

From
the Past

Into
the Future

Manitoba
Métis
Policy

Government of Manitoba

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Introduction

Creating the Manitoba Métis Policy is based on the findings of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI), which was commissioned to examine the relationship between the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba and the justice system. The report was submitted in 1991 and included an analysis and observations regarding the historical treatment of Métis people.

In 1999, the Government of Manitoba established the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (AJIC) to advise it on methods to implement the AJI recommendations. In 2001, the AJIC recommended that the Government of Manitoba develop and adopt a comprehensive Métis Policy with the full participation of the Manitoba Metis Federation.


The AJIC gave three reasons for its recommendation:

1. Métis were leaders in the creation of Manitoba and it is important to reflect both the historical role and the cultural distinctness of the Métis as one of Manitoba's Aboriginal peoples.
2. There is an enduring gap in the quality of life between Manitoba's Métis and non-Aboriginal peoples that will only be closed through better and more focused programs.
3. Departments within the Government of Manitoba have worked with the Manitoba Metis Federation and Métis people to develop and deliver programs over the years, but there has not been any overall plan. Current programs and future ones could be more effective if they were better coordinated.

In 2002, the Government of Manitoba accepted all of the AJIC recommendations.

Within a year, both the scope and complexity of Métis issues and relationships with the Manitoba Metis Federation increased profoundly. Mandated child welfare services were devolved from the Government of Manitoba creating a new institution, the Metis Child and Family Services Authority and Agency. The Supreme Court of Canada's Powley decision recognized the existence of a specific Métis Aboriginal right for the first time. Program relationships between the province and the Federation as measured by the dollar value of contributions increased by 270%. Coming to a mutual understanding of what the Métis Policy should deal with and efforts to define a process of working together were challenged by this extraordinary growth.





The Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation formally agreed to work together to prepare the Métis Policy in 2008. Both agreed that the goals of the policy would be to strengthen the capacity of the Métis people in Manitoba to address current and emerging economic and social issues, and achieve greater self-reliance and socio-economic well-being. To do this, the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation worked together on the basis of trust and respect, built upon existing partnership relationships and focused efforts on their mutual interests.

In the months that followed, the province and the federation held internal and joint meetings, information sessions in every region of the province, workshops and focus groups, townhall meetings, and interviews with academics and external groups serving Métis people. This highly participatory process contributed significantly to a greater understanding of Métis people's priorities and how to address them. The Métis Policy was shaped by this feedback.

The Métis Policy is the Government of Manitoba's strategic policy context to both close the gap in quality of life and promote excellence for the estimated 71,810 Métis people living in the province. It builds on the cultural distinctness of the Métis as a defining feature of Manitoba's social fabric and the knowledge that enhancing Métis goals and prosperity strengthens Manitoba's social and economic vibrancy.

The Métis Policy forms an important context for cooperative efforts with the Manitoba Metis Federation, Métis people, other organizations and governments to improve Métis well-being. It acknowledges that Métis people should have a say about, and influence actions that could affect their lives. No simple structural or procedural formula guarantees policy and program coherence in efforts to serve Métis people. Effective approaches can only be found through a sustained commitment to deal with the distinct nature of Métis culture, with full regard for the common values that hold our society together. Implementing the policy will be an organic process that grows and develops over time.

The Métis Policy Principles and Framework are not based on any evaluation or assessment of Aboriginal rights. They are not intended to define any Aboriginal rights of the Métis in Manitoba and do not affect any Aboriginal rights of Métis people in Manitoba.

What has been achieved in the Métis Policy is inspiring. It has become clear that the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation share a common purpose on what needs to be done to improve the quality of life and promote excellence among Métis people in Manitoba. Through the Métis Policy, we can ensure that we understand and recognize the Métis for their contributions to Manitoba and to Canada, and create the tools for Métis people to participate fully and benefit equally from what society has to offer.

Métis Policy Principles

The Métis Policy is guided by the following five principles, which have received extraordinarily high levels of support from Métis people, organizations serving Métis and governments.

Recognition Principle

The Métis were leaders in the creation of the Province of Manitoba.

The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people in Manitoba with a unique history, culture and aspirations to be protected and nurtured while respecting diverse Métis needs and the common values shared by all Manitobans.

Explaining the Principle

The Métis organized the Provisional Government and led the delegation that negotiated the *Manitoba Act* with the Dominion of Canada. While this has been recognized in different ways over the past century, this is the first time formal recognition has been provided in Government of Manitoba policy.

The Métis are also a well-defined part of Manitoba's population who are culturally distinct from First Nations and Inuit peoples.

Although the situation has been improving, statistics show that Métis education, employment, income, housing, and health status, among others continue to lag behind the population as a whole. Approaches that support Métis decision-making and are attuned to the Métis community for whom they are designed can improve this situation.

To be effective, the Métis Policy will consider differences within the Métis population. Where a Métis person lives, for example in a city, in the country or in the north will affect his or her priorities. Other important differences relate to languages spoken, age, gender, health status and lifestyle. These differences should be taken into account and balanced with a Métis-specific approach.

The Métis Policy also needs to be balanced against the need for social cohesion in our neighbourhoods, communities and across the province. The new policy is intended to bring people together in society, not create inequalities and conflict.

Partnership Principle

The Manitoba Metis Federation is a political representative of Métis people in Manitoba and represents in Manitoba the Métis who collectively refer to themselves as the Métis Nation.

The Manitoba Metis Federation provides advice to the provincial government in priority setting, policy and program development to make sure that Métis interests are properly reflected in programs and services that affect Métis.

The renewed relationship between the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation will be ongoing, based on mutual respect, reciprocity, understanding, responsibility, sharing and transparency.

Explaining the Principle

The Manitoba Metis Federation Constitution states that it was created to be the democratic and self-governing representative body of the Manitoba Métis community. The Federation is made up of approximately 140, community-based Locals in all regions of the province. The objectives of the Manitoba Metis Federation are to:

- promote the history and culture of the Métis people and the cultural pride of its membership;
- promote the education of its members on their legal, political, social and other rights;
- promote the participation of its members in community, municipal, provincial, federal, Aboriginal and other organizations;
- promote the political, social and economic interests of its members; and
- provide responsible and accountable governance on behalf of the Manitoba Métis Community using the constitutional authorities delegated by its members.

Today, the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation have many complex partnerships across the areas of housing, health, education, social and economic development, culture and self-government.

More and more often, the Government of Manitoba is working with Métis people and the Manitoba Metis Federation as it develops provincial policies and programs that will affect the Métis and to preserve Métis culture for future generations. The Manitoba Metis Federation will be central to the government's understanding of Métis concerns and in closing gaps in quality of life between Métis and Manitobans as a whole.

Comprehensive Principle

An integrated and coordinated approach to Métis issues will promote greater consistency and help ensure equity of access and the effectiveness and efficiency of resources available to the Manitoba Metis Federation and the Government of Manitoba.

Explaining the Principle

Over the years, different departments in the Government of Manitoba have worked with the Manitoba Metis Federation and Métis people in different ways to develop programs in their area of work, for example in education or housing. The number of these programs has grown, and could be more effective if they were better coordinated.

The Métis Policy will link provincial policies and programs that affect Métis people together in an organized way. This allows for well-rounded discussions with Métis people and the Manitoba Metis Federation about Métis issues. It results in a better, more holistic understanding of issues and better informed decision-making. Two-way, shared financial and performance accountability will be improved by better tracking the investments directed at Métis and then finding out if the investments are meeting Métis needs. A comprehensive approach allows the Government of Manitoba to take a more consistent approach over time, and with the Manitoba Metis Federation, to develop responses appropriate to issues and needs that require long-term approaches.

Setting up good working relationships between the different departments in the Government of Manitoba that deliver programs and services for Métis increases the levels of knowledge the Government of Manitoba and public servants have about Métis issues. Sometimes coordination will require formal structures and processes, but it can also happen through shared commitments and aims, through shared understandings and processes, and a willingness to take the needs and perspectives of others into account.

Taking a comprehensive approach is a complex matter. It requires improved coordination of policies and programs across government departments, with different levels of government, engaging Métis people in policy development processes and taking a consistent approach in implementation. Specialized expertise within departments that have traditionally divided the task of governing into specialized functions will need to come together. It also means creating accountability mechanisms that are able to overcome management and accountability functions arranged vertically within departments. Finally, sufficient space for inter-agency collaboration and citizen participation in defining issues and creating appropriate responses will be required. These challenging tasks will need to be accomplished over time.

Capacity Principle

The Manitoba Metis Federation and Government of Manitoba will have the resources to meaningfully participate in their renewed relationship within the overall priorities of, and resources available to the Government of Manitoba.

Explaining the Principle

To put the Métis Policy in place, the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation will need:

- better information and data on Métis issues;
- human resources;
- organization resources; and
- program delivery resources.

There is no process in place to communicate Métis issues and priorities consistently to provincial departments and agencies. Most Government of Manitoba programs do not track whether participants are Métis. This makes it difficult to know if programs are meeting the needs of Métis, or if and when a Métis-specific approach should be taken.

Different departments in the Government of Manitoba are developing policy and delivering programs in education, housing, health, economic development and social development. There is no common process or structure to support Métis-specific approaches. To take Métis-specific approaches, the Government of Manitoba will need to have the resources to coordinate its activities.

The Manitoba Metis Federation also requires resources so it can continue to provide a voice for Métis in the province, and prepare Métis-specific policy and advocacy positions.

Within the overall priorities of the Government of Manitoba, information, people, organizational and program resources will be needed to put what is learned about the Métis into public policy and programs. These capacities should not cost more than the benefits they will create. Given the existing economic circumstances, the Government of Manitoba will need to clearly articulate its ability to act, and communicate limitations.

Accountability Principle

The Manitoba Metis Federation and the Government of Manitoba are accountable to their respective constituencies and to each other.

Explaining the Principle

Accountability means that the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation will involve people and organizations with an interest in Métis issues in the process of identifying, understanding and responding to them. It also means that the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation will report back, explain and be answerable to those same stakeholders for their decisions, actions and performance.

This principle is based on the idea that the Government of Manitoba and the Manitoba Metis Federation will take action to:

- implement the Métis Policy based on a thorough understanding of overall issues and concerns;
- establish benchmarks against which the policy and performance can be managed and judged; and
- share information about the policy, how it is put in place and the results achieved to those who base their actions and decisions on this information.

Métis Policy Framework

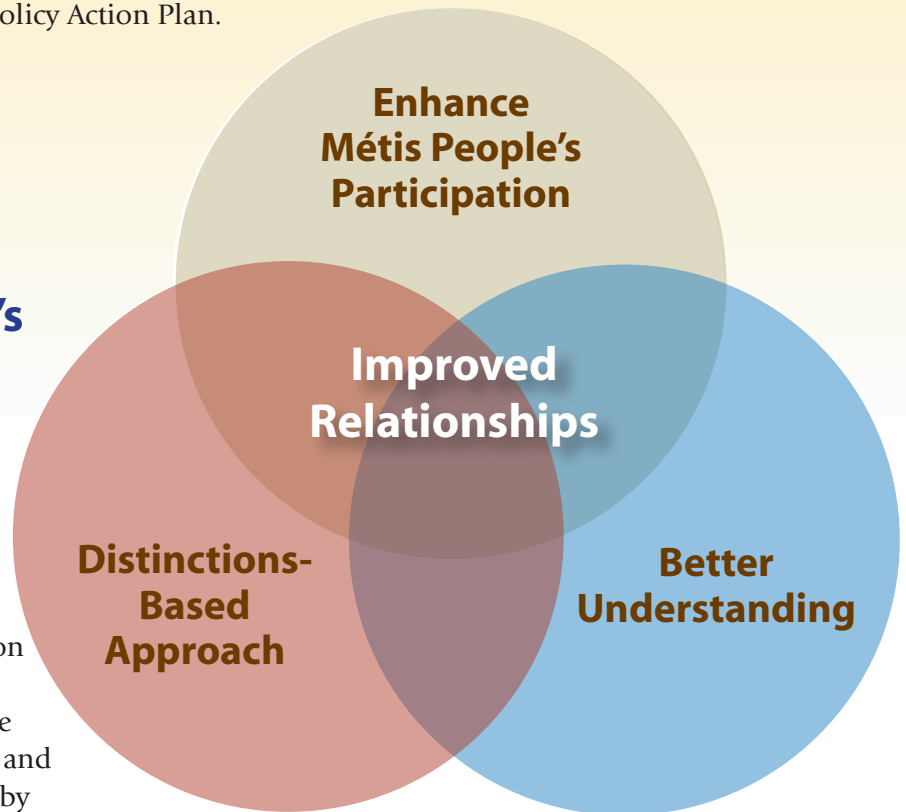
The Métis Policy Framework described in the pages that follow outlines the key elements identified for the Government of Manitoba to close the gap in quality of life outcomes and promote excellence for Métis people. Building on the Métis Policy principles, successful initiatives supportive of this goal, as well as the key messages received during the engagement process, the framework provides a strategic guide for the Government of Manitoba in its relationships with Métis people and the Manitoba Metis Federation and importantly, on developing a Métis Policy Action Plan.

The framework is made up of four complementary elements designed to work as an integrated whole:

Enhance Métis People's Participation

The first element aims to better inform, get feedback from and where appropriate, involve Métis people in decision-making processes of the Government of Manitoba. Enhancing Métis people's participation will improve the channels of communication between the province and both the Manitoba Métis people and the Manitoba Metis Federation, thereby facilitating a better understanding of Métis interests, needs and aspirations.

With this improved understanding, decision-making processes and the sustainability of solutions will be improved. Enhanced participation also involves regular feedback on the ways that input was used, enhancing transparency and accountability.



Processes:

Participatory processes are context-dependent. Depending on the issue, three different processes can be used to enhance Métis people's participation. These processes may be handled directly by the Government of Manitoba with Métis people or in joint efforts with the Manitoba Metis Federation.

1) Provide Better Information:

When its decisions will have a significant impact on Métis people, the Government of Manitoba will provide Métis people with timely, balanced and objective information to help in understanding issues and opportunities, alternatives and solutions.

2) Ask for Feedback:

In some instances, in addition to providing information, the Government of Manitoba will work to obtain feedback from Métis people on policy and program options it is considering. It will keep Métis people informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how their input influenced decision-making processes.

3) Involve:

In other instances, the Government of Manitoba will work directly with the Manitoba Metis Federation and Métis people to ensure that Métis concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and included in the policy and programming options it is preparing. These will be directly reflected in the alternatives developed and the Government of Manitoba will provide feedback on how input influenced its decisions.

Better Understanding

During the engagement process, we heard that there is an overwhelming desire on the part of Métis people, the public and public servants for more information about Métis history, culture and circumstances. Gaining this understanding involves rethinking historic and current relationships with Métis people. It will create a capacity within the Government of Manitoba to better understand the implications of government policy and programming decisions and to put practices in place that value and respond respectfully to Métis culture as an integral part of Manitoba's heritage and future prosperity.

The Métis have made significant contributions to the development of Manitoba and Canada that include leading negotiations for the Province of Manitoba's entrance into the Dominion of Canada. Manitoba and Canada were shaped by Métis ideas.

Métis are a proud, independent and resilient people who are hard-working and value self-reliance. But history has not been kind to them. Many Métis people have described how they were historically driven underground or to the margins of Manitoban society. Others have said that for many generations, "shame was poured upon us" and that to openly acknowledge being Métis was to open the door to discrimination. For this reason, some parents hid their Métis identity, language, culture and history from their children and cut their families off from the broader Métis community. With limited knowledge about their own ancestry and traditions, many Métis people communicated a real sense of urgency to know more about their heritage. They said that an accurate portrayal of Métis history, culture and values would promote a strong sense of pride among Métis people, help to overcome racism, and create a respectful relationship with people who are not Métis.

A better understanding of Métis circumstances is also fundamental to an evidence-based approach to the implementation of the Métis Policy. Evidence-based policy research levers the best available, objective evidence to identify and understand issues so that programs and services can be crafted to deliver desired outcomes effectively, with a minimal margin of error and reduced risk of unintended consequences. The major goal of an evidence-based policy approach is to ensure that the experience, expertise and judgment of decision-makers is supported and resourced with the best available research.

Processes

1. Defining the Issue and Research Priority

Setting the research agenda will be an outward-looking, open, inclusive approach in line with the interdependent nature of Métis policy issues and the diffused capacity to conduct research. Tools and techniques will be used to select research issues and priorities that enable insights to be gathered from an expanding network of sources.

2. Data Acquisition

Data is an important part of creating an evidence base as it advances research and understanding of ways to address emerging and ongoing priorities. However, there is very little Métis-specific data currently available. Data gaps on emerging priorities will need to be identified and addressed.

3. Research and Analysis: Extending the Research Network

The Manitoba Metis Federation, Métis cultural organizations, think tanks and schools of public policy are dominant players in Métis research and analysis. They generate ideas, conduct research, package and communicate results, and provide analysis and advice. Leveraging this network to meet the objective research needs of the Government of Manitoba will be necessary.

4. Communications: Connecting Findings to Decision Makers and the Public

Transferring information to decision makers and the public in an increasingly complex environment is an ongoing challenge. Gaining a better understanding will involve explicit strategies to translate and distribute knowledge about Métis culture and circumstances into a useful tool for policy makers, Métis people and the public at large. It will also include efforts to share research findings across departments and across the government, as well as sharing direction, priorities, plans and progress.

Distinctions-Based Approach

A distinctions-based approach expands the role of the Métis people in Government of Manitoba decision-making and problem-solving processes, the implementation of policy and programming, and in the delivery of services. The reasons for it are to:

- 1) Advance equal opportunity for Métis people to participate and realize equal results or outcomes in what society has to offer;
- 2) Create more effective and efficient public policy and programs; and
- 3) Value and affirm Métis culture.

The Métis are a diverse people and respecting these differences in a Métis-specific approach is not a clear-cut exercise. A long-term commitment to deal with the distinct nature of Métis culture, with full regard for both the diversity of Métis people and the common values that hold our society together will be necessary.

Some Métis people live a more traditional Métis life, while others are more mainstream. The Métis Policy will not affect any Métis person's ability to choose Métis-specific programs or programs of general application.

Processes

Advancing distinctions-based approaches can be done in one of three ways:

1. Representative Workforce:

The Government of Manitoba continues to attract Métis and other Aboriginal peoples to the public service in its effort to create a workforce that is representative of the population being served. These employees possess culturally relevant knowledge which enhances the public services they provide.

2. Practices of Government:

The second approach involves various practices of government to increase its knowledge of the distinct needs and aspirations of Métis people, and to incorporate this knowledge into the policy agenda. Métis participation on advisory councils puts a Métis voice on the overall development of an agenda for the province. Forums in which Métis needs and priorities may be expressed are also important tools for the Government of Manitoba. Informal relationships that encourage information-sharing and trust result in more coordinated and effective services for Métis people.

3. Devolution and Delegation:

The third approach involves publicly sponsoring the Manitoba Metis Federation and other organizations to develop policies and deliver programs designed specifically for Métis people. Métis institutions increase the degree to which Métis are involved in decision-making both at the administrative and policy-making levels. They also provide greater opportunities for Métis people to provide the services themselves. The agreements often lead to creative, innovative and responsive programs if new ideas and approaches can be tested, and improve relations between the Government of Manitoba, Métis people and the Manitoba Metis Federation if Métis people are able to better participate in public programming at the local level. Métis-specific approaches as well as the devolution or delegation of provincial programs and the creation of Métis institutions to administer them are all practices to consider.

4. Policy and Planning Institutional Base:

There is a need for an institutional base which can provide a voice for Métis people. The costs associated with preparing policy and advocacy positions across policy spectrums of government or to proactively manage an increasing mandate are challenges that will be strategically addressed.

Improved Relationships

Respectful, revitalized formal and informal relationships between the Government of Manitoba, Métis people and the Manitoba Metis Federation will be fostered in each element of the Métis Policy Framework. Recognition of the Manitoba Metis Federation as the primary representative of Métis people is an important part of formalizing relationships. At the same time, there are a number of organizations widely recognized as stakeholders in Métis issues, either as service providers, cultural knowledge providers or researchers. The Métis Policy will build on these resources by better aligning and coordinating efforts that support the overall goals of the policy.

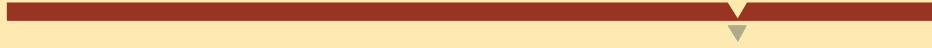
Processes

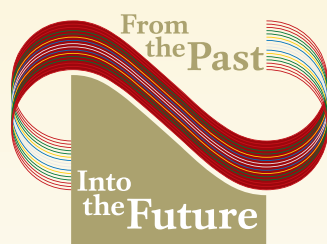
Structured, sector-specific and cross-sectoral relationships will allow for better alignment, collaboration and cooperation among the Government of Manitoba, Manitoba Metis Federation, and Métis people. These structures are recommended at the political, strategic, and administrative levels.

The range of what can be stipulated in formalized relationships is, however, limited. Improved relationships are also a product of shared commitments and aims, informal understandings and processes and a willingness to take the needs and perspectives of others into consideration. Creating opportunities for informal relationship building will be an important aspect of improving relationships.

Notes







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For more information:
www.metispolicy.ca