



February 21, 2008

Re: Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network Meeting
March 10-11, 2008
Halifax, Nova Scotia

I am writing to invite you to an important meeting that will be held on March 10 and 11 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The meeting, one of four planned regional events, constitutes the second stage of a project that started in March 2007. This project seeks to create an international policy-research network focusing on Aboriginal concerns in urban settings. In Canada, this network will take the form of interconnected think tanks that bring together academics, Aboriginal and local community leaders, government representatives and public and private stakeholders. Together they will develop a socially relevant and academically rigorous research program focusing on urban Aboriginal policy and best practice issues. The overarching goal of the project is to achieve a better life for Aboriginal people living in cities and towns.

As is painfully obvious to anyone with an interest in urban and Aboriginal issues, the rapid increase in off-reserve and urban Aboriginal populations have not been matched by a corresponding increase in scholarly or policy attention. Furthermore, the work that is underway is not always being done collaboratively with members of Aboriginal communities. This severely limits its practical import and uptake. Our aim is to correct this situation by sharply raising the level of research investment; by increasing the number of scholars, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who work on urban Aboriginal issues and broadening the scope of their work; by involving Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal institutions in research from its inception all the way through to the interpretation of results; and by forging relationships that promote research utilization for policy and program development. The March meeting will constitute a critical step in this direction.

In March of last year, a 'proof-of-concept' meeting was convened in Ottawa by the New Economy Development Group with the support of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). It involved some fifty people with an interest in urban Aboriginal policy and research. Included were Aboriginal and other scholars, federal and provincial decision-makers, service providers and other stakeholders, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The purpose of the meeting was to test the reaction of participants to an idea, specifically, the notion of adapting the mechanisms and structures employed by the International Metropolis Project to urban Aboriginal research. The Metropolis Project, launched in the mid-nineties, has transformed immigration and multiculturalism policy research in Canada and has had enormous influence in Europe. Support for the idea was virtually unanimous, provided the new project was not simply a clone of Metropolis but recognized fundamental differences between the two sets of issues. A copy of the report from this meeting and a list of participants are available upon request.

Encouraged by this endorsement and by subsequent discussions with SSHRCC and with INAC, two further steps have been taken since March: an application has been submitted to SSHRCC for research support; and productive discussions have been held with INAC to help underwrite the regional workshops that are the subject of this letter. A few words on these activities will help to clarify our directions.

Immediately following the March meeting, a small consortium was formed, headed by the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC). This consortium, in collaboration with four well-known national scholars, submitted a letter of intent to SSHRCC for project support under the CURA (Community-University Research Alliance) Program. I am listed as the principal investigator for the project, in my capacity as Executive Director of the NAFC; my co-directors on the letter of intent are Fred Wein from Dalhousie University; David Newhouse from Trent University; Evelyn Peters from the University of Saskatchewan; and Charles Ungerleider from the University of Victoria who is currently on secondment to the Canadian Council on Learning as Director of Knowledge and Research Mobilization. Fred has been instrumental in organizing the Halifax meeting to which you are being invited. At the end of March we will learn whether our letter of intent was successful and whether we will be invited to make a full submission. This is the critical phase. We are confident that if we pass this initial hurdle - and we have every reason to believe that we will - our application will be supported when the final decision regarding funding is made in February of 2009. SSHRCC CURA grants are for a maximum of \$200,000 per annum for five years.

In addition to applying for SSHRCC support, our consortium has also been actively engaged in discussions with INAC where we are championed by the Office of the Federal Interlocutor and the Strategic Research group. The department has offered to take the lead on developing a coalition of federal departments and agencies with an interest in urban Aboriginal policy research. This would be extraordinarily valuable not only as a potential source of project financing but also as a forum for coordinating federal policy-research interests and priorities without regard to jurisdiction. Coordinated federal involvement would also facilitate provincial and municipal engagement which is critical to the project's long-term success. Indeed, piquing the interest and securing the active involvement of all three levels of government is an important objective of the regional workshops.

Should the workshops meet our expectations, it may prove possible to accelerate the project's startup using alternative financing to what would be available under CURA. While financing of the sort that would be needed to sustain our project is not at this point guaranteed, the level of investment provided to us by INAC in support of the regional meetings offers an important signal as to the project's long term prospects. With this in mind, the Halifax meeting (in parallel with the other regional meetings) is designed to achieve the following five objectives:

- (1) To share information with participants regarding the project's design, long-term objectives and anticipated development process;
- (2) To establish the degree of regional interest in forming a research centre that focuses on urban Aboriginal concerns;
- (3) To identify key academic and community persons who are prepared to assume a leadership position, collaborating and investing time in developing the proposal;
- (4) To attract the interest and support of key government agencies and other stakeholders; and
- (5) To develop a preliminary list of regional research and policy priorities.

The meeting agenda (attached) is structured to support these five goals.

We have developed a website to include a number of background and supportive materials which will help to provide a more fulsome description of this initiative. The website can be found at this link: <http://www.nafc.ca/uakn/index.html>.

Please let us know at your earliest convenience (by email to nafcgen@nafc.ca) whether you would be interested in attending this invitation-only meeting. If you are unavailable, please forward this invitation to a colleague. We have limited financial resources available to subsidize anyone who is unable to find alternate means of support. We were hoping to limit subsidies to community groups; however, should you require support, we would be prepared to help you out subject to the availability of resources. If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Thank you for your consideration and I sincerely hope that you will be able to join us in our forthcoming meeting.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Dinsdale', written in a cursive style.

Peter Dinsdale
Executive Director
National Association of Friendship Centres



DEVELOPING AN URBAN ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

**Micmac Native Friendship Centre
2158 Gottingen Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

March 10-11, 2008

MEETING OBJECTIVES:

- To introduce the concept and strategic goals of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network;
- To clarify the Network's policy and research priorities along with its governance; and
- To develop a leadership corps for Network

DAY ONE - MARCH 10, 2008

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| 1:00 – 1:30 | Registration |
| 1:30 – 1:45 | Opening Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elder |
| 1:45 – 2:00 | Introductions, Project Goals and Meeting Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peter Dinsdale, National Association of Friendship Centres• Fred Wien, Dalhousie University |
| 2:00 – 2:45 | Focusing the Project: Policy and Research Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project Overview, Meyer Burstein, New Economy Group• Strategic Policy Interests - Peter Dinsdale, National Association of Friendship Centres• Regional Research Interests - Fred Wien, Dalhousie University |
| 2:45 – 3:30 | Reactions to Policy and Research Interest <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have we identified the appropriate concerns?• Within the broad topic areas, what issues should be prioritized?• Are there particular regional concerns?• Does the research community have the capacity to address the priorities that have been identified?• Are there existing projects or centres with common interests? |
| 3:30 – 3:45 | Health Break |
| 3:45 – 5:00 | Reactions to Policy and Research Concerns Continued |

DAY TWO - MARCH 11, 2008

- 9:00 – 9:15 **Presentation of key structural features**
- Meyer Burstein, New Economy Group
- 9:15 – 10:00 **Structuring the Project: Institutions, Governance and Knowledge Mobilization**
- Peter Dinsdale, National Association of Friendship Centres
- 10:00 – 10:30 **Question period to clarify proposal**
- 10:30 – 10:45 **Health Break**
- 10:45 – 12:00 **Discussion of Framework and Next Steps**
- Likely degree of university/institutional interest in hosting Centre?
 - Extent of community interest in playing active role?
 - Capacity issues re full participation by universities and communities?
 - Interest by local, regional and national policy community?
 - Preliminary indication of interest in domains – participating or leading?
 - Assistance needed to help mobilize institutions or participants?
- 12:00 - 12:20 **Closing Remarks, Next Steps and Timetable**
- Peter Dinsdale, National Association of Friendship Centres
- 12:20 – 12:30 **Closing Prayer**
- Elder