



INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: Cowichan Tribes

Recognizing “our behaviors in the workplace, how we collaborate, and how we serve the community all could be enhanced,” in 2018 the Cowichan Tribes in British Columbia overhauled its human resources (HR) policy.¹ “Embedding cultural heritage into the fabric”² of its organization, Cowichan’s revamped HR policy is designed to ensure its 500 staff members – 80% of whom are Cowichan or citizens of other First Nations in Canada – “operate as *nuts’amaat shqwaluwun* (people working together with one mind respectfully) guided by the teachings of our ancestors (The Cowichan Teachings).”³ Among the teachings employees must uphold are *Tl’i’to’ mukw’ mustimuhw* (“Each person is important”), *Hwial’asmut ch tun’ s-ye’lh* (“Take care of your health”), and *Yath ch ’o’ lhq’il’* (“Be positive”).⁴ Central to the HR policy is its “Commitment to Culture and Language,” which encourages employees “to participate in and incorporate culture and Hul’q’umi’num’ language whenever appropriate,” which includes twice-weekly language and culture classes and wellness classes that a growing number attend, and standing access to Cowichan’s Cultural Coordinator to deepen their “knowledge of cultural protocols.”⁵ The policy also features the “Cowichan Syuwun Leave With Pay” provision, which provides employees up to 15 days of paid leave to support their spiritual initiation in the longhouse, and up to five days of paid leave to employees who sponsor them.⁶ Committed to “taking care of our community’s caretakers”⁷, Cowichan also provides employees regular “psychological safety” trainings and safe spaces for hard conversations between them.⁸ In addition, it administers a lateral violence prevention policy that proactively promotes “developing and maintaining respectful relationships with those around us,” which has helped to reduce Cowichan’s annual number of workplace conflict investigations from 25 previously to just four today.⁹ In further evidence that Cowichan is successfully building “a place where people want to work”¹⁰, the Tribes’ annual staff turnover rate has decreased by more than half since 2018 to 4.3%, which is considerably lower than the average annual turnover rate among employers across Canada.¹¹ As Cowichan explains it, “We’re not just building a workforce; we’re building a family.”¹²

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¹ Hannah Seymour, Human Resources Director, Cowichan Tribes, Conversation with NCAI, July 3, 2025.

² Career Connections Canada Inc., “Career Connections Canada Inc’s post,” Facebook, June 11, 2025 (<https://www.facebook.com/CareerConnectionsCanadaInc/posts/how-can-organizations-strengthen-workplace-culture-while-staying-true-to-their-v/1492126345510627/>, accessed June 25, 2025).

³ Cowichan Tribes, *Cowichan Tribes Human Resources Policy - Amended 2018*, 2018, p. 6 (https://cowichantribes.com/application/files/4515/7928/8815/Cowichan_Tribes_HR_Policy_2018.pdf, accessed June 11, 2025); Seymour, Conversation with NCAI, July 3, 2025.

⁴ For the full list of these teachings, see Cowichan Tribes, *Cowichan Tribes Human Resources Policy - Amended 2018*, 2018, p. 35. According to Seymour, it’s easy for our employees “to [see] the whys of that legislative requirement, because we’re meant to care for each other, because everyone is important. Those fundamental cultural teachings have been incorporated through our entire HR policy, which is incredibly helpful” (Chris Davis, “Hul’q’umi’num’ in the workplace? How Cowichan Tribes is keeping tradition alive,” *HRD Human Resources Director*, January 30, 2025 (<https://www.hcamag.com/ca/specialization/corporate-wellness/hulquminum-in-the-workplace-how-cowichan-tribes-is-keeping-tradition-alive/522725>, accessed March 6, 2025).

⁵ Cowichan Tribes, *Cowichan Tribes Human Resources Policy - Amended 2018*, 2018, p. 9. According to Seymour, “We offer language and culture classes twice a week to anyone in our employee group – Cowichan or non-Cowichan – so they can begin to better understand those cultural teachings and become familiar with the language to better support our community in the services we provide” (Davis, “Hul’q’umi’num’ in the workplace? How Cowichan Tribes is keeping tradition alive,” January 30, 2025).

⁶ Cowichan Tribes, *Cowichan Tribes Human Resources Policy - Amended 2018*, 2018, p. 24.

⁷ Seymour, Conversation with NCAI, July 3, 2025.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cowichan Tribes, *Cowichan Tribes Human Resources Policy - Amended 2018*, 2018, Appendix E. According to Cowichan’s HR policy, “It is the Cowichan Tribes policy to maintain a work environment free of lateral violence. This type of behavior is not in keeping with the Cowichan culture and teachings of snu’wuyulh, which promote developing and maintaining respectful relationships with those around us” (Ibid.).

¹⁰ Seymour, quoted in Davis, “Hul’q’umi’num’ in the workplace? How Cowichan Tribes is keeping tradition alive,” January 30, 2025.

¹¹ Seymour, Conversation with NCAI, July 3, 2025.

¹² Seymour, quoted in Davis, “Hul’q’umi’num’ in the workplace? How Cowichan Tribes is keeping tradition alive,” January 30, 2025.