

Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines' Operational Aboriginal Engagement Model

Context

The Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines' (MNDM) Ontario Geological Survey (OGS) initially developed an Aboriginal engagement model in 2000 in response to changing Aboriginal expectations related to engagement and involvement in government geological survey activities. The model has since been adopted broadly across other operational units within MNDM.

Pre-exploration	Exploration	Development	Operation	Closure	Post-closure
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Lead: Government (Ont.)

Step of the Mineral Development Sequence: Pre-exploration

Key Finding: The operational Aboriginal engagement model can be considered a good practice in community engagement as it establishes a deep mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal players.

The model was developed jointly by the OGS and Aboriginal participants following a conflict faced by the OGS in 1999 related to the delivery of geological mapping projects.

Description of Measures Implemented

The OGS engagement model is designed to meet the different types of engagement required to reach different groups of people in an Aboriginal community: a) Chief to Chief; b) technical to technical; and c) community to community. The model therefore takes the following into account:

- A multi-year OGS geoscience mapping presence in a region where a longer-term relationship with multiple levels of an Aboriginal community is required (one or more Aboriginal communities may be involved);
- The importance of mutual discovery, engagement, relationship-building, information-sharing, collaboration, and consultation;
- Current legal, technical, and operational requirements;
- The goal of achieving a social licence as a result of the investment in relationship-building and collaboration; and
- The changing levels of OGS management and technical involvement through the project life cycle.

The model was communicated to MNDM by Aboriginal leaders. It is founded on discovery of mutual interests, jointly planned and delivered information and communication activities, long-term community engagement at the three above-mentioned levels, and involvement in science programming in the community school, all based on band direction. Activities may include: a) open houses; b) creation of language glossaries; c) field trips; d) classroom events in the school; e) sponsorship at geoscience and mineral sector meetings, such as the PDAC annual convention or local geoscience symposia and school events; f) radio and cable TV shows; g) science-focused articles in regional Aboriginal newspapers; h) collaboration with local colleges to design and deliver training requested by Aboriginal people; i) funding of traditional ecological mapping projects at a community level; and j) creation of information videos that have a high degree of Aboriginal control. The model is completely flexible in terms of implementation activities as long as the activity meets a band interest and falls within the mandate of the OGS. For interests that lie outside of MNDM, efforts are made to bring the responsible authority into the consultation process.

The model is not intended to address the delivery of information or consultation related to mineral sector activities and development in a region, although the geoscience knowledge shared during the implementation of the engagement model may help address many of the community information needs. The model is designed to meet the mandated function of government-delivered geological survey activities that may take place over a time frame of 1 to 10 years in proximity to a single Aboriginal community.

Results

The MNDM engagement and relationship-building model has resulted in the following:

- Separate memoranda of cooperation with four First Nation bands (the first was signed by a Deputy Minister and the last three were signed by the MNDM Minister);
- Deep mutual relationships established with many people in several First Nation communities;
- Reportedly, a “softer, more human side of Government” has been learned and demonstrated, helping to lay a foundation for many difficult discussions on topics that lie outside an operational mandate (e.g. interpretation of treaties and jurisdictional authority);
- Social licence to deliver technical projects in a collaborative way;
- Deep mutual respect between the key Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal players; and
- More than 200 individuals trained in the art and science of line cutting, some of whom went on to work in the mineral industry.

Lessons Learned

Several key lessons were learned:

- a) Engagement and relationship-building are an investment, not a cost;
- b) Patience and a long-term commitment are required;
- c) It is about the relationship, which takes time;
- d) Engagement at a community level is essential;
- e) Projects that do not have band support (i.e. social licence) are at risk;
- f) The relationship is developed between people, not organizations;
- g) It is important to maintain consistency in the “face” of the organization over time;
- h) People involved in engagement and relationship-building must have the appropriate skills and competencies, including a cultural awareness and interest; and
- i) Support by Ministry executive is a critical success factor.

For more information:

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