

Dear Mike,

I am writing on behalf of the K'omoks First Nation to submit application for Best Practice Award

We were advised of the Award on Monday when we attended the training workshop on FN Audit Preparation. What a worthwhile and informative session that was! And that is just one of many sessions our staff and board members have been attending in an effort to develop and perform with Best Practices in FN Financial Administration and Governance.

Our community has under 400 members, so we are medium in size. We are in the final stages of Treaty negotiations with an anticipated two years from signing.

I am sure there are many who could speak to the exemplary achievements of our Chief and Council and seasoned staff, regarding the tremendous work that has been done in recent years building up the Nations relationships with local governments, in areas related to Land Code development, Economic Development and new business partnerships. Yet, I have been tasked with this application, and as such I feel it is only fair to speak from my own experience, and I have only been involved with KFN since February 2017. Since I am the Finance Officer for KFN, I feel it is best I speak about the achievements in the finance department, and in the area of financial management.

February 17, 2017 I was hired, with less than a day to consider and accept the position. My predecessor had worked in the role for 20 years. I received a half day of training with her orienting me to my role and the accounts and programs and files. Her background was in tax-accounting. This was very helpful to the nation as it quickly expanded its business sector, setting up over 15 business ventures to generate own source revenues in the areas of forestry, aquaculture, retail, and tourism primarily. As the businesses grew, so did the work in the finance department. They hired an assistant who trained as a tax administrator and implemented a FN tax system, beginning in 2012, on a 38 unit trailer court. This assistant also provided me a half day training before she departed her role with the nation.

Three days before I was hired, the nation also hired a second finance officer, Sharon, hired by their Economic Development Corp to take over the financial administration of the 15 businesses and business development work of the Corp. My job, is on the government side of things, managing the government-related programming and treaty-related financial management, as well as FN taxation.

While on the surface it looks like a terrible practice to bring your CFOs on cold and provide them 1 – 3 days training, they did follow best practice in advertising through several avenues for 6 months before we both 'fell into their laps' so to speak. And they hired great people for the respective roles. Sharon has a background in corporate business bookkeeping. My background is in non-profit and registered charities bookkeeping, and as a councillor with a municipal regional district government. So, we fit our roles, which was a huge contributing factor to our success over the next several months as we had to reorganize 20 years of historic combined financial data and files to our own offices. We have both worked many long hours to sorting out a lot of records that were created by a tax-accountant rather than a proper bookkeeper. This

doesn't make sense to a lot of people who are not in finance, but Sharon and I have been dumbfounded by the manner in which the books were kept for so long. They were not like normal books. Everything was short-hand journalized rather than processed through the regular avenues, making tracking historic information exceptionally difficult. We have both switched to standard two-step bookkeeping processes, so that things can be tracked and easily found if one of us should suddenly disappear.

One of the best practices that has been a huge help to us and to keeping the nation on track financially, is the fraud prevention practices that have been in place for many years. All the correct steps are taken to ensure separation of duties for expenditures. The system is well ingrained here making staff transitions easy.

And speaking of staff transitions, not only were Sharon and I new to our roles managing our respective financial departments, but the Band Manager was hired after me, and several other management also changed within 3 months of the last fiscal year end. New Lands Manager, Social Development Manager, Youth Programs Manager, Band Admin Assistant, as well as a new Chief and two new Council members. Following all of this transition, we managed to carry on, completing our 2016-2017 year end financials and AGM, and carry on with making strides toward achieving FNFMB certification status. We have gone through 3 draft revisions of our Financial Policy and Procedures Manuals, 2 drafts of a Human Resources Manual, review of the Financial Administrative Law; and the passing and implementation of the 2017 Tax Rates Law and 2017 Expenditures Law.

One of my biggest accomplishments this year was creating budgets for all the departments from virtual scratch, training all the staff on how to read, work with, and manage their own budgets (something they had never done before), and this has been a huge support to the Band Administrator as well, in working on the strategic plans and supporting all of the various departments, and reporting to Chief & Council. I also consolidated all of these budgets into one comprehensive and easy to read budget for Chief & Council and worked with them on reading, reviewing, and providing support and guidance on the Budgets and accompanying financial updates. I cannot overstate how valuable this new process has been for supporting our fiscal prudence and transparency and accountability to funders. We are now approaching the end of our 3rd quarter using these budgets with Year To Date comparisons, and everyone is getting it and loving it and excited for the last quarter. We are anticipating a very smooth March 31 year end this year.

Another big step for us in Best Practice has been the implementation of our Finance and Audit Committee. After the budget was passed by Chief & Council, and Finance policy and procedures were drafted with the support of the FMB, we struck our first FAC meeting to review these materials and segue into this new process with the least amount of challenges to deal with. At our second FAC meeting, held earlier this week, the FAC approved the Finance Policy and Procedure Manuals to go for recommendation to Chief & Council for approval. Our next meeting is scheduled for January 24, to review the 3rd Quarter Financials, the Budget comparison, and a Five Year Budget for the next 5 years. I am working on that with the assistance of Sue-Lin from the FMB now.

The nation also has me attending the Tulo school of FN Tax Administration in Kamloops, the same course my predecessor took. It is an intensive course taking 8 weeks over 10 months to complete. It is a huge chunk of time out of my regular work schedule, adding a lot of strain to my job.

We did also hire a Finance Assistant in the summer who helps me two days a week. She is young and bright and enthusiastic, and a member of the band, and a pleasure to work with. She is quite helpful in assisting me with accounts payable and payroll, which takes some stress off my day, however, the office really could use another full time experienced person with some accounting background. But, we can't have it all, and with all of the Capital Improvements needed on the reserve lands right now, and treaty winding up to its close, and all of the new processes that we are working to implement, and new staff we are hiring in other departments, this department seems to get overlooked. I am learning that I really must step up and share my voice about the importance of the finance department in keeping things running smoothly. When will I get the time?

I really think Best Practices require people who understand what they are and have experience with them in the past in order to be implemented effectively. The nation is very fortunate to have several people with this kind of knowledge and experience working for them. That said, there is always more to learn, and it really is key to have people recognize that we are always learning new ways to do things better. Again, we seem to all know this well. All I can really say is, it's a whirlwind, but it's working.

Thank you for considering my story and submission.

Best wishes to all candidates and thank you for the opportunity to submit.

Sincerely,

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