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Aboriginal Philanthropy: A Call to Action

“Aboriginal” and “philanthropy” are not words that come together often in Canada – and we want to change that.

The time is ripe to develop Aboriginal philanthropy in Canada – to foster the involvement of philanthropic organizations in Aboriginal communities and to develop Aboriginal support for and involvement in philanthropic organizations. Both these goals require learning and change for both parties – Aboriginal Peoples and philanthropic organizations.

This report sets out the opportunities and challenges for Aboriginal philanthropy in Canada and makes recommendations for how it might be done well. The community of Moose Deer Point provides a case study and a number of lessons for the future.

Our Indigenous communities are not charity cases, nor is philanthropy a new concept, though the word itself may not be familiar. Philanthropy, in the sense of caring for our fellow human beings, is a deeply held principle of Aboriginal peoples. We have always shared with each other, within our communities and between communities.

The traditional ways of philanthropic giving may not work for Aboriginal communities for a host of reasons that are outlined in this report. We are not looking for a one-way relationship, from a wealthy benefactor to a deserving cause. We are looking for a collaborative, multilateral relationship where all parties are committed to learning and growing. In return, we offer a deep engagement in growing, thriving communities that goes far beyond a grant application or a project report.

At the same time, every social indicator tells us that Aboriginal communities are deeply in need of development. Not only that, we are in need of collaboration and innovation, of new ways of doing things. We invite the philanthropic foundations of Canada to embark on an exciting journey with us and help us build our communities, from the basic infrastructure of roads, clean water and housing to the essentials of a thriving community – economic, social and cultural development.

“Our goal is to empower First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and individuals.”
1.0 Introduction

The concept for a research and discussion paper emerged from discussions between participants of the “All My Relations” gathering that took place in Winnipeg in 2008. Recognizing that there is still a lack of knowledge on new opportunities and ways of thinking related to Aboriginal-focused philanthropy, particularly in Canada, we felt that the time was right to look more closely at some of the issues.

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (CPAPC) partnered with United Way of Winnipeg to commission AMR Planning and Consulting (AMR) to produce a research paper on Aboriginal Philanthropy in Canada. Our goal was to produce a research-based discussion paper that would provide an overview of data, stories, perceptions, grant-making models and new opportunities and ways of thinking related to Aboriginal-focused philanthropy. This paper is intended as a means to share information and enhance our collective knowledge on Indigenous philanthropy in Canada. Additionally, it provides context for strengthening relationships between foundations and Canada’s First Peoples.

OUR RESEARCH OBJECTIVES WERE TO:

1. Produce a research-based discussion paper for distribution among philanthropic foundations and United Ways in Canada, providing an historical benchmark regarding the current context of Aboriginal grant-making, and suggesting areas for further research;

2. Highlight and map a spectrum of appropriate grant-making models and processes, in particular those which have demonstrated success;

3. Highlight potential areas of intervention where philanthropy could most usefully help advance Indigenous development and well-being; and,

4. Explore opportunities for developing philanthropic capacity in the Aboriginal community.

1 See the report on this event, All My Relations: A gathering to strengthen understanding between foundations and Aboriginal Canadians. June 10 & 11, 2008, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

2 “Philanthropy” refers here primarily to foundations — private, family, community, corporate or even some arms-length publicly funded foundations — which primarily make grants to charitable organizations, as well as to United Way/Centraide organizations.
1.1 **THE CIRCLE ON PHILANTHROPY & ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA (CPAPC)**

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is an open network of foundations and other individuals and organizations interested in promoting philanthropy (giving, sharing and social investing). The Circle is composed of independent, non-governmental institutions with resources and networks of influence that want to discover how to make strategic interventions that can “change the game.”

Our goal is to connect with and support the empowerment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations, communities and individuals in building a stronger, healthier future. We aim to serve as an open network to promote philanthropy (giving, sharing and social investing).

There is a broad base of interest in developing new opportunities and ways of thinking related to Aboriginal-focused philanthropy. This is due to many factors: the development of Indigenous foundations in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand; the desire among First Peoples for culturally appropriate, self-determined programs; and the aspirations of many foundations and non-Indigenous peoples to help facilitate this process.

A gathering that took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on June 10 and 11, 2008, marked the first time philanthropic foundations had assembled together with the aim to better understand Aboriginal peoples, communities and issues in Canada. This event was the start of a journey toward greater understanding and improving effectiveness in Aboriginal focused philanthropy, and a starting point to network and collaborate around Aboriginal peoples’ ideas and initiatives over the long term. As philanthropy evolves in Canada, a growing number of foundations are interested in learning about new opportunities and ways of deepening their engagement with Aboriginal communities and organizations. This gathering came to be known as All My Relations and a report summarizing the proceedings of the two days has become a foundational document for the development of The Circle.

The Winnipeg event served as an opportunity to begin a meaningful dialogue about the ways foundations and Aboriginal groups could learn from each other and collaborate to achieve the shared goal of strengthening Aboriginal priorities and outcomes in Canada and, ultimately, strengthening Canadian communities as a whole. The group discussed what foundations and Aboriginal groups can learn from each other, what the barriers and challenges are to establishing relationships and what steps can be taken to overcome challenges. A second All My Relations gathering took place at Blackfoot Crossing, Alberta, in October 2009.

Members of CPAPC agreed that in spite of some growing interest there is still a lack of knowledge about the scale, nature, context and diversity of Aboriginal-focused philanthropy in Canada. In addition, there is a lack of mutual awareness among foundations of which organizations are involved in such philanthropy and how. Finally, through CPAPC foundations are only beginning to share information and collaborate on Aboriginal-focused philanthropy. As the first All My Relations report highlights, other countries seem to be ahead of the curve on funder networking and collaboration in this respect.

“Foundations need to dig deeply to find ways to be a support.”

---

1 For the purposes of this document, “First Peoples” is used interchangeably with “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” as descriptors for First Nations people (urban/rural, status/non-status), Métis and Inuit, inclusive.
The following report presents the results of the research undertaken on behalf of CPAPC to further the relationship between Canadian First Peoples and the philanthropic community. The report begins by discussing the methodology used for data collection. We then contextualize the issues, providing statistics that outline some of the conditions for Aboriginal Peoples. This section is followed by analysis and summary of the findings, a case study, conclusions and recommendations.

### 1.2 THE REPORT

This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the research and the rationale for selecting specific parameters and challenges. To address the project objectives, multiple lines of evidence were employed, enabling us to answer questions by triangulating multiple perspectives and sources of information.

There are seven core components of the research:

1. Research design;
2. Literature review;
3. Review of any existing documents from member organizations;
4. Key informant interviews;
5. A survey of philanthropic organizations undertaken by CPAPC;
6. A comprehensive case study; and,
7. Integrated analysis and reporting.

Each of the components is described in the report. The results of components 2 through 5, with analysis and reporting, are presented in Chapter 3. The case study is presented in Chapter 4. Conclusions and recommendations from the entire report are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.
The major objectives of research design are to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the study issues and to prepare a research matrix, including questions and data sources. This crucial first step is the foundation for a mutual understanding of the issues and tasks at hand on the part of both the research team and CPAPC.

One of the first issues we encountered was the idea that this research was not well suited to a linear line of inquiry. To meet our goals and objectives, we had to develop multiple lines of inquiry with a variety of stakeholders who exist and function within different world views. Ultimately, we decided to structure our findings in a holistic framework, using the medicine wheel\(^4\) to guide data collection and reporting processes.

---

\(^4\)The framework for research as suggested here is adapted from the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (2007).
AMR, The Circle and United Way of Winnipeg worked closely to ensure that the objectives of the study were met, confirm the study issues and ensure that the reviewers had access to relevant documentation and administrative data. The Circle provided names of key partners and stakeholders and worked with the research team to identify, prioritize and refine the research questions.

For each research question we selected indicators and data sources, both quantitative and qualitative, to reflect multiple lines of evidence. The data collection tools included:

• A survey of philanthropic/grant-making organizations and select First Peoples leadership and organizations;
• Key informant interview guides; and,
• A case study template.

The Circle reviewed and approved all data collection tools before AMR proceeded to data collection.

“We realized there was a disconnect between how important engagement with First Nations should be and how little it was happening.”
The literature review began with resources collected by CPAPC and posted on the CPAPC website or recommended by the CPAPC leadership group. Further independent research was conducted from an academic base primarily rooted in the social sciences, but also looking at business, philanthropy and ecology. As others have stated, the literature that informs this topic is sparse and little has been produced within Canada. The scope of the literature review was work recently published in Canada and internationally.

The literature review focused on relationships between philanthropic and grant-making models and First Peoples. It was also used to identify potential areas of intervention where philanthropy could best advance Indigenous development and well-being.

The purpose of the literature review was to identify similar work being done either on a smaller scale in North America or internationally and efforts in other jurisdictions to articulate the roles and relationship between First Peoples and philanthropic organizations. An example of the literature available internationally is Wendy Scaife’s 2006 study, “Challenges in Indigenous Philanthropy: Reporting Australian Grantmakers’ Perspectives.”

Specifically, the literature review undertook to:

- Identify what the situation is elsewhere;
- Identify some of the current thinking in philanthropy around social change;
- Identify some of the issues involved in relationships with governments;
- Identify paradigms and institutional approaches most effective for sustained changes; and,
- Examine the cultural gap that exists between foundations, business and governments with respect to grant-making in Indigenous communities.

“At Moose Deer Point, we explored the lessons learned in a successful philanthropic partnership.”

---

2.3 REVIEW OF EXISTING FOUNDATION DATA AND DOCUMENTATION

In addition to the literature review outlined above, we also reviewed the following documentation and data:

- Foundation documentation and data;
- All My Relations reports (2008 and 2009);
- Initial results of a benchmark survey on philanthropy in Aboriginal communities conducted by CPAPC; and,
- Existing socio-economic data on First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Canada.

2.4 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

We conducted interviews with philanthropic organizations in Canada purposefully selected from a list provided by CPAPC leadership. CPAPC consulted with its network of foundations to develop the list.

To select key informants, we developed a matrix to ensure representation from:

- East, West and North;
- Urban and rural communities;
- CPAPC member organizations and non-member organizations;
- Aboriginal organizations;
- Government; and,
- Public, community, private and family foundations.

Four different guides for structured interviews were developed. Of 24 individuals selected as key informants, 17 responded to the request and were interviewed. The respondents included seven CPAPC member organizations, four non-CPAPC members, four Aboriginal organizations and two federal government employees. The interview guide was sent to each respondent prior to the interview to allow them to reflect on their answers in preparation for the interview. All interviews were conducted by telephone, with the responses recorded and/or hand written and later transcribed. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length, with the average time from 30 to 45 minutes.
2.5 CASE STUDY

A case study allows for an in-depth exploration of a successful relationship between a philanthropic organization and an Aboriginal community. The case study allowed us to go deep with a community and explore in depth the best practices, benefits, key successes, strengths, potential pitfalls – and how to avoid them – and lessons learned in a partnership already underway. We considered several options for case studies, assessing their merits in terms of time, accessibility and resources. We chose Moose Deer Point First Nation and Niigon Technologies for several factors:

- The project is contained within a First Nation community;
- It involves a major foundation along with three levels of government;
- A community visit and key interviews could be conducted within a reasonable time frame; and,
- The project was referred to several times as a model by key informants.

We used the following lines of evidence for the case study:

- Document review of available Census information and other community profile data to develop a community snapshot;
- Site visit to the community; and,
- Key informant interviews with community, service and agency representatives, stakeholders and partners, and other community representatives who could add value and insight.

Questions for the key informant interviews were similar to those used for the interviews described above, asked and answered with a local focus.

2.6 CAVEATS

This research is based on available literature, interviews with key informants and a single case study. It is primarily qualitative and highly exploratory in nature. It may raise more questions than it answers. However, we believe these characteristics support the goal of furthering dialogue on Aboriginal peoples and philanthropy in Canada. This report should be viewed as continuing and contributing to a conversation – not a definitive conclusion. The recommendations represent an analysis of the literature, synthesis of the interviews and summary of the findings from the case study.
ABORIGINAL PHILANTHROPY IN CANADA: A Foundation for Understanding
3.0 Report on the Findings

3.1 CONTEXT

All sectors of Canadian society – government, corporate and philanthropic – have a stake in, and share responsibility for, the well-being of Aboriginal peoples and communities. To date, the dominant role played by government has overshadowed and perhaps even excused the comparatively small role of philanthropy. This was evident in both the literature review and interviews with foundations.

For example, a 2009 report commissioned by the Office of the Federal Interlocutor makes several recommendations for community economic development for the Aboriginal population of Winnipeg. Each of these recommendations has the potential for philanthropic involvement, but nowhere does the report refer to or suggest that there may be potential partnership opportunities with foundations. Similarly, and also in Manitoba, First Peoples Economic Growth Fund Inc. (FPEGF) was founded in 2008 to support Manitoba First Nation business proposals through funding and skill development programs. FPEGF partners include the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), the Province of Manitoba and, in 2009, the government of Canada. Partnerships with foundations appear to be a missed opportunity.

Samantha Nadjiwan and Cindy Blackstock’s 2003 seminal work on voluntary sector funding and First Nations found that less than 10 per cent of funds raised on reserve (separate from government funding) came from philanthropic foundations. While no breakdown has been done in Canada as to the amount of foundation funding that goes to Aboriginal communities, recent data from the US revealed that Indigenous development accounted for less than one-twentieth of one per cent of all foundation grant-making. The situation may be marginally better in Canada, but there is little doubt that foundations are either not known or poorly understood among Aboriginal communities and organizations, and philanthropy has not, overall, played a significant role in Indigenous development in Canada.

“Canadians donate $10 billion annually to charitable institutions. Little goes to Aboriginal communities.”

2 FPEGF website, http://www.firstpeoplesfund.ca/
3 Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003).
4 This is one of many insights offered in Wendy Scaife’s Challenges in Indigenous Philanthropy: Reporting Australian grantmakers’ perspectives.
The lack of philanthropic involvement in Aboriginal community development does not reflect a lack of need. Data on the issues facing Aboriginal peoples is easy to find. The following highlights are drawn from the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, the 2006 Census of Population and the 2006 Aboriginal Children’s Survey.

- The number of people who identified as Aboriginal (North American Indian/First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit) surpassed the one million mark, reaching 1,172,790, and accounting for almost four per cent of the total population of Canada, up from 3.3 per cent in 2001 and 2.8 per cent in 1996.

- The Aboriginal population in Canada is growing extremely fast. According to Statistics Canada, the Aboriginal population grew by 45 per cent from 1996 to 2006, nearly six times faster than the eight per cent increase for the non-Aboriginal population.

- Of the three Aboriginal groups in Canada, the Métis experienced the greatest increase in the past decade. Their number grew 91 per cent, reaching 389,785 people in 2006. This was more than three times as fast as the 29 per cent increase in First Nations people, whose number reached 698,025. The Inuit increased 26 per cent, to 50,485.

- The Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. Almost half (48 per cent) of the Aboriginal population consists of children and youth aged 24 and under, compared with 31 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.

- About nine per cent of the Aboriginal population was aged four and under, nearly twice the proportion (five per cent) of the non-Aboriginal population of the same age.

- There were approximately 7,000 Inuit, 35,000 Métis and 47,000 off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six across Canada, according to the 2006 Census.

- Nearly half (49 per cent) of off-reserve First Nations children under age six were in low-income families, compared with 18 per cent of non-Aboriginal children. Dissatisfaction with housing was over twice as high for those living in low-income families than for those not in low-income families (22 per cent versus 9 per cent).

- Compared to non-Aboriginal children, higher percentages of young Aboriginal children are growing up in large families and with young parents. Among Aboriginal children under six years old more than one-quarter (27 per cent) had mothers between the ages of 15 and 24, compared to 8 per cent of non-Aboriginal children.

- A significantly larger proportion of Canadian Aboriginal children aged 14 and under lived with a lone mother (29 per cent) compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (14 per cent).

- More Aboriginal children aged 14 and under lived with a lone father (six per cent) compared to the non-Aboriginal population (three per cent).

The above demographics illustrate the key issues facing Aboriginal people: the population is young, growing and disproportionately growing up in poor homes. In addition, the Assembly of First Nations notes:

“A considerable gap in educational achievement and inputs exists with respect to First Nations education. Funding for First Nations education has been capped at two per cent since 1996, whereas transfer payments to provinces have been increasing by six per cent annually. This discriminatory double standard in the provision of comparable inputs has been allowed to exist despite: i) numerous pledges by the Federal Government to address the education attainment gap; ii) the fact that the First Nations population is growing at twice the rate of the mainstream Canadian population; and iii) that by 2020 over 50 per cent of the First Nations population will be under the age of 25.”

Assembly of First Nations (August 13, 2010).
Wendy Scaife, in answer to the question of why giving to Indigenous causes warrants special interest, states that firstly, Indigenous needs are some of the deepest in society and span funding arenas as diverse as conservation, health, youth, education, housing, economic development, poverty, world peace, human rights, arts, employment, sustainable development and social justice. Further, from an impact perspective, the world’s 350 million Indigenous people spread across 90 countries contribute largely to the world’s cultural diversity, and some 80 per cent of the world’s remaining biodiversity is found within their lands (International Funders for Indigenous Peoples 2006; Funders Network 2006)\(^1\).

According to Statistics Canada, in 2007 Canadians donated $10 billion dollars to charitable institutions\(^2\). Yet little of this funding finds its way to Aboriginal communities, in spite of the obvious need and regardless of the responsibility that government, business and philanthropy share for the well-being of Aboriginal peoples and communities. This is the unrealized opportunity that we seek to understand and to introduce into the dialogue between Aboriginal Peoples and foundations. The time is ripe to change the relationships between foundations and Aboriginal communities. A growing number of philanthropic foundations in Canada want to learn about and deepen their engagement with Aboriginal communities. This includes community foundations, which operate at a local and typically urban scale, as well as corporate, private and family foundations, which operate at regional, national or even international scales. Change at every level is within our reach.

“Decisions are made based on emotions.”

\(^1\) Scaife (2006), page 1.
ABORIGINAL PHILANTHROPY IN CANADA: A Foundation for Understanding
This research report is designed to answer a few key questions about philanthropy and Aboriginal peoples in Canada:

- What factors affect the relationship between philanthropy and First Peoples?
- How are priorities for philanthropy developed and how should they be developed to assist Aboriginal Peoples?
- What are the gaps in knowledge and understanding between foundations and First Peoples?
- What are the myths and assumptions about philanthropy and First Peoples that need to be addressed?
- What are the benefits to be gained from an improved relationship between foundations and First Peoples?
- What are the unique abilities of foundations to effect real change?

Each line of evidence, question and resulting analysis was integrated into the framework of the medicine wheel (at right). Based on this framework, each question above was answered with an integrated analysis of the relevant information sources. This analysis is presented below.

**3.2 INTEGRATED ANALYSIS**

**MENTAL**
- Literature review
- Documents review
- Survey results
- Analysis - Identifying mutual education opportunities
- Identifying perspectives and models

**SPIRITUAL**
- Interviews
- Case study
- Analysis - Recognizing values of Aboriginal peoples and CPAPC partners
- Exploring concepts of “charity” vs “social change”

**PHYSICAL**
- Case study
- Interviews
- Analysis - Developing recommendations for change (sustainability)
- Call to action

**EMOTIONAL**
- Literature review
- Interviews
- Case study
- Analysis - Identifying the steps to build strong, respectful working relationships
- Unpacking the donor-donee relationships
The Relationship Between Philanthropy & First Peoples

To understand Aboriginal philanthropy in Canada, we first have to consider philanthropy in Canada. In its simplest definition, philanthropy is altruistic concern for humankind, often as manifested by charitable acts or donations. In terms of specific funding patterns, philanthropy in Canada is largely directed to specific groups and endeavours. In general, as one respondent stated, funding trends are dismal for marginalized groups and grassroots community causes.

A 2007 report published by The Offord Group reported the areas supported by charitable organizations in Canada.

2005 giving by categories of 60,871 registered and charitable organizations in Canada13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religion represents the largest sector receiving investment, with 49 per cent of charitable funding in 2005. The second largest sector is welfare, which includes disaster funds, protection of animals, charitable trusts, service clubs and community organizations. Any amount given to support sustained social change is so small as to be insignificant.

The relationship between religion and philanthropy is important for several reasons. First, it may speak to what many of the foundations referred to as the conservative nature of many foundations. In a recently published paper from Ryerson University Faculty of Business, Ida Berger states: “Religious affiliation and self-perceived religiosity appear to be important as influences on philanthropic variance. Those who are non-religiously affiliated are the least philanthropic, while those who identify themselves as conservative Protestants are the most philanthropic.”14

Second, the close relationship of religion to philanthropy may illuminate one aspect of the disconnect between foundations and First Peoples. Among the three types of foundations that exist in Canada – public foundations, private foundations and charitable organizations – private foundations control considerable assets. According to Philanthropic Foundations Canada, the top 20 private (mostly family) foundations control assets that total $6.1 billion, and overall, private foundations control more assets than public foundations ($19.4 billion compared to $16.8 billion)15.

One foundation representative described private foundations as follows: “foundations are family driven and often have small Boards. Most Boards are old hybrids of family and non-family. They are made up of private wealth – decisions are made based on emotion. The decision making is spiritual and emotional – it’s what grabs people.” The informant no doubt meant “spirit” in the secular sense, but we can also connect “spiritual” in this context to the foundation’s religious affiliation, as is often done within the Christian worldview. That worldview, which dominates philanthropic giving, differs significantly from Aboriginal worldviews and spirituality.

On the topic of spirituality, religion and philanthropy, Native American author Jo-Anne Stately writes, “I must confess to a perceived and yet real reluctance even to speak about spirituality. Spirituality is something that is interwoven to all aspects of my life. Without spirituality I would not and could not continue.” She ties her spirituality as an Indian woman (and the spirituality of American Indians) to the very survival of the culture of Native Americans. There is, she states, “no separation between our concept of a power that is greater than we are ‘two legged,’ or human, and all those things in creation that we cannot understand or explain.” Stately’s holistic perspective on spirituality is one part of the Indigenous world view that conflicts with traditional, or dominant, forms of philanthropy.

Another key informant corroborates this key point. When asked “what are some of the challenges in foundations and First Peoples working together?”, a foundation respondent stated:
“The worldview, which is dominant in the sector (but not exclusive to it). A notion of doing charity, a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities to each other and the planet, a lack of understanding of the necessity of both giving and receiving, an attitude that there is something wrong with Indigenous peoples or something we lack as opposed to seeing that we all have some spiritual growing to do. That Indigenous peoples are victims that need to be helped or supported by people who somehow know better than [them] rather than looking at true partnership.

“A lack of understanding of history, the ongoing nature of colonialism; there is still a belief that underlies a lot of work that suggests Indians just need to be more like Europeans to be better off – teach [them] entrepreneurial skills, for example, without a clear analysis that those models of business are basically what got us into this situation to begin with. Where did wealth in Canada come from to begin with? It is made by exploiting lands and resources of Indigenous peoples.”

Spirituality and religion are deeply important to many foundations and to Aboriginal peoples – yet their understandings of spirituality and religion differ significantly. An open, respectful dialogue about the role of religion in philanthropy must be part of building understanding between foundations and Aboriginal peoples.

“Philanthropy gives to issues, but a more holistic approach is needed.”
ABORIGINAL PHILANTHROPY IN CANADA: A Foundation for Understanding
Priorities – Who Says?

Closely related to the issue of worldviews is the issue of who sets priorities for funding, alluded to in the quote above.

Indigenous priorities are many, varied and significant, crossing all areas of existing philanthropic pursuits. Conventionally, most philanthropic organizations, indeed most Canadians, have tended to frame their concern for First Peoples in terms of “issues” or “challenges” such as substandard housing, poor water treatment, unequal education investment at all levels, vulnerability of language and culture, diabetes, proximity to extractive activities, access to capital, languishing land claims and racism. Both the literature review and key informant interviews highlighted the need to move away from issue or challenge centred thinking to a more holistic vision.

Respondents from foundations that have successful relationships with First Peoples or want to expand these relationship and from Aboriginal organizations emphasized the importance of self-determination as a cornerstone of success. Many respondents stated emphatically that the priorities needed to be identified by First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples themselves. One respondent stated “I'm not going to guess that, I mean I don't know that; I'm not Aboriginal. Aboriginal people can tell us what their needs are.” Self-determination has been a value of First Nations in Canada throughout their history and remains central to the structure of successful relationships between First Peoples and all sectors of Canadian society. As one respondent stated: “First Nations need to be a player and shape their own development, including the development of lands and resources.”

While those interviewed did not presume to speak on behalf of First Peoples, they were articulate about what they perceived to be some of the priority areas for funding in Aboriginal communities. Economic development was cited most often as a priority area; one respondent described the range of issues related to economic development as follows:

“What I hear is that the emphasis is on economic self-sufficiency and revenue generators and a means to address the second tier issues of independent governance; the ability to steward lands and resources and participate on equal footing; social programs and economic activity and the specifics of social programming. Primarily, economic development as a means to job creation, to help with the social programs.”

Infrastructure also was mentioned a number of times, particularly as it related to the economy. One respondent stated:

“The economic and building infrastructure in most Aboriginal communities is so poor, so far behind that it impacts everything. There are very, very few organizations and foundations that I'm aware of that support anything to do with infrastructure. Without that kind of infrastructure it’s difficult to function as a healthy community. Local communities in middle Manitoba have a curling rink, a skating rink, and offer hockey, ringette, anything to do with winter activities. Similar size communities in First Nations areas have nothing and that impacts their ability to do things that their neighbours do.”

Education is another priority area that was identified by several respondents. One respondent elaborated:

“Education is high on the list, and the landscape against which it plays out. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) study also points out that it is not just scholarship, but that Aboriginal youth need support – peers and mentorship. We need to provide youth with support in terms of family – that’s where they get their support. Other areas are poverty and all that’s involved with that, bullying. The AFN’s interest in post-secondary education and role models, quality of life comparative to everyone else.”
The other priorities as stated by those interviewed included:

- Self-sufficiency, skill development, higher levels of education and a total restructure of their relationship with government.
- Funding, governance, education, early childhood, business, issues because of the Indian Act.
  - Land, resources, language, culture, women and youth.
  - Housing, education, quality food, poor quality and expensive fruit and vegetables, lack of recreation, issues around who owns the housing, building healthy communities.
  - Water on reserves, economic opportunities.

None of these problems lend themselves to a quick fix and many are interrelated. Moreover, trying to prioritize these issues leads us back into the same kind of thinking that First Peoples are understandably cautious of: compartmentalizing and thinking in terms of issues and challenges. Responses to the question of priority areas for funding in Aboriginal communities demonstrated that many foundations have some understanding of the needs in these communities. More importantly, they understand the need for self-determination on the part of First Peoples. Also of concern to this report is the fit between First Peoples’ needs and the priorities of the foundations.

Each foundation sets its own funding priorities: for public foundations, these are set by the governing Board of Directors; for private foundations, priorities are often based on the interests and passions of the family that established the foundation. Whether their priorities are broadly defined or narrowly specific, many foundations share priorities with Aboriginal communities. Some examples are:

- Youth as future community leaders;
- Early childhood education and anti-poverty;
- Environmental education, wildlife and habitat, stewardship and conservation;
- Positive youth engagement and youth-led initiatives;
- Empower girls and women and Aboriginal youth; and,
- Fresh water resource protection across Canada.

However, the most pressing need of Aboriginal communities – economic self-sufficiency and development – is not addressed by any foundation in Canada.

“When programs are driven by the community, the change comes from inside.”
Across the Divide: Bridging Gaps in Knowledge & Understanding

The gulf between First Peoples and foundations in a number of areas was evident throughout the data collection for this report. We asked key informants from foundations two questions to help us understand this issue:

1. What do you need to know about First Peoples to develop better relationships?
2. What do First Peoples need to know about philanthropy?

Their responses fell into several categories: length or term of funding; remoteness of some First Nation communities; navigating different processes; and recognition of diversity. However, key informants emphasized that the most important factor in bridging the divide is respectful communication. Respondents from foundations and Aboriginal organizations stated clearly what was repeated in the literature: both parties need to clarify assumptions, investigate myths and have the ‘hard conversations.’

Comments from informants are presented below:

• Unfortunately, many foundations do not take a long term view. With my limited experience working with First Nations, there have been concerns with regard to legal complications when providing services, such as tax issues – how do you tax First Nations? Accessibility is difficult on both sides because of remote locations. Aboriginal people like to meet and discuss face-to-face, which creates the issue of associated costs pertaining to travel. Navigating First Nations processes is difficult for funders.

• We try to peg certain situations and put them in the same place. There’s so much diversity with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, north/south issues, urban. We get some organizations that work with some communities and then become “experts.” As a foundation, we need to maintain a balance between Aboriginal organizations and the mainstream.

• Find the right synergies. Be flexible in your approach. If you’re rigid, and only fund green balloons, then the organization will become a green balloon. It doesn’t maximize community potential.

• I feel there is a real need for a shift in thinking. Einstein said that you can’t solve a problem with the same thinking that created the problem. I don’t think the sector realizes the depth of the changes in thinking that are needed to make real change. We need to work together to come up with new thinking so we can create something better for all of us.

• There are gaps in information. The difficulties in building personal relationships are huge; we don’t hear about, don’t know, don’t see Aboriginal people. They are separate; it is rare for people in the foundation community to know or see Aboriginal people. We are trying to attract more Aboriginal people to come into the foundation circle; foundations need to dig deeply to find ways to be a support. The challenges are there because of residential schools and the intergenerational effects. There’s a different mode of communication; foundations are all about paper versus oral communication and traditions.

• Foundations are forced to spread their resources thin and it is hard to forge relationships over a long time. No one community has a really long relationship with a foundation. In the longer term ones, a special relationship develops.

• We need to be respectful of the autonomy needs of the Nations – who they are, etc. We need to do our homework, what are the challenges, what do they face? For example, transportation, fuel to heat with; there’s nothing worse than going in clueless: it’s disrespectful. We must do our homework – listen, recognize and respect.
There is no evidence that charitable funding threatens government funding to Aboriginal people.”
Respondents described some of the key challenges to building effective communication as lack of understanding, the isolation and remoteness of many First Nation communities and issues related to finances. One respondent said: “It was a challenge for face-to-face meetings. They were not truly understanding the finances – and this goes both ways. Communities are underfunded; there is a lack of transparency that is not necessarily deliberate.”

Effective communication between foundations and First Peoples is especially important because they come from different cultures and must establish a common understanding to work together. Respondents note that people, even with the best of intentions, make assumptions that our way of proceeding is appropriate. For example, many foundations think of social inclusion in terms of belonging, acceptance and recognition and that it entails full and equal participation in economic, social, cultural and political institutions. They might expect First Peoples to readily embrace social inclusion as a concept. As one foundation learned, this wasn’t so:

“The foundation was involved in developing some work on social inclusion and we invited people to provide papers on what it might look like. We found that Aboriginal peoples are not comfortable with the language of social inclusion as, to them, we heard that it represented another aspect of assimilation.”

Most foundation representatives interviewed felt that foundations needed to change their established ways of doing business to develop more productive relationships with First Peoples. One respondent said: “I find foundations are very conservative and that there are few progressive foundations in Canada. The degree to which they are transparent is small. Directories are not very clear.”

Another stated: “I’m less concerned about the specific facts that need to be presented than I am about the manner of presentation of the facts about foundations. While community people find printed materials and websites helpful, this isn’t the way that Indian people prefer to learn. Funders are always getting invited to communities so that we can experience each other, talk with each other and better understand each other. This isn’t the way that foundations generally operate, although many of them have managed to make time for that.”

It is clear that foundations who truly desire to deepen their relationship with First Peoples will have to find ways to communicate that are relevant to Aboriginal people.

The different cultures of philanthropy and First Peoples cannot be underestimated. Foundations often require considerable paperwork with standardized expectations and tight turn-around times that make the process of applying for funding a barrier in itself. In addition, if the project doesn’t fit into the foundations’ exact guidelines, changes may be requested that compromise the original vision, integrity and control of the project. An Aboriginal key informant who works in the non-profit sector described the process of applying for grant funding:

“Tedious, time-consuming and disappointing ...ABC Agency was approved for funding a few years ago from both the XYZ Foundation and 123 Foundation consecutively. However, when meeting with the foundations’ representatives after the approval process, far too many changes were requested to the original proposal and too much control of the project was stipulated. The decision was to decline the funding rather than jeopardize the intent of the original project.”

“When funders move into Indigenous communities they tread a very fine line.”
According to the informant, the funding declined was over $100,000. As stated by Ken Gordon, CEO of the Seattle-based Potlatch Fund:

“When funders move into Indigenous communities they tread a very fine line. On one side of the line they have a duty to undertake sufficient investigation to ensure that they properly understand a funding request and their own role in relation to it. On the other side, obtaining the information may conflict with the ability to acknowledge and give appropriate respect to the applicant’s culture and its bounds.”

Communication is not a one-way street. One informant explained:

“Just as much as foundations need to understand their [First Peoples’] culture, they [First Peoples] need to understand the culture of private foundations and community foundations because they certainly are not homogeneous. They [First Peoples] need to spend time in educating themselves about how foundations work and about how the current grant application process works and to know how people access money.”

Another informant pointed out:

“At the front end, they need to develop an understanding of the various philanthropies. There is a wide range of what motivates philanthropic players. A level of flexibility is important as likely the best early relationships demonstrate flux on both sides as opposed to rigidity. Consideration should be made to process, due diligence and grant making priorities.”

Several foundation respondents stated that it was only respectful to do their homework when developing relationships with First Peoples and not rely solely on the community to educate the foundation. One respondent stated that foundations need to find out “who they [First Peoples] are, cultural approaches and how they differ, diversity and the place from which the community comes. The socio-economic status, education, economic culture, traditions; what are the entry points, and what are their priorities. Solid work needs to be community driven and owned.” Once the foundation has learned the background and checked its assumptions, the foundation must listen to the people. One foundation respondent described the effort put into developing a strong relationship with First Nations:

“We have national support and regional leaders involved on our advisory committee. If a company wants to build the Aboriginal component with Aboriginal staff, if they are serious about it, they need to make Aboriginal people part of the decision-making process, make it real and visible. Don’t just do community visits…go and spend a few days, learn how Aboriginal people live, go visit and get a feel for the life. It will help in building policy for awareness. Strike a balance, be generic and sensitive and give it a longer life.”

Developing effective communication and building successful relationships will take effort from both foundations and Aboriginal communities, but it is necessary to ensure the long-term success of the relationship and achieve lasting change.

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17 Gordon, K. (2008), page 13
Key informants described a number of myths and knowledge gaps that pose barriers to developing relationships between foundations and Aboriginal communities. Some informants pointed out that foundations don’t respond well to criticism; the emphasis in changing mindsets must be on exploring myths.

Myth #1: First Nations communities are not eligible for foundation grants because they cannot be registered charities.

This is one of the pervasive myths surrounding funding to First Nations communities. As one respondent put it: “Bands can’t be registered charities and they (the foundation) are not interested in the ‘ways around.’ Anything that is presented as a way around is a barrier.” This perceived barrier was mentioned several times. However, another foundation member stated: “There is a myth of the perceived legal barriers and the lack of good information on how easily surmountable the barriers are. Someone called the other day and said they were told outright at other foundations that they didn’t qualify because they didn’t have a charitable tax number. As a First Nation, they are a self-governing nation and are considered a government and, therefore, no charitable number is needed. In addition, a host of Aboriginal organizations are registered charities and some organizations and communities have partnered to get around this.”

Myth #2: Charitable funding to Aboriginals may result in reduced federal funding.

Canada, through Treaties with First Nations, entered into a series of commitments to provide services to First Peoples. In all cases – health, education, maternal-child care, child welfare and welfare – the actual need far exceeds the funding provided. Federal funding commitments are problematic for both foundations and First Nations. If a community applies for support, for example, for a school, the foundation might say that this is Canada’s responsibility. Likewise, a First Nation may not consider applying to a foundation for school funding because they also believe that this is Canada’s responsibility. Both parties may feel that by entering into a funding agreement, they will be allowing the government of Canada to renege on its responsibilities. This concern was voiced by several foundation respondents, all saying that philanthropy is reluctant to get involved in funding First Peoples in case the Canadian state sees this as an opportunity to withdraw from its fiduciary responsibility to First Peoples.

There is no evidence that there has ever been a threat of cutbacks based on partnerships with foundations. In many urban communities, foundations are involved in the Urban Aboriginal Strategy. As one government respondent stated: “We are living in a fiscally restrained environment; we are not likely to get more money. I think that we have to work with Aboriginal communities and foundations – it has to be a multilateral discussion. There may be times that government has discussions with foundations and Aboriginal communities and organizations but at some point all of these discussions have to take place together. I don’t think that the government alone has to indicate or raise awareness within foundations in terms of issues facing Aboriginal people. I think organizations and Aboriginal communities are the best place to do that. We can, as government, broker that relationship.”

Myth #3: Federal funding for Aboriginal communities is adequate.

Perhaps the greatest myth of all is that First Nations peoples are adequately provided for under the Treaty arrangements.

The Assembly of First Nations pointed out in the 2007 pre-budget submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance that a two per cent funding cap imposed on core programs and services in 1996 constituted a shortfall of $1.3 billion for education and skills development by 2007. One respondent noted: “A poll was conducted on comparison of public funding for non-Aboriginal and First Nations. Overall, non-Aboriginal children receive 56 per cent more per person per year in public funding than First Nations. Aboriginal programs are consistently underfunded. There is an underlying inequality. I feel foundations need to become more political to achieve effective change.”

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18 One of the requirements for funding from foundations is the need for the receiving agent to have a charitable tax number.
19 In Winnipeg, both United Way of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Foundation are partners in the Urban Aboriginal Strategy.
20 Assembly of First Nations (September 2007).
“The capacity of First Nations people to keep their heads above water is phenomenal given what they have to deal with.”
The inequity in funding is plainly evident in economic, social and health outcomes. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, Aboriginal peoples continue to fall far behind on every social determinant of health\(^{21}\). As noted above, almost half the Aboriginal children in Canada under the age of six live in poverty.

One of the government respondents stated:

“The total amount of funding (from Canada to Aboriginal peoples) is actually $11 billion across the government. Foundations may say ‘wow that’s a lot of money;’ however when you know that 65 per cent of that money is for municipal-like services, it’s not a whole lot of money. Then when you look at the outcome, far too many Aboriginal people are living in poverty, facing serious health challenges, it’s a young population... Two billion dollars is dedicated specifically for non-insured health benefits. This is part of the problem; we need to identify where all the money is going. We would like to work with others. There is private sector, public/private partnerships. Are there opportunities for foundations to assist with the infrastructure because we know that’s critical to the well-being of individuals?”

Myths about the level of federal funding to Aboriginal people persist, in part, because of the social and geographic divisions between many Aboriginal people and foundations. Philanthropy for the most part, one respondent stated, is made up of people who live in urban settings, a certain socio-economic strata, and have no experience and no contact with Aboriginal people. The media is their only information source. The respondent pointed out:

“There are some skewed ideas such as that First Nation governments (chief and council) change all the time. Well, governments at every level change all the time...it’s what democracy is about. There are lots of funny ideas, but the real problem is the lack of relationship connection. In Canadian philanthropy, there’s a lack of familiarity, a lack of understanding the circumstances of First Nation people. There are cultural chasms. There are a host of assumptions, the main one being that First Nations are adequately taken care of by the Canadian state. It is racism and cultural misunderstanding. The capacity of First Nations Peoples to keep their heads above water socially, economically, politically, etc., is phenomenal given what they have to deal with. The dialogue with philanthropy is not high on First Nations agendas. Canada is not interested in supporting First Nations to handle their own money. The history of the welfare state in Canada is the history of Aboriginal peoples and the crown – a host of prejudices get played out.”

There is an opportunity for foundations to change these relationships – and to change the perception of who Aboriginal people are.

**Myth #4: Private foundations administer private money; they cannot be held publicly accountable for how it is used.**

Another myth is the fundamental question that divides some foundations of whose money is involved. One respondent stated “If it is private money, they are seen as a private foundation, but it is important to remember that the [family] got a nice tax write-off for setting up their foundation. In terms of accountability, the bar isn’t very high; foundations need to make only minimal grants to get the tax benefits.”

**Benefits of Improved Relationships**

All respondents were asked what they thought were the benefits to be gained from improved relationships between foundations and First Peoples. Key informants agreed that there were many benefits to be gained including:

- The philanthropic sector learning about the foundational issues confronting communities and Indigenous organizations and increased understanding of what will make fundamental and lasting change.
- Indigenous leaders learning to better express themselves and challenge models of philanthropy that have not served them up till now.
- Leadership on both sides developing, growing and evolving through relationship building.
- Increased understanding on both sides of motivations, aspirations and priorities.

One respondent said: “It will benefit both foundations and Indigenous communities to learn from and build upon philanthropic models that have been successful in other Aboriginal communities. I know that I have a lot to learn about philanthropy and Indigenous communities and I also know that Indigenous communities have a great deal to learn from their own members.”

Another respondent stated: “We have some intergenerational responsibility. Foundations who are interested have an obligation to understand and address the issues of Aboriginal peoples – there is some mutualism involved. We have had some Aboriginal leaders address the Board so the Board could better understand the situations. It may have been the first time they had an Aboriginal leader address the Board.”

One respondent stated that we have barely scratched the surface in terms of the benefits of an improved relationship with First Peoples:

“Good foundations crave learning opportunities. It is a privileged position to be able to step back and think about how change happens. It is incredible to go and spend time in the communities, spend time listening to people and processing how things are done. It challenges, reconfigures how your brain works. It makes you really think about connections between land, culture, language. Every time we go north, there’s another layer pulled back… We’d never appreciated how close to the land people can live… we need to preserve and restore those connections. Environmentalists can’t even understand. Anyone who comes to a gathering understands, though. CPAPC is not issue focused. There’s a diffuse vision, a way in for everyone.”

Change in foundations and Aboriginal communities has the potential to develop into lasting social change that benefits all Canadians. One respondent said, “I hope that the foundation sector will find ways of advocating for structural and legal changes as well as ideological shifts that are necessary for fundamental and much needed change.” Respondents agreed that the most significant driver of improved relationships, and the greatest benefit, was in recognizing that by improving quality of life for Aboriginal people in Canada, the population as a whole stands to gain. This commitment to social responsibility was what drew many foundations to their involvement with CPAPC.

“Foundations have the opportunity to stay in for the long haul. Who else but us can take the risk?”
Several respondents described how foundations are uniquely positioned to effect change, compared to government. One respondent explained: “The ‘biorhythm’ for governments is two to three years but we (foundations) have the opportunity to stay in for the long haul. Who else but foundations can take the risks that might be necessary when dealing with youth whose healthy development involves testing and learning? We don’t recognize failure... it is an opportunity.”

One of the exciting things about foundations, another respondent pointed out, is that they are better positioned to provide expertise and advice to communities and they are able to do so in an innovative way that government funders cannot, as government funders are restricted by policy and election cycles.

Foundations that have taken the steps to truly understand First Nations’ unique cultures are at the forefront of developing new relationships with First Peoples. The Coast Opportunity Fund is one example of a unique and successful partnership with First Peoples that is intended to have long-term sustainability. The Fund manages over $60 million from investors including foundations and governments. The Fund works with the First Nations of the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii to support sustainable and meaningful economic development, conservation management and community health projects. According to their web site, their core business is: “Partnering with First Nations to develop successful applications that fund sound, high quality projects. To that end, we work with First Nations to support essential capacity strengthening efforts, and engage in the development of relationships and networking with sister agencies, financial institutions and potential partners to leverage additional resources and maximize the impact of Coast Funds’ investments.”

Another example of how foundations can effect real change in communities is the Niigon Project, described in greater detail in this paper. The Schad Foundation was instrumental in developing the $23-million partnership with the Moose Deer Point First Nation and federal and provincial governments to create a model for sustainable development within an Aboriginal community. The Niigon Project combines education, environmental awareness, health and wellness initiatives and economic development.

One of the key goals of the Niigon Project was to create highly skilled, knowledge-based career opportunities on the Moose Deer Point First Nation. The Niigon Project included developing a world-class injection moulding facility, Niigon Technologies Ltd., and training local residents for employment at the facility. Niigon Technologies is a showcase of manufacturing automation, efficiency and environmental responsibility. The company is wholly owned by the First Nation, with all dividends being reinvested in social, environmental, wellness and infrastructure projects. The vision and investment of the Schad Foundation was essential to bring the project to life.

56%

“Non-Aboriginal children receive 56% more per person per year in public funding than First Nations.”

Coast Opportunity Fund Annual Report 2009
ABORIGINAL PHILANTHROPY IN CANADA: A Foundation for Understanding
4.0 Case Study: Niigon Project

Moose Deer Point First Nation (MDPFN), located on the eastern shore of Georgian Bay two hours north of Toronto, is home to about 180 residents. Georgian Bay, with its many lakes, freshwater beaches and islands, is cottage country for many Ontario residents. The Moose Deer Point community has three separate areas including a commercial area that houses the marina, the childcare centre, government services and, soon, a fitness centre/gym/community centre. There are two residential areas which are divided by Provincial parklands. A recent tripartite agreement will see the transfer of 263 hectares of provincial public lands to the federal government for the First Nation. This transfer will join the three parcels of land. Also included in the land transfer agreement is an increase of the surrounding O’Donnell Point Provincial Park, effectively increasing protection for the park’s wetland habitat. In 2010, Moose Deer Point became the first community to benefit from the construction of a new water system thanks to Canada’s Economic Action Plan. Prior to that, the community had been under a boil water advisory for 10 years.

There are a number of small businesses in the Moose Deer Point area, most notably the Moose Deer Point Marina, which opened in 1969. The Chief at the time, Edward Williams, was a visionary who recognized the opportunity for Moose Deer Point to establish a marina to serve the many cottages on Georgian Bay islands that are accessible only by water. Chief Williams also led the community through the development of Niigon Technologies until 2001, when the facility started production.

The events that led to the realization of Niigon Technologies have come to exemplify a model that works for First Peoples and philanthropy. Robert Schad, then President and Chief Executive Officer of Husky Injection Molding and President and CEO of the Schad Foundation, owns a cottage on the eastern shore of Georgian Bay. To get to his cottage, he had to drive through Moose Deer Point. He noticed that the residents had few opportunities and recognized that there was little year-round employment on the reserve. On one trip, his car broke down and a young man from the community came to his assistance. This encounter led Schad to continue to give thought to what, if anything, he could do to reach out to the community. He began to sit with Chief Williams to discuss the possibility of working with the community on sustainable community development.

“Niigon Technologies exemplifies a model that works for First Peoples and philanthropy.”
Over a period of time, Schad and Chief Williams consulted with the residents of the community and developed three overarching principles to define sustainable community development:

1. The active pursuit of economic development that is not just environmentally friendly, but which offers the community long-term stability, diversity and prosperity;

2. A deliberate, broadly based, multi-faceted quest for social health and individual wellbeing; and

3. A concerted, long-term program, not just to clean up the environment, but to conserve and enhance the community’s natural assets of land, water, air and living things.

As Robert Schad’s relationship with the Chief and community continued to evolve, he turned his attention to the community vision of a sustainable community project that would support long-term economic and career development opportunities on the reserve. Schad proposed building a world-class injection moulding facility in Moose Deer Point in partnership with the First Nation. Together with Chief Williams, Schad launched an Indigenous peoples’ partnership program through the Schad Foundation. With additional funding from the federal and provincial governments, they constructed a state-of-the-art injection moulding facility called “Niigon” (“future” in Ojibway), the first phase of which opened in the summer of 2001.

Rhonda Williams, the current Band Administrator, was involved in the community consultation and described the factors that contributed to its success. The consultation process took over a year and a half. It was important to all parties that the project was endorsed and driven by the community. For the community, it was important that the development didn’t change their way of life (meaning “we look out for each other” and a “sense of community, if someone needs help, you help them”), and the foundation respected that. The community also wanted any employment opportunities that resulted from the development to be permanent, not seasonal, employment. As the consultations proceeded, Williams emphasized, it was important that both the community and government believed in the project (“it seemed too good to be true”). Robert Schad, she said, was highly involved (“he didn’t send his people”). Schad had seen the marina grow, made a personal investment in the community and wanted to leave a legacy.

Niigon is fully owned by the First Nation and all employees are local residents. A training program was set up in partnership with Humber College in Toronto to train local residents in all operations of the facility. Currently there are nineteen employees, with an equal gender representation.

The planning and forethought that went into developing Niigon are apparent in the results. First, while Moose Deer Point is not as isolated as many northern fly-in communities are, it is not located where you would typically find a major manufacturing plant. As a result, when it came to determining what Niigon would manufacture, the organizers preferred smaller devices with lower transportation costs. Another challenge of the rural location is the real possibility of “brown outs” (power outages). To prepare for this, the company purchased generators to ensure production will not be interrupted and money and time lost. In addition, the environment is used to run the plant effectively and efficiently. The plant is 62 per cent more efficient than a conventional building. Some of the energy efficient features include a well-insulated building envelope, triple-glazed windows with insulating frames, space heating and cooling from waste heat, skylights on the north side and solar panels on the south side, radiant heating and cooling in office and plant, and natural lighting in the production area. In short, Niigon is a model of sustainability.

Planning the construction and surroundings of the facility took into account environmental and aesthetic factors as well as business. Precast panels were constructed from the crushed granite that was removed from the building site while laying the foundation. The carpeting is made from recycled wool and the wall paneling from recycled teak. The grounds have been naturally landscaped using native species and a constructed wetland absorbs water run-off. Bio-filtration is used for plant wastewater treatment. A dramatic series of paintings, commissioned from a local artist, hangs in the entry way and depicts the seven sacred teachings. A large circular painting represents the four clans that make up the community of Moose

Since the plant opened, the company has had to make adjustments, as is typical of any start-up business. However, all issues have been resolved over time, with the same consultation and consideration that went into the initial planning.

Chief Edward Williams passed away in the spring of 2010, after serving nine terms as Chief in his community. Former Band Councillor Barron King was elected Chief following Chief Williams’ decision to leave his position due to illness. Chief King is proud of his community and its accomplishments and was gracious in sharing his time for the purposes of this case study.

Chief King identified several critical factors to the success of the relationship between the Schad Foundation and the First Nation:

- Personal commitment from the key people;
- Federal, provincial and First Nation contributions;
- Commitment to the relationship across changes in leadership of the First Nation;
- Commitment to a long-term partnership from all partners; and,
- Commitment to stay the course from all partners and to make necessary changes as new challenges arose.

Chief King pointed out that the original concept of Niigon was for a facility that offers economic and educational development year-round for the citizens of Moose Deer Point. The project has been a success thus far and is poised to fulfil the vision of its founders. In its tenth year of operation at the time of this case study, Niigon is on the verge of breaking even. The plant is expected to begin yielding a profit in the very near future, to be re-invested in the community. A community association has been established, comprised of community members and designed to be at arm’s length from Chief and Council, to determine community investments. Two investments to date have been a daycare centre and a bus to take students to school in Parry Sound since there is no school in the community. The latter investment allowed the First Nation to stop contracting out school bus service.

The daycare centre, Binoojii House, was a joint investment of the Niigon project and the Schad Foundation. Binoojii House was built at the insistence of Robert and Liz Schad, to remove barriers for community residents with young children who might seek training and employment at Niigon. Robert and Liz also have a deeply held commitment to the importance of early childhood education. The state-of-the-art facility reflects their all or nothing approach to its development. Binoojii House includes a staffed kitchen, laundry facilities and several different age-appropriate play, activity and sleep areas. The centre is built on the lakeshore, safely fenced, and incorporates local habitat into its play structures. Tree trunks serve as table and chairs and trees cut to clear space for Binoojii House have been transformed into climbing walls. The Schad Foundation provided expertise as well as funding for this development – the designer of Husky’s Copperhouse childcare centre advised on Binoojii House. The childcare centre is available to all community residents, whether employed at Niigon or not. Binoojii House has inspired some young people to pursue studies and training in Early Childhood Education and return to the community to work.
ABORIGINAL PHILANTHROPY IN CANADA: A Foundation for Understanding
Seven key stakeholders were interviewed for this case study; five were residents of Moose Deer Point and provided their perspectives on the difference Niigon has made in the community. One respondent who was among the first group of trainees at Humber College stated:

“The development of Niigon has meant options, that community members have options – previous to this, post-secondary students knew that because there wouldn’t be employment opportunities at home, they would have to live elsewhere, but now they have that option to come home and work. Also, it’s busy - there are programs and events virtually every evening in the community.”

According to this respondent, approximately 70 per cent of community high school students graduate and the community is providing incentives to improve this rate. This number is significantly better than the national average of 50 per cent for Aboriginal students, though still far below the 90 per cent average for non-Aboriginal youth.

Another resident said that Niigon has increased community pride:

“We know that it is ours, and it isn’t something that can be taken away... It belongs to the First Nation and is community-driven... There is a recognition of the First Nation as a serious business partner. The Niigon Board of Directors was intended to be comprised of experts, not just in injecting moulding, but in business as well, solidifying its reputation as a major area business player. Our community has had a positive effect on the local economy – this is another dimension of relationship-building, MDPFN has established a protocol agreement regarding the environment with other surrounding communities. The impact of Niigon is that we’re taken seriously. Not that we had a [poor] relationship before... [but now] they believe when we say something is going to happen, it’s going to happen.”

The employment, education and training available to community members through Niigon is paying off in significant ways. For example, one of the women among the first group of trainees received additional training in quality assurance followed by an internship at Husky in Toronto. She worked in Niigon for a number of years before moving away from the community for a time. Now she has returned to Moose Deer Point to use the skills she learned at Humber and honed at Niigon as the Director of the new water treatment facility.

Karen Little Child, Niigon Technologies Quality Assurance Manager, was another of the first group of trainees. The development of Niigon brought her back to the community and she wants to see this work in other First Nations. Little Child said that the goals of making the community more sustainable and giving back to the community have been met to some degree, though there have been challenges along the way. She explained:

“Some difficulties that the community employees have had to deal with include working night shifts, weekends and 12 hour shifts; however, to make this work, they have had to deal with these issues, because this is a business. It was difficult to explain time keeping... there is a different understanding of funding and money... there was a relationship of dependency there that we just can’t afford here. The community needs to work, work hard, and work smart.”

Little Child’s comments underline an inherent culture clash between the cultures of dependency that have developed in First Nations in response to colonization and the Indian Act and the culture of post-industrial work. The tensions of this clash do not reflect the ability, skills or desire of First Nations people in Moose Deer Point or other communities, but rather the need to learn what is needed in a post-industrial world of work.

Little Child recognized that “some within the community felt that we would lose our identity, but we haven’t, and we made sure we didn’t,” since the community and the Schad Foundation shared the goal of Niigon being independent. Another challenge has been that Niigon has not made progress as quickly as they wanted, and understanding that the entire process takes time. Niigon continues to offer training groups based on interest and need; each group receives training on every aspect of the business to give them an understanding of how everything works.
“This was a true partnership, with a relationship that has ebbed and flowed.”

Foundation Perspectives

To gain the perspective of the Schad Foundation, we interviewed Peter Kendall, the Executive Director. Kendall was enthusiastic about the Foundation’s relationship with the First Nation as a business partner: “this was a true partnership, with a relationship that has ebbed and flowed.” The critical factors to relationship-building were consultation (including community members and cottagers) and communication (regular meetings and monthly updates with Chief and Council). He described other benefits of working in the First Nations community: a sense of purpose and the opportunity to increase the environmental standards in the Niigon building.

The community is responsible for the long-term management and functioning of Niigon; while the Foundation doesn’t own Niigon, it is involved for the long term. Kendall stressed the importance of long-term commitments for economic development, noting that nothing can be achieved in only a few years. Other factors that ensured the success of Niigon were the corporate partnership with the Schad Foundation, which assisted the project in getting funding from the federal and provincial governments, and involving youth in entrepreneurship.

Kendall noted that First Nations often encounter difficulties trying to secure assets, which makes it challenging for them to get loan guarantees. This is one area where partnerships with foundations can be helpful. He observed that “there’s a lot of money out there for good ideas... and the best projects are those that are community-driven.”
There is an exquisite irony in the general topic of this paper. Philanthropy has to do with giving, and every Indigenous culture has embedded within it a rich history of giving, sharing and caring. Yet there is a wide disconnect between modern philanthropy and First Peoples. Some foundations are beginning to take steps to forge stronger relationships with First Peoples, either through commitment to a long term relationship in a specific community or through investment in a fund such as Coast Opportunity Fund.

Increasingly, First Peoples are beginning the process of establishing their own foundations. One example is the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF), “a charitable organization dedicated to raising funds to deliver programs that provide the tools necessary for Aboriginal peoples, especially youth, to achieve their potential.” This Aboriginal-run organization has raised the funds to give over $37 million in scholarships.

There are many lessons to be learned from this report for those interested in bringing philanthropy and First Peoples together. Several of these are outlined below and taken from the Moose Deer Point case study. Still others are summarized in the next section, which discusses CPAPC’s role and makes several recommendations.

The following teachings are offered to foundations seeking to build relationships with First Peoples.

- One of the keys to success is an honest, personal commitment by all parties, across changes in leadership. Notably, in the case of Niigon, both Robert Schad and Chief Ed Williams displayed a deep personal commitment to the success of the project. This commitment must be maintained across changes in leadership. Schad ensured that those he brought on board from Husky and the Schad Foundation had the same level of commitment, allowing him to retire knowing that Niigon was in good hands.

- Successful relationships must be developed in person. As one informant said, Schad never “sent his people,” but always attended to the project personally. The relationship was nurtured through monthly meetings to keep the project moving forward.

- Trust is essential to both parties. For the First Nation community, it is important that the foundation has a consistent message and is committed to a community-driven project. For foundations, it is important to trust the community leaders, as foundations often fund people just as much as projects. Direct engagement of the key personnel in both the foundation and the First Nation is best, unless a hired consultant is highly trusted by both parties.

- It is important to choose the right people: those in Human Resource and management positions should be those who understand the community.
Community has to take the lead and drive the process.
The following lessons pertain to creating and sustaining a successful project.

- All parties must expect growing pains and be prepared to work through them. In the case of Niigon, the partners stayed the course, making necessary changes as new challenges presented themselves. In particular, Chief Williams’ vision, perseverance and consensus-building with the community helped the project succeed.

- Consider surrounding communities. The community and economic development principles central to the project nurtured relationships between Moose Deer Point and its neighbours. The commitment to bring in local goods and services and to offer contract work locally has ensured that Moose Deer Point has earned and maintained the reputation of being a good commercial neighbour. The environmental considerations that went into the development, planning and operation of Niigon have made the community a good environmental neighbour, effectively responding to the concerns of cottagers.

- Multiple partners may be needed. In the case of Niigon, the project obtained contributions from federal, provincial and First Nations government.

- Choosing the right project for the community is essential. The community needs to be involved in dialogue at every step of the process. Community has to take the lead and drive a lot of the process; committees cannot be token, but must be working and structured. Be careful to do what is best for the community as they define it. An important consideration in developing Niigon was creating training and education opportunities for youth. Like youth everywhere, they need purpose and something to keep them involved and living in the community.

- Try to separate politics from business.

- Genuinely partner and remember that, for First Nations, securing assets is difficult as they do not typically own the property in their communities and it is challenging for them to get loan guarantees.

- Provide training to First Nations in dealing with foundations.

A final lesson is for First Nation communities who want to develop relationships with foundations:

- Use the media: get good stories out and foundations will get involved.

Community respondents agreed that Niigon sends a powerful, inspiring message to other First Nation communities: “if this can happen for us, then it can happen for others, including larger communities”; “persevere, trust, and never lose sight of community”; and always remember and consider that, “investors can walk away, but you’re left in the community.”

“Every Indigenous culture has a rich history of giving, sharing and generosity.”
6.0 Recommendations

Our goal in this report is to understand the current relationship between philanthropy and Aboriginal peoples in Canada and how we can go about strengthening it. As such, our recommendations fall into two related categories: those that chart a way forward for The Circle and those that provide advice to foundations. These categories are related because the recommendations for foundations also identify opportunities for The Circle to engage and educate foundations to strengthen their involvement in Aboriginal communities.

To provide some context for these recommendations, we provide a brief overview of the relationship between CPAPC member foundations and The Circle to date.

Involvement with CPAPC

Many of the CPAPC member respondents traced their engagement with The Circle to their attendance at the 2007 conference of Philanthropic Foundations Canada in Montreal. Two sessions at this conference stood out to them. One was a plenary presentation by Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberté who presented on the launch of a philanthropic initiative to address the global issue of access to clean water. A conference attendee spoke to the issue of clean water in First Nations communities in Canada. At this same conference, a separate workshop on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Communities was offered that, to all reports, was exceptionally well-attended. The workshop presenters were clear in their message that philanthropic activity in reserve communities is particularly low, almost non-existent. Several conference participants began talking among themselves about the possibilities for stronger relationships between philanthropy and Aboriginal communities, and plans were made for a gathering to be held in Manitoba the following year “to strengthen understanding between foundations and Aboriginal Canadians.”

Respondents associated with CPAPC member foundations describe their involvement as follows:

- My foundation identified an interest in being involved following the Winnipeg gathering. It made sense for us.
- I saw the potential benefits to communities of building better relationships with the sector and educating the sector on the issues communities are confronting.
- I have a long history working with Indigenous peoples in Canada – very interested in this work, primarily in coastal B.C.
- Following the PFC meeting in Montreal a few years ago, when the One Drop [Cirque du Soleil] Foundation CEO spoke, Cindy Blackstock spoke and [an Aboriginal woman who attended] spoke, a few of us met and formed a steering committee committed to CPAPC. The commitment was firmed up at the All My Relations gathering in Winnipeg the following year.
- We realized in-house that there was a disconnect between how important and prominent engagement [with First Nations] should be and how it didn’t seem to be happening. There is no good data, but we know there is no involvement in a significant way and we need to start leveraging some influence. At the meeting in Montreal, the session on Aboriginal engagement drew lots of people. We need to build influence.

- As a Senior Advisor with my foundation I saw the potential benefits to communities of building better relationships with the Aboriginal sector and for Aboriginal communities educating the foundation on the issues communities are confronting. I’ve always had an interest in the Aboriginal sector and even took some University courses to learn more about First Nations people and culture.
6.1 THE CIRCLE

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada can play an essential role in redefining the relationship between First Peoples in Canada and philanthropy. The stated goal of CPAPC is to connect with and support the empowerment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nations, communities and individuals in building a stronger, healthier future. Several recommendations to accomplish this emerged from the literature review and the interviews.

1. **Develop CPAPC as a charitable organization with granting capacity.**

   One option is for CPAPC to formalize its organization, moving beyond its current role as an affinity group. In so doing, they can work with foundations and First Peoples, drawing key advisors from both populations for policy development. The process would include CPAPC obtaining a charitable tax number to take contributions and develop granting capacity. As a charitable foundation, CPAPC would have the capacity to establish partnerships with First Nations to secure assets and get loan guarantees.

2. **Act as a facilitator between foundations and First Peoples.**

   There is important work to be done developing funding resources that are accessible to First Peoples and distributing existing information to First Peoples. Books and websites that outline what foundations are available are not always accessible to First Peoples. One respondent explained: “They [First Peoples] need to know that there is a funding book. Small agencies and small communities don’t have access to technologies so we can help them access the information about what is available, where to find it and how to get it to places where First Peoples can access it.” CPAPC can also provide resources and support to help First Peoples access foundation funding. For foundations, CPAPC can work to dispel myths about Aboriginal peoples and philanthropy.

3. **Continue to bring foundations and First Peoples together to build relationships.**

   There is an opportunity for CPAPC to build on the success of the two All My Relations gathering and continue to foster the conversations that lead to relationship building. Regular and ongoing circles in communities, allowing foundations to meet people where they live and gain some practical understanding of First Peoples’ realities, will help further these relationships.

4. **Help First Peoples set up their own foundations.**

   There is an increasing population of Aboriginal people with high net worth. CPAPC can connect with these people and help them set up their own foundations. One foundation representative interviewed said, “I think we’re at a point where many First Nations could use the foundation model to create their own. CPAPC can help make this happen.”

5. **Assist foundation staff in building relationships between foundation Boards and Aboriginal communities.**

   Some foundation staff are interested in working closely with First Peoples, yet they often have a difficult time convincing the Board that this will be a valuable partnership. This may be due to the conservative nature of Boards or to myths about what funding such partnerships will mean. CPAPC members, in their respective communities, provide a link between foundation staff and Aboriginal communities to create opportunities for relationship building: invite a Chief or Elder to speak to the Board; create opportunities for conversations to happen; arrange to go to communities and visit for more than a few hours.

6. **Simplify participation for Aboriginal people.**

   There is money available, but the hoops are complicated. Respondents identified several ways that CPAPC could simplify participation in philanthropy for Aboriginal people. These include: providing funding for individuals and communities to participate in PFC (Philanthropic Foundations Canada); holding information and learning circles to strengthen the relationship between First Nations and foundations; and adopting Cindy Blackstock’s model in Caring Across the Boundaries.

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Nadijiwan and Blackstock (2003). Caring Across the Boundaries is one of the ongoing projects promoted by First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. Caring Across the Boundaries is an interactive workshop that facilitates collaboration between First Nations child and family services agencies and the not-for-profit/voluntary sector. The program was developed based on research which found that First Nations children and youth on reserve have almost no access to the broad range of prevention and quality of life services provided by the non-profit/voluntary sector.
“I think we’re at a point where many First Nations could create their own foundations.”
The following recommendations are directed to foundations that are interested in funding Aboriginal communities. As this report has demonstrated, a new paradigm of philanthropy is needed to work successfully with First Peoples. These recommendations provide direction to establish that new framework.

- Be open to innovations and paradigms that support sustained change: develop true partnerships and commit to long term investments. Develop relationships with First Peoples’ communities and nurture them: do what is asked, consult with the community and support community ownership.

- Build the amount of support to Indigenous-led initiatives, as distinguished from the amount of money given to issues; this can include increasing support for arts, economic development, culture and other projects that are led by Aboriginal people, not NGOs.

- Stop pathologizing Indigenous people. There is an opportunity for foundations to change the perception of who Aboriginal people are.

The final words are given to a foundation representative who has been working on forging relationships with First Peoples:

“We have to work on systemic change rather than services and programs. The old school model of philanthropy is just trying to ‘do good’ and they sometimes end up throwing good money after bad. For example, our foundation gets a lot of requests for programs to go north for suicide prevention, but we don’t know anything about how successful they’ll be in that setting. They might have a proven track record in an urban setting, but will they work in the north? We don’t know. We have more success when programs come from the community. When it is driven by them, the change comes from inside. A related broader national question is the way in which Aboriginal public policy is fashioned; we’ve had a century of it being driven by one dysfunctional government department. Foundations have a moral obligation to invest in public policy work and a responsibility to promote alternative policy and systems. Foundations can help liberate us from the Indian Act. There is fertile, fruitful ground for philanthropy.”
REFERENCES


