L'nui'sultinej

Mlkuktmnej ta'n Tel-minua'tumk L'nui'suti

Mi'kmaw Language ReVITALization Strategy

2024-2030

Wela'liek

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many groups and people who contributed to the development of this Strategy:

- Mi'kmaw Elders,
- Mi'kmaw Knowledge Holders,
- Mi'kmaw Language Leaders and Teachers,
- Mi'kmaw Community Members, Leaders and Members of the Urban Mi'kmaw Community in Kjipuktuk,
- Appointed Members of the Mi'kmaw Language Committee,
- Members of the Strategy Sub-Committee of the Mi'kmaw Language Committee,
- Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Leadership and Language Team Translation Services, and
- Province of Nova Scotia - Office of L'nu Affairs Senior Officials Table.

These partners thoughtfully volunteered their time and shared their wisdom to inform the development of this strategy. Wela'liek.

Strategy development was facilitated by Group ATN Consulting Inc. (ATN Strategies) with engagement support from a Mi'kmaw facilitator and the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Language Team, who provided translation services and ensured engagement was Mi'kmaw-led. In the spirit of Etuaptmumk / Two-Eyed Seeing, a Mi'kmaw narrative artist supported ATN in applying a Mi'kmaw lens to the strategy document and concepts. Strategy development was also guided by regular input from the Mi'kmaw Language Committee and its Strategy Sub-Committee of community, government and partner organization representatives.

*Note: VITAL is intentionally capitalized in the title, Mi'kmaw Language ReVITALization Strategy, to emphasize how vital the language is to the Mi'kmaw people and the importance of bringing the language back to its pre-contact state.

Contents

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Klusuaqn wejiaq Nikanus Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey aqq Nikanus nujo'tk L'nuey Mtmo'taqne | Message from Chair of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey and Minister of L'nu Affairs

The release of this strategy marks an important milestone in the shared journey towards reconciliation between the Province of Nova Scotia and the Mi'kmaw Nation.

The Mi'kmaw language is in danger, and there is an urgent need for strong action towards rebuilding the number of Mi'kmaw speakers and making the language more visible, heard and prioritized throughout our province.

This strategy is a direct outcome of the *Mi'kmaw Language Act,* which was proclaimed by the province and affirmed by the Mi'kmaq in 2022. The purpose of that legislation was to enable tangible outcomes for revitalizing the Mi'kmaw language – and this strategy is an important, foundational step in that process. We are pleased to see progress towards the objectives of the legislation, and we are committed to supporting implementation of this strategy with our partners.

Revitalizing Mi'kmaw language and culture are the highest priorities of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Board, and the province recognizes the importance of supporting Mi'kmaw leaders who are advancing this important work. We are committed to supporting the Committee's efforts to preserve, protect and promote the language, helping make using the language in all areas of life easier. When Indigenous languages are revitalized, so are the worldviews and the ways of seeing and interacting with the environment that are naturally embedded in the language.

This document is fully endorsed by the Province of Nova Scotia and the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Board and we look forward to our continued partnership and advancing revitalization of the Mi'kmaw language in the spirit of friendship and collaboration.

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As Co-Chairs of the Mi'kmaw Language Committee, we are pleased to present L'nui'sultinej - Mlkuktmnej ta'n Tel-minua'tumk L'nui'suti | Mi'kmaw Language ReVITALization Strategy. This Strategy is a critical guide for our collective efforts to bring back the Mi'kmaw language to its pre-contact state. We hope this Strategy and the collaborative approach taken to develop it will serve as a model for other regions to follow.

This Strategy is part of a multi-faceted approach to supporting the revitalization of the Mi'kmaw language. Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), the Mi'kmaw education authority in Nova Scotia, has been working on the development of Mi'kmaw language teachers, language courses, immersion opportunities and resources to support the revitalization of the Mi'kmaw Language for many years. Currently, MK is working on collecting baseline data on language in this region to track language revitalization over time. Mi'kmaw communities and organizations have also been working on various language initiatives, including working with MK to develop Community Language Plans tailored to their unique circumstances, needs and hopes for the language. **This Strategy is intended to enable and support - not replace - these existing and ongoing efforts.**

On July 17, 2022, the Province of Nova Scotia, proclaimed, and Mi'kmaq affirmed, the Mi'kmaw Language Act, which recognized the Mi'kmaw language as the original language of Nova Scotia. The Act took effect on October 01, 2022. The Mi'kmaw Language Committee is a result of that Act and is comprised of representatives from Mi'kmaw communities and organizations as well as provincial government representatives. This Strategic Plan is a critical initial outcome of the Act.

Our vision for this Strategy is for it to result in shared commitments and increased resources to support access and opportunities for all people in this region of Mi'kma'ki to be empowered to learn and speak the Mi'kmaw Language. This includes an immediate focus on building capacity for language learning in the Mi'kmaw communities. A key theme throughout this Strategy is the Mi'kmaw concept of Mawikwayk – Together we are strong. The Mi'kmaw Language Committee, as a legislated Mi'kmaw-led and province-supported committee, will be a continuous source of leadership and governance over this Strategy and will work with a variety of partners to ensure collective goals are reached over the next several years.

We encourage Mi'kmaw communities, leaders, and organizations in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia and all Nova Scotians to work together in the spirit of collaboration to awaken the Mi'kmaw language. We look forward to walking this shared journey together.
- Mi'kmaw Language Committee Co-Chairs Blaire Gould and Ian Bower

The story of Mi'kmaw language and culture in the region of Mi'kma'ki, known as Nova Scotia, is one of perseverance and strength. Despite centuries of attempts to eliminate the Mi'kmaw language and culture, it has endured. Language leaders across Mi'kma'ki have worked to protect and revive the language, and in small pockets of the province, it is still spoken fluently among family and community members.

However, in some Mi'kmaw communities throughout Nova Scotia, the language is described as "still sleeping." It is a living part of the Mi'kmaw culture, but it needs support to return to all L'nu. In other communities, it is described as a desperate situation, where the language is dying, and there are 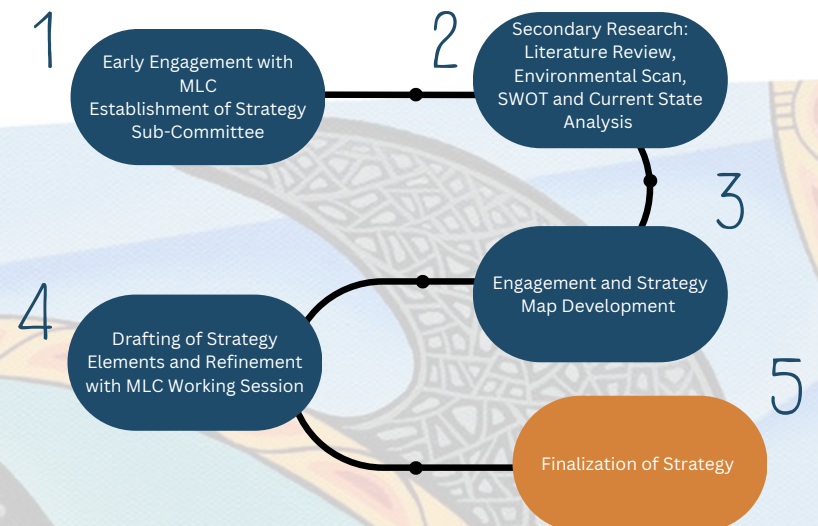no fluent speakers to pass the language on to others. **The purpose of this strategy is to provide a clear path to bring the language back where it is dying, awaken it where it is sleeping, protect it where it is awake, and preserve it for future generations of L'nu.**

This includes bringing non-Mi'kmaw people, organizations, businesses and government on this journey. The strategy has been developed with the intention that all people in this region of Mi'kma'ki will be empowered to learn and speak the Mi'kmaw language. Shared responsibility is a key element of this strategy – and only by working together with all partners will this strategy be successful - **Mawikwayk: Together we are strong.**

Kiskaja'tumk kisite'taqney | The Strategy Development Process:

This strategy was developed collaboratively by a legislated group formed following the proclamation of the Mi'kmaw Language Act This group, called the Mi'kmaw Language Committee (MLC), is made up of appointed representatives from Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, the Province of Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaw organizations and Mi'kmaw communities.

The MLC is dedicated to working together to promote, protect and preserve the Mi'kmaw Language in the Nova Scotian region of Mi'kma'ki. The MLC identified the need for a strategy to create a clear path and identify priority action items for revitalizing the Mi'kmaw language. Group ATN Consulting Inc. (ATN Strategies) was contracted to facilitate strategy development in partnership with a strategy sub-committee of the MLC.

1. Early Engagement with MLC Establishment of Strategy Sub-Committee
2. Secondary Research: Literature Review, Environmental Scan, SWOT and Current State Analysis
3. Engagement and Strategy Map Development
4. Drafting of Strategy Elements and Refinement with MLC Working Session
5. Finalization of Strategy

Koqoey pipanuijkemk wejiaq | Research Findings

SSecondary research resulted in a current state of the language analysis, environmental scan, literature review and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for the Mi'kmaw language conducted by a PhD in Linguistics. A detailed background report was developed as a supplementary document to this strategy.

Key takeaways from secondary research included:

Common programs to revitalize language globally:
•Language Immersion Programs
•Intergenerational Mentorship Programs
•Language camps and workshops
•Bilingual schooling
•Resource Development
•Continuous evaluation and research

Leading practices for revitalizing languages include:
•Bring together culture, community, partnership and elders in the teaching/learning of language
•Channel all resources through an Indigenous-led organization for effective coordination of programs.
•Successful programs have strong commitments to education infrastructure, including teacher training, curriculum development and learning resource development
•Successful approaches are gradual and progressive
•There has been success stories of technology supporting language revitalization

Koqoey nutmekip | What We Heard

Engagement was built on past discussions with L'nu community on the topic of revitalizing the language and was designed in partnership with the MLC strategy sub-committee. Each community-appointed member of the MLC determined the method of engagement for their community. Engagement was co-led by ATN in partnership with Mi'kmaw facilitators, who provided Mi'kmaw translation support and ensured engagements were Mi'kmaw-led. ATN presented nine key themes that emerged from engagement, detailed in an accompanying What We Heard Report. These nine themes summarize what community members and leaders viewed as high priority for the strategy, and include:

- Immediate action
- Consistent funding
- Consistent, inclusive, community-based and family-based programming
- Development of resources and embracing technology
- Clear paths to fluency and tracking proficiency
- Encourage learning and teaching with incentives
- Increasing exposure to the language, encouraging learners and building pride
- Access to immersion opportunities
- Mawikwayk – working together and shared responsibility

Importantly, there were different perspectives expressed within these themes and varying opinions on what should be prioritized. This is partly because Mi'kmaw communities are at various stages in their language revitalization journey. It was strongly emphasized by those engaged for this strategy that its implementation reflects the unique circumstances of each Mi'kmaw community and meet them where they are at in their language journey.
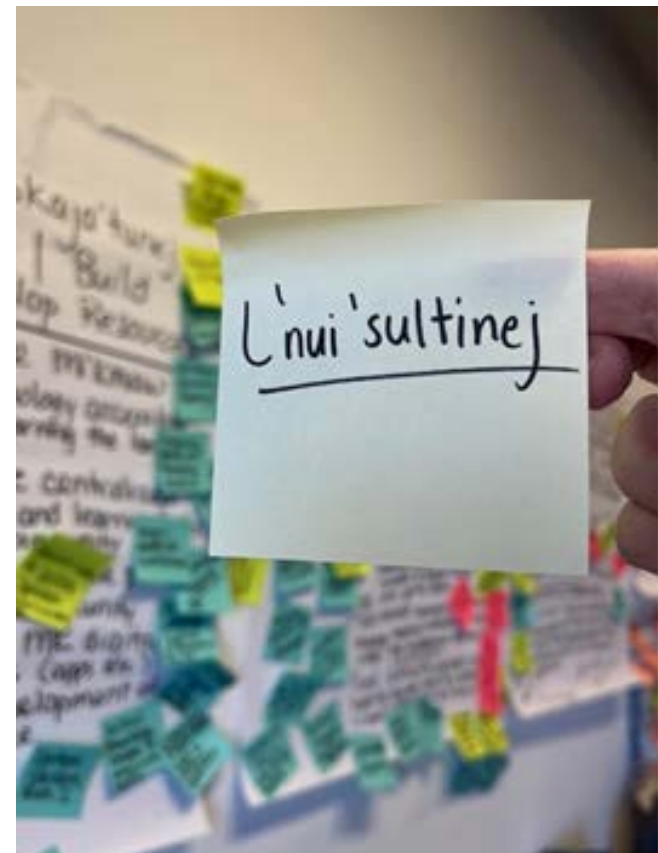
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Eltumk kisite'taqney |
Building the Strategy

The findings from research and engagement were used to create a strategy map. This document includes a vision, guiding principles, and five key strategic goals with accompanying objectives that were presented to the MLC and senior leaders from the provincial government to generate ideas for immediate action.

A refined strategy map was then workshopped with the MLC in a 1.5-day session. Through open and interactive discussions, the MLC refined the strategy elements with thoughtful input through facilitated break-out sessions. Once the action items were refined from the workshop, the group determined highest priority actions for early implementation through a voting exercise. The result is L'nui'sultinej - Mlkuktmnej ta'n Tel-minua'tumk L'nui'suti (Let's all speak Mi'kmaw - The Mi'kmaw Language ReVITALization Strategy).

The process for developing this strategy has been outlined in hopes that other provinces and Indigenous nations may use this model to work together to awaken more sleeping languages throughout Turtle Island.

"If the young ones will not come to us for language learning, we must go to them" – Bernie Francis, Mi'kmaw Linguist

Ketu'-tala'tu'k | Vision

Our vision for Mi'kmaw language revitalization is:

- All generations of L'nu and other people in Mi'kma'ki will be empowered to learn, speak and engage with Mi'kmaw language and culture regardless of location or age.

- Mi'kmaw communities and families will have the support and resources needed to learn and live the language together.

- The Mi'kmaw language and culture will be more visible, heard and prioritized throughout the province.

- When people are in this region of Mi'kma'ki, they will see the Mi'kmaw language and culture and feel inspired to learn about L'nu'k and the language.

Wije'wmumkl | Guiding Principles

- **Keknuite'tasik tetuji Kepme'k L'nui'suti | Honouring Mi'kmaw, a Sacred Language:** Recognizing the importance of language as the lifeblood of the Mi'kmaw people

- **Mawikwayk | Together we are strong–** Recognizing that no one entity or person can revitalize a language. The Strategy requires shared responsibility among government, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, Mi'kmaw communities, all Mi'kmaw people and Nova Scotians to work together to achieve language goals. This is in alignment with the Mi'kmaw Language Legislation, which emphasizes collaboration through Mi'kmaw-led and province-supported efforts.

- **Etuaptmumk | Two-Eyed Seeing:** Applying Mi'kmaw knowledge and Western resources to revitalize the language.

- **Elmi'knikewaq | Seven Generations:** Taking actions to preserve the language with future generations of L'nu in mind while honouring our ancestors

- **Wutanminaq Wejiaq | Community-based approach:** Meeting communities where they are in their language journey with a Mi'kmaw-led approach that supports their unique aspirations.

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Elqanetekewe'l / Eltaik | Strategic Goals

5

Me'sua'tunej L'nui'suti
Amplify the Language

Make Mi'kmaw more visible, heard, and prioritized throughout the province with increased exposure.

4

Kwilmnej tli-apank~tten aqq wli-nikana'ten ekina'masimk
Secure Consistent Funding and Good Governance

Collaborate to secure consistent, long-term funding and develop lasting governance structures to support implementation.

1

Apoqnmuanej Ketu'-kina'masultijik
Empower and Encourage Learners

Incentivize interest in learning and speaking the language while creating an encouraging culture between all levels of speakers. Create healing opportunities for those with feelings of shame, grief and/or trauma related to language.

2

Ne'kaw ika'tunej teli-msnmumk ekina'masimk
Provide Consistent Access to Learning Opportunities

Provide learners of all levels and locations consistent access to initiatives and programs that are sustainable, comprehensive, community-based and family-focused. Ensure opportunities for full immersion.

3

Kiskaja'tunej tel-kina'masimk
Build Capacity and Develop Resources

Invest in Mi'kmaw language learning tools and technology, develop clear paths to fluency, and build teaching capacity.

Circle diagram segments:
- Me'sua'tunej L'nui'suti
- Apoqnmuanej Ketu'-kina'masultijik
- Ne'kaw ika'tunej teli-msnmumk ekina'masimk
- Kiskaja'tunej tel-kina'masimk
- Kwilmnej tli-apank~tten aqq wli-nikana'ten ekina'masimk
- Mawikwayk

Tl-siawita'ten weja'tekemk nike' | The Path Forward

While the strategic planning process and setting of goals to form a strategy is a Western concept, we blend this with a metaphor of stewarding a forest to apply a Mi'kmaw approach to explaining that path forward in the spirit of Etuaptmumk.

The goals outlined in the image on the previous page can be compared to the steps to **apaji-minua'tumk nipukt (reviving a forest).**

Similar to bringing a language back to life, reviving a forest requires key elements. Forest growth requires sun, healthy roots, underground fungi networks to deliver nutrients, and stewards to protect the forest. These elements together support the growth of a forest.

The goal of empowering and encouraging learners is **na'ku'set (the sun)**, providing light and energy to start the process of forest growth. The goal of providing access to learning opportunities is **jipiskl (the roots)**, digging deep to provide access to nutrients and anchoring the trees. The goal of building capacity and developing resources is **lamqamu'k mawtaqne'wasikl jikoqsl (the underground networks of fungi),** communicating and working to bring nutrients to the roots so they can anchor deep in the ground and support growth.

The goal of securing consistent funding and good governance is **skwijinu'k maliaptmi'tijl nipuktl (the human steward of the forest)**, working to protect and nurture the land and water. The final goal of amplifying the language is **skwijinu'k maliaptmi'tijl nipuktl (the growth of the forest)** with the support of the other elements.

Just as goals create a strategy to revive the language in Western thinking, the goals can be viewed as these elements of plant growth working together to revive a forest, applying Mi'kmaw ways of knowing.
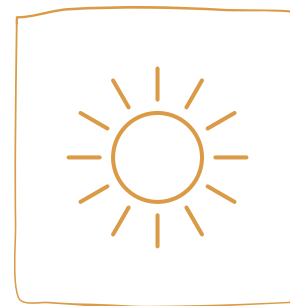
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Kisite'taqney ketu' lukwatmek | Strategic Goal 1:
Apoqnmuanej Ketu'-kina'masultijik | Empower and Encourage Learners

Objectives

- 1.1: Encourage and incentivize learning
- 1.2: Create an encouraging culture and safe learning environment for language students and teachers
- 1.3: Support healing from feelings of shame, trauma and/or grief related to language to encourage more L'nu to return to the language
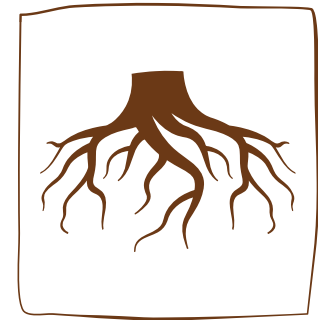
Priority Actions

- Create a consistent fund that communities can access for financial incentives for community members to attend Mi'kmaw language classes, gatherings and events. (Tied to 1.1)
- Create employment benefits and rewards for Mi'kmaw speakers. (Tied to 1.1)
- Launch a communications campaign encouraging all people in this region of Mi'kma'ki to learn Mi'kmaw with links and QR codes to resources. (Tied to 1.1)
- Work with K-12 public and Mi'kmaw schools, early education, post-secondary and the provincial government to create a "Celebration of Mi'kmaw Language Day" that incorporates anti-bullying and positive celebrations of the language and all levels of speakers. (Tied to 1.2)
- Create opportunities for positive reinforcement by honouring speakers and learners through a social media campaign that shares stories. (Tied to 1.3)
- Work with partners to create Mi'kmaw healing programs for language-related shame, trauma and grief that incorporates Mi'kmaw approaches with guidance from Elders to ensure it is community-specific. (Tied to 1.3)

Kisite'taqney ketu' lukwatmek | Strategic Goal 2: Ne'kaw ika'tunej teli-msnmumk ekina'masimk | Provide Consistent Access to Learning Opportunities

Objectives

- 2.1: Provide learners of all levels and locations throughout the province consistent access to language programs that are sustainable, comprehensive, and tailored to the unique needs of each Mi'kmaw Community
- 2.2: Create new immersion opportunities and enhance existing ones for Mi'kmaw children and youth
- 2.3: Create learning opportunities for Mi'kmaw adults to create a base knowledge of the language and to bring more speakers to fluency

Priority Actions

- Create family-focused online learning modules that are available year-round that anyone can access together. (Tied to 2.1)
- Support implementation of community language plans with access to relevant resources and funding. (Tied to 2.1)
- Extend immersion to early childhood education, including newborns and infants during prenatal and parenting classes to expose children earlier to the language and to Mi'kmaw ways of thinking. (Tied to 2.2)
- Build language nests* in all communities that express interest through community language plans. (Tied to 2.2)
- Require all provincial schools to offer classes in Mi'kmaw as part of the regular curriculum. (Tied to 2.2)
- Develop consistent part-time core language classes which become more specialized in higher-level classes and allow speakers with a base level of knowledge to develop fluency (include options like land-based learning methods). (Tied to 2.3)
- Create self-directed learning courses (language kits, online self-directed learning, AI-supported language learning). (Tied to 2.3)
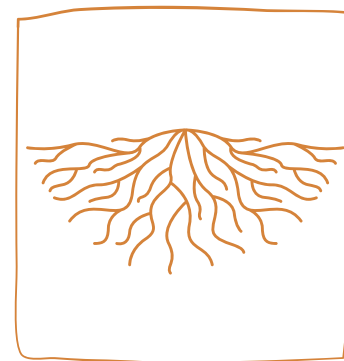
*Language nests are typically immersion programs for parents and their children age six months to five years. Some have expanded this definition to include adult immersion programs. Each community may have a different definition and vision for language nests.

Kisite'taqney ketu' lukwatmek | Strategic Goal 3:
Kiskaja'tunej tel-kina'masimk | Build Capacity and Develop Resources

Objectives

- 3.1 Increase accessibility of Mi'kmaw language learning tools for all types of learners
- 3.2 Build language teaching capacity with recruitment, training, and teaching resource development
- 3.3 Build consensus on how to measure and categorize speaking capabilities to support learner awareness, and build assessments and course curriculums based on categories once established

Priority Actions

- Create dedicated capacity for each Mi'kmaw community committed to facilitating both daytime and evening community learning and resource distribution. Create opportunities for each community's language leaders to meet regularly and share success stories and resources, and to coordinate initiatives across Mi'kma'ki. Eventually, grow a full department around the language leads in each community. (Tied to 3.1)
- Create a new teaching certification process for fluent speakers without formal education that offers a recognized credential and trains them in Mi'kmaw language teaching methods (e.g., intensive workshops, training camps, a standardized MK "learn to teach Mi'kmaw language approach"). Offer options in community to reduce transportation barriers to certification opportunities and include safety checks in the certification process. (Tied to 3.2)
- Work with post-secondary education programs to create opportunities for Mi'kmaw language teachers, including: scholarships for Mi'kmaw speakers seeking education degrees, development of curriculum for Mi'kmaw language teaching methods using Mi'kmaw, development of a hybrid B.Ed. for Mi'kmaw speakers to progress towards fluency while obtaining education degrees. (Tied to 3.2)
- Attract language teachers to communities with no internal teaching capacity with housing and bonus incentives similar to what is offered in Northern Canada for teachers. (Tied to 3.2)
- Develop an advisory group on establishing categories of speaking capability that aligns with Mi'kmaw approaches to inform the development of curriculums for categories of language courses (e.g., beginner, conversational, fluent), building on Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey's current work in this space. (Tied to 3.3)

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Kisite'taqney ketu' lukwatmek | Strategic Goal 4:
Kwilmnej tli-apank~tten aqq wli-nikana'ten ekina'masimk | Secure Consistent Funding and Good Governance

Objectives

- 4.1 Secure long-term funding agreements for sustainable community-based learning and resources tied to outcomes
- 4.2 Mi'kmaw Language Committee to provide continuous governance over implementation of Mi'kmaw language legislation and this strategy
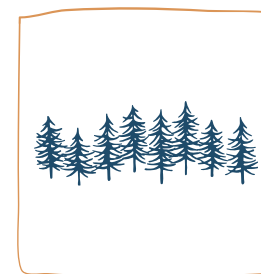
Priority Actions

- Advocate for multi-year funding agreements for core elements of phase one priorities, including multi-year agreements for funding community language plans (language nests, continuous programming, etc., depending on unique community requirements); and funding agreements for language resources, including full-time positions for language coordination and resource budgets. (Tied to 4.1)
- MLC to develop focused working committees for strategy implementation in partnership with the province, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, Mi'kmaw communities and Mi'kmaw leadership. (Tied to 4.2)

Kisite'taqney ketu' lukwatmek | Strategic Goal 5: Me'sua'tunej L'nui'suti | Amplify the Language

Objectives

- 5.1 Make Mi'kmaw language and culture more visible, heard and prioritized throughout the province
- 5.2 Support development of Mi'kmaw options in media (tv, podcasts, radio, etc.)
- 5.3 Build capacity of language translation services to support amplification efforts

Priority Actions

- Signage and place names – update and inform provincial policies to include and recognize the Mi'kmaw language legislation to ensure Mi'kmaw language is included in signage throughout the province. Connect provincial government policy makers with Mi'kmaw specialists to ensure new signage and place names are accurate. (Tied to 5.1)
- Work with partners to make Mi'kmaw art/culture /language displayed across the province, including airports and cruise ship arrivals. (Tied to 5.1)
- Provide public services and businesses with resources to include Mi'kmaw language in signage and services (e.g., toolkits, labels, certification label). (Tied to 5.1)
- Continue to provide communities with equipment to record the language and share it digitally. (Tied to 5.2)
- Support Mi'kmaw digital media artists producing independent Mi'kmaw content (podcasts, talk shows, apps, etc.). (Tied to 5.2)
- Work with media industry to create more Mi'kmaw television and radio options. (Tied to 5.2)
- Support continued growth of Kji-Wikuom Studios in Eskasoni to the benefit of all communities and support other communities seeking to develop a language studio. (Tied to 5.2)
- Create a centralized language translation service to provide translation and pronunciation support that is inclusive of multiple dialects. (Tied to 5.3)
- Create standards, standardized training and a certified designation for translators. (Tied to 5.3)

Nikanite'tasik ta'n ketu'-tla'taqatimk | Implementation Plan

Language revitalization is not a short-term process. It will take many years to bring back what is lost. However, with the right systems, resources and supports in place, over time, Mi'kmaw will be spoken, seen, and heard by all people throughout this region of Mi'kma'ki.

The implementation of this strategy includes three key phases:

Phase 1
Building Foundations
(2024–2027)

Phase 2
Expanding Efforts
(2027–2030)

Phase 3
Maintenance of Resources and Systems
(2030 +)

Priorities for Phase 1 have been identified by the MLC and are outlined under each strategic goal. These are intended to put the foundations in place that are required to facilitate consistent language learning; spark more interest in learning the language with an emphasis on building the capacity of the Mi'kmaw communities; and grow the number of speakers and teachers with consistent funding and supports.

As noted under Goal 4, the intention is for the MLC to guide the implementation of this strategy. As a legislated committee, the MLC will provide continuous oversight on language revitalization and form working groups to ensure the strategies' goals are achieved.

A monitoring and evaluation plan will be established to develop success indicators for Phase 1. Upon the conclusion of Phase 1, the MLC will revisit the priority action items to determine the next steps for expanding language revitalization efforts under Phase 2.

Tli'suti 2030al | The Language in 2030

By 2030, the aim is to reach a state where the language is well-supported with the right resources and supports in place for continued growth of the language. Our aspiration for this strategy is that **by the year 2030, we will have achieved the following:**

- We will have complete baseline data for all speakers in the Nova Scotia region of Mi'kma'ki.
- We will have a designated position for language revitalization that is funded by the Province of Nova Scotia in every community.
- Every community will have language plans.
- We will have 100 new speakers within the first five years of this strategy.
- We will have in-person and online programs available to anyone interested in learning the language.
- We will have a Celebration of Mi'kmaw Language Day each year.
- We will have 50 new resources developed for emerging speakers.
- We will have 50 new resources for established speakers.

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