

ᑭAKISQNUK FIRST NATION

Strategic Direction Session - Report

December 14 - 16, 2025

VISION, MISSION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES, VALUES	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
OPENING COMMENTS	3
DEPARTMENTAL PRESENTATIONS	4
FINANCE	4
INFRASTRUCTURE	4
HEALTH	5
SOCIAL SERVICES, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	6
EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	6
PEOPLE AND CULTURE	7
LANDS	8
CORE SERVICES	8
POLICIES	11
GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES DISCUSSION	13
OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION ON <i>THE FOUR AGREEMENTS</i>	15
STRATEGIC DIRECTION DISCUSSION	16
STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE FROM CHIEF AND COUNCIL TO ADMINISTRATION	17
FINANCIAL EFFICIENCIES AND SUSTAINABILITY	17
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STABILITY	18
GOVERNANCE CAPACITY	18
GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS	18
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	19
MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS	19
INFRASTRUCTURE	19
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	20
LAND STEWARDSHIP	20
SAFETY MANAGEMENT	20
BUILDING TRUST AND COMMUNICATION	21
COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN (CCP)	21
ENVISIONED FUTURE	22
STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES AND TOOLS	23
PARTICIPANTS	26

Vision, Mission, Guiding Principles, Values



Our Vision

Strong, healthy citizens and communities speaking our languages, celebrating who we are and our history in our ancestral homelands, working together and managing our lands and resources as a self-sufficient, self-governing Nation.

Our Mission

Through sound, responsible leadership, we will promote the well-being and economic self-reliance of our people by encouraging and fostering education and sustainable employment.

Guiding Principles

Commitment
Knowledge
Discipline
Integrity
Justice

Values

Lands
Family
Respect
Honest
Compassion
Our Culture and Language

Executive Summary

This report documents the outcomes of the ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation Strategic Direction Session held December 14–16, 2025, and serves as a continuation of the February 2025 strategic planning work. Together, these sessions mark a shift from establishing foundational roles and relationships toward clarifying strategic direction from Chief and Council to Administration. The December 2025 session strengthened alignment, reinforced trust, and articulated clear priorities to guide planning, decision-making, and resourcing for 2026 and beyond.

A key outcome of the session was a shared understanding of the distinction between strategic direction and operational execution. Chief and Council intentionally focused on defining high-level direction—what matters most and why—while leaving Administration responsible for determining how those directions will be implemented through work plans, budgets, and operational systems. This approach reflects governance best practices and provides Administration with clearer, more consistent guidance.

Using a facilitated mind-mapping approach, Chief and Council identified twelve strategic priority areas that reflect both current pressures and long-term aspirations. These include financial sustainability, organizational structure and stability, governance capacity, government-to-government relations, language and culture, membership support, infrastructure and housing, economic development, land stewardship, safety management, trust and communication, and completion of the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP). Across these areas, Council emphasized prudent fiscal management, disciplined growth, strengthened internal capacity, exercising inherent rights, culturally grounded service delivery, and a whole-community approach to wellbeing.

Equally important was the recognition that relationships and organizational culture are inseparable from strategy. Candid discussions addressed trauma, lateral violence, fear, and communication challenges within the organization. References to the Four Agreements and earlier values work at St. Eugene Mission reinforced that values must be lived and modeled by leadership, particularly during difficult conversations. The session highlighted that how people are treated and how decisions are made will ultimately determine the success of any strategic plan.

This report is intentionally strategic and does not prescribe specific actions. It is intended to guide the development of detailed implementation plans, including budgets, policies, and performance measures, which Administration will bring forward for Council review and approval as part of the annual planning cycle. Overall, the December 2025 session represents a meaningful step forward in governance maturity, providing a strong foundation for disciplined implementation, improved accountability, and continued progress toward a self-governing Nation serving current and future generations.

The closing reflections emphasized gratitude, humility, and renewed commitment to working together. Participants acknowledged moments of tension and vulnerability as necessary steps toward trust and cohesion. There was strong appreciation for the space created to have honest conversations and for the collective willingness to move forward together.

A recurring theme was the importance of relationships over process alone—recognizing that how people feel in their interactions will ultimately define success. The session reinforced a shared sense of purpose: serving future generations, strengthening identity, and leading with respect, compassion, and accountability.

Opening Comments

The opening reflections from participants demonstrated a strong sense of shared commitment to strengthening the Nation's governance, administration, and long-term direction. Participants consistently expressed pride in the progress made over the past year, particularly in building momentum, stabilizing the organization, and improving working relationships between leadership and staff. At the same time, there was a clear recognition that while important foundations have been laid, much of the work ahead requires greater clarity, focus, and alignment.

A central theme was the desire to move from planning to action. Many participants noted that previous strategic plans were overly complex, containing too many priorities or broad, ongoing activities that were difficult to measure. There was strong support for simplifying the plan by narrowing it to a smaller number of high-impact priorities that can be clearly understood, implemented, and tracked. Participants emphasized the importance of SMART goals, clearly defined KPIs, and practical measurement tools that allow leadership, staff, and membership to assess progress throughout the year—not just at annual planning sessions. Several comments highlighted the value of being able to “check the boxes,” report honestly on what was accomplished, and learn from what was not.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities emerged as another key priority. Participants stressed the need for clearer distinctions and stronger alignment between governance and operations, particularly as council portfolios evolve. While portfolios were seen as a useful way to advance leadership priorities and accountability, there was also recognition that they must work in harmony with operational roles to avoid duplication, confusion, or unintended overreach. Strengthening communication pathways, setting shared expectations, and reinforcing a team-based approach were viewed as essential to maintaining trust and effectiveness across the organization.

Participants also spoke to the realities of organizational growth and transition. Staffing changes, capacity-building, remote and dispersed work arrangements, and major initiatives—such as preparing for a new administrative building—have placed significant demands on leadership and staff. There was broad understanding that these pressures have affected the pace of implementation, and appreciation for the efforts made to stabilize core services, build teams, and lay the groundwork for future success. Looking ahead, participants expressed optimism that co-location, improved systems, and more defined structures will strengthen collaboration and service delivery.

A strong values-based perspective ran throughout the discussion. Participants emphasized that strategic planning must be rooted in Indigenous rights, community wellbeing, and the lived experiences of members. Language, culture, identity, and intergenerational responsibility were repeatedly identified as foundational—not optional—elements of the Nation's strategy. There was a clear call to ensure that planning and implementation are member-driven, culturally grounded, and responsive to both long-standing community needs and the realities of a growing and changing membership.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of accountability, transparency, and communication with membership. There was a shared desire to better tell the story of the Nation's work, celebrate successes, and clearly demonstrate progress through measurable outcomes, including financial alignment with strategic priorities. By doing so, participants felt the Nation could strengthen trust, reduce frustration, and foster a collective sense of pride and shared direction.

Overall, the opening comments reflected strong alignment around the need for a clearer, simpler, and more actionable strategic plan—one that balances flexibility with accountability, integrates governance and operations, and remains firmly grounded in the Nation's values, rights, and vision for future generations.

Departmental Presentations

Finance

Department Highlights for 2025

The Finance Department focused on stabilizing core financial systems and rebuilding capacity following past turnover and audit delays. Major accomplishments included completing audited financial statements, reducing audit costs, and significantly strengthening internal controls. Monthly financial reporting to leadership and the audit committee became more consistent, vendor payment timelines improved toward a 30-day standard, and insurance costs were reduced through market review. The department also advanced digitization efforts, including invoice scanning, reduced paper reliance, and preparation for migration to Sage Intacct. Staffing capacity was intentionally strengthened by establishing both CFO and Director of Finance roles, supported by additional CPA resources, creating greater resilience and continuity.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

Key challenges included operating with a small team while managing high transaction volumes, legacy processes, and limited technology. The existing financial system created delays and errors, contributing to workload strain and inefficiencies. Budgeting accuracy was also a challenge, as past budgets were driven by extensive “wish lists” that exceeded realistic implementation capacity, resulting in large variances between budgeted and actual spending. Complex funding structures—such as deferred revenue, housing, and grants—required ongoing education and coordination with directors. Progress toward Financial Management System (FMS) certification was slowed by the need to update governance and financial policies to required standards.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

In 2026, the department will prioritize system modernization through the Sage Intacct implementation, continued digitization, and improved data flow. Opportunities include refining budgeting accuracy through clearer KPIs, closer alignment with strategic priorities, and stronger cost estimation. Advancing FMS certification remains a key objective, alongside enhanced cash-flow forecasting, pursuit of new funding opportunities, and further staff upskilling. There is also growing opportunity to leverage modern analytical tools to support risk mitigation, financial transparency, and long-term financial sustainability.

Infrastructure

Department Highlights for 2025

The Infrastructure Department delivered a wide range of capital, operational, and housing successes. Key highlights included completing a four-plex housing project on time and under budget with full occupancy, strong emergency response to an unexpected flood, and steady progress on the multi-purpose facility despite regulatory and construction complexities. Public works operations remained reliable, with timely responses to infrastructure failures, effective winter maintenance, and successful administration of emergency repair funding. The department strengthened collaboration across administration, contractors, architects, and funding partners, while advancing asset management through updated asset condition reporting. Mentorship and workforce development were emphasized, including promoting members into leadership roles and expanding cross-training and equipment certification.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

Major challenges included managing complex construction change orders, regulatory requirements (e.g., species-at-risk permitting), and cost and schedule pressures on large capital projects. Growth-related change created

adjustment challenges for long-serving staff as new systems and structures were formalized. Fleet management, equipment utilization, and certification training gaps required ongoing attention, particularly given fiscal constraints. Housing-related challenges included aging infrastructure, health and safety risks (mold, asbestos, accessibility), condemned homes, and the sensitive nature of addressing clean-up and compliance issues—especially in privately owned or CP housing—without clear policy direction.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

Looking ahead, the department aims to maintain momentum while improving efficiency and policy alignment. Priorities include completing and operationalizing the multi-purpose facility, formalizing fleet and equipment management systems, expanding in-house capacity to reduce reliance on external contractors, and continuing housing inspections and repairs supported by available grant funding. There are strong opportunities to improve coordination through clearer governance policies on housing standards, safety, emergency response, and shared services. Centralizing asset management, strengthening cross-department collaboration, and further investing in member training and mentorship will support long-term sustainability and service delivery.

Other (Cross-Cutting Considerations)

Infrastructure emphasized the importance of collaboration with external partners, neighboring entities, and internal departments to avoid silos and duplication. Participants noted the need for clearer operational agreements with affiliated entities, better tracking of shared services, and stronger policy guidance from leadership to support staff decision-making—particularly in sensitive areas such as housing enforcement, safety, and member wellbeing.

Health

Department Highlights for 2025

The Health Department made significant strides in building a comprehensive, community-driven health system grounded in a newly approved Health Plan and a long-term, flexible funding agreement with FNHA. Key highlights included maintaining consistent primary care services, streamlining medical transportation, enrolling nearly 250 members in the new Member Benefits Plan, and launching innovative community wellness initiatives such as peer support, wellness gatherings, and land- and culture-based programming. Food sovereignty emerged as a major success, with the establishment of a community garden, integration with the Good Food Box program, and strong regional partnerships. The department also advanced health promotion through Lunch & Learn sessions, diabetes screening, and expanded community engagement, while successfully completing Phase One of the Regional Health Survey with strong participation and encouraging early results.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

Rapid departmental growth—from one to sixteen staff in under two years—created pressures related to management capacity, supervision, and change management. Increasing service demand and complex community needs, particularly in mental wellness and substance use, highlighted the absence of a registered mental health professional on the team. Data systems are still developing and do not yet fully capture the scope of work being done, while policy gaps remain in areas such as data governance, workplace wellness, and community safety. Ongoing challenges also include responding to community violence, ensuring staff wellbeing, and sustaining meaningful engagement with a growing and diverse membership.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

In 2026, the department aims to strengthen leadership and management structures, expand access to culturally safe and trauma-informed care, and address critical gaps in mental health capacity. Opportunities include

Social Services, Social Development

Education and Workforce Development

Similar to Social Services, Education faced funding limitations and leadership turnover following the departure of the department director. These transitions created uncertainty and constrained the department's ability to advance longer-term planning, particularly in workforce development. Capacity limitations also required careful coordination to avoid overextending staff and to ensure programming remained aligned with community size and availability.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

In 2026, there is strong opportunity to strengthen workforce development by aligning education programming more closely with economic development initiatives and employment pathways. Continued collaboration across departments, strategic use of funding opportunities (such as reapplying for wills and estates grants), and focused community engagement will be important. Stabilizing leadership and clarifying strategic direction will enable the department to expand its impact while maintaining high-quality, culturally relevant education supports.

Other (Language, Culture, and Elders – Cross-Cutting Consideration)

Language, culture, and elders programming—currently situated within member services—faces capacity strain, with a strong emphasis on elders limiting time available for broader language and cultural revitalization initiatives. There is an identified need to rebalance support so these programs can better serve the entire Nation, a topic expected to be addressed further through strategic planning discussions.

People and Culture

Department Highlights for 2025

People and Culture reported a period of rapid organizational growth and transition, with the workforce now at roughly 67 employees (about 55 full-time, and ~60 FTE when part-time/casual hours are included). A major highlight was strengthening internal supports for staff through increased training offerings and the introduction of online training, along with monthly staff meetings to build connection and consistency. Recruitment activity was high, with 20 hires and 11 departures between April and December, and the team began addressing workplace culture more directly through one-on-one meetings and focus groups with approximately 60% of employees, plus targeted onboarding feedback from recent hires. Additional progress included initiating mid-year performance reviews, providing direct HR support to employees and managers on workplace concerns, and starting senior leadership training and more regular leadership-level conversations about culture and management practices.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

The department identified major challenges tied to the current staffing profile: approximately 65% of employees have been in role for one year or less, creating both opportunity and pressure related to training, supervision, and organizational stability. Workplace health and safety was raised as a significant concern, including five incidents (mostly preventable) and limited internal capacity to manage OHS effectively, with low hazard awareness and training gaps contributing to risk. Other roadblocks included low employee engagement and a workplace climate where fear (of job loss or “doing the wrong thing”) affects confidence and performance—made worse by unclear KPIs/SMART goals and limited feedback mechanisms. Outdated HR policies and inconsistent onboarding processes were also highlighted, alongside recruitment constraints such as a limited local candidate pool, desire for in-person staffing, and lack of housing for relocating hires. The small workforce size amplified the impact of medical and personal leaves, creating service gaps and workload strain.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

In 2026, People and Culture aims to support the organization in becoming more stable, confident, and consistent through clear KPIs and SMART goals across departments, with stronger downward communication from directors to teams. Priority opportunities include updating and communicating the HR policy handbook (last updated in 2009), implementing a standardized onboarding approach, and developing a structured training strategy that includes staff, leadership, and potentially members and council. The department also identified an opportunity to build toward “employer of choice” status by strengthening recruitment and retention—especially of members and youth—while improving organizational visibility and hiring presence (e.g., LinkedIn). Continued relationship-

building with other HR leaders and sharing best practices is seen as another pathway to strengthen internal systems and support long-term workforce development.

Lands

Department Highlights for 2025

The Lands Department focused on strengthening capacity, advancing stewardship priorities, and increasing community engagement aligned with last year's strategic plan. Key achievements included onboarding several new roles—such as the Guardian Program Manager, Water Stewardship Coordinator, Industry Engagement Coordinator, and a dedicated Lands Community Researcher—and advancing workplans, budgets, KPIs, and grant applications tied to these functions. The department delivered strong community engagement through lake days, fish camp (in collaboration with Health and Education), and a well-attended land-use engagement session. Progress was also made in natural resource management, including fuel reduction and wildfire mitigation, invasive species control, emergency preparedness training and inventorying, FireSmart initiatives, and continued referral review across the territory.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

Significant challenges included departmental capacity constraints due to staff turnover and temporary absences, as well as gaps in specialized expertise—particularly in mining-related files. The volume and complexity of referrals (over 360) placed additional strain on staff resources. Access to reliable, up-to-date data—especially for lake stewardship and bathymetric mapping—proved difficult, with much existing information outdated. Funding limitations and reliance on project-based provincial funding, compounded by competition with NGOs for similar funding streams, further constrained progress. Community frustration with lengthy regulatory timelines also emerged as an ongoing communication challenge.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

In 2026, the department sees strong opportunity to deepen cultural and traditional knowledge integration through Guardian-led training, traditional use studies, and community interviews. Advancing the lake stewardship governance process remains a key priority, alongside expanded public education and consultation. Additional opportunities include strengthening partnerships with Parks Canada and other agencies, expanding wildlife and habitat monitoring, enhancing emergency response capacity, and completing delayed initiatives such as prescribed burns. Continued capacity building, targeted recruitment, improved data collection, and cross-departmental collaboration will be essential to advancing stewardship goals and responding effectively to increasing development pressures across the territory.

Core Services

Core Services — Events

Department Highlights for 2025

Core Services delivered a high volume of member-facing and public-facing events, strengthening visibility, community connection, and cultural presence in the region. Major highlights included Wellness Day (100+ attendees), Pride Day pancake breakfast (150+ served and significant growth from prior year), National Indigenous Peoples Day (120+ attendees and exceeded projections), Truth & Reconciliation Day breakfast (150+ attendees with strong Valley participation), winter solstice gatherings, family bowling, and the four-plex grand opening (55+ attendees). Sponsorship and coordination of film festival events generated broad reach, with "Singing Back the Buffalo" contributing to over 200 attendees, enhanced cultural experience elements, and a People's Choice

Award—plus ongoing visibility through festival promotion. Earth Day cleanup resulted in the removal of roughly 5,800+ pounds of waste, demonstrating strong staff-member collaboration and practical community impact.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

Core Services received feedback that the overall volume of events across the organization may be too high, especially given the limited number of locally resident members and competing departmental programming. Coordination across departments and timing of events remains a balancing challenge. Another consistent barrier is reaching all members—especially those living away from the community—due to limits in accessing personal contact information, which increases reliance on members opting-in via Facebook, newsletters, and other channels.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

Key opportunities include streamlining the event calendar across departments to reduce overlap, improve attendance, and prioritize high-impact gatherings. Planning is already underway for a major milestone: a community-driven grand opening of the new building, potentially aligned with June programming and incorporating member-led artistic and cultural installations to ensure the new facility reflects Nation identity and history. There is also interest in expanding community cleanup initiatives (building from Earth Day success) and exploring relationship-building events with neighboring Nations, with initial discussions already occurring to support joint activities early in 2026.

Core Services — Communications

Department Highlights for 2025

Communications improved consistency and accessibility through a streamlined monthly newsletter process, increased distribution (including hard copies), and a “video walk-through” format that received positive feedback. Research and development advanced on modernization goals including a new website and a member app concept, with work coordinated alongside external branding/identity partners to align communications with an emerging organizational brand. Current web traffic indicates strong baseline engagement (approximately 3,800 visitors per month), providing a foundation for improved outreach once upgraded platforms and content strategy are implemented.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

The largest challenge remains the inability to directly contact all members via email or other direct channels, which limits reach and creates dependency on members actively following platforms. Internally, the communications team identified barriers related to vision alignment and approval pathways that can slow progress and create stagnation. Timing and approach to community engagement—particularly during culturally sensitive periods—was also flagged as a planning consideration as the organization expands its engagement strategy with external partners.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

In 2026, communications priorities include member engagement to inform the refreshed website and outreach approach, supported by identity/brand development work and clearer internal decision pathways. Upgrading the website and exploring an app remain major opportunities to improve access for off-reserve members, centralize information, and reduce reliance on social media. A clearer approval and content alignment process will support faster implementation and stronger consistency across departments.

Core Services — Information Technology

Department Highlights for 2025

IT made major operational progress despite staffing transition. Key achievements included upgrading more than 35 laptops from Windows 10 to Windows 11 in under 10 weeks, implementing asset tracking (serial numbers, assignments, peripherals), creating IT work orders/ticket tracking with a goal of 24–48-hour turnaround, and completing a large server cleanup and drive reorganization (moving 20+ drives and reaching ~90% completion in four months). Cost-conscious software management also produced savings (e.g., reduced Adobe licensing costs). The team began organizing unused equipment for reuse to support member-serving initiatives (e.g., laptops to support education and member access).

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

The exit of the previous IT coordinator left gaps in processes and procedures, creating temporary delays, confusion around where requests should go, and reliance on external IT support. With a single IT staff position, service continuity and response time remain vulnerable, especially when tasks require external approvals or restrictions related to security protocols. User awareness and consistent process adoption (e.g., submitting work orders correctly) also requires ongoing staff training and reinforcement.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

Planned 2026 priorities include implementing mobile device management (MDM) for work phones, deploying WSUS for controlled updates and scheduled rollouts, separating domain controller and file servers for stronger security, and reviewing disaster recovery to meet industry standards. There is also opportunity to formalize KPIs for IT service delivery and provide “lunch and learn” sessions so staff understand procedures, security constraints, and best practices—especially critical as the organization transitions into the new building and increases technology dependency.

Core Services — Administration

Department Highlights for 2025

Administration strengthened organizational capacity by completing the hiring process for executive administrative assistants and aligning administrative support to most director portfolios (with one noted exception), freeing significant time for operational leadership—one example cited an estimated 25 hours per week returned to a department through admin support. Admin staff were cross-trained to cover multiple departments, enabling flexible support for minute-taking, continuity, and operational surges. The team played a major role in delivering the AGA and supporting departmental presentations/booths, and they contributed directly to major organizational needs such as insurance claim coordination after a windstorm and professional development training for administrative effectiveness.

Challenges / Roadblocks Encountered

Challenges included confidentiality concerns when embedding admin support across departments (addressed through NDAs), perceptions that staffing levels are too high, and limited physical workspace due to operating across five locations and converting meeting rooms into offices. The distributed workplace created logistical barriers, reduced meeting room availability, and increased coordination overhead. Inconsistent onboarding across the organization also created pressure on admin staff to fill gaps, as they often became a key stabilizing support for new hires and departmental transitions.

Issues and Opportunities for 2026

Key opportunities include adopting a project management tool for tracking action items and deadlines, improving cross-department coordination, and supporting consistent delivery. Core Services is also exploring cost-saving transitions (e.g., financial system alternatives) and advancing major records management planning ahead of the move into the new building. A proposed organizational adjustment—creating an administrative coordinator role—would strengthen internal management capacity, improve coordination across multiple admin staff, and reduce operational strain caused by managing staff across numerous sites and special projects.

Other — Special Projects

Core Services highlighted substantial “special project” work not originally captured in the strategic plan, estimated at roughly 5,000–6,000+ hours. Major contributions included value engineering and design input for the new building (including flooring and interior design choices resulting in documented cost savings), IT equipment and room technology planning for meeting and community spaces, furniture selection and coordination, and implementing tools like the MS Toolkit for lands/infrastructure/housing data organization. A major cross-cutting initiative is the Records and Information Management project, intended to preserve Nation history and enable secure access, improve operational readiness, and reduce legal risk—an internal analysis suggested that effective records access could avert significant costs in litigation contexts.

Policies

Strengths

The policy function rests on a solid foundation of existing policies and strong organizational readiness, with leadership supportive of strengthening structures. It also benefits from internal alignment and legally grounded dialogue with senior leadership, accelerating development and improving quality.

Weaknesses

Key weaknesses include the absence of a clear, centralized, and user-friendly policy repository, with reliance on the common drive creating risk of loss, confusion, and inconsistent access. Many existing policies were written for a smaller organization and place vague responsibility on a single role (historically the SAO), rather than clearly defining roles, accountability, and operational processes across departments. This has contributed to low institutional knowledge of “what policies we actually have”, and limited policy literacy among staff—creating uncertainty, inconsistent implementation, and over-reliance on a few people to interpret or locate current policies.

Obstacles / Challenges

Major challenges include limited policy training, high demand, and volume of policy work, and the reality that policy review cycles have not been maintained for many years—meaning most policies require updating. There are also structural constraints: the Indian Act framework continues to shape governance and operations in ways that require careful navigation. Finally, capacity is stretched—foundational work to build a policy framework and registry has reduced time available for broader legislative research and monitoring external government initiatives, even though that function remains important for the Nation’s long-term interests and proactive governance.

Focus Areas for 2026

Priorities for 2026 include completing and implementing a formal policy registry and repository and strengthened policy processes. A major focus will be expanding policy training so each department understands and can operationalize its own policies, reduce confusion and strengthen compliance and consistency. Continued policy reviews will remain a core workflow—particularly those linked to FMB standards, records retention and

information management, HR, governance, and department-specific policies such as education and member assistance. Building capacity to monitor legislation and government initiatives is also an identified need, along with strengthening collaboration with KNC and other Ktunaxa policy counterparts to share tools, templates, and best practices and avoid duplicating effort.

Guiding Principles and Values Discussion

The discussion on Guiding Principles and Values focused on making sure the organization's values and principles genuinely reflect who the Nation is and how the organization should operate, especially as the CCP process continues and deeper member engagement helps shape vision and mission over time. Participants noted that the current values and guiding principles were originally developed in earlier leadership sessions (e.g., table discussions like those at St. Eugene), and that while the existing words still carry meaning, they need to be strengthened and clarified so they are recognizable to members and useful to staff in daily work.

A key theme was the distinction between Nation-wide (Ktunaxa) values and organizational/leadership guiding principles. Council emphasized that principles for governance and administration may need to be articulated in a way that helps staff understand expectations for service, workplace culture, and decision-making—especially given the history that has shaped how safe some members and staff feel. The conversation repeatedly returned to the idea that single-word values can be interpreted differently by different people, so the priority is to add “flesh on the bones” by attaching clear definitions and expected behaviours (what the value looks like in practice), so new employees, members, and partners are not left guessing.

Several additions and refinements were raised as necessary to better reflect Ktunaxa identity and expectations of the organization. Council discussed explicitly incorporating Ktunaxa natural law, all living things, and stronger organizational commitments such as transparency, accountability, and professionalism. There was also emphasis on values that support a healthier internal culture—particularly safety and trust—and on describing expectations around reconciliation, trauma-informed service, respectful interactions, consistency, fairness, and avoiding lateral violence or harmful workplace behaviours. Alongside this, the group explored the idea of moving beyond a list of single words into short value statements or even a “credo-style” statement that clarifies who the organization is responsible to (members, staff, community) and how it will conduct itself, so values can guide real decisions and not just sit on a page.

David Bach referenced the Values discussion at St. Eugene Mission as a pivotal, reflective session where Chief and Council, together with leadership, intentionally slowed down to name the core values that should guide decision-making, relationships, and conduct within the Nation. The discussion went beyond aspirational language and focused on lived behaviour—how values such as respect, accountability, humility, and relational responsibility show up in daily interactions between Council, staff, and members. The St. Eugene

session was described as creating shared clarity and emotional grounding, helping participants recognize that values are not abstract statements but commitments that must be modeled, especially during conflict or difficult conversations. This values work was repeatedly referenced in later discussions as a touchstone for addressing lateral violence, improving communication, rebuilding trust, and ensuring that strategic priorities are conducted in a way that aligns with Indigenous ways of being and collective responsibility.

ʔakisqnuq Government Values (2022)



ʔakisqnuq Value	English	Meaning/Definition – what does it mean in terms of Councils behaviour?
ʔamakʔis	Lands	ʔamakʔis Ktunaxa or Territory of the Ktunaxa
kunmakʔis	Family	“those who belong together” (relational belonging)
ʔupqahʔ	Respect	honouring others, showing care, humility, and right relationship
kuqnuq	Honesty	truthfulness, integrity, and speaking straight — being honest in words and actions. “speaking from the heart” and “being true to your word.”
ʔakaʔnam	Compassion	To embody deep compassion, empathy, kindness, and caring for others, the land, and all living beings. It reflects the idea of acting from the heart and maintaining balance and connection through generosity and understanding.
hu sukiʔ ʔa-kaʔxaʔ	Our Culture & Language	our way of life and our way of speaking. a sacred sense of identity — representing who the Ktunaxa are as a people, encompassing teachings, land, and the spoken word as inseparable parts of cultural continuity.

Action plan for the ad hoc committee: Draft due February 23, 2026

An ad hoc committee was struck to take the discussion forward and produce draft statements that Council can edit (rather than trying to write from scratch as a whole table). The committee will be led by David Bach, with Janice Alpine, Darcy Fisher, and Donna Melynychyn as members. Their task is to review the existing values and guiding principles (including the St. Eugene materials that already pair values with definitions and behaviours) and produce a revised set that: (1) keeps what still fits, (2) adds missing Ktunaxa-based concepts (including natural law and all living things), and (3) clearly explains what each value/principle means in practice for leadership, staff conduct, and service delivery.

By February 23, 2026, the committee will circulate a first draft to Council that includes: updated values/principles with short definitions or behavioural descriptions; proposed additions such as transparency, accountability, professionalism, safety, and trust; and an optional higher-level “credo” or organizing statement that links responsibilities to members, staff, and community. The draft is intended to be practical—something that can be placed in orientation materials, posted in workplaces and meeting spaces, and used to keep staff and leadership grounded in shared expectations while the broader CCP engagement continues to shape mission and vision over time.

Overview of the Discussion on *The Four Agreements*

During the strategic discussion on building trust and improving communication, participants referenced *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz as a values-based framework that could help guide respectful interaction within the organization and the broader community. The reference emerged organically while grappling with concerns about fear, lateral violence, miscommunication, gossip, and power imbalances.

Rather than being framed as a formal or enforceable policy, the Four Agreements were discussed as a shared ethical and relational guide - a way of *being with one another*, not a set of rules to police speech or behaviour.

Key Themes from the Discussion

Values over enforcement. There was clear caution against turning any “agreements” into formal tenets with legal or disciplinary implications. Participants emphasized that the intent is not control or limitation of speech. The focus should be guiding principles, not compliance tools. The Agreements work best when modeled by leadership, not imposed.

Addressing fear and lateral violence. The Four Agreements were implicitly connected to the desire to reduce fear in interactions between staff and Council, create safer conditions for people to speak honestly, address gossip and lateral violence through awareness and accountability, and to shift from reactive conflict to reflective dialogue.

Leadership by example. Several speakers stressed that trust and respectful communication must start with Chief and Council, Directors, and senior leadership. If leadership embodies the spirit of the Four Agreements, it sets a cultural norm that others can follow.

Alignment with Indigenous values and ways of being. The Agreements were seen as resonating with Indigenous principles of respect, relational accountability, intentional speech, and collective responsibility. They were not positioned as an external or prescriptive framework, but rather as something that aligns with existing cultural values, offering language that can help articulate expectations already held within the Nation.

Ruiz’ Four Agreements

Agreement #1

Be impeccable with your word – Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

Agreement #2

Don’t take anything personally – Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won’t be the victim of needless suffering.

Agreement #3

Don’t make assumptions – Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

Agreement #4

Always do your best – Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.

Strategic Direction Discussion

The strategic discussion unfolded as a learning process in itself, marked by several attempts to find the right entry point into strategy and to clearly distinguish strategic thinking from operational or action-level decision-making. Early in the day, participants repeatedly circled back to the tension between Council's role in setting direction and administration's role in determining actions. It was acknowledged that, despite shared agreement on governance principles, discussions often slipped into debating specific actions, which blurred roles, undermined trust, and left staff uncertain about how to interpret Council's intent. This recognition became a foundational insight: the purpose of the session was not to solve every problem or approve individual actions, but to establish clear strategic direction so that directors and staff could later develop aligned work plans and budgets.

From there, the group explored different ways to approach the discussion. One option was to review the existing strategic plan line by line, as had been done in previous years. Another was to set the plan aside temporarily and invite Council to articulate, in broad terms, the most critical issues and priorities facing the Nation over the coming year. After some reflection, the group chose the latter approach. This shift allowed the conversation to move away from departmental silos and toward a more holistic, future-oriented perspective, with the understanding that administration would later translate these priorities into concrete actions across departments.

Using a mind-mapping approach, the day concluded with the collective identification of key strategic priority areas, without trying to categorize or perfect them in the moment. Major themes that emerged included strengthening governance and clarifying the relationship between Council and administration; stewardship of lands and resources; financial sustainability and efficiency, including stronger scrutiny of expenditures and organizational structure; staff capacity, professionalism, and organizational safety; and the need for a healthier internal culture grounded in trust. Council also emphasized priorities related to community wellness, recognizing the interconnected nature of issues such as lateral violence, trauma, healing, addictions, justice, aging in place, and supports for people with special needs. Rather than treating these as isolated problems, participants increasingly framed them as parts of a whole-person, whole-community approach that must be reflected in strategy.

Economic development and Nation-owned enterprises were identified as continuing strategic considerations, alongside identity, culture, and engagement with youth and members. The discussion acknowledged that many of these priorities already appear—sometimes fragmented—across existing work plans and the long list of actions under development. The value of the strategic exercise, therefore, was not in generating new activities, but in grouping and elevating priorities so administration could later report back on how resources, policies, and programs align with Council's direction.

The day also surfaced the emotional and relational dimensions of strategic work. A difficult exchange around the drug crisis highlighted how easily strategic conversations can become personal, particularly when issues are tied to lived experience, trauma, and loss. Rather than derailing the process, this moment reinforced earlier themes about lateral violence, trauma-informed practice, and the importance of careful language. Participants ultimately acknowledged the harm caused, offered apologies, and used the moment as a real-time example of why safety, trust, and respect must be embedded in both organizational culture and strategic priorities.

By the end of the day, there was a shared sense that—despite moments of tension—the group had made meaningful progress. Council had begun to clearly articulate what matters most to them at a strategic level, and administration expressed appreciation for receiving this direction. The resulting mind map of strategic priorities provided a strong foundation for the next phase of work, where these themes will be refined, connected to existing initiatives, and translated into operational plans and budgets. The session closed with optimism, a renewed commitment to working through difficult conversations together, and recognition that strong strategy is as much about relationships and trust as it is about plans and priorities.

Strategic Direction and Guidance from Chief and Council to Administration

This section documents the strategic discussion and direction provided by Chief and Council to Administration during the December 2025 strategic planning session. It captures both narrative context and clear, actionable strategic direction, grounded in the collective dialogue, values, and priorities articulated throughout the session.

It is intended to serve as a reference for Administration in developing work plans, budgets, and implementation frameworks for 2026 and beyond.

Purpose and Context

The session was convened to strengthen alignment between Chief and Council and Administration, clarify strategic priorities, and establish shared understanding of roles, expectations, and direction. While the discussion did not follow a linear path, it culminated in a comprehensive mind map of strategic priorities, reflecting both immediate pressures and long-term aspirations. The process itself—marked by candid dialogue, reflection, and relationship-building—was viewed as equally important as the outcomes.

Overarching Strategic Direction

Chief and Council provided clear high-level direction across the following strategic domains:

- Financial efficiencies and sustainability
- Organizational structure and stability
- Governance capacity
- Government-to-government relations
- Language and culture
- Membership support and relationships
- Infrastructure and housing
- Economic development
- Land stewardship
- Safety management
- Building trust and communication
- Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP)

Financial Efficiencies and Sustainability

Chief and Council directed Administration to practice prudent fiscal management in a tightening revenue environment, emphasizing disciplined procurement, early identification of financial risks, and strong oversight through the Finance, Audit, and Investment Committee. Council expects earlier engagement in the budget development process so priorities are reflected before final approval, while protecting essential services and maintaining financial wellness, including progress toward FMB certification.

Key Directions:

- Apply prudent fiscal management and procurement discipline.
- Identify budget risks early and bring forward options.
- Engage Council earlier in the budget cycle.
- Use the Finance, Audit and Investment Committee effectively.
- Present financing options for major pressures.
- Prioritize essential versus discretionary expenditures.
- Maintain FMB certification standards.

Organizational Structure and Stability

Council directed Administration to stabilize the organization after rapid growth by clarifying capacity limits, strengthening internal capability, and aligning structure with the Nation's role as a member-serving government. Improving morale, retention, and role clarity are central to long-term stability.

Key Directions:

- Implement findings from the organizational assessment.
- Pause or slow growth where capacity is strained.
- Build internal capacity through training.
- Standardize workflows and procedures.
- Improve staff morale and productivity.
- Advance an Indigenous recruitment and retention strategy.

Governance Capacity

Council emphasized strengthening governance capacity through clear roadmaps, training, role clarity, succession planning, and updated governance policies. Data sovereignty was identified as a priority requiring formal policy direction.

Key Directions:

- Develop a governance roadmap to manage workload and priorities
- Strengthen governance training, orientation, and ongoing development
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, and remuneration aligned with duties
- Advance governance policies and procedures, including data sovereignty
- Ensure governance systems support effective decision-making

Government-to-Government Relations

All government-to-government engagement was framed around the exercise of inherent rights. Council stressed consistent messaging, confidence in jurisdiction, and proactive assertion of authority across political, administrative, and judicial arenas.

Key Directions:

- Exercise inherent rights in all government-to-government engagements
- Use consistent, coordinated messaging internally and externally
- Engage provincial, federal, judicial, and regional bodies strategically
- Advance jurisdiction through both agreements and direct assertion where appropriate

Language and Culture

Council emphasized strengthening language and culture in accessible, trauma-aware ways, increasing presence on the land, and expanding awareness among staff and external partners. Language and culture were discussed as foundational to identity, governance, and organizational practice. The focus was on decolonization, cultural safety, and increasing awareness across both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

Key Directions:

- Increase linguistic and cultural competencies across the organization
- Integrate trauma-aware approaches and recognize and address how trauma impacts culture and language
- Increase non-Indigenous staff awareness of Nation ways of being
- Create awareness and presence on the land as a foundation for cultural continuity
- Explore development of a cultural centre and foundational learning programs (e.g., '101' sessions)

Membership Support and Relationships

Council emphasized respectful, reciprocal, and accountable relationships with members, including both on- and off-reserve citizens. Service delivery should be trauma-informed, creative, and responsive to diverse needs.

Key Directions:

- Generate respectful, reciprocal, and accountable relationships with members
- Ensure inclusion of both on- and off-reserve members
- Adopt creative, solutions-oriented approaches to service delivery
- Clarify service roles and pathways
- Communicate funding realities transparently
- Integrate trauma-informed practices into policies and interactions

Infrastructure

Council directed a strategic, cost-informed approach to infrastructure and housing that responds to population growth, maximizes lease options, and addresses water and facility needs.

Key Directions:

- Adopt a strategic approach to site development to reduce infrastructure costs
- Understand current and future housing demand
- Maximize value from lease and IBE options
- Address water needs for residential, commercial, and investment properties
- Update and align housing strategies, including management and allocation policies

Economic Development

Council directed expansion and diversification of economic opportunities while supporting entrepreneurs and improving alignment between economic development and workforce development.

Key Directions:

- Expand economic opportunities through strategic business ventures and investments
- Diversify the Nation's investment portfolio across sectors
- Support small businesses through grants, procurement, and information sharing
- Improve understanding of market conditions and sector opportunities

Land Stewardship

Council emphasized land and water stewardship grounded in Ktunaxa laws and meaningful participation in land decisions. Land stewardship was framed as reclaiming legal orders, protecting ecosystems, and reconnecting people to land.

Key Directions:

- Reclaim and exercise laws and legal orders within homelands
- Participate meaningfully in land use decisions
- Strengthen monitoring and reporting
- Ensure the Nation is a meaningful party in land-related decisions
- Prioritize land, lake, and river stewardship
- Reconnect members with the land through presence and practice

Safety Management

Council directed a whole-system approach to safety that includes workplace, community, cultural, emergency preparedness. Safety requires coordinated cross-departmental approaches.

Key Directions:

- Prioritize organizational and community safety
- Ensure robust OH&S plans
- Advance emergency preparedness and emergency operations planning
- Integrate cultural safety and lateral violence awareness
- Strengthen cross-department collaboration on safety
- Strengthen relationships with emergency services in the region
- Finalize the Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Address lateral violence in safety plans

Building Trust and Communication

Council emphasized rebuilding trust through improved communication, role clarity, positive values-based messaging, and addressing lateral violence through leadership and fairness. Trust-building was identified as essential to effective governance and administration. Communication must be consistent, respectful, and audience-appropriate.

Key Directions:

- Build trust between Council, staff, and members
- Improve consistency and clarity of communications
- Clarify roles and expectations
- Strengthen member services practices
- Establish guidelines for respectful interaction
- Address lateral violence through awareness initiatives, leadership, and example
- Increase Council-Administration engagement and opportunities for dialogue, learning, and collaboration

Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP)

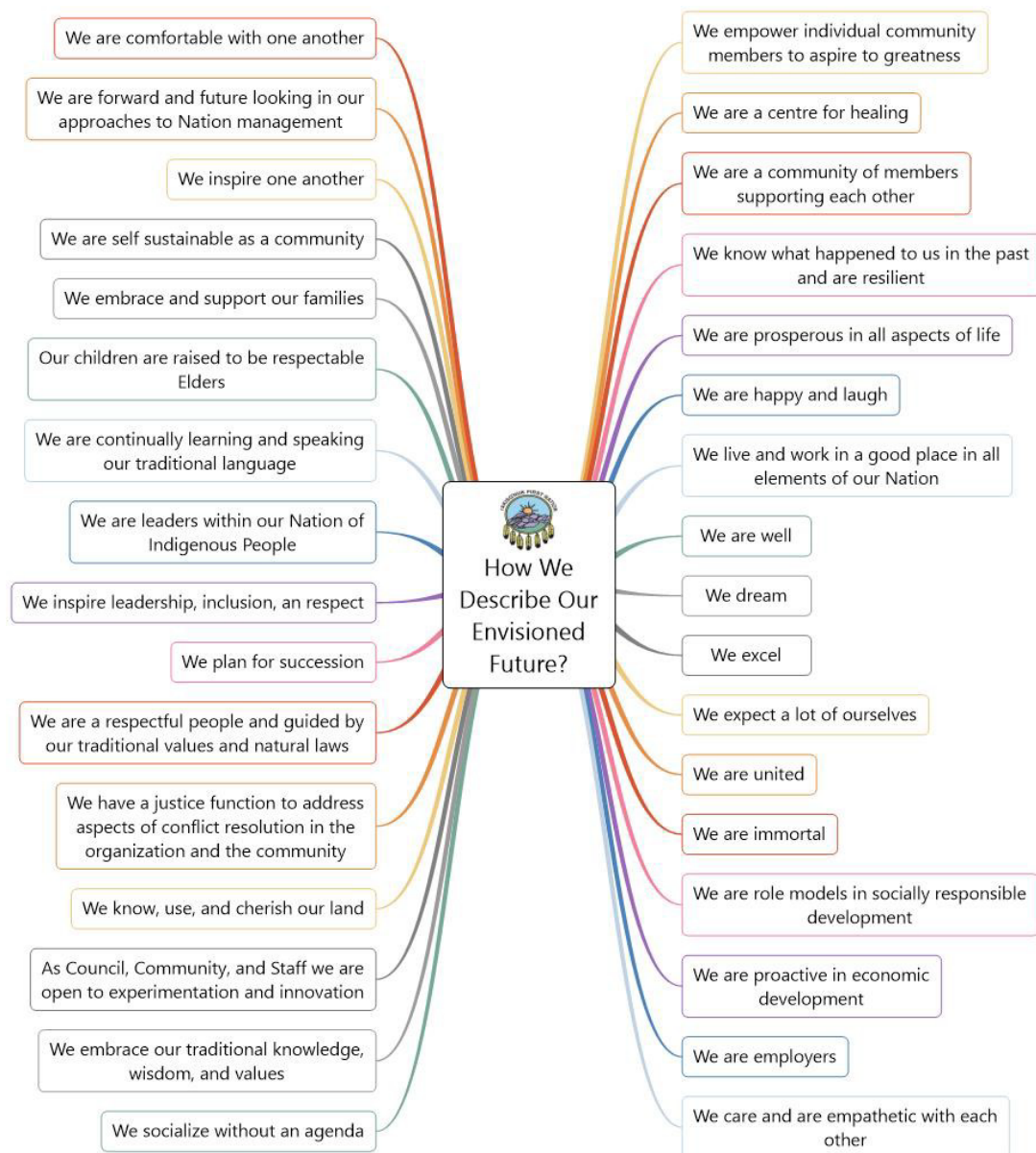
Council directed completion of a long-term, member-driven CCP that remains adaptable to growth and change. The CCP was affirmed as a foundational, living document to guide long-term development amid rapid change.

Key Directions:

- Complete the CCP as a foundational planning document
- Ensure meaningful and ongoing member engagement
- Address population growth and long-term sustainability
- Maintain the CCP as an evergreen, adaptable plan
- Integrate CCP outcomes into planning and budgeting

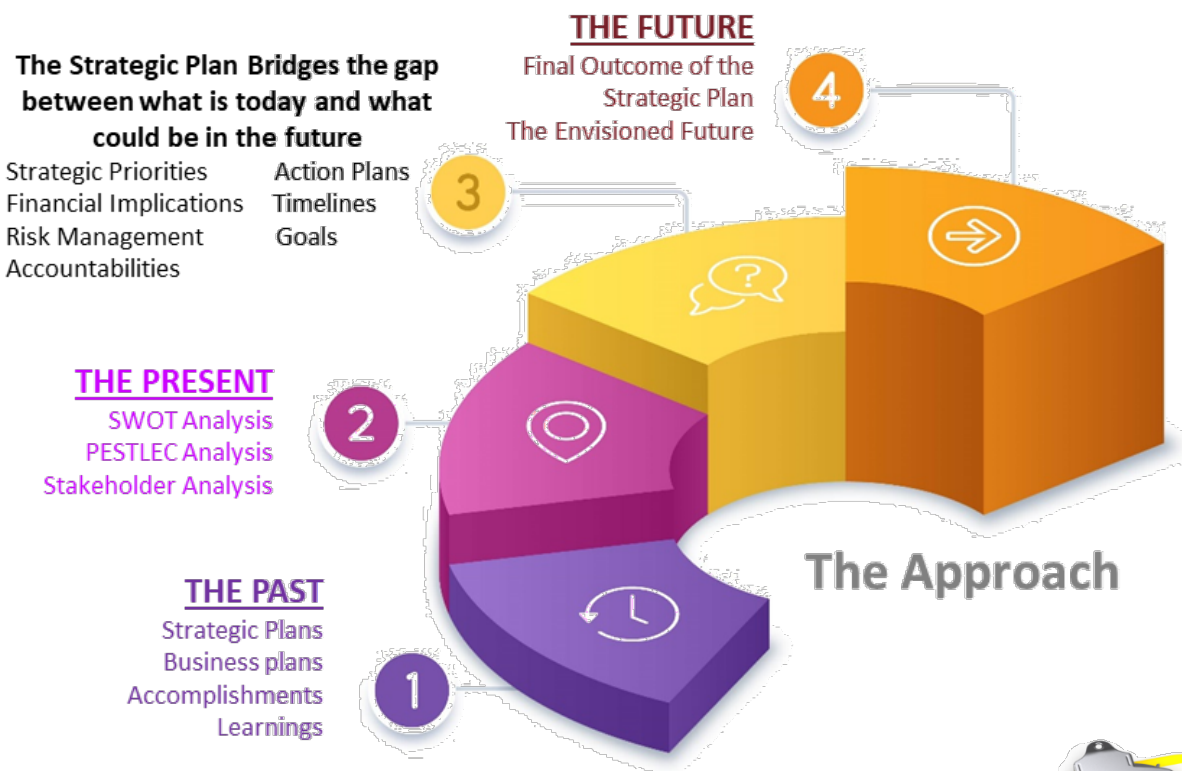
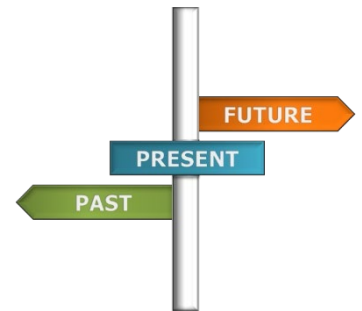
Envisioned Future

By 2028 and beyond, ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation envisions a thriving, inclusive, and united community that harmonizes tradition and innovation. Guided by Ktunaxa knowledge, values, and natural laws, we honour our lands, families, and language while fostering healing, leadership, and connection. Our people are empowered to learn, lead, and uphold integrity, ensuring every member is supported and celebrated. We will establish a culturally grounded justice system, become a center for healing and well-being, and serve as role models in governance, sustainability, and social responsibility. Rooted in compassion, respect, and shared purpose, ʔakisq̓nuk is building a resilient, self-sustaining future where generations to come can thrive in strength, unity, and cultural pride. This mind map presents the envisioned future created in February 2025.



Strategic Planning Processes and Tools

A solid plan, which is agreed to by all who are engaged in the process, not only sets the stage for moving toward the future but is used as a basis for making decisions and taking actions that shape and guide the future of the organization. Strategic Planning involves looking at and learning from the Past, examining the Present, and building a path toward the Future.



A good plan:

- meets the SMART test.
- focuses resources on critical issues.
- ensures that everyone is working toward the same goals.
- develops a basis for ongoing assessment and adjustment of direction in response to an ever-changing environment.



Monitoring Risk

Managing risks enables an organization to anticipate and prevent risks from manifesting; or mitigate risks that cannot be prevented. A basic risk analysis discussion should be part of the board / senior administration process and answers the question: What could jeopardize or derail our plans?



A Risk Register is a living document, a master document, which is updated regularly. It is a tool that plays an important part in your Risk Management Plan, helping you to track issues and address problems as they arise.

A risk is the possibility that an event will negatively affect a company. The risk register starts, of course, with a risk management plan. The risk register should be viewed as a management tool that is reviewed and updated and which enables the organization to identify, assess, and manage risks down to acceptable levels. The register provides a framework in which problems that threaten the delivery of the anticipated benefits are captured. Actions are then instigated to reduce the probability and the potential impact of specific risks.

Risk Categories might include:

- External: regulatory, environmental, market, legislative
- Internal: service, customer satisfaction, cost, quality
- Technical: changes in technology
- Unforeseen: risks which may arise that were not previously contemplated

Strategic risks should be monitored through use of a risk register that is reviewed as a standing agenda item at senior management and board meetings.

Some organizations start with a very basic risk assessment as follows:

BASIC RISK MANAGEMENT REGISTER

Risk Factor	Likelihood of this Occurring (High, Medium, Low)	How can we prevent or mitigate the Risk?

These gauges can be copied into the Risk Register as visuals to identify the Likelihood, Probability, Risk Impact, and Risk Rating. They can be resized if required.



R.A.C.I. – Assigning Role and Responsibilities

A technique used to identify the participation by people in completing tasks/deliverables. The purpose of the R.A.C.I. process is to answer the following questions ... What functions, Action Plans and tasks must be performed? Who must perform them?

THE LEAD PERSON



RESPONSIBLE 'THE DOERS'

- Individual(s) who do the work to achieve the task/deliverable.
- The accountable person defines the degree of responsibility.
- R's can be shared.

ACCOUNTABLE 'THE BUCK STOPS HERE'

- The individual who is ultimately answerable for the correct and thorough completion of the deliverable or task.
- A's delegate to R's and sign off or approve work that R's perform.
- There **must be only one** Accountable person specified for each task or deliverable.

CONSULTED 'IN THE LOOP'

- Those whose opinions are sought, typically subject matter experts.
- Two way communication is important with C's.

INFORMED 'KEEP IN THE PICTURE'

- Those who are kept up to date on progress, often on completion of the task or deliverable.
- Typically, there is just one-way communication with I's.

Sample RACI Matrix

	Name A	Name B	Name C	Name D	Name E
Task 1	I	A	R		R
Task 2	R	I	A	C	R
Task 3	A		R	C	
Task 4	I	R	R	A	C
Task 5		R	R	A	I

Participants

CHIEF AND COUNCIL	
Donald Sam	Chief
Janice Alpine	Councillor
Allan Nicholas	Councillor
Faro Burgoyne	Councillor
Darcy Fisher	Councillor
ADMINISTRATION	
David Bach	CAO
David Farrell	Policy Coordinator
Donna Melynychyn	Director of Core Services
Georgina Lieverse	Director of People and Workplace Culture
Lorena Aquino	Director of Finance
Lorne Shovar	Director of Lands
Rachel Bach	Director of Health Services
Robby Roy	Chief Financial Officer
Sue Smyth	Administrative Assistant
Wade Melynychyn	Director of Infrastructure

Dr. Marie Delorme

Facilitator and Report, Imagination Consulting



Accelerate your business with our proven methodologies

At Imagination, we'll provide clarity, focus, and a customized solution to your needs and unique business challenges. We have experience in dozens of industries and sectors and take pride in our ability to shift to the changing needs of your organization.

Don't let your business fall behind. Our broad industry expertise enables us to offer tailored solutions to meet your needs. Experience the power of transformation with our comprehensive consulting services.

Contact Information

Marie Delorme BSc MBA PhD
CEO
(403) 850-9791
mdelorme@imaginationconsulting.com

Colby Delorme ICD.D
Cistêmâw Napio (Tobacco Man)
President
(403) 809-1955
cdelorme@imaginationconsulting.com

General Inquiries
info@imaginationconsulting.com
www.imaginationconsulting.com
Toll Free: 1 (877) 640-2090

www.imaginationconsulting.com