



Additions to Reserve



A Pocket Guide for Municipalities Collaborating with First Nations

Version 1

Disclaimer: This pocket guide provides a general overview of the Additions to Reserve (ATR) process and outlines standard practices. It is intended for informational purposes only and should not be relied upon as legal advice.

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Walking the Path of Partnership

Municipalities across Canada increasingly recognize the importance of collaborating with First Nations in the spirit of reconciliation, shared prosperity, and mutual respect. One of the most practical and impactful ways this partnership unfolds is through the Additions to Reserve (ATR) process. This initiative supports First Nations in expanding their land base to meet community, cultural, legal, or economic development needs.

The 2016 ATR Policy, implemented by the Government of Canada, is designed to streamline and clarify the process of creating or expanding reserve lands. While the policy is federally administered, municipalities often play a critical role in the success of these additions. Local governments may be asked to provide input on land use compatibility, participate in service agreement discussions, or provide letters of support that facilitate the addition of the land to reserve.

This pocket guide was created specifically for municipal leaders, planners, and administrators engaging in an ATR process with a neighbouring First Nation. It offers practical insights, guiding principles, and considerations to help you understand an ATR, why it matters, and how your municipality can become a proactive partner.

Walking the Path of Partnership

Additions to Reserves are not simply bureaucratic exercises; they are opportunities to build stronger intergovernmental relationships, resolve longstanding land inequities, and support vibrant Indigenous communities. When municipalities engage early, communicate openly, and approach the process with cultural awareness and collaborative intent, the results can be transformative for the First Nation and the broader regional community.

Whether you are participating in an ATR for the first time or want to refine your approach, this guide provides a foundation for respectful engagement and meaningful partnership. It is not intended to be a legal or technical manual but a roadmap for collaboration, respect, and shared success.



Let's walk the path together because reconciliation is local and starts with informed, collaborative action.

Reserve History - The Basics

Understanding history can help municipalities see the bigger picture behind Additions to Reserve. Long before Canada became a country, First Nations and non-Indigenous people had their ways of living and governing. In 1763, the Royal Proclamation set a vital ground rule: if land was to be used by settlers, it had to be acquired fairly, with Crown consent and First Nations involvement. This idea of First Nations as autonomous nations, with the Crown as a guardian, laid early groundwork for today's land issues.

Reserves were created in various ways, through treaties, Crown grants, purchases, and even agreements with provinces, but things weren't always fair. When Canada became a country in 1867, Indigenous Peoples were not included in the Constitution. The federal government gave itself the authority to make laws about "Indians and lands reserved for Indians" under section 91(24) of the *British North America Act*.

Later, in the 1930s, the federal government transferred control of natural resources to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. However, it was made clear that these provinces had to respect First Nations' rights regarding land and resources.

Reserve History - The Basics

Today, there is still a unique relationship when it comes to reserve lands. The Crown officially holds title to the land, but the First Nation—often called the 'band'—administers it. This can happen in three primary ways:

- Under the *Indian Act (IA)*
- Through the *Framework Agreement on First Nations Land Management Act (FAFNLMA)*
- Through a Self-government agreement that includes land management

When your municipality collaborates with a First Nation on an ATR, you're becoming part of a rich history of land, law, and partnership. Embracing this background encourages respect and understanding, helping to create a solid foundation for better communication.



Consideration

Land isn't just about lines on a map; it's about the rich stories, meaningful promises, and deep relationships we share. When municipalities truly recognize this, they don't just support an ATR; they help to build a brighter shared future, one that allows us to move forward together with First Nations in a stronger way.

Understand the ATR Process



Purpose:

ATRs support reconciliation and fulfill Canada's legal and historical commitments.



Policy Overview:

The 2016 ATR Policy guides reserve expansions, including legal obligations, community needs, and tribunal decisions.



Your Role:

Municipalities are key players in land use compatibility, servicing, and long-term collaboration.

Understanding the key procedural steps and the roles of key players in the ATR process is essential. Gaining this knowledge helps your team make informed decisions.

Know the Why: Understand the ATR Process

Overall, understanding the ATR process and the role of municipalities will:

- Build stronger intergovernmental relationships
- Plan for shared services and infrastructure
- Anticipate local impacts and opportunities
- Support reconciliation in action



Reflection

Every successful ATR strengthens intergovernmental trust and local economies; it's not just a land transfer; it's a relationship builder!

A copy of the latest Additions to Reserve Policy can be found at www.isc.gc.ca.

Start Early, Talk Often, Engagement Is Key

Why Engagement Matters—for Both Sides

When municipalities genuinely connect with First Nations during the Additions to Reserve (ATR) process, it becomes more than just good planning, it's a meaningful act of recognition, respect, and reconciliation. For municipalities, connecting early makes everything flow more smoothly, especially in coordinating infrastructure, municipal services, land use, and long-term regional planning. This approach helps to prevent conflicts, shortens timelines, and fosters agreements that benefit everyone involved.

But engagement isn't just about logistics; it's about building a relationship.

For First Nations, meaningful engagement highlights their leadership while acknowledging their rights, voice, and vision for the land. It shows municipalities are eager to walk alongside Indigenous communities, not ahead or behind, as genuine partners. This approach helps First Nations feel supported, heard, and respected in reclaiming or expanding their land base, which is often tied to historical promises or outstanding obligations.

When municipalities act as respectful collaborators, they help heal the past and lay the groundwork for a shared, prosperous future.



Reflection

Think of engagement as gardening; if you plant the seeds early and tend to the conversation regularly, you'll cultivate something stronger, more collaborative, and built to last.

Plan Smart: Consider Local Impacts

When municipalities take part in the Additions to Reserve (ATR) process, thoughtful planning becomes vital—not just for the First Nation but for everyone in the community. ATRs can shape a variety of local elements, like land use, taxation, infrastructure, and the delivery of long-term services. By planning ahead and with care, municipalities can steer clear of unexpected challenges and harmonize their growth strategies with the changing land base.

By early identification of local impacts, such as how water, sewer, roads, or emergency services will be provided, municipalities can help ensure their systems stay sustainable while fostering trust and transparency with their First Nation neighbours.

Thinking ahead not only helps solve problems but also prevents them. It fosters positive negotiations regarding service agreements, zoning compatibility, and land management responsibilities.



Reflection

Smart planning is similar setting up a campsite—if you consider the layout, share your space, and prepare for the weather, everyone will enjoy the fire. Don't wait until it's time to light the fire to ask where the matches are.

Support the Process: Be a Good Partner

When a municipality is involved in an Addition to Reserve (ATR), it must demonstrate its commitment to being a collaborative, respectful, and reliable partner throughout the journey.

1. Be Responsive and Available

Timely responses to requests for meetings, information, or letters of support can make a big difference. Delays at the municipal level can slow down the entire ATR process. When a First Nation knows they can count on you to engage respectfully and follow through, it builds confidence and trust.

2. Offer Letters of Support When Appropriate

A letter of support signals your municipality's willingness to work together and is required in every case. While it doesn't mean you're approving the ATR in a legal sense, it shows that you're open to the process and supportive of the First Nation's goals.

3. Participate in Discussions About Servicing and Land Use

Engage early in conversations about utilities, roads, emergency services, and land use planning. Your input can help shape both communities' fair, functional, and beneficial agreements.

Support the Process: Be a Good Partner

4. Stay Open-Minded and Solution-Focused

Some challenges may arise, such as tax revenue changes, jurisdictional questions, or zoning issues. A collaborative mindset helps municipalities work through these concerns in partnership with the First Nation.

5. Celebrate the Milestones Together

When the land becomes Reserve, it's not just a win for the First Nation; it's a milestone for the region. Consider participating in or recognizing the achievement through a joint press release, council acknowledgment, or even a small celebration.

Supporting an ATR presents an opportunity to lead by example and demonstrate what good governance, mutual respect, and meaningful reconciliation look like in action.



Reflection

Being a good partner isn't just about having all of the answers—it's about being present, listening attentively, and creating something stronger together.

Municipal Economic Benefits & Opportunities Through First Nation Partnerships

New Business Collaborations: First Nation partnerships can spark joint ventures, new service agreements, or development projects that generate jobs and revenue for both communities.

Shared Infrastructure Investments: Pooling resources for roads, water, and waste systems can lower costs and expand service areas, creating mutually beneficial situations for local development.

Tourism and Cultural Promotion: Collaborating with First Nations can lead to cultural tourism initiatives, boost the local economy, and attract visitors with unique experiences.

Increased Land Use Certainty: ATRs clarify jurisdiction and land status, allowing municipalities and developers to confidently plan around neighboring reserve lands.

Expanded Local Workforce: Partnerships with First Nations can increase access to skilled labor and create pathways for training, employment, and economic inclusion.

Municipal Economic Benefits & Opportunities Through First Nation Partnerships

Grant and Funding Leverage: Joint projects may unlock provincial/federal funding opportunities that prioritize reconciliation and intergovernmental cooperation.

Long-Term Revenue Opportunities: Service agreements for utilities, fire protection, or land use planning can bring municipalities new revenue streams.

Enhanced Community Branding: Being known as a good neighbour and reconciliation partner can attract socially conscious investors and residents.



Reflection

Partnership goes beyond paperwork; it's a pathway to prosperity! When municipalities and First Nations collaborate, they foster stronger economies, richer cultures, and lasting trust.

Resources at Your Fingertips

Municipalities involved in the Addition to Reserve (ATR) process can greatly benefit from the same network of tools and support systems available to First Nations. These resources, from checklists and templates to regional contacts and technical advisors, help clarify the ATR process and facilitate smoother collaboration.

Key Benefits for Municipalities:

- **Clearer Understanding:** Access to tools like the Pre-Planning Guide and Readiness Checklist helps municipalities understand each phase of the ATR process and prepare for their role in it.
- **Improved Coordination:** By using shared resources, municipalities can better align with First Nations' timelines, expectations, and proposal requirements.
- **Confidence in Engagement:** With guidance from organizations like OALA and NALMA, municipal staff can approach the process more clearly, whether it involves reviewing proposals, understanding jurisdictional impacts, or preparing service agreements.
- **Access to Experts:** Municipalities can reach out to technical experts and regional advisors who are available to answer questions, clarify obligations, and assist in troubleshooting roadblocks, ensuring proactive engagement.

Resources at Your Fingertips

The Ontario Aboriginal Lands Association (OALA) and the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association (NALMA) offer tailored support, training and technical guidance to help First Nations navigate the ATR process confidently. Whether interpreting policy, drafting proposals, or accessing templates and maps, OALA and NALMA are trusted partners in turning land goals into reserve realities.



Consideration

Think of ATR resources as a shared map—when both the municipality and First Nation utilize it, the path becomes clearer, detours decrease, and the destination is one you'll celebrate together. **Scan the QR code or visit oala-on.ca for a complete list of templates, tools and resources that OALA has to offer.**



Reconciliation in Action

When municipalities sincerely engage with First Nations during the Additions to Reserve (ATR) process, they move beyond paperwork and policy and participate in meaningful reconciliation.



Reflection

Reconciliation isn't just a checklist—it's a choice to show up with humility, listen with intent, and build relationships that last beyond the land file.





ONTARIO ABORIGINAL
LANDS ASSOCIATION



OALA Additions to Reserve (ATR) Unit

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For more ATR related information, please
visit our website at oala-on.ca.