

15

First Nations



Strong relationships with First Nations based on trust and mutual respect, partnerships and working together on shared goals

01 Strategy

STRATEGIES & PLANS

- › [Special Task Force on First Nations Relations](#)
- › [Statement of Reconciliation](#)
- › [Climate Action Strategy](#)
- › [Regional Food & Agricultural Strategy](#)
- › [Regional Growth Strategy](#)
- › [Regional Housing Affordability Strategy](#)
- › [Regional Parks & Trails Strategic Plan](#)
- › [Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan](#)
- › [Corporate Asset Management Strategy](#)

CORPORATE PLAN GOALS

- 15a Government-to-government relationships
- 15b Indigenous leadership & traditional knowledge
- 15c Shared prosperity

02 Contacts

Caitlyn Vernon, Senior Manager, First Nations Relations @ [email](#) T. 250.360.3156

03 Operating Context

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2026

1. Developed a CRD Reconciliation Action Plan, with First Nations engagement.
2. Held leadership-level meetings with First Nations to strengthen the government-to-government relationship.
3. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) negotiations underway with one First Nation.
4. Service agreement updates and negotiations underway with multiple First Nations.
5. Supported all CRD divisions to engage with First Nations on a project-by-project basis.
6. Collaborated with First Nations on archaeological and cultural heritage studies to inform project planning and maintenance.
7. Worked with First Nations leadership, Elders and knowledge holders on heritage management and ecological restoration initiatives.
8. Responded to First Nations requests regarding CRD operations and planning; collaborated with CRD divisions and First Nations to determine how to respond to requests and implement new approaches where possible.
9. Offered Cultural Perspectives training to staff
10. Offered archaeological and cultural heritage training to staff, volunteers, commissions, and contractors, in partnership with Indigenous Elders where possible.
11. Staff joined Songhees Walking Tours to learn about ongoing Lək' wəŋən culture and history.
12. Internal service request system developed, tested and launched; will improve coordination and efficiencies.
13. Flew the Xe Xe Smun' Eem flag for Truth and Reconciliation Day, at the request of Orange Shirt Day Victoria.
14. Provided funding to First Nations-led community events.
15. Continued engagement and reporting to provincial staff on its Inclusive Governance Initiative.

FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT OUR OPERATIONS IN 2027 AND BEYOND

- Ongoing requests from First Nations for direct government-to-government meetings with CRD decision-makers and to have a say in all decisions that impact their traditional territories.
- High interest from First Nations regarding CRD land acquisition, with an emphasis on 'land back' and concerns about loss of access within First Nations' territories.
- First Nations are requesting capacity funding to support their engagement in CRD works, as well as MOUs, partnership agreements, and protocol frameworks to guide how we work together.
- First Nations are developing heritage management and consultation policies that could influence CRD project planning, timelines and budgets.
- Increasing requests from First Nations for quarterly staff-level meetings and detailed project information, with CRD providing administrative support.
- The scope and scale of engagement is creating the need for a new organization-wide systematized approach to tracking action items, communications and information sharing with Nations.

- For projects requiring provincial or federal approvals or authorizations, formal consultation of First Nations is required, involving detailed tracking, sharing of technical information and incorporating feedback.
- High priority from the province to finalize treaties in the region, with items that intersect with CRD services/interests largely outside the scope of negotiation. Ongoing CRD participation in Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination negotiations between First Nations and the provincial and federal government.
- Capacity within the CRD and within First Nations will be required to support ongoing reconciliation initiatives and improved collaboration.
- Interest from non-Indigenous community members in restoration of Indigenous place names, signage and other symbols of reconciliation. This needs to be approached carefully in areas of shared territory amongst multiple Nations, so that the CRD is not arbitrating territorial boundaries.
- Many CRD staff have taken cultural perspectives training and are working towards adapting their workflows to accommodate new ways of collaborating with First Nations, however, they still require support from First Nations Relations to do so.
- Heightened scrutiny from First Nations regarding heritage site protection in the context of land-altering works. High interest in field participation of First Nations' staff during project work in any/all project work involving ground disturbance (cultural monitors, Guardians, field technicians).
- High interest from local governments across B.C. trying to collaborate on approaches to heritage management and Indigenous relations.
- Integration of archaeological and heritage management review has implications to building and development permit approval and inspection processes.
- Provincial *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* initiative to explore inclusion of First Nations in regional district decision-making.
- Heightened scrutiny on how CRD Board and staff are translating reconciliation commitments into meaningful action, in the context of societal shifts towards increasing diversity, equity and inclusion at the same time as increasing residential school denialism.
- Increasing expectations of cultural safety for Indigenous employees and contractors, for approaches to First Nations' relations, and for Indigenous peoples interacting with CRD staff and services, pose reputational and relationship risks. For example, around Indigenous cultural use and traditional practices in parks.
- Provincial government initiative to transform the *Heritage Conservation Act* could have operational impacts that will require change in process and policy.

04 Services

The services listed below rely on the support of several corporate and support divisions to operate effectively on a daily basis. More information about these services is available in the Corporate Services and Government Relations Community Need Summaries.

SERVICE BUDGET REFERENCES¹

- › 1.027 First Nations Relations

STAFFING COMPLEMENT

First Nations Relations Division: **7.0 FTE (including exempt and administrative support staff)**

1. LEADERSHIP VISION

Description

Support the Board Priority through facilitating opportunities to build government-to-government relationships between Board Directors and First Nations' elected leadership.

What you can expect from us

- ▶ Advance inclusive governance across CRD
- ▶ Identify opportunities for gatherings or events
- ▶ Provide updates to the committee on the progress of various items related to Board Priority
- ▶ Provide cultural perspectives training and coaching for Board Directors

2. EMERGENT ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Description

Explore, develop, and action areas of common interest with First Nations through seeking Board direction while working closely with First Nations and affected CRD Divisions.

What you can expect from us

- ▶ Respond to and work to help coordinate activities related to requests from First Nations
- ▶ Participate in Treaty and Recognition of Indigenous Rights & Self-Determination processes
- ▶ Liaise with provincial and/or federal staff to discuss items and areas of opportunity

¹ Service budget(s) listed may fund other services

3. INTERNAL DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT

Description

Support, advise and train CRD planning & operations across all service areas to explore and improve internal approaches, processes and protocols for working with First Nations.

What you can expect from us

- ▶ Provide training and support to CRD divisions to ensure implementation of the Protection and Conservation of Heritage Sites Policy
 - ▶ Provide support to CRD divisions looking to engage First Nations on planning, activities, initiatives, field visits and regulatory referrals
 - ▶ Respond to requests from CRD divisions and offer advice on intergovernmental communication.
 - ▶ Deliver a Cultural Perspectives training program to new staff and ongoing education opportunities for all staff
 - ▶ Support CRD divisions in their meetings with First Nations and negotiation of agreements
 - ▶ Participate in and/or negotiate agreements with First Nations
 - ▶ Collaborate with CRD divisions to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan
-

4. EXTERNAL FIRST NATIONS SUPPORT

Description

Directly engage First Nations on a range of projects, initiatives, and activities to build and maintain relationships with First Nations.

What you can expect from us

- ▶ Participate in First Nations' community events and gatherings
- ▶ Support First Nations to access information on CRD activities and processes
- ▶ Listen to and work to understand the interests and activities of First Nations and share this information with CRD divisions
- ▶ Identify opportunities to support and participate in First Nations' initiatives and events
- ▶ Participate in implementation of Indigenous-led projects at the request of First Nations

05 Initiatives

Below are the initiatives listed in the [Capital Regional District 2023-2026 Corporate Plan](#) and the related initiative business cases (IBCs). For an overview of the financial impacts, including cost of staffing, please refer to the Provisional Budget report.

Initiative	Implementation year(s)
15a Goal: Government-to-Government relationships	
15a-1 Seek First Nations' guidance on understanding, developing, and implementing new mechanisms to support ongoing government-to-government relations at the leadership and operational levels	Ongoing
▶ IBC 15a-1.1 Government-to-Government Relationship Building	2024-2028
▶ IBC 15a-1.2 First Nations Relations Staffing	2024-2025
▶ RELATED IBC see 2a-2.3 Master Plan Program in Water Community Need Summary	2026-2028
▶ RELATED IBC see 7f-1.2 First Nations Liaison in Regional Parks Community Need Summary	2027-ongoing
15a-2 Collaborate with First Nations and the province to support inclusive governance by advancing First Nations participation in regional district boards	Ongoing
15a-3 Partner with First Nations to develop, monitor and report out on an organization-wide Reconciliation Action Plan	2026
15b Goal: Indigenous leadership & traditional knowledge	
15b-1 Offer ongoing learning opportunities for staff and Board Directors to build awareness and understanding of Indigenous perspectives, law, and systems of governance	Ongoing
15b-2 Seek out and invite opportunities for Indigenous leadership and knowledge to inform and transform approaches to taking care of land and water, across CRD service delivery areas	Ongoing
15b-3 Engage First Nations to collaboratively develop inclusive approaches to land acquisition that respects Indigenous rights and strengthens government-to-government relationships	Ongoing
15c Goal: Shared prosperity	
15c-1 Increase the number of economic partnerships with First Nations, across CRD service delivery areas	Ongoing

06 Performance

GOAL 15A: GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Targets & Benchmarks

First Nations are requesting direct government-to-government relationships with CRD decision-makers, with associated mechanisms such as MOUs, capacity funding and inclusion on the regional district board.

Measuring Progress

Ref	Performance Measure(s)	Type	2025 Actual	2026 Forecast	2027 Target	Desired trend
1	Government-to-government meetings involving CRD and First Nations leadership ¹	Quantity	8	4	7	↗
2	CRD governance tables open to First Nations as voting participants ²	Quantity	15	16	16	↗
3	Government-to-government agreements between the CRD and First Nations ³	Quantity	7	7	8	↗

¹ Number of government-to-government meetings between CRD Directors and First Nations elected leadership. Information collected by First Nations Relations.

² Number of Standing Committees and other governance tables where First Nations have the opportunity to attend as voting participants, whether or not they are currently attending. Information collected by First Nations Relations, with input from other divisions.

³ Number of active government-to-government agreements such as MOUs. Information collected by First Nations Relations.

Discussion

Government-to-Government MOU negotiations and implementation are underway with First Nations, and it is anticipated that more agreements will be signed. MOUs set out a schedule for regular leadership-level meetings, with fewer in 2026 due to the municipal elections.

First Nations have seats available as voting participants on the Core Area Liquid Waste Management Committee, the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission, Port Renfrew Utility Services Committee, the East Sooke Fire Protection and Emergency Response Service Commission, the Saanich Peninsula Liquid Waste Management Plan Technical Advisory Committee, the Core Area Liquid Waste Management Plan Technical and Community Advisory Committee, the Regional Water Advisory Committee and the Port Renfrew Fire Protection and Emergency Response Service Committee. Currently, First Nations are participating in only a few of these governance tables.

In 2021 the CRD Board amended its bylaws to create spaces for each Nation to appoint an elected representative to sit as a First Nation Member on CRD Standing Committees, including Environmental Services, Governance and First Nations Relations, Planning and Protective Services, Regional Parks, Finance, Transportation, Hospitals and Housing, and Electoral Areas. There has been very limited uptake with some Nations expressing a preference for direct government-to-government relationship building. The provincial government is currently exploring opportunities for more inclusive governance on regional district boards.

GOAL 15B: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP & TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Targets & Benchmarks

Inviting, respecting and incorporating Indigenous leadership and traditional knowledge through engagement and ongoing learning opportunities will enhance CRD initiatives and strategies by informing and transforming approaches to taking care of land and water.

Measuring Progress

Ref	Performance Measure(s)	Type	2025 Actual	2026 Forecast	2027 Target	Desired trend
4	Agreements with First Nations related to taking care of land and water ⁴	Quantity	4	5	6	↗
5	Planning and operations initiatives actively engaging First Nations ⁵	Quantity	95	85	85	→
6	Learning opportunities: Indigenous perspectives ⁶	Quantity	14	15	16	↗

⁴ Number of agreements with First Nations related to taking care of land and water, such as Access Agreements and Traditional Use Agreements. Information collected by First Nations Relations with input from other divisions.

⁵ Number of planning & operations initiatives actively engaging First Nations (each initiative may involve multiple Nations). Does not include regulatory referrals. Information collected by First Nations Relations with input from other divisions.

⁶ Number of opportunities for CRD staff and/or Board to learn directly from First Nations, e.g. through training, gatherings, or presentations. Does not include site visits. Information collected by First Nations Relations.

Discussion

Agreements refer to Traditional Use Agreements, Access Agreements, Environmental Monitoring Agreements or other formal arrangements with First Nations related to access to, and stewardship of, land and water. Engagement with First Nations for any given planning or operations initiative may include a variety of meetings, review of documents, site visits, and in-field collaborations between CRD staff and First Nations' staff (including lands managers, cultural workers, Guardians, field technicians, referral officers, administrators). These initiatives include such things as land altering works, park and land use planning, ecological restoration initiatives, liquid waste management, solid waste management, climate initiatives, emergency and disaster management, infrastructure projects and invasive species removal. The number will depend on the scope of active CRD initiatives and the number of requests from First Nations and as such may fluctuate each year.

Ongoing learning opportunities for staff and Board Directors build awareness and understanding of Indigenous perspectives and systems of governance. These opportunities include formal training and Nation-led learning sessions. Much ongoing learning also occurs that is more difficult to quantify, including on-the-land learning when working in the field with First Nations staff, elders and leadership, and learning through discussions with Indigenous colleagues and in staff-level meetings with First Nations. A deeper level of knowledge sharing occurs where trust has been built through respectful working relationships.

GOAL 15C: SHARED PROSPERITY

Targets & Benchmarks

Economic reconciliation has been identified as a critical interest of First Nations and an area of opportunity within CRD services. These relationships are often detailed through service agreements. Metrics around procurement from Indigenous businesses could be considered in future.

Measuring Progress

Ref	Performance Measure(s)	Type	2025 Actual	2026 Forecast	2027 Target	Desired trend
7	Service agreements with First Nations ⁷	Quantity	11	12	13	↗
8	Economic initiatives involving First Nations ⁸	Quantity	7	8	9	↗

⁷ Total number of active or honoured service agreements with First Nations. Information collected by First Nations Relations, with input from other divisions.

⁸ Number of active initiatives geared to enhancing economic opportunities for First Nations, not including procurement. Includes planning & operations initiatives that include economic opportunities. Information collected by First Nations Relations, with input from other divisions.

Discussion

Water, wastewater, solid waste and animal care service agreements are being negotiated with First Nations. Economic initiatives refer to the South Island Indigenous Business Directory, updating of service agreements, sharing of natural resources such as wood and gravel, a master plan feasibility study for water and wastewater in Port Renfrew in collaboration with the local First Nation, and identification of economic initiatives to include as action items in a CRD Reconciliation Action Plan.

Measuring the number of contracts awarded to First Nations and Indigenous businesses would be a valuable indicator of increasing support for First Nations' economic opportunities over time. Currently the CRD does award several contracts to First Nations, including contracts for cultural workers as part of land-altering works and archaeological investigations, contracts to participate in Canada Goose management, and a Regional Parks contract with T'Sou-ke to operate the Sooke Potholes Campground. Corporate-wide Indigenous procurement is not tracked at this time; doing so would be a good indicator of progress towards this priority however would require more centralized procurement support.

Offering capacity funding to support project-specific First Nations engagement can be seen as both an operational statistic, reflecting new ways of doing business and supporting government-to-government relationship building, and a performance metric, as it uplifts the capacity of First Nations to engage with CRD service delivery in meaningful ways. Staff are working towards a way to measure capacity funding organization-wide.

07 Business Model

PARTICIPANTS	All 13 municipalities and three electoral areas
FUNDING SOURCES	Requisition
GOVERNANCE	Governance and First Nations Relations Committee ↳ Previously First Nations Relations Committee (No longer active)