



Supporting Indigenous language revitalization in Canada

Building capacity for community-led Indigenous language revitalization.

Critical role of language

Language is the fundamental way Indigenous Peoples share their knowledge, communicate their understanding of the world and connect with their spirituality. Evidence suggests that language plays a critical role in Indigenous Peoples' well-being, including their mental health and sense of community belonging.

In an effort to keep Indigenous languages alive and thriving, there's a push to ensure they're spoken in homes, schools, communities and workplaces in Canada for generations to come.

“Language is vital to connecting future generations with their cultural identity, particularly when used in traditional ceremonies. Our ceremonies have to be done in our languages; I’m seeing more English being used in ceremonies so young people will understand it, but a lot of the meaning is lost.”

Elder Mary Cardinal-Collins, Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (SILR) Cultural Advisor.

The recent launch of the [United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032](#) indicates the complex nature of language revitalization and the notion that this work will take time and will require collective effort, respectful relationships and authentic partnerships.

Today, Indigenous language efforts are being made across Canada to increase the number of language speakers. This requires a collaborative effort and universities, such as the University of Alberta, are making a positive impact.

Supporting Indigenous nations and communities

The [‘Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization’](#) (SILR) project at the [University of Alberta](#) began in 2021 as a community-led, participatory five-year project, enabled by the BHP Foundation to provide support to Indigenous nations and communities to successfully carry out their own language revitalization efforts through the coming generations.

“Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization gives the University of Alberta a valuable opportunity to contribute to community-led revitalization efforts through research and training.”

Florence Glanfield, Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research).

SILR will also contribute to developing capacity within the university by supporting research by Indigenous graduate students; a language club for students; and expanding the community-engagement work with the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) and in the Faculty of Education.

Additionally, SILR also hopes to develop capacity within K - 12 school systems to embrace Indigenous community-led language revitalization activities.

Breaking down barriers

Taking the lead from [Advisory Council](#) members, SILR is guided from an Indigenous worldview and diverse language groups, including Cree (Y Dialect and Bushland Cree), Anishinaabe, Michif, Blackfoot, Dene (Denesųłiné and Dene Tha), Inuktitut (Inuinnaqtun Dialect) and Stoney.

Language is a catalyst for breaking down harmful social barriers, including those created through education systems lacking cultural relevance and connection to identity.

Indigenous communities in Canada are diverse and vary in the types of language revitalization activities taking place on the land and in the classroom. From archival projects, documentation efforts to language immersion camps – the common goal is to offer opportunities for language revitalization.

The different initiatives woven into SILR will provide multiple capability- and capacity-building pathways to strengthen and grow the Indigenous language revitalization ecosystem towards the vision and long-term goal of a future where Indigenous languages are healthy and vibrant, and are spoken in homes, schools, workplaces and on the land.

“Our approach is flexible, supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and acknowledging that post-secondary institutions have an important role to play in Indigenous language revitalization. Recognizing and respecting unique differences among communities and diversity of languages and dialects is central to SILR”

Pamela McCoy Jones, Executive Director, SILR

Creating learning pathways

The University of Alberta's Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) established in 2000, supports individuals at the community level by providing basic training in linguistics, Indigenous languages, second language teaching, and other aspects of professional enhancement such as language-related research and policy making. SILR aims to create greater accessibility and availability of language revitalization learning pathways to Indigenous Peoples across a diversity of languages and dialects.

Since its inception, CILLDI has focused on building relationships and listening to the voice of each community and developing resources tailored to their different needs. Indigenous stakeholders from more than 150 Indigenous communities across Canada have attended the on-campus CILLDI Language Revitalization Summer School. The number of participants at the CILLDI Language Revitalization-Summer School has doubled in the past 10 years with most of the growth due to word of mouth.

Over the long-term, SILR aims to provide strategic developmental support to Indigenous communities so they can enhance their own capacity to successfully carry out language revitalization efforts through the coming generations.



SILR
SUPPORTING
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE
REVITALIZATION



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The BHP Foundation Canada Country program strives to harness the potential of young Indigenous people through improved education, learning and career pathway opportunities; and improve the governance and management of water resources to meet the needs of local communities.

Learn more about the [BHP Foundation](#).