

**Establishing PSAC's National Aboriginal, Inuit
and Métis Network:**

Report of the PSAC Think Tank

**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
March 19-21, 2004**

Introduction

At the 2003 PSAC Convention, a resolution was adopted that mandated our Union to create a National Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis (NAIM) Network. A copy of this resolution is included at the end of this report.

To fund this NAIM Network, our Convention approved a dues increase – an average of 11 cents per member per month. This dues increase means approximately \$200,000 is available in 2004, 2005 and 2006 for this NAIM Network.

Why a Think Tank?

The **purpose** of this Think Tank was to discuss and make recommendations on how to build the NAIM Network of the PSAC, approved at the 2003 Triennial Convention.

The specific **objectives** were to discuss and make recommendations on:

- the mandate and objectives of the NAIM Network;
- how the Network can meet the objectives; and
- ways to communicate and reach out to our Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit members in our Union.

Participants

A diverse group of PSAC members from Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis communities across Canada came together in Yellowknife from March 19-21 to participate in the Think Tank. The PSAC members invited to this one-time meeting came from all regions across Canada, from Goose Bay, Labrador to Arviat, Nunavut to Vancouver BC, and many communities in between. They had different backgrounds, different levels of knowledge of PSAC and our structure, and different experiences in each of their communities. Together, they represent an important part of our Union.

National President, Nycole Turmel, Regional Executive Vice-President for the North, Jean-François Des Lauriers, and PSAC-Yukon Employees Union President, Dave Hobbs, were also among the participants. Elder Eliza Lawrence, who was recommended by the Dene Nation—the Nation on whose land the Think Tank was being held—participated and helped guide the proceedings.

The meeting was facilitated by PSAC Regional Representative, Debbie McLaughlin, and Alliance Facilitator, Darlene Powder. PSAC staff were on hand to support the work of the Think Tank.

This Think Tank was a historic meeting for our Union, and participants had high hopes for the future of the NAIM Network. They see the NAIM as a way for the Union to be more welcoming to, and inclusive of, all our Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit members. They see the Network as one of the ways the Union can defend the rights of Inuit, Métis and Aboriginal members, fight discrimination and racism in the workplace, and take on issues like poverty. They also see the Network as an important tool to reach out and respond to the youth.

Participants hope the NAIM Network will raise the level of opportunity within the Union, and increase the presence of the Union within the Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis communities.

In the words of one participant, *“This NAIM Network is a dream come-true for our Union”*.

Terminology

The words we use to describe each other are important. Participants recognized that many different terms to describe their communities are used, and that there are differences in terms of what words are considered appropriate.

Participants spent some time discussing the term ‘Aboriginal’. In some government and legal documents, and for some of our PSAC members, the term ‘Aboriginal’ includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Some members strongly feel that the Network should use the one term ‘Aboriginal’, and that naming ‘Inuit’ and ‘Métis’ has the effect of excluding them from the ‘Aboriginal’ group. For others, including some of our Inuit members, the word ‘Aboriginal’ does not include them, and they feel it is important to name ‘Inuit’ in the name of the Network in order to ensure that members feel included.

What participants do not want is for our Union to use terms that will create a barrier to the participation of all our Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members in the Network. Participants asked themselves what language to use to make the Network as inclusive as possible to all of our PSAC members – Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit and Métis – from coast to coast to coast.

With respect to the name of the National Network, the participants recognized that the resolution adopted at Convention refers to the creation of “a national Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis Network”.

Participants recognized that a lot of work still needs to be done on terminology. That takes time, and there are differences amongst Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit members as to what terms should be used.

Participants also recognized that the name of the Network was discussed at Convention, and that the three terms 'Aboriginal', 'Inuit' and 'Métis' need to be included in the name of our National Network.

Recommendation: Name of the Network

It is recommended that we use the term 'National Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit Network', or NAIM Network, as the transitional title.

Recommendation: Discussions on Terminology:

It is recommended that the National PSAC Network have as one of its first tasks to discuss terminology, including the name of the PSAC's National Network.

Recommendation: Resolutions to Convention

It is recommended that members of the National Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit Network get involved in getting resolutions to Convention, on issues including terminology and the name of the Network. The PSAC Constitution specifies the appropriate channels by which resolutions can get to Convention.

Mandate of the Network

Participants agreed to recommend the following mandate for the Network.

Recommendation: Mandate of the Network

It is recommended that the mandate of the Network be the following:

To provide a unified voice for the diverse community of PSAC's Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members, so that together, we can increase our involvement at all levels in our Union, empower each other, and advance our rights within and beyond our Union.

Objectives of the Network

Participants agreed on seven broad objectives for the Network:

Recommendation: Objectives of the Network

It is recommended that the NAIM Network have the following objectives:

Outreach: *To reach out to our Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members.*

Communications: *To create accessible ways and tools to communicate with our members and promote the Network.*

Terminology: *To explore and develop terminology that is inclusive and respectful of all members in the Network.*

Education: *To educate our members, our Union and the broader society on the situation and rights of Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis peoples.*

Advancing our Rights: *To make gains and fight racism and discrimination in our workplaces, our Union and society.*

Mobilization: *To mobilize our members to act and use the political processes at all levels around Union, community and workplace issues.*

Representation within the Union: *To create opportunities for representation of Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members in various structures throughout the Union, and to be the vehicle to advance Union resolutions through the political process.*

Structure of the Network

Having discussed the mandate and objectives of the NAIM Network, the Think Tank participants then turned to discussing how the Network should be set up to make it happen.

Two of the key questions discussed were:

- What should the Network look like? How will it be linked to other parts of our Union?
- Who should participate in the Network?

Think Tank participants want a Network that would allow as many Métis, Inuit and Aboriginal members to participate as possible. Outreach is a key issue. This Network is about finding ways to reach out to our Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members, finding out who they are and where they are within our Union. It is about encouraging new members to self-identify, and to join this new Network.

The Network needs to connect as many members as possible. We need to use technology, like e-mail and the internet, but we also need to find ways to reach those members who don't have access to e-mail, and who have a lot to contribute to this Network.

Communications will be really important to the success of the Network. We need to communicate the purpose of the Network, why it's being formed, and what contribution members can make upon joining.

The National Circle

The Network will be made up of as many Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members as possible. But to be effective, the Network needs a central 'Circle' of members who will be able to meet face-to-face to discuss and identify issues the Union needs to take on. The members of the Network will be linked to the Circle, which in turn will be connected to the broader Union.

It is important that this Circle be as representative of the diversity of our Inuit, Aboriginal and Métis members from North and South, East and West. Think Tank participants acknowledged that all members of the National Circle—representatives from the Equal Opportunities Committee and representatives selected in each of the regions—should have an equal voice and status in the Circle.

It is important that this Circle be connected to the rest of the Union, and be in a position to make recommendations to the Union on what issues and struggles to take on.

Recommendations: The National Circle

Recommendation: Composition of the National Circle

It is recommended that a National Circle be composed of the following members:

Two PSAC members – one man, one woman – per PSAC region	14
The two elected Aboriginal representatives on the Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC)	2
The two Alliance Executive Committee (AEC) officers who have the responsibility for the NAIM Network.	2
TOTAL	18

Recommendation: Selection of the National Circle

It is recommended that selection process be the same for all regions, and that the selection of the Circle members in each region be undertaken by the Regional Executive Vice-Presidents (REVPs), in consultation with their Regional Council.

It was recommended that REVPs undertake a widespread distribution of a standard call-out letter throughout their region to solicit names of interested members.

Recommendation: Timeline

It is recommended that we target June 21st – International Day of Aboriginal Persons – for the final selection of the Circle members.

Conclusion

This one-time Think Tank was the first step in establishing the PSAC's National Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis Network. This Think Tank was also the first time in the PSAC's history that a group of Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members from coast to coast to coast had the opportunity to meet, to discuss, to share ideas and to propose strategies for our Union to take on their struggles and make gains.

Together, participants at the Think Tank were able to take stock of the diversity of the Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit members within the PSAC. But the common experiences and struggles, and the shared vision for a strong NAIM Network were what united the group. The ‘unified voice’ and the determination to make it heard was what made the Think Tank the success it was.

The elected officers who participated and listened to the input of the Think Tank participants—Sister Nycole Turmel, Brother Jean-François Des Lauriers and Brother Dave Hobbis—will be responsible to take forward the recommendations to the appropriate structures in the Union, including the Alliance Executive Committee and the National Board of Directors.

The creation of the NAIM Network is a first for our Union. It is a major step forward for our Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members, and for our Union as a whole. It will help our members, and our Union, to make gains and fight for the rights of all our members included in this Network

**LIST OF THINK TANK PARTICIPANTS
YELLOWKNIFE, NWT
MARCH 19-21, 2004**

Joseph Aggark	Nunavut
Sandy Anderson	Yukon
Tammy Davidson	EOC Representative
Gail Gallagher	NCR
Randy Ford	Atlantic
Jeanna Graham	NWT
Joyce Maracle-McIntee	Ontario
Anne Mullin	Nunavut
Andre Paul	EOC Representative
Donald Robert	NWT
Barb Sayers	Prairies
Samatha Schumacher	British Columbia
Luc Tailleux	Québec
Nycole Turmel	National President, PSAC
Jean-François Des Lauriers	REVP – North
Dave Hobbis	President, Yukon Employees Union

**RESOLUTION ADOPTED AT THE 2003 PSAC CONVENTION
MONTREAL, QUÉBEC
APRIL 28-MAY 2, 2003**

WHEREAS Aboriginal self-governments are assuming more and more public services of the nature that members of the PSAC have traditionally provided; and

WHEREAS a constitutional debate is currently raging, where Inuit organizations and First Nations self-governments are actively challenging the right of their employees to form unions and bargain collectively; and

WHEREAS Aboriginal workers, organized into a national Aboriginal workers union through the PSAC, should have an equal voice in this debate; and

WHEREAS the outcome of this debate could have far reaching impacts on the rights of all workers, Aboriginal or not;

WHEREAS of all trade unions in this country, the Public Service Alliance of Canada represents the highest percentage of Aboriginal membership; and

WHEREAS PSAC Policy #30, adopted by the 1994 PSAC Triennial Convention in Montreal, affirms our commitment to the rights of Aboriginal people; and

WHEREAS this policy states that: “the Alliance will undertake to facilitate the development of a strong network of Aboriginal members to advise the union about issues of particular interest to them.”; and

WHEREAS it is imperative that, to fulfill the intent of this policy, the Network of Aboriginal Workers, members of the PSAC, have equal status with other political bodies within the union:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT our Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis members establish a National Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis Network.