



**Brief to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAN)
44th Parliament, 1st Session: Indigenous Languages Study**

The First Peoples' Cultural Council
Tracey Herbert, O.B.C., Chief Executive Officer

The Indigenous Languages Act received royal assent in June 2019. In this brief, we summarize some of the successes of the implementation of the Act so far, and recommend actions needed to create an environment that supports thriving Indigenous languages.

About the First Peoples' Cultural Council

The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) is a First Nations–governed provincial Crown Corporation formed in 1990 with the legislated mandate to support the revitalization of First Nations languages, arts, cultures and heritage in British Columbia (B.C.). We do this by:

- Empowering communities to reach their goals by offering opportunities for skill development, coaching, grant funding, resources and models of success
- Honouring the knowledge of First Nations people by providing funding for them to develop, share and transfer their knowledge
- Providing leadership through subject matter expertise, innovative technologies, best practices and knowledge sharing
- Practising a community development approach by partnering with communities to deliver successful language, arts and heritage programs
- Advocating for increased recognition and support for the inherent value of First Nations languages, arts, cultures and heritage

For more than 20 years, FPCC has been a regional delivery organization for the Department of Canadian Heritage's Indigenous Languages Component to First Nations in B.C.

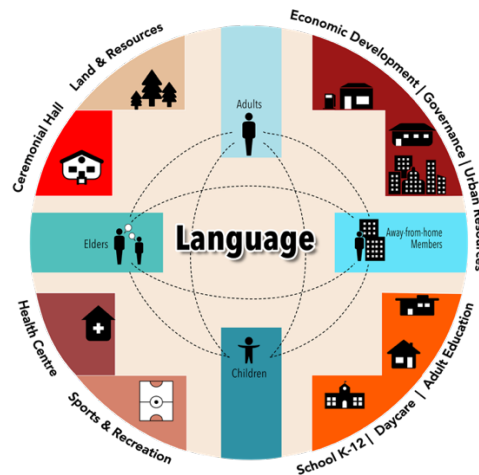
Background: Understanding Language Revitalization

Language revitalization is a complex task, especially in the context of Indigenous languages in Canada where there is high diversity and where most of the first-language speakers are aging. To revitalize a language successfully, it takes teams of people to do the work and people need to be paid to do the work. So much has been dependent on the volunteer efforts of community members or on staff trying to cover language work on top of their other roles. Each language and community is at a different stage in revitalization so approaches must be tailored to individual circumstances. Because of the impacts of cultural genocide and because there has been only modest investment in Indigenous languages for so long, many communities have not had the capacity to do language revitalization work and need support to build teams and expertise. There is very little literature available on how to do the work, especially from an Indigenous perspective. As Indigenous people, we benefit from opportunities to share experiences and support each other with this work.

Language revitalization includes all activities that increase use of a language. Anyone of any age can take part in language revitalization, from infants to Elders. When most people think of

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language revitalization, they probably think of learning a language in a classroom setting. That's one type of activity, but revitalization encompasses so much more. It involves all domains of the community: creating signs in the language for a local forest trail, teaching staff at the health centre to use greetings in the language, digitizing old cassette tapes of speakers telling stories in the language to use with advanced learners, having an immersion camp for youth and Elders out on the land, increasing use of the language in ceremonies and so much more. Wherever and whenever anyone speaks to another person is an opportunity for language revitalization. Achieving the vision of revitalization will take dedicated, coordinated work and ongoing, sustained support.



The key goal of language revitalization is to create speakers and the work to do that is unique and intensive. In addition, languages must be documented to have resources for learners and speakers, and communities need to develop language plans to direct the work. Ultimately, all initiatives must result in more speakers. Pressures on communities should be acknowledged. Language speakers are being pulled in many directions. Administrators, program coordinators and other staff are needed to support the work. Language and culture have been disrupted and it will take long-term investment to return to a state where languages can be heard in all domains of the community.

Adequate, sustainable and long-term funding

The Act aims to: “establish measures to facilitate the provision of adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages” (§5d). With Budgets 2019 and 2021, the amount of funding has substantially increased. In addition, multi-year funding was available for two fiscal years and will be available with the new funding model to be implemented in the near future. These are both very positive impacts of the Act’s implementation and have made a big difference to communities in B.C. who applied for funding.

However:

- The levels of investment will **need to increase** as communities are able to incrementally implement more language initiatives over time. Currently, \$115M annually (for all of Canada) is projected ongoing from 2024-25 onwards; this is not enough. FPCC undertook detailed research on costing which informed the research conducted on behalf of the

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) at a national level. The estimated cost of Indigenous languages revitalization for Canada is **\$1.809 Billion** annually (Daniel J. Brant & Associates, 2022).

- **Stable funding** is essential. When communities don't have certainty beyond one year, they cannot create long-term language plans or hire and retain permanent staff in language positions. Funding uncertainly also means that there is significant staff turnover in this sector and language work starts and stops and loses momentum with funding gaps.

National Language Strategy

While FPCC and B.C. First Nations are grateful for the funding they receive, to date, the Act is being implemented without a national strategy to guide it. FPCC believes that this is the best way to ensure that the intentions of the legislation are achieved and that every Indigenous language receives the support and funding needed for a sustainable future.

A national strategy is a plan for the revitalization of Indigenous languages that outlines goals and priorities with clear actions designed to meet each goal. The strategy also provides a framework for practical measurement and evaluation of the actions, to ensure the intended results are achieved and to make prudent use of government investments.

A national strategy is a priority because:

- It promotes effective approaches.
- Results can be tracked and evaluated.
- It ensures decisions are led by Indigenous people.
- Research on other countries demonstrates that a national strategy increases long-term government support.
- Indigenous leaders have asked for a national strategy since 2002.

It will be difficult to determine whether the Act is successful without baseline information on the state of language revitalization in each community. FPCC collects this information with the support of First Nations in B.C. but it is not available in other places. We still operate within the colonial system of the Treasury Board so reporting on achievements and outcomes is critical. Communities will require funding and capacity development to support the tracking of outcomes of the investment.¹

National Support Organization

FPCC is unique within Canada as a First-Nations-governed provincial Crown Corporation that supports First Nations language, arts and heritage revitalization. We are more than a funder; our community-based approach empowers communities through training, coaching and resources to support communities in reaching their goals for revitalization. We believe this is a model that works but similar organizations do not exist in all regions of Canada. The Act permits funding through Section 8/9 agreements to develop similar regional organizations in other areas where desired which is important, but a small, focused national organization is also needed for the following reasons:

¹ We have drafted a discussion paper to support the development of a national strategy; please see: https://fpcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FPCC_national_strategy_discussion_paper_June_11_2020.pdf

- To provide broad, comprehensive management of the implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act.
- To develop a strategic language strategy on a national level and collate reporting from regional and community levels.
- To connect and support existing regional organizations and offer assistance to communities where regional organizations don't exist.
- To provide a central repository to collect and organize language resources to promote knowledge transfer and reduce duplication of resources and activities.
- To act as a government & public liaison on Indigenous language issues.
- To ensure Indigenous direction of the legislation initiatives with decision making via an Indigenous board and advisory committee.
- To protect funding and programs into the future if the government changes (e.g., on the model of the Tri-Agency, Canada Council for the Arts, etc.).

Prioritize Immersion; Coordination Within and Between Levels of Government

Everything we have seen flowing from the Act to date has been through the Department of Canadian Heritage for community-based work; this is also our mandate (community-based language revitalization outside of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system). The staff at Canadian Heritage have been helpful and supportive while adapting their practices in order to implement the Act. Funding through Canadian Heritage is providing support for community-based initiatives such as immersion at the pre-school (language nest) and adult level. However, the Act was intended to provide comprehensive support. Where is new funding for immersion education? Immersion is the best way to learn and opportunities must be made available for all First Nations people, of all ages, regardless of where they live. Statistics Canada (2022) reports that nearly 72% of First Nations people in B.C. live off reserve. Each First Nations person has the right to be educated in their own language (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People) and not just in on-reserve schools but public schools as well. One public school district in B.C. has implemented a bilingual program; this is a promising model that could be emulated.

Many barriers exist to the implementation of immersion in schools. The education system is colonial and can be a hostile environment for language learning. Teachers' unions need to ensure that language teachers have pay equity with other teachers. There are not enough language teachers; universities must develop programs in second language learning pedagogy for Indigenous languages and student recruitment in this area should be prioritized. When immersion is implemented, there should be standards around the minimum number of hours required. When very few hours of language instruction are offered, it doesn't create new speakers and contributes to the demise of our languages. Outcomes need to focus on conversational fluency before literacy. But immersion schools alone aren't going to revitalize languages; a community-wide effort is needed.

The Act was meant to provide for all language needs. A collaborative approach is required, which includes the Department of Canadian Heritage, and is also coordinated with Indigenous Services Canada and with ministries in all provinces and territories. We recommend funding immersion language education and protecting Indigenous rights to Indigenous language education, especially in Québec where Bill 96 may impede those rights. The federal government could take the lead with discussions on how every province and territory is going to engage with

language revitalization at all levels. There are great examples such as provincial legislation in Nova Scotia and provincial funding in B.C. that can serve as models for other places.

Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages (OCIL)

There were extensive consultations leading up to the development of the legislation, both in B.C. led by FPCC, and at a national level led by the AFN. While there was support for a language commissioner, it was certainly not the highest priority for the legislation. We were surprised to see that nearly half of the Act concerns OCIL. The Act tasks OCIL with a large set of roles, some of which seem to be in conflict with each other, such as providing support to nations while also reporting on how nations are progressing with the use and vitality of their languages. We recommend that the role of OCIL be re-examined and modeled more closely on that of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, primarily an ombudsperson and auditing role.

A Holistic Approach to Cultural Revitalization

The Euro-Canadian policy for Indigenous language revitalization is divisive in its siloed approach to funding and support. Language, arts and heritage are braided together and we need a holistic approach to rebuild these critical aspects of our identity. While Indigenous languages are receiving increased funding through the Act, Indigenous arts and heritage are not funded at the same level as non-Indigenous arts and heritage. No federal mechanisms exist for funding that would support communities in this holistic approach. We need to work together to ensure these systems are strong into the future.

International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL)

Indigenous people in Canada are leading the way in language revitalization which is a new endeavour on the world stage. There are really great things happening across Canada and this has improved with the support of the federal government through the Indigenous Languages Act. We have learned from Indigenous experts from around the world and one of our values as Canadians is to share with others. UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages provides an opportunity to share our successes. We encourage Canada to support Indigenous experts to participate in events for the decade and celebrate efforts to keep our languages strong well into the future.

Summary of Recommendations

In sum, while the implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act has brought increased funding for language revitalization and a shift towards multi-year funding, we recommend several key actions that could help to ensure that the Act does what it was intended to do:

1. Meet the requirement of adequate funding and ensure funding is stable. The currently projected \$115M annually from 2024-25 ongoing is far short of the estimated requirement of \$1.809B.
2. Develop and implement a national Indigenous languages strategy.
3. Create a national support organization.
4. Fund immersion language education and coordinate initiatives within and between levels of government.
5. Review the role of OCIL.
6. Adopt a holistic approach to revitalization and ensure that Indigenous arts and heritage initiatives are also funded.
7. Support Indigenous experts to participate in events for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages