

Indigenous Services  
Canada

Services aux  
Autochtones Canada

**INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA**  
**FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT HEALTH BRANCH- ATLANTIC REGION**

**WORKPLACE ASSESSMENT**  
**FINAL REPORT**

CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENT

**JANUARY 18, 2021**

**PROJECT CONSULTANTS:**

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## Executive Summary

In September of 2020, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) engaged HR Atlantic to conduct a workplace assessment with the Atlantic Regional management team of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch ("FNIHB"). The employer had received concerns related to the functioning of this Team. As a result of these concerns, the employer requested a workplace assessment to be conducted to help identify any issues within the work environment and highlight any concerns staff may be experiencing. Interviews were conducted with 21 participants.

The following themes were identified after careful analysis and collation of the data collected:

- What is going well
- Leadership and Management
  - Headquarters
  - Regional Executive Officer
  - The Directors and Professional Directorate
- Environment and Culture
  - "Crisis and Emergency" Environment
  - Partner Relationships and Expectations
  - Lack of Clarity for Roles and Responsibilities
  - Challenges with Respect to Hiring, Promotion, and Turnover
  - Disrespectful and Harmful Behaviour
- Workload

Seven (7) recommendations are offered to senior leadership to assist in next steps and the development of a positive path forward for this Team.

A strong emphasis in the recommendations is a restorative approach in order to repair and reconcile the harm that was articulated throughout this assessment. This journey of reconciliation within the Team will take time. The restorative and organizational recommendations offered will have a positive impact for the Team, for the staff of the boarder Atlantic Region, and for the Partners and communities served by the Branch.

### Reporting Notes

**Background:** Indigenous Service Canada engaged HR Atlantic to conduct a workplace assessment with the Atlantic Regional management team at the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch.

**Goal:** As a result of concerns received by the employer, the employer requested a workplace assessment to be conducted to help identify any issues within the work environment and highlight any concerns staff may be experiencing. This assessment's primary purpose was to diagnosis the functioning of the Team following concerns that were raised.

**Method:** 21 individuals participated in one-on-one consultations from November 2-23, 2020.

Interview participants were assured that the data collected would be reported in collated form.

**About HR Atlantic:** A consulting firm based in Charlottetown, we are focussed on building healthy, productive and sustainable relationships in workplaces.

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## Description of Work

In September of 2020, Indigenous Services Canada (“ISC”) engaged HR Atlantic to conduct a workplace assessment with the Atlantic Regional management team (“the Team”) of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (“FNIHB”). The Team, for the purposes of this workplace assessment, also included select others who have direct involvement and interactions with senior management, mainly from the professional practice directorate. The employer received concerns related to the functioning of this Team and requested a workplace assessment to help identify and clarify issues within the work environment from multiple perspectives.

A contract for services was executed on September 18, 2020 incorporating the proposal from HR Atlantic, dated August 28, 2020. Jennifer Innis, and Lyndsay MacDonald, Consultants at HR Atlantic, were identified to undertake the work (“the Consultants”).

## Assessment Overview

The purpose of this workplace assessment was to provide a process for participating staff to share their perspectives on their work environment and relationships with a neutral third party. It was a confidential process involving one-on-one consultations. This process was designed to promote information sharing about what is working well and what, if any, challenges exist, related to the work, work environment, or working relationships for participating staff and members of the Team. The information provided by participants was through the lens of their individual perceptions and experiences, not necessarily actual fact. This assessment’s primary purpose was to diagnosis the functioning of the Team in light of the concerns raised.

Following the interviews, the Consultants analyzed the data received and developed recommendations to address the issues identified. This report, submitted to the Acting Senior Assistant Deputy Minister ISC, outlines the themed results of the workplace assessment and makes recommendations to support improvements at the FNIHB, specifically the senior management team of the Atlantic Region.

## Challenges

There were a number of challenges that occurred at the outset of, and throughout this assessment, that are noted as they had a significant impact on the process. The employer provided HR Atlantic with a list of participants to be included in the workplace assessment. Considerable discussion followed with respect to which individuals were to participate in the assessment. The participant list was refined numerous times and caused some concern for both individuals who had been identified to take part, as well as for others who were not extended an invitation to participate. There were also concerns that the email from the workplace assessment sponsor, introducing the assessment to the participants, was not blind copied. This allowed people to see who was selected to participate in the assessment. Additionally, there was an oversight that resulted in the Regional Executive Officer (“REO”) of the Atlantic Region not being included in the initial email introducing the project.

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After the interview phase of this process had been completed and the Consultants had completed their analysis and moved on to report writing, questions were still being raised by staff about the criteria for being included as a participant in this assessment. The Consultants were mindful of maintaining the boundaries of the consultation process to the Team as originally planned in the definition of the work for the project. The concerns related to the list of identified participants for the consultation process required a significant amount of management on the part of the Consultants.

The list provided to the Consultants of those to be interviewed included:

- The Regional Executive Officer, Directors and Managers on the Team;
- Others involved in the Team, including a number of persons from the professional practice directorate; and
- Some former employees who had recently held roles within the Team and were considered to have relevant information with respect to the workplace assessment.

During the time this workplace assessment process was taking place, some former and current employees spoke to the media about concerns of bullying, harassment, and conflicts of interest within the Atlantic Region. The interviews conducted as a part of this workplace assessment were raised in these media reports. Despite the media portrayal of this work, this process was not a workplace investigation into any complaint or complaints of harassment.

The Consultants want to make clear to the reader that the process did not investigate any specific allegations made by participants, nor do the Consultants make any factual findings based on what participants shared during their one-on-one interviews. While participants' perspectives and disclosures to the Consultants are outlined below, the Consultants did not evaluate or assess evidence or credibility of participants. None of the accounts shared in this report should be read or accepted as a factual accounting of what has occurred; rather it is a representation of the various perspectives held by participants at the time of their interview.

## Workplace Assessment Process

On October 21, 2020, information about the workplace assessment was sent to participating individuals by the Acting Senior Assistant Deputy Minister. This communication introduced the process and informed all of the participants that HR Atlantic Consultants would be contacting them to arrange for confidential one-on-one consultations.

The Consultants met virtually with the REO and a support person on October 23, 2020. The purpose of this initial meeting was to introduce the Consultants; for the REO to ask questions regarding the process; and to discuss any other issues the REO wanted to raise prior to the beginning of the interviews.

The following week, on October 27, 2020, the Consultants contacted the participants by email to introduce themselves and to further explain the workplace assessment process. As noted above,

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emails were later sent to a number of staff who were not originally invited to participate, but whom were identified later as persons who may have relevant perspectives regarding the functioning of the Team.

One-one-one virtual interviews were conducted with 21 participants between November 2, 2020 and November 23, 2020. Participation in the assessment process was voluntary, and not all of those who were invited for a consultation participated in one. The Consultants also had conversations with two additional individuals as part of this process, a HR advisor and a LR advisor. These conversations were not considered interviews for the purpose of the workplace assessment, however some of the information gathered from these individuals was used as context for the interview data.

The interview questions used by the Consultants are attached as Appendix "A". The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to over two and a half hours. The perspectives and level of information provided by the interviewees varied in relation to their involvement with the Team and length of time within the organization. Follow up interviews were extended to those who requested them.

Interview participants were assured by the Consultants that the data collected would be reported in collated form only. Concerns were raised by interviewees with respect to confidentiality for this process as well as the outcome of the assessment. These concerns are detailed further in this report.

Documentary review conducted during the course of the workplace assessment included the following:

- Value and Ethics Code for the Public Sector
- Atlantic Region Public Service Employee Survey 2019 Results
- INAC Atlantic Region Excluded Official Organizational Chart
- Atlantic FNIHB Organizational Charts (July 2020)
- Government of Canada websites noted in Report
- *Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations* (SOR/86-304)
- Guarding Minds at Work website
- Mental Health Commission of Canada website
- Departmental Plan 2020-2021 for Indigenous Services Canada

## Background

### Government Structure

The FNIHB is a division of ISC. ISC works collaboratively with partners to improve access to high quality services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The vision of the division is to support and empower Indigenous peoples to independently deliver services and address the socio-economic conditions in their communities<sup>1</sup>. One of the services provided by this department is Indigenous Health. The FNIHB, Atlantic Region is tasked with providing health related services, programs and funding to Indigenous

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada.html>

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persons and communities in the four Atlantic Provinces. Its fundamental mission is capacity building for Indigenous communities in the Atlantic Region.

The FNIHB has moved through a number of major structural changes and initiatives. Most recently, the FNIHB was subject to a reorganization which was announced in 2017 and undertaken in 2018. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada ("INAC") was dissolved and two separate departments were created: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada<sup>2</sup>. Indigenous Health was transferred from its place in the department of Health Canada and placed under ISC with the majority of the former INAC department.

It was heard that as a result of the reorganization, the FNIHB, Atlantic Region lost a significant number of staffing positions. The number was cited as high as forty FTE positions, or as much as twenty five percent of the workforce, that did not transfer over from Health Canada to ISC. It was also heard that a number of corporate resources were not retained as a result of the reorganization, including information technology ("IT") and human resources ("HR") positions. The Consultants understand that there has not been dedicated HR support for the Atlantic Region, and that currently this support is located in Yellowknife, NWT. There is a perspective that an inequality exists between the different offices in the Atlantic Region, with the ISC office in Amherst, NS, receiving more corporate supports than the FNIHB Regional office located in Halifax, NS. Additionally it was heard there is a discrepancy in the classifications of similar positions between the two offices.

In the existing organizational structure, the Atlantic Branch has two executive positions for reporting purposes, the Regional Executive Officer ("REO") and the Regional Director of Programs ("RDP"). It is understood that for classification purposes, certain professional positions in the Atlantic Region are connected to these executive positions on the organizational chart. As noted before, there is a professional practice group which consists of health professionals including doctors, nurses, mental health and dental professionals which is part of the management level at the Atlantic Branch.

Multiple interviewees spoke about the complexity of the Indigenous Health work in the Atlantic Region. It was highlighted that while the population, in terms of numbers, is relatively low in the Atlantic Provinces, compared to other regions in the country, the Atlantic Region is tasked with managing relationships with diverse Indigenous communities in four separate provinces. The Consultants heard that there are varied services in each province, unique relationships dependent on the Indigenous communities in those provinces and their needs, and separate provincial governmental structures including Ministries of Health. It was noted that there are federal, provincial and Indigenous jurisdictional issues at play within the four provinces. It was heard that this diversity is not recognized by Headquarters (located in Ottawa), nor is there an understanding of the complexities that accompany the varying jurisdictions.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010002/1100100010021>

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## Cultural Framework

There were underlying foundational cultural aspects of this workplace that the Consultants felt lead to a nuanced environment for the participants of this workplace assessment and played a role in the broader themes. In recognition of the Nation to Nation relationship with the Federal Government, Indigenous leaders and communities have been identified as Partners, both by participants, and in this report.

Canada's historical treatment of First Nations and Indigenous peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action provides an additional backdrop to the challenges staff face in their daily work. It was noted the migration of Indigenous Health under the umbrella of ISC has been received negatively by some because ISC is the department that is also responsible for the *Indian Act*. The movement of Indigenous Health to ISC was heard to be resisted by both the staff and the Partners. It was heard that this transition was not smooth and has had lasting effects on the work environment.

## What We Heard: Assessment Themes

A number of key workplace issues and concerns were identified by the Consultants from the collated interview data. Some of the interviewees would be in agreement with most of the themes and others would identify with one or more themes. On average, some of those individuals who had been at the FNIHB, Atlantic Region a longer time, or some of whom are more involved with the leadership team, were more significantly impacted by these key issues. It was heard in the interviews that some participants felt or perceived that the Public Service Employee Survey results with respect to the FNIHB, Atlantic Region had poor or even the worst results on a national comparison. As part of the workplace assessment, the Consultants requested the most recent survey results for the Atlantic Region. On review of those results, the Consultants felt many of the themes identified from the collated interview data were reflected in the survey results provided to the Consultants.

The key issues and themes heard have been grouped for discussion under the following themes:

- What's Going Well
- Leadership and Management
  - Headquarters
  - Regional Executive Officer
  - The Directors and Professional Directorate



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- Environment and Culture
  - “Crisis and Emergency” Environment
  - Partner Relationships and Expectations
  - Lack of Clarity for Roles and Responsibilities
  - Challenges with Respect to Hiring, Promotion, and Turnover
  - Disrespectful and Harmful Behaviour
- Workload

## What’s Going Well

All those individuals who took part in an interview willingly participated in the assessment process and demonstrated a genuine interest in efforts to address issues in the workplace. Despite the challenges which are identified in this report, the participants showed themselves to be engaged in and motivated about the work of the Atlantic Region. It was heard that most people are dedicated and believe in the mission and mandate of supporting Indigenous communities in capacity building and self-determination.

The REO’s exceptional relationship building skills with the Indigenous communities, and in particular the Indigenous Chiefs, was a common positive comment heard throughout the interviews. Participants acknowledged the strength of these relationships were mainly because of the direct interactions of the REO. As a result of these relationships, staff believed they were in tune with the needs of the communities they served and were able to achieve greater success in the work that is being done.

It was heard that the Team functioned well on a peer to peer basis. Regardless of who was identified as being part of the team, the overall general consensus is the Team is a group of competent, capable and committed individuals. Some of the words used by participants to describe others on or involved with the Team were “*effective*”, “*efficient*”, “*hard working*”, “*cooperative*”, and “*respectful*”.

While some noted that there is some dysfunction and challenges within some of the relationships between Team members, for the majority, at the Director level, the Team is seen to be functioning reasonably well. Some concerns were raised about whether the group was cohesive. There were comments about the Team being collaborative, but this was not a universal viewpoint. A few individuals felt that the positivity in relation to the Team extended to the REO, however the majority did not.

How the interviewees felt about the pandemic and its impact on the work environment varied. There were some who felt that the changes in where and how work is done, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic had provided a welcomed break from the workplace. One interviewee stated: “*We are connecting better, COVID forces us to*”. It was heard that there are less, or shorter, meetings now that staff are working remotely, and that there is less travel which was seen to be positive. Others felt that

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COVID was a barrier and has created difficulties, including challenges around communication and additional stress.

### Leadership and Management

For the purposes of this report, Leadership and Management will be explored at three levels: Headquarters (Ottawa), the Regional Executive Officer, and the Directors and Professional Directorate.

#### Headquarters

Some participants shared that the Atlantic Branch has felt isolated from Ottawa. It was heard from a few interviewees that Headquarters could provide better direction and support for the broader management team, and the REO. One example that was provided by an interviewee was that the staff learned that they were moving to ISC on the radio. Others noted that more direction and communication from Ottawa would allow them to do better work:

*Communication from Ottawa was terrible- never clear, never could provide context, impacted communication with the team and how we did our work.*

*I don't get a lot of interactions from Headquarters. Some more of that would be beneficial. It would be nice to get some guidance from Headquarters.*

However, the common issue participants spoke most frequently of were instances where concerns regarding various individuals were raised with Headquarters and not adequately addressed. There was a real sense that Headquarters had turned a "blind eye" to known issues and concerns in the FNIHB, Atlantic Region. This inaction on the part of Headquarters was heard to have been going for years.

[REDACTED] criticism of the system and its leaders who it was felt did not respond, or responded inappropriately, to complaints and concerns raised within the Atlantic Region. [REDACTED]

The following quotes showcase what some of the participants said with respect to the inaction of Headquarters to their concerns:

*Department is seriously flawed- senior leaders in Ottawa have failed us...You are not the first ones to do this- there have been others. Ottawa has allowed this to fester, continue to send folks. I am angry and upset they have allowed this to happen.*

*Worst thing is HQ, over the years have been told what is going on and don't do anything. Demoralizing for staff- this is worse than what is happening in the office. Repeatedly ignore the issues. Nothing happens.*

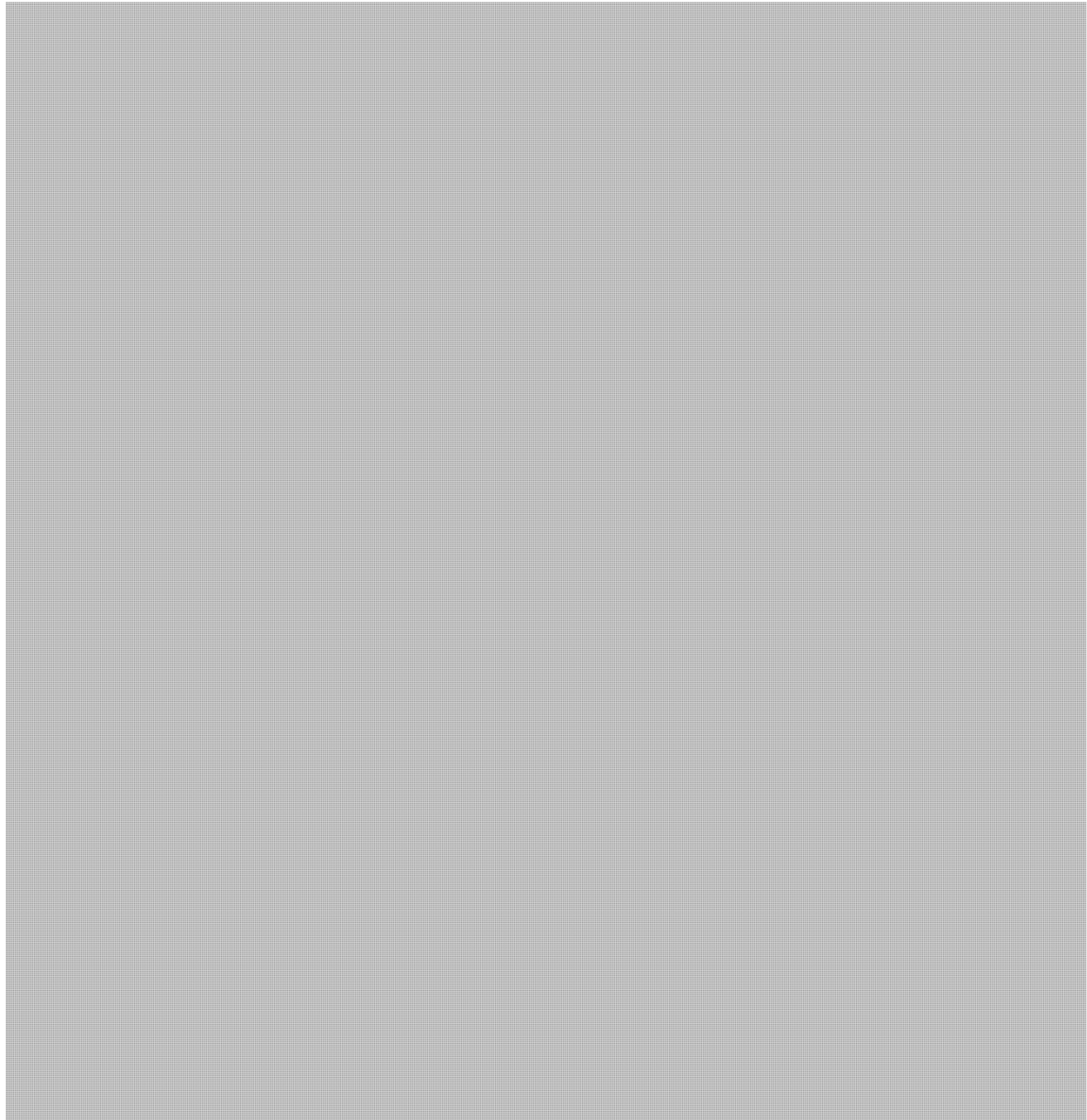
The Consultants heard numerous times that there was a feeling amongst staff that this assessment

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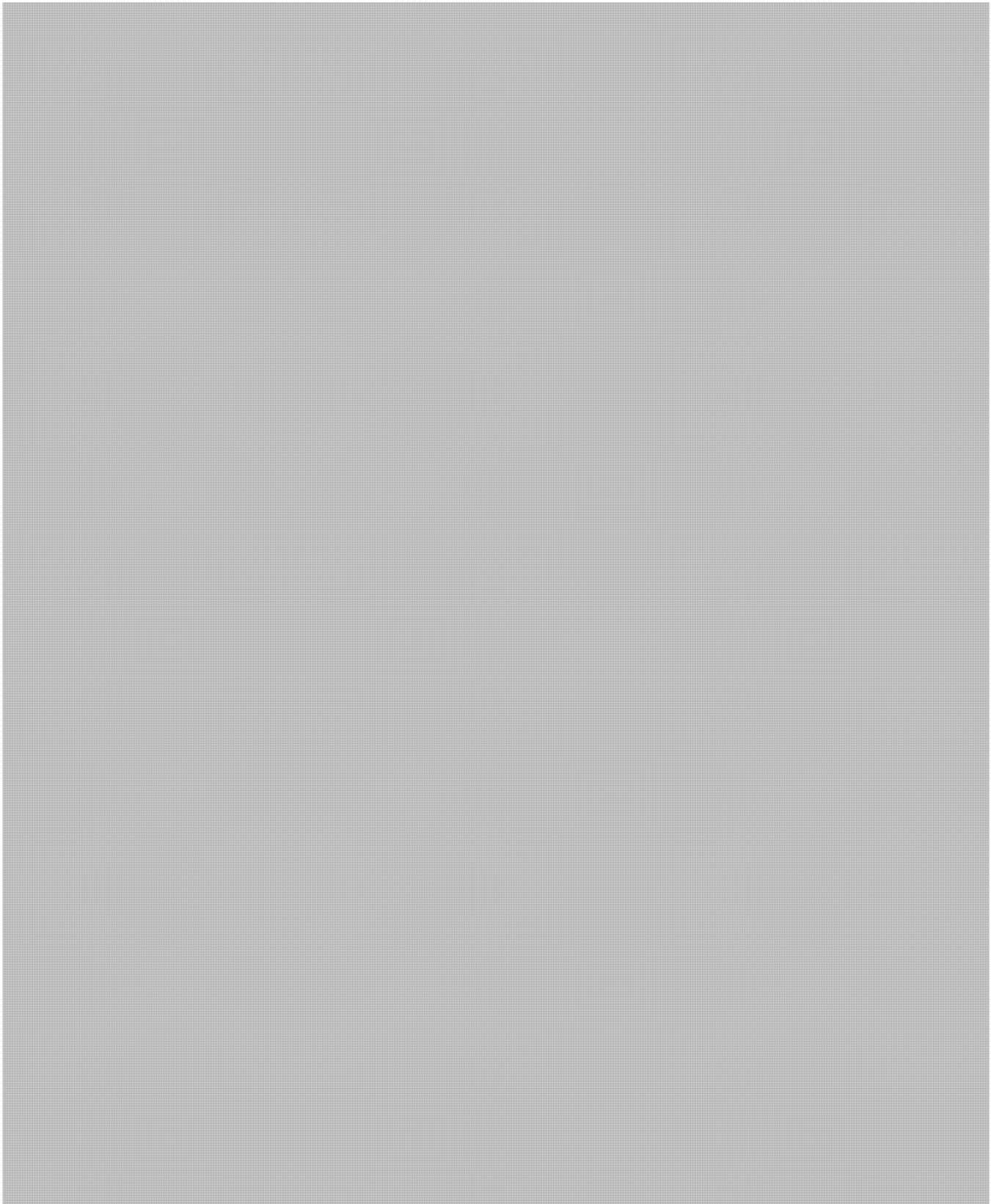
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would not result in any change. It was shared that similar processes have been undertaken in the past, and that it was felt that nothing changed as a result of that work. The Consultants reiterated with those they spoke to that there was a commitment made to share back the themes of the workplace assessment. Participants spoke of the importance for them to be provided with feedback from this process to ensure their voices were heard, and to bring accountability and transparency to the process.



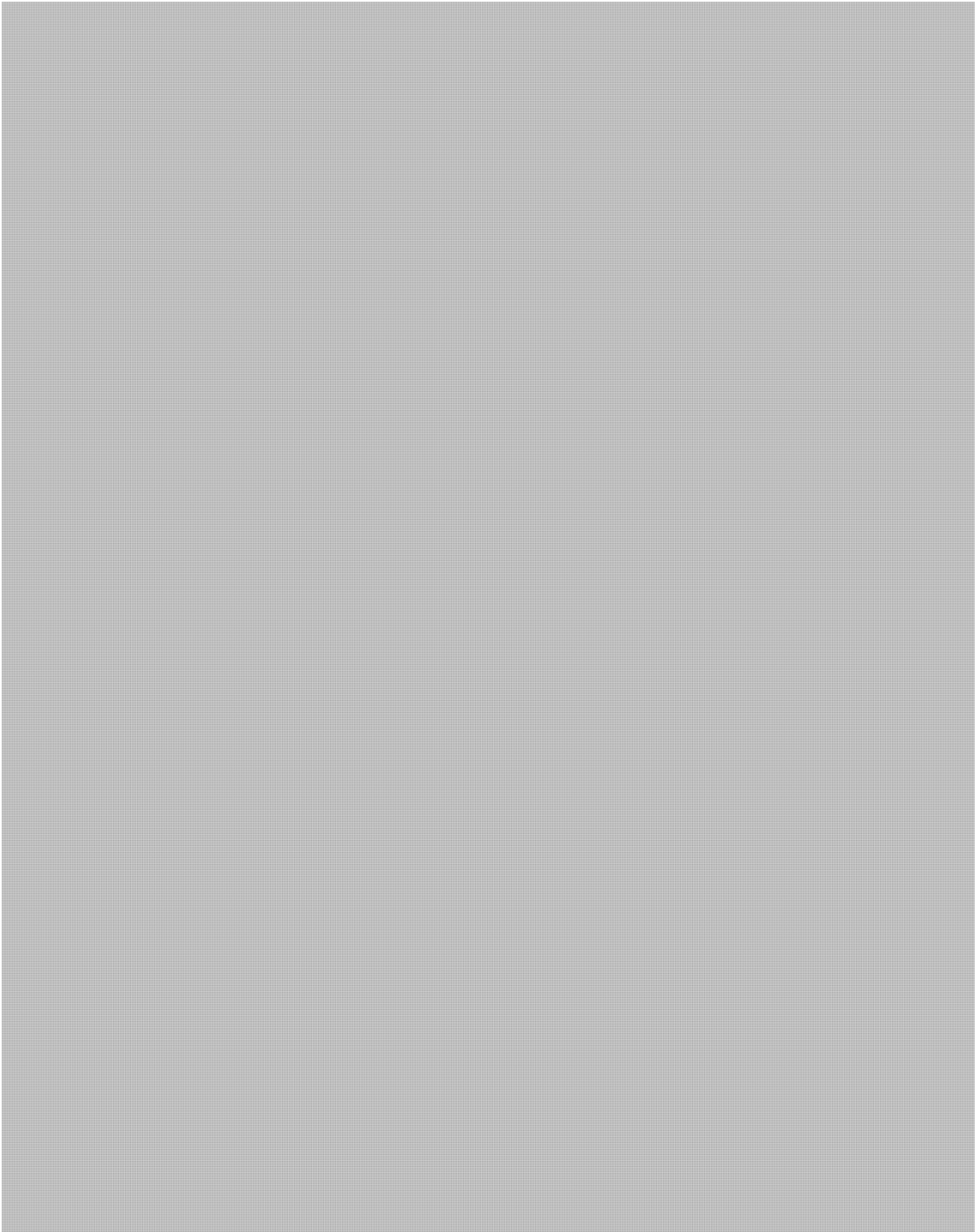
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## Environment and Culture

### "Crisis and Emergency" Environment

One of the most common sentiments expressed in relation to the work environment was *"we operate in a crisis situation."* It was heard that the staff function in a *"just in time"* environment. Some spoke about working in a setting where the priority is the crisis of the day. One of the interviewees described the workplace as feeling like an *"ICU"* or *"ER"*. Yet another said the Atlantic Region was *"more of a crisis management organization as opposed to one that takes the time to identify key priorities"*.

Some of those interviewed cited the high amount of information and meetings as contributing to a crisis environment perspective. According to some of the interviewees, there is a sense of urgency to the work and to how the REO and/or Headquarters leads that work. The feeling of always being in crisis stemmed from a chronic lack of direction, planning, delegation, priority setting, and appropriate assignment of work. As noted in the following quotes:

*Comes from the top. Often receive requests for information or data with short turnaround time.*

*5-7 different action requests per week from Ottawa, which is a revolving group of people.*

*Chronic and under supported resources, crisis management mode.*

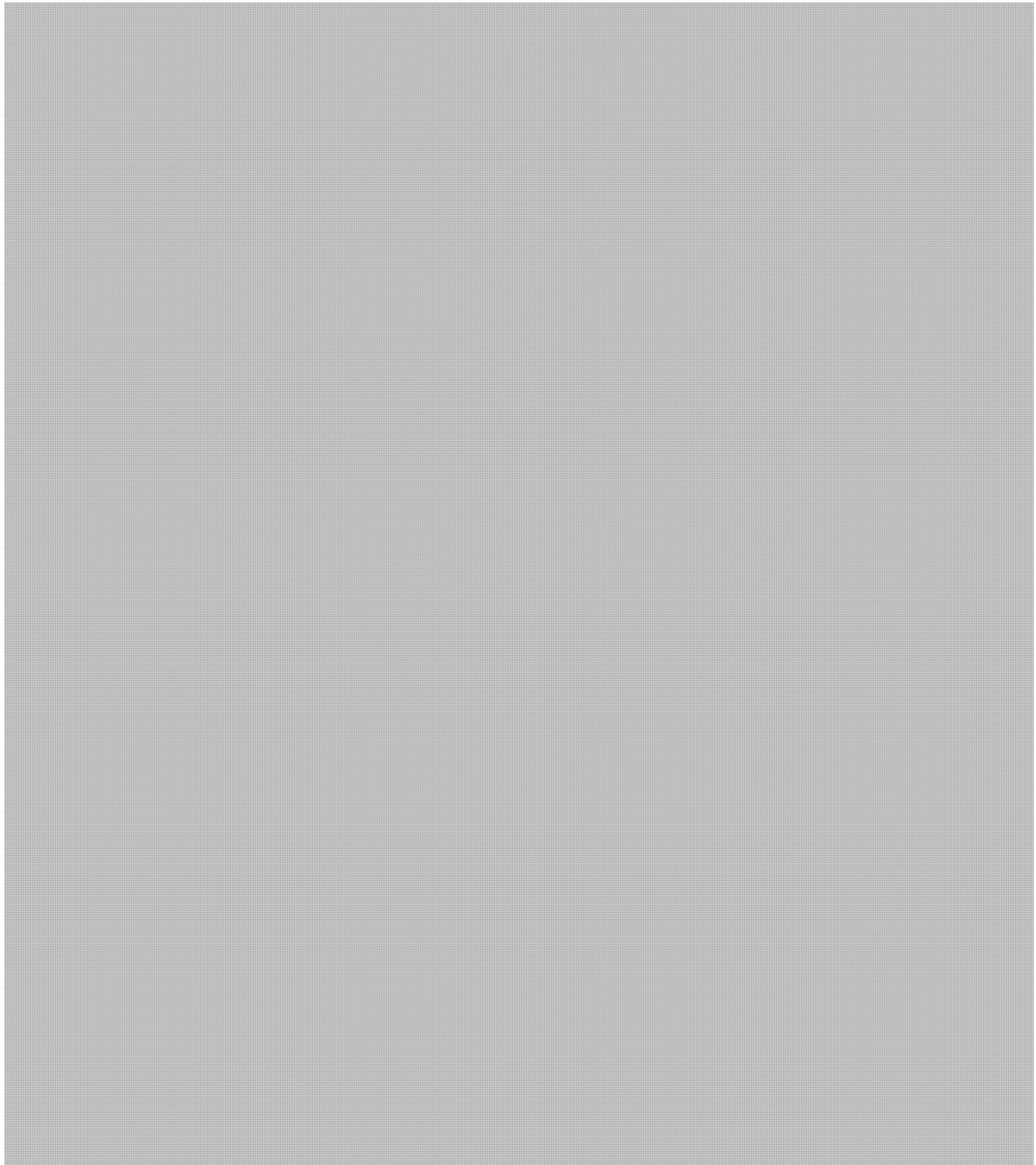
Part of this was heard to be connected to the nature of the work of the Atlantic Region in that they are providing funding and supports to numerous Indigenous communities in four separate jurisdictions which have a multitude of needs.

### Partner Relationships and Expectations



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## Lack of Clarity for Roles and Responsibilities

As was evidenced through the difficulty in identifying who would participate in this assessment, there is confusion and a lack of clarity regarding who is part of the Team, even by members of the Team. Some participants questioned if the professional practice, or subject matter experts, were part of the Team. It seemed that the Team has been, and continues to be redefined. Multiple perspectives were shared regarding “who” sat on the senior management team.

A number of the individuals who were interviewed actively questioned what their role was in the organization. There was also some confusion with respect to the reporting structure and the scope of some roles. It was heard that the reporting structure is variable and can change. The following quotes highlight issues with role clarity:

*Better role clarity- what is the job of the REO, the directors, those under?*

*People are not really clear what their roles are.*

*Clarity around scope and roles, where does one position start and another end.*

## Challenges with Respect to Hiring, Promotion and Turnover

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*Challenges with Hiring & Promotion*

Participants spoke of inequities in the hiring and promotion practices within the organization for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. The perspective was shared that some staff felt that the department has not done a good job of supporting Indigenous staff, particularly in more senior roles, as reflected in the quote below:

*We need to get more Indigenous people into this business so they can take over. They [REDACTED] but we should establish training positions. We have to be more aggressive in attracting Indigenous people to take on this work... and having more Indigenous people here would improve our ability to serve those communities.*

Some participants, while fully committed and supportive of the shift to self-determination, acknowledged they were left feeling that they may not have a future within the FNIHB, or have a limited ability to progress to more senior levels because they are non-Indigenous. The following quotes capture this sense of uncertainty:

*Another thing that can be frustrating is because we are a region we have less opportunities to move up. And you get stuck in a position [REDACTED] We are not very good at promoting internally.*

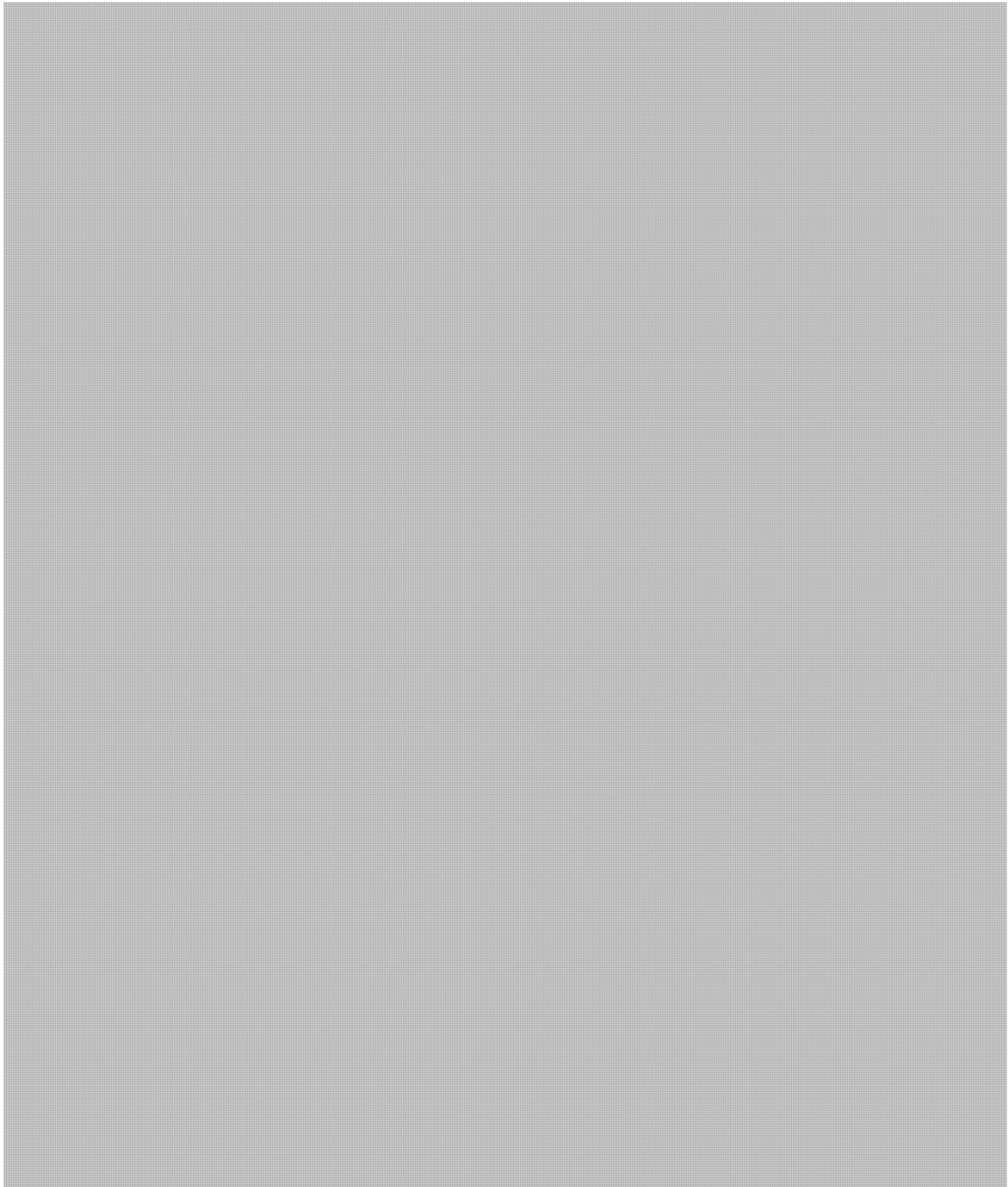
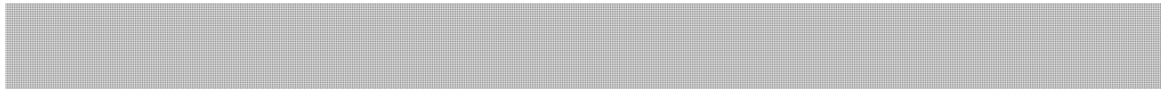
*I think a lot of people are looking to move. Part of the reason is there is no appetite for them to excel.*

Some of the participants spoke about the perception that there is a “ceiling” in terms of internal promotions. It was noted that some staff felt there was not a desire to support staff to move up to more senior positions. As a result of this, many participants could not see a continued place for themselves in the evolving future of ISC.

There was also recognition by some participants that there is a need to have better supports in place for hiring new staff, especially if they were new to government. Participants stated it can take over a year for someone new to the Atlantic Branch to fully understand the work, and develop capacity to be successful in their roles. Many felt the management style of the REO [REDACTED] the time needed to develop adequate competencies in new hires, thus further exacerbating her need to micromanage the work of others.

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## Workload

The challenges and difficulties described above, have exacerbated the impact of the high workload that staff experience. Many described the workload as unsustainable. This was connected to a number of variables including lack of role clarity; work distribution; senior leadership; the reorganization; lack of corporate services; turnover in key positions; and a work environment that is in a constant state of “chaos” or “crisis”. It was also shared that the REO can overcommit the Team to Headquarters or the Assistant Deputy Minister.

Participants spoke about the sheer volume of the work and the tight timelines that are in place. As was canvassed earlier, some of these were said to come from Ottawa and the requirements from Headquarters. A word that was heard often in relation to the impact of the workload was “burn out”. It was heard that the workload is “exhausting”, “ridiculous” and “challenging”. One interviewee described the sense of drowning in work, no matter how much time they spent on their tasks. Some participants mentioned work life balance, either in the context of attempting to create some despite the work environment, or that there was a sense that it was not respected or valued. Additionally, the workarounds created to mitigate the perceived challenges in [REDACTED] further increased the workload of an already struggling team.

The high workload was attributed, in part, to the frequent turnover of staff and vacant positions. It was cited that some of the staffing positions that were not immediately transitioned in the reorganization are still not filled and that this has had an impact on the workload for others. As one interviewee explained, “the overwhelming workload and stress that goes with it. Very dedicated people. What you find is it does burn people out and lot of turnover because of that.”

It was heard that the loss of dedicated corporate supports, including HR and IT positions, has increased the work for others. In the words of a participant, “HR processes extremely long because lack that dedicated corporate service; this leads to reactive work, doesn’t allow me to spend time at a more strategic level”.

While some participants felt that their workload was manageable, it was also heard that some of those who were interviewed felt that they, or others, were underutilized. This has been attributed to the way the work is often distributed among the senior management group by the REO.

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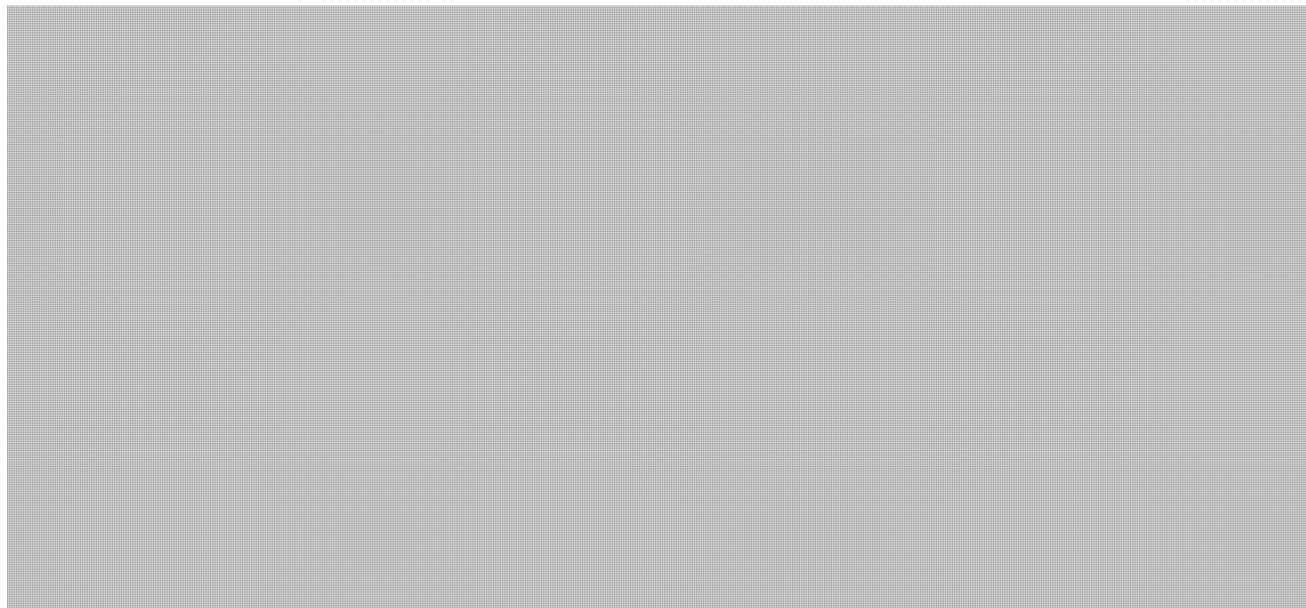
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## Analysis

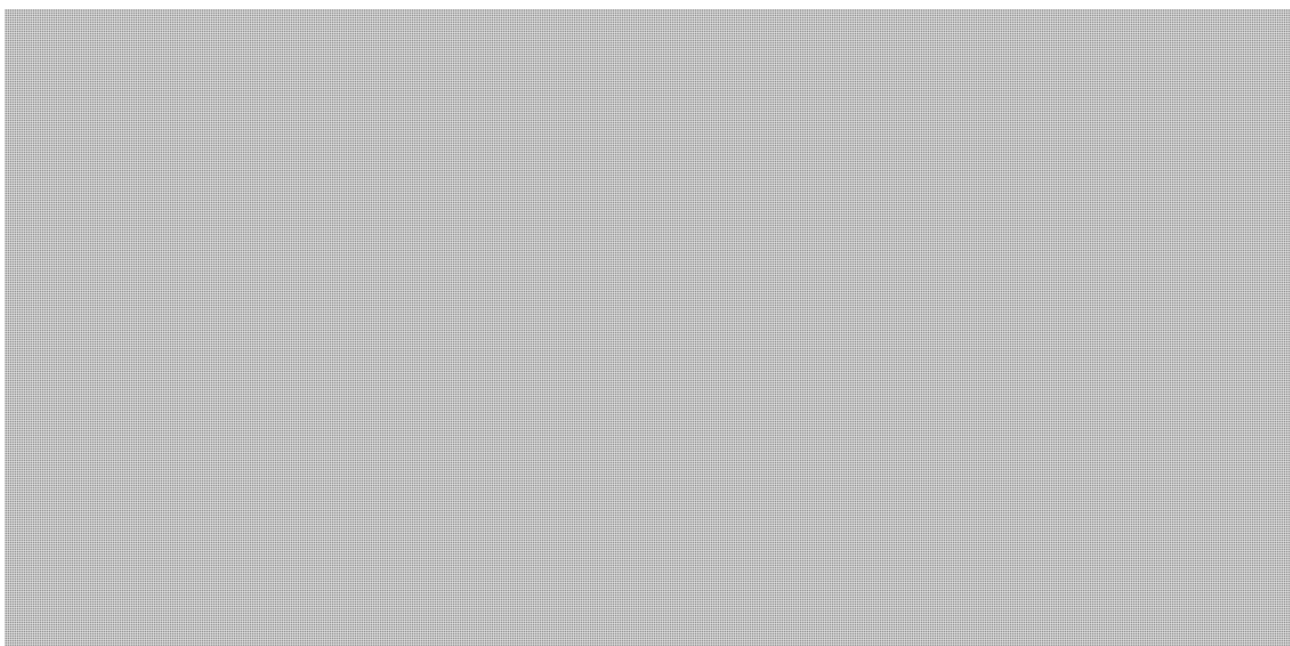
### Influencing Factors

The Consultants see three influencers in the creation of the work environment that was heard to exist for the Team; lack of trust, lack of accountability, and fear. The experiences and perspectives of staff varied on these three factors depending on their role, and the length of time they have been part of the FNIHB. For some, they did not experience any of these factors which were present for others.

### Trust



### Accountability

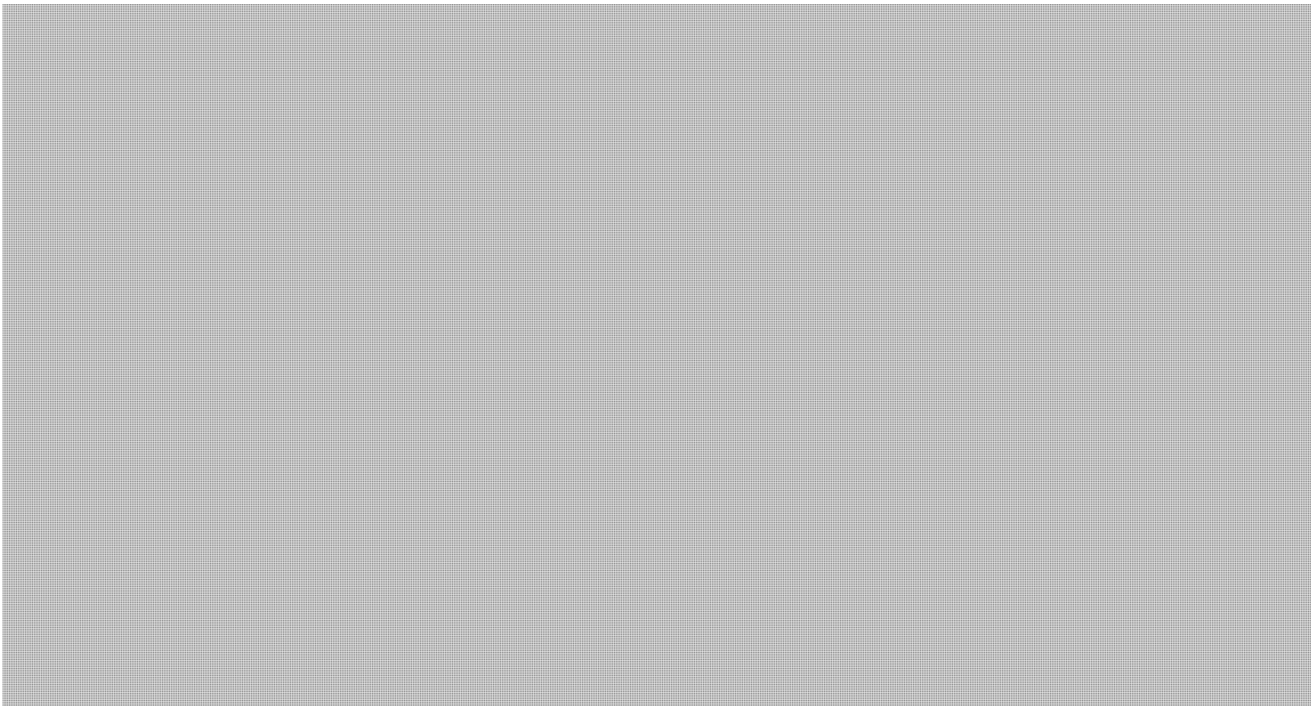




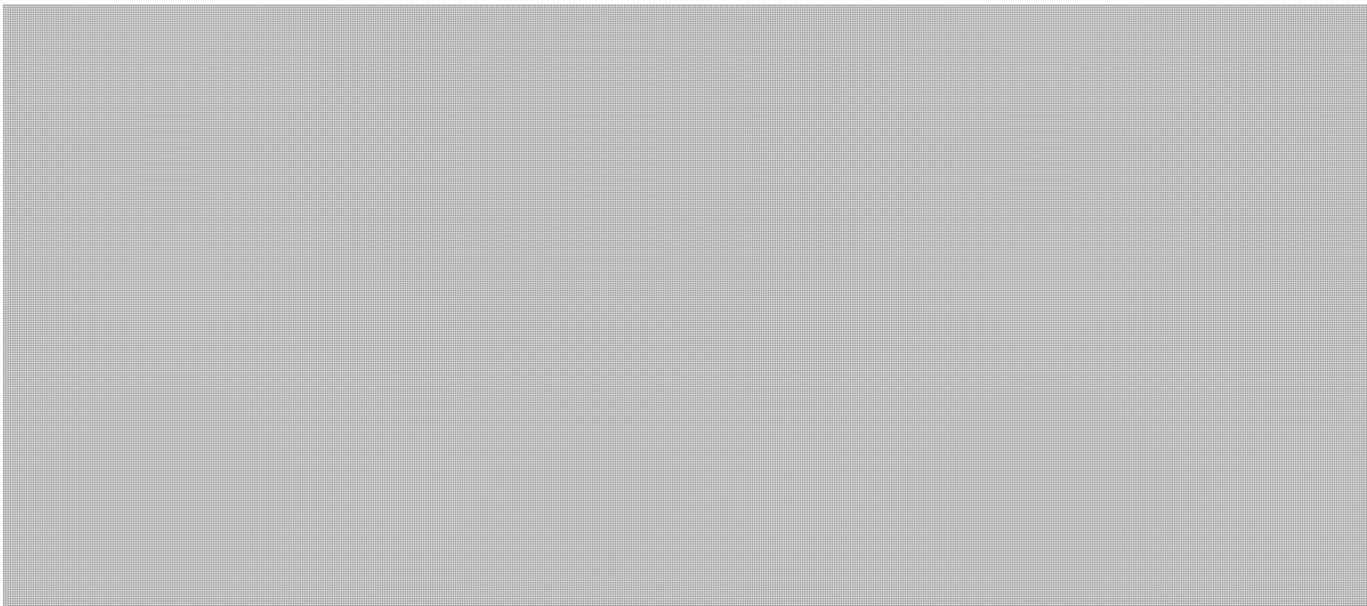
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Fear



Psychological Health and Safety



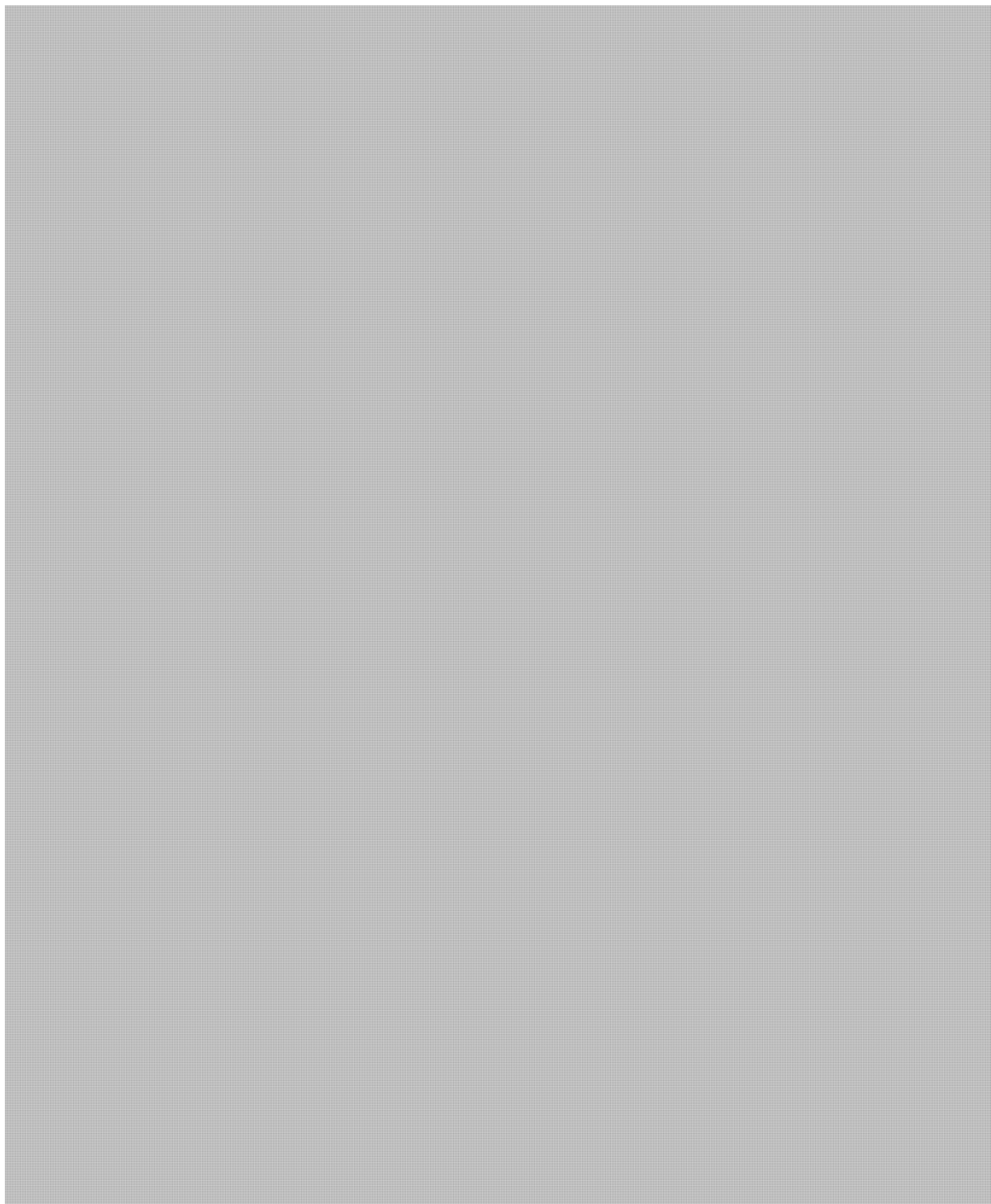
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/about/about-safety>

<sup>4</sup> As of January 1, 2021, legislation will come into force to ensure employers prevent harassment and violence in federally regulated industries and workplaces. Prior to this date, employers need to continue to comply with the *Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*, SOR 86-304, Part XX which set out employer obligations with respect to Violence Prevention in the Work Place. The requirements for employers to prevent harassment and violence in federally regulated workplaces are detailed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/workplace-health-safety/harassment-violence-prevention.html>.



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Consultants understood that part of this may be as a result of the past similar processes which did not fulfil that need. Multiple interviewees shared that it is essential that participants in this process are heard now.

The Consultants also considered the media stories surrounding this group, the assessment, and the Atlantic Branch in general. It would appear, due to the perceived inaction on the part of senior government officials to appropriately address their concerns in the past, there is a sense of mistrust that there will be accountability or meaningful change come out of this process. It is unfortunate that for some individuals, the only way they believed their voice could be heard was to place their concerns in such a public forum as the media.

### Next Step—Sharing the Results of the Workplace Assessment

The Consultants believe a summary of the themes should be presented to the REO first so that she can understand the main areas of concern expressed by her staff. Next, it is suggested that the Consultants virtually present the themes of the workplace assessment with staff. This is a very important step in the process for staff as it will start to address the transparency and trust issues that exist and will hopefully be the first step towards healing this workplace. It is very important that people feel like they have been listened to, that the senior leadership has heard their concerns, and that an action plan is being developed that will enable the Team and workplace to positively and productively move forward.

## Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are structured to address the challenges within the FNIHB, Atlantic Region based on what the Consultants heard during the workplace assessment process. Recommendations One and Two are critical to establishing a transition period within the FNIHB aimed at restoring stability and a feeling of safety for many staff within the workplace. Recommendations Three to Seven are meant to restore the functioning of the senior management team and allow them to do their best work. These recommendations will need to be addressed regardless of who is leading the Team or the Team as a unit will continue to struggle.

### Recommendation One:

**Rebuild a culture of trust and accountability and a feeling of safety within the workplace by immediately establishing a restorative process customized to the needs of the FNIHB Atlantic Region senior management team.**

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Trust, accountability and a sense of safety must be rebuilt within the senior management team and their leadership. An immediate first step to be taken following this workplace assessment is restorative work that supports the team to heal and to rebuild relationships to resume effective functioning within the senior team. This will require a significant investment of time for the leadership and senior management team. It is estimated a restorative process will span months, not days. To be authentic any restorative process undertaken must incorporate traditional Indigenous healing practices as well as non-Indigenous healing processes to reflect the diversity of the Team and the nature of the work of the team.

The restorative process will also require rebuilding of trust with the organization's most senior leadership. The Consultants heard that participants in this process felt that Headquarters ignored and did not address concerns raised to their level on multiple occasions. Therefore, leadership representing Headquarters must consider how to address the perception of many staff that Headquarters failed to hold FNIHB Atlantic Region leaders, and others, accountable for their actions. Consideration should be given to whether an acknowledgement or recognition of some nature is appropriate from Headquarters. An acknowledgement need not be about blame or admissions. It is about demonstrating an understanding of the situation and its impact. It should validate that the workplace assessment participants were heard. A number of individuals used the word "reconciliation" when speaking about the need to heal the relationships in this organization. A restorative process will address the past harms that some individuals perceive to have occurred in the workplace which were not acknowledged over an extended period of time.

The restorative process must identify what the Team needs to support a safe and healthy work environment. This will likely contain aspects of *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* including addressing some of the 13 factors of psychological health and safety in the workplace<sup>5</sup>. As stated on the Guarding Minds website, while psychological health and safety deserve equal protection, from a strategic perspective, ensuring safety in the sense of preventing psychological harm is a prerequisite to the promotion of health<sup>6</sup>. This restorative work should address aspects of the work environment that are problematic from a health and safety perspective, including disrespectful and harmful behaviors that some of the participants highlighted and believe were not addressed. It will be critical for the team to have a voice in identifying what they need going forward and be participants in the developing elements of the restorative process.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/13-factors-addressing-mental-health-workplace>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/about/about-safety>

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**Recommendation Two:**

**Leadership competencies must reflect knowledge of the FNIHB mandate, programs and services, expertise in restorative and collaborative practices, and a track record for effectively managing teams at a senior level.**

**Recommendation Three:**

**Strengthen Senior Team's Effectiveness through Clarity of Mandate and Strategic Priorities.**

The nature of the work environment and leadership has negatively impacted the senior management team's ability to function at the high standard they desire in relationship with their Indigenous

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Partners. The restorative work must incorporate supports to restore each respective team members' ability to work from place of strength, not vulnerability, as members of the senior team and to lead staff in the effectively delivery of the FNIHB, Atlantic Region's mandate, its programs and services. Part of this will require senior team members to engage in a reflection of their own management style and competencies to maximize their own abilities to operate in a collaborative fashion.

The team must work with leadership to obtain clarity on mandate and seek agreement on priorities to move past a feeling of crisis management. Achieving agreement on mandate and the ways and means to achieve the mandate is critical and must flow from the highest level of leadership, to the senior management team, to staff delivering services and programs, to Indigenous Partners.

**Recommendation Four:**

**That the organization review its policies and procedures respecting harassment in the workplace to ensure that policies are adequate and complaints are effectively addressed.**

The Consultants heard that multiple complaints with respect to disrespectful and harassing behaviour had been advanced and not addressed. This was the perception of a number of the interviewees. While the Consultants did not undertake fact finding of complaints as part of the workplace assessment process, it remains that staff feel there has been a lack of accountability and action on the part of leadership within the Atlantic Branch and at Headquarters with respect to complaints and concerns advanced by employees.

To ensure that staff feel safe at work, leaders must ensure adherence to their organization's policies so that issues are addressed as they arise in a timely manner and there is appropriate follow up. The Consultants recommend that violence in the workplace policies, respectful workplace and prevention of harassment and discrimination policies are reviewed and brought up to date. Education and training for senior leaders and new hires on their obligations and responsibilities with respect to such policies, processes and procedures and adherence to their timeframes be provided. In addition, a commitment to a respectful and harassment free workplace should be modeled from those in leadership positions. The expectation that the FNIHB Atlantic Region Branch is a respectful workplace for all employees should be stated and modelled.

Attention must be given to the current complaints that were the impetus for this broader workplace assessment. An assessment by leadership of the most appropriate resolution is required, including whether the restorative work and recommendations herein when implemented will effectively address the current complaints. Leadership must turn their mind to the current complaints and be satisfied that a responsive and accountable approach has been taken to address the concerns and consider whether additional steps must be taken.

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**Recommendation Five:**

**Strengthen human resources strategies and supports: succession planning; recruitment and retention; effective performance management.**

As noted in this report, there is a significant gap that is perceived with respect to corporate supports and most notably human resources support to the Atlantic Region. Consideration should be given by Headquarters to the adequacy of corporate resources to this Region. Specifically, enhanced human resources support and a strategy that encompasses a plan for recruitment and retention is needed. A focus on retention is most urgently needed as there is a high level of turnover and vacancies in positions. Workload is high as a result. Currently, human resources support is provided from Yellowknife, NWT.

The Consultants heard that a third seat at the Executive level would be of assistance to the two current executive positions of the REO and RDP. It was recognized that the RDP role has frequent turnover as it has been difficult to retain people in the role. Following the implementation of restorative process recommended in Recommendation One,

There is also a sense that leaders in this workplace could do better with enhanced performance management processes in place. More robust performance management processes would ensure that leaders are provided timely feedback to enhance their insight into how their management style and practices are impacting their staff. It also provides the opportunity to adjust behaviour accordingly. Improved performance management processes are required throughout the Branch from the REO and RDP positions to their directors and their staff to ensure performance expectations are clearly communicated with regular ongoing feedback, and if needed, timely corrective measures. Acknowledgement for good work is also a key aspect of performance management that is needed in this workplace.

Finally, consideration should be given to succession planning for this organization, within the lens of the cultural context of the work of capacity building, and the vision of self-determination for Indigenous communities.

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There must also be work done to ensure that those who are sitting at the senior management table and those who are involved in the team are clear on their roles and responsibilities within the organization's mandate and with respect to the Indigenous Partners and communities.

The Consultants also heard that those in the workplace feel better clarity is needed around work expectations and assignments. This clarity on the work must be modeled from the top down. This includes the setting of boundaries around work life balance and ensuring those boundaries are

**Recommendation Seven:****Senior leadership team to identify priorities and develop strategic plans that align with priorities.**

It was heard the senior leadership team would benefit from strategic level planning on identified priorities. The Consultants are aware that ISC has presented a Departmental Plan for 2020-2021 that includes five interconnected priority areas. However, the team itself should be given an opportunity, time and space to set priorities for the team at the Atlantic Branch. Some noted that there have been efforts to do this high level strategic work already but more focus on this would be beneficial. This planning should limit the sense that the work environment is constantly in crisis as the team becomes more purposeful. A foundational component of this would be that all members of the senior team are actively engaged in this process. Then each senior member of the team could work with their own staff to develop a plan for their area that is in line with organizational priorities.

As a piece of this planning, consideration should be given to creating boundaries and expectations for work with the Indigenous communities and Partners in the Atlantic Region. The Partners should be part of the dialogue on what is realistic to expect from the organization and must have a voice in a collaborative approach to priority setting and planning with respect to the work. Through the lens of, and in support of Truth and Reconciliation, the Indigenous Partners and communities need to be part of these discussions and their perspectives be valued.

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## Conclusion

The collated data from the participant one-on-one consultations has highlighted the impact of a multitude of issues and challenges faced by the senior management team at the Atlantic Region, FNIHB. As described earlier in this report, the “festering” of these issues and challenges over a prolonged period of time has created considerable harm within the Team.

The restorative process recommended is a critical component in order to repair and reconcile the harm that was articulated throughout this workplace assessment. This journey of reconciliation within the Team will take time. The restorative and organizational recommendations offered will have a positive impact for the Team, for the staff of the broader Atlantic Region, and for the Partners and communities served by the Branch.

Ensuring adherence to the policies and legislation that are currently in place to address concerns of disrespectful and harmful behaviour, as well as addressing systemic organizational gaps will assist senior leaders in creating a safe, respectful, and functioning work environment for all staff and the communities they serve. It will also help address the influencing factors participants identified regarding trust, accountability, and safety. Ultimately, it will foster courage for people to feel comfortable to speak their truth and re-establish the importance of sharing their voice. As stated by one participant:

*Courageous behaviour rewarded creates more courage. We need to see support and modeling of this by senior leaders and others on the team.*

Respectfully,

HR Atlantic



Jennifer Innis  
Consultant



Lyndsay MacDonald  
Consultant



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## Appendix “A” – Consultation Questions



### First Nations and Inuit Health Branch/ Atlantic Region

#### Workplace Assessment Consultation Questions

##### **BACKGROUND**

Can you tell me a little bit about your role and work and how long you've been working with the FNHIB?

##### **EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS**

1. Tell me about your interactions with the management team.
2. What would you identify as working well at work?
3. Tell me about your work and workload?
4. How would you describe the culture/work environment?
5. Let's think about relationships within the workplace, how would you describe your work relationships and interactions with others?
6. How would you assess the effectiveness of communication that's necessary for you to do your job?

##### **What's Possible**

7. What in your view would have a positive impact on the work environment and work relationships?
8. What happens if nothing changes?

##### **Final Thoughts**

9. Is there anything else you want to share with me or think I should be aware of that has not come up in our discussion?

If I have any follow up questions or need to connect with you for more information, is it ok to contact you?