



# Spirit Speakers

Our Languages, Our Future

October 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> 2020

Spirit Speakers: Youth Language Revitalization Conference

## RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

On October 17 and 18, 2020, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) hosted a virtual forum with First Nations youth from across the country to talk about First Nations language revitalization. The forum, titled “Spirit Speakers: Our Languages, Our Future” provided a space for youth to connect and discuss their experiences with speaking, learning, and teaching their language.

Throughout the course of discussions with youth, several valuable recommendations emerged on how to revitalize Indigenous languages. These recommendations apply to multiple levels of government, including First nations governments. For ease of review, these recommendations have been grouped into five broad categories: Funding and Infrastructure; Lifelong Learning; Mainstream Media Representation; Communication and Partnerships; Supports for Different Styles of Teaching/Learning/Accessibility; and Healing.

A total of 13 recommendations have been summarized under these five categories. It should be noted that there is no prioritization for these recommendations, and some recommendations may be more applicable to certain regions than others, depending on the level of existing resources and community capacities. These recommendations also include specific action and implementation ideas, as presented by the youth.

### Funding and Infrastructure



**1. Ensure teacher education, training, and compensation are properly resourced and equitable with other teaching positions. For example:**

- Ensure Elders receive adequate compensation for their work.
- Create full-time language teacher positions.
- Increase the amount of paid youth positions for language-based employment.



**2. Provide reliable, consistent, and flexible funding that allows First Nations and other First Nations led languages initiatives to make their own spending decisions. For example:**

- Dedicate a budget for First Nations student scholarships and bursaries for language revitalization. Provide funding for non-First Nations learners to engage in and support language revitalization.
- Provide resources for language camps and land-based learning.
- Provide funding to help ensure all basic needs of learners are met, including child-care needs.
- Provide funding for complementary activities and skills such as grant writing and grass roots programming.





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### 3. Build infrastructure such as schools and youth centres on and off reserve, including in urban areas, so there is a dedicated space to learn languages.

- Create opportunities for youth to be employed/host learning activities and workshops for their peers and community members.

### Lifelong Learning



### 4. Start programs in early childhood and offer them consistently throughout all stages of life, using a womb to grave approach.

- Make it mandatory to learn an Indigenous language in school where possible.
- Develop language nests.
- Create programs focused specifically on different life/family stages (family camp, single learning, couples' immersion, Two-Spirit retreats).



### 5. Develop programs that link intergenerational learning.

- Create Elder-youth mentorship programs, where Elders would provide help in accessing resources and opportunities.
- Provide support for "Silent Speakers" – pair up silent speaker Elders with other community or family members who can speak the language.

### Mainstream Media Representation, Communication and Partnerships



### 6. Work to increase the presence of First Nations languages in the 'mainstream culture' and social media.

- Create First Nations language-based channels such as newsletters, websites, board games, books, signs, land acknowledgements, among others. For languages that have a written orthography, create publications in those languages (children's books, comics, dictionaries, memes, etc.).
- Create programs such as a "Tik Tok Language Competition", telling stories in First Nations languages over Facebook live and similar mediums.



### 7. Recognize First Nations languages as official languages across Canada, like in the Northwest Territories or even nationally.



### 8. Develop partnerships with universities and colleges.

- Provide accreditation for First Nations languages in colleges and universities.





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## 9. Maintain connections between youth across the country.

- Establish Youth Councils and 'Youth Ambassadors' across First Nations that can provide a support system for networking and learning.
- Host additional youth language revitalization meetings and large group forums, like this event.

## Supports for Different Styles of Teaching/Learning/Accessibility



## 10. Provide funding for experiential learning programs that combine western and traditional knowledge and incorporate activities and body movements into learning.

- Have programs that allow for activities such as berry-picking, drum-making, painting, medicinal gathering while immersed in language.
- Incorporate 'total physical response' (TPR) learning into the system.
- Create programs that incorporate art and culture with language learning, similar to artist-in-residency programs.
- Have language teachers include American Sign Language (ASL) in their teachings simultaneously while speaking.



## 11. Make versatile technology available for all learners.

- Ensure there are accessible resources for people with disabilities to be able to access language courses.
- Offer self-paced learning options, both online and in-person.
- Develop programs that will allow off-reserve members to engage in language learning, through remote platforms and other resources.
- Utilize innovative technologies, such as 'leapfrog tablet', apps, online games, websites like Kahoot and Quizlet, 'Native Duolingo'.

## Healing:



## 12. Integrate language into healing programs and initiatives, such as those developed for residential school survivors, related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, among others. Where possible, use traditional healing and medicines.



## 13. Build more cultural treatment centres for youth that include rebuilding their connection to culture and language.

