



Capital Regional District Indigenous Employment Project

SUMMARY REPORT

Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge that the CRD conducts its business within the traditional territories of many First Nations, including, but not limited to, BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), P'a:chi:da?ah (Pacheedaht), Pune'laxutth' (Penelekut), Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay), Songhees, STÁUTW (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.

We are grateful for the support of CRD staff, in particular its First Nations Relations Division: Caitlyn Vernon, Shauna Huculak, Elizabeth Hermsen and Sandra Allen.

Project Overview

This project stems from the Capital Regional District (CRD)'s 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 project also supports the CRD's **Statement of Reconciliation**, which focuses on self-determination, shared prosperity and relationships with the land and water in the capital region.

The objectives of this project were to:

- learn how First Nations and Indigenous organizations in the capital region would like to be engaged on employment initiatives and determine their initial areas of interest.
- assess CRD department readiness to collaborate on employment partnerships and initiatives with Indigenous partners.
- research and report on wise practices related to Indigenous employment and workplace cultural safety.

This document provides a summary of the findings and recommendations of the CRD Indigenous Employment Project. For more detail on the project, please reference the full report.

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

Methodology

This report was developed by **Arrive Consulting**, a BC-based consulting company that supports cultural competency and Indigenous-focused learning, reconciliation planning and action, and Indigenous self-determination and cultural resurgence. The findings in this report are based on engagement with:

- First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous communities
- CRD divisions and union representatives
- Wise practices subject matter experts in Indigenous employment

This project involved interviews with the following groups:

Group	Number of Departments/ Organizations	Number of Individuals
Indigenous communities	10	13
CRD divisions & union representatives	9	15
Wise practices subject matter experts	9	15
Total	28	43

An environmental scan was also conducted to identify wise practices in Indigenous employment. The findings in this report represent only the perspectives of the people interviewed and were not informed by statistical or demographic research on employment in communities or in the CRD, nor through public Indigenous community engagement sessions.

Principles

Key principles 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.

Reciprocity: Initiatives developed by the CRD should bring benefits to Indigenous communities.

Cultural humility and ongoing learning: Adopt an approach of 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.

Context

CRD Context

- All CRD divisions that participated in this project are interested in working to increase Indigenous employment and recognize the value of doing so.
- The unions representing CRD workers are key players in increasing Indigenous employment. CUPE local 1978 expressed interest in working collaboratively with CRD management in this area.
- The CRD has undertaken steps to increase the cultural competency of their workforce. While these steps have been impactful, more learning and relationship building is needed to create a culturally safe workplace.
- CRD divisions identified that they are under-resourced to engage with communities at the level that is required to build strong relationships.
- While there are past successes to build on related to Indigenous employment, most have not included clear leadership direction or sufficient resources and engagement to address barriers to participation, and thus have been met with limited success.
- Current CRD hiring practices include barriers to recruitment of Indigenous employees and would need to be revised in partnership with the unions representing CRD workers.

Indigenous Communities Context

- Indigenous communities are interested in engaging with the CRD on employment initiatives if the engagement is resourced, there is commitment to follow-through and the initiatives are intended to be mutually beneficial to communities and the CRD.
- Indigenous communities continue to face barriers to socioeconomic prosperity resulting from generations of colonial oppression; however, community members are increasingly achieving high levels of education and training.
- There is a great diversity of Indigenous communities within the CRD: some have small populations and others larger populations, some are remote from population centres and some are not, some reside in highly urbanized areas and others in rural settings. Given this diversity, each community has different employment needs related to their demographics and location.
- The current labour market shortage and higher demand for Indigenous employees has led to increased numbers of Indigenous community members accessing employment.
- Rather than looking to attain employment, many community members are seeking opportunities to advance in their careers (including access to training and improved qualifications) or to engage in more meaningful and rewarding work.
- Many Indigenous community members are seeking work that aligns with or supports them to fulfill cultural obligations in their communities.
- Youth entering the labour market are a key demographic as they are still exploring what they want to do with their careers and looking to enter new fields of work.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Clear Strategic Leadership and Commitment

Findings

- Indigenous employment initiatives require long-term commitment and financial resources.
- Employment programming needs to be delivered alongside other systemic supports.
- Indigenous employment initiatives intersect with CRD-wide Indigenous engagement and collaboration efforts.
- There is a lack of clear leadership and strategy within the CRD to support Indigenous employment.

Actions

- 1.1** Make public commitments and fully resourced actions to demonstrate follow-through.
- 1.2** Develop a comprehensive, organization-wide reconciliation strategy.
- 1.3** Commit to a collaborative, partnership-based approach to working with the unions representing CRD workers.
- 1.4** Develop an Indigenous employment strategy with clear goals and targets.
- 1.5** Improve CRD workforce demographic data collection.

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

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Enhanced Collaboration and Engagement with Indigenous Communities

Findings

- Work to promote Indigenous employment requires partnership with Indigenous communities.
- Engagement with Indigenous communities requires time and resources to build and maintain personal connections. Showing up and participating in Indigenous communities is important.
- Engagement timelines should be flexible and responsive to the needs and capacities of Indigenous communities.
- Both CRD divisions and Indigenous communities have an interest in working together on employment initiatives; however, both are under-resourced to do so.
- Some Indigenous people interviewed expressed interest in working with, not for, the CRD (e.g., in partnership programs or business relationships).
- Indigenous communities are not well aware of the CRD's responsibilities, service areas or work opportunities.

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.

– CRD employee

Actions

- 2.1** Hire additional Indigenous engagement positions within the CRD and include Indigenous engagement responsibilities in job descriptions for managers and external-facing roles.
- 2.2** Provide resources to Indigenous communities to enhance their capacity to engage with the CRD.
- 2.3** Develop procurement approaches that attract more Indigenous businesses.
- 2.4** Work with the CRD Communications Department to increase awareness in Indigenous communities in the capital region.

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

RECOMMENDATION 3: Improved Hiring Practices

Findings

- The CRD has had some experience with preferential hiring of Indigenous candidates.
- Union regulations create barriers to hiring Indigenous candidates, but the union is interested in working to address such barriers.
- The competitive labour market and increased societal interest in reconciliation means that Indigenous employees are in demand, and Indigenous governments and organizations struggle to find qualified staff.
- CRD job descriptions can be confusing and deter many Indigenous job seekers.
- The CRD hiring processes tends to exclude Indigenous job seekers and is generally not culturally responsive.
- Indigenous communities are not very familiar with the roles the CRD performs and potential employment options.



Actions

- 3.1** Create an Indigenous human resources (HR) specialist within the CRD to support Indigenous job seekers and further relationships with Indigenous communities.
- 3.2** Increase targeted recruitment of Indigenous employees.
- 3.3** Adapt CRD job postings to make them more understandable, relatable and appealing.
- 3.4** Review and adapt the CRD's hiring processes to be more culturally appropriate and welcoming for Indigenous job seekers.
- 3.5** Develop and implement policies and processes for the preferential hiring of Indigenous people.

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

– CRD employee

Some Indigenous people don't have the education required for a position, but they have the experience. The CRD should take that into consideration. I know there are policies in place, but policies can be changed.

– Indigenous community respondent

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Policies and Practices to Support and Retain Indigenous Employees

Findings

- Indigenous people want to work in an environment that is culturally safe and free from racism and discrimination.
- Many Indigenous job seekers are seeking work and career opportunities that support and accommodate the fulfillment of cultural obligations.
- Indigenous employees often feel isolated in mainstream organizations but have found support when a network is in place (e.g., Indigenous mentors and/or colleagues).
- Policies to support cultural obligations can be beneficial to all employees, especially in an increasingly diverse workforce.

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

– CRD employee

Actions

- 4.1 Review the CRD's Respectful Workplace Policy and training to ensure 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.
- 4.3 Designate Indigenous mentors/confidantes for Indigenous employees in the CRD.
- 4.4 Develop onboarding processes that connect Indigenous employees to available supports.
- 4.5 Provide all CRD employees with paid leave for cultural and ceremonial practices.
- 4.6 Provide all CRD employees with paid leave for bereavement practices, with a broad definition of "family."
- 4.7 Ensure current leave policies for political participation are inclusive of leaves of absence for Indigenous governance.

Anybody who is able to work is currently working given the labour market situation right now. Almost everybody is employed but would take a better position if one was available. Being an attractive employer would help.

– Indigenous community respondent

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Improved Cultural Safety in the Workplace

Findings

- Recent efforts to provide Indigenous cultural safety training have been welcomed, and employees have reported the trainings have been engaging and valuable.
- Some CRD employees describe a work culture that is not always tolerant or respectful of diversity.
- The current workforce of the CRD is not as culturally and racially diverse as the general population.
- A culturally safe workplace benefits all employees and is especially relevant for the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees.

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

Actions

- 5.1** Develop a learning framework to increase CRD staff's Indigenous cultural awareness and competency.
- 5.2** Formally recognize, honour and encourage individual and organizational participation in National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, National Indigenous Peoples Day and Louis Riel Day.
- 5.3** Develop strategies to improve CRD workforce engagement, including gathering feedback from Indigenous employees.
- 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 verbal 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 Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous populations living within the capital region.

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

– Indigenous community respondent

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Employment Programming that Provides Benefit to Indigenous Communities

Findings

- Indigenous communities are seeking employment opportunities that build skills and capacity for individuals and their communities.
- Indigenous communities are struggling to recruit qualified Indigenous employees in a tight labour market—CRD Indigenous employment programming should not compete with the hiring efforts of Indigenous communities.
- Given the diversity of job positions within the CRD, it would be valuable to have programs where employees have the opportunity to try out different roles.
- CRD employees recognize that their work could benefit from being informed by Indigenous knowledge and would like to hire positions that are specifically intended to bring Indigenous perspectives into their work environment and project teams.
- Exposing youth to the CRD as a potential employer could be an effective way to attract Indigenous applicants.

Actions

- 6.1** Develop training and certification programs that provide pathways to long-term employment and growth for Indigenous employees.
- 6.2** Create new positions specifically targeted to Indigenous employees within CRD divisions.
- 6.3** Create Indigenous youth education and engagement programming to increase awareness and “plant the seeds” about career opportunities in the CRD.
- 6.4** Develop short-term or job-shadowing programs for Indigenous employees to experience diverse areas of work within the CRD.

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

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 12–15 of the *CRD Indigenous Employment Project Findings Report*.



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.