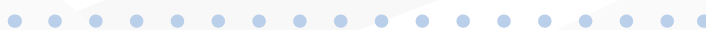




FIRST NATIONS
PUBLIC SERVICE
SECRETARIAT

What We Heard



Strategy Review Engagement Report

Prepared by
Lisa Nye and Karen Gelb

for
**First Nations Public Service
Secretariat**

December 14, 2021

Foreword

It has been ten years since the First Nations Public Service Secretariat (FNPSS) has undertaken extensive engagement with BC First Nations on the role of the FNPSS, its activities, priorities and plans moving forward. As FNPSS sought to review and reaffirm their strategic direction and priorities, it was integral that the strategic review process involved open and collaborative engagement with First Nations throughout British Columbia. In order to accomplish this goal, FNPSS decided that an arms length approach to the process was most suited to allow for a rigorous process with fulsome, open, and honest feedback from First Nations across the province. Accordingly, FNPSS sought the expertise of external strategic planning and qualitative research consultants to support their comprehensive engagement process. FNPSS led the overarching direction of inquiry, with support from Lisa Nye and Karen Gelb – Research and Engagement Consultants with extensive experience in government, policy, and qualitative research approaches – in the implementation, review, and synthesis of materials. The process was rooted in curiosity, openness, and a desire to hear what First Nations want and need in order to be successful.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
About FNPSS	1
Project Approach	3
What We heard in the Engagement Sessions	4
Key Learnings: What Does It All Mean?	10
Moving Forward: Recommendations for Updating the FNPSS Strategy	11
Appendix A	13

Introduction

The First Nations Public Service Secretariat (FNPSS) has been engaging with BC First Nations through online discussion sessions about the ways that FNPSS can support First Nations to strengthen their administration and governance capacity. This final report highlights the key findings from sessions held with Band Administrators and First Nation program staff, and with Chiefs and Council members, between April and September 2021.

The current mandate for FNPSS was developed in 2010. As part of the strategy review project FNPSS needed to hear from First Nations administrations on critical services, and First Nations leadership on what support their administrations need to implement the vision of their Nations. This review offers an opportunity to update FNPSS' strategy, receive feedback on the FNPSS journey over the last decade, and to formulate the way forward based on the needs, goals, aspirations, and plans of First Nations. The information gathered through these sessions is informing a responsive FNPSS strategy renewal, including the creation of specific actions to address updated goals and objectives.

About FNPSS

FNPSS was established because BC First Nations Leadership recognized that there was a need to support BC First Nations to build capacity in their administrations. FNPSS provides programs, services and information to BC First Nations that will help them in strengthening their administrations and carrying out their decision-making rights effectively and efficiently.

FNPSS received its mandate from resolutions passed by the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. The existing FNPSS mandate and strategy was developed in 2010 based on engagement with First Nations in BC and endorsed by First Nations leadership.

Current Mandate:

1. Strengthen and enhance capacity in First Nations communities and organizations, on an individual and Nation level
2. Create and implement a collective plan to support BC First Nation communities and organizations across the core public service sectors as they pursue excellence in their own governments and administrations

FNPSS has three broad goals:

1. Strengthen and support relationships between First Nations leadership, administration, and communities.
2. Coordinate and strengthen human resource development for Nation workers in the core competencies: human, financial, and information management, and policy development.
3. Support and enhance human resource development efforts for Nation workers in a range of professional sectors such as health, education, children and families, resource management, etc.

FNPSS core pillars:

- Human Resources Management
- Records and Information Management
- Policy Development and Implementation
- Financial Management

Current FNPSS Key Activities:

- Listen to BC First Nations to define our priorities and guide our work
- Training: new and tailored existing to meet First Nation needs
- Toolkits and guides
- Mentorship and networking
- Coordination across organizations and with government
- Research and advocacy

FNPSS recognizes the key role Band Administrators play in their communities and the importance of the advice and insight that they can provide to FNPSS. The Band Administrators Advisory Committee (BAAC) was established as FNPSS' primary advisory group and guides all work planning and projects. For additional details on FNPSS programs and activities, visit: www.fnps.ca.

Project Approach



The FNPSS Strategy Review engagement project was framed by four goals:

- Gather input and guidance on the work of FNPSS and reconfirm priorities.
- Determine to what extent FNPSS is meeting the needs of First Nations with respect to programs and services by hearing from First Nation administrators and staff, as well as Chiefs and Council members.
- Hear from First Nations about future directions for governance and administration capacity building support.
- Help to raise awareness amongst BC First Nations on the role and activities of FNPSS.

FNPSS hosted fifteen virtual engagement sessions primarily for Band Administrators (Chief Administrative Officers, Band Managers, CEOs, Executive Directors, etc.) from across the province from May to June 2021. Sessions were open to all First Nations in British Columbia. In addition to Band Administrators and program staff, a few Chiefs and Council members participated in some of these sessions. An additional three sessions with Chiefs and Council Members were hosted between August and September 2021. Invitations were sent to First Nations by direct email, with follow up phone calls. Invitations were also circulated through the FNPSS newsletter and social media. Eighty-five First Nations registered for engagement sessions; sixty-five participants attended from forty-one First Nations across eight regions.¹ FNPSS also offered an opportunity for First Nations to contact the organization directly to share perspectives and input. This is an ongoing process and FNPSS seeks and encourages dialogue with First Nations at all times.

The sessions were set up in a way that allowed for open dialogue and discussion, facilitated with a standard set of questions to guide the conversations. Jehan Casey, Director FNPSS, led each session with additional personnel there to assist with facilitation, notetaking, and to manage any technological issues. Members of the BAAC were invited to attend all sessions to share their perspectives and participate in the dialogue. A summary of the key themes that emerged from these sessions were sent to all participants to review for accuracy and invite any further clarification or feedback.

FNPSS facilitated three sessions with Chiefs and Council members (August – September 2021), where they shared a summary of the key elements raised in the earlier engagement and sought further input. The information gathered through the discussion sessions, including those with Chiefs and Council members, have been reviewed and summarized using thematic analysis to generate key themes. The results of the engagement are intended to help FNPSS update their strategy and create specific actions to address updated goals and objectives. This final report with recommendations for an updated FNPSS strategy is being provided to First Nations leadership and administration.

¹ The eight geographic regions as defined on the BC AFN website.

What We heard in the Engagement Sessions

The following sections detail the key themes that were identified during the engagement sessions with Administrators, Chiefs and Council members. The themes reflect input on FNPSS' work, to what extent FNPSS is meeting the needs of First Nations with respect to programs and services, and information about the future directions of First Nations' needs for governance and administration capacity building support.

What we heard About FNPSS

We heard that people value the role that FNPSS plays in providing programs and services to First Nations throughout the province. FNPSS has a strong reputation for offering useful, relevant, and high-quality initiatives that respond to the support that First Nations are seeking in order to help develop their administrations. This was evidenced throughout the engagement sessions with Administrators, Chiefs and Council members as well as from a FNPSS staff perspective, garnered through staff engagement (see [Appendix A](#)).

Participants commented that they have different types of experience with FNPSS and have participated in different programs and services. Participants consistently noted that they had been directed to FNPSS by colleagues who appreciated the work of FNPSS and the opportunities that they provide. Those that were just learning about FNPSS in the engagement sessions were excited to know that the organization exists and keen to engage more.

- FNPSS has a good reputation. People who do not know about FNPSS directly were referred to the organization by others. This demonstrates FNPSS' value as a resource that gets promoted and shared through connections and contacts.
- FNPSS is known to do good work. Participants who have experience with FNPSS commented that they appreciate the programs and services that FNPSS offers.
- FNPSS is known to run engaging sessions.

While First Nations commented positively about FNPSS activities, participants offered feedback on areas that could be changed or expanded to better meet the current and emerging needs of First Nations administration:

- Some people know about FNPSS and have engaged in FNPSS programs, others did not know about FNPSS at all, or had only heard of FNPSS through the engagement sessions. FNPSS could do more to raise their profile and become more recognized as a key source for First Nations public service information and support.
- Many of the original areas of work in the mandate are still relevant and important to First Nations – Human Resource Management, Records and Information Management, and Policy Development and Implementation – but more is needed. A revised scope is worth exploring as part of this strategic review process.

Finally, of note, the language and wording of FNPSS' current mandate does not consistently resonate for people and could be clarified. Many participants noted that they did not really understand what it means, as well as commenting that there is a clear gap between the wording of the mandate and what FNPSS should offer to meet current and emerging First Nation needs. Changing the mandate language could help effectively communicate the goals, purpose, and activities of FNPSS to First Nations.

What we heard About First Nations Needs and Interests Related to Administration and Governance

Networking and Knowledge Sharing between Nations and Individuals from Other Nations/ Communities is Very Important

- Participants emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing across communities and learning from one another given the First Nation and administration complexity.
- Networking, making connections across First Nations, and mentorship are all very important in addressing the isolation of the Band Administrator role. Participants shared that isolation contributes to job fatigue and that more networks and stronger connections could be important to helping staff stay in their roles longer and feel more positive about their work. They also noted that increasing networks and connections would be good for First Nations and communities.

Identifying and Pursuing Ways to Grow a Healthy & Sustainable Work Culture is Top of Mind

- Participants commented that growing and sustaining a healthy work culture is very important to address. Participants also noted that it is a challenge for communities given the historical trauma, impacts of colonialism, and issues such as inadequate funding for competitive employee recruitment and retention and other factors central to work culture.
- To address this, organizational development was raised as something important to address, particularly people wanting to see more being done to ensure that healthy and sustainable work cultures are being developed and supported.
- Participants commented that they are ready to support and act on these needs and wanted information on what they could do. Elements of change management, operational reviews, healthy work culture, setting workplace boundaries, and developing trust and accountability were all raised as topics of importance to people, and ones they were interested in learning more about.
- People talked about wanting to create positive workplaces that are not toxic or emotionally draining places to work, as this affects hiring and retention, as well as personal healing and well-being.
- Band Administrators were clear that a healthy, positive, and sustainable work culture is foundational to effective Band administration, and something that needs active support to develop and to sustain.

Employee Recruitment and Retention is a Critical Challenge

- Recruiting qualified Indigenous workers and workers from within communities is challenging due to a variety of social, economic, and historical factors including the impacts of colonialism, existence of trauma within communities, and the availability of adequate training.
- Turnover in Band Administrators is high, due to the broad scope and demanding nature of the role and the need to sometimes respond on a 24/7 or urgent basis to issues.
- Pay equity, employee retention, and encouraging youth to work in First Nation administrations are key issues that need to be addressed to develop a strong workforce and positive workplaces where employees stay for multiple years, building knowledge and administrative capacity.
- Wage or salary differences between Band offices and other First Nation and non-First Nation organizations are significant. Bands/Nations cannot compete with the compensation levels and ranges within First Nation organizations and in other governments and the private sector. This contributes to employee recruitment challenges, struggles with effective succession planning, and an unsupportive work culture where employees feel undervalued.

- Succession planning and recruiting employees also remain big challenges due to training availability within or near communities, general interest in the positions from people within communities, negative work culture leading to high turnover, a lack of applicants, non-competitive salary and wage levels, and in some cases a lack of available housing in or near communities.
- FNPSS should include youth in any engagement with First Nations on employment and career opportunities to highlight how First Nation administration and service delivery are potential career paths.

Education & Training Programs are Valued, and Still Needed

- Education and training in a variety of forms are still needed to support First Nations to develop key skills, and FNPSS' programs do this well.
- Education programming should continue to be accessible and tailored specifically to the needs and interests of First Nations communities.
- Knowledge sharing amongst communities and First Nations Governments and communities is a valued part of FNPSS' education and training activities and should continue to be included in programs going forward.

Communications & Information Technology Skills are a Growing Need

- Communications skills, both within Band offices and with the community, has been a growing need that people would like to see addressed through training and skills development sessions.
- More support is needed for First Nations in the area of communications through sharing guiding information, resource materials, and training/skill-building with First Nations.
- Information Technology is also an area that was raised by participants where more support and training would be helpful. Specific details were not shared but a standard definition is the technology involving the development, maintenance, and use of computer systems, software, and networks for the collecting, managing, and sharing of information and data.

A Central Information Repository Would Help First Nations Administrations

- First Nations would like one centralized place to access information on different topics and issues, to learn about potential approaches and help ensure they aren't "reinventing the wheel" with respect to policies, programs, or decisions.
- Developing a central information repository/library would be very helpful for Administrators.
- Participants shared that they would value having one place to call to seek direction to the appropriate resources, as well as one established and trusted resource library where they can look up templates and existing approaches to standard issues.

- They would also like a place to go for “informal” information, for example, learning how other communities are managing grief and supporting healing or addressing housing needs.
- Many people noted it would be particularly useful to have some sort of primer available (e.g., a session, materials, or a 1-1 orientation) on the Indigenous history of the region, as well as the relationships and connections between government, Nations, and organizations, because this is something that takes a lot of time to learn. With staff turnover being high, and not all Band staff being from the community, the region, or Indigenous, learning the work of Band administration takes a lot of time and energy. New staff not knowing the work and community context can mean missed opportunities for communities. Administrators felt that it would be a huge asset to have a simple and effective way to orient people to relevant learning and skills development resources, networks for mentorship and knowledge sharing, and an introduction to the important organizations, departments, and resources available (in lieu of on the ground learning over the course of a year, or years).

First Nation Governance Models are Complex

- The governance model imposed by the Indian Act has and continues to create challenges for First Nations. First Nations want to retain and/or regain their traditional governance practices, while also needing to operate effectively under the current system.
- When asking about First Nation visions for the future, participants were clear that Nations want to live and operate through their traditional governance systems and ensure their communities are strong and resilient based on self-determination and self-governance. First Nations also want to build capacity of their own citizens to take on the needed roles in their Band administrations.



Financial Management Remains Central to Effective Administration but is Available through Other Organizations

- Financial accountability and transparency specific to a First Nation came up frequently as an issue, and one that overlaps with growing requests for communications and organizational development training.
- Participants felt that Financial Management training and information is less critical as a core FNPSS pillar now than in the past because this skill area is a focus of other organizations such as the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association and the First Nations Financial Management Board.
- However, while there are many options for formal financial management training, participants commented that there is still a need for basic skills training relevant to the First Nation operating context. For example, bookkeeping or managing a budget when funds are unconfirmed for months into the fiscal year, managing a budget with a non-financially trained manager, and relationships with finance for non-financially focused managers are all themes that were identified by participants.

On FNPSS' Advocacy Role

FNPSS sought the views of First Nations regarding their advocacy role with governments in various areas of concern. Participants identified issues that are problematic to thriving First Nation administrations and commented that FNPSS could play a role in bringing these forward to governments for resolution. For example:

- Resources for pay equity for First Nations in Band administration.
- Networking amongst Nations with shared interests, advocating and articulating the issue of wage equity to government, and rigid government reporting timelines and structures are all potential areas of action for FNPSS.
- More predictable and on-going funding for First Nation administration to enable communities to streamline their efforts on drafting proposals and reporting.
- More flexible and practical reporting mechanisms so that First Nations can report to governments and other agencies on the use of funds in ways that are more consistent with their timelines and workflow.

Key Learnings: What Does It All Mean?



- We learned through the dialogue with Band Administrators and Chiefs and Councils that the work of FNPSS is valued, remains important, and supports First Nation administrations. Moreover, FNPSS has a strong reputation that speaks for the relevance of their approach and the credibility of their initiatives.
- FNPSS would be well served to consider revising the language of their mandate. When discussing the FNPSS mandate, First Nation administrators and leaders commented that it is not clear, and consideration should be given to simplifying the language, and ensuring it is reflective of the scope and work that FNPSS does.
- Overall, Administrators continue to support the four pillars within the current FNPSS Strategy. However, Communications was suggested as a critical area for First Nation administrations and identified as a potential additional pillar for FNPSS.
- Financial administration and management are a critical skill and function within First Nation administrations. Administrators recognized that other organizations provide training in financial administration and management; however, there is a continued role for FNPSS to collaborate with these organizations to address these needs and interests of First Nation administrations.
- Creating and sustaining positive work cultures and workplaces was a recurring theme throughout the dialogue. This objective is important for First Nations to recruit and retain employees from the community or other Indigenous communities; and to ensure that they are supported with appropriate training and education. Organizational development tools and strategies for creating and sustaining healthy work cultures are sought after by many Band Administration offices. Specific attention to this area of learning could be developed and added to or expanded in existing programs and training offered by FNPSS.
- Networking is a continuing need among First Nations. First Nation administrators commented that learning from and sharing knowledge between Nations is important to building capacity and learning from each other.
- Additionally, avenues for formal and informal networking among Administrators remains very important. FNPSS plays a critical role in facilitating spaces for and access to networking, and participants stressed the value of this on a continuing and ongoing basis.
- First Nation Administrators and Chiefs and Councils recognize the importance of having a central location for accessing information and resource materials on a range of issues and topics. Having a core repository of information is viewed as a way to avoid duplication and support First Nations in identifying ways to address challenges in their communities.

- The concept of advocacy with other governments was discussed in broad terms. Overall, people felt there was space for FNPSS to embrace advocacy with federal and provincial governments more intentionally in their work. As an organization that connects and supports First Nations across the province, FNPSS has a unique perspective, and could play a role in bringing forward identified issues from First Nations to government. For example, for specific topics and issues identified by First Nations, FNPSS could initiate and engage in discussions to advance resolution and the identification of opportunities.

Moving Forward: Recommendations for Updating the FNPSS Strategy



The engagement process identified key areas and suggestions for updating the FNPSS Strategy (dated 2010). Specifically:

- Look to revise the mandate language to clearly reflect the purpose and direction of FNPSS.
- Incorporate communication as a key area of support in training and programming offered, be that through the addition of a Communications pillar, interweaving it through other pillars, or both.
- Integrate more organizational development content into the HR management pillar, and across pillars and programs, including networking, so that successful practices can be shared Nation to Nation through knowledge sharing.
- Ensure networking in a variety of forms is explicitly enabled and supported. Alongside networking for existing band administrators, FNPSS is well positioned to offer some programming specific to engagement of youth and other community members in learning about careers in Administration.

Strategic resource investment areas that are vitally important to Nations are needed in these areas:

- Focus on youth engagement and growing their capacity in administration; work that is integral to supporting a Nation's recruitment, retention, and succession planning goals.
- Expand training in organizational development to support ongoing growth toward positive and healthy workplaces; capacity development that is critical to sustainable Administrations.
- Create and sustain the central repository of information requested by First Nations to streamline Nation-to-Nation collaboration and optimize learning.

Additionally, it is notable that many First Nations see FNPSS as a model in organizational structure, work culture, and effective programming. While Nations are talking about the challenges with succession planning, it highlights the opportunity for FNPSS to be a model in succession planning and sustainable work culture by developing their own resiliency plan, including securing funding for succession planning and the associated capacity development to ensure long term support for First Nations Administrations in BC.

Finally, it warrants mention that updating the strategy lends itself to an integrated evaluative process, whereby strategic planning and outcome mapping are done together, to ensure there are mechanisms to assess effectiveness of programs and practices in relation to established goals. FNPSS continues to be engaged in extensive planning and gathering feedback on the programs and services that it provides to First Nations. Adopting an integrated evaluative process accompanying the strategy update may be a logical next step in this review process.



Appendix A



FNPS staff participated in an early engagement session in February 2021 to help inform and guide the FNPS Strategy Review process. Following are the key themes emerging from that session.

What we Heard About FNPS From Staff

Staff members expressed a strong commitment to supporting and contributing to long term sustainable change, both within communities, and upstream, at a provincial and federal, institutional, and governing system level. They recognize that success at the community level cannot be achieved or maintained without some major changes in the way that governments and institutions connect with and serve communities. That goal is what has drawn them to the work. The culture and the sense of progress are why they stay at FNPS.

- The on-the-ground, responsive, and community-specific approaches that FNPS offers appeal to staff as effective and appear meaningful to Nations and community members based on what staff see and hear.
- The purpose-driven work that FNPS conducts is a large draw for staff.
- People stay because the work culture is excellent, and it harmonizes with the positive goals they are trying to achieve in their purpose-driven work.
- Staff feel that FNPS is true to their mandate and doing what they say they will do with respect to how they run their organization and programs.
- FNPS offers an opportunity to be innovative in trying to solve past, new, and emerging challenges within First Nation communities and governments.