



Project Update

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Despite the setbacks and challenges that Covid has meant for all of us, the Rebuilding First Nations Governance (RFNG) Project has had some important successes in the last year, and we are feeling enthusiastic about what this next year will bring. One of our resolutions is to regularly publish updates on what we're up to. Welcome to our first edition!

Inherent Rights Youth Initiative



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One of the most significant projects we supported last year brought together youth and spiritual leaders from our partner communities to learn about their Inherent Rights and to support their development as leaders in implementing the Inherent Right to self-government in their communities. With the guidance and teaching of Elders, the youth designed their own Youth, Elders and Spiritual Leaders Gathering and then opened it up to other youth from our partner Nations and more broadly. Held over four days in ceremony in October 2021, over Zoom, this was a joint initiative of the Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG), ourselves, Turtle Island Institute, the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR) and the Institute of Public Administration Canada (IPAC). We are discussing ways to sustain the incredible energy, relationships and knowledge sharing built during this workshop, and to grow support for more youth leaders in the years to come. This winter, we have plans to bring together the Youth and Elders again for a storytelling initiative that will have the Youth and Elders learn and share stories from their respective nations.

The RFNG Webinar Series

With help from project partner, IPAC, the five nation-wide webinars we held throughout last year were a great success. Almost 1800 people registered to take part in the series from coast-to-coast-to coast, with average participation of about 200 people per session. In addition to First Nations peoples, many of the participants were from other levels of government across Canada who wanted to develop a deeper understanding of self-government and Aboriginal rights and to apply the learning in their work. The series also resulted in some very rich insights into the great work many communities and individuals are doing, and we'll be making greater use of the recordings to share what we learned, with shorter written summaries and video clips. Recordings of the sessions are all available on our [website](#).

Research

In the next couple of months, we look forward to publishing an article on **Systems Mapping the Indian Act** by Dan McCarthy, University of Waterloo, Greg Hill, Portland University, and Erin Alexiuk, University of Waterloo. Their ground-breaking work is helping to illustrate just how entangled the Indian Act is in every aspect of life on a First Nation reserve, as well as identify key leverage points to make long-lasting change.

Also slated for publication this year is a book chapter by Frances Abele, Kent McNeil and Satsan titled **"How First Nations Have Been Transforming Public Policy through the Courts"**. (Policy Success in Canada: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, eds. E. Lindquist, M. Howlett, G. Skogstad, G. Tellier, P. 't Hart Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2022). We've been given permission to share the chapter now. You can read it [here](#)

New research is being launched this year on financing First Nations governments (fiscal relationships) by Frances Abele, Carleton; Land Tenure by Jaime Lavelle, USask Law and, using policy as a transition device to exercise the inherent right to self-government by Catherine

MacQuarrie. David Newhouse, Trent University, plans to explore the issues of off-reserve citizenship, and Miriam Jorgensen, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona, plans to do a comparative review of Indigenous law-making in select American Nations.

If you haven't already seen it, we recommend Kent McNeil's important piece "[Indigenous law and the Common Law](#)" in which he lays out the case for courts to give due consideration to the existence and application of Indigenous law. Kent concludes: "Indigenous law exists and is followed in Indigenous communities. It is part of Canadian law and can be applied by Canadian courts without being specifically incorporated into Canadian law by treaty, statute, or judicial decision."

Research Assistants

Sending out much respect and gratitude to the post-secondary students who are contributing to the project! To date we have engaged 17 research assistants (RAs) from five different universities across the country, at all levels of academia and in several different disciplines (law, policy, public administration, journalism, and political science among others). More than half of the RAs we've engaged so far are Indigenous. All of them are making important contributions to the project in a variety of ways. The students have their own learning and social network in Basecamp, led by RA Amsey Maracle.

Community work

Despite a very heavy year of managing Covid, weather crises and ongoing traumas, including unmarked graves at residential schools, many of our partner communities are persevering towards exercising their inherent rights, and many are gearing up for getting back involved in 2022. With the help of technology and our partners at IPAC, CFNG has been able to hold virtual workshops with several communities and Tribal Councils to get them started on the road to self-government. As a result of these sessions, we hope to soon be able to announce several new community partners in the project.

"As far as the five pillars are concerned, Satsan, you are speaking our language. We totally understand it. It's what we've been talking about and looking for. There is no confusion between the Elders and Youth about this, it's the generations in the middle that have been damaged by the Indian Act and the residential school that we've got to bring together so that we can rebuild our nations with all of our people." – Jerry Sawanis, Nishnawbe Aski Nation Elder

Law-making based on culture, language and traditions is emerging as a major topic of interest for many First Nations as they look to reassert jurisdiction over programs and service delivery such as child and family services and health. Several communities are interested in making a start on policy governance.

