



Office of the Commissioner of
**INDIGENOUS
LANGUAGES**

2023-2024 Language Gatherings

SUMMARY REPORT

Kamloops | Winnipeg | Ottawa | Halifax

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

2023-2024 LANGUAGE GATHERINGS	4	OTTAWA: INUIT LANGUAGE GATHERING	14
KAMLOOPS: NATIONAL INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE GATHERING	6	THE PATH FORWARD	16
THE PATH FORWARD	8	HALIFAX: FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES GATHERING	18
WINNIPEG: MÉTIS LANGUAGE GATHERING	10	THE PATH FORWARD	21
THE PATH FORWARD	12	CALLS TO ACTION	23

SUMMARY REPORT: 2023-2024 LANGUAGE GATHERINGS

The Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages (the Commission) hosted four Indigenous languages gatherings across Canada between September 2023 and March 2024. These gatherings were an important part of the Commission's mandate to support the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance, and strengthening of Indigenous languages.

2023–2024 Gatherings

- **Kamloops, British Columbia** – National Languages Gathering (September 14–15, 2023)
- **Winnipeg, Manitoba** – Métis Languages Gathering (March 14–15, 2024)
- **Ottawa, Ontario** – Inuit Languages Gathering (March 20–21, 2024)
- **Halifax, Nova Scotia** – First Nations Languages Gathering (March 25–26, 2024)

The gatherings brought together Elders, youth, language speakers, educators, translators, interpreters, researchers, and community leaders from across the country. They created opportunities to share experiences, celebrate successes, identify challenges, and discuss priorities for Indigenous language revitalization. The gatherings also fostered meaningful connections among language champions, strengthening relationships and knowledge-sharing networks that extend beyond the gatherings themselves.

The gatherings began in Tk'emlúps (Kamloops), British Columbia, in September 2023. Building on the insights and relationships established there, the Commission hosted three distinctions-based gatherings in Winnipeg, Ottawa, and Halifax, creating space for Métis, Inuit, and First Nations participants to share perspectives grounded in their unique languages, cultures, histories, and realities.

Collectively, the gatherings provided valuable guidance to the Commission on how it can best support Indigenous-led language revitalization efforts while highlighting the strength, resilience, and innovation already present in communities across Canada. Throughout the gatherings, participants reinforced that communities are at the centre of efforts to reclaim, revitalize, maintain, and strengthen Indigenous languages and are best positioned to lead this work. The gatherings also demonstrated the Commission's role as a national convenor and bridge builder, creating opportunities for language champions, Elders, youth, educators, organizations, and partners to



connect, share knowledge, and build relationships. By bringing diverse voices together, the Commission helped foster collaboration and strengthen the networks that support Indigenous languages across the country.

APPROACH

The gatherings were designed to create welcoming and culturally grounded spaces where participants could openly share their experiences, knowledge, challenges, and successes. Through facilitated discussions, panel sessions, storytelling, and cultural sharing, participants explored opportunities and barriers related to language revitalization while highlighting innovative approaches being implemented in their communities.

The gatherings also fostered the development of relationships and knowledge-sharing networks among language speakers, educators, researchers, translators, interpreters, and community organizations. These exchanges identified common priorities across regions while recognizing the distinct needs and strengths of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The insights gathered through these dialogues continue to inform the Commission's work and contribute to broader efforts to support Indigenous languages across Canada.

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KAMLOOPS: NATIONAL INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE GATHERING

September 14-15, 2023

The Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages launched its national engagement activities by hosting its first national Indigenous Languages Gathering in Tk'emlúps (Kamloops), British Columbia. Held on the traditional territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within the unceded ancestral lands of the Secwépemc Nation, the gathering brought together First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Elders, language experts, educators, translators, interpreters, youth, and community leaders from across Canada. It was also an opportunity to celebrate their work and share experiences related to the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance, and strengthening of Indigenous languages.

Throughout the gathering, participants highlighted both the resilience of Indigenous languages and the challenges facing language revitalization efforts. Discussions emphasized the critical role of Elders, fluent speakers, and community language champions who continue to carry and transmit Indigenous languages despite limited resources, increasing demands, and the declining number of fluent speakers. Participants shared that language revitalization must remain community-led and grounded in the knowledge, priorities, and realities of those doing the work on the ground.

A recurring theme was the urgent need to strengthen language learning opportunities through teacher training, mentorship programs, language immersion, and language nests. Participants also spoke about the importance of connecting language learning to culture, community, and land-based teachings, which help learners understand not only the words themselves but the values, knowledge systems, and relationships intertwined within Indigenous languages. The gathering further highlighted the need to preserve languages through documentation and digitization while continuing to support oral traditions.

The gathering highlighted promising practices shared by speakers and participants, including:

- Language immersion programs and language nests that create supportive learning environments for speakers of all ages;
- The use of technology to support language promotion, digitization, preservation, and accessibility;
- Mentor-apprentice initiatives that connect Elders and fluent speakers with emerging language learners;
- Youth leadership and engagement through cultural performance, research, art, sport, and mentorship; and
- Indigenous-led language revitalization projects taking place in communities, schools, and organizations across the country;
- Land-based language learning approaches that strengthen cultural connections while supporting language acquisition.



THE PATH FORWARD

The two-day gathering concluded with priorities in relation to the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance, and strengthening of Indigenous languages:

- Supporting community-led language revitalization efforts and ensuring decisions remain grounded in local priorities and realities;
- Enhancing the role of Elders and fluent speakers in language transmission and revitalization initiatives alongside younger generations;
- Increasing investment in Indigenous language teacher training, mentorship programs, language immersion, and language nest initiatives;
- Providing adequate and sustainable funding, compensation, and resources for language speakers, teachers, translators, and interpreters;
- Advancing the use of technology to support language promotion, digitization, preservation, and access to language resources;
- Expanding opportunities for land-based and culturally grounded language learning experiences; and
- Promoting the value, importance, and visibility of Indigenous languages at all levels of society to support long-term revitalization efforts.



WINNIPEG: MÉTIS LANGUAGE GATHERING

March 14-15, 2024

This session was organized to gain specific insights regarding current initiatives, successes and challenges faced by Métis communities in preserving their language and culture.

The gathering highlighted the complexities surrounding the lack of teacher education programs, including immersion teacher training, as well as the shortfalls of a proposal-based system of funding, which does not allow for long-term program planning. Equally important, participants expressed the need for capacity-building, which requires increasing the number of adult language speakers who are not only fluent, but also adept at successfully teaching Michif to younger generations.

A key promising program identified by participants during the session was the Michif Master/Mentor-Apprentice (MAP) Language House in Brandon, Manitoba. The program provided an immersion method of language learning, which has been identified by community members as the fastest and most effective way to learn Michif. The program recently lost funding, which further highlights the need for long-term, sustainable and adequate funding for language revitalization initiatives.

The participants expressed that further progress in language revitalization will take full community engagement, with language being spoken and supported in every home, in addition to having funding mechanisms in place that support community-based methods of delivery.

The discussions in Winnipeg also touched on the topic of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential role in language revitalization efforts. Participants expressed concerns about the ability for AI to support accuracy, dialect differences, and the need for human interaction in language learning environments.



THE PATH FORWARD

The two-day gathering generated overarching themes, challenges and solutions, which were consolidated as next steps for the continued revitalization and strengthening of Michif:

- Expanding immersion programs: Adequate, long-term and sustainable funding is required for the success and longevity of immersion programs/curricula and language nests. These programs have proven to be effective at producing new fluent speakers and encouraging intergenerational transmission.
- Improving teacher training: providing specialized training tailored to Michif immersion teaching methodologies, to better equip language teachers with the required resources to achieve fluency. Fostering community-based learning: promoting community-driven and land-based language learning to facilitate natural immersion through daily living, relationships, and cultural practices.
- Increasing the number of adult speakers: programs that focus on creating a new generation of adult fluent speakers should be prioritized as they are key to passing on the language through immersive, community-centered activities and initiatives.
- Building collective support systems: developing networks, resources and forums to connect language teachers, speakers, and champions across communities. These support systems will encourage the sharing of promising practices and provide a platform to collectively address challenges and barriers.



OTTAWA: INUIT LANGUAGE GATHERING

March 20-21, 2024

The Inuktitut language gathering held in Ottawa brought together Inuit Elders, youth and knowledge keepers to share experiences, create dialogue and pave a way forward for continued Inuktitut revitalization and strengthening.

The gathering highlighted a generational gap when it comes to Inuktitut, where youth face more obstacles in learning and maintaining fluency than previous generations. A centralized hub consolidating language learning materials and resources was presented as a solution.

Another emerging theme from the Inuit engagement was the essential role of communities in safeguarding the well-being, health, and resilience of all Inuit. Participants shared that the sense of unity and shared identity within communities is crucial for fostering a supportive environment which nurtures Inuktitut revitalization and is fundamentally connected to cultural preservation.

Notably, various projects are already underway in different communities, where for example, through a collaboration between Elders and youth, Inuktitut portals were developed. However, there was also agreement that further in-depth discussions and focus groups are needed to enhance existing initiatives and better amplify their impact.

The gathering highlighted promising practices shared by speakers and participants, including:

- Overall increased number of Inuktitut language programs in communities;
- The strong tradition of intergenerational transmission of Inuktitut between Elders and younger generations;
- The greater accessibility of technology that connects Inuktitut learners and teachers across the country; and
- Practicing Inuktitut reclamation and revitalization by reconnecting with language, culture and community.



THE PATH FORWARD

The two-day gathering concluded with priorities in relation to the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance, and strengthening of Inuktitut:

- Supporting immersion: increasing funding and resources for Inuktitut language education and immersion programs. This includes hiring more teachers, developing Inuit-specific curricula and materials, and increasing the capacity of existing programs.
- Supporting technology initiatives which make the process of learning Inuktitut more accessible, such as digitizing archives and developing interactive applications and games.
- Healing through language: addressing intergenerational trauma and shame around learning Inuktitut through increased investment in education, counselling, and community healing. The lack of infrastructural support in relation to addressing intergenerational trauma has hindered revitalization efforts.
- Strengthening language legislation and enforcement: advocate for policy changes and legislations which recognize and protect Inuktitut language rights at federal, provincial and territorial levels. Securing these protections would provide a framework for revitalization efforts.
- Expanding language learning pathways: promote and fund immersion programs, camps, and exchanges to create supportive language environments.



HALIFAX: FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES GATHERING

March 25-26, 2024

Much like the Métis and Inuit gatherings, the Commission hosted a language session in Halifax with a diverse group of language experts, Elders, youth and community members dedicated to revitalizing First Nations languages.

Participants shared the complexities surrounding social responsibility related to the revitalization of First Nations languages. More specifically, the challenges of language learning within Western institutions were highlighted. The lack of resources dedicated to documentation of First Nations languages was also cited in addition to the difficulties in collectively supporting the preservation of every-day language use.

Discussions highlighted that within communities, heavy responsibilities are being placed on teachers, who have very few resources and support networks. The youth are also losing the desire to speak their language at a very young age and are scared to take pride in their own languages. The absence of adequate, long-term and sustainable funding exacerbates existing challenges, which further hinders revitalization efforts in communities.

Promising practices were also shared by participants, which heavily focused on the importance of revitalizing First Nations languages through collaborative partnerships with institutions and organizations. Immersion language programs and Indigenous-specific curricula were also cited as promising practices to best support language learning.

A unique component of this engagement was a detailed discussion on Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and revitalization of Indigenous languages. Following a presentation on the topic by Fireside Analytics Inc., participants had an open discussion about the important role Generative AI can play to support the revitalization, learning and promotion of First Nations languages. Although there were concerns about ownership and accuracy, there was agreement amongst attendees that technological assets can be a useful tool for all language learners. It was reinforced that the spirit of the language needs to remain at the core –





where the principles of First Nations knowledge, worldview, and relationality are respected and upheld.

Participants spoke about the impacts of residential schools and historical and ongoing colonial policies in relation to the loss of languages and the erosion of cultural identity. For many survivors and intergenerational survivors, this has created a sense of insecurity, shame, and barriers to reclaiming their First Nations identity and languages.

THE PATH FORWARD

The gathering ultimately proposed key priorities to increase the number of fluent Indigenous language speakers and support language revitalization efforts:

- Increase funding and support for language immersion programs and language nests to create more opportunities for immersion learning and fluency.
- Support mentorship programs that involve Elders and fluent language speakers, who can work with youth to facilitate language transmission.
- Provide more support and training for interpreters, translators, and teachers to increase the number of skilled language speakers and resources.
- Documentation is critical with the declining number of fluent speakers. As such, effective language documentation methods must be used for immersion programs and the development of Indigenous-specific curricula.



CALLS TO ACTION: SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PRESERVATION EFFORTS

The Indigenous languages gatherings hosted by the Commission brought participants together to celebrate and honour the diversity of Indigenous languages, cultures, heritage and ways of knowing. The sessions provided opportunities for intergenerational learning and community building amongst those dedicated to language revitalization.

Equally as important as paving the path forward for collective next steps, the language gatherings also put forward a series of calls to action to support Indigenous Peoples in their efforts to reclaim, revitalize, strengthen, and maintain their languages:

- **Supporting language teachers:** support, funding and advocacy is needed for more training programs and incentives geared towards Indigenous language educators. This includes the promotion of language certification, greater equality of certified educator distinction, and creating mentorship opportunities for aspiring educators.
- **Prioritizing immersion programs:** to effectively teach Indigenous languages, with emphasis on land-based learning, fluency, cultural immersion, and community involvement. Immersion programs can be enhanced through active partnerships with schools, community organizations, and government agencies.
- **Greater collaboration:** between governmental institutions at all levels, school boards, organizations, and Indigenous Peoples to ensure the revitalization, maintenance, and strengthening of Indigenous languages is a priority.



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