



Factsheet #1: Connections with Culture & Traditional Values in the Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce

Overall Project Context: The “*anpBC Strategy*” is an Indigenous approach designed to strengthen, support, and uplift the countless number of dedicated people who work and volunteer within Aboriginal Non-profit (ANP) organizations. The *anpBC Strategy* is the result of hundreds of stories shared by dedicated ANP employees and volunteers across the province from 2012 to 2013. It offers a suite of resources and recommendations aimed at sustaining and nurturing our Aboriginal workforce in four areas: strengthening connections with culture and traditional values; mentorship and professional development; employee pensions and benefits; and workplace wellness and balance.

Aboriginal non-profit organizations are one of the ways we enrich our traditional and cultural support networks historically supplied by our families and community. Supported by a strong workforce, ANPs can continue to offer services to our communities that support, heal, and strengthen our people now and for generations to come.

Culture and Traditional Values in the Workplace

Embedding culture and traditional values in workplace practices within ANP organizations makes good sense. Strong and relevant human resource and workplace practices help to empower and uplift the dedicated people who choose to make their careers in the non-profit sector. Recent 2012/13 research with more than 200 people who work and volunteer for ANP organizations across BC showed that culture is alive and well within the sector. Of 147 volunteers and employees surveyed, 93% agreed that they feel more satisfied in a workplace that incorporates culture and traditional values. 88% of respondents agreed that they were more likely to work for and remain employees of an organization that fosters traditional culture and values.

The Importance of a Culturally Anchored Workforce

A culturally anchored workforce helps staff and volunteers to better cope with the challenges associated with working for non-profits, enabling them to be in the best position to assist people in need of help. And more importantly, for the Aboriginal workforce, culture plays an essential role in promoting healing and addressing deep and lasting impacts of residential schools and colonization. 2012/13 research showed that Aboriginal workplaces often place a great value on traditional protocol; the natural world; and respecting individual ways of practicing culture. Integrating culture into an organization is influenced by many things including the level of cultural competency of the staff and leaders and whether Elders or cultural mentors are present.

Embedding culture in all aspects of human resource practice is essential to our ability to do our work with communities

Strengthening Culture and Tradition in Your Workplace

Culture and traditional values are at the heart of the Aboriginal non-profit sector's identity. The anpBC strategy offers the following recommendations towards strengthening culture and traditional values in the workplace:

Build cultural practice into your agency's policies and strategic vision. This can help to establish clear objectives and a genuine commitment from leaders, no matter who is in charge. Consider using the cultural self-assessment guide as developed by the anpBC strategy as a way to assist in making culture a more explicit part of the workplace (www.aboriginalnonprofits.com).

Look for ways to increase cultural practices and displays into the workplace to help improve employee morale, client satisfaction, and to share traditions and teachings and help increase pride in Aboriginal identity.

Showcase the role that culture plays in your workplace when you offer professional development or training, and recruit new employees or volunteers.

Support the role that Elders can play in your workplace such as providing opportunities for Elders to serve as teachers and mentors and to help promote a culture of respect within the agency.

Strengthening Culture and Tradition in the Broad ANP Sector

Based on research and engagement with the ANP community in BC, the following recommendations are suggested for the entire sector:

Establish ANP sector resources such as HR specialists and cultural liaisons or mentors to assist in cultural policy development and implementing culture in the workplace.

Support more Aboriginal-led research and evaluation of the impacts of implementing work-based Aboriginal cultural practices and programming.

Develop organizational resources for ANPs across BC to support cultural development (e.g. Cultural Self-assessment Tool), as well as offer provincial education and training.

Engage with government and other funders in promoting culturally aligned models of service delivery that incorporate traditional values and Indigenous approaches.

Hold gatherings with ANP organizations to share promising and wise practices of culture in the workplace, and foster communities of practice across BC.

Create culture-based recruitment practices and initiatives which consider the importance of culture for Aboriginal employees in the non-profit sector, including youth.

Create a permanent Elders Cultural Advisory Council for the ANP sector and establish actions to enhance the role of Elders in ANPs across British Columbia. Consideration can also be given to include Youth representative on the Elders Cultural Advisory Council.

Explore funding models and options that consider long term, sustainable funding for ANP organizations including culturally-based workforce development

For more information on the anpBC Strategy, or to learn more about the other themes within the strategy (mentorship and professional development; employee pensions and benefits; workplace wellness and balance), please visit www.aboriginalnonprofits.com



Factsheet #2: Mentorship and Professional Development in the Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce

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Strengthening the ANP Workforce through Mentorship

Mentoring is nothing new to our communities. It has been a practice used by our 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 has 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.

The Role of Mentorship and Development in the Workplace

From 2012 to 2013, The *anpBC Strategy* set out to hear from hundreds of ANP employees, volunteers, and board members about their experience with mentors and job training. Story after story revealed the ways mentorship lifts people up and builds strength and abilities. Professional development training was noted as competency and skill-building for both employees and board members. It has been used as a tool to address job training needs and eliminate barriers for Aboriginal people who may not have the credentials for a job, but have the competency, culture and commitment needed for the work. Overall, mentoring and professional development opportunities help employees and volunteers to feel supported and valued, and are key reasons why people choose to stay in their job.

Mentorship and Professional Development in Your Workplace

The anpBC strategy offers the following recommendations towards strengthening mentorship and professional development opportunities within your workplace:

Support the role that Elders might play in your workplace, such as providing opportunities for Elders to serve as mentors to both employees and agency leaders.

Consider setting aside specific resources for formalized approaches to mentorship, such as scheduled time for peer mentoring for all staff (either assigning or asking staff to self-select peer mentors with different ranges of experience and roles). Mentorship can be expressed in a variety of ways such as cultural, personal, or workplace related.

Affirm your workplace as a place of life-long learning. Where possible, make a commitment to ensure all employees of the organization will be intentionally connected to a mentor, including agency leaders, employees, and volunteers.

Offer a professional development training day for all employees in an area of shared interest or job specific, such as an annual cultural training event. Consider including the board of directors in any professional development training opportunities.

Mentorship and Professional Development the ANP Sector

Based on research and engagement with the ANP community in BC, the following recommendations are felt to benefit the entire sector:

Establish an ANP sector resource for mentorship that contains a list of volunteer mentors with various levels of experience and expertise across the province that can be accessed by anyone who works or volunteers within the ANP sector.

Establish an ANP sector professional development network that advertises a range of free or low-cost professional development training opportunities relevant to ANP organizations.

Create an ANP Sector Mentoring Framework that would serve as a tool for organizations to build their own mentorship programs, help to frame discussions about mentorship, and help to map out a desired direction that the sector may want to take towards mentorship. The framework could be informed by traditional values, culture, and current practices that hold promise for the sector.

Share examples of mentorship and professional development practice across the sector to enhance cross-agency learning and improvement. Organizations could post the mentorship or professional development practices they are involved with on a central database, as well as within their agency newsletters and websites.

For more information on the anpBC Strategy, or to learn more about the other themes within the strategy (strengthening connections with culture and traditional values; employee pensions and benefits; workplace wellness and balance), please visit www.aboriginalnonprofits.com



Factsheet #4: Employee Pensions and Benefits for the Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce

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An Aboriginal approach to Pensions and Benefits

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 us as Aboriginal people, because traditionally we have looked to our families and communities to take care of us when we can no longer provide for ourselves. Meaningful benefits in an Aboriginal context span beyond extended health and dental packages and include cultural benefits that allow us to attend traditional ceremony and community events, access Elders, and take advantage of healing opportunities such as Sweat Lodge. A recent 2012 survey with ANP employees demonstrated the importance of cultural benefits: Almost 80% of respondents indicated that cultural benefits are important when working for an ANP organization.

Pension and Benefit Practices in the ANP Sector

Recent 2012/13 research with a range of people who work and volunteer for ANP organizations across BC showed that cultural benefits, more than any other type of benefit, are a key reason why people join and stay in the Aboriginal non-profit workforce. For example, leave-of-absence policies related to family funerals need to consider the significance of extended families. Research also revealed a very real tension between traditional and western approaches to retirement planning, and that very few ANP employees are adequately prepared for the years ahead when they retire from paid work.

“We now need to make more plans for our retirement years. The tradition of being taken care of when we can no longer provide for ourselves has been disrupted by residential schools and is no longer easy to achieve.”

Strengthening Pension and Benefit Practices in Your Workplace

The anpBC strategy offers the following recommendations towards strengthening practices related to pensions and benefits in the workplace:

Integrate cultural benefits into standard employee benefit packages through either working with your benefits provider to make changes, or using creative ways to offer cultural benefits that are of low cost to the organization. For example, offer opportunities for cultural events during the work week such as “soup and bannock Fridays” or smudging ceremonies.

Build a “paid time off” (PTO) policy into your organization. PTO combines sick days, cultural days, vacation days, and leave days into one category and gives more control to the employee towards how they will take their time off, such as taking time off for cultural events.

Consider building a social enterprise¹ into your organization to generate income that can be directed towards offering retirement income to your employees, such as in the form of a registered retirement savings plan.

Consider opportunities to partner with other ANP organizations that provide pooled benefits and retirement income plans. This may help to expand the options you can offer to your employees, and reduce costs through sharing an established plan with another agency.

Strengthening Pensions and Benefits Practices in the ANP Sector

Based on research and engagement with the ANP community in BC, the following recommendations are suggested for the entire sector:

Establish an ANP sector benefit plan suited to the Aboriginal context and aligned with an Aboriginal worldview. Make this plan available to any ANP organization who may want to participate. A widely available plan may help to reduce insurance premiums for organizations and contribute to relevant benefits for Aboriginal employees.

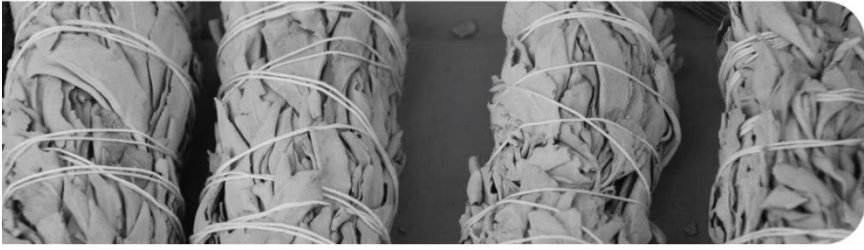
Establish an ANP retirement income strategy and benefit plan including offering educational workshops about the importance of saving for retirement and cultural approaches to retirement. Creating and offering an ANP retirement benefit plan will enable thousands of employees to actively participate in making a financial investment towards their retirement.

Hold gatherings with ANP organizations to share knowledge and promising benefit practices. Sector wide conversations could include: gathering ANP leaders and benefits providers to discuss successful cultural benefit policies; promoting benefit management practices that maximize coverage while minimizing costs; and financial literacy² for the sector.

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¹ Social enterprises are businesses owned by nonprofit organizations, that are directly involved in the production and/or selling of goods and services for the blended purpose of generating income and achieving social, cultural, and/or environmental aims. Social enterprises are one more tool for non-profits to use to meet their mission to contribute to healthy communities. (*Social Enterprise Council of Canada*, 2014)

² Financial literacy can be defined as the ability to make informed choices about finances and to understand how those choices affect a person’s life (*Aboriginal Finance Officers Association of British Columbia*, 2011)



Factsheet #3: Wellness and Balance in the Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce

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The Importance of Wellness and Balance

Workplace wellness is critical to the success of ANP organizations: When wellness is achieved within 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. In a recent 2012 survey with the ANP sector, nearly 100% of respondents noted that healthy workplace relationships and leadership were important to them in the context of wellness in the workplace. Workplace wellness leads to more of a healthy 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-life.

Promoting Wellness and Balance in the Workplace

Recent research in BC’s ANP sector explored the conditions that promote workplace wellness and balance. More than 200 people who work and volunteer for ANP organizations identified a range of activities that support healing and wellness including: a strong organizational strategic vision with clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities; activities that help staff feel valued and appreciated; workplaces that promote healthy living such as laughter and joy and eating together; adequate organizational funding that covers resources such as living-wages (salaries that reflect the real cost of living) and resources required to do the job right (e.g., up-to-date computers); access to culturally based counselling and coaching; ability to practice culture in the workplace and access to Elders.

Laughter and joy contribute to workplace wellness. Serious business and funny business are two sides of a well-balanced coin (Atleo 2004)

Strengthening Wellness and Balance in Your Workplace

The anpBC strategy offers the following recommendations towards strengthening wellness and balance within your workplace:

Create opportunities for agency staff and volunteers to eat daily lunches together such as providing food and/or space for a potluck lunch. Eating together is a traditional value that promotes self-care and can increase access to healthy foods for all people in an organization.

Support the role that Elders might play in your workplace in helping to promote wellness through providing functional spaces for Elders in the agency, such as an Elders lounge, that would encourage them to visit, share cultural teachings, and participate in various day to day operations.

Create opportunities for more cultural and spiritual practice in the workplace such as opening and closing meetings and events with a prayer and allowing time off to participate in traditional and cultural activities.

Strengthening Wellness and Balance in the ANP Sector

Based on research and engagement with the ANP community in BC, the following recommendations are felt to benefit the entire sector:

Establish a provincial workplace wellness resource that includes an assessment tool to help organizations identify what workplace wellness means to them, and provide training resources towards developing wellness toolkits for ANP agencies throughout the province.

Host gatherings of ANP organizations to share promising and wise practices for developing wellness in the workplace. For example, host a provincial conversation with ANP leaders who have successfully created policies that promote culture and wellness while balancing the demands of mainstream non-profit funders.

Conduct further research into sector solutions towards compensating Elders for the important role that they play in ANP organizations and the sector. For example, research the potential for a provincial Elder resource registry where ANPs can contribute money to a provincial fund that can go towards compensating Elders and/or offering transportation allowance.

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