Wise Practices for collaborative policy development between MCFD, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and Indigenous Communities

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Acknowledgements

Offering acknowledgment in honour of the traditional keepers of this land, the Lekwungen people, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

I would like to acknowledge I have no family or community ties to the Indigenous communities. I have been a settler in Victoria, BC, for the last three years.

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Executive Summary

The Aboriginal Policy branch at the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) is interested in encouraging collaborative policy making between MCFD, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and Métis and Inuit communities, and Indigenous people living both on and off reserve. Local communities have expressed concerns about current policies and identified gaps between the communities’ real challenges and recommendations made by MCFD.

The following report aims to identify wise practices and principles for respectful and culturally-sensitive collaborative engagement with Indigenous communities in the modification and creation of policies regarding child welfare. A literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan and key informant interviews revealed that collaboration is best achieved through a set of
principles promoting shared decision-making and real transfers of power to Indigenous communities; there must be a greater awareness of oppression, past policies and the narratives present in both historical and current Canadian culture. In addition, a series of steps and processes were identified to complement the key principles.

In the context of a disproportionately high number of Indigenous children being placed in care, history of oppression and discrimination towards Indigenous communities and complicated relationships between some Indigenous communities and MCFD, a truly collaborative engagement of Indigenous communities in the reform of the child welfare system could provide an opportunity for relationship building. Resulting recommendations from the present report include the following first steps:

- **Signals for long-term commitment at the organisational and community level**
  - Longer timelines & targets (not months but years)
  - Collaborative timelines or at least timelines agreed-upon by Indigenous partners

- **Train and support staff to engage differently**
  - Awareness of historical context of Indigenous and setter relations in Canada
  - Ability to deconstruct policies and previous collaborative initiatives, think about privilege and power imbalances, and work at changing power imbalances
  - Consider using an anti-oppression framework in addition to the Aboriginal Practice and Policy Framework

- **Place value in the process of collaboration, not just the outcome**
- Evaluate the experience of community partners: Are they feeling heard? Are community partners engaged in a meaningful opportunity to lead decision-making initiatives that affect their communities?
- Trust and quality of the relationship are measurable outcomes in future evaluations
Context

Indigenous communities in British Columbia (BC) are very diverse and include First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. They represent more than 200 000 individuals and account for approximately 5% of the general population in BC (Statistics Canada, 2011). Yet, in 2016, 60.1% of the children in care in BC were of Indigenous descent, despite a general downward trend in the overall number of children in care (Grand Chief Ed John, 2016). Due to over-representation of Indigenous children in care, an increasing number of actors have recognized the interplay of multiple systemic disadvantages, and historical and current discrimination faced by Indigenous communities (Martell, 2013; Grand Chief Ed John, 2016). Indeed, currently in BC, almost three quarters of the Indigenous children come into care due to concerns about neglect (Grand Chief Ed John, 2016). The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) identified a need for structural interventions targeting housing, substance misuse, and poverty (Martell, 2013). FNCFCS provided evidence for a discriminatory provision of Indigenous child welfare services across Canada in a complaint filed in 2007 to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT). The CHRT upheld their claims in January 2016. It found the funding received by agencies made it difficult if not impossible to comply to the provinces’ legislation and standards and provided incentives to remove children from their communities; it also found Indigenous communities were negatively impacted by several service gaps, denials, and culturally inadequate programs (Fontaine, 2016; FN Leadership Council, 2016). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) also dedicated five of its calls to action to child welfare and advocated for a reduction of Indigenous children in care, the implementation of the Jordan’s principle, the creation of
Annual reports, new child welfare legislation and more culturally appropriate programs (FN Leadership Council, 2016). The CHRT ruling and the TRC’s report provide an additional incentive for the government of Canada to work with Indigenous communities to reform child welfare.

Despite changes to the legislation in multiple Canadian provinces, such as Manitoba or Ontario, during the last decades, policies and legislations have failed to address the key concerns of Indigenous communities and to reduce the gaps in child welfare and well-being between Indigenous communities and other communities. Local actors, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, and Indigenous communities have also pointed to the discrepancies between policies and real world challenges or needs. In addition, BC First Nation leadership expressed a strong desire to engage in reforming child welfare with the Ministry of Child and Family Development and the federal government (FN Leadership Council, 2016). As a result, MCFD would like to engage in greater collaboration with Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and Indigenous communities both on and off reserve to collaboratively create policies which are reflective of the experience of the Indigenous families they are intended to serve.

The following report aims to identify wise practices and principles for respectful and culturally-sensitive collaborative engagement of Indigenous communities in the modification and creation of policies about child welfare. First, I will report on the findings from a literature search and jurisdictional scan in order to build on the successes or struggles of other Canadian provinces (Manitoba and Ontario) and Australia. I will draw on theories explaining the failures of past initiatives, and provide a discussion of current initiatives. The results of two informant interviews done in BC will be provided and the themes will be contrasted with the existing literature. The
final part of this report will identify short-term and long-term recommendations.

**What are the wisest approaches to collaborative policy-making implemented in other jurisdictions? What are the key principles in respectful and successful collaborative policy-making with Indigenous communities?**

**Methods**

Three complementary research activities were undertaken: a jurisdictional scan, a literature review, and interviews with key informants.

**Literature review**

The literature search was completed using several databases such as the University of Victoria’s Academic Search Complete, EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The search included several combinations of the following keywords: (Canada OR Australia OR Ontario OR Manitoba) AND “cultural policy” OR “collaborative policy” OR “community engagement” AND “aboriginal communities” OR “Indigen*” OR “maori” OR “first nations”, with the addition in the first searches of “child welfare” OR “child welfare policy”. When initiatives in collaborative policy were identified, the policy’s or the initiative’s name was added to the search. The grey literature was accessed using Google search. Scholarly research, theses, dissertations and reports were reviewed.

**Cross-jurisdictional scan**

Collaborative policy initiatives between Indigenous communities and provincial or federal governments in Ontario, Manitoba and Australia were identified through the literature review or google searches. The search was
not limited to policies about child welfare and was extended to include policies in education, and policies targeting key structural disadvantages which influence child well-being – to account for the very limited number of well-documented and truly collaborative policy-making initiatives concerning child welfare. Then, government and association’s reports, websites and other resources describing the initiatives and their outcomes were compiled and wise practices or principles for collaboration were identified. To further illustrate the discussion, a couple of initiatives are analysed in this report using the principles identified during the literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan.

**Interviews with key informants**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a senior executive at MCFD and a Indigenous member of the community (See Appendix A). Both participants had extensive experience in child-welfare practice with Indigenous communities and have been involved in collaborative projects between MCFD and Indigenous communities. One interview was conducted over-the-phone, and the other interview was conducted in person. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using a thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analyses allow researchers to acknowledge that similar events can lead to different, subjective meanings and that the interview allows for a co-construction of meaning between the participants and the researcher (Weigert & Gecas, 2003). The interviews were coded line-by-line. Throughout the coding process and as the data themes were identified and developed. Themes are indicated in *italics*. 
Limitations

I would like to acknowledge I have no family or community ties to the Indigenous communities. Despite the inclusion of articles and reports from Indigenous authors and the interview of one Indigenous community member, my results are limited by the lesser representation of Indigenous perspectives in scientific publications and the grey literature, and the lack of research on Indigenous indicators and principles of engagement for policy collaboration between governments and Indigenous communities. Very few initiatives have been attempted in the child welfare system, and, as a result, some of initiatives reported on were undertaken in other related but distinct domains such as health.

In addition, due to time constraints, it is beyond the scope of the present report to exhaustively review all collaborative policy initiatives done in Canada and Australia, and to research initiatives undertaken with Inuit and Métis communities.

Yet, the present report should provide some recommendations for future research and some key principles for engaging in collaborative policy making with Indigenous communities in BC.

Key Definitions

Collaboration versus consultation

Different levels of participation and engagement characterize what have been termed “collaborative projects”. Asking communities to “cooperate”, “coordinate”, “collaborate” (Graham & Skelton, 2017) or to engage in “consultation”, or “partnership” (Arnstein, 1969) is associated with variable levels of trust, delegation of power and decision-making processes. Thus, defining what each form of engagement entails will be
important in 1) identifying what initiatives are truly collaborative and 2) understanding the barriers to collaboration.

**Consultation.** Arnstein (1969) argued meaningful participation can be understood only through an analysis of the redistribution of power within participatory initiatives. Consultation gives the opportunity of being heard and gaining information. It involves one or more meetings between communities and governmental bodies. However, the consulted parties lack direct control over the outcome or decisions, and as a result, the consultation process can easily become tokenizing and lack concrete and satisfying outcomes for the consulted parties (Arnstein, 1969). It lacks an embedded system to ensure the consulted parties have power over decision making.

**Cooperation.** Cooperation necessitates more organization and trust than simple sharing of information or consultation. It involves the consistent sharing of important information and may imply a modification in some activities of each partner to move toward their independent but similar goals (Graham & Skelton, 2017).

**Coordination.** Coordination is a step up from cooperation and entails a sharing of resources by both partners. Goals are becoming interdependent. It requires power to be shared between partners, a high level of trust, and may involve some written agreements (Graham & Skelton, 2017).

**Collaboration.** Collaboration represents several qualitative and concrete improvements over coordination. Collaborating partners increase their respective knowledge, learning and capacity by learning together from their mistakes, and by sharing power, resources, accountability and successes in front of their respective communities. Collaboration necessitates trusting relationships developed over several years through frequent communication, and the agreement on well-defined and
operationalized goals (Graham & Skelton, 2017). Participatory approaches defined as “partnerships” or “delegated power” by Arnstein (196) are more representative of collaboration: non-governmental parties have been granted enough power to negotiate, and to directly participate in and strongly influence decision-making.

"Everybody is transparent, people feel heard, people are engaged in the process and no one party is driving the process." - Senior executive at MCFD on collaboration

When it comes to collaborative research designs between settlers and Indigenous communities, some researchers have argued that consultation can be a first step towards collaboration – and allow for actors to develop trust, and relationships, to identify representatives from both groups – or can be used to involve the more general community occasionally once a collaborative practice exists between two groups (Lowe et al, 2009). However, it is important to highlight once more that not only is consultation not collaboration and, as a result, cannot achieve the same processes and outcomes, but also it may not result in increased trust and stronger relationship if used as a token engagement.

**Steps for collaborative engagement**

“Collaborative impact” initiatives have provided one of the most recent frameworks for collaborative engagement. Engaging communities in a collaborative process can be broken down into four big steps (Graham & Skelton, 2017):

- [Direct link to the cited source, Graham & Skelton, 2017]
- Step 1: Learn about the communities’ context, start to define a common agenda with all key partners and communities
- Step 2: Identify leaders, resources, and create an incentive for change
- Step 3: Build the organisational structure and engage the wider public to support the initiative
- Step 4: Sustain actions and evaluate outcomes and processes

At all steps, all stakeholders should be involved and having a say in the direction of the initiatives and the decisions taken.

Kramer (2011) identified some of the essential elements of “collaborative impact” initiatives. Partners in a collaborative initiative have a common and detailed agenda, based on a shared understanding of the problem, potential solutions, and goals. They have a plan for what each of them is supposed to do, how and when.

Having a common agenda cannot be achieved without frequent and transparent communication between community and government partners. It also ensures that common measures are agreed upon by all and used across all participants.

Within the context of a collaboration between MCFD and Indigenous communities, defining common goals and agenda and agreeing

Collaborative engagement is about:

**GIVING DECISION MAKING POWER TO COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

Defining a common long-term goal (e.g. X% less of Indigenous children in care in 4 years), and a shared agenda (e.g. which policies to change/issues to tackle first)

Providing resources: organisational and financial support, data on previous initiatives, etc.

Having a clear implementation plan to put those policies into practice

Evaluating: learn from the successes and failures of the policies
on common measures is likely to be one of the first challenges encountered by participants. First Nations’ researchers such as Keely Ten Fingers (2005a) have increasingly called for a rejection of Western frameworks of research policy development and their replacement with indicators based on First Nations’ values and ways of knowing. The Dakota Social Policy Development project was supported by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and is an example of how community specific values and context can significantly impact which indicators are meaningful to the community and how they should be measured (Ten Fingers, 2005b). In addition, an increasing body of research suggests that psychometric measures in parenting assessment as well as current approaches to measure outcomes in Indigenous communities can miss the mark and reproduce the misconceptions of the dominant culture, thereby failing to really assess what happens in Indigenous communities around child welfare (Choate & McKenzie, 2015). In the past, a lack of operationalisation of key constructs (e.g. trust, culturally-rooted) with each community and the use of meaningless indicators have plagued several participatory initiatives and prevented them to lead to a true engagement of communities (Carter, 2010).

Within the common agenda, Kania and Kramer (2011) advocate for a planning which promotes “mutually reinforcing activities”. It encourages partners to build on each other’s activities, and to coordinate their initiatives to build on each other successes instead of competing. Finally, to sustain collaborative projects and diminish the time lost by each partner in logistical or administrative processes, the authors recommend the creation of a backbone organisation dedicated to coordinate partners, provide support for organising calls, meetings, writing papers, and do other administrative or logistical tasks.
Many collaborative initiatives, whether they endorse the “collective impact” framework or not, evolve in a way similar to the four steps. They ensure collaboration through:

- Regular meetings (Hunter et al, 2015)
- Representation of consulted parties and governmental bodies on decision boards or in committees (Carter, 2010)
- Higher number of consulted parties’ representative than governmental representative (transfer of decision-making power; Hudson & McKenzie, 2003)
- Legislative incentive for collaboration (Hunter et al, 2015)
- Support from leadership, and/or ministers (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003)
- Public consultation before initiatives are implemented (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003)
- Seek feedback and evaluate regularly (Carter, 2010)

Design, implementation and evaluation plans are modified on an ongoing basis, based on the initiatives’ challenges and successes but also based on the discussion between representatives and feedback from the public consultations. Collaborative projects do not evolve in a linear fashion. The implementation and evaluation phases can lead to modifications in designs and building the organisational structure (step 3) can lead to renewed discussions about common goals and agenda, identifying new leaders, or creating additional incentives for change (step 1 and 2).
**Principles for successful collaborative policy making**

**between Indigenous communities and governmental bodies**

Regardless of the steps chosen to start the work, real collaboration needs more than a simple set of guidelines about when to start which activities. It is an organic process and what works will be highly dependent on the groups involved. It also necessitates additional principles to ensure that collaboration does not become token engagement, and that all groups feel included, heard and agents of change.

"Engagement is rarely seen as a long-term, multi-layered moral and relational commitment to redressing social inequalities, not only as statistical indicators but on local Aboriginal terms."

- Carter, 2010

**One size fits all does not work.** There is strong consensus that when doing collaborative work with Indigenous communities, “one size fits all” approaches do not work (e.g. Carter, 2010; Hunter et al, 2015; MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014). Using protocols or a fixed set of strictly defined rules to engage with all Indigenous communities is likely to limit engagement and place-specific and context-specific variations (Carter, 2010). Protocols can induce a) stereotypic views of Indigenous communities as whole and of the engagement process and b) decrease capacity to listen to the specificities of each Indigenous community. In addition, they are rarely created by the Indigenous communities themselves.

Engagement involves both the creation of place-specific governance, goals, agendas and policies negotiated with each individual community, as well as province-wide goals, agendas and policies negotiated between

The Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework was created by MCFD with Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and can provide the direction for future engagement. It is based on consultations with Indigenous members during the redesign of the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators previously used to guide Delegated Aboriginal Agencies in the provision of services. The APPF’s description of the Circle process – which includes gathering the circle, listening, assessing and finding solutions, creating security, belonging and well-being and keeping the circle strong – remains flexible and can be adapted collaboratively with community partners (Ministry of Children and Family Development & Directors Forum, 2016). It uses concepts such as respect and creating security which both can guide the process and be operationalized more concretely to suit the needs of each communities.

During the qualitative interviews, the two informants commented on a related issue: the importance of building a relationship with each Indigenous community, of really knowing and understanding the specific resources, strengths, needs and ways of relating of individual communities. One interviewee and member of the Indigenous community explained:

“For anybody who is going into Indigenous communities, it is about making a connection, actually finding out who that person is: can you tell me a bit more about yourself? Your family and community? Can you tell me more about your traditions? What is the culture? The
cultural frames of reference? And that is different across British Columbia and there is so much diversity.”

“As an example, maybe going and doing collaboration in the fall is not a good time because people are canning fish or collecting berries or whatever it might be.”

The emphasis on relationship building and more deeply really knowing each community echoes the growing recognition of researchers that engagement needs to be flexible and adapted to communities rather than fixed in protocols. The APPF also highlights essential components of building relationships: building safety through the adherence of key cultural values such as respect, inclusion and truth telling (Ministry of Children and Family Development & Directors Forum, 2016).

**Accountability and shared decision-making.** Shared decision-making implies a strong desire from all partners to participate in discussions and decisions and is one of the hallmarks of true collaborative projects with Indigenous communities (Graham & Skelton, 2017; Libesman, 2004; Arnstein, 1969). Yet, it can be complicated for governments to become “enablers” rather than “problem-solvers” (Hunter et al, 2015), and seemingly successful transfers of power can repeat dynamics of the past or place an unfair burden on communities without providing them with the necessary resources to enact positive changes (MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014). Thus, shared decision-making cannot be discussed without also looking at accountability.

Indigenous communities are at different levels of readiness and self-government and self-determination may have different meanings to different Indigenous communities – going from the establishment of separate laws to more active participation in existing institutions (Bennet, 2003). Yet,
Indigenous communities have expressed interest in greater self-determination and control regarding child-welfare issues (e.g. FN Leadership Council, 2016, Bennet, 2003). Greater levels of self-determination has been associated with better outcomes for youths and their communities (e.g. Blackstock, Brown & Bennet, 2007). The Action Framework drafted in 2016 by the FN Leadership Council and the Touchstones of Hope (2006) reports are examples of the Indigenous communities’ knowledge and desire. The Touchstone of Hope report is also a testament to the desire for change by the social work profession and representatives from the government.

However, desire for change does not ensure successful transfers of power or adequate accountability structures. MacDonald and Levasseur (2014) provide an analysis of accountability structures in place in the collaboration that emerged from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative between Indigenous communities and the province of Manitoba. They identified two types of accountability: vertical and horizontal. Vertical accountability refers to the traditional model whereby employees are accountable to their superior, up to the minister and where the minister is in turn accountable to the citizens. Horizontal accountability refers to peer-to-peer accountability whereby equal partners have leverage to ensure they are both fulfilling their part of the contract.
Both types of accountability should be present in collaborative policy making. According to the authors, despite government’s discourses presenting the Child Welfare Initiative as collaboration, an analysis of the actual accountability structure suggests the state remained the true centre of power. Less than adequate funding was given to Indigenous communities; the diversity of Indigenous communities was not adequately represented on the Leadership Council and Indigenous community participants lacked the power to extend their jurisdiction to related policy issues including poverty, health (MacDonald and Levasseur, 2014).

MacDonald and Levasseur (2014)’s discussion underlines the importance of defining how, to whom, and for what each partner is accountable. With inadequate funding and increased responsibility, there is a high risk the new system simply reproduces the systemic disadvantage and discrimination Indigenous communities suffered from and solidifies the negative, problem-focused narrative associated with Indigenous communities.

Thus, understanding accountability structures and their limits can protect Indigenous communities and enhance collaboration. For
governmental staff, cultural competency training should be combined with an incentive to deconstruct current policies, practices and protocols, and identify how new policies can avoid to subtly reproduce past oppressive policies (Carter, 2010). The APPF recognizes the importance of a collective sense of accountability and the need to understand the shared history between settlers and Indigenous people (Ministry of Children and Family Development & Directors Forum, 2016). However, it would benefit from the addition of information about the different forms of accountability, and how they are enforced or not in the Canadian society.

In addition, several authors have identified the importance of formalized agreements, and legislation that provide an incentive for government officials and staffs to engage with Indigenous communities on a regular basis (Carter, 2010; Libesman, 2004; Hunter et al, 2015). Finally, many Indigenous communities would benefit from the allocation of additional financial or other resources (Bennet, 2003; Carter, 2010) or the creation of a backbone organisation (Hunter et al, 2015) to bear the costs of collaboration.

Just like reconciliation, collaboration with Indigenous communities on policies about child welfare will most likely involve a shift in practices, values and a capacity to understand and deconstruct the continued impact of existing practices, policies and legislation. Being aware of the historical context can be a first step toward a critical deconstruction of existing policies.

“\textit{It has been least successful when people viewed it as a discrete moment or event, and most successful when people understood that it involved a difficult, fundamental change with an ongoing re-examination of truth, values and beliefs at personal, professional and societal levels}” – Blackstock, et al (2007) on reconciliation
Awareness of historical context. The two interviewees and numerous researchers alluded to the mistrust of Indigenous communities towards policy makers and government, stemming from the historical and current oppression and discrimination experienced by Indigenous communities (Blackstock et al, 2007; Chief John, 2016; Bamblet & Lewis, 2007).

In both Canada and Australia, the child welfare system has embraced the dominant culture’s values and beliefs about child well-being and parenting, and has struggled to incorporate Indigenous perspectives (Bamblet & Lewis, 2007; Blackstock et al, 2007). Historically, the importance of the child’s cultural background and community has been downplayed. Interventionist policies applied with insufficient cultural awareness harmed Indigenous communities.

Thus, the cultural-competence training of government officials and staffs should include analyses about the impact of historical and current discrimination and policies on relationship building between Indigenous communities and MCFD, as well as analyses about privileges, differential power in relationships, and how colonizing practices have harmed Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Bamblet & Lewis, 2007; Blackstock et al, 2007). Just like “one size fits all” approaches do not work, having only a general, non-place-specific understanding of historical context could lead to overgeneralizations. Different communities suffered in variable ways from the same policies, and service delivery. Understanding the specific impact of policies and practices in each community, with the help of community partners, can enhance government officials and staffs’ capacity to deconstruct policies in more concrete and applied terms. This in turn would actively foster relationship building from an ‘allyship’ perspective (Gehl, 2015).
Thus, learning about the historical context will help to understand the emergence of current policies and practices. To further enhance trainings, it can be complemented with other frameworks of analysis such as the anti-oppression framework used in Ontario (2010), or the tools such as the toolkit for reconciliation made by the BC society for social workers (2016). The addition of an anti-oppression framework can allow for the cultural shift within an organisation to be planned and evaluated and for action to be taken (see Wong and Ying Yee, 2010, for more details).

Lastly, an awareness of the historical context and a community’s previous experiences with MCFD or other governmental bodies will help employees from MCFD to understand and work with Indigenous communities to remedy reluctance or mistrust, and allow for a more appropriate set of practices to emerge over time.

“Don't be afraid if you get rejected at the onset because I think there is a lot of fear and hostility around the ministry.”
- Indigenous community member in BC

**Representation.** In the context of multiple and diverse Indigenous communities in BC and the previous discussions, representation of all interested groups and parties becomes both challenging and one of the key factors that will ensure support for the new or revised policies in the communities. Australian communities identified the need for both transparent and flexible ways to put forward their representatives, and for most vulnerable members of their communities (e.g. children, women) to also be represented in the negotiations when appropriate (Carter, 2010). In some Canadian communities, colonization had a negative impact on gender
equality and Indigenous women have voiced their desire to be more represented in collaborative or self-determination initiatives (Libesman, 2004).

The Empowered communities’ initiative in Australia tried to put in place a flexible model of engagement which ensures adequate representation (see page 29 of the present report for more details; Hunter et al, 2015). Indigenous communities are encouraged to join the project on an opt-in basis, and to identify four types of leaders (cultural, natural, organisational, educated) to take part in the project. Cultural leaders are involved in maintaining a community’s traditions and laws. Natural leaders are community members who have created a different future for themselves and their families and are engaged in creative ways to combine their traditions and modern life. They are highly regarded by members of their community even if they have no organisational, cultural or other leadership role. Organisational leaders are often given the authority by governments and are leaders of key Indigenous organisations. Educated leaders are experts, or professionals (Hunter et al, 2015).

A major challenge in representation is that a majority of Indigenous people in British Columbia in urban centres (Lavoie et al, 2015). Despite this situation, Indigenous people are often told to engage based on their Nation or tribe, rather their place of residence (Lavoie et al, 2015). Métis and Inuit individuals in urban areas face similar challenges to representation outside of their chartered or Federally recognized community. By contrast both Ontario and New Zealand have developed ways to recognize associational (i.e. living in the same space rather than being from the same nation or tribe) Indigenous urban communities. Both have passed legislation to recognize associational Indigenous communities and created Indigenous
advisory boards in urban environments (Lavoie et al., 2015). While
Indigenous representatives are only consulted, and lack the power to directly
guide decision-making, both systems have allowed for a better
representation of all Indigenous communities, and the opportunity to choose
whether they wish to be represented by their Nation or their urban
community.

Involving several types of Indigenous leadership ensures a wider and
hopefully more accurate representation of Indigenous communities’
interests. It also allows different types of knowing and understanding
complex issues to come to the table. Discussing the circumstances about a
community’s past allows participants to acknowledge the past and to work
more respectfully at changing the child welfare system (Blackstock, Brown
& Bennet, 2007). Given the tumultuous history of Indigenous communities
and government bodies, discussions must be clear and open; unclear or
mixed messages will most likely significantly impair any collaborative
work.

**Transparency and respect.** *Transparency* and *respect* are important
ingredients for longer, trusting relationships between MCFD and Indigenous
communities. They are also key values guiding the APPF (Ministry of
Children and Family Development & Directors Forum, 2016). On-going
communication between partners needs to include discussion and problem-
solving about barriers (e.g. funding), expectations, and difficulties or
frustrations in the relationship (Graham & Skelton, 2017).

Both interviewees spoke about transparency and respect and identified
the need for the ministry to acknowledge and take on board the insights
shared by community members. Their accounts point to the necessity for
clearly expressed goals to consultation or collaboration initiatives, and a
willingness to accept the Indigenous communities’ feedback and incorporate it into policies and practice. To put it into the words of the senior executive at MCFD:

“One of the things I have heard in the past is that "oh you consult with us but then you don't use any of the information we give you or tell you. So are you consulting or are you telling us what is going to happen? There is different things here." So when we are consulting we really have to value what we are being told and be sure that what we are being told is reflected back to the community.”

It also implies asking what recommendations are most important to the Indigenous communities, and making sure to define and operationalize concepts in concrete terms. For example, the Indigenous community member reported some frustration in the community about the Indigenous Policy and Practice Framework, because concrete and desired changes to the current system mentioned in the consultation were not kept in the higher-level document. In addition, the participant provided examples of how to signal respect for a community: be interested in the community’s culture, resources and strengths, providing lunch, snacks or a small honorarium, be involved with the community for a long period of time.

**Long-term commitment.** Interviews with both key informants indicated *time* was a *major barrier* to successful collaboration between MCFD and Indigenous communities. MCFD’s tight timelines and fast-paced, changing environment can significantly hinder work with community partners. The senior executive at MCFD commented on the existing timelines:

“One of the big barriers is time, when we are talking about developing policies or new standards, we often have a time limit before us, we have to
have something done by this date. This does not work, if you want to do real true collaboration, especially in the Aboriginal community. Those are our timelines they are not their timeline, in order to get a real input and a true input that time factor, I believe, is often a barrier. We can't rush that from the Aboriginal side”

The Indigenous community member further developed, before adding two years working with a community seemed to be a minimum:

“'I always think about an Elder in one of the communities. she framed it about social workers coming in. She said: "They don't get to know us and who we are and what we do, because they just come in and then they leave". There are always rotations, people live there not for long. There is nobody there for long term, to be able to really engage and develop that really collaborative relationship. Without that relationship for the Aboriginal community it is difficult and challenging to be that partner.’”

Both interviewees strongly emphasized the need for more time and different timelines to start a truly restorative and collaborative process between MCFD and Indigenous communities, and to build trust toward the relationship and each other as partners. It requires once again, a move away from usual statistical indicators and to recognize the value not only in Indigenous indicators of child well-being but also in the collaborative and relationship building process itself. Collaboration with Indigenous communities on child welfare can provide an avenue for reconciliation (Blackstock et al, 2007). While reconciliation is long process filled with complicated and painful truths and potential trauma, it offers numerous promises: better outcomes for Indigenous children, safer communities, equality between Indigenous communities and other groups of the Canadian population.
Most collaborative initiatives span several years and may from the start even aim to last for a decade or more (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003; Hunter et al, 2015). The Indigenous leadership in Australia is asking the government for a 10-year commitment for the Empowered Initiatives and a funding reform (Hunter et al, 2015). While the APPF recognizes the importance of “keeping the circle strong” and maintaining the relationship between MCFD and Indigenous communities (Ministry of Children and Family Development & Directors Forum, 2016), it does not indicate what are appropriate timelines for engagement (years, decades).

Collaborative initiatives require a large investment of human, financial and logistical resources, and regular and frequent meetings between the numerous partners. They also require a shift in the way collaborative work is approached and implemented, a willingness to analyse past practices and policies, recognize harm and discrimination and train government officials and staff to allow for a different framework of engagement. Yet, collaborative initiatives can bring about long-term changes and growth to communities, especially when they tackle complex problems such as education or child welfare (Kania & Kramer, 2011). In addition,
through relationship building, MCFD could benefit from the *expertise and strengths of Indigenous communities* described by both interviewees:

“I think that it is a real positive that despite everything that happened they still want to engage with MCFD and find a way to work together more collaboratively - being heard and acknowledged for the strengths they have in their communities. Knowledge is one of their biggest strengths, they know what they are talking about. (...) They have the historical knowledge and day-to-day knowledge - that policy, great idea!, but on the ground that is not going to work. They have the knowledge to be able to say what will work on the ground.” (senior executive at MCFD)

“I think some of the strengths is in the relationships, the community relationships, the cultural connections, the ability to collectively come together if there is some need, a crisis.” (Indigenous community member)

“It can't be just one person driving it or one specific area responsible for these actions, it has to be ALL parts of the ministry and it has to be embedded in the organisation itself. Unless we do that the attitudes and the old practices will hang around so it has to be really embedded within the organization and everybody has to feel a sense of responsibility to do the work in a different way from your frontline worker to the top of your leadership level in the organisation. Everybody has to have that sense of responsibility.”

- Senior executive at MCFD
Empowered Communities (Australia)

The value of development is to “expand the range of choices (freedom) enjoyed by individuals” p.13

Political willingness:
- Bi-partisan support in 2013
  - Closing the Gap initiative (20 year targets)
  - Jawun program since 2012 – Government’s employees work for & live with an Indigenous community for 6-12 weeks

Recognition of harm done to Indigenous communities
- Closing the Gap targets not met in 2015
- High percentage of Indigenous youth in care
- Education, poverty, substance abuse – need for structural interventions

2013
- • 25 Indigenous leaders of 8 regions met to develop a proposal of comprehensive reforms
  - • Bi-partisan support for the design phase + collaborative plan for design in place

2015
- • End of the design phase
  - • Collaborative agenda and targets defined

2016
- • Backbone organisation created to support Indigenous communities
  - • Work on First Priority Agreements starts

5 Priorities:
- Children’s education
- Lower number of children in care
- Adult employment
- Housing (private ownership)
- Domestic violence and drug abuse

Promote self-determination & increase opportunities for Indigenous communities and individuals
**Empowered Communities (Australia)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>2 years for the design phase&lt;br&gt;Indigenous leadership asking for a 10-year involvement from the government&lt;br&gt;Planned long-term collaboration/No creation of a separate Indigenous agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of responsibility to Indigenous communities</td>
<td>Community-led change, Indigenous leaders well-represented on decision-making committees + driving the design report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives for all partners</td>
<td>Funding reforms; reforms of the welfare system to provide incentive for Indigenous families or individuals to look for new opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding reforms</td>
<td>Move to a pooling model for each region, funding allocated based on success, transparency on results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One size fits all does not work</td>
<td>Place-based agendas set collaboratively with local communities&lt;br&gt;Opt-in basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal accountability</td>
<td>Indigenous Policy Productivity Council – Independent body:&lt;br&gt;Oversees commitment from both parties&lt;br&gt;Evaluate policies and programs&lt;br&gt;Annual reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative support</td>
<td>Development of a Reform Framework: National Policy agreements and legislation&lt;br&gt;Indigenous Empowerment Act proposed&lt;br&gt;Multiple accords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>E.g. current problems in funding model are extensively discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>2-year and 10-year comprehensive review planned by the Indigenous Policy Productivity Council&lt;br&gt;Continuous – learn as you go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No evaluation report out yet. Design report was released in 2015.
First Nations’ Health Governance (BC)

- **2005**
  - Transformative Change Accords - Tripartite accord between BC and Canada governments and First Nations leadership
  - Establish a new relationship, close the gap in health care

- **2006-7**
  - Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan
  - 10-year plan with 29 Action items, recognized by BC and Canada

- **2011**
  - Tripartite Framework Agreement on Health Governance
  - New First Nations governance structure, transfer of authority to a First Nations Health Authority within 2 years

- **2013**
  - Canada Funding Agreement and Sub-agreements
  - Federal transfer of resources and responsibilities
  - Formation of the governance structure for First Nations’ Health in BC: First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), First Nations Health Council (FNHC), First Nations Health Directors Association (FNHDA)

Collaboration between 2005 and 2013
Culminated in the creation of a First Nations Health Authority to work alongside other government bodies

Requires less training in existing governmental structures
BUT
Could lead to a slower shift in practice at all levels of government

Other actors:
BC Ministry of Health – determines policy direction and sets province wide goals and standards
Provincial Health Services Authority (PHS) – provides specialized health services throughout the province
**First Nations’ Health Governance (BC)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term</th>
<th>10-year plan to close the gap in health care provision and health indicators in 2005 Creation of the FNHA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of responsibility to Indigenous communities</td>
<td>Transfer through the FHNA, FNHC and FNHDA More control on policies for design, implementation, funding of on-reserve programs Ability to partner with provincial and federal government to redesign policy and legislation – Unclear how much can influence BC Ministry of Health policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding reforms</td>
<td>Funding agreement in 2013 13.5 million annual expenditure on new services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One size fits all does not work</td>
<td>Community engagement hubs Collaboration between the 3 agencies Plans specific to each region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal accountability</td>
<td>Accountability between the FNHA, FNHC and FNHDA No independent structure holding provincial and federal governments and the 3 agencies accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative support</td>
<td>Creation of a new FNHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Some senior executives reported on the importance of transparency in building relationships (see next page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Annual reports – BUT not made by an independent organization First Nations’ indicators of health and wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Lavoie et al (2015) raised concerns about the representation of associational urban Indigenous communities Good representation of First Nations Leadership on committees</td>
</tr>
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</table>
First Nations’ Health Governance (BC)

One independent evaluation from researchers at Simon Fraser University

Methodology for evaluation:
34 key informant interviews with senior representatives at the FNHA, provincial health services and FN communities
A roundtable with 60 participants including 17 students, community members, elders or members of the academic community – to discuss results from interviews

Goals:
Reflect on shared governance, partnerships, relationship-building, reciprocal accountability and changes in quantity and quality of health services for FN communities

Key findings:
Administrative and structural changes made partnerships possible
Reciprocal accountability meant efforts to work together to take shared action and to monitor progress, Sense of responsibility in executives from PHS
First Nations leadership feeling in control of the process
Importance of building relationships – trust, consensus building, consistent commitment, integrity
Importance of transparency for at least some senior executives on both sides
Uniqueness of First Nations’ perspective on health and wellness
Culturally safe and appropriate care

Horizontal accountability and funding are two key issues when transfers of power are done through the creation of a new Authority (MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014). More information is needed to evaluate the initiative.

Recommendations

First steps

Signals for long-term commitment at the organisational and community level

- Longer timelines & targets (not months but years)
- Collaborative timelines or at least timelines agreed-upon by Indigenous partners

Train and support staff to engage differently

- Includes awareness of historical context of Indigenous and settler relations in Canada
- Ability to deconstruct policies and previous collaborative initiatives, think about privilege and power imbalances and work at changing power imbalances
- Consider using an anti-oppression framework in addition to the Aboriginal Practice and Policy Framework

THEN

Place value in the process of collaboration, not just the outcome

- Evaluate the experience of community partners: Are they feeling heard? Are community partners having a meaningful opportunity to lead decision-making initiatives that affect their communities?
- Trust and quality of the relationship are measurable outcomes in future evaluations

Ask communities whom to speak to, how to start – listen and learn
Avoid general protocols
Encourage communities to let staff know what they feel is needed for a respectful and meaningful engagement
What is the history of the community? Previous experiences with consultation or collaboration?
What are the key concerns?

- Collaboratively operationalize terms like trust, respect, child well-being, etc. with community partners
- Collaboratively develop Indigenous community-based indicators of and targets for child well-being
- Collaboratively set common goals, create a common agenda, and identify indicators and their measurements
- Ensure there is collaboratively agreed-upon processes for grievances to be heard
- Support communities in the engagement process through providing human, logistical or financial resources as necessary
  - Are all types of leadership represented and supported?
- Be transparent about availability of resources, scope of engagement, etc.

**Long-term**

- Commit to collaborative work for the long-haul: design, implementation, evaluation, modification.
- Continue to be collaborative – multiple and regular meetings with all types of leadership
Support staff in their decolonizing journey through continued training and opportunities to engage with Indigenous communities

Provide opportunities for policies on structural problems or for policies across ministries

**Research**

- Review staff training programs
  - Cultural competency
  - Anti-Oppression frameworks
  - Exploration of privilege
- Research preferred modes of engagement for each community
  - Métis, Inuit and First Nation communities
  - Evaluate experience in previous consultations
- Let the research reflect good collaborative practices
  - Long-term
  - Relationship building
  - Led by Indigenous communities
- Evaluate outcomes and processes
  - Using indicators collaboratively chosen with Indigenous communities
  - Evaluate the engagement process: do communities feel heard? Is the engagement tailored to the communities’ needs?
References


Minister of Health (Canada)/Minister of Health (British Columbia)/First Nations Health Society. (2011, October 13). British Columbia Tripartite Framework Agreement on First Nation Health Governance. Retrieved from:


Appendix A

Interview with a senior executive at MCFD

In what context have you worked with the First Nation Leadership so far? What do you think about MCFD and Aboriginal communities engaging in collaborative policy making about child welfare? What are some of the strengths that Aboriginal communities and/or MCFD already possess and that would play a role in this project? What do you think might be the biggest barriers to a policy collaboration between MCFD and Aboriginal communities? How might they be addressed? Are there any wise practices that you have used or know about and would recommend for this project?

Interview with an Aboriginal community member in a leadership position

Have you previously been involved in a collaborative project with MCFD? If yes, which one? What do you think about MCFD and Aboriginal communities engaging in collaborative policy making about child welfare? What are some of the strengths that Aboriginal communities and/or MCFD already possess and that would play a role in this project? What do you think might be the biggest barriers to a policy collaboration between MCFD and Aboriginal communities? How might they be addressed? Are there any wise practices/precedents you know about and you think we should look at for this project? If you had a magic wand, what would an “ideal” collaboration look like? How would it start?
## Appendix B: Using the APPF to drive change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Recommendations</th>
<th>Using the APPF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term commitment</td>
<td><em>The APPF recognizes the need to “consider how time may be valued differently” and the importance of continuing to foster relationships in the future in order to do the last phase of the circle: Keep the Circle Strong.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular Meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years not months</td>
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Nevertheless, tight timelines were still seen as one of the biggest barriers to collaboration by the interviewees. It may be helpful to rethink timelines from the beginning (e.g. being open to longer timelines and signalling it to the staff and communities) and work collaboratively with communities to decide on a timeline that works for them.

Train staff to:
- Be culturally sensitive
- Deconstruct past and current policies, practices and protocols
- Understand power differentials, privilege and the impact of discrimination

| Train staff to:                  | *The APPF highlights the need to:*
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Recognize the importance of stories, legends, cultural traditions</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Learn about and understand the impact of the shared history of colonization</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Have more trauma-informed policies and practices</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Practice cultural safety including “actively exploring and challenging complex power relationships”</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

May benefit from the addition of an Anti-Oppression Framework, or more emphasis on how to deconstruct policies and practice step-by-step/practically, and how to understand the impact of power differentials and discriminations (e.g. concrete activities to do with the staff, etc.)

What does one need to think about to create trauma-informed policies? Identify issues staff need to think about in order to create cultural safety

Have conversations with each communities about impact of particular
| Horizontal accountability  
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient resources</td>
<td>The APPF recognizes collective responsibility and accountability and that “Aboriginal people are in the best position to make decisions that affect their children and youths”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-going assessment</td>
<td>How to translate that in providing sufficient resources (logistical, funding, etc.) for collaboration, assessment of collaborative practices by an external researcher? An assessment of staffs’ training including Indigenous perspectives? Can there be a way for Indigenous communities to hold MCFD accountable by having a formal pathway for voicing their concern? A formal agreement for resolving disputes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous leaders having direct influence over the decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate representation</td>
<td>Inclusion and truth-telling are key values of the APPF. The role of community elders and the family is seen as central. The issue of representation is particularly important in the Gathering the Circle phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous leaders represented Cultural, Organisational, Natural and Educated leaders Urban centres</td>
<td>Need more details on the different types of leadership, how to involve communities in deciding whom should represent them &amp; how to interact with associational communities in urban centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘One size fits all’ does not work – Learn to know each community Context and history What do they think is needed for collaboration? Previous experiences with collaboration? Key concerns?</td>
<td>Circle rooted in Indigenous traditions &amp; meant to be community centered. Wisdom and belonging are key values of the APPF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationalise concepts collaboratively Respect Both concepts to define a successful collaboration and define common goals</td>
<td>The APPF mentions the importance of common values and foundations, and of doing the work collaboratively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They need to be defined collaboratively with each community and operationalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>(concrete examples, etc.). What does it look like concretely for each community?</td>
<td>In the APPF, respect is operationalised flexibly to be adapted to different communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide enough resources for collaboration</td>
<td>Provide enough resources for collaboration. Lunch? Logistical support? Funding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The APPF mention the importance of witnesses in Aboriginal communities</td>
<td>The APPF mention the importance of witnesses in Aboriginal communities. Discuss each community’s needs with community partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define common agenda &amp; measures</td>
<td>The APPF asks to strive for common understanding and collective decision-making, and recognizes the resiliency and knowledge of Indigenous communities, at all points of the process but also especially in the Listening, Assessing and Finding Solutions phase. Outcomes are improved with community input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine collaboratively with community partners the goals, agenda and measures/indicators of success</td>
<td>Determine collaboratively with community partners the goals, agenda and measures/indicators of success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value the relationship-building process</td>
<td>The APPF recognizes the Circle itself is a restorative process, and that healthy relationships between policy-makers and communities are essential to the long term health and well-being of children and youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the outcome of the initiative</td>
<td>The APPF identifies an Assess and Listen phase. It further highlights the assessment process should be “inclusive, collaborative, holistic”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the outcome of the initiative</td>
<td>Listening and assessing communities’ needs should be an on-going feature of any engagement process, not only at the beginning but also after solutions have been implemented. It is key to involve communities in the design, implementation and analyses of evaluations: collaboratively choose key indicators and ways to measure them, collaboratively discuss the results, successes and areas to be improved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Evaluate the engagement process
Are participants feeling heard?
Is the staff sufficiently trained?
Listen to the participants’ feedback

The APPF identifies an Assess and Listen phase. It further highlights the assessment process should be “inclusive, collaborative, holistic”. The APPF recognizes the engagement process should be responsive to each community’s specificities, culturally-safe and collaborative.

The APPF does not explicitly focus on the evaluation of the engagement process. Learning from past mistakes and past engagements will be crucial to forming more trusting relationships. In addition, developing collaboratively a plan to assess collaboration will held all parties more accountable. Again, the key indicators, measurements and data collection methods need to be worked on collaboratively. The APPF can provide ideas about what an evaluation of the engagement process could focus on:

- Is it responsive to communities?
- Is it culturally-safe?
- Is it sufficiently collaborative?