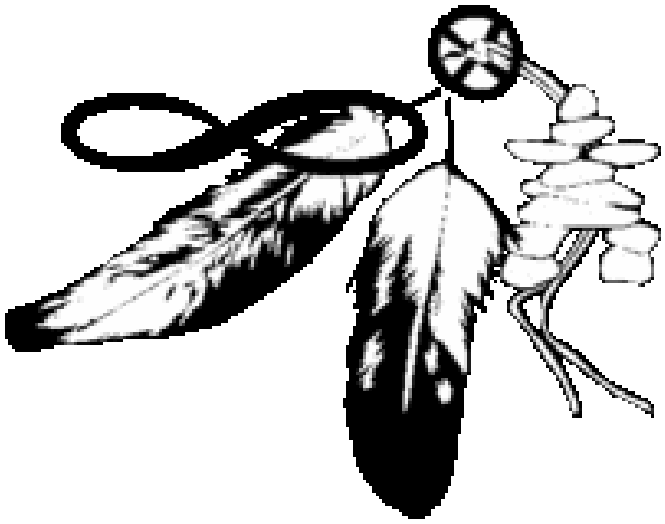

A Practical Handbook
for
"Good Communication / Consultation"
with Aboriginal Communities
2018

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1) PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

There are several basic principles of good communication and consultation that apply in any situation – from consulting with individuals to large diverse groups of people. These principles also apply whether you are consulting about specific issues or broad policy changes. And, when consulting with Aboriginal people, you will find yourself dealing with a whole range of situations.

Having a basic background of some of the main principles of good communication and consultation will help guide you in working with communities. With that said, regardless of the good intentions you may have in engaging the community in a consultation process, the degree of success will depend upon the understanding, input and acceptance of the community.

Build Trust

Consultation is a long-term process and takes commitment and follow-up. It requires time to build trust and credibility with the community and it requires time to develop relationships with people. Therefore, it is important that you or your representative(s) is consistent and acts consistently throughout the life of the project. People are naturally suspicious of representatives who come and go. If they have put trust in someone and they are no longer there, it is easy to feel betrayed and confused.

Communicate Frankly and Honestly

For a community to gain the trust of a representative it needs to know if the representative is caring; if it is encouraging meaningful community involvement; and if it is honourable in engaging the community in the process. If you communicate with honesty and fairness, the community will usually respond in kind. If you fail to do so, trust is unlikely.

All too often, representatives have either already developed a new program or initiative and then tried to "sell" it to the Aboriginal community or asked for input and simply ignored what they heard. This has lead to misconceptions and distrust when communities hear that representative wants to "consult" with them. So, be aware of this past history of representative/Aboriginal relationships, and the factors that inspire trust or mistrust.

Because of the general mistrust that some Aboriginal communities have of some representatives, whether federal, provincial or industry, they tend to read a representative, its motives and actions carefully. For example, community opposition to a representative's proposal may be in part to the proposal or initiative itself but it may also be to the manner in which the representative proposes or tries to engage the community in the process. Pay attention to process because it is (almost) everything.

Clarify the Process

Another important principle is to explain how your representative works and how decisions will be made. Just as Aboriginal communities may seem mysterious to representatives, the internal workings of government or industry are often a mystery to people outside of organization. Communities need to know exactly how they will fit into the consultation process and how their input will be incorporated into decisions. Remember, consultation does not automatically mean consent to the organizations decision so make sure the community understands this from the beginning.

Be Upfront with Information

It is also important to be forthcoming and upfront with information right at the onset of the consultation process. It is very easy to lose trust and credibility if information is withheld (whether good or bad) and it may come back to haunt you later. This is an important concept in gaining trust because it is much easier to act consistently trustworthy instead of trying to "push" the community to trust you later in the process. If you lose credibility early on it will be extremely difficult for the process to be meaningful. Be patient in gaining trust and don't expect all the people to trust you all the time, even if you feel that you are totally trustworthy.

Explain Your Limitations

Make sure that as a representative you do not make promises that cannot be fulfilled. Know and explain the limitations of what you can and cannot do. It may be easier to state goals, with an explanation that there could be hold-ups, rather than stating what you will deliver. During the consultation process, give progress reports and explain why there are hold-ups if they occur. Again, remember that consultation is a time-consuming process and not a "one-shot" or "one encounter" deal! When working with Aboriginal communities, you have to have the appropriate attitude, knowledge of and respect for the communities. Consultation takes up your time but it also takes up their time.

The Human Face of Your Representative

Consultation does not mean telling people what is best for them. And, Aboriginal communities are all too familiar with representatives who have done so. It is advisable to be aware of the various social roles you have as a government, organization or industry representative. These include the governmental, industry, professional, political and human role. It is relatively easy to "tear apart" a representative – a faceless individual who espouses organizational policy. Of course, as a representative you have to keep these roles in mind and act professionally but don't be afraid to let your human side show either. Give information about yourself – your background, your experiences. Have a sense of humour. You will earn greater trust and respect by doing so. Good communication does not happen with a "faceless" person. The community needs to

know about you, in an appropriate way and to a certain degree, in order for communication to take place.

Respect

Respect the values and cultural differences that exist within the Aboriginal community. Learn to listen to values and feelings and deal with everyone equally and fairly. Listen to what various groups are telling you and avoid offending any group. When people convey their feelings, values and cultural differences, they let you know what is important to them and what they want. Often this can be very emotional. Past history with your organization and other representatives will undoubtedly surface. People may express frustration and anger. Be careful not to be defensive when these situations occur and do not dismiss these feelings or you may end up offending those people. Remember, if you fail to listen, it is unlikely people will listen to you and the consultation process will be shut down.

Respecting the capacity of the community that is engaged in the consultation process is crucial. Respect the amount of time and human resources that they can contribute to the process. Often organizations have timelines in which to do certain projects but they may not coincide with the communities' timelines or capacity to respond. Therefore, be prepared for the fact that progress may not occur as quickly as you would like and make sure you have adopted adequate timelines to take this into account. If this is not possible, be clear about the timelines that you are working with or suggest other avenues to continue the discussions.

Shift in Attitude

As stated before, the consultation process is a *process* and requires a long-term commitment on the part of both parties. This can take more time and money but more often a shift in attitude and expectations will make the process work. For example, it takes no more time to listen to people than to argue with them. Decisions or policy changes in an organization also take an incredible amount of time and organizations representatives are all too familiar with this. You cannot have the same expectations of Aboriginal communities to work quickly and be organized no more than your own organization is capable of doing.

Follow-up and Documentation

Finally, follow-up and documentation are an essential part of consultation – very basic principles but ones that are frequently ignored. Document meetings, phone calls, conversations so that you have a record of how the process is occurring, the direction you have been given, and the contacts you have been making. Also, let communities know how things are progressing. Send out minutes after meetings. Make follow-up calls to key contacts. Let people know if there are hold-ups. Do what you say you are going to do. Check to see if what was promised actually happened. Develop a system whereby people can get in touch with you so they are not bounced around through the

organizations system. These suggestions may seem very obvious but they are not that easy to implement. Again, it takes time and commitment.

Keep these principles in mind when working with Aboriginal communities. It may take some time to overcome a long history of distrust. If you find there is little support or a lack of trust despite your attempts at being trustworthy, ask yourself if you have failed to follow these basic principles or better yet, ask those people who don't trust you why they feel as they do.

In order to engage in consultation with the Aboriginal community it is important to have an understanding of their complexity and diversity. The Aboriginal community in general does not speak as one united group – just as all Canadians do not speak as a united front. The following provides some basic information regarding the different stakeholders that may have to be consulted in a given situation.

2) THE NATURE, DIVERSITY AND GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

One of the main challenges in consulting with Aboriginal communities is the immense range of diversity that exists – from cultural, political, social, economic and land-based factors to governmental and jurisdictional issues.

An understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal people in the Province is necessary in order to understand with whom you need to consult. In section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada are identified as *"Indian, Inuit and Metis people of Canada."*

In the *2001 Census of Canada* compiled by Statistics Canada, 199,015 people in Alberta identified themselves as Aboriginal – that is, North American Indian, Metis or Inuit. Of that number, 144,060 people identified themselves as North American Indian. 63,610 people identified themselves as Metis making it the largest population of Metis in Canada. This number included some 6,500 people living on Metis Settlements. Metis is a French term usually meaning "mixed blood" and refers to those with some North American Indian admixture or ancestry. The population of Inuit in Alberta is relatively small and consists of some 2,425 people.

It should be noted that within the *Census*, some people identify themselves with more than one Aboriginal ancestry therefore the statistics do not represent an entirely exact breakdown of cultural groups. For example, a person may identify themselves as North American Indian and Metis, Inuit and Metis, or Inuit and North American Indian.

First Nations

The majority of people who identified themselves as North American Indian belong to First Nations. The people of First Nations are the descendants of the original inhabitants

of North America. A registered Indian is a person registered under the *Indian Act.* Most registered Indians live on First Nation reserves, however, more and more are living off-reserve due to economic reasons, the pursuit of formal education and/or better job opportunities that are not available on-reserve.

There are 46 First Nations in Alberta representing many different cultural and linguistic groups. The main cultural groups are Cree and Blackfoot. Other groups include Dene, Chipewyan, Beaver, Tsuu T'ina (or Sarcee), Assiniboine (or Stoney or Nakoda), Iroquois, and Ojibwa.

First Nations have a unique situation within Alberta because of the signing of Treaties. The Treaties in Alberta were negotiated and made between the Crown in right of Canada and First Nations. The three main Treaties are 6, 7 and 8. Treaties 4 and 10 cover extremely small portions of the Province. Treaties are legal documents that confer rights and obligations on both parties. First Nations people were granted certain rights in exchange for the surrender of their traditional lands. Many First Nations people, however, feel that they only agreed to share their lands. In Alberta, these rights include, but are not restricted to, entitlement to reserve lands, hunting, fishing and trapping. Treaty rights are also recognized and affirmed in the *Constitution Act, 1982.*

Governing Structures of First Nations

First Nations on reserve land have to abide by numerous regulations set out in the *Indian Act* including the election of Chief and Council. Usually, elections are held every two years but some First Nations like the Blood Tribe have opted for four-year terms. Chief and Council have an immense responsibility. In effect, they are responsible for what could be compared to as a large municipality - with responsibility for the administration of education, health care, child welfare, housing, social services, employment and economic development, policing and other services for members both on and off-reserve.

The *Indian Act* also describes reserve land as lands which have been set apart for the use and benefit of a Band, and for which the legal title rests with the Crown in right of Canada. The federal representative has primary jurisdiction over these lands and the people living on them. So, although Chief and Council are responsible for the administration of activities on reserve land, they must comply with regulations set out in the *Indian Act* and the federal representative of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

It is a very complex system and often Chief and Council members are very difficult to reach. There are ways of accomplishing this and this will be discussed in detail later in the handbook.

First Nations are also members of three main Treaty representatives: the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, the Treaty 7 Tribal Council and the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta. These representatives have specific mandates set out by the member First

Nations to act in a representative capacity on specific issues. Often, contacting the Treaty representatives for direction on issues is a good place to begin a consultation process.

There are also a number of regional Tribal Councils that represent First Nations on a more local level. These include the Athabasca Tribal Council, Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council, Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council, North Peace Tribal Council, Tribal Chiefs Ventures Inc., Western Cree Tribal Council and Yellowhead Tribal Council.

Governing Structures of Metis Settlements

Alberta is the only Province that has passed legislation specifically for Metis people. The legislation provides for a unique form of government on the Metis Settlements. The legislation consists of several *Acts* that established the constitutional protection of the Settlement lands, the development of local representative structures and systems, and provincial financial commitments.

The legislation established eight Metis Settlements. Each Settlement is run by a five-person Council that is elected by the membership and headed by a chairperson who is selected by the Council members.

Metis Settlements are also governed in a manner comparable to municipalities. Settlement Councils can make bylaws provided that they do not contravene any provincial law and they must be approved by members of the Settlement. Councils are also responsible for determining the membership of, and land allocations within their settlements.

The legislation also established the Metis Settlements General Council. It is comprised of the elected councilors of all of the Metis Settlements and a four-person executive who are elected by the councilors every three years. The General Council deals with matters that affect the collective interests of the eight Settlements. It makes policies in consultation with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. These policies are binding on the General Council and every Settlement. Policies dealing with hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping must be approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. When dealing with the Settlements, often the General Council is a good place to make initial contacts.

Metis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA)

The Metis Nation of Alberta Association is a representational organization that was formed to help the betterment of the Metis in Alberta. The MNAA is organized into six Regions within the Province. Within each Region there are numerous Locals - approximately 65 across Alberta. Each Region elects a President and Vice President and develops business plans and goals to work towards enhancing the condition of the Metis of Alberta. Some of these include, but are not limited to, the pursuit of Metis rights, program service and delivery development, capacity building and other goals to address

issues facing its members. The Regional Offices are located in Lac La Biche, Bonnyville, Calgary, Edmonton, Slave Lake and Peace River.

A Provincial Council that consists of a provincially elected President and Vice President as well as all the Regional Presidents and Vice Presidents governs the MNAA. The Provincial Council is located in Edmonton. An annual general assembly is held every year. Like the Treaty representatives and the Metis Settlements General Council, the MNAA Provincial Council is often a good starting point to begin consultations.

In 1987, the Government of Alberta signed a Framework Agreement to enable the Province to work with the MNAA in developing plans for the improvement of services and greater participation for the Metis in providing them. The Framework objectives are to ensure effective participation in the development and access to Alberta representative policies, programs and services and to promote joint planning and action in such areas as education, economic development, family and social services, health, justice and others. This agreement was renewed in 1999 and will expire in 2006.

Other Aboriginal People

Many Aboriginal people are not represented or belong to a First Nation or Metis Settlement. Nor do they affiliate themselves with other representational governments. An example of this is the Calling Lake Community Association. The Calling Lake community is comprised of off-reserve First Nation people, Metis, non-status Indians and non-Aboriginal people. The Community Association represents all of the various groups within the community.

Friendship Centres

Friendship Centres provide valuable services for Aboriginal people living in urban areas. There are 20 Friendship Centres located throughout the Province and a provincial representative, the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. These are also important avenues to utilize when trying to consult with urban Aboriginal people or those that do not affiliate themselves with other Aboriginal organizations.

3) THE PLANNING PROCESS

3.1 Determining the scope, impact and magnitude of what you are trying to do

Now that you are familiar with some basic principles and background material, the next step in the consultation process is the planning stage. Before consultation takes place, one has to assess exactly what one is trying to accomplish. This will help determine the level of consultation that will be required.

At this stage, it is important to determine exactly what your organization is trying to do – whether it is designing new or reviewing existing policies, programs and services and/or

to assess how these address the needs, legal requirements and agreements with respect to Aboriginal people in the Province.

One method of generating this information is to ask and answer a number of questions such as:

a. Is this a new policy or program, a policy change, a new initiative or particular strategy?
b. Are you reviewing existing policies or programs to see if they meet the needs of Aboriginal people?
c. What will be the overall impact of this project/activity?
d. Will it affect all Albertans including Aboriginal people in the same way?
e. Is it designed specifically for all Aboriginal people, certain groups/representatives or communities of Aboriginal people?
f. Will it apply differently in an urban or rural context?
g. Will it affect Aboriginal people on and off- reserve differently?
h. Are there any regulatory, land-based or resource development components? If so, it would be advisable to contact the Alberta Government before proceeding any further.
i. What is the timeline for your planning?
j. Have you thought about adequate timelines for consultation?
k. Do you have the adequate funding in place?
l. Which jurisdiction has primary responsibility?
m. Have you incorporated some measure to determine the success of the consultation process?
n. Are there other organizations / representatives that should be involved?

There are many more questions that you may have to ask and they will differ depending on the issue and the organization involved. You can never ask too many questions. It is far better to be thorough in this stage than to find out you missed an important element later on. Even more dangerous is to begin a consultation process only to find out later that you have not done enough planning. As mentioned before, lack of planning can seriously jeopardize credibility. You have to be prepared in knowing exactly what your organization is capable of doing before you begin asking for Aboriginal input.

The answers to these questions and the planning process surrounding these will help determine how, and more importantly, with whom to consult regarding the project or activity.

3.2 Determining the stakeholders and who needs to be involved in the consultation process

After completing the questions and the initial stage of the planning process, the next stage involves determining the stakeholders and who needs to be consulted. This is perhaps the most crucial stage in the planning process. While it is impossible to consult with every

Aboriginal person in the Province, you have to be sure that those who need to be included or represented are identified.

This stage can pose a problem that many people find quite baffling. That is, at what level do you initiate consultation? Do you initiate contact with political bodies, representative groups, specific or several diverse communities, grassroots representatives, individuals, etc?

Probably the easiest way to address this problem is by reflecting on the questions and answers of the initial planning stage.

Province-wide Programs or Services Open to All Albertans

Leaving aside on and off-reserve issues, Aboriginal people are generally entitled to provincial programs and services. They are impacted, like other Albertans, by changes to these programs. Experience has shown that broad public consultation processes often lack sufficient input from the Aboriginal community and either enhanced or separate process are often required. This could be accomplished through focus groups and or specific various forums, or questionnaires.

Words of advice on questionnaires or mail outs: many Aboriginal people do not feel comfortable with this type of communication and the response may be very low. From a cultural perspective, Aboriginal people tend to prefer face-to-face communication. For centuries, oral tradition was their method of communicating, teaching, negotiating and keeping historical accounts. This tradition is still ingrained and very much alive in Aboriginal communities and should not be ignored.

Jurisdictional Issues

The jurisdictional issue also has to be taken into account when identifying stakeholders. Some Aboriginal organizations and agencies have mandates and funding to provide programs and services. This is especially true for those living on-reserve. While the Province does not always have jurisdiction on-reserve, provincial laws often apply. Sometimes, the Province provides programs and services on-reserve. Consultation and coordination with First Nation organizations is essential in those instances where your program or service will be provided on-reserve. Likewise, through the Alberta/MNAA Framework Agreement, the MNAA may be consulted on any program or service that addresses areas of joint planning and action as identified in the Agreement.

Province-wide Policies or Programs Directed Towards Aboriginal People

If on the other extreme, your organization is contemplating a new piece of legislation or policy directed towards Aboriginal people, then consultation should be considered a necessity. Because the Province has a “government-to-government” relationship with First Nations and Metis Settlements, one would have to start with their political entities. The MNAA is a representational association and as such, the Province does not have an

existing government-to-government relationship with the MNAA. Nonetheless, the MNAA does represent off-settlement Metis people and consideration should be given to their Provincial Council for consultation purposes.

For example, a representative may initiate contact with the Treaty organizations, the Metis Settlements General Council, and the Provincial Council of the MNAA. From there, further consultation could take place with individual First Nations, Metis Settlements and MNAA provincial Regions. The consultation process may continue to expand to include individuals such as Aboriginal people and elders from various communities. The point here is that with a major new policy, one must always begin at the top with the overall governing bodies of all the stakeholders. They in turn, may give advice and direction on how they would like the process to proceed or how they think it would best proceed.

Province-wide Policies or Programs Directed towards First Nations

If your program or service were directed towards First Nations, then your consultation process would focus on those specific groups. For example, Alberta Community Development implemented the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act.* The focus of consultation was directly with First Nation communities. This process involved notifying all the First Nation Chiefs about the legislation. The next step was to contact each of the Treaty representatives. They, in turn, indicated it would be best to consult with those First Nations who had sacred artifacts that originated from their communities in the Provincial Museum and the Glenbow Museum. In the end, approximately 10 of the 46 First Nations actually needed to be consulted. The legislation was passed in 2000 and consultations are still continuing to develop regulations and protocol for the return of the sacred ceremonial objects.

Regional or Specific Issues Related to Aboriginal People

There may be occasion when consultation is required for a very specific issue. The Dunbow Cemetery is a good example of this type of consultation. This was a very sensitive issue that involved the re-interment of Aboriginal children's graves that were becoming exposed by river erosion. The original cemetery was part of a residential school and through research it was possible to determine the children's names and communities of origin. The consultation process involved talking to distant relatives, where possible, and/or elders from the communities to resolve the situation. Because the children were from different cultural backgrounds, proper protocols and customs had to be taken into account. The consultation process took several months even though it involved a small group of people.

Land-based or Resource Development Initiatives

Finally, if your policy, program or initiative has any regulatory, land-based or a resource development component to it or it has the potential to affect any existing treaty or Aboriginal rights, the consultation process should be handled by the Consultation

Coordinating Group. This committee was established specifically to facilitate the "formal" obligation to consult and is mandated to deal with resource development and land use decisions that may affect any Aboriginal rights.

When planning the consultation process, it is a best practice to identify as many stakeholders as possible. As the process proceeds, you may find that you do not have to consult with as many people as planned. But, it is good practice to at least identify all the possible stakeholders because later on you may not be able to actually contact or gain the participation of everyone.

3.3 Determining the capacity of the entity/community/organization in which consultation will take place and the required timelines for the process to occur

Once the stakeholders have been identified, it is important to determine the capacity and commitment of those stakeholders to participate in the consultation process and the timelines required for meaningful consultation to take place. Some communities or organizations are better staffed than others and will be able to respond and devote human resources to the project. Others may not have the capacity to respond, however, this does not mean that they should be excluded. It may mean that you will have to find creative ways to include them and adjust project timelines to meet their needs.

Community leaders are often under a lot of pressure to help their communities better themselves, yet they may not have the time, technical help and and/or resources to accomplish this. Elected officials are overworked and have to play many different roles. Instead of focusing entirely on one portfolio they often have to adapt their workloads as new and pressing issues arise. When elected officials are constrained by time and work load they may not be able to deal with a consultation process in an effective, timely manner. Nonetheless, it is important that they know that you want to consult and they are aware of the issues and the focus of the consultation process. While an elected official may not have the time to be the actual contact they may assign the band administrator or another employee to be the contact person for the consultation process.

Some communities have a high degree of administrative and technical staff to deal with various issues while others have an extremely small staff to attend to the community's needs and do not have the capacity to respond to projects. As more and more Aboriginal people are pursuing post-secondary education, they are becoming highly desirable in various employment opportunities in larger centres and often leave their home communities to pursue these opportunities. This can be problematic for First Nation and Metis Settlement communities as their trained workforce often prefer to work in larger centres rather than returning home to their smaller communities.

The important point here is that in a consultation process their input is still important. Elected officials still have to be notified and help determine who should be consulted. It may be that certain individuals within the community have an interest in the topic and they will be asked to help guide you through the proper channels for consultation.

Another point to remember is the dynamics that exist within Aboriginal communities. There are often several extended families within communities and some may be more powerful or vocal than others. You may be advised to speak to certain people within a community but as other community members realize a consultation process is occurring they will want to become involved as well and have their voice heard. It can be a delicate balance when working in communities to make sure your process is inclusive, yet respectful of the desires of elected officials.

For a meaningful consultation process to take place, you have to be aware of the capacity and dynamics of each community that you will be working with. This means researching communities, knowing who the elected officials are and their portfolios, who the band or settlement administrators are and who the unelected leaders of the community are.

4. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS – HOW DO YOU DO IT?

As previously noted, your research and the magnitude or impact of your policy or program should help you in identifying the stakeholders and where to begin the consultation process. To consult means to seek information or advice but when working with diverse Aboriginal communities, the question is with whom do you consult?

Given the turn around of elected officials due to the frequency of elections for First Nations, Metis Settlements and the MNAA, the grassroots contacts are extremely valuable as a stable base in the community. They are also often much more aware of the "pulse" of the community and what is happening politically and socially in the community.

Elected officials are extremely busy people dealing with a number of issues that affect their communities. Economic development and high unemployment rates are often their main focus. They may also be dealing with various levels of governments, lawyers, land claim negotiators and various businesses. Thus, people residing in the community often have more time to commit to consultation or can direct you to the right contacts depending on your project or initiative.

4.1 Establishing and Maintaining Contacts

Develop a Network of Contacts

Those who have consulted with Aboriginal communities before know the value of having a network of contacts. If you have never consulted with Aboriginal communities, a good piece of advice is to speak to colleagues in other organizations and ask about their contacts. Often colleagues can make introductions or at the very least give you the names and telephone numbers of their contacts. Be sure to ask colleagues for their permission before engaging their contacts. Some of their contacts may not want to be involved in your consultation process or may not have an interest in another consultation process.

They may, however, be able to direct you to people in the community who would be interested.

Establish Links

Whenever the opportunity arises, get to know people in the community. If Aboriginal people are contacting your office with questions, try to develop a rapport with them as well as answering their questions. Try to find out more about their community – but do so in a friendly manner. If you barrage them with questions or seem too nosy, they may not tell you anything. If you know someone from his or her community, mention this. Aboriginal people tend to enjoy establishing links. If you mention that you know a certain person, they may respond by telling you how they are related to that person. This is not uncommon. Establishing how people are related is one of the cultural differences between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. The term "all my relations" is significant in both a social and spiritual way.

Again, this is one way of establishing contacts. Meet one person and you may suddenly have gained access to several other contacts. Obviously, you cannot rely on just one person to open the door to the community. Remember, in Aboriginal communities there are often several extended families and clans. You may be accused of favoritism if you consult with just one group or family. If that group happens to include the elected officials, at the next election, another group may rise to power in the community. Be sensitive to this fact and make sure the various families and /or clans are included or represented in the consultation process.

Keep in Touch

Keep in touch with your contacts. If you develop a trustworthy relationship with them, you may be invited to community events or even home visits. Like any social situation, it is important to attend if you have received an invitation. Make the time to do so because your appearance in the community can be very important. It will show that you care about the community and you are there to learn more about the community. You will also meet other people who could potentially become valuable contacts.

Attend Community Events

Another suggestion is to attend round dances and pow wows. These are open to the general public and literally hundreds of people of all ages attend these events. Not only will you gain a better cultural perspective of Aboriginal people but you may also make new contacts or have the opportunity to visit with and help maintain your relationship with your existing contacts. And, by attending such events, community members can see that you have a genuine interest in their culture.

Attend Ceremonial Events

If you are fortunate enough, you may be invited to a ceremonial event. Do not be afraid to attend even if you feel totally out of place or at a loss as to what the event entails. People will guide you through the ceremony. They do not expect you to know what to do. If you are unsure about the proper protocol, ask your contact what you should do before you attend. They may suggest what to bring, what to wear, etc. Do not be afraid to ask. Express to them in an honest way that you have never participated in this type of ceremony and are unsure of what to do. It is also a best practice to carry tobacco with you, as tobacco is one of the most common and sacred offerings used in ceremonial events.

Cross-Cultural Courses and Events

If Aboriginal people have been hospitable and invited you to a ceremony, it is considered bad manners not to attend and you could lose your credibility in that community. If you feel you are entirely out of your league in attending ceremonies, consider taking a cross-cultural course. Various government departments, industry as well as private companies offer cross-cultural awareness courses. In addition, conferences and Aboriginal cultural workshops are often offered throughout the year. Industry, government and Aboriginal organizations usually sponsor these. The major museums in Alberta such as the Provincial Museum in Edmonton, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre near Fort McLeod have permanent galleries devoted to the interpretation of Aboriginal cultures by Aboriginal people themselves.

Develop a Community Presence

Participating and being part of community events cannot be stressed enough. You need to develop a presence in the community if they are going to trust you and communicate with you. Again, this is time consuming and may involve a lot of travel, but the end results are worth it. You will no longer be the "faceless" representative, but rather someone who has actually taken the time to try and better understand the community.

Those who work with Aboriginal communities on a continuous basis realize the importance of maintaining their contact base. If you have never done this before, it may seem overwhelming, but really it isn't. It is just good communication, respect for your contacts and their communities and relationship building. It is similar to developing contacts within other organizations representatives. Think about the people you deal with in your own social circle. The same basic principles apply when working with Aboriginal communities.

Be Inclusive

Another important point to consider when developing a contact base is to include Aboriginal people from all walks of life. This could include elders, administrators, politicians, social workers, community liaison workers, parents and students. The

broader your contact base, the easier it will be to develop other contacts or at minimum gain ideas and advice as to whom to consult regarding certain issues. In essence, do not rule out anyone in a community as a possible contact.

Build Relationships

If you do not have the budget to travel to communities, at the very minimum keep in touch with your contacts through telephone calls – not just business calls – but also friendly "how are things going?" type of calls. You are building relationships with people and you do that by being interested in them and their communities. If you know that your contact may be in your locale for a meeting or business trip, try and meet with them or at least suggest that you try and meet. Depending on their schedule, you may be able to have a cup of coffee together or perhaps a lunch or dinner. At least make yourself available if the person is in your city or town and make the offer to get together.

Working with Community Liaison Workers

If you are fortunate enough to find a Community Liaison Worker in the community, you should not have problems in initiating contacts. A Community Liaison Worker acts as a liaison between the "outside" world (governments, industry, etc.) and the community. They also work for the betterment of the community and are usually more than happy to help you in establishing contacts and setting up community meetings.

Conferences

There are always numerous conferences and gatherings that take place throughout the Province on a yearly basis. If these conferences have anything in common with your project or initiative be sure to attend or ask to be a presenter at the conference. There are several Aboriginal newspapers like Windspeaker, Sweetgrass and the Native Journal that list conferences or carry advertisements regarding these conferences.

Newspapers and Websites

Consider subscriptions to these newspapers or check their websites. Subscriptions to these newspapers can be an invaluable tool and they can be shared amongst colleagues. Not only will you find out about conferences and events but also you will gain a better glimpse and understanding as to what is going on in "Indian Country." The more knowledge you have, the better equipped you will be in planning your consultation process and making contacts.

Networking

And, remember that every Aboriginal person that you meet has the potential to become a contact in one form or another. Get to know Aboriginal people and do not be afraid to network. As in any other business, organization or government department, networking

pays off. The more Aboriginal people you get to know, the wider your contact base will become.

4.2 Political Protocol

Initiate Consultation through Elected Officials

When working with Aboriginal communities such as First Nations, Metis Settlements and the MNAA, it is important to respect the governing structures of these communities and organizations and initiate contact with them before undertaking any community consultations. Therefore, it may be necessary for you to write to First Nation Chiefs, Metis Settlement Chairpersons and the MNAA President to inform them that your organization would like to consult on a particular issue, initiative or program.

A Note on High Level Management / Ministerial Correspondence

If correspondence is sent, make sure that the elected leaders are notified so they have a "heads-up" that a letter from the Director is forthcoming. Correspondence may become lost in band, settlement or MNAA offices and the Chief, Chairperson or MNAA President may not receive it in a timely manner. If you are unable to contact an elected official, try and talk to the band administrator or office manager. Follow-up with a second telephone call to make sure the leadership has received the letter and has had an opportunity to respond or has assigned someone to respond to the letter or request.

Correspondence should also be sent to the 3 Treaty representatives, the 7 Tribal Councils, the Metis Settlements General Council and the MNAA Regions. In this way, all levels of Aboriginal governments, organizations and regional groups will be aware of your desire to consult. This may seem like a lot of effort but it is extremely important that the leadership in Aboriginal communities and the representative groups are aware of an organizations desire to consult. Having notified all of these groups, it may then require co-ordination on the part of your organization and the Aboriginal communities and organizations on how to best proceed with the process.

For example, the Treaty organizations may suggest you work directly with each First Nation in the Treaty area but keep them informed on the process. The MNAA may want to be actively involved along with the Regions or if a project is specific to a certain Zone, may suggest you work directly with the administration of the Zone. The important point is that they are informed and help guide the consultation process.

4.3 Engaging Communities in the Consultation Process

Request an Official Contact Person

Once you have made the political connections, and established an acceptable consultation process, the next step in engaging communities is to ask for an official contact person in

the respective communities or organizations. Elected officials are often too overwhelmed by other issues in their communities to be the contact person. If you request a contact person to assist you in working with the community, you will have greater success in engaging that community in the consultation process.

Be proactive in requesting a contact person. Often, this is the only way you can gain access to the community and this person becomes your connection to Council and the community. If you have contact people in the community already, you could request that you work with those people in gaining community input. However, if you are told to work with a particular person, you should honour that request.

Arrange an Information Meeting

Once you have an assigned community contact, arrange an information meeting in the community, if at all possible. Or, consider conducting the meeting in a central location that is accessible for a number of communities. Ideally, the first meeting(s) should involve Chiefs, Metis Settlement Chairpersons, the MNAA President and Tribal Council Directors or their designates. If this is not possible, follow-up and let the leadership know how the meeting(s) went and what the process will involve from this point onwards.

After the initial meeting(s), you should have a better understanding of how to continue with the process. In order to have proper community representation during the consultation process, you could suggest inviting other community members to participate in the discussions, including your own contacts. Remember that you want the process to be inclusive. Explain to your contact that you want to gather as many ideas and viewpoints as possible.

Additional Meetings

Depending on the scope of your consultation process, you may have to attend a number of community meetings or functions. And, it usually takes more that one meeting before trust and understanding develop between the two sides. Make sure that the community is well informed about what you want to accomplish and that they have a voice in how they would like the consultation process to proceed. No two communities are the same and the process may occur in different ways and with different timelines depending on each community.

Listen to Everyone Equally and Fairly

When working with Aboriginal people remember that opinions will differ within communities. However, experience has shown that it is important to listen to everyone equally and fairly. Some people may be more emotional about issues, some people may disagree about issues and some people may not want to be in the same room as others discussing issues. Be sensitive to these dynamics.

You may have to conduct meetings with separate groups of people to develop a comprehensive idea of what the community wants and needs. Or, if possible, try to instill in people that you are all working towards the same goal and give everyone time to voice their opinion. That way, people will believe they are being treated fairly and may be more cooperative with each other.

If your consultation process is exclusive to certain groups it may come back to haunt you. Community members will say that they were not consulted and were excluded from the process. You may then find yourself in a position of damage control so it is advisable to be aware of this from the beginning.

Respect the Capacity of the Community

The capacity of the community to participate must also be taken into account. As mentioned previously, some communities will have the human resources to be very actively involved while others may have only a few individuals who can commit to the process. Some organizations projects or initiatives may not garner much interest in Aboriginal communities. If this is the case, it may take more time and perseverance to gain support and participation. If you want meaningful consultation to take place you will have to factor these issues into your timelines and work at initiating interest. One way to do this is to explain that it is to the communities' benefit to participate. In that way the project or initiative will help meet their needs more effectively.

Make People Aware of Your Desire to Consult

Unfortunately, you cannot force communities to participate. You can, however, make sure that stakeholders and elected officials are aware that you are willing to consult and gain community input into a project. It is also good practice to document your efforts in engaging communities to participate. If there is a backlash later, at least you have the documentation to prove that you attempted to involve communities.

Keep People Involved

Likewise, it is very important to document meetings, telephone calls, and correspondence related to the consultation process. After you have met with communities or stakeholders, be sure to send them the minutes of the meetings. Keep them involved in the process and let them know what will happen next.

Be Aware of Other Issues

Even if you are very goal oriented in your consultations it is inevitable that other issues will arise. It is the nature of consultation. Once you begin discussions with communities they often feel that it is a forum to address a whole range of community issues. Stay focused on your particular project even if you feel like you are becoming a sounding board for community problems. If you can, direct them to appropriate representatives that

may be able to address their concerns. Try and be helpful but do not make promises that you cannot keep.

4.4 Engaging Other Stakeholders in the Consultation Process

Your initiative may be of the scope and magnitude that the consultation process has to include Aboriginal people other than those living on reserve, a Metis Settlement or as represented by the MNAA and its Regions. If this is the situation, the consultation process will have to be expanded to include a wide range of people.

Once you have contacted these various organizations, the process is much the same as it is with First Nations, Metis Settlements or the MNAA. First, ask for a contact person. Second, arrange a meeting with the organization to explain your initiative and why you want to consult. Third, establish a working relationship with the organization and the people it represents. Develop a mutually acceptable procedure for the consultation process. And finally, proceed with the process and include the necessary follow-up.

Advisory Committees

Establishing an Advisory Committee for your organization can be advantageous if your consultation process will occur over the long-term and involve a very focused issue of mutual concern. When establishing an Advisory Committee, follow the proper political channels. If you are asking for representatives from a First Nation, ask that a Band Council Resolution be passed that states the names of those that will represent that First Nation on the Committee. If there will be representatives from the Metis Settlements, the MNAA or other Aboriginal organizations, again, obtain the proper documentation that indicates who will represent them on the Committee.

Develop a "terms of reference" for the Committee. Often it is more effective if the Committee members are involved in this process. Decisions regarding the mandate of the Committee, consensus, quorums, honorariums and terms of appointment should be included in the terms of reference so that the Committee members and political leaders fully understand what is expected of them.

Many organizations have successfully employed the strategy of Advisory Committees in engaging the Aboriginal community and developing long-term working relationships. Advisory Committees can also have their limitations if they are the sole source of Aboriginal consultation. One of the drawbacks of Advisory Committees is that Committee members can come under criticism within their own communities for not representing the interests of the community. Or, in some cases community members may perceive them as advancing their own personal agendas. In order to have an effective Advisory Committee, it is important that the Committee members have credibility within their own communities and they are in contact with the political leaders on a regular basis.

The establishment of an Advisory Committee can be a good starting point for long-term consultation on a particular issue. Conversely, it can often be the end result or final recommendation of a consultation process.

Focus Groups

Depending on the scope of your project, focus groups can be an effective way to consult with Aboriginal communities as well. A focus group represents a cross-section of the Aboriginal population in terms of gender, culture and location. The premise of focus groups is that they can provide a method of gathering viewpoints and feedback regarding specific topics in a short period of time. Establishing focus groups can take some time but they can be useful if you do not have the time and resources for a full-fledged consultation process or if one is not warranted. When conducting focus groups, remember that they do not represent the views of the entire Aboriginal community. Focus groups can be beneficial as a starting point for consultation by giving you a general idea of the positions, views and barriers that may exist within the community regarding certain policies or initiatives.

However, they are very useful in certain applications. For example, AADAC employed the strategy of using focus groups in developing their Tobacco Reduction Strategy for Aboriginal people. In this case, because it was a promotional campaign rather than a new policy, focus groups worked very well. It would have been unwise and costly to conduct a major consultation process for a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of tobacco use. The most important thing to remember when using focus groups is to consider and take into account what you are trying to accomplish. Obviously, focus groups can work well in some situations but not all.

There are basically two approaches in establishing focus groups. The first approach is to select a cross-section of people that you know or who are recommended through your contact base. This cross-section should include people from each Treaty area, MNAA Region, Metis Settlements and the urban Aboriginal community. Often one or two representatives from each of these are sufficient. The second approach is to contact the elected leadership and ask them for suggestions as to who should represent them in a focus group.

When working with focus groups, keep in mind that it may take two or three meetings for the process to be effective. The first meeting is usually an informational meeting whereby organizations representatives explain the purpose, goals and expected outcomes of the process and the common goals or interests that both sides share. A second meeting allows the participants to bring forth their ideas, suggestions and concerns. The third meeting gives you an opportunity to show how you have incorporated their input and gather feedback.

While focus groups may seem fairly easy to conduct, there is always the issue of the time and expense of bringing people together for meetings. It may be more productive to hold focus groups in different regions of the Province rather than one central location – for

example, the three Treaty areas. You may also find that after conducting focus groups that the issues are such that further consultation with a broader number of people may have to occur. Again, this will depend on the scope of the issue, the representational aspect of your focus groups and the feedback that you receive.

4.5 Working with Elders

Working with Elders is perhaps the most gratifying and rewarding part of consulting with Aboriginal communities. Elders are the most respected people in the community. They carry the wisdom, the traditional knowledge and the cultural traditions of the community. The community reveres them so their input is crucial in any consultation process. Elders are not just "old" people. Rather, they are people who are recognized by the community as having gained the knowledge and wisdom to be called an "Elder." In some communities, Elders can be quite young but they have worked and learned from older Elders, know the ceremonies, have the authority to conduct ceremonies, and have acquired and earned the wisdom and knowledge that is recognized by the community.

Respect Their Age and Capacity

When you consult with Elders, a number of factors have to be taken into account. Sadly, as the years go by and Elders pass on, there are fewer and fewer of them in each community. Many are quite old and tire easily. They cannot spend long periods of time engaged in conversation or giving advice. If they have to travel to attend meetings away from their home community, they may have to stay overnight at a hotel to break up a long trip. For First Nation Elders and some Metis Elders, English may be their second language so an interpreter may be required. They are sensitive to their surroundings, so home visits rather than large meetings may be necessary.

Choose a Quiet Time and Place

Many Elders live with two or three other generations of family in their homes so you have to find a time to meet when it is relatively quiet in their home. And it is always a polite gesture to bring some food to the home – perhaps some fruit or pastries. If you are offered something to eat or drink in the home, do not refuse. When talking to Elders, often you find that there are long periods of silence in the conversation. Many non-Aboriginal people may find this aspect of Aboriginal culture uncomfortable. It requires patience. It does not mean the conversation is over. Learn to be comfortable with the silence – it is part of the whole conversation. Elders do not like to be bombarded with questions. They prefer the conversation to flow at their own pace.

Make Them Feel Comfortable

When you are consulting with them, make sure they understand the purpose of why you want to talk to them. To make them feel more comfortable, initially ask them questions about their life, what the community used to be like, their family, etc. Let them feel comfortable with you. Eventually, you will be able to ask more pertinent questions but

be specific in your questions. Speak in plain English and do not use acronyms or jargon when asking or answering questions. Ask their permission to take notes and ask if you may come back and talk to them again if necessary. You may find that it takes two or three meetings with Elders for them to truly trust you and be open with you.

Dress Appropriately

Out of respect, it is important to dress appropriately when speaking to Elders. For women, this means wearing a long skirt that covers the knees and a top that covers the arms. Whether you are male or female, do not wear a business suit. Remember, you are from the "outside" coming into their community. Nothing says this louder than a business suit, a briefcase and a marked representative vehicle!

Offer Tobacco

Finally, there is the issue of protocol when dealing with Elders. This can vary from culture to culture but one element that seems appropriate for all First Nation cultures is the offering of tobacco or cigarettes. By offering tobacco before you begin to ask for advice, you are symbolically saying, "I am offering this gift of tobacco in exchange for your time and wisdom." If you do not offer tobacco, an Elder may not tell you anything. The symbol of offering tobacco is a gesture of respect – respect for the person, their cultural traditions and their knowledge. There is a certain method of offering tobacco as well. You don't just say, "Here's some tobacco." A more respectful way of offering tobacco is to say, "With respect to the Creator, I would like to offer you this tobacco in exchange for your help and guidance." If you are uncomfortable with this, at least say, "I am offering this gift of tobacco in exchange for your help and guidance."

Metis Elders

Many Metis Elders practice Christianity rather than traditional religions, so the offering of tobacco may not be necessary nor considered a Metis cultural norm. If you are unsure, ask your contact person what would be appropriate. Some Metis Elders follow both Christianity and traditional religions, so it is best to approach the offering of tobacco on an individual basis depending on the Elder's beliefs.

The Issue of Honorariums

Many people feel that you pay for access to knowledge and information through schools and other resources and an honorarium is appropriate in exchange for an Elder's time and information. This can be a sensitive issue and it is best to ask your contact person what the protocol is regarding honorariums in the community, as an Elder would seldom ask you outright for an honorarium. It is also advisable to determine if it is your representative's policy to provide honorariums. Another concern is the amount of money that honorariums can take up in the consultation process. The average honorarium is about $200 per day. If you intend to speak to 20 Elders, the honorariums alone will take

up $4000 of your budget. Another budgetary point to consider is travel costs if you intend to have meetings in larger centers like Edmonton or Calgary. For some Elders who have to travel a great distance, this may mean two nights of accommodation and meals as well as honorariums.

These issues have to be addressed in the planning stages of the consultation process. It often costs an organization more money to include Elders but because they are so respected within the community, you cannot really have a meaningful consultation process without including them. Elders help legitimize the process because of their place in society. Even elected officials rely heavily on the advice of the Elders in the community.

Elders Coordinators

Some communities have an Elders Coordinator who arranges various events for Elders in the community. The Elders Coordinator can be an excellent contact for reaching Elders. However, they provide programs and assistance for all the older people in the community and as mentioned before some of the older people may not be recognized in the community as "Elders." Nonetheless, if there is an Elders Coordinator in the community, this is a good place to start. You may ask to attend one of their events – a potluck lunch for example and explain your project at that time. From there you can decide if these types of gatherings will fulfill the consultation process or if you must speak to individual Elders that community members recommend for meaningful consultation to take place.

In addition, many Elders belong to established committees or boards within the community. During the planning and research stage, try and find out what types of committees exist within the communities. Through these committees, you can often gain access to Elders who are used to being board or committee members and consequently are used to dealing with "outside" people.

Elders Gatherings

Elders' gatherings are another valuable way to make contacts. These are usually organized through the Treaty organizations and are advertised well in advance. Contact the organizers to see if you may attend or better yet, see if you can be put on the agenda to discuss your project or initiative. This does not constitute "consultation" per se but at least you are letting people know that you will be beginning a consultation process and you are interested in listening to their ideas.

4.6 General Protocols When Working with Aboriginal Communities

Do Your Homework and Research

Make sure you have a clear understanding of your role and the purpose of the consultation and if there is a history or background as to why you need to consult. Try

and second-guess possible questions and be aware of any contentious issues beforehand and work through possible solutions for handling those issues before arriving in the community.

Be aware of the constraints your organization may have such as fixed budgets, legislative constraints, and jurisdictional issues so that you do not make promises or give the wrong impression of what your organization can deliver during the consultation process.

When meeting with people in the community try and convey that you are consulting with community members because both sides have a common purpose or interest. Consultation in an Aboriginal manner may take longer than in the non-Aboriginal world so be patient. Sometimes matters of importance cannot be approached too quickly or directly.

Cultural Differences

Aboriginal people tend to communicate by using a less direct approach. They may not express a firm opinion immediately and may discuss a topic in general terms before actually stating their opinion. In these situations, they may be gauging others views to see if they are at odds. To avoid any confrontation, the speaker may minimize their own opinion so that others feel comfortable in expressing their opinions and ideas. Others may remain silent if they do not like certain ideas and if they are respected in the community, other people will take note of their silence.

As in any situation, there are exceptions and you may find that some powerful people in the community or younger, more educated people will challenge you and confront you. Out of respect, Aboriginal people tend not to criticize each other's ideas in public even those who are confrontational. They also like to have time after an initial meeting to discuss issues with other people in the community so that they do not feel they are speaking on behalf of other community members without consulting with them. As part of the traditional decision-making process, often a community member likes to feel that there is a consensus among people before they speak on their behalf. It is therefore important to realize that your first meeting in a community may not produce the results that you anticipated and in fact, it may take several meetings to really begin the communication process.

You should also be aware of the different cultural concepts regarding time. Make sure you are flexible in your arrangements because they could be changed with little or no notice due to a range of community issues such as a death or funeral. Finally, remember that you are from the "outside" entering their community. How you present yourself to the community is very important. Do not be boastful or loud but rather be patient and respectful in the way you speak to people and in the way you conduct yourself. And, dress in an appropriate way that is casual, neat, plain and practical.

5. EVALUATING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

For the purposes of your organization's business planning process, the consultation process needs to be evaluated for its relativity and effectiveness. This means that measures and indicators of success should be incorporated into the planning process before consultation begins. A consultation process by its very nature is difficult to measure. With consultation, qualitative results are usually a better indicator or measure of success than quantitative results. But, they are much more difficult to measure. The number of people that you consult with can be measured and recorded but the number of people involved does not necessarily indicate that the process was successful.

Evaluation should be proactive and occur throughout the consultation process, and especially at the end. It is a necessary measure for checking the success or failure of the process and it also provides a means to ensure that the outcomes have been recorded and followed through.

There are other benefits to evaluating the consultation process. The evaluation can help you:

- receive feedback to further improve efficiency, effectiveness and performance;
- assist with further planning of consultations;
- identify the most effective means of information gathering and sharing;
- determine the best way to use financial and human resources;
- improve the methods and processes that were used;
- improve communication between Aboriginal communities and your organization;
- increase your contact base in the Aboriginal community.

When developing an evaluation process there are a number of questions to consider such as:

- How should success be defined and measured and by whom?
- What worked well? What did not work well? What factors inhibited the consultation process?
- Was there enough time allocated for meaningful consultation to take place?
- Would more time have improved the process and results?
- Was the consultation process of benefit to the stakeholders? Did they gain skills or knowledge that would assist them in future consultations? Did the organization's staff gain knowledge or insights that would assist them in future consultations?
- Will consultation need to continue over the long-term? Do you need to establish an advisory committee for long-term planning and implementation?
- Were stakeholders satisfied with the process, the feedback and follow-up they received on decisions and how their views were taken into account?
- Is the policy, program or initiative successful from both the organization's and the stakeholders' point of view?

Obviously, in order to answer these questions, you have to not only look at what occurred in your organization but you must also seek stakeholder viewpoints to determine if the consultation process was successful. This requires follow-up both during the process and once the policy, program or initiative is in place. In essence, it requires more consultation!

Follow-up

Follow-up, however, is not as extensive as the consultation process itself especially if it is occurring as the process is taking place. After each meeting, for example, ask stakeholders how they thought it went. Did they think it was productive? Did they think more people or less people needed to be involved? Did they understand why they were being consulted? Did they feel their viewpoints were being taken seriously? Make sure to document their responses.

Once the consultation process has concluded, and strategies are being developed for a program or initiative, again, continue with follow-up. Let the participants know what is happening. Once the initiative is implemented and after a defined timeline, follow-up with the participants to see if they feel it is successful. At this point, using a focus group or establishing an advisory committee composed of the larger stakeholder group may be beneficial. Another good practice to determine success of a program or initiative is to ask those who are accessing or are directly involved with it for feedback on whether it is successful or not.

The final follow-up for all stakeholders should generally include a report on the proceedings of the consultation and the main points made at the meeting(s); information about the scope of the consultation and the diversity of opinions and the input that was received; an analysis of how that information may relate to other relevant factors such as the representative budgetary concerns, timelines and capabilities, further opportunities for input, if necessary and if possible; the impact of the consultation process on decisions and the recommendations and/or the final decision.

Determine How Information Will be Made Available

The stakeholders and the organization should agree on how this information will be made available when they are planning the consultation process in its initial stages. It could be made available as a mail-out or on-line written report to all the stakeholders or through telephone calls or personal contact. It should be noted that not all stakeholders or communities have access to Internet services so while a document can be posted on a web-site, you must still make sure it is accessible for those who do not have these services. If Elders are included in your consultation process, care must be taken so that the follow-up information is presented in an appropriate way. Telephone calls, personal contact, or a community meeting are the suggested methods for reaching this group.

Be Prepared to Devout Time to the Process

Remember that consultation takes time. Depending on the impact of a proposed project, the consultation process could take anywhere from six months to two or three years and even longer. It is important then, that the communities are aware of how the process is proceeding and this can be accomplished through follow-up and by providing feedback. Your measures of success and the business plan will have to reflect this long and complicated process. For business (and consultation) planning purposes it may be wise to break down a long-term consultation process into workable yearly goals and outcomes and the associated measures that would indicate their completion and/or success.

6. CONCLUSION

Consultation is a long-term process that requires commitment and follow-up. It also requires a certain shift in attitude. When you consult with people, you are there to listen and learn and take the process seriously. Due to historical factors and the impact of past policies, "government and now some industry" is often viewed negatively in the minds of Aboriginal people. This perception can only be countered by meaningful consultation and credibility on the part of an organization's representatives. Consultation allows communities to have a real influence in the decision-making process – something that in historic terms is a relatively new concept.

One of the main challenges in consulting with Aboriginal communities is the immense range of diversity that exists – from cultural, political, social, economic and land-based factors to representational and jurisdictional issues. Every consultation situation or process will be different, although the principles of good communication and consultation do not change. Proper planning, research and a sound understanding of what your organization is trying to accomplish with the Aboriginal community are the key elements in devising a consultation process.

The elected leadership and representational groups must be made aware of consultation processes that involve their communities and should be involved in determining how the consultation process will proceed. Consultation should also be regarded as a way to gain a progressive understanding of Aboriginal cultures and recognition of the rights that Aboriginal people and communities inherently and legally have. Undertaking culturally appropriate consultation conveys an understanding and respect for Aboriginal people and communities.

The idea of respect is one of the main principles of good consultation. Aboriginal people are familiar with their own needs and are entitled to be involved in issues that directly affect them. By involving Aboriginal people in a decision-making process that directly affects them is not only showing respect but is also a proactive, "good representative" practice. It is the duty and responsibility of the organization to initiate consultation processes that are meaningful and conducted in good faith.

This handbook has presented some ideas and approaches for organizations in undertaking the responsibility of "good communication / consultation". It is only through this type of consultation that organizations can improve working relationships with Aboriginal communities, encourage long-term partnerships, and gain a greater understanding of the issues and dynamics of consultation.