

DATA GOVERNANCE

MARCH 2025



The Data Governance team is supported by the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq (UNSM) and administers data related surveys and projects with Mi'kmaq First Nations in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. The Data Governance team has their own webpage under UNSM: Mawkim.com. In Mi'kmaq, the word 'mawkim' means to count and record.



HOST ORGANIZATION: UNION OF NOVA SCOTIA MI'KMAQ

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'koma'q. Established in 1969, the UNSM provides a unified political voice for the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia. The Data Governance team is managed under the Capacity Development department of UNSM.

COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

Nova Scotia First Nations:

- Bear River
- Annapolis Valley
- Glooscap
- Sipekne'katik
- Millbrook
- Pictou Landing
- Paqtnkek
- We'koqma'q
- Membetou
- Potlotek
- Eskasoni
- Wagmatcook

Newfoundland First Nations:

- Miawpukek
- Qalipu

The Data Governance team coordinates national level surveys, including the First Nations Regional Health Survey, the First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey, the First Nations Labour and Employment Development and the new First Nation Regional Social Survey (2026.)

FNIGC and the Data Governance team work together to administer regional data collection & research processes that embody the principles of OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession.

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Our team is provided with funding and support from the national First Nation Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). FNIGC became an independent, incorporated non-profit entity on April 22, 2010. But their history can be traced back to 1996, when the Assembly of First Nations formed a National Steering Committee to design a new national 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.

Mi'kmaq Regional Data Centre

The Mi'kmaq First Nations of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have been working towards the establishment of a Regional Data Centre to administer data collection and research based on Mi'kmaw principles and priorities. These efforts are supported by FNIGC as well as a network of regional bodies across the country. By establishing a Regional Data Centre, Mi'kmaw First Nations communities and governments will have timely access to accurate, reliable, and quality data.

Governance Framework

In the fall of 2023, the Mi'kmaq Chiefs in Nova Scotia authorized the establishment of a Steering Committee to oversee the creation of the Regional Data Centre. The Steering Committee members include: Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, Mi'kmaw Grand Council, Tajikeyimik Health Authority and Newfoundland representatives. The purpose of the Steering Committee is to provide strategic direction for the Data Governance team.

Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty will create the governance capacity First Nations need to engage with other levels of government on an equal footing – in mutually beneficial ways – to help resolve common issues, better and faster. It is essential for these Regional Data Centres to be non-political. It is widely acknowledged that independence is necessary for a statistical agency (or data centre) to have credibility and trust, and to carry out its functions to provide an unhindered flow of reliable, useful, high-quality information to all rights holders, the public and policy makers, as we see fit.

Rebranding and Website Revamp in 2024

This rebranding effort is part of a broader strategy to increase Mawkim's visibility and independence as we administer data-related projects.

The new website will serve as a central hub for our work, offering secure and accessible data tools and resources for the communities and people served by our data center. The IT support and ongoing maintenance will ensure that our operations are scalable and secure, allowing us to adapt to future technological needs.

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Robin Thompson (she/her)

Governance Manager | **Email:** rtompson@unsm.org

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



Muin Ji'j (Bertram) Bernard Jr. (he/they)

Special Projects Coordinator | **Email:** bbernard@unsm.org

Muin Ji'j [moo-in geeg] (Eskasoni First Nation) coordinates various special data-related projects in the Atlantic Region and 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.



Sean Campbell (he/him)

Data Analyst | **Email:** scampbell@unsm.org

Sean (Sipekne'katik First Nation) is responsible for data cleaning and analysis for on-reserve regional data sets, reports, and publications, including the First Nations Regional Health Survey (FNRHS), the First Nations Regional Labor and Employment Survey (FNLEDS), and the First Nations Regional Social Survey (FNRSS).



Shenayah Gould (she/her)

Projects Coordinator | **Email:** sgould@unsm.org

Shenayah [shen-aye-yuh] (Eskasoni First Nation) supports the preparation, deployment, monitoring, and dissemination of surveys administered by the IGDP team, including the **Regional Health Survey (RHS)** and **Regional Social Survey (RSS)**. She also contributes to work with **Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch (MEW)**, ensuring ethical research practices. Dedicated to **cultural connectivity**, Shenayah works closely with communities in need of **data and social research**, helping to strengthen their voices through meaningful and respectful engagement.



Camryn Sock (she/her)

Outreach Coordinator | **Email:** camrynsock@unsm.org

Camryn (Eskasoni First Nation & Elsipogtog First Nation) supports the communications and engagement for the Data governance team. Her role is to foster working relationships with our communities, stakeholders and leadership. Camryn's extensive experience in community development, both nationally and internationally, has fueled her passion for community and leadership. Camryn holds a passion for empowering communities to uphold their rights to Data Sovereignty.

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Melissa Webb (she/her)

Policy Analyst | **Email:** mwebb@unsm.org

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.



Kayla Doucette (she/her)

Administrative Assistant | **Email:** kayladoucette@unsm.org

Kayla serves as the Administrative Assistant for the Governance team. She is from Membertou, N.S. She is a former student of both Saint Mary's University and NSCC. In addition to her professional role, she is a proud mother to a one-year-old daughter and the owner of two cats, Izzie and Callie. During her time in Halifax, Kayla gained experience working as a barista at Starbucks and as an employee at Old Navy. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, visiting the park with her daughter and spending quality time with her family.



Zabrina Downton (she/they)

Program Coordinator | **Email:** zdownton@unsm.org

Zabrina Downton (Wasoqopa'q First Nation) is the Program Coordinator for the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch and, in her role, Zabrina works collaboratively with researchers, REB's, institutions, and communities to ensure that research with, and related to, Mi'kmaw people is ethical, respectful, and community centered.

Zabrina holds a BA Honours in Anthropology/Sociology, as well as a Certificate in Social Research from Cape Breton University. Additionally, Zabrina holds a Master of Arts, Social Justice and Equity Studies degree from Brock University. Zabrina is an educator with several years of experience teaching in the Department of L'nu, Political and Social Studies program at Cape Breton University. Zabrina's background and experiences have led to a strong interest and commitment to advancing ethical and responsible research with Mi'kmaw people.

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MI'KMAW ETHICS WATCH

We are very excited to announce that as Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (MEW) enters its 25th year, with the support of Cape Breton University, MEW has transitioned to the UNSM!

Founded in 2000 by a committee empowered by the Sante' Mawio'mi (Grand Council), MEW has upheld the highest standards in Indigenous research within Mi'kma'ki. MEW has played a pivotal role in safeguarding Mi'kmaw traditional knowledge and people in research.

The name Eskinuapimk, originates from the Grand Council's responsibility for overseeing the Council Wigwam, embodying our core mission: providing careful, thoughtful oversight of research involving Mi'kmaw communities. We are in the process of rethinking the logo with our stakeholders.

By becoming a part of the UNSM, MEW will be able to enhance its reach, expand its impact, and further strengthen the collaborative efforts between Mi'kmaw communities, organizations, and leaders. This move represents a shared vision for the future of Mi'kmaw peoples, grounded in mutual respect, accountability, and cultural preservation.

This milestone also signifies the strength and growing self-governance of Mi'kmaw people in research and data sovereignty. MEW will now be part of the Data Governance team at the UNSM, overseeing the implementation of OCAP principles to ensure that all research with Mi'kmaw communities aligns with the highest ethical standards.

For more information, please email:
MEW@unsm.org

NETWORK OPPORTUNITIES

The Data Governance Team made a trip to Winnipeg, MB for the First Nations Data Sovereignty & Research Conference on January 21 – 23. This experience sparked ideas and future opportunities for the Data Governance team. Our representatives were inspired by the passion and drive from the Data Champion team at The First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba (FNHSSM). We are excited to utilize the knowledge from this opportunity in the future!



(Pictured above: Zabrina Downton & Camryn Sock)

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BIOBANKING & FEASIBILITY STUDY EVENT

On February 19, 2025, the Data Governance team along with our partners FNIGC, University of Toronto, Carleton University and Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, hosted a Feasibility Study Discussion for First Nations Biobanking and Genomic Research. The event brought together community leaders to share their thoughts on- and experiences with- biological health and genomic research as well as biobanking with Mi'kmaq communities.

Discussions focused on understanding, experiences and perspectives on biological health research, with a focus on genomics and biobanking in Mi'kmaq communities and how communities might benefit from this type of research; potential risks related to biological health research, genomics and biobanking and how these can be addressed; and, the types of supports needed to lead, control, own, and govern biological health and/or genomics research and biobanking.

Attendees expressed significant interest in biological health and genomics research as well as biobanking and shared that Mi'kmaq communities could and should benefit from these initiatives. They highlighted that research should be holistic and incorporate humans as well as animals and the broader environment. Attendees also spoke to historical and ongoing breaches of trust with researchers that were rooted in poor communication, lack of reciprocity and an overall lack of benefit to communities.

Attendees recommended that going forward, biological health research should be grounded in Mi'kmaq knowledge and language systems and led by local Indigenous researchers. They recom-

mended that in order to meet these goals there is a need to strengthen existing capacities and invest in training and education for Mi'kmaq community members to better engage in this type of research, as well as a need to update ethical oversight and policy tools at the community-level regarding how this research is implemented in the region.



(Pictured L-R: Kayla, Zabrina, Robin, Shenayah, Melissa, Camryn and Muin.)

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REGIONAL HEALTH SURVEY (RHS) PHASE 4 UPDATE

The Regional Health Survey (RHS) is currently in Phase 4. Surveys are being conducted by trained fieldworkers from the community, with support from the Data Governance team.

Community Progress Update (As of February 11, 2025)

Completed or Nearing Completion

(Among 12 Fieldworkers)

- **We'koqma'q First Nation** – 100% Complete
- **Eskasoni First Nation** – 93%
- **Miawpukek First Nation** – 87%
- **Annapolis Valley First Nation** – 95%
- **Glooscap First Nation** – 70%

Ongoing Data Collection

- **Paqtnekek First Nation** – 45%
- **Potlotek First Nation** – 50%
- **Membertou First Nation** – 47%
- **Millbrook First Nation** – 24%
- **Wagmatcook First Nation** – 8%

Pending Community Engagement

Sipekne'katik First Nation, Wasoqopa'q First Nation, and Bear River First Nation – Awaiting fieldworker applications.

Overall, We'koqma'q has successfully completed its survey efforts, while Eskasoni, Miawpukek, Annapolis Valley, Glooscap, and Membertou are nearing completion. Data collection is still ongoing in several communities, with efforts continuing to engage remaining locations.

REGIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY

National surveys administered by FNIGC, are reviewed and regionalized by the Mi'kmaq Research Advisory Committee (MRAC). The Regional Social Survey (RSS) is at the regionalization stage and is set for collection in 2026. We will be hosting the MRAC meeting sometime in June.

The RSS, focuses on understanding the well-being of First Nations children and caregivers living on reserve. This survey aims to gather data on social and economic indicators that will help shape programs and policies to support Mi'kmaq families.

Why this project is important:

The RSS will provide valuable data on the social determinants of health for children and caregivers, helping us understand and address the challenges faced by Mi'kmaq families.

The data collected will support the development of programs and services that are tailored to the needs of our region, ensuring a better future for Mi'kmaq communities.