



COUNCIL TRAVEL REPORT



WHAT: Indigenous Languages Conference

WHEN: April 2, 2025

WHERE: Montreal, QC

WHO: Chief Tesha Rourke

WHY: To engage in national discussions around Indigenous language revitalization, funding, and policy advocacy. Chief Rourke's participation reflects Akwesasne's commitment to protecting Kanien'kéha and supporting intergenerational language resurgence.

**NEXT
STEPS:**

- Explore forming or joining a Regional Language Committee to support collective advocacy and collaboration on language rights and funding.
- Integrate Kanien'kéha into daily governance operations, including council documents, community signage, and internal communications.
- Support youth-led language initiatives, especially those using media and technology, to normalize and celebrate language use in everyday life.





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For Immediate Release:

Onerahtókha/April 8, 2025

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES CONFERENCE *CHIEF TESHA ROURKE*

Tsi Snaihne District Chief Tesha Rourke attended the Indigenous Languages Conference in Montreal on April 2, 2025, hosted by the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. The event brought together Indigenous leaders, educators, youth, and cultural advocates to discuss strategies for sustaining and revitalizing Indigenous languages.

BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARIES:

Opening Remarks & Cultural Emphasis:

- Elder Kevin Deer delivered the opening remarks, offering a powerful reflection on the spiritual essence of Indigenous cultures and the role of language in healing and reconnection.
- A celebration of Indigenous languages and cultures took place the evening before the conference, showcasing the collective pride, strength, and resilience of Indigenous communities.
- Kahnawake shared insights into their adult immersion program, Kanien'kéha Ratiwennahní:rats, highlighting its success in supporting adult learners on their journey to reclaim and speak Kanien'kéha.

Adequacy of Funding:

- Positive Developments: Community commitment to language revitalization remains strong; immersion program is producing tangible results
- Ongoing Challenges: The decline of first-language speakers continues. Second-language fluency varies across regions. Mainstream school board support is still limited.
- Funding Concerns: Federal funding (primarily from Heritage Canada) remains inadequate—currently \$52 million annually, despite the AFN's call for \$2 billion.

Recommendations:

- Improve data collection and outcome tracking.
- Strengthen community-led governance.
- Establish long-term, sustainable funding models.

Youth Panel – The Future of Language:

This panel featured four inspiring youth, including Akwesasne's own Arihwisaks Colin Benedict. Each panelist spoke about the connection between language, identity, and their future dreams.

Key Strategies Discussed:



- Media tools like film, radio, and social media.
- Immersive and hands-on learning.
- Being surrounded by fluent speakers.

Linguistic Realities in Quebec:

- Challenges: Quebec's dual colonial languages (French and English), high translation costs, Bill 14 prioritizing French, and systemic diglossia.
- Advocacy: Regional Committee for First Nations Languages defends rights, promotes policy change, and fosters skill development.
- Urgent Issue: Funding cuts – from \$13M to \$2M – for First Nations language support.
- Call to Action: Support the *Declaration on First Nations Language Rights* and defund the place of Indigenous languages in all sectors.

Artificial Intelligence & Indigenous Languages:

Shingai Manjengwa discussed the growing role of AI in language preservation — especially in generating data for learning algorithms.

Important Questions Raised:

- *Who owns this data?*
- *How do we ensure ethical use?*
- *How can Indigenous communities lead AI development?*

Strategic Planning & Community Driven Revitalization:

Dr. Lorna Williams emphasized the importance of community-based planning and Indigenous pedagogy. Stressed collaboration between regions and government responsibility in providing adequate, consistent funding.

NETWORKING & COLLABORATION:

- Language Coordinators and Cultural Leads from Mohawk communities discussed shared goals for immersion expansion and sustainability.
- Representatives from the Regional Committee for First Nation Languages explored legislative advocacy and resource sharing.
- Elders and Knowledge Holders highlighted the need for intergenerational knowledge transfer in modern curricula.
- Youth Leaders, including Arihwisaks Benedict, stressed using technology to promote language engagement.

RECOGNITION:

A heartfelt shoutout to Arihwisaks Colin Benedict for representing Akwesasne with strength and pride on the Youth Panel. Hearing him speak Kanien'kéha and share what it means to him was incredibly powerful. E:so tsi ioianeré – your dedication, presence, and voice are inspiring. Keep planting those seeds of language and identity everywhere you go. We see you, we hear you, and we are proud of you.

MOHAWK COUNCIL OF AKWESASNE

Sustaining our inherent rights, facing challenges together to build a strong and healthy future.



KEY TAKEAWAYS & NEXT STEPS:

- Secure sustainable funding for long-term, stable investment in Indigenous language programs. Advocacy for increased and more transparent funding streams must continue.
- Elevate youth involvement in leading language projects — especially those involving media, tech, and peer-to-peer learning.
- Consider establishing or joining a Regional Language Committee to amplify Akwesasne's voice in policy discussions and resource sharing.
- Begin incorporating Kanien'kéha into council documents, signage, and community operations as a way of living the language daily.
- Actively support the Declaration on First Nations Language Rights and assert Indigenous language use as a matter of sovereignty and nationhood.



AKWESASNE—LAND WHERE THE PARTRIDGE DRUMS

PHONE: 613-575-2250
FAX: 613-575-2181

PO BOX 90
AKWESASNE, QUEBEC H0M1A0

101 TEWESATENI ROAD
AKWESASNE, ONTARIO K6H 0G5

WWW.AKWESASNE.CA
INFO@AKWESASNE.CA