

What are the stepping-stones to sustainable growth planning in a First Nations community?

This is a suggested sequence.

Start with an inclusive community role in creating a vision. From that, have the community agree on the hierarchy of outcomes, meaning the “must-have” results.

For resource development, it is absolutely critical to have a process that will get full community endorsement.

At that stage, the management professionals in the Band make sure the community understands the resources in place to meet those goals. That includes evaluating people, experience and resources. That usually results in a reality check.

Then, the staff develops proposed strategies that are reviewed, modified and approved by leadership. This process is shared with the community. Once the strategies are implemented, they are monitored and regular progress reports are also shared with the community. Adjustments are made in a timely fashion to avoid unnecessary losses.

Looking closer at some of these steps, the following guidelines are useful.

Goals should be limited in number. Each one should have strategies and objectives.

Strategies should be exact but at the same time, they should have possible “reset” alternatives. This is where tactics come in. It’s like a time out in a hockey game where the players and coach agree on moves they will take if the opposition surprises them.

Finally, in setting up the strategic plan, be aware of what could go wrong. There is a short list of factors that can play havoc with economic development plans in Aboriginal communities. These include: lack of implementation time, no buy-in by leadership or the community, over-loading the goals and not having a plan “B” should plan “A” fall into problems.

With the right vision and community engagement, First Nations can avoid these pitfalls.

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In any organization, effective decisions require effective leadership. This applies to business, politics and First Nations communities.

With respect to First Nations resource development, the Band Council, including the Chief, carries ultimate responsibility for strategic planning, fiscal controls, policy development, monitoring and measuring success, selecting and directing senior staff and establishing committees. Even when the First Nations community creates a development agency, it ultimately reports to the higher authority of Council.

In addition, to all of these responsibilities, a First Nations council also has an obligation to keep itself trained, informed and ready to assess new opportunities.

To be a positive force in economic development, the Council, and the committees it establishes, must

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be disciplined, anticipate issues, prepare for meetings and never meet just for the sake of a meeting.

Councils, like any elected group, should operate on a decision cycle. Each new annual plan for community development requires research, understanding the present, defining future goals and determining how goals will be reached. Planning the cycle also means agreeing on corrective measurements should plans appear to be off course during the cycle.

There is a goal-setting system called S.M.A.R.T.E.R. where each letter has a meaning as follows. Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Realistic. Tangible. Extending/Evaluating and Rewarding. It works for all top-level bodies directing planning in organizations, including First Nations.

Leadership in economic development also involves the ability to work with others.

When it comes to working with partners, this means understanding their priorities, how they make decisions, their capacities as well as their motives for entering the deal. Of course, partners need to have the same understanding of First Nations.

Working well with consultants means that First Nations leaders should give them clear direction, monitor their work, have agreed milestones and termination clauses.

Working well with staff requires that First Nations leaders involve staff in goal-setting, have fair performance assessment systems and respect professionalism.

If all of these disciplines are followed, and strengthened by clear, continuous communication to all stakeholders, First Nations leaders can be the leading force in economic development.