FIRST NATIONS
Centre of Excellence

Iyon Kechika Contracting, Ltd. Case Study

Respecting community values in economic development: FNCOE/Iyon Kechika Contracting, Ltd. case study (Lower Post case study)

Summary

Harlan and the FNCOE team begin supporting Lower Post and their economic development corporation, Iyon Kechika Contracting, Ltd., while Harlan served as deputy chief for the community. He recognized there was a need for intentional economic development in the community; there were gaps between local government, First Nations, and Crown governments that could be addressed for the benefit of all partners involved.

The FNCOE team's approach in Lower Post was to work with the community to identify their economic development priorities and support a planning process for the economic development corporation to work towards these goals, while ensuring that community values were acknowledged and respected at every step in the process. Once a structure was established through strategic planning, Iyon Kechika could apply for funding to support their growth and development.

As of early 2026, Iyon Kechika Contracting, Ltd. gained approximately $100 million in infrastructure funding to build a strong foundation for business operations in Lower Post. The development corporation team is accountable to membership and to funders through regular financial reporting as part of their established systems and structure.

Background

Harlan Schilling, member of the Kaska Dena Nation and current CEO of First Nations Centre of Excellence, grew up in Watson Lake, Yukon and served as a combat engineer in the Canadian Armed Forces before serving on the Daylu Dena Council as a councillor for three years and deputy chief for six years. He became the founding CEO of First Nations Centre of Excellence in 2024.

According to Harlan, the role of the Centre of Excellence is to engage with First Nations governments and development corporations in Economics 101. They work with economic development officers and leadership to help achieve dreams for their Nations on an economic scale, whether that is networking with Crown governments, making connections with businesses in the area, or building capital projects to contribute to own source revenue. The Centre of Excellence provides a crucial service to rural and remote First Nations who may be underserved by other organizations.



Opportunity

Harlan and the FNCOE team got involved with Lower Post while Harlan served as deputy chief for the community. He recognized there was a need for intentional economic development in the community; there were gaps between local government, First Nations, and Crown governments that could be addressed for the benefit of all partners involved.

Once the gaps in economic development had been identified, the FNCOE team helped the Daylu Dena Council how to structure operations, including separating chief and council from the development corporation and hiring a director of strategic operations. Within this new structure, the development corporation could apply for funding through connections made with support of the FNCOE team.

During this time of development, Harlan invited Premier John Horgan to visit Lower Post where he was able to see firsthand the lasting effects of trauma from residential school in the community. Harlan and his team helped membership tell their story and to find pathways to move forward from this painful history. According to Harlan, economic sovereignty is one tool that is helping his community move forward and find success.

Approach

The FNCOE team's approach in Lower Post was to help paint a picture of where gaps existed in skills and training so they could be addressed. They also worked with the general manager of the Nation to identify what the wants and needs were for economic development in the community so they could support a planning process to make those things happen. Part of the planning process was building the internal structure of the development corporation and establishing clear pathways of connection and communication to get the work done.

Harlan characterized the process in this way, "The left wing is political representation, and the right wing is the economic development team. They need to work collaboratively because they are two wings on the same bird."

Harlan also emphasized that community engagement is an essential part of their work because each First Nation is unique with their own culture and values. Understanding the values of each community helps the FNCOE team understand who they are helping and how they can support the community in moving forward on their own path using their own message. The first step is asking community members what they want for themselves, then helping them achieve it.





Results

In terms of results, the development corporation has achieved financial success through approximately $100 million in infrastructure funding to build a strong foundation for business operations in Lower Post. The development corporation team recognizes the importance of accountability to membership and to funders through regular financial reporting. Daylu Dena Council leadership and the development corporations keep their dialogue open with each other and with membership to ensure needs continue to be met and funding continues to come in.

Recommendations

In Lower Post, change happened because the community led. One of the major goals of the FNCOE is to help build economic leaders within each First Nation they support and make space for the next generation of economic leaders so that success continues to grow in each community.

Harlan emphasized the importance of investing in our youth,

> *"Someone invested in me as a young person and it put me on a path to leadership. Never stop supporting our youth; it will take all of us to ensure success for future generations."*


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