

Governance Pilot Project: Shoal Lake #40 First Nation

To help achieve the community's expressed goal of developing open, accountable and effective government, Shoal Lake First Nation used the opportunity provided by the First Nation governance project to advance their ongoing work on a 'portfolio and decision-making process'. The project fuses tradition with the Band Council system. It does so by opening the decision-making process up to the community using a system of community circles and traditional principles to guide Chief and Council in four key areas of decision making and portfolio responsibility: education, economic development, social development and infrastructure.

The Shoal Lake governance project represents an attempt on the part of the community to "keep with the teachings and traditions, and to fuse tradition with modern ways of conducting business". In so doing, the project remains grounded in Anishnabeg traditions and understandings of the circle and the four directions. The portfolio and decision-making structure that is proposed requires that Band Council decisions involve the entire community (the circle) and input from the four directions.

Four "community councils", one each representing Elders, youth, women and men, would be established to facilitate community participation in the four key portfolio areas of education, economic development, social development and infrastructure. Each of the four councils would engage with these portfolio areas, and would provide a delegate to the "executive councils". Executive councils would be established in association with each of the four portfolio areas. Their membership would comprise delegates from the four community councils as well as a Band Councilor. They would act as community conduits, guiding and supporting both Chief and Council and the four community councils in the portfolio areas.

In fusing tradition and modern political practices, the project goes beyond simply designing a mechanism to facilitate community participation or create a more open, accountable and effective government. The project extends this by stating that the seven natural laws of the Anishnabeg (bravery, honesty, humility, love, respect, truth, wisdom) must be the guiding principles and values of their system of government. It should be noted that the portfolio and decision-making process that is proposed would be interfaced with the existing Band Council system. As such Chief and Council would retain political and legal authority, and ultimate responsibility.

In terms of implementation, Shoal Lake First Nation had not begun implementing this proposed process at the time of reporting. Implementation planning, however, was well underway and cost estimates prepared. Costs of implementation include developing a web-site to keep the community informed, hosting and conducting community meetings and circles, and executive council meetings.

Excerpted from *First Nations Governance Pilot Projects: Challenge and Innovation*. A Final Report Prepared for the National Centre for First Nations Governance by Carleton University Centre for Community Innovation. February 2005.