

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

Wachay OFNEDA Community,

I hope you had a wonderful summer and found time to connect with family, community, and the land.

As we move into the fall season, I am pleased to share a few highlights from recent OFNEDA activities.

Our Bi-Weekly EDO and Entrepreneur Virtual Networking Sessions continue to see strong participation from First Nation Economic Development Officers and entrepreneurs across Ontario. These sessions provide a valuable opportunity to connect, share experiences, discuss challenges, exchange ideas, and celebrate successes while strengthening relationships within our network.

We are also looking forward to our upcoming Regional Meeting in London, Ontario, where EDOs and entrepreneurs will come together to share knowledge, explore opportunities, and build meaningful partnerships.

As part of our Entrepreneurship Unlocked series, we recently hosted Managing Growth: Scaling Your Business Sustainably, facilitated by Sarah Hopkins of Three Sisters Consulting. The session provided entrepreneurs with practical tools and strategies for managing growth while staying true to their vision and values.

I am pleased to congratulate the recipients of the **OFNEDA FNEAC Awards**, presented at the First Nations Economic Advancement Conference

(**FNEAC**) Gala Dinner and Awards Night on September 15:

Economic Development Officer Award

Gina Wesley

Lac Seul First Nation

Community Project Award

Leading Cloud Gardens

Apitipi Anicinapek First Nation

Project Lead: Kara Tremblay, Food Coordinator

Congratulations to both recipients for their outstanding contributions and leadership.

I would also like to thank everyone who attended the FNEAC Conference. Your participation and engagement helped make the event a tremendous success. A special thank you to our sponsors, partners, speakers, exhibitors, artisans, board members, members of the Events Committee, and volunteers whose hard work, support, and dedication made this year's conference possible. Together, you helped create an inspiring and impactful gathering that strengthened connections, celebrated Indigenous innovation and entrepreneurship, and advanced First Nation economic development across Ontario.



Adam Pawis
Chair, OFNEDA

From Community Priorities to Community Prosperity: Gina Wesley Named OFNEDA’s 2026 Economic Development Officer of the Year



Congratulations to **Gina Wesley of Lac Seul First Nation**, recipient of OFNEDA’s 2026 Economic Development Officer of the Year Award. Recognized at the FNEAC Gala and Awards Night, Gina’s leadership, innovation, and commitment to community-driven economic development continue to create meaningful opportunities and lasting prosperity for Lac Seul First Nation.

[READ MORE](#)

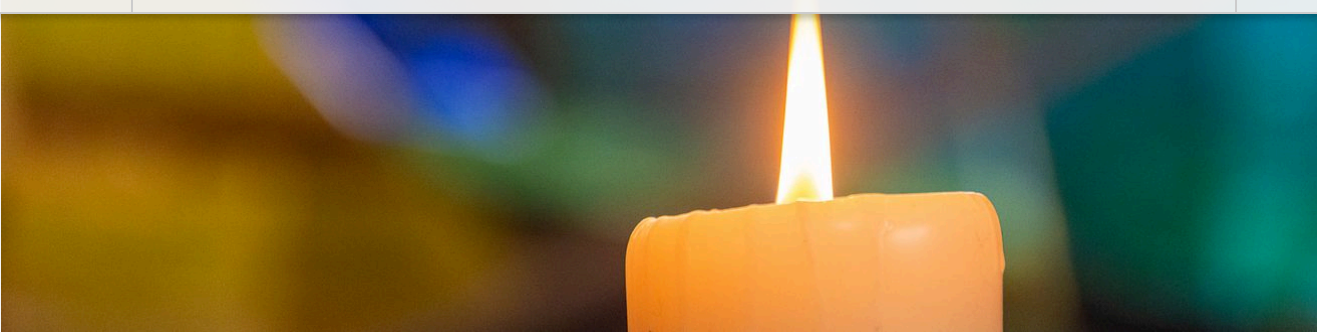
Leading Cloud Gardens of Apitipi Anicinapek Nation Receives OFNEDA’s 2026 Community Project of the Year Award



Congratulations to **Leading Cloud Gardens of Apitipi Anicinapek Nation**, recipient of OFNEDA’s 2026 Community Project of the Year Award! Recognized at the FNEAC Gala and Awards Night, this innovative initiative, led by **Kara Tremblay**, is advancing food security, food sovereignty, community wellness, and sustainable economic development. Through community-driven solutions and a commitment to First Nation values,

Leading Cloud Gardens is creating lasting impacts and helping build a healthier, more self-sustaining future for generations to come.

[READ MORE](#)



On National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we stand in solidarity with First Nations communities across Ontario. We reflect, we remember, and we recommit to the ongoing journey of healing and understanding.

Our work is rooted in respect, collaboration, and the strength of Indigenous voices. Today and every day, we walk together in the spirit of truth, learning, and meaningful change.



Together, We Did It!

With your generous support, we raised \$2,696.70 CAD and \$10 USD for Whitewater Lake First Nation during the First Nations Economic Advancement Conference (FNEAC) Gala and Awards Dinner on September 15.

This year, we were honoured to support Whitewater Lake First Nation, a community that has been impacted by recent wildfires. As part of the Gala Dinner, we held a traditional blanket donation ceremony, recognizing the importance of community, culture, and collective support.

Adam Pawis, Chair of the Ontario First Nations Economic Developers Association (OFNEDA), presented the cheque for \$2,696.70 CAD and \$10 USD cash to **Emily Drake**, a youth panelist from Whitewater Lake First Nation, on behalf of her community.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and helped make this initiative a success. Your generosity and support will help create meaningful opportunities for the community and reflect the spirit of partnership, compassion, and collaboration that defines FNEAC.

Together, we made a difference. ❤️

WHAT'S COMING UP IN OCTOBER



EDOs/Entrepreneurs

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

THE VIRTUAL NETWORKING EVENT FOR FIRST NATIONS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS AND ENTREPRENEURS



EDOs/Entrepreneurs Community Connections

Wed, Oct 14 and Oct 28, 2026 | 2:00 PM – 3:00 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 biweekly space offers EDOs the chance to have informal conversations with one another, share ideas, discuss challenges and successes, 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 SPOT FOR OCT 14

RESERVE SPOT FOR OCT 28

Questions or Tech Issues? Reach Out Anytime

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

UPCOMING REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT FORUMS

REMINDER

Regional meetings are intended for First Nations Economic Development Officers, but they are also open to First Nations entrepreneurs, Chief and Council members, or a designated representative from the First Nation.

Our Regional Meetings are small gatherings where we meet with First Nations in the hosting area to hear community priorities, challenges, and opportunities. These sessions help us share OFNEDA programs and resources while ensuring each community feels informed and supported. You will have the chance to connect with Ryan Moore, Monica Lister, and other team members, and your input will help guide the development of upcoming toolkits.

Breakfast, snacks and lunch are included.

IMPORTANT:

Please select the Regional Engagement Forum closest to your Chapter or First Nation. Travel and accommodation support is available only for First Nation Economic Development Officers employed by their Nation's Economic Development Department and attending the nearest forum location.

Not sure which Chapter you belong to? View the Chapter Map here:
<https://www.ofneda.ca/about/chapters>

Please note: First Nation entrepreneurs and all other attendees are responsible for their own travel, accommodation, and related expenses.



Regional Engagement Forum – Manitoulin Island

Tuesday, October 27 | 8 AM – 4:30 PM

Manitoulin Hotel & Conference Centre

66 Meredith St E, Little Current, ON Canada | (705) 368-9966

Hotel block code: **G1711**

Visit hotel website– <https://manitoulinhotel.com/>

RESERVE YOUR SPOT

VIRTUAL COFFEE MEET-UPS

The Northwestern Ontario Workplace and Worker Health Study

Oct 1, 2026 | 10 AM – 11 AM ET

REGISTER NOW



Presented by:

Adam Banner

PhD Candidate '28

Research Assistant

EPID@Work Research

Institute

Lakehead University

EPID@Work (Enhancing the Prevention of Injury and Disability at Work) is a research institute at Lakehead University who is currently conducting the Northwestern Ontario Workplace and Worker Health Study. This confidential online survey looks at physical and mental health in the workplace as we hope to highlight the voices of individuals in Northwestern Ontario. Ultimately, we are looking to improve the health of workers across NWO, help workplaces identify areas of concern, and suggest pre-existing interventions for workplaces.

Building Stronger Communities Through Strategic Planning

Oct 27, 2026 | 1:30 PM – 2:30 PM



Presented by:

Chloe Langlois,

Rural Economic

Development Advisor

Rural Policy and

Economic Development

Branch

Ministry of Rural Affairs.

A strong strategic plan helps communities identify priorities, align resources, strengthen partnerships, and create a clear path toward sustainable growth. Join us for an engaging discussion on the importance of community-driven planning and learn how strategic planning can support long-term economic and community development success. Participants will also receive information about the Ministry of Rural Affairs' upcoming free Strategic Planning Virtual Webinar Series, designed to provide communities with the tools and knowledge needed to turn vision into action.

Chloe Langlois has more than 14 years of experience with the Government of Ontario, with a career spanning agriculture, food safety, rural development, and community economic development. She currently serves as an Economic and Business Advisor with the Ministry of Rural Affairs, supporting municipal and Indigenous communities across Northern Ontario in advancing economic growth, capacity building, and community development initiatives. Her diverse background provides a unique perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing rural and Northern communities.

VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS SERIES

BUILD & GROW: A 10-PART SERIES ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP

We are excited to launch a new 10-part learning series for entrepreneurs, led by Sarah Hopkins, Matriarch and Founder of Three Sisters Consulting. Each session offers practical training to support our community in starting, building, or growing a business.



Procurement: How to
Sell to Government &
Corporate Clients

[REGISTER NOW](#)

Mon Oct 19

12:30 PM – 4:30 PM ET

Session Overview

Government and corporate procurement is one of the biggest opportunities for First Nation entrepreneurs (and one of the most confusing). This session breaks it all down. We will look at how procurement works, what buyers are looking for, and how to position your business to compete. We will walk through how to read an RFP (Request for Proposals), what to include in your response, and

opportunities for your business.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify at least 2 procurement programs or opportunities relevant to your business
- Read a sample RFP and identify the key evaluation criteria
- Start or update your capabilities statement
- Register with at least one vendor database or certification program

2026 Cando Conference

October 5 – 8, 2026

Victoria Convention Centre – Victoria, BC

Cando is pleased to announce its **32nd Annual National Conference & AGM** to be held on October 5–8, 2026 in Victoria, British Columbia.

The Cando National Conference is the only platform that focuses exclusively on topics and trends related to the advancement of Indigenous Economic Development in Canada. It is an important venue for economic developers and related stakeholders to come together, create new business contacts, share best practices, address obstacles and relevant existing trends in our dynamic economy.

REGISTER NOW

**AFOA Ontario Bookkeeping
Foundation Workshop Series**

October 20–21, 2026

Note: These workshop series are not covered under OFNEDA membership. Registration fees and associated costs are the responsibility of participants or their organizations.

Save the date for the Bookkeeping Foundation Workshop Series, hosted by AFOA Ontario on October 20–21, 2026, at the Water Tower Inn in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. This two-day workshop is designed for Indigenous professionals seeking to strengthen financial management skills and workplace practices within their communities and organizations.

Participants will gain practical knowledge through two key modules: Budgeting, Forecasting and Variance Analysis, and Planning for the External Audit. The sessions will provide valuable insights into budgeting processes, financial planning, audit preparation, and effective financial management practices that support organizational success.

For more information, contact linda.sandy@foa-ontario.ca or visit AFOA Ontario's website.

VISIT AFOA TO LEARN MORE



NEWS ARTICLES, GRANTS & OPPORTUNITIES



If you would like to book an appointment with **Ryan Moore**, our **Director of Indigenous Procurement & Entrepreneurship Development**, please click the link below. Whether you have questions about CanadaBuys and Ontario Tenders, funding, business opportunities, or any hurdles you are facing, Ryan is here to help.

BOOK AN APPOINTMENT WITH RYAN

Autumn or Fall?

I prefer the term autumn, and this month don't let opportunities "fall" through the business cracks. Check your profile on the various databases out there to make sure you've got the right information posted, and you can start to add one more to that list with the **Chiefs of Ontario's** First Nation Business Directory.

Click the link below to learn more, or you can hear from 'COO' at our upcoming regional in-person meet ups:

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DIRECTORY

Click the links to learn more about [CanadaBuys](#) and [Ontario Tenders](#) opportunities.

Grant Opportunities

Funding and support for Indigenous businesses and organizations across Southern Ontario.

Indigenous businesses, organizations, and not-for-profit groups can access support and guidance from the Indigenous Economic Development team at FedDev Ontario. The team works directly with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit organizations and entrepreneurs across southern Ontario, helping them navigate available programs, services, and funding opportunities that support economic growth, business development, and community prosperity.

For more information, contact indigenous-autochtones@feddevontario.gc.ca or call at 1-877-553-5507.

LEARN MORE

Additional Wildfire Relief Funding Available

funding through the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF). With \$1 million dedicated to wildfire relief, the fund is designed to provide immediate support to communities facing urgent needs as a result of wildfire emergencies. Applicants are encouraged to request funding for their most pressing priorities, with all funds directed toward direct community relief and support activities. Please note that funding cannot be used for administrative expenses.

APPLY NOW

Ontario Investing \$25 Million to Support Indigenous Energy Projects

Ontario is investing \$25 million through the Indigenous Energy Support Program (IESP) to support Indigenous-led energy projects, strengthen community participation in Ontario’s growing energy sector, and advance Indigenous economic reconciliation. The funding supports capacity building, economic development, energy planning, and community energy resilience initiatives, helping Indigenous communities build skills, pursue energy opportunities, and shape a more sustainable energy future.

Applications for 2026 funding are now open, with a deadline of October 2, 2026.

LEARN MORE

Young Indigenous Business Grant 2026

The Young Indigenous Business Grant 2026, presented by Loblaw Companies Limited, supports Indigenous entrepreneurs under the age of 35 through the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) Tools for Indigenous Business Program. This grant provides financial support and resources to help young Indigenous business owners start, grow, and strengthen their ventures. It is an excellent opportunity for emerging entrepreneurs seeking to turn their business ideas into reality and contribute to the economic prosperity of their communities.

APPLY NOW

Complimentary Legal Support for Indigenous Businesses

This unique initiative offers complimentary legal support to Indigenous small businesses and entrepreneurs, providing access to experienced legal professionals who can assist with a variety of business-related legal matters. Whether you're starting a new venture, growing your business, or navigating day-to-day operations, this program is designed to help you succeed.

Eligibility requirements include:

- Your business must be 51% or more owned and controlled by Indigenous person(s).

- Family, criminal, and immigration matters are not eligible.
- Applicants may be asked to provide documentation to verify eligibility.
- This program helps remove barriers to legal services while supporting the growth and success of Indigenous businesses.

Don't miss this opportunity to unlock your business potential!
To learn more about the program and submit an application.

[LEARN MORE](#)

First Nations Community Highlights



FNEAC 2026 Community Project Finalist Spotlight
Mattagami First Nation Food Sovereignty Project Recognized
for Innovation, Sustainability, and Community Impact



Source: Bananas, limes and tea grown in Mattagami: One First Nation's work toward food sovereignty / CBC News

Growing Food Sovereignty in Mattagami First Nation
Community-Grown Food. Lasting Economic Strength.

Mattagami First Nation, with the support of Mattagami AKI L.P., has been named a finalist for the FNEAC 2026 Community Project Award for its innovative Food Sovereignty Project, a

This project is more than a food-growing program. It is a long-term vision for strengthening community self-sufficiency by creating sustainable local food systems that support future generations.

At the heart of the initiative is MILKOGI, a hydroponic farm that serves as the project's economic engine. Through year-round production of fresh, locally grown food, the farm is designed to generate revenue that can help sustain and grow the broader food sovereignty initiative.

The project also includes several interconnected components that work together to support community needs:

- A Heated Greenhouse for fruit production, expanding northern growing opportunities and providing hands-on learning experiences.
- A Community Garden that brings fresh vegetables closer to home while encouraging community participation and knowledge sharing.
- An Orchard that will provide a lasting source of locally grown fruit and promote stewardship of the land.
- Community Walking Spaces that encourage wellness, connection, and outdoor recreation.
- A Future Abattoir planned to teach safe and sustainable food handling practices while building local skills and food knowledge.

What makes this project stand out is its integrated approach. By connecting economic opportunity with community benefit, the initiative helps improve access to fresh foods, creates learning opportunities for youth, supports local capacity building, and advances self-determination.

By reducing reliance on external food sources and investing in local food production, Mattagami First Nation is creating a model of food security rooted in resilience, innovation, and community leadership.

Being recognized as an FNEAC 2026 Community Project Finalist highlights the impact and potential of this vision. The project demonstrates how Indigenous communities are developing innovative solutions that strengthen local economies while supporting the health and well-being of their people.

Project Lead:
Tim Harvey
Chief Executive Officer
705-845-8760 | tim.harvey@mattagami.com
PO Box 99, Gogama, ON, POM 1W0

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT

Celebrating Indigenous Voices: Introducing Tianna Small, a Self-Published Indigenous Author

Tianna Small’s book was first showcased at the First Nations Economic Advancement Conference (FNEAC) Gala Dinner and Awards Night, where attendees had the opportunity to learn about her powerful story of healing, resilience, and breaking cycles of generational trauma.

At this year’s FNEAC Gala Dinner, OFNEDA was proud to recognize Tianna Small, an Indigenous woman affiliated with Beausoleil First Nation and the

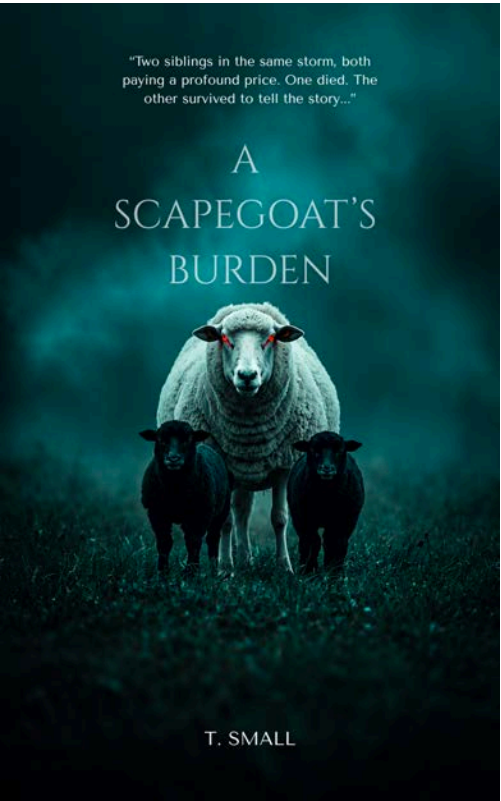


reclaim their stories, and build a brighter future for themselves, their families, and future generations.

Image Caption:
ORC Chief Abram Benedict with Tianna Small's book at the FNEAC Gala Dinner and Awards Night, where the self-published work was showcased for the first time.

A Scapegoat's Burden: Sixty-One Days Without You By T. Small

A Scapegoat's Burden: Sixty-One Days Without You is a powerful testament to resilience, truth, and the courage to break cycles of generational trauma. Through honesty, compassion, and personal reflection, T. Small explores the lasting impact of emotional abuse and the often-overlooked effects of narcissistic family dynamics.



At its heart, the book honours the memory of the author's brother, whose life was profoundly shaped by pain and struggles that few people fully recognized or understood. By sharing her story, T. Small sheds light on the invisible wounds carried by many survivors and the ways trauma can ripple through families across generations.

More than a memoir of loss and healing, A Scapegoat's Burden offers hope to those navigating the aftermath of emotional abuse. It reminds readers that healing begins when silence is broken, truth is spoken, and the journey toward recovery is embraced with courage and self-compassion.

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY



Grant and Funding

RESOURCES DATABASE

➡

Have You Taken Advantage of the Funding Resources Available on OFNEDA's Member Portal?

Discover funding opportunities, grants, and valuable resources designed to support your organization's growth and success. Log in to your OFNEDA Member Dashboard to access the Grant and Funding Resources Database, along with exclusive member content.

You can also watch past recordings anytime through your OFNEDA Member Dashboard, including sessions such as Tech Essentials, SharePoint, and Microsoft 365 Training. Log in using your member email address to access recordings of past webinars, training sessions, and Coffee Meet-Ups at your convenience. Catch up on missed sessions, revisit valuable content, and make the most of your membership benefits.

ACCESS FUNDING RESOURCES AND TRAINING ARCHIVES



Happy Thanksgiving from Team OFNEDA

As Thanksgiving approaches, the OFNEDA team would like to extend warm wishes to all our members, partners, and communities. We hope this season brings you time to connect with family and friends, reflect on the year's accomplishments, and celebrate the many reasons to be grateful. Wishing everyone a safe, happy, and relaxing Thanksgiving weekend. 🦃 🍂 🍁

[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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