

Rebuilding First Nations: Tools, Traditions and Relationships



John McBride
with
Graham MacDonell
Charlene Smoke
Colin Sanderson

Acknowledgements

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Recognition and thanks were offered by moderator Gary Merkel to the Coast Salish for welcoming conference participants to traditional Coast Salish territory.



Gary Merkel is a member of the Tahltan First Nation. The popular conference moderator describes his conference roll as the “Chief Cat Herder”. Gary is a practicing professional forester.

“I am reminded of what Darwin said: It’s not the strongest that survive and it’s not necessarily the smartest or the most intellectual. It’s the ones who are most responsive to change.”

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Introduction

The tools, traditions and relationships that it takes to re-build First Nations, to realize good governance, were the three key elements discussed at the Aboriginal Financial Management Association of B.C.- INAC conference on Governance and Accountability, held in Vancouver, June 10-11, 2002.

Entitled, “A Vision for the Future”, the conference featured presentations, forums and workshops on how some of B.C.’s First Nations developed those tools, how they were inspired by their traditions and how they forged relationships that propelled them closer to independence.

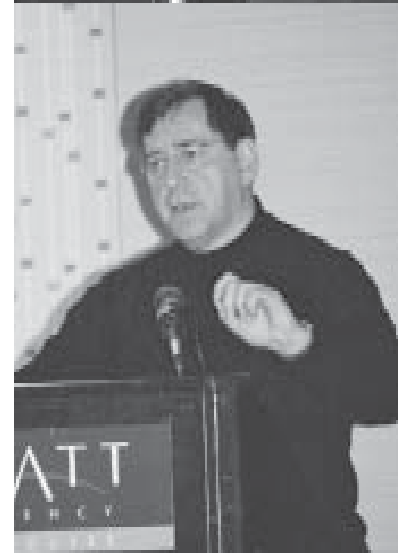
This conference record features the stories of those First Nations. But first, let’s look at what are the tools, traditions and relationships needed for nation-building and what role is played by First Nations leaders and their communities on the path to nationhood.

The tools for nation building are the devises that help communities involve their membership, create a vision, plan a strategy, and develop the management abilities for good governance. Creating a vision for the future builds a picture in the mind’s eye of what nationhood will be. The picture might include how the community will earn a living, make decisions, settle disputes and celebrate the culture.

Once there is a vision of the future, the community needs the planning tool to develop a strategy to achieve that vision. The strategy will identify strengths and opportunities and develop a community plan based on those strengths and opportunities.

“We wanted to establish a vision of a quality of life for our community and develop a plan by which we could address those quality of life issues.”

Chief Nathan Matthew
North Thompson Indian Band





The tool needed to carry out the strategy is the tool of good management. Good management means the wise allocation of human and physical resources, developing systems for making decisions, delegating work, and keeping records. Good management fosters an environment that brings out the best in people. Just as it is essential for good governance to have a vision to give direction, a strategy to determine how to get there, and ways of involving the community, it is essential to have good management to ensure independence is achieved.

“...we have such a need to increase the administrative ability within all of our communities.”

Chief Sophie Pierre
Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council

Chief Liz Logan and Kathi Dickie of the Fort Nelson First Nation, told their story at the conference of how their community created a vision, and Chief Nathan Matthew related how his North Thompson Band got back on the road to independence by planning with their community.

Traditions that communities have drawn upon to rebuild their nations can also be found in the following stories. The answers to the challenging questions of how to re-establish self-governing nations are commonly found in First Nations traditions.

It is the traditional wisdom that inspires the re-building of the institutions like the schools, the health system, the justice system or the band council. When rebuilding schools, communities often reflect on the role of the Elders and the traditional learning approaches. When re-designing health service delivery, they build on traditions of healing and spirituality. When they think about justice, they reflect on their traditional approaches to dispute resolution. And when re-constructing the band council, First Nations often reflect upon the decision-making processes of the Feast Hall or the Sun Dance ceremony.

These institutions are the building blocks of nationhood. Successful First Nations have found that with all these institutions, there needs to be a “cultural match”, a connection between



the present and the past. Traditions of governance provide, like a railing down a steep staircase, solid guidance and support to achieving independence.

“Our visions come from a very solid base, they come from our own traditions and our own cultures.”

Chief Sophie Pierre
Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council

In this conference record you can hear about the Tahltan Nation’s struggle with finances and how they utilized traditional structures to work their way to financial health. Listen to the experiences of Tsawwassen Chief Kim Baird and to the story of Chief Liz Logan, from the Fort Nelson First Nation, and how their communities drew upon tradition.

Relationships can provide the resources and services for independence that a community needs but doesn’t already have. Partners may provide financial capital needed to invest in infrastructure, the human talents that the community has yet to develop or the technology required to communicate or to add value to natural resources. Good relationships are the basis for co-operating with neighbouring native or non-native jurisdictions to provide services or partner in developing roads, water, health services or safety for community members. Gaining control over these services is a step towards good governance.

Every nation needs partners and there are many examples in this book of the solid relationships that have been built, including: the Hartley Bay Band, the Kitamaat Band and the Tahltan Nation.

“When it comes to relationship building, the most important thing in any relationship is you’ve got to know who you are.”

Chief Robert Charlie
Burns Lake Band





Also, solid partnerships with other governments are valuable in the effort to gain more independence.

One of the last stories is about the conference itself and how its partners have co-operated to spotlight the issues of governance and accountability. The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, with the guidance of the Working Group on Accountability and Governance, sponsor this annual conference, now entering its fourth year. This partnership supports the essential dialogue of good governance: the needed policy development, program and procedural changes and new legislation that will facilitate the rebuilding of nations.



Leaders from both First Nations and INAC recognize the road to independence is long and complex. Each step yields increments of sovereignty as First Nations' capacity is developed. For everyone's sake, that road is best traveled in partnership. The process of achieving greater self-determination involves a sharing of power, a succession of leadership and a great deal of good faith. Those providing leadership deserve our respect and support for the difficult task they have undertaken.

Leadership is required to oversee that the tools are available, the traditions drawn upon and the important relationships are fostered. But leaders have other specific responsibilities in the quest for good governance. Leaders have a direct responsibility for creating a harmonious climate, holding up the vision of nationhood, maintaining the plan to achieve independence, and managing change.



Creating a harmonious climate that brings out the best in people may mean leaders taking action to mend conflicts between other people or families or letting go of old rivalries themselves. The most important of all relationships are those among the people in the community. Communities that are torn apart with conflict are not communities that are winning their independence. Leaders keep the important vision of nationhood and the plan for achieving it before the members. Otherwise, conflict will distract the community from its long-term goals. A common vision can be a basis for unity.



Leaders also need to be effective change agents. Change is not easy and changing from a “colonial” to a “take charge” mind set is a big change. Steve Cornell from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development says, leaders have to change the discussion from “What they did to us.” Or “What they owe us.” to “What we will do for ourselves.” and “How we want them to help.”

As if that isn’t enough, leaders are called upon to involve youth, foster new leadership and effectively delegate jobs and responsibilities. It sounds impossible but it isn’t if the leaders follow the most important strategy of all – engaging the members in the task of achieving independence.

Engaging the membership is the key step that must be taken to achieve self-government. When the membership is engaged, it means the leaders have:

- involved the members in building a vision and strategy;
- informed members of the issues and involved them in the debates;
- included them in the decision-making and forged a consensus; and,
- won member support for the always challenging implementation.

In the process, new leadership has been fostered and an atmosphere of inclusion generated.

All this means leaders must give over some of their power, and that is not easy. But when they do, they utilize the community’s existing talents and encourage others to get involved, get the training, and acquire the skills needed for good governance. Engaging the community in the effort is the strongest strategy for achieving independence.

The leaders with solid community support carry the biggest stick at the negotiating table. By engaging the membership, leaders are following the Aboriginal tradition of accountability – leaders are accountable to members and members account-





able to the community. The successful communities who presented at this conference have confronted the challenge of engaging their members.

There were many more stories of good governance and accountability that were shared by the participants in the conference workshops. Every community has its successes and every successful First Nation learns from the others.

This conference brought together committed and talented people in a spirit of sharing their experience and with the excitement of working towards the same goal – strengthening independence. This conference record includes some of the stories of nation-building that are currently going on in British Columbia.



“I think that we can do this by sharing our expectations with the people and that by together establishing or re-establishing the rules of how we want to live and how we’re going to distribute the resources and the benefits of our collective resources.”

Chief Nathan Matthew
North Thompson Band





Stories from the Communities

“Don’t give up on caring for others because when people see and hear that you care, it empowers our people. Leadership is empowering your people and, if you can make a difference in one person’s life, that is success.”

Chief Yvonne Tashoots
Tahltan Band



A new Chief and Council leads Tahltan community out of financial difficulties

Chief Yvonne Tashoots with team members Richard Jackson, Norm Day and Wenda Day

“It all started the morning after we won the election, June 22nd, 1996,” said then new Tahltan Chief Yvonne Tashoots.

“We were locked out of our Band Office and B.C. Hydro was climbing the pole to cut the power to the administration building. When we got in, we found the staff had not been paid, social assistance cheques couldn’t be issued and there was little cash in the ‘kitty’.”

“Some of the members were screaming at us. We had no doubt INAC were in the process of putting us into third-party management – third-party was at our door!”

At the same time the Tahltan Nation Development Corporation (TNDC) was on the verge of bankruptcy. TNDC director Norm Day recounted the situation: “Four years ago, a dark cloud hung over TNDC. Bank statements had not seen black ink in years, constantly operating in limited overdraft provisions. Creditors were pounding at the door; accounts payable were 60, 90 or more days behind, in some cases, years behind. Some suppliers were demanding cash in advance for machine parts; other suppliers had cut off the relationship totally.

“TNDC’s contract bonding for construction projects, essential for bidding on public construction work, had been terminated. In order to meet the basic payroll obligations, TNDC had to ask clients for advances. The frank and brutal truth of the matter was TNDC was insolvent, unable to pay its debts and bills.”





Establishing accountability

This is the brave story of the Tahltan Nation, located in the northwest corner of the province, who faced a nightmare deficit. The chief and council had a choice: they could have ‘walked’ and left the mess to Indian Affairs’ third party management but they were determined to stay in control. The Tahltan pride and the spirit of independence, that comes from living in a remote location, gave them the strength to take on the daunting task.

By utilizing their traditional political structure and good management practices, they involved their community in all aspects of Band business and solved their financial problems. They held themselves accountable to their members and, through their traditional structure, created accountability of their members to the community.

Norm Day said about the Band and TNDC: “We were determined to be in control of working ourselves out of this mess. We had a variety of expertise and we believed we could...we knew we could...make a difference. We didn’t want to give up, sit around and cry. We asked for and INAC gave us three months to gain trust and establish credibility. We examined each program, budget by budget. In the beginning, we had a review every three months. We made social development and staff salaries the priority.”

Chief and council didn’t take their full compensation and the Iskut Band, their partner band in the Tahltan Joint Council, helped with legal counsel, office staff and office supplies.

Councillor Richard Jackson: “It was very hard. It was our sense of humour that kept us intact...it’s a form of healing.”

Drawing on traditional governance

If there was ever a time a community needed to harness all its resources, this was the time. The Tahltan traditional governance system was one in which each of the five family groupings had a spokesperson.



Chief Yvonne Tashoots said, “So we started from within the community, consulted Elders, spoke to families and built a team that represented all the families. We tried to align the housing, social services and other committees to our family structure by putting a family ‘rep’ on each committee.”

The thinking was that family representatives on each committee would help educate all Tahltan members. Through their family ‘reps’ the members became more aware of the reality facing chief and council. Representation from each family also helps avoid nepotism and the charges that some families are benefiting more than other families. It was the financial crisis faced by the new chief and council that made them go back and utilize their traditional governance structure and traditional accountability to their members.

“It makes you feel good when your traditional values are being respected.”

Councillor Richard ‘Rocky’ Jackson

Delegating to strong managers

Good management was the vehicle that drove the Tahltan out of the financial swamp. The chief and council delegated power and responsibility as a way to utilize all the talent available.

Chief Tashoots explained: “We couldn’t afford to not delegate to managers – there was too much to do. We set policy; the program managers managed. Neil Sterritt helped us with the roles and responsibilities of board members. It is not always easy but it is important to separate politics from management.”

Each of the committees had a manager, someone who was not political but was interested in that area of work. There was a council person attached to each committee who performed a liaison function. To create more community involvement, boards were appointed for The Three Sisters Haven Society social services umbrella and the Tahltan Nation Development Corporation. This provided an opportunity for more community members to get involved.





Positive, open environment

To support the management process, Chief Tashoots explained that they created an environment of open and honest discussions that allowed problems to be voiced and solutions to be proposed.

“When you create these positive environments, you allow people to grow. Good management meant delegating, sticking to policy and letting managers manage, creating an open environment and increasing Tahltan involvement.”

Chief Tashoots added, “Hire good people and let them manage...it has worked.”



The five-year remedial action plan with INAC ended March 31, 2001.

One of the good people they hired and let manage TNDC was John Pijl, CEO. He had been district manager with the Highways Ministry for 19 years. He knew all about road construction and maintenance and was an accomplished manager.

The secret to TNDC’s success?

“Hire good people and keep business at arms length from politics”, stressed Norm Day. John Pijl has done the job. Today, TNDC is a far different company than a few short years ago. It can stand with pride as a First Nations-owned company, not dependent on government funding or handouts but a proud participant in the economic reality of the traditional territory.”



TNDC is a vital employer and a significant force in the social fabric of the community. TNDC employs approximately 60 people during the winter full-time and during the summer months they employ as many as 120 to 150, depending on the work. They have established partnerships with mining, forestry and trucking companies and have successful catering, road maintenance and construction divisions. Today they have strong working capital, no long-term debt and have secured their own forest licence. Six years after their visit to the brink of bankruptcy, the future looks very bright.



Finding time to plan

As many First Nations leaders say, planning is an important ingredient in success.

Chief Tashoots agreed, “In order to work together as a team, you need time and space to plan. We travelled together over the long distances in our territory. We used that time to plan. That’s why we are presenting as a team at this conference: we did it together as a team.”

“We cried, laughed and went places together. It was the long car rides we took together through our territory that gave us the time to think and plan together.”

Chief Yvonne Tashoots

It is also important to have planning time with the larger group, whether it is the whole community or the band administration.

As Chief Tashoots advised, “Go for a retreat, respect the teachings, listen hard, and organize different working sessions.”

The Tahltan Chief and Council took the disadvantage of the great distances to travel in their territory and turned it into an opportunity to do their planning. The Tahltan initiated a Land and Resource Management Plan, which mapped the resources in their territory.

The government began to take notice of their economic potential. The plan not only documented resources and land use for future treaty negotiations but also opened the door for government visits to their Band Office. It is not easy to get officials into the office. To reach their Band Office in Telegraph Creek, it is over a twelve-hour drive from Prince George.





Meeting the challenge of their location

The Tahltan are still challenged by their remote location. They now arrange community visits and interviews with the teachers and nurses who apply for jobs. Because there have been too many professionals who left early because of the isolation, they give them an opportunity to visit and screen themselves out.

The Tahltan still expend energy trying to get the attention of the government and service agencies. But, by staying active on provincial environment and economic development committees, they maintain valuable linkages and relationships with government and other First Nations.



Through their valuable partnerships with industry they have a better connection with the 'South'. Despite these efforts to compensate for their remote location, they still find they must be self-reliant.

"Let's try to build a nation."

Councillor Richard Jackson

Exercising leadership

None of what the Tahltan have accomplished would be possible without leadership.

Chief Yvonne Tashoots reflected on her leadership experience: "Leadership is being a role model 24 hours-a-day. There are no secrets. If you as a leader can refrain from drugs and alcohol, you can lead people...you must lead from the heart, be good listeners, talk to people, show you care and be patient. All levels of government are a test. Support from family is important."

Real leaders find ways to build a team, use traditional wisdom, engage the community and share their power. Chief Yvonne Tashoots is one of those kinds of leaders.



Over the time of her administration, 1996 to 2002, Chief Tashoots and her team led the Tahltan out of a nightmare deficit by consulting the Elders, going back to the traditional governance structure, building a team based on families, establishing good management and exercising leadership in an indigenous way. Solving the financial crisis has reinvigorated their community and renewed their confidence to solve their own problems and deal with the challenges of the future.

As Chief Tashoots modestly summed up as she leaves office for a well-earned rest, “We think we have raised the bar for the next administration.”

“Our weapon is the education we give our children.”
Chief Yvonne Tashoots

Questions and Answers:

Participant: “When you looked back on the economic mess, did you want to go after those responsible or did you let it go?”

Chief Tashoots: “We had no money to cover the legal costs and there was no basis for criminal charges. If we go back we are wasting energy that we could spend in a more positive way. No point in going back: we need to look forward. I think we have raised the bar for the next council.”

Participant: “Is running as a team becoming more common like a slate, in municipal politics? Is there a trend towards running a ‘full-meal-deal’ group?”

Chief Tashoots: “Yes. And we started it prior to 1996 because in order for us to make this happen, we had to believe in each other...come together as a team, have the same philosophy and want to make a difference. That’s what we did — and that’s what really got us through a lot of that.





Participant: “How did you separate business from politics”

Chief Tashoots: “We appointed boards. We tried to hire the best people for program managers, and not tie their hands.”

Participant: “...what our new, really young council is looking for, is balance...our hereditary chiefs are coming to us and saying: “ Listen, we understand that you’re a totally different generation but we need to connect the past and the future so that those roots are there.”

I’m finding it’s coming around. Our young council is very open to it and it has been amazing, the things that we’ve been able to teach each other and the strength and power in numbers as a result of having the traditional and the political all in one...Have you tried to achieve that balance?”



Richard Jackson: “I say this is the struggle we’ve been having, its finding a balance between the realities of 2002 and traditional culture. So I think it would be an awesome idea if you just went away from the community and go back to the land because that’s where they’re comfortable and, maybe that way, you could be open to the learning from them. We found that they tell stories and sometimes we sit there and think, “Okay, where are they going with this?” But at the end they have taught you something. So I think we have to become good leaders - listeners and we have to respect and understand where they’re coming from. But at the same time, they need to know what we’re being faced with in this new world, because it is a different.”

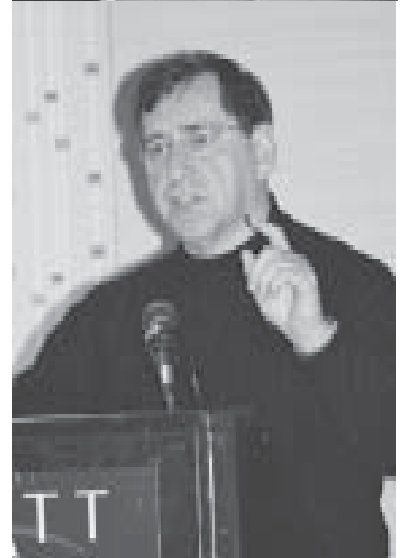


Participant: “Hello, I am from the Haida Nation, on the Skidegate Band Council and finance is my portfolio and I’m very interested and happy for you in what you’ve accomplished and I’ve got a couple of questions.

One is, when you started looking back upon what had happened before your terms in office and you found what you obviously did, did you deal with that or did you just let it go away?”



Chief Tashoots: “We just let it go. There was no point and the Band didn’t have any money for any legal and we looked at it and realized that there was no substantial evidence for any criminal activity, so we just let it go and we didn’t go back there. We just let it go, we couldn’t spend our energy going back and pulling forward all the information, so we just got a handle on it and moved forward.”





Fort Nelson First Nation builds on cultural traditions and role of families to achieve a community vision

**Chief Liz Logan and Kathi Dickie
Community Development Co-ordinator
Fort Nelson First Nation**

“Nation building requires the laying of a solid institutional foundation through strategic thinking.”

Chief Liz Logan

With that understanding, Liz Logan, Fort Nelson First Nations Chief, and Kathi Dickie, the Community Development Co-ordinator spoke to the challenge of creating a shared vision of the future for the four different cultural groups that make up the Fort Nelson First Nation (FNFN).

Diversity is a challenge...

The people living in the north-east corner of B.C. were nomadic and traveled great distances, moving with the seasons. Rather than being a single cultural group, the Fort Nelson First Nation is an amalgam of four groups brought together through various circumstances.

Their members include descendants of fur traders dealing with the Hudson Bay Post of Fort Nelson and residential school students that were brought together by government policy in the last century. Many of these students have now grown up in the Fort Nelson area and have never returned to their own traditional territory.

The four groups, occupying ten different reserves, consist of Dene/Slavey, Cree, Beaver and Sekani. The groups are distinguished by the area they live in. The Dene/Slavey were the





people of the big animals; the people of the Peace River were known as the Beaver; the Sekani, the people of the rocks; and, the Cree, the men of the woods. Today, this diverse community lives together as one.

“...there remain some divisions in the community based upon linguistic, family and economic lines, but most accept that we’re in this together.”

Chief Liz Logan

Taking advantage of diversity, turning it from a challenge to a strength, is part of the talented approach taken by Chief Logan.



“The more ways we can look at a problem, the more likely we are to come up with workable solutions,” she stated.

Building on the similarities – families and traditions

Kathi Dickie agreed: “Building on similarities instead of focusing on differences, is the philosophy that has strengthened this community.”

The first similarity shared by each of these four cultures that the Nation has built upon is their recognition of the family as the primary unit of governance. The members of the Fort Nelson First Nation hold to the belief that family is the centre of all that is good in their community. The Elders teach the young; youth are taught to take care of the Elder’s needs before their own; knowledge is passed down orally, which means that time is taken to sit and communicate with one another and that both resources and problems are shared. Families work as the basic unit of organization.



Regarding the fear to move ahead: “We must not let our mistakes from the past limit what we can do today or tomorrow. We must learn from them and move on.”

Chief Liz Logan



To build on this strength, FNFN uses special events to honor Elders and recognize families. The Family Breakfast, Family Support Program and Elders' Tea Time are programs that help the families in the community.

The community's 'Head Start' outreach program offers parents and their children a hot breakfast once a week. The FNFN's family support worker along with the Ministry for Children and Families helps families in crisis. The Elders' Tea is also hosted by the Head Start Program once a month, when members of all ages are encouraged to volunteer with serving and are invited to eat the traditional food and participate in the entertainment that is offered.

The second similarity shared by all the cultures that make up the Fort Nelson First Nation is the moral and guiding authority of cultural traditions. Despite the disruptions they have endured, Fort Nelson's cultural traditions are very much alive. Many members have traditional knowledge because they still maintain a close relationship with the land.

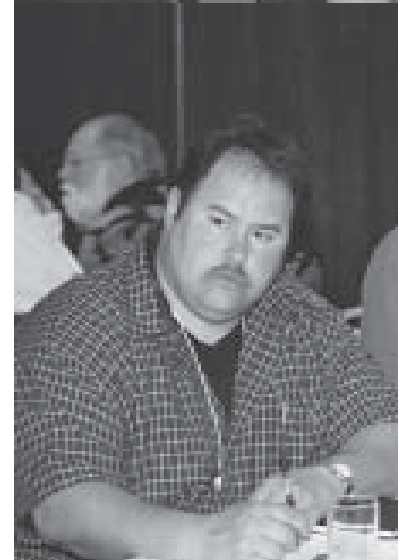
“By building on the great range of skills and experience in the community and the traditional values and philosophies of the Nation, the community can look to its future with wisdom and hope.”

Chief Liz Logan

Chalo School is at the core...

Both the central importance of the family and the strength of the traditions are embodied in the Nation's Chalo Elementary School - considered to be the core of the community's strategy for change.

Despite the long and difficult history of First Nations and the school system, the FNFN Board of Education and a talented school administration and staff have created an environment that welcomes families into the school. Parents and grandparents visit - often with pre-school children in their arms - and





take great pride and comfort in a school that works for and reflects their community.

A good part of what makes them proud and comfortable is the school's role in supporting and promoting the cultures. There are culture classes where students are taught to make traditional crafts and learn the languages. The children's arts and crafts are prominently displayed throughout the school.

Chief Liz Logan and Kathi Dickie have utilized the common strengths of family and tradition as a foundation on which to build a vision.

“Reaching for Our Vision” – a four-step planning process



The planning process that the community began, entitled, “Reaching for Our Vision”, was intended to answer the question: “What do we want for the future of the Fort Nelson First Nation community?” This project, which was done in four phases, has become the umbrella framework from which all other projects and processes flow.

Step 1: “Who We Are”

The process began by reaching out to families and beginning to build a profile of the FNFN membership. After surveys, interviews, and consultations with past reports and statistics, a document entitled, “Who We Are”, was published.

It tells of the history, the strength and the values of the FNFN. It describes the community, the social, economic and health issues they face, and the services being provided.

Step 2: “What We Think”

Phase Two, a summary of the community's opinions, was compiled into a report called, “What We Think”. Among those consulted through focus groups were: youth, women, Elders, social assistance recipients, service providers, the policing committee and the general membership.



Workshops were held within the community to gather information from those groups that didn't come to these focus groups.

Prior to this process, the Fort Nelson First Nation developed the following vision statement:

“To have the community of the Fort Nelson First Nation be a strong, healthy, proud and self-reliant community, made up of strong, healthy, proud and self-reliant community members.”

The vision that has been crafted is as much a reflection on who they were as who they want to be. All these communities were strong, healthy, proud and self-reliant. It is no surprise that their vision for tomorrow is to re-build these characteristics.

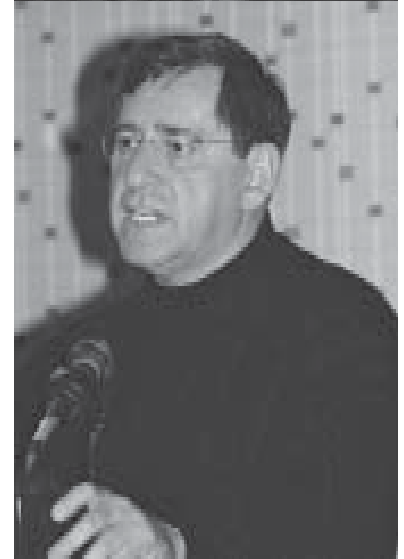
Why bother with a vision?

A vision statement plays an important role in a band office where there are a number of distractions.

Chief Logan explained: “It can be really discouraging and disheartening at times, the day-to-day frustrations can seem really overwhelming some times. There are times when you figure you're taking about two steps forward and then one back; and then you take another step forward and three back. So it's really important to keep your eye on the long term, on the next generation ...making the vision a priority over other demands for time and resources helps keep everyone on track.”

Kathi Dickie added: “Many issues need attention in the community and if you try and address them all your energy and focus becomes scattered.”

“In short, our overall approach is to develop comprehensive coordinated strategies in pursuit of our vision,” Chief Liz Logan summarized.





Step 3: Priorities for action

The third step was to establish priorities for action. This began with an analysis of the information and opinions collected. Several themes came up repeatedly. These became the priorities for action.

The 12 priorities for action are:

1. to prevent and address the abuse of drugs and alcohol;
2. to increase the quality and quantity of the community's housing stock;
3. to address environmental health concerns, particularly from a nearby factory's pollution;
4. to improve the communication between FNFN and its members;
5. to revitalize the Nation's traditional languages and cultures;
6. to provide increased supports for Elders;
7. to provide additional supports to youth, particularly high school students;
8. to promote "meaningful employment" opportunities;
9. to address community safety concerns;
10. to promote community support networks and volunteerism;
11. to improve the community's physical infrastructure;
12. to include members living off-reserve in the FNFN community.

To validate the planning process, it was important for the community to see that what they said was accurately reflected back in the action priorities.

Chief Liz Logan stressed, "In building the action plan, we aim to publicly acknowledge the concerns of the members."

Step 4: Long term strategic plan and CDP

The fourth phase, a long-term strategic plan, was developed that will be reviewed every five years. It is a living plan that can be adjusted as the community grows and changes. It incorporates another project, called the Comprehensive Commu-



nity Development Plan (CDP), which is designed to build on the successes of the “Reaching For Our Vision” planning process and the priorities it identified.

Linking the CDP closely to the priorities identified by our members, ensures that the planning process is staying on track. The CDP will develop a series of interlocking strategies including the physical development plan, the economic development strategy, a land use strategy, a community facility strategy and a housing strategy.

Chief Logan explained that the planning process is more than the plan. “The planning process is serving as a community development tool that is helping to bring us together as people, as a community and as a Nation. It has also helped us to understand more fully just who we are. It is helping us to appreciate the strength and the assets upon which we can build as well as to understand the shortcomings which we must overcome.”

Building on the strength of traditions...

As a result of the planning, and building on the strength of tradition, the Nation has initiated a project called “Healing Through Our Culture”. This project addresses the needs of those who have become dependent on social assistance.

Chief Logan explained: “We propose that by getting back to the land and our culture, we will have a better future. Understanding the past will help us make wise and healthy choices tomorrow. We want to put in place a bridging program in a traditional cultural setting.”

Through involvement in safe traditional activities, they hope to provide support and opportunities for learning and self-esteem building for those people who are so dependent on social assistance.





“I continually say to my community that if you want something that you’ve never had before, you must be willing to do something that you’ve never done before.”

Chief Liz Logan

Chief Logan emphasized, “Counsellors will be working and participating alongside the participants. We have found that the standard type of counselling is not always successful so we feel that we need to find another approach.”

This is an example of a distinctively First Nation’s approach.

The old “program maze”...

Chief Liz Logan pointed out, “Historically, there has been little coordination among many federal, provincial and community agencies involved in Aboriginal programming and community development.”

The consequence, according to the Chief, is a program maze through which few people can navigate effectively.

“There is a focus upon weaknesses rather than strengths, a focus on only the problems which are most fully-developed and severe, and on efforts to address the problems of individuals, without addressing the social and economic environment in which they have occurred.”

That approach may meet some of the immediate needs of individuals but it cannot make any significant difference through the long-term for either the individual or the community.

Programs that work towards a vision...

Chief Logan summarized, “The experience of other communities emphasizes the importance of shifting from remaining programs which address immediate problems to create a programming which works towards a vision for the future.”



This type of programming, according to Chief Liz Logan, “Allows us to bridge the gap between where we were and where we want to be in the future.”

This is a move to a coordinated strategy that is owned by the community.

These lessons, added the Chief, are embodied in “Reaching for Our Vision”.

Planning is important

FNFN Chief Logan explained that the planning process has also helped them to understand more fully just who they are. It is helping them to appreciate the strength and the assets upon which they can build as well as to understand the shortcomings that must be overcome. The overall FNFN approach is to develop comprehensive coordinated strategies and pursue their vision.

Chief Logan concluded: “The planning process allowed us to adjust the very roots, the very fundamental causes of the financial and social dependency that too often has characterized our people...we hope that our commitment to this integrated and community development approach may serve well as a model for other First Nations.”

Very much has been accomplished through the FNFN planning process. The Nation started by recognizing its strengths: the families and the cultural traditions. This approach was an excellent strategy to address the challenge of the diversity that makes up their people.



Questions and Answers

According to Chief Logan, there were a number of questions asked of her and Kathi Dickie throughout the two days. How they operated their school generated the most interest.

Participant: I've had the pleasure of visiting up in the Fort Nelson community several times now over the past number of years. The one big thing that caught my eye was the Chalo School and I think there's some lessons to be learned there.

Kathi, you explained to me, one time, the process that your community went through when you were deciding whether you wanted to have an open traditional style of school that was warm, or a jail style with steel doors and bars on the windows. Could you relate that experience?

Kathi Dickie: Our community went through the residential school (system) and...we used to send our kids into town after - when we no longer had to send them away and parents just weren't comfortable going into the school. It was a foreign place, it was cold and it wasn't welcoming...

The community came together and they looked at studies that showed our kids weren't at grade level, 85 percent of our kids were not at grade level. So they said okay, well, if we can get them a good start, we'll start with the pre-school kindergarten, we'll give them a really good start so they, at least when they go into the school, they'll basically have the pre-readiness skills that they all need.

We started with the pre-school, kindergarten and from there it was really popular, we had parents coming in at our school, they feel friendly – or they feel comfortable coming in. We expanded to Grade Two, then to Grade Four and now we've gone into Grade Seven.

The whole thing...is it's a community school; it's got a real sense of community. We have parents dropping in all the time. It's welcoming...the parents can come and sit and talk and chat and introduce every new baby that's born...we



spend some time on the couch and let the principal carry the baby around. But it's just a really open welcoming school and it is - it's our school.

When we were talking about setting up our school, the parents were saying we don't want it to be segregated, we want the reverse of the residential school. So we've opened it up to non-First Nations as well. I can go on and on about the school. That's one of my pet projects.

We wanted to make sure the kids were getting a good quality education as well. So we use the provincial curriculum and we use the provincial standards because eventually our kids have to go into the regular school system, so we want to make sure that they're all measured by the same ruler. So we do use the standard curriculum.

Participant: I'm from the Haida Nation. I'm wondering, is your school an independent school? Is it on the reserve?

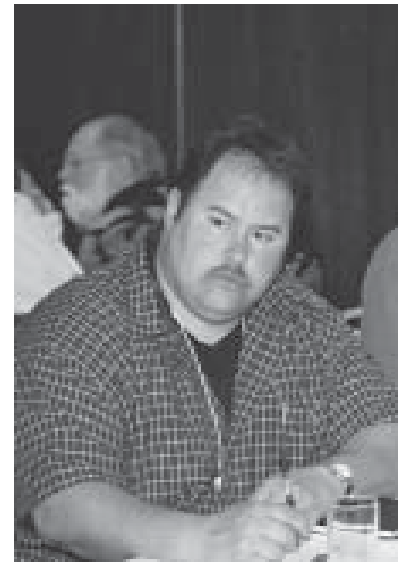
Kathi Dickie: It's a band-operated school and we looked at the idea of getting independent school status just to get the provincial funding but right now we're still a band-operated school. As was mentioned, we're looking at possibly expanding to higher grades so then we're looking at more – the independent school status.

Participant: Okay. So how do the non-First Nations – how are they funded, like how are their costs covered?

Kathi Dickie: That's one thing that – one of the reasons we looked at getting the independent school status because we weren't getting funding for them at all. We opened our school to them, the school district wouldn't give us the funding. There's different things in local education agreements – they have a reciprocal clause, which was a possibility.

Participant: Do you have an LEA? (A local education agreement which is an agreement signed between a First Nation and the local school district.)

Kathi Dickie: We do have an LEA.





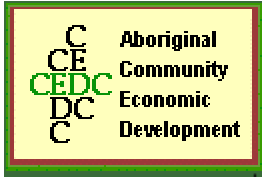
Participant: Was that in place before?

Kathi Dickie: No, our LEA was signed after they did away with the reciprocal clauses.

Participant: And you couldn't negotiate that into your LEA, to have the school district funds for non-First Nations?

Kathi Dickie: That's a work in progress right now. A lot of it is almost – a personality – dependent on the school district. Right now we have a really good Board and we have the superintendent...so we're working together, we're trying to work something out on that.





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