



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

First Nations Community Planning Project

Partner	Wagmatcook
Region	North America
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

The majority of indigenous people of Canada have endured discrimination and lived in poverty for years. Community-based planning is necessary, yet absent in their communities. It continues to be viewed as optional, negligible and inconsequential yet it holds the key to good governance, self-reliance and economic development. It is in this context that the Indigenous Community Planning Project intended to invent tools and capacity, to establish a collective direction.

Background and Objective

Situation Before The Initiative Began Desperation, hopelessness, and corruption define the bleak reality in many indigenous communities. Federal efforts to compensate for their historic loss of land and natural resources have fostered dependence on federal funding and localized corruption and inequalities. Resulting social issues include high suicide rates, alcohol and drug dependencies, and high unemployment. Establishment Of Priorities The Joint Community Planning Committee (JCPC) identified the priorities based on the experiences of the partner communities with federal government agencies and the need for a more effective and efficient method of dealing with developmental issues in indigenous communities. The priorities set out were for communities to: Become more self-reliant; Use limited resources more effectively; Have a louder voice nationally, and; Develop more effective and efficient strategies with federal government agencies. The intent was that community-based planning could address these priorities through communities becoming empowered, educated and self-reliant, and the Federal Government responding in a cooperative way to the more independent management of indigenous community affairs. Formulation Of Objectives And Strategies The main objectives of the project were for the Cities & Environment Unit, in conjunction with the JCPC, to: Develop the Indigenous Community Planning Model unique to indigenous communities as a tool to let communities decide on their own future; Increase awareness about planning and the importance of community involvement in building self-reliance, transparent governance, and environmental stewardship; Demonstrate the difference that planning can make through three pilot projects that develop community-based plans; Build capacity in community planning in the Atlantic Canada and across Canada. Planning techniques and processes are conveyed by the stage-by-stage application of the Model and through an approach of “learning by doing”. Mobilization Of Resources Collaborative, multilateral funding was found through the redirection of existing funding from the partner government agencies. The approach to funding this project has been to make the most from the least, as federal funding is difficult to find and is dependent on external budget constraints that change frequently. It is important to note that government funding to the communities is a project driven and often dependent on the political interests of the federal government. Numerous proposals are prepared for any one project to acquire funding as requirements for project proposals vary from agency to agency. In order to account for the project funding, reporting requirements - numbered in the hundreds per year - are required from each community member. This project succeeded in bringing numerous federal government funding agencies around one table to see a project in a holistic way. Initially the funding was directed to Wagmatcook community, which acted as the manager of the finances and resources. The JCPC, through Wagmatcook community, contracted the technical expertise of the Cities and Environment Unit. Trainees were hired through the JCPC and their salaries and travel arrangements were handled through Wagmatcook. Currently, the Cities and Environment Unit’s contract is being administered through the Atlantic Policy Congress of Community Chiefs while individual bands are responsible for hiring planning trainees and managing funds for their own community planning initiatives.

Actions and Implementation

Specific products were developed to address the barriers to community planning in the community. While the products can be reviewed individually, it is important to keep in mind that they were developed as an interconnected whole. The Indigenous Community Planning Model addressed the lack of planning tools in community-based planning. To ensure meaningful community-based involvement and accountability in the process of plan preparation, the Model is broken into defined stages with clear products. Each stage is seen as a point for discussion, debate and decision-making within the community. Where possible the development of the plan is used as a vehicle for training and skills improvement particularly in the areas of project development, implementation and monitoring. Building Awareness addressed the lack of common understanding of community-based planning. There is very little sense of community. Volunteerism is virtually absent resulting in few opportunities for community members to voice their thoughts or concerns. To address this, awareness of community planning in the community was extended in two ways. First, awareness of the planning process itself



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was created in the pilot communities through newsletters, open houses, and community meetings. Second, general awareness of the Indigenous Community Planning Project was created through a video, a project newsletter, a website, and numerous workshops. Pilot Community Plans and Posters addressed the need for visible and easily understood products of the planning process. Community plans were developed in Abegweit community, Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq, and Pictou Landing using The Indigenous Community Planning Model as the guide for the planning process. Project teams consisted of one planner from the Cities and Environment Unit, a planning trainee from the pilot community, a Community Contact from the band administration, a Planning Work Group consisting of a broad cross-section of community members, and 4-5 other trainees from various communities in the Region. The plans and posters were widely distributed in the communities. Capacity Building addressed the current and future needs for planning knowledge and experience in First Nations in Atlantic Canada and across the country. Planning was seen as a vehicle for building human resource capacity. Trainees formed a supportive network and learned from research and practical experience. Fourteen members from thirteen communities gained training and experience in community planning. Through work sessions at Dalhousie University, hands-on work in the pilots, and assignments relative to the process, the trainees have built a strong base of planning knowledge and practice. Capacity building will be extended to the rest of Canada through a proposed First Nations Community Planning Certificate Program.

Outcomes and Impacts

This project has had a tremendous impact on indigenous communities, federal government departments, and the planning profession by redefining how Aboriginal people manage their own communities as well as beginning to change the working relationship between the indigenous communities and the government. Federal government departments, communities and Universities throughout Canada refer to this work as an innovative approach to community planning. The model was recognized with an award from the Canadian Institute of Planners, while the project as a whole earned international recognition from the Environmental Design and Research Association. Specifically, the project has led to the following initiatives: Planning Tools: Indigenous Community Planning Model, 2nd Edition resulted from testing the model in the pilot communities. Indigenous Community Planning Workbook explains the products of each stage in the Model and provides resource information. Indigenous Community Planning Case Studies outlines the many communities throughout the country that are making progress by improving their quality of life. Ideas for Developing a Community Planning Curriculum for Mi'kmaq and Maliseet Elementary Students outlines a foundation for developing a community-planning curriculum. Capacity Building The Indigenous Planning Resource Centre is being developed to continue the trainee network and provide guidance and support. Seventeen Indigenous communities are now in the planning process with a total of eighteen trainees gaining planning experience and knowledge. The Indigenous Community Planning Certificate Program is being developed in conjunction with the First Nations University of Canada. Awareness Indigenous Community Planning is extending across Canada with the federal government currently outlining a national process for planning and capacity building.

Sustainability and Scalability

Sustainability Financial Sustainability The project has sustained financially through a commitment from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the federal government department responsible for the development of Indigenous communities. Thus far, the funds have been redirected from other initiatives in an effort to focus the community efforts in the community. The redirected funds have been direct contributions with no requirements for repayment. Currently discussions revolve around the government's responsibility to continue redirecting funds to community planning across Canada as a means to more self-direction and self-empowerment. **Social and Economic Sustainability** Though it was not necessarily the intention, the project has attracted a majority of women both as trainees and as members of Planning Work Groups. Seventy-eight percent of the trainees have been women and approximately 65% of the Planning Work Groups were women as well. There have been efforts to include single mothers in the planning process, as they represent a large proportion of the parenting population in the participating communities. There were also efforts to include those on social assistance or employed seasonally as this group also represents large proportions of the populations. **Cultural Sustainability** The cultural element has been a very strong influence on how the model was developed and how the plans have been created and implemented. The planning process and the public participation methods have included aboriginal practices, and some of the elements of the plans were graphically represented as metaphors to aboriginal symbols. Ongoing discussions have occurred that include keeping a strong connection to traditional practices and beliefs and the planning process. **Environmental Sustainability** The plans take a strong stand in environmental stewardship. The environment is always the first consideration when deciding on the physical features of the communities. The projects that have evolved from the plans have all included some environmental component, which include sustainable technological use for heating systems, use of local materials for building, and local economic development to curb long distance travels.

Gender and Social Inclusivity

The indigenous communities across Canada have shown a great interest in this project with many asking for assistance in creating plans in their own communities. The Indigenous University of Canada, located in Saskatchewan, is utilizing the Model as a required text in a research methods course and discussions with that institution are being initiated to form an Indigenous Community Planning Certificate program. The Indigenous Community Planning Project is being used as a possible model for the continuation of planning in the communities across Canada. A "road show" is being planned that will be an awareness campaign to inform communities and regional Indian and Northern Affairs Canada offices about community-based planning and how they



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can begin the process in their regions. It has been realized that a large awareness element is needed before real community-based planning can be adopted widely and that it is very difficult to “catch-up” with this element if it is missing in the beginning. The Federal government is primarily interested in seeing community-based planning occur but they are also interested in the reorganizations of their departments, which needs to occur in order to properly respond to community-based plans once they are being implemented. This reorganization will begin with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the primary service provider for the indigenous communities in Canada, and will also include other departments that operate programs in the community which include Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Health Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada Mortgage and Housing, and Natural Resources Canada. The Indigenous Community Planning Project set out to advance several ambitious, complex and interconnected goals. Those goals were reached and in some instances, surprisingly surpassed. Discoveries were made along the way, new methods uncovered, friendships and partnerships strengthened. In retrospect, this kind of work was possible only because of a stubborn commitment to doing the very best, and thus to excellence by those involved.

Innovative Initiative

Lesson 1: Community-based planning is crucial for the ongoing effectiveness of the plan’s intentions. Community-based planning is difficult to do in the best of situations. The challenges faced in the pilots were substantial, yet, this type of planning proved to be essential to build confidence and trust in the power of community-based decision making. The project extends the idea of community-based planning to a new level in the following ways: 1. Planning Work Groups representing a cross-section of the community served as liaisons with community members and contributed real work to the plan. 2. School children were seen as the future leaders of the community and their involvement was gained through youth events and school visits. Lesson 2: The format of the plan needs to be visible and easy to understand. The format of the community plans represents a new approach to presentation. Each plan consists of eight individual parts that can be used on their own but also work together to comprise the plan. Emphasis was on making the planning process and products visible by using the following strategies: 1. Posters for each stage were displayed in prominent places in the community. 2. Children designed planning posters. 3. The planning video depicts one community’s experiences during the process. 4. Physical models were built which provided tangible and visible work tools. Lesson 3: A fundamental change in attitude needs to occur at the community level and within the government. Community-based plans should make decision-making easier for those in the band administration and also make relationships with federal government agencies less work intensive. The plans provide communities with opportunities to voice ideas and concerns, the band administration with direction to pursue projects the community needs and wants, and the federal government with assurance that they can assist in good faith that the community is behind the initiatives. It is very difficult to change long held habits and roles and perhaps the most important lesson learned in this project is that the community and government agencies need to redefine themselves in order to implement community-based plans effectively.

Conclusion

First Nations Community Planning Model: David Moffat, Places, Volume 16 no.1, Fall 2003, pp 20-23. A First Nations Community Planning Model Canadian Institute of Planners Conference Proceedings 2003, Building Capacity A7: Building Local Capacity, A First Nations Community Planning Model, www.cip-icu.ca/English/conference/proceed03.htm. Cities & Environment Unit Publications: Information Matrix: A Guide to First Nations Community Planning Information Phase 2: Planning Resource Reference Book Bear River Resource Project Wagmatcook: Ideas Toward a Community Plan A Vision of the Future: Public Involvement in Community Planning First Nations Community Planning Model, 1st Edition First Nations Community Planning Model, 2nd Edition First Nations Community Planning Workbook, 1st Edition Plan for Abegweit (Video) Abegweit First Nation Community Plan 2002 Metepenagiag Mi’kmaq Nation Community Plan 2002 Pictou Landing First Nation Community Plan 2002 Wagmatcook First Nation Community Development Plan 2002 Case Studies, Volume 1 A Guide to On-Reserve Housing Information – Atlantic Canada Ideas for Developing a Community Planning Curriculum for Mi’kmaq & Maliseet Elementary Students (2003)