

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY NOVEMBER 2008



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This document identifies communication priorities of the National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) - the specific vision, mission and purpose statements that have been developed and put into practice. The optimum goal is to create a service delivery system that meets the Literacy and Essential Skills - related needs of Aboriginal people. NILA has made great strides towards building a national network of Aboriginal educators, advocates and community leaders. Sustained efforts have been made to implement the strategy, however, there continues to exist many challenges that need to be recognized and addressed. This document summarizes these challenges and how NILA will address these issues through a five –year communication plan.

The Communication Strategy of NILA endeavors to produce, communicate, and distribute information designed to build awareness and understanding of Aboriginal literacy issues and advance the objectives and vision of the organization. The five year communications plan is designed to meet four key communications objectives:

- Raise awareness of Aboriginal literacy issues in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities
- Build a national network to support strategic approaches to Aboriginal literacy development
- Building strategic partnerships with other relevant service providers; and,
- Strengthen NILA's profile as a national agency.

The outcome for developing the communications strategy and directing the activities have been a collaborative effort achieved through strong strategic partnerships with other relevant service providers. NILA consulted with existing partnerships and developed new alliances to ensure the communication plans were integrated, efficient and effective.



STRATEGIC APPROACH

Based on consultations the following priority areas have been recommended:

- Developing a network by targeting the communities, regional and national key stake holders in partnership initiatives
- Establishing NILA Developing membership and working committees, targeting high profile Aboriginal literacy supporters, producing a clear image and organizational philosophy.
- Providing Services Become the source for information and networking for Aboriginal literacy in a practical and cost-effective manner, designing a website with an extensive resource database, news network, research and developmental projects that add value to the Aboriginal literacy field.
- Media and Public Relations the communications strategy works to develop materials and provide information to the media, the Aboriginal community and general public about NILA, its activities and positions as well as the overall mandate/mission and priorities. NILA recognizes that the majority of Canadians receive their information regarding Aboriginal peoples primarily through the media and works to establish an effective working relationship to ensure NILA is viewed as a constructive and productive organization. NILA will also utilize other informational channels to reach the public directly.
- Public Awareness and Public Education NILA will develop and implement public and community awareness and public education strategies based on its activities and positions to promote awareness and understanding of literacy issues, and priorities and mandate/mission/history of the Aboriginal community.
- Facilitating Discussion NILA will develop discussion forums utilizing working committees and membership, provide presentations and workshops at key conferences and continue with interpersonal networking and providing speakers at relevant conferences and public forums.



MESSAGES - MEDIA - IMPLEMENTATION

The communications strategy clearly identifies the key messages; that there is a problem as high levels of Aboriginal people are not successfully navigating mainstream educational institutions or participating in the workforce to the levels that they aspire. There are solutions to alleviate this issue and Indigenous cultural approaches are an essential component to the solution.

WHY A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY?

NILA has identified the development of a communications strategy as a priority to provide nationally coordinated development and support services for the Aboriginal literacy field by engaging an effective national network.

The NILA Communication Strategy will address the following areas:

♣ ABORIGINAL LITERACY ISSUES ARE OFTEN IGNORED

In spite of critically low literacy levels, literacy is not a top priority in Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities are concerned with that they perceived to be more urgent issues such as treaty rights, housing, economic development, cultural recovery, unemployment, poverty, and health issues. NILA recognizes these priorities and will need to show how literacy can and must be an essential part of broader Aboriginal community recovery and development. The reality is that Aboriginal issues continue to exist in a system that is fragmented, isolated, and poorly funded by the two systems of government.

Awareness of the issues relating to literacy need to be raised through the promotion of greater understanding across a wide audience, from grassroots community members to politicians and various agencies, and potential partners will be encouraged to see more clearly how their needs and work relate to Aboriginal literacy issues.



OBJECTIVE: Raise awareness of Aboriginal literacy issues. Increase general awareness about the issues across the country among key stakeholders in a way that shows these groups how they have a stake in Aboriginal literacy, and that encourages their involvement in meaningful solutions. Help make literacy training a higher priority for Aboriginal communities.

★ There is a lack of a coordinated National Aboriginal Literacy strategy

There have been projects that attempt to develop strategies for Aboriginal literacy development (such as the Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan in the early 1990's, or the Aboriginal Literacy Enhancement Strategy begun in the late 1990's). However, none of these efforts have been implemented. What has been lacking is a strong literacy network on which to build a national Aboriginal literacy strategy that has buy-in from key partners across the country. The lack of such a network is the main reason why an Aboriginal literacy strategy has never actually been fully developed, evaluated or implemented. A network is needed to improve coordination and the sharing of new developments and activities in the literacy field with stakeholders, helping to prevent duplication and use resources more effectively.

OBJECTIVE: *Build a network* to support strategic approaches to Aboriginal literacy - Establish the foundation for a national Aboriginal literacy network to support Aboriginal literacy strategies, involving Aboriginal literacy practitioners, service providers, development activities and new partners across the country.

♣ THERE ARE LIMITED RESOURCES DEDICATED TO ABORIGINAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT WORK



NILA participates on a national board that is working to establish a foundation providing funds for Aboriginal literacy. However, a foundation only addresses part of the problem; a clear national Aboriginal literacy strategy requires the attention and participation of a wide variety of community groups and leaders. There are many potential partners in Aboriginal literacy development. Literacy work is complex, challenging, and under-resourced. Potential partners may be reluctant to devote energy to literacy development because of the time and effort involved in networking and developing effective partnerships, combined with low funding levels for literacy. Ultimately, because literacy cannot be developed in isolation from other community initiatives, NILA must attract and involve them in literacy development work (projects) and in the increased sharing of resources and activities supporting Native literacy delivery.

OBJECTIVE: Attract new partners in Aboriginal literacy - Contribute to increased commitment to and support for Aboriginal literacy among new partners, by beginning to link Aboriginal literacy services with these new partners in Aboriginal literacy.

♣ NILA HAS NOT YET BEEN PRESENTED AS PART OF THE SOLUTION

While NILA is slowly building awareness and links in Aboriginal literacy development, as a new organization it still needs to present communities with assistance and services that have practical effects in the field. NILA needs to build visibility, sustainability and credibility as a national organization, bridging between its recent creation and its establishment as a crucial and unique national agency and unifying force in Aboriginal literacy development.



OBJECTIVE: Develop NILA as a National Agency - Gain an increased national profile for NILA by beginning to add value in practical ways to national Aboriginal literacy development.

NILA continues to promote and support the need for coordinated and seamless service provision for literacy promotion within the Aboriginal community; it is for this reason that NILA continues to seek further expansion by implementing a community, regional and national awareness strategy.

TARGET AUDIENCE

NILA CLIENTS

Clients are mainly on the "front line": learners, practitioners and, to some extent, delivery agencies. The Communications Strategy focuses primarily on the practitioners and learners.

NILA PARTNERS

Potential partners include regional, provincial/territorial and national literacy networks, development agencies and coalitions, post-secondary institutions, funding agencies and potential funding agencies, Aboriginal representative organizations, and leaders in other realms of Aboriginal education and community development.

LEARNERS

NILA needs to consider potential learners as well as learners already in programs. In many communities, the need for improved literacy rates is acknowledged, but those most in need of these services are often reluctant to come forward and involve themselves in a program, so we have to consider those who have not identified themselves or become involved learners as well. At the same time, NILA



needs to be careful not to attract new learners to literacy programs and services where there are none. In the longer term, potential learners could benefit from a comprehensive survey of broader resources available to support Aboriginal literacy training, e.g., through Aboriginal Training bodies, Aboriginal Education Authorities, access/transition programs and other community agencies, as well as the literacy programs, be they community based or operating through community colleges and school boards.

PRACTITIONERS

As with Aboriginal literacy learners, NILA will need to address a broader group than just those practitioners involved in the field. While some Aboriginal literacy practitioners remain in the literacy field for over 5 or even 10 years, turnover is generally very high, and many practitioners move through literacy positions as one stop on the trajectory of their working career, often coming out of various community development jobs and returning to them after their "tour of duty" in literacy. Practitioners we spoke with, for example, included a former Aboriginal language teacher, crisis counselor and Justice of the Peace. Therefore it is crucial that NILA address not just those individuals who reside in literacy programs as narrowly defined by various levels of government, but also Aboriginal community educators and workers whose career trajectory will cover a range of community activities, related in varying degrees to literacy (i.e., all levels of education both in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal systems, healing, cultural awareness and language programs, and other community social programming.) Such a focus will involve more communications efforts, but should also pay off, since it fits in with NILA's objective of involving more partners in Aboriginal literacy development work.

LINKING WITH PARTNERS

Our consultations tell us that Aboriginal literacy practitioners and programs are very much tied to other community initiatives such as libraries, schools, post-secondary institutions, and community centres, especially the Friendship Centre movement in urban areas. Very few programs are run through independent agencies whose sole focus is literacy. While a number of practitioners express the desire to run "stand"



alone" programs, there are pros and cons to operating a literacy program that is operationally independent. At any rate the current and foreseeable reality is that Aboriginal literacy agencies will continue for the most part to operate under the authority of agencies with multiple focuses, for financial reasons. In general, practitioners seem to be very aware of the need to develop clearer partnerships with other Aboriginal community initiatives such as Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement Holders, healing programs (especially as they relate to residential school fallout), corrections and justice systems, programs addressing child poverty, restoration of Aboriginal jurisdiction (self-government), housing, economic development, and in general, programs where more significant funding is available. As one practitioner said, "people give their attention where there's money."

PROGRAM SUPPORTS

Practitioners we spoke with were interested primarily in more funding supports and curriculum development for their programs, especially methods and materials that relate to learners' lives, followed by greater opportunities for training for them (see below). Practitioners also desire greater supports for building Aboriginal cultural perspectives into programs, curriculum and teacher training. They also often express a need for Aboriginal control over funding (funding support with guidelines developed from the community with a minimum of red tape), recognition of and support for holistic learning, and links with learning and physical disabilities associations.

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING

Overall, support is strong among practitioners for a stronger "Community of Practice" – meaning that there needs to be a way of linking with one another as practitioners and sharing knowledge, training and other supports. Practitioners want more opportunities to gather and share their experiences with one another. In the longer term, many practitioners would like to see literacy training linked with other education bodies that are accredited and lead to teaching certificates or other degrees, especially institutions that support accredited co-op learning. It was suggested that a Literacy Practitioner Training Institute would need to assist with



Professional Learning Plans for teachers and with providing information on and links with scholarship funds, conferences and sabbaticals.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Practitioners often find themselves operating programs without much awareness or support from within their own communities. Practitioners consistently tell us of the need to get to agencies (and potential agencies) that host literacy programs more aware and supportive of literacy training. Practitioners feel that stakeholders such as the Friendship Centre movement and Chiefs and Band Councils and their associations need to be part of an active literacy movement. Other suggestions from practitioners for raising community awareness included the need to attract youth with new technologies, the use of high profile people like Buffy Ste Marie, and literacy scholarships

SUPPORT FOR HOLISTIC CULTURAL APPROACHES

Practitioners want to see greater awareness and active support for holistic approaches in the classroom – which includes everything from working with multiple levels, age groups and even education systems in literacy training, to being able to consider the emotional and physical well- being of learners in the learning process. This means considering and building on Aboriginal cultural values and indigenous knowledge systems, and generally emphasizing quality over quantity and statistical measurement in education. It also means breaking down the limitations imposed through "funding silos" that divide our communities internally according to bureaucratic requirements rather than community realities.

ADVOCACY

Practitioners want their needs to be heard by the people who have influence on their lives and work, from local leadership to provincial, territorial and federal education and training ministries and literacy departments. (While NILA needs to be careful not to become an "advocacy organization" in the lobbying sense, much can be done through effective networking to raise awareness and involvement of leaders in the development of new solutions to pressing literacy issues.)



AN ABORIGINAL LITERACY STRATEGY

Practitioners generally want a broad working strategy that addresses gaps in the field and works to assert Aboriginal jurisdiction over the development and delivery of Aboriginal literacy education, in tandem with other Aboriginal self-government initiatives. In particular, practitioners in Aboriginal communities want the tools to be able to address local authorities in other systems (education and other systems relating to the work of literacy training).

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY - WORK AND ACTIVITY PLAN

WEBSITE

- ♣ provides immediate, up-to-date information on events, activities and initiatives internal information on external activities and developments
- shares information in a timely manner to ensure clear, concise and consistent messaging from all NILA representatives

PUBLICATIONS AND PRODUCTION

- article submissions to the Aboriginal media,
- production of public service announcements
- NILA brochure, posters
- on-line photo library and success stories

INVENTORY OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

- identification of key target audiences
- inventory of strategic speaking opportunities
- strategic assessment and coordination of speaking opportunities
- Publication launches and external events



CONFERENCE MATERIALS

- ♣ Power point presentations/ communiqués and briefing materials designed for specific audiences at relevant conferences/gatherings with speeches and publicity packages
- ♣ Display Booth for set up at related gatherings and conferences (by the end of the first year of the Communications Strategy).

NEWSLETTER/JOURNAL

While the web site will include a brief on-line newsletter, in addition NILA will develop a 4-6 page mail-out newsletter for members. Ultimately, we hope that this newsletter evolves into a journal of Aboriginal methodologies for literacy education.

TELEVISION AND BROADER PUBLIC MEDIA

NILA will fundraise for and consult and commence development on a series of national broadcast quality television spots reflecting the NILA messages, with the aim of preparing for broadcast. The television spots will hold the highest of professional standards and have the aim of stepping up the campaign to develop a national strategy. We are considering an educational approach similar to Canada's "Heritage Minute" campaign, but related to the importance of literacy in protecting Aboriginal cultural legacies by demonstrating how to address the impacts of cultural loss and the importance of linguistic and cultural education to Indigenous survival. The aim is to produce the message in partnership with other stakeholders and supporters.

OTHER MEDIA

In addition to the above, NILA will continue to consider the possibility of:

♣ Free profiles in relevant magazines, newspapers and newsletters and TV, taking advantage of journalism that looks at education, cultural revitalization, self-government and community healing issues, and taking the approach that we are news



- ♣ Promotional high tech publicity packages (DVD/ CD/ videos, etc.)
- ♣ Strategic Partnerships: "marketing alliances" with partners for specific initiatives (joint promotions and activities that share costs with other leaders in education with similar philosophies/clients
- ♣ Public Relations events: e.g. press conferences, corporate charity sponsoring galas: to create a "buzz" about the message and services, solicit support and build awareness of the issues as well as the public perception of the NILA and its stakeholders.

RESOURCES STRATEGY

PAL PROJECT

NILA will need to gain continuing support from the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) through project activity as the main source of funding. In the first year of the Communications Strategy, NILA will focus on the Partners in Aboriginal Literacy (PAL) project, already submitted to NLS. This project will continue the work of developing a strong, sustainable national Aboriginal literacy network. A large part of the PAL project will directly involve the implementation of the Communication Strategy.

OTHER RESOURCES

The communication strategy cannot be fully implemented without expanding NILA supports through additional funding agencies. In the first year of the strategy, we will focus on developing local and regional project supports where our current networks are strongest, in Ontario and Manitoba, while continuing to research and implement a wider project strategy. In Winnipeg, we are applying for local projects through the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy and the Winnipeg Foundation, and are exploring potential supports through branches of the provincial government, such as the Ministry of



Literacy and Adult Education. In Ontario, we are enlisting the help of a grad student through AHRDA funds to help support the research component of the Communication Strategy at the national level, and are exploring a partnership project to be supported through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Finally, we are developing a funding strategy for foundations that explores non-governmental funding sources, which will be implemented early in the New Year.

SETTING PRIORITIES

NILA needs to be vigilant. In order to build a successful network promoting and supporting Aboriginal literacy, we will need to take a careful strategic approach. While all of the recommendations and messages made in this plan are important, NILA, throughout the course of this project, without any significant efforts at publicizing has already begun to receive regular requests for literacy funding from various Aboriginal groups. The priorities for the Communication Strategy have therefore been carefully distributed over a 5-year period so that the expectations built up through NILA communications do not exceed NILA's capacity.