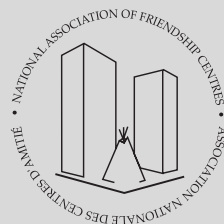


ABORIGINAL GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP:

Volunteers in the Friendship Centres of Canada

Prepared by
Douglas Durst &
Karen Martens Zimmerly
Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina
Regina, SK, S4S 0A2,
doug.durst@uregina.ca
Feb. 17.05



NATIONAL RESEARCH
PARTNERSHIP WITH
KNOWLEDGE
DEVELOPMENT
CENTRE,
CANADIAN CENTRE
FOR PHILANTHROPY
AND
THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
OF FRIENDSHIP
CENTRES

RESEARCH TEAM

Douglas Durst, Ph.D.

Principal Researcher,
Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina

Alfred Gay

Co-Researcher,
Policy Analyst,
National Association of Friendship Centres
Ottawa, ON.

Karen Martens Zimmerly, M.A.

Community Researcher and Co-Author
Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy
University of Regina

ABSTRACT

This one-year national study examined the Board volunteer leadership of the 117 Aboriginal Friendship Centres in Canada and is in partnership with the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC). There has been growing interest in understanding non-profit organizations and the contributions they provide (Hall and Banting, 2000). However, little is known about Aboriginal leadership and this study offers some ground-breaking research. The decision making and leadership are different in traditionally based Aboriginal communities and how modern urban Aboriginal leaders transpose their leadership and governance styles to non-profit organizations is of interest in order to develop, train and retain volunteer leaders.

The research methodology involved three distinct strategies: a national survey of 75 randomly selected directors and volunteers attending the Annual General Conference and in-depth qualitative interviews with leaders and non-participant observations of Executive, Board and Annual General meetings in 3 strategic centres across Canada.

A fact sheet and a practical pamphlet have been produced that can be used by volunteers and Board members. The final report identifies “best practices” and discusses the leadership styles and issues pertaining to Aboriginal leadership including suggestions for building and retaining leaders.

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Douglas Durst &
Karen Martens Zimmerly
Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina
Regina, SK, S4S 0A2,
doug.durst@uregina.ca
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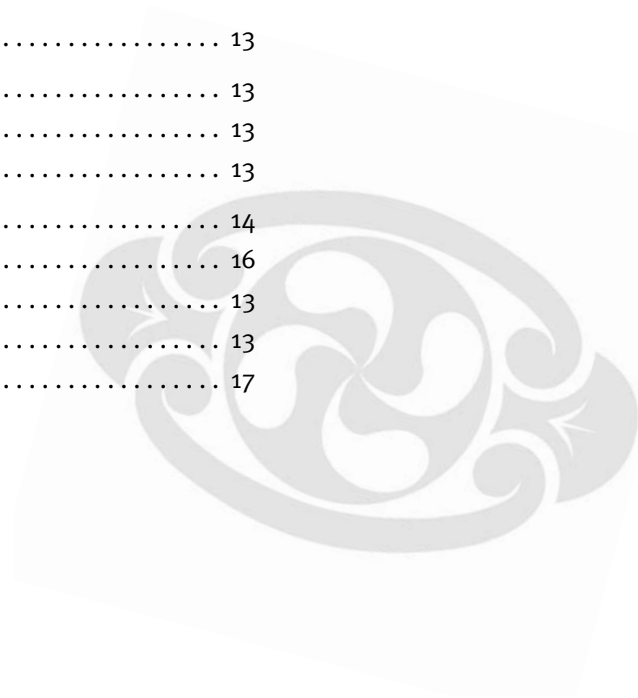
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SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION: A NATIONAL STUDY ON GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 Theme and Background

1.1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC AND THEME: A NATIONAL STUDY ON GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

This one-year national study examined the Board Leadership of the 117 Boards of Directors of Aboriginal Friendship Centres in Canada. In Canada, there has been growing interest in understanding non-profit organizations and the contributions they provide (Hall and Banting, 2000). It is expected that the leadership of these friendship centres located across Canada utilize Aboriginal forms of leadership and governance.¹

Little is known about Aboriginal leadership and this study offers some ground-breaking research in this area. The decision making and leadership are different in traditionally based Aboriginal communities and how modern urban Aboriginal leaders transpose their leadership and governance styles to non-profit organizations is of interest in order to develop, train and retain volunteer leaders.

This report is divided into four sections. Section 1 presents an overview of the study including objectives, background information into the cultural values of Aboriginal leadership, and a summary of helpful literature pertaining to board leadership and functioning. Section 2 presents the conceptual framework applied to the national survey of 75 board members. The findings of the survey identify the performance of the boards under the following categories: contextual, educational, interpersonal, analytical, political, strategic and Aboriginal values. Section 3 is the largest section and gives the details of board gover-

nance from the site visits of the four Centres. It includes the data gained from the in-depth interviews. Section 4 offers a summary and conclusion with recommendations for board development.

1.1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study proposes to find the “best practices” in governance and leadership in Aboriginal Friendship Centres among its Board of Directors and experienced volunteer leadership. Its focus is not “problem centred” but on what practices work. What does an efficient and effective Friendship Board look like and how does it incorporate Aboriginal culture. It proposes to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the Board Members and senior and youth volunteers in the 117 Friendship Centres and Associations in Canada? Where do they come from? What are their ancestries? What are their ages, sex and education levels?
2. How long have they been volunteers or Board members? How long have the youth participated in the Youth Council? What circumstances maintain their involvement and commitment to the organization? What is the ratio between men and women and are there differences in involvement? What extrinsic and intrinsic benefits do they feel they receive by volunteering and/or being on the Board? What cultural differences in leadership do they observe or experience? Does Aboriginal leadership and governance differ in style from mainstream agencies?

Little is known about Aboriginal leadership and this study offers some ground-breaking research in this area.

1. For the purpose of this report, the term “First Nations” is used to describe persons who are status Indians as defined by the Indian Act. The phrase “Aboriginal peoples” is a broader term used to include all those people who identify with being of Aboriginal ancestry and may be of mixed ancestry. The term is used to include status, non-status, Inuit, and Metis persons.

3. As volunteers and leaders, what decisions do they make? Do they make decisions of financial, personnel, planning, education or other level? Are these decisions really decisions or of a more token level and why? Do the decisions embrace Aboriginal leadership styles?
4. What are the issues and concerns they have as Board members? What are the issues and concerns of the Youth Council? Where do these board members and youth see the problems and solutions to leadership in the organization? What supports such as leadership training and development do they see important? Do they experience cultural tensions in decision-making?
5. What style of leadership do they employ and how is related to Aboriginal culture?

Before data collection began, the University of Regina Research Ethics Board (REB) reviewed and approved the study ensuring appropriate ethical standards were applied.

1.1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Self-government for Aboriginal and First Nations has become a major priority for the various departments of the federal and many provincial governments. In addition the right to self-government is enshrined in the Canadian Constitution (Section 35). Many Aboriginal people on reserve and in urban centres are marginalized and not included in the fabric of Canadian life. Many efforts for social inclusion and greater citizen participation have failed. Developing and retaining Aboriginal leadership in governance and decision making at the community and government levels has been a federal goal. The literature is clear that Aboriginal people have different styles of leadership and decision making than mainstream society. For example, some Aboriginal cultures discourage hierarchy and positions of power.

What is intriguing is that for more than 50 years, the “social experiment” of Aboriginal Friendship Centres has been quietly happening “under our noses” without recognition or understanding of many Canadians. In centres across Canada, Aboriginal people have been living their culture in the modern urban context with little interference

Self-government for Aboriginal and First Nations has become a major priority for the various departments of the federal and many provincial governments. In addition the right to self-government is enshrined in the Canadian Constitution (Section 35).

from outside. Last year these centres provided over 900 programs reaching over 757,000 persons. Also, youth programs and services comprise a significant portion of centre programs (17%) and are of considerable interest in developing “the leaders of tomorrow”.

This study offers an in-depth look at urban Aboriginal women and men and Youth who maintain a cultural connection that is unique in Aboriginal society. Friendship Centres are unique in that they cross Aboriginal groups and politics involving various First Nations (Status Indians), Metis, Inuit, and others with Aboriginal ancestry. The study will uncover practical findings that will contribute to our cross-cultural understanding and will enhance mainstream leadership as well. The lessons learned will have implications for all volunteers and board members in non-Aboriginal agencies.

Finally, at the annual meeting in July 2003, the National Board of the Association of Friendship Centres (representing all 117 agencies) passed a resolution that identified leadership and governance development as a national priority. The need for this research was determined internally for its purpose of building and retaining Aboriginal leadership.



1.2 The Context and Literature Review

1.2.1 BACKGROUND

In Canada, close to 50% of Aboriginal people live in urban communities (Graham, 1999, p. 377). Most Aboriginal people maintain ties with their home or reserve communities and some migrate back and forth (Frideres and Gadacz, 2001, p.143). Almost all have a strong sense of personal identity to their reserves or Bands, even those who seldom visit their home communities. As early as the 1950s, community leaders recognized the difficulty many Aboriginal and First Nations persons were having adjusting to the urban environment. In response to this need, these leaders created the Friendships Centres in cities across Canada. Today there are 117 Centres and Associations, which have affiliation with the National Friendship Centres in Canada (NAFC). Each of these centres operates as a Non-government Organization incorporated by the legislation of each province. Each organization has a volunteer Board of community leaders, mostly with Aboriginal ancestry.

1.2.2 BOARD LEADERSHIP:

SUMMARY OF HELPFUL LITERATURE

*If you don't know where you want to go,
any road will get you there.*

Anonymous

In the following section, the writers offer some brief annotations on related literature on non-profit boards. The selections were identified as being helpful for board members and volunteers in appreciating good governance. Many of these themes re-emerge in the overall findings of the study. An important resource is the web based library of the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy at: <http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/home.asp>

Duca, Diane J. (1986).

***Nonprofit Boards: A Practical Guide to Roles, Responsibilities, and Performance.* Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press.**

Duca offers an excellent book that provides helpful information on all aspects of Board management. There is a good section on the "Pyramid of Policies" that describes the major policies, secondary policies functional policies, procedures and operating plans,

rules (p. 39). She emphasizes the importance of orientation and training for retention and sustaining of board members.

Robinson, Maureen K. (2001).

***Nonprofit Boards that Work: The End of the One-Size-Fits-All Governance.* New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**

This is a helpful book on diversity and the pros and cons of differing board and organizational structures. The discussion on "No stupid questions" is helpful as it points out that in most situations there are other board members who have the same question but are too shy to ask (p. 71). Hence, the board could carry on with its business with board members who do not understand the issues. The book stress and offers suggestions on how to treat each other with respect, an important Aboriginal cultural value.

Tropman, John E. & Elmer J. Tropman. (1999).

***Nonprofit Boards. What to Do and How to Do It.* Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.**

This book is easy to read and it is targeted for non-professionals. There is a good section on the interdependence of policy and administration—inside influences and outside influences. It describes the "grey" area where these functions overlap (p. 43). The agenda bell is presented (p. 173) and the principles of dividing the agenda into "halves"

Today there are 117 Centres and Associations, which have affiliation with the National Friendship Centres in Canada (NAFC). Each of these centres operates as a Non-government Organization incorporated by the legislation of each province.



and “quarters” offers practical suggestions for meetings. The authors offer a helpful survey or evaluation instruments for evaluating the performance of boards, and directors.

Smith, Bucklin & Associates, Inc. (2000).
The Complete Guide to Nonprofit Management.
2nd Edition. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

This is a good textbook and suitable for comprehensive study. The chapter on “Working Together: Maximizing Board and Staff Effectiveness” is particularly relevant to this research.

The governing board and the executive staff share the responsibility for their nonprofit’s success. The successful nonprofit manager must understand the relationship between board and staff and be able to communicate effectively with elected leaders. (27)

A nonprofit organization is typically born out of a group’s desire to solve a problem, meet a need, help a profession to develop, or create new opportunities. As the organization grows and gains strength with time and experience, it often evolves from a group of volunteers managing all aspects of its activities to one that depends on staff to handle its day-to-day business. Once the nonprofit moves into its formative years, most of its policies and procedures should be in place, with the governing board working closely with staff to fulfill the defined mission (27).

However, it would be naïve to not expect that problems continue to emerge but it is hoped that those formative issues become resolved.

The roles and responsibilities of boards are to:

- ensure the mission is carried out;
- meet fiduciary responsibilities;
- contribute to the organization’s “bottom line” through time, expertise, counsel, and money;
- respect other board members;
- maintain professional and ethical standards and deal with confidentiality and issues of conflict of interest;
- respect and support staff and maintain lines of communication and the separation of roles;
- enhance public image of the organization; and
- recruit other volunteers (30–37).

As the organization grows and gains strength with time and experience, it often evolves from a group of volunteers managing all aspects of its activities to one that depends on staff to handle its day-to-day business.



Wolf, Thomas. (1990).
Managing a Nonprofit Organization. New York, NY: A Fireside Book, Simon & Schuster.

“Trustees should:

- determine the organization’s mission and set policies for its operation, ensuring that the provisions of the organization’s charter and the law are being followed;
- set the organization’s overall program from year to year and engage in longer range planning to establish its general course for the future;
- establish fiscal policy and boundaries, with budgets and financial controls;



Volunteers in the Friendship Centres of Canada

- provide adequate resources for the activities of the organization through direct financial contributions and commitment to fund raising;
- select, evaluate, and, if necessary, terminate the appointment of the chief executive; and
- develop and maintain a communication link to the community, promoting the work of the organization” (p.29–30).

What is interesting is what trustees should not do and includes engage in the day-to-day operation of the organization, hire staff other than the executive director and make detailed programmatic decisions without consulting staff (p. 30). Interference with daily operations and personnel issues can be harmful to the leadership and supervision of the staff and organization as a whole.

When considering Board composition, one should consider the necessary skills and knowledge. The responsibilities of trustees suggest those skills and areas of knowledge that a board must collectively possess. A practical listing might include the following areas of expertise:

- nonprofit trusteeship;
- organizational planning;
- financial/accounting;
- fund raising;
- personnel management
- legal matters; and
- public relations” (p. 43).

The book offers suggestions about “Deadwood”—those board members who have been on the board too long and are no longer productive. They

When considering Board composition, one should consider the necessary skills and knowledge.

include limiting terms of office, rules about attendance, expectations about financial commitment and issues of lack of knowledge and information (p. 46). Long term board involvement can be a serious issue for Friendship Centres.

Hudson, Mike, (1999).

Managing Without Profit. The Art of Managing Third-sector Organizations. 2nd Edition. London, England: Penguin Books.

This book has a helpful section on board development arguing that strong boards are essential (p. 66). They identify the forces behind ineffectiveness (p. 67). They also describe the delicate issue of having clients on the board under the problems and strengths with service users (clients) on board (p. 72). They identify seven principles of public life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership, p. 76–77). They list some social research on board effectiveness (p. 81) and provide an interesting chart on life cycle of organizations (p. 356). They use the International Classification of Non-profit Organizations and many Friendship Centres fit into 6 of the 11 classifications! The classifications most relevant to Friendship Centres are:

Group 1: Culture and Recreation,

Group 2: Education and Research,

Group 3: Health,

Group 4: Social Services,

Group 6: Development and Housing, and

Group 7: Law Advocacy, and Politics.

Other classifications include Group 5: Environment, Group 8: Philanthropic Intermediaries and Voluntarism Promotion, Group 9: International Activities, Group 10: Religion, Group 11 Business, Professional Associations and Unions and Group 12: Not Elsewhere classified.

Howe, Fisher, (1997).

The Board Member's Guide to Strategic Planning. A publication of the National Center for Nonprofit Boards. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Howe's book is a practical guide to strengthening organizations through strategic planning and offers a step by step and easy to read resource for workshops and development seminars.



Drucker, Peter F. (1990).

***Managing the Nonprofit Organization, Practices and Principles.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.**

Author interviews experts on their opinions on boards, and other non-profit issues such as working relationships with board and effective board functioning. They emphasize the importance of a clear mission (p. 172), positive relationships (p. 176) and preventing factions within the board (p. 177).

Broder, Peter. (2002).

***Primer For Directors of Not-for-Profit Corporations.* Ottawa: Industry Canada.**

This is an excellent resource and it is available on the web at:

http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/incilp-pdci.nsf/en/h_clooo2oe.html

These are only a few of the excellent resources available for understanding and managing non-profit boards. 🌸



SECTION 2:

NATIONAL SURVEY OF BOARD PERFORMANCE

2.1 Introduction to the National Survey

The researchers wanted to produce a national overview of the governance practices of Friendship Centres. It was believed that some of this information would be available in the files of the National Association of Friendship Centres in Ottawa. Initially, it was proposed that the researchers would conduct a national telephone survey. However, many board members from across the county were participating in the Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Friendship Centres held July 6–10, 2004 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was felt that this opportunity allowed an effective and efficient method of reaching a cross-section of board members. Two researchers travelled to the conference and used this time to collect national data on the Friendship Centre Board membership.

2.2 Measuring Board Performance: Conceptual Framework

Researchers Jackson and Holland (1998) published two articles relating to their study of board performance. They noted that effective “boards require a range of competencies in governance”, especially in planning, setting strategic goals and monitoring organizational performance (Holland & Jackson, 1998, p. 121). Board volunteers offer a variety of business and professional skills with a spirit of altruism. However, the skills of operationalizing values into mission statements and action plans is frequently missing. Setting priorities and monitoring performance are sometimes lacking. It is believed that improving board performance will lead to improved efficiencies and effectiveness of non-profit organizations.

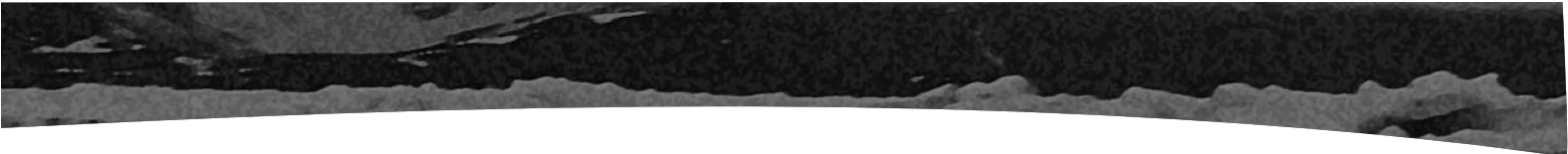
The researchers have isolated six dimensions of board competency that are essential to effective governance. In our research, we have added a seventh competency, Aboriginal Values as been essential for Friendship Centres. The dimensions are:

- **Contextual:** The board understands and takes into account the culture, norms and values of the organization it governs.
- **Educational:** The board takes the necessary steps to ensure that members are well informed about the organization and the professions working there as well as the board’s own roles, responsibilities and performance.
- **Interpersonal:** The board nurtures the development of its members as a *group*, attends to the board’s collective welfare, and fosters a sense of cohesiveness and teamwork.
- **Analytical:** The board recognizes complexities and subtleties in the issues it faces, and draws on multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and to synthesize appropriate responses.
- **Political:** The board accepts as one of its primary responsibilities to develop and maintain healthy relationships two-way communications and positive relationships with key constituencies.
- **Shapes Direction/Strategic:** The board envisions and shapes institutional direction and helps to ensure a strategic approach to the organization’s future (Holland & Jackson, 1998, p. 122–3).
- **Aboriginal Values:** The board incorporates Aboriginal values such as a holistic understanding of the world, egalitarian perspective, a belief that leadership is diffused and voluntary, a tolerance of individual members, a priority of collective versus individual needs, an avoidance of conflict, a culture of sharing and social obligations of reciprocity and indirect and internal mechanism of social control.

2.3. Research Methods

Over 300 individuals were present for the AGM including volunteer board members representing the various Friendship Centres and the NAFC Board of Directors. Two researchers attended the conference and were introduced by the Conference Chair. This action assured the Conference participants that the study was based in NAFC and the findings were to assist Boards seek the best practices. During breaks and between conference sessions, board members were invited to participate in this study on “Best Governance Practices of Urban, Aboriginal Boards” through a questionnaire that included 40 statements on governance practices





(Appendices). The point of the survey was to find the best practices and not to focus on problems and failures. Seventy-five respondents participated in the self-administered questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire, board members were given a 10-dollar gift certificate for Tim Horton's restaurants as a token of appreciation for their contribution. These small gifts were highly appreciated and soon the conference members were seeking out the "Tim Horton's Ladies" who were conducting the study. The experience was positive and data was efficiently and effectively collected.

A total of 40 questions were asked on the above categories. The seven categories were interspersed throughout the questionnaire so that clusters of questions did not appear. Some questions were inverted or presented in the "negative" and these scores were inverted in the analysis. The questions are listed in the Appendix and some of the questions are inverted so that a negative response was a high value of the concept being measured. A four point Likert Scale was applied from "Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree." "Don't Know" was not offered as a choice forcing the respondent's to select a category or leave blank. Through statistical testing, Holland and Jackson (1998) found that their categories held internal consistency (reliability) and questions seemed to operationalize the concepts appropriately (internal validity).

During breaks and between conference sessions, board members were invited to participate in this study on "Best Governance Practices of Urban, Aboriginal Boards"...

The point of the survey was to find the best practices and not to focus on problems and failures.

Each response from each participant was coded and entered into SPSS program for data analysis and interpretation. The data offered a potential for 21,000 data entries under the seven categories.

2.4 Research Participants

The 75 questionnaire responses provide an interesting demographic overview of Board composition. It found that 96% of board members were Aboriginal (48% Metis, 46.7% **First Nations**) and **63.5% in the age bracket** of 40–64 years of age. These volunteers are mature individuals with a life history and experience, which they bring to the board. Seven of the participants fit the Youth category of under 25 years of age and another 7 are in the 65 and plus category. Most of the board members are older with experience. In our sample, 57.3% are women and 42.7% are men, which indicates active participation from women. Most participants (65.8%) have post-secondary education, which demonstrates an educated group of individuals. They are active in the workforce with 65.2% employed full time and 8.7% working part-time. Five respondents were students which fits the under 25 group. Ten participants were retired. Fifteen (20%) of the members have been on their boards for over 10 years. This number was an interesting finding and demonstrates a long time commitment to their agency. Thirty-four respondents (45.3%) have been on the board for 2 to 5 years. Again, this sample is an experienced and committed group of educated volunteers.

It can be interpreted that this sample of 75 board members is not completely representative of the total population of all board members that is estimated at any given time there would be about 1200 board members in the 117 organizations. It can be expected that older and more experienced board members would be sent to represent their agency at the AGM. Newer and less experienced board members would less likely be sponsored to attend the Halifax conference. In that sense, the participants are similar to key informants who possess the special knowledge and experience to reflect on their board's performance.

The following table includes a summary of information on the seventy-five people who participated in this component of the study.



TABLE 2.1: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN BEST PRACTICES SURVEY

AGE	Under 25 9.5% (7)	25-39 17.6% (13)	40-64 63.5% (47)	65+ 9.5% (7)
Gender	Female 57.3% (43)	Male 42.7% (32)		
Education	High School 28.8% (21)	Post Secondary 65.8% (48)	Other 5.8% (4)	
Employment	Full-time 65.2% (46)	Part-time 8.7% (6)	Student 7.2% (5)	At home/ unemployed 2.9% (2)
				Retired 14.5% (10)
Length of Service on Board	Under 2 yrs. 17.3% (13)	2-5 yrs. 45.3% (34)	6-10 yrs. 17.3% (13)	Over 10 yrs. 20% (15)

2.5. Survey Findings

The 75 participants responded to all categories at response rates of 96.4 to 98.2 percent demonstrating that they seemed comfortable answering all questions in all seven categories. The findings do not present any category with significant “avoidance” or implied “don’t know” responses (“Don’t Know was not offered as a response category).

Overall, almost all of the respondents rated their boards very high in all categories: see Table 2.3, Frequencies and Percentages of All Responses by Category. They reported especially high values in contextual and the Aboriginal values categories. The Contextual value identifies the appreciation that their board understands and takes into account the culture, norms and values of the organization it governs. It was rated at 39.8% as “Strongly Agree”. Not surprisingly, they also rated the comparable value of Aboriginal Values highly at 34.8% as

TABLE 2.2: FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF RESPONSES BY CATEGORY

DIMENSION	Total Response	% of Possible Responses	# of Possible Responses
Contextual	442	98.2%	450
Educational	362	96.5%	375
Interpersonal	365	97.3%	375
Analytical	434	96.4%	450
Political	364	97.1%	375
Strategic	439	97.6%	450
Aboriginal	506	96.4%	525



TABLE 2.3: FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF ALL RESPONSES BY CATEGORY

DIMENSION	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Contextual	39.8% (176)	36.2% (160)	18.3% (81)	5.7% (25)
Educational	26.2% (95)	49.8% (180)	18.5% (67)	5.5% (20)
Interpersonal	30.1% (110)	54.2% (198)	12.3% (45)	3.3% (12)
Analytical	25.1% (109)	47.0% (204)	21.7% (94)	6.2% (27)
Political	23.1% (84)	43.1% (157)	26.6% (97)	7.1% (26)
Strategic	25.3% (111)	43.3% (190)	23.2% (102)	8.2% (36)
Aboriginal	34.8% (76)	49.0% (248)	14.4% (73)	1.8% (9)

“Strongly Agree”. They found that their board incorporates Aboriginal values such as a holistic understanding of the world, egalitarian perspective, a belief that leadership is diffused and voluntary, a tolerance of individual members, a priority of collective versus individual needs, an avoidance of conflict, a culture of sharing and social obligations of reciprocity and indirect and internal mechanism of social control.

Two categories were rated especially lowest in the “Strongly Disagree” categories: Aboriginal (1.8%) and Interpersonal (3.3%). The Interpersonal category identifies that the board nurtures the development

of its members as a *group*, attends to the board’s collective welfare, and fosters a sense of cohesiveness and teamwork. The interpretation is that the boards manage and address Aboriginal Values and Interpersonal relationships very positively.

Of the highest “Strongly Disagree” are three categories of Strategic (8.2%), Political (7.1%) and Analytical (6.2%). However, it is important to recognize that these findings are still very small percentages. Tentatively, these values can be interpreted as low in performing the board functions of: **Shapes Direction/ Strategic:** The board envisions and shapes institutional direction and helps to ensure a strategic approach to the organization’s future; the **Political:** The board accepts as one of its primary responsibilities to develop and maintain healthy relationships two-way communications and positive relationships with key constituencies; and the **Analytical:** The board recognizes complexities and subtleties in the issues it faces, and draws on multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and to synthesize appropriate responses.

Statistical tests were run seeking correlations between the seven categories. It is evident that the all of the categories relate positively with Aboriginal Values. Since all the scores are high, these relationships are not surprising. However, it is interesting to note that Aboriginal Values relates highest with the



TABLE 2.4: CORRELATIONS: ABORIGINAL BY ALL CATEGORIES

DIMENSION	Correlation to Aboriginal	Level of Significance	# Responses
Contextual	.613	.0001	57
Educational	.575	.0001	55
Interpersonal	.691	.0001	58
Analytical	.610	.0001	57
Political	.647	.0001	56
Strategic	.634	.0001	57

Interpersonal category (.691). There is a definite emphasis in board functions to nurture the development of its members as a group, attend to the board’s collective welfare, and foster a sense of cohesiveness and teamwork. As discussed earlier, these are important cultural values that are preserved in board functioning.

It is important not to over interpret the statistical findings but the lowest of the positive correlations with Aboriginal values is the category of Education (.575). The Educational category finds that the board takes the necessary steps to ensure that members are well informed about the organization and the professions working there as well as the board’s own roles, responsibilities and performance. This category had the lowest of positive correlation with Aboriginal Values.

2.6 Conclusions

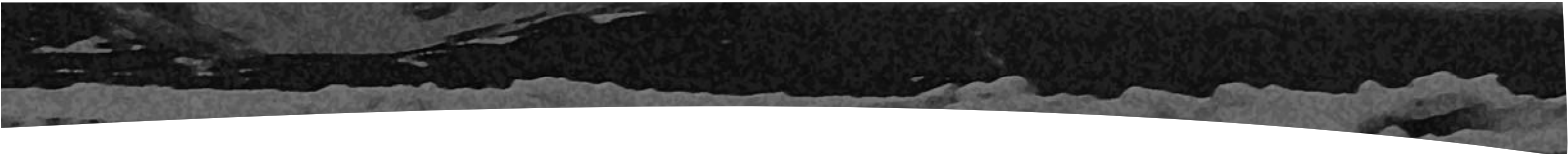
Statistically, it is incorrect to make any “significant” interpretations from the findings. However, the respondents hold an overwhelming positive view of their boards. This finding can be partly explained by the fact that the participants were board members who were selected to attend the national conference and were, therefore, representing their respective board. It is highly unlikely that they would be attending the conference if they held strongly negative views of their board.

Also, the national conference was an exciting positive environment where past conflicts were far-away. Held in a “first class” hotel, the atmosphere was energetic and enthusiastic for the national organization and the Friendship Centre movement. All of this is conducive to a positive frame of mind towards his/her own institution. Also, the researchers who invited the participants to complete the survey were endorsed by the NAFC and offering simple gifts for completing the instrument.

In spite of these limitations, the participants hold a positive perspective of their boards and seem satisfied with the levels of Aboriginal values interpreted in his/her agency. Clearly, the reflection of Aboriginal values in the governance and operation of the agency is highly regarded and must be attended to by Friendship leaders.

...the participants were board members who were selected to attend the national conference and were, therefore, representing their respective board.





Perhaps in a reflective way, the findings suggest that more attention could be paid on the Educational, Analytical and Political categories but without cost to the internal Interpersonal and Contextual categories.

For future research, it would be interesting to expand the survey to include past board members who have left the agency and members who are not attending the conference to see if their interpretations correspond with the results found here. 🌀



SECTION 3:

ENTERING THE PULSE OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRE COMMUNITIES

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 OVERVIEW OF SECTION

This section represents the heart of the research project and offers the most interesting and informative of its findings. This section presents the data and analysis of the site visits and in-depth interviews of leaders from each of the four Friendship Centres in Whitehorse, Victoria, Thunder Bay and Halifax. It gives an overview of each centre describing its structure and board composition. Listed are each of the centre's best governance practices. The section covers 13 topics pertaining to board governance including selection and structure, composition, meetings and procedures, decisions and decision-making process, role of leadership, management structure, vision, strategic planning, communication, Aboriginal practices and principles, board training, board commitment and benefits, and other concerns. Under Aboriginal practices and principles the following are explored: holistic world view, importance of community, Aboriginal leadership practices, Aboriginal governance practices, traditional spiritual practices, and cultural tensions in decision-making. At the end of each topic is a short summary statement in italics that highlights the key concerns of the preceding discussion.

This section represents the heart of the research project and offers the most interesting and informative of its findings.

3.1.2. THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) was established in 1972 to represent the growing number of Friendship Centres, at the national level. Currently, the NAFC represents the concerns of 99 core-funded and 18 non-core funded Friendship Centres (117 total), as well as 7 Provincial/Territorial Associations (PTAs), across Canada (121 overall total).

The primary objectives of NAFC are:

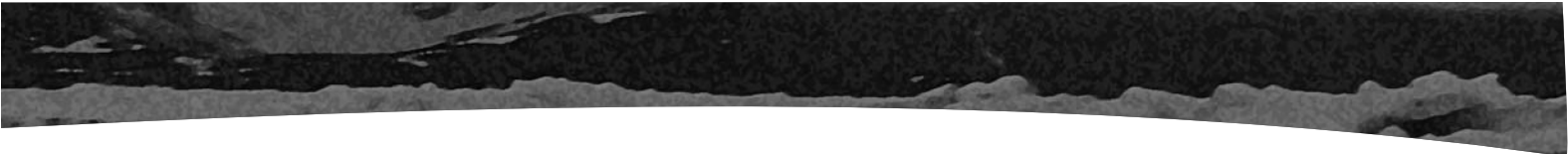
- to act as a central unifying body for the Friendship Centre Movement;
- to promote and advocate the concerns of Aboriginal Peoples; and,
- to represent the needs of local Friendship Centres across the country to the federal government and to the public in general.

The mission of the NAFC is

to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in urban environment by supporting self-determination activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in Canadian society; and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness (from "History and Background", www.nafc-Aboriginal.com).

The NAFC is a non-profit organization governed by a voluntary Board of Directors comprised of eleven regional representatives and a youth representative who acts as the liaison with the Aboriginal Youth Council. There is a five member Executive Committee, comprised of the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer and Youth Executive.

Part of the NAFC governance structure includes a senate made up of nine individuals. "Senators are individuals who are recognized for representing a set of values which reflect past developments of the Friendship Centre Movement while allowing the current leadership and membership the right to define their own direction" (NAFC Constitution, Article X, p. 9). On a rotating basis, the senators



attend meetings of the Board of Directors to provide guidance, advice and respond to contentious policy issues.

On the request of membership the Senate is called on to establish a process for resolving contentious issues. The resolution panel will consist of a minimum of two Senate members, a Youth representative and an Elder.

The work of the NAFC includes:

- monitoring the activities and programs of various federal government departments which have a mandate to provide either funding or services to urban Aboriginal people;
- acting as a central communications body and facilitates external liaisons for both the Friendship Centres and the PTA's; and
- serving the community with three main program areas: National Programs, Policy and Communications and Personnel and Finance.

3.2 The Friendship Centre Site Visits

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW STUDY

The executive and staff of the National Association of Friendship Centres selected four Friendship Centres for participation in this study. They were selected based upon the quality of their organization and strong board performance. They are: the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre in Whitehorse, YK, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Thunder Bay Friendship Centre and the Micmac Friendship Centre in Halifax, NS. Eleven in-depth interviews of 30–45 minutes were conducted with a sample of Board Members from these Centres and one individual is a Board Member of the National Association of Friendship Centres, as well.

The Project Coordinator established a relationship with a community contact at each Centre. The community researcher identified appropriate board members to interview and assisted in making the arrangements for the site visit. These community researchers were invaluable in providing “insider perspectives” and legitimacy for the outside researcher. This process is critical in developing a trusting environment and opened the door to the research interviews.

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Seven men were interviewed and four women. The community researcher met with each individual in a one on one situation and asked 32 interview questions relating to five broad areas of board governance and leadership (Appendix). The interviews were conducted at Friendship Centres, in coffee shops and two were conducted over the phone. The face to face interviews were tape recorded.

The following chart provides some profile data on the individuals interviews.

In summary, there were 7 men and 4 women participants, 6 in the age category of 25–39 years and 5 in the 40–64 category. All eleven had completed high school and 7 had gone on to post secondary education. Ten were employed full time and one had recently retired. They came from 7 different First Nations including: Ojibway (2), Klinket (1), Taigish/Klinket (1), Metis (1), Cree (1), Micmaq (1), and Malaseet (1).



TABLE 3.1: DATA PROFILES OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

GENDER	Age	Education	Employment	Ancestry	Yrs. Of Board
Male	49	High school	Full-time	Ojibway	17
Male	32	Post secondary	Full-time— power engineer	Ojibway	1
Female	57	High school, some commu- nity college	Recently retired- Director of Ser- vice Commission	Klinket	15
Female	Almost 40	2 secondary degrees	Full-time— lawyer	Taigish/Klinket	2 and 1/2
Male	49	Masters—Library and Information Science	Full-time—Family and Children’s Services	Metis	9
Male	38	High school	Full-time— Journeyman/ carpenter	Cree	5
Female	40–64 category	Post secondary	Full-time— Executive Director	First Nation— Whitehorse	1 and 1/2
Male	34	High school	Full-time— Economic Development	Coastal Salish	1
Male	40–64 category	Post secondary Economics	Full-time—2 jobs	Micmaq	5
Male	25–39 category	Post secondary —working on Master’s thesis	Full-time— Government	Malaseet	1
Female	25–39 category	Post secondary	Full-time— Lawyer	Malaseet	1

3.2.1 SKOOKUM JIM FRIENDSHIP CENTRE, WHITEHORSE, YUKON.

I arrive in Whitehorse with a great deal of curiosity about the intriguing name of the Centre and what I will find. As I walk down the street where the Centre is located its boldly painted colours of green and burgundy announce that this organization cares about its presence in the community (Project Coordinator).

In January of 1961 plans were announced to build a meeting centre for Indians in Whitehorse. Funding for what was to become the Skookum Jim Memorial Hall came out of the estate of Skookum Jim Mason, one of the co-discoverers of gold in the Klondike who was known for his strength and therefore given the name “Skookum”. In his will he established a trust fund to be “devoted towards furnishing medical attendance supplying necessities and comforts to Indians in the Yukon Territory and towards assisting needy and deserving Indians in the said Territory in any way or manner said trustees may deem best” (from an unpublished history paper of “Skookum Jim”).

Today the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre is a vibrant organization, strongly rooted in its vision to respond to the needs of the community. With a staff of thirteen, volunteers and strong Elder participation, the Centre offers programs in recreation, pre-natal nutrition, traditional parenting, student training and financial services, an Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre and First Nation Youth Diversion- an early intervention program for First Nation youth and their families who come in conflict with the law. During the 2003–2004 year the Centre received funding for nearly 1.6 million dollars and ended the year with a carry-over of \$87,000. Over the years the Centre has served as the creative spark in the development and eventual independence of fourteen other programs and organizations.

3.2.2 VICTORIA NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE (VNFC).

It is late afternoon and after walking up and down the street several times I locate the sign of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC). I am about to discover that the unassuming appearance of the exterior belies all the activity that the Centre offers (Project Coordinator).

The VNFC is a dynamic organization where the Executive Director directs a staff of 38 to 42 people who provide services to urban Aboriginal people in the greater Victoria area. On any given day between 250 and 300 individuals use their services which include thirty programs in the areas of: 1) health and social programs, 2) culture and community, 3) career, employment and community, and 4) youth. The annual budget for the 2003–2004 year was approximately \$2.5 million, with a payroll of 1.3 million. Indeed, by anyone’s standards, this is a large non-profit organization.

The VNFC has been in existence for thirty-five years and has grown to be one of the largest service providers in the Victoria area. The Centre has experienced many changes during its history including severe cutbacks in funding from the government as well as leadership changes. One employee who has been with the Centre the last fourteen years has experienced the leadership of eight directors!

The task of running a centre like VNFC is a complex one. The Centre is like an embassy of Aboriginal peoples, with a large staff and many people who make use of the services. With many people in an organization come many perspectives of what should be done and how it should be done. As a non-profit organization the VNFC receives funding from a variety of sources; the main ones being the provincial and federal governments. While the Centre sees itself as having the ability to work at meeting many needs among its constituency, it is often challenged by the lack of funds or limitations placed on it by the major funding agencies.

3.2.3 THUNDER BAY FRIENDSHIP CENTRE, ONTARIO.

Provides a wide variety of support services to Native people residing in, migrating to, or traveling through the City of Thunder Bay with emphasis on preserving and enhancing Native culture with the Aboriginal Family Support worker. Programs involve recreation/ social programs and special projects such as the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Program that provides assistance, food and clothing for families.



Volunteers in the Friendship Centres of Canada

3.2.4 MICMAC NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE, HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA.

I first meet the director of the Micmac Native Friendship Centre at the Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Friendship Centres, being hosted in Halifax. His energetic and warm hospitality give me a hunch that the Centre he directs is a “happening place”! (Project Coordinator).

For over thirty-one years the Micmac Friendship Centre has been part of the Halifax community. They have grown from a three person operation to a staff of 46 people and 57 volunteers with a budget just under 2.3 million and a payroll of \$909,000. The Centre operates twenty-one programs in the areas of: Native Employment Assistance, the Kitpu Youth Centre, the UMAC Regional Desk, the Mi’Kmaq Child Development Centre, Adult learning Program, and the Mainline Needle Exchange/ Direction 180 programs. Growth has come from:

- identifying needs in the Community;
- dedicated staff and volunteers working together to make sure the need is fulfilled through programming;
- staff that keep programs on track and funds coming in; and lastly

- management that makes sure funds are administered properly, reports are made on time and reported to funding agencies, and that the voice of the Community that is heard.

3.3 Summary of Best Governance Practices

3.3.1 BOARD SELECTION AND STRUCTURE

Two of the Friendship Centres follow a standard procedure of nominating candidates for board member positions prior to their Annual General Meeting (AGM). Candidates must be “a member in good standing” with the organization. Elections are held at the AGM. The following table shows the board structure for the six Centres at the time of the site visit.

The boards of these Centres are similar in size and having a youth position acknowledges the high value they place on the role of youth. Where the boards differ is in the length of Board of Director terms and the constituency that the appointed board members represent. In Halifax board members are elected on a yearly basis. In Whitehorse board members serve two-year terms with five members elected one year and six the next. In Victoria board members are elected for three-year terms. Within its system each Centre has the possibility of electing new people to the board as well as re-electing incumbents that allows for new perspectives, as well as continuity.

TABLE 3.2: BOARD STRUCTURE

CENTRE	# on Board	# of elected Board Members	Appointed Board Members	Male/Female	Youth
Whitehorse	14	11	2 Elders—non-voting, 1 rep. from Skookum Jim family	Elected 2/6 2 female Elders	1-vacant
Victoria	14	11	1 rep. from Esquimalt F.N., 1 from Songhees First Nation	Elected- 4/7 F.N. positions vacant	1-vacant
Thunder Bay	9		Elders	7/2	1
Halifax	15	10 elected yearly	5 from related agencies	Elected -4/6	1



Once the board has been elected the board meets to elect executive officers for the year. These positions include the role of president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and in some Centres past-president. At all the Centres visited the Executive meets between board meetings.

The **appointed board members** reflect the unique context of each Centre. The Skookum Jim Friendship Centre in Whitehorse has one position available for a member of the Skookum Jim family, recognizing the ongoing role that Skookum Jim’s vision and estate has in the work of the Friendship Centre. The two Elder positions recognize the high value that the Centre and the constituency place on traditional cultural values and how the wisdom of the Elders can strengthen community life.

The Victoria Native Centre is located in downtown Victoria but the Centre recognizes that they are housed and work on land which traditionally belonged to the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations. The VNFC does not want to be in conflict with the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations and recognizes the privilege they have to be on this land by designating two positions on the board for one representative from each First Nation.

The Micmac Native Friendship Centre in Halifax is the only Friendship Centre in Nova Scotia. Of the twelve objectives named in the Constitution and

Bylaws three objectives speak of working in harmony with, supporting and assisting, and co-coordinating efforts with other organizations in order to help people of Aboriginal descent. One of the ways they work at meeting these objectives is to have the nominating committee name five supporting Native or Non-Native agencies that relate to the Centre (such as Family Services, Parent Resource Centre) and the elected Board approves the five appointed representatives from these agencies.

Summary statements:

- **Boards are composed of mostly elected and some appointed members.**
- **Elected members include a mix of new people and individuals who have a longer history and knowledge of the Friendship Centre.**
- **The board selects an executive from the elected board members.**
- **The appointed members reflect the unique context and purpose of the local Friendship Centre.**

3.3.2 BOARD COMPOSITION

Interviews with board members at each of these Centres reveal that it is not just enough to have positions filled but the skills and the qualities the person brings to the board table contribute to the quality of the decisions made. The following table lists the professional backgrounds represented at each of the Friendship Centres.

TABLE 3.3: BOARD COMPOSITION

CENTRE	Professions Represented:
Whitehorse	Aboriginal Constitutional lawyer, Territorial Government workers, social workers, carpenter/journeyman who is president of a housing corporation, service industry workers with background in personnel, executive director from Council of Yukon First Nations, Elders who are facilitators for Friendship Centre programs
Victoria	4 instructors/counsellors at Camosun College, previously elected Chief of Sioux Nation, politically active mature student, former director of Native Housing (finance background), economic development, former president of First Peoples Language and Culture
Thunder Bay	Social workers, healing and wellness workers, political background, student, commissioner of Aboriginal culture, forester
Halifax	Prison worker, several First Nations lawyers, a Chief, a politician, social workers, addictions counsellor, self-employed with accounting/computer background



Volunteers in the Friendship Centres of Canada

Boards make a variety of kinds of decisions related to personnel, policies, finances and programming. It is therefore helpful to have on the board individuals who are familiar with those areas of decision-making and bring the wisdom, knowledge and skills from their background as well as their network of resources to the Friendship Centre.

At two site visits board members stated that the board is taking a more proactive position in naming the kind of skills/expertise the board still needs at the table and then actively searches for individuals who might bring those skills. In one situation the board agreed they needed additional financial expertise. During the year the board identified an individual who had the skills they were looking for. They waived the constitutional timeline for electing this individual in order to bring her on immediately. Another board agreed that a nominating committee that recruits before the AGM could strengthen their board and give greater assurance that all positions are filled.

Board members identified the following skills and qualities that collectively contribute to good community decision-making:

- a diversity of backgrounds in personnel management and administration, financial background, social services, law;
- individuals who are open minded and visionary;
- individuals who have a strong knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal issues;
- individuals who are respected in the community;
- individuals who have knowledge of how the various levels of government operate;
- individuals who have a vision of self-reliance and self-determination; and
- individuals whose concern for the welfare of the Friendship Centre community comes first rather than personal gain.

In each of the Friendship Centres the board is made up of a mix of men and women. In three of the Centres there is a majority of women on the board (see chart under Board Selection and Structure) but in Thunder Bay the majority of board members are male. All board members interviewed said there is no differentiation in roles between men and women.

Summary statement: Boards that govern well

- **are made up of a variety of people who bring a diversity of knowledge, skills and wisdom from their workplace and life experience,**
- **collectively, they use their diversity of knowledge and network of resources in governance decisions that are in the best interests of their Friendship Centre.**

3.3.3 MEETINGS AND PROCEDURES

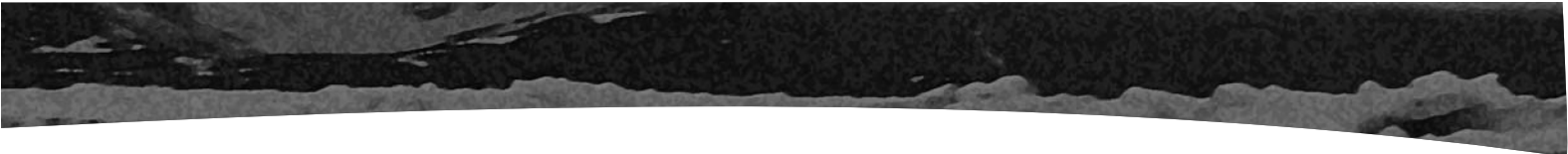
The boards of these Centres meet either monthly or every other month and take the summer off. They regularly meet at the Friendship Centre facility. One board member commented that the routine contributes to strong board decision-making. The VNFC has a standard meeting time at 6:00 p.m. on the last Tuesday of the month. The other Centres did not seem to have a certain day of the month designated but planned meeting dates according to need and what suited board member's schedules.

The meetings of these boards follow an orderly process of:

- Taking attendance (The Constitution of each Centre outlines the process for addressing those who miss meetings).
- Call to order and opening prayer or other ceremony
- Approval of agenda
- Approval of minutes
- Reports
- Old/New business
- Next meeting set
- Adjournment

Boards make a variety of kinds of decisions related to personnel, policies, finances and programming.





What becomes clear when attending these meetings is that while there is business and agenda to cover, the gathering of the board is more than just “taking care of business”. Board members come to the VNFC board meeting from work and so the Centre provides them with a casual meal prior to the meeting in order to relax and visit. Prior to the AGM at the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre a salmon supper was served and at the MicMac Friendship Centre a seafood chowder meal was served. Each of these meals is a way that the respective Centre shows its board and volunteers that they appreciate the work that is done and the social time is an important opportunity for forming friendships and strengthening the community.

While the structure is formal one board member described the interactions between individuals as “less formal, people are friendly and laid back.” Board members from a number of Centres stated that “we know each other”, “we are friends” and “among peers” and that this contributes to a relaxed yet productive working atmosphere.

Summary statement: Boards that govern well:

- **establish a pattern for meeting regularly that ensures the needs of the Centre are cared for and at the same time is respectful of the availability of individual board members;**
- **develop a meeting format that allows for continuity and accountability; and**
- **at the same time is balanced with informality that invites people to get to know each other and enjoy being together.**

3.3.4 DECISIONS AND THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Friendship Centre Boards make decisions about:

Programs—including initiating and approving new programs, setting direction and guidelines for programs and problem solving with existing programs

Finances—such as approving the budget, reviewing contribution agreements, developing sound accounting practices, look for funding

Personnel—assisting in the hiring of staff, giving guidance to the Executive Director as it relates to managing staff but in a way that it is at arm’s length and does not micro manage

Policy Development—identify and then develop policies

Broader Community Involvement—such as being involved in broader Aboriginal issues that affect First Nations

Each of the sites visited follows the principles of Robert’s Rules of Order for decision-making; motions are made and seconded, then following discussion a vote is taken. The following is a summary of comments made by board members about the decision-making process and observations made by the community researcher:

a) Presentation of an issue, concern, new idea or program.

Board members may receive an email or report ahead of time alerting them to the issue and providing background information so that they can come to the meeting prepared for the discussion. At other times the issue is simply presented at the meeting. When a decision needs to be made about specific programming the Executive Director may invite a staff person to make a presentation to the Board.

Illustration: the VNFC was receiving complaints via anonymous phone calls. The ED presented this concern to the board, including listening to the recorded messages. Following discussion the VNFC put a policy in place that all concerns to the board whether from staff or clients or the community, must come in written form so that there is a) accountability -they know who (individual or group) the concern is from and who they must respond to, and b) the concern or idea is clearly presented so that they can respond to the concern.

b) Determining Direction

Once the issue or request is received the board reflects on what present direction the constitution and bylaws, policies and mandate of the Friendship Centre have to say, if anything, on this issue.

For example, the mission statement of the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre states: *Skookum Jim Friendship Centre is committed to a vision of bettering the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well being of First Nation Peoples, fostering the way of friendship and understanding between people.* “It is important that we not get caught up in someone else’s dream unless it fits with our mission,” one board member



stated. And so when a decision regarding initiating a new program or accepting a proposal from another agency is made it is tested against this mandate.

c) Brainstorming Alternative Strategies

In this phase questions are asked both of the person presenting the issue/concern and other board members. Some board members expressed concern that this is the process followed and does not reflect traditional Aboriginal ways of decision-making. Many agreed that the reason this format works is that ample time is given for discussion, for hearing everyone's voice and working to achieve consensus.

One board member was quite surprised at how formal the process was for decision-making. Now after being on the board one year this member plans to propose a practice that he has used in other settings where the board sits in a circle and after discussion of an agenda item but before it is closed off the group would go around the circle and each person would have an opportunity to comment.

d) Devil's Advocate

One board member said that on his board he is willing to step out on a limb and ask "dumb" questions concerning an issue or decision that needs to be made. He wants to ensure that each board member understands the full implication of the decision they are making because often the decision they make has a direct affect on people's lives; either of staff or clients.

At a board meeting of another Friendship Centre one board member seemed to play the role of "Devil's Advocate" and present a position that seemed contrary to what others were saying. In a follow-up conversation a staff person commented that this individual often "disagrees" in order to help the group look beyond the immediate situation to the larger implications of the decision they are making.

e) Determining an Action Plan

After an issue has been thoroughly discussed the Board may:

- agree by consensus and make a decision or recommendation or
- defer a decision to a later date so that more information and input can be received or

- assign a sub-committee to do further study, work out the details and return to the board with a recommendation.

f) Implementation of a Plan

Once a decision has been made the work is assigned to the appropriate sub committee or if it is program and staff related the Executive Director is held accountable for ensuring that staff implement the decision.

g) Evaluation

Board members at each of the Centres responded that there is no formal process for evaluation but evaluation does take place in the following situations:

- reflection and evaluation of decisions when the Board receives feedback from the community;
- use financial accountability to evaluate a program;
- at regular board meetings when looking at the business arising from the minutes take time to reflect on recent decisions and evaluate whether they could have responded differently;
- take time at the end of the year to reflect on what has been accomplished and what hasn't been done; and
- evaluate during strategic planning.

Summary statement: Good decision-making is a process that involves:

- **clear presentation of an issue, concern or new idea with appropriate background information;**
- **discussion of the issue in light of the mandate, goals, and policy of the Friendship Centre;**
- **thorough discussion, ensuring that each individual around the table has input;**
- **discussion of opposing or alternate perspectives in order to develop a fuller appreciation of the decision being made;**
- **development of an accountable plan of action for making the decision; and**
- **a plan for implementing the decision and evaluation.**



3.3.5 ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

There is no single pathway to excellence for non-profit organizations but demographics of high performance non-profit organizations reveal four areas of strengths: 1) how the organization functions externally with other groups, 2) how it functions internally with its own structure, 3) the importance of leadership, and 4) the internal management of its systems. Of these four categories, leadership is the most important key (Light, 2002). This study allowed for observation of leadership in action in terms of the leadership of the Executive Directors of the Friendship Centres and the Board of Directors of the Friendship Centres.

Role of the Executive Director

Three of the Centres visited have women as Executive Directors and three of the Centres have male directors. These directors are all in the 40–65 year age category. Each one brings his or her personality and style to the position yet each one shares some common leadership qualities to lead and equip staff to carry out their programs and provide the leadership and knowledge necessary to enable the board to carry out its mandate. These leadership qualities include:

- a clear sense of where the organization needs to go;
- the ability to work hard and juggle many demands yet “hang loose” ;
- being decisive;
- staff relations:
 - has clear expectations and high standards for staff
 - empowers staff to take responsibility and initiative for their work
 - affirms the positive work of staff in a variety of settings
 - is respected by the staff; and
- external relationships-networks with other agencies:
 - advocates for the Centre and is assertive in naming both its needs and what it has to offer when looking for funds; and
 - respected by the constituency of the Centre and the larger community.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the VFNC state that the Executive Director “shall be responsible for the general direction of the affairs and operations of the VNFC ...and...be responsible to the Board for his own administrative conduct.” The MicMac Native Friendship Centre states that the Executive Director “shall be responsible for directing all staff” and for making recommendations concerning staff to the Board of Directors.

Board members who were interviewed had a working knowledge of their Director’s work and identified the following as the role of the Executive Director:

- senior administrator: to give overall leadership, direction and management to the Centre’s employees, programs and its finances;
- to report to the Board on his/her work and the work of the staff;
- to take back to the staff direction set by the Board and be responsible for implementing decisions; and
- in conjunction with the Board provides public relations in the larger community.

One board member used the image of an hourglass to describe the Executive Director’s relationship with the organization. Concerns of the staff are funnelled through the Executive Director to the Board and communication/decisions from the board that relate to the staff also funnel through the Executive Director.

Board members identified that the Executive Director plays a vital role at board meetings in helping them fulfill their board governance decisions and obligations in the following areas:

- 1) Program, Personnel and Financial Decision-making– the Executive Director, through his/her report keeps the board informed as to what is going well and where the challenges and issues are in relationship to the programs, its clients, funding and staff.
- 2) Advisory Role— because the Executive Director, in the senior administrative role is in close contact with the various constituents of the Centre, its programs, its funders and related agencies the Executive Director is in a good position to coach the board and give advice; providing helpful background information, data, reports and resources to equip them in their decision-making process.



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Summary statement: The executive director in his/her leadership role contributes to the strength of the governance of the organization through:

- **clear vision and articulation of where the organization needs to go,**
- **motivating and empowering staff,**
- **being respected and connected in the larger community and as a result of the above, and**
- **able to equip the Board with the information and resources to make informed decisions.**

Role of Board Leadership

Board members were very clear in understanding that the role of the board is to ensure that the direction and the vision of the Centre is carried out. Their role is to:

- give direction to the Executive Director and through the Executive Director, oversee personnel, programs and new initiatives of the Centre,
- ensure funding is in place and be responsible for financial decisions and good accounting practices,

- develop policies that contribute to well managed programs and healthy staff and community relationships,
- ensure the Centre is involved in the larger community and broader Aboriginal issues that affect all First Nations,
- provide services in agreement with the NAFC, and
- ensure that these decisions are made and carried out in a transparent manner.

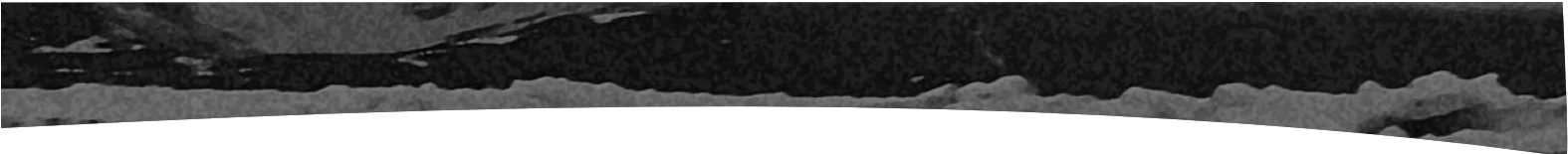
The VNFC recognized at one point that board meetings were becoming too long and the agenda could not be finished in one evening due to lengthy discussions over specific issues and decisions. At that point the decision was made to develop sub committees. These committees would meet between the regular meetings of the board, work through the details of an issue or decision and then report to the board, still allowing for discussion and final approval by the board.

The following table lists the Centres, their sub-committees and the composition of members on the committee.

TABLE 3.4: BOARD SUB COMMITTEES AND COMPOSITION

CENTRE	Sub Committees	Committee Composition
Whitehorse	1) – Finance – Personnel and Resolutions 2) – Recreation – Elders Capital Management – Traditional Parenting – Dept. of Training – Justice – Skookum Jim Trust Fund	1) Executive and ED 2) Board members volunteer to sit on these committees along with staff members
Victoria	– Finance And Development – Personnel and Training – Constitution and Bylaws – Nominating	Executive 3 board members, 3 staff members
Thunder Bay		
Halifax	– Personnel and Finance Events Committee	Executive





Summary statement: Board leadership ensures that the mandate of the Centre is carried out in a thorough, financially accountable and transparent manner so that they are in agreement with the NAFC, that their decisions and policies contribute to the needs and well being of the Friendship Centre community and that they remain connected to the larger community.

3.3.6 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The management of staff, programs and finances has a significant impact on the role of the board in relationship to staff and programs. The following are examples of management structures developed by two of the Friendship Centres:

Victoria Native Friendship Centre

In the past the Centre was run from a top down approach in which the Executive Director and the Finance Officer (staff member) controlled the financial decisions, including the signing of cheques. These two individuals held the power and very little trickled down to the rest of the organization. The Centre has now developed a more flat-line management approach with a management team. The team is made up of a team leader and key individuals from within a program area. Together with the Executive Director, the Program Director and input from the Board (Board members are encouraged to attend staff meetings) this group plans and sets direction for the various programs within its domain. The effect is greater ownership and responsibility for the programs it offers.

An example of the team management approach would be the Finance Committee that was established. It is now made up of the Executive Director and Financial Officer (both staff) and the President, Treasurer and other volunteer board members. The committee meets monthly to review the finances and make recommendations to the Board. The role of the Finance Officer is to explain the budget and highlight what the monthly issues are but it is the Board that makes the final decision to approve the finances.

Skookum Jim Friendship Centre

At one point the board was micro-managing the work of the staff, the programs of the Centre and the budget. The Centre started the fiscal year with a deficit

of \$23,000. A new auditor recommended changes to involve program managers more closely in budget development as previously they had no responsibility for where they were in relationship to their budget.

The current Executive Director, along with the Financial Officer and the Board has worked with program managers to give them greater ownership in the decision-making of their programs and budgets, including going after funding. Through professional development opportunities managers are being equipped to manage and monitor their budgets, supervise their staff and maximize their potential. This has led to new creative energy and internal department partnerships. One example is in the area of youth programming. UMAC, Traditional Parenting and Recreation are all program areas for youth. The staff for these programs has worked together in a collective, collaborative approach to provide the best type of supports and services that is within their means for the benefit of their Youth.

At the Board level these changes have meant that instead of micro-managing staff the board focuses on how new initiatives fit within the vision of the Centre and receive program/staff reports and personnel reviews through the Executive Director.

At the AGM held at the end of June the President of the board commented that this change in management has led to the strengthening of the team, better staff/board relationships and improved financial control leading to a surplus of \$87,000.

Summary Statement: Boards that govern well develop a team management approach that:

- **encourage program managers and staff to take ownership of their programs in setting direction, planning and initiating new ideas**
- **equip program managers and their staff to establish, monitor and seek funds for their budget**
- **is clear on what the roles and relationship of staff, Executive Director and Board are in the management structure.**



3.3.7 VISION

Responses from board members reveal that vision for local Friendship Centres comes from a variety of sources. Friendship Centres are part of the NAFC and therefore as part of the Friendship Centre movement hold to a common vision of providing services and creating community capacity for Aboriginal people.

At the VNFC, SJFC and the MicMac Friendship Centre board members identified the following groups who contribute to the vision of their respective Friendship Centre: Board members

Staff members:

At the MicMac Centre two board members identified staff as the primary sources of establishing vision for the Centre through their programs. At one point a staff member came to the board with a proposal to open a Friendship Centre gift shop. The Board studied the proposal but didn't feel the vision could be carried out. There was a history of failure of gift shops in the area. (The Centre is just outside the downtown harbour front tourist area in Halifax).

At the SJFC one board member identified that some of the vision for the Centre is personality driven by the creative energy of the staff and this initiative is welcomed. For example: Traditional Parenting is a contribution driven program through the NAFC where Elders teach young parents healthy, traditional parenting skills. The traditional parenting program manager developed an idea and the funding to bring these Elders together for their own support and training.

The board member from the VNFC identified setting vision as joint process between the board and staff (see Strategic Planning for description).

The Friendship Centre Community- members of the society and those who make use of the programs contribute ideas on the direction their local Friendship Centre should consider. The Annual General Meeting is one opportunity where they can voice their ideas.

For the SJFC the vision of the board, staff and community is guided by the vision of Skookum Jim, a Tagish Indian of the Wolf clan who became a gold prospector in the late 1800s. When he died his will

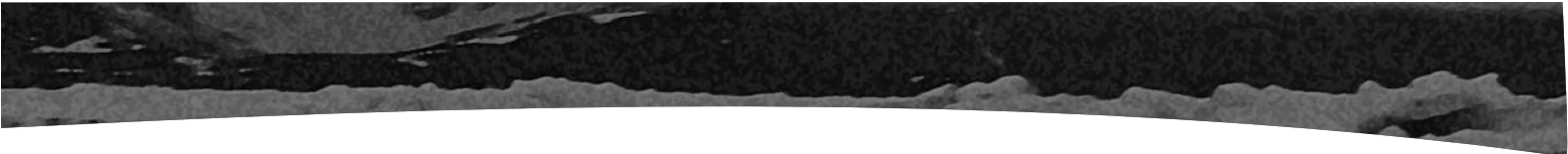
Skookum Jim Friendship Centre is committed to a vision of bettering the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well being of First Nation Peoples, fostering the way of friendship and understanding between people.

outlined that "the income from said trust funds shall be devoted towards furnishing medical attendance supplying necessities and comforts to Indians in the Yukon Territory and towards assisting needy and deserving Indians in the said Territory in any way or manner said trustees may deem best." (Skookum Jim unpublished history paper, p.7)

Today the mission statement of the SJFC states: *Skookum Jim Friendship Centre is committed to a vision of bettering the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well being of First Nation Peoples, fostering the way of friendship and understanding between people.* This statement is visibly posted in the reception area of the Centre; it is printed on all program brochures and newsletters; and in each of the four in-depth interviews that were conducted board members quoted part of the mission statement when discussing where vision and direction for the Centre come from.

While board, staff and the community contribute to the vision in each of the Centres, there is variation in where the primary centre for that vision comes from. Whether the board is the initiator of the vision or the receiver of the vision interviewed board members were clear in identifying that in their governance role they must take the responsibility for discerning whether the vision fits within the mandate and best interests of their local Friendship Centre.





Summary Statement: Boards that govern well establish vision in agreement with the Friendship Centre movement and the guiding vision of their local Friendship Centre. Within these parameters the board, staff and members of the society are encouraged to contribute their ideas and vision but it is the board that takes ultimate responsibility for discerning the vision of their Centre.

3.3.8 STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic Planning is a complex process and Board members identified this area as one of the hardest issues for a board to work at. Strategic planning takes time and scheduling for this can be difficult when the time of both staff and volunteer board members is full with the more immediate demands of the organization and many other commitments. One board member identified that strategic planning has happened at their Centre but in the recent past when there were some internal concerns and issues the focus was on correcting the problems rather than looking at the future and the big picture.

Funding creates additional challenges for a Centre in its strategic planning. Core funded Centres such as the Centres visited in this study can apply for government funds for certain programs such as: prenatal, Diversion, UMAC, traditional parenting and recreation. Along with the funds are terms of agreement for the designated programs and use of the funds. Friendship Centres must make yearly application for this funding. Long term planning can be challenging when funding happens on a yearly basis and within one program funding comes from a variety of sources, some of which may not be available the next year.

Victoria Native Friendship Centre

Like many organizations the VNFC felt like it was always racing, either one step behind or just barely keeping ahead of the many demands on its staff and programs. Racing and never resting gets tiring. The question was raised: isn't there a better way to plan than just reacting or responding to demands? Then a second question was raised: how did our people traditionally respond to the demands in their environment? How did they prepare for the unexpected?

The Centre recognized that while the Aboriginal population that relates to the Centre is diverse there was a common seasonal work/rest rhythm traditional to each group that could guide the strategic planning of the organization and ultimately make it stronger. A facilitator was brought in to help them develop a strategic plan that would have long term impact.

A key component in developing the strategy was recognized that all Aboriginal groups are traditionally connected to the land and listening to the land is something all First Nations hold in common. The fall was traditionally a time of action and preparing for the winter. Winter was the Potlatch season, a time of celebrating and of naming children. Spring with its new life was a season of renewal and preparation. And the summer a time of leisure and enjoying the outdoors and each other. This traditional rhythm had a balance of more intense work times (spring and fall) and more relaxed times (summer and winter).

Based on this wisdom the VNFC developed a seasonal evaluation timeline in order to be prepared for the organizations varied demands. Spring is now the time to get proposals ready at the Centre. Summer is a time of leisure, when people take holidays and the work slows down. Fall is action time when the proposals and plans are implemented. The winter season is a time when the Centre acknowledges sponsors, its community partners, volunteers and Board members with suppers and luncheons.

The process is a self-healer. Using this plan takes away the anxiety of always being on the go; there are periods of intense work but there are also more relaxed times. The planning begins with the Executive Director and Board of Directors setting a one year and five year plan for the Centre. The plan is then fleshed out with the management team and key staff over a number of meetings in order for maximum input and "buy-in".

Skookum Jim Friendship Centre

A plan and process for strategic planning has been initiated where the board and staff are to meet every one or two years with the help of a facilitator. The purpose is to look at where the Centre is at, where the Centre is going and to set a vision for the organization. Strategic planning has addressed such



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issues as how to improve relationships internally in the organization, how to improve productivity, and how to improve programs and services.

Board members identified the following ideas that can contribute to helpful strategic planning:

- developing both a one year plan and a five year plan
- strategic planning is a dynamic process, not a one time event, that must take into account the present reality of the Centre
- to be effective both staff and board must participate and see the value of the process
- for the strategic plan to be implemented there must be a plan to intentionally incorporate the plan into the weekly work schedule of staff and the mandate of the board

Thunder Bay Friendship Centre

The Thunder Bay Friendship Centre reveals in the story of its history the dynamic process of strategic planning. In 1964 an initiator by the name of Xavier Michon began to volunteer and bring native people, particularly youth together in the city of Thunder Bay. Two non-Aboriginal women heard of his work and joined with him to begin an Indian Friendship Centre.

The strategic plan at the inception of the Centre was to form a Board of Directors “who could help the native people, by virtue of their position and provided they developed an interest, an understanding and a sympathy for the enormous social problems of

the Indians.” (from article “Challenge of the Native People: One Leader’s Response” *Human Relations*, Ontario Human Rights Commission, p.4) Mr. Michon recruited the Deputy Chief of Police, a judge, school teacher, an officer of the Human Rights Commission, the jail superintendent and a furniture salesman. Each was chosen because many Indian people faced struggles in these respective areas. It was hoped these individuals could help educate the larger community and therefore lead to more culturally sensitive treatment. The furniture salesman was able to provide the Centre with free furniture!

A second prong of the strategy was for Mr. Michon to join agencies that could help the native people and speak to service clubs to educate them of the needs and how they could be involved. The Centre began to hold teas for community leaders to inform them of the Centre’s needs and its progress. With outside help the Centre grew in maturity and stability. This strategy led to a point where the twelve member board became half Aboriginal and half non-Aboriginal.

Today the board consists of nine Aboriginal board members. This past year the board held a retreat to do some strategic planning with the main purpose being to rewrite the bylaws. Revising the guidelines for how the organization is to function and be governed has been a year long process. Because of this the Annual General Meeting scheduled for October 2004 has been postponed to January 2005 in order to present all the bylaws that will form the foundation for the way the Centre continues to operate and carry out its vision.

Summary statement: Boards that govern well recognize that strategic planning is important but difficult work that gives direction not only to what will be accomplished but how it will be accomplished. They develop a strategic planning process that:

- 1) allows for the board and staff to work together,**
- 2) is focused in what it wants to accomplish,**
- 3) develops a plan for implementing the plan**
- 4) includes short term and long term goals.**



3.3.9 COMMUNICATION

Board decisions can affect the staff and the programs they offer, clients, the Friendship Centre community as well as the larger community and funders of their programs. Decisions relating to staff and programming are communicated through the Executive Director. Friendship Centres use a variety of ways to communicate the programs they offer and the decisions made:

- Friendship Centre newsletter
- Program brochures and newsletters
- Through partnerships with other organizations
- Posters
- Radio announcements
- Electronic communication/websites
- Annual General Meeting
- Monthly financial statements

Summary statement: Boards that govern well seek to keep their community informed using multiple forms of communication.

3.3.10 ABORIGINAL PRACTICES AND PRINCIPLES

Friendship Centres live with their feet in two worlds; one is the world of Aboriginal cultures with their values and traditional ways and the other is being part of a larger culture that does not always understand or appreciate it. To function within that reality Centres face the challenge of bridging both worlds.

Holistic World View

- 1) An Aboriginal perspective of seeing the world holistically includes *respect for people across the life span*. This value is reflected in board governance through:
 - a) Ensuring that the wisdom of **Elders** is part of the Friendship Centre. At the Skookum Jim FC this means having two honorary Elders on the board. The Elders will observe how the board operates and then state what they have observed or make an evaluation. “They can be quite blunt and are not afraid to say that they think the Board is wrong,” one board member stated. The board looks to the Elders to give their input on hard decisions. During difficult discussions the Elders may pray to help people refocus on the “big picture”. Another board member stated that with their wisdom “the Elders give us the tools we need to make decisions.”

At Skookum Jim as well as at the VNFC and the MicMac Centre in Halifax Elders are involved in traditional teaching in various programs. While SJFC is the only Centre that has a designated role for Elders on its board the other Centres said that an Elder may be elected a board position and that individuals on the board may seek the advice of an Elder on a specific issue.

- 2) **Youth** representation- Each of the Centres visited has a position on the board for a youth. At the time of the visits Halifax was the only Centre that had someone in that position. However in each of the Centres, youth programming is a major part of the work of the Centre and not only programming for youth but opportunities for youth leadership. At the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre they have one youth (age18–24) who is on staff in each of their program areas.

The **Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres Initiative**, guided and funded through the NAFC has had a significant role in having positive outcomes in the lives of Aboriginal youth through youth directed programming for youth. In the UMAC Negotiating Committee Report to the NAFC AGM, July 7–10, 2004 they stated, “all of those interviewed are enthusiastic about the Initiative and believe that it has contributed towards...improved academic performance; enhanced employability; broadened understanding of, and appreciation for, their cultures; strengthened self-esteem and engagement in their communities; and the development of leadership and management skills.”

“Key factors in the success of the Initiative are its emphasis on allowing Aboriginal youth to participate in its administration and delivery and its design flexibility, which reflects the needs, culture and capacity of each region.”

- 3) A traditional Aboriginal understanding is to see *individuals holistically*. While individuals who come as clients to the Centre may have a specific need in one area they are not treated as a number to be pushed through the system but as a person who is an emotional, spiritual, physical being. Once their “need” has been addressed they are still welcome to participate in the Friendship



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Centre community. One board member stated that this Aboriginal understanding can empower the individual who may have been left between the cracks in other organizations where the approach is not as holistic. At times this has created tensions with funding agencies who say the money is to address a specific concern or need and once that need is addressed there is no reason for the individual to continue that program or service.

One board member identified that when they interview and hire staff an important part of the process is identifying the person's Aboriginal culture and language awareness.

At the board level understanding individuals holistically means respect and recognition that board members are volunteering their time and have a life and family outside of their board commitment. Board members are expected to attend meetings regularly but family is a priority and if a family need prevents attendance and the board is duly informed that is respected and accepted.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

Board members identified that a) they experience a strong sense of community at the board level and in the Friendship Centre and b) while respecting the individual's freedom of choice make decisions in the best interest of the community and therefore involve the community in decision-making.

Community building for board members happens in a number of ways:

- 1) Meals at the Centre provide an opportunity for board members to informally interact with each other as well as with employees, clients and members of the Centre.

- 2) Centres hold various Recognition Suppers to acknowledge and thank board members, volunteers, staff and Elders for their contribution.
- 3) Recognition Gifts- Appreciation of the contributions of individuals is recognized through the giving of gifts and awards.

At the AGM of the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre gifts were presented to the Elders on behalf of the Board; Board members received gifts as a thank-you from the staff; Skookum Jim Awards were given to staff and board members recognized by their peers; and a gift of recognition and thanks to a board member who was leaving the board. These gifts acknowledge the individual and recognize their value and relationship to the community.

Aboriginal Leadership Practices

"Traditionally leaders were chosen from within the clan but even when family members were chosen the emphasis was always on choosing individuals because of their skills and their concern for the community," reflected one board member. Two Friendship Centres identified that in the recent past this traditional practice led to nepotism and did not serve the organization well. If relatives are considered the emphasis must be on the skills they have to offer.

Consistently board members said that there is nothing Aboriginal about the process for identifying leaders. However upon some reflection several board members did state that while there is nothing Aboriginal about the formal process they work at finding individuals who are respected in the community and have a strong knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal issues. One board member identified that when they interview and hire staff an important part of the process is identifying the person's Aboriginal culture and language awareness.

Aboriginal Governance Practices

At every Centre board members identified consensus as an Aboriginal practice that contributes to sound decision-making. It is important that everyone is given an opportunity to speak whether in support or against the decision that is being made. This process includes not only hearing what the individual has said but considering the individual's feelings and respecting each other's perspective.



While the individual's perspective is respected there is also a strong sense of community within the board. Members of two different boards identified that they have had heated discussions concerning an issue but when the meeting ended "we are still able to go out for coffee or drive home together as friends" and "we try our best to make sure that no one goes away isolated."

Traditional Spiritual Practices

Some Centres are very diverse in the Aboriginal backgrounds of the staff and the client while other Centres may reflect mainly one predominant group. With the diversity of the groups represented comes a diversity of traditional ways and symbols. But Centres that have respectfully incorporated meaningful traditional symbols into their meetings identify these symbols as powerful tools that enhance the work of their board. These symbolic acts may include:

- 1) beginning and ending the meeting with prayer. This may include standing and everyone holding hands.
- 2) smudging at the beginning of meetings and when there are difficult decisions to make
- 3) offering a gift of Sweet Grass
- 4) passing of the feather to speak when discussing an issue

Cultural Tensions in Decision-making

One board member stated that all their programs are very traditional and when they make a decision they make sure the traditional values and what the board has to do work together. To operate the programs that teach traditional knowledge and ways they must have the finances and proper management and so the two must work together to make the program work.

Friendship Centres do experience some tension in working with government agencies and departments. Sometimes government funds come attached with complicated and bureaucratic strings that do not allow the flexibility the Friendship Centre needs to develop and provide culturally appropriate service. These situations can create conflicts and tensions.



One board member wondered whether this tension is compounded by the fact that as an Aboriginal non-profit organization there are high expectations but a limited budget and so one individual employee must be multi-talented and cover the work of several positions and at times this means being unable to meet the funder's deadlines.

The Skookum Jim Friendship Centre faces these tensions yet at the same time is fortunate that the political dynamics in the Yukon are quite a bit different than in other respective jurisdictions. The Yukon has fourteen First Nations and there are self-governing First Nations who have completed land claims. This helps influence public perception of Aboriginal people and develops an appreciation that there is a difference in how Aboriginal people operate and what their priorities and objectives are.

The Centres can be diverse in the Aboriginal cultures represented among employees, clients and community members. When tensions arise because of various traditions "we try and resolve them through respect for our neighbour," one board member stated.

Another board member identified that tensions in their Centre are probably experienced more at the program level than directly at the board level. Their daycare would like to serve traditional wild meats but because of government standards they are not allowed to serve it.



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3.3.11 BOARD TRAINING

Two of the Centres provide some board orientation. Board members identified the following practices that contribute to helping them do their job, as well as practices that could enhance the Board's effectiveness:

- 1) Orientation to their role and responsibilities as board members by a resource person/consultant.
- 2) With the help of a consultant reflect on the collective strengths and weaknesses of the current board.
- 3) Orientation to the programs of the Centre given by staff members over a period of board meetings.
- 4) Provide board members with copies of the Centre's Constitution and Bylaws and Policy Manual.
- 5) Provide understanding of the history of the Centre.
- 6) Make use of board orientation in the wider community. (Example: the Volunteer Bureau in Whitehorse)
- 7) Develop an orientation manual
- 8) Provide on going training in specific areas to equip the Board for responsible decision-making.

Summary Statement: Boards that govern well recognize that board orientation and training provides a foundation for informed governance and decision-making.

3.3.12 BOARD COMMITMENT AND BENEFITS

Many of the students who participate in our programs want to give back to the Centre in gratitude for what was done for them and with hopes of continuing to offer that service to others. One young teenager who was on the street and an alcoholic came to the youth group at the Centre. There were no demands placed on her. She continued to attend and became comfortable. The youth group became a safe place for her and she went in to rehabilitation. She then enrolled in classes and completed her grade 12 equivalent. At college she became editor of the school newsletter. From there she went to university to become a lawyer. When her schooling was finished she returned to the Centre and became a member of the Board of Directors. (VNFC)

Over and over board members commented that they were a part of the Board of Directors of their Centre because they believed and wanted to be part of an organization where the programs and activities were helping to make a positive difference in the lives of Aboriginal people. A second motivating factor is seeing that there are still needs to be addressed and participation on the board is the way they can contribute to addressing those needs.

The personal and extrinsic benefits board members receive are closely linked to their ongoing commitment to their Friendship Centre:

"I am a bit pale skinned and growing up was rough in my First Nations community because of that. But at one point I became a human being and I like to think I have some value and can now contribute to my community."

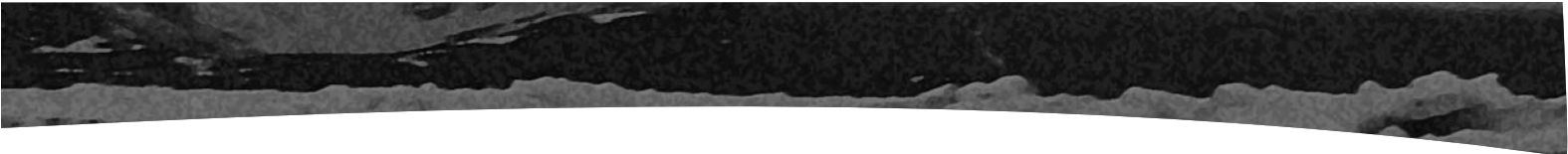
"When I first came to this city I wasn't the most respected individual but now I feel like I'm at an age where I can contribute something. Being on the board makes me feel connected to the community."

"Personally I gain experience from being on the Board and this in turn translates into opportunities for me in other areas."

"I am very proud to be on this board. I have been able to mould some of the things that happened over the years in this Friendship Centre to make it an interesting, vibrant organization. ... I have been a volunteer forever and I enjoy doing it because it is a better place now than when I was growing up."

"A board member was my very first Indian Dance teacher. I danced in this basement... My life has been about community contribution. My accomplishments are not my own. I recognize they are a combination of collective interest in me an individual and so this is one small but hopefully significant way I can give back to that which has been given to me..."





“Being on the Board gives me the opportunity to stay involved in Aboriginal issues and participate in national Aboriginal concerns and promote Aboriginal culture...The Friendship Centre as it has evolved is like a family. You become close to the people you work with and volunteer with.”

“Some people have hobbies. My hobby is volunteering and helping people, either individually or as a group. I get gratification from seeing things done.”


For many board members there is a strong family or community identity with the Centre. Some board members have grown up attending the children and youth programs of the Centre and now as an adult say thank-you to the Centre through their participation on the board. Long time board members have grown with the aches and pains of Centres in their infancy or in crisis and have weathered the storms. They have learned from the problems and want to ensure the on going health of the organization and therefore continue to be involved after 10, 20, and 30 years of board service. For other board members who have moved into the community and more recently connected with the local Friendship Centre their commitment stems from a desire to continue improving life for Aboriginal people in the city and passing on the traditional and cultural strengths to their own children and the next generation.

Summary statement: Commitment to the organization stems from:1) a positive association with the Centre, 2) a strong belief that what the organization is doing benefits the Aboriginal community and 3) a belief that one has skills and abilities to contribute to addressing those needs.

3.3.13 CONCERNS

The Friendship Centres chosen for this study were identified as having a history of healthy governance. The in-depth interviews revealed and affirmed that these Boards intentionally work at decisions, policies and finances that contribute to strengthening the services and community of their local Centre. While each of the Centres has many strengths, board members still dream and are able to identify issues that they would like to address such as:

- Have the Friendship Centre return to a more accessible open concept of a drop in Centre rather than a business rhythm of 9 to 5 hours.
- A well developed orientation and orientation package for board members.
- An updated computer program for accounting to improve reading of financial statements and accountability.
- Develop a better physical facility.
- A central location and traditional setting where the Friendship Centre could partner with other Aboriginal groups.
- Increase the commitment of some board members to be involved in the work of the sub committees and not just attend meetings.
- Continue to work at empowering employees.

Summary statement: Boards that govern well are not content with the status quo but identify concerns that still need to be addressed in order to contribute to the well being of the Centre and the people it serves. 



SECTION 4:

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Purpose of Study

Traditional Aboriginal culture is on individualism and egalitarianism where everyone's opinion is equal, each member has a free choice and there is no formal authority or institution. Some of the key values are:

- holistic understanding of the world;
- egalitarianism;
- leadership that is diffused and voluntary, not authoritarian;
- tolerance of individual members;
- priority of collective versus individual needs;
- avoidance of conflict;
- sharing and social obligations of reciprocity; and
- indirect and internal mechanism of social control (Durst, 2000).

Little is known however about how traditionally based Aboriginal leadership understandings are translated into the leadership and governance of urban Aboriginal leaders. This study begins to improve our understanding on how Aboriginal leadership manifests cultural values.

The study examined the leadership of the 117 Boards of Directors of Aboriginal Centres in Canada to find the "best practices" in governance and leadership and how Aboriginal leadership principles are incorporated in the urban setting. The study asked the following broad questions:

- 1) What is the demographic profile of the volunteer Board Members in the 117 Friendship Centres and Associations in Canada?
- 2) What keeps volunteer Board Members involved and committed to the organization?
- 3) What kinds of decisions do they make? How does their decision making involve Aboriginal leadership styles?
- 4) What are the issues, concerns and cultural tensions they face in decision-making?

4.2 Research Methods:

The study involved gathering data from three sources:

- Field visits were made to three Friendship Centres identified by the National Association of Friendship Centres as having a history of continued competent and skilled leadership. The community researcher attended and observed the decision making process during a Board of Directors meeting or an Annual General Meeting.
- In-depth interviews of 30–45 minutes were conducted with a sample of board members at each Centre.
- A self-administered questionnaire on "best practices" was responded to by 75 volunteer Board Members. The questionnaire had 40 questions examining board functioning in 7 categories. The members were from Friendship Centres across Canada who attended the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Friendship Centres, July 6–10, 2004 in Halifax.

4.3 Findings on "Best Practices" in Aboriginal Non-profit Organizations

4.3.1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN BEST PRACTICES SURVEY

The data from the self-administered questionnaire offers a snap shot of board profiles across Canada. There are limitations to the data but it does indicate that board members are mature and experienced contributors to the decision-making of their Friendship Centres. There is active leadership from both men and women and from both seniors and youth. The majority of members are in the 40–64 age group (63.5%). Since 20% have been on the board for over 10 years, there may be issues of lack of turnover and participation from new members. A summary is presented in the Table below.

The data from the self-administered questionnaire offers a snap shot of board profiles across Canada.



TABLE 4.1: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN BEST PRACTICES SURVEY

AGE	Under 25 9.5% (7)	25–39 17.6% (13)	40–64 63.5% (47)	65+ 9.5% (7)	
Gender	Female 57.3% (43)	Male 42.7% (32)			
Education	High School 28.8% (21)	Post Secondary 65.8% (48)	Other 5.8% (4)		
Employment	Full-time 65.2% (46)	Part-time 8.7% (6)	Student 7.2% (5)	At home/ unemployed 2.9% (2)	Retired 14.5% (10)
Length of Service on Board	Under 2 yrs. 17.3% (13)	2–5 yrs. 45.3% (34)	6–10 yrs. 17.3% (13)	Over 10 yrs. 20% (15)	

4.3.2 VOLUNTEER BOARD COMMITMENT

The study found that the commitment from the Board stems from three sources. First, there exists a positive association with the Centre, its programs and community. There is a positive attitude towards the organization and its services. Second, the member holds a strong belief that what the Centre offers benefits the Aboriginal community and is providing a valued and need service to his/her people. Finally there is a belief that as a Board Member, one has the skills and abilities to contribute to addressing the needs of the community. They value their contribution to an organization that they feel worthy.

4.3.3 DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The Boards in this study use the principles of Robert's Rules of Order with a strong emphasis on the Aboriginal principle of consensus building through thorough discussion. They ensure that each member is heard and all opinions are valued. The adversarial voting procedures are avoided. Generally, the Boards give direction and make decisions relating to programs, personnel, finances, policy, and broader community involvement.

4.3.4 ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

The Executive Director plays a key role in equipping the Board with the necessary information from the programs, personnel and the larger community in order for the Board to make informed decision. How-

ever, the Board ensures that the mandate of the Centre is carried out in a financially accountable and transparent manner so that their decisions contribute to the well being of the Friendship Centre community.

4.3.5 ABORIGINAL PRACTICES AND PRINCIPLES

Board members who have the respect of their community and use their skills for the well being of the community **honour traditional leadership practices**. Boards value the wisdom of Elders and the perspective of youth at their meetings and in leadership roles within the organization. The application and use of traditional spiritual symbols and practices connect the work of the Board to a larger purpose. Community is important and the work of the Board is strengthened through their friendships and participation in the activities and community meals of the Centre.

4.3.6 ISSUES, CONCERNS AND TENSIONS

Centres experience tension with government funders when government standards and timelines make little allowance for limited Centre staff trying to address huge work loads in culturally appropriate and holistic ways. The lack of stable funding and dependable financial resources creates tremendous stress on the staff and Boards. In addition, Boards are often comprised of diverse cultural groups crossing ethnic lines. A strong custom of respect is needed to address the tensions that may arise



with the diversity of Aboriginal and First Nations represented in the organization. Board members recognize the need for orientation and ongoing training in order to be equipped for the decisions they must make. Boards are not content with the status quo but identify concerns that still need to be addressed.

4.4 Final Word

Almost invisible in 117 cities and communities in every region of Canada are active well-managed Aboriginal non-profit organizations called “Friendship Centres”. These Centres provide a host of social and recreational and educational programs for the Aboriginal peoples living or just passing through its community. With some budgets over 2 million dollars, 70 staff and 40 different programs, they are large and complex organizations. Their welcoming doors are open to all regardless of Aboriginal ancestry, individual history, or present situation. Each day, the staff and volunteers face myriad of social situations requiring great tact, skill and knowledge. Sadly, they encounter the ugliness of blatant racism and discrimination yet they rise above offering acceptance and hope. These Centres are cultural centres celebrating the rich traditional heritage of Aboriginal peoples, instilling pride and preserving the values and culture of its peoples.

Unfortunately, the leadership as expressed in its board of directors and senior management continuously deal with insecure funding. They creatively tap every available resource “begging” for money from a host of federal departments, provincial divisions, city governments, and private agencies and foundations. The grant application process is an art mastered by many hard working individuals buried within the organization.

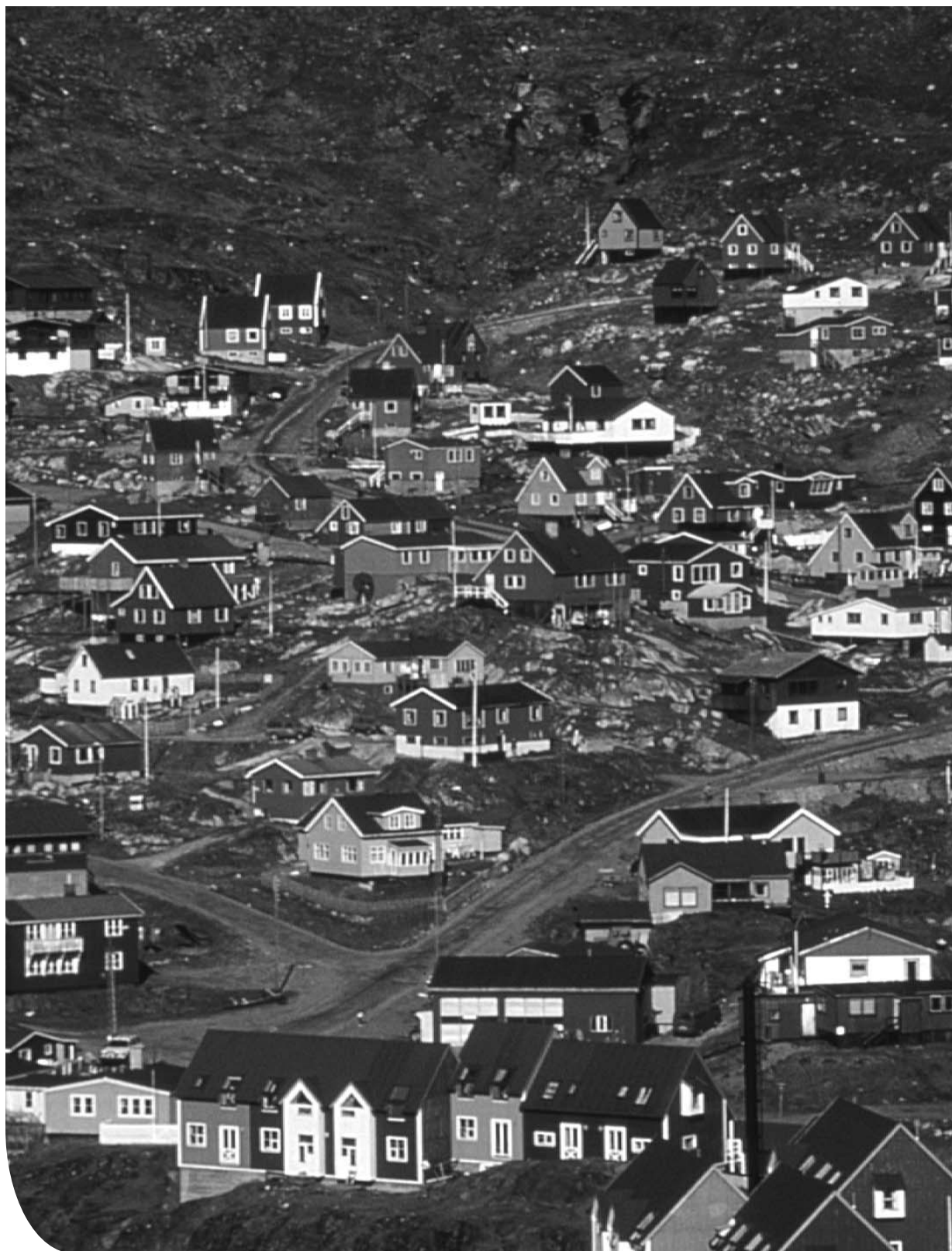
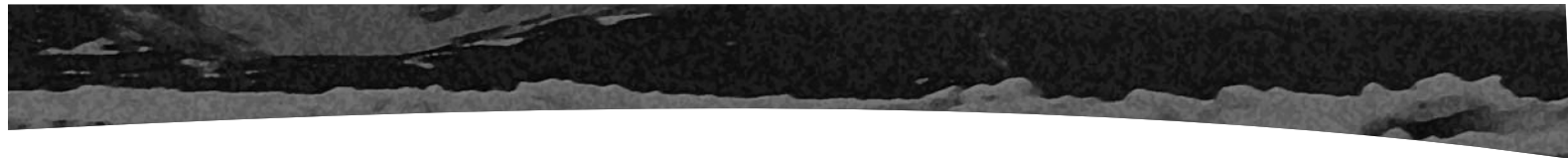
The Board provides the overall leadership and direction. The Board is where the “buck stops”—the final responsibility for all aspects of the organization. With their staff, they are an impressive group of dedicated, skilled and hard working individuals. It has been a pleasure for the researchers to have had participated in this study; however, the study has only scratched the surface and more research needs to be done. More research on the relationship between culture and decision-making needs to be done. Research-based information can assist in developing board training and determining methods for Board retention and renewal. The work has been ongoing and more needs to be done.

Megwetch to All Who Participated

Douglas Durst & Karen Martens Zimmerly

Feb. 17.05



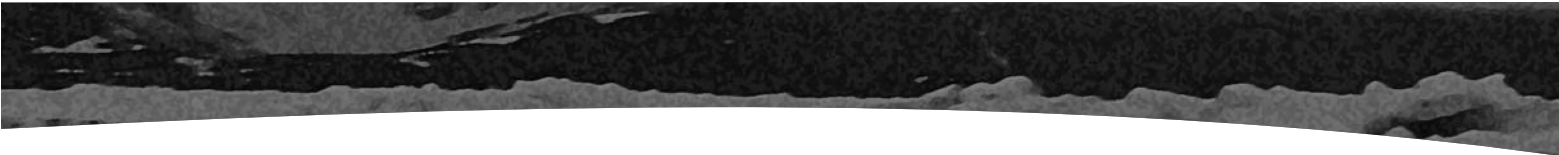


SECTION 5:

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SECTION 6:

APPENDICES

6.1 Description of Participating Organizations

National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)
www.nafc-aboriginal.com

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) provides leadership and coordination to the 117 Aboriginal Friendship Centres across Canada. The Friendship Centres provide services and programs to support the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people and assist in their inclusion and participation in urban life. The Mission Statement of the NAFC is “to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in urban environment by supporting self-determination activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in Canadian society; and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness”.

The Association will provide the mechanisms to reach the research participants and will provide a direction in developing appropriate questions for the self-administered questionnaire and telephone interviews. They will assist in the analysis and dissemination of the findings.

Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy (SIPP)
www.uregina.ca/sipp

The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy (SIPP) is a non-profit organization located in Regina. It is dedicated to improving public policy development through collaboration with stakeholders and researchers. The Institute is committed to inclusive, multi-disciplinary approaches to the analysis of complex policy problems.

**Social Policy Research Unit (SPR),
 University of Regina**
www.uregina.ca/spru

The Social Policy Research Unit is an independent research unit in the University of Regina whose mandate is to research social policy and program issues pertaining to marginalized and disadvantaged members of Canadian society. It has a long history and a substantive record of administrating and researching issues similar to this project. It is committed to collaborative and inclusive approaches to social research

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) provides leadership and coordination to the 117 Aboriginal Friendship Centres across Canada. The Friendship Centres provide services and programs to support the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people and assist in their inclusion and participation in urban life.

6.2 SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BEST GOVERNANCE PRACTICES OF URBAN, ABORIGINAL BOARDS

Practice	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have participated in board discussions about what we should do differently as a result of a mistake the board has made.				
2. This board takes regular steps to keep informed about important trends in the larger environment that might affect the organization.				
3. In discussing key issues, it is not unusual for someone on the board to talk about what this organization stands for and how that is related to the matter at hand.				
4. The board seeks to frame a discussion issue in the context of a holistic understanding of the world.				
5. This board communicates its decisions to everyone who is affected by them.				
6. I have never received feedback on my performance as a member of this board.				
7. This board is more involved in trying to put out fires than in preparing for the future.				
8. Leadership on this board is shared and voluntary.				
9. New members are provided with a detailed explanation of this organization's mission when they join the board.				
10. I have had conversations with other members of this board regarding common interests we share outside of this organization.				
11. I have been in board meetings in which it seemed that the subtleties of the issues we dealt with escaped the awareness of a number of the members.				
12. This board reviews the organization's mission at least once every five years.				
13. At least once a year, this board asks that the executive director articulate his or her vision for the organization's future and strategies to realize that vision.				
14. This board periodically sets aside time to learn more about important issues facing organizations such as the one we govern.				
15. This board values the equal participation of all its members.				
16. If our board thinks that an important group or constituency is likely to disagree with an action that we are considering, we will make sure that we learn how they feel before we actually make the decision.				
17. Differences of opinion in board decisions are more often settled by vote than by more discussion.				
18. When faced with an important issue, the board often "brainstorms" and tries to generate a whole list of creative approaches or solutions to the problem.				
19. One of the reasons that I joined this board was that I believe strongly in the values of this organization.				

Questionnaire continued on the next page



QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BEST GOVERNANCE PRACTICES OF URBAN, ABORIGINAL BOARDS—CONTINUED

Practice	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. This board has, on occasion, evaded responsibility for some important issue facing the organization.				
21. I have participated in board discussions about the effectiveness of our performance.				
22. This board has formed ad hoc committees or task forces that include staff as well as board members.				
23. This board gives higher priority to the needs of the group rather than individual needs.				
24. This board has made a key decision that I believe to be inconsistent with the mission of this organization.				
25. At our board meetings, there is at least as much dialogue among members as there is between members and administrators.				
26. The board periodically requests information on the morale of the professional staff.				
27. This board tries to avoid issues that are ambiguous and complicated.				
28. The board has conducted an explicit examination of its roles and responsibilities.				
29. This board avoids conflict but gains social control through an indirect and internal process.				
30. This board often discusses where the organization should be headed five or more years into the future.				
31. This board maintains a social expectation of mutual sharing.				
32. I am able to speak my mind on key issues without fear that I will be ostracized by some members of this board.				
33. I have been in board meetings in which the discussion focused on identifying or overcoming the organization's weakness.				
34. The administration rarely reports to the board on the concerns of those people that the organization serves.				
35. Recommendations from the administration are usually accepted with little questioning in board meetings.				
36. Values are seldom discussed explicitly at our board meetings.				
37. Members of this board seldom attend social events sponsored by this organization.				
38. The board discusses events and trends in the larger environment that may present specific opportunities for this organization.				
39. This board seeks information and advice from leaders of other similar organizations.				
40. This board has a high tolerance for individual members and their differences.				



Personal Data Questions:

First name: _____

Name of Friendship Centre:

Age: under 25 25-39 40-64 65+

Highest level of education:
 high school post secondary other

Employment:
 full-time part-time student at home retired

Occupation: _____

What is your ancestry? _____

Where do you come from? _____

How long have you been on the board of your Centre?

6.3 Questionnaire Categories and Corresponding Questions

The question numbers that are unlined are asked in the negative and were reversed to tabulate frequencies.

1. Contextual. The board understands and takes into account the culture, norms and values of the organization it governs.
3, 9, 12, 19, 24, 36
2. Educational. The board takes the necessary steps to ensure that members are well informed about the organization and the professions working there as well as the board's own roles, responsibilities and performance.
1, 6, 14, 21, 28
3. Interpersonal. The board nurtures the development of its members as a group, attends to the board's collective welfare, and fosters a sense of cohesiveness.
10, 17, 25, 32, 37
4. Analytical. The board recognizes complexities and subtleties in the issues it faces, and draws on multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and to synthesize appropriate responses.
2, 11, 18, 27, 35, 39
5. Political. The board accepts as one of its primary responsibilities the need to develop and maintain healthy relationships among all key constituencies.
5, 16, 22, 26, 34
6. Shapes Direction. The board envisions and shapes institutional direction and helps to ensure a strategic approach to the organization's future.
7, 13, 20, 30, 33, 38
7. Aboriginal Values: holistic understanding of the world, egalitarian, leadership that is diffused and voluntary, tolerance of individual members, priority of collective versus individual needs, avoidance of conflict, sharing and social obligations of reciprocity and indirect and internal mechanism of social control.
4, 8, 15, 23, 29, 31, 40

6.4 In-depth Qualitative Questions— Interview Guide

Introductory Questions about the Board

1. How many board members are there?
How many men/women?
2. Where do you meet?
3. How often do you meet?
4. Does everyone attend?
5. Where do the board members come from?
6. What kind of backgrounds do they represent?
Professional, social services, seniors...

Internal Functioning of the Board

1. What is the process for choosing board members?
Are there different roles? Different roles for men
or women?
2. What is the role of the board?
3. How are you equipped to do your work? Give
examples.
4. What kind of decisions does the board make?
Do you feel these are real decisions or are you
approving decisions that have already been made?
5. What is the process for dealing with issues and
making decisions? Do you make motions/
follow Robert's rules of order/consensus?
6. How is direction shaped for the Centre/how
does strategic planning happen?
7. How does the board evaluate its work?
8. What is the role of the Executive director?
The staff?

External Aspects of Board Governance

1. Who is affected by the decisions the board
makes? How is this communicated?
2. Where does vision for the Centre come from?
3. What is the process for moving from vision to
facilitating change?

Aboriginal Leadership and Decision Making

1. Are elders involved? How?
2. Are there Aboriginal practices your board
follows in identifying leaders? What are they?
3. Are there specific Aboriginal practices or
principles that are used in governance and
decision making? What are they?
4. Are there tensions between your traditional
cultural values and the decisions your board
must make? How do you address this?
5. What strengths do Aboriginal ways contribute
to your board governance?

Benefits to being on the Board

1. What are the personal, intrinsic benefits to
being on the board?
2. What are the extrinsic/ external benefits to
being on the board?
3. What keeps you committed and involved in
the Centre?

Personal Questions

male/female

1. How long have you been on the board?
2. What is your age category- under 25, 25–39,
40–64, 65+ ?
3. What is your education- high school, post
secondary, other
4. Employment—full-time, part-time, student,
at home
5. What is your ancestry? Where do you come from?
6. If you could make any improvements what
would they be?
7. Do you have any other comments you want to
make? Questions?