



ATLANTIC NATIONAL EVENT CONCEPT PAPER¹

Halifax, Nova Scotia
October 26-29, 2011

CHALLENGE:

For well over a century, several generations of Aboriginal children in Canada were taken away, often forcibly, from their homes, families and communities for weeks, months, and sometimes years at a time. Many also suffered various forms of abuse while at the schools where they were sent to live. The cost has been a legacy of widespread trauma and inter-generational impacts. Yet the story of residential schools is still relatively unknown and little understood by many.

A core mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is to educate *all* Canadians about the complete history of the residential schools', and to inspire reconciliation for individuals, families, communities, religious entities, government, and the people of Canada.

Seven TRC National Events must contribute to this healing of survivors, their families and the nation.

To be successful, each event will:

- Build on the successes of the past National Events (Winnipeg, Manitoba in June 2010 and Inuvik, NWT in June 2011), and incorporate feedback and lessons learned from the preceding national events, and other exemplary community events;
- Educate participants, and fellow Canadians, about Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the role of Survivors, the Parties, and all Canadians;
- Share Truth, through hearing the compelling experiences of those affected by residential schools, their families and others;
- Inspire Reconciliation, through hearing current efforts and wise practices by community members, governments, churches, and others to reconcile past events and present relationships;
- Engage a growing number of Canadians and partners willing to become actively involved in this important national initiative through follow-up activities.

PURPOSE:

The Mandate of the TRC describes a specific role for the National Events:

¹ Draft Pending TRC Commissioners Approval



“The national events are a mechanism through which the truth and reconciliation process will engage the Canadian public and provide education about the IRS system, the experience of former students and their families, and the ongoing legacies of the institutions.

The Commission shall fund and host seven national events in different regions across the country for the purpose of:

- Sharing information with/from the communities;
- Supporting and facilitating the self empowerment of former IRS students and those affected by the IRS legacy;
- Providing a context and meaning for the Common Experience Payment;
- Engaging and educating the (Canadian) public through mass communications;
- Otherwise achieving its goals.”

The Mandate also says:

“National events should include the following common components:

- An opportunity for a sample number of former students and families to share their experiences;
- An opportunity for some communities...to share their experiences as they related to the impacts on communities and to share insights from their community reconciliation processes;
- An opportunity for participation and sharing of information and knowledge among former students, their families, communities, experts, church and government officials, institutions and the Canadian public;
- Ceremonial transfer of knowledge through the passing of individual statement transcripts or community reports/statements...
- Analysis of the short and long term legacy of the IRS system on individuals, communities, groups, institutions and Canadian society including the intergenerational impacts of the IRS system;
- Participation of high level church and government officials;
- Health supports and trauma experts during and after the ceremony for all participants.”

PRINCIPLES FOR NATIONAL EVENTS:

The Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, soon after their appointment, made several strategic decisions about National Events:



National Events as Mandate Milestones - The TRC faces limited time and financial resources. National Events are an ideal opportunity to maximize resources by incorporating activities related to *all* components of the TRC Mandate.

Each National Event will be designed to advance each of the many, distinct obligations under the Mandate and to report overall progress on them:

- Sharing and witnessing the Truth of survivors and their communities, and others affected by the school experience;
- Sharing Research findings about residential school history and impacts;
- Commemorating various aspects of this history;
- Educating the public;
- Supporting emotional and spiritual Healing
 - through provision of contemporary and traditional health supports
 - through provision of cultural teachings and reflection
 - through traditional and contemporary musical celebration
- Sharing and honouring examples of meaningful Reconciliation between and among various Parties to the residential school settlement agreement;
- Gathering materials for the eventual National Research Centre
 - through collection of written, spoken, audio-visual and other individual and group “statements”
 - through documentation of all of the above

Survivors as Focal Point - Each TRC national event will maintain an important focus on children. This Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the first in the world to focus specifically on something that happened to *children*, and children of a specific ethnicity. Most of those still alive are now elderly adults.

Thousands of others died while at the schools, and many others have been lost to untimely, premature deaths, and are no longer with us to tell their story.

The National Events will honour all these former little ones by involving an appropriate number of intergenerational survivors, including young children:

- They will serve as a present-day reminder of the ages of children who were removed from their parents for long periods of time.
- They will help other Canadians ‘feel’ and relate to the enormity of the impact on family and community of having so many children removed from them.
- They will help keep the focus of TRC work on Survivors and their descendants

Reconciliation as Component of all Activities - The past cannot be changed, but a new understanding of it can lead to respectful relations for the future. This is one of the greatest



hopes for the TRC; a growing reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

- Each National event will strive to inspire Reconciliation, by demonstrating values which the Commissioners believe to lie at the heart of Reconciliation: respect, courage, humility, truth, honesty, wisdom and love. These values are known by many Aboriginal Peoples as the “Seven Sacred Teachings”. They are also in the ancient teachings of most world religions.
- Each National Event, and the planning leading up to it, will include meaningful involvement by all Parties to the IRS Agreement.
- Each National Event will honour purposeful contributions made by growing numbers of other organizations, agencies or companies.

Cultural Celebration - One of the most frequently mentioned “harms” from the residential schools is the loss of Aboriginal language, cultural identity and indigenous pride. Intergenerational “survivors” express frustration and anger at what they have *not* been taught about who they are as distinct peoples. Efforts are underway in many Aboriginal communities to restore traditional and cultural knowledge and pride.

Each National Event will honour, respect, and offer teachings about the indigenous cultural context of the place where it is held:

- All cultures will be welcomed into this specific cultural context
- Events will be free and generally open to the public except for designated private activities

National Events as a National Journey - National Events are the greatest TRC opportunity to attract national (and international) media and political attention. It is important to hold and expand that interest for each event throughout the term of the TRC.

- Each National Event will be designed to be ‘part of the whole’.
- Each National Event will link thematically to the next one, building momentum and profile leading up to the TRC Closing Ceremony.

LOCATION

Atlantic National Event- Halifax, Nova Scotia:

The TRC’s advisory Survivors Committee recommended that one of the seven national events be held in the Atlantic Region. Halifax was chosen as the host City for the event for several reasons:



Shubenacadie Indian Residential School - The Atlantic Region had one residential school, Shubenacadie, which operated from 1929 to 1967.

The Department of Indian Affairs built Shubenacadie on 147 acres on top of a hill overlooking the village of Shubenacadie, approximately 60 kms from Halifax. It opened in February 1930 to students from all three Maritime Provinces and the Restigouche Indian Reserve in Quebec.

The Archdiocese of Halifax operated Shubenacadie IRS on behalf of the department of Indian Affairs until 1956, after which the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate managed the school. These organizations were assisted by the Sisters of Charity, who referred to the school as St. Anne's Convent.

Concentration of Survivors in the Province - Nova Scotia has the highest concentration of Survivors in the Atlantic region. CEP Applications Processed for the Atlantic Provinces up to September 2010 were as follows:

- Nova Scotia -369
- New Brunswick -128
- Newfoundland and Labrador-22
- Prince Edward Island -43

Population- Halifax has the largest population in the Atlantic Region. In 2010, Statistics Canada projected the population of Halifax to be just over 400,000.

Halifax possesses a relatively young and growing population. According to the 2010 NS Dept. of Finance Community Counts, over one-half of residents (51%) in the area are less than 40 years of age and over one-fifth (21%) are under 20.

Hosting the Atlantic National Event in Halifax provides optimal opportunity to educate a young and growing population on the history and legacy of Residential Schools.

Source: <http://www.greaterhalifax.com/en/home/economicdata/people/demographics.aspx>

Accessibility – the Atlantic Event is easily accessible by land, air and sea for those wishing to attend from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Halifax Stanfield International Airport serves the most areas in this region.

Air Canada Jazz, Air Labrador, Provincial Airlines and Innu Mikun Airlines offer services to those residing in Labrador that may wish to attend the Atlantic event.



Academic Engagement – the City of Halifax has the largest concentration of Universities in the Region providing the opportunity for public education on the legacy of residential schools. The City also has educational institutions that focus on service to the churches, training for in-demand skilled professions, those interested in pursuing a career in art and design, as well as Aboriginal learners re-entering the education system.

The diverse range of educational programming offered in the City of Halifax, is an opportunity for the TRC to generate interest and participation from a wide range of audiences.

The Universities are:

- Dalhousie University
- Mount Saint Vincent University
- Saint Mary's University
- Saint Mary's University Business Development Centre
- University of King's College

The Colleges are:

- CompuCollege - Halifax Campus
- Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

Ecumenical Education

- Atlantic School of Theology

Specialized Programming

The Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre is host to Kjiptuk Aboriginal College which offers a variety of adult education programs designed to meet the needs of adult learners at various stages of literacy. These academic and training programs are tailored to the needs of First Nations people.

Regional Engagement – The TRC values the feedback and advice from the Members of the All Parties Settlement Agreement at the National and Regional levels. As such it has created committees whereby information can be shared to better equip the TRC in making event planning decisions that reflect the wants and needs of survivors and engages all Canadians.

The Atlantic Policy Congress is in Cole Harbour and will be providing advice and assistance from the local level on planning the event.

Over the course of the last 5 years, the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs has been providing outreach to former Indian Residential School (IRS) students. As APC has



provided information about the Indian Residential School Agreement and the individual components of that agreement, IRS former students have communicated critical feedback to the Atlantic Policy Congress on strategies to address the harms done to them. These insights were ascertained by extensive outreach to communities and by guidance of the Outreach Residential School Atlantic Committee (ORSAC).

PROGRAMMING COMPONENTS:

To address the above Principles, the following key creative components should be part of each National Event:

Pre Event Regional Hearings -

- During the months preceding the National Event
- To take the form of community hearings before Commissioner/s
- To maximize Survivor access to TRC, in order to share their experiences, and provide personal statements or submissions
- To build awareness of TRC and profile for upcoming National Event
- To allow involvement of those unable to attend National Event
- To document visual elements from the communities for possible inclusion in National Event activities.

Traditional Ceremony -

- Relevant to the Indigenous Peoples of the location where the National Event is being held
- Ceremony to mark official opening and closing, and appropriate moments throughout events.

Public Education -

- To explain residential school history and legacy, Settlement Agreement, and TRC mandate
- To publicly release and spotlight new findings of research commissioned by TRC as it becomes available
- To maximize use of new and conventional media, regional, national, and international
- To engage and involve Ministries and Departments of Education, and universities, colleges and schools.

Truth-telling -



- **Group** Sharing by Survivors and others, of aspects of their school experiences and/or how they have been affected by this experience
- **Individual** Designated Speakers to Share their School story, and healing journey
- **Private** statement gathering

Public Reconciliation -

- To pledge and showcase reconciliation gestures, actions and intentions by governments, churches, the business sector, communities, families, individuals, or other committed groups and citizens.
- To express reconciliation through creative collaboration activities (music, writing, art, comedy, blanket ceremonies, etc.)

Commemoration -

- To recall former students, especially those who did not survive the residential school experience.
- To share new/latest information about research and field work related to burial sites and unmarked graves
- To re-create missed opportunities from childhood experiences
- To recall and possibly re-create positive school experiences
- To share information about existing community commemoration initiatives

Cultural and Artistic Expression and Celebration of Achievement -

- To share artistic expressions related to the school experience or legacy
- To showcase artistic collaborations as voices of reconciliation, *healing* and inspiration.
- To showcase cultural voices that have survived in spite of the schools
- To celebrate emerging and evolving cultural expression
- To have fun!

Witnessing -

- To recall and explain the ancient spiritual practice of Witnessing, as specified in the TRC Mandate
- To demonstrate traditional witnessing by designating, and calling on, witnesses:
 - for each day of the TRC event, and
 - for the overall event

Engagement -

- To identify and build a growing circle of reconciliation ‘advocates’ beyond the TRC staff and the official Parties to the IRS Agreement
- To ensure ongoing work of Reconciliation beyond the National Event, and beyond the term of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Documentation -

- To ensure accountability for the National Event
- To ensure available materials for ongoing TRC outreach and educational activities
- To ensure a credible, audio-visual record for historic and National Research Centre purposes

KEY MESSAGES:

- Canada's TRC is about something our country did to generations of its own little children, and their families. We have not been the country we thought we were.
- Canada, and our society, is still paying the price for that history today, in the everyday realities of our urban and Aboriginal communities, and in our international reputation for how we regard our Indigenous Peoples.
- The impact of Canada's Residential Schools has not been felt only by Aboriginal children. The issue has affected and continues to affect all Canadians. Several generations of non-Aboriginal children have been ingrained with racist beliefs taught in Canada's schools. While Aboriginal children were being taught in Residential Schools that their languages, race and culture were inferior, non-Aboriginal children were being taught the same thing in their schools. There is a need to reform school curricula about this history everywhere.
- This is not a situation created *by* Aboriginal people. We have a shared responsibility to set things right.
- The TRC is *not* a government program. It is sponsored by residential school Survivors, with commitments, as ordered by the courts, from the federal government, and the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United Churches.
- Truth and reconciliation matters to *all* Canadians. As we explore with honesty a sad part of our past, we work to build a positive, courageous image of how we now wish to see ourselves, and wish to be seen by the rest of the world community.
- This is an historic opportunity to begin new relationships of respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, and to serve as a model to the world.
- The TRC challenges all Canadians to learn about this history, and to initiate and engage in reconciliation actions and activities.



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