

The Indigenous Advisory Council of the Regina Symphony Orchestra

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Consider the implications of long-standing historical, political, and social challenges on a contemporary community relations concern.
- Reflect on the nature of effective consultation for an arts organization pursuing community engagement initiatives, and the opportunities and constraints it presents.
- Discover the value of strategic consultation through an advisory group, determining the group's role and responsibility in a musical arts organization.
- Evaluate whether and how an ongoing community relations initiative fits into an arts organization's mission and vision.
- Balance perspectives and anticipate short- and long-term consequences, when evaluating competing solutions.
- Recommend strategies to address a sensitive community relations challenge.

Topics For Discussion

Establishing Meaningful Dialogue

Just over 300 years ago, the Original peoples of southern Saskatchewan encountered consecutive waves of European fur traders and then settlers, ushering in unprecedented changes to Indigenous demographics, resources, and ways of life. The case presents a brief historical overview of some of the physical, political, and social challenges facing the local Indigenous communities since that point of contact. **Appendix 1** presents additional information related to residential schools in Canada. Based on these historical accounts, consider the events that shaped the current landscape of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Regina and the surrounding areas. Given these historical events, which aspects of dialogue and trust might be important for the Regina Symphony Orchestra (RSO) to consider when entering into discussions with, or working on projects between, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities?

For interested readers, additional historical information can be found in the following resources, recommended by Audra Young, member of the Cowessess First Nation:

- Stonechild, Blair. *The New Buffalo*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press. 2006.
- Stonechild, Blair. *The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2016.

- Stonechild, Blair. *Loss of Indigenous Eden and the Fall of Spirituality*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2020.
- Daschuk, James. *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013.
- *Indian Act, Revised Statutes of Canada* 1985, c. I-5. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) final report came out in 2015, it consolidated the accounts of over 6,000 individuals including residential school survivors, shedding light on the personal toll of a failed government policy of cultural assimilation. The creators of the report also challenged organizations and individuals across Canada to contribute meaningfully to truth and reconciliation in their communities.

- The TRC Executive Summary: Introduction (Excerpt) and Select Calls to Action are included in **Appendix 1**. Although few of the individual calls to action speak directly to orchestral organizations, what is at the heart of the recommendations? What overarching objectives can be gleaned from the sections on education, language, and culture (Calls to Action 6–17, 62–66), and how could an arts organization support these objectives in their programming and operations? How could an orchestra contribute constructively to “Commemoration” (Calls to Action 79–83)?
- Taking into account the orchestra’s Mission and Vision Statements (**Appendix 2**), what could truth and reconciliation could look like for the Regina Symphony Orchestra?
- Orchestras Canada, of which the RSO is a part, also encouraged each of its members to promote inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in their organizations. As the RSO issued its own IDEA Declaration (**Appendix 3**), what are the organization’s responsibilities to uphold these values? In which ways did consulting with the IAC demonstrate the RSO’s commitment to these values?
- How could initiatives supporting truth and reconciliation correspond with the values of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility?

RSO Conductor Gordon Gerrard felt that learning about historical events can inform productive cross-cultural dialogue and is an important aspect of community relations. After the publication of the TRC final report, he invited Eugene Arcand to speak with the RSO about his experiences as a residential school survivor. Gerrard also began considering what consultation—that is, the organizational practice of seeking advice on meaningful community engagement—looks like and later reached out to a professional colleague for guidance.

- Review the principles of consultation, which Gerrard’s colleague offered at the end of the case. What opportunities did it unveil? What are potential barriers to implementing valuable consultation according to this model?
- Solicit alternatives to this approach to consultation. What are the benefits and drawbacks of these approaches?
- Consider in particular the challenge Audra Young encountered when she first approached an Elder from Piapot First Nation to coordinate the Buffy Sainte-Marie concert tour. What could an individual in the same situation have done differently?

Roles and Responsibilities

Audra Young's realization that she needed additional support to advise on the Buffy Sainte-Marie tours to local reserves led to the formation of the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC). Twelve members sat on the original board, including representatives from business, government, and the arts, as well as a local Elder, and they met roughly once a month.

- What was the initial purpose of the IAC? What were members responsible for?
- After the first Forward Currents Festival, board members began to reflect on the role of the IAC, which had broadened beyond simply advising the RSO on bringing Buffy Sainte-Marie on tour to local reserves. In light of these organic changes to the scope of the IAC's purpose, consider the following questions:
 - Members of the IAC were engaged not only based on their ties to Indigenous communities, but because of additional skills that were valuable to the RSO. What were some of these skills? How could they contribute meaningfully to the success of the organization?
 - Certain IAC members also had backgrounds and skillsets for organizational change along the lines of equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion. Given the institutional IDEA Declaration (**Appendix 2**), should the IAC take on a role toward fostering a more diverse and inclusive organization?

When the IAC was formed, discussion did not take place regarding the fundraising role of the council, nor the place of its operating budget—including the conductor's and staff salaries, advertising, and other overhead costs—in determining the total cost of these events. As the year progressed, those involved wanted to demonstrate the value of the IAC and Indigenous programming, which would involve granting them access to the financial documents of the organization.

- Should the IAC be responsible for raising funds for initiatives they advise on and promote? If so, should they be responsible for ensuring that those initiatives meet their budgets?
- When determining the value—including the break-even point—of these and any RSO events, should the budget include overhead costs? Consider how reporting back to the council would look in both instances.

Advising on programming initiatives that engaged the Indigenous community was central to the purpose of the IAC as well as to RSO conductor Gordon Gerrard's vision for socially relevant programming.

- In addition to the Buffy Sainte-Marie tour and Forward Currents Festival, what other upcoming initiatives relied on strong consultation with the Indigenous community?
- What are the benefits to an arts organization and its stakeholders of pursuing community engagement with robust and meaningful consultation? What are possible repercussions to community engagement without such consultation?
- What drawbacks existed to consultation, and in which ways could these drawbacks be mitigated?

One of the challenges that came up during the consultation process for the Forward Currents Festival included a lapse in communication that allowed the residential school photograph to be published. IAC members also reiterated that it was important to offer enough time to allow Elders to pray on matters of spiritual importance.

- Ask students their reaction to this dilemma and highlight the stakes of that crucial moment in the case.
- Just as IAC members had responsibilities to the RSO, what were the organization's responsibilities to the IAC?

Terms of Reference

At the time of the Forward Currents Festival, the IAC did not have terms of reference in place. Terms of reference usually refers to a document outlining a committee's mandate, responsibilities, and procedures. Several board members remarked after the fact that having approved terms of reference could have helped mitigate communications concerns or avoid them altogether.

- What is the purpose of terms of reference when guiding the effective functioning of a community relations-based advisory council charged with advising an orchestral organization?
- The IAC terms of reference working document from 2019 is included in **Appendix 5**. After reviewing this document, consider how the council might have influenced the events leading up to and immediately following the Forward Currents Festival with terms of reference in place.
- Terms of reference are meant to be updated at regular intervals. What is an appropriate way of ensuring the terms of reference stay up to date and members of an advisory council are informed of their roles and responsibilities?

Additionally, other arts organizations and businesses with long-standing histories of Indigenous consultation establish budgets for their advisory councils.

- Should the RSO create a budget for the IAC? What would be covered under such a budget? Readers may consider Elder honoraria, costs for regular Sweat Ceremonies or Feasts, resources for unexpected costs, and other budget items.
- Reviewing the 2017–18 Audited Financial Statements (**Appendix 4**), consider where the funds for such a budget could come from.

Recommending Community Action

Following the spiritual harm unintentionally caused by disseminating the residential school photograph as part of the first Forward Currents Festival, the RSO board faced an unprecedented situation. The IAC recommended that the RSO pay for four ceremonial Feasts on the guidance of local Elders. RSO board members had to consider not only the immediate fallout with IAC members should their recommendation not be heeded, but also any long-term consequences in the local Indigenous community—people with whom the RSO had wanted to build stronger bridges through programming and strategic initiatives. Given the matter centered around the spiritual injury to the Indigenous community, it was important that the board give strong weight to the voices of Indigenous individuals consulting for the RSO.

- Did paying for Feasts fit within the role and responsibilities of the RSO?
- Although the cost of the Feasts was not an overwhelming sum, the funds for an unexpected expense would have to be covered in the budget. Reviewing the 2017–18 Audited Financial Statements (**Appendix 4**), consider how the RSO could cover this cost. Was paying the fee reasonable, given the RSO's current financial situation? What were the concerns for future expenses?

Amid the controversy of contributing to the four Feasts, both the legitimacy of the IAC and the inclusion of Indigenous people were felt to be at stake. The board had not previously discussed what resources and assets it was willing to invest, and it became clear that there was not consensus on the issue. The Feasts became a kind of proxy for whether the RSO was serious about supporting Indigenous engagement.

- Ultimately, should the board take the IAC's recommendation and pay for the four Feasts? What is the most prudent decision, and why? Students can prepare responses to this central question with rationale and specific actions, based on the details presented in the case. Responses can be posted or circulated in advance to generate more robust debate in live discussion.
- What initiatives seem the most pressing for the IAC going forward? Where do they align with the RSO's mission and values?
 - What additional programming or strategic initiatives ought to receive attention in the short, medium, and long term? Consider performances that featured Indigenous artists, recruiting additional Indigenous individuals to the RSO board and organization, and the IAC's goal of one day seeing Indigenous performers as members of the orchestra or its conductor.