

Northern Policy Institute

Institut des politiques du Nord

Presentation to Lakehead Economics

22 November 2013

A QUICK (recent) History of NPI

- Common Voice Northwest submitted 148 recommendations for Northern Growth Plan, a key one being creation of NPI
- Oct 2009: Proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario includes establishment of a Northern Research & Policy Institute
- March 2011: Release of *Growth Plan for Northern Ontario, 2011* included NPI
- August 2012 MNDM Announcement of NPI

NPI Status

- NOHFC approved \$5 million funding – August 2012
- NPI Incorporated – December 2012
- Founding board chosen and appointed – February 2013
- CEO Search complete – appointed June 2013
- Contract with NOHFC signed – July 2013
- First funds received – August 2013
- Offices opened - September 2013
- First staffing and project commissioning – Sept/Oct 2013

What is a “think tank” anyway?

“It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.”

- Mark Twain

“Politics is the art of the possible.”

- Winston Churchill

“If you want to change the world, forget politics, win the war of ideas.”

- Friedrich Hayek

How do think-tanks succeed?

Ultimate success for a policy think tank is marshalling the evidence, forming a recommendation from what the evidence tells you, and having that advice followed.

If you say a policy should be changed, killed or created, success is having that policy changed, killed or created.

There are MANY roads to that success.

“Parade marshal” approach

- Quickest way to succeed
- Determine which way the parade is going, and get in front of it
- Better still, have close connections to the parade participants
- “Do-tanks” and NFP consultants fall into this category
- Conference Board, RAND Corp, PPF, Mowat Centre

“Cheerleader” approach

- Depend on your “friends” for success
- “Cheerlead” for a particular political/philosophical perspective and make “real” progress when your friends are in office
- “right” and “left” wing think tanks fall into this category”
- Fraser, CCPA, Frontier, AIMS

“Permission givers”

- Hardest, longest and most uncertain way to succeed
- Ask the tough questions and stick to the answers the evidence gives you
- Go farther than others are willing to go in the current “p” political climate

This gives the public, politicians and policy makers permission to go just a little further towards the “right” policy

In Canada we have CD Howe, IRPP

Success as a permission giver

- Short term:

- Are people listening?
- Are people debating your ideas?

- Medium Term:

- Are people sharing your ideas?
- Are people advocating for your ideas?
- Are people ASKING for your ideas?

- Long Term:

- Are people implementing your ideas?

NPI Letters Patent

- Proactive, evidence-based and purpose driven policy options that:
 - Deepen the understanding of the unique challenges facing Northern Ontario
 - Ensure the sustainable development and long term economic prosperity of Northern Ontario
- Research and analysis of
 - Existing and emerging policies relevant to northern Ontario
 - Economic, technological and social trends affecting northern Ontario
- Formulation and advocacy of policies that:
 - benefit northern Ontario and first nations communities
- Other complementary purposes not inconsistent with these objectives

The NPI role

- To identify what we “know” that just ain’t so
 - Avoid “executive paternalism” - If it sounds good – it must be good, right? Wrong.
 - Just because you want it...needs v wants, and prioritizing needs – that’s the tough part
 - Learn from the mistakes, and successes, of others

How?

- Research if necessary, but not necessarily research
- Ideas advocacy, not partisan, or ideological, but evidence driven
- **HAVING** an idea, is only step one, **COMMUNICATING** ideas is the primary role of Policy Institutes

Educate and Engage

- Community education and engagement
 - Get evidence into hands of public and decision makers
 - Comment on current and potential future policy directions
- Listen, learn and adapt to the evidence

BEFORE they call us

- There is a BIG difference between:
 - “working WITH a Policy Institute” and “HIRING a consultant”
- Independent means just that - look at terms of reference, ie:
 - “impact assessment of provincial owned and operated road to ring of fire” = consultant, decision predetermined, decision based evidence seeking
 - “assess WHETHER the province should own and operate a road to the ring of fire” = independent policy work, evidence based advice for decision making

Areas of Focus - broadly

- Northern Growth (note NOT Northern Growth “PLAN”):
 - 1. Economy
 - 2. People
 - 3. Communities
 - 4. Infrastructure
 - 5. Environment
 - 6. Aboriginal peoples

And...about the Growth Plan

- It is NOT NPI's role to "IMPLEMENT" the Growth Plan
- As to "monitoring the plan", a couple OF points:
 - Every plan should be a LIVING one, just because something made sense in 2011, does not mean it should be done in 2014 just because you said you would
 - We could measure process and provide check boxes on "priorities completed" – but that wouldn't show that anything worked, just that it was "done"
- NPI WILL be looking to monitor and report on "GROWTH", that is far more interesting
 - We will seek to assess causation or at least demonstrate correlation, controlling for global market forces etc
 - If you are looking for definitive proof that doing X led to Y, you will usually be disappointed

Three Key Goals for NPI

1. Enhance Measurement, and the availability of those measures to all stakeholders
2. Building SUSTAINABLE community capacity.
3. Enhancing self-sufficiency
 1. Of individuals, communities, sub-regions and the region as a whole

How do we choose projects?

- Key questions:
 - Is it an important public policy issue?
 - More on that in a minute
 - Can we make a difference?
 - If everyone else is doing this work, we don't need to
 - Can we find the resources?
 - Data, research capacity, funding
 - **SECRET** – fourth question

Is it an important policy issue?

- This is where you come in:
 - Are people talking about it
 - Headlines, letters to the editor, direct feedback via NPI online consultation tool
 - Government Initiatives
 - Federal, provincial, municipal
 - Stakeholder and interest groups
 - Industry and professional associations, Unions, Chambers, Grassroots community orgs, opposition parties
 - Experts DO know
 - “ivory tower” academics, “bureaucrats”, “vote obsessed” politicians; all good and reliable leading indicators of future issues

Examples

- **Headlines:**

- Ontario kids can't do math

- **Government Initiatives:**

- Federal: aboriginal education act, “consumer first” in air transport
- Provincial: the service road to ring of fire, highway investments, new architecture and law schools
- Municipal: revenue sharing, focus big cities or spread govt love around

- **Stakeholders:**

- PC white paper, TB/Ont Chamber – apprenticeship

- **Experts:**

- GAI – Dauphin MB findings, ECE – the Finnish “sleep in a box” model, HST, “cutting” corporate taxes

NPI Projects underway

Commissioned:

- Review of federal aboriginal education act
- Northern data bank – both NOHFC/MNDM and Fednor have agreed to work with NPI to release as much data as possible (now working with Statscan and other local data holders)
- Land use planning driven locally and oriented to growth vs driven centrally and oriented towards control
- Anti-poverty efforts – GAI vs the min wage
- A better way to “set” minimum wage – average industrial wage vs GDP
- Income splitting for parents with children under 18 – a(n) (Northern?) Ontario mirror to the federal 2015 plan
- Potential for Port/Airport Authority model to fund, build and manage Ring of Fire infrastructure

RFP stage:

- Online community consultation tool
- NPI website – “evidence portal”

NPI Projects under consideration

Discussion stage

- Demographic trends – and policy directions
- Northern performance measures – community level
- Lessons in local control and entrepreneurship
 - Membertou model
 - Westbank First Nation – Medical Tourism
 - Subsidiarity in the EU – lessons for NO
- Wealth transfer and “balance of payments” (update and analyze trends and any potential policy responses)
- Defining selection criteria for setting infrastructure priorities, then applying them to the ring of fire specifically, and the northern inter-modal plans more broadly
- Analyzing best practices for funding infrastructure and applying those to the ring of fire and the multi-modal plan
- Looking at the cost of smaller class sizes – sizes in line with the literature on 15 or fewer in early grades
- Looking at potential applicability and cost for Netherlands approach to community based elder care
- Looking at the potential applicability and cost of having our children “sleep in boxes” like the Finns
- Potential framework for community development or benefits negotiations/agreements with proponents IN their community or IMPACTING their communities

How can community help

- Ideas –
 - We have lots of them, always need more
- Volunteers – many hands make light work
 - Board
 - Advisory Council
 - Online Citizens Panel
 - Research Advisory Board
 - Researchers/Reviewers/Resources (this non-volunteer)
- Independence – yes, that means \$
 - NPI has ONE funder right now – need LT balance – public and private funds, multiple small grants not one, or even several, large ones
 - Perception is reality and “he who pays the piper calls the tune” – must get to point where no single donor can significantly upset NPI workflow with adverse funding decision

Where do Students fit?

- YOU are members of the community too:
 - So ideas, approaches, volunteer, participate
- Requests for papers:
 - Not limited to your professors
- Internships – with us and with our partners:
 - Growing community capacity
- Student publication platforms:
 - Blogs
 - Student papers

We are “up and running”

- Give me a call or drop me an email:

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- Snail mail:

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*Thank You, Merci,
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