

Commentary

The Arctic Council Permanent Participants: A Giant Step Forward in Capacity & Support

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One year ago, for the Arctic Yearbook 2015, I wrote a commentary entitled “The Arctic Council Permanent Participants: Capacity & Support – Past, Present, & Future.” In that piece I looked at the history of the Permanent Participants (PPs) and the discussion that has taken place since the founding of the Arctic Council (AC) in the Ottawa Declaration on how best to support the work of the PPs. That every Ministerial Declaration since Ottawa has mentioned PP capacity and support is testimony to the value that the PPs bring to the work of the AC and to the problem of how best to support these small organizations that are faced with an ever increasing workload as the AC grows in responsibility and importance.

One year ago I also wrote about a process that the PPs have initiated to address how to increase capacity and contribute to more of the work of the AC. This process, to establish a PP funding mechanism, has achieved considerable progress in both vision and technical detail, and the remainder of this piece will summarize what has transpired in the last year.

To date efforts to establish the fund have included a variety of activities. There has been the development of a body of literature both from the PPs themselves and from independent bodies, to

better understand the needs of the PPs and the value they bring to the AC. This work has been ongoing throughout the history of the AC, and some of it was documented in my earlier commentary. More recently a business plan which identified mechanisms and a path forward for both the short and long term has been developed, and funding from the Arctic Funders Collaborative and other non-governmental funding sources has been secured to develop and implement a marketing, fundraising, and fund governance development process. The development of the business plan has led to the establishment of the following elements for the fund:

- Sweden has been identified as the best domicile for the funding mechanism because of favorable trade and tax arrangements which will allow contributions to be received from funders and distributed to the PPs;
- The fund will be established as an endowment with a fundraising goal of 30,000,000 USD to insure that the PPs will receive annual distributions that are meaningful, consistent, and sustainable; and
- Bylaws, rules of procedure, and policies that will provide a necessary buffer between the funding and the AC, while at the same time ensuring transparency, accountability, and the use of established best practices for fund management.

The establishment of an endowment will allow funds to be distributed so that the principle remains untouched and endowment earnings can be distributed equally to the six PPs, less inflation proofing and administration. Administration of the Fund will follow best practice and insure legal acceptance, management, and distribution of funds while making sure that local and international laws are recognized and obeyed.

The goals and objectives of the PPs for their participation in the AC are varied, and include things like protecting the interests of their communities, facilitating the robust inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the work of the AC, actively partnering in projects so that communities are involved in work that is intended to serve them, promoting cross-border cooperation among Indigenous Peoples, and supporting local initiatives so that they can receive attention within the AC.

Accomplishing these goals means traveling to meetings and being physically present in the AC, and also doing outreach about AC work to their constituencies, but more and more it also requires access to specialized expertise in a variety of areas as well as administrative and operational support. In order to make PP contributions reflect the needs of the communities, the PPs must be able to attract local experts and coordinate between Indigenous organizations within their regions, and also with the other PPs. In addition, the long term viability of PP organizations requires that they be able to attract the next generation of Indigenous leaders. In working toward these objectives, the PPs bring a very high level of value to the AC, improving the outputs and deliverables, and making the AC unique among intergovernmental fora. Now more than ever, with ever increasing attention turning towards the Arctic and the work of the AC growing, the PPs need a sustainable, predictable, and consistent funding mechanism to support their work.

In the Saami language *Álgu* means “beginning”, and so with the recently named *Álgu* Fund the Permanent Participants hope to foster a new beginning in which they can more fully benefit from and contribute to the work of the Arctic Council.

With the planned inauguration of the fund in the fall of 2016, what better opportunity than the 20th anniversary of the Arctic Council to take a giant step towards overcoming the hurdle of support and capacity for the Permanent Participants so that the next twenty years are marked by an even more robust collaboration with the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic.