



Walters Cove Resort – now Tiičma Lodge – is a 46-bed lodge that will be used for sports fishing, eco and cultural tourism, and community social, health, and well-being programs supporting citizens and their families. *Photo: Media One*

Strategic planning lessons from a small First Nations community

For any community, economic certainty and self-sufficiency are strong motivators. This is especially true for the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7er'h' First Nations (KCFN) community as it implements a new strategic plan designed to secure a prosperous future.

In 2021, the sovereign treaty community on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island engaged its leadership, traditional government, and 600 members to establish this vision: "Flourishing, healthy, and resilient Nations leading a sustainable economy in Kyuquot Sound region and beyond."

To make progress on that vision, the KCFN Group of Businesses Board and management developed a Five Year Strategic Plan in 2022 in an effort to promote profitable businesses, build a successful economic base, and foster entrepreneurship within the community. Furthermore, they rebranded and renamed the KCFN Group of Businesses to Tiičma Enterprises to reflect KCFN's culture, values, and principles.

Tiičma (teech-ma) is a Nuučaan'al word meaning "heart." These "businesses with heart" are the economic lifeblood of KCFN, which includes 200 residents and another 400 community members living

in other regions, some of whom would return home if there were more opportunities for work.

Reconciliation with government and industry is important for Indigenous communities, and KCFN is providing a case study for how to do it successfully. While facing pressure to be self-sustaining, the community also has the freedom to make decisions unencumbered by the bureaucracy of traditional local government. This enables KCFN to act more nimbly and disrupt business-as-usual practices as it restores its independence.

Creating a Living, Breathing Strategic Plan

Not every community has a strategic plan, and for those that do, the plan often sits dormant in a PDF or ends up managed ineffectively via a spreadsheet. Even fewer local governments align their budgeting process with their strategic plan.

Strategic plans are important because they demonstrate progress to community stakeholders. This means a plan must go beyond conveying an organization's idealized vision for the community it serves. It must also express outwardly its progress on actions to achieve a community's goals and objectives.

For First Nations communities, in particular, strategic planning is critical to maintaining focus on goals and efficiently and effectively leveraging limited resources. This became even more salient after the economic challenges and isolation experienced by Indigenous populations during the pandemic.

With its dispersed population, KCFN is making it a priority to frequently engage community members and regularly communicate progress on its strategic plan. The strong foundation of community engagement will ensure the plan continually gains traction and doesn't sit in isolation.

Digital Tools for Transparency and Trust

An effective strategic plan should contain a long-term vision, high-level goals and priorities, and strategies to steer actions.

In this digital age, we must take advantage of technological advances



Gary Wilson (garyw@tiiicma.com) is Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development of Tiičma (Teech-ma) Enterprises.



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– particularly in cloud-based software – to make our strategic plans actionable. This means leveraging the power of digital tools to efficiently translate the vision, goals, and strategies of a plan into actionable items with associated timelines, department owners and contributors, and performance metrics.

As we monitor along the way to ensure progress, sharing data with community stakeholders via a public dashboard will be critical in ensuring transparency and accountability. This transparency plays a significant role in restoring the trust and support of KCFN members.

KCFN is currently implementing its strategic plan using software that enables goals to be made actionable, establishes transparency, and builds trust. KCFN's strategic plan will use a public dashboard feature to demonstrate how its operations are aligning with its goals. By displaying its progress quarterly, the community can monitor its investments and projects to better understand how money is spent and what outcomes result.

Economic Development for Future Generations

Tiičma Enterprises, KCFN's citizen-owned and operating businesses, aligns with the community's culture, which values long-standing collaborative and familial relationships and the key natural resource elements of water and land that have sustained the population for thousands of years.

Located in Houpsitas and the larger Kyyuquot Sound region, the businesses

include the Fair Harbour Marina and Campground, Houpsitas Village Suites, Tiičma Fisheries, Tiičma Forestry, Tiičma Hospitality, Walters Cove Resort, West Coast Expeditions, and various other joint ventures.

Tiičma's strategic plan for economic development is guided by seven principles:

- **Community health and well-being** – Supporting projects that address and improve community health and wellbeing.
- **Education, training, and mentorship** – Providing education and support for KCFN members who are learning new skills, building capacity on the job, and developing leadership and management skills.
- **Culture** – Encouraging projects that restore and celebrate KCFN culture and heritage while integrating language and culture into all aspects of economic development.
- **Business retention and development** – Improving the performance of existing businesses, including KCFN citizen-owned businesses, and supporting citizen entrepreneurship.
- **Employment** – Creating more jobs for KCFN members across seasons.
- **Partner, promote, and welcome** – Raising the profile of KCFN through co-operation and collaboration with regional community economic development partners.
- **Self-sufficiency** – Facilitating projects that improve the self-sufficiency of Houpsitas and KCFN.

The community's strategic plan is designed to foster collaboration to achieve strategic goals, as well as promote accountability and transparency in self-governance. The plan will make actionable these five goals and objectives:

- Achieve financial self-sufficiency through effective fiscal planning and management
- Expand employment and training opportunities for KCFN members
- Expand on existing successful businesses
- Identify and pursue new opportunities and partnerships
- Establish the community as a skilled, agile, and effective organization

Staff will use this strategic plan when developing annual budgets and work plans, or any other plans connected to the Tiičma Enterprises. They will also produce quarterly and annual reports outlining progress made on the goals and objectives.

Early Progress and Lessons Learned

Even in this early stage of strategic plan implementation, Tiičma has made significant progress on a number of fronts. These achievements include the acquisition of businesses and capital assets that have put the community in the position to negotiate the purchase of a forestry tenure.

These milestones are enabling Tiičma, and therefore KCFN, to provide opportunities to build its wealth and establish partnership and job opportunities for our members. At the same time, the plan implementation has challenged KCFN and the Tiičma Enterprises team to build capacity, engage members to participate, and access capital to achieve plan objectives.

The process has generated several valuable lessons that could benefit other First Nations communities and local governments throughout Canada. Here are seven to consider:

- **Just start** – It will take a while to get it right, but the important thing is to begin the process.
- **Develop plans in collaboration with the community** – KCFN's community members are also shareholders of its group of businesses, and as such, should be in frequent contact through meetings and other forms of

communication to ensure goals align with their vision.

- **Use the strategic plan to inform the budget** – This goes against the grain of typical local government budgets, which are driven by incremental changes to last year's line items for each department. Budgeting for outcomes that align with strategic goals and priorities is a better way to ensure money is spent on what the community values.
- **Prioritize consistency** – Inertia and legacy processes can hold back progress. By building habits with the team around reporting back on progress, an organization is continuing to revisit its goals and objectives, which leads to ongoing improvement.
- **Create a sense of ownership within the team** – Involve team members responsible for the delivery of the operational plan in the building of the plan.
- **Keep engaging** – Community input isn't just the first step; it's an integral part of the journey.
- **Leverage transparency to build trust** – Make your processes visible to community stakeholders through a public dashboard that tracks and visualizes progress on goals and objectives.

What Comes Next

With their thousands of years of history, Indigenous people tend to think collectively and collaboratively about community. They are always considering the impact of one action on the whole and into the future: the Seventh Generation Principle.

This innate framing of life takes into account not only the people in a community but also the land, water, and other species, including the winged, finned, and four-legged ones. At KCFN, this socioeconomic lens ensures the community is focused on more than building wealth. It is developing businesses that will sustain the community and also the larger ecosystem by finding ways to restore and replenish its resources.

Indigenous communities have existed for 10,000 years and with strategic planning will exist for 10,000 more. In the process, they can create a model that benefits both tribal and non-tribal governments. If these organizations want to get in the canoe with us, we would be happy to go on a journey together. **MW**

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St. Catharines
905.688.6655

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