Over the past year, IISD has been engaged in a joint project with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to measure the well-being of Winnipeg First Nations community. Measures are being sought to illuminate the current state of the urban First Nations community, what course the community is on, and how far the community is from their common-vision of the future.

With this knowledge comes the power to effect positive change, celebrate success, and reconnect and empower the community.

The project was designed with a bottom-up approach that strives to engage the grassroots community in order to accurately identify the issues and concerns of Winnipeg’s urban First Nations directly from the community.

A series of ‘Feast & Forums’ have proven to be an effective and powerful tool to engage the Urban First Nations people and their service sector providers. With a semi-structured forum, people feel comfortable to talk about the issues that matter most to them and often tell moving stories to provide context about how what matters impacts their well-being.

One youth did just that at our first ‘Feast & Forum.’ The young First Nations male stood at the front of the Ralph Brown Community Centre and told all the participants of the forum that he would be in a gang, in jail, homeless, or dead in a ditch somewhere if it were not for the sense of pride he has for his people and the role that pride plays in his well-being. His cultural identity has kept him grounded and that sense of identity and respect for this culture makes him a positive role model for younger generations.

The number of people participating in our forums is growing with each session we hold and the process is far from over. One of the most powerful aspects of this process is the ability to bring individuals with different stories and experiences together and unite them with the development of a common-vision for the future—a vision that is a reflection of who they are as a collective people, a cultural people and a first people.

For more information on this project, visit the project website: http://www.iisd.org/measure/knowledge/community/first_nations.asp.