



# governance toolkit

## case study #02

**Principle:** Meaningful Information Sharing  
**Community:** Miawpukek First Nation

### OPPORTUNITY

*Miawpukek First Nation (MFN) are Micmac people living on the south coast of Newfoundland. In 1998 they indicated to the Government of Canada their desire to move toward self-government negotiations. Recognizing the nature and scope of achievements of the community within its short existence as an Indian Act band, departmental officials proposed a unique exploratory discussion process. This process was implemented in late 1999 and continued through to spring 2001.*

The exploratory discussions showed that while there was genuine interest in self-government, there were also many issues that members wanted to more fully understand before moving toward formal negotiations. There was a strong desire for meaningful information sharing where ideas could be exchanged frequently, openly and in all directions. There was a clear commitment by many to involve themselves in working groups and committees to fully explore, assess and understand the implications of such a fundamental change in community governance and jurisdiction.

### NCFNG

is a national, independent, First Nations-controlled organization dedicated to supporting First Nations as they work to implement their inherent right to self-governance. The development of a set of shared principles that clearly articulate our approach to effective governance is one way in which we support that work. This NCFNG Effective Governance Case Study profiles a best practice in the principle “Meaningful Information Sharing”.

To learn more about this case study, contact:  
Miawpukek First Nation  
[www.mfngov.ca](http://www.mfngov.ca)

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In this way, it was the community that determined that a robust exploratory discussion stage would best prepare them to build consensus on whether entering formal self-government negotiations was appropriate.

### PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

It took Miawpukek and their partners at least ten years to implement the full process of community consultation and begin to experience the benefits associated with meaningful information sharing and the increased capacity to take charge of their own affairs.

Early on, careful selection of representatives was important. Stated agreement on stakeholders' roles, responsibilities and skills proved invaluable in community consultations during the developmental phase and later in formal self-government negotiations. All key project stakeholders, whether they were independent consultants, DIAND headquarters or regional office representatives, or community representatives, demonstrated a deep commitment to the initiative's goals and adopted methods of communication.

There were two goals for the consultations: 1) to provide a means to successful negotiations and implementation of self-governance, and 2) to increase the capacity for governance itself across the community.

A community consultation work plan was developed through a cooperative partnership involving the self-government working team members, the band and DIAND representatives. The work plan goals included:

- Conduct an environmental scan
- Identify and inventory operational barriers
- Identify and establish relationships with other groups that will be affected by Miawpukek self-government process
- Identify negotiating issues to be addressed *before* self-government negotiations begin
- Build community consensus and membership awareness of issues, options and procedures

## SUCCESS FACTORS

The Miawpukek work team identify a number of key processes and principles that provided support to their activities.

**A COMMUNITY-LED PROCESS:** Miawpukek has demonstrated a genuine commitment to building its own future through a sustained effort to keep the initiative at the “grass roots” level. This has been done by ensuring the full participation of the First Nation community, generating relevant community-based research, focusing on community needs and practical problems, and validating the process with community members. They have also articulated a set of socially and culturally relevant expectations of governance, and openly addressed any entrenched fear and suspicion among First Nations related to government actions and intentions.

**BUILDING THE FOUNDATION:** Several critical strategies were employed by the self-government working team in order to reach the long-term objectives. These strategies included reaching a common understanding and agreement among all project partners about the key issues, ensuring that community participation would become a cornerstone of all project-related activities, and learning from existing governance systems.

**CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS:** A series of workshops was designed to provide community members with historical and contemporary information required to assess the self-government initiative, the opportunity to explore the implications of self-governance from political, program and financial perspectives, and provide input and direction to the self-government exploratory initiative.

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION:** In addition to community workshops, an Open Council Session, community meetings, and community open houses were held in order to reach more community members with information about MFN band programs, departmental activities and expenditures. Community mem-

**The First Nations currently negotiating self-government arrangements with Canada believe that self-government negotiations must be driven by the grass roots people and must proceed at a pace comfortable to the grass roots people.**

— Miawpukek Negotiation Discussion

bers were kept informed through postings on the MFN website, regular mail outs and media press releases in the local press and community radio station.

## CHALLENGES

The Miawpukek faced and successfully addressed a number of challenges during the course of the work including the following.

- Ensuring authentic community engagement was accomplished through the investment of a great deal of time and effort. The process needed to be flexible and frequent rescheduling was required to accommodate the greatest number of participants.
- The inclusion of off-reserve membership in discussions and planning was important in order for the interests of all Miawpukek to be fairly represented.
- Significant time was invested to make certain that information on the process was both easily understood and readily accessible. The lack of self-government resource material in plain, accessible language caused initial delays.

## NCFNG GOVERNANCE LESSONS LEARNED

*Meaningful Information Sharing* is critical for a nation to realize its vision and only occurs when the exchange of information happens frequently, openly and in all directions.

The Miawpukek recognized that governmental reform without community buy-in is unlikely to produce significant, long-term results, and that community buy-in depends on real investments by government in education and engagement (listening) with the whole of the community. They set as priorities the attainment of a common understanding and agreement among all project partners, and that the identification of key issues and the exploratory work should be pursued in a partnership approach. The Miawpukek built a strong foundation to their work by ensuring that community participation would become a cornerstone of all project-related activities.

## LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

Miawpukek First Nation Self Government  
[www.mfnselfgovernment.com](http://www.mfnselfgovernment.com)

Miawpukek First Nation Proposal,  
[www.mta.ca](http://www.mta.ca)

Miawpukek Human Resources  
[www.mhrnl.com](http://www.mhrnl.com)

Miawpukek First Nation Community Story  
[www.rural.gc.ca/decision/connel/conne\\_e.phtml#f2#f2](http://www.rural.gc.ca/decision/connel/conne_e.phtml#f2#f2)