A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO
ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Communication Strategy Background

In March 2011, the Chief & Council of the Pikwàkanagàn Nation recognized the need to increase the level of community engagement.

Communication Strategy Goal

The leaders and administrators of the Pikwàkanagàn First Nation require the engagement of the community in order to govern effectively and efficiently. This Communication Strategy is one of the means by which engagement will be fostered and, hopefully, by which future communication initiatives will be inspired.

Engagement exists, in general, when community members choose to get involved enthusiastically and show genuine interest in furthering the communities' goals. For individuals to become engaged, there needs to be a positive emotional attachment to the community. They need to feel that their contribution makes a real difference, that their presence is noticed, and that their voice is heard. Engagement is generated when both the head and the heart (the thoughts and feelings) are acknowledged.

Communication Strategy Objectives

There is a multitude of ways of achieving the above goal and the objectives that follow represent stepping stones to enhancing the engagement of the Pikwàkanagàn First Nation:

1. Determine the most effective way(s) to consult, on an ongoing basis, with the membership living on and off reserve in order to propel the decision-making process involved in governance.

2. Increase membership participation in all communication processes and opportunities (i.e. surveys, elections, group discussions, celebrations, community activities, etc.).

3. Assuming that surveys are one of the tools to effectively and efficiently consult with the membership, another key objective is to identify the necessary resources (human, material, and financial) for creating the best and most economical surveys.

4. Collect, analyze, and share (when appropriate and beneficial) the data garnered from communication initiatives as a means to track the engagement level of the community.

The way to achieve these objectives is detailed below as well as recommendations to support the engagement process within and beyond the scope of this mandate.

1.   Consulting the Membership

Consulting with the membership is a two-step process: first, you need to be able to **reach** the members physically and, secondly, you need to move them emotionally so that they choose to **engage**.

Based on the information gleaned from the Past Membership-Wide Communication Initiatives Table (see *COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES*) and the most recent survey (see *SURVEYS – Preferences of Consultation Method Survey Results*), the following principles have emerged as a guide to devising the most effective and efficient means to consult with the on and off reserve membership:

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES	RECOMMENDATIONS
REACHING the membership	
The optimal way of reaching the membership is to know and use their preferred consultation method(s).	1. Determine the **frequency** and **tool(s)** you intend to use to allow the membership to inform you of their preferred consultation method (ex. those who once preferred mail surveys may eventually prefer to be surveyed online). 2. Insert this in your Communications Activity Calendar. 3. Ensure the availability of resources.

Table 1.1 Communication Principles – Reaching and Engaging the Membership

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES	RECOMMENDATIONS
REACHING the membership (cont'd)	
The currency of membership contact information ensures efficiency of the consultation process.	1. Continue to maintain current membership information. 2. Determine the necessity of changing or improving the **frequency** and **tool(s)** used to allow the membership to notify you of any changes to their contact information.
DRAFT NOTES	
ENGAGING the membership	
Members engage when they feel their leaders and administrators are **credible.** Credibility is conveyed in a myriad ways. Despite the fact that it is a subjective quality, **coherence** and **action** are two practical elements which, when practised, contribute to creating an environment where credibility is high.	1. Ensure that promises or commitments made by leaders and administrators are followed through (ex. change in by-law following a community meeting, sharing of information collected through survey, etc.) 2. Ensure follow-up to commitments is timely and appropriate. Encourage colleagues to follow through without judgement. 3. Ensure that all written correspondence sent to the membership aligns with current regulations, policies, procedures, etc. and conveys a uniform message. 4. Ensure that all public signage or postings have a uniform and professional look depicting the Pikwàkanagàn logo. Use the community motto when appropriate. 5. Recognize community members who are models of integrity.
DRAFT NOTES	

Table 1.1 (cont'd) Communication Principles – Reaching and Engaging the Membership

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLE	RECOMMENDATIONS
ENGAGING the membership (cont'd)	
Members engage when they believe their leaders and administrators have a genuine **desire** to foster engagement.	1. Give momentum to community engagement by inviting members on and off reserve to define it. Perhaps this could be done through a contest where participants of different age groups would either submit a drawing, an essay, or a poem that depicts their perspective on engagement. 2. Elaborate an official definition of engagement as it pertains to the Pikwàkanagàn community and based on the contest submissions. 3. Track the level of participation in every communication initiative or community event. 4. Take every opportunity to give feedback to the membership with respect to the participation at events, at elections, in completing surveys, etc. 5. Communicate all important information promptly and effectively. 6. Elaborate and present the Pikwàkanagàn Vision, Mission, and Values to the community. 7. Develop an energetic language when communicating with the members whether in the written or oral form. 8. Find innovative ways to involve the off reserve membership recreationally. 9. Seek suggestions for and implement new activities and events or reinvigorate some favourite community happenings. 10. Recognize community members who model engagement through their regular and vigorous participation.

Table 1.1 (cont'd) – Communication Principles – Engaging the membership

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLE	RECOMMENDATIONS
ENGAGING the membership (cont'd)	
Members engage when they are moved by leaders **skilled** at fostering engagement. Engagement is an emotional response to the environment. A person's ability to actively listen, to effectively speak in public, to influence, to inspire, to implement suggestions or new initiatives, to rally groups, and to acknowledge people are key to engaging a community.	1. Ensure that there are multiple ways for community members to submit ideas and opinions and that the members are aware of these communication channels. 2. Create an environment where community members feel emotionally safe to submit ideas and opinions. 3. Ensure good suggestions pertaining to all community matters are implemented promptly and that the originators are part of the process when feasible. 4. Ensure that members are informed of the leaders' intention to include good suggestions, which cannot be implemented promptly, in community plans and that the community is kept abreast of progress. 5. Invite the best speakers in the community to chair committees, MC events, to inspire the youth to develop their oratory skills. Invite the natural leaders in the community to take informal roles bound to engage others. 6. Recognize community members who encourage and lead others to be more engaged.
DRAFT NOTES OR COMMENTS 	

Table 1.1 (cont'd) – Communication Principles – Engaging the membership

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLE	RECOMMENDATIONS
Engaging the membership (cont'd)	
Members engage when they see their leaders and administrators have the **capacity** to foster engagement. Capacity includes: - knowledge - ability to learn - time - personnel - communication tools (ex. phone, newspaper, bulletins, website, surveys, etc.) - money	1. Identify the communication and engagement process knowledge requirements for the leaders of this Communication Strategy. 2. Train the leaders of this initiative in priority areas as determined by a thorough review of the process. 3. Determine whether extra personnel are required to assist in building the engagement level through better communication. If so, draft the job profile of the prospective incumbent and commence the hiring process if resources are available. 4. If resources are not available, determine alternative ways to ensure that progress is made within available means and plan to secure resources in the future. 5. Continue to examine the current ways of communicating with and engaging the community and continuously seek more effective and efficient ways.
DRAFT NOTES OR COMMENTS	

Table 1.1 (cont'd) – Communication Principles – Engaging the membership

2. Increasing Membership Participation

It is a rather intuitive notion that member participation increases when there is a heightened level of engagement. Table 1.1 above lists many ways of fostering engagement, based on the four Communication Principles, and these will be successful as long as they allow thoughts and feelings to be expressed.

For example, in December 2010, the **capacity** to foster engagement was shown by *examining the current way of communicating with and engaging the community.* It was acknowledged that the recent level of survey participation varied from as little as 0.3% to 30% (see *COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES - Past Membership-Wide Communication Initiatives Table*).   With this information in hand, a survey was designed to consult the community members on how they preferred to be consulted. Interestingly, the preliminary findings indicate that more than 10% of the surveys were returned with 84% of the membership expressing their preference for consultation via traditional mail and 41% indicating their desire to be informed of the survey results as means to encourage them to participate. It would then follow logically that when the members are informed of the results, they will feel like they were heard and this simple action will favour future participation and translate into increased engagement in other areas of community life.

As suggested in Table 1.1, the way to increase participation is by reaching and engaging the membership and the best options will be those that are tried, tested, and shown to produce results in addition to aligning with the Vision, Mission, and Values of the Pikwàkanagàn Nation.

3. Optimizing Survey Consultation

As mentioned above, past surveys have been met with more or less interest but there is reason to believe that this economical consultation tool can be leveraged in a way to help administrators and leaders receive the information and feedback required to perform their duties. In fact, the survey results point to the great potential of surveys as an effective and efficient way of communicating with the members.

For surveys to fulfill their mandate, many aspects need to be considered. The *Survey Checklist* (see *SURVEYS)* helps the originator of the survey to verify these aspects. The *Survey Optimization Guide* (see *SURVEYS*) will assist also in determining what resources need to be mobilized to achieve the Desired Participation Rate (DPR). Although it would be ideal to have near 100% participation in each and every survey distributed on and off reserve, it is clear that the cost in personnel and in financial resources would be highly prohibitive. This is the rationale behind accepting a lower DPR provided it reaches or surpasses quorum.

The complete results of the *Preferred Consultation Method Survey* can be found under the *SURVEYS* tab. The highlights are as follows and should be considered when designing future surveys:

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CONSULTATION SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The vast majority of surveyees prefer to be consulted via mail.
- The lack of topic knowledge is the most important reason why surveyees would refrain from responding followed by lengthy questionnaires.
- The best way to encourage members to respond is by providing a summary on the topic. Equally important, at 42 and 41% respectively, are the preference of the membership to be informed of the reasons behind the survey and the desire to see the results of the consultation.

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4. Tracking Community Engagement

As a means to measure increased engagement, it is critical that it be defined and that a metric be chosen in all aspects of community life where it is meaningful and informative. Some of the opportunities to measure engagement could be:

Council meetings
Elections
Elders group meetings
Youth group meetings
Other group or community meetings
Pow wow
Community Bingo
Other community events
Team sports (players)
Sporting events (audience)
Surveys

Other than by the number of people showing up for the events, another metric, especially as it relates to meetings, could be the number of ideas and opinions shared by the attendants.

Summary

The Pikwàkanagàn leaders have recognized the need for heightened community engagement. This Communication Strategy is the guiding document that will propel the Nation to a new level of participation whereby the members enthusiastically contribute to its overall wellbeing and success.

Gradually, through sustained initiatives, the community will experience the level of engagement necessary for the Chief & Council and the team of administrators to efficiently and effectively tackle the many responsibilities inherent to the governance of the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn.