

The ADR Community and Indigenous Relations “What are we doing?”

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At ADRI2016, members came together to dialogue about one of Canada’s most important historical and contemporary issues that has been, and still is, very much informed by conflict; Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples. They shared their perspectives and ideas about the ADR community of practice’s role in this relationship and asked “What can we do? What should we do?” Their short answer was, “We should do more.” ADRI2017 will be an important opportunity to continue this conversation and seek appropriate ways forward.

What are the ADR profession’s roles and responsibilities in what may be Canada’s most important conflict resolution challenge: reconciliation and advancement of our relationship with First Nation, Inuit and Metis (Indigenous) peoples, “What could we do? What should we do?”

ADRI members examined these important questions at ADRI2016 in two workshops. Essentially, the workshop participants laid down a challenge to our community (or family) of practice: “We should do more.”

At the close of ADRI2016, the workshop participants left with a mutual resolve to further explore actions that could address these questions within their respective regional networks, and within their ADRI affiliates. They outlined seven principles to guide initiatives and actions to use as a “compass” in walking a path forward with Indigenous people: “Ask”; “Listen”; “Learn”; Self-Awareness”; “Recognize”; “Embrace”; “Advocate”. A copy of the ADRI2016 workshop report outlining these principles is available from the writer or ADRI.

In Ontario, this has led to formation of the ADRIO Indigenous Reconciliation and Advancement Working Group (IRAWG), with strong support of the ADRIO Board.

IRAWG’s goal is to foster growth in ADRIO, as an organization that is appropriately engaged in the work of Indigenous Reconciliation and Advancement, both within our organization, and as part of its place in the ADR community of practice and broader society. Activities are being planned under three objectives:

AWARENESS - “What do we need to know about Reconciliation, as Canadians and as ADR professionals?”

METHODS AND VALUES - “What are Indigenous dispute resolution methods and values and what do they teach us as non-Indigenous ADR practitioners?”

TRANSFORMATIVE - “How can ADR professionals contribute to Reconciliation? What, where and how do we adapt or transform our practice and our organization to make it relevant to reconciliation and co-existence with Indigenous Peoples?”

As part of IRAWG’s plans, we will be working with Indigenous knowledge holders, other professionals and ADRIO Special Interest Sections to develop programming that responds to the foregoing objectives. Some of the topic areas may include:

- Fundamentals, such as history, culture, treaty relationships and contemporary conflict
- Indigenous approaches to conflict resolution
- Cultural understanding in areas such as Restorative Justice, Workplace, Family and Conflict Coaching
- Business and commercial matters, such as partnering with Indigenous businesses and impact-benefit/participation agreements
- Legal context issues including the Crown’s Duty to Consult and resolving conflicts over contemporary resource and energy development

At the core of IRAWG’s principles is the concern to be careful; a concern that Canada’s past relationship with Indigenous peoples has too often been characterized by what non-Indigenous organizations can “do for” – or worse – “to”, Indigenous communities. This history is only too well documented in numerous reports, including the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Final Report and the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

All levels of government have now initiated meaningful actions in response to the TRC Calls to Action (see for example commitments by Canada, the Province of Ontario and Federation of Canadian Municipalities). Additionally, corporations, non-governmental organizations and civil society across Canada are also working to address the TRC Calls to Action (see, Reconciliation Canada and Canadians For a New Partnership as just two of numerous examples). Canadians, generally, understand that Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples lacks equity and is fraught with conflict, but they support efforts to change this situation (see Environics, “Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples”, June 2016).

How should the ADR community of practice be part of this important movement forward?

In keeping with the core values of ADR, our community of practice should seek to learn and co-develop methods and actions with Indigenous peoples that serve the goal of a future characterized by a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship through appropriate dispute resolution. Our understanding of the roles for self-determination; respect; being sensitive to different values and cultures; and, being careful listeners, are attributes we can draw on as ADR practitioners that will serve us well in this journey.

With the ADRI2017 conference well into its planning phase, Indigenous issues including reconciliation and advancement of respectful, mutually beneficial relationships, is a topic that presents tremendous opportunity for learning and development within our profession. Few of our practice areas would not benefit from a deeper understanding of Indigenous values, interests and worldviews in relation to what we need to know and what we “should do” as ADR professionals.

Many ADR practitioners across the ADRIC community and within its affiliates are already work in this important area. Many others want to learn more. Others, outside our profession, from the Indigenous community have important knowledge that we must seek to move forward appropriately. Together, we can share knowledge, ideas, experiences and develop plans for action in response to the question, “What are we doing?”

I invite you to take part in conversations about this important question within your own affiliates or within your own community of peers and hope we have a chance to meet in person and discuss it further at ADRIC2017.

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