



Saskatchewan
Government Relations and
Aboriginal Affairs

*Report on the
Regina Urban Dialogue*
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REGINA URBAN ABORIGINAL DIALOGUE REPORT

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I. Introduction

Aboriginal, community, municipal, provincial and federal government representatives were invited to continue a dialogue about issues affecting urban Aboriginal people in Regina. The June 5, 2003, **Regina Urban Dialogue** followed through on the Deputy Minister's commitment at the December 3, 2002, Canada West Foundation meeting to hold additional discussions. This is a report on the discussions that occurred.

II. MOR Strategy

The presentation outlined the evolution of the provincial Strategy for Métis and Off-Reserve First Nations people (MOR). The MOR Strategy is a comprehensive provincial response - the only one to date in Canada - that responds to the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and what RCAP Commissioners heard from thousands of people across Canada in the 1990's. The Strategy was developed in consultation with Aboriginal political leaders, Aboriginal institutions, major third parties, provincial post-secondary education institutions and, most importantly, Aboriginal people and the public in seven urban locations during 1999 and 2001. The Strategy is an opportunity for federal and provincial governments to work together with Aboriginal people to address urban Aboriginal issues. Twelve provincial departments are involved on an interdepartmental team to address the circumstances facing urban Aboriginal people from a comprehensive perspective.

The Strategy has four key goals: improve the success of Aboriginal people in education; prepare Aboriginal people for work; achieve representative participation in the economy; and well-being.

The commitment was made to report back to the community about the results of the work done with Aboriginal people through five year comprehensive assessments and annual progress reports to Aboriginal people and the public. As well, a plan for another round of community discussions is planned for this fall.

Every year, the interdepartmental team reviews the action plan from a critical perspective. This process facilitates department accountability to ensure the strategy remains on target and on track. The Critical Analysis process is an important way to facilitate internal accountability.

In the spring 2001 budget, the province committed \$10 million in new and enhanced funding for initiatives supporting the strategy. Despite challenging fiscal circumstances in Saskatchewan, this funding level was maintained in 2002-03 to facilitate ongoing development of the community schools, ensure that services for children and families are available where they are needed, and make modest investments in community priorities.

III. Format for Discussion

The audience was instructed to break into groups and sit at a table where they only knew one or two others. Each table assigned a recorder and a reporter. The group was then given three questions to discuss.

IV. Questions

Question 1 - What are the community's immediate and short-term priorities?

There is a perception of “lack of government support” and “different government agencies/departments need to talk to each other”. “Human resource development and support systems for people” are needed, and the “need for forums like this” will help to build community supports. Elected leadership needs to focus primarily on Aboriginal issues. There were several reoccurring themes in the discussions: health, individual and community well-being, youth, education and employment, culturally sensitive services and supports, and housing.

Health & Individual & Community Well-Being

Discussions included the need to address “FAS” (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) and “FAE” (Fetal Alcohol Effects), and “addiction problems” through ongoing development of “treatment centers”. “FAS/FAE”, “addiction problems” are “symptoms of hopelessness” and an indicator of “utter poverty”. An “increased level of nutrition” is needed because it is not possible to “teach people skills or develop independence when they are hungry”.

“Personal wellness is key” and one must be “inventing and striving for balance in all quadrants – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual”. Several points were discussed with respect to individual well-being: “levels of education”; “family history”; and “family wealth”. There are “psychological personal barriers to making some choices”. “Fundamental requirements for families need to be met”: many families have no “belongings, no beds, no cribs, no tables etc. This is the normal situation”. “Basic skills (i.e. life skills, parenting skills)” are needed because “too many are falling through cracks - HIV, drugs and jails”.

Community “stability”, “safety” and home ownership are key issues. “Community consultation” and a “bottom up approach to community development” are the preferred means of “engaging and empowering communities”. The “development [of the] community at grass roots level”, “supporting social connection[s]” and “identification of leadership at the community level” are critical to this process.

Other discussions involved the need to “build [the] capacity of community organizations” to “acknowledge the real problems and help people move forward”. There is a need to “put community needs first”, meaning a “switch of thinking” and “put[ting] dollars into community development”.

Improving “socioeconomic conditions of inner city families” is key to “North Central revitalization”. “Community schools moved into these areas”. All levels of government should “invest in First Nations community members”.

Youth, Education & Employment

“Sport, culture and recreation [are] part of community well-being”. “Part of the answer is prevention and opportunities” to provide young people with “positive experiences”. “Youth need to be kept off the streets”. “A lot of Aboriginal youth are growing up in desperate circumstances”, and need access to “safe houses”.

Participants indicated that there is “nothing on reserve for many young people”, so they come to urban centers “in search of jobs” and they are “landing jobs without training and education” which affects the job “quality”, their ability to do a job, “affordability” of lifestyle, and “self-reliance”.

Culturally Sensitive Services & Supports

Participants indicated there is a “lack of Aboriginal counselors/counseling services”, “lack of career counseling” and a “lack of available services [that are] culturally sensitive and culturally relevant”. There was strong support for “program delivery by Aboriginal people” and having Aboriginal people deliver services for Aboriginal people. All levels of government need to provide “guidance” to Aboriginal organizations to avoid setting them up for failure when funding is provided”.

Participants indicated a need to support First Nations and Métis newcomers to Regina. They need “support options other than the street or social services”, and suggested an Aboriginal “Welcome Wagon”, “a transition group or agency that helps them learn about how to live in Regina”, or “someone that welcomes them to the resources of the city”.

Participants indicated that “basic needs such as clothing, food [and] housing for Aboriginal community members” need to be met, and “services [be provided] to meet the full needs of individuals (e.g. substance abuse, the return of kids, financial assistance, training and employment, temporary and long-term shelter)”. “Early childhood development”, “family support mechanism[s]” and “treatment for families” are top priorities. There is a need to listen to community service providers because they know their communities and see the problems and issues facing First Nations populations (e.g. addictions, moving from alcohol to injection drug use). There also needs to be “more decentralization of program delivery to community organizations, not only through government.”

Housing

Discussion of this issue included “homelessness” and “transience”, “inadequate” housing, “overcrowding” and need for “affordable” housing. Participants stated the “quality of housing” is “particularly an issue in certain neighborhoods”, because proper housing has a “connection to social development and wellness”.

Other Priorities

Issues raised in the discussions were “How do we get funding to [build] community support?” and the need for “core funding for Métis services”. The “need to see efforts to spend funds and coordinate activities between the federal, provincial and municipal governments and CBO’s (community building organizations)” was a priority.

Question 2 - What strengths and opportunities exist among us (Aboriginal, provincial, municipal and federal) to work together?

Question 3 - What resources and successes exist in Regina to move forward together and improve the circumstances of Aboriginal people?

Participants viewed the “strengths and opportunities” as the “resources and successes” in Regina. Several areas were addressed in the discussions: events; education; government and policy; programs; organizations; and people.

Events

Build on the National Aboriginal Day cultural celebrations, the First Nations Summer and Winter Games, recognition awards and career fairs like the one held by Scott Collegiate.

Education

Recognize and build on education and program development at “strong Aboriginal education and training institutions” like “Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI), Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Scott Collegiate, Albert School and First Nations University of Canada”. Discussions also included the “success of community schools” and the “pre-Kindergarten program”.

Government and Policy

“Municipal activity”, “provincial integrity”, “federal expression of interest” and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) were recognized as strengths. Discussions also acknowledged “partnerships”, “task forces”, and “committees”.

With respect to policy, many participants suggested there is a need to review the mandate, role and membership of the HSIF (Human Services Integration Forum)/RIC (Regional Intersectoral Committees) to ensure Aboriginal participation. Provincial, federal and municipal policies should enforce a “working together principal”. Other comments included the importance of “more dialogues” to encourage and build a “trust relationship”, which is “vital to good public policy”.

Programs

Programs like “Kids First”, “Youth Justice Forum”, the “Regina area Drug Strategy”, “North Central Community Partnership” and the “Representative Workforce Strategy” were recognized as opportunities for development. “Employers support” and the willingness of the “private sector” to hire Aboriginal people through the Aboriginal Employment Development Program were recognized by the participants as key strengths.

Resources and successes also included: “early childhood development initiatives”; “drug strategies”; “Aboriginal Partnership Program”; “life skills programs”; “health programs”; “Aboriginal round table”; and, the “Regina Youth Forum”.

People

Discussions reflected “people are the greatest strength and resource to build upon”. Participants acknowledged an “increase in [the] Aboriginal voice”, “more mentors every year” and a stronger and “natural interest and awareness of issues and willingness to participate”. The participants recognized “First Nations people [are] in places of decision making and policy development”. Participants also indicated there is an “increase in pride about First Nations culture” and “Elder support”.

Organizations

Resources and successes include Aboriginal organizations like the “Gathering Place, Métis Local, Métis Women”, the “Indigenous People Health Research Center”, speakers’ bureaus like “Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) and Aboriginal Government Employees’ Network (AGEN)”.

V. Community Priorities

Our analysis indicates, through the number of times an issue was raised, that housing is the most immediate priority that needs to be addressed. Using this same process, the resources and successes we have to build on are programs

like Kids First, Regina Area Drug Strategy, Aboriginal Employment Development Program, etc. Table 1 and Table 2 display our findings:

TABLE 1
Brief Summary of Comments for Question 1

Question 1 – What are the community’s immediate and short-term priorities?

Issue	Number of Times the Issue was Raised	Rank
Health & Individual & Community Well-Being	56	1
Youth, Education & Employment	41	2
Culturally Sensitive Services & Supports	34	3
Housing	25	4
Other	9	5

TABLE 2
Brief Summary of Comments for Questions 2 & 3

Question 2 – What strengths and opportunities exist among us (Aboriginal, provincial, municipal and federal) to work together?

Question 3 – What resources exist in Regina to move forward together and improve the circumstances of Aboriginal people?

Issue	Number of Times the Issue was Raised	Rank
Programs	40	1
Education	30	2
Government and Policy	26	3
People	18	4
Organizations	12	5
Events	11	6

TABLE 3
Summary of Comments for Question 1

Question 1 – What are the community’s immediate and short-term priorities?

Issue	Number of Times the Issue was Raised	Rank
Health & Individual & Community Well-being	56	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addiction problems and the affects (i.e. FAS/FAE) are symptoms of hopelessness and indicators of poverty. ▪ An increased level of nutrition is needed because it is not possible to teach people skills or develop independence when they are not healthy. ▪ Personal wellness is key. One must strive for balance physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. ▪ There is a need for community stability, safety and home ownership. ▪ North Central revitalization is key to addressing the socioeconomic conditions of inner city families. 		
Youth, Education & Employment	41	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prevention is key, by keeping youth off the streets and providing opportunities, like sport and recreation, are needed to give positive experiences to young people who are growing up in desperate circumstances. ▪ The limited opportunities for young people on reserves compel them into urban centers in search of jobs some are landing jobs without training and education, which affects the job quality, their ability to do a job, affordability of lifestyle, and self-reliance. 		
Culturally Sensitive Services & Supports	34	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a lack of available services that are culturally sensitive and culturally relative. ▪ Program delivery through Aboriginal people to Aboriginal people is needed. ▪ Support options other than the street or social services. A need for Aboriginal “Welcome Wagon” to introduce urban newcomers to the resources that are available. ▪ Basic needs such as clothing, food and housing for Aboriginal community members need to be met. ▪ Services that address substance abuse, financial assistance, training and development, early childhood development, family services etc. need to put in place and evaluated. 		
Housing	25	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many homes are overcrowded and of poor quality and there is a need for affordable housing. ▪ The issue of homelessness and transience needs to be addressed. 		
Other	9	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a need to obtain funding to help build community support and Métis services. ▪ Efforts must be made to spend funds and coordinate activities among federal, provincial, municipal, and the community sectors. 		

TABLE 4
Summary of Comments for Questions 2 & 3

Question 2 – What strengths and opportunities exist among us (Aboriginal, provincial, municipal and federal) to work together?

Question 3 – What resources exist in Regina to move forward together and improve the circumstances of Aboriginal people?

Issue	Number of Times the Issue was Raised	Rank
Programs	40	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build on and strengthen programs like Kids First, Youth Justice Forum, the Regina Area Drug Strategy, North Central Community Partnership, Representative Workforce Strategy, Aboriginal Employment Development Program and the Aboriginal Partnership Program. 		
Education	30	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize and build on education and program development at strong Aboriginal educational institutions like Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Scott Collegiate, Albert School, and the First Nations University of Canada. 		
Government and Policy	26	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acknowledge and strengthen partnerships, task forces, and committees existing between municipal, provincial, federal, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and other Aboriginal organizations. ▪ Review the mandate and role of the Human Services Integration Forum/Regional Intersectoral Committee to ensure Aboriginal people are represented and participate in policy development. ▪ Vital to good public policy is use of dialogues to encourage and build a trust relationship. 		
People	18	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take advantage of the stronger interest and public awareness of issues and willingness to participate and continue to increase pride in Aboriginal culture, Elder support and the Aboriginal voice. 		
Organizations	12	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to strengthen and build the capacity of Aboriginal organizations like the Gathering Place, Métis Local, Métis Women and speakers' bureaus like Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) and Aboriginal Government Employees' Network (AGEN). 		
Events	11	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build on the National Aboriginal Day celebrations, the First Nations Summer and Winter games, recognition awards and career fairs like the one held by Scott Collegiate. 		

VI. The Importance of Ongoing Dialogue

Through this dialogue, the immediate priorities and existing resources we have to work with were identified. Ongoing dialogue involving the Aboriginal community and the municipal, provincial and federal governments will continue to open and create communication links to align priorities and initiatives. It is clear an ongoing dialogue process will be a key factor in ensuring the future success of Aboriginal people in Regina.