



OPENING REMARKS FROM
JESS GORDON, CO-CHAIR
FNTC INTEGRATED INFORMATION MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Good Morning Everyone:

Welcome to what may very well turn out to be only the first in a series of forums on the topic of the day.

We are here to discuss, consider and share on the topic: “First Nations Governance Information Management”.

The ‘Governance’ part of that title implies government: policies, law-making, delivering leadership and services to a constituency. However let us also regard the second part of the title, ‘Information management’. This forum is not about which policies to adopt, what laws will be good for self-governing First Nations or even which services may need to be delivered. All of these subjects will vary, sometimes greatly, from community to community; Nation to Nation.

What we are here to consider is how we will administer the laws that are enacted – whatever they may be. We need to be ready and able to provide our leaders and lawmakers with timely, relevant information to support their deliberations. We will need to have legally defensible records to take to court, accurate and reliable tax rolls, health and social programs that are administered within meaningful guidelines and with measurable outcomes, economic development agendas that are profitable, culturally aware and environmentally sound. And, we will have to do these things with far smaller numbers of people than other levels of government have available.

Let’s consider the scope of a self-governing First Nation: what powers will it have? What responsibilities will it bear? How will it relate to surrounding communities, neighbors, other levels of government? How much of the tedium of day-to-day administration will a self-governing First Nation be willing to endure in order to hold



the control it feels necessary over its traditional territories and its social and cultural future?

Among the present-day principles of good government, 'transparency' is seen as at or near the top of the list. What is transparency but the ability of citizens to ask questions and receive clear, unclouded answers? Citizens want and need to feel that they can 'look into' the workings of their government and see what is going on. Back-room deals, classified information and secrecy, although still common at some levels of government, are no longer considered by citizens as justifiable instruments of government activity.

In contrast, citizens are more than ever concerned with the confidentiality of their personal information. Privacy laws are now national standards here in Canada and in most countries around the world.

The actuality of transparency, confidentiality and a host of other, often competing, social demands in government presupposes firstly, the existence of accurate information and secondly, an effective means of retrieving appropriate amounts of it within the context of diverse and often conflicting sets of regulations.

Citizens expect their political and administrative leaders to make sensible, informed decisions when administering laws, delivering services, granting land use permits or accepting or rejecting economic development proposals. Making informed decisions demands information – accurate, timely, relevant information provided to the decision-makers in a form they can easily understand.

In examining many of the current Treaties under negotiation, as well as those few that have been enacted, it is evident that the governance position of a post-treaty First Nation lies somewhere between that of a Regional District and the Provincial Government. If First Nations are to fully realize the now and future opportunities afforded by treaties and the changing political environment, they will find themselves obligated to gather and manage information nearly as broad in scope (although admittedly much smaller in size) as that presently held by the provincial government. All BC First Nations, whether in the Treaty process or not, are finding that the demand



for better and more timely information is growing every day. For example, First Nations participate in the Land Use Planning process. Many, if not most, First Nations are hard-pressed to respond to Land Use proposals in a way that clearly reflects their vision for the future due to the burden of information management this process imposes.

Information is power, and whenever power is needed to protect the rights, prerogatives, safety or future of a people, the party with the best information is far more likely to achieve its goals.

Some First Nations are largely urban, some very rural. Some have salt water in their traditional territories, some large bodies of fresh water, some – very little water at all. Some First Nations have large numbers of citizens, some fewer. However all First Nations, regardless of size or location, terrain or history, still share the same fundamental responsibility to their citizens – those of providing the best possible standard of living while protecting the cultural and social lives and values of the community.

Although it is clear that there will be differences in the authorities and responsibilities applicable to different self-governing First Nations, it is also clear that all self-governing First Nations will share many of the same or similar administrative responsibilities. Those similarities form a core of functions that will be common to any First Nations government, regardless of location, size or cultural distinctiveness.

We here today can make an enormous contribution to our own communities, First Nations and Aboriginal communities everywhere and to future generations if we can begin the work of creating a roadmap for Governance Information Management that will help to enable ourselves and others to pursue true self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Thank you.