

Noront Resources' Community Engagement and Readiness Work in Ontario

Context

Noront Resources is a junior mining company with the largest land position in the Ring of Fire, an emerging mineral-rich region located in the James Bay lowlands of Northern Ontario. Noront's principal project is its Eagle's Nest nickel-copper-platinum-palladium deposit, which is one of the largest high-grade nickel sulphide discoveries in Canada. Since discovering Eagle's Nest in 2007, Noront has made extensive efforts to engage local communities to help maximize their benefits and guide the project. Specific efforts have been made to engage with youth, to involve communities in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process, and to prepare individuals to participate in the upcoming economic development opportunities through skills development.



Description of Measures Implemented

Noront has worked to provide opportunities for training and education, employment, procurement, business development and community investment. For example, they established the Ring of Fire Aboriginal Training Alliance (RoFATA), in partnership with the Matawa First Nations' Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen employment and Training Services (KKETS) and Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology in Thunder Bay. This program provides skills-based training and guidance for long-term career paths for Indigenous peoples from the Matawa communities who are interested in working in the exploration and mining sector.



Map showing the location of Noront's community initiatives

In 2013, RoFATA received \$5.9 million from the Government of Canada's Skills and Partnership Fund. With this funding in place, nine specialized training and six pre-trade courses were delivered to Matawa First Nations members. Training courses were offered in local First Nation communities and in other communities such as Thunder Bay and Sudbury. The length of the training initiatives varied from 2 to 20 weeks.

Noront also engages in ongoing and forthright communication with local communities regarding their projects by meeting regularly with First Nations Chiefs and Councils, in addition to holding town hall meetings and open houses. Noront's team has effectively established relationships over many years by working closely with local communities to understand their concerns about the potential impacts of projects.

Furthermore, Noront employees have spent considerable time in the local First Nations communities engaging with youth through various activities such as camps and movie-making projects, and have participated in classroom and school events.

Results

Over 400 individuals have participated and graduated from the RoFATA program since its inception, acquiring skills in areas such as heavy equipment operation, environmental monitoring, diamond drilling, welding, underground common core, and remote camp operations. Moreover, Noront has hired approximately 30 individuals from local communities to work at its Esker Camp in the Ring of Fire providing support for ongoing exploration work.

Early engagement with the local First Nation communities on the EA process revealed a common set of environmental concerns. As a result, Noront redesigned aspects of their Eagle's Nest Project to address specific concerns regarding water, tailings and local economic needs.



Noront's educational youth programming

Community programs have been successful in teaching the youth about the process of mining and what they can expect in terms of opportunities and impacts in their region as mines are developed. A particularly successful initiative was a movie-making program, sponsored by the Ontario Mining Association, which resulted in Indigenous youth from Matawa communities winning a provincial competition.

As a result, the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) recognized Noront's accomplishments and commitment to social initiatives in Northern Ontario with its 2015 Environmental and Social Responsibility Award.

Lessons Learned

The earlier the mining company engages with the local communities, the better for all involved. In the case of the EA for the Eagle's Nest Project, early engagement gave the company the opportunity to change its plans and its design to reflect the concerns of the local people, and therefore achieved greater acceptance for the project.

Youth represents the future workforce for the mines and the entrepreneurs needed to create new businesses to support economic development, and, as such, it is critical to have them fully engaged and knowledgeable about the future opportunities.

Hiring locally helps to set the standard for future operations and the expectation of an inclusive, mutually beneficial culture.

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