



Factsheet #3: Wellness and Balance 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.

The Importance of Wellness and Balance

Workplace wellness is critical to the success of ANP organizations: When wellness is achieved within the workplace, organizations across BC are better able to promote wellness and healing within the community. Workplace wellness is about caring for one another, and living and working with holistic practices that nurture the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional aspects of a person and an organization. In a recent 2012 survey with the ANP sector, nearly 100% of respondents noted that healthy workplace relationships and leadership were important to them in the context of wellness in the workplace. Workplace wellness leads to more of a healthy work-life balance for the committed individuals who choose to work and volunteer in ANPs: The effects of wellness in the workplace flows into the employee’s family, home, and community-life.

Promoting Wellness and Balance in the Workplace

Recent research in BC’s ANP sector explored the conditions that promote workplace wellness and balance. More than 200 people who work and volunteer for ANP organizations identified a range of activities that support healing and wellness including: a strong organizational strategic vision with clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities; activities that help staff feel valued and appreciated; workplaces that promote healthy living such as laughter and joy and eating together; adequate organizational funding that covers resources such as living-wages (salaries that reflect the real cost of living) and resources required to do the job right (e.g., up-to-date computers); access to culturally based counselling and coaching; ability to practice culture in the workplace and access to Elders.

Laughter and joy contribute to workplace wellness. Serious business and funny business are two sides of a well-balanced coin (Atleo 2004)

Strengthening Wellness and Balance in Your Workplace

The anpBC strategy offers the following recommendations towards strengthening wellness and balance within your workplace:

Create opportunities for agency staff and volunteers to eat daily lunches together such as providing food and/or space for a potluck lunch. Eating together is a traditional value that promotes self-care and can increase access to healthy foods for all people in an organization.

Support the role that Elders might play in your workplace in helping to promote wellness through providing functional spaces for Elders in the agency, such as an Elders lounge, that would encourage them to visit, share cultural teachings, and participate in various day to day operations.

Create opportunities for more cultural and spiritual practice in the workplace such as opening and closing meetings and events with a prayer and allowing time off to participate in traditional and cultural activities.

Strengthening Wellness and Balance in 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 a provincial workplace wellness resource that includes an assessment tool to help organizations identify what workplace wellness means to them, and provide training resources towards developing wellness toolkits for ANP agencies throughout the province.

Host gatherings of ANP organizations to share promising and wise practices for developing wellness in the workplace. For example, host a provincial conversation with ANP leaders who have successfully created policies that promote culture and wellness while balancing the demands of mainstream non-profit funders.

Conduct further research into sector solutions towards compensating Elders for the important role that they play in ANP organizations and the sector. For example, research the potential for a provincial Elder resource registry where ANPs can contribute money to a provincial fund that can go towards compensating Elders and/or offering transportation allowance.

For more information on the anpBC Strategy, or to learn more about the other themes within the strategy (mentorship and professional development; employee pensions and benefits; workplace wellness and balance), please visit www.aboriginalnonprofits.com