



Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice:



Lennox Island First Nation

Context

The Mi'kmaq people have inhabited the land in Prince Edward Island for over 10,000 years.

Lennox Island First Nation is the first reserve in Canada owned by its people, having been purchased in 1878 from landlords by the Aboriginal Protection Society. It is the seat of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI. It has an on reserve population of 320, and off-reserve population of 720. Over 60% of the population is under the age of 35, so retaining youth is a key strategy.

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were prepared as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

After much federal government intervention, in 1969 the community began to take a more active role in its development. In 1972-73 a bridge was built to Lennox Island, which opened the community to more trade opportunities and to freer travel. In the 1970s a comprehensive development plan was created. Various business initiatives were tried. In the 1980s the Mahemigew Corporation tried to develop oyster beds that got crushed in the ice flows, organic blueberries were developed before the market did, and a peat moss operation got flooded with seawater. Despite these setbacks, there was a continuous effort to try. With the Marshall Decision in 1999, a native fishery was born alongside the growing rights agenda. This is the key context of Lennox Island First Nation – a community with great history and great firsts, and a desire to experiment within a background of new opportunity.

History

The history of self-determination and pursuit of a community economic development agenda started three chiefs ago, who set the stage for thinking about “taking care of ourselves.” Development had to be considerate of community needs, it had to be culturally sound, it had to invigorate culture, and it had to have ecological integrity.

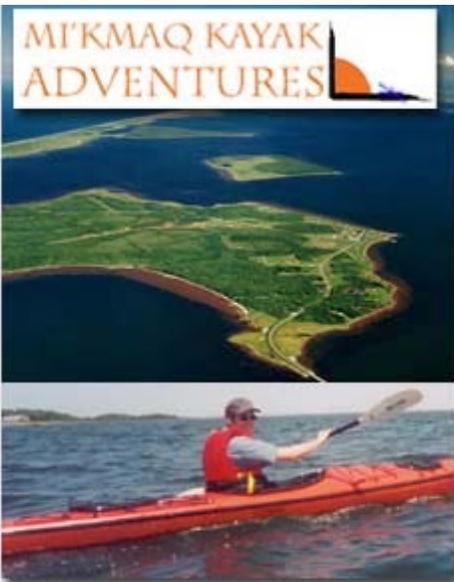
In 1999, the community developed a ten-year eco-tourism strategy that celebrated their environment and their culture. It welcomed people in and also provided an opportunity to build the health of the community – emotionally, spiritually and physically. The beautiful trails were as much for the tourist as it was for the physical and psychological health of community members. This particular strategy was short-listed for an international responsible tourism award. It illustrated the depth of their community.

Matt McGuire, Community Economic Development Officer, was hired five years ago to facilitate this direction using his business and planning skills.

Activities

The Lennox Island First Nation’s CED activities touch almost all sectors of the economy, including:

Information Technology – The idea here is to leverage and focus on the remoteness of the community, not to downplay it. Lennox Island aims to become a centre of excellence in applying technology in remote communities.



Eco-Tourism is the most developed of Lennox Island's activities

Lennox Island Prince Edward Island

Location – Lennox Island is located on Malpeque Bay, 50 km northwest of Summerside on the north shore of Prince Edward Island.

History – There has been a native presence on the shores of Malpeque Bay dating back 10,000 years. Mi'kmaq have had a permanent settlement on Lennox Island since the early 19th century.

Economy – The lobster fishery, ecotourism and crafts are the main contributors to the economy.

Social Need – Providing employment to retain its youth who make up 60% of the population.

Claim to fame – Seat of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island.

Fishery – With the Donald Marshall decision in September 1999, there was an opportunity to expand the fishery. Today, a major project is developing the wharf. The community has purchased a small seafood processing facility in order to lessen dependence on outside buyers and suppliers and are expanding access and utilization of a greater diversity of species.

Energy – Connecting to the ecological underpinnings of their community strategy, the focus here is renewable energy: wind power. They are involved in the preliminary design of a wind power farm and research station. Also an important element here is that new construction be energy efficient, from housing to a potential recreation centre.

Eco-Tourism – Started a number of years ago, this is now the most advanced of all of their activities. It incorporates trails, cultural centres and craft development.

Community Infrastructure and Quality of Life Projects – Lennox Island is implementing a program of improving the community streetscape, building sidewalks and implementing better and safer street side lighting. Pedestrian rates on the reserve are very high for a rural community, as well, there is no bussing on reserve so the streetscape improvements take on a significant public safety importance.

The streetscape program also includes benches, bicycle racks, waste receptacles and a considerable investment in lining the streets with quality trees, as the central community has never been treated for beautification in a significant way.

Unique community-specific roads signs that feature the Mi'kmaq language are also being included in the streetscape in order to highlight the culture and heritage of the community.

Community Entrepreneurs – These activities seek to foster entrepreneurship and be flexible to the nature of the people. For instance, baskets are sold to tourists, but it is not necessarily just in the season for basket making. Plus, no one makes baskets in a hurry -- it is something men and women do in the evenings. So what the community does is buy the baskets and stockpiles them for the season.

General Management – One issue is to become more efficient with resources and foster a climate of innovation, for this reason they have become one of the first communities designated under the ISO 9000 quality management system.

Major activities in the coming year will be securing some money to upgrade the wharf and the band office, and for co-hosting the 2009 Canada Games. As part of that they want to build a C2000 building, energy efficient, which will be incorporated into the overall development of a resource for the community – a SMART building.



Local Band members work on the Eco-Trail

Participatory and Comprehensive Analysis

The approach used in Lennox Island is broad. It incorporates the principles of CED and actively integrates social, economic, and ecological priorities together towards enhancing the community's health.

“A big part is accepting reality. One, that we are remote, in fact, we should exploit our remoteness. There is not an effort to be something else. If we can address our remoteness we can be leaders. There is an acceptance that some people just want to make a living, while others want to become wealthy. There is acceptance of a natural way in employment which does not fit a nine-to-five schedule,” says Margaret Sark, Band Administrator.

Comprehensive Analysis

The approach used in Lennox Island is broad. It incorporates the principles of CED and actively integrates social, economic, and ecological priorities together towards enhancing the community's health. A high priority is placed on having band members involved in any development. There is a celebration of their remoteness and of a natural rhythm in life.



Craft-making is integrated into the Eco-Tourism development strategy.

Whatever the activity, a high priority is placed on having band members involved in the developments.

A good example of how leaders think in Lennox Island is the case of the Eilerslie Island Biological Station. In 2004, the band acquired Eilerslie Island Biological station from the federal government when it was decommissioned. Initially an accounting firm did a business plan on the site and suggested a motel development that required the ensuing human waste to be trucked off to a waste pool at Lennox Island, which would have to be enlarged to accommodate more waste. Instead of this proposal, the band decided to move the motel to Lennox Island and create 5 apartment units to meet local housing needs. They are now partnering with an Israeli firm to develop a research site for a new sea based product. This may create 45 jobs in research, harvesting and attendants. For Lennox Island, this type of development that creates different types of jobs provides an opportunity to lead in a sector and maintains local ownership, which is key to making things work and retaining youth in the community.

Outcomes and Evaluation

The community does use planning. It has a 10-year eco-tourism strategy, it has short-term operational plans, and recently it commissioned a Masters student in Recreation to do a five-year recreational analysis and plan. Evaluation is ongoing. The process generally follows the steps of: analyze, try, monitor, re-develop, try again, etc. On a formal level, since the community does use various government programs, part of receiving any government funding includes an evaluation component.

A couple of indicators of progress can be seen in being short-listed for their Eco-Tourism strategy, and the fact they have grown a fishery from 7 fishers in 1999, to over 100 today. That is a 1500% increase in 6 years!

Success Factors, Policies and Lessons

The community wants success. Matt McGuire the CED officer says, "I've been involved in other communities where promoting development is like pulling teeth, but here people want progress. The desire for progress on Lennox Island is the single largest determining factor for the success that we have achieved."

"I think we've had so little for so long, that we're willing to take a gamble for any opportunity for success," says Margaret Sark, Band Administrator.

Mr. McGuire adds, "people are playing their roles, for instance Chief Darlene Bernard is great at seizing opportunities, and is a very strong and outspoken advocate for the community. Leadership is key."

Lennox Island First Nation

The greatest enabling policy has been the Marshall decision of 1999, which opened the fishery to the band, but also began a rights agenda. It reinforced the feeling that native peoples had rights, which has given some self-confidence back to the people. Compared to 10 years ago, there is much more co-operation with the federal government.

At the same time, there are some limiting policies. For instance, Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) has gutted economic development programs. INAC has also changed policy on housing. "We cannot use capital program labour and equity as the 25% to leverage other monies. So we need to find a magic pot of money. This may force the Band to build a lower quality of housing than community members are willing to accept and that violate the Band's ecological principles (the R-2000 homes that the Band is currently building are slightly more expensive than a conventional home)," says Matt McGuire CED Officer.

Success Factors

- Members have a desire for success and embrace of experimentation
- Key individuals step up to play their role, i.e. to promote the community, seize opportunity and build partnerships
- Leadership by the Chief

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More information on the Lennox Island First Nation can be found on their website at:
<http://www.lennoxisland.com/>

More Profiles of Effective Practice and other resources on social inclusion are available at:
<http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>

This project is funded by the Community Development and Partnerships Directorate of Social Development Canada. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of Social Development Canada.

Published by:

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