

MAWKIM



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
- Paqtneke
- We'koqma'q
- Membertou
- 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).

First Nation Information Governance Centre 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.



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'kmaq 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'kmaq 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'kmaq Grand Council, Tajiikimik 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 2025

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.

THE TEAM



Robin Thompson (she/her)

Governance Manager | Email: rthompson@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.



Shenayah Gould (she/her)

Projects Coordinator | Email: sgould@unsm.org

Shenayah [shen-aye-yuh] (Eskasoni L'nue'kati) supports the preparation, deployment, monitoring, and dissemination of FNIGC surveys administered by the team, including the Regional Health Survey (RHS) and Regional Social Survey (RSS). 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.



Susy Denny (she/her)

Governance Coordinator | Email: susydenny@unsm.org

Susy (Eskasoni L'nue'kati) supports the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch (MEW), the Regional Health Survey (RHS), as well as various other projects within the team. Prior to joining the Data Governance team, Susy worked with the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq's Governance Team on special projects – specifically with the Mi'kmaq Grand Council on inherent governance projects. She graduated from Cape Breton University in 2019 from the Bachelor of Arts program. Susy is passionate about linguistics, empowering language and inherent governance.



Camryn Sock (she/her)

Outreach Coordinator | Email: camrynsock@unsm.org

Camryn (Eskasoni L'nue'kati & 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.



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.



Erica Johnson (she/her)

Administrative Assistant | Email: ericajohnson@unsm.org

Erica Johnson is 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 Data Governance 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.

Outside of work, Erica is actively involved in the local equestrian community. She shows horses and volunteers her time at local horse shows, combining her love for animals with a strong sense of community and teamwork.



Muin Ji'j Bernard (he/they)

Special Projects Coordinator | Email: bbernard@unsm.org

Muin Ji'j [moo-in geeg] (Eskasoni L'nue'kati) 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.

Muin Ji'j also serves on the Assembly of First Nations' National 2SLGBTQ+ Council. The National 2SLGBTQ+ Council provide advice and guidance on matters relating to First Nations 2SLGBTQ+ people to the National Chief, Executive Committee, and First Nations in the Assembly.



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.

MI'KMAW ETHICS WATCH (MEW)

In February 2025, Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch (MEW) officially transitioned to the Data Governance team at UNSM, coinciding with its 25th anniversary. Founded in 2000 by a committee empowered by the Sante' Mawio'mi (Grand Council), MEW has served as the cornerstone of ethical oversight in research involving Mi'kmaw people. MEW's integration into UNSM enhances its reach, supports the development of new ethical frameworks, and strengthens collaborative relationships between communities, institutions, and leaders.

MEW continues to rely on the invaluable contributions of community members who volunteer their time and expertise to serve as reviewers and advisors. Recruitment efforts are currently focused on expanding representation in the fields of environmental science, forestry, fisheries, and health. MEW will be undergoing an operational review and rebrand in the upcoming months.



MEW Update July 2025

- 14 volunteer reviewers
- 42 applications so far this year
 - 7 amendment applications
 - 2 exemption applications
 - 33 full applications
- 23 approved applications

For more information, please email:

MEW@unsm.org

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

The Data Governance Team attended the Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty (GIDSov2025) conference held in Canberra, Australia on April 1-3, 2025. Our team was part of the delegation from FNIGC.

Over 300 Indigenous Peoples from around the globe were in attendance to reflect on successes and map future pathways to advance Indigenous Data Sovereignty. This Conference was held a decade after the first one.

The event spanned three days, with discussions on policy, regulation, education, and the future of Indigenous data governance. The team had the opportunity to expand their network with other regional staff and data sovereignty champions across the country and around the globe. We are excited to utilize the knowledge from this opportunity in the future!



(Pictured above: some of the FNIGC regional team members – including Robin and Camryn)

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Data Governance team held a Strategic Planning Session on April 16–17, 2025, with members of the Steering Committee of the Mi'kmaw Regional Data Centre project, Mi'kmaq Research Advisory Committee (MRAC) and invited special guests.

The two-day session focused on the foundational thinking behind the development of the anticipated Mi'kmaw Regional Data Centre grounded in sovereignty, cultural protection, and ethical data practices. Through group exercises, visioning, and dialogue, participants identified critical needs and priorities.

Participants emphasized that the centre must be led by Mi'kmaq people, reflect L'nu values, and serve as a tool for long-term self-determination. Presentations from FNIGC and the team highlighted the importance of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®) principles, sustainable governance, and proactive planning to ensure the centre's success.

A report was developed to outline specific action items for each priority area, emphasized areas such as creating legal frameworks for data governance, training community-based data analysts, and developing secure infrastructure. This Strategic Planning work will continue in the fall.

INDIGENOUS ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

This August, our own **Muin Ji'j Bernard**, Special Projects Coordinator with the Data Governance team, will be featured at the upcoming Wi'kipaltimk Mawio'mi in Sydney, an event recognizing the achievements of Mi'kmaq alumni making impactful contributions to their communities. Congratulations Muin!



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.

The current overall project completion is 75% across all actively surveyed communities. Our region is among the highest in Canada for RHS participation. The team is working towards a final completion target of 80 – 85% which we hope to achieve by the end of August 2025.

Community Progress Update, as of July 10, 2025

Completed or Nearing Completion:

- We'koqma'q First Nation – **100%**
- Wagmatcook First Nation – **100%**
- Annapolis Valley First Nation – **100%**
- Eskasoni First Nation – **93%**
- Miawpukek First Nation – **90%**
- Glooscap First Nation – **70%**

Ongoing Data Collection:

- Sipekne'katik – **60%**
- Potlotek First Nation – **50%**
- Wasoqopa'q – **50%**
- Membertou First Nation – **47%**
- Paqtnkek First Nation – **45%**
- Millbrook First Nation – **40%**
- Pictou Landing – **39%**
- Bear River – **20%**

We continue to work closely with local fieldworkers, community leadership, Health Directors, and health centres to ensure that the data collection process is respectful, inclusive, and reflective of community needs and values.

REGIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY (RSS)

The Regional Social Survey (RSS) focuses on understanding the well-being of First Nation's 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. Survey collection is planned to commence in 2026.

National surveys administered by FNIGC, are reviewed and regionalized by the Mi'kmaq Research Advisory Committee (MRAC). We hosted an MRAC meeting on June 11, 2025, to regionalize the survey questions. This is the third time, the MRAC has reviewed the questions to ensure that they will reflect Mi'kmaq values.

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.

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

In collaboration with Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, University of Toronto and Carleton University, the Data Governance team hosted a Feasibility Study Discussion for First Nations Biobanking and Genomic Research on February 19, 2025. This was a follow-up event to the three-day training session hosted in Pictou Landing First Nation on May 24-26th, 2024.

The February event provided a platform to discuss and explore the topic of strengthening the capacity of First Nations to lead, control, own, and govern biological samples and genomic research in alignment with their interests and principles of data sovereignty and OCAP. A report was recently compiled and shared with the participants for their feedback.

The final stage of this initiative will include a community cultural activity. The team is currently working with leadership and community members in Pictou Landing First Nation to plan a basket-making workshop, scheduled for Fall 2025.

MI'KMAQ DATA LITERACY TRAINING PROGRAM

The Data Governance team has received funding to develop a data literacy training program for our Mi'kmaq communities. This program will develop data literacy training to support understanding data through the development of culturally relevant data training, tools, programs, and related resources.

Key objectives of the data literacy training:

- Development and distribution of culturally relevant data literacy training tools tailored to the data needs of the Mi'kmaq communities;
- Support the IT infrastructure necessary to be responsive to data literacy needs; and
- Explore relationships with relevant data authorities to facilitate access to and use of data

On June 16, 2025, the team participated in the National Network for First Nations Data Training Initiatives. This meeting brought together regional partners working on similar initiatives. Participating regions shared updates, including online training for senior leadership, community workshops, and the integration of data literacy training into health policy development.

MAWKIM DATA SOVEREIGNTY FORUM

The Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq and Data Governance/Mawkim team is hosting the Mawkim Data Sovereignty Forum on **October 22 – 23, 2025** at Delta Dartmouth, Halifax. The forum goal is to provide data sovereignty information for First Nations communities to reclaim control over their data and knowledge. This environment creates a space for First Nations communities, researchers, leadership, and non-First Nations allies to discuss First Nation research and data sovereignty. The forum will also include the official announcement of **Mawkim**; the regional data centre which is in development to serve the Mi'kmaq communities within Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Target Audience:

- **First Nations community members** (Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Youth, Health Directors, and community members)
- **First Nations researchers and academics** (Research professionals and students)
- **First Nations and non-First Nations government** (Regional Chiefs, Chiefs & Councils, and non-First Nations government officials that involve in decision-making and policy development)
- **Non-First nations researchers and academics** (Research professionals, students, and universities, that are seeking to learn about Indigenous Research Methodologies and Data Sovereignty)
- **Professionals from Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations**

The forum will feature workshops, panels, and presentations led by Knowledge Keepers, researchers, community members, leadership, and professionals, all focused on advancing First Nations data sovereignty and research. Discussions will explore pathways to strengthen community capacity and develop strategies to assert data sovereignty.

UNSM SUMMER SCHEDULE

The Data Governance Team observes the UNSM summer schedule, we are operating under a condensed work week, with Fridays off until September 5, 2025. The UNSM offices will also be on summer shut down from July 24th to August 13th. Some members of the team will be taking vacation before and after these dates.

To reach any member of our team, please email; Data@UNSM.org. We look forward to hearing from you! Happy Summer 2025

