



First Nations Leadership Town Hall: Upcoming First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting Summary Report



May 19, 2026



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Introduction

In December, Prime Minister Mark Carney committed to Chiefs during the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Special Chiefs Assembly that he would convene a First Ministers Meeting in 2026 to bring together First Nations leadership with the Prime Minister and the Premiers. The Prime Minister also committed that First Nations would determine the agenda.

This commitment is the result of sustained advocacy by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) with the Prime Minister and including the National Chief's meeting with Premiers in summer 2025.

There are many compelling reasons for First Nations and First Ministers to engage at this time of great change and upheaval in Canada's international trade relationships and global economic pressures. Provincial, territorial and federal governments have been making decisions and passing legislation respecting major project regulation and environmental protection without meeting their constitutional and international legal obligations to First Nations.

In addition, there are many other topics suitable to a high-level multilateral process like a FMM such as advancing economic reconciliation, implementation of the Calls to Action of the TRC and implementation of the MMIWG Inquiry's Call to Justice.

In all these matters, the Crown's legal duties to respect First Nations legal rights and jurisdiction cannot be ignored.

Since the announcement, the AFN has launched opportunities for First Nations leadership to engage with each other to discuss key priorities and strategies for this meeting through national forums, Chiefs Committees, AFN Councils, regional gatherings, and a series of Virtual Town Halls. These meetings provide opportunities for First Nations leadership to work with each other to shape a First Nations-led agenda and to strategize on the First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting (FNFMM).

On May 19, 2026, the AFN convened the third Virtual Town Hall with First Nations leadership in this series. Building on discussions held on March 11 and April 15, this session focused on a summary of the process to date, the potential outcomes of a FNFMM, regional discussions and representation, ceremony and protocols, and approaches to structuring discussions at the 2026 AFN Annual General Assembly.

This report summarizes the key themes, insights, and considerations raised during this Virtual Town Hall.

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Virtual Town Hall – Meeting Purpose

The purpose of the May 19 Virtual Town Hall was to continue discussions among First Nations leadership in preparation for a potential First Nations–First Ministers' Meeting in Fall 2026.

The objectives of the session were to:

- Provide an update on planning and discussion activities related to the FNFMM;
- Discuss lessons learned from previous First Ministers' Meetings and potential outcomes for a future FNFMM;
- Explore approaches to regional discussions and representation;
- Discuss the role of ceremony, protocols, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers throughout the process;
- Consider options for structuring discussions on the FNFMM at the 2026 AFN Annual General Assembly; and
- Gather feedback from leadership to inform agenda development, representation considerations, and future meetings to prepare for the FMM.



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Opening Remarks from National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak welcomed participants and acknowledged the collective advocacy efforts that secured a commitment from the Prime Minister to convene a First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting (FNFMM), the first such meeting since the Kelowna Accord more than twenty years ago.

She emphasized that the FNFMM represents a significant opportunity for First Nations to engage directly with the Prime Minister and Premiers on matters of critical importance to First Nations and noted that First Nations have largely been excluded from, or afforded only limited participation in, First Ministers' Meetings despite their unique status as treaty, inherent and Section 35 rights holders.

The National Chief highlighted a growing consensus among First Nations leadership that the FNFMM should not be a one-time event, that progress and concrete outcomes require an ongoing process of meetings between First Nations leadership and First Ministers. She stressed that meaningful progress on issues of jurisdiction, responsibility, and cooperation will require sustained political commitment and regular dialogue.

The National Chief expressed concern about legislation and major projects advancing without adequate consultation and contrary to the substantive and procedural rights of First Nations under Treaty, Canada's Constitution, and international law. She also noted broader political developments occurring across Canada and emphasized the importance of protecting Treaty rights, the right to self-determination, and the status of First Nations as nations and peoples with the right to determine their own futures.

The National Chief highlighted recent court victories achieved by Treaty First Nations in Alberta, noting that these decisions reaffirm the importance of Treaty and constitutional rights and underscore the role of First Nations in shaping the future of Canada. She emphasized that First Nations will continue to assert their place in decisions affecting their rights and interests and will not be ignored or sidelined.

The National Chief provided an update on ongoing preparations for the FNFMM:

- the AFN continues to engage federal officials and encouraged leadership to collaborate with their respective with provincial and territorial governments
- the AFN is continuing to press for confirmation of a date and location for the meeting and that the Fall 2026 is suggested to allow time for preparation by First Nations.
- has submitted a funding request to support development of First Nations-led agenda and process.

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She noted that the meeting is being proposed for The AFN continues to gather perspectives through Virtual Town Halls, national forums, Chiefs Committees, AFN Councils, and attendance at regional meetings to facilitate discussion, raise awareness, and collect feedback on priorities for the FNFMM.

The National Chief emphasized that extensive preparation will be essential to the success of the meeting. She noted that leadership discussions to date have consistently highlighted that the most important work occurs before the meeting itself through coordinated planning, outreach, relationship-building, and strategic alignment. She stressed the importance of identifying a focused set of priorities to guide discussions and ensuring that any future commitments are supported by clear outcomes, measurable targets, transparent reporting mechanisms, and defined implementation road maps.

Finally, the National Chief highlighted the importance of the upcoming AFN Annual General Assembly as a key milestone in preparations for the FNFMM. She noted that preparations for the meeting will feature prominently at the Assembly, providing opportunities for regional caucuses and plenary discussions to gather leadership feedback, refine priorities, develop a plan, and seek a clear mandate to advance a First Nations-led approach to the meeting.

Summary of Process to Date

A [presentation](#) was provided outlining previous meetings undertaken in preparation for a potential First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting.

The AFN has committed to a series of Virtual Town Halls leading up to the Annual General Assembly, supported by ongoing discussions at AFN national forums, Chiefs Committees, AFN Councils, and regional assemblies.

The presentation reviewed key themes emerging from previous meetings including:

- the importance of establishing an ongoing dialogue between First Nations and First Ministers
- maintaining clarity and unity around a focused agenda;
- ensuring discussions address issues that cannot be effectively resolved through other forums
- grounding economic reconciliation measures in respect of First Nations rights, consent, equity, and benefit sharing;
- incorporating ceremony throughout the process.

It was also noted that the upcoming Annual General Assembly will serve as a key venue for identifying priorities, discussing representation, and advancing planning for the FNFMM.



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Panel Presentations and Discussion

A [presentation slide show](#) was used to support the meeting and can be found [here](#) on AFN's website.

The panel featured presentations from Gina Wilson (Kitigan Zibi Anishnaabeg), Chief Jeff Copenace (Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation), and Harold Tarbell (Mohawk of Akwesasne). Each panelist shared insights from their experience with First Ministers' Meetings, federal, provincial, and territorial processes, and First Nations–Crown interactions.

The following is a summary of the four topics presented for discussion and leadership feedback:

1. Overview of FMMs and Potential Outcomes

Discussion focused on the nature of First Ministers' Meetings as high-level political forums that require extensive preparation, relationship-building, strategic clarity, and sustained follow-up.

Participants heard that successful outcomes depend on significant work occurring before the meeting itself, including agenda development, relationship-building with government leaders, coordination among First Nations leadership, and preparation of implementation strategies.

Discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on a limited number of achievable priorities and that a focused agenda increases the likelihood of concrete commitments and meaningful outcomes.

The importance of identifying allies and champions among provincial and territorial governments was also discussed, along with the value of side agreements and complementary processes that can advance progress beyond the main meeting itself.

Participants stressed that implementation planning will be critical. Any commitments resulting from an FNFMM should be accompanied by accountability mechanisms, timelines, follow-up processes, and ongoing structures to support implementation.

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2. Foundation in Ceremony and Respect for Protocols

Discussion highlighted the importance of grounding the FNFMM process in First Nations cultures, protocols, and ceremonies.

Participants emphasized the need to provide sufficient time and space for Elders and Knowledge Keepers to guide the process and contribute their advice and direction. It was noted that ceremony should not be viewed as an add-on but rather as an integral component of the process from planning through implementation.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of considering logistical and structural elements that support meaningful incorporation of ceremony and culture, including meeting location, room configuration, availability of ceremonial spaces, and opportunities for cultural learning and exchange.

Participants discussed the potential value of establishing an oversight or planning structure that includes Elders and Knowledge Keepers and noted that supportive relationships with provincial and territorial leaders could help advance these considerations.

3. Regional Discussions and Representation

Participants discussed approaches to balancing shared national priorities with regional diversity and distinctions among First Nations.

The discussion highlighted principles contained within the AFN Charter, including respect for the sovereignty of First Nations and recognition of diverse political realities and priorities.

Participants emphasized that one important objective of the FNFMM should be advancing the exercise of First Nations rights, responsibilities, and authorities. Regional discussions were viewed as critical to identifying priorities and informing representation decisions.

Discussion also focused on the need to identify delegates and spokespersons well in advance of the meeting to allow time for preparation and coordination. Participants noted the importance of developing strategies that maximize opportunities for participation and influence, including exploring various avenues for interactions with provincial and territorial delegations.

Consideration was also given to how meeting structures, speaking opportunities, room configuration, and overall logistics can influence discussions and outcomes.



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4. Structuring Discussions at the 2026 Annual General Assembly

Suggestions included creating opportunities for focused discussions within regional caucuses, establishing dedicated information sessions related to FNFMM planning, and exploring approaches that support consensus-building among leadership.

Discussion also addressed the potential development of a resolution related to the FNFMM. Participants suggested that such a resolution could identify key priorities, outline desired strategic outcomes, provide direction to a future delegation, and establish expectations regarding post-meeting processes and accountability mechanisms.

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that identified priorities do not diminish the importance of other issues facing First Nations and noted that existing regional and treaty-related processes should be considered when developing approaches to both pre- and post-FNFMM discussions.

Strategic Leadership Discussion

In addition to feedback about the presented topics, further leadership discussed potential priorities, desired outcomes, and approaches to preparing for a successful FNFMM. Leadership emphasized the importance of clearly defining what success would look like and ensuring that any commitments resulting from the meeting are supported by concrete implementation mechanisms, timelines, and accountability measures.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on First Nations rights, Treaty relationships, and constitutional issues. Participants expressed both interest and some caution on the inclusion of Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* as a potential agenda item. While many agreed that First Nations rights should provide the foundation for discussions, some cautioned that constitutional issues may be too broad to produce tangible outcomes within the scope of a single meeting. Participants also noted that the current political environment may present challenges to advancing discussions related to First Nations rights and jurisdiction.

Participants discussed the need to move beyond program-based approaches and toward discussions focused on the exercise of First Nations rights, title, jurisdiction, and decision-making authority. Several participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that First Nations are able to benefit from their lands and resources and identified ongoing challenges related to housing, infrastructure, safe drinking water, health services, language revitalization, and economic participation. Concerns were also raised regarding environmental impacts and the accelerating pace of major project development without adequate consideration of First Nations rights and interests.

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Discussion highlighted the importance of honouring Treaty relationships and ensuring that governments uphold their obligations and fiduciary responsibilities. Participants stressed the need for meaningful outcomes that extend beyond political commitments and include mechanisms for reciprocal accountability, regular reporting, and ongoing discussions. Suggestions included establishing working groups, identifying clear implementation road maps, developing communiqués or joint action statements, and ensuring that post-meeting processes are connected to existing federal-provincial-territorial and regional mechanisms.

Participants also discussed the importance of understanding the broader political and intergovernmental environment in advance of the meeting. This included identifying key decision-makers, understanding relationships between First Nations and provincial and territorial governments, and assessing how those relationships may influence discussions and outcomes. Several participants noted the need to determine representation, participation, and speaking roles well in advance of the meeting and to ensure that opportunities exist for a broad range of First Nations voices to contribute.

The discussion reinforced the importance of preparation and strategic coordination. Participants noted that governments will devote significant resources to preparing for the meeting and emphasized the need for First Nations leadership to organize effectively, develop consensus around key priorities, and present clear and coordinated messages. The importance of building solidarity while respecting regional diversity and different approaches to exercising sovereignty was repeatedly emphasized.

Participants also highlighted the importance of communications and public engagement. Several noted the need for a coordinated communications strategy that helps convey First Nations priorities to governments and the broader Canadian public while countering misconceptions regarding First Nations rights, title, and jurisdiction. The value of youth participation, Elders' guidance, and strategic use of formal and informal discussion opportunities before and during the meeting was also discussed.

Overall, the discussion reflected a strong desire to ensure that the First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting is focused, outcomes-oriented, grounded in First Nations rights and Treaty relationships, and supported by clear implementation, accountability, and follow-up mechanisms capable of producing lasting results.



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Key Takeaways

Key themes emerging from the discussion included:

- A strong desire for the FNFMM to establish an ongoing process of First Nations FMMs in order to ensure momentum and progress
- The importance of incorporating ceremony, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural protocols throughout the process
- Recognition that First Nations rights, jurisdiction, and Treaty relationships should provide the foundation for discussions
- The importance of maintaining a focused agenda supported by a limited number of clearly defined priorities
- The need for extensive preparation, relationship-building, strategic coordination, and implementation planning
- The importance of a coordinated communications strategy and strong public messaging
- The need to establish clear outcomes, timelines, accountability measures, and reporting mechanisms
- The importance of developing consensus while respecting regional diversity and different approaches to exercising sovereignty
- Areas of interest raised included First Nations rights, title and jurisdiction, honouring Treaties, addressing issues related to lands, resources, infrastructure, housing, health, language revitalization, safe drinking water, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity

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Next Steps

- The AFN will continue offering opportunities for leadership to connect with one another in advance of \ the First Nations–First Ministers' Meeting through national forums, Chiefs Committees, AFN Councils, regional gatherings, and future Virtual Town Halls.
- Feedback gathered will continue to inform agenda development, representation considerations, and discussions with federal, provincial, and territorial governments regarding the timing, location, structure, and desired outcomes of a future First Nations–First Ministers' Meeting.
- The Annual General Assembly will serve as a key opportunity for regional caucuses and plenary discussions focused on identifying priorities, discussing representation, and developing a clear mandate for a First Nations-led approach to the FNFMM.



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