



Aboriginal Governance Structure

Canadian Studies
Social Studies 30

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Teaching Materials
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To meet the need for instructional resources that complement new curricula, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation sponsored a professional development session and a unit writing workshop for teachers.

The workshops were facilitated by the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit and teachers were assisted in their efforts to polish their units by staff from SPDU, the Department of Education, and the STF.

Table of Contents

Goals and Beliefs	1
Role and Function	2
The First Nations-in-Assembly Composition.....	2
The Confederacy of Nations	2
The Executive Committee	2
Student Assignment	4
Additional References.....	4

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Canadian Studies Governance Sub-unit: Aboriginal Governance Structure

Theme: Contemporary view of Aboriginal governmental institutions

World view of traditional governance for most Aboriginal governments:

--Government is holistic—it is connected with family, spirituality, and the land.

versus

World view of governance for the greater population of Canada:

--Government is often seen as remote and somewhat divorced from the people.

Goals and Beliefs

1. Aboriginal people intend for self-government to have a base with a strong knowledge of the past models of government that will be used and adopted to consider the changes and realities of today.
2. Traditional and contemporary methods are combined to form Aboriginal governments.
3. Aspects of Aboriginal traditional governance:
 - a) The centrality of the land—many Aboriginals believe that land encompasses all living and non-living entities that inhabit nature, and the philosophical approach to governance is based on respect for the land.
 - b) The rule of law—Many Aboriginal people believe the law is grounded in instructions from the Creator.
 - c) The role of women (Their role is in a state of flux. Views vary.)
 - i. Some Aboriginal women believe that self-government is a male-dominated process, and are working to change that.
 - ii. Self-government has given women a voice.
 - d) Individual autonomy and responsibility—There must be a sense of responsibility to the community because the welfare of the community depends on individual members.
 - e) The role of the elders—Attempts have been made to restore the position of the elders in Aboriginal government.
 - f) The role of family and clan—In many Aboriginal societies, the extended family is the major self-governing unit.
 - g) Leadership—Accountability is part of the system. Elders are viewed as community leaders.
 - h) Consensus in decision making—Aboriginal government and leaders strive to reflect the entire group they represent.
 - i) The restoration of traditional institutions—Aboriginal people are in the process of revitalizing their traditional approaches to government practices.

Source: "Traditions of Governance" in Volume 2 : *Restructuring the Relationship*, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report. Available online at <http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v2/Vol2Ch3s1.2.asp>

Role and Function

1. The role and function of the Assembly of First Nations is:
 - a) “To be a national delegated forum of First Nations and harmonizing effective collective and co-operative measures on any subject matters which the First Nations delegate for review, study, response, or action.”
 - b) “To be a national delegated forum of First Nations which, by virtue of their sovereignty, are the sole legitimate source for what it is, does, or may become in the future.”

The First Nations-in-Assembly Composition

1. Chiefs of all the First Nations
2. Each First Nations shall have one representative in the First Nation-in-Assembly.

Their function and power:

The First Nation-in-Assembly has power: “To make decisions on any subject matter that chiefs of First Nations desire to initiate or undertake co-operatively and collectively through Assembly of First Nations.”

The Confederacy of Nations

1. “The Confederacy of Nations shall be composed of First Nations representatives of each region on the basis of one representative for each region, plus one representative for each 10,000 First Nations’ citizens of that region”

Their function and power:

The Confederacy of Nations exist as the governing body between assemblies of the First-Nations-in Assembly.

The Executive Committee

1. The Executive Committee shall consist of the National Chief, the AFN Regional Chiefs and the Chairman of the Council of Elders.

Their function and power:

“The Executive Committee shall function as a unit and any decisions or actions by any individual member of the Executive Committee shall be null and void and of no force or effect”

2. Members of the Executive Committee:

a) *National Chief*

“The National Chief is a member of, and is not separate and apart from the Executive Committee. He or she functions as a member of a collective leadership.”

b) *Council of Elders*

“The Council of Elders shall consist of Elders representative of First Nations in addition to its chairperson who shall be associated with the Secretariat and be an advisory member of the Executive Committee.

c) *The AFN Secretariat* (National Indian Brotherhood)

“The Secretariat of the AFN shall be comprised of the Executive Committee and such administrative, technical and support staff as the Assembly of First Nations may require.”

Their functions:

The Secretariat shall provide administrative, technical, and support services to the AFN.

Source: "Charter of the Assembly of First Nations". Available online at http://afn.ca/About%20AFN/charter_of_the_assembly_of_first.htm . Retrieved 31 October 2001.

Student Assignment

1. Make a concept map of the organizational structure of Aboriginal self-government.
2. Compare and contrast the structure of Aboriginal government to the Canadian federal system of government.

Additional References

For further information please see this web page:

- Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. Volume 2 - *Restructuring*.
- *The Relationship*. Available online at <http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/tableofcontents/vol2tableofcontents.asp> . Retrieved 31 October 2001.

