



## Public Service and Truth and Reconciliation

### Where do we start? What do we do? How do we keep it going?

#### *Forward*

On January 23, 2017, twenty-five senior leaders from Indigenous organizations, federal and provincial governments, from academia, and from civil society accepted an invitation from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) to participate in a Leaders Dialogue Circle to talk about public service roles and responsibilities in reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Metis in Canada. The event was organized as part of IPAC's 2017 *National Year of Dialogue for Reconciliation and Renewed Relationships*. Throughout 2017, IPAC is hosting regional and national dialogues, bringing public sector administrators and officials together with administrators and leaders of Indigenous governments and organizations to discuss shared challenges. These events create opportunities to learn from each other, to talk about what renewed relationships could mean, and to establish new networks and working relationships.

“Reconciliation is the most important nation-building project in Canada since the railway”.

Building on a recent essay for IRPP by David Newhouse of Trent University entitled [“Indigenous Peoples, Canada and the Possibility of Reconciliation”](#), the Leaders Circle was non-partisan, non-political discussions on the opportunities and challenges public services face in supporting Canadian governments achieve what Professor Newhouse described as “the most important nation-building project since the railway”.

The dialogue, held on the unceded, traditional territory of the Algonquin, used the format of a traditional First Nation’s talking circle that gives each person an opportunity to speak and be heard. Participants are encouraged to speak honestly and from the heart, and to listen attentively and with respect. Participant’s comments were not for attribution. This summary report shares only the main observations from the dialogue.

Following an opening teaching by Algonquin Elder Claudette Commanda, Professor Newhouse set the context and then invited each participant to share their perspectives in turn.

**I. Setting the Context: Truth and Reconciliation: Will this time be any different?**

Reconciliation is a long game.

The effects of 150 years of government policies and practices designed to assimilate First Nation, Metis and Inuit peoples – what Professor Newhouse calls “the long assault” – cannot be undone overnight. Approaches to “managing” Indigenous “problems” have produced disastrous, multi-generational effects from which Indigenous peoples are only now beginning to recover.



Courtesy of IRPP

In some respects, reconciliation has been underway for almost fifty years, starting in the 1970s as Indigenous peoples began to organize and assert their rights. The first “act of reconciliation” Professor Newhouse suggests, was withdrawal of the federal government’s infamous [1969 White Paper](#). Over the intervening years, the legal and intellectual foundations for reconciliation have grown, including the most recent [Calls to Action](#) by the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The current political climate and a demographic imperative can help accelerate progress.

But how does one practice reconciliation, and how will we know when we are reconciled? Reconciliation is not the job of any one organization or group of people. It is a multi-generational, multi-dimensional effort. It requires the collaboration of individuals and all sectors in Canada, because the essential questions about how Indigenous peoples and Canadians will co-exist into the future, and whether that is a future of hope and full expression for Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples, goes to the heart of who we are as a country, what values we cherish and how we match our words to deeds.

A nation-building project of this complexity requires planning, measurable indicators of progress and monitoring. And, while the recommendations of the [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#), the TRC Calls to Action and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) set out specific actions to be taken, these long lists need a framework to make it easier for all Canadians to see the broad directions of reconciliation and where various efforts can fit. Professor Newhouse proposes four thematic categories for planning and measurement: Harmony, Conversation, Closing the Gap, and Restoration.

Professor Newhouse then turned the groups' attention to the role of public service, of individual public servants, and their education and training. The key questions were: Where do we start? What do we do? How do we keep it going?

**Note: a copy of Professor Newhouse's presentation is attached to this report.**

## **II. Summary of discussion**

### *Education for Culture Change*

Much of the leaders' dialogue centred on concerns about the lack of knowledge in most public services about Indigenous peoples; that reconciliation won't go far if most public servants aren't equipped to do their part. While several participants noted government training efforts being made to broaden awareness (Ontario for example has made Indigenous awareness training mandatory for all public service employees), all felt that this is insufficient to the task ahead.

Most felt that basic education should be mandatory for all public servants, and while its main purpose is to provide the needed information base, it should also strive to mobilize public servants to contribute to change. Training needs to relay the significance of reconciliation to society; that it is about nationhood and core principles of who we are as Canadians. It should foster a culture change within public services by demystifying the issues and helping public servants get beyond a “risk management” mindset and “legal minimums” in working with Indigenous peoples.

Public service training programs should include personal interaction with Indigenous Elders, leaders, professionals, artists and community people to dispel stereotypes. Positive culture change that creates more welcoming and inclusive work environments will also serve to improve the recruitment and retention of First Nation, Metis and Inuit employees in public service.

### **The Importance of Education**

- All public servants should have mandatory basic education on Indigenous peoples in Canada
- Training should
  - Convey importance of reconciliation to Canada’s core values and nationhood
  - Mobilize staff to contribute to change
  - Foster culture change so employees go beyond risk management and “legal minimums” and can provide culturally-sensitive service delivery
  - Provide opportunities for personal interaction and relationship building
- Those working directly with Indigenous peoples and issues should have
  - a deep understanding of history, rights, the legal and constitutional foundations for the relationship and
  - current on issues of modern treaties and other agreements or changes in the legal landscape
  - Be knowledgeable about the communities and cultures they are working with

Those specializing in Indigenous issues should have a deep understanding of history, rights, the legal and constitutional foundations for the relationship, and remain current on issues of modern treaties, other agreements or changes in the legal landscape, and on new instruments such as UNDRIP. Leaders agreed that public services need many more policy and program innovators who are deeply skilled and culturally competent. Their knowledge must include experience of the peoples, cultures and communities they are working with.

Leaders also talked about the need to grow the number of experts in Indigenous issues across government – not

ghettoize expertise in one or two departments. Broadening and deepening expertise will result in much more informed policy advice and take governments further in advancing reconciliation goals.

Leaders from the academic community talked about the needs and challenges of educating the next generation of public servants. Universities should ensure students graduate with a good foundation of knowledge about Indigenous peoples. Programs in public administration and policy most especially, should offer an honest look at the history of the public service and its relationships with and effects on Indigenous peoples. Ideally, university and college education or other youth learning opportunities will include personal interaction with Indigenous peoples and community visits.

But these leaders were frank that the academic community itself needs to be better educated about Canada's historical relationship with Indigenous peoples and about modern cultures and issues. At the same time, they noted the growth in Indigenous research and the potential for academia to play a pivotal role in helping to enrich dialogue with new knowledge and increased learning within and across disciplines and sectors.

The continued education of Canadians was also deemed important. Leaders said that growing public attention to Indigenous issues in Canada means that a majority now understand and support efforts to "close the gap" in Indigenous communities: safe water, good housing, health services and education. On the other hand, there is still limited understanding and appreciation of aboriginal rights and title, or concepts like "nation to nation" relationships, which are also essential elements of reconciliation.

### *Planning and measuring for ReconciliACTION*

The leaders in our dialogue circle agreed that planning, measuring and monitoring reconciliation commitments is necessary for progress and sustaining momentum. Further, they saw the need for many plans. Teams, organizations and departments should develop plans that are relevant to their work and propel them to act on opportunities for change.

At the same time, leaders warned against the hazard of planning paralysis due to the enormity and complexity of issues. They worried about the possibility that too much emphasis on planning, on bureaucratic process and activity checklists, could render reconciliation meaningless. As Elder Claudette Commanda underlined in her opening words, reconciliation requires getting down to action.

Well-defined “deliverables” (what we want to achieve and by when) and going beyond a focus on history, problems and gaps to also address aspirations, are necessary elements of good plans, but don’t be slavish to deliverables and targets. One leader pointed out that sometimes the best outcomes are unanticipated ones, relaying the story of a community history project that resulted in restoring pride and well-being in the youth when they saw their culture and history valued and celebrated.

Leaders underlined that the planning process itself has to be approached in the spirit of reconciliation. Engage and listen before you start drafting a plan. Recognize the individuality of First Nations, Metis and Inuit experience, and respect the fact that they may well already have their own well-informed improving conditions for plan should mirror, Indigenous agenda.

Public servants Indigenous partners to taking and trust-building reconciled relationships. respect inspires public informed and educated rights, governing capabilities of the diverse Canada.

Participants in the circle also recognized that opportunities for reconciliation are everywhere, and can be done by anyone starting now. From self-study to hiring decisions, or to simply seeking the perspectives of Indigenous colleagues, there is no need for public servants and others to wait for “the plan”.

*Opportunities for reconciliation are everywhere. Create a clear plan; focus on action, implement, and monitor progress. Don't succumb to planning paralysis or ticking boxes.*

ideas and priorities for their peoples. Your agenda or complement or align with the

were urged to take risks with implement their ideas. Risk-are essential to creating Starting with an attitude of servants to become better about the distinct histories, structures, cultures, and Indigenous peoples across

### *New ways to engage and partner for relationships and results*

One of the biggest challenges for public servants and government institutions is breaking out of the old ways of doing policy and program design, decision-making, implementation and delivery.

Leaders told us that looking inside the institution is an important first step: reviewing laws, policies, current practice and staff capability from a reconciliation lens. Where do these continue to perpetuate colonial practices, or stand in the way of trying new approaches? Do

we have a tendency to provide advice based on legal minimums? Are advisors able to apply a thorough understanding of Section 35, other rights, titles and legal instruments such as UNDRIP to their advice? Do staff have a thorough understanding of the cultures and communities they are serving, including being able to respect and work with the different governing structures and legal rights that may exist from region to region?

If the spirit of reconciliation is present, policy proposals are informed by Indigenous peoples themselves and ideally, developed in collaboration and decided jointly. Much like new approaches being taken in design-thinking in public sectors around the globe, Canadian policy developers need to start with listening openly to the experiences and views of people affected by government decisions, and be ready to try new ideas and ways of doing things. They must respect that Inuit, First Nations and Metis peoples already have a good understanding of what is going to work best in their own communities.

Many leaders emphasized the critical importance of building ongoing trusting working relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous governments and organizations. There are two aspects to these relationships – the individual and the institutional. They are intertwined.

Institutional trust won't develop without trusting relationships between individuals, which can only be created through meaningful relationships. As one participant explained, the way to develop meaningful relationships is much like making and keeping friends in our personal lives. If you only show up when you need something, don't keep promises, and don't reciprocate interest and sharing, you won't have (or keep) many friends.

The constant churn in many public service organizations presents a significant obstacle to developing meaningful relationships, as does the likelihood that newly assigned officials need to be educated all over again by their Indigenous "partners", owing to their lack of knowledge or expertise. Public service leaders need to take this problem into account when staffing and training for key roles. And individuals in these positions need to take the initiative to earn the respect and trust of the Indigenous peoples with whom they are working.

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Leaders also recommended that public services consider how their working relationships with other sectors in Canada can contribute to broader societal progress in reconciliation. All public servants should be encouraged to think creatively about how they can support and encourage the business community, not-for-profit sector and others they interact with to expand and improve their own relationships with Indigenous peoples.

### *Recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees to public service*

There was strong consensus that public services need to reflect the face of the nation and that includes strong representation of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples within their

Employment of Indigenous peoples in the public service is both an opportunity to mirror diversity and to model inclusion. How do we value the experiences and cultures of Indigenous colleagues at work?

ranks, at all levels. Public sector organizations have more work to do on recruitment and, especially, on retention of Indigenous peoples. Ideally, Indigenous peoples will see public service as a good career choice for affecting change in their communities.

Noting that Canada is the largest employer in the country, one leader said that improvements in recruitment and retention should be an opportunity to mirror diversity and model inclusion for Canadian society. An important step in the process is the education of public sector managers so that their hiring decisions are contributing to recruitment and their management practices are creating working conditions that help Indigenous employees contribute fully throughout their careers.

This shift in perspective on Indigenous employment includes placing greater value on the knowledge and experience that Indigenous employees bring to the workplace and the potential to apply this additional expertise in new and creative ways. How, for example, can Indigenous traditions, practices or knowledge enrich all areas of public service – from policy innovation to conflict resolution, to environmental assessment?

### **III. Conclusion**

Throughout the dialogue, leaders made suggestions on the role that IPAC can play in furthering reconciliation. As a non-profit, non-partisan organization of public service employees and leaders across the country at all levels, IPAC is uniquely placed to further education across levels of government.

One participant said IPAC can “help shrink the planet” through networking, representation, education and open engagement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous public services. IPAC was encouraged to hold more events like the Leaders’ Dialogue Circle or other ways to allow critical conversations to take place and to provide opportunities to meet “the other” and build understanding and relationships. IPAC was also encouraged to develop learning tools and other educational supports for public services to engage in reconciliation.

This report is one among other report-outs, tools and resources that IPAC is developing as part of its Indigenous Government Programs. As *National Year of Dialogue* events unfold across Canada in 2017, we will be sharing the results and attempting to draw out key lessons for governments and others interested in taking action on reconciliation. These insights will also help IPAC develop future initiatives with its partners as part of its long-term strategic priority of inclusion of and support for Indigenous governments and renewed relationships.

IPAC is currently offering a one-day workshop for public servants across Canada called “Reconciliation Begins with Me”. Designed as a complement to in-house awareness training, this workshop focuses specifically on the roles and responsibilities of public servants in reconciliation, and supports individuals in building a professional and personal action plan with the insights gained from the course.

More information about IPAC’s National Year of Dialogue, including upcoming events across the country can be found at: <http://reconciliation.ipac.ca/>