

MAWKIM 

# HONOURING THE JOURNEY



MAWKIM DATA GOVERNANCE  
UPDATE: 2023-2026

This is a highlights report, not a full technical report. Information is current at time of publication and may be updated as planning and approvals continue.

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MAWKIM



Eskasoni Women's Drum Group

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# Table of Contents

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>MEET THE TEAM</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>MILESTONES: KEY ACTIVITIES 2023-2026</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>SPECIAL PROJECTS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>MAWKIM DATA SOVEREIGNTY FORUM</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>ONGOING ACTIVITIES AND ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>WHAT'S NEXT</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>NOTES</b>	<b>22</b>

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# Context

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is a three-year highlights report (2023–2026). It shares key milestones, progress to date, and next steps. It is intended to give community members, leaders, and partners a clear snapshot of progress and direction of the Mawkim Data Governance Team.



Dr. Marie Battiste is one of the original committee members of MEW. She was honoured for her work at the Mawkim Data Sovereignty Forum.

## WHAT IS MAWKIM?

In Mi'kmaq, the word **Mawkim** means to count and record. Mawkim is a Mi'kmaq-led data governance and research stewardship initiative hosted by the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq (UNSM). Mawkim's work is rooted in Mi'kmaq governance, community ethics, and the responsibility to protect Mi'kmaq knowledge.

Mawkim's work is guided by Mi'kmaq governance and community ethics. It is designed to protect Mi'kmaq knowledge, support ethical research practice, and strengthen community control over information. Governance structures, decision-making, and public updates are part of how Mawkim stays accountable to leadership and communities as the work grows.

Mawkim is advancing Mi'kmaq **data sovereignty**, which means that Mi'kmaq communities have a meaningful say in how information about them is collected, protected, accessed, shared, and used. It is about control, consent, and trusted information that supports community decisions.

**Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch (MEW)** is a Mi'kmaq-led ethics review board that is a part of the Mawkim Data Sovereignty Team. It ensures research upholds the highest ethical standard and that Mi'kmaq knowledge and communities are protected.

## ABOUT UNSM: HOST ORGANIZATION

The Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq (UNSM) is a tribal council organization serving five of the 13 Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia: Membertou, Eskasoni, Potlotek, Wagmatcook, and We'koqma'q. Established in 1969, UNSM provides a unified political voice for the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia. The Mawkim and Data Governance team is managed under the Capacity Development department of UNSM.



Mawkim serves all 13 Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw communities



Mawkim Team at the Data Sovereignty Forum (DSF)

# Meet the Team

## MAWKIM DATA GOVERNANCE TEAM



**Robin Thompson** (she/her) **Data Governance Manager**

Robin Thompson is Cree Métis from Treaty 1 Territory and a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation. Robin holds a business diploma, an Advanced major in Social and Criminal Justice from St. Francis Xavier University and a Juris Doctor from the Schulich School of Law. She is a practicing member of the Nova Scotia Barrister Society. In 2015, she was one of the ten participants chosen worldwide for the Indigenous Fellow Programme with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland. Robin has 20 years of senior management experience developing governance capacity within Indigenous communities and is a strong advocate for First Nation self-determination. Robin is currently a Human Rights Commissioner for the province of Nova Scotia and the first President of the Eastern Door representing L'nu lawyers in Mi'kma'ki.



**Camryn Sock** (she/her) **Outreach Coordinator**

Camryn Sock is Mi'kmaw and a member of Eskasoni First Nation in Unama'ki (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia), with familial roots in Elsipogtog First Nation, NB. Camryn is the Outreach Coordinator for the Mawkim team at the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq. Her previous work experiences have given her a profound passion for Community and Leadership. Through her past work, she has seen community development at the international and national levels. Camryn has enjoyed community involvement in the past. Her drive for youth advocacy strongly impacts her beliefs. Camryn's future goal is to bring the Mi'kmaw teachings to our youth today.



**Erica Johnson** (she/her) **Administrative Assistant**

Erica Johnson is a Southern Inuit of NunatuKavut and holds a Bachelor of Business Administration with a major in accounting from Mount Saint Vincent University. Before joining UNSM, as the Administrative Assistant for the Mawkim team, Erica worked for several years with the Canada Revenue Agency in the Audit Division. She brings her valuable experience in financial analysis and engagement within the public sector.



**Muin Ji'j Bernard** (he/they) **Special Projects Coordinator**

Muin Ji'j [moo-in jeech] is a Mi'kmaw scholar and a member of the Eskasoni First Nation in Unama'ki (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia). He is the Special Projects Coordinator for the Mawkim team at the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq. In his role, Muin Ji'j coordinates various special data-related projects in the Atlantic Region. Muin Ji'j is a Saint Mary's University doctoral student in the Executive Doctorate of Business Administration program. In addition, he graduated from the Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Business Administration program at Cape Breton University, and a Certificate in Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities from Harvard Business School. Muin Ji'j is well-rounded in various aspects of business and management.



**Melissa Webb** (she/her) **Operations Analyst**

Melissa (Nain, NL) is an Inuk from the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area and a Nunatsiavut Beneficiary member. She has been practicing in the field of Human Resources for the last 11 years. Recently realizing her natural passion for policy research and development, she joined UNSM's Data Governance team as a Policy Analyst at the end of November 2024. She is driven by ensuring the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia continue to have a right to own and govern their collective data and knowledge gifts as a self-determined, self-governing First Nations.



**Lauren Adams** (she/her) **Project Manager, Regional Data Centre**

Lauren Adams is a settler who grew up in Nova Scotia and is based in Pictou County. She is the Project Manager of the Regional Data Centre within the Mawkim Team at the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq. She holds a Bachelor of Mathematics from the University of Waterloo. With a strong foundation in data and analytics, Lauren is dedicated to advancing Indigenous data sovereignty through approaches that are secure, culturally grounded, and community-centred. Guided by a project management approach rooted in collaboration and community priorities, she works to strengthen Mi'kmaw-led decision-making and ensure access to meaningful, reliable tools and information that support self-determination.



**Zabrina Downton** (she/they) **Research Analyst**

Zabrina Downton is a 2SLGBTQ+ Mi'kmaw scholar and educator of mixed ancestry, and a member of Wasoqopa'q First Nation. She is the Research Analyst for Mawkim, where she works with researchers, ethics boards, institutions, and Mi'kmaw communities to ensure research is ethical, respectful, and community-centred. Zabrina holds a BA Honours in Anthropology/Sociology and a Certificate in Social Research from Cape Breton University, as well as an MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies from Brock University.



**Kelly Paul** (she/her) **Program Coordinator, Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (MEW)**

Kelly is Mi'kmaw from Membertou First Nation in Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island). She is the Program Coordinator for the Mawkim team at the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq. She holds a Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism Management degree from Cape Breton University and brings hands-on experience in community engagement, entrepreneurship and relationship-building through Indigenous tourism. As both an entrepreneur and crafter, Kelly has worked closely with community members and local businesses to support collaboration and growth. In her role with the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, she coordinates ethical research reviews, supports the development of policies aligned with OCAP principles, and works with researchers and communities to ensure that research involving Mi'kmaq people is conducted respectfully and responsibly.



**Shenayah Gould** (she/her) **Projects Coordinator**

Shenayah [shen-aye-yuh] is Mi'kmaw and a member of Eskasoni First Nation in Unama'ki (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia). She is the Projects Coordinator for the Mawkim team at the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, where she supports the preparation and administration of community surveys, following OCAP® principles with FNIGC (First Nations Information Governance Centre). With over eight years of experience as an Educational Assistant, Shenayah has a strong connection to her community and is passionate about supporting people of all ages. She works closely with community members to ensure their voices are reflected in the work she supports.



**Lillianna Simon** (she/her) **Research Coordinator**

Lillianna Simon is Mi'kmaq from Eskasoni First Nation in Unama'ki (Cape Breton). As a Research Coordinator with UNSM, she will be using her background in public health and the Two-Eyed Seeing approach to work with First Nation communities. Lillianna will help design and run research projects that respect and incorporate Indigenous knowledge, focusing on the community's needs to improve their health and well-being.

# INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT

Mawkim's work is part of a broader International Indigenous-led movement to strengthen control over data, including health and community information. The team is supported by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC).

The FNIGC traces its roots to 1996, when the Assembly of First Nations established a National Steering Committee to design a First Nations health survey, in response to a decision from the Federal Government to exclude First Nations people living on reserve from three major population surveys. FNIGC was federally incorporated on April 22, 2010, with a Chiefs-in-Assembly mandate to advance First Nations data governance.

FNIGC tabled A First Nations Data Governance Strategy (FNDGS) in March 2020, which envisions a First Nations-led national network of regional information governance centres.

Funding and support from FNIGC began flowing in 2023 to support Mawkim's regional First Nations data sovereignty work.

The First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession – more commonly known as OCAP® – assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes, and that they own and control how this information can be used.



**FNIGC | CGIPN**

First Nations Information Governance Centre  
Le Centre de gouvernance de l'information des Premières Nations



Douglas Brown (UNSM Executive Director), Robin Thompson, Jonathan Dewar (FNIGC CEO)



To read the First Nations Data Governance Strategy or to learn more about the First Nations Principles of OCAP®, please visit: <https://fnigc.ca/>

# Milestones

## KEY ACTIVITIES 2023-2026

### GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK: FALL 2023

In the fall of 2023, the Mi'kmaq Chiefs in Nova Scotia authorized the establishment of a Steering Committee to oversee the development of a Regional Data Centre. The Steering Committee members include representatives from: Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, Mi'kmaq Grand Council, Tajikeimik Health Authority and Newfoundland.

**The purpose of the Steering Committee is to provide strategic direction for the Data Governance team.**



### REGIONAL HEALTH SURVEY PHASE 4 2023-2025

The UNSM has administered the Regional Health Survey (RHS) since the pilot project in 1997. The RHS is the first national health survey created and administered by First Nations people, and its results support policy and programming at community, regional, and national levels.

In 2023, RHS Phase 4 continued with community-based data collection with community consent (via Band Council Resolutions).

#### Community Fieldworkers

UNSM hires fieldworkers from the communities being surveyed whenever possible. These fieldworkers carry out and complete the RHS surveys with participants, which supports comfort, trust, and strong participation.

**85% survey completion rate!**

RHS Phase 4 data collection concluded in November 2025 with an 85% completion rate, placing the region among the highest in Canada for participation. Regional teams, including Mawkim, are supporting the evaluation and interpretation of results, and engagement with Health Directors and leaders is informing priority data areas for regional reporting.

## REGIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY (RSS)

This is a new regional survey which focuses on the well-being of children and families living on reserve. The information collected from the RSS will help our communities, organizations, and all levels of government develop and support programs and policies aiming to improve the wellbeing of Mi'kmaw families living on reserve.

**This survey has been thoroughly reviewed by the subject matter experts within our Mi'kmaq Research Advisory Committee (MRAC). Data collection for RSS is anticipated to start in fall of 2026.**

The MRAC Committee has been supporting the development of Regional Social Survey for two years, their final review of this survey took place on February 11 & 12, 2026.

## Mi'kmaq Research Advisory Committee (MRAC)

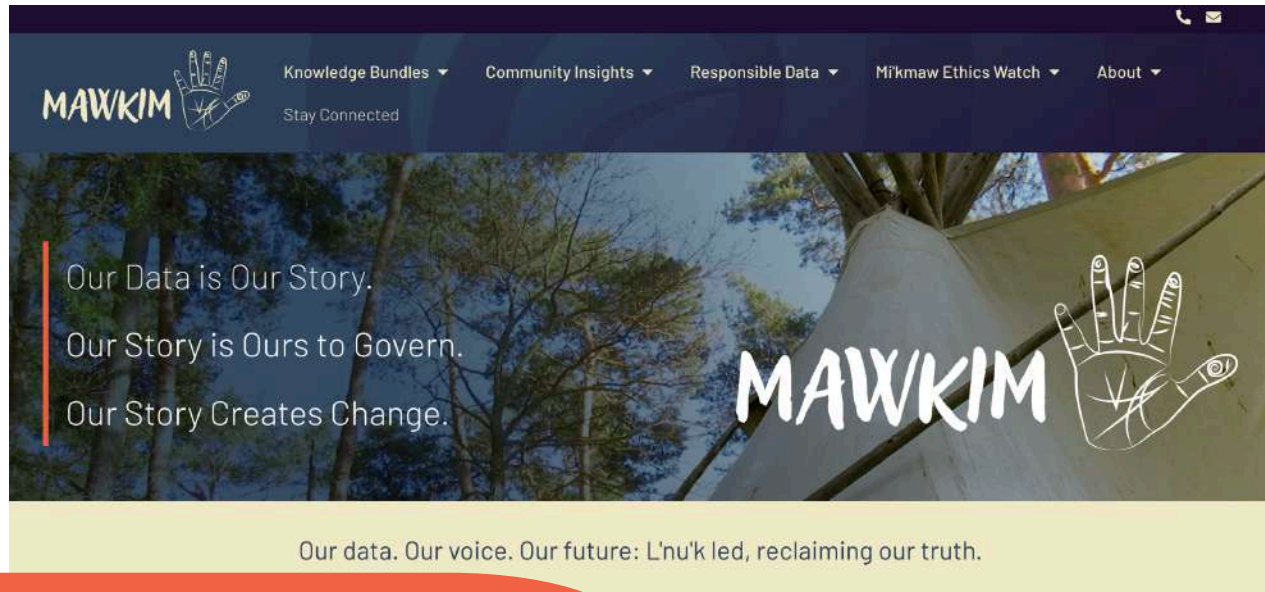
The **Mi'kmaq Research Advisory Committee (MRAC)** supports Mi'kmaw-led governance in survey and research work by reviewing and regionalizing national survey tools so that they reflect Mi'kmaw values and regional priorities.



**MRAC Members** and support staff at our MRAC Meeting in February 2026. Photo taken by Regional Chief Andrea Paul (L-R) (Cynthia Benoit, Robin Thompson, Shenayah Gould, Chief Deborah Robinson, Jennifer MacDonald, Melissa Webb, Erica Johnson, Kristen Basque, Vance Denny, Kara Paul and Mandy Millea)

## REBRANDING AND WEBSITE REVAMP IN 2024

In 2024, Mawkim began a rebranding process as part of a broader strategy to increase visibility and strengthen independence as the team administered data-related projects. The website was framed as a central hub for the work, offering secure and accessible tools and resources for communities, with scalable IT support and maintenance.



Visit us at <https://mawkim.org/>

## BRAND STORY: THE MAWKIM HANDPRINT LOGO AND COLOUR SCHEME

### MAWKIM HANDPRINT LOGO

At the heart of the Mawkim Data Governance Team logo is the symbolism of the Kejimkujik handprints: a record of existence, identity, and belonging, ranging from child to adult. Much like the handprints of ancestors, the data gathered today is a way to leave a mark. Each fingerprint, each line, and each record tells a story of identity, resilience, and cultural continuity. The handprints also act as a reminder to safeguard Mi'kmaw stories and ensure they remain in Mi'kmaw care for future generations.

### MAWKIM COLOUR SCHEME

Mawkim's colour scheme (Midnight Sky, Deep Water, Ochre Clay, Raw Hide) is rooted in the traditional ways stories were shared, recorded, and passed down. Midnight Sky speaks to teachings passed by firelight. Deep Water reflects learning through hunting and fishing practices. Ochre Clay represents petroglyphs and markings made on stone as visual records of knowledge and memory. Raw Hide reflects the materials used in drums and rattles and the teachings carried through song and dance.



## SPECIAL PROJECT

# CREATING ETHICAL SPACE FOR MI'KMAQ-LED GENETIC, EPIGENETIC, AND OTHER BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN NOVA SCOTIA



The Mawkim Team, alongside the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, facilitating the biological health research training in Pictou Landing First Nation in May 2024

Mawkim, alongside the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, visited Pictou Landing First Nation and had the privilege of delivering a three-day training session titled, "Indigenous Knowledge and Epigenetics: Creating Ethical Space for Mi'kmaq-led Genetic, Epigenetic, and Other Biological Research in Nova Scotia" in late May 2024.

This initiative aims to build capacity and create an ethical space for Mi'kmaq-led biological research, integrating traditional knowledge and lived experience.

In November 2025, the Mawkim Team hosted a basket-making/basket-weaving cultural session at the Pictou Landing First Nation School Gym, with 15 community members in attendance, facilitated by Lynn Battiste.

The gathering provided hands-on cultural learning, space for informal community dialogue, and relationship-building connected to the broader feasibility study and training work.

Building on this initiative, the biobanking and genomic health research training developed through the project is planned to be offered on the new Mawkim website in 2026, supporting wider access and long-term capacity building.



Pictou Landing First Nation Basket Making Workshop

# MI'KMAW ETHICS WATCH



Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (MEW) is a Mi'kmaw led, volunteer-based ethics review board made up of community members, scholars, and knowledge holders from across Mi'kma'ki. It was established in 2000 based on principles and protocols developed by a committee empowered by the Sante' Mawio'mi (Grand Council).

MEW continues to encourage the highest standards of ethical research related to Mi'kmaw people and communities with the importance placed on cultural sensitivity and protocols, informed and prior consent, capacity building in the development of research in communities, the protection of Indigenous knowledge and self-determination, and the inclusion of Mi'kmaw perspectives and voice in the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the research. The principles and protocols of MEW are also intended to guide research and studies in a manner that will guarantee that the right of ownership rests with Mi'kmaw People.

<https://mawkim.org/mikmaw-ethics-watch/>

# MI'KMAW DATA LITERACY INITIATIVE

In 2025 Mawkim received funding to support the development and implementation of a Mi'kmaw Data Literacy Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to build community confidence and practical skills for understanding, using, and sharing data in ways that reflect Mi'kmaw priorities, knowledge, and governance. This initiative will develop culturally relevant training and tools and make data more useful for communities rather than something defined or controlled by outside institutions.

**Data literacy empowers Mi'kmaw communities to reclaim our stories, govern our futures, and turn information into self-determination.**

# MAWKIM DATA SOVEREIGNTY FORUM

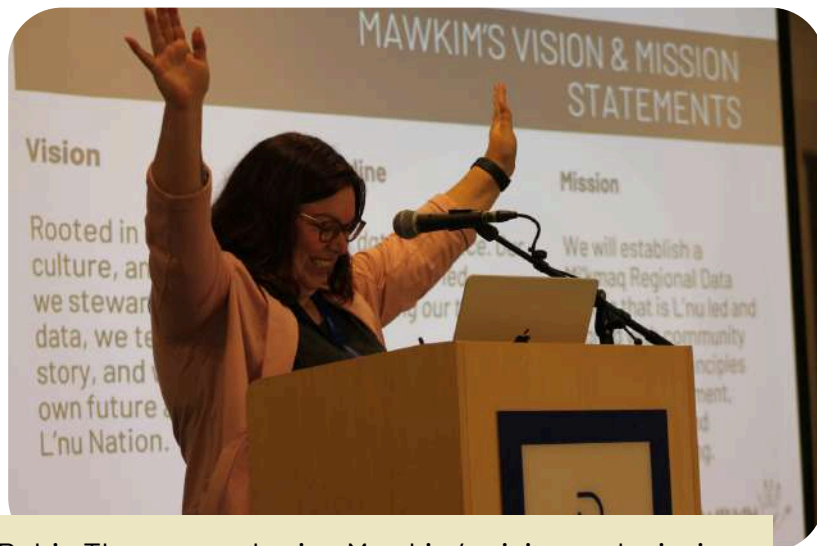
OCTOBER 22-23, 2025

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia



The UNSM and the Mawkim Data Governance Team hosted the **Mawkim Data Sovereignty Forum** to create a space for First Nations communities, researchers, leadership, and allies to learn, share, and collaborate on reclaiming control over First Nations data and knowledge. The forum brought together First Nations leaders, Knowledge Keepers, Youth, research, and allies.

**Strategic Direction:** The Forum was the first opportunity to share the goal, vision, and mission of the Mawkim Data Governance Team with all stakeholders.



Robin Thompson sharing Mawkim's vision and mission statements during the Data Sovereignty Forum

## GOAL, VISION, MISSION

### Goal

To establish a Regional Data Centre on behalf of First Nations in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

### Vision

Rooted in our language, culture, and tradition, we steward our own data, we tell our own story, and we shape our own future as a strong L'nu Nation.

### Mission

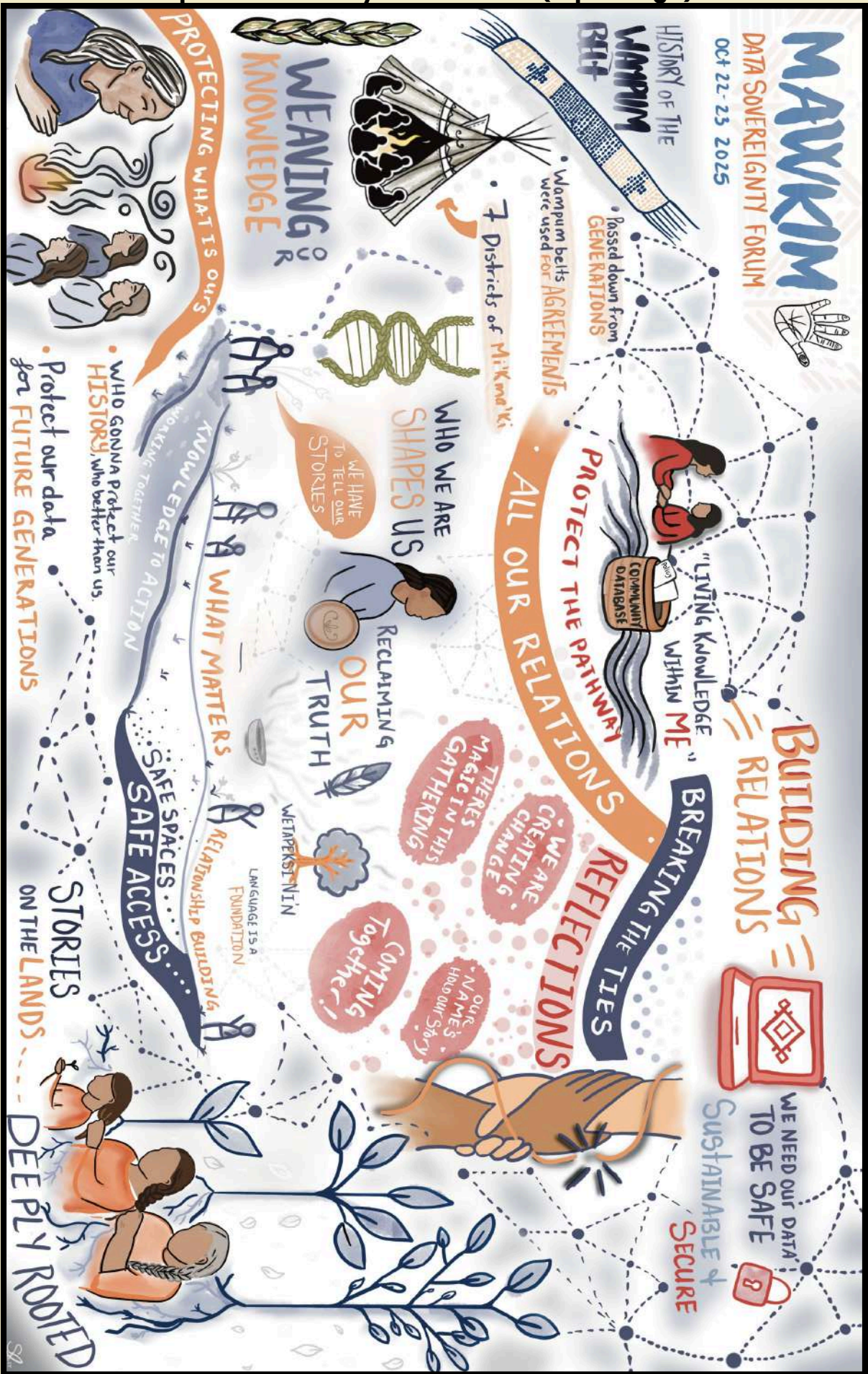
We will establish a Mi'kmaq regional data center that is L'nu'k led and aligned with community priorities and principals through engagement, collaboration and strategic planning.



Kji-Saqmaw  
Norman Sylliboy



Sharon Rudderham  
(Tajikeimik)



# MAWKIM DATA SOVEREIGNTY FORUM (CONTINUED)



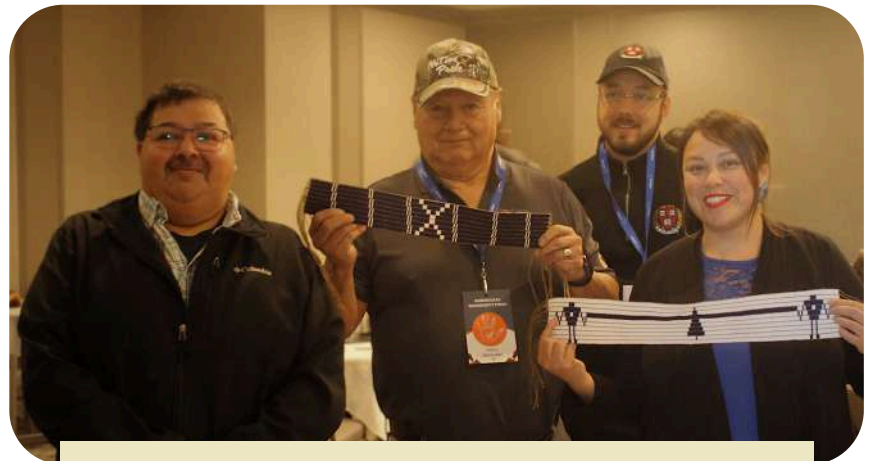
Regional Chief Andrea Paul



Elder Dr. Albert Marshall



Kji-Keptin Antle Denny



Keptin Blair Paul, Putu's Danny Alex,  
Michael Maracle-Polak, Tabitha Morrison



Aaron Prosper

# MAWKIM DATA SOVEREIGNTY FORUM (CONTINUED)



Dr. Marie Battiste, Zabrina Downton,  
Laurianne Sylvester

During the Data Sovereignty Forum, a celebration marked the 25th anniversary of Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (MEW), including recognition of long-standing volunteer reviewers for their contributions to ethical research practice and community-led data sovereignty.



Semise'l Sa'n



Amy Bombay, Billie-Jo Hardy



Scan this code with your phone  
to watch our highlight video!



Kristine Neglia (FNIGC), Camryn Sock

# ONGOING ACTIVITIES

## ENGAGEMENT



Mawkim Team, Feasibility Study Discussion for First Nations Biobanking and Genomic Research Event, February 2025: Kayla Doucette, Zabrina Downton, Robin Thompson, Shenayah Gould, Melissa Webb, Camryn Sock, Muin Ji'j Bernard



Mawkim Team members at the Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty (GIDSov) Conference, Australia, April 2025: Robin Thompson, Camryn Sock



Mawkim Team members at RHS meeting in British Columbia, November 2025: Melissa Webb, Camryn Sock, Erica Johnson



Mawkim Team members at the First Nations Data Sovereignty and Research Conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, February 2025: Zabrina Downton, Camryn Sock



First Nations Labour and Employment Development Survey Conference, July 2023

# FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE

Following a strategic planning session held April 16-17, 2025, led by Storm Gould, UNSM Governance Manager with key stakeholders, the Mawkim Team developed core themes and priorities into a framework of strategic functions.

**These themes and functions support our vision, mission and the team now reports based on this framework.**



## Themes & Priorities:

1. Mi'kmaw Data Sovereignty & Ownership
2. Ethical, Culturally Grounded Research & Protection
3. Informed Decision-Making for Services, Policy & Planning
4. Cultural Preservation & Knowledge Stewardship
5. Capacity Building & Community Empowerment
6. Infrastructure, Security & Sustainability
7. Trust, Transparency & Community Accountability

## Mawkim Guiding Functions / Guiding L'nu'k Data Sovereignty

*Strategic, sovereignty-driven functions that set direction, values, authority, and priorities, ensuring all data activities align with Mi'kmaw governance, cultural integrity, and long-term objectives.*

1. L'nu'k Data Governance / Governing our Living Knowledge
2. L'nu'k Data Cultural Integrity & Continuity / Grounding our Living Knowledge Culturally
3. L'nu'k Data Use & Action / Activating our Living Knowledge for Use
4. L'nu'k Community Data Capability & Empowerment / Building Community Capacity for our Living Knowledge

## Mawkim Supporting Functions / Supporting L'nu'k Data Sovereignty

*Safeguards Mi'kmaw cultural knowledge, values, and protocols to ensure data is respected, preserved, and carried forward appropriately.*

5. Technology & Infrastructure Resilience / Enabling our Living Knowledge
6. Partnerships, Engagement & User Services / Connecting our Living Knowledge
7. Corporate Services & Operations / Sustaining our Living Knowledge Centre

# WHAT'S NEXT

## INCREASE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strengthening engagement is essential to ensure community perspectives are embedded into the Mawkim Data Governance Team. We will increase its outreach with communities to deepen relationships and awareness. The focus will be on understanding how Mi'kmaw data is currently being used, goals for its use, and understanding gaps or barriers that limit its impact.

## CONTINUE WORKING ON DATA STRATEGY

Advancing a clear data strategy remains a priority as we move toward Phase 2 of the Regional Data Centre. The Mawkim Team will continue working closely with committees and stakeholders to align data efforts across all sectors. A key focus will be refining our strategic priorities with an emphasis on grounding them in Mi'kmaw language and values.

## ALL CHIEFS MEETING

As part of planning for Phase 2 of the Regional Data Centre, the Mawkim Data Governance Team will host an All Chiefs Meeting, tentatively scheduled for **June 9 to 10, 2027**. At this gathering we will seek leadership direction, confirm Regional Data Centre priorities, and ensure strategic alignment with community. These efforts will ensure the Regional Data Centre maintains transparency, fosters collaboration, and promotes self-determination.







**WELA' LIEK**

**MAWKIM.ORG**

**OUR DATA. OUR VOICE. OUR FUTURE: L'NU'K LED, RECLAIMING OUR TRUTH.**