

# INCORPORATION OF INUIT QAUJIMANITUQANGIT, OR INUIT TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, INTO THE GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT

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## ABSTRACT

*Defining the term “indigenous knowledge” is a difficult process as it encompasses different things to different people. Variations on the term are about as many as there are interpretations of the concept. Inuit Qaujimanituqangit, or “Inuit traditional knowledge,” is a topic of much interest for the Government of Nunavut, which has publicly stated that it will use Inuit Qaujimanituqangit (IQ) as its foundation. IQ, in this context, becomes more than a purely intellectual exercise: from legislation and policy development, to program design and delivery, to needs assessment, statistical analysis, etc. IQ has huge practical ramifications on public administration in Nunavut. The anthropological element of IQ subsides somewhat, and contemporary political and social development issues come to the fore. IQ, then, becomes a question and means of actualizing social and political aspirations of a people. In this paper, I will talk a bit about the IQ*

*work in the Department of Sustainable Development, the policy and program development framework that we developed for the Department, and about the model and set of guiding principles upon which we base our work.*

On April 1, 1999, a new territory was added into the Canadian federation. The Nunavut Territory was a result of more than a quarter century of Inuit struggle for political recognition within the Canadian federation from which two very important facts are found:

1. A Land Claims Agreement between the Inuit of Nunavut and the Canadian government that formalized a political and economic relationship between the two signatories; and
2. The Nunavut Act, because non-ethnic self-government<sup>1</sup> was negotiated in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, created a public government in which all residents (Inuit and non-Inuit) have the right to influence and participate in the development of political, social and economic policies of the Nunavut Government.

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What sets the Nunavut government apart from other jurisdictions in Canada is that it has publicly promised to incorporate Inuit values and *Inuit Qaujimanituqangit* (or Inuit Traditional Knowledge) into all aspects of its operations—everything from policy-making to the delivery of its programs and services.

The Nunavut Legislature is democratically elected in the full sense of the word; and Inuit, who comprise the majority of the Nunavut Territory, do not differentiate ethnically in the election of its legislators. But more important, in essence, the incorporation of IQ follows an even more fundamental principle of the western tradition: the right to exercise and institute the values and principles of conduct of its citizenry into its constitution. It is outside the scope of this paper however, to explore the contradictions and implications any further than this brief statement.

### Chronology

The dream of Nunavut came about from the realization that in order to protect and preserve Inuit rights and culture, a government that reflected Inuit culture needed to be created. In 1971, Tagak Curley and others created Eskimo Brotherhood, which was to become the Inuit Taparitsat of Canada (ITC) and was to negotiate on behalf of Inuit of the eastern Arctic. In November of 1975, the James Bay Agreement was signed in Nunavik, and in 1984, the Committee of Original Peoples' Entitlement (COPE) signed on behalf of the Beaufort Delta Inuvialuit. On May 23, 1993, the largest of these Inuit land claims agreements, the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, was signed by the Canadian government and by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated.

In 1975, John Amagoalik became a leader of the land claims negotiations. In 1976, a document called "The Nunavut Proposal" was drafted, which subsequently had to be rewritten because the Inuit felt that the original document did not reflect the goals and aspirations of the Inuit. In the spring of 1982, a plebiscite on whether or not to divide the NWT was put forward to the people, and the majority voted to divide the Northwest Territories and to create a Nunavut Territory. A decade later, the boundaries of East and West were agreed upon and finalized. In June 1993, a month after the signing of the Nunavut Land Claims, the Canadian Parliament passed the Nunavut Act. Then, finally, on February 15, 1999, the residents of

Nunavut elected the Members of the First Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

### Inuit Qaujimanituqangit in the Context of Nunavut Government

The birth of Nunavut has spawned a heated discussion on the wisdom of its creation. Nay-sayers have cited everything from poor "economic viability" of Nunavut to the more extreme "backward culture" of Inuit arguments. It is not the author's intention to rebut such stances on the issue. However, a couple of facts pertaining to the issue need to be said:

1. Most territories and provinces are "dependent" on transfer payments from Ottawa. Nunavut is no exception, only more so. Now we will have control over how money and resources are spent on healthcare, education, etc.
2. To judge Inuit culture purely on its physical artifacts in the context of the creation of Nunavut is, again, to miss the point entirely.

The creation of the Nunavut government is intended as a constitutional shift that transcends both politics and economics. As alluded to earlier in this paper, as a jurisdictional entity recognized within the Canadian federation, Nunavut has the same practical power to institute the values and beliefs of its residents into its governance structures as Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, or any other province or territory of Canada. The finer and more discriminating vagaries of the legal document that make up the Nunavut Act are beyond the comprehension of the author. However, on a more practical level and under the overarching rubric of "IQ," falls the values, principles and beliefs of Nunavut's residents, as the author and a great many others understand the original Nunavut dream to be.

### What Is Inuit Qaujimanituqangit?

*Inuit Qaujimanituqangit*, or IQ, from its inception, is intended to include not only Inuit traditional knowledge, but also the contemporary values of Nunavut's communities. IQ, translated as "that which are long known by Inuit," is a misnomer. When the new Government of Nunavut (and its arm's-length agencies) first started discussing the concept of "Inuit traditional knowledge," it was in the context of the old GNWT Traditional

Knowledge Policy, which deals with “traditional knowledge” largely in isolation from contemporary realities. And, as a result, the translation of the word that we’ve inherited reflects that. At that time Office of the Interim Commissioner that initiated the discussion envisioned an all-encompassing philosophy of the Nunavut Government that included the contemporary values of today.

The printed materials produced by the Interim Commissioner’s Office—the vision and mission statements, etc.—do not refer to IQ specifically. However, the concept is spoken to quite clearly, especially in the last bullet of “A Vision for Nunavut”:

“Incorporate the best of Inuit and contemporary government systems”

Where the term *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* first appears and gained common usage is in the NSDC’s Inuit Traditional Knowledge Committee meeting in Igloolik in August of 1998.

The Department of Sustainable Development’s IQ Working Group is quite active and plays a significant role in the department. The group acts in an advisory role on many of the activities and decisions that are made within the department. Its definition of IQ is this: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit society.

Early on, the Sustainable Development IQ Working Group, made a conscious decision to use *Qaujimanituqangit* instead of *Qaujimajatuqangit* for the simple reason that [-niq-] captures the concept in the abstract, as opposed to [-jaq-] which connotes passivity. Passivity was the furthest thing in defining one’s role within the process of policy and program review and development that we wanted.

Given our definition of IQ as stated earlier—that which tries to capture past, present and future experience, knowledge and values of the Inuit—we played around with *Inuit Piqqusingit*, or “the ways of the Inuit” and its variations. In the end, we settled on *Inuit Qaujimanituqangit* for two reasons:

1. the term is not too radical a departure from the one now in common usage (although IP is a more accurate term than IQ, if one should ask) and
2. because we’re a government bureaucracy with a natural fondness for acronyms, IQ seems to us more aesthetic than IP.

## Implementing the Vision

Our government will work with our partners like the Nunavut Social Development Council to ensure that Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is a basis for all government decisions and actions.

Throne Speech to the Second Session of the First Legislative Assembly of Nunavut

To give this vision form, the Nunavut Social Development Council—an arm of the Land Claims Organization, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.—has held a series of workshops and community consultations from which invaluable initial contributions to the development of IQ were made.

The Conference on Inuit Traditional Knowledge that took place in Igloolik, March 20–24, 1998 was particularly important. Delegates from all the communities of Nunavut (a majority of them Inuit elders), Inuit organizations, territorial and federal government departments and interested NGO’s attended the conference.

“The Conference set several interrelated objectives, all aimed at establishing processes designed to ensure that Inuit culture, language, and values are democratically reflected in the policies, programs, and day-to-day workings of the new Nunavut government” (Nunavut Social Planning Council, 1998). The ideas, discussion topics, and recommendations that came out of the conference are impressive and visionary. One Inuit elder even suggested appointing at least eight elders to an advisory committee to perform a permanent, senate-like function for the Nunavut Legislative Assembly.

The Department of Culture, Language, Elders & Youth (CLEY) organized a Government-wide Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Workshop that was held September 29–30, 1999 for government employees to discuss practical issues surrounding IQ and best practices pertaining to implementing it within the government as a whole. The two-day workshop was also attended by elders from the Baffin, Kivalliq, and Kitikmeot regions. These basic questions were asked of the participants:

1. What do you think IQ is, and why is it important to Nunavut?
2. How can we fit IQ into the Government of Nunavut?
3. Where do we go from here?

Throughout the workshop, Inuit values and traditional and contemporary practices, such as teaching and child-rearing practices, the importance of kinship systems and the role of government from the Inuit perspective were topics of discussion. From the outset, there was an implicit understanding that the Inuit need and want to take the best of traditional Inuit values (social, political, economic, and environmental) as well as contemporary methods and means of governance and adapt them to the changing environment. Current social, political, and economic issues were also discussed, as were ways of engaging Nunavummiut meaningfully in policy and program development. Issues pertaining to communications and accessibility of the government by the public were identified as well. A report is currently being drafted with a list of recommendations from the workshop participants.

During the workshop, the elders and other participants expressed a strong desire to preserve the Inuktitut language, culture, mores, and values. The elders felt that it is essential that we document and preserve kinship systems, the foundation of Nunavut's society. The complex kinship terminology and structure is more than just a means of asserting kinship ties; it is a distribution system based on familial ties, namesakes, friendships, and other obligations.

Following a recommendation from the workshop, most, if not all, of the departments have initiated working groups or committees to advise them on the incorporation of IQ into their work. In looking ahead however, the interdepartmental workshop planning committee saw the need for an integrated approach to IQ development, and recognized the Department of Culture, Language, Elders & Youth as the natural leader at the government-wide level.

There is much to be learned.

### Why an IQ Framework?

From the metaphysical to the practical, IQ becomes a question of designing policies and tracking programs and services that make sense to the people we serve. The rigid, mechanistic, hierarchical model has its place, somewhere, within the Government of Nunavut, but its underpinnings in program and services design have largely been unequivocal failures. The basic assumptions of the mechanistic model do not really apply within Nunavut's unique context. In

fact, most well-intentioned social development efforts have had the exact opposite effect. A long list of spectacular failures speaks for itself — everything from assimilationist policies to programs that engender gross dependency on welfare in all its forms.

Nunavut, by any standard and on all levels, is a land of extremes. There is no denying the grim facts that statisticians churn out. We have the highest suicide rate, the highest birth rate, the highest drop-out rate, the lowest GDP, and so on. Yet, in the midst of all this dysfunction, people survive, and society survives. There is much room for improvement, but there is also something keeping Inuit society intact.

With IQ development, we are looking at rethinking monitoring and evaluation practices; what is important to the program provider has to be reconciled with what is important to *Nunavummiut*. Benchmarks and indicators will have to be developed to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of Nunavut's demographic and statistical landscape. For example, the traditional economy plays an important role in Nunavut:

- the gross estimated value of traditional activities such as hunting and the value-added activities that come from hunting that is contributed annually to the Nunavut economy (est. \$30m/annum for food replacement value alone) surpasses that of social welfare expenditures (\$26m);
- as stated earlier, the traditional (kinship and non-kinship) distribution systems of Inuit communities are still very much functional and active.

Nunavut has a young population, a majority of which will probably stay in Nunavut. This emerging sector of Nunavut will have a huge impact on job creation, health, and other social issues. How do we meet this challenge with our limited resources?

The creation of Nunavut presents not only a challenge to Inuit and the Canadian federation. It also presents an opportunity to rethink governance structures from the ground up in a more grass-roots, community-centered fashion. The expert-driven colossus we call bureaucracy may work in a corporate setting. However, people are not corporations, and at the end of the day it is people who are our *raison d'être*. Our policies and programs should reflect that.

In keeping with the desire to integrate the best of Inuit and Western means and methods,

we need to adapt or modify technologies, philosophies, and know-how that are consistent with Inuit values and needs. We can learn and adapt ideas from humanism — Camus and Freire, in terms of political and social development, for example — and the emerging chaos/complexity theory may provide scientific vindication of Inuit traditional views on the environment and wildlife population dynamics.

### Department of Sustainable Development's (DSD) IQ Framework

In the later planning stages around the departments leading up to the creation of the Government of Nunavut, the caretaker Government of NWT made funds available to the Nunavut and Western regions for traditional knowledge projects. Our predecessor department, through the Community Economic Development Division, applied for and was granted monies for a number of our own traditional knowledge projects. One of these projects was to hire an Inuit consultant (Joelie Sanguya) to travel to various communities in Nunavut, and conduct interviews with elders about IQ. Based on his work, we abstracted a set of principles to guide our efforts in community economic development, and we produced a document called "Community Economic Development from the Perspective of Inuit Qaujimanituqangit — A Framework." From this starting point, we developed an IQ framework to guide the department's policy and program development based on a traditional Inuit family model.

The framework has four basic guiding principles which will be explained for non-speakers:

1. *Pijitsirniq*
2. *Aajiiqatigiingniq*
3. *Pilimmaksarniq*, and
4. *Piliriqatigiingniq*

These core principles, we found, are prerequisites for family and leader/community relationships to function at their most ideal.

From there, the DSD IQ Working Group adopted and expanded the framework to include two more guiding principles for program and policy development:

5. *Avatimik Kamattiarniq*
6. *Qanuqtuurrunnarniq*

Principle 5 assists us in addressing the wider responsibilities of DSD, which include the areas

of Wildlife and Environmental issues. Principle 6 reflects our "sustainable development" mandate and the always limited resources with which we have to work.

This set of guiding principles is intended to be used as a planning tool in organizational development as well in the monitoring and evaluating phases.

### The Guiding Principles of IQ

#### 1. *Pijitsirniq*

*Pijitsirniq* is a concept of serving (a purpose, or community) and providing for (family and/or community). This is an essential element of the leadership role as Inuit understand it to be — authoritative as opposed to authoritarian. In fact, the latter form of leadership is seen as juvenile, even dangerous, to a community. Everything that was taught and passed on to children boils down to being able to look after oneself and to provide for family. This concept of service as it pertains to leadership ties in knowledge, skill, and wisdom — in other words, legitimate Inuit leadership is not hereditary, nor based on vague political ideology, but on merit.

To gain and maintain credibility and legitimacy as a program, service, and information provider, the Department of Sustainable Development has publicly committed itself to being a *pijitsiqti* to *Nunavummiut* to implement or review its legislative and program responsibilities. Also, to this end, the department has drafted a the "Department of Sustainable Development's Policy on Program Partnerships," which outlines the purpose and criteria for establishing partnerships: to support community economic development through business development, organizational development, and community capacity building.

#### 2. *Aajiiqatigiingniq*

Webster's dictionary defines the intransitive form of confer as meaning: *to compare views or take counsel*. This is the closest English definition that one finds for the concept of *aajiiqatigiingniq*. In a community setting, *aajiiqatigiingniq* is the Inuktitut way of decision-making — through conference, one might say.

In its departmental policy and legislative review, DSD sees *aajiiqatigiingniq* as a way to involve communities in its own development as a learning organization. It seeks to improve consultation processes and monitoring and evaluation methods knowing that relevancy and usefulness

of its products to *Nunavummiut* can only come about through *aajiiqatigiingniq*. *Aajiiqatigiingniq* should not be merely an obligatory consultation process however, it is through discussion and discourse that language and conventions are created, that a common language becomes possible. As a learning organization, DSD has a perfect opportunity to engage Nunavut communities in developing a terminology that is common to both planners and end-users, and to both scientific researchers and local knowledge holders through *aajiiqatigiingniq*.

### 3. *Pilimmaksarniq*

Although oral tradition plays an inestimable role in imparting Inuit culture, knowledge, and cosmology, the adage that if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day ... is most apropos for Inuit teaching and learning styles. Practical knowledge and skills have traditionally been passed on through observation, doing, and practice. This hands-on approach to teaching and learning is, and will be, invaluable for job training and, more importantly, as communities start taking on more and more of the administration of block-funding to deliver government programs and other “community empowerment” initiatives.

True empowerment though implies being able to do more than just the practical stuff. The ability to engage oneself in ideas, the ability to look at issues critically and to ask the right questions, the ability to affect meaningful changes in one’s lot are vitally important for healthy, sustainable communities. Capacity-building, from this standpoint, then becomes more than an exercise in basic skills acquisition; a sense of ownership needs to be instilled along with a sense of responsibility.

The DSD Policy on Program Partnerships states that for the “purpose of community capacity building partnerships the Department will ... strengthen and support the participation of Nunavut communities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of community development issues.”

### 4. *Piliriatigiingniq*

As a communal society, the concept of working together and collaboration have vital significance to the Inuit. As all these guiding principles overlap (*aajiiqatigiingniq* and so on), *piliriatigiingniq* ensures that limited resources are used wisely in conjunction with what is already in the communities — intellectual, mate-

rial resources and the knowledge and memory of the community.

Most of the elders who were interviewed by Joelle Sanguya expressed an expectation that the government of Nunavut will work more collaboratively with *Nunavummiut*. Work — though not necessarily the kind that earns wages — they said, is absolutely essential for a healthier self-image. *Piliriatigiingniq* should be the basis of our department’s community initiatives programs. This means redefining the roles and relationship between government and community to that of a more equal partnership. The DSD Policy on Program Partnerships speaks directly to the concept of *piliriatigiingniq* in its approach.

### 5. *Avatimik Kamattiarniq*

Environmental stewardship is a significant part of DSD’s mandate. Seen as a whole, environmental stewardship is not only about the environment, but acknowledges that also includes wildlife and humans. Given DSD’s diverse mandate — natural resources development, environmental protection, tourism, wildlife management, economic development — it makes perfect sense to marry western science with IQ. The intimate, experiential knowledge of the Inuit in terms of wildlife movements and environment is already available and has been accumulated over a vast expanse of time. In conjunction with developing a common terminology for researchers and local experts, models and research methodologies must be developed to incorporate local knowledge of the land, sea (ice), and fauna.

Mathematics and language that describe complex adaptive systems that are more in line with Inuit conceptual frameworks for environment/flora/fauna interactions already exist. Inuit taxonomic schemes, knowledge of wildlife behaviour, and physiological sciences need to be documented and be used as a basis of communications between researchers and local knowledge holders.

Mike Ferguson (1999) co-authored a research paper on the relationship between Arctic Tundra Caribou population dynamics and environmental conditions where he compares the scientific findings with observations by the Inuit hunters of Cape Dorset and Kimmirut. The paper suggests quite strongly that these types of collaborations can yield surprising results. Another scientific paper (Ferguson; Taylor; Born & Messier, 1998) examines the linkages of population distribution of polar bears and ice mor-

phology. A dynamic and holistic analysis that is informed by both scientific and anecdotal evidence warrants further investigation.

### 6. *Qanuqtuurunnarniq*

A “can do” approach to life has made life possible for Inuit in an extremely harsh Arctic environment. Of all the things that make an Inuit an Inuit, *qanuqtuurunnarniq* (ability to improvise with what is at hand) is a true source of pride. Resourcefulness, the ability to improvise and innovation are keys to adapting to an ever-changing environment.

*Qanuqtuurunnarniq* is really about reflecting on a problem and seeking many possible solutions because one has very limited resources. It is what allowed Inuit to survive, even thrive, in an unforgiving environment using what is at hand and using the power of the intellect. *Qillaqsuaq*'s epic journey to Greenland and back perfectly illustrates the concept of *qanuqtuurunnarniq*. Through sheer determination and resourcefulness, Qillaq traces a path of discovery of self and country.

### IQ in the Workplace

From thought to words to actuality, the commitment to using *Inuit Qaujimanituqangit* in the workplace has been a long time coming. The philosophy of IQ, at least from DSD's perspective, is not to dole out blame for Nunavut's ills, nor is it our intent for it to be a reaction against perceived injustices, real or imagined. IQ is tool that we are, and will be, using to do our work as a government department. IQ is how we relate to and interact with *Nunavummiut*, our employers.

For the Department of Sustainable Development, vetting work through the IQ Framework and consulting with the Working Group is becoming now largely a matter of course. The department is currently planning to conduct a major review of its policies and the IQ framework will naturally play a very important role

in the consultation and redrafting process. New Departmental initiatives—such as the Nunavut Economic Strategy, the proposed Wildlife Act, the “one window” approach to the delivery of our business development programs, etc.—use IQ as their starting point.

Nunavut is huge in terms of geographical mass, but the population is such that it is possible to put a human face on its governance structures. One of Nunavut's strengths is that the majority of its people understand that statistical numbers are snap-shots of actual human lives and not mere abstractions that planners use to prescribe remedies for our social ills. This is IQ. This insight is vitally important to the reinvention of ourselves as a government department.

### NOTES

1. Mary Simon calls a Nunavut-type government a non-ethnic self-government in which all residents have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic, and social spheres.

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