

Community accountability means direct communication with the people to provide information to and to receive feedback and input from Band Members. It provides an opportunity to discuss Band Council business in an open and transparent manner. Community Accountability is achieved through a number of processes including the Annual Report, the audit, and the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

What is Accountability?

Put simply, accountability is the same thing as responsibility – responsibility to a person or group of people. Accountability is used to make sure people do the things they should, and don't do the things they shouldn't.

“Give us responsibility, and we shall be found worthy of it.” – Chief Joe Dreaver – Mistawasis

Accountability is not a new idea but, unfortunately, it is often neglected through lack of attention to communication activities. The importance of accountability cannot be underestimated. Corruption, fraud, theft and apathy cannot be tolerated. By developing and maintaining an accountability policy and program, you will be taking important steps to ensure a positive future for you, your community and your organization. Accountability programs can be surprisingly easy to implement, and after a brief look at different types of accountability, we will examine some of the methods for introducing accountability policies and tie them to your organization's strategic objectives.

Types of Accountability

There are different types of accountability. Four types are specifically relevant to First Nations:

- **Political/Managerial**
- **Program or Administrative**
- **Fiscal**
- **Individual Stakeholder or Member**

Political and Managerial Accountability

Political accountability is the need for political leaders to work ethically, in the best interests of the citizens they represent. “Among the diverse traditions of First Nations, there are a variety of customs and practices for ensuring the political accountability of First Nations leaders to the community. Elections, traditional governing practices, and open community meetings are some examples.” Aboriginal governments and institutions should be fully accountable to their citizens for all decisions made and actions taken.

Likewise, managers must be ethical and accountable to their employees, customers, members and other stakeholders. Beyond political representation, managers are accountable for all aspects of running an organization. From managing spending to the overall success of the enterprise/program, managers must take responsibility for all aspects of their organizations.

Program or Administrative Accountability

As an organization undertakes its various projects and duties, some duties may go unaccomplished. To prevent project failure, or to ensure the efficient day-to-day operation of an organization, program and administrative accountability policies governing staff and volunteers should be developed and implemented. This can often be accomplished by having a strategic management model that uses performance measurement to accommodate accountability requirements.

Financial Accountability

Mistawasis as members to the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada is encouraging its members and many Aboriginal organizations through education and training to assess their accountability practices and develop fiscal by-laws, policies and systems based on the principles of transparency, disclosure and redress. These principles are consistent with other governments in Canada, and are appropriate to traditions. Strong financial accountability practices that stress community information-sharing and the rights and obligations of stakeholders are essential practices. Financial accountability ensures that funds are being directed to the appropriate projects and are used for the purposes intended.

The First Nations Financial Management Board (FNFMB) is Canada's only legislated body that develops and publishes Financial Performance and Financial Management System Standards for First Nations. The FNFMB is an Aboriginal institution that provides a suite of financial management tools and services to First Nations governments seeking to strengthen their fiscal stewardship and accountability regime and develop necessary capacity to meet their expanding fiscal and financial management requirements.

The FNFMB is one of the First Nation institutions created through the *First Nations Fiscal Management Act (FMA)* which is federal legislation designed primarily to provide participating First Nations with the tools and capacity needed to facilitate their participation in long-term pooled borrowing through the Capital Markets – on a similar basis as other governments in Canada – to support their social and economic development objectives.

To support the FMA's primary initiative, the FNFMB has established the following standards and corresponding service:

- **Financial Administration Law Standards and Approval**
- **Financial Management System Standards and Certification**
- **Financial Performance Standards and Certification**

On April 24, 2013 Mistawasis signed a Letter of Cooperation to work with FNFMB in the development of the Bands financial administrative law and to obtain a financial performance certificate and to obtain a financial management systems certificate.

On May 24, 2013 Mistawasis made a Band Council Resolution to request to be added to the Schedule to be attached to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act (FMA).

On June 10, 2013 Mistawasis received acknowledgement from the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, otherwise known as INAC, adding Mistawasis to the FMA schedule.

Individual Stakeholder or Member

Accountability or in other terms, *social responsibility*, is an ethical theory that an entity, be it an organization or individual, has an obligation to act to benefit society at large. Social responsibility is a duty every individual or organization has to perform so as to maintain a balance between the economy and the ecosystem. A trade-off always exists between economic development, in the material sense, and the welfare of the society and environment. Social responsibility means sustaining the equilibrium between the two. It pertains not only to business organizations but also to everyone who's any action impacts the environment. This responsibility can be passive, by avoiding engaging in socially harmful acts, or active, by performing activities that directly advance social goals.

Elements of Accountability

Any accountability program must contain the following three elements to be successful:

- **Transparency**—Decisions and the processes of making decisions are open and transparent;
- **Disclosure**—Information on administrative policies and standards is readily obtainable by stakeholders; and
- **Redress**—Procedures for review, including appeal mechanisms are in place.

The Accountability Cycle

Everyone is responsible for accountability: governments, corporations, the Assembly of First Nations, First Nations, organizations, and individuals. There is an obligation to ensure the integrity and honesty of representatives and an obligation to ensure that they work with honesty and integrity for the people being represented.

The issue of redress is especially important in organizations where the manager or Chief has considerable power. If the Chief or Council cannot be forced to comply with the wishes of the community through fiscal, political or managerial practices, such as audits, elections or termination of employment, redress cannot be taken. That is why it is essential to ensure that everyone in the organization is accountable to someone else.

Duly-elected democratic governments must be held accountable to the electorate. The AGM gives the government a face-to-face opportunity to report to the community and to account for the decisions it has made on behalf of the community's best interests.

The AGM is the official opportunity to hear what the Chief and Council have to say and provide direct feedback. AGMs are open community forums which all community members are invited to attend. At the AGM the Band Council reports on, "what we did" and "what we want to do" in the current year. The audit is formally tabled with the members and the Annual Report is presented and distributed.

Minimum requirements for the AGM include:

- completed audit summary
- program reports
- established goals for now current fiscal year

Evaluation and Monitoring

Quarterly planning items

April



Year-end Report

May



Program Accountability [Program Reports due]

June



Program Accountability [Performance Reports to council]



Audit [accepted by Council]



Audit [to Canada]

July



Expenditure Review [1st Q]

August



Audit [Letter of Acceptance from Canada]

September



Mid-year Report



Annual Report [to community]



Audit [to community]

October



Appropriations Mid-year



Community Accountability [Annual General Meeting]

November



Planning Framework

December



Funding Agreements [begin negotiations]

January



Expenditure & Variance Reports [3rd Q]



Mandate Objectives



Prioritization

February



Audit [letter to Auditor]



Preliminary Program Budgets



Capital Plan

March



Revenue Forecast



Funding Agreements [signed]



Appropriations & Program Work Plans [initial]



Fiscal Plan & Final Program Budgets