

Five Most Important Responsibilities Of Chief & Council

By Andrew Leach, MBA

To help First Nations strengthen their leadership and operations, I describe the five most important responsibilities of a Chief and Council in this article, based on research and my work with more than a hundred First Nations Councils.

Responsibility #1: Set Concrete Goals

An unfocused First Nations Council makes poorly informed and costly decisions. So get focused early on in your mandate.

To stay focused, new councils must develop a plan with clear, specific goals, and with input from senior management. Your plan should outline what will be accomplished during specific time frames (i.e. one to five years). Usually, your senior manager will be responsible for executing and reporting progress on the plan.

Responsibility #2: Organize Yourselves

Some First Nations councils are comprised solely of volunteers, others have paid staff positions, and some have the Chief as the only paid council position. In addition, many councils use a portfolio system.

All of these approaches are examples of how council can organize itself. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Regardless of the approach used, your community should get good value for council costs.

The bottom line is to structure council so resources are used effectively. One way is to develop a detailed Leadership Policy Manual to govern all council activities.

Responsibility #3: Hire Excellent Managers

Good planning can go only so far. Ultimately, you also need good people to execute your plans. Hiring the right people is one of the most important decisions a council makes. Indeed, you cannot afford to choose second-best employees for key positions. Top-notch employees may cost more but will be worth the investment in the long run.



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Responsibility #4: Hold Productive Meetings

One of the most common complaints I hear about is long, unproductive council meetings, with people playing a variety of roles: endless talker, complainer, bully and/or emotional wreck.

Well organized council meetings require a strong but respectful chairperson and a structured approach to agenda development and decision making.

In short, make an agenda, have participatory input into discussions, decide on an action, then make it so.

Responsibility #5: Assess Your Performance

Finally, council should objectively evaluate its own performance. Council self-assessments provide an opportunity to review and make adjustments wherever necessary. Often these evaluations are done during retreats or similar meetings; using an external facilitator can help ensure these forums are constructive and productive.

Summary

Undoubtedly, First Nations councils undertake more responsibilities than described in this article, but these five are critical. If you perform these tasks well, you're ahead of the pack.



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