

A Vision of Environmental Excellence

BY FIRST NATIONS, FOR FIRST NATIONS

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources' (CIER) proposed Environmental Excellence Vision will be a 'by First Nations, for First Nations' plan to assist First Nations in their goals for environmental and sustainability excellence. CIER will implement this Vision, in partnership with and for First Nations to help meet environmental needs. CIER developed our Environmental Excellence Vision, Mission, and plan of activities based upon the needs of First Nation communities and organisations seeking assistance with environmental issues.



Working with First Nations to meet your environmental needs

Who is CIER?

CIER is a First Nation-directed, national, environmental non-profit organisation. It was created in 1994 by a group of First Nation leaders who felt it was critical for First Nations to have access to their own research and education environmental institute that addresses environmental matters using an integrated approach combining multiple perspectives and fostering collaborative relationships. CIER offers education, training, and professional development, research, and advisory services in four interconnected areas: forests, climate change, water, and sustainability.

CIER operates as an independent organisation. We are not affiliated with any political bodies, nor have we received operational funding at any point in our 11-year history. Instead, we have survived, grown, and flourished by working on a range of projects within the scope of our overall Mission.

To date, we have worked on over 150 projects aimed at helping First Nations across Canada understand and address their environmental concerns. We remain a small, but dedicated First Nation organisation focussed upon First Nations and your environment.

CIER and its Environmental Excellence Vision

Since 1994, CIER has been working with and for First Nations across Canada on environmental research and education projects. The founding group of leaders envisioned that CIER would grow over time to be able to provide more extensive high quality, effective environmental research, advisory, and education services to requesting First Nations across Canada: in other words, they had a Vision of Environmental Excellence for CIER. The CIER Board of Directors believes that having a First Nation institution with a clear plan and vision of environmental excellence is fundamental to achieving a meaningful increase in the environmental governance capacity of First Nations.

To realise this Vision, CIER put forth the proposal “Towards the Development of a First Nation

Centre for Environmental Excellence”, to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) in 2003. The proposal requested funds to explore the concept of environmental excellence through research and dialogue with First Nations and related parties. Based upon our discussions with First Nations, and our extensive experience and development over the last 11 years, CIER believes that it has many, but not all of the capabilities it will need to better assist First Nations in addressing environmental problems. During this next phase of the project, CIER will further explore the possible ways in which it may develop its internal capabilities and enter into exciting and innovative partnerships to assist First Nations in their goals for environmental and sustainability excellence, and to achieve our Environmental Excellence Vision.



CIER'S Mission: Assist First Nations with building the capacity to address the environmental issues they face.

Developing the Environmental Excellence Vision

From 2004 to present, CIER attempted to answer the following questions:

1 What are First Nation environmental needs, according to communities?

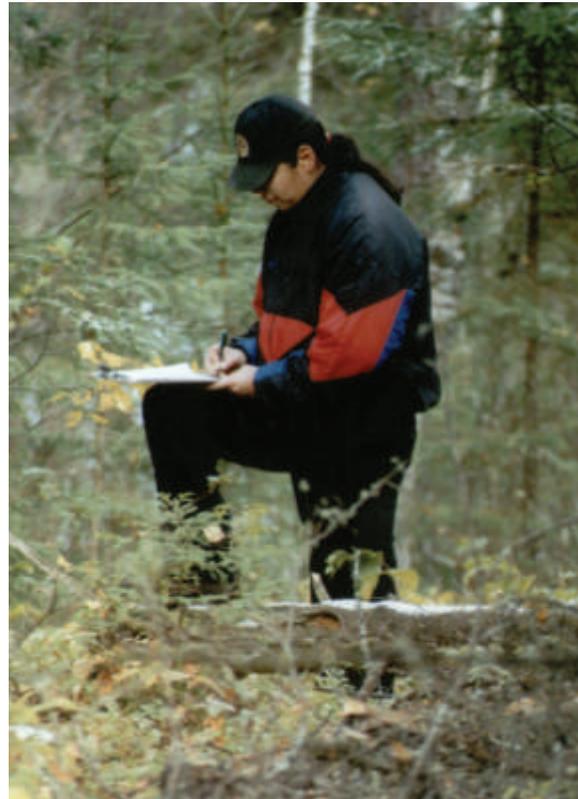
2 What is the general response from First Nations to the proposed Environmental Excellence Vision?

3 What are the recommendations for the purpose, activities, priorities, and funding of CIER's implementation of the Environmental Excellence Vision?

Through Dialogue Sessions with First Nations across Canada, CIER gathered feedback on First Nation environmental needs and the development of an Environmental Excellence Vision. People participated in a few different ways. CIER met with approximately 60 First Nations communities and 30 organisations. An information kit and questionnaire were sent to environmental contacts in every First Nation in Canada. (This information was also available on the CIER website (www.cier.ca), in English and French). Ninety-one (91) participants completed the questionnaire.

CIER also met with INAC, three environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a selection of private-sector companies to gain their perspective on how our Environmental

Excellence Vision could do to support First Nations. To complete our research, CIER also relied on our extensive experience with First Nation environmental issues.



In addition to the Dialogue Sessions, CIER researched existing environmental issues and environmental tools. The research on environmental issues looked at what Western scientists and academics are studying regarding First Nations environmental issues. This research

“Dialogue” is not “consultation”. Consultation is one of a number of legal obligations of the Crown regarding treaty and Aboriginal rights. Consultation requires the Crown to engage in meaningful discussions with Aboriginal peoples prior to making a decision that might infringe their treaty and Aboriginal rights.

report is on the CIER website (www.cier.ca). Most of the available research relates to First Nation culture and language issues. CIER found a large gap in the research being done, that activities implemented through an Environmental Excellence Vision could help to address with meaningful, First Nation-directed environmental research.

Information on environmental tools (frameworks, best practices, etc.) was collected to understand what tools exist that a First Nation could use to help it deal with environmental concerns, management, and planning. While there are many tools out there, First Nations have only created a few of these. Often, First Nations are not the audience for which the tools were originally developed. CIER could work with First Nations to modify and adapt these tools to make them relevant and user-friendly.

An environmental tool is a framework, program or system used to assist people in implementing an environmental goal, for example, a ‘toolkit’ designed to help First Nations carry out environmental assessments.

What First Nations Told Us About Environmental Issues

Comments from First Nations

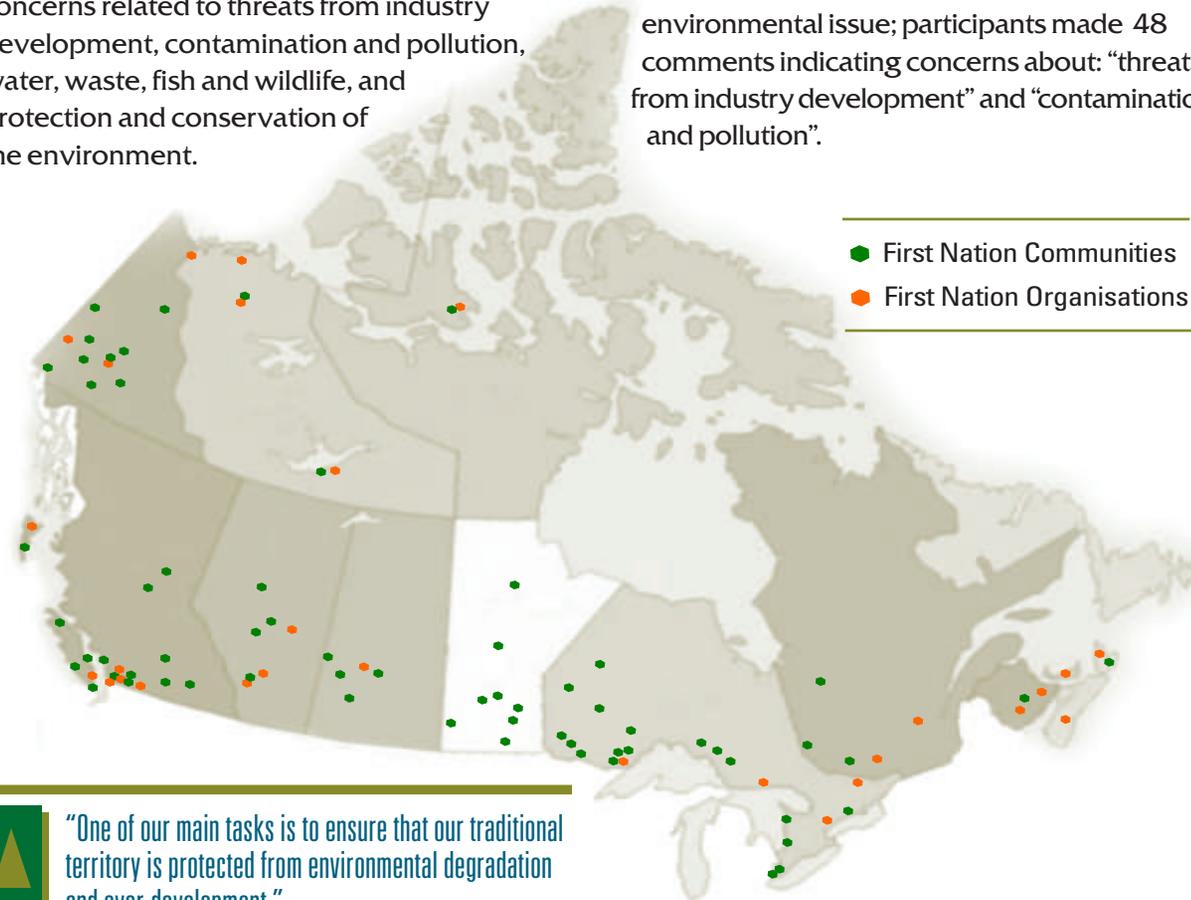
First Nations in Canada are facing a wide variety of environmental issues and many do not have the people, funding, or tools to address them. This lack of resources, education and expertise to deal with environmental issues was the most frequent issue mentioned in the environmental excellence questionnaire responses. Other key concerns related to threats from industry development, contamination and pollution, water, waste, fish and wildlife, and protection and conservation of the environment.

What the Findings Mean

The most common environmental concern raised by respondents related to the “lack of resources, education, and expertise”. Seventy-two (72) comments from First Nations across Canada related to this theme and were divided into sub-themes.

Two themes tied for the second most common environmental issue; participants made 48 comments indicating concerns about: “threats from industry development” and “contamination and pollution”.

The third most common environmental issue related to water. There were 36 comments related to “water issues” and 21 specifically mentioned “water-quality” as a concern.

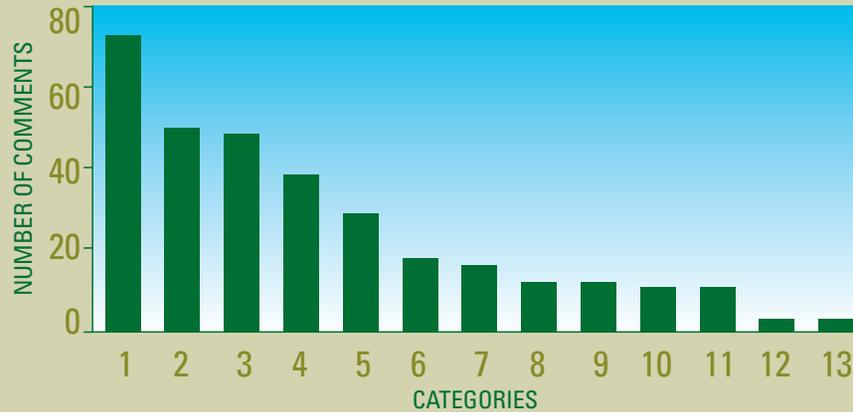


 “One of our main tasks is to ensure that our traditional territory is protected from environmental degradation and over-development.”
-Survey Participant

 “We need to build skills and capacity within our First Nation for environmental stewardship and general lands management.”
-Survey Participant

Survey Results: Environment Issues Themes

ENVIRONMENT ISSUES THEMES



CATEGORIES

- 1 - Lack of resources, education, and expertise
- 2 - Threats from industrial development
- 3 - Contamination and pollution
- 4 - Water-resource issues
- 5 - Waste-management issues
- 6 - Fish and wildlife conservation
- 7 - Protection and conservation of the environment
- 8 - Preservation of Traditional Knowledge and culture
- 9 - Air quality
- 10 - Environmental health concerns
- 11 - Climate change
- 12 - Loss of natural beauty
- 13 - Land claims, treaty, governance issues

SUB-THEMES

Lack of education
 Need environmental management team
 General capacity-building
 Poor access to information
 Low community involvement/awareness
 Need more funding
 Need policy, legislation and plans
 Poor knowledge of government programs
 Need monitoring and enforcement
 Lack of consultation with First Nations
 Lack of training/technical expertise
 Poor relationships with governments and other First Nations

Forestry
 Mining and explorations
 Oil and gas industry
 Agriculture
 General industry
 Power transmission
 Roads, highways and railways

Water
 Air
 Industrial waste
 Land
 General pollution
 Chemical exposure
 Contamination of food
 Remediation of contaminated land

Water quality
 Watershed conservation
 Drinking water quality and availability
 Water quantity
 Well management

What First Nations Said

First Nations expressed strong support for the Environmental Excellence Vision during the in-person meetings with CIER. These participants believe that an Environmental Excellence Vision implemented by a First Nation organisation dedicated to the highest quality of community environmental support is urgently needed.

Vision

· First Nation · Leadership · Balance · Environment · Health
· Holistic · Equity · Stewardship

A vision represents ‘the world we would like to see in the long-term future’. To begin a dialogue about the definition of the Environmental Excellence Vision, CIER suggested eight words that could be used in the vision. We asked participants if they agreed or disagreed with these words and to suggest other words that could be used. Approximately 80% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with these words.

Mission

· Listening · Dialoguing · Capacity · Knowledge · Research
· Linking · Developing · Defining · Awareness · Relationships
· Sustainability · Learning · Culturally appropriate

We took a similar approach to developing the Environmental Excellence Mission. CIER suggested 14 words that could be part of the Environmental Excellence Mission and asked people to respond to these words and suggest others that were important. Again, approximately 80% of the participants agreed with the suggested Environmental Excellence Mission words.

Values

· Recognition · Respect · Sharing · Responsibility

CIER has suggested that the Environmental Excellence Values be based upon the fundamental values set forward, defined, and followed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996.



New Priority Activities for CIER

The Dialogue Sessions also asked participants to think about the activities in which CIER should be involved. People reviewed an extensive list of potential activities and chose the five most important. We mention the top six activities below because each were chosen more than 30 times by respondents.

Participants suggested ‘**research (R)**’ and ‘**programs, courses, and training (PCT)**’ as top priorities, followed by ‘**creating partnerships and linkages (P&L)**’; working on ‘**Environmental Management Systems (EMS)**’; providing ‘**advice, guidance and resources (AGR)**’; and working on ‘**innovative approaches to dealing with environmental issues (IA)**’.

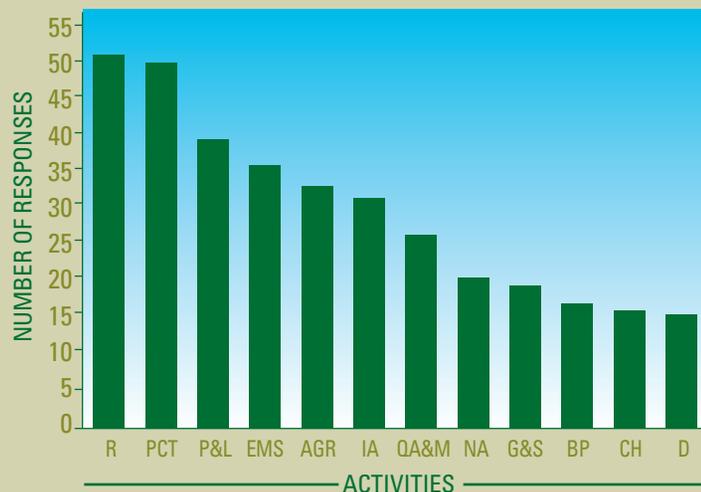
New Areas of Focus for CIER

CIER also asked people to suggest areas where the Environmental Excellence Vision should focus its activities (What specific research should be conducted? What training should be provided?). Nineteen (19) possible areas were suggested and participants were asked to choose the most important areas for the Environmental Excellence plan.

Participants chose the following top focus areas more than 20 times: **‘comprehensive community planning’; ‘use and protection of TK’; ‘environmental impact assessment’; ‘sustainable land use’; ‘water quality and protection’; ‘alternative energy’; ‘environmental health’; and ‘environmental site assessment’.** Participants also believe it is very important for the Environmental Excellence Vision to be

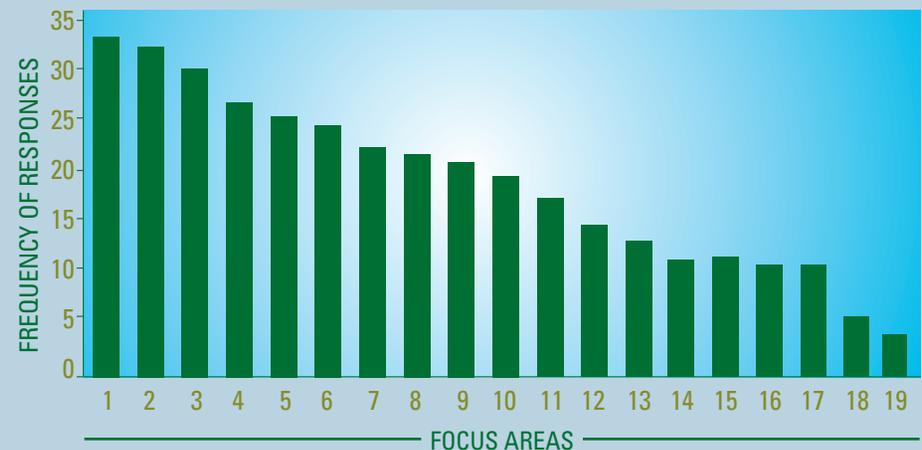
implemented out of a building that includes an accessible library and a First Nation Dialogue Centre. More than half of the participants indicated they thought that the work undertaken under an Environmental Excellence Vision should be funded through a combination of government sources and revenues generated through fee-for-service projects.

FREQUENCY OF SELECTED PRIORITY ACTIVITIES



- R: Research
- PCT: Programs, courses, training
- P&L: Create partnerships and linkages
- EMS: Environmental management systems
- AGR: Advice, guidance, resources
- IA: Innovative approaches
- QA&M: Quality assurance and monitoring tools
- NA: No answer
- G&S: Performance guidelines and standards
- BP: Best practices
- CH: Information clearinghouse
- D: Promote dialogue and discussions

FOCUS AREA PRIORITIES



- 1: Comprehensive community planning
- 2: Use and protection of TK
- 3: Environmental impact assessment
- 4: Sustainable land use
- 5: Water quality and protection
- 6: Alternative energy
- 7: Environmental health
- 8: Environmental site assessment
- 9: Sustainable water use
- 10: Sustainable resource use
- 11: First Nation sustainability
- 12: Assessment of risks and alternatives
- 13: Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- 14: Sustainable development
- 15: Approaches to consultation/public participation
- 16: Pollution prevention
- 17: Biophysical inventory/areas of significance
- 18: Emergency preparedness and response
- 19: Housing and green building

What Other Participants Said

CIER also talked to INAC, a few national First Nation organisations, environmental non-governmental organizations, and private-sector companies. CIER met with these groups to share information about CIER and the Environmental Excellence Vision project, and to increase our understanding of these organizations' mandate, role, projects, and possible partnerships.

Four national First Nation organizations participated in the discussions: the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), National Centre for First Nations Governance (NCFNG), Lands Advisory Board and Resource Centre (LABRC), and the National Aboriginal Land Managers Association (NALMA).

CIER met with three environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS): the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI), Ecotrust Canada, and the David Suzuki Foundation. CIER met with these organisations because of the relevance and quality of their work and relationships with First Nations.

The private-sector companies that participated included companies in the banking, forestry,

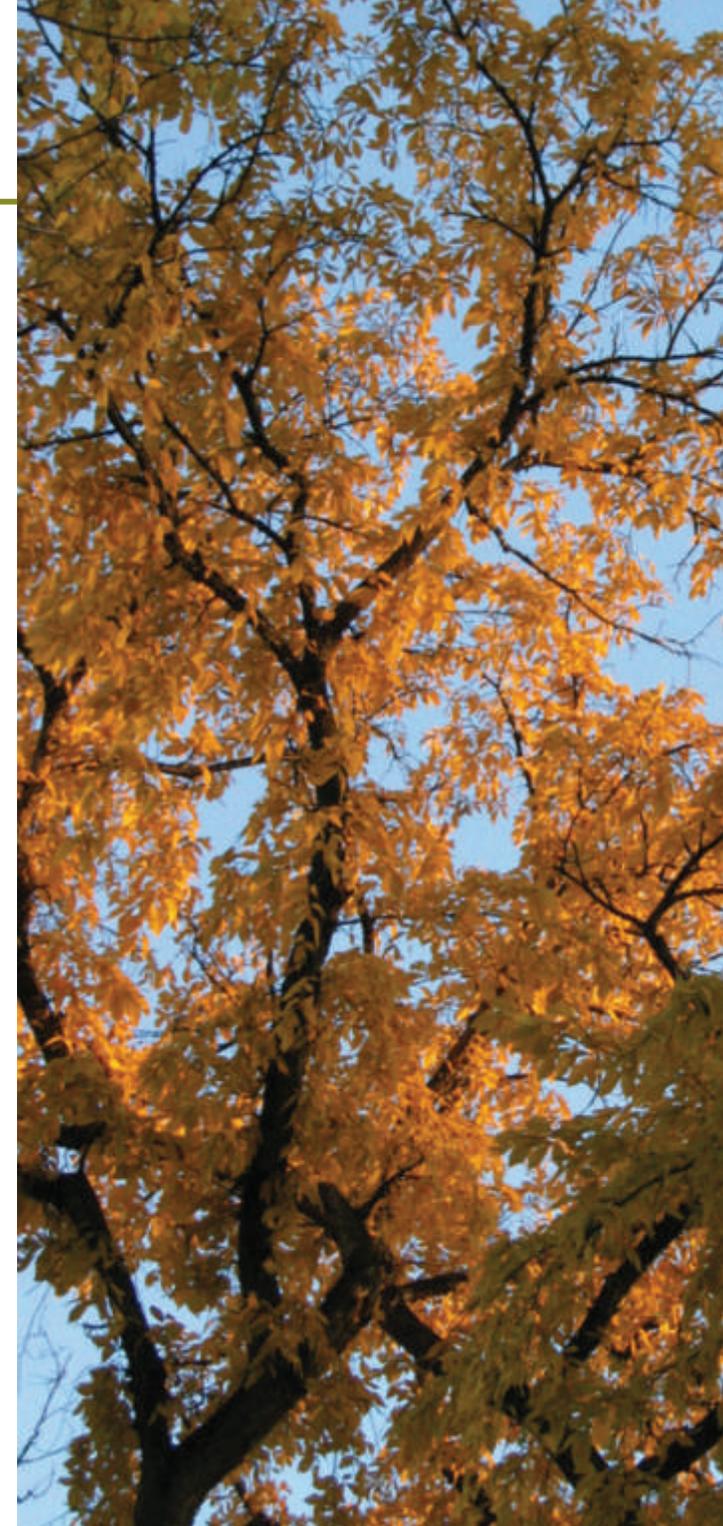
mining and minerals processing, oil and gas, and wind power industries.

Meetings with INAC officials indicated a high degree of support for the creation of our Environmental Excellence Vision. INAC representatives agreed there is a need for a national First Nation organization to be able to deal with more environmental management, capacity building, governance, linkages to sustainability, and information access.

All other groups CIER met with supported the need for the Environmental Excellence Vision. Many groups offered encouragement, support, and some expressed interest in meeting again to explore possibilities for collaboration or partnership. All were interested in meeting again in the next phases of the project.



Non-government organizations (NGOs) are not directly affiliated with any national government, but often have a significant impact on the social, economic, environmental, health-related, and cultural sectors of the country or region involved.



Early Ideas for the Environmental Excellence Vision

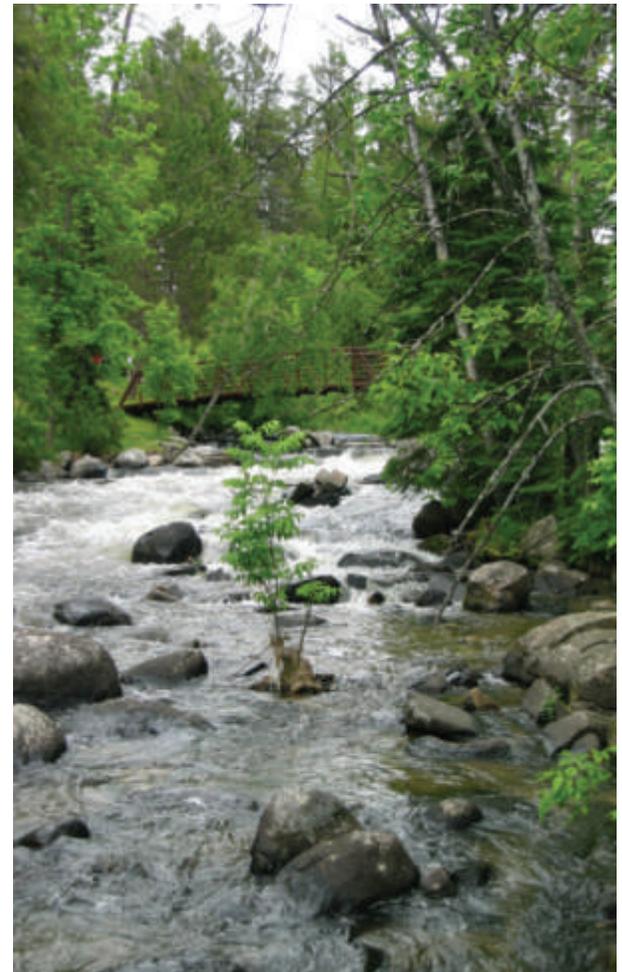
Concept for the Vision

CIER's primary purpose in developing its Environmental Excellence Vision is to create more information, options, tools, and resources for First Nations regarding environmental management of their lands and resources. CIER is not a "representative" organisation; its Environmental Excellence Vision will not aim to identify or meet all the environmental needs of all First Nations. CIER and projects that are part of the Environmental Excellence Vision will offer voluntary services and support to interested First Nations. CIER will determine the Environmental Excellence activities collaboratively with First Nations. We understand that First Nation environmental needs are best identified by you – although CIER can assist with identifying and meeting these needs with First Nations willing to participate or engage in Environmental Excellence activities.



In the discussions last year, many participants asked if the Environmental Excellence Vision would be implemented through a network or an institution. CIER believes this question likely stemmed from participants awareness of other academic or research "Networks of Centres of Excellence", which are usually large networks of universities doing research in a particular area, sometimes in partnership with the private sector or other related communities. CIER is not a network, although we have numerous partnerships and relationships with First Nations and their organisations across Canada. We envision the Environmental Excellence Vision as the continuation of CIER's current structure, but expanded in terms of the extent of the initiatives CIER is able to implement with First Nations. We are currently located in Winnipeg, but could expand to include satellite operations (as suggested by participants in the First Nation Dialogue Sessions). CIER is not based within an academic institution; but, as an independent, unaffiliated First Nation organisation, CIER may develop partnerships participate in environment-related networks. While CIER will engage in more extensive and structured research, its activities will also focus on certain environmental training

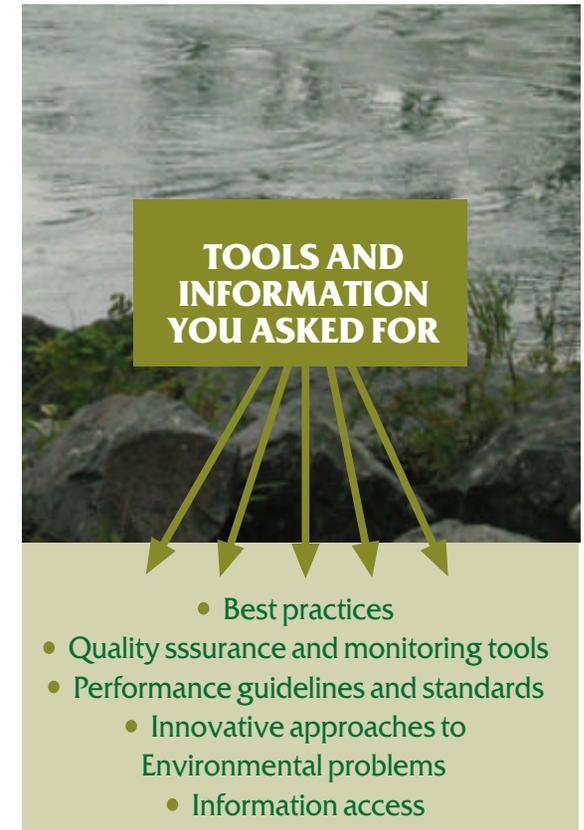
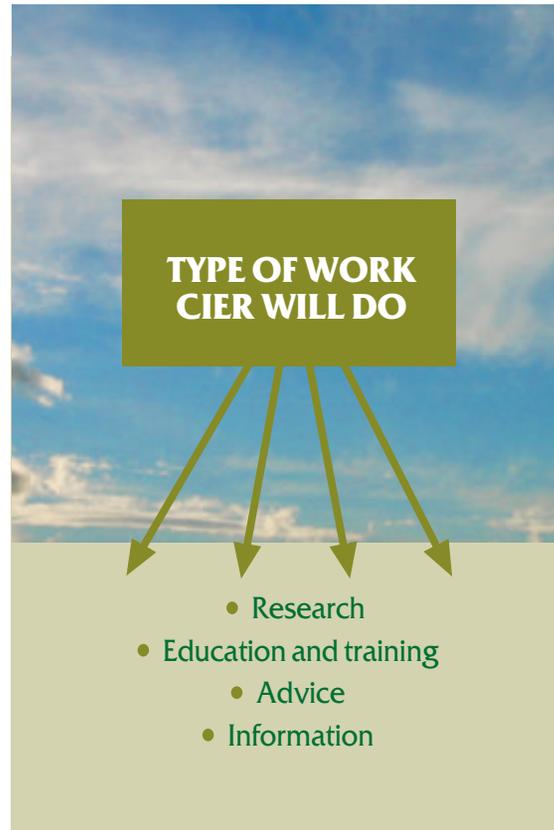
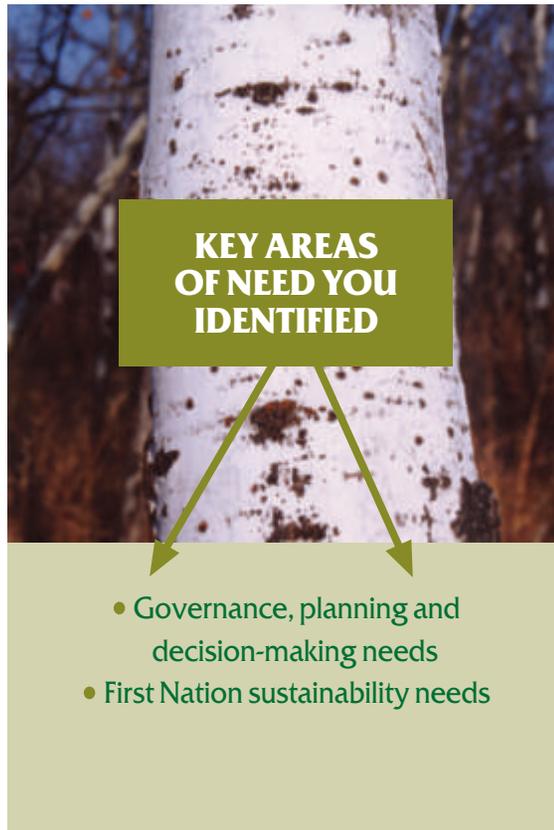
and advisory needs of First Nations. CIER will engage in its work with a goal of excellence, but will not use the term "Centre of Excellence" in order to avoid confusion with "Networks of Centres of Excellence".



A detailed summary report, entitled, "A Vision of Environmental Excellence" is available on CIER's website (www.cier.ca)

First Nation Environmental Needs and Environmental Excellence Actions

Based on comments received throughout the Dialogue Sessions and research conducted at CIER, an initial set of First Nation environmental “**needs**” and possible Environmental Excellence “**actions**” (suggested as the best response to those needs) emerged.



CIER has created a preliminary decision-making framework that will direct projects that are part of the Environmental Excellence Vision selection based on these environmental needs, primary actions, and focus areas. This framework will help CIER understand if a project or activity is related to an environmental need and actions within the Environmental Excellence Vision, and which activity is best suited to address the need. This type of decision-making ensures that CIER has the required resources and expertise to engage in effective activities. It also ensures that projects undertaken by CIER continually focus on First Nation needs. This framework will be refined in 2005-2006.

An important area of need, “use and protection of Traditional Knowledge”, was not seen as a separate area of study, but rather as an approach and source of knowledge and values that must be considered, used and protected through all CIER initiatives.

Next Steps

In 2005/06, CIER will proceed with the definition of its Environmental Excellence Vision. To do this, we will continue Dialogue Sessions, define how to build CIER's internal capacity to implement this Vision, and complete in-depth research on key environmental strategies and tools that could be of immediate benefit to First Nations in Canada. CIER will also create a Working Advisory Committee to advise us as we develop an Environmental Excellence Sustainability Plan that will direct our research, training, and advisory, and information initiatives for the next five years.

CIER will meet with some of the First Nations who already participated, as well as First Nations who are participating in the CIER Dialogue Sessions for the first time. CIER will also meet with more First Nation organizations, federal government departments, provincial and territorial governments, and members of the academic, private sector, and environmental communities. We have three main goals for the next stage of the discussions.

- 1. Continue to increase understanding about First Nations environmental needs.**
- 2. Develop key Environmental Excellence projects and activities.**
- 3. Explore opportunities for partnership and collaboration.**

How Can You Get Involved?

The “by First Nation, for First Nation” approach to CIER’s Environmental Excellence Vision means that feedback from First Nation communities and organisations is essential.

If you would like to provide your input or comment on our Vision of Environmental Excellence, please do not hesitate to do so. If you are interested in being involved in the 2005/06 Dialogue Sessions please contact us.



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