



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS BULLETIN

December 18, 2020

Languages and Culture Sector Update

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) issues regular updates on work underway at the national office. More information is available at www.afn.ca.

SUMMARY:

- The Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) completed consultations with First Nations about the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act*. The consultations focused on the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages (OCIL), and the development of an Indigenous Languages Funding Model (ILFM).
- In October 2020, the AFN's Languages and Culture Sector held a virtual national gathering for youth called "Spirit Speakers: Our Languages, Our Future."
- The AFN successfully advocated for First Nations inclusion in decision-making about the funding of language proposals and the OCIL appointment process.
- The Notice of Opportunity for the OCIL Commissioner and Director positions has been posted on the Governor in Council appointments webpage.

Department of Canadian Heritage Consultations on the Implementation of the Act

The AFN continues to work collaboratively with DCH, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and the Métis National Council (MNC) on the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act*, which passed in June 2019. The Act requires the Minister of DCH to consult on certain issues, including:

- meeting the objective of providing adequate, sustainable, and long-term funding, which is being discussed in the context of developing the new ILFM; and
- appointing a Commissioner and up to three Directors for the OCIL.

The Government of Canada's consultations with Indigenous Peoples began in March 2020 but were interrupted by health concerns arising from COVID-19. Regional consultations resumed by videoconference on September 28, 2020 and will be concluded in December 2020. The consultations are being facilitated by a Discussion Guide, which includes questions about the OCIL and the provision of adequate, sustainable, and long-term funding (including the development of an ILFM). Common comments noted to date on the OCIL and the ILFM include:

- The Commissioner and Directors should be Indigenous, should speak (or be learning) an Indigenous language, and should have experience working in language revitalization.
- The OCIL should have regional offices or representatives.
- The Office should conduct surveys to develop an improved understanding of the status of Indigenous languages across Canada and should invest in building capacity.
- Funding for Indigenous languages should be long term, sustainable and easy to access.
- Funding should flow directly to First Nations.
- First Nations-led initiatives and organizations should be supported and funded.
- All types of programs for language revitalization, from womb to grave, should be funded.
- Immersion programs should be funded both inside and outside the education system.
- Success can be measured by the growth over time in numbers of fluent speakers.

Additional submissions and comments can be sent to DCH by mail or electronically until mid-December 2020. An online questionnaire on the consultation topics was also still available at the time that this update was prepared. For more information, visit: <https://bit.ly/3qRQnFs>.

Notice of Opportunity for the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages

The AFN continues to work collaboratively with DCH, ITK, and MNC on the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act* at the Joint Implementation Steering Committee. The AFN has advocated for the timely appointment of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. The Notice of Opportunity for the Commissioner and Director positions has been posted on the Governor in Council appointments webpage. For more information, visit: <https://bit.ly/37TlKqD>.

First Nations Inclusion in Decision Making

The AFN advocated for First Nations inclusion in formal decision-making processes concerning language revitalization, including processes for funding and the appointment of the Commissioner and Directors of OCIL. Achievements to date include:

- the establishment, in summer 2020, of First Nations Review Committees that are led by First Nations persons, for the assessment of funding applications to the Indigenous Languages Component of DCH's Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program; and
- the inclusion of First Nations representation on the federal Selection Committee for the appointment of the Indigenous Languages Commissioner and Directors.

Spirit Speakers: Our Languages, Our Future

The Sector planned to hold an in-person national youth gathering in Ottawa in March 2020. However, the event had to be postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The gathering, called "Spirit Speakers: Our Languages, Our Future," was held via Zoom on October 17-18, 2020. A total of 22 youth, aged 14-24 from across Canada, participated.

The event provided a space for youth to connect and discuss their experiences with their languages. Goals, challenges, and success stories were shared, and recommendations were put forward. The youth came up with a broad range of language revitalization recommendations related to funding, infrastructure, lifelong learning, representation in mainstream media, partnerships and communications, connections with Elders, off-reserve supports, and healing.

At the end of the gathering, the youth presented their recommendations to the Director General of DCH's Indigenous Languages Branch. The Director General was enthusiastic to receive the final report. The final report, including recommendations from the youth, is being developed and will be available on the AFN Languages and Culture website when completed.

National Symposium:

DCH is organizing a national symposium about best practices in reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining, and strengthening Indigenous languages. At this time, the symposium is expected to be held from January 25 to 29, 2021. The AFN, ITK and MNC are offering advice to DCH about the symposium. Additional details may be obtained from DCH by emailing PCH.info-info.PCH@canada.ca or by phoning 1-866-811-0055 between 8:30 am and 5:00 pm (EST).

For more information:

- Please visit: <https://www.afn.ca/policy-sectors/languages-and-culture/>.
- You can also reach out to the AFN Languages and Culture Sector at: afnlanguages@afn.ca.