



March Insights: Newsletter

The OFNEDA team is pleased to share this month's updates, highlights, and opportunities from across our network. Each edition reflects the strength of our partnerships and the collective work advancing economic development in First Nation communities. We look forward to continuing this momentum together.

OFNEDA's Annual First Nations Economic Advancement Conference

Join us in Toronto from September 14 to 17, 2026, at the Pearson Convention Centre for the First Nations Economic Advancement Conference (FNEAC), the fifteenth celebration of Indigenous economic advancement.

***Reminder:** Do not forget to book your flights in advance. We will be posting airline discount codes and hotel information in the coming weeks so you can begin arranging your accommodations well ahead of time.*

GET CONFERENCE UPDATES



A Message from the Executive Director: Community Visits, Reflections, and Upcoming Initiatives at OFNEDA

Wachay OFNEDA Members,

Spring still feels a long way off, with winter lingering across much of Ontario. Despite the extended cold, March has been a full and productive month for our team, focused on connection, learning, and growth across our network.

We successfully hosted our fourth Regional Meeting, delivered the TEAD course, and held our Annual General Meeting in Sudbury. These gatherings continue to be important spaces for sharing knowledge, strengthening relationships, and aligning our collective priorities. Thank you to everyone who participated, both in person and virtually. The final AGM presentation deck will be shared in the coming weeks. In the meantime, we encourage you to visit the member portal under Resources to access the recording and presentation slides.

We are pleased to welcome one new Board member along with two returning members to the OFNEDA Board of Directors. Their leadership, both new and continued, will help guide our work as we respond to the evolving needs of our communities. Internally, our team also strengthened our skills through training in Tech Essentials, SharePoint, and Microsoft 365, ensuring we are equipped to provide modern, efficient support and services.

Our Coffee Meet-ups continue to expand, fostering peer-to-peer learning, collaboration, and mentorship. We are also excited to launch a new monthly virtual networking opportunity, the **EDO/Entrepreneur Community Connections Meeting**, designed to bring together Economic Development Officers and entrepreneurs for knowledge sharing and relationship building. This new virtual gathering will also include an area for **sector-specific discussions**. Our goal is to share information and insights for the

We remain committed to visiting First Nation communities whenever invited, to learn, listen, and provide support directly where it is most impactful.

In line with this commitment, we are moving toward providing some in-person training sessions for Northern First Nations who face broadband constraints, ensuring equitable access to capacity-building opportunities regardless of connectivity challenges.

This month also marks one year since I stepped into the role of Executive Director following Rob's retirement. Over the past year, we have made meaningful progress together, expanding programming, strengthening partnerships, and deepening engagement with our members. I am truly grateful for your trust, collaboration, and shared commitment to this work. It is an honour to walk alongside you.

As we look ahead to the next fiscal year, our focus remains on delivering high-quality training, expanding accessible learning opportunities, strengthening regional engagement, and ensuring that First Nation communities have the tools, resources, and support needed to thrive on their own terms. We are excited about what lies ahead and the continued impact we can make together. Thank you for your ongoing partnership and dedication.

Meegwetch,

Peggy Domingue

Executive Director, OFNEDA

Annual General Meeting Highlights

The AGM recording and PowerPoint slides will be posted in the Resources section of your portal. *Simply log in to your portal to view all materials.*

[LOGIN INTO YOUR PORTAL](#)

Community Connections

Monthly Virtual Meetings

Wed, Apr 22, May 20, Jun 17, Jul 15, 2026 | 2–3 PM ET

OFNEDA is inviting Economic Development Officers and First Nations Entrepreneurs to connect in a casual, welcoming setting, whether over a coffee, tea, or whatever you enjoy at your desk.

This monthly space offers EDOs the chance to have informal conversations with one another, share ideas, discuss challenges and wins, and highlight what is happening in their communities. It is an opportunity to build relationships, exchange practical insights, and strengthen the network that supports economic development across First Nations in Ontario.

RESERVE YOUR SPOT NOW



Brewing Ideas Together: Join us for our next FREE online Coffee Talk

A relaxed, engaging session to connect, share ideas, and pick up helpful tips over your favourite coffee or tea. Bring your questions, share your journey, and connect with others in community



Presented by:

Bruno Presutto

Senior Energy Project
and Account Manager
| Growth



Indigenous Energy Transition Decision Framework – Innovation Sandbox Challenge: Empowering Indigenous Innovation and Leadership

Apr 7, 2026 | 10 – 11 AM ET

RESERVE YOUR SPOT NOW

Sandbox Innovation challenge is a framework for selecting energy projects that First Nation should invest in.

Role in the Project: Hydro One will act as a technical and regulatory advisor to the Indigenous Energy Transition Decision Framework project. Its primary contributions will include:

- Providing expertise on regulatory processes, grid connection, and project development pathways.
- Advising on the integration of technical feasibility and policy considerations within the framework.

regulatory context.

- Supporting knowledge transfer and sectoral outreach once the pilot framework is complete.

Hydro One's participation will ensure that the resulting framework not only reflects community priorities but also aligns with provincial regulatory standards, promoting smoother collaboration between Indigenous communities and energy proponents.

About the Presenters

Bruno Presutto is a leader at Hydro One with extensive experience supporting workforce development, community partnerships, and talent initiatives across Ontario. His work focuses on strengthening relationships with communities, advancing inclusive hiring practices, and creating pathways for Indigenous youth and professionals to enter skilled trades and energy-sector careers. Bruno brings a strong commitment to collaboration and capacity-building, and he continues to support programs that help grow a diverse and future-ready workforce at Hydro One.



Presented by:

**Indigenous Business
Leadership Executive MBA –
Beedie School of Business,
Simon Fraser University**

Apr 9, 2026 | 10 – 11 AM ET

Beedie School of
Business
Simon Fraser
University



BEEDIE SCHOOL
OF BUSINESS
SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY

The Indigenous Business Leadership Executive MBA at Simon Fraser University is a nationally recognized graduate program designed to strengthen Indigenous leadership, economic development, and Nation-building capacity. This 20-month, hybrid program weaves Indigenous worldviews with advanced business education, offering flexible online and in-person learning for working professionals. Students gain tools in entrepreneurship, governance, sustainability, and organizational leadership while learning alongside a strong network of Indigenous leaders from across Canada. The program supports experienced professionals who are committed to advancing sovereignty, self-determination, and economic wellbeing within their Nations and organizations.

About the Presenters

Megan Rosso is the Manager of Recruitment at the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University. She leads strategic outreach and engagement for Beedie's graduate programs, including the Indigenous Business Leadership Executive MBA. Megan works closely with prospective students, communities, and partners to support pathways into advanced business education. Her work focuses on helping learners find programs that align with their goals while ensuring they feel supported throughout the admissions process. She brings a strong commitment to relationship-building and to expanding access to business education across diverse communities.



Presented by:
Heather McKeown
Program Delivery
Officer



Supporting Growth in Northern Ontario: Understanding FedNor Programs and the Youth Intern Opportunity

Apr 23, 2026 | 10 – 11 AM ET

[RESERVE YOUR SPOT NOW](#)

This webinar offers a clear overview of FedNor's core programs, with a focus on how the Youth Intern stream helps organizations build capacity. Participants will learn how the program supports employers by funding recent graduates to lead community, digital, and economic development projects. The session highlights eligibility, funding details, and examples of successful youth-driven initiatives across Northern Ontario.

About the Presenters

Heather McKeown has worked with FedNor for the past five years as a Program Delivery Officer. She began her career with FedNor in Kenora, Ontario where she lived and worked for two years before transferring to her current location in the Sault Ste. Marie office. Heather is excited to present FedNor programs across Ontario, supporting communities and businesses with knowledge and resources that she hopes will help support economic growth across the region. Her primary areas of interest include agriculture/agrifood and tourism, although she supports a variety of projects across priority sectors.

To secure your spot, simply log in to your portal and complete your registration.



Presented by:

Reema Chopra

Director of Marketing
& Training
OFNEDA



Ryan Moore

Director of Indigenous
Procurement &
Entrepreneurship
Development
OFNEDA

Hands-On AI Training: Practical Skills in Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, and ChatGPT

Apr 15, 2026

10 AM – 12 PM ET

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Objectives

This interactive session introduces participants to today's leading AI tools and demonstrates how they can streamline daily tasks, improve productivity, and support decision-making.

What We Will Cover

- Overview of generative AI and its practical applications
- Hands-on exercises in Microsoft Copilot for writing, research, and data tasks
- How to use Gemini for search, summarization, and content generation
- Practical prompts and workflows for ChatGPT
- Comparing the three tools and selecting the right one for each task
- Responsible use of AI, privacy considerations, and accuracy checks
- **Live demonstration: How to take an existing grant template and adjust it to a specific government RFP**



- Guided practice with real-time examples and participant questions

Upcoming Webinars

Indigenous Opportunities Financing Program (IOFP) Webinar

April 15, 2026 | 2–3 pm ET

The Indigenous Opportunities Financing Program (IOFP) is Ontario's long-standing Indigenous financial guarantee program that helps Indigenous partners participate directly in major infrastructure projects. By providing financial guarantees on credit products, the IOFP enables communities to access capital at below-market financing rates to support equity ownership in eligible energy, resource development, and critical minerals projects. The program is designed to help create long-term revenue streams and support economic well-being across Indigenous communities.

During the session, the BOF IOFP and Partnerships team will provide an overview of the IOFP, outline eligibility criteria, and share how communities can leverage the program for upcoming opportunities. There will also be time for questions and open discussion.

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Emergency Preparedness & Management

Four-Part Zoom Series

AFOA Canada is proud to present a new four-part series on Emergency Preparedness and Management. From the basics of preparedness to the technical side of hazard mapping, we are covering the essentials to keep our communities safe.

Register for individual sessions or join us for the entire series.

Session 1: Intro to Community Preparedness & Emergency Management

March 31, 2026 | 2 PM – 4 PM ET

In this webinar we will introduce the foundational concepts of emergency preparedness and management with a specific focus on Indigenous communities.

Session 2: Crisis Communications for Indigenous Communities

April 14, 2026 | 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM CST

Learn culturally appropriate emergency communications, including community notification, information sharing, and coordination with external partners during emergencies.

Session 3: Indigenous Emergency Planning Foundations

April 21 & 23, 2026 | 9:30 am to 4:30 pm CST

Gain a foundational understanding of Indigenous community emergency planning, emphasizing the integration of traditional knowledge, governance structures, and culturally appropriate practices with contemporary emergency management frameworks.

Session 4: Community Risk Assessment & Hazard Mapping

April 28 & 30, 2026 | 9:30 am to 4:30 pm CST

This course introduces participants to the process of identifying, assessing, and prioritizing community risks and hazards by combining Indigenous knowledge,

Costs to Attend Webinars:

One day workshop: \$100 for members and \$200 for non-members

Two-day workshop: \$200 for members and \$350 for non-members

Full series: \$300 for members and \$600 for non-members

REGISTER NOW FOR THE FULL SERIES

Questions or Tech Issues? Reach Out Anytime

If you have any trouble logging in, please reach out to our Training Coordinator, **Debbie Donovan**, at trainingcoordinator@ofneda.ca or call **519.200.1033** for assistance. We look forward to insightful conversations and building lasting connections!

Did you know OFNEDA First Nations members can sign up for EDCO membership at a reduced rate?

It is a great time to take advantage of that benefit, especially with the 2026 Bright Ideas Competition now underway.

EDCO's Bright Ideas Competition is a province-wide program that brings economic development professionals together to tackle real challenges facing Ontario communities. Participants are matched in teams to develop innovative solutions, gain exposure, build their network, and earn 5 points toward their Ec.D. designation. It is a supportive, collaborative environment suited for both new and experienced practitioners.

Registration closes on Friday, April 10, 2026.

Competition page.

To Sign for EDCO membership click here –
<https://edco.on.ca/membership/membership-information/organization-membership/>

SIGN UP FOR BRIGHT IDEAS 2026!

This Month's News from First Nations Across Ontario

NAN and GCT#3 Congratulate Anishinaabe Musher Jesse Terry, 2026 Iditarod Rookie of the Year

Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Grand Council Treaty #3 are celebrating Anishinaabe musher Jesse Terry, who has been named the 2026 Iditarod Rookie of the Year. Jesse, a member of Lac Seul First Nation, completed the 1,000-mile race with the fastest rookie time, finishing 14th overall. His achievement reflects years of dedication, deep cultural connection, and the strength of community support.

To read the full statement and learn more about Jesse's remarkable journey, please visit the press release page.

[READ THE FULL PRESS RELEASE HERE](#)

Economic Development Strategy

Economic Development Strategy

March 04, 2026

Chapleau Cree First Nation Strengthens Long-Term Planning

Chapleau Cree First Nation is making significant progress toward a comprehensive community planning framework through several major initiatives focused on long-term growth, resiliency, and community well-being.

With support from LEDSP funding, the Nation has completed an updated Community Strategic Plan, shaped by meaningful input from Band Members, Chief and Council, managers, and local stakeholders. This five-year plan will guide development priorities and support coordinated decision-making across the community.

At the same time, Chapleau Cree is renewing its Community Energy Plan through IESO project funding. A series of workshops on energy efficiency, resiliency, and energy sovereignty will take place this spring and summer, offering members opportunities to help shape the community's future energy direction.

Additional updates to the Emergency Plan and Financial Policies are underway through Indigenous Services Canada's Professional and Institutional Development Program, strengthening preparedness, governance, and business continuity.

Together, these initiatives lay the groundwork for major upcoming projects, including upgrades to the Pimii Kamik Gas Bar, a potential business park development, and a proposed micro-grid combined heat and power system for the new subdivision expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

Community Economic Development Officer

Chapleau Cree First Nation

Phone: 705-864-0784

Fax: 705-864-1760

Email: edo@chapleaucree.ca

AI Adoption Checklist for EDOs and First Nations

This guide provides EDOs and First Nations with a practical, step-by-step checklist for safely adopting AI in their daily work. It outlines how to identify low-risk tasks, prepare inputs, generate first drafts, and review outputs with cultural and ethical considerations in mind. The document also highlights how AI can support planning, analysis, communications, and team capacity building.

In addition to the checklist, the resource includes a curated list of free and paid AI tools that can support community planning, economic development, project management, and entrepreneurship. These tools range from general AI assistants like Microsoft Copilot and Gemini to specialized platforms for data analysis, mapping, engagement, and business development.

This file is designed to help communities begin using AI confidently, responsibly, and in alignment with local values and priorities.

DOWNLOAD THE FILE NOW!

Need Support Navigating Procurement Portals?
We are Here to Help

partner connections or application strategy, contact **Ryan Moore**, Director of Entrepreneurship and Procurement, at ipeddirector@ofneda.ca. Free one-on-one support is also available through each organization.

Procurement Assistance Canada**Bo See Fok**

A/Regional Manager

bosee.fok@pwgsc-tpsgc.gc.ca

Tel: 647-408-8656

Supply Ontarioinfo@supplyontario.cadoingbusiness@supplyontario.ca*[View email in browser](#)***OFNEDA****ONTARIO FIRST NATIONS ECONOMIC
DEVELOPERS ASSOCIATION****QUESTIONS ABOUT MEMBERSHIP?**

For OFNEDA membership support please contact membersupport@ofneda.ca

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