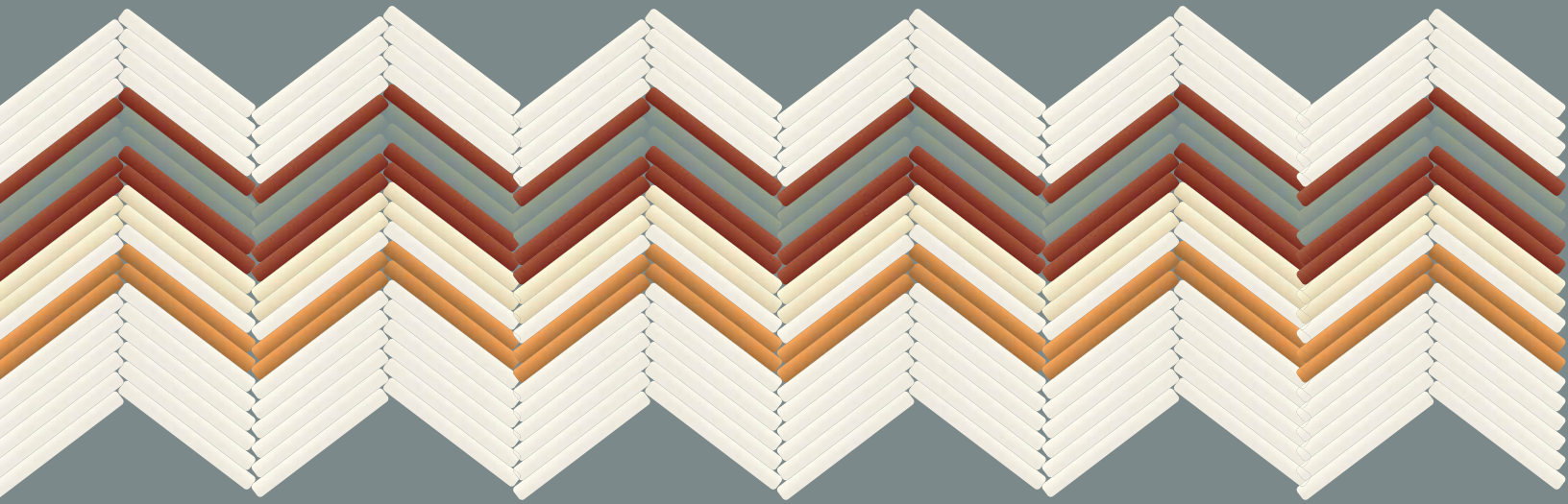


# Sante' Mawio'mi Unama'ki District Strategic Plan 2025

March 2025





# Contents

Foreword by the Mi'kmaq Grand Chief .....	4
Foreword by Douglas Brown.....	5
Executive Summary .....	6
Nation Rebuilding Project.....	7
Project Team.....	7
Project Methodology.....	8
Advisory Committee Members .....	8
Leadership Engagements.....	9
Research .....	9
Unama'ki Leadership Gatherings .....	9
Analysis and Reporting.....	9
Feedback and Revision.....	9
Strategic Framework .....	10
The Five Pillars of Effective Governance.....	11
SOAR Analysis.....	12
Results.....	13
Our Grand Vision.....	13
Five Year Vision.....	13
Our Mission.....	16
Our Overarching Teachings/Values.....	16
Our Principles.....	16
STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES.....	18
1. Governance & Relationship Building.....	18
2. Administrative Support & Capacity Building.....	19
3. Education & Knowledge Transfer .....	20
4. Resource Development & Management.....	21





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SCOTIA  
MI'KMAQ**

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It is both an honor and a privilege to present the Strategic Plan for the Mi'kmaq Grand Council, a groundbreaking initiative that marks a pivotal moment in the continued journey of the Mi'kmaq Nation. The Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq (UNSM) is proud to have collaborated on this vital project, playing a key role in shaping the path toward stronger, more resilient governance for our people.

The Mi'kmaq Grand Council serves as the heartbeat of our Nation, a central force in protecting our traditions, laws, and rights. As our Nation navigates the complexities of modern governance, the Unami'ki District Rebuilding Project has provided an invaluable opportunity to affirm our role in shaping the future of Mi'kmaq communities.

This Plan reflects the input of leaders, Keptins, and community members, and serves as a blueprint for long-term empowerment, unity, and respect. This plan charts a course toward a future where our Nation is self-determined and self-sustaining.

The UNSM has always been committed to supporting Mi'kmaq leadership and ensuring that our voices are heard in shaping the decisions that affect us. Together with the Mi'kmaq Grand Council, we will continue to advocate for our rights, our people, and our land. This Strategic Plan is a reflection of our collective vision for the Grand Council and a powerful tool that will guide our Nation for the next seven generations to come.

In partnership and solidarity,

**Douglas Brown**

Executive Director, Union of Nova Scotia



# grand council of micmacs mi'kma'wey mawio'mi



With deep respect for those Mi'kmaq who participated in discussing and collaborating on this strategic plan, I present the strategic plan for the renewal of the Unama'ki tribal district of the Mi'kmaq nation. As the governing body of the Mi'kmaq Nation, the Sante' Mawio'mi is responsible for preserving and strengthening our inherent laws, traditions, and relationships with our seven districts and other nations under our treaty alliances. In renewing and restoring our nation, the Mawio'mi decided that affirming the seven districts' role in our traditional constitutional law was necessary to reassert and reinforce their role and strengthen the Mi'kmaq nation. The governance of the Mi'kmaq tribal districts honours our most sacred traditions, which have made Mi'kmaq governance so enduring.

The Unama'ki District Rebuilding Project, launched in September 2022 with the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, has guided the Mi'kmaq First Nations in the Unama'ki tribal district through phases of discussions, engagement, visioning, and strategic planning. Through a two-phase process, we sought to engage with our leadership, communities, and Keptins to ensure that this strategic plan reflects our present aspirations and future needs. It is a tool to guide other districts through the challenges and opportunities of today and the coming generations.

Through this three-year collaborative effort through a two-eyed (etuaptmumk) approach in Unama'ki, the Mi'kmaq Keptins and First Nations identified key priorities of district governance—such as unity, better administrative and service delivery processes, citizenship, and resource management—essential to make life better for the Mi'kmaq families. Our strategic focus on empowering district governance was to secure inherent and treaty jurisdictions and ensure their rightful participation in our unwavering determination to protect and promote a better life for the Mi'kmaq families through their inherent and treaty rights, knowledge, language, and culture. This strategic plan seeks to unite the Mi'kmaq families in a shared future and ensure that the Mi'kmaq Nation and its seven districts continue to thrive for future generations.

As Kji-Saqamaw for the Mawio'mi, I share this strategic renewal plan with you. It was an effort guided by the teachings and values that have always defined the L'nu that created the structure of the Mi'kmaq nation. I invite you to evaluate it and join together to bring it to life. As my grandfather, Kji-Saqamaw Gabriel Sylliboy taught us: "The strength of our people lies in our unity and our traditions. We must never forget where we come from and the teachings of our elders."

With respect and unity,

Kji-Saqamaw Norman J. Sylliboy



# Executive Summary

This Strategic Plan is the result of a multi-year Nation Rebuilding project, administered by the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq (UNSM). The overall purpose of this project was to reaffirm and strengthen the role of the Grand Council within the context of contemporary governance structures particularly with regards to matters of Nation-level concern.

UNSM was approached in 2021 by Grand Council Executives for Nation Rebuilding support. UNSM, with the Chief's direction, secured funding from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) in 2022. Although the original hope was to support a larger scale project, it was more manageable to start with a pilot project where there was strong leadership support for this initiative.

The information in this Strategic Plan was collected through a variety of engagements, including advisory committee meetings, community leadership meetings and large-scale leadership gatherings within Unama'ki. Keptins from other Mi'kma'ki districts were engaged and their contributions helped to inform the results of this work which demonstrates the transferability of this plan.

Through collaborative leadership, strategic action and cultural resilience, this plan could assist in Nation Rebuilding work across all districts of Mi'kma'ki.





# Nation Rebuilding Project

Through extensive community engagement and research, the project laid the groundwork for a unified approach to Mi'kmaw governance, with a strong emphasis on self-determination, sustainable governance and resource management.

## Project Team



This project was administered by UNSM's Governance team and led by, Susy Denny (Governance Coordinator) and Robin Thompson (Governance Manager). The UNSM Governance team has provided critical support for the project's success including, Camryn Sock, Outreach Coordinator and Julia Witmer, former Governance Policy Analyst. The information for the plan was analysed and complied by Storm Gould (Governance Manager) and Joan Stevens (Director of Capacity Development).

Picture 1: (from L to R): Robin Thompson, Susy Denny, Camryn Sock and Julia Witmer at the Nation Rebuilding Gathering in Membertou, NS on March 19, 2024.



Picture 2: Susy Denny, Governance Coordinator & Project Manager

### SUSY DENNY

Governance Coordinator & Project Manager, UNSM

A Mi'kmaw governance professional, Susy Denny, is working as the Governance Coordinator within the Capacity Development Department of UNSM. Susy was responsible for project coordination efforts, ensuring the successful delivery of strategic planning initiatives for the Grand Council. Susy is Mi'kmaq from Eskasoni First Nation.



Picture 3: Robin Thompson, Governance Manager

### ROBIN THOMPSON

Governance Manager & Legal Expert, UNSM

Robin (Cree Métis from Treaty 1 Territory) is the Governance Manager within the Capacity Development Department of UNSM. With over 20 years of senior management experience in Indigenous governance, Robin is a strong advocate for First Nation self-determination. In 2015 she was one of the ten participants chosen world-wide for the Indigenous Fellow Programme with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Geneva Switzerland. Robin is a practicing lawyer and a Human Rights Commissioner for Nova Scotia.



## Project Methodology

The methodology for the project outlines the approach and processes used to collect data, engage stakeholders, and develop the Strategic Plan. The project was guided by the members of an Advisory Committee, representing the district of Unama'ki. The Advisory Committee members determined the direction for the project during regular meetings and approved all deliverables.

## Advisory Committee Members

- ☀ Kji-Saqamaw Norman Sylliboy
- ☀ Kji-Keptin Andrew Denny
- ☀ Pu'tu's Danny Alex
- ☀ Keptin Michael Denny
- ☀ Keptin Blair Paul
- ☀ Keptin Joe Googoo
- ☀ Keptin Douglas Peck
- ☀ Keptin Francis Doucette
- ☀ District Chief Alex Christmas
- ☀ Executive Director Douglas Brown, UNSM





## Leadership Engagements

Throughout the project, leadership from the Unama'ki District (*Grand Council, Chiefs, Council, and UNSM staff*) participated in discussions to define priorities and envision the future of Mi'kmaw governance. These engagements included meetings across all Mi'kmaw communities in Unama'ki to gather diverse perspectives.



## Research

Researchers Semisel Sa'n and Romona Morris conducted interviews with Mi'kmaw families within Unama'ki and analyzed the role of the Grand Council, focusing on lineage, historical governance practices, and modern perspectives. This research was carried out to analyze the impact of the Grand Council from community member's perspectives.



## Unama'ki Leadership Gatherings

Annual Unama'ki Leadership Gatherings were hosted in Membertou in the spring of 2023, 2024 and 2025. Participants have included Unama'ki Chiefs and Councillors, Grand Council members and District Chief Alex Christmas. Special guests and speakers included; Senator PJ Prosper, the Honourable Dan Christmas, Member of Parliament Jaime Battiste and Legal Advisor James (Sa'ke'j) Henderson.

There was great appreciation for all leaders to meet to discuss the future of the Mi'kmaq Nation as well as an acknowledgement that the Grand Council should have an active role in contemporary governance systems. There was a stated desire to focus on unity. The gatherings themselves are an act of self-determination and a significant step towards collaborative action.



## Analysis and Reporting

The final deliverable of the project is the Unama'ki District Strategic Plan, which integrates the findings from the leadership engagements, research, and leadership gatherings. The strategic plan is an exercise of self-determination and serves as a guiding document to strengthen governance systems.



## Feedback and Revision

Throughout the project, the Advisory Committee members were continuously guiding the planning process to ensure the strategies are relevant, actionable and aligned with Mi'kmaq values. At various stages of the project, support was provided by the Centre of First Nations Governance (CFNG) facilitators, Darcy Gray and Amsey Maracle, as well as the Honourable Dan Christmas and Grand Council Legal Advisor James (Sa'ke'j) Henderson.






# Strategic Framework

The framework used for strategic planning within the district of Unama'ki was based on the Five Pillars of Effective Governance developed by the Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG).

## Five Pillars of Governance:

**The People**    **The Land**    **Laws and Jurisdiction**    **Governing Systems**    **Resources**

These five pillars were developed by CFNG through extensive consultations with First Nations citizens, leaders, elders, academics and on-the-ground facilitators associated with the CFNG. The pillars blend the traditional values of our respective nations with the modern realities of self-governance.

The People	The Land	Laws & Jurisdiction	Governing Systems	Resources
				
Shared Vision	Authority Over the Land	Expansion of Jurisdiction	Transparency & Fairness	Human Resource Capacity
Participation in Decision Making	Developing an Economy	Rule of Law	Results-Based Governance	Financial Management Ability
Meaningful Decision Making	Respect for the Spirit of the Land		Cultural Alignment of Governing Systems	Performance Evaluation
			Effective Inter-Governmental Relations	Accountability & Reporting
				Expanding the Diversity of Revenue Sources





# The Five Pillars of Effective Governance

The original framework provided a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex matters involved in reimagining the role of the Grand Council in contemporary governance. It allowed for a holistic consideration of all aspects of governance while centering on Mi'kmaq values and principles. Below are the results that came from our sessions:

THE PEOPLE	<p>Focuses on citizenship, identity, and the relationship between the Nation and its members.</p> <p>Addresses questions of who belongs to the Nation and how citizenship is determined.</p> <p>Considers the role of families and communities in Nation governance.</p>
THE LAND	<p>Centres on stewardship of territory and resources.</p> <p>Addresses the protection of land for future generations.</p> <p>Considers how to assert jurisdiction over traditional territories.</p>
LAWS & JURISDICTION	<p>Focuses on the development and implementation of Mi'kmaq laws.</p> <p>Addresses how jurisdiction is exercised and relationships between districts.</p> <p>Considers the balance between traditional and contemporary legal frameworks.</p>
GOVERNING SYSTEMS	<p>Centres on the structures and processes of governance.</p> <p>Addresses the relationship between the Grand Council and Chief and Council.</p> <p>Considers how administrative support can be provided to governance entities.</p>
RESOURCES	<p>Focuses on the sustainable management of resources based on Mi'kmaq values.</p> <p>Addresses the implementation of Netukulimk (taking only what is needed).</p> <p>Considers economic development, taxation, and resource management.</p>

# SOAR Analysis

A SOAR analysis is a strategic planning framework that organizations can use to create a shared vision of the future that aligns with the current organization's strengths. The SOAR analysis was used because it's forward-thinking, amplifies internal strengths of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council as a whole, and can also be used to focus on the potential of the Unama'ki district. SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Risks/Results.

## Internal

## External

### STRENGTHS

Strong Presence in Mi'kma'ki  
Unity and Understanding  
Treaty Agreements  
Mi'kmaq Sovereignty  
Continuity  
Consensus-Based Decision Making  
Valuing Knowledge Holders  
Living as L'nu

### OPPORTUNITIES

Reclaiming Autonomy  
Inherent Rights  
Unceded Territory  
Restoring Mi'kmaw Laws  
Community Involvement  
Collaborating with Leadership  
Opportunities for Growth  
Economic Self-sufficiency

### ASPIRATIONS

Honouring Our Roles  
Overcoming Fear of Change  
Avoiding Political Mentality  
Treaties - A Source of Inspiration  
Netukulimk - Living as L'nu  
Unify the Nation  
Restoring and Sharing Laws  
Self-Governance

### RISKS / RESULTS

Fear Surrounding Roles of Leadership  
Fear of Asserting Inherent Rights  
Fear of Rights or Demands Being Denied or Dismissed  
Internal Jealousy  
Resource Depletion  
Colonization Impacts Causing Divisions





# Results



## Our Grand Vision

A strong, unified Mi'kmaw government, where the Mi'kmaw Grand Council works collaboratively with Chiefs and Councils to uphold Mi'kmaw self-determination and governance. The Grand Council will serve the Mi'kmaw Nation by:

- ✧ Championing the integration of Traditional Mi'kmaw values and principles into law, policy, and governance, ensuring they guide decision-making at all levels.
- ✧ Safeguarding our lands, waters, and resources as stewards, upholding our sacred responsibility to protect them for future generations.
- ✧ Leading negotiations and dispute resolution efforts at local, regional, and national levels, ensuring Mi'kmaw rights, sovereignty, and interests are upheld.
- ✧ Revitalizing and strengthening Mi'kmaw identity through language preservation, cultural resurgence, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge.

## 5 year vision:

The Grand Council in Unama'ki unified with Chiefs and Councils, working collaboratively in decision making, advocacy, and overall governance within clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

The shared vision of all Unama'ki leaders was captured in the diagram below by graphic facilitator Savanna Joe at the Leadership Gathering in April 2023.

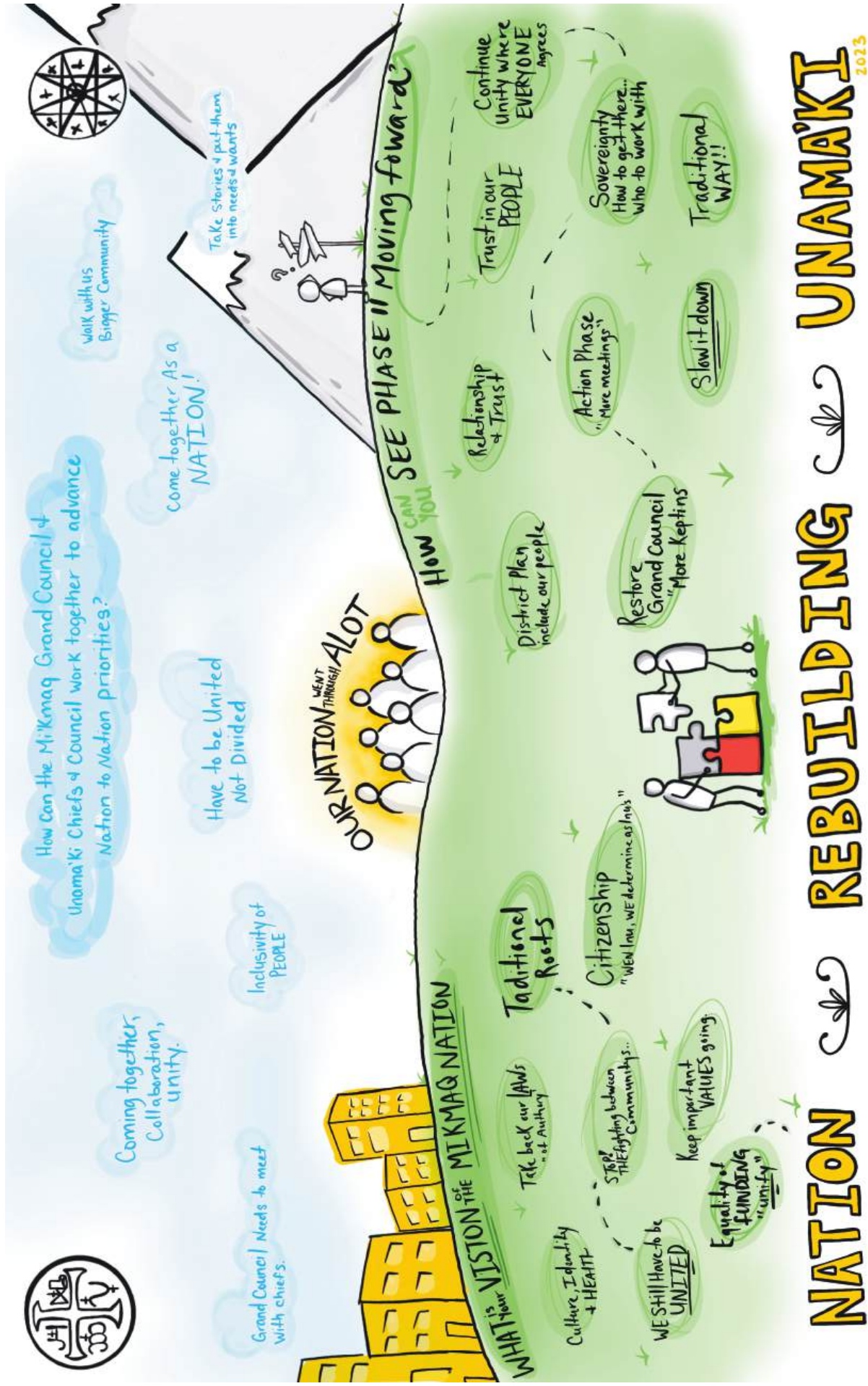


Figure 1: Graphic Facilitation of the Nation Rebuilding Gathering by Savanna Joe. 2023



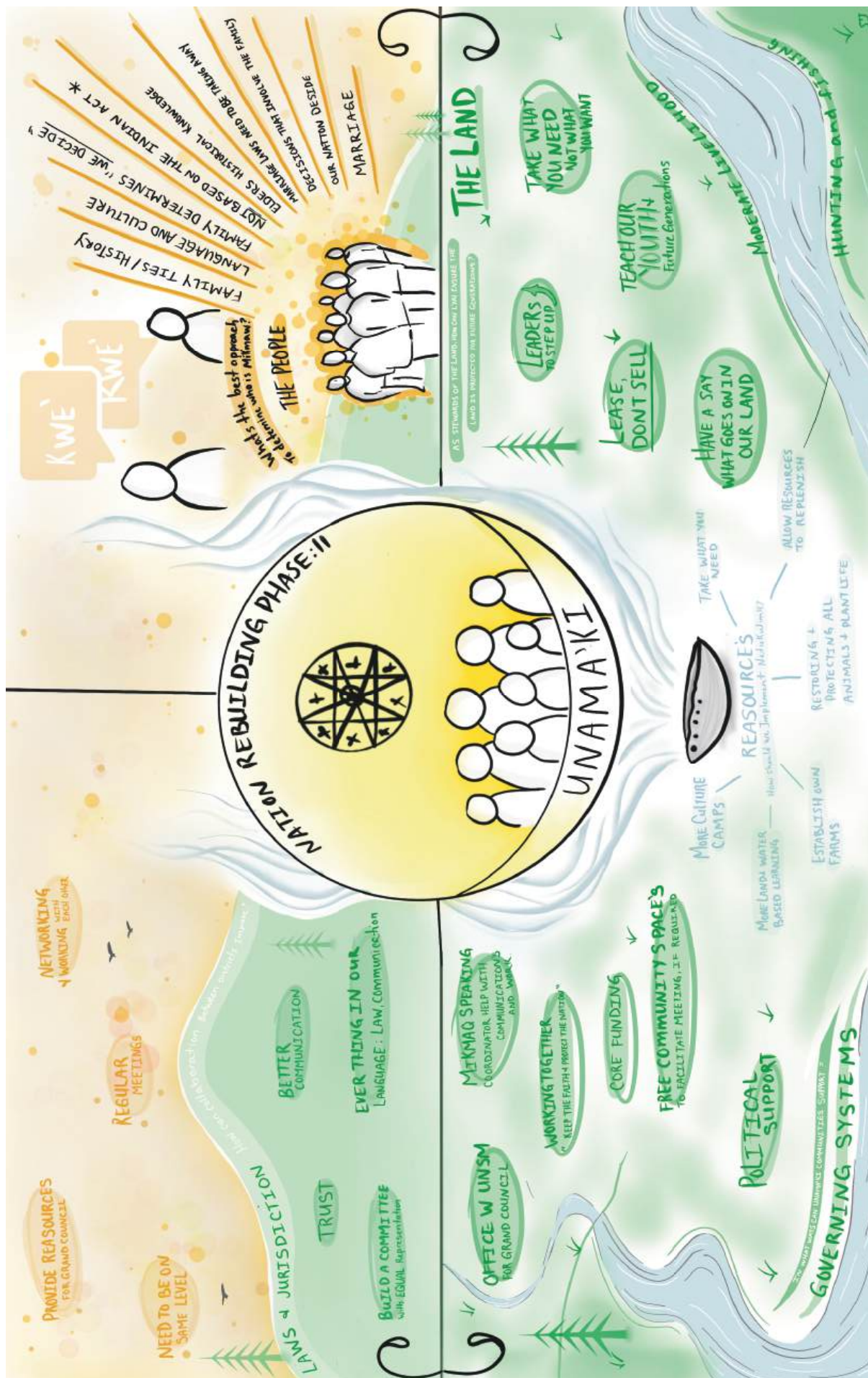


Figure 2: Graphic Facilitation of the Phase 2 Gathering by Savanna Joe, 2024

RESPECT

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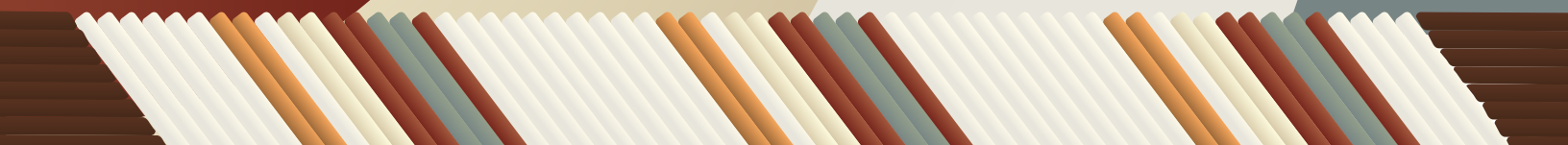
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CEREMONY



# STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

## 1. Governance & Relationship Building

☀ **Objective:** Strengthen the governance structure of the Mi'kmaw Grand Council and build strong, collaborative relationships with Chiefs and Councils.

### Actions:

1. Develop organizational documents to support Grand Council operations and formalize the governance structure.
2. Establish clear protocols for communication and decision-making to streamline governance and ensure effective coordination.
3. Hold regular meetings between the Grand Council and Chiefs and Councils to ensure open dialogue and foster collaborative relationships.
4. Develop a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities between the Grand Council and Chiefs and Councils.
5. Ensure the Grand Council is positioned as a central body for governance, offering guidance and leadership in decision-making.

### Expected Outcomes:

- ☀ Strengthened collaboration and coordination between the Grand Council and Chiefs and Councils.
- ☀ Clear governance roles and responsibilities, ensuring effective decision-making.
- ☀ A functional and organized Grand Council Secretariat to facilitate streamlined operations.

# STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

## 2. Administrative Support & Capacity Building

🌟 **Objective:** Build and sustain the administrative capacity necessary for the effective functioning of the Grand Council.

### Actions:

1. Identify funding sources for ongoing administrative support to ensure sustainability of Grand Council operations.
2. Establish a centralized administrative office (Grand Council Secretariat) to manage operations and communication effectively.
3. Develop capacity within communities to support an expanded role of the Grand Council through community involvement.
4. Create mechanisms for accountability and transparency in governance processes to strengthen trust and responsibility.
5. Identify, Develop and Secure sustainable funding by exploring opportunities for taxation and revenue generation and the development of partnerships with external organizations and governments for ongoing administrative operations to ensure long-term support, sustainable development and self-sufficiency.

### Expected Outcomes:

- 🌟 Sustainable administrative support for Grand Council operations and governance initiatives.
- 🌟 Increased community involvement and capacity to support governance functions.
- 🌟 Improved accountability structures for transparent decision-making and operations.

# STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

## 3. Education & Knowledge Transfer

🌟 **Objective:** Foster a deeper understanding of traditional governance systems and empower future generations with knowledge.

### Actions:

1. Create educational materials on Mi'kmaq governance, citizenship, and the Grand Council's role to enhance community understanding.
2. Create opportunities for youth to learn about traditional governance systems and leadership to empower the next generation of leaders.
3. Support language revitalization as a foundation for Mi'kmaw governance, ensuring cultural preservation.
4. Develop educational materials on Mi'kmaq citizenship to share with communities, focusing on family and community-based citizenship.
5. Engage with families and communities to build consensus on citizenship criteria and ensure an inclusive process while preserving Mi'kmaq identity.

### Expected Outcomes:

- 🌟 Increased understanding of Mi'kmaw governance, the Grand Council's role, and Mi'kmaw cultural values.
- 🌟 Empowered youth equipped to take on leadership roles in Mi'kmaw governance.
- 🌟 A revitalized Mi'kmaw language that strengthens cultural identity and governance.
- 🌟 A clear, community-supported framework for Mi'kmaq citizenship that involves families and communities.



# STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

## 4. Resource Development & Management

🌟 **Objective:** Develop and implement a sustainable approach to resource management, supporting both economic development and cultural conservation.

### Actions:

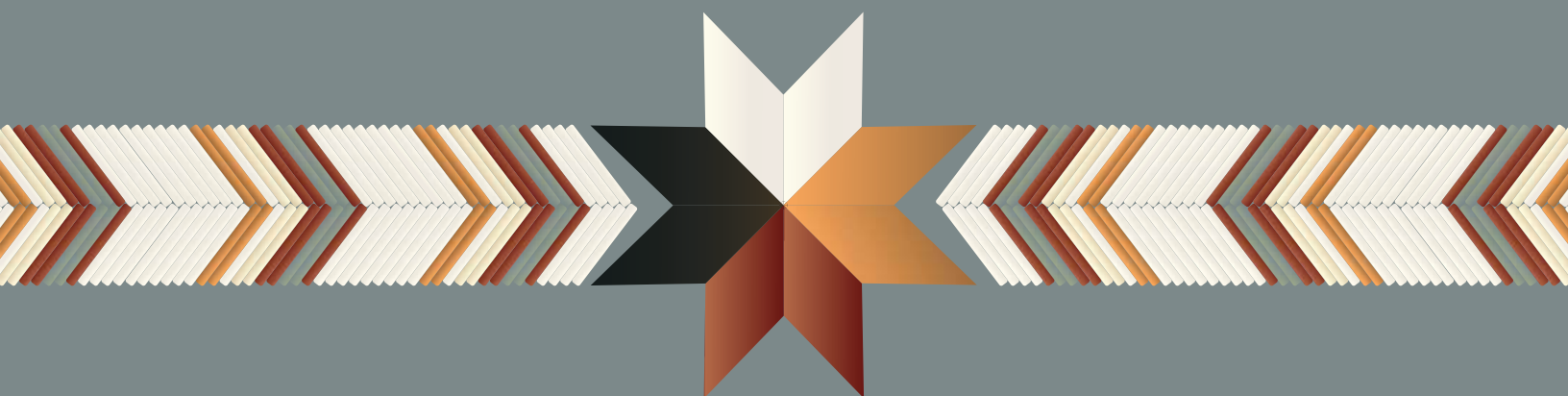
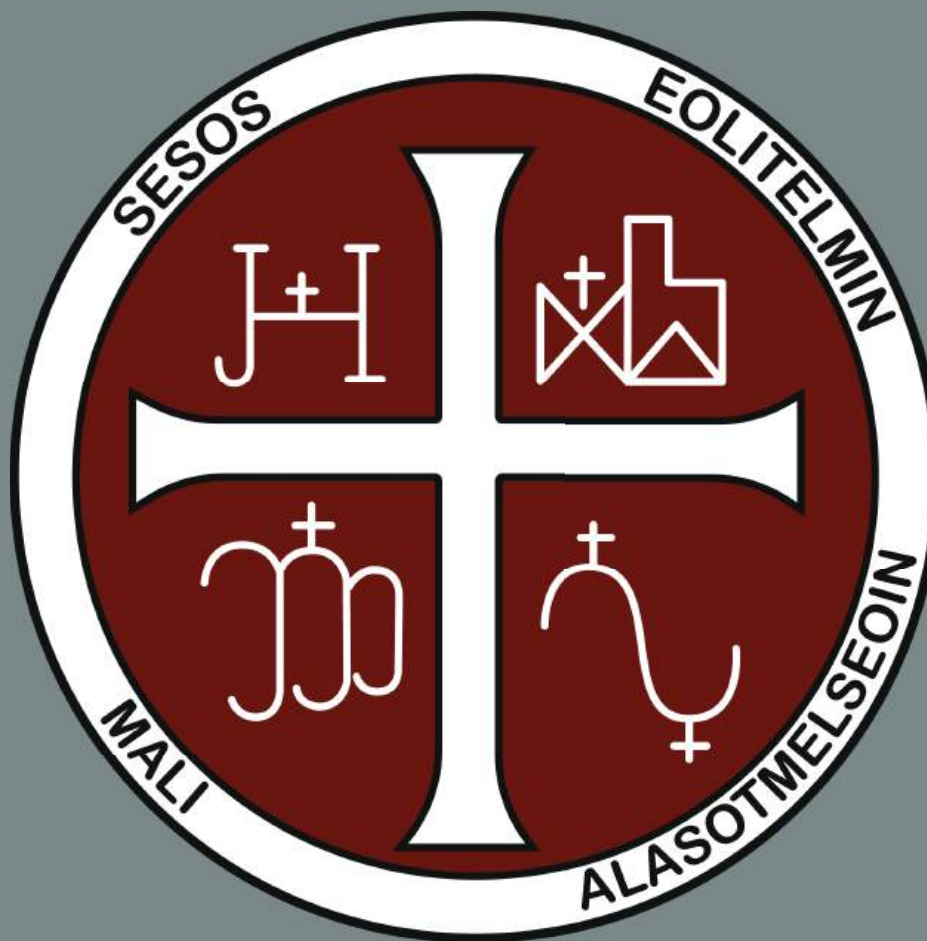
1. Define and implement the principles of Netukulimk (taking only what is needed) in all resource management decisions.
2. Strengthen the role of the Grand Council in resource management decisions to ensure that Mi'kmaw perspectives are integrated into policy and practice.
3. Create opportunities for education and dialogue about sustainable resource use, integrating Mi'kmaw traditional knowledge with contemporary approaches.
4. Explore partnerships with federal and provincial governments to assert Mi'kmaw jurisdiction over traditional territories while maintaining control.
5. Develop a comprehensive resource management framework based on Mi'kmaw values, focusing on sustainable use and stewardship of resources.

### Expected Outcomes:

- 🌟 A balanced and sustainable approach to resource management that respects Mi'kmaw traditions and ensures long-term environmental stewardship.
- 🌟 Increased Mi'kmaw control over resources, asserting jurisdiction and sovereignty over traditional territories.
- 🌟 Economic development strategies that align with Mi'kmaw values and principles of sustainability.







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