

CASE IN POINT 2009

Planning for Planning: The CIER Comprehensive Community Planning Training Program

CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Cooper

Department of City Planning, University of
Manitoba

Lisa Hardess

Centre for Indigenous Environmental
Resources, Winnipeg, MB

*Comprehensive
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ABSTRACT

Comprehensive community planning (CCP) enables communities to integrate a broad range of planning issues into a long-term plan. CCP has become a more common planning method and form of plan used by First Nations across Canada (Mannell and Ternoway, 2008). At the same time, the need for capacity building in First Nations that are designing and implementing plans has become evident. However, there is little literature detailing how this capacity building can happen.

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) is a national First Nations-directed non-profit organization located in Winnipeg, MB. CIER has created an 18 month support program for First Nations that are interested in developing comprehensive community plans. Through week-long training sessions, web-based resources, and support from CIER, participants develop plans with their community.

The CIER CCP Training Program is cutting edge work. This case study of the CIER CCP Training Program, which explores the program structure, contributes to a more specific understanding of how First Nations can build capacity for, and in, their CPP processes.

BACKGROUND

Comprehensive community planning (CCP) is an approach that enables communities to integrate a holistic range of interdependent planning issues, including cultural, ecological, economic and social issues, into a long-term plan. It involves community members as core decision-makers in the process, and should educate and empower people to engage with the long-term challenges and opportunities that come along with the development and implementation of a long-term vision and community plan.

Historically, planning in First Nations has been imposed by external government agencies and consultants, and has been directive rather than inclusive. As planning's approach has become more participatory and less directive, and as First Nations have taken on more local responsibility, CCP has become a more common planning method and form of plan used by First Nations across Canada (Mannell and Ternoway, 2008). Rather than having others making decisions for First Nations, CCP engages the community directly in decision-making, with the goal of developing a plan that is more directly related to the needs and wants of the specific community (Harivel and Anderson 2008). CCP is an evolving process that responds to changing priorities and needs, and professional planners are not necessarily involved at all stages of the plan, particularly in the implementation stages.

The summer 2008 issue of *Plan Canada, Celebrating Best Practices of Indigenous Planning*, included a number of articles related to comprehensive community plans. Many of these articles reflect the importance of community direction and involvement throughout the planning process, as well as

the need for capacity building for First Nations and community members who are designing and implementing the plans (see Harivel and Anderson 2008; Mannell and Ternoway 2008; Cook 2008; Wade 2008). However, few of these articles detail ways in which this capacity building and involvement can happen.

While there are a number of programs, workshops and initiatives that have been developed to train and support First Nations in developing capacity for planning and creating comprehensive plans, few have been documented. This case study examines how CIER's CCP Training Program is structured and how the program has been adapted to respond to the participants' needs. It also contributes to a more specific understanding of the kinds of capacity building that are needed in First Nations, and how this capacity building can be achieved to better support First Nations in their CCP processes.

FACTS OF THE CASE

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER), located in Winnipeg, MB, is a non-profit organization. Its focus is to



Participants identify issues to be addressed by the CCP process. (photo: CIER)

“develop and implement sustainable solutions to proactively address environmental issues affecting First Nations lands and resources” (CIER 2009). It is First Nations-directed and has a mandate to support First Nations communities nationally.

CIER has developed a training program for First Nations that are interested in developing their own community plans. The program’s focus is on meeting the needs of the individual community. During the 18 month program, four training sessions are held in Winnipeg, and in-community

visits from CIER staff are also incorporated into the program. Some of the handouts and resources used in the process are available on the CIER website, and may be used by First Nations and communities who are not part of the program. Funding for the pilot program came from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Ottawa; the partnership approach between CIER

and First Nations meant that each Band provided for the internal costs associated with the CCP process (e.g. local planner, meeting costs). There is no specific funding program for CCP, and this funding was a part of CIER’s ‘environmental excellence vision’ work with the Environment Directorate.

The CCP program was developed in response to national research CIER conducted

to develop its ‘environmental excellence vision’ as a means of prioritizing its own work and actions. To gather this information, CIER staff visited 130 First Nations and 50 Aboriginal organizations across Canada from 2004-2006. CCP was overwhelmingly identified as a governance priority for First Nations. Information about the CCP support program was shared through advertisements in Aboriginal newspapers and on the CIER website; forty First Nations indicated that they would be interested in participating in the pilot course.



The CCP Sustainability Wheel (image: CIER)

The program’s pilot course began in September 2007, and finished in early 2009. Six First Nations began the program and four finished (two First Nations left the group for a variety of reasons). The four that completed the course were Champagne & Aishihik First Nations (Yukon Territory), Simpcw First Nation (British Columbia), Tsleil-Waututh

Nation (British Columbia), and Little Black Bear First Nation (Saskatchewan). The participating First Nations have not yet finished their plans; each First Nation is at a different place now depending on internal capacity over the last year and a half, and the ebb and flow of CCP as a priority in the midst of other immediate needs. However, even when the plans have been completed, they will be considered as living documents. Because the contexts and processes



Using the Medicine Wheel to discuss community sustainability. (photo:CIER)

of developing the plans are so different in each community, the final plans will not all look the same.

Every four to six months, the local planners gathered in Winnipeg at the CIER offices for training sessions. These sessions provided the planners with the information they would need to undertake CCP processes, as well as tools and activities that they could take back to their First Nations. The sessions began with the basics of what is needed to start the process of developing a comprehensive plan, including steps such as background research and developing a communications plan, and continued through how to set and prioritize goals, how to organize and run community engagement processes, and how to implement and monitor the plan once completed. These sessions also provided the local planners with an opportunity to talk to other planners, to share stories and to learn from each others' struggles and successes.

The planning support from CIER included both remote and in-community time. Remote support included one-on-one telephone calls, group conference calls, writing (proposals, communications, highlights), and research.

CIER staff worked with each community locally during two- to four-day visits designed to support the local planner in whatever way was needed. CIER staff worked as resources to the participant, and built a relationship with the participant who then built relationships with the community to ensure the success of community engagement activities and the ongoing ability of the local planner to continue the CCP process.

CIER visited each First Nation between two and four times, depending on both budget and need.

Staff were kept consistent on visits to each community to maintain and build comfort with community members; wherever possible two staff, a man and a woman, went to work with the First Nation. The staff and local planner would work together to develop and implement community engagements; they could then debrief and plan the next steps. Covering topics such as community self-perceptions, values, dreams and goals, the engagements would gather ideas and perspectives from everyone from elementary and high school students through to Elders. The intent of the visits was to support the participant to take a leadership role in the CCP process, as they felt comfortable.

CIER's CCP training program is not just a workshop process, but a formal training (though unaccredited) and coaching process. The goal is to develop longer term capacity for planning and implementing community comprehensive plans. It is a model that allows for in-community work to happen alongside the training, enabling First Nations to practice and implement the learnings as they go through the program; in the end, it should result in plans that reflect the communities' own needs and visions.

LESSONS LEARNED

A sense of where participants and their communities are at is needed at the beginning of the process. This will enable CIER to use resources as efficiently as possible, and to ensure that the program is tailored to the needs of each individual First Nation as much as possible. For the next course of the program, set to begin in September 2009 (pending funding), a meeting was held in February 2009 with representatives from First Nations who are interested in taking part. This meeting was meant to ensure that CIER has an understanding of where the First Nations are in the CCP process. Half of this time was spent on training and knowledge sharing about planning ideas and tools, and the other half was spent talking about the planning and community engagement histories of each community. A checklist of planning activities was shared with the participants which helped them to determine where their First Nation might find itself in the early stages of setting up a CCP, and where CIER might be able to provide support (for example, a community might

have no history of planning, but might have strong community engagement and networking practices).

The ‘Preparing to Plan’ steps in the communities took longer than expected.

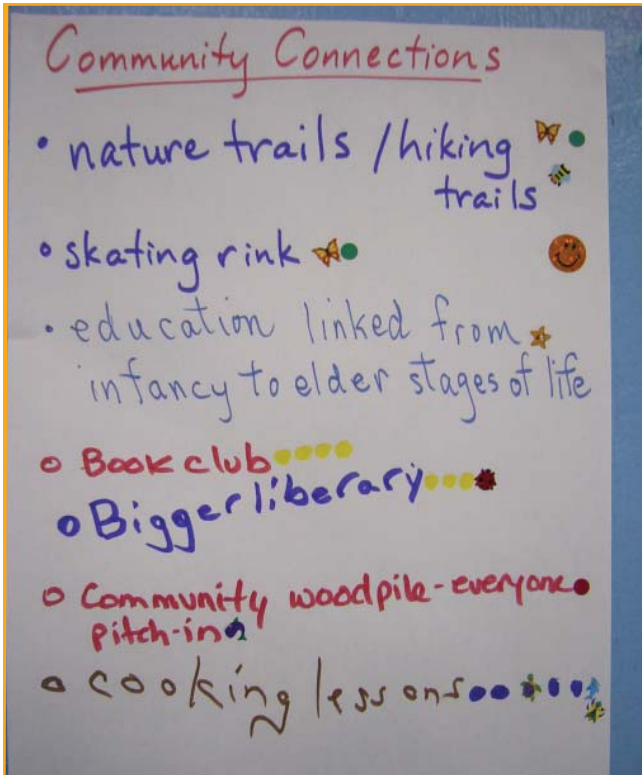
Getting a team together, setting up the process to be followed, and developing a common language around planning in the First Nation took a relatively long time, but it was very important in building a strong structure and foundation for the CCP process. Because of this, in future courses, CIER staff will make community visits in the early stages to help generate momentum in the communities.

The group learning process was very successful. The schedule was intentionally designed to be flexible, with spaces left in the schedule for stories and sharing among the participants. This also allowed time for revisiting topics in new ways, especially as participants worked with their communities and returned with new questions about the processes. Future sessions may be held in participating communities, to allow the participants to see how the process is working differently in each community and to provide additional experiential learning.

More stand-alone resources are needed.

To provide more and better resources to First Nations, CIER is looking at developing more stand-alone resources. This will allow First Nations to connect in at different places in their own CCP processes, and should provide more options for how to develop and implement CCP processes. One idea is to create interactive webinar-type resources that can be viewed and used on-line.

Only having one participant from each First Nation was a challenge. Funding was only available for each First Nation to send one representative to the program. One First Nation sent a second representative at their own expense. It was sometimes hard to maintain consistency of participants, due to job changes and other factors (e.g. a maternity leave, conflicts with key negotiation meetings). As well, there



Identifying community connection ideas in Simpcw First Nation. (Photo: CIER)

was a lot of pressure on the one participant to implement the CCP process in the First Nation. However, there was clear commitment to the whole process from both the participants and their First Nations.

Funding can be precarious. The next process will use a seven month framework, to address the often late funding (i.e. receipt of funds in October). The scope will begin with how to set up a planning team, and will end with setting some goals, in those first seven months.

The process is as important as the final plan. The community needs to be ready to work on the plan, otherwise the final plan will not reflect the community's goals and needs, and will not be as relevant as it could be. While CIER's program may seem lengthy in comparison to a consultant-led CCP process, it helps to ensure that the community planner has the capacity to implement the eventual plan, and that the engagement process has sufficient depth.

NEXT STEPS

CIER is following this initial program with a second program and is currently pursuing funding support. This next program will work

with seven First Nations from Manitoba and Ontario on the CCPs. It will continue with the same approach of building capacity for the local planners and the First Nations, even as the program is adapted to meet the hopes and needs of this new group. In addition, CIER is incorporating this approach into its proposals for its work with First Nations on land use planning and climate change adaptation planning. As the program continues to be adapted and refined each time it is offered, it is hoped that it will continue to benefit and support First Nations in creating and implementing their community visions and sustainability plans for the long term.



Working with students in Simpcw First Nation. (photo: CIER)

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The cover image is from Simpcw First Nation (CIER).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Cooper

Department of City Planning, University of Manitoba

Sarah Cooper is a student in the City Planning program at the University of Manitoba. She grew up in Toronto.

email: sarah.e.v.cooper@gmail.com

Lisa Hardess

Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, Winnipeg, MB

Lisa Hardess is the manager of the Building Sustainable Communities area at CIER. She is a sustainable community planner and an educator. Her background is in environmental science, education and planning.

phone: (204) 956-0660

email: lhardess@cier.ca

web: www.cier.ca