



Factsheet #2: Mentorship and Professional Development in the Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce

Overall Project Context: The “*anpBC Strategy*” is an Indigenous approach designed to strengthen, support, and uplift the countless number of dedicated people who work and volunteer within Aboriginal Non-profit (ANP) organizations. The *anpBC Strategy* is the result of hundreds of stories shared by dedicated ANP employees and volunteers across the province from 2012 to 2013. It offers a suite of resources and recommendations aimed at sustaining and nurturing our Aboriginal workforce in four areas: strengthening connections with culture and traditional values; mentorship and professional development; employee pensions and benefits; and workplace wellness and balance.

Aboriginal non-profit organizations are one of the ways we enrich our traditional and cultural support networks historically supplied by our families and community. Supported by a strong workforce, ANPs can continue to offer services to our communities that support, heal, and strengthen our people now and for generations to come.

Strengthening the ANP Workforce through Mentorship

Mentoring is nothing new to our communities. It has been a practice used by our people to transmit culture, language and tradition for countless generations. In the ANP sector, mentorship is part of the way organizations do business. Mentoring others is a sacred role and responsibility and plays an important part in cultural, professional, and personal development. Recent research in the ANP sector in BC showed that mentorship has helped people to take on more responsibility and increasingly challenging roles in the workplace; assist with career advancement; and contribute to a positive working environment. In a 2012 ANP survey, 74% of respondents noted that mentorship improved a sense of belonging in the workplace, and 70% reported that mentorship contributed to a respectful working environment. The combination of professional development training and mentorship is key to strengthening the workforce and ensuring ANPs can respond to the growing needs of their communities, now and into the future.

The Role of Mentorship and Development in the Workplace

From 2012 to 2013, The *anpBC Strategy* set out to hear from hundreds of ANP employees, volunteers, and board members about their experience with mentors and job training. Story after story revealed the ways mentorship lifts people up and builds strength and abilities. Professional development training was noted as competency and skill-building for both employees and board members. It has been used as a tool to address job training needs and eliminate barriers for Aboriginal people who may not have the credentials for a job, but have the competency, culture and commitment needed for the work. Overall, mentoring and professional development opportunities help employees and volunteers to feel supported and valued, and are key reasons why people choose to stay in their job.

Mentorship and Professional Development in Your Workplace

The anpBC strategy offers the following recommendations towards strengthening mentorship and professional development opportunities within your workplace:

Support the role that Elders might play in your workplace, such as providing opportunities for Elders to serve as mentors to both employees and agency leaders.

Consider setting aside specific resources for formalized approaches to mentorship, such as scheduled time for peer mentoring for all staff (either assigning or asking staff to self-select peer mentors with different ranges of experience and roles). Mentorship can be expressed in a variety of ways such as cultural, personal, or workplace related.

Affirm your workplace as a place of life-long learning. Where possible, make a commitment to ensure all employees of the organization will be intentionally connected to a mentor, including agency leaders, employees, and volunteers.

Offer a professional development training day for all employees in an area of shared interest or job specific, such as an annual cultural training event. Consider including the board of directors in any professional development training opportunities.

Mentorship and Professional Development the ANP Sector

Based on research and engagement with the ANP community in BC, the following recommendations are felt to benefit the entire sector:

Establish an ANP sector resource for mentorship that contains a list of volunteer mentors with various levels of experience and expertise across the province that can be accessed by anyone who works or volunteers within the ANP sector.

Establish an ANP sector professional development network that advertises a range of free or low-cost professional development training opportunities relevant to ANP organizations.

Create an ANP Sector Mentoring Framework that would serve as a tool for organizations to build their own mentorship programs, help to frame discussions about mentorship, and help to map out a desired direction that the sector may want to take towards mentorship. The framework could be informed by traditional values, culture, and current practices that hold promise for the sector.

Share examples of mentorship and professional development practice across the sector to enhance cross-agency learning and improvement. Organizations could post the mentorship or professional development practices they are involved with on a central database, as well as within their agency newsletters and websites.

For more information on the anpBC Strategy, or to learn more about the other themes within the strategy (strengthening connections with culture and traditional values; employee pensions and benefits; workplace wellness and balance), please visit www.aboriginalnonprofits.com