

Aboriginal Leadership Initiative

Concept Paper

Canada enjoys a reputation as a special place – a place where human rights and dignity are guaranteed, where the rules of liberal democracy are respected, where diversity among peoples is celebrated. But this reputation represents, at best, a half-truth.

A careful reading of history shows that Canada was founded on a series of bargains with Aboriginal peoples – bargains this country has never fully honored. Treaties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments were agreements to share the land. They were replaced by policies intended to remove Aboriginal people from their homelands, suppress Aboriginal nations and their governments, undermine Aboriginal cultures, stifle Aboriginal identity.

It is now time to acknowledge the truth and begin to rebuild the relationship among peoples on the basis of honesty, mutual respect and fair sharing. The image of Canada in the world and at home demands no less.

Looking Forward, Looking Back
Canadian Government Report

Canadians enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living. Over the past decades, the country has made remarkable strides in advancing the health and prosperity of its citizens. Unfortunately, the conditions in which most of Canada's Aboriginal people live have not followed the same path. The level of social and economic well-being of Aboriginal Canadians remains significantly lower than other Canadians. The accumulated trauma of residential schools and cultural loss has led to an array of complex social challenges and suffering in Aboriginal communities.

As the ultimate symbol of hopelessness in many communities, Aboriginal youth are committing suicide at alarming rates. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, suicide rates are five to seven times higher for Aboriginal youth compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. The many who do not take that drastic measure often live at the margins of Canadian society: compared to other Canadians, Aboriginal communities are marked by higher rates of unemployment, educational failure, disease, violence, and conflict with the law and incarceration. Not only is this creating dislocation within Aboriginal communities, it is producing lost opportunities for the country at large, as thousands of would-be entrepreneurs, workers, and producers are opting out.

For years, Federal and Provincial Governments have undertaken massive initiatives to address the many challenges that Canadian Aboriginals face. Some have been successful, but many have not. Scores of thoughtful studies have developed insightful and appropriate recommendations, many of which have yet to be implemented. Government and Aboriginal leaders alike agree that many government assistance programs, however well-intended, are not working. There is a sense that constructive discourse is not happening, that the conversation is stuck. Nearly everyone on all sides of the issue feels frustrated. This frustration may invite further misunderstanding, repression, or even violence. This frustration may also be the catalyst to find a new path forward.

A new generation of Aboriginal people who did not themselves live through the residential schools experience is now entering their 20s and 30s. They are poised to assume positions of

leadership and responsibility within their communities and in Canada more broadly. The energies and attention of these young leaders can be channeled either into confrontation and conflict or into constructive engagement and visionary stewardship of their peoples. These young leaders are the seeds from which a new relationship between Canada's Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can be grown.

One of the most promising ways to realize a better future for Canada's Aboriginal people is to reweave a social fabric that has become frayed. This can be done by catalyzing meaningful dialogue, building relationships of trust, and by stimulating joint action involving Aboriginal communities and organizations, government, civil society and businesses.

With this in mind, a consortium of government, First Nations, and non-profit organizations has come together to launch the *Aboriginal Leadership Initiative*. The purpose of the Initiative is to identify and implement new ways to improve quality of life among aboriginal people and to enhance the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal societies. The initiative is built on four pillars:

- **Capacity Building:** Enhancing the ability of Aboriginal communities and others to initiate, manage, and participate in constrictive dialogue.
- **Dialogue and Trust Building:** Convening groups from Aboriginal communities, government ministries, businesses, and civil society organizations to deepen understanding of one another, to bridge divides, and to build new relationships.
- **Action Initiatives:** Moving from dialogue to action, enabling cross-sector teams to design and implement on-the-ground pilot projects responding to priority community needs.
- **Evaluation & Replication:** Assessing results, documenting learning, and facilitating the replication of the initiative in other geographical areas.

The project's vision is national in scope, but locally rooted in execution. An initial pilot phase has been designed for launch in late 2007, in the territories of the Nuu Chah Nulth Peoples of British Columbia. The Nuu Chah Nulth comprise 14 First Nations living along the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island. Like many Canadian First Nations, the Nuu Chah Nulth are a people with a proud history of strength, self-reliance, respect for others, and stewardship of the natural environment. Today's reality for most Nuu Chah Nulth, like First Nations elsewhere in Canada is challenging, as communities continue to be plagued by high unemployment, substance abuse, poor health, inadequate housing, alarming rates of youth suicide, and other difficulties.

The Nuu Chah Nulth Tribal Council has embraced the Aboriginal Leadership Initiative as an important means of helping to improve their relationship with government, of forging new alliances with business leaders and of addressing priority needs within their communities. Three Nuu Chah Nulth communities, Ahousaht, Tseshah and Ehattasah, have self-identified to participate in the Initiative and have offered their territories to be the site of the pilot phase.

A project team comprised of the Nuu Chah Nulth Tribal Council, the British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Health Canada, and the Synergos Institute has come together to design and deliver this British Columbia pilot project. (See Appendix 1 for project team detail). The pilot program is scheduled to launch in late 2007 and will last two years. If successful, the initiative will be replicated in other parts of British Columbia and across Canada.

Method and Activities

At the heart of the Aboriginal Leadership Initiative—and what differentiates it from other approaches—is an innovative approach which enables groups of diverse stakeholders to tackle complex challenges. The approach enables people operating at different points within a problem system to develop a shared understanding of the issues to be addressed, to forge inter-personal relationships, and to jointly design and together implement common solutions.

The Aboriginal Leadership Initiative involves five work streams. (See appendix 4 for activity flowchart).

1. Community / Participant Preparedness

This phase entails workshops and other training activities to prepare First Nations community leaders and representatives from government, business, and civil society organizations to engage in subsequent cross-sectoral dialogue efforts. First Nations and other groups will participate in trainings separately as a necessary precondition to inter-group dialogue. Trainings and workshops will help participants to become more open to engaging people from different backgrounds, beginning to break down “us/them” barriers. Some of the topics covered will include:

- Active Listening
- Cross-Cultural Communication
- History and background of other participants groups (i.e. government and business learning about First Nations).
- Trust Building
- Mental Models
- Individual “Blind Spots” and Perceptions
- Conflict Resolution

2. Facilitator Training

A cohort of local facilitators will be equipped with advanced skills in multi-stakeholder process management. It is envisaged that 10-15 experienced facilitators would embark upon an intensive course in order to enhance their existing skills and develop new skills to be applied in multi-sectoral dialogue. Most facilitators in the cohort will be from First Nations communities themselves. The key content areas of the training include:

- Multi-Stakeholder Process Design & Facilitation
- Conflict Management
- Governance and Decision-Making Systems in Multi-Stakeholder Contexts
- Collective / Adaptive Leadership
- Systems Thinking and Systems Change
- Action Project Prototyping and Piloting

The training is conceived as an action-learning experience. Participants in the training will be assigned to actually designing, and then facilitating, the subsequent cross-sectoral dialogue process. Design and facilitation work will take place under the tutelage of the Master Facilitators, who would provide skills enhancement training as mentors/coaches throughout the dialogue process.

3. Cross-sectoral Dialogue, Learning & Convening Events

A group of 30 First Nation, government, business, and civil society representatives will take part in a series of dialogue, learning, and convening events. Plenary discussions will kick off with five days of workshops within one month. At these events, participants will:

- Re-perceive one another, reinforcing a shared humanity and better appreciating others' strengths and constraints.
- Build new personal relationships based on shared experience.
- Create a shared understanding of the current state of relations between BC First Nations, government, business, and civil society.
- Identify areas of current or potential misunderstanding and consider new ways to resolve or prevent disputes.
- Identify priority needs within First Nations communities
- List of potential multi-stakeholder field projects responding to priority community needs.
- Form sub-teams to design field projects

In order to continue the dialogue and relationship building process, the entire group will continue meeting once per month for twelve months.

4. Action Projects

Sub-teams formed at the dialogue events will design and implement action projects. A unique aspect of the Aboriginal Leadership Initiative is that the project team is not pre-determining the exact nature of these field projects, leaving it to First Nations leaders and participants in the dialogue process themselves to determine specific action options. The project Guiding Council (see below) will frame the priority issue areas and will engage representatives from all sectors in a plenary session to further explore those issues. Key areas for action may include:

- Youth development, youth employment
- Economic opportunities and employment
- Education
- Suicide prevention
- Community health
- Cultural preservation

Action projects are intended to serve the dual purposes of: 1) responding to priority community needs, combining the competencies of different sectors to meet these needs, and creating pilots that are potentially scalable and 2) furthering relationship and capacity building through the experience of project design and implementation.

A \$300,000 venture fund will be set aside and made available for seed projects. The Governing Council will determine project funding. The venture fund will be administered by a third party fiduciary organization (i.e. community foundation, trust, charitable organization).

5. Evaluation, Documentation and Dissemination

Ongoing evaluation is a key component of the project and will undertaken at various milestones through the two-year path of the Initiative in order to gauge its effectiveness and measure the outputs of the work being undertaken. An evaluation framework and performance indicators will be developed at early stages; milestones will be set for ongoing evaluation and an overall evaluation report will be done at the end of the two year project cycle.

Key aspects of the initiative will be documented and shared in a variety of print and electronic formats. Documentation will be necessary to ensure the project can be used as a model for other First Nations and provide learning for communities who are also grappling with difficult socio-economic issues. Focal areas for documentation and dissemination will include:

- Capacity building curricula
- Process design and facilitation guides

- Governance & decision making process
- Action project design and implementation framework
- Multi-stakeholder project management and organization

Project Governance

The Aboriginal Leadership Initiative will be governed by a multi-sectoral Guiding Council. The Guiding Council will consist of eminent persons from: the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council and community elders, BC Provincial Government, Federal Government, corporations, and the Synergos Institute. The Guiding Council will fulfill the following functions:

- Guiding and setting the direction of the Initiative
- Hiring and managing a project leader
- Providing input to and validating project design
- Deciding on venture fund allocation, based on criteria set by the participant group
- Brokering relations with key stakeholders and helping to convene the dialogue process
- Mediating conflicts arising within the project execution team or participants
- Ensuring high standards of quality, accountability, transparency, and integrity

Budget

There is expected to be a mixed funding base that includes resources from the Federal and Provincial budgets, corporations, and private philanthropy. We believe this funding model allows us to strengthen the constituency, broaden ownership, and deepen buy-in. In addition to funding, it is anticipated that partners will contribute time, knowledge, mentoring, coaching, and in-kind support. Assuming a \$1.2 million budget over two years, the following provides a breakdown of our draft budget expenditures:

<u>Component</u>	<u>Amount (\$C)</u>
Community-Level Capacity Building & Participant Preparedness	100,000
Advanced Training for Aboriginal Facilitators	100,000
Cross-Sectoral Dialogue, Learning & Convening Events	300,000
Seed Funding for Action Projects	300,000
Project Leadership and Staffing	200,000
Evaluation	100,000
Documentation, Dissemination	100,000
Total	\$1,200,000

Federal and Provincial financial support is contingent upon matching funds from corporate, philanthropic, and individual donors. To date, some \$300,000 of in kind and cash support has been contributed by the Federal and Provincial governments, aboriginal organizations, corporate donors, and the Synergos Institute and used for project pre-work, convening, and design.

Timeline

The national plan is to launch the pilot project in British Columbia in late 2007. Project activities in British Columbia will last two years, as follows:

October – December 2007	Facilitator Training & Process Design
January –March 2008	Community & Participant Preparation Convening for Dialogue
April 2008	Dialogue, Convening and Learning Events
May 2008	Selection, Launch, and Funding of Action Projects
June 2008 – May 2009	Action Project Implementation Monthly Plenary Meetings
June – September 2009	Project Assessment, Documentation, Planning for Replication

The BC Pilot is envisaged as the first of a number of similar projects that will be launched across the country, after the pilot has been evaluated, building on the success of the pilot. It will serve as a model to encourage national and local stakeholders to engage in similar projects in their own regions.

Appendix 1

BC Pilot Partner Organizations

Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council represents fourteen communities located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island in local and national leadership. Mirroring traditional governance systems and kinship ties, the Council's vision is for self-government that promotes strong, healthy Nuu-chah-nulth communities. The Council works to provide various programs and services to approx. 8,000 registered members, including services in Child welfare, Fisheries, Economic Development, Membership, Education & Training, Financial Administrative Support, Employment & Training, Infrastructure Development, Health, Newspaper (Ha-Shilth-Sa) and Social Development. Approximately 2,000 Nuu-chah-nulth people live off reserve in communities across territories stretching along approximately 300 kilometers of the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island, from Brooks Peninsula in the north to Point-no-Point in the south, and include inland regions.

<http://nuuchahnulth.org/tribal-council>

The British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation provides leadership in building new relationships with First Nations and Aboriginal people in British Columbia. Guided by principles of trust, recognition, respect and reconciliation of Aboriginal rights and title, the Ministry is tasked to be the centre of excellence on innovative approaches on Aboriginal policy across government and leads the government's efforts to build the social and economic capacity within First Nations communities and with Aboriginal people.

The British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation works with agencies across government and with Aboriginal partners to coordinate efforts in three key areas: practical steps to narrow social and economic gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal British Columbians, building strong and respectful relationships between government and Aboriginal organizations, and long-term reconciliation through treaties and other lasting agreements. <http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr>

Health Canada is the Federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health. It is committed to improving the lives of all people in Canada and to making its population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle and effective use of the public health care system. In partnership with provincial and territorial governments, Health Canada provides national leadership to develop health policy, enforce health regulations, promote disease prevention and enhance healthy living for all Canadians. The Department ensures that health services are available and accessible to First Nations and Inuit communities. It also works closely with other federal departments, agencies and health stakeholders to reduce health and safety risks to Canadians.

Health Canada is comprised of thirteen Branches, Offices and Bureaus and four agencies, and maintains presence in six regions across the country, including British Columbia and Yukon, Alberta and Northwest Territory, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Ontario and Nunavut, Quebec and Atlantic. www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index_e.html

The Synergos Institute develops effective, sustainable, and locally rooted solutions to poverty. Synergos – which means working together – engages partners to mobilize resources and bridge

social and economic divides to reduce poverty and increase equity around the world. An independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1987, Synergos facilitates effective cooperation between communities, civil society organizations, government, and corporations to enable stakeholders to realize their social and economic development goals. Synergos' programs catalyze partnerships that address complex development challenges, strengthen the organizational capacity of community development foundations, and convene the world's leading philanthropists to deepen the impact of their social investments.

Synergos has a staff of 40 and a headquarters in New York City. The Institute has worked in some 20 countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Africa, Synergos maintains a three-person Cape Town field office and an extensive network of relationships across the continent, particularly in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Mozambique.

Appendix 2 **Interested Parties**

To date, the following have been approached and are supportive of this initiative:

Federal Government Departments

Health Canada
Indian & Northern Affairs
Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Justice Canada
Human Resources & Social Development
Parks Canada
Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Services Canada

Provincial Government Ministries

BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations & Reconciliation
BC Ministry of Children & Family Development
BC Ministry of Children & Youth
BC Ministry of Justice

First Nations Organizations

Assembly of First Nations
Nuu Chah Nulth Tribal Council

Private Sector

McConnell Foundation
The Samuel Family Foundation
Imperial Oil
Communities Foundation of Canada
Institute on Governance
BC Shipbuilders Association
BC Mariners Union
BC Hydro
Polaris Corporation

Appendix 3

Activities – Outputs –Outcomes - Impacts Matrix

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening cross-sector BC groups to participate in open and inclusive dialogue and problem solving processes • Enabling joint development, design and execution of on-the-ground projects, designed to address identified problem situations • Building the capacity of Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal leaders, trainers, and facilitators to engage in cross-sector dialogue and problem-solving work • Evaluating and documenting the process that is developed, in the form of a replicable problem solving model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development, design & execution of projects that respond to priority community needs • Mentoring, coaching and support of participating stakeholders to improve the community's capacity to solve its own problems going forward • Semi-permanent forums where cross-sector groups can safely raise and address issues • Reduction of silos among stakeholder groups (including government agencies working with Aboriginal communities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowered barriers to collaboration and improved relationships among Aboriginal communities, government, business, and civil society • Shared understanding of systemic causes of problems affecting aboriginal communities • Increased capacity of Aboriginal communities to address these problems • Projects designed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase community/youth safety - Improve education - Enhance economic opportunities/conditions and increase employment - Decrease rates of attempted youth suicide - Improve community health (i.e. mold in homes; improve parenting skills; increased literacy and cultural knowledge) • Publicly-available tools and a replicable problem-solving model for the Canadian context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthier communities • Empowered, hopeful youth with a future • Reduction in community poverty