

ACR Aboriginal Programs Project Program Template

Program Area:	4.0	Community Relations
Sub Program:	4.2	Building and Sustaining Positive Community Relationships
Template:	4.2.5	Conflict Analysis, Prevention, Management, and Resolution
Sponsor(s)	<i>Royal Roads University</i>	

Objective

To use proven conflict prevention, mitigation, containment and resolution techniques to establish, enhance and sustain positive, stable, mutually respectful relations with Aboriginal communities who have an interest in and could be impacted by resource development projects.

Description

Understanding conflict analysis and management and learning how to prevent and resolve conflict situations are central to Aboriginal relations and the successful management of resource development projects. Proven techniques should be embedded in the conception, design and implementation of all phases of resource development projects, not brought to bear as an afterthought, when problems erupt. Hurried, quick-fix, one-size-fits-all assumptions and approaches must be avoided. Each Aboriginal community, its culture and concerns, and each resource development project is unique. In all conflict analysis, management, prevention and resolution efforts, a learning approach is advisable.

Components of an effective conflict analysis, management, prevention and resolution strategy can include the following:

Analysis – Long before you propose your development project, do your homework. Conduct a comprehensive community analysis and impact assessment. Look at the economic, environmental, social and political impacts of the project you're envisioning. Pay special attention to cultural, historical and symbolic factors. Analyze stakeholder groups, both demographically and psycho-graphically. Inquire about Aboriginal communities' values, concerns, needs, and goals. Ascertain what resources, skills and capacities these groups possess - and which they aspire to acquire. Be aware that differing worldviews can influence parties' assumptions, behavior and priorities. Reflect critically on your own and your company's attitudes, values and approach. Resource companies must be willing to invest in Aboriginal communities, not only financially, but relationally. Building a relationship with community members is a critical first step.

Outreach – Outreach can play a powerful role in the development of positive, stable, mutually respectful relations as well as the prevention, mitigation, containment and resolution of conflict. Outreach involves "asking after" others and listening carefully to their views, values, concerns,

and goals. Outreach often involves informal, one-on-one or small group conversations. The principle aim of outreach is to learn about and understand Aboriginal communities. When well done, it builds trust, credibility, and social capital. It signals a willingness to work together and may clear up misunderstandings. Outreach lays the foundation for ongoing relations.

Dialogue – After relationships have been established, a forum for facilitating meaningful dialogue must be created. Stakeholders need a safe place to discuss their views, values, concerns, and goals. Study circles, town halls, community conversations, and talking circles are examples of forums that can be used to improve parties' understanding and relationship. Ideally, participants should co-design the process. Setting process and outcome ground rules and goals may be beneficial. As with all public consultation and participation processes, authenticity and honesty are imperative. If decisions have already made, trust will be shattered. All dialogic efforts should aim to promote positive, stable, mutually respectful relations with Aboriginal communities and prevent conflict.

Mutual learning – Mutual learning initiatives, of which there are two types, can be used to increase parties' understanding of each other, their situation and ways in which they can improve it. The aim of reciprocal learning initiatives is to provide parties with a forum to teach and learn from one another. Such activities afford disputing parties an opportunity to tell their story. Understanding others' narratives, their past pains and future goals, can greatly clarify issues and options. The aim of joint learning initiatives, which can range from communication and conflict management workshops to presentation by outside experts, to joint research projects, is to gather new information, improve parties' capacities and strengthen relations. Mutual learning activities yield information and understanding that are central to conflict analysis, management, prevention and resolution. They build trust and help parties discover common ground and shared vision. Mutual learning facilitates well-informed decision making and problem solving. It can prevent conflict and precipitate cathartic breakthroughs when negotiations have stalemated.

Collaborative decision making and problem solving – The aim of collaborative decision making and problem solving is to proceed in a manner that endeavors to improve all parties' quality of life. Co-developing a shared vision of the future and jointly deciding how best to achieve it is recommended. When differences surface or conflicts occur, parties must guard against blaming one another and, instead, focus on their mutual problem. Decisions and solutions should be acceptable and beneficial to the majority of stakeholders. When consensus appears unachievable, agreements should be structured so dissenting parties can, at minimum, "live with" them. To be stable and enduring, decisions and solutions should be culturally respectful, environmentally sustainable, economically profitable, socially beneficial, politically salable, and technologically practical. All decisions and solutions should include details about implementation and provisions for future improvements. They should all foster harmonious long-term relations.

Ongoing community and capacity building – Most agreements - and relationships - can be improved upon. Having the freedom and flexibility to refine Agreements as new information comes to light or parties' situation change encourages ongoing dialogue and mutual learning. This in turn promotes improved understanding, relationship building and parties' capacity to deal effectively with future challenges. The skills parties have acquired can be applied to other situations. In this manner, the learning approach to conflict analysis, management, prevention and resolution promotes ongoing community building and capacity building.

Implementation

When undertaking to use conflict prevention, mitigation, containment and resolution techniques to foster, enhance and sustain positive, stable, mutually respectful relations with Aboriginal communities, it is important to guard against presuming that all Aboriginal groups are the same. Each group has its own history, culture, and concerns. Each group must be approached in a way that honours its uniqueness.

Some communities may not have the capacity to engage with industry in a constructive manner. There may be skills, from job training to the development of ancillary services, that Aboriginal communities need help developing. Resource companies may choose to aid or invest in the development of those skills. Doing so can improve relations, which in turn can provide resource companies with greater predictability and sustainability.

Finally, be mindful of industry's assumptions, beliefs, and values. Other stakeholders may not share them. Strive to be reflective, think critically and cultivate sustainable relations.

Timeframe for Results

The time required to design, implement and manage conflict analysis, prevention, management and resolution initiatives can vary widely, depending on the situation. Aboriginals' conception of time is often different than industry's. Patient investment in a long-term relationship is advisable. Trust takes time to build. Results may accrue slowly, but the benefits of using culturally appropriate approaches to conflict prevention, management and resolution can extend for generations.

Measurable Criteria

Benefits of using culturally appropriate conflict analysis, prevention, management and resolution techniques range from:

- reduced risk of conflict that can threaten successful joint ventures;
- can greatly reduce delays in the time required for resource companies to obtain regulatory approvals for proposed ventures.

Budget

The cost of conflict prevention, management and resolution initiatives can vary widely, depending on the complexity of the situation. Knowing how to prevent, manage and resolve conflict can save money, relationships and even lives. When the management and development of natural resources are at issue, keeping even one issue out of court or getting the necessary approvals quickly can save all parties substantial amounts. The use of culturally appropriate conflict prevention, management and resolution approaches can improve relations and provide a positive return on investment.

Partners and Sponsors

Conflict analysis, prevention, management and resolution efforts can be initiated by any resource company wanting to build stable, mutually respectful relations with Aboriginal communities.

Federal, provincial and municipal government agencies, Aboriginal communities, professional and non-governmental organizations, and intermediaries can undertake similar initiatives. These efforts can be undertaken independently or in partnership with others.

Experience with the Program

The potential of these techniques to foster, enhance and sustain positive, stable, mutually respectful relations with Aboriginal communities is well documented in both theory and practice.

Though sometimes difficult to quantify, there is no doubt they can contribute positively to long term community building and capacity building in both Aboriginal communities and the resource development industry.

General Applicability

The principles and techniques outlined above can be applied in all resource sectors and projects.

Additional Information or Support

The Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) Division of Royal Roads University offers a range of conflict management, prevention and resolution programs. In addition to open enrollment executive education programs, PCS will develop customized courses and deliver them on-campus, on-line or at a site of clients' choosing. PCS offers a two-year master's degree in Conflict Analysis and Management with concentrations in organizational conflict, community and school conflict, ethno-political conflict, environmental conflict, international peacekeeping, and international trade and commercial conflict. PCS also offers a master's degree in Human Security and Peacebuilding and a bachelor's degree in Justice Studies.

All programs emphasize the achievement of specific learning outcomes and the mastery of competencies that participants can take back to their community or workplace. Courses are designed so that they can be completed while participants continue working. Academic credits can be laddered into other programs. PCS programs are pertinent to people working for private-sector resource development companies, federal, provincial and municipal government agencies, Aboriginal communities, professional and non-governmental organizations, as well as consultants, customers and suppliers.

Judy Carter, Peace and Conflict Studies Division of Royal Roads University, Victoria, B.C.

Telephone: (250) 391-2654 (toll free 1-800-788-8028)

Email: ruconflict@royalroads.ca

Website: www.royalroads.ca/pcs

Date Entered or Updated: June 15, 2003