

Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network



Background Brief & Success
Story:

An Aboriginal Feast as an
Urban Community and
Economic Development Tool

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Title: Background Brief & Success Story: An Aboriginal Feast as an Urban Community and Economic Development Tool

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About the Urban Aboriginal Economic Development Network: The Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network is an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder network of researchers and practitioners working in urban Aboriginal and Métis communities. This includes organizations, universities, federal/provincial/municipal and Aboriginal governments, private industry, community groups, and NGO's. The network's focus is on mobilizing economic development knowledge and strengthening organizational capacity.

This paper can be found on the network website: <http://abdc.bc.ca/uaed>

An Aboriginal Feast as an Urban Community and Economic Development Tool

On May 6-8, 2010, a Chinese business delegation of twenty individuals, consisting of senior logistics professionals representing the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing (CFLP) and Chinese government officials, visited Prince George, BC to learn about the region's infrastructure and logistics facilities that connect British Columbia with Asia. The visit was part of CFLP's considerations of investment expansions in the Province as well as the exploration of trade and education opportunities for the future.

The delegation's visit was hosted by the Initiatives Prince George Development Corporation (IPG) with support from a number of Prince George organizations and businesses, such as the Prince George Airport Authority, the Prince George Global Logistics Park, CN, and Supply Chain Logistics Canada (IPG Media Release).

IPG "is a municipally-owned corporation mandated by the City of Prince George to undertake programs and projects designed to grow and diversify the local economy" (IPG website). The Aboriginal Business Development Centre (ABDC) in Prince George, BC works with IPG to help coordinate some of their efforts as they both pursue economic development and the promotion of business opportunities in the area. ABDC is a "results oriented team of professionals, working together in unity to provide a full spectrum of culturally, client sensitive, business and economic development services to assist Aboriginal individuals, organizations and communities to achieve 'their' full potential" (ABDC website).

Consequently, IPG consulted with ABDC when developing the schedule, program, and budget for the visit from the Chinese delegation. ABDC CEO Ray Gerow had been stressing for some time that the Prince George business community needed to include Aboriginal input when presenting itself to businesses and international guests, and following this suggestion, IPG agreed to let the Aboriginal business community host the delegation for one evening and included Aboriginal aspects in the two-day schedule, which also featured a visit to Prince Rupert.

The Feast

The Aboriginal way of doing business takes business partners and visitors out of a strict business environment and focuses more on honouring and entertaining to create the opportunity to get to know someone personally before engaging in business relations with them.

Integrating cultural programming and traditional Aboriginal business habits in Prince George's business environment has the potential to make Prince George stand out as a business location in comparison to other places. After having missed some opportunities to present cultural and business diversity to international guests at the time of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, IPG agreed to leave it to Ray Gerow to plan adequate Aboriginal input in the CFLP visit.

ABDC organized a traditional Aboriginal welcome for the delegation's arrival at the Prince George Airport. Ray Gerow and Vince Prince of the Nak'azdli First Nations Cultural and

Leadership Program greeted the group with a traditional, formal welcome dressed in regalia. They introduced themselves with a talking stick and invited the guests to a Feast for the following evening.

The purpose of the Feast was to impress and honour the visitors, to entertain them beyond a purely business-oriented environment, and to give the visitors as well as the local business community an opportunity to get to know each other on more personal terms.

Vince Prince's family coordinated and prepared the food. A group of approximately sixty people, including local and regional government representatives, members of the All Nations Elders Counsel, a Métis delegation, representatives of local and regional businesses and organizations, and members of the Aboriginal business community, welcomed the CFLP delegation at Prince George Exploration Place. Adhering to local Aboriginal tradition, all members of the delegation were introduced individually with a talking stick and guided to their seats. After a prayer song, the feast began accompanied by a slide show introducing and showcasing some of the local Aboriginal culture.

Apart from a multitude of traditional and local foods, the visitors were presented with an entertainment program that featured Nu Yiz Drummers, Prince George native and singer Marcel Gagnon, the Grandchildren of the North Métis Jiggers Dance Group, and the Prince George Native Friendship Centre Rainbow Dancers. The evening ended with honour and farewell songs as the CFLP delegation were drummed out of the feast hall. The following evening Ray Gerow and Veronica Creyke were on hand at the Prince George airport to see the delegation off, during which time gifts were handed out to the departing CFLP delegation to honour them and keep them safe on their journey.

Relevance for Urban Aboriginal Economic Development

ABDC is aiming to create an understanding in Prince George's business community that business visitors need to be taken out of a strictly business-related environment to be introduced to local culture. As a result, lately they have been witnessing a new awareness in the Prince George business community that there is a need to open up to local cultures, include cultural elements in their business activities, and to be willing to go beyond a purely business-oriented approach and allow visitors to enjoy true cultural experiences as well.

In an Aboriginal context, business and culture go hand-in-hand as they do in some other countries such as China. Allowing a significant amount of input from the Aboriginal business community makes the presentation of Prince George to business visitors more diverse and more likely to attract international business activities. The successful example of the Aboriginal Feast for the CFLP delegation is encouraging the Prince George business community to maintain this traditional element and recognize the benefits to local business development. The mainstream business community shows signs of recognizing the value of Aboriginal input as well. Since the success of the Feast has validated Aboriginal business traditions, an increasing number of Prince George business initiatives are asking for Aboriginal representation on their boards.

Beyond the benefits for the entire region, the local Aboriginal business community benefits through increased involvement in the overall business realm of the region. Their chance to lend Aboriginal protocol beyond strictly Aboriginal business activities and the realization among mainstream businesses that Aboriginal involvement strengthens the entire business environment provide economic development and expansion opportunities through active involvement, networking, and a strengthened and extended presence in business activities for the urban Aboriginal community.

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