



Assessing the Aurora Business Leadership Program

Brandon, Manitoba's BoLu Intermediary Services has launched the Aurora Project, which aims to create economic prosperity by empowering Canada's newcomer entrepreneurs. Local newcomers with business ideas are recruited and assisted through the process of developing and launching their businesses. Aurora Project consultants with experience in settlement services and immigration, as well as new business start-ups and enterprise development, work with the budding entrepreneurs. The project consultants also provide support to the business owner after they have launched their business. To embark on the AURORA journey, newcomers must have permanent residency status and at least CLB Level 4 English.

The Rural Development Institute at Brandon University will be providing an arms-length assessment of the success of the Aurora Project. Success will be defined, in large part, as the number of businesses started, but many factors for success must be

teased out. The client's business acumen, previous business experience, education, English proficiency, and a host of other economic, social, and environmental considerations may all play a role. These must be taken into account in order to assess the impact of Aurora itself on the business start-ups.

Annual deliverables from the *Assessing the Aurora Business Leadership Program* project will consist of three assessment reports: one formative and two summative. The formative assessments will provide a detailed look into the Aurora program by checking newcomer progress on an on-going basis. As clients complete each program volume, surveys will be used to collect data on clients' perceptions of both the training itself and their own knowledge acquisition. Survey data results will be delivered in the formative assessment report. Results from these formative assessments will add value to the learning modules by suggesting improvements.

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The two annual summative assessments will look at the impact of the Aurora project after clients have reached the final stage of the program, in which they are operating their businesses and Aurora consultants are involved in an advisory capacity. The first summative assessment will use surveys to examine clients' perceptions of the impact of the Aurora program—from the first module to the final stage—on the client's business success. An emphasis will be placed on economic/financial impact.

The second summative assessment will use in-depth interviews with clients to better understand the social processes accompanying newcomer identity transformation. Specifically, this assessment will be framed by the sociological notion of status passage, or the transitional phase through which the client passes as he or she acquires new attributes and/or social positions. A simple example is a client moving from self-identifying as a newcomer to self-identifying as a community member and business owner. In addition, clients' own notions of value and success, in all its experiential, cognitive, and economic aspects, will be examined.

Assessing the Aurora Business Leadership Program is a two-year project that will culminate in a final research report with key findings on the Aurora Project's success, as well as its economic, financial, and social impacts. The final research report, expected in summer 2021, will consolidate results from the annual formative and summative assessments and will include an overall analysis of the success of any revisions to the Aurora Project modules that are made as a result of previous assessments.

Ideally, *Assessing the Aurora Business Leadership Program* will prove the validity of the Aurora Project and its process. It will support the project's success by suggesting revisions. The Aurora Project's success, meanwhile, will be good for the regional economy as new businesses are created and newcomers are employed. This research will also be valuable as the success of the Aurora Project models best practices for other not-for-profits.

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