

# GOVERNANCE THINK TANK 27-28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008

## FINAL REPORT CONVEYANCE LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

On behalf of the National Centre for First Nations Governance (NCFNG), it is with great pleasure that we present our report of the Governance Think Tank, held March 27 to 28, 2008 on the shared territory of the Squamish, Musqueam and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nations in Vancouver, B.C. The Governance Think Tank was an opportunity to bring together scholars, practitioners and community leaders to discuss governance capacity building, nation building and implementing the inherent right to self-government, in First Nations across Canada.

We recognize the existing challenges that communities face with respect to governance. Our mission at NCFNG is to support First Nations as they seek to implement their inherent right of self-governance. We also assist First Nations in the further development of their day-to-day government operations. This means the Centre supports First Nations in their efforts to implement and put into practice their jurisdictional authorities and to achieve the well-designed characteristics of good government. I believe that good governance is key to removing some of the barriers that our communities face. We take courageous steps to accomplishing our goals towards our collective dream of creating a new memory in the minds of our children by establishing effective governance practices in our nations.

You will see that among the key recommendations from the Governance Think Tank are to offer models of governance, share best practices in governance, offer governance capacity assessment tools to communities, provide opportunities for networking between First Nations and communities, promote strategies to re-learn our stories, ensure our work matches the diverse cultural contexts we work in, and to ensure youth play a key role in community based governance initiatives. We are committed to achieving these outcomes at the NCFNG. We hope that we will have your support as these projects emerge.

Finally, I would like to thank those who attended the Governance Think Tank and contributed their time, experience and expertise, and to thank our dedicated staff who put a considerable amount of time and effort to arrange this important session. Together we were able to have a meaningful dialogue about First Nations Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and contribute to lasting change in First Nations communities.

With great respect,

**Satsan** (Herb George)  
President  
National Centre for First Nations Governance

# GOVERNANCE THINK TANK SUMMARY REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The National Centre for First Nations Governance identified a need for governance capacity building as a necessary step in strengthening nations and communities. The vision statement of the NCFNG is as followed: *“Rebuilding our Nations through the exercise of our Inherent Right to Self-Determination through strong, stable and culturally relevant systems of government.”*

The National Centre for First Nations Governance held a Governance Think Tank and brought together 20 academics, practitioners and staff. It was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008, in Vancouver, the shared territory of the Squamish, Musqueum and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

The objective of the Governance Think Tank was to identify ways to effectively support communities through governance capacity building work, identify strategies by which communities exercise their inherent right to self-government and obtain feedback regarding existing governance principles framework, indicators of good governance and determine emerging areas of research needed to support the work of the National Centre for First Nations Governance.

Participants widely acknowledged that communities need to examine the nature, source and content of their inherent rights in order to advance toward self-governing, culturally relevant systems of government.

To foster dialogue, the National Centre for First Nations Governance utilized World Café, Break-Out Workshops and Round-Table Forums to elicit the experiences, knowledge, and tested-strategies shared by participants. The result was a space in which individuals spoke positively about real strategies that can harness the latent potential that stands within every Indigenous community, keenly aware of its inherent rights to be self-governing.

This report presents the contributions and findings of the Governance Think Tank.

***“Good governance is fluid and dynamic and requires maintenance”***

## Challenges Identified By Participants:

- Lack of strategic planning in nation-building.
- Low participation levels in nation-building activities within communities.
- Restricted ability to effectively govern ourselves, with existing Indian-Act leadership.
- Restricted ability to reconceptualize governance, due to colonial structures, language and attitudes that prevails amongst ourselves.
- Deskilling of people through creation of band councils and western representative democracy models.
- Diminished use of traditional values in a modern context.
- What do we do where western democracy does not fit squarely with traditional governance models.
- Lack of understanding on how to turn “Indian bands” or “First Nations” into real nations with sovereignty.
- Determining how to reconstitute people into nations and collectives.
- Developing culturally relevant policies (supportive to be self-sustaining).
- Educating communities about our inherent rights.
- Determining the content of our inherent rights and understanding what s35 of the Constitution Act 1982 means for nations and communities.
- Asserting our inherent rights, on and off reserve.
- Incorporating traditional governance structures effectively.
- Getting people to understand the source of their authority and jurisdiction.
- Welfare dependency.
- Indian reserve mentality.
- Lack of trust between community members and leaders.
- Aboriginal groups being pitted against each other, due to limited funding and fight for dollars.

A dominant theme that emerged from discussions is the challenges with exercising traditional governance in the context of Indian-Act governance. This system, for the majority of First Nations, is based on a system with conflicting values and principles that may not fit the unique history, nature and aspirations of the First Nation. Participants agreed that there are substantial socio-economic difficulties that face communities on a daily basis. Very often this places a huge burden on the community and can lead to reactionary responses to crisis.

Chief and Council are charged with the authority to handle many of the daily challenges, however, they often lack capacity and are ill-equipped. This obstructs them from turning their minds to broader, long-term strategies such as exercising their inherent rights, instituting traditional governance structures and

building internal governance capacity. It is widely acknowledged that the restricted ability to interrogate existing governance structures is largely due to colonial structures, attitudes and language that fractures our collective identities as Aboriginal people. In this respect, it can be difficult to get community members to think meaningfully about the source, nature and content of their inherent rights.

The diminished use of traditional values and teachings over time has meant many generations find it difficult to contemplate alternative forms of governance and governing principles. Despite low participation levels amongst community members for nation building activities, there is often more receptivity amongst community members than Chief and Council.

The capacity needed to sustain traditional governance is also of concern to many participants. The creation of chief and councils often has had the adverse effect of “de-skilling” community members due to structural flaws in information sharing and decision making. Lack of accountability, fractured identity and misplaced values can lead to a sense of hopelessness amongst members, reducing participation levels in nation building efforts further obstructing them from considering their inherent rights.

Further, there are complicated issues involved in turning “Indian bands” into nations without talking about sovereignty; the ongoing issue of how members should organize and reconstitute themselves into nations and collectives is a consideration. Finally, there is need to develop culturally relevant policies within any governance structure which have in-built support mechanisms, are sustainable over time and have the ability to propagate the very values they are based on.

*“When we are working with a community, it is about their definition of governance”  
-Ed Allen*

## **FINDINGS**

The forum was developed to encourage dialogue on the following points:

- *What supports can NCFNG offer to support and prepare nations/communities to implement their inherent right to self-government?*
- *What can NCFNG do to help nations and communities to remove psychological dependency and move communities towards thinking of their Inherent Right?*
- *What can NCFNG offer to nations and communities to change generational thinking and put a new memory in the minds of our children?*

The findings that emerged from the discussions are summarized below.

<b><i>What support can NCFNG offer to support and prepare nations and communities to implement their inherent right to self-government?</i></b>
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- Become a centre of excellence to help develop capacity building and professional development.
- Provide information on Best Practices to communities, as they emerge.
- Provide training programs on key governance functions and how to use the model.
- Share successful implementation plans.
- Develop steps to help First Nations and communities look at their governments critically and “discover” what (inherent rights) are already there.
- NCFNG needs to bring out the inherent right “story”.
- Promote networking between First Nations and communities and bring First Nations/community leaders together.
- Develop processes to deal with or resolve conflicts between traditional governance leaders and Indian Act leaders.
- Educate non-aboriginal people about the realities of Aboriginal people, the possibilities of self-governance, and the inherent rights background and histories.
- Educate our own people through our own stories and histories.
- Develop culturally appropriate institutions and help communities utilize their own systems such as the potlatch.
- Help people have an understanding about the rights we have.
- Share stories of effective inherent rights strategies.
- Help communities’ strategize for best test case scenarios.
- Establish strategic partnerships between leaderships (AFOA, Banff Centre and University Victoria) and avoid re-inventing the wheel.

Participants unanimously agree the direction of NCFNG is essential for communities moving toward good governance and increases governance

capacity. In order to understand the source of their inherent rights, communities need to undergo reflection and begin dialogue amongst themselves seminal questions such as: Who are we? What are our fundamental guiding principles? What political strategies do we have in place to exercise our inherent rights? Where do we want to take our nation in 25 years? How can we remove dependencies and foster interdependence amongst ourselves? Histories, stories, and traditional governance structures should be explored at every level of the community to develop governing principles that reflect them. NCFNG is in a unique position to support communities develop culturally appropriate institutions and utilize their own governance systems (for example, principles from the Potlach). Further, NCFNG has potential to be a centre of excellence through providing training programs on key governance functions and supporting communities through implementation processes. A significant challenge for NCFNG will be to help strengthen the relationship between Indian Act leaders and Traditional Leaders. NCFNG can also support communities by sharing models of best practice as they emerge. In this respect, NCFNG can foster networking amongst First Nations and community leaders, and advance the dialogue on building governance capacity.

***“It’s about managing the divide between business and politics”***

***What can NCFNG do to help nations and communities to remove psychological dependency and move communities towards thinking of their inherent right?***

- Hold think tanks for youth in different nations.
- Ask where our dependency is coming from (legal, economic, social and mental).
- Work with communities to talk about what their inherent rights mean to them.
- Show tangible alternatives to present situation.
- Provide diagnosis and facilitation.
- Utilize story telling, metaphor and visual representations to communicate principles.
- Create definitions of important themes and words for nations.
- Ensure “cultural match” in our work.
- Research alternatives to Indian Act membership from other communities.

Participants addressed this question by asking another question. What are the factors that cause communities to suffer psychological dependency? Do they differ from community to community? This can open doors to many complicated and overlapping themes. This is why NCFNG may be able to support nations and communities by beginning facilitated dialogue sessions with communities in order to critically assess the source of dependencies and to provide diagnosis of the challenges facing communities and nations. The question should be asked; What are the indicators of successful communities? It is important that NCFNG can show alternatives to the present situation and share success stories. In doing so, it is essential to ensure cultural match in the work at NCFNG - story telling, using metaphors and showing visual representations can be useful tools with which to talk about shared values and vision. When communities see themselves in this light, it may create the appetite to explore the meaningful expression of this worldview and vision into institutions and structures that can sustain and promote those values.

***“There is a better way than what we have been doing for years. There is a better way than the Indian Act.”***

– Jaimie Battiste

***What can NCFNG offer to nations and communities to change generational thinking and put a new memory in the minds of our children?***

- Include youth and children in governance activities.
- Provide age appropriate materials on governance for youth.
- Facilitate discussion on inherent rights among all levels of community.
- Adopt plain language and use culturally appropriate metaphors.
- Story telling curriculum.
- Youth mapping and interactive tools.
- Networking.
- Present heroes (past and present).
- Apprenticeships, job shadowing and mentoring.

Participants agreed that the children of today will be the bearers of the legacy we leave them and be in charge of running our communities in the future. There are many ways in which this belief can be expressed. This will depend upon the unique values and ways of expressing these teachings, within nations and communities. One thing is clear; we need to rewrite the narrative of who we are and instill into our children and youth, to help leave a new memory. Significant investment needs to occur with respect to engaging youth in current governance activities, providing information to them in a language that they can understand and relate to, and examining successful leaders and heroes who have been at the source of positive changes for the community. Additionally, it is essential to mentor youth in community activities, either through apprenticeships or job shadowing in order to build human resources and capacity. Finally, hosting forums and think tanks to foster dialogue amongst youth regarding the continued need for effective governance, is an effective means for networking and building support for youth throughout their lives and to encourage them now to take on greater responsibility in governing their communities.

***“The younger ones are the seventh generation”***

-Herb George

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There were some strong themes that emerged from the findings. These recommendations are:

***1. Provide information to communities on Best Practices of effective governance models, implementation plans and governance capacity building activities, as they emerge.***

***2. Promote networking between First Nations and Communities whilst bringing leaders together through forums and think tanks.***

***3. Promote strategies that focus on examining the source, nature and content of inherent rights and work with communities to build a strategy to use their inherent rights.***

***3. Promote strategies that focus on relearning our own stories, laws, histories and values.***

***4. Collaborate with communities in order to ensure better “cultural match” in our work.***

***5. Include youth and children in governance activities and ensure effective mentoring for youth in governance positions.***

***6. Work with communities to identify heroes in their communities, past and present, in order to better understand the strategies they used to effect positive change.***

## **Developing our Governance Principles: A Work in Progress**

The development of the NCFNG Governance Principles is ongoing. The Governance Think Tank was a forum in which to have meaningful discussion about these principles and obtain feedback to inform and guide future development of the Governance Principles. The outcomes of these discussions are significant however are not included in this report as they are a work in progress. Instead, they will be shared in the future after they have been finalized.

During this forum, several activities occurred to obtain the feedback and responses from practitioners and academics. Principally, the main objectives were to:

- Get feedback on the principles framework;
- Get feedback on governance indicators;
- Hear about other work in these areas;
- Contemplate new avenues to research, advance work in these areas.

As a result, the following activities occurred:

- Presentation on the NCFNG principles of effective governance framework;
- Small group exercise to consider, explore, discuss the principles in greater detail;
- Plenary session to review findings, key points of discussion, and overall thoughts about the framework;
- Miriam Jorgensen, from the Harvard Economic Development Project gave a compelling presentation on Native Nations Institute work on measurement indicators;
- Plenary discussion exploring the challenge and opportunity of using indicators to show governance capacity.

The outcomes were significant. We received a general support for the work presently occurring at NCFNG in the core business areas. We received specific clarifications around salient matters to governance, had a chance to ask questions, identify new research avenues and areas for growth for the centre. Finally, there was a greater understanding of linkages between the work presented and the work of the participants.

### **Conclusion**

The Governance Think Tank was successful. The principal objective of the two-day event was to elicit feedback from practitioners and academics toward further identifying NCFNG's role in advancing governance effectively. The existing challenges communities face with respect to governance are great and as such

NCFNG is designed to support First Nations as they seek to implement their inherent rights of self-government. The forum was successful in so far as it created a space by which to share case studies, governance best practices and practical examples of successful governance models and approaches. All of these served to illustrate the various functions and processes when approaching the subject of governance. Certain areas of capacity building, understanding our inherent rights and identifying areas for growth and nation building were some of the recurring themes throughout the event. There was a strong overall sense of support for the work NCFNG is engaged in and many recommendations were made to improve the role of NCFNG for communities. It is hoped that through the meaningful discussion of the important core business areas that NCFNG carries out, together with the feedback from participants, the Governance Principles were discussed. These principles continue to be developed by the National Centre for First Nations Governance, in order to advance First Nations as they seek to implement their inherent right to self-government.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Host Nations: Squamish, Musqueam and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nations

**The National Centre for First Nations Governance** – is a national, independent First Nations controlled organization dedicated to supporting First Nations as they work to implement their inherent right of self-government. The vision statement of the NCFNG is: *Rebuilding our Nations through the exercise of our inherent right to self-determination through strong, stable and culturally relevant systems of government.*

To accomplish the vision, the National Centre for First Nations Governance has established five regional offices across the country. Each regional office implements activities in the four business lines of the organization:

1. Governance Advisory Services
2. Land, Law and Governance Research
3. Professional Development
4. Public Education and Communications

The British Columbia Regional office is located at 100 Park Royal on Squamish Nation land. For more information visit [www.fngovernance.org](http://www.fngovernance.org)