

# The Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce Strategy



March 2014

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# The Aboriginal Non-Profit Workforce

Thousands of Aboriginal people throughout British Columbia dedicate their careers to helping people in need, through Aboriginal non-profit organizations. These employees and volunteers face a number of issues in the workplace that impact their ability to do their jobs well. Research and experience tells us that the long-term effects of residential school and colonization, poor wages and benefits, stressful work, and short-term funding cycles have a lasting and negative impact on the ANP workforce.

The *anpBC Strategy* is a set of ready-made Indigenous resources and activities for ANP organizations and the ANP sector, designed to target human resource (HR) challenges and strengthen and support the ANP workforce in a holistic and impactful way. The strategy is designed to:

**Embed culture and traditional values in HR practices in the workplace and sector.**

**Build more resources to create wellness and balance in the workplace and throughout sector.**

**Create more opportunities for mentorship and professional development in the workplace and sector.**

**Build and explore opportunities to increase employee benefits and retirement options for the workplace and sector.**

The following document describes the *anpBC Strategy* and summarizes the process used to create it. This is a “living strategy”, and will be amended over time.





## History

BC's Aboriginal non-profit sector was born in the late 1950s around the time when the federal government lifted a travel ban prohibiting First Nations people from leaving their reserves. As more individuals began to move into cities and towns, Aboriginal people began to establish non-profit agencies to augment or replace informal networks of support that were traditionally supplied by families and community. Over the course of 60 years, approximately 800 Aboriginal services and organizations have been created throughout BC<sup>1</sup>, many of which are non-profit societies working in the areas of health, employment, drug and alcohol treatment, child and family services, and housing<sup>2</sup>.

In 2010 and 2011, leaders of ANP organizations gathered together as a sector on two different occasions to discuss shared HR issues and opportunities to improve the workforce<sup>3</sup>. This led to the eventual development of the *anpBC Strategy* and a commitment to work towards sustaining and uplifting the ANP workforce.

The *anpBC Strategy* was created through extensive research with ANP organizations throughout BC in 2012 and 2013. Hundreds of stories were collected from ANP sector leaders, employees and volunteers, and transformed into a set of activities aimed at nurturing our Aboriginal workforce now and for generations to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Aboriginal Organizations and Services 2011/12, Government of BC

<sup>2</sup> For a list of Aboriginal non-profits in BC, please visit [www.aboriginalnonprofits.com/the-sector](http://www.aboriginalnonprofits.com/the-sector)

<sup>3</sup> For the 2010 gathering report and other background documents, please visit [www.aboriginalnonprofits.com/the-sector](http://www.aboriginalnonprofits.com/the-sector)

# Introducing the Strategy

The *anpBC Strategy* aims to build and support a strong ANP workforce so that organizations can continue to assist, heal, and strengthen Aboriginal communities now and into the future.

From 2012 to 2014, community researchers worked with the ANP sector to help build the strategy by exploring how a culturally-grounded, healthy, and robust workforce could be created and sustained.

Hundreds of stories were shared by dedicated ANP employees and volunteers across the province from Aboriginal organizations that specialize in housing, health, treatment, employment, and child and family services. Community and Indigenous based researchers hosted sharing circles, interviews, surveys, and conversations with ANP employees, volunteers, Elders and youth. Research was conducted in four different areas: Culture and traditional values in the workplace, workplace wellness and balance, mentorship and professional development, and pensions and benefits.

The research with the ANP sector led to a total of 17 suggested activities including 10 for organizations, and seven for the sector. The activities are designed to be implemented in two overlapping phases. The first phase is a series of no cost and/or low cost activities for organizations that can begin now. The second phase is designed to start in the Spring of 2014, involves longer-term activities for organizations and the sector, and requires additional funding and resources.

Some of the activities might feel familiar to ANP organizations. This is because all of the activities and examples have been created based on the stories shared by the ANP community over the past two years. The gift of the *anpBC Strategy* is that while it may support what the ANP sector already does well, it has the potential to spark new and innovative ways of strengthening the ANP workforce.





## The Four Research Areas

**Culture and Traditional Values in the Workplace.** Aboriginal culture, in its many forms, is at the core of the ANP workforce and serves as the anchor to all that the ANP sector is and does. Weaving culture and traditional values into HR practices helps to empower and sustain the dedicated people who choose to make their careers in the Aboriginal non-profit sector.

Recent research with ANP organizations across BC showed that culture is alive and well. Of 147 volunteers and employees surveyed, 93% agreed that they feel more satisfied in a workplace that incorporates culture and traditional values. Further, 88% of respondents agreed that they were more likely to work for and remain employees of an organization that fosters traditional culture and values.

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"Culture is not a box that you check once per day, but something that you live throughout the whole day, because it's what you do - respectfully practicing culture in all of your dealings, from working with Elders to developing organization programs." (Youth Sharing Circle Participant)

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**Wellness and Balance in the Workplace.** Workplace wellness is critical to the success of ANP organizations. When wellness is achieved in the workplace, organizations across BC are better able to promote wellness and healing within the community. Workplace wellness is about caring for one another, and living and working with holistic practices that nurture the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional aspects of a person and an organization.

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"Employees are affected by the same issues as our clients (violence, substance abuse, residential school). They need healing to deal with these issues to do their jobs better and create a healthier environment." (Key Informant)

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In a recent 2012 culture and wellness survey with the ANP sector, nearly 100% of respondents noted that healthy leadership and workplace relationships were important to them and key drivers of workplace wellness. Wellness contributes to better work-life balance for the committed individuals who choose to work and volunteer in ANPs. The effects of wellness in the workplace flows into the employee's family, home, and community.



## Mentorship and Professional Development in the Workplace.

Mentoring is nothing new to Aboriginal communities. It has been a practice used by Aboriginal people to transmit culture, language and tradition for countless generations. In the ANP sector, mentorship is part of the way organizations do business. Mentoring others is a sacred role and responsibility and plays an important part in cultural, professional, and personal development.

Recent research in the ANP sector in BC showed that mentorship and professional development have helped people to take on more responsibility and increasingly challenging roles in the workplace, assist with career advancement, and contribute to a positive working environment. In a 2012 ANP survey, 74% of respondents noted that mentorship improved a sense of belonging in the workplace, and 70% reported that mentorship contributed to a respectful working environment. The combination of professional development training and mentorship is key to strengthening the workforce and ensuring ANPs can respond to the growing needs of their communities, now and into the future.

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“Mentoring is valuable and necessary. It blends well into our traditions and passing knowledge to the next generation.”  
(Sharing Circle Participant)

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**Pensions and Benefits for the Workforce.** Employee pensions and benefits in an Aboriginal non-profit context often look different than mainstream approaches. That is, when it comes to retirement planning, pension options may not be used or even considered. Pensions are a relatively new option for Aboriginal people, because family and community have traditionally been looked to when people can no longer provide for themselves. Pension planning in the ANP context needs to include monetary benefits as well as ways to care for Elders who have retired from the sector as paid employees.

Meaningful benefits in an Aboriginal context span beyond extended health and dental packages and include cultural benefits that allow Aboriginal people to attend

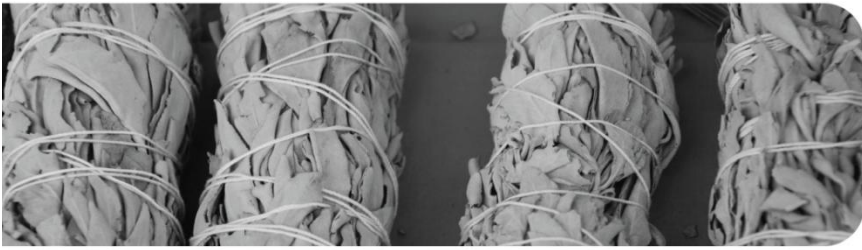
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“When I retired from my job [in the ANP sector], I didn't stop working, I only retired from getting paid for what I do. The work of caring for others never stops.” (Elder)

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traditional ceremony and community events, access Elders, and take advantage of healing opportunities such as Sweat Lodge.

A recent 2012 survey with ANP employees in BC demonstrated the importance of cultural benefits. Almost 80% of respondents indicated that cultural benefits are important when working for an ANP organization.



## Phase One Activities for the ANP Workplace

Phase one is a series of no cost and/or low cost activities that ANP organizations can begin to implement now and into the future.

### 1. Build 'cultural practice' into the organization's policy manual and strategic vision.

**Purpose:** Building cultural practice into a formal structure such as a policy manual or strategic plan can help to establish clear objectives and a genuine commitment from leaders, no matter who is in charge.

**Examples:** Embed culture into mission statements and other core documents such as the strategic plan and annual reports, as well as into employee policies in the form of paid time off for cultural events (cultural leave) or conflict resolution. Use the *Cultural Self-Assessment Tool* created by the *anpBC Strategy* to assist in making culture a more explicit part of the workplace (see Appendix B).

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"We usually get the call the same day or the day before - that the fish is coming in. So at the last minute I asked for the day off and it was granted but it wasn't paid, and when I got up there the fish hadn't come in. So I had not gotten paid that day, and paid to travel and got no fish, which is an important source of food for my family. When the fish did come in I couldn't afford to go, so I missed an opportunity to go and learn how to clean and can the fish, plus an opportunity to spend time with my aunties and uncles and do my part in the process. Those times are very important when we can all be together." (ANP Sector Employee)

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### 2. Integrate cultural benefits into standard employee benefit packages

**Purpose:** Cultural benefits are one of the most important types of benefits for ANP employees, according to a recent survey with the ANP sector, and help to attract people to and keep people working in the ANP sector. Cultural benefits are a reinforcement of the importance of cultural identity, and are part of a holistic view of health and wellbeing.

**Examples:** Work with the benefit provider for the organization to make changes to the formal benefit plan, or use creative ways to offer cultural benefits that are of low cost to the organization. Cultural benefits added to a standard



benefit plan could include: options to attend regular healing ceremonies during work hours, paid time off for healing activities, weekly “soup and bannock Fridays”, and regular access to Elders.

### 3. Build a “paid time off” (PTO) policy into the organization

**Purpose:** PTO combines sick days, cultural days, vacation days, and leave days into one category and gives more control to employee as to how they will take their time off.

**Example:** An ANP organization on Vancouver Island uses a PTO approach, combining sick days, vacation days and cultural days into one. When an employee wants to take time off to attend a cultural activity, the employer avoids having to intervene or decide the appropriateness of the event and leaves it up to the employee to use the time off as part of the PTO.

### 4. Look for ways to increase and showcase cultural practices and displays in the workplace

**Purpose:** Increased cultural displays and practices can help to improve employee morale, client satisfaction, and increase pride in Aboriginal identity.

**Examples:** Acknowledging the territory and people where the organization is located; visible or tangible displaying of culture in the workplace such as art, language or music; advertising the importance of culture in the workplace when posting jobs to recruit new staff; opening and closing meetings and events with a prayer.

### 5. Create opportunities for agency staff and volunteers to eat daily lunches together

**Purpose:** Eating together is a traditional value that promotes self-care and can increase access to healthy foods for all people in an organization.

**Example:** Provide weekly or monthly lunches for staff, and/or organize staff gatherings that involve a potluck lunch.

### 6. Set aside specific resources for formalized approaches to mentorship

**Purpose:** Mentorship can enhance employee learning, empowerment and sense of value. Mentorship plays an important role in succession planning and can help with career advancement. Additionally, mentorship can improve consistency of service as mentoring co-workers about specific jobs in the organization creates a workplace where others can cover off when one worker is off on vacation or leave.

**Examples:** Create a system in the organization where all employees, leaders, and volunteers are offered a peer mentor and asked to set specific time aside for mentorship meetings. Or, set up mentoring opportunities between organizations and/or sectors where employees spend time in other workplace

environments and learn and gain transferable skills and knowledge. Mentoring involves using good listening skills, being open and honest, having regular check-ins, de-briefings and an ‘open-door policy’, and having a common purpose. Mentoring can be a formal structure, or can happen more informally through job shadowing. Mentorship can be expressed in a variety of ways including cultural, and/or personal, or focused on specific areas of skills development such as writing, or chairing meetings or events.

## 7. Create a formal structure that ensures Elders play a prominent role in the workplace

**Purpose:** Research shows that Elders<sup>4</sup> play a vital role at all levels of ANP organizations. Elders support embedding traditional values in organizational policies, serve as teachers and mentors to guide employees, substantiate cultural decision making, and promote wellness and respect.

**Examples:** Provide opportunities for Elders to serve as mentors to both employees and agency leaders. One ANP organization maintains an active Elders Council that is available to assist with various day-to-day operations and special events. Other organizations have dedicated, functional space in their facilities for Elders such as an Elders lounge, which encourages Elders to visit and spend time at the organization.

## Phase Two Activities for the ANP Workplace

Phase two activities are designed for either ANP organizations, or for the ANP sector. Phase two activities are intended to start in the Spring of 2014 and are subject to additional funding and resources.

## 8. Build a social enterprise at the organization to generate additional revenue and funding sources

**Purpose:** Social enterprises are significant and strategic tools for non-profit organizations. They involve the production and/or selling of goods and services for the blended purpose of generating income and achieving social, cultural, and/or environmental aims<sup>5</sup>. Social enterprises can create additional revenue for an ANP organization, contribute to financial sustainability, and help to create positive community impact and social values.

**Example:** Prince George Native Friendship Centre runs a social enterprise entitled *Smokehouse Catering*, a catering and restaurant service that serves the dual

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<sup>4</sup> It should also be noted that some Elders and individuals are still profoundly affected by the legacy of colonialism and residential schools. Asking the help of wounded healers means also being there to help them and being sensitive to their healing needs.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Social Enterprise Canada

<http://www.socialenterpriseCanada.ca/en/learn/nav/whatisasocialenterprise.html#sthash.YP2FrK7k.dpuf>

purpose of generating revenue for the centre, and providing a pre-employment training program for individuals wishing to enter or re-enter the paid workforce.

## 9. Offer annual or semiannual professional development organization-wide training days

**Purpose:** Agency-wide training has been linked in ANP research to enhanced employee morale, motivation, team-building, staff cohesion, and positive workplace relationships. Professional development training has an added bonus of contributing to community development, as the skills and knowledge gained in the workplace trickle out into the community.

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One of the ANP employees who was interviewed talked about how participating in an agency-wide suicide prevention training had a positive impact on her community. She learned practical skills and was then able to share suicide prevention knowledge and skills with family, friends and neighbors.

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**Example:** Offer training to all employees at certain points of the year. Determine the topic by offering job-specific training, or polling employees to determine an area of shared interest. Consider including the board of directors in professional development opportunities.

## 10. Partner with other ANP organizations to provide pooled benefits and retirement income plans

**Purpose:** Partnering with other ANP organizations and sharing in benefit and retirement income plans may help to expand the options that can be offered to employees, and reduce costs.

**Examples:** The Federation of Community Social Services of BC is an umbrella organization with 140 social service agencies as members. Member agencies are eligible to participate in a pooled benefit plan that offers comprehensive products and reasonable rates, and is suitable for both union and non-union organizations. The Province of BC is exploring options for pooling pensions. One approach is a Pooled Registered Pension Plan (PRPP) that would enable ANP employees to contribute a certain amount of money each year to a pooled fund managed by a third-party administrator, such as a bank or insurance company. Upon retirement the pension income amount received would be dependent on how much was invested over a period of time, and how the pooled fund matured.

## Phase Two Activities for the ANP Sector

### 11. Develop central HR resources for ANP organizations across BC

**Purpose:** A central HR resource hub for ANP organizations would enable greater HR efficiency, reduce administrative costs, and help to strengthen the overall workforce. Central HR resources could include (but not be limited to): resources to support cultural development, free or low cost professional development training resources, career development resources for youth and succession planning, HR specialists and cultural liaisons available to the sector to assist with things such as cultural policy development, workplace wellness assessment tools and resources, and mentorship resources for the sector such as a mentorship framework, tools, and a provincial volunteer mentorship registry.

**Examples:** The *Cultural Self-Assessment Tool* developed through the *anpBC Strategy* is designed for ANP organizations who wish to make culture a more significant part of their workplace. The tool can be used to help raise employee morale and create a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing.

### 12. Establish an ANP sector benefit plan suited to an Aboriginal context and worldview

**Purpose:** An ANP sector benefit plan could offer a comprehensive suite of health, dental, and cultural benefits to ANP organizations in BC. By pooling a benefits plan to meet the needs of ANP organizations, the ANP sector could design a relevant plan for the Aboriginal context, with a very competitive rate.

**Example:** The Federation of Community Social Services of BC is an umbrella organization with 140 social service agencies as members. Member agencies have helped design a pooled benefit plan suitable to union and non-union organizations and are eligible to participate in a plan that offers comprehensive products and reasonable rates.

### 13. Establish an ANP sector retirement income and planning strategy

**Purpose:** People who work in the ANP sector generally work for lower wages than the provincial average and have very little money saved for retirement, as money is first directed towards supporting families. A retirement income and planning strategy would help to ensure more money for the future and help to create ways for the sector to take care of the valuable people who will retire from the sector.

**Example:** Steps to establishing a retirement income plan and strategy include researching available options for pooled retirement savings and piloting an approach to gauge interest level from ANP organizations, offering educational workshops about the importance of saving for retirement, and developing cultural approaches to retirement.

#### 14. Establish an annual or semi-annual ANP sector gathering

**Purpose:** Annual ANP sector gatherings could enable sharing of knowledge and promising practices in the sector. They could also help to cross-pollinate ideas between organizations towards improving workplace practices in the areas of: culture, wellness, mentorship and professional development, benefit practices, owning and operating a social enterprise, and financial literacy. ANP gatherings may help facilitate partnerships between organizations that could result in pooled benefit plans and retirement income strategies.

**Example:** In 2010, ANP sector leaders gathered together for the first time to discuss shared HR issues and opportunities. One main outcome of this gathering was the creation of the *anpBC Strategy*.

#### 15. Create a permanent ANP Sector Elders Cultural Advisory Council

**Purpose:** An Elders Cultural Advisory Council can help to oversee the further development and strengthening of the ANP sector workforce and ensure that the workforce advances in a good, cultural way. The Council can also help to establish actions to enhance the role of Elders in ANPs across the province. Consideration could also be given to include youth representatives on the Council.

#### 16. Engage with government and other ANP funding bodies to promote culturally aligned models of service delivery and more sustainable funding models

**Purpose:** A culturally aligned model of service delivery incorporates traditional values and supports Indigenous approaches. When ANP organizations are supported by funders to work in an Indigenous way, employee morale and service outcomes improve. Improving funding models to allow for longer funding cycles for non-profits (such as moving from a one-year to a three-year cycle) could also help improve service outcomes and employee morale.

**Example:** The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) is an example of a culturally aligned organization. Located in Merritt BC, NVIT is an Aboriginal public post-secondary institution that provides education from an Aboriginal perspective. In addition to academic programs and courses such as Social Work and Health Care Assistant, NVIT offers a range of Aboriginal-centred programs including Aboriginal Community and Health Development and Aboriginal Early Childhood Education.

#### 17. Support more Aboriginal-led research and evaluation in the ANP Sector

**Purpose:** Aboriginal-led research would allow the Aboriginal community to assess and analyze issues and opportunities from an Aboriginal perspective, and enable Aboriginal-driven solutions for the ANP sector.

**Examples:** Research and evaluate the impact of implementing the *anpBC Strategy* activities for ANP organizations and the sector, and the impact of implementing culturally based HR practices. Other research projects could include: Investigating sector solutions towards compensating Elders for the important role that they play in ANP organizations and the sector. (Such as a provincial Elder resource registry where ANPs contribute money to a pooled fund that goes toward compensating Elders and/or offering transportation allowance for ANP organizations that need it.); A sector recruitment strategy involving culture-based recruitment practices and initiatives that would help to ensure a steady supply of people interested in working and/or volunteering in the ANP sector, including youth.



# Background to Creating the Strategy

The *anpBC Strategy* was created by transforming hundreds of stories shared by ANP sector leaders, employees, and volunteers into a set of suggested activities for ANP organizations and the sector.

A team of community researchers set out across the province from 2012 to 2014 to learn about how to develop and sustain a culturally grounded, healthy and robust ANP workforce. This question was asked through a variety of ways, including:

**Interviews** with 82 different frontline staff, managers, executive directors, volunteers, and board members (including youth and Elders) from the ANP sector

**Surveys** with 228 ANP employees and/or volunteers

**Cultural Self-Assessment Tool** with dozens of different types of ANP organizations to help capture the ways culture is practiced in the workplace (to view the tool, please see Appendix B)

**Conversations** with around 70 youth at a provincial Aboriginal youth conference

**Sharing Circles** with 77 people who work and/or volunteer in ANP organizations in or around Kelowna, Kamloops, Terrace, Victoria, and Vancouver

The community research team worked together with an advisory council in an Indigenous and collaborative way to understand what was learned from the community. Together, they combined expertise, vision, and wisdom to listen to and consider the stories, and transform them into suggested activities. The team of researchers and advisors is made up of 17 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community researchers, 11 First Nations and Métis advisors, and a cultural council of Elders and Youth. (For a full list of people involved in building the *anpBC Strategy*, please visit Appendix A.)



## The Community Researchers

Each community researcher belonged to one of four teams: culture and traditional values in the workplace, workplace wellness and balance, mentorship and professional development, and pensions and benefits.

The teams were selected by the First Nations and Métis advisors through a vigorous “request for proposal” and evaluation process where proposals were screened against a comprehensive set of criteria.

Community researchers were then asked to work together in a collaborative way due to the connected and overlapping nature of the four subject areas. It was also recognized that working together would be an effective way to engage ANP organizations and the sector at the same time, rather than asking for people’s time separately and creating consultation fatigue.

## The Advisors

The *anpBC Strategy* advisors are a mix of highly experienced leaders from the ANP sector. The advisors helped to both model and reinforce the use of Aboriginal ideologies in the research and building of the strategy. In many ways, as Elders do, the advisors had faith in the process and emphasized the Indigenous value that ‘we are more than a sum of our parts’. Advisors helped set the tone for collaboration and teamwork while offering expertise, wisdom and guidance.

## The Research Reports

Each team produced an independent report, containing a summary of the stories that were heard, an analysis of the stories, and a set of recommendations. These reports will be published on the ANP website in mid-March 2014

# Appendix A – The Strategy Team

## Community Researchers

1. Bruce Parisian, Aboriginal Non-Profit Executive Director
2. Dr. Leslie Brown, Academic and Community Based Research
3. Kim Cameron, HR Strategist
4. Ron Lees, Facilitator and Communicator
5. Marek Tyler, Cultural Facilitator and Analyst
6. Sebastian Silva, Researcher and Analyst
7. Linda Lucas, Aboriginal Non-Profit Executive Director
8. Rachelle Dallaire, Aboriginal Non-Profit Senior Leader
9. Marilyn Van Bibber, Facilitator, Researcher and Analyst
10. Carol Hubberstey, Facilitator, Researcher and Analyst
11. Sharon Hume, Facilitator, Researcher and Analyst
12. Deborah Rutman, Facilitator, Researcher and Analyst
13. Tamara Goddard, Cultural Facilitator, Researcher and Analyst
14. Dr. Michelle Corfield, Researcher and Analyst
15. Nene Kraneveldt, Cultural Facilitator, Researcher and Analyst
16. Moira Cameron, Researcher and Analyst
17. Lori Fitzgerald, HR Specialist, Researcher and Analyst

## Project Advisors

1. Harvey McLeod, Executive Director, Interior Salish Employment and Training Society
2. Cyndi Stevens, Executive Director, Port Alberni Friendship Centre
3. Murry Krause, Executive Director, Central Interior Native Health Society
4. Karin Hunt, Executive Director, Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Society
5. John Webster, CEO, Access
6. Leo Hebert, Executive Director, Prince George Métis Housing
7. Marcel Swain, CEO, Lu'ma Native Housing Society
8. Wedlidi Speck, Treasurer, Tsow-Ton Le Lum Treatment Society
9. Marge White, Elder representative
10. Tanya Gregoire, Aboriginal Youth representative

## Cultural Council

1. Tousilum-Ron George, Elder (Cowichan)
2. Deb George, Elder (Cowichan)
3. Raven, Youth (Carrier)
4. Jeff Nicholls, Youth (Tsimshian)

## Appendix B – Cultural Self-Assessment Tool

# **Strengthening Connections with Culture & Traditional Values in the Aboriginal Non-profit Workplace**

**A Self-Assessment Guide for Aboriginal Non-Profits**



**Developed as part of the Aboriginal Non-Profit Sector  
Workforce and Human Resources Strategy**

**Victoria Native Friendship Centre Project Team**  
November 2013

**Draft v 1.0**

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## About this tool

This self-assessment guide was developed by (and for) BC's Aboriginal non-profit (ANP) sector. It was created in 2013 following a series of interviews, surveys and facilitated sessions with employees and volunteers from the sector across the province. Elders and Youth also contributed to the development of this guide.

This tool is a starting point for Aboriginal non-profit organizations who wish to make culture more a part of their workplace. It is a collection of examples of First Nations culture and traditional values reflected in the workplace and in the human resources policies of organizations.

Those who shaped this document shared examples that were meaningful to them. In addition to specific examples of cultural practices, this tool incorporates values or "ways of being," since culture is "about who we are, not what we do."

## Why use this tool

Research has shown that employees in the ANP sector are more satisfied and likely to work for, and remain employees of, organizations which have culture in the workplace. Given the importance of attracting and retaining good, qualified staff, this tool can be used by organizations to help raise employee morale and create a greater sense of purpose and well-being. It can also be used in program management and evaluation of grant applications to illustrate how culture is expressed and used to create positive outcomes.

## How to use this tool

This tool is meant only as a guide to identify areas of strength and opportunities. It should not be seen as a measurement of success or failure. The value and applicability of this tool's criteria will vary in different organizations; you may be doing only one or two of the examples shared in each of the categories and still rank yourself highly.

## Assessment scale

This scale from 1-5 is designed to help you rank your organization in each category. This guide is a living document. BC Aboriginal non-profit organizations can add or remove cultural practices to make it appropriate to their circumstances. If you have suggestions for improving the document, please contact the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. We are all stronger when we collaborate and work together!

Rating System	
5 =	We do an excellent job
4 =	We do a good job
3 =	We do a satisfactory job, but still need improvement
2 =	We do an unsatisfactory job
1 =	We do a very poor job or nothing
N/A =	This category is not applicable or more information is needed to rate it

## Categories – Cultural Practices

1) Protocols and Traditional Practices in the Workplace	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

*“Meetings are opened and closed respectfully, with a welcoming environment and practices.”*

- ANP sector employee

**Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:**

- Acknowledgement of local territory, clans and nations
- Acknowledgement of those present and of their ancestors
- Opening and closing prayers
- Safe talking circles
- Elder involvement
- Youth involvement
- Traditional foods are served
- Gifting takes place
- Prayer honorariums
- Witnessing takes place
- Drums and drumming
- Sweat lodges/cleansing takes place
- Sweeping rooms or smudging with cedar, sage, sweet grass
- Brushing off
- Pipe ceremony, offering tobacco
- Traditional language spoken at meetings
- Use of talking sticks, feathers, rock
- Staff show gratitude and give thanks
- Sashes, traditional art is displayed
- Spirituality

**Notes & Suggestions:**



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Rating System					
5 = We do an Excellent job	4 = We do a Good Job	3 = We do a Satisfactory job but still need improvement	2 = We do an unsatisfactory job	1 = We do a very poor job or nothing	n/a = not applicable/insufficient info

2) Elder Involvement	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

*Our agency looks to Elders and community members for guidance and direction. We participate in prayer together and share in teachings together, honouring where we all come from.*

- ANP sector employee

**Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:**

- Elders teachings
- Elders are available to staff as counsellors, cultural advisors and mediators
- Elders consulted in program development and implementation
- New offices blessed by Elders
- Elders, grandmothers and grandfathers are included in meetings
- Elders are included in committees, boards, human resources and staff and executive meetings
- Elders are given opportunities to share stories about the past
- Elders are accommodated to ensure they are comfortable, there are frequent breaks, decaf coffee is available, served food first, etc.
- Elders not asked to heal others if still dealing with their own emotional challenges



**Notes & Suggestions:**

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Rating System					
5 = We do an Excellent job	4 = We do a Good Job	3 = We do a Satisfactory job but still need improvement	2 = We do an unsatisfactory job	1 = We do a very poor job or nothing	n/a = not applicable/insufficient info

3) Culture-Based Human Resources and Employee Benefits	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

### Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Employees can adjust their schedules to reflect cultural practices
- Employees can request time off for cultural leave (harvesting, fish canning, funerals, etc.)
- Cultural leave is paid
- There is a formal documented policy for cultural leave
- National Aboriginal Day recognized as statutory holiday, celebrated
- Employees can take time off to attend cultural conferences, rallies, demonstrations (e.g. ANP Workforce & Human Resources Strategy workshops, Idle No More)
- Cultural liaison on staff
- Hiring practices include importance of culture in organization
- Bereavement leave 5 days/year
- Bereavement leaves includes extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.)



### Notes & Suggestions:

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Rating System					
5 = We do an Excellent job	4 = We do a Good Job	3 = We do a Satisfactory job but still need improvement	2 = We do an unsatisfactory job	1 = We do a very poor job or nothing	n/a = not applicable/insufficient info

1) Events and Gatherings	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

### Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Sharing meals and eating together regularly, and using this time to share cultural teachings in an inclusive way
- Elder gatherings are held
- Community feasts to share information and build relationships/Potlatches
- Traditional food is served (e.g. Bannock, moose, venison, smoked salmon, fish head soup, etc.); leftovers sent home with Elders, families
- Blessing food, thanking cooks and helpers
- Traditional activities (singing, music, dancing, and story-telling) are part of gatherings
- Dance groups evenings, pow wow, round dance, etc.
- Traditional events (naming and coming of age ceremonies and other milestones) are celebrated
- Community members are invited to be a part of the planning process
- Participation in/teaching of traditional Fishing/Hunting/Gathering (root digging, berry picking)
- Sweat lodges/cleansing takes place
- Medicine gatherings
- Sun dance, mask dance
- First salmon ceremony, first spring burning
- Activities outdoors



### Notes & Suggestions:

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## 5) Cultural Teaching and Training - Understanding the Past and How it Shapes the Present

5      4      3      2      1      n/a

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*"I think for me the philosophy of the First Nations Code of Ethics are embedded in our practice. We are both housing and health and as such require all staff to understand Cultural Competency. As a Society we strive to ensure that Holistic practices are represented in all aspects of our service and organization."*

- ANP sector employee

### Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Cultural workshops such as drumming, drum making, weaving (basket making/cedar hats), beading, etc.
- Cultural advisors and Elders are available in the workplace
- Culturally knowledgeable individuals are valued and supported
- Access to language programs or ability to work in the Indigenous language
- There is a cultural committee
- Cultural teachings are routinely shared
- Cultural competency training is available to employees, including history of colonialism, residential schools and related abuses
- Teachers are well-versed in culture
- Cultural artifact making such as medicine pouch, dream catcher, etc.



### Notes & Suggestions:

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6) Wellness, Support, and Self-Care	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

*“Meaningful role for an Elder to be part of programs. Taking care of one another: if a staff member is facing a personal struggle, there is the recognition of our humanness and other staff provide support. There is financial support available from employer for counseling or other creative supports.”*

- ANP sector employee

#### Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- The members of a workplace treat each other as a family, not just as co-workers
- Workplace promotes self-care and balance, holistic view
- Individuals are treated as whole person and supported in their development
- Employees can request time off to participate in treatment programs
- Practice respect, honesty, understanding and openness
- Culture is foundation of treatment programs
- Staff support each other during times of personal struggle
- Grief and loss supports - staff come together as a group, smudging/crushing, sweating, etc.
- Workplace includes Elders, Youth, families, and parents



#### Notes & Suggestions:

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7) Organizational Structure and Conflict Resolution	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

*“The reason I continue working in ANP agencies is because I feel safe; if that's culturally, emotionally, spiritually.”*

*- ANP sector volunteer*

### Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Interlocking circles with shared responsibility and open communication instead of a hierarchical pyramid with bosses and top-down communication
- Clarity of purpose and expectations for different circles: work updates and planning; sharing; healing; “round table”
- Important large meetings are based on Long House/Big House model instead of Board meeting model
- Elders are involved in resolving conflict
- Ensure all voices of staff are heard
- Team-based approach to problem solving
- No gossiping – dealing with it in person
- Healing circles
- Restorative justice principles embodied
- Conflict resolution viewed as opportunity for growth
- Open and inclusive approach



### Notes & Suggestions:

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8) Youth Involvement and Development	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Teaching and empowering Youth
- Youth involved in the organization (e.g. Youth board members, etc.)
- Coaching Youth and providing volunteer and work experiences
- Programs dedicated to supporting Youth development
- Employees given space to deal with situations involving their children
- Youth consulted in program development and implementation
- Youth included in committee, board, meetings



Notes & Suggestions:

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9) Workplace Environment	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Workplace is treated like a community or extended family, and a part of the larger Aboriginal community
- Importance of family recognized and given strong priority
- Time and space is provided for people to bring culture in the workplace
- Cultural art and artifacts in workplace
- Culture practiced daily working with Aboriginal clients
- There is a cultural suite – a room dedicated to culture with special objects, teachings, etc.
- Elder's room or space
- Working together, helping each other finish projects
- Family are allowed to visit workplace (when appropriate)
- Artists invited into offices to sell their goods
- Using Native language
- Laughing, quality time in/out workplace
- Delivering programs and services in a good way following tradition and culture



Notes & Suggestions:

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10) Organizational Practices to Implement Culture	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

Examples to help you determine your level of integration in this category:

- Culture is part of organization's mission statement, constitution, strategic plan
- There is acknowledgement of location on cultural practices and events
- There are opportunities for staff to share culture; culture is staff-led
- Leadership supports practicing culture and is accommodating
- Culture is a priority even when the delivery of services is contracted out
- Cultural practices are inclusive
- Workflow planning is based on seasons and traditional calendar
- Acknowledgement of the power of words and the challenges of translation
- Recognition that culture is personal and private and cannot be imposed
- Use social media to promote cultural events
- Respect for all First Nations represented in the organization
- Traditional concepts of time; includes "down time" and time for unexpected personal challenges
- Include culture in research work



Notes & Suggestions:

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## Bringing it all together

To track how much culture is rooted in your workplace, add up all the scores from each category.

Area	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
1) Protocols and Traditional Practices in the Workplace						
2) Elder Involvement						
3) Culture-Based Human Resources and Employee Benefits						
4) Events and Gatherings						
5) Cultural Teaching and Training - Understanding the Past and How it Shapes the Present						
6) Wellness, Support, and Self-Care						
7) Organizational Structure and Conflict Resolution						
8) Youth Involvement and Development						
9) Workplace Environment						
10) Organizational Practices to Implement Culture						
<b>Total (out of 50):</b>						

## How we're doing as an organization

Tracking your level of cultural integration over time will help you assess how your organization is doing in terms of culture in the workplace.

Assessment to help you assess how much culture is rooted in your organization			
Maximum total out of 50	0-10	Low	Significant effort and great opportunities for improvement
	11-25	Moderate	Considerable effort and great opportunities for improvement
	26-39	High	Some effort required and key opportunities for improvement
	40-50	Very High	Small effort required and opportunities for improvement



## Moving Forward

If your overall score reflects a moderate or low level of cultural practices and policies in your workplace, you may want to involve your team in developing an approach to more fully embed culture in your workplace. You can also reach out to individuals or organizations with experience in doing this.

Conversely, if you have assessed yourself as having a high or very high level of culture in the workplace, you may want to mentor others who may benefit from your guidance and experience.

In either case, you have probably made notes about what you could do to reflect culture and values in your workplace.

As a staff or through a cultural community, you can develop a plan of action to help move your organization in the direction which best reflects your objectives about how culture and traditional values should be reflected in your workplace.

## Culture Action Plan Sample Template

A plan of action includes steps your organization will take to accomplish a goal or specific action. It involves identifying:

- 1) What you want to do, and why
- 2) Who is going to do it, and by when
- 3) Guidance or directions for those responsible

### Example:

Category Name: Elder Involvement					
Category Rating: 2/5					
#	Action to take	Rationale / Reason	Individual (s) Responsible	Due Date	Notes
1.	Ask local Elder to sit on our Board	Ensure Elder wisdom at the table	Jenny	By March 31	Steve knows an Elder who has experience in Aboriginal non-profits who may be available
2.	Ask volunteer Elder to assist in cultural training, if available and willing to do so	Ensure all staff share cultural sensitivity	Roger	February 28	Cultural training workshop happens the first Monday of every month

These are a few examples of specific actions that can be included in a plan of action to bring your organization to a cultural place that is right for you.

A few key points to keep in mind (based on advice from employees in the sector):

- Involving all staff is essential
- It's extremely important to have the support and leadership of decision makers
- Forming a cultural committee or group to move this along helps
- Culture in an organization starts with the territory the organization is located on, and then broadens to reflect the culture of individuals who are part of the organization
- Putting cultural practices into policy can be very valuable
- Everyone should be free to participate (or not) in the manner that feels right to them
- Elders and traditional knowledge holders are keys to success

## Final Remarks

The tool should be used with flexibility to suit your organization's structure, objectives, goals, and unique circumstances to help you craft a plan to strengthen connections with culture and traditional values in your workplace. Elders, knowledge holders, leaders and Youth can assist staff in this process. Staff in other Aboriginal non-profits may be a resource to you as well.

It is with our deepest respect that we give thanks to all who serve in the Aboriginal non-profit sector. With your insight and willingness to envision a future for generations to pursue careers in the Aboriginal non-profit sector, we were able to develop a tool to assist in assessing culture and traditional values in the workplace.