



BUILDING BETTER ALLIANCES

BY MATTHEW BRADFORD

THE FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES BRINGS FIRST NATIONS GROUPS AND MUNICIPALITIES TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE GREATER ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Stronger partnerships. Shared services. Mutual growth. Since the early 2000s, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has taken a lead in helping municipalities and their First Nations neighbours create a shared vision for their economic futures.

"What we're doing today is a result of our membership coming to us and asking how they can better collaborate with the First Nations governments in their region," says Helen Patterson,

program manager of FCM's Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI).

Those inquiries gave way to FCM workshops and programs designed to help municipalities work on a more meaningful level with First Nations communities on issues within their region. One of the first concerns high on FCM's agenda was that of the boiling water advisories in First Nations communities that were located close to municipalities

with clean water. For FCM and its members, it was a disconnect that could not be ignored.

So in 2010, with support from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the Federation launched its Community Infrastructure Partnership Program (CIPP) to assist First Nations communities and municipalities in forming water service arrangements.

"The idea behind CIPP was to support First Nations and municipalities in coming together to address issues of drinking water and sewage management, which was a big concern for First Nations communities as well as smaller municipalities," says Peigi Wilson, CIPP program manager with FCM. "It was a program designed to help both parties acknowledge that they could both benefit by sharing services and supporting one another."

Through CIPP, FCM initiated talks between First Nations communities and neighbouring municipalities throughout Canada, many of which represented historic "firsts." It also facilitated service agreements between the communities, paving the way for similar partnerships down the road.

CEDI

CIPP's success was influential in the formation of FCM's Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI), headed by Patterson. Launched in 2013, the multi-phased program builds on CIPP's vision and helps First Nations and municipalities come together once again, only this time on joint economic and land management issues.

With the support of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, FCM took the idea to CANDO, a national Aboriginal organization focused on community economic development. They became a key partner in making CEDI a reality. "At the time, there was no venue for a First Nations government and municipal government to sit down and discuss how they could build their economy together," recalls Patterson. "So we built a program around the idea

of building capacity within those local governments to conduct joint economic development planning."

The CEDI program received over 280 applications from First Nations communities and municipalities across the country, and six were selected to participate in the pilot project. The idea was to use these initial partnerships to develop and test CEDI tools that could then be used by a wider range of communities.

"For that first round, we wanted all First Nations communities to see themselves in our examples, so we selected communities that were small, remote, near large urban centres, and represented a large range of sectors," Patterson explains. "We learned a lot from each of those communities and we were able to provide support in building those relationships and providing peer mentoring from both FCM and CANDO."



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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

A large part of CEDI's success has been its focus on relationship building. This has been accomplished through sitting down with First Nations and municipal governments, discussing past histories, working through current barriers, and assessing the needs of both parties. Explains Patterson: "Each of these communities now has an established venue for joint planning, and we're actively involved in following up, going out there, and collecting those best practices."

All six of CEDI's initial community partners have had success with the program. In Manitoba, the program was instrumental in bringing together the Town of Pas, the Rural Municipality of Kelsey and the Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) to sign a Friendship Accord in 2014 outlining their commitment to work together for the benefit of the region. This partnership led to the creation of a Tri-Council through which the parties have continued collaborating to promote their region and address infrastructure issues. Highlights from the partnership include the drafting of a Regional Economic Analysis Process and the joint publication of an investor attraction brochure and website.

"Getting the Regional Economic Analysis Process done was big," says Duncan Lathlin, EDO for Paskwayak Development Corporation. "Trying to find a way to use that information... is something we're trying to do right now. We (need) an investor profile for our region because we've found that investors don't have enough information about the Pas and about OCN. Our local businesses are really enthusiastic about it."

In Ontario, CEDI played a role in bringing together the Lac Seul First Nation in the municipality of Sioux Lookout and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) for the purposes of relationship building and joint strategic planning. That partnership has laid the groundwork for the development of a 10,000-square-foot regional distribution centre in Sioux Lookout, among other initiatives. "This partnership has been welcoming to all those who want



Katie First Nation Chief Susan Miller and Pitt Meadows Mayor John Becker sign cooperative agreements for fire, water and sewage services as part of an FCM initiative

to partner," says Vicki Blanchard, economic development manager at Sioux Lookout.

Elsewhere, B.C.'s Seabird Island Band and the District of Kent worked through the CEDI program to create a joint marketing and river management strategy. FCM and CANDO's work has led to similar partnerships in Quebec (between Eagle Village First Nation, the Town of Témiscaming and the Municipality of Kipawa), Alberta (Sawridge First Nation, the Town of Slave Lake and the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124), and New Brunswick (Madawaska Maliseet First Nation and the City of Edmundston).

"We have learned a lot from that first round and made some amazing partnerships thanks to the incredible leadership on both sides. One of the biggest achievements, though, was proving that it's possible for two governments to come together despite jurisdictional and cultural boundaries to create joint economic planning initiatives, a greater

voice, and access to other services and funding in their respective provinces," says Patterson.

Phase 2 of the CEDI program is already underway and set to run until 2021. It will include 30 participating communities and include larger cities. It will also make a stronger call for all Canadians to work on reconciliation with First Nations communities.

While the original CIPP program is no longer active, it has inspired a new pilot project in Manitoba, where Indigenous Northern Affairs is working with FCM to replicate its national approach on a regional level. "We want to demonstrate that there is no magic to what we're doing," says Wilson. "From our experience with CIPP and CEDI, we have lots of tools and resources to share with any organization that is interested in doing what we've done on a more local level. If we can help a larger number of communities access these same services, everyone will achieve their objectives faster." ■