybrid delivery. A hybrid online college system not only improves the opportunities for aboriginal learners throughout the Northwest but will allow further development of our integrated plan of community educational offerings – exactly what our citizens need so that they can fully participate in the new employment opportunities created by the "Ring of Fire" and regional economic development across the region. Through multiple agreements the six northern Colleges and Fleming College have agreed to work together to share expertise and support access and delivery of programming across northern Ontario. To quote Mayor Dumas of Marathon "Confederation College is a strong education and community development partner for Marathon, local business, industry, and First Nations. Innovative distance education delivery ensures integrated and experiential learning opportunities ... to those who wish to remain in their home communities."²

Priority 3: Confederation College delivers integrated learning in support of social innovation, economic and community development. The **Community Development Initiatives** (integrated Employment Services/Training Network, Innovation/Entrepreneurism Hubs, Applied Research, and Study North) will support Confederation College's community development and social innovation impact. Our history of effective rural and remote community partnerships and collaboration are the foundation for the next phase of our work; bringing entrepreneurs, innovators, community leaders, learners and the public sector together to support communities in their efforts to help themselves. As Kenora Mayor Canfield wrote "... we recognize that there is a potential to create close to 1,000 jobs in the next 5 years. Without a training facility in Kenora to educate these people, we will not have the labour force to meet the demands of the future."³

The **Student Village** currently under concept development, will provide better and more affordable housing options and supports for the changing needs of students, particularly aboriginal learners from remote communities; a significant number of whom have child care needs and require housing that will support multi-generational families. The Village will provide accommodation, recreational facilities, access to child care and spiritual and cultural support through an on-site elder to ensure student success and wellness in a sustainable integrated and environmentally-focused living and learning setting.

¹ These are exemplar comments from letters that we have received from First Nations leaders

² These are exemplar comments from letters that we have received from Community leaders

³ Ibid

Part 1: Confederation College - Proposed Mandate Statement

Confederation College is a comprehensive access institution with priorities of: Aboriginal Learning; The Virtual College; and Community Focused Development.

Confederation College serves northwestern Ontario, a geographic region of 550,000 sq km, more than half of the province. It has a relatively sparse and unevenly distributed population base of 240,000 including 50,000 people with an Aboriginal heritage. While half of the population lives in Thunder Bay, the remaining half are in rural and fly-in remote communities. To respond to the need for learning across this vast area, Confederation College has nine campuses with additional programming delivery to more than 60 communities through hybrid learning and learning networks, most notably Contact North. Northwestern Ontario is the traditional land of the Anishinaabe people who are experiencing the most significant demographic change in the region with a rapid growth in the number of aboriginal youth.

Educational attainment in the region is characterized by the lowest high school completion rate in the province; a relatively low participation rate in postsecondary education, although a higher than average number of college graduates. The Northwest economy is rapidly restructuring and growing. Economic growth is driven by renewal and expansion of resource-based industries, within a context of economic diversification and growth of knowledge-based health and technology enterprise. Mining alone will contribute more than 13,000 new employment opportunities in the region in the next five years with little existing workforce to respond to this need. Ninety percent of these employment opportunities will require a college credential. This is not only a challenge of the future; Thunder Bay already has overall unemployment amongst the lowest in the province, particularly in trades and technologies. Major employers are importing employees with these skills from other parts of the country and the world. Increasing the postsecondary participation and learner success rates would help respond to this increasing workforce demand.

Confederation's mission "to inspire learners to succeed in their lives and careers in northwestern Ontario and beyond", describes our vital community role. Now more than ever education must be delivered in ways that suit the students; whether that is at one of our campuses, their home communities or the job site. We are uniquely poised to answer the call.

Part 2: Confederation College – Vision

Our Vision is "Confederation College will enrich lives through learning". We are part of the social fabric of northwestern Ontario. KPIs indicate we are #1 in graduate employment and we are the premier college in terms of preparing students for employment and a catalyst for community change and development. The Northwest is on the cusp of profound positive economic and social change. Confederation College is supporting learners and their communities so that they are able to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Part 3: Confederation College - Priority Objectives

Priority #1: Aboriginal Learning

The vast region that is Northwestern Ontario is home to the Anishinaabe comprising several treaty areas including the 1850 pre-Confederation Robinson-Superior treaty and several numbered treaties such as Treaty #3, Treaty #5 and Treaty #9 (Nishnawbe Aski Nation). The historical significance and current influence of the Métis people in community and economic development is felt throughout the Northwest. Together First Nations and Métis peoples comprise approximately 25% of our population as such Aboriginal learning is clear priority.

The Centre for Policy and Research in Aboriginal Learning mandate is to: develop evidenced based policy to support aboriginal learning for the College and postsecondary institutions in general; guide our applied and action oriented research in aboriginal learning and community focused development; expand our applied learning practices (e.g. Medical Interpreter Program and Maternal Care both at Meno Ya Win in Sioux Lookout); and complement the work of the Northern Policy Institute. A major focus of the Centre is to identify and guide the implementation of cost-effective ways to support aboriginal learning in a variety of Canadian and international environments. The Centre will be launched in 2013 and house a policy leader, primarily supported by College resources, with the research chair and project funding provided by provincial, national granting councils, NGO's and private funding sources.

Negahneewin College, the centre of indigenous studies and support services for aboriginal students, has evolved as a college within and throughout Confederation College.⁴ This one-of-a-kind model enables leaders and academics to articulate new strategies to bring Indigenous Studies from the margins into the nucleus of postsecondary learning. Our learner-centered, programs use indigenous knowledge and pedagogy to support the full integration of Aboriginal learning outcomes across programs in the institution. While the aboriginal learning outcomes provide a cultural context that can be identified by aboriginal students, the outcomes are also used to stimulate discussion of diversity among all cultures represented in the learning environment.

A wealth of expertise has grown at the College since the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy Fund was established in 1991-1992 by the MTCU. The potential to expand this expertise further is reflected in our work in the area of Aboriginal Literacy and Identity, as explored with Writer-in-Residence Tomson Highway in 2010 (in collaboration with Lakehead University and Magnus Theatre) and our ongoing dialogue events chaired by our students with John Ralston Saul on "Canada as a Métis Nation" in association with Lakehead University. Through Negahneewin College at Confederation College we are articulating a provincial approach that treats Aboriginal education as integral to postsecondary programming among all colleges. Negahneewin College has a long history of providing leadership and support for province wide initiatives. For example, the Indigenous Peoples Education Circle (IPEC) emerged from Negahneewin support of Ontario's locally based Aboriginal Education Councils which enabled Aboriginal educators in the colleges to consolidate resources.

This specific strategic approach has grown through the leadership of Negahneewin College into a provincially coordinated group that builds initiatives such as the current Aboriginal self-identification project. We are engaging in our community with events through our alternative learning space called The Learning Café, supporting learners in the south core of the City of Thunder Bay, reaching out to key community partners such as the Evergreen Neighbourhood Renewal, Bindigaate Film Festival, CBC Radio, the Northern Woman's Bookstore and the Ontario Human Rights Legal Centre.

While the Aboriginal population is the fastest growing in northwestern Ontario, the labour market participation of Aboriginal peoples lags behind the non-aboriginal population. This is a result of multiple factors including: limited geographic access to education particularly in remote communities; significant family responsibilities; limited use of indigenous pedagogy; the complexities of federal funding for aboriginal education; as well as overall inadequate funding for aboriginal primary and secondary education often resulting in poor preparation for College studies. Aboriginal students who are able to access college education often have significant gaps in preparedness, may be excluded due to standard admissions tests and criteria, and often require additional time and supports to be successful.

⁴ *Negahneewin*, translated from Anishinaabemowin means, "leading the way".

Our vision is that every learner/graduate will leave with an informed awareness of Indigenous peoples, clearly distinguishing our learners from others in Ontario. This vision of intercultural learning means that Aboriginal students and their fellow “Canadian” counterparts experience a unique learning environment that enables both to find common ground in learning about their own identities, while reconciling Canadian history and building a future together.

The “Aboriginal and Canadian Relations” certificate, that students can choose to take to further enhance their knowledge and skills, positions graduates for unique employment opportunities emerging across the country. Our partnership with George Brown College will support the delivery of aboriginal learning programming in Toronto by 2013/14.

Priority #2: The Virtual College

Access to education is a challenging issue in northwestern Ontario due to the vast geography, low population density, irregularly dispersed population, poor preparation of many students, the high cost of living away from home, family demands and limited (although improving) access to technology in many remote communities. This challenge is particularly acute in a College that provides upgrading and applied learning in a wide variety of “hands on” disciplines.

The College currently uses Technology Enabled Learning (TEL) to support hybrid synchronous delivery across multiple campuses and into individual residences in the Northwest. This builds cost-effective cohorts when there may only be two or three students at any one site participating in a program. Faculty located at any campus teach across multiple sites in the Northwest with students supported in each community by our regional campus staff. Currently, 16 programs are delivered to 8 regional campuses and through distance education primarily supported by Contact North infrastructure. Last year over 400 students took programs as varied as Aboriginal Community Advocacy, Child and Youth Worker, Paramedic, Practical Nursing and BScN. These programs offered the same experiential and workplace learning opportunities as traditionally delivered programs.

We will expand the Virtual College strategy in rural Southern and Eastern Ontario communities in 2013 through collaboration with Contact North’s 18 eLearn Access Centres. We are in discussions with educational institutions in western Canada with the goal of creating a national, inter-supportive network for synchronous TEL delivery.

The College responds to learner demand for “Just for Me, Just in Time, and Just my Way” access to learning through “Confederation Online”. Leveraging the OntarioLearn Consortium, and strategically selecting course equivalencies from the hundreds of OntarioLearn online courses currently available and filling in gaps with our internally developed online courses, we will offer four high demand post-secondary MTCU credential programs this winter, to any internet-connected learner worldwide!

Traditional campus and hybrid students are now able to customize their classroom timetables as we remove scheduling requirements for multiple sections of Communications and General Elective courses. Rural and remote students now have the option of accessing more learning opportunities from their home communities. This also creates cost savings in that we are able to make the best use of faculty resources and the courses we’ve designed.

Effective student support is essential to facilitate both personal and academic success. As such, in addition to traditional support services, we are developing the Flexible Learning Centre as an alternative

to the traditional classroom model. Opening in the fall of 2013 the Centre will allow students to learn in an environment that has all the support that they require in one place including student advisors, registrar and admissions assistance, instructors, tutors and testing. A variety of interactive group work models will be available and students will be supported as they learn at their own pace and in ways that fit their personal life commitments. Student resources like the traditional and online library, study skills supports, and IT access will be housed together for increased access and availability. This will be followed by the Virtual College Flexible Learning Centre available for students by the fall of 2014 creating flexibility and improved services for students.

Increasing the support of education and training close to home has been shown to improve student success and thereby provide for a) pathways b) maintenance and c) success in transitioning to work; providing the vital skilled workforce to satisfy the growing economic demands and facilitating personal development as well as economic development for remote communities. We have a successful student retention platform that is in place in our urban campus; we propose to pilot an expansion of these services to students in our regional campuses and in smaller, remote communities. We have a successful model of aboriginal student advisors and counsellors, transition advisors, employment advisors and financial advisors. The Foundations for Success project shows that these types of supports ensure student retention and improved graduation rates. We intend to pilot a “navigator” program in rural and remote communities; the goal being to provide students with the same kinds of supports that urban students have available to them; albeit in different modes – online, texting, site visits, peer mentoring and community mentoring.

Confederation College is working with other Ontario colleges to increase access to a range of programming, student support and to build sustainable cost effective cohorts of students. The six northern colleges have agreed to sign an MOU in Nov 2012 to collaborate in a number of fields including the sharing and delivery of programming across the north. This approach reduces program development costs, increases access and decreases the cohort size required at any one location to deliver a credential. A second MOU will be signed between Boreal, Confederation, Northern and Fleming to collaborate in similar fashion in environmental and natural resource fields. Confederation College has 26 new or reconfigured programming in process or planned for the coming 3 years. Where possible these will be developed and delivered through the multi-college MOUs. If public policy were to change then six existing programs, as well as Aviation Systems Management and Aviation Flight Management would be delivered as 3-year degrees.

The College has developed learning pathways to support the growing career aspirations of our learners. Pathways include the School College Work Initiative (SCWI) with more than 900 high school students each year in the northwest taking upgrading and skill development through preparatory programming including Pre-health, Pre-Technology, Pre-aviation (proposed) and College Access. Pathways allow students that participate in non-credit contract training programs to use some of their training modules to ladder into credential studies at a diploma level and ultimately continue their studies through articulation agreements with universities: Nipissing, Algoma, UOIT and our primary university partner Lakehead University.

Confederation College and Lakehead University are the only two public postsecondary institutions located in northwestern Ontario. We share common goals and are committed to supporting the economic and social development of the northwest. As such we collaborate on program offerings and student access to continue to improve postsecondary credential completion as well as build student pathways to higher learning.

Our collaborative partnership results in opportunities for students to move directly from our College diploma programs into degree studies and from degrees to advanced college credentials. We continue to work together to create seamless and cost-effective pathways for all learners in northwestern Ontario. Building on the success of this existing partnership, work is underway to enhance our multiple agreements, including a shared commitment to enhancing educational opportunities for aboriginal peoples.

We will jointly expand and develop new student pathways that explore ways to integrate curricula so that students graduate with both the advanced theoretical education embedded in a university honours degree and with the applied knowledge and professional training of a high affinity college diploma. More than 95% of our diplomas currently ladder directly into degree articulations and pathways that have been developed with Lakehead University. Discussions continue on other possible collaborations including: applied research initiatives, sharing infrastructure such as library and IT resources; and co-teaching using university and college faculty. An example of this collaboration is the Trans-Institutional Collaboration on Knowledge, Education and Training in Health (TICKET Health) that builds on the long standing cooperation and collaboration between Lakehead University, Confederation College, Thunder Bay Regional Hospital, and the St. Joseph's Care Group to create a shared vision of health care education and training in the Northwest that includes seamless and community driven health education and training pathways.

Priority #3: Community Focused Development

Confederation College goes beyond providing learning throughout the northwest but recognizes the integration of learning in support of social innovation, economic and community capacity development in the Northwest. Our community focused initiatives include the development of:

An Integrated Employment Services/Training Network; This network would provide employment (job search) services integrated with assessment, student retention and academic delivery services. This approach will use store front operations as well as technology to provide services to rural and remote locations.

Innovation/Entrepreneurism Hubs; True to the success of any community and economic development opportunity, innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit must be nurtured, developed and promoted. Key to this success is a mentorship model that provides would-be entrepreneurs with education and training, as well as supports for development and growth. In Thunder Bay we are a partner in the Northwestern Ontario Innovation Centre in which all of our students have the opportunity to explore entrepreneurship and in turn local entrepreneurs can receive support from our students' specialized expertise in accounting, marketing, human resources and multimedia to support SMEs. The College is working with the Innovation Centre to bring this model and expertise to smaller rural and remote communities through collocated facilities and entrepreneurship, mentorship and training expertise throughout the Northwest.

Applied Research; At Confederation College applied research focuses on alternative energy, wellness and aboriginal learning. Our action oriented applied research approach supports experiential learning for our students, as well as incremental innovation of SMEs and the education sector, to develop new or more effective products and services. Examples include but are not limited to: development of biomass for energy production; improved maternal care and improved dental services in remote communities. These are currently funded through private sector, provincial and federal funding sources.

Study North; Study North is an initiative of the six northern Colleges to increase the number of learners recruited to northern colleges and augmenting the workforce of northern Ontario. Funding would be provided by NOHFC, community economic development offices and private enterprise. We are similarly increasing the number of international students studying and, we hope, staying in Thunder Bay. An increased focus on international student recruitment has been very successful and we expect our international student population to grow to 10% of our credit students within three years.

The Student Village; Located at the Thunder Bay campus The Student village will support access and success of all students with a particular focus on support of aboriginal students from remote communities. At the current time the lack of affordable suitable accommodation in Thunder Bay is a significant factor in limiting the number of students attending the College. In addition the College recreational facilities have approached the end of their useful lives. We propose through a P3 partnership to develop new student accommodation and recreation facilities that respond to the needs of students from rural and remote communities in the northwest. An RFP for these facilities will be issued early in 2013.

Summary:

The three priorities, **Aboriginal Learning**, the **Virtual College** and **Community Focused Development** are highly interdependent and inter-supportive. As a result it is not possible to distinguish their individual contribution to enrolment. However we anticipate that overall the priorities will result in relatively modest enrolment growth across the next three to five years.

This enrolment projection is based on regional demographic changes including the growing number of aboriginal youth; increasing our growing international student population; implementation of the Study North initiative to attract GTA students in oversubscribed programs to northern colleges; expansion of our integrated delivery plan with other northern Colleges and southern Ontario through Contact North; expansion of online program offerings and new programming designed to attract new learners. The forces that would increase enrolment may be negatively influenced by the strong economic growth that is present and expected to continue for the foreseeable future in the Northwest.

