

2011

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A NND Capacity
Development Initiative
Document

[SO, YOU WANT TO RUN FOR COUNCIL?]

A support and orientation handbook written for the citizens of NND.

So, You Want to Run for Council?

“So You Want to Run for NND Council!”

If you are thinking about running for NND Council, this handbook is for you. It has been written to help you identify, understand, and think about the issues connected with being a Council member.

The handbook is meant to support you in your personal decision-making process by encouraging you to take some time at the beginning of your journey to learn about the job of being a Council member. In a way, the handbook is like a job description with extra information here and there to help fill in the blanks. We’ve also added some questions you may want to ask yourself to help determine your state of readiness and qualification for taking on the job.

By taking time to review this information now, you can feel confident that you have made the decision to enter politics because it is the right thing for *you* – that is, because it resonates with what it is you want to learn, give, and achieve by becoming a Council member.

If you do decide to go ahead with a ‘yes’ decision, you will know that you are doing so with a basic understanding of what the expectations will be if you are elected. This will support a feeling of confidence and motivation about why you are right for the job. In turn, having this level of understanding may help you be articulate in your campaign and gain support from others.

On the other hand, if reading this information over helps you realize that a Council position may not be the right thing for you at this time, the handbook will still have achieved its main purpose. Perhaps reading over the material here will enable you to clarify what your motivations and strengths are, resulting in a better sense of which path *would be right* for you. Even if other choices aren’t clear at first, you will have saved yourself the heartache of a decision that isn’t right for you. And if serving your community is your main motivation, you may find that there are other choices which may help you gain the experience and skills you need to run for Council in the future.

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Of course, knowledge doesn't replace experience, and there's no way to get experience except to do the job – but by having some of the basic information you need about the job before you start down the road, you will have some idea what to expect, and this will guide, enhance, and help shape your experience to be a positive one.

Introduction

Being a member of Council is a tall order. If you are elected, you will be taking on a highly complex job which requires you to deal with very demanding work.

Consider the following areas you will need to become familiar with:

- Political work in the community – being the eyes and ears of the community
- Overseeing the administrative work of the government administration – ensuring that the government “works” and good governance is being provided
- Being connected to what is happening in the NND corporate world – without interfering, knowing where and how to get involved
- Intergovernmental work – understanding what it means to be a government, interacting with other governments following strict intergovernmental protocol

In other words, being on NND Council means becoming familiar with political, administrative, and corporate situations, many of which overlap and connect. These issues will span the entire community to include the interests of individuals, families, businesses and every facet of community life. Council is also required to work with other governments and interests from outside of the community.

Because the work Council often touches on subjects that are at the very heart of the community, emotions also play a key role and must be handled with care. Council members have to listen to all points of view, consider the many factors contributing to the situation, and respond by making decisions that will be in the best interests of NND. This can be very challenging when different parts of the

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community want different things, which is common. It can create a situation that feels like a constant stream of challenges for each Council member and the Council as a whole. This, of course, will affect many areas of your life.

At the same time, your willingness to stand as a Council member is a significant gesture of generosity towards your community – your First Nation. While you will benefit as an individual from the growth you will achieve by taking office (assuming you are elected), you will also be giving and helping the community in a very valuable way. You will be sacrificing some of your private life in order to help your community strengthen and prosper.

Why Run for Council?

Things to Consider Before Saying ‘Yes!’

As is true of any major life decision, it’s good to have a clear understanding of what your reasons are for wanting to be a Council member before going ahead with the decision. Here are some of the most common (both positive and negative) reasons people choose to ‘get into politics’:

What are the Right Reasons to Run for Council?

Strengthening the First Nation

If you feel that one of your primary goals in running for Council is to strengthen your First Nation, then this is a strong reason to consider going ahead.

As a Council member you are well-positioned to help NND become more self-reliant by supporting and encouraging the blending of traditional ways with the modern ways of self-governance. In so doing you will be in a position to foster the participation of all community members in the political process, including the Youth and the Elders. This is an important and vitalizing aspect of the Council member’s role.

Improving the Quality of Community Life through Government

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Having a sincere desire to improve the quality of community life by contributing positively to governance is one of the most important motivations for running for office. Good governance creates quality programming and services and supports strong leadership, thereby improving the overall standard of living within the community.

If you feel inspired about strengthening the community, and you believe that a strong commitment to government process is the best way to move NND forward, your conviction will help you meet the challenges you will face if elected to Council.

Having a strong personal motivation will also help you to stay in tune with the community throughout your term in office. This is essential in order to make good decisions on its behalf, which is the role of a functional and productive Council.

Improving the Quality of Government

If you feel that government should be fair, open, and accountable, and you want to contribute your energy to the process of creating and maintaining such a government, then this is also a very good reason to consider running for Council.

Creating good government requires a willingness to learn about the government structures and processes which have been designed to keep things fair, open, and accountable. This means Council members must be willing to make a commitment to learn and follow those processes.

This requires a certain sense of objectivity and a willingness to understand why the modern system is the way it is, what its requirements for effective participation are, and how you can contribute to make it perform at its best for the citizens of NND.

The learning curve that must be negotiated to embrace this level of knowledge can be steep at the outset. Again, if your motivation is strong, it will carry you through the challenges and help you see the larger picture of how transparency and fairness can be achieved and maintained by NND.

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A Desire to be Good Role Model

If you are in good health, free of addictions, have a positive attitude towards government process and community growth, and have enough energy and family support to contribute the 'extra' amount of energy that is needed to do Council work, you are the right kind of person to be in the public eye. Your presence as a Council member will inspire others, and your actions and words will be respected by the community. This is living out the Constitution in a strong and very positive way that helps others see a future path for themselves.

You have Good Skills and Experience to Contribute

Perhaps you have a strong background in finance, business, or management, or you are very well acquainted with the community and the issues that need attention. Maybe you are a great communicator and mediator. If you feel you have good skills in areas that would allow you to be effective as a Council member, this is another good reason to run.

You are Willing to Learn

If you are truly interested in government process and community well-being you may want to learn everything you can about how it all works and what individuals can do to become more empowered through the system. This can be a great motivator and give you the passion needed to do a great job.

What are the Wrong Reasons to Run for Office?

Sometimes people are motivated to run for office for reasons that may feel right to them, but are wrong for the community that needs to be served by its politicians. Some of these include:

A Desire for Personal Power

Because there is a certain sense of status given to those who hold political positions, it is not uncommon for people who want to gain a sense of personal power to run for office. This is misguided because the type of power you gain from giving your energy to public service is very different than self-interested

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power, or the kind of power that some may feel when they think of themselves as having power *over* others.

Instead, it is the job of senior officials in all systems to act as guides, working with government process to make it function at its best on behalf of the people. At NND, Council members have been entrusted to direct the government in ways that will best serve the community. Council members are not in their positions to assume power or authority over others for their own purposes.

This can be confusing in some ways because (among other things) Council is the top management authority at NND and therefore has many responsibilities associated with being 'in charge.' For example, Council is responsible for hiring senior management, which reports to and seeks direction from Council.

However, the flow of energy from Council to management and beyond (to the directors and employees) is communicated through the Chief and Deputy Chief on behalf of the Council. The Chief and Deputy Chief are responsible for containing this flow by working with the Executive Director and other directors (the senior management). Council itself doesn't directly tell NND employees what to do or how to do their work, even though Council makes decisions about how this work should be handled -- from the top.

So while Council is technically 'in charge' of the smooth running of the government, this does not mean that its power and authority can be used to promote individual interests, or to support individual council members to act as 'bosses' either inside or outside of government. In fact, Council are the employees of the First Nation, hired to lead and guide on their behalf.

Council must work cooperatively, as a team, to direct the government by working well within their defined role. The individual Council member is one of a *group* which cooperatively steers the ship. In many respects, Council are the employees of the community.

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A Desire to Obtain Perks and Benefits

A focus on perks and benefits takes the heart and soul out of Council work. Council members need to be strong in their personal health, ethics, and vision to work on behalf of NND. If your heart and soul are not engaged in the job, the demanding nature of the work will far outweigh the perks – and negate the most profound benefit, which is personal growth and meaningful contribution to the community.

Someone who feels they *need* the perks of being a Council member for their own (or their family's) personal well-being should probably not run for Council. Council members should feel self-sufficient and confident enough to be able to give their energy and focus to the work they are doing for others. Council is meant for people who can take care of themselves, and still have energy left over to help others. It is not about helping yourself.

These are just a few of the reasons, good and bad, people may choose to enter into politics. They have been included here to help stimulate the process of reflection, so that individuals may be clear about their motives for pursuing a Council position. The message here is that the experience will only be productive and satisfying, both for the member and the community, if the decision to run comes from a sincere desire to make a contribution to NND.

Running for Chief or Deputy Chief Versus Running for Council

The questions that should be considered when running for Council carry even more weight when an individual is thinking of running for the position of Chief or Deputy Chief. This is because the Chief and Deputy Chief must provide leadership and direction to the Council, government and community as a whole. This means that the Chief and Deputy Chief have significant additional responsibilities, on top of those assumed by regular Council members, associated with their roles.

The Chief is principal spokesperson for NND. The role of spokesperson involves providing the clear voice of leadership within the government itself, as well as the community, and beyond. The Chief is responsible for leading NND, ensuring that

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NND rights, titles and interests are represented and protected in all processes and decisions. Often this involves negotiating with representatives of other governments and speaking with the media.

In order to fulfill this role, the Chief must act as the main communicator, or liaison, between Council, the administration, and the Assembly. The position of Chief is like a communication conduit between all of the governing bodies, and also to the community.

As the main source of direction for the administration, the Chief communicates Council decisions regularly and often to the Executive Director and senior management, and in turn is briefed on administrative matters by managers in this way. The Chief also reports to the Assembly on behalf of the Council.

The Deputy Chief fills this role when required, as well as performing any additional tasks Council may delegate to him or her. The Deputy Chief must be prepared to take on the role of Chief at any time, and so must stay on top of processes and situations, staying as aware and informed about issues and situations as the Chief.

The most important thing for the Deputy Chief to learn and remember, when authorised to act as Chief, is to continue to follow the same official mandate as the Chief. This is necessary to ensure that there are no contradicting positions, decisions, or actions. Contradictions and sudden changes of position create turmoil, destroy the credibility of the Council, and erode the stability of the government. They need to be avoided at all costs!

Strong Leadership Skills

Because the role of the Chief is so fundamental, it requires an individual who is familiar with and able to lead the many facets of the First Nation as it builds strength through self-governance. To do this, he or she must be capable of understanding and handling many complex situations at once.

Therefore, a person considering running for Chief must believe in him or herself, have a high level of skill and knowledge, be able to demonstrate capability in

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managing complex situations, and be able to determine what needs to be said and done (and why) in challenging situations.

All of this requires the ability to focus and a willingness to act. The Chief has a great deal of responsibility and must be willing to both speak up and answer for government decisions and actions.

For these reasons, it is very important to consider your skill level, your understanding of government process, your relationship with the community, and your ability to handle complex situations very carefully before you decide to run for Chief or Deputy Chief. In these positions, the supports and skill level required of the regular council member are magnified and multiplied, so the challenges are even greater. For example, the Council member needs to understand government process, but the Chief needs to know government process *inside out* in order to lead the Council, the administration, and all the other governing bodies. Every aspect of the Council member's job description is taken a step higher for the description of the Chief and Deputy Chief.

In other words, running for Chief or Deputy Chief is something for existing leaders to consider doing. You need to be a leader, not a 'wannabe,' in order to have what it takes to do the job of the Chief or Deputy Chief.

On the plus side, however, the level of contribution you will make to the community by taking on this role is also greater than other roles. If you feel you have the skills and knowledge to do a good job as Chief or Deputy Chief, then this may be the right time to challenge yourself, to grow in directions that your skill level says you are ready to take on.

Consult with your friends, family, and other supporters to ask yourself the tough questions about why you want to do it, and if you are ready. The same questions asked earlier in this handbook to clarify motivations for running for Council should be reviewed with an eye to the even larger responsibilities and powers of the Chief or Deputy Chief. Again, taking the time to answer and think through these questions now will help clarify your position and give confidence, regardless of which direction the process takes you.

Supports You Need to Do Your Job

Behind every good Council member stands the support of his or her friends, family, and community. Deciding to run for Council is a decision that will affect your personal life, and therefore those who are close to you, in a profound way.

Consequently it is important to be confident that the people in your life support you to take on this role *before* you run. Spouses, friends, and family will need to be there for you, even though there will be many times the nature of your work will be confidential and you will not be able to discuss it directly. This is a challenging situation, so it's best if your life is in relatively good shape and the people who are close to you feel they have what it takes to handle the ups and downs of political life.

Before you read over the job description and other self-assessment information in this guide, it's also important to point out that we are not emphasizing the challenges of Council work in order to make you feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Rather the underlying motto here is 'forewarned is forearmed' -- the more you know and can think about ahead of time, the more likely it is that you will be successful.

Remember that there are other supports in place to help you learn your job if you do become elected. Although NND's form of government is new (legislative government at the community level), it is similar enough to democratic governments around the world that there is a wealth of good information and accessible models to follow.

Based on these, NND has created orientation tools and materials to help you learn and do the job. This handbook is the initial support tool offered to potential Council members. Think of it as an introduction meant to inform and prepare you, as openly and accurately as possible, for what the job entails.

Part of the initial process of self-assessment includes reviewing the strength of the support system in your personal life, and weighing this information along with

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your level of skill, experience, and other strengths. This process will give you a good idea of your readiness to run for Council.

What the Job of the Council Member Looks Like

As you are no doubt aware by now, the job of the Council member has many sides to it. Although this handbook can give a basic outline of Council duties and responsibilities, remember that many of the energy requirements you will face on the job will be the kind that cannot be easily described in a handbook.

For example, while briefing meetings may not take up too much time in themselves, depending upon your level of skill and knowledge, and the kinds of issues involved, being properly prepared to participate in such a meeting might require significant preparation time before meeting.

Similarly, when there are conflicts or highly charged issues for Council to deal with, this will demand personal energy that may take a toll on your family and possibly interfere with other commitments. It is difficult to identify these aspects of a job in a job description, yet they take up a lot of time and energy.

Therefore, keep in mind that this simple description is focussing on the aspects of the job that are most easily identifiable, and that really they represent the ‘tip of the iceberg.’ Many of the items listed here will be more or less demanding for different individuals, depending on the level of skill and knowledge they may have before achieving a position on Council.

The simplest way to categorize the general duties of Council is in three sections:

What you have to *learn*

What you have to *do*

What you have to *uphold*

Of course, these sections do overlap in many ways, as you will see in the lists themselves. We offer brief snapshots of what is involved in each of these areas,

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just to give you a general idea of the different ways you will be required to use your energy if you are elected to Council.

What you will need to Learn

- Government structure, process, laws, policies, and procedures,
- Different rules guiding Council meetings, behaviour and action
- How to work as a unified, decision-making government body
- How to interact with different elements of the community as a Council member
- How to read and understand concepts related to community planning (such as strategic plans)
- How to interact with other governments and with the media

In a nutshell:

You will need to understand the basic structures and processes of government, and know how these relate to the work Council does. In particular, you will become very familiar with the NND Constitution, the different pieces of legislation NND has enacted, and the policies which affect Council process and procedure. It will be important to understand how Council is responsible for developing policies and regulations, and how these are then put into action by the government administration.

You will also need to learn about how Council communicates with and relates to the other governing bodies and the administration. Communication and negotiation with corporate interests, other governments and the media will also be important.

Some of this knowledge will be obtained by reading documents. The *Council Governance Policy Handbook* will be a major resource, as well as *the NND Orientation and Transition Guide*, which provides a basic level of understanding about government structure.

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There is a list of some of the other documents you will need to become familiar with on Page 17, under **Documents Council Members Need to Become Familiar With.**

What you will need to DO

Attend Council meetings, Assembly meetings, and other meetings and events involving different community, business, and intergovernmental interests

Participate in meetings by listening, discussing issues, offering points of view with respect, thoughtfulness, and clarity

Read documents and information relating to government processes and Council issues; prepare for meetings

Work with the other Council members in a consensual way; learn to be part of a cohesive group dynamic, speaking with “one voice,” ensuring Council solidarity

Abide by rules, policies, and procedures guiding Council behaviour

Act and speak with the knowledge that you are a role model for the community

Make decisions based on fairness and quality (not on the wishes, interests or opinions of family and friends) for the betterment of the whole community (rather than advancing the interests of family and friends).

In a nutshell:

Along with gaining a good understanding of how government works, Council members need to be fully present and functional in their role. This means being well-prepared to participate in meetings, making sure you have read, consulted people or resources, and researched whatever information might be appropriate or necessary to understand the issues that are at hand.

It also means offering opinions and ideas and listening to others in constructive ways. It is important to act in ways that help build a positive group dynamic in the Council, while maintaining personal integrity and identity.

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Being fully present as a Council member requires being attentive to all aspects of community life and maintaining a level of awareness of how community issues and government process connect. This knowledge and awareness is then directed to fuel government action in a way that truly serves community needs.

What you will Need to Uphold

There are many aspects of the NND Constitution, legislation and policy that spell out the rules and guidelines for ethical Council behaviour and action. Council members need to be very aware of these requirements and ensure that they uphold them. The details of these policies and directives are listed in the Council governance policy handbook, as well as in the Constitution, individual legislative acts, and policies. If you are elected you will be expected to learn all of these rules and abide by them.

Here are some of the central themes regarding Council conduct:

Observe Council Governance Policy

Council shall observe and follow this Council Governance Policy.

Maintain Confidentiality

Council members shall abide by the rules of confidentiality.

Avoid Conflict of Interest – when a member of Council, or his or her family, finds that they may benefit directly from a contract Council enters into, or from a decision that Council makes, the Council member must inform the Council that this is the case. Then a suitable course of action will be taken that will protect the member and the Council.

Avoid Unbecoming Conduct – if a Council member's dignity or integrity is called into question because of certain conduct or behaviour, the Council as a whole is accountable. Certain situations may require disciplinary action, or may even result in removal from office.

Avoid Undue Use of Influence – this occurs when a Council member accepts a fee or reward of some kind in exchange for using their Council position to

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influence the outcome of a matter before Council. If such a situation arises, the person involved may be prosecuted or required to appear before an administrative tribunal.

In a Nutshell

Council members must maintain a constant awareness that they have been entrusted by their community to perform in their positions of leadership and authority. Council members are NOT there to serve the interests of their families – the focus must always be on the entire community and ensuring the equality and fairness for all NND citizens.

Therefore there must be a dedication to discretion, right mindedness, and adherence to the Council Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is designed to guide Council behaviour, and Council is responsible for ensuring that if conduct becomes questionable, it takes preventative action or, and , if necessary, disciplines itself. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Council member to be self-policing and to live up to the standards required by NND law and Council policy, and to be responsible to Council as a whole by enforcing these standards on its behalf.

Documents you will Need to Become Familiar With

There are a number of documents you will need to become familiar with if you are elected. These are:

NND Elections Act (2009) - You will need to know all the provisions that apply to you as a candidate.

NND Constitution (2009) – As a Council member, you will need to learn the Constitution intimately in order to live and follow it.

NND Government Act (2006) – Provisions applying directly to Council must be learned.

NND Finance Act (2006) - The general information in this Act needs to be understood in order for you to be an effective Council member.

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NND Privacy Act (2006) – This Act contains information you will need to learn in order to understand privacy issues connected with Council work.

NND Orientation and Transition Guide: Understanding Governance (2011)- this is a reference describing the basic structure of NND governance and its relationship to the community.

NND Council Governance Policy Handbook (2006 and 2011)– this will be your main reference as a Council member. It explains everything Council needs to know in terms of government structure and policy, and how to do your job.

Skills and Experience Needed for the Job

What kinds of skills are desirable in a Councillor? Because Council members are elected, not appointed, they are chosen by the community based on what kind of people they are. Therefore, they come to government from different kinds of career and personal backgrounds, and they bring a variety of skill sets and experiences to the table.

Much of what new Council members have learned *outside* political life -- such as business, management, or people skills -- will be valuable *inside* political life. So it is important to recognize that even if you don't have political experience, it is still very likely that your life and work experience will prove valuable as you work within the NND government.

However, First Nations throughout the Yukon have lamented that people who run for Council need to be aware that there are specific skills and experience required to do a good job on Council. People want their Council to succeed, which is not possible if the Council members are lacking in key skill areas, or if individual members have pursued the position for the wrong reasons.

Before you decide to run for Council, take some time to answer the following questions to help you assess your skills. If you feel that you have difficulty coming up with positive answers for many of the questions, you may need to do some work in these areas before you run for Council. If you feel confident that you can answer most or many of these questions positively, and that you are willing to

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work on the areas where you lack skills or experience, then you may be well situated to run for Council at this time.

Knowledge of NND

How well do you know the NND community and family structures? How long have you lived in the community?

How familiar are you with NND culture, traditions, and language? Do you have a sense of how to blend the old ways with the new ways?

How familiar are you with the history of NND colonialism?

Do you understand the difference between the pre-contact period, when NND was self-reliant, and the contact period, when NND was colonised and people became dependent on the colonial government's 'hand-out policy'?

Are you knowledgeable about the NND Agreements? The Constitution? NND legislation and regulations?

Do you know that NND signed agreements that essentially created a new form of legislative government? And that this form is one that blends modern government structures with traditional NND philosophies and principles?

Have you attended a significant number of Assembly meetings?

Do you understand the relationship between the Assembly and the Council?

Do you understand basic government structure and process, and the role of Assembly members, and the responsibilities of the different Governing Bodies and the administration?

Do you understand how the role of Council fits into the overall government picture?

Literacy

Are you comfortable reading formal government documents?

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Are you confident about your writing skills?

Are you comfortable reading NND history, and speaking to the Elders about the old ways and the 'hard times'?

Computer

Do you have basic computer program skills? Would you bring any extra technical knowledge or expertise in this area to Council?

Financial

Do you have basic numeracy skills?

Do you understand the basic principles of budgeting, balanced budgeting, and financial reporting?

Management

Have you had experience with hiring and firing staff? Delegating work? Directing employees and having employees report to you?

Do you have knowledge regarding basic personnel issues such as benefits, pay scales, vacations, sick leaves, etc.?

Working as a Team, Decision-Making

Do you have good judgement? Are you comfortable analyzing a situation?

Are you a good listener?

Can you speak your mind clearly and respectfully in a group setting?

Are you able to make your point clearly and concisely?

Are you flexible and able to compromise when appropriate?

Are you able to lead a discussion?

Do you understand the concept of 'Council solidarity' and 'speaking with one voice'?

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Problem solving

Are you able to approach a problem logically?

Are you a creative thinker?

Do you have a personal approach to problem-solving?

People Skills

Do you have experience working with different kinds of personalities?

Are you comfortable in working with people in different settings?

Are you able to respond to people compassionately as well as objectively?

Are you able to remain calm when people are emotionally upset?

Can you recognize when you are reacting to a situation emotionally?

Do you then know how to continue to deal without letting your emotions take over?

How do you handle conflictive situations?

What do you enjoy about working with people?

Have you ever had to make decisions that people disagreed or were unhappy with?

What are you like in a team environment? What kind of contribution do you feel is natural for you to make to a team?

Again, these are just a few of the many questions that could be asked in order to help you assess your skills and experience. The important thing is to think about what your skills and experience are, and in your own mind, identify how these could be valuable in the role of Council member. Of course, not everyone has

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skills and experience in all areas and most people have gaps in their development that they need and want to fill. If you know yourself, and what you have to offer, you can identify what you will do to improve your effectiveness if you are elected to Council.

As with the previous exercises in this handbook, if reviewing your skills makes you question your decision to run for Council, talk it over with someone in a good position to give you an objective point of view. You may need to work on these areas before you actually run, or they may be the kind of skills you can develop on the job.

Either way, you will be better armed to face the future and achieve your goals with the self-knowledge you have gained. By putting in the effort now to take stock, you may expose a previously unknown set of personal choices – including the possibility of running for Council in future – to consider.

Conclusion

There is a lot of material here to digest and consider. We hope that you will find that the information is valuable for its own sake, and that the questions asked have assisted you to discover substance and fuel for your personal journey.

Though we have highlighted the challenging nature of Council work and political life in general, this handbook is meant to encourage and support you to run for Council if the time is right for you. There is no question that a person who is well-informed about the challenges is a person who is well-prepared to meet them. Just like every other government in the world, NND needs caring, skilled, and well-motivated people at the helm. It is hoped that the material provided here will help you identify your state of readiness, and encourage and support you on this path.

We wish you all the best as you explore the path of public life and reflect on your personal journey. Good luck!

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