

## WESK and FHQ Developments: Enhancing Indigenous Women Entrepreneurship

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**Regina, SK** – In collaboration with strategic partners, and feedback from Indigenous women entrepreneurs, WESK (Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan) developed the [Matchstick](#) program to support Indigenous women in their entrepreneurial journey. Matchstick offered business planning, mentoring, business advising, and financing to over 300 Indigenous women entrepreneurs (see Matchstick Backgrounder below).

To advance the momentum achieved during the three-year pilot and move to the next phase of Matchstick, [WESK](#) and [FHQ Developments Ltd.](#) have committed to a long-term strategic partnership to enhance entrepreneurial capacity for Indigenous women entrepreneurs.

WESK CEO Prabha Mitchell said, “The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with FHQ Developments is not only pivotal as FHQ was a member on the Advisory Council of the original Matchstick program; but it further strengthens our ability and capacity to support Indigenous women in an impactful way.”

WESK has incorporated Matchstick into its core programming and services. The MOU will not only support Matchstick but also include collaboratively seeking solutions to identify and address gaps and challenges and seize opportunities for Saskatchewan Indigenous women entrepreneurs to start or grow their businesses. In addition, the two organizations will address strategies to enhance diversity in the supply chains and in procurement.

“This is an important alliance for FHQ Developments in the development of Indigenous women entrepreneurs within our territory and beyond. We are very proud of the work we have done together with WESK through Matchstick and look forward to adding more Indigenous entrepreneurs so that we can continue to diversify Saskatchewan’s economy”, said Thomas Benjoe, CEO and President of FHQ Developments.

A report entitled *Indigenous Women Entrepreneurship in Canada (July 2020)*, released by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, noted that though Indigenous women account for 51% of the Canadian Indigenous population, they make up only 41% of the self-employed Indigenous population.

Not unlike all women entrepreneurs, Indigenous women entrepreneurs encounter challenges in entrepreneurship related to their gender. The same report as above noted that the main barrier is access to financing, followed by balancing family responsibilities, lack of support within their communities and limited access to business training. These challenges were also conveyed in the Matchstick roundtable discussions with Saskatchewan Indigenous entrepreneurs, along with additional barriers including lack of mentoring and networking opportunities and limited business advising services.

### Supporting Links

- Find the release online: <https://wesk.ca/press-releases/wesk-and-fhq-developments-enhancing-indigenous-women-entrepreneurship/>
- Matchstick Backgrounder: <https://wesk.ca/matchstick-backgrounder/>
- Matchstick Webpage: <https://wesk.ca/programs/matchstick/>

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### About WESK

WESK is a non-profit, membership-based organization that provides business advisory; start-up, purchase and expansion lending; mentoring and networking and learning opportunities. WESK is supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada.

[www.wesk.ca](http://www.wesk.ca)

### About FHQ Developments

In 2010, the 11-member First Nation communities of File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (FHQTC), representing over 16,000 First Nation citizens and 435,000 acres of reserve lands in Treaty 4 territory, formed FHQ Developments as a limited partnership agreement.

The mission of FHQ Developments is to contribute to the long-term economic independence and prosperity of our Limited Partners and our citizens by developing profitable business ventures and economic development opportunities while advancing employment and livelihood for our Nations and citizens in a manner consistent with the Nehiyaw (Cree), Dakota, Nakota, Lakota, and Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) Nations teachings.

[www.fhqdev.com](http://www.fhqdev.com)

## **Backgrounder**

### **Matchstick: Spark for Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs**

Timeline - Three-year Pilot (2017 to 2020)

#### **Purpose:**

- Created Matchstick to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and skills in Indigenous women.
- Matchstick model moves the entrepreneurial process from the intention to start a business right up to owner-managers of more established ventures.

#### **Matchstick Advisory Council**

Creation of a Matchstick Advisory Council with representatives from Indigenous organizations to provide direction and oversight.

Partners included:

- Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations,
- FHQ Developments Ltd.,
- Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation,
- First Nations University of Canada,
- Onion Lake First Nation

#### **Fueling Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs**

Activities:

- Gathered valuable input from Indigenous women entrepreneurs during 4 roundtable discussions that shaped the development of Matchstick
- Delivered workshops for business planning and strategies for growth to Indigenous women entrepreneurs in 7 provincial locations (Regina, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatoon, North Battleford, Prince Albert, Onion Lake, and Yorkton; and one webinar)
- Over 300 Indigenous women participated in training, networking, and mentoring
- Four Indigenous women were trained to deliver business workshops, business advising and facilitating mentoring circles
- Four businesses were created and expanded through Matchstick's business advising and lending services

#### **Pilot of Matchstick Funded by:**

Western Economic Diversification Canada

FSIN (in conjunction with INAC and ARO)