



# Running for Vuntut Gwitchin Council

AN INFORMATION GUIDE

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## Running for Vuntut Gwitchin Council: An Informational Guide

This informational guide was created to support Vuntut Gwitchin Citizens who may be interested in running for Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) Council. There are many considerations when deciding whether to run for Council. This guide contains key information, including answers to commonly asked questions and a look into the day-to-day activities and responsibilities of VGFN Council Members.

We have created this guide to assist our community members in deciding whether or not they are interested in becoming a Council Member and entering VGFN politics.

### Key Terms

If you are elected to be a Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Council Member, there will likely be many new government-related terms and phrases that you will learn and regularly use in your job. Below is a list of key terms that are used throughout this guide and in other VGFN documents that may assist your understanding of key terminology and concepts.

- **Accountability:** demonstrating responsibility and ownership of one's own actions.
- **Confidentiality:** the expectation that information may be kept secret or private.
- **Conflict of interest:** a situation in which the concerns or aims of two different parties are incompatible, and one party may derive personal benefit from actions or decisions made in their official capacity.
- **Consensus:** agreement among multiple parties.
- **Council resolution:** a formal expression of decision or action agreed upon by the VGFN Government.
- **General Assembly:** a governing body composed of eligible Citizens that provides direction to Chief and Council.
- **Governance:** all of the processes related to governing the Nation through laws, norms, policies, language, and traditions.
- **Legislation:** laws and/or rules that regulate the actions of members.
- **Non-disclosure:** failure to reveal or disclose information.
- **Policy:** principles of action adopted or proposed by the government
- **Politics:** all of the activities associated with the governance of the Nation, including debate or decision-making processes conducted by those who have authority or who hope to gain authority
- **Unilateral:** acting as only one person or one body when making decisions without the agreement or consent of others.

# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

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Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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## Introduction

Running for Council is a big decision. If you are elected as a Council Member, you will take on important duties and responsibilities that have real life consequences for our Citizens. As a new Member of Council, you will have to learn more about the following:

- How the VGFN government is structured;
- Ways to build constructive and positive relationships with other VGFN leaders, other First Nation governments, Territorial and Federal governments and other stakeholders in and outside of the community;
- The rules and conduct that Council members are expected to abide by;
- The way that Council members are expected to interact with community members;
- How to develop, read and understand documents pertaining to the way our community is governed and organized; and
- How to interact and communicate with other governments, and other community's representatives.

## Why you should run for Council

There are many reasons to run for VGFN Council and become a leader for our Nation. Below is a list of common reasons identified by people who feel called to run for Council and to participate in the political life of our Nation.

### **1. You want to strengthen the governance of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation.**

Serving as a Council Member also allows you to contribute to the betterment of the VGFN Government. Being a Council Member allows an individual to have direct involvement in the development and implementation of VGFN policies and laws. If you are interested in government and would like to be more involved in the success of the VG Government and our community, then running for Council could be a great fit for you. Strong government relies on the participation of citizens in its processes, and if you see gaps or changes that you think are necessary, you can be involved in leading that change as a Council Member.

Council Members are also instrumental in supporting our modern self-governing Nation to become increasingly self-sufficient, while honouring the important traditional elements of our governance.

Being part of government requires leaders to learn and adhere to specific standards of conduct and accountability in order to maintain public trust. Ensuring the VGFN Government remains fair, transparent and honest is part of the responsibility that you accept as an elected Council Member.

# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

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Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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## **2. You want to serve our community and our Citizens in a truly meaningful way.**

Being a Council Member means you will have the chance to be involved in directing the vision for important community programs and services that VGFN Citizens – those living in Old Crow and those living elsewhere – use in our day-to-day lives.

Serving on the Council will allow you to be highly engaged with all our Citizens. It will be part of your job to develop an understanding of the needs and priorities of our Citizens and to help to deliver solutions that will best serve those needs. Chief and Council cannot solve or intervene in every question or problem that is brought to them, but they can advise, remind and encourage Citizens about their own agency in situations that require action or problem solving, and Council Members may help them to identify proper supports and tools.

The desire to serve others is crucial for Council Members. Rather than consider how you might personally benefit from being elected to Council, Council Members should consider how to work to better the lives of your fellow Citizens.

Council is ultimately responsible for bringing the voices of Vuntut Gwitchin Citizens to the decision-making process. This is a critical role for VGFN Council Members as they are responsible for educating Citizens on matters related to our Nations governance so that they may be able to contribute to and benefit from their own government.

## **3. You want to uphold and maintain the history, traditions, culture and values of VGFN for the benefit of present and future generations.**

The importance of VGFN's autonomy and agency as a self-governing Nation transcends our current elected government officials; it is about respect for our past and future generations as well. As a Council Member, you will be responsible for carrying forward the vision of our Elders, ancestors and past leaders who negotiated for self-government and reclaimed our Nation's freedom from the Indian Act. VGFN Council Members are held accountable for maintaining our history and carrying those traditions and cultural values forward for the benefit of present and future generations.

## **4. You enjoy working with others.**

Serving as a Council Member requires a great deal of collaboration and team work with the Chief, other councilors, Elders Council, Youth Council, the VGFN General Assembly, VGG staff, our Citizens, and other governments.

Anyone considering running for Council should consider their experiences working closely with others and whether they have the patience, communications skills, and interpersonal skills for collaborative forms of governance and decision-making.

Sometimes you may have disagreements with other Council Members, and each Council Member should be able to give and receive constructive feedback or engage in debates that are productive and respectful.

# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

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Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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Working with others is a key part in ensuring the VGFN Government remains fair and balanced with multiple perspectives being represented. Council strives to make all decisions by consensus, so responsible and respectful communication is extremely important.

In the event that consensus cannot be reached, a majority vote will be held which also requires Council Members who are in the minority to respectfully accept the outcome and work with their colleagues to serve the community.

## **5. You want to be a leader and a role model to others.**

Council Members are viewed as leaders within the community, and many of our youth look up to Council Members. You may have a mentor or role model that you look up to yourself. Running for Council is a good way to pay that forward to others in Vuntut Gwitchin Nation.

The VGFN Government strives to have leadership positions filled by people who our community's children and youth can look up to as role models – people who will serve with integrity, honesty, and positivity. If you hope to take on a leadership role within the Vuntut Gwitchin Government, running for Council is a great opportunity for you to embody these characteristics.

## **Things to consider before running**

Vuntut Gwitchin Council consists of the Chief and four Council Members who are elected by eligible voters from VGFN. A Council Member's term lasts for four years, and it is expected that you see out the entirety of your term if you are elected.

To be elected to Council, you must be a Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Citizens who is 18 years of age or older and who ordinarily resides in Canada. Any person desiring to run for Council cannot have any indictable offence convictions for five years preceding the election. Each person elected to be a Councilor must take an Oath of Office to affirm their loyalty to Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. In taking this Oath of Office, you will promise to uphold our values, protect and obey the Constitution, seek guidance from Elders, and provide good, effective and accountable government for the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and its Citizens.

The job of a Council Member can often be demanding and, at times, difficult. You will be elected to work on behalf of Vuntut Gwitchin Citizens including those who are your friends and family members. You must feel confident in your ability to act in the interest of the Nation, and not allow personal interests or gains to cloud your judgement or decisions. Conversely, you may find yourself in a position whereby you have to make decisions that people close to you do not agree with, and you may have to answer to them in public settings or meetings. These can be uncomfortable situations that you should be prepared for in the event that you are elected to Council. It is important to consider the types of support that you have available to you for managing these difficult situations. Maintaining good health and wellness can go a long way in making it through this demanding position, and it

# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

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Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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would be helpful to have a trusted fellow Councilor, Elder, and family members to help you stay mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy.

Council Members have a number of duties which are outlined in the following sections and it is a role that requires a significant amount of personal support from your loved ones, friends and family. The job of Council Member can often be highly demanding of your time and energy, and it can often affect those closest to you.

Sometimes, your work as a Council Member will require confidentiality and discretion and you will not be able to discuss details of your day with anyone outside of the Council, including your friends and family. Yet their support and understanding of your position as a member of the VGFN Council will be extremely important for you to succeed professionally and to feel supported personally.

The ability to keep certain information strictly confidential is an extremely important part of a Council Member's job. Not only is it bound by law in many cases, but keeping certain information private is often imperative to maintaining the trust of the community and our Citizens who elect our Council. You should be sure about your ability to abide by confidentiality or non-disclosure agreements before deciding to run for Council.

## Skills you will need to practice and develop as a Council Member

There are a number of important skills that Council Members must learn, develop and practice. However, it is expected that these skills will be strengthened as time goes on and as Members gain experience in their position on the VGFN Council. If elected, there are options available to Council Members who may need or request support related to developing their skills in areas such as reading complex documents, policy writing, technical awareness, and general Council orientation. Many of the skills that you will have the opportunity to practice and apply within the role of Council Member are outlined below:

- 1. Written communication:** Council Members must be able to effectively communicate in writing with each other, the Chief, the General Assembly, VGFN Citizens, and others. Writing emails, and reviewing policy drafts, legal documents, and community communications materials are all part of the job of a Council Member.
- 2. Interpersonal and oral communication:** Council Members are responsible for attending and participating in community meetings where they must articulate Council decisions clearly. This requires strong oral communications skills as well as interpersonal communication. Council Members must be able to build strong relationships with colleagues and our Citizens in order to establish trust in government. This will involve being versatile, strong conflict resolution skills, and being able to manage high-stress or emotional situations.
- 3. Literacy of policy and governance documents:** Council Members will have to be able to skillfully read and interpret policy and legal documents to sufficiently carry

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# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

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Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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out your duties. Council Members must be comfortable with these types of materials, but there are resources and other supports to assist when needed.

4. **Knowledge of Vuntut Gwitchin land, culture and language:** Council Members are expected to uphold the sacred values of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, including the history of our lands, culture and language. To do this, you must have a strong understanding of who we are as a Nation. Council Members should not only possess this knowledge, but should be ready and willing to expand upon it by learning from VGFN Elders and listening to knowledge keepers from our Nation.
5. **Computer and technical skills (i.e., familiarity with different software):** basic computer skills are required for Council Members and having knowledge of other computer software and programming would be very useful.
6. **Teamwork and collaborative working:** Council Members work closely with one another as well as other people in leadership both inside and outside of VGFN. It is important for Council Members to be prepared to work with many different personalities and in various work settings. You must be prepared to lead with compassion and respect when communicating with colleagues, even in the event of disagreements or debate.
7. **Problem solving:** the questions and problems that Council Members are faced with can be diverse and challenging. You will need to be able to solve problems using creativity and logical thinking in collaboration with your fellow Council Members.
8. **Organization and time management:** As a Council Member, you will be expected to meet deadlines, show up to meetings on time, and stay on top of your work – even in the face of multiple meetings and different pieces of work. Council Members are responsible for overseeing many different parts of community life, and organizational ability is key in ensuring that responsibility is met.

## The role of a Council Member

The role of the VGFN Council is to set policies, procedures, and community guidelines as well as to review and approve legislation that contributes to the peace, order and good governance of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. However, Council does not make its decisions unilaterally.

Council Members are elected leaders of the Vuntut Gwitchin Government, and strong governance for VGFN also requires strong administrative leadership. Senior staff provide administrative leadership and, in accordance with VGFN law and policy, work together with Council Members to communicate and collaborate in respectful and important ways. One example of how elected and administrative leadership work together is through the work of standing committees.

In accordance with *VGFN's Governance Act*, standing committees are established so that every department of the government is within the purview of a standing committee. Each standing committee is chaired by a member of Council and conducts business that the whole Council refers to them.

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# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

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Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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Once elected, it is important for Council Members to learn the distinct roles and responsibilities of elected and administrative leaders. It is also important to understand the ways that VGFN law and policy direct our elected and administrative leadership to work together.

Establishing trust with VGFN Citizens is a major component of the role that Council Members play. This is key to fulfilling the Constitution. In every aspect of your role as VGFN Council Member, including in your personal life, you will be expected to conduct yourself in a manner based on Vuntut Gwitchin Nation values, rules, and policies.

## **A day in the life of a VGFN Council Member**

In order to carry out their duties and do their jobs effectively, Council Members take part in a range of diverse tasks which vary from day to day. A day in the life of a VGFN Council Member can include any combination of the following tasks and activities:

### **Attending Council meetings, community meetings, and meetings with other levels of Government.**

Council holds regular public meetings as well as special meetings called by the Chief or other Council Members. At these meetings, it is important for Council Members to come prepared and informed about any impending conversations on legislation, policy or decisions that would impact Citizens.

Council Members will be expected not just to attend, but also to participate thoughtfully and offer productive points of view with respect and humility. When these meetings are centered around sensitive or divisive political issues, it can take a great deal of mental energy, it may interfere with other duties or commitments you have outside of the Council, and it can sometimes be stressful.

Council Members are also expected to attend and participate in meetings with representatives of the Federal and Territorial governments. These meetings are often held for the purposes of conducting meaningful community consultations and relationship building. It is the responsibility of VGFN Council Members to actively participate in such meetings and represent the views and interests of all Vuntut Gwitchin Citizens.

### **Reviewing legislation, resolutions, and documents such as Draft Council Resolutions**

Council Members are responsible for proposing new legislation, while also reviewing and enacting existing policies and rules for the community. You will be expected to learn and understand the processes and structures of governance including the VGFN Constitution, and will be expected to familiarize yourself with important documents such as VGFN Council Resolutions. You will have to be comfortable working with the inner workings of the Vuntut Gwitchin governance system and how different governing bodies interact, communicate and function together.



# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

---

Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

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## **Engaging with Vuntut Gwitchin Citizens**

In order to make well-informed decisions about legislation and community policy, Council Members are required to be in touch with current events and topics of interest within the community and Nation. This may require hosting public community meetings, but also having one-on-one conversations with the people and families that will highlight the important priorities of the people who Council Members are elected to serve.

## **Answering emails and messages from other VGFN staff and community members**

Because Council Members work so closely with one another and other members of the Vuntut Gwitchin Government, communication with colleagues and staff is very important to staying up to date on discussions about policy development, relationship building, and community initiatives. Current restrictions on in-person gatherings have resulted in much of the VGFN government's work occurring virtually, and so keeping up with emails and phone calls proves very important.

## **VGFN documents to familiarize yourself with**

The following are important governance documents that will be important for you to familiarize yourself with if you are considering a run for VGFN Council:

[Vuntut Gwitchin Governance Act](#) (2006)

[Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Constitution](#) (amended 2019)

[Vuntut Gwitchin 2020 Interim Elections Act](#) (2020)