



governance toolkit

best practices

Principle: Meaningful Information Sharing
Government: Squiala First Nation

OPPORTUNITY

Squiala First Nation is located within the boundaries of the City of Chilliwack, B.C. in the central Fraser Valley east of Vancouver. The connection of Evans Road to Ashwell through Squiala lands has been an issue of ongoing discussions between the City of Chilliwack and Squiala First Nation.

In response to the roads project – and Squiala's work to develop financial and governance policies and the *Squiala First Nations Land Code* – the Squiala initiated a comprehensive community planning process. The Squiala felt the process would enable a meaningful exchange of information within the community which would in turn support authentic negotiations between the nation and the city. The intent was to build stronger relationships in the community and create a community development plan that truly represents the interests of the people.

The resulting plan provides a framework for making decisions to address existing needs and establishes broad direction for future community development.

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:
Squiala First Nation
www.squiala.com

To learn more about the NCFNG:
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PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

To drive the planning process, Squiala established a steering committee of elders, youth, council and staff. The First Nation also tapped into external resources through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the City of Chilliwack.

The greatest benefit from the planning process has been having the lines of communication opened up in the community. Council and citizens now share a greater understanding of community issues. Considerable time and resources, both human and financial, have been invested to carry out a comprehensive community planning process and implement the outcomes. Dedicating those resources to the planning process was essential to Squiala's success.

Squiala will continue to evaluate and adapt the planning process and the plan through ongoing dialogue with the community. This strategy is designed to maintain their full participation. "We want to assess the community's understanding of the process, issues and outcomes, as well the success of the land designation process and interest in pursuing new business opportunities," says band administrator Tammy Bartz. Community engagement based on meaningful understanding is critical for the planning to go forward.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Meaningful information sharing is the common theme across all of the indicators that supported success in the evolution of the Squiala Community Development Plan.

Effective communication, both within and outside the community, permitted the gathering of critical background and contextual information that provided a foundation for the plan.

Regular information sharing within the community

ensures that the community continues to endorse the plan, is up-to-date on planning activities, understands the activities of the planning process and the planning team, and has the knowledge to actively participate in the process.

Communications outside the community, with other levels of government, private industry, and academic institutions, helps to coordinate the community's plan with other local or regional plans thereby increasing its chances for success.

The entire community has been involved in the planning process. To help facilitate community engagement, the First Nation held dinners and family-head meetings, distributed newsletter and surveys and maintained an open door policy at the band office.

A key focus of the planning process has been acknowledging progress and community celebration of each success, no matter how small.

CHALLENGES

Community engagement is an essential element of comprehensive community planning and Squiala found the process presented some challenges. "There are several distinct generations in the community," explains Bartz. "The six original patriarchs are in their 70s, with most of the rest of the community in their 40s and 20s. Every generation has a different perspective and it took some effort to blend everyone's needs."

Establishing effective community engagement can be a difficult task. Solutions to typical challenges can include the following.

If community members show a lack of interest or motivation, look for ways to connect with them at the personal level. What will the initiative mean to them, their families or business?

Squiala as a self-reliant community - our community members will have a range of choices in education, employment and economic opportunity

— Squiala Vision Statement

If community members show a lack of trust, arrange for meetings to occur in a neutral place.

If community members show limited cooperation, acknowledge any historical basis for their reluctance and show an appreciation for their participation now.

Be certain that all information can be easily understood and is accessible.

NCFNG GOVERNANCE LESSONS LEARNED

The effective governance principle of Meaningful Information Sharing is critical for a nation to realize its vision. Meaningful information sharing occurs when the community is engaged – when the exchange of information occurs frequently, openly and in all directions. Planning for the future is an excellent opportunity to engage people in meaningful information sharing.

Successful community planning processes are those that are community-driven. All sectors of the community should have an opportunity to participate through speaking and listening, including elders, youth, members residing within and outside the community, and family heads, among others. The plan must accommodate the needs of community members in order to have validity and credibility, and for members to endorse its implementation.

With engagement, the community becomes a source of new ideas for discussion and action. Participation encourages people to take responsibility for initiating and implementing projects, and also creates momentum and sustains support. Engagement expands the leadership base of the community and presents opportunities to transfer planning and responsibility to a new generation of community members over time.

LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

Squiala First Nation Community Development Plan
www.squiala.com/complan.php

First Nation Success Story: Squiala Nation
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/bc/fnbc/sucsty/crgn/ccp/sqfn_e.html

Comprehensive Community Planning Handbook
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/bc/proser/fna/ccp/ccphb/ccphb_e.html