

# **NORTHERN DENE LANGUAGES: USE THEM OR LOSE THEM**

## **Arctic Athabaskan Language Revitalization Plan**

**Moses Hernandez, Nina Larsson,  
Jessie MacKenzie, and Itoah Scott-Enns**

Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship

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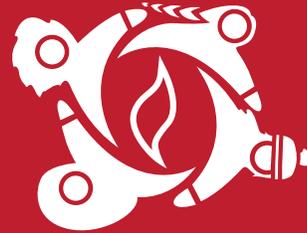
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**NORTHERN FELLOWSHIP**

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# AUTHORS

## Moses Hernandez



Moses Hernandez was born and raised in Somba Ke/Yellowknife. He has completed a BA (Honours) in political science at St. Francis Xavier University and completed graduate courses in Arctic studies and polar law with a focus on indigenous rights and traditional knowledge, at universities in Finland and Iceland, respectively. He is also an alumnus of Dechinta Bush University from their first cohort. Some of his research was recently published (2012) in a northern edition of *Pimatisiwin: Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, where he looked at some of the complexities of indigenous knowledge incorporation in government policy.

His work experience includes research and policy analyst for the Government of the Northwest Territories, and is currently the Registrar of Appeals for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Moses also enjoys working with and giving back to the youth in his community. He has worked at the Kalemi Dene School in N'dilo as a Leadership Resiliency Program Coordinator, and continues to work as a residential/community support worker for a local NGO part-time. He is also an active member and volunteer with the Yellowknife Ski Club as a communications assistant and a certified coach for youth in the Jackrabbits ski program. He is also a competitive skier on the high-performance cross-country ski team.

## Nina Larsson



Nina Larsson is a member of the Gwich'in Nation and Swedish, born and raised in France. She resides in Yellowknife – Northwest Territories – with her husband and son. Nina is currently the Executive Assistant to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.

As a skilled and experienced leader recognized for her achievement and excellence in the business, government, and charitable sectors, Nina is the founder of Energy North Corporation, a business specializing in renewable energies.

As a Fellow of the Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship (2013-2015 cohort), she wrote two policy papers: “Mind the Gender Gap” and, together with three fellows, “Northern Dene Languages: Use Them or Lose Them – Arctic Athabaskan Language Revitalization Plan.”

She also developed the vision, and spearheaded the Indigenous Circumpolar Women’s Gathering in November 2014, bringing together over 100 women from the circumpolar countries.

Known for visionary and forward thinking approaches, Nina volunteers her time on projects that will benefit Indigenous women and foster women in leadership. She strongly believes in the importance of cultural revitalization and developing an Arctic network to create positive change.

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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

### Jessie MacKenzie



Jessie MacKenzie is an Akaitcho Dene and lives in Yellowknife, NT. She has a certificate in Aboriginal Health and Community Administration through UBC's Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Health and is a Research Coordinator at the Institute for Circumpolar Health Research.

Jessie believes learning our mother tongues can expand our world view and reveals Indigenous philosophies that promote healing and prosperity in an ever-changing world. She currently uses the Denesoline Deninu K'ue dictionary and takes private language lessons with her great aunt, former interpreter Ann Yorchenko of Lutselk'e Dene First Nation.

### Itoah Scott-Enns



Itoah Scott-Enns is a member of the Tłı̄ch̄q Nation who was born and raised in the beautiful Denendeh. She graduated from the University of Toronto in June 2014 with an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in aboriginal studies and ethics, society and law. She also holds a background in communication studies, which has helped her to advance her career working for indigenous organizations including the Tłı̄ch̄q Government and the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

Itoah is a former member of Native Students' Association Executive at the University of Toronto and recently represented the university on a trip to Belize in 2013 to learn from Mayan and Garifuna Indigenous communities. Itoah's academic excellence has been acknowledged by various awards including the Helen Bassett Commemorative Student Award and the University of Toronto Dean's Initiative Travel Award. She has volunteered for the Toronto Truth and Reconciliation Event and the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning. In the future, Itoah hopes to see the North and her Tłı̄ch̄q people flourish as healthy and sovereign communities. To contribute to the advancement of indigenous self-determination, she is pursuing law school and most importantly, she is trying to learn her Tłı̄ch̄q language.

# INTRODUCTION

Language and stories express our cultural identities and connections to our lands. Colonial pressures and globalizing forces accelerate assimilation into the dominant English-speaking world and contribute to the loss of Arctic Athabaskan languages. Yet Indigenous people continue to demonstrate resilience and the will to rebuild their linguistic communities through local language revitalization programs. However, the lack of Indigenous language legislation and funding at the international and federal levels in the Arctic regions of Canada and the United States suggests the need to further develop policies that promote and protect Athabaskan languages, cultures, and identities.

Despite the dominance of the English language in North America, Indigenous language users are determined to rebuild their linguistic communities through tools such as social media and political rights campaigns. Colonial language policies and funding obstacles are among the barriers built by federal, provincial and state authorities in Canada and the United States. To succeed, language revitalization needs policies supported by both settler and Indigenous governments. This is especially true for the Northern Dene language family. These languages are widely used Indigenous dialects in Arctic North America, and one (Ket) still survives in the Russian Arctic but has very few

speakers. Unlike the Navajo, some Northern Dene languages are endangered;<sup>1</sup> in Arctic Canada most of the fluent speakers are elderly.

This report examines the challenge of Northern Dene language vitality and identifies options and recommendations for Arctic Athabaskan linguistic community recovery. The authors acknowledge that the multiplicity of Northern Dene dialects, some with many speakers and others with few, presents real challenges. Given the scarce resources available for northern Indigenous language programs, this document does not recommend specific spending priorities for either federal or regional governments. Nor do we suggest that the kind of “Standardization” strategies under discussion in Inuit communities in Greenland and Nunavut are realistic options for the Arctic Athabaskans.

**Indigenous people continue to demonstrate resilience and the will to rebuild their linguistic communities through local language revitalization programs.”**

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<sup>1</sup> The Endangered Languages. accessed September 11, 2015, <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/#/3/63.954/-57.107/0/100000/0/low/mid/high/unknown>

# PROBLEM

Simply put, if Arctic Athabaskan communities do not use their Northern Dene languages, they will slowly but surely lose them. This problem has several dimensions: Indigenous, regional, state or territorial, and federal.

## **Indigenous Dimensions**

For generations Northern Dene First Nation and Alaskan Athabaskan tribal leaders have been negotiating questions of land and jurisdiction and rebuilding communities shattered by colonialism. With the settlement of land claims and the implementation of self-government, leaders now seem more inclined to make Arctic Athabaskan language revitalization a higher priority. The dimensions of this challenge include:

1. A minority of Arctic Athabaskan families use a Northern Dene language at home;
2. At present, too few learning environments exist for cultural Athabaskan language and linguistic exchanges between elders and youth.
3. In general, Northern Dene governments and organizations do not require the use of their Indigenous tongue as a language of work;
4. Some communities speak more than one Northern Dene language, which creates an unhealthy competition for limited resources;
5. Some communities have very few Arctic Athabaskan-language speakers and are less able to attract funding and teachers; and
6. Not all Dene leaders speak their Arctic Athabaskan languages in public settings.

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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

### Regional, State or Territorial dimensions

Because national governments have not given much attention to the health of Arctic Athabaskan tongues — which, in fact, are international languages — responsibility falls to state (Alaska), territorial (Northwest Territories and Yukon) and tribal language authorities.

1. Not enough funding exists for Arctic Athabaskan daycare and pre-school programs;
  2. Arctic Athabaskan language proficiency is not required for high school graduation;
  3. There are no programs available for public service employees to learn an Arctic Athabaskan language;
  4. Few industrial employers provide opportunities to use Northern Dene dialects as a “language of work.”
2. English is the official language of the United States, yet numerous Indigenous languages are still a part of that nation’s heritage and cultural fabric but are not actively supported by Washington.
  3. Arctic Athabaskan language proficiency is not required for high school graduation;
  4. There are no programs available for public service employees to learn an Arctic Athabaskan language;
  5. Few industrial employers provide opportunities to use Northern Dene dialects as a “language of work.”

### Federal Dimensions

Federal laws maintain Arctic Athabaskan languages at a lower status in Canada and the U.S.

1. Canada’s Constitution recognizes English and French as national languages, but has not given sufficient support to Indigenous languages in general and specifically Arctic Athabaskan languages.

# BACKGROUND

## First Nations Government Language Policies

The Athabaskan language groups in the Northwest Territories (N.W.T.) include the Denesuline, Gwich'in, North Slavey, South Slavey and Tłı̄chǫ. Each language region has developed an Aboriginal Language Plan in partnership with the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to guide the delivery of programs in their own language.<sup>2</sup> Each region receives funding from the GNWT for the implementation of their language plans.<sup>3</sup> Regional budgets approximate \$300,000 with funds for plan implementation, language literacy, and revitalization programs. Regions are implementing their plans; however, there is no mechanism to monitor progress, making it difficult to gauge the effectiveness of programs.

In addition, the Akaitcho, the Dehcho, the Gwich'in, the Sahtu, and the Tłı̄chǫ have made language a priority in their programs. Due to the connected nature of Indigenous language and culture, it is difficult to determine the full extent of efforts and funds being invested into language. For example, communities often link language learning to on-the-land programming, traditional knowledge projects, and other cultural activities.

## Northwest Territories Language Policies

Under the *N.W.T. Official Languages Act*,<sup>4</sup> the Athabaskan languages are official languages along with four other Aboriginal languages, and English and French. The GNWT committed to offering essential programs and services in all official languages.<sup>5</sup> Despite the “equal status” of the

**Despite the ‘equal status’ of the Indigenous languages in the NWT, there are very few Athabaskan language immersion programs to support the majority Indigenous population.**

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2 Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, *Aboriginal Languages Plan: a Shared Responsibility* (Yellowknife: Government of the Northwest Territories, 2010), accessed June 30, 2015, [http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/T4.02.01\\_NWT%20Aboriginal%20Languages%20Plan%20-%20A%20Shared%20Responsibility.pdf](http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/T4.02.01_NWT%20Aboriginal%20Languages%20Plan%20-%20A%20Shared%20Responsibility.pdf).

3 Government of the Northwest Territories, Education, Culture, and Employment, *Official Languages* (2015), accessed May 2015, <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/official-languages/aboriginal-languages/strategies-and-agreements>.

4 *Official Languages Act*, R.S.N.W.T. 1988,c.O-1,s.4, accessed June 30, 2015, <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/official-languages/official-languages.a.pdf?t1435689004138>.

5 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Main Estimates 2014-2015* (Yellowknife: Government of the Northwest Territories, 2014), accessed May 2015, <http://www.fin.gov.nt.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2014-2015mainestimates.pdf>.

## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

Indigenous languages in the N.W.T., there are very few Athabaskan language immersion programs to support the majority Indigenous population. Examples of Indigenous language immersion programs include the Tłı̨ch̨q̨ early childhood education program<sup>6</sup> and the Dehcho Aboriginal Language Revitalization Program.

The GNWT published the *Aboriginal Languages Plan: A Shared Responsibility* outlining strategies to strengthen Aboriginal languages.<sup>7</sup> The N.W.T. based the Plan on the idea that families, communities, and governments share responsibility for language revitalization. The GNWT worked with each language region to develop an Aboriginal language plan specific to their region and language population.

The GNWT's 2015-2016 budget includes \$3.8 million in revenues from the federal government under the Canada-N.W.T. Shared Cooperation Agreement for French and Aboriginal languages.<sup>8</sup> The GNWT has budgeted \$4.8 million for distribution to communities to manage their Aboriginal Language Plans, and allocates another \$370,000 for Aboriginal language broadcasting.<sup>9</sup>

The shift towards community-managed language programs has inevitably diminished the GNWT's scope of responsibility. As well, the restructuring of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has eliminated language positions and programs within the GNWT. In 2015, the GNWT began a review of the *Official Languages Act*.

## Yukon Language Policies

Unlike the NWT, which adopted official bilingualism in 1988, and Nunavut, which inherited this legislation on its creation in 1999, the Yukon Government negotiated an agreement with Ottawa that provided funding parity for Indigenous and French language services throughout the territory. The Yukon Government (YG) *Language Act*, Section 2, reads: "Nothing in this Act limits the authority of the Legislative Assembly to advance the equality of status of English, French, or a Yukon aboriginal languages."<sup>10</sup> With the settlement of Yukon First Nations land claims in 1992 and Parliament's adoption of Yukon's Aboriginal self-government agreements after 1993, Yukon's self-governing First Nations began to assume responsibility for their Indigenous language programs.

6 Tłı̨ch̨q̨ Government, Office of the Cultural Coordinator, Gonàowo t'a Nàts'etso; Èlets'àts'edı t'a Nàts'etso : Tłı̨ch̨q̨ Language, Culture and Way of Life: A Report from the Cultural Coordinator 2010-2013 (Behchokò, NT: Tłı̨ch̨q̨ Government, 2013), accessed May 2015, <http://www.tlicho.ca/sites/default/files/CC%20Report%202010-2013.pdf>

7 Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Aboriginal Languages Plan.

8 Government of the Northwest Territories, Main Estimates 2015-2016 (Yellowknife: Government of the Northwest Territories, 2015), accessed May 2015, <http://www.fin.gov.nt.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2015-2016mainestimates.pdf>.

9 Ibid.

10. Languages Act, R.S.Y. 2002, c133,s.2, accessed May 2015, <http://www.gov.yk.ca/legislation/acts/languages.pdf>.

## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

Late in the 20th century, the YG hired Indigenous language instructors for public schools. In 2006, the YG Department of Education created a First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit within the Public Schools Branch. The Unit is responsible for developing language classes' curriculum, and for continuing to provide a Northern Dene cultural and language resource person to each school.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it provides funding to the Yukon Native Language Centre based at Yukon College.

In 2010, the Yukon Government and the Kluane First Nation, in co-operation with the Self-Government Secretariat of the Council of Yukon First Nations, signed the Northern Strategy Trust<sup>12</sup> \$2.5 million funding agreement to implement the *Walking Together to Revitalize and Recognize Yukon First Nation Languages*<sup>13</sup> program. Lack of funding and human resources remains a barrier to implement their own language revitalization plans.

### Alaska Language Policies

Under Alaska Senate Bill 130, language advisory committees became responsible for making recommendations regarding the future of the heritage language in each of their communities. The Assembly of Alaska Native Educators adopted *Guidelines for Strengthening Indigenous Languages*<sup>14</sup> in 2001 with a goal of strengthening their languages with inter-agency support.

Established in 2012,<sup>15</sup> the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council provides recommendations and advice to both the Governor and Legislature on programs, policies, projects, networking and advocacy.<sup>16</sup> In October 2014, the Alaskan Governor signed the House Bill 216<sup>17</sup> recognizing 21 Alaskan Indigenous languages as official languages, but funding and implementation plans are unclear at this point.

11 Yukon Government, "First Nations Programs & Partnerships," First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit, accessed May 2015, <http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/programs.html>

12 Yukon Government, "Northern Strategy Trust," Executive Council Office, accessed May 2015, [http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/northern\\_strategy\\_trust.html](http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/northern_strategy_trust.html)

13 Council of Yukon First Nations, "Language Revitalization," Self-Government Secretariat, accessed May 2015, <http://sgsyukon.ca/language-initiatives/>

14 Assembly of Alaska Native Educators, *Guidelines for Strengthening Indigenous Languages* (Alaska: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2001), accessed May 2015, <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/Publications/language.pdf>

15 State of Alaska, Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, "Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council," Community and Regional Affairs, accessed May 2015, <http://commerce.state.ak.us/dnn/dcra/AKNativeLanguagePreservationAdvisoryCouncil.aspx>

16 Alaska State Legislature, "Bill History/Action for 28th Legislature," 28th Legislature(2013-2014), accessed May 2015, [www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?Bill=HB%20216&session=28..](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?Bill=HB%20216&session=28..)

17 *An Act adding the Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Alutiiq, Unangax, Dena'ina, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Gwich'in, Tanana, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Hän, Ahtna, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian languages as official languages of the state*, S.L.A. 14,c.116, *Ibid*.

## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

### Canadian Federal Government Language Policies

One effect of 20th century assimilation policies was the marginalization of Indigenous languages in Canada. The federal government established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and adopted the *Official Languages Act*,<sup>18</sup> the *Constitution Act, 1982*,<sup>19</sup> and the “Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”<sup>20</sup> These provided legal recognition and protection of French and English as official languages in Canada.<sup>21</sup> While Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, recognizes Aboriginal rights “to practice one’s own culture,”<sup>22</sup> Indigenous languages are not specifically recognized in the Constitution. Nevertheless, the Charter of Rights may be read to offer some protection for Aboriginal rights, including language rights.<sup>23</sup>

The federal government has since launched the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives “to support the preservation and revitalization of Aboriginal languages.”<sup>24</sup> This program seeks

to enhance Aboriginal language and culture preservation and revitalization by funding community-based initiatives and projects. As a component of the Aboriginal Peoples’ Program, this initiative has three key policy objectives:

1. To strengthen Aboriginal cultural identity;
2. To encourage the full participation of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian life; and
3. To preserve and revitalize Aboriginal languages and cultures as living elements of Canadian society.

Grants amounting to \$1.34 million and \$16.2 million supported the Aboriginal Peoples’ Program in 2013-2014,<sup>25</sup> but these funds are not all for Aboriginal language programs.

### U.S. Federal government Language Policies

Athabaskan languages are widely spoken across the United States, spanning from

18 Official Language Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. 31 (4th Supp.), accessed June 30, 2015, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/O-3.01.pdf>.

19 Constitution Act, 1982, accessed at Government of Canada, Department of Justice, A Consolidation of the Constitution Acts, 1867-1982, accessed June 30, 2015, [http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/CONST\\_E.pdf](http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/CONST_E.pdf)

20 “Part 1, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” Constitution Act, 1982, Ibid.

21 Prior to this, Federal recognition/protection of French and English as official languages was limited to parliamentary debates and court proceedings pursuant to Section 133 of the British North America Act 1867.

22 Michael Asch, Home and Native Land: Aboriginal Rights and the Canadian Constitution (Agincourt: Methuen, 1984), 30.

23 Konstantin Prodanovic, “The Silent Genocide: Aboriginal Language Loss,” Terry\*, accessed May 2015, <http://www.terry.ubc.ca/2013/10/16/the-silent-genocide-aboriginal-language-loss-faq/>

24 Government of Canada, “Aboriginal Languages Initiative: Aboriginal Peoples’ Program,” Canadian Heritage, accessed May 2015, <http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1267285112203>

25 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, “Canadian Heritage,” 2013-14 Estimates, accessed May 2015, <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/20132014/me-bpd/me-bpd02-eng.asp#toc2-23>

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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

Alaska to the southern states. Legislation passed in the 1970s promoted Indigenous rights for Native American education and self-determination, and included language provisions.<sup>26</sup> The *Native American Languages Act* (1990) solidified support and recognition of Native languages, but failed initially to provide funding for programming.<sup>27</sup> The *Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act* eventually established \$50 million for language immersion programs.<sup>28</sup> More recently, the *Native American Languages Reauthorization Act* of 2014 amended outdated legislation to support Native American language vitality.<sup>29</sup>

U.S. policies do not recognize Native American languages as official languages alongside English. However, some individual states support Indigenous language revitalization. For example, one of the main purposes of the *New*

*Mexico Indian Education Act* is to “ensure maintenance of native languages”<sup>30</sup> and Native American groups have implemented language education programs from kindergarten to post-secondary school.<sup>31</sup> groups have implemented language education programs from kindergarten to post-secondary school.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Warhol, Larisa. (2012). Center for Applied Linguistics. Native American Language Policy in the United States. Accessed from <http://www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/native-american-language-policy.pdf>.

27 Crawford, James. (2015). “James Crawford’s Language Policy Website and Emporium”. Archives. Language Policy Website (1997-2008). Native American Languages Act of 1990. Accessed from <http://www.languagepolicy.net/archives/nala.htm>.

28 Cultural Survival. (2012). Native American Languages Funding Bills Introduced in House and Senate. Accessed from <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/native-american-languages-funding-bills-introduced-house-and-senate>.

29 U.S Congress, Indian Affairs Committee, Amending The Native American Programs Act of 1974 To Provide Flexibility And Re-Authorization To Ensure The Survival And Continuity Vitality Of Native American Languages. 113th Cong., 2d sess., 2014, S.Rep 113-266, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/113th-congress/senate-report/266>.

30 New Mexico Public Education. (2015). Department. Indian Education Division. Indian Education Act. Accessed from <http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/IEDIEA.html>.

31 Rose, Christina. “10 Ways To Boost Tribal Language Programs”. Indian Country Today, April 27, 2015. Accessed from <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/04/27/10-ways-boost-tribal-language-programs-160111>.

# OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

## First Nations Options

1. Athabaskan families should make more use of Arctic Athabaskan languages at home;
2. Communities should create more Arctic Athabaskan language learning environments in which elders, children, and youth can interact;
3. Current and emerging leadership should increase their use of Arctic Athabaskan languages in public settings as much as possible; and
4. First Nations governments and organizations could require greater use of Arctic Athabaskan languages in their operations.

## Analysis of First Nation Options

1. Athabaskan families should make more use of their Arctic Athabaskan Languages at home. For example: many Dene communities might host cultural events that honour elders and teachers. Communities might also hold language festivals at which grandparents could be awarded prizes for being role models and cultural mentors within their own families. Perhaps also the Arctic Athabaskan Council could sponsor appropriate awards for outstanding language transmission work by elders.

<b>Opportunities</b>
Encourage Arctic Athabaskan Language exchange amongst all generations.
Host family nights using Arctic Athabaskan Language games and programming with prizes.
<b>Challenges</b>
Anglophone and Francophone language television is a constant distraction for children and youth.
English is required in most workplaces so families will want their children to have a good command of English.

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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

2. Communities should create more Arctic Athabaskan Language learning environments in which elders, children, and youth can interact. For example:

Opportunities
On-the-land programming offers a reconnection to land-based traditions.
Entrepreneurs or co-operatives could open Arctic Athabaskan language child care or daycare centres.
Encourage service matching between seniors' homes and child care or after-school programs.
Challenges
Land programming may be a high-cost item.
Liability issues may arise for on-the-land programming and service matching.

3. Current and emerging leadership should increase their use of Arctic Athabaskan Languages as much as possible. For example: a Dene Member of the Legislative Assembly, Jackson Lafferty, speaks Tłı̄ch̄q in the N.W.T. Legislature, although he is a fluent English speaker. This requires the GNWT to respond to the demand for Tłı̄ch̄q language services.

Opportunities
Some leaders may welcome the opportunity to display their fluency in Athabaskan dialects.
Communities can also encourage their leadership to use their Arctic Athabaskan Languages more often.
This will increase the cultural pride of community members.
This could encourage other First Nation governments and organizations to provide Arctic Athabaskan language programming.
Challenges
Other leaders may not be fluent or comfortable speaking an Athabaskan dialect.
Some non-indigenous people may resist the increased use of Arctic Athabaskan languages.
Could cause tension within communities that use more than language or dialect.

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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

4. First Nations governments and organizations could require greater use of Arctic Athabaskan languages in their operations. For example: The Tłı̄chǫ Assembly is conducted entirely in the Tłı̄chǫ language and translation service is provided for non-Tłı̄chǫ speakers. Also, the N.W.T. Legislative Assembly provides simultaneous translation for MLAs who participate in debates in their own languages. Communities should create more Arctic Athabaskan Language learning environments in which elders, children, and youth can interact. For example:

<b>Opportunities</b>
This could increase community pride.
It could encourage other governments to provide language programming in their communities.
<b>Challenges</b>
This could negatively affect staff morale of non-indigenous speakers.
Could cause competition and tension in communities that speak more than one Athabaskan language.

## Territorial and State Options

1. Dedicate long-term funding for Arctic Athabaskan language programs for daycares and pre-schools;
  2. Amend territorial and state curricula to make Arctic Athabaskan language proficiency a requirement for high school graduation;
  3. Territorial and state governments should develop structures to support public sector employees' Arctic Athabaskan language learning, through the use of instructors, course material, and leave with pay;
  4. Require industry to negotiate the use of Arctic Athabaskan languages in appropriate workplaces.
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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

### Analysis of Territorial Options

1. Provide permanent and sufficient funding for Arctic Athabaskan language programming in daycare and pre-schools.

<b>Opportunities</b>
This initiative could create community and entrepreneurial openings for home-based businesses or village co-ops.
<b>Challenges</b>
Without federal or territorial/state supports, such centres might struggle.
These facilities will be more expensive than babysitters.

2. Amend territorial curriculum to make Arctic Athabaskan language proficiency a requirement for high school graduation. Example: the Dehcho Adult Aboriginal Language Program is a post-secondary language program that could provide a framework for the development of secondary school programming.

<b>Opportunities</b>
Language skills increase the possibility of high school graduates being admitted to top universities.
Could be offered as an alternative or an addition to the French high school graduation requirement.
Elsewhere in the world, a mastery of two, three or more languages is considered an asset.
Indigenous Language learning can support the overall health and well-being of youth.
<b>Challenges</b>
Possibility of negative reactions from non-Indigenous groups.
Recruitment of Arctic Athabaskan language teachers and curriculum development material can be costly.
Local Arctic Athabaskan language choices can be politically problematic.

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**Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them**

3. Government should develop structures to support public sector employees' Arctic Athabaskan language learning through the use of instructors, course material, and leave with pay. For example: the Canadian federal government expends large sums on French language training for federal public servants. The territorial governments in Canada could mirror these programs to develop similar opportunities for territorial government employees to gain Indigenous language skills.

Opportunities
Successful implementation requires territorial/state, and/or federal government, union, and First Nations support.
This would represent an important investment for the cultural well-being of territorial citizens.
Challenges
Requires significant public sector expenditure for investment for the cultural well-being of territorial/state citizens.
Could encounter management opposition, which would frustrate successful implementation.

4. Require industry to negotiate the use Arctic Athabaskan Languages in appropriate workplaces. For example: The Canadian-owned Red Dog mine employs hundreds of Inuit from the Nana Region of Alaska, making it likely that Inuktitut-speaking crews operate there. The Tantalus Bute Coal mine in the Yukon Territory operated with a Southern Tutchone work force, organized by a tribal leader functioning as a labour contractor. In such a setting "language-of-work" agreements could easily be negotiated.

Opportunities
Reducing language conflicts between settler supervisors and Indigenous workers could improve workplace safety.
Such agreements could reduce Indigenous employee turnover.
Such agreements could improve labour-management relations.
IBA, SEA, and Collective Agreements are among the instruments that could be used to negotiate such accords.

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## Northern Dene languages: Use Them or Lose Them

Challenges
Temporary southern workers may object to reduction of Indigenous employee turnover.
Although they routinely accept such policies elsewhere in the world, resource industries might see language requirements as a disincentive to invest in the territories/state.
It would be hard to implement the use of Arctic Athabaskan Language in the workplace if the regional, state or territorial governments have not already done so.

### Federal Options

First Nations and territorial governments should collectively negotiate a new language accord with the federal government that supports Athabaskan language use as well as French and English. For example: in the 1980s and 1990s, the three territorial governments in Canada negotiated language agreements with the federal government, agreements that recognized Canadian objectives towards bilingualism and territorial goals of supporting Indigenous languages. Following land claims settlements (self-government and devolution agreements) in Alaska and the three territories, the time may be right for new Athabaskan language negotiations that bring tribal authorities to the table with state and territorial governments for a 21st century Dene Language Accord, that might be negotiated first in Canada and, later, the United States.

### Analysis of Federal Options

Opportunities
This could be a nation-building initiative
Challenges
It could be costly

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendations for First Nations**

1. Dene Leaders should begin to use their Arctic Athabaskan languages on every possible occasion.
2. Families should use Arctic Athabaskan language in the home.
3. Create learning environments for elders, youth and children to interact.
4. First Nations and tribal organizations should increasingly communicate in their Arctic Athabaskan language.
5. Negotiate with industry for the use of Arctic Athabaskan Languages in appropriate workplaces.
6. First Nations and territorial governments should collectively negotiate a new language accord with the federal government that supports Arctic Athabaskan language, as well as French and English.

## **Recommendations for Territorial Governments**

1. Government should develop structures to support public sector employee Arctic Athabaskan Language learning: instructors, course material, leave with pay and financial incentives for successful graduates.
2. Provide sufficient funding for Athabaskan language programming in daycare and pre-schools.
3. Amend territorial curriculums to make Arctic Athabaskan language a requirement for high school graduation.
4. Require industry to negotiate the use of Arctic Athabaskan languages in appropriate workplaces.

## **Recommendations for Federal Governments**

1. First Nations and territorial governments should collectively negotiate a new language Accord with the federal government that supports Arctic Athabaskan languages, as well as French and English.
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# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The authors of this policy report's recommendations intend them only for consideration by the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). As a circumpolar non-governmental organization with broad cross-jurisdictional policy objectives, the Arctic Council is well positioned to support Indigenous communities within and across member states in the implementation of community-based and community level indicators for measuring language revitalization efforts. It is important to note that the performance measures that are developed and advocated by the SDWG (as a non-governmental organization) are different than and distinct from the performance measures required of public governments. In this context, the recommendations in this paper address and support community-based language revitalization programming, and accept that it should be up to individual language groups and communities to develop indicators according to their needs. While the SDWG may have formal evaluation processes, the consultants recommend that the Arctic Athabaskan Council respect the informal implementation processes of communities and families.

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