

National Indigenous Literacy Association

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**NILA**

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# STRATEGIC PLAN 2008 - 2013



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) is a national network of literacy practitioners supporting Aboriginal literacy in developing and disseminating best practices, coordinating activities and offering access to resources and information.

As the largest national Aboriginal Literacy organization in Canada, NILA works with partners to bring effective, accessible and practical services supporting Aboriginal literacy development to communities. Over 50% of Aboriginal people in Canada have issues regarding low literacy levels and lack of essential skills. We are the source for learners to locate Aboriginal literacy services and resources in their area as well as a resource for teachers and communities to access resources and materials that are culturally relevant.

NILA has been in operation since 1998. Since that time, NILA has developed a network across Canada of academics, social policy experts, practitioners, non-profit organizations, business and learners. The common thread is the importance of improving the literacy rates among First Nations people, Metis people and Inuit people. No matter whether Aboriginal people live in remote communities, large urban areas, rural townships, or on the land, literacy is important for social and economic self-sufficiency.

*"Literacy is the key to life long learning. It is the gateway to social, educational and economic prosperity. NILA is an organization committed to creating linkages and partnerships to accelerate literacy among Canada's Aboriginal peoples"*

**Kelly Lendsay**  
**President and CEO**  
**Aboriginal Human Resource Sector Council of Canada**

NILA is focused on increasing awareness about Aboriginal literacy issues in Canada and the benefits to learners, the community and the economy of increased literacy levels.



The Board of Directors of the National Indigenous Literacy Association represents First Nations people, Metis people, and Inuit people from coast to coast. Through provincial representation as well as representation in all stakeholder groups, NILA is poised to respond to the vision of eradicating illiteracy in our communities.

## VISION

“Instilling pride today and hope for tomorrow through literacy approaches that are holistic for Aboriginal Peoples”

## MISSION STATEMENT

The National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) believes that literacy is a basic human right; therefore, NILA serves as the eyes, ears, and voice of Aboriginal literacy in Canada, and reflects the spirit and values of Aboriginal Peoples and Nations in all of its work.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. We are here to serve the Learner - The Learner is the most important person in the program.
2. Effective Approaches - The holistic approach to Aboriginal literacy has been proven to be effective, and is crucial in the designing, developing, delivery and evaluation of Aboriginal literacy programs.
3. Functional Language/Language of Identity - While recognizing that the functional languages of Canada in each province and territory must receive priority, NILA supports the importance of literacy in indigenous languages of identity.
4. Inclusivity - Literacy affects us all, regardless of culture and geography. Literacy, therefore, needs to be the purview of an organization that is inclusive of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and that builds on the commonalities of each while respect distinct cultural approaches.
5. Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education/literacy – The funding provided to Aboriginal peoples for Aboriginal literacy will maximize learning, and achieve the most cost-effective approach.



6. Adequate and long-term funding – Aboriginal literacy providers can provide the most effective programs and services through funding that is commensurate with the need and that allows for long-term approaches.

Environmental Scan: (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats)

## INTRODUCTION

In May 2008 the National Indigenous Literacy Association was at a major organizational crossroads. There have been some monumental gains in the 10 years NILA has been in operation but there were some significant challenges.

Some of the significant successes included the presentation to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 2003 and the Standing Committee of Senate on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2007.

NILA has developed over 100 partnerships and alliances and has co-hosted or hosted two National meetings. NILA has also presented at over 100 conferences nationally and internationally.

The challenges that NILA recognized in May 2008 included:

- A need for a renewal of organizational strength and vision
- The need to respond to the national priority of development of essential skills
- The need to create self-sufficiency because of funding issues
- The need to ensure NILA had the capacity to respond to the needs of stakeholders including business, learners, communities, governments, and teachers and programs.

Because of the pressing challenges and the vision of the board, a strategic planning process was started. The following document is the compilation of the strategic planning discussions of the meetings of the Board, the outcomes of two strategic planning sessions, and the input of the staff.



## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT: STATEMENT OF NEED**

Throughout all the surveys, inventories and personal interviews conducted with Aboriginal literacy programs and practitioners leading up to NILA's incorporation (and since), several consistent themes have arisen: The need to develop a national Aboriginal networking and support organization for Aboriginal literacy practitioners and other stakeholders. The need exists for recognition and further development of distinct Aboriginal approaches to literacy education, reflecting environmental concerns and the need to preserve traditional Indigenous wisdom and knowledge practices.

At the end of the first planning session, the initial review and foundation process, NILA identified 3 major goals:

Developing capacity at the grassroots level by providing (and conducting) research, considering statistics and current research, and disseminating knowledge and best practices, materials and resources to grassroots.

Creating a comprehensive support network for practitioners by acknowledging the distinctiveness of approaches and advocating for the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures

## **IN ORDER TO MEET THESE NEEDS**

In order to address the needs of the stakeholders, NILA must showcase what NILA is doing and what communities are doing to increase literacy and literacy programming that is responsive to Aboriginal people in Canada.

NILA must develop an initiative that would assist organizations to identify what communities, organizations, businesses, agencies, and individuals utilize literacy programs

NILA must advocate for policy reform and legislative review. (although "one size does not fit all" NILA would strive to ensure everyone is treated equally.) Through government consultation, NILA can affect change so every Aboriginal person in Canada can access literacy programming



NILA must work towards being the organization that the governments consult with and ask direction when considering literacy policy and legislation that affects Aboriginal literacy.

*Thank you again for this great opportunity to help practitioners in Alberta become better facilitators of aboriginal literacy learning.*

*Janet*

*(Janet Lane - Executive Director of Literacy Alberta)*

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Some of the key principles for NILA will be ensuring the values of Aboriginal Literacy:

- Cultural based
- Quality of service
- Respect cultural teaching
- Showcase community partnerships and community best practices
- Explore best practices for example bridging business and community
- Model excellence in relationships (communicate, support, and partner)
- Acquire funding for networking including showcasing best practices, sharing resources, disseminating knowledge
- Keep it simple



Christine and grandson Kestin at the Spread the Word Festival at the Aboriginal Centre



## **NILA NEEDS TO ADAPT TO WHAT WORKS FOR OUR STAKEHOLDERS**

- Knowledge dissemination occurs by word of mouth for learners and practitioners
- NILA must remain aware of what is happening at the grassroots level
- NILA must become more involved in research and more aware of the research that is being done
- NILA must consider hosting, presenting at, and attending conferences
- NILA must make greater strategic efforts in networking including becoming involved in projects and programs
- NILA must produce the newsletter more systematically and more regularly
- NILA must ensure the website is accessible and learner and practitioner friendly and has content that is useful
- NILA must remain current on policy development at all provincial and the national levels to ensure Aboriginal values are reflected in policies
- NILA must work towards bringing the values and goals of the Aboriginal literacy community together with governments to create understanding
- NILA can be the centre of excellence where NILA assists with the funding of community endeavours
- NILA could be the central hub for programs that work to address Aboriginal literacy. NILA could be the expert in materials, resources, methods, and assessment, empowering communities to take control of literacy at the community level
- NILA needs to seek alternative funding sources
- NILA needs a marketing and promotion strategy



## **SWOT (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS)**

### **NILA'S STRENGTHS**

- 1) NILA has a board and staff that is representative of the diversity of cultures and situations of Aboriginal people
  - Includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit
  - Includes remote, rural and urban peoples from various regions across Canada
  - Includes people with expertise/experience in the following facets of literacy – curriculum/materials development, indigenous languages, essential skills
  - Includes people who interface with various levels of programming – local, provincial/territorial and national
  - Have a variety of professional backgrounds – educational, managerial, financial, legal, political
  - Has made provisions for Elder and Learner representation

The Directors of the Board of NILA are chosen by the members of the Board. Annually the Board of Directors reviews its membership. As Directors need to be replaced, the Board seeks nominees that provide representation, expertise, and are passionate about literacy.

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2) NILA has a strong foundation of knowledge

The founding member and President, Ningwakwe was the Native Literacy Coordinator with the Ontario Ministry of Education from 1988 to 1994. She has authored books and articles on Native literacy.

Ningwakwe was a trainer/consultant for four years with the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition and she coordinated the first ever in Canada National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG).



Ningwakwe was asked to develop the Rainbow Approach to Aboriginal Literacy for the Parkland Regional College national project. The National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) then adapted this approach. In April 2000, the NADC (National Aboriginal Design Committee) coordinated the National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering in Morley, Alberta. This event increased awareness on a national level of Aboriginal perspectives on literacy, confirmed the need for a strong network, and provided key links with numerous national and international literacy stakeholders and potential partners.

Then, the National Aboriginal Design Committee (now NILA) worked to develop a Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. The Position Paper was the first comprehensive study of Aboriginal literacy issues in the history of the literacy movement in Canada. While it incorporated the work of noted Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics, as well as position papers by people in other jurisdictions who are dealing with similar issues, it drew primarily on the experiences of the people most directly involved in literacy programs: learners, practitioners and Elders.

NADC followed this up with a presentation of its Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy to the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in 2002. The proposed national Aboriginal Literacy organization became a reality when the National Indigenous Literacy Association received its letters patent as a national non-profit corporation in 2003.

- 3) NILA has developed strong partnerships and relationship across Canada

## **WEAKNESSES THAT NILA MUST ADDRESS**

### **LACK OF COMMUNICATION**

There are 3 areas of Communication NILA must strive to address.

- 1) **ORGANIZATIONAL** – Communication to and from the Board.

Communication from the staff has been a struggle. There are a variety of reasons for this.

The plan to address this includes Monthly activity reports and financials will be provided to the Board by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the following month. The board of Directors will receive updates on projects, meetings, and initiatives in a



timely manner. All staff and the Board have the capacity to connect through the internet. Quarterly Board meetings, either in person or by teleconference will provide a forum for discussion of projects and goals.

2) **STAKEHOLDERS** – Monthly reports must improve to provide better insight for funders and stakeholders on the activities and goals of NILA. Currently reports are anecdotal and minimal. Reports must be concise but must also align with the objectives established in the funding agreements and agreed to by the board. The staff of NILA have been directed by the Board to create a reporting format that will reflect the reporting needs of the organization. This is now in place.

3) **COMMUNITIES, ORGANIZATIONS, PRACTITIONERS, AND LEARNERS** - Grassroots and organization to organization communication need to be improved. Currently, NILA has little recognition in programs and organizations. NILA has struggled through some serious funding gaps that have created a need to operate on a project basis. The NILA Board has identified the need to create opportunities to work in partnership with organizations and programs at the grassroots as a priority. NILA has also identified the website and the newsletter as priorities to begin strengthening outreach capacity. NILA has also identified the need to further strengthen NILA's Board presence in their regions. The Board has agreed to become more of an advocate for NILA and the staff are developing opportunities to visit different regions to talk about the needs of programs and practitioners across Canada.

## **FUNDING ISSUES**

**THERE ARE THREE FUNDING RELATED ISSUES THAT NILA FACES ACCORDING TO THE STAFF AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

- 1) Single stream
- 2) Insufficient funding
- 3) Lack of capacity (plan) to secure other funding

### **SINGLE STREAM/GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

The issues with single stream funding, identified in the strategic planning process, include the vulnerability that single stream government funding creates. If the government chooses to change priorities, funding can be



eliminated. It is mandatory to follow the objectives and mandates of the government instead of priorities of the board and the organization as a whole, and the funding is never enough to develop greater capacity.

In order to address the funding issues, administration and the organization needs to change.

The priorities are clarity and accountability to respond to the reporting required by stakeholders and the government. The Board must be able to speak to activities, costs, and "bang for the buck" if they are to be champions of the organization.

Employees must have a sense of responsibility and ownership "every dollar that comes through the door-take that and turn it into two...do that and no one can stop you." (Wetere, 2008).

- Could have patrons – some higher profile First Nations/Métis/Inuit people.
- Operate regionally, and with alternative trustees
- Chose projects and partnerships that are strategic for profile and funding source