

# LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION POLE

In recognition of the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages

*Language is everything that we are. If you don't know your language, then it is difficult to understand in a profound way who you are.*

~ Phil Fontaine, FNEF National Spokesperson

What is language? It's a uniquely human gift that allows us to communicate with one another. Our languages also carry with them the richness and the vitality of our cultures keeping us rooted in our traditions, knowledge and understandings.

Globally, there are 7,000 languages in the world representing 5,000 different cultures. The overwhelming majority of these languages are spoken by 370 million Indigenous people in over 90 countries. A great majority of those languages are disappearing at an alarming rate. In Canada, there are approximately 60 Indigenous languages, each with unique dialects, histories and cultural traditions; almost three-quarters of these languages are at risk of being lost within this generation. If these languages go extinct, Indigenous nations risk losing their cultural identities.

*What do we lose when we lose our language? We lose our culture. We lose our greetings. We lose our praises. We lose our laws. We lose our songs. We lose our cures. We lose our legends. We lose our prayers. We lose our wisdom. We lose our way of life.*

~ Joshua Fishman, Reversing Language Shift, 1996

The international community has come to recognize that special and immediate measures are required to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and their distinct cultures and ways of life. Indigenous peoples in Canada have also been drawing attention to the urgent need to preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages for decades. However, it is only until recently, as Canada and Canadians make the journey of Truth and Reconciliation, that we are beginning to understand the impact of our history on Indigenous families, cultures and language and the need to take responsibility and undo the effects of our history as we work toward reconciliation and healing.

## A 21st Century Approach

Immediate action is required to document and curate the language and knowledge held by fluent Elder speakers of Indigenous languages in Canada as rapidly as possible while they are still with us. Tapping into the exponential power of technology is the key that will unlock our ability to meet this great challenge, and to allow future generations to successfully learn and revitalize these Indigenous languages and to learn from their knowledge, history and wisdom.

The First Nations Education Foundation (FNEF) is a not-for-profit and federally registered charity that collaborates with First Nations' communities to preserve and revitalize at-risk Indigenous languages using the power of technology. FNEF is working with the Yuułu?it?ath Government (Ucluelet First Nation) in Ucluelet, BC on an innovative pilot project for preserving Indigenous languages. The project will engage the remaining seven fluent Elder speakers of the Nuu-chah-nulth language to preserve and then teach their unique Barkley dialect. With only seven fluent speakers remaining, this Indigenous language and culture will become extinct without immediate action to preserve it. Once completed, the Yuułu?it?ath people will have access to a digital archive and truly living dictionary of Nuu-chah-nulth words, phrases and stories on an interactive digital platform for desktop and mobile language learning. These resources will be made available to the other 13 Nuu-chah-nulth nations with over 10,000 members across BC.

The pilot project with the Yuułu?it?ath Government offers a basis on which a new rapid language curation methodology and technology can be tested and proved, then swiftly replicated within other Indigenous communities in BC and across Canada. This innovative language curation model can be easily customized, allowing the content to be tailored to the specific needs of any First Nations community or language, making language preservation and learning strategies feasible for communities of all sizes and offering real hope for Indigenous language revitalization in Canada and around the world.

In recognition of the importance of Indigenous language and culture and the 2019 UN International Year of Indigenous Languages, FNEF has also commissioned a Language Revitalization Pole from renowned Nuu-chah-nulth carver, Tim Paul.

This pole will not only raise awareness of the threats facing Indigenous languages in Canada and around the world but will also draw attention to innovative solutions and the urgent need to advance reconciliation and healing by supporting Indigenous peoples and communities in their efforts to preserve and promote their languages and cultures. The estimated cost of the Indigenous Language Revitalization pole and pilot project is \$1 million.

## Project Budget:

Pole Carving (Students, guest carvers, tools, location costs)	\$150,000
Logistics (Tree, transportation, staging, raising, etc.)	\$100,000
Nuu-chah-nulth Language Preservation Pilot Project	\$650,000
Documentary, Ceremony and Promotion	\$100,000
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Estimated Total Project Cost	\$1,000,000

For more information about how you can support the Indigenous Language Revitalization Pole and Nuuchahnulth Language Preservation Pilot Project, contact:

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