

# SUMMARY REPORT

FEBRUARY 28-29, 2024



BC Guardians Gathering: February 28-29, 2024

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## Introduction

On February 28-29<sup>th</sup>, 2024 the Province of British Columbia (Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship) hosted a BC Guardians Gathering in Vancouver, BC which brought together over 160 participants. The objectives of the gathering were:

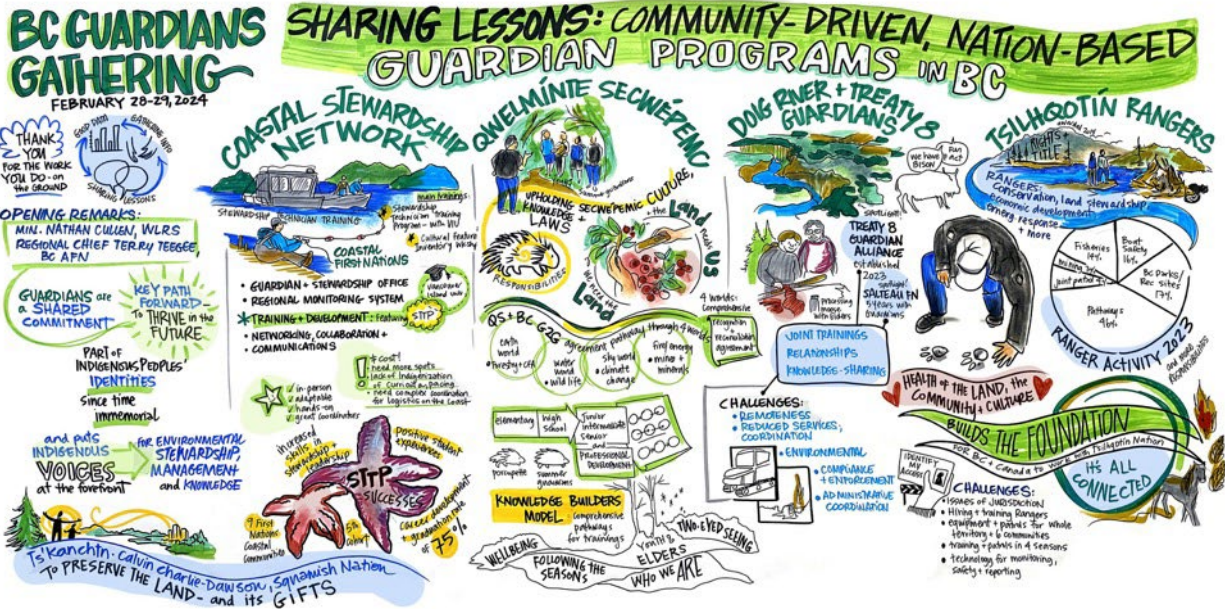
1. For the Province of BC (Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship) to engage with First Nations about Guardians work and identify opportunities to provide further support.
2. To network, exchange ideas, and share experiences amongst Guardians, leaders, and program leads.
3. To learn from one another and offer guidance to inform the Province's future activities relating to Guardians.

The Gathering was organized into three themes: (1) Sharing Lessons in the Establishment of Community-Driven, Nation-Based Guardians Programs; (2) Opportunities, Successes and Challenges in Training Initiatives for Guardians Programs; and (3) The Interconnectedness of Guardians Work. For each theme, a number of presentations were made by experts in the field to share their experiences, provide context, and offer new insights to add to the broader topic.

Following each panel of presentations, participants were engaged in tabletop discussions where they were asked to share their feedback on key questions. The feedback shared to the engagement questions will inform the co-development of provincial policy related to supporting First Nations Guardians programs. This summary report written by Four Directions Management Services (FDMS) who served as the independent and neutral facilitators of the BC Guardians Gathering, is a summary of that feedback. FDMS received written summaries from each tabletop discussion and distilled the immense feedback into common themes summarized in the sections to follow.

In addition to the tabletop discussions that took place during the Gathering, a “First Nations Guardians Backgrounder and Engagement Questions” developed by the Province was shared. First Nations were invited to review the Backgrounder and provide input to BC via an online form. The online form included a couple of additional questions that weren't posed during the Gathering's tabletop discussions. The feedback received to the additional questions is summarized in Appendix A. Feedback offered through the online form that aligned with the feedback gathered during the Gathering were included into one summary together.

# Part I: Opportunities and Challenges in Establishing Guardians Programs



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## What are the main opportunities in establishing Guardian Programs?

The engagement discussion surrounding the opportunities for the establishment of Guardian Programs convened an assembly of voices echoing the ancestral wisdom and contemporary needs of First Nations communities across British Columbia. In this collective exchange, participants identified many opportunities intrinsic to Guardian Programs, articulating a multifaceted vision encompassing not only land preservation but also cultural revitalization, community empowerment, and intergovernmental collaboration. At the heart of these discussions lay a profound commitment to safeguarding the lands, imbued with both ecological significance and spiritual resonance, against the encroachments of modernity and environmental degradation.

Central to the discussions was the recognition of Guardians as stewards entrusted with the sacred duty of preserving the spirit of the territories, safeguarding ancient sites of cultural significance, and nurturing a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Participants highlighted the transformative potential of Guardians as educators, stewards, and role models, capable of instilling a profound respect for the land among



recreational users, redirecting harmful activities towards more sustainable practices, and fostering a deeper understanding of First Nations heritage and environmental stewardship.

Moreover, the dialogue underscored the indispensable role of Guardians as liaisons bridging the gap between First Nations and provincial authorities, facilitating cooperation with entities such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to enhance law enforcement, resource management, and emergency response efforts. Participants shared insights into the operational dynamics of diverse Guardian programs, ranging from community-based emergency services to wildlife monitoring and cultural preservation initiatives, each tailored to address the unique challenges and aspirations of their respective Nations.

The discussions also encompassed the intricate tapestry of training needs essential to equip Guardians with the skills, knowledge, and cultural sensitivity required to navigate the complexities of modern governance and environmental stewardship. From ecological habitat restoration to enforcement protocols and traditional ecological knowledge, participants emphasized the holistic nature of Guardian training, integrating both Indigenous wisdom and contemporary best practices to ensure effective land management and cultural preservation.

Amidst the vast array of opportunities presented by the Guardian Programs, participants candidly confronted the formidable challenges hindering their realization. These challenges ranged from funding constraints and safety considerations to the imperative for comprehensive training regimens and intergovernmental collaboration frameworks. Nevertheless, participants remained resolute in their conviction that Guardian Programs represent a potent instrument for First Nations empowerment, environmental resilience, and reconciliation.

The dialogue illuminated a path forward characterized by collaboration, cultural revitalization, and a steadfast commitment to honouring ancestral connections to the land. It affirmed Guardian Programs as a transformative force for First Nations' self-determination, environmental sustainability, and intergenerational resilience, heralding a future where the lands are cherished.

From the extensive responses provided, several overarching themes (listed alphabetically, not in priority) emerged regarding the main opportunities in establishing Guardian Programs:

1. **Accountability and Resource Stewardship:** Guardians play a critical role in ensuring accountability for resource extraction on the land and water. By being present on the ground or water, they monitor ecological resources and enforce existing laws, protecting resources beneficial to the Nations' food, social, and ceremonial needs. This accountability is essential for active stewardship and sustainable resource management.

2. **Challenges with Funding and Capacity:** While funding presents an opportunity for establishing and sustaining Guardian Programs, it is also a significant challenge. Limited resources and capacity constraints hinder the ability to implement and maintain effective programs, particularly in remote or economically disadvantaged communities.
3. **Community Engagement and Education:** Guardian Programs provide opportunities for community engagement and education, enabling First Nations to reconnect with their cultural heritage, pass on traditional knowledge to future generations, and involve youth in environmental stewardship initiatives. Guardians facilitate knowledge transfer between Elders and younger generations, reconnecting communities with their cultural heritage and language.
4. **Communication and Knowledge Sharing:** Guardians act as conduits for transferring knowledge of the land and water into communicable formats for Chief and Council, the community, and external organizations. They facilitate cross-value teaching by integrating Western and Indigenous values, empowering members, and fostering inclusion and resurgence of language within the community.
5. **Cultural Monitoring and Traditional Knowledge Integration:** Guardian Programs aim to blend traditional ecological knowledge with Western scientific approaches to monitoring and managing natural resources. Incorporating cultural monitoring practices and Indigenous perspectives into environmental assessments and decision-making processes is essential for holistic stewardship.
6. **Cultural Revitalization and Connection to the Land:** Guardian Programs play a vital role in cultural revitalization efforts, reconnecting First Nations with their ancestral lands, practices, and spiritual beliefs. This connection fosters a sense of pride, identity, and belonging among community members.
7. **Data Collection and Reporting:** Guardian Programs contribute to data collection efforts, providing valuable information on environmental conditions, wildlife populations, and human activities within their territories. Standardizing reporting protocols and integrating data into decision-making processes are key challenges and opportunities.
8. **Emergency Response and Safety Concerns:** Guardians often play a role in emergency response efforts, such as wildfire management and search and rescue operations. Ensuring their safety and providing adequate training and resources for these tasks is crucial.
9. **Employment Opportunities and Economic Development:** Guardian Programs provide employment opportunities, both seasonal and long-term, contributing to

economic development in First Nations communities. This employment serves as a means of honouring the responsibility to the land while building relationships and understanding among people and groups, both First Nation and non-First Nation.

10. **Empowerment and Rebuilding:** Establishing Guardian Programs is seen as a means of rebuilding and empowering First Nations communities, providing employment opportunities, reclaiming territory jurisdiction, and fostering cultural revitalization. Guardians play a vital role in reconnecting communities with their traditional ways of knowing and reclaiming their roles as stewards of the land.
11. **Environmental Stewardship and Protection:** Guardian Programs offer a crucial opportunity to preserve and protect lands, including culturally significant sites, from encroachment and environmental degradation. They serve as stewards entrusted with safeguarding the natural and spiritual essence of the territories, addressing issues like illegal activities, habitat destruction, and wildlife conservation.
12. **Interagency Collaboration and Liaison:** Guardians act as liaisons between First Nations communities and provincial authorities, fostering cooperation with agencies such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to enhance law enforcement, resource management, and emergency response efforts.
13. **Jurisdictional Issues and Collaboration:** Guardian Programs encounter challenges related to jurisdictional complexities, especially concerning shared territories and overlapping responsibilities with provincial agencies and private landowners. Collaboration and clear protocols are needed to navigate these issues effectively.
14. **Networking and Collaboration:** Establishing Guardian Programs facilitates collaboration among First Nations communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders, enabling the sharing of resources, knowledge, and best practices. It also strengthens relationships and collective identity among Nations.
15. **Recognition and Visibility:** Guardian Programs bring recognition to First Nations and provide a platform for their voices to be heard on matters affecting their ancestral territories. The presence of Guardians on the land ensures visibility and acknowledges the expertise of Indigenous peoples in environmental stewardship.
16. **Resource Management and Economic Development:** Guardian Programs offer opportunities for First Nation communities to manage their forests, watersheds, and other natural resources sustainably, leading to economic development and food security. They also contribute to informed decision-making through data collection and monitoring.

**17. Policy Advocacy and Legislative Engagement:** The work that Guardians undertake contributes to advocacy for policy changes and legislative reforms to address environmental issues, uphold Aboriginal rights and title, and strengthen community resilience. Engaging with government agencies and advocating for First Nations-led conservation initiatives are integral to their work.

**18. Training and Capacity Building:** There is a recognized need for comprehensive training programs to equip Guardians with the necessary skills, knowledge, and cultural sensitivity to fulfill their roles effectively. Training encompasses a range of topics, from ecological habitat restoration to enforcement protocols and traditional ecological knowledge. This includes transferring skills to others within the community and fostering a sense of independence through meaningful work aligned with community needs.

These themes highlight the diverse roles and responsibilities of Guardian Programs and underscore the holistic approach to environmental stewardship and empowerment advocated by First Nation peoples. Overall, the feedback provided demonstrates the opportunities for Guardian Programs to address a wide range of challenges while empowering First Nations to reclaim their roles as caretakers of the land.



## What are the main challenges in establishing Guardian Programs?

Establishing and maintaining Guardian Programs in British Columbia presents a myriad of challenges that require immediate attention and strategic planning. These challenges encompass various facets, including funding, operational logistics, cultural recognition, legal frameworks, community engagement, and capacity building. Addressing these complex issues requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving First Nations, government agencies, industry stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations.

Funding emerges as the most pressing challenges for Guardian Programs. Securing sufficient funding on a large scale is essential for the development and sustenance of these programs. Operational costs, particularly in remote areas inaccessible by vehicles, pose significant financial burdens. While some communities have managed to secure grants from entities like the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the grant application process is intricate and demanding, requiring continuous effort to stay ahead. Guardians often rely on grants to procure essential equipment like trucks, boats, and storage facilities, further adding to the financial strain.

Moreover, the seasonal nature of employment exacerbates strain on resources and hinders long-term planning and sustainability. Bridging the gap between Indigenous knowledge and Western practices through education and community engagement is essential. However, training opportunities are often limited, especially in remote communities, resulting in challenges with recruitment and retention of qualified personnel. Furthermore, interactions with local government agencies and industries present challenges, as issues are often pushed onto First Nations to address without adequate support or resources.

Racism and illegal activities such as dumping and poaching pose pervasive challenges that Guardians must confront while contending with personal safety risks. Additionally, the lack of recognition and integration of Indigenous laws and cultural practices into government policies exacerbates conflicts over jurisdictional authority and autonomy, hindering effective environmental management. Efforts to overcome these challenges require a holistic approach that addresses systemic barriers such as funding constraints, racism, legal recognition, and capacity building.

Collaboration between First Nations, government agencies, and industry stakeholders is essential to develop sustainable solutions and ensure the success of Guardian Programs in protecting and preserving the natural and cultural environmental. This collaboration should involve meaningful engagement with First Nations, acknowledging their traditional knowledge and expertise in environmental stewardship. It should also include the establishment of clear legal frameworks that recognize Indigenous jurisdiction and provide adequate resources for Guardian Programs to operate effectively.

Furthermore, community engagement and education play a crucial role in fostering understanding and support for Guardian Programs. Public awareness campaigns, cultural events, and educational initiatives can help bridge the gap between First Nation and non-First Nation communities, fostering mutual respect and cooperation. Moreover, capacity building initiatives, including training programs and mentorship opportunities, are essential for empowering First Nation communities to take on leadership roles in environmental management.

Addressing the challenges facing Guardian Programs in British Columbia requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. From the extensive responses provided, several overarching themes (listed alphabetically, not in priority) emerged regarding the main challenges in establishing Guardian Programs:

1. **Administrative Barriers:** Administrative barriers hinder the efficient functioning of Guardian programs, encompassing challenges such as limited training opportunities, licensing constraints, and insufficient support for capacity building efforts. Meaningful community involvement is often impeded by a lack of centralized resources and support structures, hampering program effectiveness and sustainability.
2. **Capacity Building and Training:** Building and maintaining a skilled workforce is essential for the success of Guardian programs, yet challenges such as difficulty in finding qualified candidates and inadequate training opportunities persist. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge and traditional ecological practices into training programs is crucial for promoting cultural competency and program effectiveness.
3. **Collaborative Funding Models:** Collaborative funding models offer potential solutions to funding challenges, yet complexities such as funding disparities, competition among First Nations, and the need to leverage funds and create own source revenues pose significant obstacles. Efforts to streamline funding processes and promote equitable distribution are essential for the sustainability of Guardian programs.
4. **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Creating space for First Nations communities in decision-making and building community capacity and resilience are central to the success of Guardian programs. Strengthening relationships within and between Nations, fostering collaboration, and promoting inclusive decision-making processes are essential for effective environmental stewardship and community empowerment.
5. **Cross-Boundary Collaboration:** Collaborating across territorial boundaries presents unique challenges, including navigating jurisdictional boundaries,

coordinating with neighbouring Nations and local and regional governments, and establishing standardized approaches and protocols. Overcoming these challenges requires effective communication and cooperation between diverse stakeholders.

6. **Cultural Considerations:** Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the success of Guardian programs, with challenges arising from the general public's lack of understanding and negative connotations associated with the term "Guardian" and the need to overcome racism and foster cooperation from non-Indigenous individuals. Additionally, the lack of acknowledgment of Indigenous laws and cultural practices poses a barrier to effective environmental stewardship.
7. **Data Collection and Management:** Effective data collection and management are essential for informed decision-making in Guardian programs, yet challenges such as meaningful data collection and utilization, limited resources for data management and analysis, and difficulties in translating data into actionable insights persist, highlighting the need for improved data management governance, practices, and infrastructure.
8. **Funding Challenges:** Securing sufficient funding for the establishment and ongoing operations of Guardian programs remains a significant obstacle. These programs require substantial financial resources for development, operational costs, and addressing specific challenges related to remote access. Ensuring sustained, long-term funding is crucial to the stability and effectiveness of these initiatives, particularly in competing with industry wages, especially in remote locations where resources are limited.
9. **Governmental Challenges:** Governmental challenges encompass issues related to jurisdictional authority, funding collaboration, and recognition of Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty. Bureaucratic barriers often impede progress, hindering effective collaboration between First Nations and government agencies.
10. **Legal and Policy Framework:** Legal and policy frameworks pose challenges to the effective implementation of Guardian programs, including the recognition and acceptance of Indigenous laws and sovereignty, policy creation, and implementation challenges, and the need for clear legal frameworks and guidelines to guide program operations.
11. **Operational Hurdles:** The day-to-day operations of Guardian programs are beset by various challenges, including staff retention and recruitment issues. Remote locations present logistical difficulties, compounded by the lack of driver's licenses or driving programs in rural communities. Additionally, administrative tasks such as reporting and proposal writing can strain resources and divert attention from core program objectives.





## Part II: Opportunities, Successes and Challenges in Training Initiatives for Guardians Programs



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### What training is most needed for Guardians and what are the main barriers to accessing training?

Significant discussion centered on the training needs of Guardians and the primary barriers they face in accessing such training. The feedback received was extensive and highlighted a broad spectrum of training necessities alongside numerous barriers that impede access to this essential training.

Participants identified a wide range of training needs essential for Guardians, encompassing both practical skills and deeper cultural understanding. Among the practical skills, there was a strong emphasis on the need for Firearms PAL training, soil and water testing, and techniques for more in-house sampling to reduce the necessity of external experts. The importance of certification in off-road safety driving, ATV and UTV operation, small vessel operation on water, and radio operator certification was underscored. Furthermore, there was a call for drone training for surveying potential archaeological sites and cultural sites, first aid and wilderness first aid, fire safety, boat



licensing, incident logging with an indigenized approach, swift water rescue, verbal judo for communication, understanding body language, and comprehending the nuances between on and off-reserve environmental laws.

Barriers to accessing these training opportunities were highlighted, with accessibility, the cost of funding, and the challenge of bringing training into communities being primary concerns. The effectiveness of online training was recognized, albeit with limitations. The overarching issue of funding, or the lack thereof, was a critical barrier, exacerbated by the absence of consistent own-source revenue. Participants expressed a desire to see a reversal of roles, acknowledging that while new skills are essential in the colonial context, the transmission of traditional teachings remains paramount. Concerns were raised about the suitability of existing training curricula, such as that offered by Vancouver Island University, to truly reflect Indigenous knowledge and the need for training standards that respect First Nations sovereignty and values.

The feedback also touched on the holistic approach to training across the province, aiming for teachings that encompass perspectives from the north to the interior to the south. The discussions brought to light a lack of trust in government, the need to build relationships, the inadequacy of the funding provided, and the need for a commitment to full-time, long-term funding. Reporting and the capacity to be able to meaningfully share teachings were identified as barriers, alongside the need for youth engagement and nation rebuilding that transcends the Guardian role, emphasizing a deep connection to the land.

The need for specialized training tailored to the unique environmental and cultural contexts of each Nation was evident, with a call for training in climate change impacts, ecosystem health assessment, traditional ecological knowledge, life skills, and the various aspects of regulation and enforcement. A bidirectional learning and training model between First Nations and the BC government was proposed, alongside the necessity for more streamlined processes for accessing data and funding for training.

Based on the feedback provided, the top training needs for Guardians included, were not limited to:

1. **Certification and Specialized Training:** This includes certifications for crossing highways with ATVs, radio operator certification, and specialized area-dependent training like electro-shocking and boat operation.
2. **Communication and Conflict Resolution:** Training in verbal judo, communication strategies, body language reading, and public speaking (Toastmasters).
3. **Cultural and Indigenous Knowledge:** Emphasis on passing on traditional teachings, understanding cultural values and laws, Indigenous protocols, and complimenting traditional knowledge with western science.

4. **Environmental and Ecological Skills:** This includes soil and water testing, environmental law differences between on and off reserves, climate change impacts, assessing ecosystem health, and environmental monitoring.
5. **Health, Safety, and Self-Care:** Guardianship self-care and boundaries, health and safety program requirements, and understanding family history and values for better land use.
6. **Legal and Administrative Skills:** Aboriginal law and administrative law knowledge, legal notetaking and documentation, compliance and enforcement training, and proposal writing.
7. **Operational and Technical Skills:** Skills such as firearms PAL training, ATV and UTV training, small vessel operation, drone operation (including using LiDAR and infrared cameras for surveying), snow depth and ice measuring, and boat licensing are crucial.
8. **Practical Field Skills:** Off-road safety driving, resource road use, defensive driving, small engine repair, and maintenance training for equipment like quads, boats, etc.
9. **Safety and Emergency Response:** This encompasses wilderness first aid, fire safety (e.g., S100 Basic Fire Suppression and Safety) and entrapment prevention, and swift water rescue.
10. **Technical and Data Management:** ArcGIS training, data management, database management, and IT skills including the use of Microsoft Office and specialized software for environmental studies.

The main barriers to accessing training include, but were not limited:

1. **Accessibility and Availability of Training:** Challenges in physically accessing training locations and the broader issue of ensuring training opportunities and funding information are readily accessible and culturally and territorially appropriate. This includes overcoming logistical barriers to organize community-based training and improving the dissemination of information about available training and funding without reliance on sporadic outreach methods.
2. **Communication and Information Sharing:** A lack of communication about the roles of Guardians, training opportunities, and creating systems for sharing and accessing information among First Nations to ensure everyone is informed and able to participate.
3. **Cultural and Intergenerational Transmission:** Highlighting the barriers to the transmission of traditional knowledge and practices, emphasizing the need for

youth engagement and the involvement of elders and cultural teachers in the training processes to ensure continuity and integration of traditional wisdom.

4. **Cultural Appropriateness:** The need for training that respects Indigenous knowledge and cultural sensitivities, and the challenge of finding trainers with the right cultural awareness.
5. **Employment and Career Development:** Addressing the challenge of providing clear career pathways and securing employment for Guardians post-training, to encourage retention within their communities and prevent the loss of trained individuals to external opportunities.
6. **Funding:** A significant barrier is the lack of sufficient and sustainable funding, the critical need for specialized skills in grant writing and the importance of dedicated staff to manage applications and seek out funding opportunities, the inadequate distribution and utilization of funds available, and the need for a re-evaluation of financial commitments to ensure full-time, long-term support for Guardian programs.
7. **Government and Institutional Barriers:** Skepticism towards the motives and effectiveness of government-funded training programs and the need for policies that genuinely support Indigenous training initiatives, rather than imposing external standards and certifications not aligned with Indigenous knowledge systems.
8. **Regulatory and Policy Constraints:** Navigating the complexities of compliance, enforcement, and navigating the bureaucratic processes for permits and approvals for training activities.
9. **Technological Limitations:** While online platforms offer some solutions, they cannot fully address the need for practical, hands-on training that requires field experience, indicating a gap in the current digital training offerings.

These themes reflect a comprehensive understanding of the training needs and barriers faced by Guardians, highlighting the importance of developing tailored, accessible, and culturally appropriate training programs supported by sustainable funding and policy frameworks.

The comprehensive feedback provided underscores the vast range of training needs for Guardians and the significant barriers to accessing such training. It highlights a strong desire for training that is not only practical and skill-based but also deeply rooted in cultural teachings and traditions, reflecting a holistic approach to stewardship of the land. The call for flexibility in training delivery, the recognition of Indigenous knowledge, and the necessity for sustainable funding mechanisms are pivotal to the future success and effectiveness of the Guardians program in British Columbia.

## What would success for the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative look like in your view?

Success for the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative, as envisioned by participants at the "Guardians Gathering," encompasses a multifaceted approach that emphasizes financial accessibility, autonomy, cultural integration, long-term sustainability, and meaningful collaboration across various levels of government and First Nations communities. A successful initiative would see all funding direct allocated to Guardians for their training. This approach underlines the importance of equipping Guardians with necessary resources without diverting funds away from their intended purpose.

A cornerstone of success involves building collaborative and equal relationships among the three levels of government, ensuring that the information gathered supports Nations directly and that the programs developed are valued and respected at the governmental level. Tailoring programs to meet the specific needs of each community is crucial, acknowledging that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective due to diverse community needs and values. This individualized strategy would pave the way for meaningful long-term training, job creation, and the implementation of programs that resonate with the unique cultural, environmental, and social landscapes of each First Nation.

Increased capacity building within a holistic framework is vital. Such an approach would incorporate traditional knowledge and practices, self-governance over territorial lands, and the creation of Guardian gatherings to facilitate shared learning and program development. Recognition of professional certifications within Indigenous contexts, allowing communities to craft their curricula, further underscores the initiative's success by merging traditional knowledge with recognized professional standards.

Addressing systemic issues such as racism and ensuring job stability beyond the constraints of short-term grants would contribute significantly to the initiative's success. Expanding the capacity of First Nations to cover their territories effectively and enhancing the authority of Guardians to enforce regulations and protect lands from infractions like poaching or illegal fishing are essential elements. Long-term funding stability is critical, ensuring that the initiative and its benefits persist for generations, allowing for the collection and sharing of crucial environmental data among First Nations.

The integration of Indigenous laws, enforceable bylaws within First Nations territories, and the development of strategies to address infractions with meaningful consequences are pivotal. Collaboration and networking opportunities for sharing information about funding, alongside strategies for generating revenue through resource taxes or user fees, would provide a sustainable financial model. Incorporating community input into decision-making processes, especially regarding land and resource management during critical periods such as fire seasons, embodies the holistic vision of success.

Success is also defined by the integration of Indigenous languages and cultures into stewardship processes, asserting the significance of language as a vital connection to the land and its resources. Substantial investment in Indigenous methodologies, recognized and respected by all stakeholders, including governments and industries, is deemed essential. Establishing clear mechanisms for knowledge transfer, data sharing, and the incorporation of First Nations authority in environmental governance encapsulates the broader vision of success.

Furthermore, the initiative's success is seen in its ability to provide a career path and professional development for Guardians, integrating traditional knowledge with formal education and ensuring competitive compensation. It envisions an environment where Guardians play a pivotal role in community education, ecosystem management, and the restoration of traditional practices. Success ultimately encompasses a comprehensive and adaptive training model that supports the diverse needs of First Nations communities, ensuring the guardianship role is recognized, respected, and capable of adapting to the evolving challenges of stewardship and land management.

The responses to what success would look like for the Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative have been summarized into the following top themes:

1. **Adaptive and Inclusive Training Models:** Creating flexible training programs that accommodate diverse learning styles and levels, including online and land-based learning, that recognize and integrate Indigenous knowledge alongside technical training.
2. **Capacity Building and Job Stability:** Expanding the capacity of First Nations to effectively cover and manage their territories and ensuring job stability for Guardians beyond short-term grant funding.
3. **Collaborative and Networked Learning:** Opportunities for Guardians to share experiences, knowledge, and strategies, both within and across communities, fostering a network of learning and support.
4. **Collaborative Relationships Across Governments:** Building equal and cooperative relationships among federal, provincial, and First Nations governments, with mutual respect for the information gathered and programs developed, ensuring these efforts are valued at all governmental levels.
5. **Data Management and Sharing:** Developing systems for the efficient collection, management, and sharing of environmental data among First Nations, including the use of technology to facilitate this process.
6. **Direct and Sustainable Funding:** Success is characterized by financial resources that directly support Guardians for their training needs, ensuring long-term stability



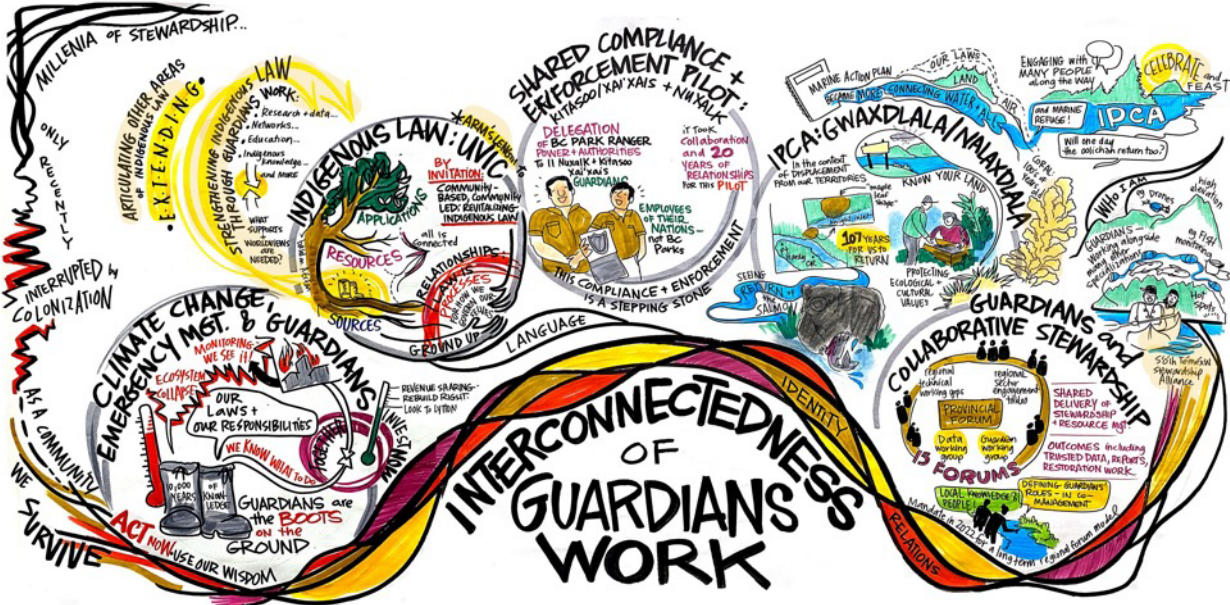
and sustainability of the initiative without diverting funds to provincial staff or gatherings.

7. **Incorporation of Traditional Knowledge and Practices:** Integrating Indigenous laws, cultural practices, and Indigenous languages into the stewardship programs, with an emphasis on holistic approaches and self-governance over territorial lands.
8. **Recognition and Authority of Guardians:** Enhancing the role and authority of Guardians to enforce regulations, issue penalties for infractions, and be recognized as key stewards of their territories, including the development of roles such as “Master Guardian.”
9. **Regulatory and Jurisdictional Recognition:** Achieving broad recognition and respect for First Nations’ jurisdiction and authority in stewardship and guardianship, ensuring Indigenous laws and governance structures are acknowledged and implemented.
10. **Resource and Revenue Generation:** Exploring and implementing strategies for First Nations to generate revenue through resource taxes, user fees, and partnerships with industry, to support stewardship activities and territorial management.
11. **Tailored and Community-Specific Programs:** Programs designed to meet the unique needs and values of each community, allowing for the creation of culturally relevant training and job opportunities that are not one-size-fits-all but rather reflective of individual community contexts.

In conclusion, the feedback provided collectively outlines a vision for a successful Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative that is financially sustainable, culturally integrated, community-specific, and recognized across governmental and jurisdictional boundaries, with a strong emphasis on collaborative relationships, capacity building, and the empowerment of Guardians as key stewards of their lands.



# Part III: Identification of Priorities Moving Forward for Guardians Programs and the Province of B.C.



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## What are your top priorities for B.C. and First Nations to work together to better support Guardians?

The top priorities for the Province of B.C. and First Nations to work together to better support Guardians, as expressed by participants at the "Guardians Gathering," reflect a collective desire for a paradigm shift in the approach to guardianship, stewardship, and the management of natural resources. At the heart of these priorities is the call for B.C. to provide comprehensive financial and technical support to Guardian initiatives, relinquishing the role of defining guardianship to the Nations themselves. This shift underscores the need for fostering relationships based on key initiatives like wildlife management, creating space for Guardians to assert authority under the leadership of their Nations, and building collaborative, equal partnerships between governments.

Participants emphasized the importance of a long-term commitment to funding and supports, advocating for the work done by the Nations to be recognized and utilized in accordance with environmental standards set by the Nations on their unceded territories. The consensus points toward the need for long-term funding with low administrative barriers, fostering local Guardian groups and alliances for better collaboration, more sharing and networking, and the creation of opportunities for Guardians to learn from one another through shared communications like newsletters or groups.

Open communication and setting clear goals were highlighted as essential, with a call for sustainable, long-term funding to support both capital and operational expenses, reflecting the reality of the high cost of living in the province. The integration of technology to simplify data input and reporting, alongside formal education and certification for Guardians, was seen as critical for providing direction and career opportunities for youth. Networking opportunities to meet provincial teams, build partnerships with organizations like BC Parks, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Conservation Officer Service (COS), and facilitate information sharing were identified as crucial for the effectiveness of Guardian programs.

Year-round employment opportunities for Guardians to address issues of retention and the need for relationship building based on trust and understanding were underscored as vital components of a successful collaboration. The terminology used to describe the Guardians and their programs was also a point of discussion, with some participants suggesting a shift towards terms that emphasize unity with the land rather than an adversarial stance.

One overarching theme was the need for a significant shift in framework to accommodate the realities of climate change, ensuring that the collaboration respects the laws, language, and land of First Nation. This includes recognizing and empowering Indigenous laws and providing the space for Nations to lead in the stewardship of their territories. Shared resources, information about salmon monitoring, and management agreements with BC Parks were mentioned as examples of collaboration that need further development and commitment.

The priorities for B.C. and First Nations to work together effectively to support Guardians encompass sustainable funding, collaborative partnerships, enhanced communication and networking, educational opportunities, year-round employment, and respect for First Nations sovereignty and Indigenous laws. These priorities call for a reimagined approach to guardianship and stewardship that places First Nations at the forefront of decision-making and implementation, fostering a relationship that truly reflects the principles of respect, recognition, and reciprocity.

In summary, the top priorities for B.C. and First Nations to work together to better support Guardians included the following key themes:

1. **Collaborative Partnerships and Equal Recognition:** Establishing collaborative, equal partnerships between the provincial government and First Nations, where the work and environmental standards set by the Nations are recognized and utilized on par with those of the Province.
2. **Education and Capacity Building:** Prioritizing education and certification for Guardians to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge, alongside efforts to build local Guardian groups and alliances for shared learning and support.

3. **Empowerment and Autonomy for Nations:** There is a strong call for B.C. to support and recognize the roles, responsibilities, authorities, and framework of guardianship as defined Nations themselves, allowing them to lead in the stewardship and management of their territories in accordance with their traditional laws and practices.
4. **Networking and Partnership Building:** Creating opportunities for Guardians to network with each other, share information, and build partnerships with provincial teams and agencies like BC Parks, DFO, and COS to enhance collaboration and information sharing.
5. **Open Communication and Shared Goals:** Emphasizing the importance of open communication channels and shared goals between B.C. and First Nations, including the development of tools like the Indigenous Guardian Toolkit to facilitate government-to-government dialogue.
6. **Relationship Building Based on Trust:** The priority of developing deeper, trust-based relationships between B.C. and First Nations, moving beyond transactional interactions to genuine understanding and collaboration.
7. **Respect for First Nations Sovereignty and Indigenous Laws:** Ensuring that B.C.'s collaboration with First Nations respects and integrates First Nations sovereignty, Indigenous laws, and practices, with a shift in framework that acknowledges First Nations' leadership in managing their territories.
8. **Sustainable Funding and Financial Support:** A crucial priority is the provision of long-term, sustainable funding for Guardians programs, including both capital and operational expenses, with an emphasis on fair wages reflective of the high cost of living.
9. **Technological Support for Data Management:** Implementing technology systems that simplify data input and reporting for Guardians, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of their work.
10. **Year-Round Employment Opportunities:** Addressing the need for year-round work for Guardians to improve job retention and support the continuity of stewardship activities throughout the year.

The feedback provided collectively underscores a desire for a transformation in the relationship between B.C. and First Nations, moving towards a model that supports the empowerment of Guardians through financial sustainability, collaborative governance, respect for Indigenous sovereignty, and the provision of necessary educational and technological resources.



## What is your vision for the future of Guardians and their roles in B.C.?

The vision for the future of Guardians and their roles in British Columbia encompasses a broad spectrum of responsibilities, rights, and relationships with the land, waters, and communities they serve. Central to this vision is the expansion of Guardians' responsibilities to include monitoring and enforcement across all First Nations lands and waters within B.C., ensuring that the stewardship and caretaking roles traditionally held by First Nations are not only recognized but fully integrated into the contemporary management of natural resources. Guardians are key actors in gathering data that can be used to mitigate cumulative impacts and preserve cultural uses of the land, positioning them as crucial to the decision-making processes that affect their territories.

The envisioned future involves Guardians representing their Nations according to their unique perspectives and priorities, rather than fitting into a pre-existing government model of land, water, and wildlife management. This recognition extends to the public sphere, where Guardians need to be respected as the primary authority on environmental stewardship and conservation within their territories. The role of Guardians is imagined to include direct enforcement activities, particularly in culturally sensitive areas and in the regulation of recreational activities such as fishing, where they would work alongside or in coordination with agencies like the DFO.

To support this expanded role, there is a call for increased communication and collaboration between Guardians and provincial teams, including pre-season meetings to discuss duties, safety, and operational priorities. The vision includes a structured educational pathway for Guardians, encompassing formal curriculum development focused on stewardship and land management, and site-specific training that enables informed decision-making by First Nations leadership.

A major component of this vision is stable, long-term funding to alleviate the constant cycle of application and reapplication for financial resources that detracts from the Guardians' ability to carry out their work effectively. The Vancouver Foundation's funding model was recommended as it offers no-strings-attached funding and was highlighted as a potentially useful structure for supporting Guardian initiatives. Financial stability is critical in the face of escalating environmental crises such as wildfires and climate change, where First Nations communities often find themselves on the front lines with insufficient support.

The vision also includes a call for a territorial-level approach to stewardship that moves beyond the pan-provincial strategies currently favored by B.C., advocating for frameworks that are developed and led by First Nations themselves. This approach would empower communities to enact compliance and enforcement powers, addressing issues like unauthorized backcountry use during droughts and ensuring that resource extractive

industries and government agencies are held accountable for their impacts on First Nations territories.

The future of Guardians in B.C. is one where Indigenous laws are re-established and fully authorized, with Guardians recognized as subject matter experts by all levels of government and industry. This future sees Guardians integrated into the education system, ensuring that future generations understand their culture and law, and envisages fully staffed, resourced, and long-term sustainable Guardian programs that is respected and acknowledged for its critical role in preserving the health and vitality of B.C.'s natural and cultural landscapes.

The vision for the future of Guardians and their roles in British Columbia, as shared by participants, can be summarized into several top themes:

1. **Collaborative Frameworks:** A shift towards collaborative frameworks developed and led by First Nations themselves, moving away from paternalistic and pan-provincial approaches to land management.
2. **Education and Training:** The future includes comprehensive education and training pathways for Guardians, encompassing both traditional knowledge and site-specific scientific data collection, to inform better territorial management decisions.
3. **Empowered Communities:** Communities are empowered to set their own priorities and make decisions about land and water protection that are reflective of their unique cultures and traditions, without being constrained by existing government models.
4. **Expanded Authority and Enforcement:** A vision where Guardians have expanded roles in monitoring and enforcing laws across all lands and waters in B.C., including the authority to implement and enforce Indigenous laws, especially in culturally sensitive areas.
5. **Integration into the Broader System:** Guardians are integrated into the broader environmental management system in B.C., including linkages to education about Indigenous culture and law, ensuring future generations understand the importance of stewardship.
6. **Master Guardian Career Path:** The development of a "Master Guardian" career path, providing a structure for advancement and professional development within the guardianship field.
7. **Recognition and Respect:** The vision includes a future where Guardians are widely recognized and respected by the public, government agencies, and other

stakeholders as the primary authority on environmental stewardship within their territories.

8. **Shared Revenue and Resources:** Access to shared revenue profits, such as gaming revenue or hunting and fishing licensing fees, to fund Guardian programs, ensuring they have the resources needed to fulfill their roles effectively.
9. **Stewardship and Caretaking:** Guardians are envisioned as the primary stewards and caretakers of the land, utilizing gathered data to mitigate cumulative impacts and preserve cultural land uses, ensuring sustainability and safety for future generations.
10. **Sustainable Funding:** A critical component of the vision is stable, long-term funding for Guardians programs, allowing for meaningful careers, community support, and the avoidance of constant financial uncertainty.

Ultimately, the feedback provided collectively paints a picture of a future where Guardians play a central, respected role in the environmental stewardship of British Columbia, supported by adequate resources, authority, and recognition. This vision emphasizes the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation practices, fostering sustainable, community-led approaches to land and water management.

