



# so, you want to run for council?

A Support and Orientation  
Handbook Written for the  
Citizens of KDFN

## acknowledgements

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A Support and Orientation Handbook  
Written for the Citizens of Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

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Photo: F. Mueller

# so, you want to run for KDFN council!

If you are thinking about running for KDFN Council, this handbook is for you. It has been written to help you identify, understand and think about the issues connected with being a Council member.

The handbook is meant to support you in your personal decision-making process by encouraging you to take some time at the beginning of your journey to learn about the role of a Council member. In a way, the handbook is like an outline of what the role involves with extra information here and there to help fill in the blanks. We've also added some questions you may want to ask yourself to help you figure out whether you are prepared to meet the challenges that come with a role on Council.

By taking time to review this information now, you can feel confident that you have made the decision to enter politics because it is the right thing for you—that is, because it resonates with what it is you want to learn, give and achieve by becoming a Council member.

If you do decide to go ahead with a “yes” decision, you will know that you are doing so with a basic understanding of what the expectations will be if you are elected.

On the other hand, this information may help you realize that a Council position may not be the right thing for you. This handbook can help you to clarify what your motivations and strengths are, resulting in a better sense of which path would be right for you. Even if other choices aren't clear at first, you will have saved yourself the heartache of a decision that isn't right for you. And if serving your community is your main motivation, you may find that there are other choices which may help you gain the experience and skills you need to run for Council in the future.

Of course, knowledge doesn't replace experience, and there's no way to get experience except to do it—but by having some of the basic information you need before you start down the road, you will have some idea what to expect, and this will guide, enhance and help shape your experience to be a positive one.



Photo: G. Bremner

# introduction

Being a member of Council is a tall order. If you are elected, you will be taking on a highly complex role which requires you to deal with very demanding tasks.

Consider the following areas you will need to become familiar with:

- Political work in the community—being the eyes and ears of the community.
- Provide direction for the administrative work of the government administration—ensuring that the government works efficiently, treats all Citizens fairly and that good governance is being provided.
- Being connected to what is happening in the KDFN business world—without interfering, knowing where and how to get involved.
- Intergovernmental work—understanding what it means to be a government, interacting with other governments while following intergovernmental protocol.

In other words, being on KDFN Council means becoming familiar with political, administrative and corporate situations, many of which overlap and connect. These issues will span the entire community to include the interests of individuals, families, businesses and every facet of community life. Council is also required to work with other governments and interests from outside of the community.

Because the work Council does often touches on subjects that are at the very heart of the community, emotions also play a key role and must be handled with care. Council members have to listen to all points of view, consider the many factors contributing to the situation and respond by making decisions that will be in the best interests of KDFN. This can be very

challenging when different parts of the community want different things, which is common. It can create a situation that feels like a constant stream of challenges for each Council member and the Council as a whole. This, of course, will affect many areas of your life.

At the same time, your willingness to stand as a Council member is a significant gesture of generosity towards your community—your First Nation. While you will benefit as an individual from the growth you will achieve by taking office (assuming you are elected), you will also be giving and helping the community in a very valuable way. You will be sacrificing some of your private life in order to help your community strengthen and prosper.



Photo: F. Mueller

# why run for council?

## Things to Consider Before Saying Yes

As is true of any major life decision, it's good to have a clear understanding of what your reasons are for wanting to be a Council member before going ahead with the decision. Here are some of the most common (both positive and negative) reasons people choose to get into politics.

## What Are Good Reasons to Run for Council?

### Strengthening the First Nation

If you feel that one of your primary goals in running for Council is to strengthen your First Nation, then this is a strong reason to consider going ahead.

As a Council member you are well-positioned to help KDFN become more self-reliant by supporting and encouraging the blending of traditional ways with the modern ways of self-governance. In so doing, you will be in a position to foster the participation of all community members in the political process, including the Youth and the Elders. This is an important and vitalizing aspect of the Council member's role.



### Improving the Quality of Community Life Through Government

Having a sincere desire to improve the quality of community life by contributing positively to governance is one of the most important motivations for running for office. Good governance creates quality programming and services, and supports strong leadership, thereby improving the overall standard of living within the community.

If you feel inspired about strengthening the community, and you believe that a strong commitment to government process is the best way to move KDFN forward, your conviction will help you meet the challenges you will face if elected to Council.

Having a strong personal motivation will also help you to stay in tune with the community throughout your term in office. This is essential in order to make good decisions on its behalf, which is the role of a functional and productive Council.

### Improving the Quality of Government

If you feel that government should be fair, open and accountable, and you want to contribute your energy to the process of creating and maintaining such a government, then this is also a very good reason to consider running for Council.

Creating good government requires a willingness to learn about the government structures and processes which have been designed to keep things fair, open and accountable. This means Council members must be willing to make a commitment to learn and follow those processes.

This requires a certain sense of objectivity and a willingness to understand why the modern system is the way it is, what its requirements for effective participation are, and how you can contribute to make it perform at its best for the citizens of KDFN.

### Desire to Be a Good Role Model

If you are in good health, free of addictions, have a positive attitude towards government process and community growth, and have enough energy and family support to contribute the extra amount of energy that is needed to do Council work, you are the right kind of person to be in the public eye. Your presence as a Council member will inspire others, and your actions and words will be respected by the community. This is living out the *Constitution* in a strong and very positive way that helps others see a future path for themselves.

### You Have Good Skills and Experience to Contribute

Perhaps you have a strong background in finance, business or management, or you are very well acquainted with the community and the issues that need attention. Maybe you are a great communicator and mediator. If you feel you have good skills in areas that would allow you to be effective as a Council member, this is another good reason to run.

### You Are Willing to Learn

If you are truly interested in government process and community well-being you may want to learn everything you can about how it all works and what individuals can do to become more empowered through the system. This can be a great motivator and give you the passion needed to do a great job.

### What Are Poor Reasons to Run for Council?

Sometimes people are motivated to run for office for reasons that may feel right to them, but are not helpful for the community that needs to be served by its politicians. Some of these include:

#### Desire for Personal Power

Because there is a certain sense of status given to those who hold political positions, it is not uncommon for people who want to gain a sense of personal power to run for office. This is misguided because the type of power you gain from giving your energy to public service is very different than self-interested power, or the kind of power that some may feel when they think of themselves as having power over others.

Instead, it is the job of senior officials in all systems to act as guides, working with government process to make it function at its best on behalf of the people. At KDFN, Council members have been entrusted to direct the government in ways that will best serve the community. Council members are not in their positions to assume power or authority over others for their own purposes.

Council must work cooperatively, as a team, to direct the government by working well within their defined role. The individual Council member is one of a *group* which cooperatively steers the ship. If elected, what you will quickly realize is that, in many respects, you and the rest of the Council are the employees of the community.

#### Desire to Obtain Perks and Benefits

A focus on perks and benefits takes the heart and soul out of Council work. Council members need to be strong in their personal health, ethics and vision to act on behalf of KDFN. If your heart and soul are not engaged in the job, the demanding nature of the work will far outweigh the perks—and reduce the most profound benefit, which is personal growth and meaningful contribution to the community.

Someone who feels they *need* the perks of being a Council member for their own (or their family's) personal well-being should probably not run for Council. Council members should feel self-sufficient and confident enough to be able to give their energy and focus to the work they are doing for others. Council is meant for people who can take care of themselves, and still have energy left over to help others. It is not about helping yourself.

These are just a few of the reasons people may choose to enter into politics. They have been included here to help stimulate the process of reflection, so that individuals may be clear about their motives for pursuing a Council position. The message here is that the experience will only be productive and satisfying, both for the member and the community, if the decision to run comes from a sincere desire to make a contribution to KDFN.



# running for chief vs. running for council

The questions that should be considered when running for Council carry even more weight when an individual is thinking of running for the position of Chief.

The Chief must provide leadership and direction to the Council, government and community as a whole. This means that the Chief has significant additional responsibilities, on top of those assumed by regular Council members, associated with their role.

The Chief is principal spokesperson for the First Nation. The role of spokesperson involves providing the clear voice of leadership within the government itself, as well as the community, and beyond. The Chief is responsible for leading KDFN, ensuring that KDFN rights, titles and interests are represented and protected in all processes and decisions. Often this involves negotiating with representatives of other governments and speaking with the media.

In order to fulfill this role, the Chief must act as the main communicator, or liaison, between Council and other governing bodies, the administration and the General Assembly. The position of Chief is like a communication conduit between all of the governing bodies, and also to the community.

Council decisions are communicated to the Executive Director and senior management. Council in turn is briefed on administrative matters by the Executive Director. The Chief also reports to the General Assembly on behalf of the Council.

## Strong Leadership Skills

Because the role of the Chief is so fundamental, it requires an individual who is familiar with and able to lead the many facets of the First Nation as it builds strength through self-governance. To do this, he or she must be capable of understanding and handling many complex situations at once.

Therefore, a person considering running for Chief must believe in him or herself, have a high level of skill and knowledge, be able to demonstrate capability in managing complex situations, and be able to determine what needs to be said and done (and know why) in challenging situations.

All of this requires the ability to focus and a willingness to act. The Chief has a great deal of responsibility and must be willing to both speak up and answer for government decisions and actions.

For these reasons, it is very important to consider your skill level, your understanding of government process, your relationship with the community and your ability to handle complex situations very carefully before you decide to run for Chief. In this position, the supports and skill level required of the regular Council member are magnified and multiplied,

so the challenges are even greater. For example, the Council member needs to understand government process, but the Chief needs to know government process *inside out* in order to lead the Council, the administration and all the other governing bodies. Every aspect of the Council member's role is taken a step higher for the description of the Chief.

In other words, running for Chief is something for existing leaders to consider doing. You need to be a leader, in order to have what it takes to do the job of the Chief.

On the plus side, however, the level of contribution you will make to the community by taking on this role is also greater than other roles. If you feel you have the skills and knowledge to do a good job as Chief, then this may be the right time to challenge yourself, to grow in directions that your skill level says you are ready to take on.

Consult with your friends, family and other supporters to ask yourself the tough questions about why you want to do it, and if you are ready. The same questions asked earlier in this handbook to clarify motivations for running for Council should be reviewed with an eye to the even larger responsibilities and powers of the Chief. Again, taking the time to answer and think through these questions now will help clarify your position and give confidence, regardless of which direction the process takes you.

# supports you will need

Behind every good Council member stands the support of friends, family and community. Deciding to run for Council is a decision that will affect your personal life, and therefore, those who are close to you, in a profound way.

Consequently, it is important to be confident that the people in your life support you to take on this role before you run. Spouses, friends and family will need to be there for you, even though there will be many times the nature of your work will be confidential and you will not be able to discuss it directly. This is a challenging situation, so it's best if your life is in relatively good shape and the people who are close to you feel they have what it takes to handle the ups and downs of political life.

Before you read over the information in this guide, it's also important to point out that we are not emphasizing the challenges of Council work in order to make you feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Rather, the more you know and can think about ahead of time, the more likely it is that you will be successful.

Remember that there are other supports in place to help you learn your role if you do become elected.

KDFN has created orientation tools and materials to help you learn and perform tasks associated with being a member of Council. This handbook is the initial support tool offered to potential Council members. Think of it as an introduction meant to inform and prepare you, as openly and accurately as possible, for what the job entails.

Part of the initial process of self-assessment includes reviewing the strength of the support system in your personal life, and weighing this information along with your level of skill, experience and other strengths. This process will give you a good idea of your readiness to run for Council.



# what the role of the council member looks like

As you are no doubt aware by now, the role of the Council member has many sides to it. Although this handbook can give a basic outline of Council duties and responsibilities, remember that many of the energy requirements you will face on the job will be the kind that cannot be easily described in a handbook.

For example, while briefing meetings may not take up much time, depending upon your level of skill and knowledge, and the kinds of issues involved, being properly prepared to participate in such a meeting might require significant preparation time before meeting.

Similarly, when there are conflicts or highly charged issues for Council to deal with, this will demand personal energy that may take a toll on your family and possibly interfere with other commitments. It is difficult to identify these aspects of the role in advance, yet they will no doubt take up a lot of time and energy.

Therefore, keep in mind that the following simple outline focusses on the aspects of the job that are most easily identifiable, and that really they represent the “tip of the iceberg.” Many of the items listed here will be more or less demanding for different individuals, depending on the level of skill and knowledge they may have before achieving a position on Council.

The simplest way to categorize the general duties of Council is in three sections: what you have to *learn*; what you have to *do*; what you have to *uphold*.

Of course, these sections overlap in many ways. We offer brief snapshots of what is involved in each of these areas, just to give you a general idea of the different ways you will be required to use your energy if you are elected to Council.

### What You Will Need to Learn

- Government structure, governing bodies, their roles and Rules of Procedure
- Different rules guiding Council meetings, behaviour and action
- How to work as a unified, decision-making government body
- How to interact with different elements of the community as a Council member
- How to read and understand concepts related to community and organizational planning (such as strategic plans)

- How to interact with other governments and with the media
- How powers of Council are exercised – Rules of Procedure for Council, legislative processes, laws, policies and procedures of KDFN
- Content, meaning and current status of implementation of KDFN’s *Final Agreement*, *Land Claim* and *Self-Government Agreement*.

### In a nutshell:

You will need to understand the basic structures and processes of government, and know how these relate to the work Council does. In particular, you will become very familiar with the KDFN *Constitution*, the different pieces of legislation KDFN has enacted, and the policies which affect Council process and procedure. It will be important to understand how Council is involved in developing policies and regulations, and how these are then put into action by the government administration.

You will also need to learn about how Council communicates with and relates to the other governing bodies and the administration. Communication and negotiation with corporate interests, other governments and the media will also be important.

Some of this knowledge will be obtained by reading documents. The *Council Rules of Procedure* will be a major resource, as well as *the KDFN Council Orientation Toolkit*, which provides a basic level of understanding about government structure.

There is a list of some of the other documents you will need to become familiar with on Page 17.

## What You Will Need to Do

- **Attend** Council meetings, General Assembly meetings, and other meetings and events involving different community, business and intergovernmental interests.
- **Participate** in meetings by listening, discussing issues, and offering points of view with respect, thoughtfulness, and clarity.
- **Read** documents and information relating to government processes and Council issues; prepare for meetings.
- **Work** with the other Council members in a cooperative way; learn to be part of a cohesive group dynamic, speaking with “one voice,” ensuring Council solidarity.
- **Abide** by rules, policies and procedures guiding Council behaviour.
- **Act and speak** with the knowledge that you are a role model for the community.
- **Make decisions** based on fairness and quality (not on the wishes, interests or opinions of family and friends) for the betterment of the whole community (rather than advancing the interests of family and friends).

## In a nutshell:

Along with gaining a good understanding of how government works, Council members need to be fully present and functional in their role. This means being well-prepared to participate in meetings, making sure you have read, consulted people or resources, and researched whatever information might be appropriate or necessary to understand the issues that are at hand.

It also means offering opinions and ideas and listening to others in constructive ways. It is important to act in ways that help build a positive group dynamic in the Council, while maintaining personal integrity and identity.

Being fully present as a Council member requires being attentive to all aspects of community life and maintaining a level of awareness of how community issues and government process connect. This knowledge and awareness is then directed to fuel government action in a way that truly serves community needs.

## What You Will Need to Uphold

There are many aspects of the KDFN *Constitution*, legislation and policy that spell out the rules and guidelines for ethical Council behaviour and action. Council members need to be very aware of these requirements and ensure that they uphold them. If you are elected you will be expected to learn all of these rules and abide by them.

Here are some of the central themes regarding Council conduct:

- **Observe Council Governance Policy** – Council shall observe and follow the Council Rules of Procedure.
- **Maintain Confidentiality** – Council members shall abide by the rules of confidentiality.
- **Avoid Conflict of Interest** – When a member of Council, or his or her family, finds that they may benefit directly from a contract Council enters into, or from a decision that Council makes, the Council member must inform the Council that this is the case. Then a suitable course of action will be taken that will protect the member and the Council.
- **Avoid Unbecoming Conduct** – If a Council member’s dignity or integrity is called into question because of certain conduct or behaviour, the Council as a whole is accountable. Certain situations may require disciplinary action, or may even result in removal from office.
- **Avoid Undue Use of Influence** – This occurs when a Council member accepts a fee or reward of some kind in exchange for using their Council position to influence the outcome of a matter before Council. If such a situation arises, the person involved may be prosecuted.
- **Avoid Lateral Violence Behaviours** – Lateral violence includes behaviours linked to bullying and harassment that intentionally discourage or make a person feel bad in the workplace. This type of behaviour is not tolerated within the government of Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

#### In a nutshell:

Council members must maintain a constant awareness that they have been entrusted by their community to perform in their positions of leadership and influence. Council members are NOT there to serve the interests of their families—the focus must always be on the entire community and ensuring the equality and fairness for all KDFN Citizens.

Therefore, there must be a dedication to discretion, integrity and adherence to the Council Rules of Procedure. The Rules of Procedure are designed to guide Council behaviour, and Council is responsible for ensuring that if conduct becomes questionable, it takes preventative action or, and, if necessary, disciplines itself. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Council member to be self-policing and to live up to the standards required by KDFN law and policy, and to be responsible to Council as a whole by enforcing these standards on its behalf.



# documents you will need to become familiar with

There are a number of documents you will need to become familiar with if you are elected. These include (and are not limited to) the following:

## Self-Government Agreements

*Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement*  
*Kwanlin Dün First Nation Self-Government Agreement*  
*Kwanlin Dün First Nation Self-Government Implementation Plan*  
*Land Claims Agreement: A Summary*

## Constitution

*Constitution of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation*

## Statutes And Regulations

*Elections Act*  
*Referendum Code*  
*Financial Administration Act*  
Interest Regulation  
Purchase Order and Contract Regulation  
*Income Tax Act*  
*Goods and Services Tax Act*  
*McIntyre Greenbelt Zoning Act*  
*Judicial Council Act*



## Rules Of Procedure

The Rules of Procedure for the Council  
The Rules of Procedure for the Elders Council

## Policies

Council Benefits and Compensation Policy  
Finance Policy and Procedure Manual  
Donations Policy  
First Nation Artwork & Crafts Purchase Policy  
Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual



# required skills and experience

What kinds of skills are desirable in a Council member? Because Council members are elected, not appointed, they are chosen by the community. Therefore, they come to government from different kinds of career and personal backgrounds, and they bring a variety of skill sets and experiences to the table.

Much of what new Council members have learned *outside* political life—such as business, management or people skills—will be valuable *inside* political life. So it is important to recognize that even if you don't have political experience, it is still very likely that your life and work experience will prove valuable as you work within the KDFN government.

However, First Nations throughout Yukon have lamented that people who run for Council need to be aware that there are specific skills and experience required to do a good job on Council. People want their Council to succeed, which is not possible if the Council members are lacking in key skill areas, or if individual members have pursued the position for the wrong reasons.



Before you decide to run for Council, take some time to answer the following questions to help you assess your skills. If you feel that you have difficulty coming up with positive answers for many of the questions, you may need to do some work in these areas before you run for Council. If you feel confident that you can answer most or many of these questions positively, and that you are willing to work on the areas where you lack skills or experience, then you may be well situated to run for Council at this time.

### Knowledge of KDFN

*How well do you know the KDFN community? How long have you lived in the community?*

*How familiar are you with KDFN culture, traditions, and language? Do you have a sense of how to blend the old ways with the new ways?*

*How familiar are you with the history of KDFN colonialism?*

*Are you knowledgeable about the KDFN Agreements? The Constitution? KDFN legislation and regulations?*

*Have you attended a significant number of General Assembly meetings?*

*Do you understand the relationship between the General Assembly and the Council?*

*Do you understand basic government structure and process, and the role of General Assembly members, and the responsibilities of the different governing bodies and the administration?*

*Do you understand how the role of Council fits into the overall government picture?*

### Literacy

*Are you comfortable reading formal government documents?*

*Are you confident about your writing skills?*

*Are you comfortable reading KDFN history, and speaking to the Elders about the old ways and the “hard times”?*

### Computer

*Do you have basic computer program skills including experience using word processing, email and scheduling applications?*

### Financial

*Do you have basic numeracy skills?*

*Do you understand the basic principles of budgeting, balanced budgeting and financial reporting?*

### Working as a Team, Decision-Making

*Do you have good judgment? Are you comfortable analyzing situations and making decisions?*

*Are you a good listener?*

*Can you speak your mind clearly and respectfully in a group setting?*

*Are you able to make your point clearly and concisely?*

*Are you flexible and able to compromise when appropriate?*

*Are you able to lead a discussion?*

*Do you understand the concept of “Council solidarity” and “speaking with one voice”?*

## Problem Solving

*Are you able to approach a problem logically?*

*Are you a creative thinker?*

## People Skills

*Do you have experience working with different kinds of personalities?*

*Are you comfortable working with people in different settings?*

*Are you able to respond to people compassionately as well as objectively?*

*Are you able to remain calm when people are emotionally upset?*

*Can you recognize when you are reacting to a situation emotionally?*

*Do you then know how to continue to deal without letting your emotions take over?*

*How do you handle conflict situations?*

*Do you enjoy working with people?*

*Have you ever had to make decisions that people disagreed or were unhappy with?*

*What are you like in a team environment? What kind of contribution do you feel is natural for you to make to a team?*

Again, these are just a few of the many questions that could be asked in order to help you assess your skills and experience. The important thing is to think about what your skills and experience are, and in your own mind, identify how these could be valuable in the role of Council member. Of course, not everyone has skills and experience in all areas, and most people have gaps in their development that they need and want to fill. If you know yourself, and what you have to offer, you can identify what you will do to improve your effectiveness if you are elected to Council.

As with the previous exercises in this handbook, if reviewing your skills makes you question your decision to run for Council, talk it over with someone in a good position to give you an objective point of view. You may need to work on these areas before you actually run, or they may be the kind of skills you can develop on the job.

Either way, you will be better armed to face the future and achieve your goals with the self-knowledge you have gained. By putting in the effort now to take stock, you may expose a previously unknown set of personal choices—including the possibility of running for Council in future—to consider.

# conclusion

There is a lot of material here to digest and consider. We hope that you will find that the information is valuable, and that the questions asked have assisted you to discover substance and fuel for your personal journey.

Though we have highlighted the challenging nature of Council work and political life in general, this handbook is meant to encourage and support you to run for Council if the time is right for you. There is no question that a person who is well-informed about the challenges is a person who is well-prepared to meet them. Just like every other government in the world, KDFN needs caring, skilled and well-motivated people at the helm. It is hoped that the material provided here will help you identify your state of readiness, and encourage and support you on this path.

We wish you all the best as you explore the path of public life and reflect on your personal journey. Good luck!





Photo: G. Bremner



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