Introduction:

Over two half-day think tank sessions, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) engaged 20 youth in facilitated sharing circle discussions to explore their identified barriers to full participation in the economy, to share information about the employment and educational programs and services that exist for youth and to provide input into the direction of MNO in its ongoing delivery of youth related services and supports. A number of common themes emerged through these discussions including the need to explore strategies to reach out to youth and ensure there are fully aware of MNO programs and services, that youth that were engaged with MNO programs expressed very positive experiences in their involvement, and that youth wanted to be more connected to their community and have opportunity to give back. While a number of the youth did indicate that they had heard about MNO from its communication activities (social media, website, promotional materials), however the majority of participants became involved with MNO through word of mouth.

Overall Priorities

1. Youth expressed feelings of stress related to financial need to pursue and continue in their educational studies and to be able to support themselves and their families. Although they were aware of various financial supports and bursaries, the youth felt these were not sufficient to pursue higher learning or preferred career paths. This does not appear to be deterring these pursuits as most of these youth were already on the path to fulfilling their life goals. It was identified that increased financial support would allow youth to meet their goals, whether graduate studies; professional degrees or accreditation programs and lead them into full participation in the economy.

2. Youth identified cultural preservation and traditional knowledge as a priority. A connection to Métis identity was discussed as a critical part of personal growth. Most participants felt that pride in their culture translated into positive experiences in the classroom and the workplace. In cases where youth did not know have these connections there was a sense of embarrassment that could be a barrier to learning and growth. The youth felt that MNO plays a critical role in
upholding culture and creating positive experiences through cultural safety and culturally-relevant programs and services.

3. Implementation of Role models was an identified priority. The youth expressed that there are a number of role models and inspirational figures within the Métis and the MNO community overall. When surveyed participants could name a number of people who inspired them to attain their goals. The participants also felt a certain responsibility to give back to the community, whether through volunteering, working or sharing cultural knowledge.

4. The youth expressed a desire to explore opportunities to give back to the Métis Nation. Although the youth did identify a number of barriers in the areas of education, training and cultural knowledge, they expressed a genuine optimism about the future and the role that MNO can play to assist youth in their pursuits.