Research on ICT with Aboriginal Communities

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Across Canada, Aboriginal communities are considering how information and communication technologies (ICT) can help them reach their development goals. Research on ICT with Aboriginal Communities (RICTA), a new research network, is building a critical mass of knowledge that Aboriginal communities can both contribute to and tap into on their paths to achieving their aspirations.

RICTA is building alliances of support for action-research approaches and building bridges between academic, government and funding institutions and Aboriginal communities. The research fostered by the RICTA cluster will be intellectually important if it can be applied in meaningful ways in Aboriginal communities and create a research environment in which Aboriginal peoples become active participants, preparing for the possibilities and challenges that now and in the future.

The RICTA members are more than 40 people working with universities, community research institutes, Aboriginal organizations, government and the private sector. RICTA is a space to challenge the status quo both at the funding and at the academic institution levels. The RICTA platform has the potential to create a legitimate voice for change to shift both funding and research organizations.

RICTA has the potential to set out a framework of contemporary Aboriginal Peoples ICT projects that not only focus on the 'decolonization aspirations' of particular Aboriginal communities but also gaze towards the development of global research and Indigenous strategic alliances. RICTA has the potential to develop a model for collaborative research that could be emulated in other community settings in Canada and in developing regions.

The RICTA principles are:

- Working WITH Aboriginal communities
- Using information and communication technologies (ICT) strategically and creatively
- Building local capacity to develop and conduct research
- Holding cluster meetings in communities that facilitate Aboriginal participation
- Facilitating connection and trust among diverse cluster members

A distinctive feature of the RICTA cluster is its use of ICT. The RICTA cluster is demonstrating leadership with ICT processes and supporting others to become comfortable in virtual environments and communities. Using ICT strategically and creatively includes using videoconferencing, web streaming and web chat to allow cluster members and potential members across Canada and internationally to participate in events.

For example, the founding RICTA meeting held in March 2005 used a videoconference bridge to connect more than 50 RICTA members and guests in Balmertown, Fredericton, Ottawa, Toronto, Akwesasne, Guelph, Six Nations, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Sandy Lake First Nation and Sioux Lookout. Research on ICT with Aboriginal communities is a critical but new research area in the multidisciplinary context.

RICTA's work will focus on three groups of priority activities:

1. Interactive engagement and bridge-building
2. Research collaboration and knowledge impact
3. Outreach and facilitating change

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For more information, to view the RICTA video,
or to download our founding meeting report,
visit our website:
www.ricta.ca