

PATHWAYS: Mentorship and Elder Guidance in Aboriginal Non-Profit Organizations

A HANDBOOK



anpBC

Nurturing a healthy Aboriginal non-profit sector
is nurturing healthy communities—we are one.

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Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

1. Introduction to this Handbook	1
Purpose of this Handbook	1
Overview.....	1
What is mentoring?	1
A role for Elders	3
2. Why a Mentorship Strategy	4
Benefits of mentoring	4
Role of mentors in the workplace	5
Examples of mentoring approaches.....	6
3. Fostering Mentorship in Aboriginal Non-profits	9
Determining need.....	9
Setting the stage	10
Elder guidance	12
Mentorship guidelines	13
4. References and Resources	17

Preface and Acknowledgements

The Aboriginal Nonprofit (ANP) BC Strategy aims to build and support a strong ANP workforce so that organizations can continue to assist, heal, and strengthen Aboriginal communities now and into the future.

This handbook is part of a larger strategy to support the workforce of Aboriginal non-profit organizations (ANPs) in British Columbia. Hundreds of ANPs across British Columbia offer services in the areas of health, employment, drug and alcohol treatment, child and family services, and housing in a wide range of locations – rural, urban, on-reserve, and off-reserve.

Between 2012 and 2014, work was undertaken to help create a strategy to strengthen the ANP sector so that it in turn can continue to do the work of strengthening Aboriginal communities. The results of this work can be found at: <http://anpbc.com/anpbc-strategy/>.

In 2016, the focus shifted from finding out what the ANP sectors need to developing resources for their use. The five areas of the ANP initiative are:

- 1. Mentorship / Elder guidance and recruitment and retention of Indigenous youth**
- 2. Culture and wellness plans**
- 3. Pension planning**
- 4. Holistic approach to retirement planning**
- 5. Promoting the ANP sector to Indigenous youth.**

This Handbook was created as part of the project on Mentorship/Elder guidance and recruitment and retention of Indigenous youth. For more information about the anpBC Elder Guidance and Mentorship program visit: <http://anpbc.com/anpbc-strategy/>.

The information for this Handbook was gathered from communities across BC. We are most appreciative of the thoughts, time and wisdom shared with us by Elders, youth, staff of Aboriginal non-profits and community members.

1. Introduction to this Handbook

Purpose of this Handbook

This Mentorship and Elder Guidance Handbook for Aboriginal non-profits provides information for staff working in, or people interested in supporting, Aboriginal non-profits (ANPs) in British Columbia. It is also important to Boards of Directors in their governance conversations.

This Handbook is a resource for:

- **ANP managers & staff**
- **Community members**
- **ANP Board members**
- **Youth**
- **Elders Councils**
- **Trainers**

Overview

This Handbook was developed as an orientation to mentoring in the workplace for employees, employers, Elders, volunteers, and potential employees. To create this, we held gatherings across BC and heard from individuals and Indigenous organizations; we also gathered mentorship resources from across Canada.

The Handbook can be a stand-alone resource or a companion piece to the Mentoring Tools and other tools developed as part of this initiative.

The values and principles that inform the good work of ANPs are good reference points to consider and return to when implementing mentoring and Elder guidance initiatives.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is an age-old practice in Aboriginal communities to guide, teach, and nurture individuals to achieve their fullest potential. At its core, mentoring is relationship based learning with a trusted advisor. While the term "mentor" originates from a Greek word, the concept is very much part of Indigenous cultures.

In Indigenous cultures the word 'mentorship' didn't exist, but the concept did. (Aboriginal non-profit employee)

Teaching and learning happens during all stages of life: you are never too young or too old to learn and to teach.

In past times, the belief that “it takes a village to raise a child” reflected the fact that everyone had a role in teaching and guiding the next generation. For example, when a child showed a natural gift, the extended family and especially the Elders would nurture the development of that gift. Today, educational institutions and growing numbers of workplaces are recognizing the value of this practice of guided learning to nurture the talents of the next generation of Indigenous peoples.

Mentoring fits into a continuum of learning and is distinct from other forms of professional development such as coaching and training. It is also distinct from supervision and therefore choosing a mentor is a key part of the mentoring process.

A mentor understands and upholds the **workplace values, vision, and purpose** of the non-profit organization while also displaying the skills, abilities, and attitudes required to support and guide a co-worker.

In Aboriginal organizations, mentoring is closely aligned to cultural values and is based on positive relationships between the mentor and mentee. The following are examples of ways to describe mentoring in Aboriginal organizations:

- culturally grounded, Aboriginal focused
- values-based and ethical
- relationship-based and holistic
- leading by example
- peer-based
- safe and respectful of boundaries and roles

What is mentoring in the workplace?

The purpose of mentoring in the workplace is to: provide guidance in building the skills and capacities of workers; promote cultural knowledge and practices; and, support personal development and good relations.

Mentoring in the workplace often involves a formal arrangement wherein there are defined goals and perhaps an agreement that outlines expectations.

A role for Elders

Determining the role of Elders is a responsibility of each community. The following section offers examples of Elder guidance in the workplace. It is up to each nation and community to decide the role of Elders and other knowledge keepers in the workplace.

Elder guidance is traditionally the role of someone who carries the knowledge and wisdom passed down through generations. The well-being of Indigenous communities is linked to our connection to Mother Earth, our life experience, and the traditional ways of our ancestors.

Elders are culturally regarded as teachers, mediators, advisors, medicine people, stewards of our lands and the keepers of our culture and way of life. (BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, 2010, p. 4)

Mentoring and Elder guidance are key approaches to building capacity and strengthening the BC Aboriginal non-profit sector. Traditionally, Indigenous communities gained knowledge and skills through guidance from experienced family and community members. This form of hands-on learning and passing on the wisdom of Elders in the workplace is a key resource for building professional skills amongst new staff while nurturing the full potential of young people. It also acknowledges the continuing value of knowledge keepers and



Laurie MacDonald, Enoch First Nation

Elders who have worked a lifetime in communities and with Aboriginal non-profit organizations. Respect for and sharing of traditional knowledge and ways of being are central to strengthening and healing our communities.

2. Why a Mentorship Strategy

Benefits of mentoring

For ANPs, there can be many benefits to having a mentorship strategy.

For the youth/staff being mentored some of the benefits include:

- Enhanced knowledge and skills for carrying out job/career
- Enhanced knowledge and skills for working with Indigenous communities
- Receiving insights, feedback and recognition
- Connections to Elders and culture
- Development of a circle of friends and colleagues both within and outside the community
- Knowledge of how to reach out to appropriate resources to resolve potential challenges

For the Mentor, some benefits include:

- Learning as a "two-way street" where the mentor is also learning from the mentee
- Professional development
- Strengthened cultural and community connections
- Engagement in leadership opportunities
- Development of a new and reinvigorated outlook on one's own job
- Ability to pass along traditional knowledge and/or to encourage others in their growth and development

My experience participating in a mentor program was both positive and inspiring. It had a ripple effect on the agency where I work. Firstly, I was being mentored and a little later, a student working with me referred to me as her mentor, even though I am only a couple of years ahead in this field. Based on my experience, our organization made a decision to set up its own staff mentoring program.

I have applied for further mentoring from the original mentor program to learn more skills and strengthen my network. (Aboriginal non-profit manager, Community Gathering participant)

For the ANP, some benefits can include:

- Mentoring is a part of professional development and staff training
- Staff can see room for advancement and/or ways to acquire new skills and knowledge
- Reduced staff turnover
- Increased ability to recruit and retain Indigenous staff
- Engaged staff/community/Elders
- Increased cultural connections
- Good staff relations

Benefits to the community:

Mentoring and Elder guidance are important components of healing by keeping traditions strong. The mentoring process is guided by traditional values of respect, caring, sharing, and teaching. It is based on relationship and reciprocity between two or more people.

Role of Mentors in the Workplace

ANPs are increasingly competing against private and public sector employers for qualified Indigenous staff. Given the importance of having competent, skilled, knowledgeable, and committed staff, tapping into youth's desires to have meaningful employment is an important strategy¹. This allows them to contribute to the well-being of their community. Mentoring and Elder guidance are approaches that ANPs can use to promote traditional knowledge and practices, to foster healthy communities, and as part of their recruitment and retention practices.



¹ BCAAFC initiative, Economic Empowerment of BC's Aboriginal Youth, found that the majority of youth attending engagement sessions around the province want opportunities to contribute to their community. <https://www.bcaafc.com/initiatives/eebcay>

In the workplace, a mentor can be described as “someone who is willing to provide support and guidance, information, contacts, goal setting, and role modeling” (www.indspire.ca). Inclusion of Elders can help ensure that staffs’ experiences and information are grounded and connected to culture and community. Elders can also support youth and staff with real life issues such as cultural connection, financial literacy, respectful communication, and so forth.

Examples of mentoring approaches

Some examples of ways in which mentoring can take place follow.

e-Mentoring/Mobile Mentoring

On-line communication is one way to bridge distances and to connect individuals in different locations in a mentoring relationship. Depending on the aim, e-mentoring programs can require dedicated resources including an on-line platform. Partnering with agencies/ organizations that are already doing e-mentoring may be an option. Additional ways to connect with youth through social media include using WhatsApp for focused support and conversations. One benefit of e-mentoring for youth in rural/remote communities is that it can give them a sense of relationship and connection to others including ANPs – and ideas for post-secondary pathways.

RURAL & ABORIGINAL EMENTORING (UBC Faculty of Medicine) is an on-line mentoring program that connects youth including Indigenous high school youth with mentors from around the province. The e-mentoring program exposes the students to new ideas and career opportunities in health science. <http://blogs.ubc.ca/ementoring/https://soundcloud.com/ubc-faculty-of-medicine/communityconnection>

DREAM CATCHER MENTORING is an online mentoring program designed to empower students to realize the benefits of staying in school. Dream Catcher Mentoring originated with the Aboriginal Human Resources Council as Kocihta and is now offered through Big Brothers Big Sisters. Professionals work with northern youth providing support and guidance regarding their career dreams. www.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca/en/home/mentoringprograms/dreamcatchermentoring/default.aspx



One to one mentoring

This approach is based on a face-to-face relationship between two people, one being guided and the other doing the guiding. Success depends on making sure that the two people are well matched, their schedules work well together, and there is ongoing monitoring to support the success of the relationship.

COMMUNITY COUSINS MENTORSHIP program at Vancouver Island University designed to support incoming Aboriginal students www2.viu.ca/communitycousins/

ABORIGINAL BUSINESS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM developed and run by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, which mentors Aboriginal entrepreneurs to reach their business goals/improve their business https://www.ccab.com/aboriginal_business_mentorship_program

Group mentoring

A group of mentors are matched with a larger group of mentees that allows for individual relationships to emerge more naturally and for support and mentorship opportunities to emerge naturally as well.

LEADERSHIP 2020, which brings together a diverse group of emergent, experienced, and legacy leaders from Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, Friendship Centres, community agencies, and the Ministry for Children and Family Development. The process involves residency/face to face learning followed by several months of on-line support and engagement to explore and develop personal, practice, participatory, and perceptive skills. <http://fcssbc.ca/learning/leadership-2020/2020-indigenous/>



Aboriginal Business MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Canadian Council for
Aboriginal Business



Cultural mentoring

While many changes have occurred since time of contact, the old way of doing things and guiding people is still an important foundation for personal and community development and resilience.

SELKIRK FIRST NATION developed a fish camp guidebook as a tool for mentoring youth on traditional knowledge. The use of family fish camps is at the heart of how knowledge is passed from one generation to another. It is where the cultural principles of Northern Tutchone are taught, questions are answered and guidance provided. The guidebook is intended as a tool to help keep traditions alive and suggest teaching opportunities by sparking conversation, storytelling and teachings. www.aicbr.ca/selkirk-project



Elder Guidance

An elementary school teacher at a Tribal school wanted to learn her traditional language so that she could teach her students. She asked an Elder who speaks the language to mentor/guide her and to help her learn the language.

3. Fostering Mentorship in Aboriginal Non-profits

This section identifies some of the steps that can be taken toward developing mentorship within your ANP. It is based in part on interviews and surveys done as part of the ANP strategy, as well a review of existing Indigenous mentoring programs.

Determining Need

Before creating a Mentoring and Elder Guidance strategy, it is important to consider what you want to achieve and whether mentoring is the most appropriate approach.

Throughout this section, we include questions for you and your workplace/ community to reflect upon and potentially discuss as a group.

Question: What is the vision for a mentoring strategy?

Starting with this question will help provide a foundation for what comes next.

EXAMPLE: Our vision is to develop our own Indigenous talent by providing staff/youth with leadership challenges and growth opportunities, including opportunities for Elder guidance and cultural/spiritual development.

Examples of actions that can be taken to help determine what kind of mentorship strategy is right for your workplace:

- Staff are asked for their input on the kinds of mentorship opportunities they'd like to have and/or their vision for a mentoring strategy.
- Board members are engaged in discussions about what a mentoring strategy may achieve for the agency and how they can support it.
- A task group is established with staff, Board, and Elder membership to help guide development of a Mentorship & Elder Guidance Strategy by determining the goals and other critical components of the mentoring strategy.

Question: What do you want to achieve?

As an example, if the purpose is to encourage Indigenous youth to consider Aboriginal non-profits as an employment option, then you may want to collaborate with the local high school or college to create specific learning opportunities for youth such as job shadowing, cooperative education placement, summer employment, scholarships, volunteering, or internships.

If the purpose is professional development or retention, then different strategies will be required. For example, an Elder who has worked in a particular field or who is knowledgeable in a specific area such as his/her language, could be asked to do cultural or work related mentoring with a staff person. Alternatively, an ANP could encourage staff to pursue mentorship opportunities externally such as through professional bodies, or with an Elder that they look up to in the community.

Setting the Stage

Mentoring and Elder guidance are strengthened when time is taken to work through the following actions to set the stage:

Question: What is your organization's definition of mentoring?

Some Aboriginal mentorship programs choose to use Aboriginal concepts/words to describe the mentoring process and strategy. As an example, the **Community Cousins Training Manual**² uses Coast Salish and Nuuchah-nulth concepts (see box) as Indigenous specific examples to convey teachings associated with the westernized descriptions of mentoring:

- Xwiqw tsu tsun uq': teaching and learning while being in relationship with each other
- Haa hoo po: teaching while doing something active
- Kwenatus tul: many people holding hands
- Tsow tun tul: Helping each other

These are provided as examples only and each ANP is encouraged to use the teachings and language that makes sense in their context/environment.

² Vancouver Island University (no date) Community Cousins Aboriginal Mentorship Program Training Manual, p. 4: www.counselling.net/jnew/pdfs/Community%20Cousins%20Program%20Manual.pdf

Question: What are your organization's guiding principles and values?

For example, guiding principles may include: wholistic approach; cultural values and practices; healthy Elders as cultural resources; respectful communication.

Question: What are the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for mentors and mentees?

For example, roles may include: career support; emotional support; encouragement and access to learning opportunities; and/or passing on cultural/traditional knowledge.

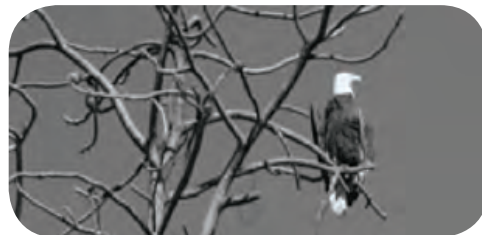
Question: Who are the potential mentors and mentees?

For example, there may be external mentor programs in which employees can take part, such as with a professional organization (e.g. accounting or human resources) or certain staff members may be ideal mentors for co-workers. However, attention to power balance is important; the mentoring relationship thrives on openness, trust, and an ability to express freely. Consequently a supervisor who also has the power to discipline the mentee cannot simultaneously be a mentor. Both mentor and mentee must be participating voluntarily for the mentoring to be successful.

Note:

Some say that a supervisor should not be the mentor as this can stifle the development of an honest relationship in which both parties express their true feelings and take healthy risks. Others say that a supervisor can be very good mentor.

What are your thoughts on this?



Elder Guidance

Question: Who are Elders best suited for your organization?

Each community has its own way of deciding who takes on the role of respected Elder, especially when setting an example or providing guidance to the next generation.

When seeking to involve Elders:

- Identify an Elder who is able to provide support, direction, and advice on the work being done at the non-profit organization <https://www.saintelizabeth.com/FNIM/About-Us/Elder-Network.aspx>
- Understand and apply necessary community protocols in approaching Elders [saintelizabeth.com](https://www.saintelizabeth.com)
- Ensure the Elder understands the vision and purpose of mentoring and Elder guidance
- Ensure Elders are not over-committed and have access to transportation

Do you know of Elders who may welcome the opportunity to offer guidance to youth and/or younger staff?

Question: How to support Elder involvement?

Involving Elders may involve considering:

- who has experience in the sector that your agency represents (e.g. housing, employment, treatment, children and family, health)
- who has the time needed to make the mentoring experience a success
- ways of valuing the relationship
- protocols and expectations regarding honoraria

Question: What are the qualities you are seeking?

Think about what positive qualities the Elder may bring to the mentoring relationship.

For example, an important quality needed from Elders is patience. You'll also need to make sure that you have respected gender balance; try to select as many Elders as possible so as not to tire them out. As well, consider what it is that is needed – e.g., someone who has knowledge and experience working in an ANP, or someone with knowledge of traditional practices. They may not be the same person. If the aim is to help employees learn traditional practices and values, you may find that a cultural advisor is better positioned to help.

Question: How will Elder engagement take place?

Some examples of Elder engagement:

- An Elders Circle or Council is created to advise the agency and staff
- Advice and/or support is sought from a local Council of Elders
- Elders are included in committees, Boards, human resources, and staff and executive meetings
- Elders attend meetings as cultural advisors and mentors
- Advice and/or support is sought from Elders in their own home or community

Mentorship Guidelines

Following are some of the questions to think about when crafting a mentoring strategy for your organization/workplace.

Creating guidelines and thinking through these questions can help to prevent some of the challenges that agencies can experience with mentorship approaches such as:

- Time commitment – i.e., agreeing to an amount of time that is not onerous to mentor or mentee
- Managing expectations – i.e., unrealized hopes
- Confidentiality issues
- Size and resources of the Aboriginal non-profit organization – if a small organization or agency, then other options will need to be explored, such as hiring an external mentor.



In one community, the small ANP didn't have the resources for mentoring a new staff person. Instead, the agency arranged for someone from another agency who did have the necessary skills and knowledge to be a mentor for the new hire.

Question: What are expectations regarding the time commitment and how long is the commitment?

How long can staff take part in a mentoring partnership/relationship? This may have resource implications, depending on the mentoring relationship/experience or focus. To illustrate, will staff who are engaged in mentoring activities be expected to maintain all of their regular duties and responsibilities or will additional coverage be required?

Question: Who can be involved?

Is mentoring available to all staff or is it targeted to specific roles/positions? Will it be one to one or can one mentor work with two or more people at a time?

Question: When and how often will mentors and mentees meet?

The success of mentorship can rest on the development of a mutual and compatible relationship. It will be helpful for the mentoring partnership (or team if more than two people are involved) to be able to meet regularly – on the job or in the community, depending on the focus.

The timing of mentorship can be flexible. However, your agency and the mentor and mentee may want to consider questions such as:

- If cultural/community activities take place on weekends or in the evening, does this count as regular work hours?
- Does the mentoring relationship have to take place within work hours, or after hours?

Question: Where will they meet?

This will depend on the nature of the mentoring and who is involved. However, regardless whether the mentoring match is about acquisition of job-specific skills or about taking part in traditional practices or cultural events, at all times the ability to talk, explore, and learn in private needs to be considered. Therefore, finding a healthy space will be important. If the match is between people who are in different locations, then the meetings may take place via phone or Skype.

Question: What will be the nature of the mentoring sessions?

If the mentoring is job-focused, consider whether there will be assignments such as making a presentation. If traditional knowledge/practices is the focus, then will it involve attending certain cultural events or storytelling?

Question: Who will oversee the mentoring strategy?

Someone needs to have responsibility for oversight of the strategy to provide support or to do troubleshooting as may be required. This is most appropriately with the Human Resources (HR) department of an agency or the Executive Director if no HR person/department exists.

Question: Is community involvement an aspect of the strategy?

Who are the potential partners that can help support your mentorship process? This will depend on what you are trying to achieve. Some possibilities include the local high school, college, or university; Elders' Council; professional associations; umbrella organizations such as an Aboriginal Friendship Centre; or other Aboriginal non-profits.

Question: What resources are required?

Is a budget required or does the work-flow need to be modified to accommodate having staff engaged in mentoring activities? If that is the case, how many people can be involved in a mentoring process?

Question: Are workplace/organizational policies or guidelines sufficient?

Depending on the focus of your mentoring strategy, some of the following policies or processes may need to be developed or reviewed:

- Conflict resolution policy or process
- Screening protocols for mentors working with youth under age 19
- Eligibility policy
- Confidentiality policy
- Transportation policy



- Guidelines regarding the length of time staff can be away from work when they are taking part in cultural activities/mentoring
- Guidelines regarding supporting/honouring/valuing Elders and the use of honoraria

Question: Does the workplace/organization promote and support a safe environment?

For the mentoring relationship to succeed, everyone must feel safe. The mentor and mentee need to be able to jointly create a safe environment where they can take risks and have honest conversations. It is important that the organization facilitates and supports a safe workplace environment. Does your organization have a safe environment with guidelines to prevent lateral violence or other behaviours that undermine the work environment?

The following resources offer an excellent description of lateral violence, as well as the behaviours that are linked with lateral violence, the costs, and what to do in the even of lateral violence occurring in your life or workplace:

“Aboriginal Bullying” presentation by Simon Brascoupé, Acting CEO National Aboriginal Health Organization: www.slideshare.net/NAHONews/aboriginal-bullying

From Bob Joseph’s ‘Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples’ website: www.ictinc.ca/blog/aboriginal-lateral-violence-in-the-workplace

From Denise Findlay and Tereasa Golka’s YouTube video on ‘Lateral Violence in Aboriginal Communities’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJDwGPve8f4>



4. References and Resources

- Brascoupé, S. (no date) *Aboriginal Bullying presentation*. Acting CEO National Aboriginal Health Organization: <http://www.slideshare.net/NAHONews/aboriginal-bullying>
- BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. (2010). *Honouring Our Elders: Elder Abuse Prevention & Awareness*. Victoria, BC: BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres.
- Findlay, D. & Golka, T. (2007) Lateral Violence in Aboriginal Communities. YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJDwGPve8f4>
- Indspire, Indigenous education, Canada's future. <http://indspire.ca/for-educators/mentorship/>
- Joseph, B. (no date) Aboriginal Lateral Violence in the Workplace. www.ictinc.ca/blog/aboriginal-lateral-violence-in-the-workplace
- St Elizabeth Health Care. Elder Network, Purpose, Definitions, Roles. www.saintelizabeth.com/FNIM/About-Us/Elder-Network.aspx
- Vancouver Island University. (no date) Community Cousins Aboriginal Mentorship Program Training Manual, www.counselling.net/jnew/pdfs/Community%20Cousins%20Program%20Manual.pdf



About the anpBC Strategy

The Aboriginal Non-profit Workforce and HR Strategy is an effort to strengthen the aboriginal non-profit sector by developing human resources and workforce strategies. The sector includes agencies and organizations that deliver services in the areas of health, employment, child and family services, treatment, and housing.

About the Logo

"This print represents the perseverance and sustenance involved when we work for our communities. The salmon represents perseverance and is about respect for tradition, intuition, inner voice, determination, and the ability to follow your vision. The hummingbird represents sustenance and is the great nectar of Life, giver of beauty, love and harmony, the tireless song of joy."

Artist: Jaminn Zuroski, Namgis First Nation



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