



governance toolkit

best practices

Principle: Inter-Governmental Relations
Government: Sliammon First Nation

OPPORTUNITY

In 2002, the City of Powell River, on the Sunshine Coast in south-western B.C., began construction on a seawalk park. The project inadvertently destroyed or disturbed significant cultural sites of Sliammon First Nation including petroglyphs and shell middens. Deeply concerned by the site impact and the lack of consultation with their nation, then Chief L. Maynard Harry and respected Elder Norm Gallagher confronted city officials.

Resolution was achieved not in the courts but through consultation and the sharing of both planning and cultural knowledge as well as the joint participation in the development of the project between the governments of the nation and of the city. Working collaboratively, the two governments were able to increase the resources available to the project by attracting financial support from both the Ministry of Transportation and BC Ferries to complete the park.

PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

In 2003, building on the successful inter-governmental cooperation of the seawalk project, Sliammon First Nation Council and the City of Powell River negotiated

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 "Inter-Government Relations".

To learn more about this case study, contact:
Sliammon Treaty Society
www.sliammontreaty.com

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and signed a *Community Accord*.

The accord articulates the operating relationship of the nation and the city and is a critical piece in their future inter-governmental initiatives. The accord recognizes Sliammon's traditional territory and unresolved aboriginal rights and title, including the right to self-governance. It cites the mutual recognition of the legitimacy of each other's governments, principles of cooperation, including "mutual respect and recognition" and "reciprocal consideration" of common interests between both communities, and the agreed upon promises to protect cultural heritage resources and promote community growth.

Tangible results of the Sliammon commitment to pursue and maintain effective inter-governmental relations are evident throughout the communities. In the dedication of the *Old Hospital Site / Tees Kwat* the city recognized the existence of a Sliammon village and fishing site long before the formation of Powell River. Leaders of the city were also honoured in naming ceremonies receiving First Nations names. Further recognizing the significance of naming, Sliammon place names in the Coast Salish language have been added to the English and French versions on all signs that were erected in the city's neighbourhoods.

In 2004, Sliammon raised a welcome pole at Ajoomixw Park in Powell River. The project was sponsored by BC Ferries, RBC, Dick Barr and the Sliammon and enriches area tourism which drives economic benefit. The city and Sliammon nation worked together on the design of a historical viewpoint overlooking the seawalk and Malaspina Straight that displays two totem poles carved by Sliammon artists with the flags of the municipality and the First Nation flying side by side. Contributions to support the viewpoint were made by the city, RBC, BC Ferries and local businesses.

Each of these successful projects is a symbolic demonstration of the effectiveness of the inter-government relationship.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Sliammon First Nation have identified a set of principles that they believe supported their success and may be of value to other communities and governments working to establish or strengthen their inter-governmental relationships:

- Start by building a relationship of mutual trust and respect
- Establish and maintain regular communication
- Involve and inform others
- Establish protocols, agreements or guiding principles
- Establish and participate in joint committees
- Share and celebrate successes
- Be creative in seeking innovative solutions
- Negotiate fair service agreements
- Recognize jurisdictional limits
- Write reciprocal letters of support
- Agree to disagree

CHALLENGES

The Sliammon and city governments have recognized in the accord the significant benefits of joint planning and collaboration particularly in cultural and recreation projects. However, there remain challenges in operationalizing the intent of the accord particularly around shared infrastructure and the need for coordinated planning. The current discussion includes transportation and water and sewage services with the goal of achieving economic benefit through shared service provisions.

Building from its successes with local government, the Sliammon are now following the same route to engage the regional government. Sliammon First Nation has recently completed their first *Sliammon Comprehensive*

Our relationship continues to be challenged by outdated attitudes, by the experiences of the past and the resulting tension. Our goals do not and will not always align. However, we are successfully shifting from negative to positive communication.

Anything is possible if you put enough effort into it. We need to explore these opportunities for our future generations

— Sliammon Chief Walter Paul

Community Plan (CCP) to support community development and nation building.

The challenge is now to implement the plan in coordination with Sliammon's partners and neighbours. To be successful, regional planning must include all three local governments, and the parties must be willing to work together and address political issues and operational challenges. Progress in relationship building with the regional district has been limited, but it is hoped that a meaningful regional planning process will help to address this.

NCFNG GOVERNANCE LESSONS LEARNED

The leaders of Sliammon First Nation took key actions to build and sustain the effective governance principle of *inter-governmental relationships*.

Have courage and commitment: Leaders of the nation had the courage to approach the mayor of Powell River directly when things went wrong. City leaders had the courage to deviate from the business as usual approach to find a better way of working. Both parties were committed to the best solutions for their communities.

Practice open and effective communication: For communication to be effective it must be based in trust, meaningful, inclusive, and an opportunity for all parties to both listen and to learn.

Recognize and acknowledge each other: The evolution of B.C. has resulted in the overlap of municipal, regional and reserve boundaries. Recognition is a critical first step to moving forward.

Lead by example: If leaders lead with integrity and transparency, their staff and communities will follow.

Take time and patience: Relationships, projects and joint ventures take time to evolve and mature; patience and perseverance are important. The seawalk issue first surfaced in 2002, and it was two years later the seawalk was opened.

LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

The Six-Stage Treaty Process

www.sliammontreaty.com/treaty_process_stages.html

The Treaty Negotiations Office

www.gov.bc.ca/tno

City of Powell River

www.powellriver.ca