

QNT Tribal Council Executive Session Policy

PURPOSE

This policy is intended to guide toward a better way of handling executive sessions when or if they occur during council meeting. As with many practices that are not fully understood, executive sessions can cause consternation. And, as with practices that are not completely open, they have the potential for misinterpretation and misuse. When not well managed, executive sessions can fuel problems, ranging from a lack of transparency and disregard for public accountability to inappropriate council member behavior and distrust between council and staff members. But, they need not.

The following guidelines can help ensure that executive sessions become a productive, rather than a dubious, practice:

Adherence to Following Behaviors

As a QNT Council Member, I will:

1. **Facilitate executive sessions judiciously.** Executive sessions exist for particular purposes that the council should clearly define and follow. First, the Tribal Council President shall only allow executive sessions for the following reasons: when the subject matter concerns child welfare, personnel, litigation, tribal enrollment and other matters made confidential by tribal ordinance or law as stated in the Constitution and By-Laws approved by the council 9-12-2011. When in executive session, stick to the issue at hand — grounded in facts and circumstances, not gossip or speculation. Do not let executive sessions be used to scheme behind the administration's back, fuel rumors, isolate dissenting council members, or manipulate the results of a vote.
2. **Create a safe haven.** Council service often requires uncompromising, independent decision making. Use an executive session to create a forum for thoughtful discussion, not to hide behind a cloak of secrecy. In the absence of staff, encourage council members to feel more comfortable asking questions, expressing doubts, and challenging assumptions. These private discussions can help nurture a robust discussion style that can spill over into the council meeting.
3. **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** A closed door discussion provides privacy when a council needs to handle delicate matters, but eventually the message needs to be shared. Tell those being excused when, why, and how the council uses executive sessions. The council president should clearly state when the executive session begins and concludes. After an executive session, share the results with those who need to know.
4. **Not take action in meetings.** Council business belongs in the normal council meeting, regardless of the difficulty of reaching the ultimate decision. Use executive sessions for frank open conversations but return officially to the council meeting to take formal votes. Remember, final council decisions are recorded in the minutes and shared with staff, and the results often become public knowledge when the organization takes action. A council must know how to address the right issues in the right setting with the right individuals present. A savvy council manages itself and relationships thoughtfully. It distinguishes between inappropriate secrecy and legitimate privacy. Relying on good judgment, it is able to take advantage of the seclusion an executive session provides when private communication is necessary. At the same time, knowing how not to abuse executive sessions, a savvy council manages to maintain trust and confidence in the organization's integrity and processes.