

ACFN RUNNING FOR COUNCIL GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Are you thinking about running to serve on Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Council?

Then this guide is for you!

Running to serve our Nation is a huge decision, and this guide has been prepared to help you understand the role of Chief and Council, as well as information on what skills, experience, and knowledge help you to become an effective member of Council.

Being a member of Council is an important responsibility. Chief and Council guide the future of the Nation, setting the vision, mission, goals, and direction to ensure long-term sustainability, and work with ACFN administration to achieve these goals. Along with political advocacy and intergovernmental relations, Council acts as the representative of every Member of the Nation. There are many challenges in serving the Nation on Council, but it is also a tremendous opportunity for committed, dedicated individuals to make a difference.

Before running for Council, it's important to understand:

- The role of Chief and Councillors
- Good and bad reasons to run for Council
- What you will need to do, know, and uphold to be an effective member of Council
- What strengths, experience and skills will help you serve our Nation
- What documents you should read and understand prior to serving on Council

**** In August 2023, ACFN Members voted to update the ACFN Customary Election Regulations (Election Code). The modernization of these rules is important to understand as it changes some of the regulations around elections, including eligibility, by-elections, and appeals. You can find information on the updated Election Code at www.acfn.com in the Members Only section. ****

Serving our Nation is an honour; your fellow Members put their trust and faith in Chief and Council to lead the Nation with the best interests of all Members in their minds and hearts. Chief and Council carry the proud tradition, heritage, and legacy of ACFN, showcasing all that is best about our Nation.

Are you ready to serve the Nation? Keep reading and find out!



WHY RUN FOR COUNCIL?

Good Reasons to Run

Strengthening the Nation

Is your primary goal to strengthen the Nation now and for the future? This is a great reason to run to serve on Council! As a Member of Council you have the opportunity to build our Nation's strength through development of policies, goals and the guiding vision and mission that set the direction for the future. As we continue to encounter challenges for all our Members, including Youth and Elders, and work to protect and preserve our traditions, history, culture, and language, ACFN needs strong leaders to guide the way.

Trailblazing for Treaty Rights, Culture, Tradition and Language

Are you passionate about Treaty Rights, and Dene Culture, Tradition and Language? ACFN needs leaders who will advocate and work to protect, preserve, and promote these critical elements of our Nation. Your passion, channeled through your work on Council, can ensure future ACFN Members enjoy every aspect of our proud Nation!

Improving Life for ACFN Members

Are you already active in our Nation? Are you committed to improving the quality of life for others in our Nation through acts of service or volunteerism? This commitment can ensure you meet all the challenges you might face on Council as your purpose will be clear. Having a clear purpose helps to make decisions that align with the best interests of all Members and the Nation.

You Believe in Fairness, Equity and Accountability

Do you believe in fairness, equity and accountability? Honest and effective leaders must not only believe in these qualities but live them every day. As a member of Council you have the chance to set the bar on what fairness, equity and accountability mean in our Nation.

Being a Strong Role Model

Do you want to inspire youth through being a strong, positive and effective leader? Are you interested in being a trailblazer in advocating for Treaty Rights, our culture, traditions and language? Youth need to see strong leaders to become a strong leader; leaders who lead from the heart and head, keeping in mind the best interests of all Members, inspire others to follow this path – and change the future for our Youth.

Contributing Through Your Skills and Experience

Do you have a legal, financial, educational, business or management background? Are you a skilled communicator, advocate, or mediator? Do you know the issues facing the Nation and are you passionate about addressing them? Having the right skills and experience helps you to serve our Nation successfully, using the talents and knowledge you already have to benefit our Members.

Willingness to Learn

Are you willing to learn new skills? It's okay to not know everything immediately, but a willingness to learn is essential in order to effectively serve the Nation. There may be many aspects to serving on Council that are new to you; if you are willing to learn, though, it can be incredibly rewarding to see your new skills help to change the present and future for our Members.



Are These Good Reasons to Run?

Power

Serving as an elected member of ACFN Council is a position of responsibility, not power. Accountability for all decisions made rests with you, and it requires a deep commitment to acting with transparency, integrity, and thoughtfulness to ensure all decisions made reflect the best interests of the entire Nation.

Prestige

Being known as a Councillor may give an individual prestige in the Nation and the community; this prestige is best developed through the respect one gains in serving as an ethical, fair, balanced, and strong servant leader for the Nation.

Position

The position of Chief or Councillor may be best viewed as someone who serves the Nation as opposed to someone in a position of power and authority; the position comes with a great deal of responsibility and a need to act in ways that inspire trust, faith, and respect.

Perks

Using a role on Council in an attempt to secure perks that would otherwise not be available to an individual does not serve the Nation or Members well; being a member of ACFN Council takes time, commitment, and dedication to ensuring the needs of Members are met.

Contributing Through Your Skills and Experience

While being an ACFN Chief or Councillor is an important role, it is also a tremendous honour and a significant responsibility. The sustainability of the Nation, the future of our youth, the well-being of our Elders and the needs of our Members all rely on you. The satisfaction and pride that comes in serving the Nation well should be the personal achievement to which all potential Council Member should aspire as opposed to any form of personal gain.



ROLE OF CHIEF

Vision; courage; integrity; fairness; balance; the Chief of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation must bring all these qualities, and more, to this important role on ACFN Council. While all roles on Council carry significant responsibility, the role of Chief carries an even heavier weight as the leader of ACFN and our Council.

The Chief acts as the Nation's primary spokesperson; this means in the Nation, with media, and with other levels of government. The Chief is responsible for leading Council and administration in delivering the vision, mission and strategic priorities of the Nation, while also ensuring ACFN Treaty Rights and culture, history, tradition and language are both protected and promoted.

As the link between the Nation and ACFN Council and the municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as other First Nations, the Chief must be a skilled communicator and an experienced relationship builder.

The Chief also sets the tone for Council; the Chief must lead with courage and conviction, while also embodying all the values that allow them to be an inspiring leader and role model for youth. Providing clear, consistent direction and doing so with dignity and integrity is essential as the Chief leads the Nation through both good times and bad. In recent years, the Nation has experienced some tremendous challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, floods, climate change, and more. The ability for the Chief to remain calm and make logical, rational decisions in the best interests of all Members is critical.

The role of Chief is an important one; and those considering seeking this role should carefully consider if their skills, experience, motivations and commitment match the requirements to be a successful Chief of ACFN.

Skills and Experience to be a Successful Chief

Strong leadership skills

As the leader of the Nation and ACFN Council, the Chief must have strong and proven leadership skills. Working together with other Members of Council, ACFN administration, ACFN Members, and other leaders, the Chief must have the ability to lead effectively regardless of the complexity of the situation.

Strong communication skills

As the primary spokesperson for ACFN, the Chief must be able to communicate effectively. Communicating the goals of the Nation, ensuring Treaty Rights are protected, and promoting our culture, tradition, history and language requires the Chief to be comfortable even in stressful or uncertain environments.

Clear vision for the future

Leadership means knowing where you want to go and how to get there; the Chief must have a clear vision and direction for the future of the Nation to ensure sustainability over the long term.

Ability to work collaboratively

The ability to work collaboratively is critical when you act as the Nation's representative in every way; that includes creating a strong and collaborative Council that can work effectively with administration to achieve the vision, mission and goals of ACFN.

Ability to listen carefully

A key part of leadership is the ability to listen carefully and make decisions based on the knowledge and information gained. Listening carefully is needed for the Chief to be a successful leader.

Decision-making ability

The Chief must be able to make fair, just and sound decisions quickly, and be able to lead Council in achieving those decisions. The Chief must also recognize that when Council reaches a decision with which they do not agree, they are still responsible for supporting Council on these decisions to provide consistent and collaborative leadership for the Nation.

Knowledge of how government works

It is critical for the Chief to understand how government works – but not only First Nations government. Understanding how other levels of government work and the concepts underlying governance are important foundational skills for any individual interested in serving in the role of Chief.

Confidence and courage

As the leader of ACFN Council and the Nation, the Chief must be able to act with confidence and courage, knowing that all leadership decisions have been made to protect, promote, preserve and sustain the Nation.

Past leadership experience

Given the challenges, past leadership experience is an important piece of serving as ACFN Chief. Existing leaders will be able to bring their skills and experience to this role and effectively lead the Nation.

Summary

In summary, serving as the Chief comes with tremendous responsibility and challenges; it is also a role where a committed, experienced and dedicated individual can make a significant contribution to the Nation.





ROLE OF COUNCILLOR

As an elected Councillor, you become part of a leadership team that has been selected to represent the Members of the Nation. This role is a significant time commitment, but even more than time it requires a commitment to learning, knowing and upholding the vital information, policies, and procedures that enable you to be an effective Councillor.

The role of Councillor is one of trust; the Members who have elected you trust you with the present and future well-being and sustainability of the Nation. While this role can be very challenging, it is also very rewarding when you know that you have a direct impact on creating a stronger and better future for the Nation.

This guide only provides a summary of some of the things you will need to learn, know and uphold. If elected, new situations will introduce new information, policies and procedures. Being a Councillor is a learning journey of continual change and growth!

Skills and Experience - Councillor

While each individual brings different strengths, skills and experience to ACFN Council, some existing knowledge, skills and experience will provide the foundation to be an effective Member of Council. The below indicate just some of the areas where knowledge, skills and experience will enable you to serve the Nation well.

The most critical aspect though is a willingness to learn and grow in areas where you might have less knowledge, skills and experience. Serving on Council will be a growth experience for anyone elected to serve, and the ability to adapt and learn will ensure you can meet new challenges as they arise.

A key question to ask yourself is:

What do I bring to the Council table?

Here are some other questions to consider:

ACFN Knowledge

- Do you understand the role of ACFN Council in terms of representing Members?
- Are you aware of the time and personal commitment serving on Council requires?
- Are you familiar with the challenges facing ACFN both as individual Members and as a Nation?
- Are you familiar with our culture, traditions, and history?
- Are you willing to work to preserve, promote and protect our culture, traditions and history, including findings ways to reflect them in a modern world?

Literacy

- Are you comfortable reading documents that might include technical language and complex information?
- Are you comfortable asking questions if you do not understand the material presented?
- Are you confident in your ability to compose written items including statements or comments on difficult material?

Technology

- Are you comfortable using computers including for virtual meetings?
- Are you willing to learn new technological skills that may be necessary?

Finance

- Are you comfortable working with budgets and financial documents?
- Do you understand the basic principles of budget development and financial reporting?

Decision Making

- Can you exercise good judgement in difficult situations?
- Are you comfortable making decisions which may not please everyone but are in the best interests of the Nation?
- Can you explain why and how you've reached a decision?
- Can you uphold decisions that have been determined by Council even if they may not align with your personal opinion?

Team Building

- Are you a good listener?
- Can you be a strong team player?
- Can you hear other points of view and fairly consider their merit?
- Can you be flexible and adaptable when needed?

Leadership

- Can you lead a discussion or a meeting?
- Are you able to act as an exemplary role model for all Members, especially youth?
- Can you balance the needs of the Nation with the needs of individuals?

Problem Solving

- Are you able to analyze issues and develop potential solutions?
- Can you disagree in a way that is respectful and that leads to solutions?
- Can you collaborate with others on solutions?

Relationship Building

- Are you able to build strong relationships with others, including your future Council Members as well as all ACFN Members?
- Can you bring relationship building skills to interactions with other levels of government and other Nations?

These are just some of the skills and experience needed to be an effective leader for ACFN. You may have additional skills and experience that provide benefit; and you may need to learn some of these skills and gain experience as you serve if elected.

THINGS TO LEARN, DO AND UPHOLD

Skills and Experience

To Learn

If you have not served on Council previously, there may be a steep learning curve as you become familiar with the bylaws, policies and processes that govern the Nation. This is just a brief overview of the things you will need to learn to successfully serve as an effective Member of Council.

While learning this new information and these new skills will take place over time, some items will need to be learned quickly as Council “hits the ground running” after the election is held. This is why being interested in learning new things and able to adapt are critical qualities for anyone serving on Council.

What You Need to Learn

- The role and responsibility of ACFN Council
- How other levels of government function and the areas for which each level of service (federal, provincial and municipal) are responsible
- How to work effectively with other Members of Council
- How to make collaborative, informed decisions as a Council
- How ACFN interacts with other governments, including other Nations and other levels of government
- How to effectively represent the Nation in the community and with Members
- How to read and understand planning and operation documents such as strategic plans and operational plans

To Do

Serving on ACFN Council requires a significant time commitment, and not only for attending meetings. Reading and understanding documents, familiarizing yourself with bylaw, policies and procedures, and building and maintaining relationships are critical parts of being an effective Councillor.

The role of Councillor requires you to be fair and transparent and act with integrity; you are elected to represent the Nation in all settings, which means acting as a role model for Youth and always keeping in mind the best interests of the Nation.

What You Need to Do

- Attend Council meetings, committee meetings, and other meetings as necessary such as meetings with other levels of government
- Actively participate in meetings, adhering to the code of conduct expected of Council to achieve strong, collaborative decisions
- Read and understand documents related to Council business, including raising questions as necessary to understand the documents
- Abide by the policies, processes and rules that Council has created
- Act with transparency, integrity and fairness in all matters, including when making decisions
- Build and maintain strong relationships with other Members of Council and ACFN Members

To Uphold

The responsibility that comes with serving on Council is not light; the present and future of the Nation rests on you. The decisions made as a Council determine the sustainability of the Nation, and in recent years some particularly complex challenges have faced ACFN. Being able to act decisively and collaboratively, while upholding all policies and following all processes and maintaining confidentiality, will be necessary to carry out the duties of Councillor.

What You Need to Uphold

- Follow all Council bylaws, policies and processes
- Avoid and/or declare conflicts of interest
- Maintain confidentiality
- Behave with integrity, fairness and transparency

Summary

The information provided here is not meant to discourage, but to present a realistic picture of what it means and requires to be an effective Member of Council. There is tremendous opportunity for an ACFN Councillor to create meaningful, lasting and powerful positive change for the Nation; but to do so often requires hard work, long hours, and a genuine commitment to serving others. All of this needs to be considered when you are thinking about running for Council.

GETTING READY TO SERVE

Serving on ACFN Council is a journey of learning! If you are considering running to serve the Nation, you can get a jumpstart on this process by ensuring you are familiar with key documents and information that will help prepare you.

Important documents to read include:

- ACFN Membership Code
- ACFN Election Code
- ACFN Emergency Plan
- ACFN policies such as the Housing Policy, Education Policy, and more

You can find these documents, as well as more, on the ACFN website at www.acfn.com.

It is also a good idea to familiarize yourself with non-ACFN documents, such as the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls to Action, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, and Treaty 8.

There will be many more documents that you will need to read, learn and understand should you be elected to serve. Having an initial understanding of these documents will provide you with a solid foundation on which to build.

In addition to reading documents, it is wise to be actively participate in the events and activities of the Nation prior to seeking election. This means choosing to attend and participate in meetings, engagements, and social activities to begin to build the strong relationships and knowledge base you will need to serve effectively.

Support You Will Need

Being a Member of ACFN Council is a significant commitment of time, energy, and effort. As a Member of Council, it will be important that you have the support of your family, friends and community in order to serve effectively.

The support of others will ensure that you are able to focus on your role and on making sound, wise decisions in the best interests of the Nation. Many times the information you learn as a Member of Council is confidential; so while you may not be able to discuss the specifics of your work it will be important to have people in your life who will support you as work through decisions and situations that may be difficult, challenging and time-consuming.

This is a good thing to consider prior to running for Council, as the experience of serving the Nation is incredibly rewarding but can also be extremely challenging. Knowing that you have a good support system will help you to face the challenges and serve the Nation to the best of your ability!

CONCLUSION

As you've likely seen in this guide, there is a lot to consider when thinking about running to serve ACFN. Your skills and experience, your support system, and your reasons for seeking election are all critical elements in choosing to run. The campaign for election is the easy part – the hard work truly begins when the election is over, and you begin your service to the Nation.

The information in this guide is not meant to discourage, but to prepare potential Council Members for the experience of serving on ACFN Council. This tremendous responsibility comes with both challenges and rewards; and the importance of the role of Council cannot be overstated. Every decision Council makes impacts the lives of Members today and tomorrow; and the very future of the Nation rests in the hands of ACFN Council.

This might seem like a daunting prospect, but it is also an exciting opportunity to make a difference and guide the Nation to success. This guide was created to ensure that you are ready to serve should you decide that running for Council is the right path for you. ACFN needs motivated, dedicated, knowledgeable and compassionate leaders, and you may be the leader the Nation needs!

Whatever path you choose, good luck!

And remember that serving your Nation and fellow Members isn't done only through being on Council. Being an active participant in the Nation, contributing to community through your knowledge and skills, and helping others to succeed can be done whether you are an elected representative or not.

Every ACFN Member contributes to making Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation a vibrant, successful and sustainable Nation!

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