

Forging Linkages & Finding Solutions A BC Treaty Commission Conference for First Nations

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Good afternoon. It's good to see you, it's good to see many old friends here – not old friends, but friends I have known for a while – and connect with some new folks as well. It's really good to catch up and be back here.

I have done work with the Treaty Commission over the past number of years, as well as working with a number of First Nations and the provincial government and federal government. I've been lucky to see the treaty process from all sides. As a result, I have some stories to tell and some questions for you on the nature of community engagement.

While I am setting up, I want to take a minute, just in silence, and think about the challenge you have right now engaging your community in the work you are doing. One of the hardest parts of doing this work, whether it's community planning or treaty making, at this huge level where all the stakes are so high, is how do you work with your community members? How do you engage them? How do you get them to own what it is that we're doing?

I invite you to take a moment on your own and right down the number one challenge that you face in doing this work now, in moving to doing more engagement work with your community.

I want to begin this afternoon by saying I think consultation is dead. That is my first provocative statement. I think the idea that one person can stand up in front of a room like this with all the answers and people can meaningfully contribute, I think that idea is dead.

I think it's dead because I think people are jaded about those kinds of processes. Think about the kinds of consultation processes as First Nations you are subjected to by the province or the federal government all the time. I'm not talking about consultation in terms of the Haida/Taku; I'm talking about community consultation staff.

People are jaded because they give their best thinking but they don't know where it goes. They spend time and energy coming up with ideas and nobody ever gets back to them. People don't show up to ask questions that they don't know the answer to in consultative processes.

I don't think it's dead because we're not doing a good job of it; I think it's dead because people are overdone with it. I don't know how many of you feel like you would love to – if you had the opportunity this afternoon – to go to a consultation session. Put your hands up. On whatever topic – health, economic development or whatever it is. It's just dying as a practice.

What I think it's time for now is engagement that brings community back to life, because that's what our communities really need. These are businesses we're running here. These are groups of people, our family members, our friends, our enemies in some cases. People who we're in relationships with and have been in relationships with because our ancestors were in relationships with each other and our descendents will be in relationships with each other.

There's a reason for living together in a community – it provides us with life. When our communities are sick and when our communities are not talking to one another we get into these situations where everything we do seems to exacerbate and make worse all the stuff that's pulling us apart. Here's a fundamental principle and this comes from a biologist, Umberto **Matzeramo** (sic), a really interesting guy. He studied living systems and self organization and all kinds of other things. One thing he came up with is the way to heal a living system is to connect it to more of itself.

Any time we are doing community healing work, any time we are bringing people back together, we know one thing we have to do is to connect communities to themselves again.

As I give my presentation and then accept questions from you, I invite you to start thinking about why treaties can't be the things that reconnect our communities. Why do they have to be a thing that it is so hard for us to explain, where people get in the way, that is just so difficult? It's like you want to enter into a treaty process, you want to enter into a community planning process and the nightmares that come up with it – child welfare, community planning, health planning. You start thinking, "How are we going to do it?" We go into those processes with that kind of energy and we end up encountering all kinds of issues and problems.

My fundamental principle here is that any of these big initiatives we're doing – the ones that Stephen was talking about – there's always an opportunity for those things to actually bring our communities closer together. Why not? Why wouldn't we do it like that? Why wouldn't we begin entering into treaty negotiations with the express purpose that it would make things better? It would actually contribute and make our community more whole.

I want to show you some pictures of the shape of consultation. These are just random. This is some Scottish rail consultation. It divides all its stakeholders into little boxes. Here's another consultation process that comes from somewhere in the UK. It's pretty, it has nice color, so maybe it's an improvement but again it's like everything is divided into little boxes – everything is chunked away. There's no way any of the people in any of those circles are talking to each other. It doesn't really look like a community.

Here's another one. Does this look more like a community to you? It might look more like a community because it's a housing strategy and it seems to be something in the centre. That sounds familiar to us. There's stuff on the outside, but if you look, none of the things on the outside of that diagram are connected to one another. So it's still really not a community. In fact, it puts people into little boxes.

One of the things I learned when I was doing treaty negotiations or consultations for the federal government up in the Cariboo when Robert (Phillips) was with Cariboo Tribal Council, is we would go out and have consultations with loggers. We would have loggers on our regional advisory committees and we would sit there and want to talk to them about what their interests were. One day a couple of loggers came in and said, "We want to be a part of what is going on in terms of the consultation you are doing with the regional advisory committee on the Cariboo Tribal Council. And by the way, we live at Sugar Cane."

That was one of the communities. You would not believe the amount of paper that flew around the federal government about what do we do with these band members that wanted to be on the regional advisory committee.

The fact is that our communities are not divided up into stakeholder groups like that; they are much more complex than that. We belong to all kinds of different affiliations. So consultation processes that divide us up like that also divide our communities like that and contribute to some of that kind of sickness stuff.

It's kind of unfair of me to take tables like this out of context, but this one I haven't got a clue what's going on here. I just googled stakeholder analysis and this came up. One thing I think is happening here is lots of people are working at cross purposes and it seems to be a design of the process. At least they're honest. We will give them credit there.

Here's another one. These are all just shapes of consultation. All of those shapes look like the shape at the bottom to me. They all share certain fundamental things, kind of a broadcast consultation.

There is one person at some point in that process that holds the purpose for why we're doing this, whether it's a housing strategy or some rail strategy or maybe it's a treaty negotiator trying to explain to the community what's going on. You have the purpose that's kind of hidden. I don't know how many of you have been in band meetings – has anybody here not been in a band meeting before? I'm going to come back to band meetings.

At band meetings one thing happens. People sit up at the front and it's almost like someone has secrets and we're trying to tell people what's going on. We're doing our best to communicate. A lot of times people out there are going, "I don't get it, what is it you're not telling me? What's the secret?" And you start getting into this cross examination.

I think watching too many courtroom dramas is really not teaching us how to talk to one another anymore. There are always cross examinations going on. "Did you take my advice into consideration?" Yes and no questions, these kinds of things. Or, impossible questions – "How much did what I say mean to you?" "I can't answer that question."

Broadcast consultation like this is very difficult. It divides, it isolates us. The leadership owns the results of the work. This is something we were guilty of when I worked for government and I think we're all guilty of that to some extent. We go out, we consult and we take the results back. What about these people we just spent all our time with? Do they own the results? You're talking about treaty implementation here. Who do you think is going to implement these things? We got them signed off. It's not going to be the negotiating team. If they are community members maybe, but you need a lot more people to do the heavy lifting of actually living in a community that's implementing its rights. So who owns this stuff?

One thing that's good about broadcast consultation is, despite everything else, it seems to be very efficient, which is why we do it. We have these three-month consultation processes and we get in love with the idea that the efficiency factor will be really good for us. We also get in love with the idea that you know we are actually talking to one another. You could make some legitimate objection to the community at this point and say, "No. In all these things we're having good conversations back and forth, there's lots of to and fro."

I think that's probably true and that we don't spend a lot of time thinking about what the whole conversation is; the one where community members can actually care for the whole. Where, as a stakeholder, you can come into a process and say, "Yes, it's about my interests but I can also see it's about the community's interest, too." You need to spend more time building containers like that.

Those containers have that shape, their co-ownership over the results of all this work of treaty making. And co-ownership has shared purpose. Somebody asked the grand chief earlier how do you get everybody on board? He said the first thing was you have to make sure that you're all doing the same thing and you've got a shared purpose.

A shared purpose is like one that's in the middle, that's not owned by anybody. When you put something in the middle of the circle the only way to understand it is if everybody around the circle makes a contribution

about what they're seeing, because it doesn't look the same from every angle. So, shared purpose is important.

Dialogue is important as opposed to cross examination. Actually sitting with one another and asking what the hell is going on. That's a really good question. What does this mean? How are we going to do this? Questions you don't know the answers to and then engaging in dialogue like that. Co-ownership unifies communities and it actually provides a container in which there can be a collective ownership of results. But there can also be dissent in there. It's a good, healthy place for dissent because there are no right and wrong answers when you're trying to figure out your way in the world. The bad news is it takes time, but the good news is we're not going anywhere.

Here's what I think the shape of community engagement sometimes looks like. You will notice – look at the shape on the top there – you see all these people standing around. There's this purpose in the middle. This is a Haida canoe coming back – probably the repatriation, some bones or something they're bringing back – and here they all are, everybody pulling together, everybody co-owned this purpose. That canoe is not going to move on its own and it's not going to stay upright if they keep standing up like that.

Here's another depiction of what community looks like. This is a piece by Bo Dick and it's commemorating a memorial, it was prepared for a memorial in 1993. Look at that shape. Everybody is standing around the outside. Everybody is contributing to remembering the person that has passed and caring for that family and making sure that everything that goes on in that memorial keeps the culture intact.

Here's another one. This is more for my culture where I come from in Ojibwa country. We're gathered around playing and this drum in our tradition represents the heartbeat. As everybody in the community is playing, we're all contributing to the community heartbeat. If you play music of any kind with people, you realize that in music making there's a lot you can learn about community engagement and co-ownership in music making.

Here's another one. Anybody recognize that? Yes, that's Bella Bella. That's a big supper that was put on for some ball teams that came back from the all native tournament, but everybody is there. Everybody is showing up and you see what's happening in the middle – people are being honoured. But these kinds of things can't happen unless people do the work of cooking, do the work of eating. And you can't really honour people as a community if you don't even show up. So even to show up here and be a part of the celebration and a part of what is going on is really important.

These are really key shapes in these communities. This is a community that's engaged. This is a community that's doing work. You go back to the Haidas – these guys are doing work. This is serious business bringing home the bones. This is not just how to reorganize ourselves for a good time.

Here's the first question I invite you to think about this afternoon. What is the current challenge in designing and implementing community engagement that contributes to healing in your community? In other words, if you were really going to do this work of making treaties that heal, what is the number one challenge you are facing right now as a leader, as someone involved in the treaty team, as somebody who is maybe involved in doing this engagement? Are there any that come to mind? Just shout them out.

Intergenerational trauma. Residential schools. Are you talking about the difference between adults and youth? The layers of trauma, intergenerational trauma. What else?

Complexity and the amount of information that has to be discussed. Is it possible for every community member to know every single thing about the treaty? No, of course not. But the huge amounts of

complexity.

Yes, it is hard to knit together a community when you have people in three or four different cities and two or three different countries. This colonization piece that Lydia raised is a really good one. If there is one thing I invite you to take away from this it's about being conscious, being aware of the processes we use when we talk to the community to make sure they are our processes; to make sure that we're not operating out of a colonized mindset.

This is, for me, is a key piece of leadership that I discovered as I have travelled around, a key piece that leaders are getting a handle on. The stuff that's going on in their communities, that they're working on their own mental models, the way they see the world. They're re-establishing themselves in connection with some of these other shapes, some of these shapes that make sense rather than some of these ones that don't really make all that much sense.

This is a box of kindling. I want to elucidate. I want to explain three principles that I have learned about community. These principles I have encountered through my time working in consultation and my time working with First Nations here, in the States and in other places. They all inform my practice really deeply and a lot of the places I've seen people working, they really inform their practice as well.

This box of kindling is a reminder of a story I heard from a Cheam elder. I was working out in Cheam doing some work bringing some youth and elders together – there were about 25 elders. We were gathered for lunch one day and one elder said, "You know things are not like they used to be." I asked how so. He said, "In the old days if someone was coming up your path to visit you you would go out and cut kindling. Today, we just pull down the blinds."

I think about this every time I'm out cutting kindling. I wonder who is going to come and visit. But for me there is a key teaching in here, which is about hospitality. A real authentic community is about welcoming each other, it's about hospitality, it's about feeding each other and keeping each other warm when we come together; a key principle. I'm going to elucidate principles we can use to design community engagement that is different from consultation.

First one, hospitality and welcoming the visitor. Second one, anyone recognize this building? It's kind of a strange angle. Yes, it's Fort Rupert. The elders gave us permission to have this photograph and to work in here.

I was working with a network of aboriginal youths from around the province. Some of you probably know them – BOLT – Building Our Legacy Together. One of the things they started to do a couple of years ago was to go around to different communities and run events where youth could find their own strength in the community and be able to participate in what was going on in community life. When the elders and the chiefs discovered we were coming up to Fort Rupert they said you have to meet in the big house. You have to meet in there because that's where it all starts. We had a lot of elders there that day, a lot of youth there that day and the kinds of teachings and the kinds of connections that went on was incredible. This reminds me of a story from an elder of mine from Ontario, Bruce Elijah, an Oneida elder.

Bruce told me one time when I was starting out in my career, about 15 years ago, and running a consultation process... I asked him, "What kind of advice can you give to somebody that's never done this before?" He asked if I would do a lot of community healing and told me that when I go to communities the first thing I should ask the people I'm meeting with is to take me to the place of power in this community and let's work from there. It's funny; sometimes they'll scratch their head and take me to the band office, or sometimes the church. But we don't have the conversation about why.

A lot of times it will be to a sacred place in the community, it will be to a place where we have traditionally met, it will be the long house or it will be to some other place where ceremony goes on. And we start to work from there. I asked Bruce, “Why do you do that?” He said, “Because that’s the place in which we are absolutely who we are. That is absolutely the core place. We can start there from our power; then we can begin to work out from there.” That helps to get our key purpose together.

The thing about that place of power is that it can be a physical place but it can also be a kind of psychological place. Who are you when you’re strong? Who is this nation when it’s at its best? These kinds of questions begin to take us right to our place of power from which we can then work.

Here’s the last principle, and it’s a very simple principle, but it’s captured in this little diagram I did. I’ve been working the last couple of years in the Navajo country with some people that are doing some health promotion and community outreach around diabetes prevention specifically, but around a bunch of other stuff. The Navajo elders tell us all the time that nothing will happen, nothing ever happens without ‘ka’, this word: ‘ka’. For them ‘ka’ is the word that describes the connection we have between the two of us, between the four of us, between any of us.

So when we’re in a relationship with each other we have some ‘ka’. They talk about it like there is a flow that goes between us. They said if you don’t have that you can’t do any work. So the most important thing, our elders are saying, is you have to foster that right. You have to foster that ‘ka’.

What do you do when things really start to go haywire? The elders were saying you can walk through, you can take that courageous walk through politics if you’re still connected going into it and coming out of it at the end of the day. But when we sever the connections we have with each other – and this is something Stephen was saying – when we choose people, when we privilege people in the community and we sever the connections we have with them and we lose the ‘ka’ it actually makes it harder for us to do things in the future.

The thing to guard against any time we are doing community engagement is: “Are we sacrificing relationships at the altar of the efficiency.” Sometimes, we just have to get it done. We haven’t got time for all this talk. We haven’t got time to include everybody. Okay, that’s fine, but if you’re going to make that decision, I am always advising people, let’s measure the cost first. Are we going to be able to come back to people and expect them to participate in processes after we have done that to them? Are they going to worry that if things take too long next time the same thing will happen? Are we contributing to the social capital we need in our community?

The Navajo call this ‘ka’ and I’ve heard this principle all over BC, and I pronounce it badly but the way it’s pronounced in Tsimshian and Nisga’a country, is sayt ki’lim goot. It means of one heart.

In Nuu-chah-nulth country we have [native word] – it’s a key principle. It means everything is one. I’ve heard Hawiik (sic) when I’m out on the West Coast meetings and ask whether what we’re doing has sawack (sic). They will do that because they want to make sure there’s interdependence here; that there’s one that’s represented here. It’s a key principle.

Down in the Coast Salish territories one of the words I have learned is ‘nautsa mawt’ (sic), meaning one mind. It shows up everywhere. The Navajo call it ‘ka’. It’s a key principle for designing community engagement, for working with our people. Are we living our own principles? As Stephen was saying, are we living into our own laws?

I always love having elders and if I am on the coast, as we are, in meetings because they will hold us to that accountability that that is who we really are.

Here's a question, and I am actually going to give you a few minutes to talk about it with your neighbours. Turn to one another and have a five-minute go at this question: why is it even important that we live in communities? What do communities give us? What we get from it? It's not a question we think about all the time. Yes, we're making treaties to sustain the communities, but we should think about why it's actually important that we even live together. We could all just move to the city. Why is it important that we stay in a community? And what can we learn about engagement from the way we do it in daily life?

Turn to one another for a few minutes and whatever comes to mind on that think of a few principles on your own.

[Group Discussions]

Wrap up the current thoughts. Did anything come up for anyone? What are some of the answers out there?

Answer: Sense of identity

Chris: A sense of identity is why it's important to live in a community because then we know who we are.

Answer: Source of strength.

Chris: It's a source of strength? How so? Communities provide a sense of support that makes it possible for individuals to do better than if they were on their own and that's key to our culture.

Answer: Culture and tradition.

Chris: The culture and traditions are there, right. Land in the community and they are held there. There's a reciprocal, there's a gifting piece in here. You've got to give to live in it. Give to live – there's a slogan.

All those teachings, that good way of life, it's all there when we have the language, when we have a culture and we have the identity together.

This is key. I want to move into seven principles that in some of the work I've been doing with some of you here in this room and others that we've learned actually fosters community engagement that comes out of who we are as people.

I was doing some work the last number of years on the community linkage around all of this, with the Child and Family Services regionalization. It wasn't always popular work, but I was working in communities that were saying, "If we're going to do work for our kids and on behalf of our children, let's ask the question about what's at the centre of that work." What's at the centre of that work is the kids themselves. So we chose a principle of some of the work we were doing on Vancouver Island of putting children at the centre.

When we put children at the centre, the next question we had was, "How do we create engagement that flows from this idea of putting children at the centre?" How would we do engagement with community people from that perspective? So we asked this question, "How do children inspire us to engage?" It's a really interesting question. It's a fascinating document recovering process.

The question of how children inspire us to engage came up and we came up with all kinds of different answers. One of which was that children inspire us to engage. There were about 40 of us in the circle training together and this elder told a story.

She said, “My granddaughter was asked if she played violin, and she replied, ‘I don’t know I’ve never tried.’”

Children inspire us to engage out of possibility. Most of us would say, “I don’t know. No, I don’t. I’ve never done it, I don’t.”

This is the piece here. Children inspire us to listen to one another. Children inspire us not to make false promises to one another. Children inspire us to play.

We were thinking about how we act when we have children in the room. There are some meetings that happen in the world, very few of them, but some that I wouldn’t bring my children to for what goes on. And some of those meetings I know that if I had my children there everything would be different. It’s interesting.

We were thinking about how we can create structures in which we put children at the centre and what would happen if we actually brought children into those settings. How does it change us, because we have teachings about how to behave when we’re around children.

The first key principle: find a centre, find something that you can continually come back to that roots you in who you are.

Second principle: I said it before; don’t sacrifice relationships at the altar of efficiency.

If you’re going to do engagement, for me there’s a balancing of three things: work, co-learning and relationship building.

Work, if you just do it on its own. This is one way to tell the story: if you just do work on its own, it’s just drudgery. Like I’ve got to wash the dishes, change the diaper.

If you’re doing just relationships on their own, you know you’re just being in relationships with each other. It’s like a party or something.

If you’re just doing learning on its own, it’s like going to school. There’s no work, there’s no relationship, there’s just learning, learning, learning.

If you’re doing work and learning together – that’s how you get innovation. That’s how you get innovative thinking because together we’re working and together we’re learning, co-learning. That’s where innovative thinking comes from. But there are lots of people who do innovative thinking that end up hating each other afterwards – high performance work teams they’re called. They get into some pretty high performance anxieties with each other. If you don’t pay attention to the relationships, that suffers.

And if you’re just doing work, good work, and good relationships without doing any learning together, without doing any innovation, that just provides a nice happy status quo, right?

Put up your hand if you’ve worked in the federal government. I shouldn’t knock our federal friends but I have so I’m telling you.

It’s like we get along really well, we do good work together but we’re not really innovating, we’re not really

learning, we're not really doing things differently.

If you do relationships and learning together without doing any work, that's like a road trip. It's like, hey, let's go on a trip. We'll go see somewhere we've never been and have a good time and we'll be fast friends when we come home. We're not doing anything though. That would be called a holiday, not work.

But if you do these three things together and you pay attention to work, relationships, learning with people, and you're including lots of people in this, you can sustain the sweet spot of engagement because this will result in sustainability. This will mean that when times get tough we're going to hang in there with each other instead of just saying, "You're no good; we're voting you out of office." If we're working in it together here, this provides the sustainability we need to implement treaties, to implement community planning. That's the second principle: balance, work, relationship, and co-learning.

The third principle....this is another map. I showed you those other maps of consultation processes. This is a map of a consultation process, a community planning process actually, that I was doing with some other friends at the Quinault nation down in Washington State. Some of you have relations down there, some of you know them. They are hard ass on sovereignty. Do you know Joe Delacruise? That's his community—sovereignty fighters from the sixties.

Okay, *Boldt decision*, Quinault. These guys are hard core. Strong, powerful community and they're stuck. So they needed to do some strategic planning. This contract actually began because they couldn't make their entire band operations fit into a data base because nobody talked to each other in the band office or in the tribal office anymore. All the departments were doing totally different things, so we said, "We need to do a planning process that thinks about the future and we need to start from a good key centre."

What's the best story about Quinault? The one that everybody tells whenever they go anywhere else and everybody told us? It's about the Blue Backs. Do you know what Blue Backs are? They're sockeye salmon. The southernmost sockeye run in North America. They come up the Quinault River. You see those sockeye in the middle there? Those sockeye represent everything they wanted the planning process to be because they wanted to involve as many community people as they could in creating a future. They were very cognizant of the fact that sockeye are born orphans, they die childless, they give their entire life for a generation they'll never see and they've never had any schooling in how to live. It's fascinating how salmon get back.

For them this was a really inspiring story. We made it – you can see the basis of a healthy sockeye habitat is these core values, for a strong community down here at the bottom there's forest. It's a respect and leadership, wisdom, learning and stewardship – those are all things they identified as we went forward.

This little piece was actually a 12 X 8 foot mural that we harvested from a community conversation but we reduced it down to an 8½ X 11" or 8½ X 14" thing and everyone started carrying it around the community.

I get what the planning is about. It's about the Blue Backs and it's about thinking about the future the way the Blue Backs do.

The next thing we did was took it to a conversation with people in the community and we asked what the really important areas we need to work on were. They came up with these domains: wellness, community, prosperity, learning and land. In the middle there's a Quinault word: it says Tsóoto. It means plan and it also means hope in the Quinault language.

They began to organize all the tribal operations around these domains. It was really interesting because

none of the tribal operations were named any of these things. There was no prosperity department, no wellness department. There's a health department but there are others that were involved in other things.

What happened was the community set these – 200 people came to some consensus on what these were. Then 200 more people met and came up with some end states based on these domains. What's interesting about all of these is that the tribal government at every level needs to talk to each other if it's going to meet these end states because there is no wellness department. There's a health department but the education department needs to be involved and the land department needs to be involved, as well as the economic development department.

So we started convening these conversations within the Tribal Government. The point is that this principle and the story that comes from it is work from the deepest stories about who you are and you need to include as many people as you can in helping to tell what that story is.

The next principle, the fourth principle, is the invitation process. Anybody recognize this person? That's Lila Brown. Lila is a Cowichan member and has been associated with Squamish as well. That's her son down there, Tyee. Lila is the best person at invitation that I have ever met.

One of the ways you want to encourage people to get involved in community engagement processes is through invitation. Don't just send the flyer out in the mail. How come nobody came to our meeting? You've got to do better than that.

Invitation is a process and we know how to do it. Lila and I were working on the Victoria Urban Development Agreement a couple of years ago. We were going to have a big community meeting and Lila said, "I'll help spread the news." She printed up these brochures. She also bought a bunch of baskets, put a plant in the basket, some food and a brochure, and she took them around to all the aboriginal organizations in Victoria and left them on the reception desk. People would come out because they were watering all of the plants and they'd water this new one without even thinking about it, pick up this thing and think, "This is interesting."

After she finished doing that she was heading back home and she went past the Salvation Army and there were a couple of guys lined up, waiting to go inside. These were exactly the kind of guys we needed.

We were hired to do aboriginal engagement on an Urban Development Agreement that had been going for two years and nobody had thought to ask Indians anything. It's like, who are we working for again? Who lives in downtown Victoria? After a year they said, "Maybe we should have an aboriginal engagement piece."

So Lila goes down to the Salvation Army and there are these two guys standing outside. Lila's got a lot of songs, you can see she's singing here at this community event and they say, "Hey, pretty lady, what are you doing?"

So she came across the street and said, "We're having a community meeting, do you want to come?"

They asked, "Is there going to be food?"

She replied, "Yeah, of course, it's going to be a feast."

"Is there going to be music?" they asked.

“What kind of music?” she responded.

“Like this kind of music,” the guy says and he starts playing air guitar and singing old country songs.

She asks, “Do you know this one?” and starts playing air drum and singing an old Squamish song.

These two guys went, hey, she does Indian music. Cool hey, here’s another one. She gave another tune and they went back and forth like this for an hour and a half before they finally went into the shelter.

At the end of that, these guys said, “Listen, how many of those invitations have you got?”

She said, “I’ve got a hundred of them right here.”

“Just give them to us,” they said. “We’ll take care of them. We’ll spread them out. We’ll make sure everybody is there”

“Great!” she thought. “The community can co-own the invitation.”

They went all over Victoria and the day of the community meeting the way I knew we had the community in the room was because at lunch somebody made an announcement and said, “There’s an illegally parked shopping cart in the back and it needs to be moved.”

One guy got up and said, “It’s mine. I’ve got to take care of it because it has a coffee holder on it.” Three other people stood up and said, “A tricked out shopping cart. I’ve got to see this.” That’s how I knew we had all the right people in the room.

The invitation wasn’t sent out by the mayor’s office. The invitation was co-owned by the community. Community can do this. This could be good. There’s going to be some singing. We’re going to be talking about our future. We’re going to eat. Why don’t you come? I’m going.

Think about invitation beyond just a brochure. Invitation is a process.

The next principle is a key one. Have a good question. When you’re doing any kind of consultation or engagement, have a question you don’t know the answer to. It always boggles my mind whenever I work for government and we’re doing consultation processes that there’s somebody standing up at the front and they’re getting asked questions.

I’m like, wait a second. This is a consultation process. You’re supposed to be asking these people the questions. These are the smart people. You’re the guy that’s stuck. That’s how it works. But they always seem to get into that pattern where this person is up here defending his or her work and all these people are attacking and asking questions for clarity. But we don’t get any conversation going.

I would look at a room like this or I would look at a collective. This is an elder. If I look at a community as wise, as the wisest elder, what are the questions I would ask? Here’s a good question we asked in the Victoria process that we didn’t know the answer to. It was posed by the chief, Chief Andy Thomas, from Esquimalt. He said, “You make sure everybody who is here at the end of two days and the stuff discussed doesn’t end up on a shelf. “

Somebody asked, “How do we do that?”

He said, "I don't know, but you better figure it out."

So we said cool, well we'll make a question. How can we continue to work together to keep this work off the shelf and make stuff happen?

A basic question, but none of us knew the answer to it. All 60 people there answered that question and many of them took ownership for the results – doing some community gardening, doing some housing work and so on and so forth. We knew that it was going to be Lila and me and a couple of government geeks that this thing wasn't going to fly. Consultants and government geeks don't make a good mix.

Second to last principle, the sixth principle: always have a participatory process. This is a group of people I was working with in New York City in May. Really amazing street youth outreach group, very radical group of people and they were stuck in their organization. It was just time to reconnect the system to more of itself.

Have conversations between people. Not like this, but between people. Participatory process builds engagement because you get voices in the room, you get ownership in the room, and you manage to tap the wisdom that's there.

Most of my pictures look like this because I'm a facilitator. So it's pictures of people doing meetings. These guys are really interesting. They all run native radio stations in the United States.

This is the last principle. The native radio stations they run in the States get funded predominantly by their own sources, but they also get funded by foundations. Some of the foundations were saying, "We have to have a way of measuring your effectiveness."

I don't know if you've travelled in the States or if you have a radio station at home. We're talking about tiny little radio stations. They asked, "How do you want us to prove that were effective?"

The foundations said, "You have to show the number of listeners you have. "

"Is 15 enough, because that's how many we've got? This is so confusing," the stations replied.

This project I'm working on with this organization, a network in the States called The Native Public Media, is to actually invite the community to define its own evaluation standards because the foundations need to measure impact.

So we said, "How do you measure the impact of a tiny little radio station when all it does is language programming? It's a very important role with very few listeners. So we began by asking the question, "What would happen if the radio station disappeared overnight?"

When you confront your own death you get really clear about the role you play in the world. If they started recording all of their ideas around, here's what we really do, here's who we really are, here's how you can measure us, so the number of language speakers in the community, the number of people that get vaccinated, the number of people that get out of the way of the floodwaters when we broadcast emergency messages, these are all ways to measure our impact. If we didn't have that media then people will be swept away all the time.

People are totally capable of coming up with measuring their own work. That's another principle.

I'm going to leave you with this. I want to say that the work here is to continue. These are principles that I learned but you have your own stories of community engagement. All of you are doing innovative work at some level, and the approach here is to work on developing what works. It's sometimes called an appreciative approach. We take our assets and we appreciate them. We take what's working and we grow it, we learn from our best successes to make more success elsewhere.

To create the principles of community engagement what other practices can you add to the list? Because when we get it all right, when we get it all right and we sometimes do, we get community meetings that look like this.

This is my little buddy from Ehattesaht who was at one of our gatherings. We need the children there to hold us accountable. He was pretty happy with the way the day went.

Thank you very much for your time and the invitation to be here. Good luck with the work.