

Northern Policy Institute

Institut des politiques du Nord

Working together to GROW Northern
Ontario

26 September 2013 – Thunder Bay

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

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

Areas of Focus - broadly

- Northern Growth Plan:
 - 1. Economy
 - 2. People
 - 3. Communities
 - 4. Infrastructure
 - 5. Environment
 - 6. Aboriginal peoples

How do you choose projects?

- Three 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

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
- RFP stage:
 - Online community consultation tool
 - NPI website – “evidence portal”
- Discussion stage
 - Demographic trends – and policy directions
 - Northern performance measures – community level
 - Lessons in local control
 - Membertou model
 - Westbank First Nation – Medical Tourism

How can you help

- Ideas –
 - 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

We are “up and running”

- Give me a call or drop me an email:

- 807-632-7999

- ccirtwill@northernpolicy.ca

- Snail mail:

Northern Policy Institute

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BEFORE You call

- 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

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



*Thank You, Merci,
Müigwetch,*