

# First Nations Public Service Secretariat

*The Courage to Excel*

2018 Conference Final Report



## First Nations Public Service Secretariat 2018 Conference Report

On March 13th & 14th, 2018, on the unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam First Nation in Richmond, BC at the Executive Airport Plaza Hotel, approximately 70 participants attended the 2018 Conference hosted by the First Nations Public Service Secretariat (FNPSS).

The FNPSS was re-established in November 2017, after being on hiatus since March 2013. The FNPSS' mission continues to be supporting First Nations' in BC to strengthen their own public service, and to enhance the capacity in First Nation communities and organizations, on an individual and Nation level, by coordinating activities across core public service sector competencies: Policy Development and Implementation, Financial Management, Records and Information Management and Human Resources Management.

To accurately collect information, the FNPSS utilized several avenues to maximize and encourage feedback throughout the conference.

- Detailed feedback workbooks were included in the conference kit
- Q & A sessions followed each discussion panel and breakout session
- Several volunteer rapporteurs were present throughout the conference
- The conference was recorded live and streamed for those not in attendance, and open to comments via email
- Post-conference the video was/is available for viewing via [www.fnps.ca](http://www.fnps.ca)
- The FNPSS social media presence was announced throughout the conference to encourage participants to share their experience via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

Post-conference, 26 completed participant workbooks were received, detailed notes from volunteers and FNPSS were compiled, and FNPSS received correspondence and comments from participants in the days following the conference. This report is a compilation of all avenues utilized to collect feedback from participants.

### FNPSS 2018 Conference goals:

1. Increase awareness of the FNPSS and its mandate
2. Give BC First Nation public servants practical knowledge and understanding of what to expect from the FNPSS in the future
3. Identify BC First Nations' immediate needs for support within the public service sector
4. Seek BC First Nations' input to guide FNPSS activities for the upcoming fiscal year

## Summary of Keynotes and Guest Speakers

The conference included several panels of experts in the fields of public service operations and capacity development, as well as a youth panel and workshops and networking opportunities.

Elder Larry Grant opened the 2018 Conference, welcoming everyone to the unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam First Nation.



*Grand Chief Edward John, First Nations Summit*

The conference featured speeches from key First Nation and Provincial leaders including:

- Howard Grant, Executive Director, First Nations Summit
- Grand Chief Edward John, First Nations Summit
- Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Union of BC Indian Chiefs
- Jessica Wood, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Additional speakers on the discussion panels were a cross-section of individuals from federal, provincial, municipal and First Nation governments, and will be identified in sections throughout this report.

It was made clear from the speakers' remarks that despite its hiatus, the FNPSS never lost support from First Nation leaders, community members and its various non-First Nation organization partners. The overall response from all participants was positive and welcoming. Maintaining this strong backing suggests the capacity building work of the FNPSS is still very relevant, and transcends any political divisions that may exist between treaty and non-treaty First Nations in BC and other non-First Nation organizations.

In addition, since the first iteration of the FNPSS, there have been significant political changes in both the federal and provincial governments that have created a positive new climate for government-to-government relations with Indigenous Nations. These include the adoption of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples and the recommendations of the Truth (UNDRIP) and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). Further, there is a renewed commitment to reconciliation between Canada, BC and First Nations. Speakers throughout the conference recognized that while Canada and BC have adopted these two important documents and aim to implement reconciliation, they do not yet know how to live up to the standards identified within them and require collaboration and direction from Indigenous Nations.

## Overview of Speakers Remarks

While all the speakers spoke about their own unique experiences, their recurring message was of pride in the work completed towards First Nations self-governance to-date, yet noting there is still a long way to go. It was positive that they all expressed their ongoing support of the FNPSS' mission and goals, and recognized the importance of the FNPSS. Other common themes included: acknowledgement that building capacity in First Nations has been lacking for far too long; and, encouragement to take advantage of this critical time as the federal, provincial and municipal governments are aligning to an

Indigenous perspective - the FNPSS and First Nation communities all over BC need to capitalize on the political shift.

Throughout the conference, speakers also repeatedly noted that current First Nation administrators, leaders and youth have professional expertise to offer and need to be included when developing training tools and resources going forward. First Nations administrations are the most closely located, geographically and culturally, to the people they serve and understand the needs of their communities.

Each speaker touched on the history of Indigenous Public Service and spoke positively about the progress First Nations are making in re-asserting their authority over their own public service, while continuing to move forward by engaging with other governments. Consistently, all speakers raised that there is still a real lack of resources for administration. First Nations are challenged as there are very high expectations for how they manage their own affairs and have significant responsibility yet with the same or fewer resources as other governments.

A presentation detailing the FNPSS work to-date concluded the key speakers for day one, before moving on to panel discussions. This presentation was beneficial to help participants understand the work FNPSS had already accomplished, and its plan to execute and deliver capacity building, training and other professional development opportunities to help a First Nation public service build skills that are appropriate to their work in their own communities, and transferrable to other areas of service.

## Youth Panel Summary

Prior to its hiatus, FNPSS held a symposium in which participants said more interaction between youth and leadership is necessary to foster leadership skills and build strong communities. At this conference, FNPSS made the youth panel a priority on the agenda: they kicked off the discussion panels on day one. FNPSS recognizes that it's imperative to have the youth voice present in discussions on developing future communities. Even those who leave their communities to pursue post-secondary education need to feel their community is their home, and need continued support. All youth on the panel shared this "don't forget about us" sentiment.

Youth Panel Participants:

- Timothy Masso (Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation)
- Karen Thomas (Tsleil Waututh Nation)
- Megan South-Flett (Opaskwayak Cree Nation)
- Tia Maria Felix (Splatsin Nation)

Each panelist had an opportunity to share their story, and their combined list of accomplishments and achievements was inspiring. All these individuals are dedicated, motivated and very passionate about pursuing an education in their respective fields. This discussion panel was the highlight for a majority of the conference participants.



*Youth Panel Participants*

The panel was facilitated by Jehan Casey, where they were asked the following questions (panelist responses are paraphrased):

**Why is the youth voice so important?**

Collectively they answered: the youth are the future, we need to be heard. The panelist shared the various challenges they've experienced within the existing post-secondary education system, particularly a lack of empathy and understanding from their peers, and the prevalent misperceptions of First Nations people. There doesn't seem to be room for opinions that don't fit within the existing structure; it's important to change the existing educational system to take into consideration the real struggle of being different, away from home, and being faced with self-doubt and lack of empathy.

**What can we (communities, FNPSS) do to support youth who want to achieve their goals?**

Overwhelmingly, panelists responded: provide additional support to counter financial challenges. To attend university, First Nations youth are often forced to move closer to the Vancouver area, which is incredibly expensive for anyone, especially students. Most reserves are not conveniently located near a university. Youth also need support outside of funding, such as job opportunities within the community when they return and emotional support. First Nation communities should be checking-in with their youth; panelists encouraged using social media as a tool to keep youth connected and feeling included in their communities. A last suggestion was to work with youth to create appropriate practicum opportunities within communities so they can get relevant experience, and youth are encouraged to return home to work.

**What was it like returning home (to your community)?**

It's a double-edged sword. First Nations community members are proud of their youth, they have a deep sense of family, and support education, but at the same time there is a disconnect and misunderstanding of the knowledge youth bring home. Youth are faced with misperceptions and are accused of "being white" or "better than others"; there is sometimes jealousy of their education and knowledge. They feel they are "blazing a trail" and are proud to represent their communities, but know that by being away they are missing opportunities to learn about language and traditional knowledge. Coming home is always welcoming but can feel like "catch up"; at home more of their time is spent listening and engaging in traditional activities such as beading and language classes.

**Do you run into funding problems with continuing your education?**

All youth said they do receive funding from various sources, but consistent yearly funding is hard to secure. Funding is more of a lottery; they know of other students that couldn't finish their degrees due to lack of funding, and not knowing whether they will be funded is the hardest part. Certain types of students find funding more challenging (e.g. mature and off-reserve) and as indicated earlier most youth have to leave their communities to attend universities and colleges, which is added cost.

**What would your dream community look like?**

Tia Felix referred to this slogan: "Nothing about us, without us."

Inclusion is key, not only with youth, but all community members when determining a course of action for the future. The panelists said their dream community is a safe, collaborative and prosperous place that encourages career exploration at a young age and where they are surrounded by community members that boost their self-confidence and encourage them to seize new opportunities. Lastly, revitalization of First Nations traditional language and knowledge must be a priority.

## Management Panel

The management panel consisted of five officials from First Nations and federal government with experience in public service management.

Management Panel Participants:

- Caroline Caza (Regional Director General, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and Co-Chair, Indigenous Interests and Issue Committee (IIIC))
- Caitlin Williamson (Integration Officer, ECCC and Working Group Member, IIIC)
- Bill Guerin (Associate Regional Director General, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC))
- Darrell Jones (Education Director, Splantsin Nation)
- Collette Sunday (Band Administrator, Upper Nicola First Nation)



*Management Panel Participants*

The federal officials highlighted the various training and development strategies they use to build capacity within their organizations. Moving forward, implementing development strategies for a First Nation public service must be done in collaboration with First Nations leaders and communities. First Nations communities have different challenges based on size and location; it was recognized by all panelists that “one size does not fit all”. Both the IIIC and ISC have a great deal of management expertise, and detailed potential collaboration areas.

- Training opportunities
  - Knowledge sharing to support development of programs, i.e. Developing a First Nations School of Public Service
  - In-community learning opportunities on governance and public systems
  - Support for educational workshops and provide subject matter experts
  - Collaboration with Canada School of Public Service
- Employment Opportunities
  - Student Internships
  - Access to Management Training
  - Job Shadowing and Mentorship opportunities

Both organizations also spoke of their commitment to increasing Indigenous perspectives within the Government of Canada.

Two other reoccurring themes came up often in the panel discussion: credibility of training opportunities and wage equity. Regarding the first, courses and certifications should be transferrable to help community members advance their careers and get recognition for their knowledge and skills – whether working in the community or in other sectors. The FNPSS has a seat on the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Training Secretariat and is communicating with universities and colleges about potential common learning platforms, with recognized and transferable credits for courses and training.

With respect to the second, it was noted often that the wage gap between First Nations staff and staff in other levels of government is considerable. This topic requires further discussion and research, as currently, no real data exists on First Nations' staff salaries, with the exception of Chief and Council. The IIC suggested interchanges (a federal program, in which government employees are 'loaned out' to another organization for a specified period of time, where the employee's salary is paid by the receiving organization at the employee's existing salary rate) may be an opportunity to address wage equity, but the disparity between what the federal government can pay and what First Nations can afford is a significant barrier.

The FNPSS also announced its intention to establish a Band Managers' Advisory Committee to work with FNPSS and its partners and guide the work of FNPSS. Two First Nation officials from the panel shared their experiences implementing new structures and policies in their communities such as developing job descriptions, standardizing pay scales and writing employment agreements. They described their typical work day as "which fire are we putting out today".

The First Nation presenters also referred to the challenges within communities as policies are developed, implemented and enforced - resulting in changes to the ways in which decisions are made by leadership. This can, on an interim basis, result in disgruntled community members until they see the value in having predictable, dependable decision-making processes.

## **Core Pillar Breakout Sessions**

In the afternoon of day one, one-hour breakout sessions were led by experts in the areas of Policy Development, Financial Management, Records and Information Management and Human Resources Management. These breakout sessions were intended to provide participants with a sample of a possible training model the FNPSS plans to offer in the future. Feedback on the breakout sessions was overwhelmingly positive from almost all participants; most indicated that they wished the breakout sessions were longer, and felt it was easier to absorb information and ask questions in a smaller setting. These comments indicated this training model works well, and will be welcomed when offered at further FNPSS events.

## **Human Resource Management Breakout Session**

This session was facilitated by Soleil Dempsey (Public Service Commission of Canada) and Andrew Mills (Indigenous Services Canada). A presentation on federal Human Resource (HR) management initiatives was on the agenda but the session became more of a discussion where participants asked questions and shared their individual challenges. HR management within First Nations communities is far more

complex than within most other organizations because of First Nations' culture, family ties, and the proximity of Band staff to the rest of the community.

This was the most well attended breakout session and participants commented on the need for support and training in order to properly implement HR legislation in their communities. First Nations often need to outsource for legal guidance or hire HR managers from outside of the community; their guidance doesn't always translate effectively within a First Nation context. In addition, regardless of community size, challenges with retention, wage equity, and the lack of core competencies of staff continues to result in high turnover in First Nation communities and organizations.

Possible next steps and potential projects for the FNPSS include:

- Interchanges with federal HR representatives
- Mentorships between larger and smaller First Nations supporting HR practices
- Indigenous Summer Employment Opportunities
- Creating a corporate office for resources, i.e. First Nations HR Agency
- Creating a resource where First Nations can access experts when they have HR questions (e.g. 1-800 number for HR questions)
- Creating spaces for dialogue and sharing experiences amongst HR Managers from different First Nations

Human Resources Management training is pivotal to building capacity within First Nations; the overall feedback from participants placed this core pillar as the top priority for the FNPSS.

### **Records and Information Management Breakout Session**

The Records and Information Management (RIM) breakout session was led by Sandra Dunkin (First Nations Summit & Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) Vancouver Chapter). This breakout session covered RIM fundamentals, electronic management issues, electronic records systems and information governance.

This core pillar is often overlooked in funding applications and allocations and is rarely included in treaty negotiations but is crucial to establishing an organized self-governing body. The most significant RIM issues within communities are the lack of resources and trained staff managing their information and history.

RIM is not merely a means of filing away documents. With current technology there are intricate systems in place that make retrieving information simple but do require in-depth training on information technology, software systems and a basic understanding of information governance. RIM technology is an incredible tool for First Nations to record their rich histories and plans for the future, but the sheer volume of information to be recorded while implementing these systems simultaneously is difficult without resources.

Consultation with RIM professionals and access to resources, such as the RIM toolkit which is available through the FNPSS' partnership with ARMA, can be the first step to implementing a RIM system and help to identify gaps within an organization. In previous years the partnership with the ARMA Vancouver chapter resulted in training and resources being brought to communities directly; the FNPSS plans to



build upon this previous work to strengthen records and information management within First Nations communities.

### **Policy Development Breakout Session**

The Policy Development breakout session was facilitated by Alyssa Melnyk and Lisa Nye (Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC)). Although a presentation was originally planned providing an overview of the key principles of policy development, the facilitators and participants spent the majority of the workshop in discussion of specific examples, their own experiences, and asking questions. It was clear that this was a topic of keen interest to the workshop participants, and in the future FNPSS should dedicate time to training and more workshops on the various aspects of this core skill. In particular, it was noted that not only is policy development an area of interest, but information on implementing policies, engaging the community and seeking buy-in for policies, and updating existing policies are of interest for future training.

### **Financial Management Breakout Session**

The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of BC sponsored Laara Yaghujaanas, of Carden Consulting, a First Nation consulting practice to lead the Financial Management breakout session. The presentation on Budget Planning, Management and Reporting was adapted to encourage a group discussion due to the number of participants in attendance.

Throughout the session participants discussed similar challenges related to leadership capacity, organizational capacity and the need for policy to create a fair and transparent government. Laara also sent additional resources to participants post-conference on various topics discussed during the breakout session. The group shared emails to remain in contact to support each other.

Additional resources sent out post conference covered the following:

1. HR Performance Evaluation and Professional Development Plan Policy;
2. Quarterly Reporting Template;
3. Budget Process for Finance Policies; and
4. Cashflow Template for Budget Management and Reporting.

### **Day Two**

Day two of the conference opened with a summary of the previous day's events. As on day one, speakers throughout the second day referenced the current political climate and policy shifts from both the Government of Canada and the Province of BC, such as commitment to UNDRIP, plans to implement the outcomes of the TRC, and both governments' renewed commitment to reconciliation.

Speakers encouraged the FNPSS in its work to build capacity within First Nations communities to create stronger organizations that will serve the interests and needs of their people. The FNPSS can be a valuable resource so that BC First Nations are adequately prepared to respond to the opportunities for self-determination governments seem to be supporting.

Dialogue in the day two plenary sessions indicated again that supporting HR management capacity should be the priority for the FNPSS. Throughout day two, participants joked about the previous day's HR breakout session becoming "rowdy". Participants were undoubtedly passionate and seeking solutions.

## Keynote Speakers Day Two

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip (Union of BC Indian Chiefs) spoke and passionately endorsed the work of the FNPSS; he stated "what's happening in this room is historic."

Grand Chief Phillip went on to note the positivity of current relationships demonstrating strength and unity among First Nations people. He spoke of past experiences, in particular during the 1970s, and First Nation Chiefs and band managers competing with each other for favour from the federal government. He spoke of discord that previously existed between First Nation leadership groups and factions and how important it is that the BC Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), and the First Nations Summit (FNS) - together known as the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) – have now been working together for over a decade advancing Indigenous rights. Leadership from all three organizations support the FNPSS.



*Grand Chief Stewart Phillip,  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs*

Assistant Deputy Minister Jessica Wood (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation) spoke in the afternoon, and she re-confirmed the Ministry's commitment to supporting the work of the FNPSS. She described the Province of BC's vision for advancing reconciliation as respectfully co-creating a First Nations Public Service agency rich with traditional knowledge and built on the perspectives of Indigenous people.

An emphasis on the need for open communication amongst First Nations was expressed by everyone; participants commented that information sharing on government processes and best practices should be a priority.

## Partners' Panel Summary

The Partners' Panel consisted of speakers from three professional associations: ARMA International (Vancouver Chapter), Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) and Local Government Management Association (LGMA) of British Columbia. Prior to 2013, these partner associations had signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with the FNPSS. Presenters re-confirmed their commitment to working in partnership with the FNPSS and highlighted the importance of two-way learning, opportunities for collaboration, and the resources available through each organization.

- Dierdre Bradshaw represented the ARMA International, Vancouver Chapter. ARMA is an industry leading association that specializes in Records and Information Management (RIM); RIM is broadly recognized as the foundation of effective information governance. The FNPSS

originally partnered with ARMA in 2010 to provide quality information management programs and support to First Nations in their endeavours to develop RIM systems. Together, a RIM tool-kit was developed and is still available to all First Nations along with further training.

- Lisa Nye represented the IPAC, Vancouver Chapter. IPAC is a national organization that focuses on the practice of public sector administration and management. IPAC and FNPSS are going to re-sign their MOU and it will focus on sharing research, experience, information and skills. Proposed projects include: short term exchanges, conference and workshop participation, and research collaboration. IPAC's professional practice and service delivery resources and events will enhance First Nations' understanding of the public sector and offer networking opportunities with industry peers in all levels of government across various sectors.
- Nancy Taylor represented the LGMA. The LGMA is a non-profit association dedicated to providing professional development products and services to senior local government staff across BC. LGMA offers various professional development programs; Ms. Taylor's presentation highlighted one specific collaborative effort, a Local Government and First Nations Pilot Workshop: Understanding and Sharing Land Use Frameworks. LGMA collaborated with First Nations to build a program that was First Nations-centred and created a safe place to discuss different perspectives on land management practices in both the treaty and non-treaty context.

Each partnership yields a great deal of opportunity for two-way learning, expertise and resources to support First Nations governance and capacity needs. The FNPSS will continue to work with its existing partners and explore avenues to secure new partnerships.



*Partners Panel Participants*

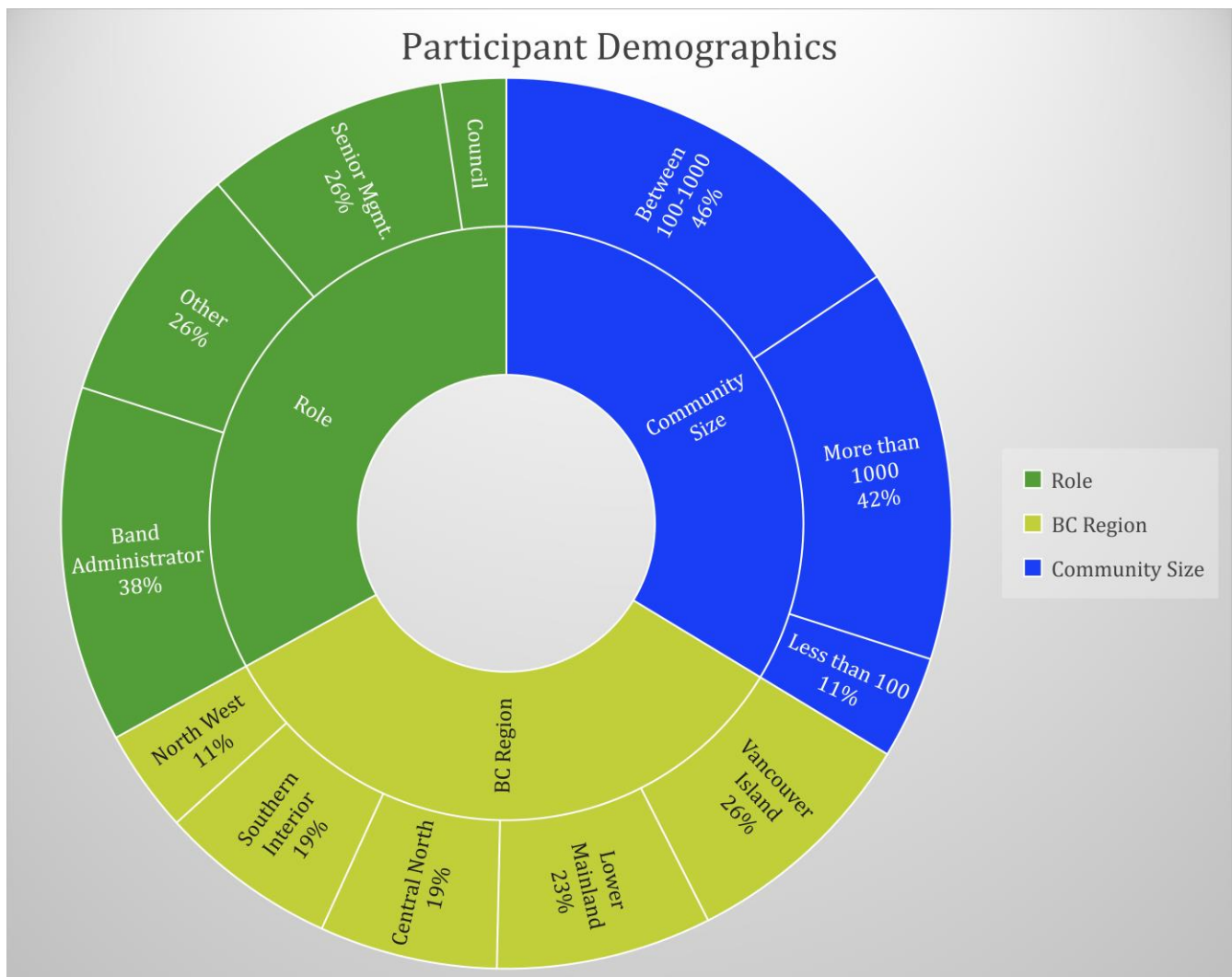
## **Conclusion**

The conference concluded with a brief presentation from FNPSS, reiterating its mission and goals and opened the floor for additional questions. The two-day conference successfully raised the awareness of the FNPSS, demonstrated and engaged participants in a model for future training opportunities and provided FNPSS with a direction that will best suite the needs of BC First Nations.

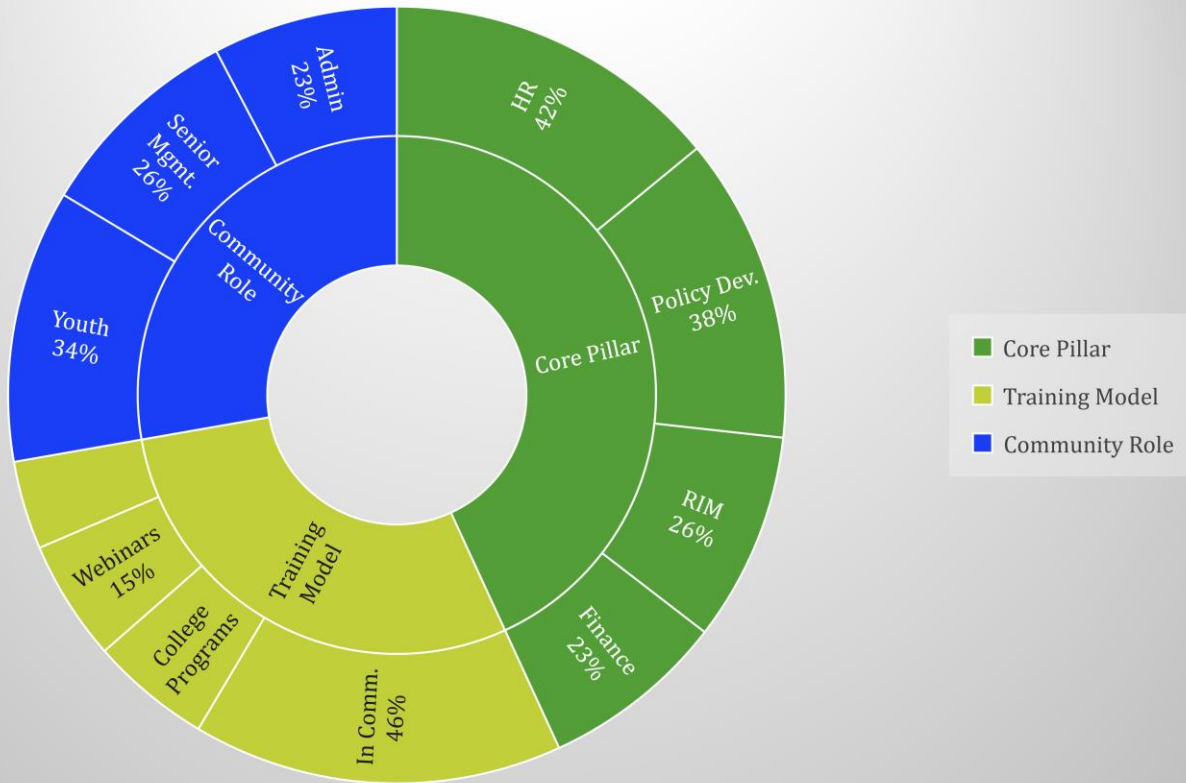
The FNPSS mission continues to be supporting First Nations in BC to strengthen their own public service, and to enhance the capacity in First Nation communities and organizations, on an individual and Nation level, by coordinating activities across core public service sectors.

### Feedback Overview

This portion details the results from the 26 completed participant workbooks received during and after the conference. Participants voiced that “one size does not fit all” when determining capacity building needs. The strategy and priorities will vary dependent on location and community size. The FNPSS goal is to reach all communities throughout BC. The graph below represents First Nation participant demographic by region within BC, community size and the role within their administration.



## Identified Core Pillars and Training Models



Participants were also asked to identify and rank the core pillar, training model and role that FNPSS should focus on as priorities for capacity support. Accessible, in-community training in Human Resources was considered a priority. Participants considered the Youth Panel to be the most inspiring portion of the conference and highlighted the integral role youth have in communities. The majority of participants indicated youth should be a priority and at the forefront when developing an action plan that affects their communities' future.

**Overall participants ranked the four core pillars from highest to lowest priority for training as follows:**

1. Human Resources Management
2. Policy Development and Implementation
3. Financial Management
4. Records and Information Management

Delivery models for training need to be affordable and accessible; currently available professional development opportunities are not realistic for senior management in First Nations. Capacity needs affect the entire administration. Management is overwhelmed, taking on multiple roles without succession planning or professional development. Despite this, a number of public servants within First Nation administrations are from their own communities so their dedication goes beyond the job the investment is personal and rooted in tradition. In-community training was ranked as the highest priority by half of the participants in attendance.

## Next Steps

The FNPSS will use the feedback from the 2018 Conference to guide their workplan for the coming year and beyond.

## Contact the FNPSS

For more information on the FNPSS, training opportunities, stream video from the 2018 Conference, or provide your input into the work of the FNPSS:



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