Traditional Governance and Adapted Forms of Government

In the early 19th century, British and Canadian governments began interfering directly with the autonomy and sovereignty of Indigenous nations. They forcefully disposed of traditional governments and replaced them with a system of indirect rule effected through newly created offices of Chief and Councilor. Initially viewed as an experiment in 'civilization' and 'assimilation', this system soon became preferred federal policy and was institutionalized in the *Indian Act* using Band Councils.

Over time Band Councils have taken on a life of their own as community institutions whose authority and responsibilities extend far beyond the legal and political confines of the *Indian Act*. Despite this, Band Councils continue to be viewed as 'alien' institutions by many. As a result, many communities are actively pursuing the renewal of traditional governance or the renewal of traditions within a system of governance that combines elements of First Nation and imported Canadian political traditions.

The fundamental reform of core First Nation government structures and procedures remains outside the ambit of current federal legislation and policy. Despite these impediments, many First Nations, engage in discussions of traditional governance, or used their traditions as a basis for exploring the foundations for good governance and development of community-appropriate governance tools. In so doing they engage in a diverse set of projects that range from integrating a discussion of traditional practices regarding citizenship to an elaborate modeling of a new political system grounded in the nation's traditions.

Many First Nation governance projects raise and explore a complex array of issues pertaining to the re-establishment of traditional governance and renewal using traditions.

Issues that are addressed include:

• What is traditional governance?
• What are traditional political values, philosophies and practices?
• What would a traditionally grounded citizenship code look like?
• What is the role of Elders traditionally?
• What should the role of Elders be today?
• Did the traditional system provide for a separation of judicial, legislative, executive and administrative functions and structures of government?
• Does a traditional political system meet the demands of modern First Nation governance?
• How can a traditional government structure be 'modernized' or combined with the Band Council form of government?
• How can a First Nation's political traditions be used to promote good governance today?