COMMUNITY
COUNCILLOR
HANDBOOK

Northwest Territories Association of Communities

Northwest Territories Municipal and Community Affairs

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Introduction

The NWT Association of Communities (NWTAC) and the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) are pleased to have partnered to produce this COMMUNITY COUNCILLOR HANDBOOK. The challenges of serving on your Community Government can seem enormous and overwhelming. We hope the information provided in this Handbook will help you meet those challenges as you perform the day-to-day duties of an elected official on a Community Government. If you want to learn more, other resources are available through the NWTAC and MACA websites.

If you have any comments on the content or would like to make suggestions for future editions, please contact the NWTAC or MACA.

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1 Roles & Responsibilities

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations, you were elected to Community Council because your friends and neighbours believe you are one of the right people to lead your Community. Now what do you do? Serving on Council means more than just attending a monthly meeting. It can be a time consuming, demanding and challenging job. It's important to remember that you are not alone. You are one member of a team.

Who's on your Team?

By working with your fellow Councillors, the Mayor/Chief and Administration, your family, employer and the entire community, you can build an effective team. The first step is to understand everyone's roles and understanding that everyone has a job to do.

- Define and understand the tasks at hand
- Understand and use the authority you have as an elected official
- Stay within the boundaries of your role
- Work out relationships and respect other people's opinions and positions
- Manage conflict
- Set and work together to achieve Council's goals

The Main Players

Mayor/Chief

Your Mayor/Chief plays three roles: a member of Council, chief executive officer of the Council, and community representative. The Mayor/Chief does not make decisions alone.

- As a member of Council, the Mayor/Chief has the same responsibilities as other Councillors
- As the CEO, chairs meetings, ensures that everyone has a chance to speak, signs official papers, works with Administration and ensures Council's work is done
- Represents the community to other levels of government, hosts special visitors, attends meetings outside the community and speaks on behalf of Council

Councillor

- You represent all members of your community
- You help make the policies that direct planning, financing and community services
- With the Mayor/Chief and the rest of Council, you give direction to the SAO/Band Manager and ensure policies are carried out
- You need to understand what residents in your community want
- Brings to Council's attention anything that would promote the welfare or interests of the residents of the community as a whole

Administration (Senior Administrative Officer/Band Manager)

The Senior Administrative Officer/Band Manager is hired by the Community Council to manage the day-to-day affairs of the Community Government and oversee its employees. Duties and responsibilities include:

- Provide professional advice and support to the Council
- Follow Council direction
- Manage, lead and direct Community Government staff
- Maintain Community Government finances
- Ensure all programs and services are effectively and efficiently delivered
- Implement and monitor resolutions, bylaws and policies
- Assist with the development and implementation of the strategic, business and operational plans
- Maintain internal and external relations with First Nations and community organizations, local and regional businesses, government departments, professional associations, partners and key stakeholders, and members of the public

What should Councillors expect of Administration?

- Council meeting agendas in advance
- Easily understood monthly financial statements that provide a snapshot of the financial state of the Council
- Well researched and easily understood reports which contain several recommendations complete with suggestions of possible problems and solutions
- Prompt and polite treatment of the public
- Timely reporting of problems, complete with analysis and recommendations to resolve the issue

What should Administration expect of Councillors?

- Councillors who know their roles, understand Council operations and are familiar with community programs, services and operations
- Councillors who come to meetings well prepared, knowing the issues, understanding the problems and willing to review all options and recommendations with an open mind
- Councillors who ask questions and suggest changes to improve recommendations
- Councillors who work with and support Administration when less popular decisions are made
- Councillors who do not interfere with the day-to-day operations of the Community Government programs and staff
- Support for ongoing training and professional development of SAO and other staff

Members of your Community

The public is the most important member of the community team. Make involving the community the top priority of your Council. As a Council, ask yourselves: "How and when can we involve the community in this issue?"

Councillors do this by:
- Attending, listening and actively participating in Council and Committee meetings
- Being visible in the community, attending public events (sometimes just as an observer)
- Visiting people and being available to hear their concerns and discuss their issues
- Reaching out to the community to get their guidance on serious issues. Going on community radio or hosting a public meeting are great ways to do this
- Having regular meetings with elders, social workers, RCMP and others to get their points of view
- Understanding the duties and obligations of your Community Council and how your decisions affect the community
- Ensuring consultation is "real" by creating a dialogue with residents to help form policy, that you're not just getting reaction to a pre-determined position
- Survey residents to find out what issues are important to them
- Keep people informed, perhaps by printing and distributing a monthly newsletter, by speaking on the local radio or by creating a community website

Family and Work – Finding the Right Balance

Also, important members of the team are your family and employer/employees. You need a solid foundation of support at home and at work to be an effective, involved member of your Community Council. You are expected to spend a lot of time in meetings, reading reports and letters, and attending community functions, so make sure you balance the demands on your time.

You can do this by:
- Organizing yourself: set up an office or working area at home. Create a filing system and keep it up to date. Make "to do" lists in a calendar or diary. Make sure your family and workplace know when regularly scheduled meetings are held and give as much notice as possible when unexpected events occur
- Set some goals: Don't get bogged down in complaints. Learn to say no and make sure the time you spend on Council business is used effectively
- Get the information you need: We're often bombarded with details. Have Administration develop a summary of a report that helps you understand an item without having to read every sentence. But don't be afraid to do some of your own research or ask Administration for more information if it is necessary.

Four simple steps to deal with stress

Know yourself. Remember your priorities; remind yourself what is really important.

1. Understand how you react to pressure and why. Accept that the way you react may cause stress. Review your important goals as a member of Council. Get help if you need it. Don't be too proud to ask for help
2. Have support around you – your family, other members of Council, and Administration. Take advantage of training when it's presented
3. Be involved in recreation. Exercise helps to relieve stress. Get a hobby. Keep balance in life – there is more to life than politics
4. Keep your sense of humour. It will help you get through difficult situations. It is also part of a healthy lifestyle

2 Where your Authority Comes From

Introduction

First and foremost, members of Council are elected by residents of their communities. A Community Government is in place to provide good government to the residents, to develop and maintain safe municipalities, and to provide services, products and facilities. However, your actions are guided by several sets of legislation enacted by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Know your Acts

Each type of Community Government in the NWT is established under specific legislation:

- Cities, Towns & Villages Act
- Hamlets Act
- Tłįchǫ Community Government Act
- Charter Communities Act
- Settlements Act
- Indian Act (Federal)

The Acts and their associated regulations spell out a Community Government's authority. For example, they specify how many people sit on the council, the length of their terms, the frequency of elections, and how a Council may, by bylaw, vary these.

Take the time to read the statute that governs your community and make sure you understand what you can and cannot do as a Community Government.

Increasing Community Responsibility

Starting in 2007-2008, Community Governments began to receive additional responsibilities, a major change in how NWT communities do business. This "New Deal" offers the potential for all NWT communities to assume full authority over community public infrastructure.

To make this happen, Community Governments receive stable, long-term, predictable funding for infrastructure development, as well as support for developing capital investment plans, and training through MACA's School of Community Government.

It's important to be up to date on legislative changes, such as the possibility of including access to information and protection of privacy laws to include Community Governments.

GNWT Statutes Affecting Community Governments

In addition to various Acts already mentioned that define Community Government authority, there are a number of GNWT statutes that affect Community Governments. Here are some of the additional statutes that your Council will need to consider:

1. All Terrain Vehicles Act
2. Civil Emergency Measures Act
3. Curfew Act
4. Dog Act
5. Employee Standards Act
6. Environmental Protection Act
7. Fire Prevention Act
8. Interpretation Act
9. Liquor Act
10. Local Authorities Elections Act
11. Lotteries Act
12. Motor Vehicles Act
13. Planning Act
14. Property Assessment and Taxation Act
15. Public Health Act
16. Senior Citizens & Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Act
17. Summary Convictions Act

Electronic copies of all GNWT statutes and regulations are available on the Department of Justice website (www.justice.gov.nt.ca). You can also contact the NWTAC or MACA for assistance in locating a particular Act.

3 Working Together for Effective Meetings

Introduction

Meetings of Council are, by far, the most highly visible part of your role as a Councillor. They are what the public sees and hears about and could be the basis on which your effectiveness as a Councillor is judged. The way in which meetings are conducted and the way in which you participate in them are extremely important to the success of Council and your image as a Councillor.
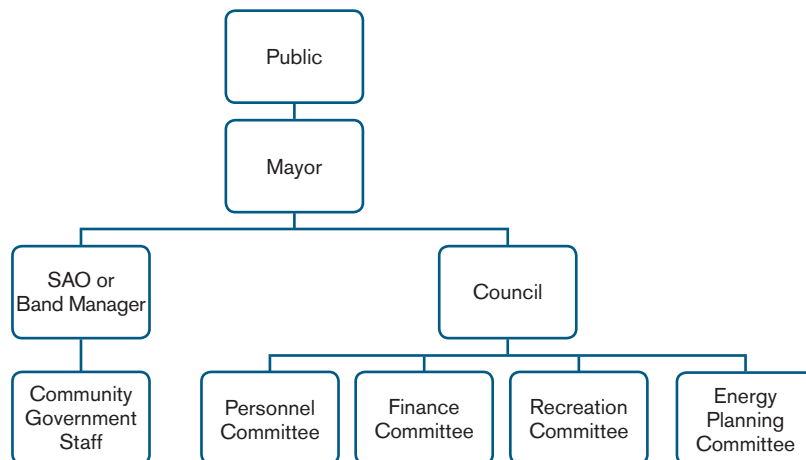
Key Points about Council Meetings
- There are important legal requirements
- They must begin and end on time (unless extended by motion)
- They need to be well planned
- They need to be well run
- Effective follow-up is required
- Councillors must be well prepared
- Councillors must work well together during the meetings

Community Government Structures
A commonly used structure consists of Council, Senior Administrative Officer (SAO) or Band Manager and committees (see below). Committees are an effective way of organizing decision making so that Council deals with recommendations by interested persons in a more timely fashion rather than including these discussions as part of the Council meeting. Committees may be set up by Council to deal with both matters internal to the Community Government (e.g. Personnel Committee) and matters where the general public has an interest (e.g. Recreation Committee). Ordinarily, the committee includes Councillors, but in the case of a committee dealing with a general public interest, it may be dominated by public members appointed by Council.

Committees can be an effective way of involving the public in Council decisions.

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"Procedures of Council" normally describe the structure the Council will use and the rules of order under which your Council operates. (e.g. Robert's Rules of Order)

In most cases, committees are chaired by a Councillor. Your committee work is probably the most important work you will do. Council business can be handled more efficiently with information and recommendations received from committees.

Committees enable Councillors to concentrate on specific areas of responsibility and to share the workload among a larger number of people. The Mayor/Chief is an ex officio member of all committees. Committee meetings are open to the public and may only be held in private under the same conditions that allow Council to hold private meetings.

Some Community Governments use a "Committee of the Whole" system. No specific committees are struck so that all members sit as a committee to discuss agenda items. In this system, the entire Council, working as a committee, hears a report from staff, considers options, asks questions and makes recommendations to the next Council meeting.

When matters are referred by Council to a committee, the members of that committee, with assistance from staff as necessary are expected to:
- Sort through all of the background information available
- Consider the legislative and policy implications
- Consider all of the options
- Consider all of the good and bad aspects of each option
- Consider the financial impact, if any, of each option
- Meet with the SAO or Department Heads
- Present a specific written recommendation for Council

It is important to note that committees, unless delegated specific authority under a bylaw, only make recommendations to Council, that a final decision needs a vote by Council.

Legal Requirements
GNWT statutes contain a number of provisions relating to meetings. These provisions are the same for meetings of cities, towns, villages, hamlets, charter communities, Tłįchǫ community governments or settlement corporations. For First Nations Band Councils, legal requirements are outlined in provisions of the Indian Act and the Indian Band Council Procedures Regulations.

1. The First Meeting
Must be held not more than 45 days after the community election. This meeting is held at the time and place that the Mayor/Chief chooses. Every Council must hold its meetings and transact its business entirely with the community, unless Council, by resolution, decides otherwise. Under the Indian Act, Band Councils must meet within a month of the election.

2. Regular Meetings
Hold at least one meeting per month, on a regular date and time.

3. Meetings in Public
Hold all regular, special and committee meetings in public, except where a resolution has been passed by two-thirds of the members present to close such a meeting to the public. Private or "in camera" meetings should be restricted to topics such as personnel or legal issues. Your municipal Act defines topics that allow for Council to hold a private meeting.

4. Business at Special Meetings
Business at a special meeting is restricted to the items listed in the notice of the special meeting – unless all Council members are present at the special meeting and unanimously agree to consider such matters. Special meetings require 48 hours public notice. Administration must receive a written request from at least the Mayor/Chief or two Councillors.

5. Quorum
Maintain a quorum at all times when carrying out community business in a meeting. A quorum is a majority of the number of Council members currently holding seats.

6. Keeping Minutes
Administration must make a written record of all Council and committee meetings and approved minutes must be adopted by Council.

7. Rules of Council Procedure
Pass a bylaw or adopt a code containing rules related to the calling of meetings, rules of order, voting by the Mayor/Chief, behaviour of Council members, appointment of committees, and general conduct of business.

Conflict of Interest

It is important that everyone be encouraged to get involved in government, including running for elected office. As an elected official, you should not make decisions (or try to influence decisions) that might benefit you or a member of your household **financially**. This is a Conflict of Interest.

The Conflict of Interest Act is about **financial** interests. If you have a direct or indirect financial interest in a decision before Council or one of its committees, you should:
- Declare "a conflict of interest" and make sure this is recorded in the minutes

- Most Councils have adopted by bylaw or by custom that you should leave the room until the discussion is over
- Not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter
- Not influence the decision in any way – before, during or after the meeting

If you are charged with "conflict of interest," you could:
- Lose your Council seat
- Be barred from running for Council or any board in the NWT for five years
- Be fined up to $5,000.00

The Role of Council Chair

Ordinarily, legislation requires that the Mayor or Chief is responsible to preside over or chair all meetings of Council and is responsible for making sure the meeting runs smoothly and Council procedures are followed.

The chair is also responsible for:
- Keeping order in the meeting (including Councillors and delegations)
- Running the meeting according to Council procedures and the rules of order
- Encouraging participation
- Ensuring one member does not dominate discussions
- Asking questions to make sure all points are covered and understood
- Summarizing discussions, noting areas of agreement and disagreement
- Calling for votes on the issue once there has been adequate discussion

Organization of Meetings

A Council procedures bylaw or resolution sets the order of the agenda. A good agenda should attempt to put the more important items at the beginning.

Sample Agenda
1. Meeting called to order
2. Adoption of the Agenda
3. Declaration of Conflict of Interest
4. Adoption of Minutes
5. Reception of Delegations
6. Tabling* and consideration of petitions and communications

Items that have been directed to Council for consideration.

7.   Presentation and consideration of committee reports
8.   Introduction, consideration and adoption of bylaws
9.   Introduction of motions and notices of motion
10. Old Business
11. New Business
12. Adjournment

Some Councils also include an item such as "Councillor Statements."

Conducting the Meeting

Administration can do its part by helping to prepare a well-designed agenda and providing support material. How well the meeting runs depends upon you and the other members of Council.

- Each agenda item should be discussed thoroughly, but without repetition
- Develop a format for the way you want to receive reports
- Stay on topic during discussions
- Follow the rules in regard to the order in which people speak to an item or motion
- Make a decision once an item has had enough discussion or debate
- The entire Council must "stand behind" a decision once it is made – this is referred to the Council "speaking with one voice." This does not mean you have to agree with the decision, only that you must publicly support it because it is a Council decision.

Minutes – How Important?

Minutes are the official record of the meeting and **are required by NWT law**.

Minutes carry the list of motions made during the meeting and reflect whether or not the motion was carried. Any Councillor may request the vote on a motion be recorded. The minutes should record any declaration of conflict of interest by Councillors. Minutes must be made available to the public.

To be effective, minutes should contain:
- Staff reports to show why certain actions were taken
- Clearly indicate the statute, bylaw or policy on which a motion is based or to which it refers
- Action reports with spaces to describe **who** is to do **what** by **when**

4 Making Decisions

An effective Council is one that plans ahead. While it is impossible to foresee every circumstance, by developing sound plans, creating good policies, bylaws and resolutions that reflect community needs, the job of governing can be made easier.

Planning: Foundation of Good Government

You can't make policies, set direction and build your community without effective planning. Community Governments are receiving increasing authority to develop infrastructure, manage finances and deliver services to their communities. Good planning will help guide how that's done.

Strategic Plan:
- Determines a community's long-range vision and the specific goals, objectives and actions that will achieve that vision
- Helps a Council allocate resources to achieve goals
- As a "living document," it must be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure your Community Government remains on track
- Integrates other community plans

Capital Plan:
- Developed with support from MACA
- Determines how your Community Government is going to build recreation facilities, upgrade water treatment plants and sewage lagoons, roads and other community infrastructure

Energy Plan:
- Determines the cost of operating your facilities and ways to reduce that expense
- Can be used to help your community reduce pollution
- Sets energy standards for residential, commercial/industry and community infrastructure development

Human Resources Plan:
- Determines how many people your Community Government needs to employ
- Sets out the skills and requirements to help residents get the training they need to fill jobs in your Community Government

Land Use Plan:
- Sets out how you want your community to develop
- Identifies important cultural and historic sites
- Identifies areas for residential, commercial and industrial development

Emergency Plan
- It's required that the community prepare for emergencies, like forest fires, floods, extended power outages or extreme weather events
- Identifies people and resources that can help in the event of an emergency

Recreation Plan:
- Creates an inventory of recreation facilities
- Identifies recreation needs and sets out goals to achieve them

Others?

So you're a Policy Maker…

Policies guide the decisions a Council makes. The best ones are developed when Council and Administration work together.
- Council or Administration may suggest that a policy is needed
- Council approves policy, not individual Councillors
- Administration carries out the policy decision
- Council ensures Administration is carrying out the policy decision as intended

Some "policy decisions," such as the approval of an annual budget, are very general. Other policies are for special things, such as a local purchasing policy.

Before Council makes a policy decision or bylaw, Administration should review NWT legislation to make sure you have the authority and that what you plan to do is legal. It can also be useful to consult other Community Governments or the NWTAC to see if there are examples of similar policies or bylaws in other areas. As a member of Council, you should be familiar with NWT laws that apply to your Community Government:
- Charter Communities Act
- Cities, Towns & Villages Act
- Hamlets Act
- Settlements Act
- Indian Act (For First Nations Community Governments)
- Tłı̨chǫ Community Government Act
- Local Authorities Elections Act

NOTE: NWT legislation affecting Community Governments is subject to updates and changes. It is important that Administration is aware of changes and that you as a Community Council play a role in shaping changes when Acts are reviewed. You can do this by being a member of the NWT Association of Communities.

Policies, Bylaws and Resolutions

Legislation specifically states whether a bylaw is required or a resolution is sufficient.

Policies – Written Statements to Guide Decisions by Council and Administration
- Passed by Council
- Often supported by procedures which are used to explain how to implement the policy
- For example, hall rental policy, ice rental policy

Bylaws – Community laws that set out Community Government Authority
- Passed by the Council controlling items they are responsible for
- Applicable legislation states what Councils may be responsible for
- Some bylaws require other approvals (i.e. voter approval or Ministerial approval)

Resolutions – Decisions that address specific questions
- Passed by Council and generally deal with a single event or issue
- Expression of Council's position
- Give direction to the SAO
- Approve short term planning (special events…)

Band Council Resolution – Decisions and Directions of Band Council
- A Band Council Resolution is a recorded decision made by a First Nation Band Council
- This decision requires the support of a majority of Chief and Councillors, at a meeting of the Council
- A Band Council Resolution is required to pass or approve many decisions made by a First Nation Band

A Closer Look at Policy Making

There are five main stages to making policy:

1. Get Started
- Council decides what the community needs and what it might look like in both the short and long term
- Policies are then developed to meet those needs. This sometimes involves amending or "fixing up" old policies Administration will provide advice when this is required
- If new policy is required, an individual member of Council or Administration may suggest that Council consider new policy development

2. Research
- Information needs to be gathered before policy is made. This is usually done by Administration, with direction from Council
- Effective policies are those that have public input

3. Approval by Council
- Only Council, in a regular or special meeting, can approve policy

4. Carry out the Policy
- Putting a policy into action usually results in a change to a program or service. Administration is responsible for directing staff to see that the policy is carried out
- Councillors should monitor how well the program is working by setting performance standards

5. Review or Evaluation
- After a period of time both Council and Administration should review past performance to see if there are ways to improve policy

5 Council Role in Financial Management

Introduction

Decisions about what programs and services to offer is probably the most important thing a Council does. In order to make realistic and effective decisions, Council must know how much money it has to operate with and how much the programs and services cost to run. This requires a clear, effective and accurate budget.

Purpose of the Budget

- A policy document, stating community priorities and goals
- A financial plan, providing estimates of money to be received and spent
- An operations guide, describing activities, services and functions
- A communications device, providing an overview of significant budgetary issues and trends
- A resource planning guide setting a framework for future financial activities

Budgeting and GNWT Legislation

- Every Council must prepare a budget and provide a copy to the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs before each fiscal year
- The budget must show estimates of all money to be spent and received
- Council cannot pass a deficit budget
- Any deficit at the end of a fiscal year must be eliminated by the end of the next fiscal year
- Council must appoint an auditor once a year to review the financial records and comment on management practices

Council Role in Financial Management

- Identify community priorities
- Adopt a budget that assigns financial resources to meet local needs and priorities
- Sets goals, objectives and standards for service delivery (e.g. three water deliveries per week)
- Make bylaws, resolutions or policies that set fees for services such as garbage collection, water delivery and sewage collection

Councillors should look at the big picture, not the small details of finance. It is Administration's job to provide financial information that Council uses to determine if revenues and expenditures are on target and to make decisions.

Revenue

Money earned, including government grants, contribution and charges for municipal services.

1. A significant portion of Non Tax-Based Community revenue is from the GNWT.
2. The GNWT does not pay taxes on its property within a Tax-Based Community. Instead, it provides a "grant-in-lieu" of taxes. In Tax-Based Communities, between 20%-40% of their money is raised through property taxes.

Sources of Revenue

All municipal governments can raise revenues by:
- Selling licenses (e.g. Dog, ATV, Business) and permits
- Assessing fines
- Renting buildings or equipment
- Earning interest on investments
- Profiting from recreation canteen sales
- Charging user fees for garbage pick-up and/or water delivery
- Contracting with the GNWT for operating the airport or other programs and services or with the federal government for operating a post office, etc.
- Charging administration fees for programs transferred from the GNWT or federal government

Revenues from local sources

- Why is this charge being made?
- Does Council have the authority to charge the fee?
- Is the amount realistic? Could we charge more or should we charge less?

Important Questions

When considering fees or looking at new revenues or programs, Council should ask some important questions:
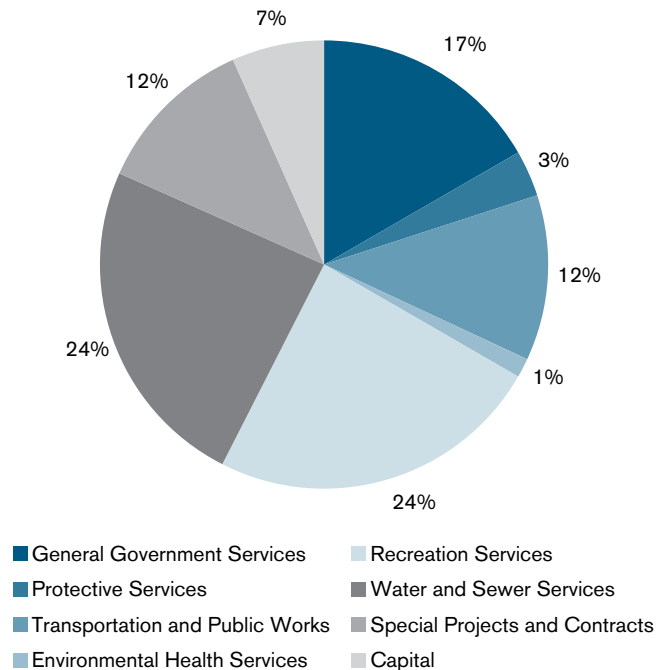- Will the new revenues cover the cost of running the program? If not, where will the money come from? Is it reasonable to expect staff to suggest options for funding the new program?
- Will the new expenditure meet a community need? If not, is the new program/service really needed?
- Is the program suggestion in response to requests made by community members? If so, are they prepared to pay extra fees or other charges to pay for it?
- Are there other programs or services that could be cut or reduced to pay for it?
- If it's new funding from a higher level of government, how long will it last? Are there obligations that come with the funding?

Expenditures

Costs including salaries and wages, operating costs, capital costs and grants to community groups. Decisions around what to expect are based on three main factors:
1. Last year's expenditures: Councillors can rely upon Administration to provide information about expenditures made during the previous year. Building this year's budget from last year's budget makes sense if last year's expenditure figures were realistic.

2. New programs or services: Communities can often raise new revenues by developing new services or taking on expanded responsibilities from the Territorial Government. While new services can result in a stronger community and better coordination and integration of services, it's essential that you consider the cost of providing the service as part of your budget process.

3. Priorities set by Council: Councillors make sure that local needs are identified and choices are made about which expenditures best meet local needs.

- ■ General Government Services
- ■ Protective Services
- ■ Transportation and Public Works
- ■ Environmental Health Services
- ■ Recreation Services
- ■ Water and Sewer Services
- ■ Special Projects and Contracts
- ■ Capital

Some Thoughts about Operating and Capital Expenditures

With the transfer of responsibility for planning capital expenditures having shifted to all communities, it is critical that you understand the difference between operating and capital expenditures.

Operating or current expenditures are made for goods or services necessary for the day-to-day operations of the community. They're used to pay salaries to Community Government workers, pay for electricity use at the community hall and similar expenses.

In contrast, capital expenditures result in the community acquiring an asset of fixed or permanent nature, like community hall, arena or water treatment plant. Expenditures which improve or extend the useful life of an existing asset are also considered capital expenditures.

Monitoring the Budget

Part of a Councillor's job is to watch how well the budget is working. A Councillor should pay close attention to revenue and expenditures.

Administration should give Council monthly variance reports that show the year-to-date actual expenditures and revenues compared to the total budget. These reports should show revenue and expenditures for the preceding month. You should request Administration provide information on how the expenditures to date compare with the amounts they expect to have spent by that point in time and how they explain for any large differences.

How well are Council priorities and community needs being served by the expenditures? How does Council measure or decide how well the needs and priorities are being met? Did you think about how you were going to measure success when you decide set priorities? You might, for example, survey residents. A community survey could ask, "What do you think of water delivery services?" "Are you getting good services?" "If not, what problems do you have?" "Is the service provided often enough?" "On time?" "Are the fees acceptable?"

Financial Statements

There are two main types of community financial statements:

Annual
- Summarizing the whole year's operations
- These are the statements that are audited by an independent auditor

The audited financial statements must be submitted to the Minister within 120 days of the end of the fiscal year.

Interim
- Produced throughout the year (usually monthly)
- Used by Council and administration to compare year-to-date balances to budget
- Used by Council to help make decisions

The Role of the Auditor
- Must be appointed by Council
- Council must advise the Minister the name of the auditor within 30 days of being selected

The main role of the auditor
- To report the accuracy of the community's financial statements
- To see if the financial statements are prepared correctly – according to the Minister's guidelines and proper accounting principles
- To look for proper financial practices and internal controls (e.g. are there proper procedures in place for receiving money? For handling money? For depositing money?)

What opinions can the auditor form about the financial statements?
- "Unqualified audit " (everything in good order)
- "Qualified audit" (auditor finds a few problems)
- "Denied audit" (there are major problems)

Why is an auditor valuable to a community?
- An auditor can be valuable source of financial information and advice
- In the "management letter" the auditor will tell the community
  » Where the financial problems are
  » How to correct these problems
- An auditor provides outside consulting advice to the community

Importance of Timely Financial Reporting
Funding from other levels of government often comes with the need to provide reports on how the money was spent. Failure to live up to these obligations can have important consequences for your Community Government: your community may not receive annual funding the following year; your community may not qualify for other program funding.

6 Communicating with Each Other and the Public

Introduction
Your success as a Councillor depends a lot upon your hard work and how you're viewed by members of the public. It's essential that all members of Council learn how to communicate effectively with each other and with the public, whether directly or through the news media.

Be Careful What You Say!

If Councillors are going to work well together, they must respect each other. So, before you speak, make sure:

- What you are going to say is true
- It will not hurt someone's reputation

If it's not true and might be damaging, don't say it.

Effective Communication

Effective meetings and interaction with the public require good communication, and you can do that by using good listening skills. These include:

- Asking questions to make sure you understand ("So your main concern is…" or, "What you are telling me is…")
- Thinking before you speak
- Keeping control of your emotions
- Respecting other people's opinions
- Speaking about the issue, not the individual making a motion or suggestion

Poor communication can be a result of:

- Unclear language
- Using jargon, technical terms or slang
- Inappropriate body language
- Strong emotion – if somebody is angry, they may not listen very well and not hear the message properly
- Listeners not paying attention – they are distracted by a noise or someone entering or leaving the room

Debate ends with a Vote

Once a decision is made, it's important that you stand behind it, even though you voted against a motion or policy. Speaking out publicly against a decision after it has been made creates mistrust and anger and can pit Councillors against one another. Continuing to disagree with a decision can also confuse residents of your community and undermine the SAO's ability to implement a policy supported by the majority of council. This is what's known as "speaking with one voice."

Members of the public can be critical of a decision, and they should be encouraged to come before Council, to make their feelings known. Perhaps they didn't understand what was being discussed and only understand the implications once a policy is in effect. Dialogue with residents after a decision is healthy, but while it may not always result in a decision being reversed, listening to what people have to say and explaining why a decision was made is healthy communication.

Dealing with Complaints

As a member of Council, you will deal with many complaints. Here are some strategies to help you deal with them:

- Council should develop policies or ways to deal with certain issues
- Administration and Staff should be trained to handle complaints. The receptionist or water truck driver can be the first person to deal with an upset member of the public
- If your community runs effective programs, there should be fewer complaints
- Show patience and tact when receiving a complaint
- Ask the person to refer their complaint to the SAO in writing. The SAO will either solve the problem or refer the complaint to the Mayor/Chief and Council
- Whatever the answer, report it back to the person who made the complaint
- Always remember, there are two sides to every story

Make the Right Decision at the Right Time

There is often a lot of pressure to make a decision right away. Delegations that come before Council sometimes want answers right away. Or fellow members of Council may want you to act immediately. However, it is important to take the time to make the best decision possible.

While you must be careful to not discourage communication, take time to think about an issue. Thank a delegation for their input but caution them that Council needs time to consider what has been said and to do further research.

- You can't be expected to know every detail of every issue
- Don't feel that you need to be right all the time
- Ask questions – if you need more information, ask for it

Dealing with the News Media

So, you have received a call from the news media. What do you do now? It's tempting to ignore the message in the hope they'll just go away. However, that might not be the best strategy. Often, a reporter is calling in search of a story – any story. It's important for Council through a designated spokesperson to create a relationship with reporters and establish a sense of trust and help them understand the issues affecting your community. This relationship will be invaluable in the event something tragic happens. And remember, while bad news almost always makes headlines, you can use the media to get vital information about programs and services to residents.

Here are some strategies:

- In your Council Procedures, appoint a spokesperson. That may be the Mayor/Chief on political issues or the SAO on technical matters. Refer questions to the appointed spokesperson
- Speak with one voice – respect a decision of council once it has been made
- Have key Council members or the SAO take media training
- You don't have to answer questions right away. Take time to consider the information being sought and draft some possible answers. Respect the reporter's deadline but arrange the interview on your time frame
- Every conversation with a reporter should be considered to be "on the record"
- If you have a good news story, such as a community carnival or special occasion, issue a press release or call a reporter after preparing a statement. Chances are it will get reported
- Don't lie to a reporter
- If possible, record the call so you have a record of what was said
- Avoid saying "No Comment" as this will make it appear as if you have something to hide

Resources Available on the Internet

Department of Municipal and Community Affairs
Community Operations
Tel. (867) 873-7672
Fax (867) 873-0609
Website: www.maca.gov.nt.ca/operations/

School of Community Government
Tel. (867) 920-3159
Fax (867) 873-0584
Website: www.maca.gov.nt.ca/school/

NWT Association of Communities
The NWTAC works to serve NWT communities by addressing common issues, delivering programs and exchanging information. We are the unified voice for communities on municipal goals determined by our members. Includes the Northern Communities Insurance Program, a self-insurance program for NWT Community Governments
Tel. (867) 873-8359
Fax (867) 873-3042
Website: www.nwtac.com

Local Government Administrators of the NWT
Professional development organization comprised of senior administrative staff from most NWT Community Governments
Tel. (867) 765-5630
Fax (867) 765-5635
Website: www.lgant.com

Arctic Energy Alliance
A not-for-profit NWT society with a mandate "to help communities, consumers, producers, regulators and policy makers to work together to reduce the costs and environmental impacts of energy and utility services in the Northwest Territories."
Tel. (867) 920-3333
Fax (867) 873-0303
Website: www.aea.nt.ca

Federation of Canadian Municipalities
The national voice of municipal government
Website: www.fcm.ca

Database of Canadian Federal and
Provincial legislation and other links
Find the Indian Act, read court decisions or find comparable
Provincial legislation
Website: www.canlii.org/en/ca/index.html

MuniMall.net
An online resource with links to municipal government websites
across Canada, municipal associations and information for
municipal governments
Website: www.munimall.net

Municipal Excellence Network
Government of Alberta Website that hosts information on best
practices by Alberta municipal governments
Website: www.menet.ab.ca

Centre for Civic Governance
An initiative of the Columbia Institute, aims to provide
information to help people "build strong, progressive
communities throughout Canada
Website: www.civicgovernance.ca