



James Roach, RPP, is an Ojibway of Batchewana First Nation in Northern Ontario and the Land Use Planning Coordinator at the National Aboriginal Lands Mangers Association (NALMA). Over the last 10 years, he has worked with the private sector, First Nation governments, and not-for profit organizations. His areas of expertise include community land use planning and engagement, economic and sustainable development, lands management, and strategic partnership development.

Registered Professional Planner

PROFILE

NAME:

James Roach, RPP

LOCATION:

Curve Lake, Ontario

POSITION:

Land Use Planning Coordinator at the National Aboriginal Lands Mangers Association (NALMA)

Tell us about NALMA.

NALMA officially incorporated in 2000 as a non-profit, non-political, technical organization committed to raising professional standards in lands management. Membership consists of eight Regional Lands Associations, with a membership at large of 217 Land Management professionals across Canada. NALMA is governed by a Board of eight Directors who represent our eight Regional Lands Associations.

As stewards of the land, we are committed to empowering Land Managers to the highest standards of ethics and professionalism. We are responsible for the sustainable management of our ancestral lands for future generations.

To raise professional standards in Land Management, NALMA's mandate focuses on three areas:

- Professional Development: NALMA provides training and capacity-building opportunities for First Nation Lands Managers. Since 2004, we have certified 176 Lands Managers through the Professional Lands Management Certification Program (PLMCP).

- Networking and Communication: NALMA provides a channel for successfully networking through open lines of communication, knowledge sharing, and the establishment of partnerships and strategic alliances across Canada.
- Technical Support: NALMA provides technical expertise in the area of land management to First Nation Lands Managers, First Nation organizations, and government agencies. NALMA has established units specifically in surveys, environment, and land use planning. NALMA also hosts the Centre of Excellence for Matrimonial Real Property (COEMRP)

It is important to note that our Regional Lands Associations mirror the same mandate and provide opportunities from a regional perspective.

The NALMA Land Use Planning (LUP) Unit was developed to address the need for LUP support among First Nation communities in Canada.

Tell us something about your own involvement with NALMA and what brings you the greatest satisfaction?

In my role at NALMA, I coordinate the Land Use Planning Unit, working directly with First Nation Lands Managers across the country to support planning needs. I provide outreach, direct technical training, support services, funding, and capacity-building opportunities to assist First Nations in Community Land Use Planning.

The greatest satisfaction comes from engaging in discussions, providing the tools, resources, and knowledge to build capacity and support Lands Managers in making informed planning decisions that reflect the unique cultural, traditional, economic, and ecological goals of the community. It is also satisfying to see Land Use Plans developed and implemented to improve community quality of life, respecting community input and values throughout the process.

Tell us a bit about the relationship between Indigenous and Western Planners? How do Indigenous and Western perspectives differ with respect to credentials?

Indigenous Land Managers have an intimate knowledge of their lands and traditional territories. They understand and value social, cultural, and ecological aspects of their lands, resources, and communities. This knowledge is often gained through community, culture, and oral history teachings. Western perspectives often identify a Planner as someone with a specific university degree and do not always value or validate the critical importance of traditional Indigenous knowledge of land management. Both perspectives can provide invaluable input when making informed planning or land management decisions that reflect the needs of a community.

It is important that Indigenous Land Managers and Western Planners work in collaboration on all planning projects, both on and off reserve lands. Western Planners should strive to understand the culture and values of the community in which they are working or that their work may impact. Consultation needs to be meaningful and ongoing, not just checking a box. It must be a continuous process focused on the importance of relationship building.

How has planning policy challenged relationships between Indigenous communities and the planning profession?

Often Western Planning policies have excluded Indigenous Peoples from the planning and consultation processes, resulting in disregard to Indigenous values. In addition, a history of irresponsible land management by governments and Planners have discriminated against Indigenous Peoples by ignoring existing treaties and nation-to-nation relationships. The lack of follow through and action on policies and promises made.

Some progress has been made recently within the planning profession, recognizing the importance of Indigenous land management and striving for truth and reconciliation. Policies, reports, and recommendations have been developed. Now these

policies need to be implemented and actioned to ensure they achieve the desired objectives.

Planners should be proactive in research and inclusion, especially when Indigenous consent is required. This can be accomplished when Planners work with a First Nation, engaging in discussion and providing tools, resources, and information at the onset of a project.

The terms “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” group a diversity of people into one convenient category. What is the danger with this? How can Planners do better?

“Indigenous,” “Aboriginal,” “Native,” “Indian,” and more are not terms we have selected for ourselves. These terms have been used throughout history by government and policy makers to conveniently categorize a diverse group of peoples. In Ontario alone, there are 133 First Nations belonging to many distinctive groups of Indigenous Peoples, each with their own unique languages, traditions, beliefs, and cultures.

It is important for Western Planners to understand and acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and cultures. Planners should do their homework and learn, research, and reach out to Indigenous Peoples and First Nations in their local area or the area in which they are working. They should also engage in discussions and make meaningful efforts to understand and appreciate specific values and perspectives of the communities the plans are meant to serve. As a first step, Planners should know which Indigenous territory or treaty area they are located in and learn about the history of that area.

What can individual Planners can do right now to introduce more of the truth into their work and help build better relationships with the Indigenous People in their areas?

Undertake some self-learning: read important documents that outline steps for truth and reconciliation, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and planning-specific Indigenous policies and guidelines developed by OPPI and CIP, and incorporate the calls to action into your work.

Reach out to organizations like NALMA, First Nations Land Management Resource Centre, or local Indigenous organizations to engage in discussion.

Talk to Land Managers in your neighbouring First Nation communities, identify common interests, goals, and objectives and build relationships – and include them in discussions when making planning and policy decisions.

Participate in community events, attend a powwow, and celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21.

Do you have a message for RPPs and future RPPs?

Current Planners: Indigenous Peoples have successfully and sustainably managed the lands and territories of our region for thousands of years. Our traditional knowledge and practices have

enabled us to thrive and develop vibrant, healthy communities pre-dating European colonization. In this land we now share, partnerships, collaboration, and consultation with Indigenous Peoples are key to cultural understanding and will only strengthen the planning profession. This can often be started by a simple conversation and can be a stepping-stone on one's personal path to listen, learn, and understand the First Peoples perspectives and the inherent role we have held throughout history as caretakers of the land. Western Planners and Indigenous Land Mangers can form an important alliance and work together to address current and future land use issues.

Future Planners: Get involved, ask challenging questions, and apply new methods and ways of thinking – this will continue to add value and diversity to the profession. It is important to understand our true history in order to progress with new and innovative methods of planning.

As a final note, I would like to reiterate that this interview is only one Ojibway Planner's perspective and in no way is meant to characterize the views of all Indigenous perspectives. I encourage all Indigenous and non-Indigenous Planners to actively listen and learn from one another. Through lessons learned, meaningful discussion and collaboration, and mutual respect and understanding, we can carve a path of endless opportunities and create formative change within the planning profession. (Y)



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