



Capital Regional District Indigenous Employment Project

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Prepared for the Capital Regional District (CRD)
by Arrive Consulting





Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge that the CRD conducts its business within the traditional territories of many First Nations, including, but not limited to, BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), P'a:chi:da?ah (Pacheedaht), Pune'laxutth' (Penelekut), Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay), Songhees, Sc'ianew (Tsawout), T'Sou-ke, WJOLEŁP (Tsartlip), WSIKEM (Tseycum) and x^wsepsəm (Esquimalt), all of whom have a long-standing relationship with the land and waters from time immemorial that continues to this day.

We thank all of the Indigenous community members, including representatives from local First Nations, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and Métis Nations of Greater Victoria, who met with us and informed the recommendations that are presented in this report.

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Front cover photo art acknowledgment:

The two pieces of art pictured on the front cover were commissioned as part of the CRD Wastewater Treatment Project.

Pacific Peace House Post: The 10-foot-tall western red cedar house post was commissioned by the Pacific Peoples' Partnership to celebrate their 45th anniversary and honour their historical relations and enduring friendship with the Lekwungen Peoples. Artists Yuxwelupton Qwal'qaxala (Bradley Dick), of the Lekwungen/Da'naxdaxw Nations, and Ake Lianga, of the Solomon Islands (now residing in Victoria), worked together in partnership for two years prior to the house post's installation at Macaulay Point. The house post looks out to the Pacific Ocean where all Pacific Peoples have voyaged to secure resources, share knowledge, and build kinship since time immemorial.

Kinship: Adorned in copper, which was known for its healing properties by many Coast Salish People, this design was created during a time in our world when healing is a priority. Esquimalt Nation is represented by the Wolf. For generations, the Wolf and Raven have worked together to ensure a successful hunt, representing the power of unity—a much needed remedy in times of uncertainty. Darlene Gait created this piece and is a member of Esquimalt Nation and is an active artist.

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Executive Summary

This report includes findings and recommendations about how **the Capital Regional District (CRD)** can support Indigenous employment within the CRD. The report stems out of prior work conducted from 2015–2021 to identify opportunities for the CRD to support Indigenous economic development and more inclusive models of governance and decision-making.

The findings in this report are based on engagement with:

- Indigenous communities, including First Nations on whose traditional territory the CRD operates, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and Métis Nations of Greater Victoria.
- CRD divisions.
- Subject matter experts in Indigenous employment.

An environmental scan was also conducted to identify wise practices in Indigenous employment.

The recommendations in this report are intended to support the CRD to work in partnership with Indigenous communities to co-develop employment opportunities. Some of the key findings of this report include:

- CRD divisions and Indigenous communities both have an interest in collaborating on employment initiatives, but both are under-resourced to do so.
- While there are some past successes to build on, most of the work to date has not included clear leadership direction, adequate engagement or sufficient resources to remove barriers to Indigenous employment, and thus has been met with limited success.
- Due to the current labour market shortage and low regional unemployment rate, most Indigenous workers who want to be employed are. Rather than looking to attain employment, many community members are looking for opportunities to advance in their careers (including access to training and improved qualifications) or to engage in more meaningful and rewarding work. Local Indigenous youth are a key demographic for the CRD to engage with.
- Current CRD hiring practices create many barriers to recruitment of Indigenous employees and need to be revised in partnership with the unions representing CRD workers.
- The CRD is early in its journey of building relationships with Indigenous communities and creating a culturally safe workplace—more learning, awareness and engagement is needed.

- Employment initiatives should be developed and delivered in partnership with Indigenous communities in a way that is mutually beneficial to both communities and the CRD.
- Employment programming cannot be delivered without other systemic supports, such as leadership commitments, changes in human resources (HR) policies and practices, increased funding for relationship building and engagement, and improved cultural safety within the CRD.

As a result of these findings, the report recommends that the CRD undertake actions in the following areas:

- 1. Clear strategic leadership and commitment**
- 2. Enhanced collaboration and engagement with Indigenous communities**
- 3. Improved hiring practices**
- 4. Policies and practices to support and retain Indigenous employees**
- 5. Improved cultural safety in the workplace**
- 6. Employment programming that provides benefits to Indigenous communities**

The work plan in this report includes targeted timelines to achieve these actions over the next five years.

The recommendations in this report provide a clear path forward on the journey of reconciliation and collaborative relationships between Indigenous communities and regional government.

Sometimes we bring things up and things aren't done, but the fact that you're reaching out like this gives me hope. Out of all my years, I've not had anybody from the CRD approach me in this way. I am grateful. I've been hearing people say that our input falls on deaf ears, but it's not, not with everybody. To me that is working towards truth and reconciliation. You're doing your part.

– Indigenous community respondent

Project Background

The **Capital Regional District (CRD)** is a regional level of government that serves residents from three electoral areas and 13 municipal governments throughout southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. The CRD delivers over 200 services, including watershed management, wastewater and solid waste management, regional parks and trails, affordable housing, recreation centres and emergency management and response.

The CRD conducts business within the traditional territories of many First Nations, who have taken care of these lands and waters since time immemorial. In its **Statement of Reconciliation**, the CRD commits to working towards reconciliation with First Nations, informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and focused on self-determination, shared prosperity and relationships with the land and water in the CRD region.

Relevant actions undertaken by the CRD prior to the project include:

- In 2015, the CRD established a Special Task Force on First Nations Relations, with a mandate to recommend more inclusive models of governance and decision-making between the CRD and First Nations governments.
- In 2018, the Task Force published a final report that summarized its governance and reconciliation findings and recommendations. Of particular importance, this report introduced the idea of “reconciliation through economic development” as a mutually beneficial framework for building partnerships with First Nations governments.
- The CRD Board adopted the Statement of Reconciliation in 2018 and established the First Nations Relations Standing Committee in 2019.
- In 2020, the CRD undertook a feasibility study for an Indigenous Economic Partnership Model. This feasibility study, led by the Indigenomics Institute, involved engagements with CRD staff and the nine First Nations in the capital region with populated reserve lands: BOKEĆEN (Pauquachin), P’a:chi:da?ah (Pacheedaht), Sc’ianew (Beecher Bay), Songhees, STÁUTW (Tsawout), T’Sou-ke, WJOLEEP (Tsartlip), WSIKEM (Tseycum) and x^wsepsəm (Esquimalt). The “CRD First Nation Economic Development Partnership Model Feasibility Study Report” contained several goals and recommended actions related to CRD Indigenous employment initiatives. See next page for summary of goals and recommended actions related to CRD Indigenous employment initiatives from this report.

Key employment actions from the 2020 CRD feasibility study for an Indigenous Economic Partnership Model

Goal 1: Increased opportunities for First Nations employment across CRD		
Objective 1a: Increase opportunities for Indigenous employment		
Action 1a(1):	Partner on supporting mentorship/shadow short-term employment opportunities	2020
Action 1a(2):	Engage in an Indigenous Internship Program	2021
Action 1a(3):	Develop a CRD Indigenous Employment Strategy that is complementary to the Diversity and Inclusion Framework to specifically increase the participation of Indigenous Peoples	2022
Action 1a(4):	Adopt Indigenous Employment Target(s) based on Indigenous Employment Strategy	2022
Objective 1b: Support a more inclusive employment environment		
Action 1b(1):	Develop and implement a Cultural Confidence Program for all CRD Staff	2021
Action 1b(2):	Explore opportunities for tailored training for those CRD staff in management roles	2022
Goal 2: Support First Nations in having a better awareness of CRD opportunities and activities		
Objective 2a: Streamline communications to First Nations		
Action 2a(1):	Develop First Nations Communications Plan	2020
Action 2a(2):	Prepare enhanced communication materials tailored to First Nations interests	2021
Action 2a(3):	Build First Nations Economic Opportunity portal to highlight CRD procurements	2021
Objective 2b: Establish more robust communication channels with First Nations		
Action 2b(1):	Engage First Nations to identify interest in developing a Community Engagement Hub	2023

- As one component of implementing these prior recommendations, in 2021 the CRD sought contractors to work with the CRD to explore and determine a path forward for the development of an Indigenous internship program with local First Nations.
- Arrive Consulting developed a project approach in response to this request, which included in-depth exploration with local First Nations, as well as urban Indigenous and Métis people living within the capital region, about their employment goals and priorities as related to working with the CRD.

The Indigenous Employment Project is a result of these prior steps.

The goals of this project are to:

- build and strengthen working relationships between the CRD and Indigenous partners, including local First Nations, Métis Nation BC and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre.
- understand how First Nations and Indigenous organizations would like to be engaged on employment initiatives and determine their initial areas of interest in the development and delivery of employment partnerships and programs.
- engage with CRD departments and unions to gauge interest, capacity and readiness to collaborate on employment partnerships and initiatives with Indigenous partners and to engage in culturally safe work with Indigenous partners, employees and interns.
- research and report on wise practices in Indigenous employment and workplace cultural safety.

This approach was developed to support meaningful relationship building by involving Indigenous communities directly in the employment program development and linking Indigenous employment programming with cultural safety training and reconciliation planning.

This project is envisioned as the first component of an ongoing process. As outlined in the recommendations and work plan, the subsequent steps are anticipated to include:

- co-development of employment programming and reconciliation planning.
- delivering employment programming and implementing the reconciliation plan.

This report includes:

- detailed findings from this project.
- recommendations based on the findings.
- a next step work plan with proposed implementation timelines.

Methodology

This report was developed by **Arrive Consulting**, a BC-based consulting company that supports cultural competency and Indigenous-focused learning, reconciliation planning and Indigenous self-determination and cultural resurgence. Arrive Consulting's work focuses on holistic, transformative and systemic change within organizations. Their approach combines research and learning with planning and project implementation to bridge knowledge into action.

For the purposes of this project, Arrive Consulting conducted a series of interviews between June and October 2022 to gather information and build relationships. Interviews were conducted primarily in partnership with the CRD First Nations Relations Division and included relationship-building elements. The interview process involved territorial acknowledgments, personal introductions and informed consent. All interviewees external to the CRD were offered an honoraria or gift for their participation, although not all were able to accept.

This project involved interviews with the following groups:

Group	Number of Departments/ Organizations	Number of Individuals
First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous communities	10	13
CRD divisions and union representatives	9	15
Wise practices subject matter experts in Indigenous employment	9	15
Total	28	43

For a complete listing of the groups that provided input into this report, see Appendix A.

In addition to these interviews, Arrive Consulting conducted an environmental scan to identify best practices for Indigenous employment. This scan focused on BC but also included other jurisdictions in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Interview data was then analyzed for key themes. The findings in this report have intentionally not been ranked in order of importance or frequency of mention, as even ideas mentioned by a small number of people may have significant value. The recommendations were then developed based on the findings of the interviews, the environmental scan, the past reports that inform this project and Arrive's past experiences working with organizations on similar initiatives.

It is important to note the following limitations and choices of the methodology:

- Indigenous community respondents shared that they were not able to speak for their entire community, meaning that information shared regarding community needs represent their individual perspectives and are not informed by wider community input or engagement.
- Engagement with CRD divisions was limited and is not a comprehensive overview of CRD opportunities and barriers.
- All direct quotations in the report are paraphrased and anonymized to keep identities confidential.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are divided into six thematic categories:

1. **Clear strategic leadership and commitment**
2. **Enhanced collaboration and engagement with Indigenous communities**
3. **Improved hiring practices**
4. **Policies and practices to support and retain Indigenous employees**
5. **Improved cultural safety in the workplace**
6. **Employment programming that provides benefits to Indigenous communities**

It is important to note that the recommendations are interdependent. Implementing select categories without addressing the other categories is not recommended. For example, cultural safety training and policies to attract and retain Indigenous employees are important to making Indigenous employment programs successful. Similarly, clear strategic leadership and commitment needs to be accompanied by policy and program change.

The next steps work plan provides a suggested pathway for the implementation of these recommendations.¹

Recommendation Principles

Key principles required for successful implementation of all the recommendations in this report include:

Nothing about us without us: Indigenous communities should be engaged at all stages of the journey. Timelines should be flexible and responsive to the needs and capacities of Indigenous communities. Engagement should prioritize strengthening relationships between Indigenous community staff and CRD staff.

Reciprocity: Initiatives developed by the CRD should bring benefits to Indigenous communities and contribute to their needs for increasing skills and capacity within their communities.

Cultural humility and ongoing learning: Implementing these recommendations effectively will require ongoing learning and an attitude of cultural humility, which includes being vulnerable, learning from mistakes and being open to new perspectives.

Meaningful change for reconciliation and Indigenous rights: Enacting reconciliation and Indigenous rights means doing business differently, shifting power from colonial institutions to Indigenous people. This involves letting go of control, being responsive to the direction of communities and not having predetermined outcomes.

¹ Recommendations that include an * were also mentioned in the 2020 CRD First Nation Economic Development Partnership Model Feasibility Study Report.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Clear strategic leadership and commitment

- 1.1** The CRD Board and Executive Leadership Team clearly communicate commitment to:
- increasing Indigenous employment.
 - enhancing CRD engagement and collaboration with Indigenous communities.
 - improving Indigenous awareness and workplace cultural safety.
 - achieving a representative workforce at all levels within and across the CRD.
 - upholding Indigenous rights and reconciliation.
 - anti-racism and creating a culturally safe work environment.
- 1.2** Develop a comprehensive, organization-wide reconciliation strategy that includes clearly defined actions to achieve the report recommendations.
- 1.3** Commit to a collaborative, partnership-based approach to working with the unions representing CRD workers in the development and implementation of Indigenous employment and workplace cultural safety initiatives.
- *1.4** In collaboration with Indigenous partners, CRD divisions and the unions representing CRD workers, develop a **CRD Indigenous employment strategy** based on the findings of this report, including clear goals, targets and key performance indicators. The strategy should be inclusive of diverse Indigenous populations (including First Nations, urban, Métis and Inuit) living in the region, as well as diverse age groups, employment levels (entry level to executive) and types of positions (short-term and ongoing).
- 1.5** Improve CRD workforce demographic data collection, monitoring and reporting to gather information on Indigenous employment.

2. Enhanced collaboration and engagement with Indigenous communities

- 2.1** Provide clear strategic direction and enhance resources to increase the capacity of the CRD to engage and collaborate with Indigenous communities, including:
- hiring additional Indigenous engagement positions within the CRD.
 - including Indigenous engagement responsibilities in job descriptions for managers and external-facing roles across CRD divisions.
 - supporting CRD staff to spend time on relationship building and being physically present in Indigenous communities.
- 2.2** Provide resources to Indigenous communities to enhance their capacity to engage with the CRD on employment initiatives, including:
- funding Indigenous liaison positions within Indigenous communities.
 - providing honoraria and event funding for engagements.
- *2.3** Work with Indigenous communities to develop opportunities for Indigenous communities to work with (not just for) the CRD, including procurement approaches that attract more Indigenous businesses.
- 2.4** Work with the CRD Communications Department to increase awareness in Indigenous communities about what the CRD is, what it does and the diverse range of job opportunities available across CRD divisions.



3. Improved hiring practices

- 3.1** Create an Indigenous HR specialist position within the CRD, whose role includes:
- supporting the development and implementation of the Indigenous employment strategy.
 - supporting Indigenous job seekers to navigate the application process.
 - building and maintaining relationships with employment and training personnel in Indigenous communities.
 - supporting recruitment of Indigenous employees.
 - leading the implementation of supports for CRD's Indigenous employees (including Indigenous mentors, an Indigenous employees network and other such initiatives).
 - collaborating with Indigenous communities and CRD divisions on Indigenous employment initiatives.
 - having the authority and capacity to allocate small amounts of as-needed funding to address barriers to participation in the workforce (e.g., transportation vouchers, equipment and clothing funds).

The Indigenous HR specialist will preferably be an Indigenous person.

- *3.2** Increase targeted recruitment of Indigenous employees by:
- building personal relationships with key staff in Indigenous communities.
 - creating Indigenous-targeted recruitment communications, including a CRD Indigenous employment webpage.
 - visiting Indigenous communities and attending events and career fairs.
 - improving circulation of CRD job postings in Indigenous communities.
- 3.3** Adapt CRD job postings to make them more understandable, relatable and appealing.
- 3.4** In collaboration with Indigenous communities and the unions representing CRD workers, review and adapt the CRD's hiring processes to be more culturally appropriate and welcoming for Indigenous job seekers.
- 3.5** In collaboration with unions and Indigenous communities, develop and implement policies and processes for the preferential hiring of Indigenous people (and potentially other underrepresented groups) as part of a strategy to establish a representative workforce.

4. Policies and practices to support and retain Indigenous employees

- 4.1** In collaboration with Indigenous people and the unions representing CRD workers, review the CRD's Respectful Workplace Policy and training to ensure that they are culturally appropriate in regards to Indigenous employees and include restorative processes to address racism and discrimination in the workplace.
- 4.2** Establish an Indigenous employee network/group within the CRD, and ensure Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees are allocated adequate time during work hours for group participation.
- 4.3** Designate mentors/confidantes for Indigenous employees in the CRD who are not direct supervisors, whom Indigenous employees can meet with for confidential conversations, support and guidance. If possible, mentors should be Indigenous people in more senior roles in the CRD. Mentors should be given adequate capacity and time to fulfill their roles.
- 4.4** Develop onboarding processes that connect Indigenous employees to available supports, and follow up with Indigenous employees at regular intervals to determine if the processes are working.
- 4.5** Provide all CRD staff with paid leave for cultural and ceremonial practices. This leave should be available to all staff to support and accommodate the CRD's increasingly diverse workforce. Wise practices research indicates a minimum of five days paid cultural leave.
- 4.6** Provide all CRD staff with paid leave for bereavement practices. The paid bereavement leave policy should include a broad definition of "family" that includes all extended family, Elders, friends, community leaders and community members. Wise practices research indicates a minimum of five days paid bereavement leave.
- 4.7** Ensure current leave policies for political participation are inclusive of leaves of absence for Indigenous employees to:
- vote in Indigenous elections.
 - run for positions in Indigenous governance.

5. Improved cultural safety in the workplace

- *5.1** Develop a learning framework to increase CRD staff's Indigenous cultural awareness and competency. The framework should:
- be based on a needs assessment of CRD's current learning needs, including building on the impacts of previous training sessions.
 - include ongoing learning opportunities, not just one-time training.
 - include multiple levels of learning beyond baseline cultural awareness training.
 - increase awareness of local Indigenous communities and involve local Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and facilitators.
 - employ a variety of approaches, including formal training and informal education such as learning in community, visits to CRD work sites by local Knowledge Keepers and Elders, book groups, learning through mentorship, on-the-land learning and days of awareness.
 - include specialized learning for supervisors and positions that interact directly with Indigenous communities and/or heritage sites.
 - be fully resourced and staffed, including Indigenous employees and Indigenous contractors.
- 5.2** Formally recognize, honour and encourage individual and organizational participation in the following days, and grant time for staff to participate in community events:
- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day (September 30)
 - National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21)
 - Louis Riel Day (third Monday of February)
- 5.3** Develop strategies to improve CRD workforce engagement, including gathering feedback from Indigenous employees on their experiences working with the CRD.
- 5.4** Include physical recognition of Indigenous cultures in the workplace, including Indigenous art, Indigenous languages and territorial acknowledgements in physical spaces in CRD workplaces and job sites.
- 5.5** Include Indigenous cultures in communications through land acknowledgements, use of Indigenous place names, culturally responsive language and references to reconciliation and Indigenous rights.
- 5.6** Where appropriate, adjust terminology of Indigenous initiatives to be inclusive of First Nations as well as Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous populations living within the capital region.

6. Employment programming that provides benefits to Indigenous communities

- 6.1** Develop training and certification programs that provide pathways to long-term employment and growth in the CRD for Indigenous employees (e.g., partnering with universities, offering on-the-job training, bursaries, job shadowing and mentoring). These programs should begin within CRD divisions that have a higher degree of readiness.
- 6.2** Create new positions specifically targeted to Indigenous employees within CRD divisions that have shown a high degree of readiness and need (see findings section for more detail).
- *6.3** Create Indigenous youth education and engagement programming to increase awareness and "plant the seeds" about career opportunities in the CRD. Programming should include:
- experiential and participatory learning, including youth summer camps.
 - field trips and visits to the CRD's diverse work sites.
- 6.4** Develop short-term programs for Indigenous employees to experience diverse areas of work within the CRD (e.g., job shadowing, practicum placements, co-op placements, summer positions and internships).



Next Steps Work Plan*

2023

2024

2025

2026

2027

Laying the groundwork: Commitments and partnerships

- 1.1 CRD Board and Executive Leadership Team commitment
- 1.3 Partnership approach with the unions
- 1.5 Workforce demographic collection
- 5.6 Adjust terminology of Indigenous initiatives to be inclusive of First Nations as well as Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous people

Developing the infrastructure

- 1.2 Develop and implement Reconciliation strategy
- 1.4 Develop and implement Indigenous employment strategy that includes goals and targets
- 3.1 Hire Indigenous HR specialist
- 5.1 Develop and implement learning framework
- 6.1 Develop and implement training and certification programs for Indigenous employees

- 6.2 Develop and hire for positions targeted to Indigenous employees

Policy and culture change

- 3.3 Revise job postings to attract Indigenous applicants
- 3.4 Revise hiring processes to attract Indigenous applicants
- 3.5 Implement preferential hiring of Indigenous employees
- 4.1 Review the CRD's Respectful Workplace Policy
- 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 Implement cultural, bereavement and political leave
- 5.2 Honour Indigenous days of awareness
- 5.4 Include representation of Indigenous cultures in physical space
- 5.5 Include Indigenous cultures in communications

Indigenous employment initiatives

- 2.1 Fund Indigenous engagement positions within CRD divisions
- 2.2 Provide funding to enhance Indigenous community's capacity to engage with the CRD
- 2.3 Increase procurement of Indigenous businesses
- 2.4 Increase awareness of the CRD in Indigenous communities
- 3.2 Increase targeted Indigenous recruitment
- 4.2 Create Indigenous employee network
- 4.3 Create Indigenous mentorship system
- 4.4 Develop onboarding process for Indigenous employees
- 5.3 Gather feedback from Indigenous employees
- 6.3 Implement Indigenous youth employment programming
- 6.4 Implement short-term Indigenous employment programming

*The wording of actions has been condensed in this concise work plan. Full wording can be found on pages 12–17 of this report.

Current State Findings

The current state findings are based on interviews with Indigenous community members and CRD staff. For a complete listing of interviewees, see Appendix A.

Current State of Indigenous Employment within the CRD

Summary

Some past and current experiences to build on: CRD divisions have a variety of experiences with Indigenous employees and contractors. Some examples include:

- the Watershed Protection Division contracting members of the T'Sou-ke Nation and working in partnership for almost 20 years.
- contracting First Nations–run companies for trucking and campground management.
- employing summer students, some of whom have been Indigenous.
- employing an Indigenous cultural programmer in the Regional Parks Division.
- contracting cultural monitors (archaeological field technicians) from the local Nations during project activities.
- supporting the employment of Indigenous archaeological field technicians during project work.
- partnering with Tsawout First Nation to offer a lifeguard training program for youth at the Panorama Recreation Centre.

Limited success and lessons learned: While a few Indigenous employment opportunities were identified by the CRD divisions as successful (e.g., the Watershed Protection Division's partnership with T'Sou-ke Nation and the Indigenous cultural programmer in the Regional Parks Division), the majority had limited successes and, in some cases, did not achieve the program goals. For example, none of the youth participants completed the lifeguarding program at the Panorama Recreation Centre, and Hartland Landfill observed many barriers that limited the ability of Indigenous employees to work there, including transportation and lack of access to required safety equipment, such as footwear. Contracting relationships have faced some challenges but have been successful overall.

Opportunities to deepen existing relationships: There are existing relationships with First Nations that some CRD divisions could deepen—for example, the work Hartland Landfill is doing with the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council, the connection between Panorama Recreation Centre and the WSÁNEĆ communities and work that the Regional Parks and Watershed Protection departments are doing with T'Sou-ke Nation.

CRD strengths

We noticed a huge increase in the number of Indigenous community members who participated in the programs when we had Indigenous employees.

– CRD employee

Interest within CRD divisions: The CRD divisions interviewed for this report expressed interest in supporting Indigenous employment and recognized the value of employing Indigenous people. They described that having Indigenous employees would make their workforce more representative of the communities they serve and build relationships. They also hoped that having more Indigenous employees would increase opportunities to learn from Indigenous knowledge, particularly around culture and environmental stewardship. Some divisions had taken the initiative to seek out ways to encourage Indigenous employment on their teams; others mentioned that they would like to do so.

Some successful relationships: Some CRD divisions have had successful employment partnerships with local Nations and businesses. The Environmental Protection Department noted that having a CRD liaison person employed within the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council was “tremendously helpful” to building relations.

Diversity of opportunities: The CRD has a wide diversity of employment opportunities, from entry-level to executive positions, in a wide array of fields. Many fields relate to land and resource management, which some Indigenous community respondents noted would align with Indigenous values and responsibilities around stewardship and environmental protection.

Current initiatives to create a more culturally safe workplace: Some current initiatives within the CRD include introductory-level cultural awareness training, a respectful workplace group in the Wastewater Infrastructure Operations and territorial acknowledgements in some meeting rooms (Regional Parks). Several Indigenous communities mentioned that they appreciated seeing First Nations names and languages at CRD parks. Recently, approximately 650 CRD staff took a “Cultural Competency 101” course and 150 staff took a “Building Local Relationships” course offered by Indigenous Perspectives Society. Respondents reported that this cultural-awareness training has been engaging and impactful, and they would welcome more opportunities for such learning.

Current initiatives to create a more inclusive workplace: The CRD Human Resources Department is developing an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) framework that could have elements that support Indigenous employment.

CRD challenges

Lack of clear strategic direction from CRD leadership: There is no clear direction or strategy for supporting Indigenous employment across the organization. Only Regional Parks mentioned having reconciliation as a pillar in its strategic plan. Much of what is already happening with the CRD related to Indigenous employment is ad hoc and not systemic or strategic. Certain divisions have been taking the initiative to seek out ways to support Indigenous employment, but they have not had a mandate from leadership to do so and sometimes feel their efforts are not resourced or supported.

We are willing to build relationships, and we recognize it takes time. We work in a fast-paced environment. We need to slow down and build relationships, get out of the office and into the community. We need to build relationships before coming with any agenda or expectations.

– CRD employee

Current relationships with Indigenous communities are not as strong as they could be: Some divisions reported having strong relationships, but the majority identified building stronger relationships as an area they would like to spend more time on. Some managers noted that the CRD sometimes treats relationship building and engagement with Indigenous communities as a means to an end, rather than recognizing the value of ongoing, properly resourced relationship building as valuable in itself.

No support for addressing barriers to Indigenous employment: CRD staff noted a number of specific barriers they had observed for Indigenous employees, from hiring practices and educational and certification requirements to clothing (uniforms, footwear) and transportation. In some cases, CRD divisions mentioned wanting to hire Indigenous people but not being sure how to approach it. There is no strategy, resources or direction about how to address such barriers.

Perceived risk of sensitivity and strategic implications if First Nations employees and contractors don't meet requirements: It was noted that when First Nations-owned businesses provide services under contract, disagreements or conflicts about contractual obligations that impact the business relationship can also impact other, broader working and political relationships with the First Nation. An external interviewee in the wise practices research provided an example of a time when a First Nations employee from a prominent local family was let go with cause from their organization, and it strained relationships politically between their organization and the Nation.

Communications challenges: Some divisions reported challenges communicating with local Indigenous communities. For example, one division had circulated a job posting in a way that they felt would attract Indigenous applicants, only to later hear that the Indigenous community was disappointed in the approach as they had not seen the opportunity in time to apply. One CRD division mentioned the need to be flexible in communication approaches, as email is not always best. Another mentioned the challenge of not having access to fonts for First Nations languages.

Some Indigenous people don't want to work for government: Several CRD divisions heard from some Indigenous people who expressed discomfort about working for colonial governments and didn't want to wear government or law enforcement-style uniforms. Some CRD managers mentioned that Indigenous communities have expressed that they are more interested in business partnerships and contracting opportunities (working with the CRD) than employment of their members within the organization (working for the CRD).

Lack of workforce demographic data: There is no workforce demographic data that identifies the number of Indigenous employees within the CRD. Many divisions stated they weren't sure if they had Indigenous employees or not. A recent EDI survey did not include data on Indigenous participation in the workforce.

Internal culture of discomfort and bias: One respondent mentioned that people can feel nervous talking about Indigenous issues, stating, "people get awkward and don't want to say the wrong thing." Sometimes, especially with older staff, there has been resistance to participating in cultural safety training. One person explained that the CRD operates in a "culture of mistrust," and there is unconscious bias. Another person explained a situation in which one Indigenous employee was relied upon to answer everyone's questions about Indigenous people. Generally, CRD divisions reported that the internal culture of the CRD is not always supportive for Indigenous people.

Current state of employment needs within Indigenous communities in the capital region

The employment landscape has changed dramatically. There is no shortage of jobs. People aren't coming to us because they need work, they're coming because they want more certifications, better job titles or work gear.

– Indigenous community respondent

Tight labour market in which most people already employed: Many Indigenous communities mentioned that most of their members who want to be employed already are and that other employers are also coming to them with efforts to recruit Indigenous employees.

Youth a priority: There are a range of people in Indigenous communities looking for employment, but youth are a main priority for employment. Because many older adults are already employed, youth are the ones in the community who are still looking for work and trying to find the right fit. In some cases, youth who want to participate in postsecondary education have to wait for funding or program space, so they need short-term work while they are waiting. Several communities mentioned that there is also a need for employment amongst middle-aged and older adults, as well as people with physical or mental health challenges.

Diversity of communities: Within the capital region, there is a great diversity of Indigenous communities: some are small and some large, some remote from population centres and some not. Each has different employment needs related to their demographics and location.

Job term: Indigenous community members are looking for all kinds of work, from short-term seasonal employment to full-time ongoing employment. Some people are looking for seasonal (especially summer) work that fits around cultural obligations such as Big House season (generally late fall through early spring).

Goals for Indigenous Employment

Local Indigenous Nations' and communities' goals

Employment opportunities that provide education, training and certifications: Many local Indigenous people want to acquire training and certification through employment in order to advance their careers and gain higher-paid positions. Employment opportunities that provide on-the-job training and education to gain certifications was one of the employment goals mentioned the most by local Nations and communities.

Desire to build community capacity through external employment: Indigenous interviewees mentioned that they want to have people from within their communities who are able to provide services for their community (e.g., utilities, water management, waste management). They want people to gain skills and experiences through external employment that they can then bring back and offer within the community.

Employment that enables community members to meet cultural obligations: Many local Indigenous people are looking for employment opportunities that support and don't conflict with cultural practices, which are a sacred, obligatory responsibility for many Indigenous people and can't be missed. About half of the First Nations people interviewed for this project shared the challenge of meeting employer expectations while working around Big House season (generally late fall through early spring).

Meaningful work: Community members are looking for employment that is meaningful and aligns with their values.

Need for opportunities for youth: Communities want to provide a variety of meaningful employment opportunities for youth, including opportunities to attain higher levels of education and training. Some communities don't have the internal capacity to provide programming that trains youth and identified that it would be valuable for youth to participate in this kind of programming externally.

Diverse employment opportunities: Community members are seeking employment in a wide range of fields, both in community and externally.

Cultural safety: Culturally safe and supportive work environments are important for many Indigenous people. A local community leader noted that Indigenous people increasingly will not tolerate culturally unsafe work environments.

Remote work opportunities: Some communities mentioned an interest in workplace flexibility that allows for remote work, including the opportunity to work on reserve.

Strengths-based approach: Communities noted that the CRD should recognize the strengths community members have and build opportunities based on that. For example, the CRD could employ or award contracts to local Knowledge Keepers in parks, as Cultural Monitors or other services.

CRD goals

No clear goals or commitments: The CRD has no clearly defined goals related to Indigenous employment, either at the leadership level or within divisions. While some CRD divisions support the idea of increasing Indigenous employment, managers noted there is currently no strategic direction from leadership and no clear goals.

I wish it was a goal to hire Indigenous employees. But it's not a goal yet.

– CRD employee

Representative work force: Several divisions identified that hiring Indigenous employees would create a workforce more representative of the communities they serve and thus help improve service delivery. This is especially relevant in public-facing divisions such as Panorama Recreation Centre.

Enhanced relationships with Indigenous communities: Some divisions noted that having Indigenous employees is a good way to support relationships with Indigenous communities and that strong relationships with communities could in turn facilitate increased recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees.

Increased cultural safety: Several divisions mentioned an interest in creating a more culturally safe and supportive workplace, which they feel would benefit not only Indigenous employees but also other employees.

Increased local knowledge: Respondents noted that hiring Indigenous employees who could bring more local knowledge onto their teams would be beneficial. This is especially relevant in land-based divisions like Watershed, Regional Parks and Environmental Protection.

We could learn so much from Indigenous employees, and they would have a lot of input that would really inform how we deliver our programs.

– CRD employee

We'd like to become an employer of choice for Indigenous candidates.

– CRD employee

Interest in mutually beneficial approaches: One CRD respondent mentioned that they want to be careful that CRD Indigenous employment initiatives don't "draw resources away from the Nation" and that the way to create mutually beneficial programming is through working in partnership with Indigenous communities having a "joint understanding of the path forward."

CUPE Local 1978 goals

Support from CUPE Local 1978: CUPE Local 1978 representatives voiced support for and strong interest in engaging and collaborating with CRD management and Indigenous communities on Indigenous employment initiatives, including potentially discussing changes to the collective bargaining agreement to facilitate increasing Indigenous employment. They also expressed interest in discussing changes to the collective bargaining agreement to add paid leave for cultural, ceremonial and bereavement practices and mentorship opportunities within the CRD.

Support for Indigenous awareness and cultural competency learning: CUPE Local 1978 representatives voiced support for training all staff, managers and supervisors to enhance Indigenous awareness and cultural competency. Representatives also noted the need to provide more educational resources and tools to supervisors and staff.



Barriers to Indigenous Employment

CRD internal barriers to Indigenous employment

The CRD divisions and Nations identified the following barriers to Indigenous employment that exist with the organization:

Job postings: Often CRD job postings are hard to understand and don't provide a plain-language description of the opportunity. Indigenous communities described the application process as impersonal and difficult to navigate technically. Some CRD staff and managers stated that job postings are "terrible" and inaccessible.

CRD job postings are way too formal, too structured in the local government way. We believe that some of the value people will get from working for us is the social aspect, that people want their contributions to count. We are trying to figure out how to become friendlier in how we communicate in job postings.

– CRD employee

In my department, we haven't had an external hire in a long time because our hiring process favours internal candidates. Internal hires are generally not Indigenous. If we are going to create opportunities for Indigenous applicants, we will need to change how we hire.

– CRD employee

Current workforce demographics: The CRD's current workforce is largely White, which can cause a lack of Indigenous perspectives within divisions and impact the bargaining priorities of unions representing CRD workers vis-à-vis measures to increase Indigenous employment.

Lack of awareness of the CRD: Some Indigenous communities were not very aware of what the CRD is, what the CRD does and the range of jobs available. They mentioned that community members might find it hard to picture working there. They shared that the CRD's public-facing communications (website, job postings) are inadequate, not visually appealing and have an inaccessible, overly corporate feeling.

The CRD's current hiring processes are biased against Indigenous job seekers: Several CRD employees and local Indigenous communities shared that current CRD hiring processes are built on a Western competitive model and don't culturally align with Indigenous approaches. For example, the interview process requires self-promotion and enumerating personal achievements, which goes against cultural norms for many Indigenous cultures, which often place a high value on personal humility.

A CRD employee and a community member both noted that the CRD hiring process is especially hard for people who are introverts and less likely to feel comfortable "selling themselves." Another CRD employee shared that they once interviewed a highly qualified Indigenous candidate who would have been an excellent fit for the job, but because the applicant was a humble person of few words, they did not use the specific verbiage needed to score high enough in the points-based interview approach. The majority of the CRD divisions interviewed also mentioned challenges with the hiring process. One CRD division noted that the application process requires written submissions, which may not be the best way for some Indigenous applicants to show their strengths. When they provided a screening through phone calls, they found applicants were more qualified than their written applications showed.

The CRD's current interview process is biased in favour of extroverts who are comfortable selling themselves.

– CRD employee

Collective agreements: Several respondents noted that current collective agreements, which strongly favour internal candidates, seniority and formal qualifications, could pose a barrier to increasing Indigenous employment in the CRD and to making the hiring process more appropriate for Indigenous job seekers. The Human Resources Department noted that currently the only way to preferentially hire an Indigenous candidate is through a BC Human Rights Code exemption. In addition, measures intended to create more attractive work opportunities for Indigenous people, for example, providing paid time off for cultural and ceremonial practices, will require reviewing and adapting collective agreements in collaboration with the unions representing CRD workers.

Concerns amongst communities and CRD staff about preferential treatment: One Indigenous community respondent noted the hiring process is already "preferential" in that it gives preference to internal CRD applicants. CRD divisions also noted barriers related to the preferential hiring of Indigenous applicants. Only First Nations Relations has formally undertaken preferential hiring, and Regional Parks was in the process of a preferential hiring job search at the time this report was developed. Other divisions were interested in preferential hiring but not sure how to go about it in light of current collective agreements and hiring processes. One CRD employee identified a risk that if Indigenous people appeared to get preferential treatment, then there might be feelings of resentment amongst non-Indigenous employees.

Indigenous communities' barriers to employment

Indigenous communities identified the following barriers within their communities:

Lack of certifications and credentials: The lack of necessary certifications and credentials required by CRD jobs are often a barrier to employment for local Indigenous people.

Transportation: Challenges with transportation was the most commonly cited barrier to employment. Barriers include lack of driver's license, lack of access to vehicles, inadequate public transport services (especially in semi-remote communities), long commute times and not wanting to leave the community. For example, several communities mentioned only having several buses pass their community each day and the bus times not lining up with regular work hours.

Childcare: It can be hard to find affordable access to childcare, especially at the last minute for interviews.

Racism: Community members have experienced racism in the workplace. As a result, some don't want to be the only Indigenous person in their workplace.

Lack of support for cultural obligations: Indigenous employees are sometimes not supported to take time off for cultural obligations, putting them in a position where they are asked to choose between their cultural obligations and their employment.

Personal lives: For Indigenous people, colonial trauma, community loss and impacts of the pandemic contribute to personal circumstances that can impact their employment attendance and performance, including family and community challenges and mental and emotional health (including anxiety and depression).

Not wanting to leave community: Several Nations mentioned that their members prefer to stay working in community and aren't as keen to work externally.

External barriers

Competitive labour market: Many interviewees, both from Indigenous communities and CRD divisions, mentioned challenges with a competitive labour market. Indigenous communities are struggling to recruit and retain their own staff. In addition, many non-Indigenous organizations are looking to increase diversity and contribute to reconciliation by recruiting Indigenous employees, so Indigenous employees are in high demand. It's a challenging time for the CRD to seek Indigenous employees, who have many options to work elsewhere.

It is important that the CRD's efforts to attract Indigenous employees don't compete with the hiring efforts of Indigenous communities, and instead are mutually beneficial. Indigenous communities noted that in general their community members aren't looking for work just to have a job, but instead are thinking about how they can attain higher paid or more meaningful work. They explained that one way to address the impacts of the current labour market shortage in a mutually beneficial manner would be for the CRD to provide employment alongside training opportunities that contribute to community capacity.

If we recruit Indigenous employees, we have to be aware of the risk to Nations of losing some people who could be working within the Nation to build capacity there. We don't want to sap their resources.

– CRD employee

Opportunities for Indigenous Employment

Anybody who is able to work is currently working given the labour market situation right now. There are not very many people looking for work. Almost everybody is employed but would take a better position if one was available. Being an attractive employer would help.

– Indigenous community respondent

Areas of employment mentioned by Indigenous communities

Indigenous communities noted that community members are looking for jobs in a wide variety of fields and therefore were hesitant to narrow it down. Also, many were not aware of all the departments and services within the CRD so were not able to specifically pinpoint desired areas. However, the following areas were the primary ones that were suggested by Indigenous communities:

- Parks and Environmental Services: Environmental conservation, guardianship, tourism, invasive species, environmental monitoring, land stewardship, management of garbage, landfill maintenance
- Integrated Water Services: Watershed protection (stream-keepers), environmental monitoring, data collection, public tours, protecting the reservoir, water testing, training in wastewater management and water systems
- Planning and Protective Services: Animal care, bylaw enforcement, regional housing services
- Corporate Services: Cultural services within First Nations Relations (e.g, hiring local Knowledge Keepers to provide training)
- Panorama Recreation Centre: Aquatics

Other areas: Trades, administrative assistants, cooks (especially pit cooks), health-care attendants, youth workers, mental health and addictions workers

Areas of employment mentioned by CRD

Not all CRD divisions were engaged, and deeper engagement is needed to develop a more comprehensive list of potential opportunities, particularly opportunities for on-the-job training and certification supports/programs. Those CRD divisions that were interviewed identified the following areas where they saw opportunities for more Indigenous employees:

Existing positions that could be attractive to Indigenous applicants:

- Hartland Landfill: Attendants in drop-off area
- Environmental Protection: Sampling positions, invasive species removal, goose management
- Wastewater Operations: Wastewater operators
- Watershed Protection: Assistant wildlife biologist, boat operator
- Panorama Recreation Centre: Aquatics, after-school care
- Regional Parks: Trail crews, campground management
- Regional Housing: Caretaker position

New positions that could be created specifically for Indigenous applicants:

- Watershed Protection: Providing public tours of the watershed, supporting cultural tourism, guardian program
- Environmental Resource Management: Indigenous outreach position related to solid waste management planning with local Nations
- Regional Parks: Sharing traditional knowledge to support conservation, giving public tours, working on infrastructure and signage with Indigenous names
- Panorama Recreation Centre: Community liaison with local Nations

Potential on-the-job training programming:

- Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Operations: Interest in developing a 3–12 month utility operator certification program in partnership with educational programs
- Watershed Protection: In the past has paid for forestry training and designations for staff
- Panorama Recreation: In the past has offered lifeguard training and certification to local Nations

CRD staff also mentioned interest in working with local Nations through a Guardian Watchmen program, if Nations are interested in establishing such a program.

Areas of interest shared by Indigenous communities and CRD divisions

The following CRD divisions were mentioned as areas of interest by both Indigenous community members and CRD employees:

- Regional Parks
- Environmental Protection
- Environmental Resource Management
- Panorama Recreation Centre
- Watershed Protection
- Wastewater Treatment

Frame it as a values-aligned position. We have sacred responsibility to care for land, and we can earn a living off of that. Any and all of caring for land, including environmental protection, would be of interest. CRD roles are very much in alignment with many of the values of people I meet with. It could be very attractive to be part of.

– Indigenous community respondent

Engaging with Indigenous Communities About Employment

Suggestions for engagement approaches

It would be great if we had an Indigenous community liaison who could be point person with communities and focus on building relationships. Ideally it would be someone from a local Indigenous community. We don't have time to make these connections because we are struggling to maintain staffing levels to meet operational needs.

– CRD employee

Indigenous communities shared the following general suggestions related to engaging with them on employment programming:

Ongoing engagement is needed: Many interviewees stated that they couldn't speak on behalf of their entire communities, and more in-depth, ongoing engagement about employment initiatives is needed. The engagement process needs to be responsive to communities' needs and timelines.

Relationship-based approach: It's important to build ongoing, long-term relationships between communities and the CRD to demonstrate that the CRD is truly committed. Building trusting working relationships takes time, resources and consistency. A relationship-based and personal approach is needed—not just between communities and the CRD, but between individuals within Indigenous communities and individuals within the CRD.

We currently don't have funding to support our staff to do engagement, but we appreciate consistent attempts to engage. If there is a situation in which it makes sense to engage and is a productive use of everybody's time, then we are open to more engagement. But if it's engagement just to engage, we don't have capacity to take that on.

– Indigenous community respondent

Follow-through: Some communities have had experiences with the CRD where there was a lack of follow-through. Respondents shared that it's important to "carry the ball across the finish line" and not let things "fizzle."

Having the right people: Some Nations suggested working with Chief and Council; others suggested working directly with the employment and training staff person. Several mentioned the importance of engaging with Elders and youth. Some interviewees noted specific names of individuals to engage with. In each Indigenous community, it's important to identify and connect with the right people and build and maintain personal relationships with them.

What may be beneficial to the CRD in terms of Indigenous employment may not be beneficial to the local Nations unless the initiatives are formed through relationships and joint understanding of the path forward.

– CRD employee

Communications: Communities noted that communications should be clear and plain-language, and accessible both virtually and in hard-copy.

Appropriate timelines: Both Indigenous communities and CRD employees noted that timelines for engagement can often feel rushed. It is better to slow down and engage with communities appropriately, which increases the likelihood of success.

Being in community: Both Indigenous communities and wise practices interviewees mentioned that CRD employees showing up in community, such as by attending community events that are open to the public, can help build relationships. For example, several communities have community lunches, and one suggested the CRD could set up an information table at the lunch.

Relationship building itself is a project. We need to create space and time for that to happen, and we haven't seen that yet. It took hundreds of years to get the relationship to where it is now, and it isn't going to turn around in a few weeks. It will take decades to build trust. Short timelines don't allow for meaningful engagement and can risk engagement being insulting. We are walking a razor wire of managing relationships with Indigenous communities while trying to accomplish something within sometimes unreasonable and even harmful timelines implemented by CRD leadership. To support Indigenous employment, this culture has to change.

– CRD employee

Indigenous communities' engagement needs

Indigenous communities shared the following feedback about their needs in relation to engagement with the CRD:

Increased capacity for engagement and partnership: There is a need for the CRD to support capacity in communities in order for them to be able to meaningfully engage and partner with the CRD. The CRD needs to recognize that limited resources are spread thin across many other priorities for communities, so Indigenous communities are not interested in engaging just to engage. The engagement needs to have tangible benefits to the community. A suggestion that came up more than once was to have an engagement liaison embedded in the community, an approach that a CRD employee identified as being "tremendously beneficial."

Reciprocal relationships: Engagement shouldn't be approached with the mindset of "helping" communities, but rather with an approach that values the strengths and skills that community members have to offer.

Enhance awareness of the CRD and career opportunities: There is a lack of understanding of what the CRD is, what the CRD does, and what employment opportunities exist across CRD divisions. There is a need to improve education and communication within Indigenous communities about the CRD and its wide variety of employment opportunities. It was also noted that a map of all regional parks would be useful.

Connecting directly with members: The CRD needs to build relationships directly with community members, not just with staff or leadership, and engage with members in-person, in community. Sending out a job posting to a band office and asking them to share it is not enough. It feels like it's ticking a box, and it puts too much onus on the communities' employment and training staff people to do all the work of recruiting people.

CRD engagement needs

CRD divisions shared the following feedback about their needs in relation to engagement with Indigenous communities:

Engagement capacity low for both parties: CRD managers and staff noted that they have limited time and capacity to build and maintain relationships with Indigenous communities. In addition, many Indigenous communities have limited capacity and resources, so even when CRD does reach out, often Indigenous communities are unable to engage.

Engagement with diverse Indigenous peoples living in the region: The First Nations Relations Division has a mandate primarily to engage with local First Nations. For initiatives like employment, there is a need to expand this focus because a significant majority of Indigenous people in the capital region aren't from local First Nations.

Engagement with unions representing CRD workers: Many of the recommendations brought forward in this project will require close collaboration with the unions representing CRD workers. It is essential that the CRD work in a healthy, collaborative partnership with the unions to support Indigenous employment initiatives.

CUPE Local 1978's engagement needs

It is important to note that engagement with unions included the CUPE local but not the Steelworkers local. Moving forward, all of the union locals representing CRD workers must be included as partners in collaboration on Indigenous employment initiatives.

Need for improved collaboration: CUPE Local 1978 expressed concern that CRD management's current approach to engaging with unions on Indigenous issues is too top-down, hinders effective collaboration and fails to treat CUPE Local 1978 as a key stakeholder and partner. Local representatives noted that in order to successfully collaborate on Indigenous employment initiatives in the CRD, there is a need for CRD management and CUPE Local 1978 to establish a respectful, collaborative, transparent, partnership-based working relationship.

Need for improved conflict resolution processes: CUPE Local 1978 representatives noted the need to improve conflict- and dispute-resolution policies and processes, including those addressing racism and discrimination. Policies and processes should be more restorative, rather than compliance-based and punitive.

Workplace safety concerns: CUPE Local 1978 representatives support improving workplace cultural safety, but voiced concern that there are currently many challenges related to workplace health and safety overall, and that current workplace safety policies and processes are inadequate and must be improved. They also noted that there is a need to improve psychological safety in the CRD.

Need to improve workforce demographic data: CUPE Local 1978 noted there is currently a lack of information on the CRD's workforce demographics and therefore a need to improve workforce demographic data collection and reporting. The local expressed frustration, suspicion and concern that the results of the CRD's EDI staff survey have not been shared with staff in a more fulsome and transparent way. On the union side, there is an opportunity to gather workforce demographic data via pre-bargaining surveys of members, which can include demographic questions, including the option to self-identify as Indigenous.

Wise Practices for Indigenous Employment and Culturally Safe and Supportive Workplaces

The following wise practices findings are based on the interviews with local Indigenous communities, subject matter experts on Indigenous employment, CRD managers and staff and the environmental scan. While the purpose of this report is to apply these findings to the CRD, the underlying wise practices may be relevant to other employers seeking to enhance Indigenous employment.

Organizational Approaches

If we are hiring Indigenous employees to provide input into our programs from an Indigenous perspective, there has to be support and awareness that we have to be all in. We have to listen to their ideas and be willing to unlearn and change the way we currently work.

– CRD employee

Organizational values and approach

Strengths-based approach: Creating culturally safe and supportive workplaces and increasing Indigenous employment should be pursued with a strengths-based approach that emphasizes the benefits for everyone – rather than offering “help” or “support” for Indigenous community members.

Systemic approach: For employment initiatives to be successful, they need to be part of wider systemic supports for Indigenous employees that increase cultural safety and better align with Indigenous ways of being.

Senior leadership buy-in: Genuine buy-in and commitment from senior leadership are essential. Senior leaders must lead by example, codify commitments in plans with performance measures and evaluation processes, and allocate the time, financial investments and human resources needed to achieve meaningful results.

Follow through: It's important to ensure that Indigenous employment programs have a foundation of support and a solid plan for execution. Too many similar employment programs have been discussed but have never taken off. Communities suggested the CRD start with the end goal in mind and then work backwards so that they know the plan is solid.

Communicate the "why": Leaders must effectively and routinely communicate the "why" behind Indigenous employment and workplace cultural safety initiatives to ensure their success. Supervisors and staff should clearly understand why their participation in such initiatives is important and beneficial to the organization, to staff and to the communities and people they serve.

Healthy, partnership-based collaboration with unions: In unionized workplaces such as the CRD, collaborative and productive working relationships between executive leadership, managers and union representatives are essential for success on Indigenous employment initiatives. This involves recognizing unions as partners working towards common goals of cultural safety and increasing Indigenous employment—and engaging with them proactively.

Non-Indigenous people taking responsibility: Creating safe and supportive work environments for Indigenous people is the duty and responsibility of non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people should not be relied upon to have all the answers or provide advice and guidance beyond the scope of their job descriptions. Adequate financial and human resources must be dedicated to educating and training non-Indigenous leaders, managers and staff.

Avoid tokenism: Tokenistic practices can make Indigenous employees feel uncomfortable, embarrassed and more likely to leave the organization. Nearly all of the wise practices interviewees noted that tokenism in various forms must be avoided. Tokenism can include making commitments and claims without taking meaningful action or investing adequate financial resources and staff capacity; relying on Indigenous employees to be the poster people for progress; citing numbers of Indigenous representation without having done the important work on cultural safety and staff supports; cherry-picking actions to make the organization look good while not taking adequate action in the areas that matter most to Indigenous employees and communities; hiring Indigenous employees but not really wanting to acknowledge, respect and uplift the unique perspectives and insight they bring.

Clear organizational commitments supported by strategies and action plans

To create culturally safe and supportive workplaces and implement Indigenous employment initiatives, it is essential to have clear strategic leadership and organizational commitments, backed up by strategies and action plans with clear goals, supporting actions, performance measures and processes for monitoring, evaluation and accountability. Such plans could include:

Reconciliation action plan: Initiatives to increase Indigenous employment within organizations should be part of an organizational reconciliation action plan. It is helpful to link initiatives to frameworks such as the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#), the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#) and the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\) Calls for Justice](#).

Reconciliation Plans in Practice

The following cities have Reconciliation plans that were developed in collaboration with local Indigenous communities and contain clear guiding principles, strategic objectives and supporting actions:

The City of Montreal's [Strategy for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples](#)

The City of Ottawa's [Reconciliation Action Plan](#)

The City of Toronto's [Reconciliation Action Plan](#)

The City of Edmonton's [Indigenous Framework](#)

The City of Vancouver's [UNDRIP Strategy](#)

TRC Calls to Action

Call to Action 43: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement UNDRIP as the framework for Reconciliation.

Call to Action 57: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, UNDRIP, treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights and anti-racism.

Call to Action 92(ii): Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

UNDRIP Commitments

UNDRIP Article 21: Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

The **BC Government's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan** sets clear goals with supporting actions to support implementation of UNDRIP, including Action (3.2): "to set and achieve targets for equitable recruitment and retention of Indigenous Peoples across the public sector, including at senior levels" [our emphasis].

Indigenous employment strategy and action plan: A strategy that includes clear commitments, goals and targets for increasing Indigenous employment and that outlines approaches to increasing Indigenous employment through tangible, appropriately resourced initiatives and actions

Indigenous Employment Strategies and Plans in Practice

The **City of Toronto's Aboriginal Employment Strategy** supports its commitment to "implementing employment practices that ensure that opportunities for employment are accessible to Aboriginal people and increase the number of Aboriginal employees at all occupational levels."

The **New South Wales Public Service Commission's Aboriginal Employment Strategy** includes clear goals, areas of strategic focus, and initiatives to get results.

The **Government of Nunavut's Inuit Employment Plan** supports its commitment "increasing the number of Inuit employees in the territorial public service to be representative of the people we serve."

Representative workforce strategy and action plan: A plan to achieve a representative workforce, with clear employment goals for equity-seeking groups such as Indigenous people, targeted at all levels of the organization, including leadership positions

Equity, diversity and inclusion: Many government service providers have strong commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion, often supported by detailed strategies, frameworks and action plans. These plans often include goals related to Indigenous employment and culturally safe workplaces. The CRD is currently developing an equity, diversity and inclusion plan, which is an opportunity to enhance inclusion of Indigenous peoples.

Representative Workforce Strategies and Plans in Practice

The **Saskatchewan Health Authority** has committed to be a "diverse, culturally competent organization with a workforce that is representative of the community we serve" and has undertaken a highly successful **representative workforce initiative**. This includes an **organizational strategic plan** as well as an operational **strategic action plan**.

The Yukon Government is committed to having "a representative public service" and has a supporting **strategic plan** with clear objectives.

Anti-racism commitments or policies: Approaches to prevent and effectively address racism in the workplace and in service delivery

Anti-Racism in Practice

The **City of Calgary** has made a **Commitment to Anti-Racism** and has a number of supporting initiatives underway.

Alberta Health Services' Anti-Racism Position Statement includes clear commitments and supporting actions to achieve them.

The **City of Vancouver** is committed to **anti-racism and cultural redress** and has a number of supporting initiatives underway.

Cultural safety plans and policies: Specific plans, frameworks and policies developed in collaboration with Indigenous communities and unions representing workers to create culturally safe and supportive work environments. Plans should include clear goals, objectives and supporting actions.

Cultural Safety Plans in Practice

The **Government of Northwest Territories' Cultural Safety Action Plan** has clear goals, objectives and supporting actions.

The **Victoria State Government Department of Land, Water and Planning's Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework** includes clearly defined principles, goals and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

Code of conduct: Codes of conduct should include clear guidelines for cultural safety and anti-racism/anti-discrimination.

Workforce engagement and demographic data collection

Collect workforce demographic data, including on Indigenous employees: In order to monitor the impacts of Indigenous employment programming, it is important to collect and report publicly on workforce demographic data, including data on the number of Indigenous employees. Data should be collected and safeguarded using First Nations principles for data management, known as **OCAP** (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) principles, which assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes and that they own and control how this information can be used. It is important to not use workforce data in a tokenistic way (e.g., claiming success by citing numbers, without having done meaningful work to improve workplace cultural safety or engaging with and supporting Indigenous employees).

Workforce Demographic Data Collection and Reporting in Practice

BC Hydro collects and reports on workforce demographic data related to its workforce diversity goals.

Aotearoa (New Zealand) Te Kawa Mataaho (Public Service Commission) collects and reports on workforce demographic data related to diversity and inclusion.

Hydro One also collects and reports on workforce demographic data related to its diversity goals.

Greater Victoria Harbour Authority has an employment target that **at least 5% of its workforce be Indigenous** and aims to meet standards for **certification by the Progressive Aboriginal Relations Program**, a bench-marking tool that helps businesses measure their work in Indigenous relations.

Engage with and gather feedback from employees: Ongoing employee engagement is valuable to gather qualitative feedback from staff. Methods could include surveys, talking circles, focus groups and other tools. Feedback should be gathered and shared transparently and acted upon meaningfully.

Working in Collaboration with Indigenous Communities

Codevelopment of training programs with Indigenous communities: Local Indigenous communities, leaders and staff should be included from the outset of program development and involved in every step, following the principle of “Nothing about us without us.” Developing letters of understanding with Indigenous communities can be helpful.

Relationship-based collaboration: The foundation and starting point for developing Indigenous employment initiatives should be engagement and collaboration with local Indigenous communities and strong, trusting, personal relationships with leaders and officials in those communities, as well as with their employment and training staff.

Realistic, appropriate timelines: Indigenous communities, CRD divisions and wise practices interview participants all stressed that community engagement, program development and program implementation need to move according to timelines that are collaborative, responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities and not based on the timelines of the CRD.

Long-term commitment: Building productive, personal working relationships with Indigenous communities is a long-term endeavour requiring a commitment of time, resources and dedicated staff capacity.

Values-based: Communities suggested that the CRD lead with organizational values when communicating with Indigenous communities and people about employment programs.

Recruitment and Hiring Processes

Recruitment

Indigenous communities and wise practices interviewees offered the following suggestions for recruitment of Indigenous employees:

Collaborative recruitment with Indigenous communities: Several CRD divisions noted that previous attempts to share postings directly with Indigenous communities had not been successful. Indigenous communities shared that it is important to connect with the right people within each community, understand the needs of the community and draw attention to postings that are relevant to community needs. Several wise practices interviewees noted that having strong, collaborative working relationships with key staff in Indigenous communities significantly improves recruitment of Indigenous people.

Improve information sharing and education about CRD career opportunities: The CRD should create a variety of clear communications (e.g., webpage, info sessions, pamphlets, social media, emails to Nations’ employment staff) that outline what the CRD does and all of the various career opportunities available and certification requirements for those opportunities, so that people are better able to interact with the CRD on employment opportunities and initiatives. Some job seekers also want to know more about the values and vision of CRD divisions.

Host career fairs in community: The CRD could host career fairs in Indigenous communities. This would be an opportunity to build relationships and meet directly with those who might be interested in applying for jobs so they can learn about the different opportunities and the requirements.

Engage with Indigenous youth: Many Indigenous communities stressed the importance of engaging with youth early (as young as 9 or 10 years old) and providing experiential and participatory learning programs.

Offer low-barrier options: Ensure there are entry-level positions so people feel more comfortable applying, and then give them an opportunity to grow within the organization. Also offer seasonal positions that don’t require specialized qualifications.

Targeted outreach: Develop a distribution list for Indigenous communities. Attend community events and career fairs to share about opportunities.

Indigenous recruitment webpages and communications tools: Webpages and communications specifically targeting Indigenous job seekers are an effective way to support Indigenous recruitment. Among the most common communications tools are dedicated webpages with information about supports for Indigenous applicants and videos of current Indigenous employees sharing stories about their careers within the organization.

Application and hiring processes

Sometimes when you're hiring an Indigenous person, their strengths don't come out clearly on paper, but when you meet them you'll be able to understand them better.

– Indigenous community respondent

Some Indigenous people don't have the education required for a position, but they have the experience, for example, they've worked out on the land but don't have a bachelor's degree in science. The CRD should take that into consideration. I know there are policies in place, but policies can be changed.

– Indigenous community respondent

The most common feedback about Indigenous employment was related to job postings and the hiring process. Key suggestions are summarized as follows:

Provide supports to Indigenous job seekers: Support Indigenous applicants in navigating the job application and hiring processes (e.g., provide guidance on resume writing, cover letters and preparing for interviews; support getting the relevant certifications). Having a dedicated Indigenous HR specialist is a highly effective way to provide such supports.

Job descriptions: It was widely agreed upon that job descriptions need to be improved. Some common themes were that job descriptions should:

- be clearly written in plain language, without technical jargon or acronyms.
- adopt a friendlier and less formal tone.
- provide a description that allows people to picture the job and work environment.
- identify where Indigenous cultural knowledge is an asset.
- allow/welcome applicants to self-identify as Indigenous.
- include language about equity, diversity and inclusion; Indigenous cultural safety; and, if relevant, preferential hiring policies.
- include territorial acknowledgements.
- acknowledge reconciliation, UNDRIP and anti-racism values/policies.

Self-declaration option for Indigenous job seekers and staff: Offering Indigenous employment seekers—and current Indigenous employees—an option to self-declare their Indigenous identity is an important way to connect them to supports and to enhance equitable participation in hiring processes and career advancement.

Self-Declaration of Indigenous Identity in Practice

Manitoba Hydro encourages Indigenous job seekers and other members of equity-seeking groups to self-declare when creating their job application profile online.

The Government of Canada also encourages job seekers who are members of equity-seeking groups to self-declare.

Application process: Respondents suggested that the application process should:

- offer flexibility in terms of method of application (i.e., some people prefer hard copy submissions to online processes).
- offer flexibility in how people show their qualifications (e.g., one CRD division found that doing short phone calls with shortlisted applicants allowed them to get a better sense of the applicants' qualifications than a written submission).
- not rely as heavily on written components.
- share resources about how to apply.
- connect applicants to an Indigenous HR hiring liaison who can help them with the process.

Culturally Competent Hiring in Practice

The BC Government's Indigenous relations behavioural competencies interpretive guides for hiring provide excellent teachings and tools for interviewing and evaluating Indigenous candidates in a culturally safe and appropriate way and for valuing cultural competency skills for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous candidates.

Interview process: It was widely agreed that the CRD's current interview processes are neither culturally appropriate nor conducive to attracting and hiring Indigenous employees. Respondents suggested that the CRD interview process should:

- be less formal.
- include Indigenous people on hiring committees.
- offer an online meeting option (to reduce barriers such as childcare and transportation).
- be flexible and allow hiring committees to add their own questions or adjust the process and flow.
- have a scoring process that values non-institutional qualifications such as experiential and cultural learning, Indigenous knowledge of the land and local community connections and relationships.

- when possible, avoid points-based interviews and evaluative approaches altogether.
- share the interview questions in advance so applicants can feel prepared.
- communicate in advance what to expect for the interview.
- check in with candidates before the interview to ensure they are comfortable with the interview format and nature of the questions.
- provide hiring teams with training that addresses cultural safety and unconscious bias in hiring processes.
- use story/experience-based questions rather than “sell yourself” questions.
- allow Indigenous applicants to bring an Elder, family member or friend with them to the interview.

Preferential hiring: There was widespread support for preferential hiring and precedent for this within the CRD. Indigenous communities suggested that this is especially relevant for land-based work (e.g., work with Regional Parks) and that there should be a specific number of seats held for Indigenous people whose Territory these parks reside on. They don't see this as “preferential hiring” but rather as First Nations people continuing their role of stewardship of their lands. One Indigenous community respondent noted that the current system is preferential towards internal candidates, who are mostly non-Indigenous. The Regional Parks Division has explored limited preferential hiring and has a BC human rights code hiring exemption for Indigenous-specific positions; however, more widespread preferential hiring is needed. While most CRD staff suggested that preferential hiring is desirable, they also cautioned that it must be thoughtfully planned and communicated to all staff so as not to cause resentment, perceptions of favouritism or anti-Indigenous racism. Staff stated that managers must have clear direction about how to communicate why this approach has been taken. This will also require collaboration with the unions.

Onboarding

Employee onboarding: As part of the onboarding process, staff should:

- be supported to create personal connections with other staff as soon as possible.
- be given an orientation tour that is focused on welcoming them, establishing relationships and creating a sense of belonging.
- take an onboarding survey, with an option for Indigenous self-identification.
- be made aware of how to address and report instances of racism and discrimination in a safe and culturally appropriate way.
- for new employees who self-identify as Indigenous:
- make them aware of and offer to connect them to all available Indigenous employee supports, including mentors, staff networks and Indigenous HR specialists.

- if possible, invite another Indigenous employee to support or lead the orientation tour.
- follow up at 4, 8 and 12 weeks of employment to share feedback or identify supports needed.

Managers and supervisors should be provided with training, tools and checklists for onboarding Indigenous employees and ensuring they are connected to all supports. Onboarding processes for Indigenous employees should be reviewed by Indigenous people with HR expertise.

Connecting Indigenous Employees to Supports

The University of Victoria's [A Guide for Indigenous Employees](#) provides a succinct, user-friendly overview of all Indigenous employee supports.



When you bring one Indigenous person onto your team, there have to be supports in place. You can't put all the Indigenous-/reconciliation-related asks on that one person. The role of the manager is to create clear boundaries and clear work roles of what is in the scope of the job.

– CRD employee

Indigenous HR specialists

Indigenous HR specialists: Indigenous communities and wise practises interviewees highly recommended having dedicated Indigenous HR specialists. Indigenous HR specialists should be Indigenous people who have existing relationships with local Indigenous communities. Indigenous HR specialists help organizations build a representative workforce by supporting Indigenous people in successfully navigating recruitment, application and onboarding processes, and by building and maintaining key relationships in Indigenous communities. They also help improve organizational cultural safety by providing feedback and support to managers and non-Indigenous employees based on learnings from engagement with Indigenous communities, organizations, job seekers, applicants and staff.

Indigenous HR Specialists in Practice

Island Health's Indigenous Recruitment & Retention Program has a dedicated team of **Indigenous employment advisors**.

The **City of Edmonton** has a dedicated **talent diversity consultant for Indigenous people**.

The **BC Government's Indigenous Applicant Advisory Service** has a dedicated **Indigenous applicant advisor**.

Procurement and contracting

Procurement strategy: Create and resource an initiative that supports Indigenous businesses to navigate procurement strategies. This will support the goal several Indigenous communities expressed to work "with" the CRD rather than "for" the CRD.

Supporting and Retaining Indigenous Employees

Anti-racism and cultural safety

Culturally appropriate, restorative, collaborative approach to anti-racism: Workplaces should strive to take intentional steps to become anti-racist. Addressing racist behaviour with a compliance-based, punitive approach and harsh penalties can actually be counterproductive and lead to increased racism and resentment and ostracization of Indigenous employees. Therefore, racist and discriminatory behaviour should be addressed through restorative, culturally appropriate policies and practices. It is helpful to have options for Indigenous employees to report racism confidentially as well as through a more senior Indigenous employee who is not their direct supervisor. Policies and practices to address racism and discrimination should be developed and implemented collaboratively by management, Indigenous people and union representatives.

Supports for Indigenous employees

Indigenous mentors and confidants: New Indigenous trainees and staff should be connected to an Indigenous mentor/confidant in the organization at the start of their employment. This mentor should be an experienced, senior person in the organization and not be a direct supervisor. When necessary, Indigenous mentors can act as intermediaries between Indigenous employees and managers to address concerns in a culturally appropriate way. Indigenous mentors must be allocated appropriate time for their mentorship duties.

Indigenous Mentors in Practice

The **BC Government's Indigenous Youth Internship Program** connects all participants to a mentor who provides support, encouragement, and advice. Participants can speak with mentors confidentially regarding any concerns they have, including culturally unsafe work environments or instances of racism or discrimination.

Elders in Residence: Having Indigenous Elders in Residence positions within the organization can also support the mentor/confidante role.

Elders in Residence

The **Cowichan Valley School District** and **Vancouver Island University** both employ Elders in residence to work with staff and students.

Indigenous employee networks and groups: Some Indigenous people fear being the “only one” or feeling like an “outsider” in their workplace. Indigenous employee networks and groups should be established for Indigenous employees across the organization to gather, create connections, support each other, share experiences and celebrate their identities and cultures. Managers should encourage participation in Indigenous employee groups and allocate adequate time to take part.

Indigenous Employee Networks in Practice

The **Government of Yukon’s Indigenous Employees’ Forum** “provides members the opportunity to network, learn and grow personally and professionally, access a cultural support system and build relationships with Indigenous role models.”

SaskPower’s Indigenous Employees Network provides “a collective voice and a supportive environment for Indigenous employees.”

Culturally appropriate employment assistance benefits: Employee assistance benefits should include coverage to access culturally appropriate supports for mental, emotional and spiritual health, such as Indigenous counsellors and Elders.

People-first approach: Indigenous communities stressed that the CRD needs to take an approach that recognizes that Indigenous employees are people first. They might have things going on at home that require empathy, flexibility and support. Retention comes down to understanding, listening between the lines and being as flexible as possible to meet people where they are at.

Culturally appropriate dispute resolution processes for Indigenous employees: General dispute- and conflict-resolution and grievance processes for Indigenous employees should be culturally appropriate and restorative, and developed with guidance from Indigenous people. It can be helpful to allow Indigenous employees to bring an Elder, family member or friend with them to dispute resolution circles or meetings.

Paid cultural, ceremonial and bereavement leave and statutory holidays

Recognize and value cultural practices for all employees: The importance of policies that support cultural and ceremonial practices came up in many wise practices interviews and Indigenous community interviews. For many Indigenous people, cultural practices are not a choice—they are a need and a responsibility to community. A wise practices interviewee noted that policies that support participation in cultural and ceremonial practices are vital in supporting reconciliation, as they are key to enabling Indigenous cultural resurgence. It is recommended that the following policies be available to all employees, both to reduce perceptions of favouritism and because in a diverse workforce many non-Indigenous employees also have cultural obligations or holidays that don’t align with Euro-Christian calendars and expectations.

Paid cultural and ceremonial leave: All employees should receive paid leave for cultural and ceremonial practices. Leadership should create an understanding among colleagues and managers about why this is important. Indigenous community respondents shared that there are generally more demands on the time of Indigenous people that are very active in their communities. For example, Big House season (late fall to early spring) is a top priority for many Indigenous people, and their seasonal commitments can impact attendance at work. Several First Nations in the CRD’s area of operations provide their employees with paid cultural and ceremonial leave—from 5 up to 15 days. Based on community and wise practices interviews and similar policies in local Indigenous communities, wise practices indicate that staff should receive at least 5 days of paid leave for cultural and ceremonial practices.

Paid Cultural and Ceremonial Leave in Practice

Cowichan Tribes – the largest First Nation in BC with over 400 staff – provides staff **5 to 15 days of paid cultural and ceremonial leave** per year for Big House obligations and/or Syuwun leave.

Pauquachin First Nation provides staff with 5 days of cultural leave per year.

The **Government of Western Australia’s Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety** provides staff who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders **5 days of paid ceremonial and cultural leave per year**.

Paid bereavement leave: Employers should provide all employees with adequate paid leave for bereavement practices. In many Indigenous cultures, there are obligations around death that require significant time and energy over several days or weeks. Often, employers require Indigenous people to use their “sick days” to attend to deaths in community. Bereavement leave policies must include a very broad definition of “family” that includes all extended family, Elders, close friends, community members and community leaders.

Paid Bereavement Leave in Practice

Huu-ay-aht First Nations provides staff up to **5 paid days of bereavement leave per year, and up to 3 additional paid days for travel** to ceremonies and/or estate administration.

Cowichan Tribes provides staff **5 paid days of bereavement leave per year and up to 2 additional paid days for travelling time**. Employees may also request an additional 10 paid days from accruals or an additional 10 unpaid days off for bereavement leave.

The **Government of Canada** grants employees up to **10 days of bereavement leave per year, 3 of which are paid**.

Other leaves of absence for Indigenous employees: Employers should have policies that grant leaves of absence for Indigenous employees to:

- vote in Indigenous elections.
- run for positions in Indigenous governance.
- participate in additional cultural, ceremonial and community events.

Remote work/on-reserve work opportunities: Wise practices interviewees noted that providing Indigenous employees opportunities to work on-reserve could potentially be beneficial from a taxation perspective and can support retention by providing work opportunities within Indigenous communities.

Culturally Safe and Supportive Workplaces

Our people are not willing to work in culturally unsafe environments. The tolerance for racism and culturally unsafe workplaces is vanishing.

– Indigenous community respondent

Workplace cultural safety

Implementing initiatives to meaningfully improve workplace cultural safety is an essential first step in the journey to support Indigenous employment. Culturally safe workplaces are workplaces where:

- Indigenous people can come as their whole selves and feel fully comfortable being who they are.
- Indigenous people feel safe speaking up and speaking out, free from judgement or repercussions.
- Indigenous voices and perspectives are sought out, respected, valued and meaningfully included and acted on.
- Indigenous people are free from experiencing racism and discrimination.
- Indigenous identities and cultural practices are supported, enabled and celebrated.
- There is a sense of community and opportunities for people to connect socially, with food and celebration.

The following suggestions were identified by wise practices interviewees and the environmental scan as important aspects of creating a workplace culture that is culturally safe:

Recognizing that not all Indigenous employees are “Indigenous experts”: A common challenge for Indigenous employees is when they are expected to be experts on cultural and protocol issues. In some cases, they don’t have this knowledge (sometimes because of colonial impacts that can be traumatic), and in other cases, they are not permitted to share it. Unless sharing cultural knowledge is within the job description, asking Indigenous employees for advice on all matters Indigenous is asking them to offer additional labour and expertise that they are not compensated for and can feel exploitative and/or triggering. Cultural competency training should address this issue and train non-Indigenous employees and managers about the risks of this problematic approach.

Physical spaces and building design: Architecture, interior design, office layouts and physical workspaces impact workplace cultural safety. Design elements to support cultural safety can include territorial recognitions, Indigenous art, spaces for cultural and ceremonial practices, and other design elements to make the space welcoming and supportive for Indigenous people.

Indigenous Design and Art in Practice

The **Regional District of Nanaimo** has added Indigenous art to its lobby and boardroom.

The **City of Victoria** has commissioned local Indigenous artists for Indigenous art installations throughout City Hall.

Dedicated staff: Large organizations can benefit from having dedicated staff to coordinate and implement cultural safety and Indigenous awareness initiatives.

Recognize, honour and encourage participation in important days: It is important for employers to formally recognize, honour and encourage participation in the following days, and grant paid time off for staff to participate in community events:

- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day (September 30)
- National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21)
- Louis Riel Day (third Monday of February)

Education and training for Indigenous awareness and cultural competency

The following wise practices in education and training for Indigenous awareness and cultural competency are based on findings from the environmental scan, engagement with communities and wise practices interviews:

Framework for ongoing cultural awareness learning: Employers should have learning frameworks for in-depth and ongoing learning, and not treat cultural awareness training as a one-off, box-ticking exercise. It should be offered at the onboarding stage and continued throughout employment. It should be required for all non-Indigenous employees, especially supervisors of Indigenous employees.

Variety of methods: Learning about Indigenous awareness and cultural competency should be undertaken using a variety of methods, including courses and classes, land-based and nature-based education, talks and visits from local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, lunch and learns, attending community events, volunteering within Indigenous communities, book/movie discussion groups and more. Employees should be supported to take time for informal and relational learning, not just formal training workshops.

Provide cultural education informed by local knowledge: It is important for people working within the CRD to learn from local Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and youth about the lands and cultures they operate on.

Prepare supervisors to support cultural safety: Nearly all of the wise practices interviewees emphasized the vital role that supervisors play in creating culturally safe and supportive work environments for Indigenous people. It is important that all supervisors understand that Indigenous

people are more likely to experience harm in the workplace, including various forms of anti-Indigenous racism, unconscious bias, microaggressions and discrimination. Supervisors should have appropriate and ongoing training in Indigenous awareness and cultural competency, as well as training and tools to address instances of racism and discrimination in a culturally appropriate and restorative way. Leaders should also understand the needs and priorities of the communities that team members come from.

Systemic integration: Systemic integration should be encouraged by including small education and training segments in all leadership, management and staff meetings—much like health and safety information is shared at the start of projects. For example, routine meetings could include five minutes of learning/sharing on aspects of Indigenous awareness and culture.

Make learning resources and tools available to staff: Learning resources, materials, tools and checklists should be made available to all supervisors and staff.

Indigenous Employment Learning Resources

The **Indigenous WIL Resource Hub** provides an excellent suite of learning resources and tools to support attracting and retaining Indigenous students and staff.

The **BC Assembly of First Nations' interactive map** is a great learning resource for staff who want to learn more about Indigenous Nations and territories in BC.

Indigenous Corporate Training's Indigenous cultural competency self-assessment checklist is a great tool for managers and staff in public service organizations.

Be prepared for resistance and pushback: Resistance to and pushback against training and education on Indigenous awareness and cultural competency are common and to be expected. It is important that managers and supervisors know to expect pushback and are given tools to address it in a supportive and restorative way.

Address discomfort: It is common for non-Indigenous people to feel fear of saying the wrong thing and causing offense, or discomfort with confronting difficult facts and emotions or their own levels of awareness. Learning should be guided by calling people in – not calling them out. This includes facilitated conversations that allow people to show up as they are and freely express themselves. One wise practices interviewee recommended using an approach called **The Circle Way**, an approach that, according to the Circle Way website, “affirms the essential practice of turning to one another to uphold racial, ethnic, gender, disability, economic, and environmental justice.”

Offer emotional supports: Conversations on reconciliation and workplace cultural safety can be emotionally challenging, and supports such as cultural and counselling services for both participants and facilitators should be built into learning initiatives.

Consider learning needs of Indigenous employees: Any learning program should be developed with the assumption that there may be Indigenous learners participating. It is important to consider that cultural competency training can be triggering or cause further harm to Indigenous people, or cause discomfort when non-Indigenous participants expect Indigenous people to be experts or share their experiences. Learning programs should consider how to create safety for Indigenous learners in cultural awareness training and, where appropriate, provide an option to opt-out.

Communications

First Nations Relations Division name: Métis Nation Greater Victoria pointed out that the name “First Nations” Relations Division is exclusive of Métis and Inuit people. They suggested that one possibility is to change the name of the division but stressed that if the local Nations prefer to keep it as is, that the CRD should find some other way to indicate an interest in a relationship with the Métis community in Victoria.

Communications that reflect Indigenous culture: Communications should use Indigenous languages, include Indigenous place names and include territorial acknowledgements (e.g., on websites, in email signatures, in the acknowledgement section of documents). One CRD interviewee notes that they can’t access First Nations keyboard characters.

Communications that Reflect Indigenous Culture

The **City of Vancouver’s website** includes an Indigenous territorial acknowledgement and a **link to more information about the unceded territories on which the city is located**.

The **City of Winnipeg’s website** includes an Indigenous territorial acknowledgement.

The **New Zealand Government** includes **Māori place names and language** in many of its public-facing communications.

Websites that reflect Indigenous employment: Internal- and external-facing websites should feature Indigenous employees and provide links to Indigenous employment resources and supports.

Indigenous Employment Programming

Indigenous communities and wise practices interviewees shared the following general suggestions related to employment programming:

Inclusive: Communities suggested that the CRD cast a wide net with Indigenous employment initiatives and make them accessible to all Indigenous people (not just those on reserve or from local Nations).

Focus on departments with higher readiness first: Interviewees suggested starting programs in departments that are already better equipped to provide a culturally safe environment, with an awareness that varying levels of readiness and cultural safety across departments will impact Indigenous employees and trainees.

Internal preparation: Before launching a program, the department should have clear messaging on why the program is important and provide cultural competency training to employees.

Mutually beneficial: Programs should be developed in a way that is mutually beneficial and supports the employment goals of Indigenous communities. Some programs—such as the BC Government’s Indigenous Youth Internship Program—support building capacity by placing employees to work within Indigenous governments and service-providing organizations. Others may allow Indigenous employees a leave of absence to do work in Indigenous communities.

Cohorts: Several wise practices interviewees noted that having cohorts helps Indigenous trainees create connections and feel supported, which increases their success.

Partnerships: It is helpful to partner with other organizations to develop Indigenous training and employment initiatives, including postsecondary institutions, Indigenous training organizations, Indigenous governments and services providers, other non-Indigenous service providers and, especially, employment and training staff in Indigenous communities. Examples of potential partners include Vancouver Island University, Thompson Rivers University, Camosun College, University of Victoria Indigenous Co-op Program (including career fair and mock interview programs) and the Coast Salish Employment and Training Society. Consider hosting training sessions within Indigenous communities rather than in a CRD office or building.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Partnerships with Educational and Training Institutions

University of Victoria's Indigenous Co-op Program connects Indigenous students and employers to meaningful and relevant employment opportunities.

Camosun College's Indigenous Peoples in Trades Training is open to eligible Indigenous people of all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels. It provides participants with basic foundation skills in trades or entry into one of Camosun's Trades Foundations programs.

Vancouver Island University has an **Indigenous Intern Leadership Program** in which Indigenous postsecondary graduates apply for intern positions in prominent BC companies for a two-year period at the employers' expense.

Thompson Rivers University has one of the largest Indigenous student populations in BC, with over 2,000 Indigenous students. Its **Trades and Technology Program** has many Indigenous graduates, presenting a good opportunity to recruit qualified Indigenous employees.

Coast Salish Employment Training Society develops programs and supports to meet the training and employment needs of local Indigenous communities.

Types of Indigenous employment programming

Indigenous communities and CRD divisions suggested the following types of programming to explore:

Provide training and education for Indigenous people to get certifications: Employers can provide Indigenous employment seekers with the training and education supports to earn the certifications needed for careers in the organization.

Supports for Training, Education, and Certifications in Practice

BC Hydro provides **scholarships, bursaries, skills training and apprenticeships** to Indigenous youth and job seekers.

The **Greater Victoria Harbour Authority** was lauded by several local Nations for their Indigenous training and employment supports, including providing supports for local Indigenous people to achieve the training and certification needed for employment.

The **xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Indian Band** and the **Vancouver International Airport (YVR)** have established an education and employment agreement. The agreement includes **an education-to-employment pathway that includes education scholarships and an apprenticeship program**, leading to long-term employment for **xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) members at YVR**.

Programs that provide training to achieve qualifications and certifications: By far the most common suggestion, from both Indigenous communities and CRD divisions, was that the CRD offer Indigenous employment programs that provide on-the-job training to achieve the qualifications or certifications needed for careers in the CRD. Both groups suggested partnering with universities, offering on-the-job training, bursaries, job shadowing and mentoring. Respondents shared that this approach could have many advantages, including:

- addressing the barrier of many CRD positions requiring specific qualifications.
- promoting Indigenous community capacity building by increasing the number of community members with valuable qualifications.
- making the CRD stand out as an attractive employer for Indigenous people in a competitive labour market.
- supporting Indigenous people to attain their goals for more advanced positions and meaningful work.

Youth experiential and participatory learning programs: Indigenous communities suggested that CRD could create youth programming that provides experiential and participatory learning opportunities that would offer exposure to a variety of potential careers in the CRD. Offering these programs to youth as young as 10 years old would help youth envision and plan their next steps, and after graduation, they will have a clearer path to work at the CRD. Programming could include:

- youth summer camps
- school field trips and work site visits
- land- and nature-based programming

The primary question is how interested is the CRD in engaging with youth? For youth, a personal connection is important. They must see the heart to which they can affix a drumbeat.

– Indigenous community respondent

Short-term programming: It would be beneficial if there was an opportunity to “dip your toes” into different areas of CRD. This is partly because people are unfamiliar with what the CRD does, but also because many people (particularly youth) are undecided on what they would like to do. Wise practices interviewees and local communities suggested the following types of education and employment training programs for consideration:

- job shadowing
- practicum placements
- co-op placements
- summer student positions
- internships (The idea of internship programs was not suggested by Indigenous community respondents but generally received positive feedback when suggested by the interviewer.)

The biggest risk to implementing an Indigenous employment program is not doing it. That's the biggest risk: not actioning it in a meaningful way.

– Wise practices interviewee

Conclusion

Since the establishment of the Special Task Force on First Nations Relations in 2015, the CRD has been building deeper and more impactful relationships with Indigenous communities. This report and the 2018 and 2020 reports preceding it have not only been valuable processes to identify the needs of Indigenous communities but also have themselves been part of the relationship-building journey.

The importance of moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities cannot be overstated. Through this report, Indigenous communities in the region have expressed a clear interest in working with the CRD to develop employment initiatives that are mutually beneficial, address the employment goals of their community members and contribute to capacity building within their communities. The CRD now has a responsibility to follow through and take action based on the input shared by the communities that contributed their time and expertise to this report.

The path forward is clear, and it now is time to begin the important work together, hand in hand as equal partners, to bring benefits to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the capital region.

Appendix A

CRD Indigenous Employment Project List of interviewees

Organization/Department	Number of Participants
Local Indigenous Communities	
Cowichan Tribes	1
Esquimalt Nation	1
Métis Nation of Greater Victoria	1
Pauquachin First Nation	1
Scia'new First Nation	3
Songhees Nation	1
Tsartlip First Nation	1
Tseycum First Nation	1
Victoria Native Friendship Centre	2
WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council	1
CRD Representatives	
CRD Environmental Protection	3
CRD Environmental Resource Management	1
CRD Human Resources	1
CRD Panorama Recreation Centre	3
CRD Regional Housing	1
CRD Regional Parks	2
CRD Wastewater Infrastructure Operations	1
CRD Watershed Protection	1
CUPE Local 1978	2
Subject Matter Experts	
BC Public Service – Indigenous Youth Internship Program	1
Canadian Union of Public Employees – BC and national human rights staff	2
City of Edmonton – Talent Diversity, Indigenous Peoples	2
CRD Indigenous employees	2
Greater Victoria Harbour Authority – Indigenous Relations	1
Inclusive Excellence Strategy Solutions Inc.	2
Interior Health (BC) – Aboriginal Careers	2
Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority – Indigenous HR Initiative	1
University of Victoria – Indigenous Co-op Program	2
Total number of organizations consulted: 28	43

