



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS BULLETIN June 2018

Update on the Indigenous Languages Initiative and First Nations, Inuit and Métis Languages Act

*The Assembly of First Nations issues regular updates on work underway at the national office.
More information can be found at www.afn.ca*

Update on the Initiative to Create a First Nations, Inuit and Métis Languages Act

First Nations languages are the original languages of this land, central to First Nations culture, ceremony, self-determination, health, governance and identity. Language is life. First Nations have worked continuously to preserve and promote their languages, and the enormous efforts of Elders, language speakers and experts must be acknowledged. Canada has a role to play - not in leading this work but supporting First Nations-driven initiatives and activities. First Nations will create the change.

On June 15, 2017, after much advocacy and effort by First Nations, the Government of Canada through the Minister of Culture and Heritage formally announced it would work to co-develop an Indigenous Languages Act with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and Métis Council (MNC). This proposed legislation is aimed at revitalizing, preserving, protecting and maintaining Indigenous languages.

To ensure First Nations inform the work, the AFN held First Nations engagement sessions across the country from June to October, 2017. More than 500 Elders, leaders, speakers, Indigenous scholars and language experts participated. The report is available on the AFN website in the Languages section.

In follow-up, Chiefs-in-Assembly passed *Resolution #77/2017, Support for Continued Work on the Indigenous Languages Act*, at the AFN December 2017 Special Chiefs Assembly. This provides further support and direction. Based on the AFN's Engagement Sessions, the resolution provides a set of 11 Principles to guide co-development, summarized as follows:

- Affirm Indigenous language rights under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and acknowledgement of the history and evolution of those languages and their significance to Indigenous peoples' culture and identity – this acknowledges the centrality of languages to First Nations peoples; the government's past and ongoing harms to Indigenous languages and the need for healing and reconciliation as an objective of the legislation; and that First Nations languages are inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights.

- Ensure that the relevant articles related to language and culture in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) are affirmed in the proposed legislation, in reflection of the federal government's commitment to implementing the UN Declaration.
- Identify appropriate institutional infrastructure and mechanisms related to implementation of the legislation – this supports language learners everywhere and ensures First Nations can establish and maintain their own First Nations-controlled systems. It provides for consideration of mechanisms and institutions required to revitalize, protect, promote, and preserve First Nations languages.
- Ensure that resources are committed and invested by the federal government in the form of adequate, predictable, sustainable long-term funding.

More detail is available on the AFN website under Issues Updates: First Nations Languages, May 2018.

Intensive Engagement Sessions

The Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) is launching their intensive engagement sessions on June 18, 2018, and will be visiting locations across Canada throughout the summer. The British Columbia engagement sessions will be held in Vancouver on June 27, 2018 at the Radisson Vancouver Airport, 8181 Cambie Rd, in Kamloops on June 29, 2018 at the Holiday Inn & Suites, 675 Tranquille Road, in Nanaimo, BC on July 4, 2018 at the Coast Bastion Hotel, 11 Bastion Street, and in Prince George, BC on July 6, 2018 at the Sandman Signature Prince George Hotel, 2990 Recplace Dr.

The AFN will be hosting preparatory information sessions prior to DCH engagement sessions to update participants on the background and process. The AFN pre-meeting in Vancouver will be June 26, 2018, in Kamloops on June 28, 2018, in Nanaimo on July 3, 2018 and in Prince George on July 5, 2018.

These open intensive engagement sessions will be conducted through direct/in-person engagement – “workout” type sessions convened with the First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples. The DCH will be facilitating these sessions through the review of a Discussion Guide focusing on six questions intended to build on the pre-engagement sessions held in 2017. It is planned that this round of DCH engagement will also include Indigenous rights holders that have signed modern Treaties, comprehensive land claims and/or self-government agreements.

The most up-to-date information can be found on their webpage at the following link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/indigenous-languages-legislation.html>

The DCH is also conducting indirect engagement over the course of summer 2018 through online questions, written comments/submissions, and electronic comments and submissions. Comments can be submitted directly via the links above.