BRIDGES

Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement in Saskatchewan

Evaluation Report on BRIDGES Phase Two:
Common Ground Pilot Project in Prince Albert
(2015-2016)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Summative Evaluation

The principal purpose of this summative evaluation is to provide an overview and assessment of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' developed and implemented in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan from September 2015 to March 2016. More specifically the purpose is to provide an overview and assessment of the following aspects of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project': its genesis; its purpose, goals and objectives of the project; its key events; and its organizational framework (i.e., structures and processes).

1.2 Organization of the Summative Evaluation

In keeping with the aforementioned purpose, this evaluation consists of five sections devoted to each of the aforementioned aspects of the Pilot Project, plus a section that provides an assessment and some recommendations regarding various aspects of the Pilot Project.

1.3 Methods and Sources of the Summative Evaluation

The evaluation employs a qualitative methodology, rather than a quantitative methodology. A quantitative methodology regarding, for example, quantifiable surveys of participant views, was not envisioned from the start, primarily because the time and resources needed for that methodology were not available.

This qualitative evaluation is based on the written documentation produced prior to and during the life of the project, and some discussions by the evaluation team with the various key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the Pilot Project.

2. CONTEXT AND GENESIS OF THE 'COMMON GROUND PILOT PROJECT'

A full understanding and appreciation of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' in Prince Albert, as well as this summative evaluation of it, requires an understanding and appreciation of both its context and genesis within a multi-phase project.

2.1 The 'Common Ground Pilot Project' in the Context of the BRIDGES Project

The 'Common Ground Pilot Project' constitutes one of the three phases of a multi-phase project titled the BRIDGES project. The three phases of the BRIDGES project are:

> ➢ **Phase One**: Consisting of community consultations in several larger communities in Saskatchewan

> ➢ **Phase Two:** Consisting of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' in Prince Albert

> ➢ **Phase Three:** Consisting of the continuation of the project in Prince Albert and the initiation of new projects in several other communities

2.2 Genesis of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' in Prince Albert

The genesis of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' is found in a project titled 'Blueprints for BRIDGES (Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement): Connecting Aboriginal and Newcomer Communities.

The BRIDGES project was developed in 2013 and 2014 through a partnership between three key provincial organizations - the Aboriginal Friendship Centers of Saskatchewan (AFCS), the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA) and the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan (MCoS).

The work on the first phase of the project was undertaken and completed in 2014.

The BRIDGES project was motivated by the growing importance placed on demographic changes in the province and the desire to explore existing and emergent initiatives in Saskatchewan and possible best practice models of collaboration elsewhere that might be relevant in the province. AFCS received a SaskCulture Multicultural Initiatives Fund Project grant for 2014-2015 to conduct the first phase of the project.

The BRIDGES project had two related objectives. First, for the three provincial organizations to engage in planning a collaborative research and community consultations process related to the interface between members of Aboriginal and Newcomer communities. Second, to use the information gathered during that process to provide a snapshot of current realities and determine the best course of action to build bridges between Aboriginal peoples and Newcomers in Saskatchewan.

Pursuant to those objectives, a consultant was contracted to conduct research and to coordinate the consultations in the following communities in Saskatchewan: Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Yorkton, and Regina. The report resulting from those consultations can be found online at: http://mcos.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Blueprints-BRIDGES-Final-Report.pdf

It was clear during those consultations that while many organizations and individuals saw this as an important area of work, few felt well equipped to take action, especially on a long-term basis. One of the findings that emerged was that very few of the comparable activities undertaken in the past had been evaluated to assess their impact and change either in relation to a sub-group of individuals or in relation to the community as a whole. Consequently, the partner organizations decided that their ability to encourage various organizations to implement promising practices and to provide them with some constructive guidance would benefit from undertaking some pilot projects designed to explore the relative merits of various initiatives or models for fostering cross-cultural understanding and interpersonal relations between Aboriginal peoples and Newcomers.

For the aforementioned purpose, the three partners decided to continue the collaborative approach to dealing with important issues of mutual interest by undertaking a Pilot Project in the City of Prince Albert. Toward that end they decided to facilitate a partnership among their members in Prince Albert, which included the following organizations: the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Prince Albert, the Prince Albert Multicultural Council and the YWCA, which houses the Regional Newcomer Centre. For this project the collaborative approach was broadened to include Dr. Joe Garcea, a member of the Department of Political Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, and Chair the Executive Committee from Immigration Research West, to provide some planning and evaluation support for the Pilot Project.

To facilitate the coordination of the project, the three partners decided to hire a part-time coordinator to plan and promote each gathering in collaboration with various organizational stakeholders in Prince Albert within and beyond the Aboriginal and Newcomer sectors.

Lessons learned from the Pilot Project in Phase Two will be used to design and implement the projects during the third phase of BRIDGES that will be starting in 2017. The objective of the third phase is to expand the Pilot Project to include more communities and more organizations within each of those communities. As in the case of the initial Pilot Project in Prince Albert, the objective of those projects is to bring together community based organizations to undertaken initiatives that will foster improved understanding and relations between Aboriginals and Newcomers.

3. PURPOSE OF THE 'COMMON GROUND PILOT PROJECT'

The stated purpose of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' in Prince Albert is articulated in the following preamble from the project proposal.

"Whereas relationships between cultures are an integral part of multiculturalism in Saskatchewan;
Whereas the First Nations, Métis and Newcomer populations are growing rapidly in Saskatchewan;
Whereas there are misconceptions in each community;
Whereas there are increasing tensions between the communities;
Whereas many organizations are aware of the demographic changes and increasing tensions, but have limited knowledge and resources to address them;
Whereas few projects with this aim have been effectively evaluated; and
Whereas AFCS, SAISIA and MCoS recognize the issues, are well-placed to demonstrate collaboration, are committed to taking leadership and action;
Therefore, this partnership is ready to take the BRIDGES project to the next phase by creating a pilot project in Prince Albert to offer activities designed to foster positive relationships and use data collection to contribute to the knowledge and its application in the province."

3.1 Goal & Objectives of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project'

The overarching goal of the 'Common Ground Pilot Project' was to develop and implement some potentially valuable initiatives to foster positive communication and connections between each of the following in the Prince Albert city-region:
  ➢ Aboriginal and Newcomer **organizations** serving Aboriginal and Newcomer persons.
  ➢ Aboriginal and Newcomer **persons**
  ➢ Aboriginal and Newcomer **communities and groups** within the Prince Albert city-region.

In keeping with those goals, the Pilot Project was intended to develop and implement some potentially valuable initiatives that were identified in the community consultations conducted during the first phase of the BRIDGES project. Moreover, the hope was that the key lessons learned from the Pilot Project would make it possible to develop, implement and evaluate some models of potential value for other Saskatchewan communities.

3.2 Key Objectives of the Pilot Project in Prince Albert

The key objectives of the Common Ground Project in Prince Albert were as follows:

➢ Design and implement a Pilot Project to explore the potential value of some programming initiatives proposed during Phase One of the BRIDGES project.
➢ Coordinate a series of gatherings involving staff and volunteers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations in Prince Albert.
➢ Gather and analyze data collected from those gatherings to determine the value of various facets of those initiatives
➢ Identify the most effective facets of those particular initiatives to design new and improved models for future initiatives
➢ Design Phase Three of the BRIDGES project to develop a strategy for promoting and implementing those new and improved models of initiatives in various communities with significant numbers of Aboriginals and Newcomers.

4. PROJECT DESIGN

The Common Ground Pilot Project in Prince Albert was designed to include two series of monthly gatherings that would take place in May, June, September, October, and November of 2015, and January, February and March of 2016. By the time the coordinator was in place, organizational gatherings began in August and community gatherings in September.

> ➢ The first series of gatherings was to consist of daytime gatherings for organization/agency staff designed to foster improved relations and rapport between them, and to foster inter-organizational consultations, coordination, and collaboration in building bridges between the Aboriginal and Newcomer communities; and
> ➢ The second series of gatherings was to consist of evening social/educational gatherings for Aboriginal people and Newcomers of all ages designed to provide opportunities for sharing perspectives and ideas at increasingly deeper levels of understanding and appreciation of their respective cultures and the virtues of harmonious co-existence.

The principal objectives of these two series of gatherings were:

> ➢ To create an environment that will allow members of organizations from the Aboriginal and Newcomer communities to learn about cultures (their own and others), history, and current social relations in a safe and comfortable environment.

> ➢ To foster familiarity, friendships, and trust between participants, and to inspire and support them in championing and supporting initiatives and promoting values that foster cross-cultural understanding and harmonious relations in the community.

5. PROJECT INITIATIVES

The Pilot Project included three general categories of overlapping initiatives designed to achieve the project goals and objectives.

- **Initiatives for Inter-Organizational Connections**
  - Daytime gatherings for organization/agency staff designed to foster improved relations and rapport, and also to foster inter-organizational consultations, coordination, and collaboration in building bridges between the Aboriginal and Newcomer communities; and
  - The purpose of these gatherings was to facilitate and strengthen connections among members of organizations from the Aboriginal and Newcomer communities to learn about cultures (their own and others), history, and current social relations in a safe and comfortable environment.

- **Initiatives for Inter-Personal Connections**
  - Evening social/educational gatherings for Aboriginal persons and Newcomers of all ages designed to provide opportunities for sharing perspectives and ideas at increasingly deeper levels of understanding and appreciation of their respective cultures and the virtues of harmonious co-existence.
  - To foster familiarity, friendships, and trust between participants, and to inspire and support them in championing and supporting initiatives and promoting values that foster cross-cultural understanding and harmonious relations in the community.

- **Initiatives for Community Awareness & Cohesion**
  - To promote an appreciation of diversity and to foster the values that will foster cross-cultural understanding, social-cohesion, and harmonious relations in the community.

5.1 Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings Initiatives

As part of the organizational framework, Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings were held throughout the Pilot Project months. These meetings were an important aspect of Common Ground, and served three major purposes:

- ➢ The first purpose was promoting and explaining the objectives of the Pilot Project to groups within the community.
- ➢ The second purpose was to afford representatives attending the meetings an opportunity to provide support, advice, guidance, new ideas, and differing viewpoints on actual or potential initiatives to the project coordinator.
- ➢ The third purpose was to facilitate networking and improved relations between organizational staff in the community, serving as an impetus for improving relations between the two focus communities.

The inter-organizational coordination gatherings took one of three forms:

- ➢ First, some meetings involved only the project coordinator and the core members of the project committee.
- ➢ Second, some meetings involved the project coordinator and the core members of the project committee, as well as representatives of various organizations from throughout the community.
- ➢ Third, some meetings involved the project coordinator and representatives of either a single community agency or representatives of several community agencies. Generally, such meetings were convened upon request by representatives of agencies who were either unable to attend community meetings or when additional information was requested.

Using these three forms of meeting with various organizations ensured that everyone's voice could be heard and all those who wanted input into the project could participate in meetings either to the degree they desired or the degree they were able to do so.

5.1.1 Gatherings Between the Project Coordinator and the Core Local Coordinating Committee

There were two formal meetings between the project coordinator and the Core Local Coordinating Committee. The purpose of these meetings was to come to an agreement on how to proceed with the project before involving more organizations.

The first of such meetings was held on September 14, 2015 between the project coordinator and the Core Local Coordinating Committee (consisting of representatives from the Prince Albert Multicultural Council, the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Prince Albert, and the YWCA). As the precise focus of the Pilot Project was not yet clearly set out and there was some disagreement as to who exactly would be participating in the project, the majority of the time was spent discussing Tapestrama, the first upcoming Community Gathering. It was also at this time that the project name was changed from "BRIDGES" to "Common Ground".

The second meeting, held on September 21, 2015, involved representatives of the same agencies.

The vision for the Pilot Project was clearer by this time and the project coordinator had the goal of working with a minimum of six other agencies within the community and creating six separate Community Gatherings within these target groups. Therefore, the project coordinator had the ability, if desired, to allow other organizations a degree of autonomy and control over the creation of a Community Gathering. Again, there was some discussion and disagreement regarding which organizations would be involved in the project and to what degree. Although debate and disagreement on this particular matter persisted, a tentative working plan was created by consensus at this particular point in time.

5.1.2 Gatherings Between the Project Coordinator and Multiple Organizations

As the 'Organizational Connections Initiatives' and the 'Media and Public Awareness Initiatives' of the project were developed (discussed below), attendance of key stakeholders at the 'Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings' also increased. The November gathering at the Prince Albert Multicultural Council saw 21 people in attendance, with members from several organizations involved in various initiatives within the community. These attendees included representatives from the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, Legal Aid, ISKWEW (a program to help women in crisis), Prince Albert Public Health, the Family Literacy Program, Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan, Inc., a community elder, and other core groups. This increase in numbers served to bring more members of the community into the project, explain its premise in more detail, and allow for various new ideas and opinions to be heard from grassroots representatives. It also served the important purpose of allowing for a safe space for the attendees to have open and honest discussions regarding various issues relevant to Common Ground, including racism and discrimination, particularly between the two focus groups. This sparked conversation and debate between those in attendance. Such conversations are important to have at the grassroots level, as it can begin to change the general discourse surrounding such issues and can also be reflected in the Community Gatherings Initiative.

The January monthly Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings Initiative again welcomed new organizations into the discussion, including the Regional Newcomer Centre, the Regional Aboriginal People's Network, First Nations University, KidsFirst, and Prince Albert Literacy. Although the Regional Newcomer Centre was representing the Newcomer community, there was still an overrepresentation of the Aboriginal community at this and the previous gathering. This may be an issue to be addressed as this disproportionate representation may be reflected in the Community Gatherings Initiative and the project as a whole. Competition between groups was also an issue raised at this time as more organizations sought to be involved in the project and roles were not clearly defined. At this gathering, the theme of the previous gathering was continued and important issues relevant to the project were discussed, particularly the tensions between the two focus groups. To begin, a question was posed to the group: "Is this an issue of lateral violence?" This opened the floor for a discussion around not only this question, but also evolving to discuss the use of language and how it may affect perceptions, as well as the causes of discrimination.

5.1.3 Gatherings Between the Project Coordinator and Individual Representatives

Throughout the duration of the Pilot Project, but especially during the last month, the project coordinator held a number of Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings with individual community organizations when requested. As the project grew and evolved to include more organizations, more wanted to be involved in planning and participating in events. While the increased interest and involvement of individual organizations was a positive development, it presented an important coordination challenge. It became increasingly difficult to host a gathering between the project coordinator and multiple organizations when everyone who wanted to be involved could attend. Therefore, in February, multiple meetings were held between the project coordinator and individual representatives.

Notable examples of such meetings are the following. First, student representatives from three educational institutions within the community approached the project coordinator to discuss the project. This included a representative from the First Nations University, a representative from the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and a representative from Student Services at Saskatchewan Polytechnic Institute. These representatives wanted to undertake some additional initiatives based on the success of the Community Gathering from the previous month ("Talking Tables"). Some of these institutions (particularly the Gabriel Dumont Institute), had been contacted to join the Pilot Project sooner, however they had not contacted the project coordinator until this time. Others had been observing the project unfold via traditional media and social media and decided they also wanted to be included. In responding to their interest, the project coordinator agreed to host a second Talking Tables Community Gathering at the Saskatchewan Polytechnic Institute, as well as to partner with them for their Elimination of Discrimination Week projects at the end of March.

These particular events demonstrate the increasing awareness, interest, and success of the Pilot Project. They also demonstrate the value of the Media and Public Awareness Initiatives in expanding the number of community organizations that become interested in and wanted to participate in initiatives undertaken in conjunction with the Pilot Project.

Unfortunately, the effort devoted to working with these particular organizations and the project coordinator's need to become involved in another project undertaken by SAISIA, made it difficult to convene an inter-organizational meeting involving the project coordinator, representatives of Core Community organizations, as well as other categories of community agencies during this final month of the Pilot Project. It may have been beneficial to hold such a meeting the next month to reflect on the project as a group regarding what had been achieved and on potential improvements if the project continued in Prince Albert or if it was undertaken in other communities.

5.2 Organizational Connections Initiatives

As one of the goals of Common Ground was to involve as many organizations as possible, one of the strongest points of this Pilot Project was the networking skills of the project coordinator. The first such connections were made in September, at the Tapestrama Cultural Festival. The Common Ground Project had an information booth set up at the festival, along with a number of other community organizations, including the Conseil de la cooperation de la Saskatchewan (CCS), Global Partners Institute (GPI), La Société Canadienne-Française de Prince Albert, the Indigenous Peoples Artist Collective, the Prince Albert Literacy Network, Tutor Learner Connections, and the YWCA Prince Albert Settlement Services. The presence of Common Ground at this festival served as an introduction into the community, both to a number of organizations within Prince Albert, as well as to the general public, specifically the two focus groups which were both in attendance at the festival.

In October, the project coordinator delivered a presentation at the Integration Forum at Wanuskewin that allowed her to make new contacts and generate awareness of and enthusiasm for the project. The response was overwhelmingly positive. The project coordinator was approached by a number of representatives from organizations across the province wanting her input on implementing similar initiatives within their respective communities.

Common Ground also joined the Prince Albert Community Networking Coalition in October. This coalition networks nearly 200 agencies within the community and has three facets:

> ➢ News and information is sent to the facilitator and then shared daily between member agencies
> ➢ Monthly information exchange sessions are held in which members can discuss special projects with one another
> ➢ Bi-annual gatherings are held in which agencies have a table and can provide information about their initiatives and network

The project coordinator attended a bi-annual gathering in October which allowed her to disseminate information to approximately 50 people representing a full spectrum of groups and services in the community, as well as make new contacts, notably with Family First, The First Nations University, and the French Society. The following month, the project coordinator used this coalition to send an invitation to the Inter-Organizational Coordination Gathering, resulting in a huge increase in attendance from a number or new organizations. This initiative, together with the Media and Public Awareness Initiative generated a great deal of interest in the project, within the community and for organizations to join.

5.3 Community Gatherings Initiatives

In addition to the Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings, the other main focus of the project was the Community Gatherings. The purpose of these gatherings was to provide opportunities for members of the Aboriginal and Newcomer communities to share ideas and perspectives in order to facilitate understanding and appreciation about their own culture and others. Through this initiative, the Program Coordinator had the freedom to both take part in already existing events within the community or to create gatherings specifically for the Pilot Project. These specifically created gatherings generally took one of two forms: smaller, more intimate gatherings for face to face conversation and cultural exchange, or larger, more relaxed, educational events which facilitated cultural exchange through food, music, dance, and speakers.

LIST OF EVENTS

The Pilot Project was involved in developing and implementing initiatives pursuant to its goals and objectives in two types of events:

- ➢ Initiatives undertaken in conjunction with events developed by other organizations in the community.
- ➢ Initiatives undertaken in conjunction with events developed by the Common Ground Project

The following list consists of the initiatives undertaken in relation to each of those two major types of events.

1. Celebrating Cultural Diversity (Tapestrama)   (Existing Community Event)
2. Round Dance   (Event of Common Ground Project)
3. Christmas Potluck Supper and Sharing   (Event of Common Ground Project)
4. Talking Tables   (Event of Common Ground Project)
5. Storytelling Through Music, Word and Dance   (Event of Common Ground Project)
6. Multicultural Shindig and Potluck Supper   (Event of Common Ground Project)

5.3.1 Community Gatherings as Part of Existing Community Events

5.3.1.1 Celebrating Cultural Diversity (Tapestrama Cultural Festival)

The Tapestrama Cultural Festival provided the opportunity for the Common Ground Pilot Project to have input into the planning of the event, and to introduce the Pilot Project to the community. Tapestrama, which is organized by the Prince Albert Multicultural Council, took place on September 26 and September 27, 2015. This annual event showcases and celebrates the cultural diversity within the community, therefore promoting multiculturalism, unifying the community, and introducing new cultures to those in attendance. Common Ground partnered with the festival's organizers in an effort to more closely align it with the goals and objectives of the Pilot Project. As a result, the usual location of the event was altered to take place in downtown Prince Albert, in order to make it more accessible to the focus groups. In addition, an effort was also made to include more First Nations and Métis performers and booths at the festival. Both of these efforts saw an increase in the number of people and booths to the event compared to previous years, particularly from the Aboriginal community. This served to not only expose these communities to the cultures of Newcomers, but also allowed for the reverse to occur.

5.3.2 Larger Community Gatherings Created for Common Ground

5.3.2.1 Round Dance

The next Community Gathering was the 'Welcome to Newcomers Round Dance'. It was created specifically for the Common Ground Project in partnership with the Prince Albert Indian Métis Friendship Centre. This Community Gathering was organized by the project coordinator with the support of the Project's Local Coordination Committee. The purpose of the event, held at the Prince Albert Indian Métis Friendship Centre on October 24, 2015, was to:

> ➢ Bring together Aboriginal and Newcomer communities in a fun program that encourages learning and discussion
> ➢ To educate Newcomers on Aboriginal Culture
> ➢ Bring these groups together to dispel any myths and to create understanding and friendship

As a traditional First Nations practice, this event served to introduce Newcomers to an important aspect of Aboriginal culture. Clients from the YWCA Settlement Services attended and an elder was present to discuss the history and the meaning of the Round Dance. This social event with a relaxed atmosphere helped to introduce the two communities to one another in a fun and stress free environment.

This event was very well organized. An important aspect of the organization is that prior to the actual event, an elder from the Prince Albert Indian and Métis Friendship Centre spoke to the agencies about the traditions and protocols for the event. Therefore, staff from the PAMC and YWCA could provide their clients with an orientation to those traditions and protocols before arriving at the event. At the event itself, further orientation discussions took place before the Round Dance. Such orientations were valuable both for Newcomers and even for some Aboriginal participants in understanding Aboriginal traditions and protocols.

The event was attended by approximately 200 people. This included Newcomers from the YWCA and various First Nations groups from the surrounding area. The YWCA alone drove nearly 40 of their clients to the event. For the first event planned specifically for Common Ground, this was a fantastic turnout resulting in large part from the use of both traditional media and social media in promoting it. The event was advertised by paNOW.com, CTV, the Daily Herald Newspaper, The Weekly Shopper, local cable, and through radio interviews. In addition, a Facebook event was created to invite people that had over 900 views. This event was also attended and covered by paNOW.com, the Prince Albert Daily Herald, and CTV News.

While the turnout for the event was fantastic and the overall event a success, two areas were mentioned where improvements could have been made. The first being that there was already an established Round Dance occurring near the city at the same time. If the date of the event was changed or if the Project could have partnered with the established Round Dance, the turnout may have been even greater. The second area mentioned was that the location of the event may have been intimidating for some Newcomers, who had lower attendance numbers than Aboriginal participants. This could have been overcome either by changing the location, or possibly arranging for groups of Newcomers to come to the event together in one shuttle. This was also mentioned regarding Tapestrama, therefore, arranging transportation for Newcomers to various events in the future may be an area of improvement to consider.

5.3.2.2 Christmas Potluck Supper with Discussion and Music

Similarly, the next Community Gathering in December provided a relaxed atmosphere for the two focus groups to socialize with one another. After some discussion and a few changes between the core committee and the project coordinator, the idea of a Potluck Supper with Discussion and Music was chosen as a low-key way for cultural exchange to occur. Clients from the YWCA and the PAMC attended and clients from the PAMC gave educational presentations to the group on their respective countries, helping to balance out the focus from the previous month's Gathering that focused exclusively on providing education regarding Aboriginal culture. Impromptu speakers representing Cree, Métis, and Dene cultures also provided information on their respective cultures.

5.3.2.3 Storytelling Through Music, Word, and Dance

On February 27, 2016 an event focusing on Storytelling Through Music, Word, and Song was held at the Prince Albert Multicultural Council. The event was attended by approximately 40 participants. The purpose of this event was to showcase similarities between Aboriginal and Newcomer cultures and arts. The Prince Albert Multicultural Council assisted in bringing together storytellers and artists from both of those communities. The storytellers and artists were predominantly from the Aboriginal community. The acts included the Thunderingsky Dance Troupe of Pow Wow dancers and drummers, Wesahkecahk Tales of Creation, a story teller from Ukraine, and a storyteller from Liberia. Amongst those in attendance were a number of the new Syrian refugees and students from the PAMC. Members of both communities communicated their surprise at how similar dances from other cultures were to their own. This observation underscores the point often made regarding the similarities across various nations. This was one of the recurring themes throughout the Common Ground project reports of various events. Moreover, although this was a relatively large event, the Wesahkecahk Tales presentation was interactive in a way that required all participants to interact directly with members of the other community, rather than just members of their respective communities.

5.3.2.4 Intercultural Shindig and Potluck Supper

The final Community Gathering was an Intercultural Shindig and Potluck Supper, held on March 20, 2016 at the Margo Fournier Centre in downtown Prince Albert. For this event, Common Ground once again partnered with the Prince Albert Multicultural Council for their celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As a community wide event and the last event for the Pilot Project, this event focused less on the two focus communities and more on bringing all communities within Prince Albert together. This event utilized successful elements from previous events, by including the potluck aspect once again and bringing back the Thunderingsky Dance Troupe and Wesahkecahk Tales of Creation. These were combined with new acts, such as a local Métis fiddler and the Prince Albert African Singing, Dancing, and Drum Group.

5.3.3 Smaller Community Gatherings Created for Common Ground

5.3.3.1 Talking Tables at the Prince Albert Multicultural Council Office

Talking Tables, the fourth Community Gathering took place at the Prince Albert Multicultural Council Office on January 28, 2016 with 12 people in attendance. While this gathering had fewer numbers than the previous gatherings, the premise was very different and the atmosphere arguably more intimidating. This idea combines the Toronto Public Library's Human Library and Speed Dating. Human Library initiatives in various communities around the world allow for individuals to act as a "book" and tell their story to an individual or a group of "readers", as a way of breaking stereotypes face to face. In a similar fashion, during Talking Tables, two individuals were seated at a table: one from the Aboriginal community and one from the Newcomer community. The pairs were given ten minutes to answer a question before switching tables and topics. These questions were:
  ➢ What was it like growing up for you? Tell me about your family.
  ➢ What are your hobbies?
  ➢ What are your hopes for the future?
  ➢ What are your fears?

This was arguably one the most successful Community Gatherings initiated by the Common Ground Pilot Project. It was low cost and allowed direct conversation to occur between the two focus groups. Because there was a set time limit and a distinct topic of conversation, the conversation flowed freely and enthusiastically between the participants with no awkward pauses. As a participatory event, those involved were actively engaged with one another, rather than passively observing from a distance. There is definite value in this type of event, which could be expanded upon in future projects.

5.3.3.2 Talking Tables at Prince Albert SaskPolytechnic Campus

The Talking Tables at Prince Albert Multicultural Council Office was such a success that the project coordinator facilitated a similar event at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. At this gathering, the tables consisted of four people and more time was given to discuss the events. However, the second time, the conversation was less than it was previously, leading to the conclusion that discussions in pairs are less intimidating and more engaging and productive than when in groups, provided the pairs are carefully and properly constructed. Some details to consider may be similar age ranges, interests/hobbies, occupations, and even gender.

5.4 Media and Public Awareness Initiatives

5.4.1 Traditional Media Initiatives

The already existing media connections of the project coordinator, as well as new ones created through the Organizational Connections Initiative played a key role in the success of this Pilot Project. Traditional media, in the form of radio, television, and newspaper (both online and in print) was used to promote and report on both Inter-Organizational Coordination Gatherings and Community Gatherings. In addition to the usual media used to promote the Tapestrama Culture Festival in September, in 2015, the festival was also advertised on the Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation, a First Nations/Métis specialty station broadcasting to Prince Albert and the north. This helped to attract more individuals from this particular community with traditionally lower numbers attending. Other Community Gatherings also had a media presence. After "Storytelling Through Music, Word, and Song," the Prince Albert Daily Herald published three separate articles on the gathering. The November Inter-Organizational Coordination Initiative also had a strong media presence, with four separate radio stations in attendance, as well as paNOW.com, the Prince Albert Daily Herald, and CTV News. This strong media presence served to bring more organizations and individual participants into the project, as well as raise public awareness of the project to the larger community and of the over-arching issues it was addressing. Given the context of the time period and political climate in which this Pilot Project took place, these positive representations of successful interactions between the two focus groups was especially powerful.

5.4.2 Social Media Initiatives

The power of social media was also harnessed in the same way by the project coordinator. At the January Inter-Organizational Coordination Gathering, the discussion which took place between the various groups led to the conclusion that the tension between the target groups is a type of lateral dissent. Those at the gathering agreed that false statements and misinformation spread through social media regarding issues such as government funding, jobs, and opportunities was a source of tensions between the groups. Those at the gathering concluded that Common Ground could harness the power of social media by creating a campaign with a strong social networking aspect in order to better educated the public by presenting accurate information. Common Ground was continually evolving with the needs of the newer members of the project and the political climate of the time. However, even before this discussion, social media was being used to promote the project and its various gatherings. Videos from Community Gatherings were posted on YouTube and Common Ground had a Facebook page. This page was continually updated (even after the Project was officially finished), creating events for future gatherings, showing pictures and videos of past events, and sharing relevant articles linked to the overarching goals of the Pilot Project. In addition to this, many participants at the events posted their own photos and thoughts on the event and shared the Pilot Project's posts, therefore reaching an even larger audience. While this level of media outreach may be more difficult to achieve in a larger center.

Given the awareness it raised, it may be worthwhile to consider a project coordinator for future projects who has similar experience and connections in media outreach or social media coordination.

6. ASSESSMENT

The Common Ground Pilot Project was relatively successful in two major ways. First, it was relatively successful achieving its various stated goals and objectives, albeit to varying extents. Second, it was relatively successful in serving as a Pilot Project from which other comparable initiatives could benefit.

6.1 Success in Relation to Goal of the Pilot Project

The Common Ground Pilot Project was successful when judged in relation to the stated goal and objectives. To reiterate, the overarching goal was to develop and implement some potentially valuable initiatives to foster positive communication and connections between each of the following in the Prince Albert city-region:
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal *organizations* serving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons.
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal *persons (especially Newcomers)*
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal *communities and groups* within the Prince Albert city-region.

It is fair to say that the Common Ground Pilot Project was able to develop and implement valuable initiatives to foster positive communication and connections between each of the three organizations, persons, and groups and communities in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sectors. Nevertheless, the question is whether the degree of success was as high, medium or low. Indications are that the degree of success in relation to these three faces of the overarching goal was in the medium to low range, rather than the medium to high range.

What is even more difficult to assess is the extent to which the Pilot Project enhanced communication and connection among the three of sets of organizations, persons, and communities and groups was only for the short term, the medium term or the long-term. Indications seem to be that they likely enhanced communication and connections for the short to medium-term, rather than for the medium to long-term. Special efforts will have to be made by those who were involved with the Pilot Project for the enhancement of communication and connections for the long-term.

6.2 Success in Relation to Key Objectives of the Pilot Project

The Pilot Project was also relatively successful in relation to the key objectives. To reiterate, the key objectives in relation to the design and implementation of the Pilot Project and the evaluation of and lessons learned from it were as follows:
- Design and implement a Pilot Project to explore the potential value of some programming initiatives proposed during Phase One of the BRIDGES project.
- Coordinate a series of gatherings involving staff and volunteers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations in Prince Albert.
- Gather and analyze data collected from those gatherings to determine the value of various facets of those initiatives
- Identify the most effective facets of those particular initiatives to design new and improved models for future initiatives

6.3 Areas of Improvement

Despite its successes in achieving its stated goal and objectives, there are some areas of governance, management, planning, implementation, and evaluation that constituted impediments or obstacles to optimizing the goals and objectives. These impediments or obstacles and the potential means for precluding or overcoming them in future projects are outlined below.

6.3.1 Project Resources

6.3.1.1 Administrative Resources

Observation/Challenge:
- ➢ The administrative resources available to the project coordinator were limited in terms of the part-time nature of the appointment and support from member organizations

Potential Improvement:
- ➢ Efforts should be made to ensure that sufficient administrative resources are made available to the project coordinator in terms of a full-time appointment to complete the work and adequate support from member organizations. Alternatively, a member organization responsible for the governance, management, and coordination frameworks may be a consideration, with the appropriate financial support to assist

6.3.1.2 Financial Resources

Observation/Challenge:
- ➢ The amount of financial resources for the following aspects of the Pilot Project was limited:
  - (1) Financial resources available to hire a full-time coordinator; and
  - (2) Financial resources available for promotional and programming purposes.

Potential Improvement:
- ➢ Efforts should be made to ensure there are sufficient financial resources for the following two aspects of subsequent projects:
  - (1) Financial resources available to hire a full-time coordinator; and
  - (2) Financial resources available for promotional and programming purposes.

6.3.2 Project Timelines

Observation/Challenge:
- ➢ The timeline between the initial planning phase of the Pilot Project and the start of actual events was too short.
- ➢ The timeline between planning and promoting each event and when they were actually undertaken tended to be very short.

Potential Improvement:
- ➢ Ensure there is sufficient time during the initial planning phase of the project in each community for planning projects before undertaking any projects.
- ➢ Ensure there is sufficient time between planning and promoting each project and when each project is actually undertaken.

6.3.3 Project Governance, Management, and Coordination Frameworks

Observation/Challenge:

➢ The governance, management & coordinating frameworks were insufficiently institutionalized, developed, defined, and operationalized/utilized. There was insufficient shared understanding of the governance, management and coordination frameworks. This included insufficient shared understanding by all regarding the following matters:

- The structure of those frameworks;
- The purpose of each committee and sub-committee within those frameworks; and
- The roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the various stakeholder organizations involved within each of those frameworks;
- The roles and lines of reporting and accountability for the project coordinator
- The role of the project coordinator and the relationship of the project coordinator to the Core Project team and the Local Organizing Committee.

Potential Improvement

➢ The governance, management & coordinating frameworks must be sufficiently institutionalized, developed, defined, and operationalized/utilized. There must be a high degree of shared understanding by all stakeholders of the governance, management and coordination frameworks. This includes a full and clear shared understanding by all stakeholders regarding the following matters:

- The structure of those frameworks;
- The purpose of each committee and sub-committee within those frameworks; and
- The roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the various stakeholder organizations involved within each of those frameworks.
- The roles and lines of reporting and accountability for the project coordinator
- The role of the project coordinator and the relationship of the project coordinator to the Core Project team and the Local Organizing Committee.

6.3.4 Involvement by Common Ground Member Organizations

Observation/Challenge:

➢ Although the member organizations of the Local Coordinating Committee were instrumental in making various events possible and successful, their involvement was highly variable over time and across events. There were some valid reasons for this, but regardless of the reasons, it compromised the capacity of the Common Ground Project to undertake more events and to optimize the benefits of the events that were undertaken.

Potential Improvement:

➢ Member organizations of the Local Coordinating Committee must be instrumental in making various events possible and successful, their involvement on a consistent basis over time and across events is crucial. Having one committed primary contact for each organization would address this challenge and assist in organizational relationship and partnership building at the forefront of the project and throughout it. This inter-organizational relationship building is necessary in order to build a strong foundation for the Project and to ensure future events will have increasingly more participation. An additional consideration may be to have one organization responsible for delegating the coordination of different events.

6.3.5 Involvement of Other Organizations in Events

Observation/Challenge:

➢ Within the six-month period of the Common Ground Pilot Project several organizations, other than the member organizations of the Local Coordinating Committee, became involved in various events. While the involvement of those particular organizations was invaluable, ideally even more organizations could have been involved in various projects, or in undertaking other projects, as some notable large organizations in the community were not involved in any respect. The challenges in involving more organizations stemmed from a combination of time constraints, insufficiently developed events planning calendar, and heavy reliance on the part-time coordinator to facilitate the inter-organizational communications and connections.

Potential Improvement:

➢ Special efforts should be made to strategically select and involve as many organizations as possible either in a particular event or different events, particularly large, more encompassing organizations who have the facility to make the project known on a larger scale. In addition, the hosting municipality's city council may be approached as well for in-kind facility use or other involvement.

➢ For the purpose of involving more organizations within the community in various events it is imperative that at least three things are done:
1. Developing an events calendar well in advance of any events being undertaken;.
2. Ensuring that a small sub-committee of member organizations is established to assist the project coordinator with the general planning and the inter-organizational communications and connections.
3. Either expand the membership of the local coordinating committee or create an additional events planning and coordinating committee to include representatives from community organizations that can offer additional support to the coordinator and help bring in more participants from those agencies.

6.3.6 Types, Timing of & Programs of Events

6.3.6.1 Types of Events
Observation/Challenge:
➢ The Pilot project held various types of events. Reports suggest the events that fostered or facilitated active participation and interaction among attendees were perceived as more enjoyable and valuable that those in which the attendees were members of a passive audience.

Potential Improvement:
➢ Special efforts should be made to ensure there is an opportunity for events to include a component that foster or facilitate active participation and interaction among attendees.

6.3.6.2 Timing of Events
Observation/Challenge:
➢ While the events were generally successful, there were some challenges in the timing of the events. In the case of the day gatherings the events created attendance problems for people with jobs, particularly Newcomers with multiple part-time jobs. Some could not attend at all, and others could only attend for a limited time. Similarly, attendance at some of the evening events was affected by availability of public transportation after certain hours.

Potential Improvement:
➢ To minimize attendance problems or challenges ensure that the timing of events is appropriate to the preferences, needs, and constraints of potential participants. In smaller communities, member organizations should advertise and encourage participants to attend, and if possible, assist in transportation to the events if public transportation is not adequate.

6.3.6.3 Programs of Events
Observation/Challenge:
➢ The programs of various events varied. Some components of the programs were effective and others less so. There were some suggestions that some components of the programs for events were either not perfectly aligned to the goals and objectives of the Pilot Project, and that some program participants were not clear about the purposes of the event.

Potential Improvement:
➢ Special efforts should be made to ensure the events and the programs for the events are aligned with the goals and objectives of the project.
➢ Special efforts should be made that everyone involved with programming or in the program understand fully the purpose of the event.
➢ Special efforts should also be made to ensure that organizers have a good sense of what any participants involved in the program actually intend to do or say.
➢ Special efforts should also be made to ensure the events have more structure in order to guarantee all planned activities are allotted sufficient time to be completed.

6.3.7 Participants at Events
Observation/Challenge:
➢ The participants at events were different at each of the events, even if some participants attended more than one event. Projects such as these must make a decision on whether all the events are designed for:
- The same group of participants over time,
- Different participants at each event, or
- Some combination of the first two
➢ Different objectives are achieved depending on which of those three models are used for involving participants.

Potential Improvement:
➢ The project team must make a decision on whether all the events are designed for:
- the same group of participants over time,
- Different participants at each event, or
- Some combination of the first two.
➢ Care must also be taken to ensure the number of participants from one community does not overwhelm or outbalance the number from the other

6.3.8 Accountability and Evaluation
Observation/Challenge:
➢ While some good recording and reporting on various events was undertaken, for purposes of accountability and evaluation, more variety in terms of data collection was required, particularly the type and degree of information collected.

Potential Improvement:
➢ For future projects more attention should be devoted to the following matters:
- Use of a standardized reporting template for each initiative
  - A simple reporting template or questionnaire used for each event would have been useful in addition to a detailed written one. For example, with various questions written (or the individual goals of the project) and a scale of 1-5 or 1-10 rating how well the coordinator thought that particular event met the project's overall goals and objectives ("success criteria"). The various organizations involved could have filled out a similar one. In some instances, even the participants could have filled out a comparable questionnaire either individually or in small groups, with the assistance of facilitators where necessary.
- Data collections during the project regarding the nature and effects of the initiatives
  - It would have been helpful to have feedback/data collected from the participants after each activity, for example, a survey, interview, or anonymous suggestion box/reaction cards to attempt to see if any of their feelings or views have changed over time. Another example would be a simple "Smiley Face" evaluation for participants who may have limited literacy skills or limited English asking if they enjoyed the events or would come back to a similar event.

- Detailed reports for each meeting or initiative
    - More detailed reports on what happened and problems or challenges that arise from time to time.
    - More detailed expense reports would also improve accountability and evaluation.
- Need several members of the local organizing committee or participants to attend each event
    - It may be beneficial to choose a group of core participants at the very beginning of the project from each group to attend each event. For example, the same five or ten from the Aboriginal community and the same five or ten from the Newcomer community, as well as always bringing more people in. It may have made the assessment at the end a little easier, if you can compare interviews with the same people at the start versus after six months of programming, rather than always having different participants at each event and trying to track and measure progress.