

COMMUNAL APPROACH TO POLICY TALKING POINTS

FRAYED FEATHERS

Introduction:

This is a cheat sheet of talking points to support you to explain the Communal Approach to Youth Policy for young Indigenous people aka “the Indigenous way of doing things.” Next time you find yourself needing to explain an Indigenous youth-centred approach to reconciliation strategy or program design, refer to this sheet to support discussions.

To hear these ideas shared in more long-form discussion, check out the Frayed Feathers podcast on YouTube!

What it is:

It’s all about being reciprocal, meaning to give back even more than what we take. The old “give a person a fish, and they eat for a day, but if you teach a person to fish, they will never go hungry again.” The Communal Approach to Youth Policy is teaching young Indigenous people to “fish” so to speak.

If we picture a circle with your organization being in the north (above), and the community being in the south (below), it’s about bringing the community to your level of understanding of a situation so that the community elevates and thus join you in the north. It’s about moving past hand-out type of programs and engagement and instead begin building young leaders to create change in their communities.

When we find ourselves in meetings with non-Indigenous partners that are struggling to understand, refer to this to fill any gaps. Hopefully you reach understanding right away but if not, be open to working with them to reach this goal. When people understand the Indigenous perspective, we are giving them the tools to be a stronger ally and partner.

The section below will provide some scenarios or pose a question, to which we will provide talking points to each to navigate these misunderstandings.

Talking Points:

The value - Why would you do this

1. Representation – we need young people serving young people – by extension For Indigenous, By Indigenous (FIBI)
2. Succession planning – you’re not going to be around forever.
3. Return on time investment – 1 hour of mentoring now is 10 hours of self-research.
 - Think about how many opinions you need to read just to know you’re having the right conversation online.
 - It’s so easy to go down rabbit holes that lead no where, and mentoring cuts out all the noise.

Why it's hard:

1. Very few policy-jobs that do not require high education – Master's is the standard.
 - Master's is great but I've been told it teaches you a universalized way to approach policy challenges whereas Indigenous policy is different and is still yet to be defined.
2. Young Indigenous people are born into a political discussion no one tells them how to communicate about.
 - We need to differentiate what's a service challenge, and what's a systemic challenge. – Are people experiencing homelessness and using substances because they lack support, or is our societal systems creating the environment for people to reach this level of need?
 - The communal approach to policy fills the gap in understanding for young people between a policy discussion vs service discussion.
3. We lack a streamlined process for young peeps to learn about the political system, so now you need to intercept them and onboard them into learning about policy.

How you do it:

1. Go to where the game is being played.
 - Find local youth advisory committees and create an irresistible offer.
 - Offer them a long-term mentoring opportunity that pays them to show up.
 - These young people have already committed to advocacy programs and therefore they understand the need and value of what you're offering them.
2. Be willing to invest in the long-term.
 - It will take time for young people to receive your message, they need time to reflect and hear it a couple of time for it to "sink-in"
 - This could get frustrating, especially because so much prep goes into mentoring someone, just be patient. Remember that they WANT to understand you, they just can't sometimes.
 - Be ready to adjust your expectations about results. – The fact that a young Indigenous person is taking the opportunity to be mentored is the success.
 - They're staying accountable, learning interpersonal communication, experimenting with setting boundaries, these are all invaluable things you are teaching in addition to your content.
3. Work on a project with them as a learning experience.
 - Say you want to create a youth service framework where you outline how young people need to be supported by your organization. – Create that document with them over the long-term.
 - From start to finish, meet with them weekly and give them the responsibility of pre-reading each draft so they can offer feedback.
 - If their feedback is unhelpful, work with them to make it helpful.
 - They're not offering you poor feedback, they're offering you what they know, and it's up to you to increase and add to what they know.

- Provide as much context as possible to their input and what may come out of it, because each time they hear it, they'll be enhancing their professional opinion about the topic you're teaching.