

Human Resource Management and Personnel Policies

Increasingly, First Nations are demonstrating their interest in establishing effective systems of human resource management, as well as personnel policies that are legally compliant with applicable employment law. In part this is a response to the growth in both scale and complexity of First Nation public administrations. Today, many First Nation communities manage multi-million dollar administrative operations that deliver services in the areas of economic development, health, housing, public works, recreation, education and social services. This growth, combined with the self-governing aspirations of many communities, has magnified the need for First Nations to build an effective, professional and highly skilled public service.

While the number of trained First Nation people has increased in recent years, there remains a shortage of skilled First Nation people to effectively fill some positions in First Nation administrations. As a result of these shortages, human resource planning and management of the existing pool of First Nation staff resources have become high priorities for many First Nation communities and organizations. A significant number of First Nation governance projects were either specifically dedicated to analyzing and developing First Nation capacity in this area, or addressed human resource issues and personnel policies as part of a larger effort to develop new administrative codes, or modify existing policies.

The human resource and personnel issues that First Nation governance projects addressed include the following:

- *best practices in human resource management*: identifying the main elements of comprehensive human resource manuals and their application in First Nation contexts.
- *capacity*: probing the match between educational and professional qualifications and training and the demands of self-government, and assessing the capacity of First Nations to manage complex public service organizations.
- *legal compliance*: addressing jurisdictional issues, especially the application of provincial employment law and the Canada Labor Code.
- *sensitivity to community and First Nation values*: exploring the extent to which federal and provincial programs, institutions and public service models can work in a First Nation context.
- *recruitment and retention of essential skills*: planning for the recruitment, training and retention of First Nation staff with needed skills and professional qualifications, and addressing issues of funding that place First Nations at a disadvantage in competing with other employers for trained, qualified First Nations people.

Broadly speaking, two types of reports concerned with human resource and personnel issues emerged from the First Nations governance projects. The first type includes human resource policy documents or manuals setting out terms and conditions of employment and related personnel policies and practices (e.g. Matsqui First Nation, Whispering Pines/Clinton Indian Band). The second set of reports has a process orientation, and describes the results of discussions from meetings, symposia and conferences in which HR issues are identified and discussed (Treaty Four Governance Institute, Southern First Nations Secretariat).

The majority of human resource-related governance projects contain detailed documentation on human resource policies, often accompanied by forms, manuals, and job descriptions. Many of these reflect mainstream approaches. Other reports provide a candid and clear assessment of the size and complexity of human resource management

challenges in First Nation communities. Because many of the human resource policies and manuals produced are similar with respect to content, they are highly transferable to other First Nation contexts. The way in which issues are addressed is also transferable, as the challenges are commonly shared by First Nations across Canada (e.g. legal issues and application of federal and provincial laws; approaches to training and professional development).

These reports provide strong evidence that much can be gained by sharing knowledge and experience in respect of First Nation human resource management, development and policy.

Excerpted from *First Nations Governance Pilot Projects: Challenge and Innovation*. A Final Report Prepared for the National Centre for First Nations Governance by Carleton University Centre for Community Innovation. February 2005.

Governance Pilot Project: Matsqui First Nation

The Matsqui First Nation's governance project goal was to:

- design an improved personnel policy manual to respond to changing roles and responsibilities of staff,
- create a more effective approach to managing human resources, and
- build greater capacity in preparation for self-government.

Matsqui First Nation utilized the expertise of a consultant to assist two community members with the facilitation and development of the project. The project engaged community members through numerous community meetings, helping the project to identify human resource needs in all functional areas of the First Nation's administration.

Once needs were identified, the First Nation created policy statements, followed by further policy review and development. The second phase of the process involved a presentation of draft policies to community members at a general meeting, with an opportunity for comment and feedback to be provided. In the final stage of development, the Matsqui Governing Body and project team proceeded to make changes based on input from the community. The process also provided mentoring and job paralleling opportunities designed to help First Nation members learn about First Nation administration.

The human resource policy produced by Matsqui is a concise and clearly presented document. It is sensitized to the cultural responsibilities and practices of staff, allowing up to six weeks of cultural leave without pay so employees can participate in cultural activities. The policies developed provide sound guidelines for improving the human resource management capacity of the First Nation, supported by interesting and helpful documentation in the appendices, such as a code of conduct and employee appraisal form.

The Code of Conduct or 'ethics contract' provides Matsqui First Nation employees with an incentive to familiarize themselves with First Nation policies and procedures, and to act in accordance with ethical standards. The guidelines include provisions respecting confidentiality, drug and alcohol abuse, respect for authority and in serving First Nation members, loyalty, self-improvement, integrity, and workplace harmony. The employee appraisal and self-appraisal forms are original, asking staff and supervisors to rate performance in terms of effectiveness, attitude, quality of work, attendance, work habits, communication skills, organization, and leadership ability. To provide community members with incentives to complete high school, the Matsqui Policy Manual includes guidelines for the provision of rewards to successful graduates.

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