

# **Three Nations Education Group Incorporated**



**Nikma'jtut apoqmatultinej (Mi'kmaq)  
Ntolonapemk, wicukemtultine (Wolastoqey)**

**Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy for  
Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey Language Revitalization**

March, 2022

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three Nations Education Group Initiative (TNEGI) Inc. evolved into an incorporated body in 2010 overseeing proposal based programs available through Indigenous Services Canada to support our Band Operated Schools. TNEGI also advocates with the province and liaising with post secondary education institutes within the region.

In 2016 Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and Assembly of First Nation announced a *Co-Developed Education Transformation* strategy to support First Nations governance in education under Regional Education Agreements.

TNEGI Executive has been actively participating in the Atlantic Regional REA discussions and continuously meeting as a group to discuss the best path forward for our communities.

Throughout these sessions, the Executive have settled upon a common mandate shift for the organization in their efforts towards becoming an Education Authority, to focus on Third Level Services (research, advocacy, policy, curriculum development and support for our Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey languages) as a primary function with opt in Second Level Services to community schools.

Third Level Services will be centralized governance, advocacy and jurisdictional leadership in Education to support the participating First Nation schools within New Brunswick, with the potential to accept other communities from other Atlantic provinces. TNEGI will continue to offer Second Level Services to the schools (in-school support) for the communities who wish to retain our team for these services.

As we move forward, TNEGI is lobbying to become the agency delivering services similar to a Mi'kmaq & Wolastoqiyik Department of Education, with experts working collaboratively with education partners to support quality Indigenized services to First Nations students at every level of education. Through this work TNEGI will ensure that language teachers are supported in a manner that celebrates their commitment and advances the ability of our children in our languages.

On behalf of TNEGI, we are committed to the goal of ensuring that our children and families are engaged with community schools, where language is at the heart of the curriculum, the culture is celebrated and people are positive about their futures.

Woliwon,

Warren Trembley, Executive Director

## **2021-2023 strategic planning process:**

### **What is a Strategic Plan?**

A strategic plan identifies broad future goals and objectives and the barriers to achieving them. It sets out a strategy that is considered the best way to reach those objectives including how to address the barriers. The process of building a strategic plan is a cyclical one that involves a plan, do, check process as an ongoing approach to maintain relevancy for services.

Few Strategic plans start from a completely blank slate as generally an organization has either been operating for a while or was created for a certain purpose.

For Three Nations Education Initiative (TNEGI) Inc., a Strategic Plan was created to support Band-Operated schools in 2014 and updated in 2019. While the TNEGI 2019 Strategic Plan considered Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey language as one of the areas within their mandate, work in 2020-22 in Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey language research demonstrated that the critical state of our languages requires immediate attention and its own strategy to assist the three schools.

### **1. Three Nations Education Group Incorporated (TNEGI)'s 2019 Strategic Plan:**

Some years ago the education directors in the three member communities of the MAWIW Tribal Council often met to share experiences, challenges, and opportunities. The group took advantage of these and other meetings to discuss practical education matters over many years. This informal coalition brought each of the respective education director's extensive experience, education, knowledge and networks to current issues. As sessions brought value to the respective programs, they gained importance to each Education Director. As time passed, participants felt the relationship, sessions and value they produced should become a more formalized part of their jobs.

In 2009 a new education entity was designed. The Three Nations Education Group was incorporated as a non-profit body in late 2009. That structure also allowed it to meet the federal criteria of a Regional Management Organization and be eligible to receive federal funds.

Three Nations Education Group Incorporated, or TNEGI as it became known, adopted a corporate bylaw and a strategic business plan that together described the following fundamental concepts of the organization.

**Purpose of the Three Nations Education Group**

To improve life-long education outcomes in all First Nation students in New Brunswick

**Objectives of the Group:**

- Enhance education services to First Nation students;
- Improve collaboration amongst all parties involved in Aboriginal education;
- Build long term partnerships that sustain education improvements;
- Share data and take steps to improve life-long education based on evidence;
- Measure results in key areas such as school readiness and age-grade outcomes and;
- Secure resources and build the relationships needed to accomplish objectives.

**Priorities of the Group:**

1. Implementation of FNSSP (First Nations Student Success Plan);
2. Build capacity of 3 Nations Education Group and;
3. Work toward a Centre of Excellence.

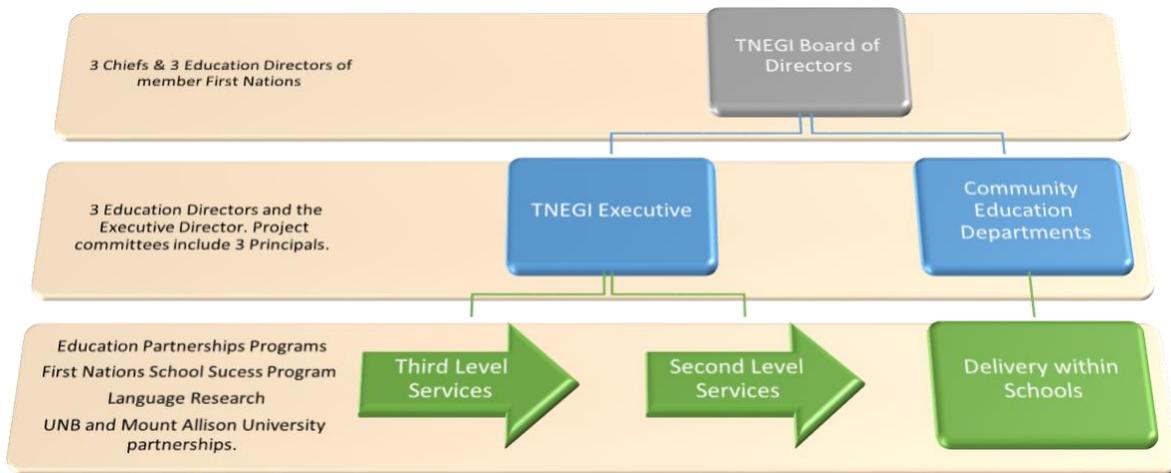
TNEGI began substantive activity in late summer of 2010 when it took responsibility for the First Nation Student Support Program (FNSSP) and adopted a workplan for the rest of the fiscal year. That workplan described specific tasks for TNEGI's initial three priorities (noted above) and added two others areas of development-- finance and administration, and communications.

In 2011 TNEGI submitted a request for FNSSP funding for fiscal year 2011 - 2012, updated its business plan, and adopted an operating budget. Key expenditures included hiring an executive director, contracting out administration, gathering education data, and developing a web site. This is seen as when TNEGI began as a separate education entity.

**1.1 TNEGI Governance**

The present TNEGI organizational structure reflected its development steps, existing relationships, and its focus on projects.

Figure 1 TNEGI Organization



TNEGI is a corporation governed by a six-person Board of Directors comprised of:

- three Chiefs of the member First Nations, and
- three Education Directors

A smaller Executive Committee oversees operations, initiatives & projects. The Executive is made up of the three Education Directors and the Executive Director. Activities it pursued include: FNSSP; EPP; UNB Education Liaison; Mount Allison University Transformation in Education Partnership; and NB Education liaison. The Committee’s working approach was to facilitate action and progress at the local level. For example for FNSSP it established a project Steering Committee that brought school principals to a common table, which informed each of their individual efforts with a local Management Team in each school. This community-based approach is shown in figure 1 above and TNEGI reported steady progress where it was in use.

## 2 TNEGI Activities

TNEGI undertook an organizational assessment after early operations. This process confirmed the group's mandate and approach to First Nations education was valid and successful, but also identified significant gaps in organizational functions and services needed to fully support those roles. As a result a Capacity development plan was created to address those gaps and an overall workplan including building new capacity, was adopted.

Early in 2014, TNEGI worked on an initial strategic plan. While not formally adopted, the document helped guide TNEGI for several years. (see attachment one). Over the next five years TNEGI built on its community-focused approach and development of internal supports. This yielded significant improvements in Literacy, positive changes to Numeracy outcomes, and notable improvements in student retention. TNEGI has strengthened the enhanced service agreements and increased services to First Nations students in provincial schools. It has forged stronger ties at both operational and management levels between off- and on-reserve schools and systems. All parts of UNB has heard TNEGI's consistent advocacy for better research in First Nation education, changes in practices, more teaching professionals, and wider adoption of Aboriginal curriculum material. In addition, TNEGI monitored and explored various organization developments in First Nation education across the country.

In 2018 Canada announced it was fundamentally changing First Nations education when ISC announced it would be changing the funding method for elementary secondary education on reserves. The process was called Education Transformation and was to:

- 1) ensure base education funding is comparable to provincial education funding;
- 2) include funding enhancements to meet First Nations' specific needs,
- 3) to fund with far less terms and conditions to allow more flexibility and;
- 4) to move toward Education Authority structures which include 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level education functions.

There were many difficulties in the initial steps of defining on-reserve funding comparable to New Brunswick education funding. However, by late 2019 it was clear that Elsipogtog had determined it was ready for its own education authority along with internal delivery of most second level education services. It suggested it saw that the future of TNEGI in the design and delivery of 3<sup>rd</sup> level education services.

Meanwhile the other two partners were dissatisfied with the draft funding levels and had not yet considered an Education Authority structure. Both remain open to receiving 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level services from a yet-to-be-designed Authority.

### 3 TNEGI Present Situation

TNEGI education directors revised their Strategic Plan in 2019 to consider a path forward for the organization amidst a changing environment in Indigenous educational nationally. TNEGI reconsidered previous explorations of Authorities created elsewhere and recognized that many included support for their Indigenous languages. These two topics follow in more detail below.

#### 3.1 Revisions to the Strategic Plan

TNEGI's previous strategic plan had not been adopted but did guide decisions for the past five years. As most had participated in development of the Plan and/or had used it throughout their work, there was no need to start over. This review found that the plan remained generally applicable, but did require some modifications. Below are the revised Mission Statement and Vision Statement for this Strategic Plan.

#### New Mission Statement:

***A Mi'kmaq – Wolastoqiyik education organization dedicated to improving education outcomes of First Nation students through advocacy, professional and educational supports, and meaningful partnerships.***

#### New Vision Statement:

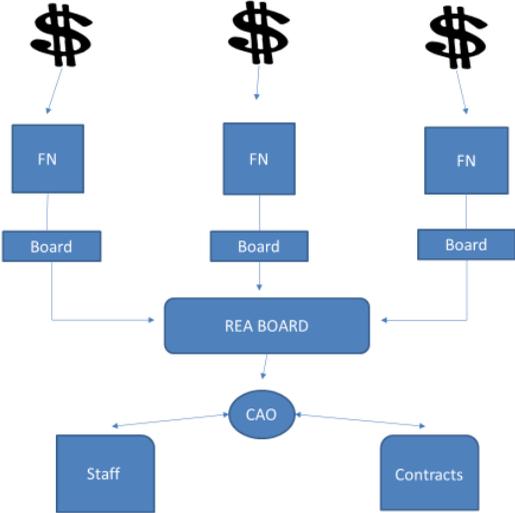
***TNEGI is delivering services similar to a Mi'kmaq Wolastoqiyik Department of Education. There, our experts work collaboratively with education partners. All support quality Indigenized services to First Nations students at every level of education. Children and families are engaged with community schools where the culture is celebrated and people are positive about their futures.***

These new statements are considered valid to guide TNEGI in its future decision making. The point was made that while few words were changed, they were in fact marks of significant developments within TNEGI partners. A return to proper names of the Nations and a focus on Indigenized education services, mean that First Nations will assert and exercise jurisdiction, bring Indigenous components to all education functions, and seek reconciliation in all dealings from all partners.

Nowhere was the nature of this change more noticeable than in the guiding principles. These form the third part of the foundation of a strategic plan (see attachment one).



A structure that had been examined in the past and allowed for differing service demands of members, was reconsidered. It was found to be generally applicable to the situation TNEGI members felt they were at this time. The model is illustrated below.



This concept recognizes that each First Nation remains as the jurisdictional body. As such, it receives federal education funding and decides on what services it will deliver itself, and which it might delegate or buy. And if so, from where.

This ongoing exercise of jurisdiction by politically accountable officials, ensures quality controls are maintained in each area through clear responsibilities and ongoing feedback and accountability on the actual services and outcomes.

The above denotes a local board at the First Nation level but this may be many types of organizations. So long as the structure oversees local education responsibilities and can ensure consistent and informed participation from it, is brought to the TNEGI board role.

The TNEGI Board in turn, ensures TNEGI staff and methods deliver what each of the member communities desire, recognizing that these services may-- and frankly probably will-- differ. The TNEGI Board in turn directs the senior staff person of TNEGI (shown here as a CAO), who in turn, hires staff to design and deliver some services, and engages others by contract to fulfil others.

The details of this governing framework will be worked out as the efforts continue to prepare for Education transformation and to implement this strategic plan. All parties recognize that this offers the best method to forge the details needed for both transformation and a longer term relationship amongst the member communities.

**Setting priorities in a dynamic context**

The key to this plan will be the next steps. Three challenges may dominate early work:

- continuing the practical daily progress in each school & system;
- completing education transformation funding and;
- developing and implementing details of education Authority structure(s) and services.

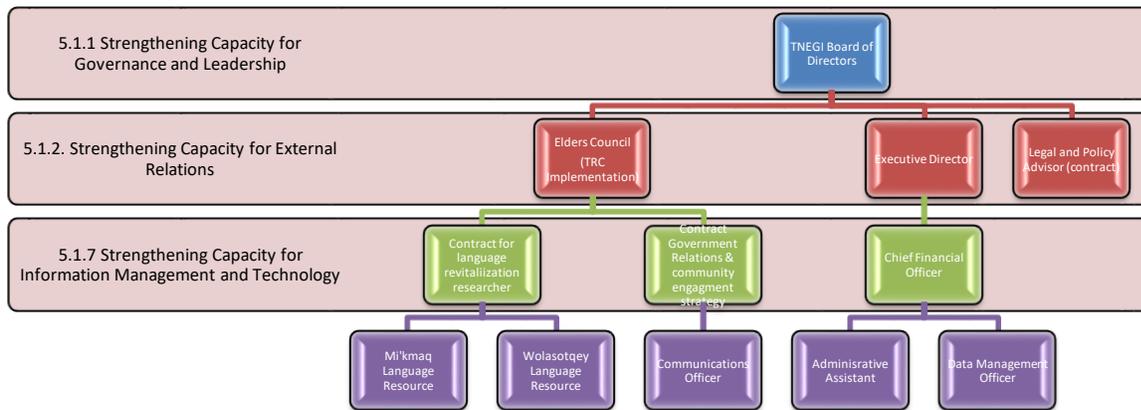
Each alone are significant, but together they can be overwhelming. TNEGI members have chosen to continue to address the challenges together, regardless of whether decisions require individual or common actions. This approach reflects the historical relationships between the three communities, the draft governing model in this plan, and the Indigenous Guiding Principles of this plan.

The group examined the previous strategic goals. The result was very similar with a few minor but significant changes and is proved in the text box below.

**Strategic Goals**

- ***Continue and Broaden First Nation Student Success***
- ***Develop Infrastructure & Partnerships to Deliver Quality Second & Third Level Services***
- ***Ensure Financial Sustainability of Education Services***
- ***Establish a Professional Education Organization***
- ***Build Indigenous Knowledge for Education***

As TNEGI moves to enhance their role from a Regional Management Organization to a Regional Educational Authority (REA), including support for Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey language revitalization is a must. Figure 2 below shows a new vision for TNEGI as an REA which includes core positions for core language development in the three schools.



**FIGURE 2 TNEGI REA PLAN**

After decades of advocacy for greater investments into Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR) from Indigenous peoples, the Federal government of Canada seems to be recognizing the urgency of Indigenous language reclamation. Canada recently introduced the *Indigenous Languages Act* which extends the meaning of Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, to include rights related to Indigenous languages (Pellitier, 2021). The Act has enabled the appointment of the first Commissioner of Indigenous Languages in Canada<sup>1</sup> to support revitalization efforts.

This creates an opportunity for Nations to accelerate the work in ILR. As such, TNEGI is moving forward to enhance Third Level Services by way of research and capacity building, ILR planning will be launched for our three schools.

#### **4. How will communities be kept informed in a Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey language revitalization process?**

TNEGI has retained the support of a communications firm to support our outreach and provide updates to the communities and the broader public as they move forward to build a plan for Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey language revitalization. The following is broad overview of the communications plan.

##### **4.1. Three Nations Education Group Language Revitalization Communications Plan 2021-23**

###### Overview:

Three Nations Education Group is pursuing a language revitalization project within the three largest First Nations communities in New Brunswick - Tobique, Elsipogtog, and Esgenoopetitj First Nations - which represent over 50% of the First Nations population in the province.

Within these communities, there are two First Nations languages - Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey - used with varying degrees of proficiency. Neqotkuk/Tobique First Nation would be classified as a "low-readiness" community with "low language vitality", while Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj are on the cusp of reclamation and revitalization with mid/low readiness with mid/low language vitality.

###### Goals:

To launch focused ILR in Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey in NB, TNEGI is focussing on the following five goals:

1. Community Mobilization: a focus on evoking community interest in language revitalization and identify potential language leaders in each of the communities to participate in the growth of collaborative language planning for the TNEGI schools.

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<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages is an important element in the implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act (the Act). On June 14, 2021, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, announced the first appointees to the new Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/culture/canadian-identity-society/languages/indigenous/commissioner.html>

2. Public Awareness Campaign: Creation of a digital communications tool in Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey to include on the TNEGI website to hear the languages spoken (translated subtitle in English) to demonstrate the importance and need for ongoing, focussed work of current speakers to ensure intergenerational knowledge transmission in our language.
3. Language Camps: plan for a land-based summer camps (min. one week per occurrence) to bring together fluent language speakers, silent language speakers, adult language learners and language teachers to encourage and nurture fluency and foster continued collaboration for the creation of shared resources within the three TNEGI schools.
4. ILR Training: make resources available to support community members who wish to increase participation in language revitalization forums, conferences, or training.
5. Documentation: consider formalizing a partnership with the University of New Brunswick Linguistics Department if there is interest in having linguists and students support documentation and archiving.

The goal of this project is to encourage excitement and enthusiasm within the three TNEGI communities about reclaiming and recovery of ancestral languages within the schools and their communities.

**Audiences:**

There are multiple segmented audiences in the TNEGI communities to reach through this work, with varying degrees of acceptance of language revitalization, therefore some different needs and tactics may be required.

**TNEGI Audiences:**

AUDIENCE	NOTES
Chiefs and Councils	Although there remains a focus on meeting basic needs for communities (housing, food, water etc...), there is support to advance language revitalization efforts, particularly in supporting the connection between identity and mental wellness.
TNEGI Teachers	TNEGI educators are excited to have more support and resources to pursue language initiatives in the classroom.

Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitjare Families	Many families already have full language immersion for their children within the homes until age 3 in these communities. Although there has been a decline in the languages vitality, parents are open to ensuring bilingualism (or trilingualism) for their children. There may remain hesitation about educational outcomes based on provincial standardization in the English curriculum.
Neqotkuk/Tobique Families	Although there has been evidence for increased excitement about opportunities for language revitalization, the language is not currently used or taught consistently. There may remain hesitation about educational outcomes based on provincial standardization in the English curriculum.

**Non-TNEGI Audiences:**

AUDIENCE	NOTES
Government of Canada - Canadian Heritage	Government funding body - need to keep informed of outcomes and included in any pro-active communications. GoC wordmark included on products
Government of New Brunswick - Education Department	Would be interested in work as it progresses
Other educational resources like Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre	Would be interested in work as it progresses
WCTI and MTI	Wolastoqeyik and Mi'kmaq Tribal Councils focussed on Aboriginal rights based issues and language revitalization rights.
Media	Potential for media stories as work progresses

**Key Messages:**

- Our language is rooted in our identity and connection to our land.
- Learning our language strengthens our minds, bodies, and spirits.
- Learning our language enriches educational outcomes for students.
- We belong to the language, the language does not belong to us.
- *Nikma'jtut apoqmatultine (Mi'kmaq)/Ntolonapemk wicukemtultine (Wolastoqey)/We work together and help one and other"*

**Plan/Tactics:**

\*much of the work planned for 2021 had to be adjusted due to complications around Covid-19

TIMELINE	TACTIC	NOTES	STATUS
February, 2021 - March, 2022	Research	Understanding Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR) and learning from other Nations who are doing work in ILR, recovery and reclamation for the TNEGI communities and schools.	Complete
January, 2022 - March, 2023	Environmental Scan of Educational Resources	Reviewing and gathering current curriculum and other digital language resources	Complete/ongoing
January, 2022 - March, 2022	Development of community engagement plan	Iterations of this work over time due to changing circumstances around Covid	Ongoing
April, 2022	Gathering of TNEGI Educators	Discuss educational resources, needs, gaps, and opportunities	Ongoing
April, 2022	Distribution of Language Report	Beaver, McIvor language report published - media interviews and community news	Ongoing
April, 2022 - July, 2022	Develop materials to show where language fits in community and	Similar to the Blackfoot hierarchy of needs model or the Inuit Social Determinants of Health model, create a visual understanding of	Not started

	individual health and well-being	how language contributes to overall health and well-being	
Summer, 2022	Language Gathering	Bringing Elders, youth, and multi-generational language keepers together to continue to teach and learn	Ongoing
Summer/Fall, 2022	TNEGI website review	Ensure TNEGI’s website reflects language goals and desired outcomes	Ongoing
Summer/Fall, 2022	Equip educators with digital resources	Building on existing digital collections of educational resources for teachers/classrooms, ensure that educators have materials to pursue language objectives in their classrooms	Ongoing
Summer/Fall/Winter, 2022	Videos	Film one video per season with a language keeper in a place where they feel connects with language to share that story orally (including versions with English subtitles that can be shared to a wider audience)	Not started
Fall, 2022	School poster campaign	Encourage students to submit their thoughts or “slogans” about why language is important - as a contest with prizes.  Create a poster campaign with the chosen idea.  Translated posters are placed prominently in schools.	Not started

Fall, 2022	Media interviews	Set up media interviews about the language work being done - successes, and barriers to success.	Not started
Fall, 2022 - Winter, 2023	School newsletters	Include language activities in each school newsletter for families to do together at home	Not started
Winter, 2023	Community Concert	Bring language speakers and local performers together for a language focused show	Not started
Throughout	Regular updates to Chief and Councils, federal and provincial governments.		

Evaluation:

In March, 2023, TNEGI will bring educators together to evaluate any qualitative observations of language revitalization or enthusiasm. Quantitative results will be monitored over many years.