



Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization Mid-Term Evaluation Report



SILR

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LANA KLOK**
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Executive Summary



The external mid-term evaluation of Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (SILR) assessed SILR's progress in building community capacity, supporting Indigenous language revitalization, and promoting cultural resurgence. Guided by Indigenous and decolonial evaluation principles, the evaluation emphasized relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect for community leadership. This report reflects on project efforts, identifying strengths and challenges, and offers actionable insights to ensure sustainability and greater impact.

Approach and Methodology

The evaluation used culturally aligned approaches, including conversations with community members, Elders, and program participants. Methods included visiting sessions, conversation circles, document review, and analysis of key metrics. The process emphasized sovereignty, self-determination, and strength-based practices, ensuring that community voices were honoured.

Key Insights

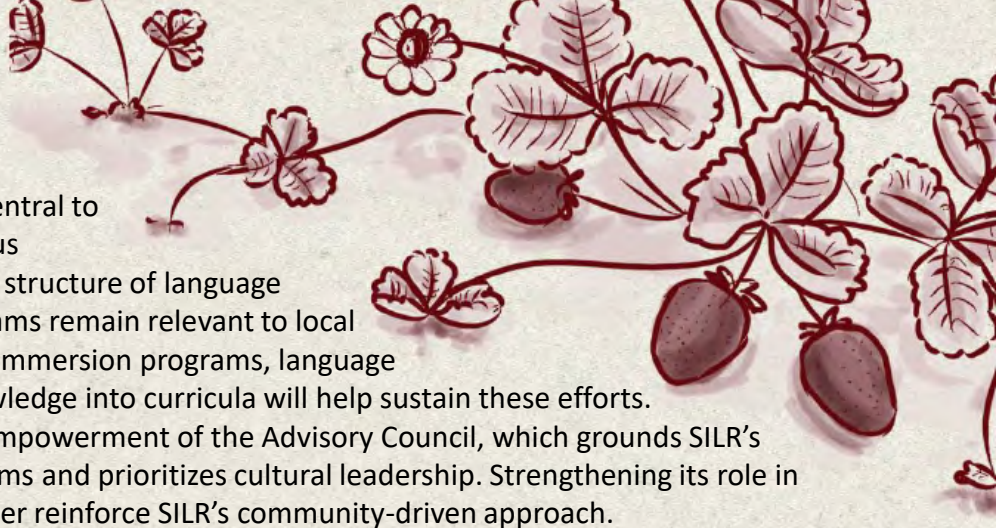
The sensemaking process identified four key themes from the stories shared, providing a holistic view of SILR's achievements and challenges and guiding future refinements:

- 1. Language Revitalization:** Language is viewed as a living entity, essential for identity and cultural survival. Revitalization is a healing process that reconnects generations and reclaims sovereignty. Community-led approaches and integrating language with cultural and spiritual practices are key in revitalization work.
- 2. Values:** Relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect guide SILR, ensuring efforts are community-driven and culturally aligned. Elders' teachings emphasize flexibility and community leadership, helping sustain long-term success.
- 3. Foundations:** Community involvement, collaboration, and Elder support are key to sustaining language revitalization. Building a "community of practice" ensures capacity for future initiatives and supports SILR's progress.
- 4. Tensions:** Navigating colonial institutions and funding complexities poses challenges. SILR can develop strategies to balance institutional demands with community accountability, staying true to Indigenous protocols and building trust-based partnerships.

Offerings and Recommendations

The evaluation highlighted several promising practices rooted in community relationships and cultural values that can guide SILR efforts. These practices, which reflect successful actions and culturally aligned approaches, provide a roadmap for helping ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the project.





First, community-led and culturally responsive approaches have been central to SILR's success. By allowing Indigenous communities to define the pace and structure of language revitalization, SILR ensures its programs remain relevant to local traditions. Expanding initiatives like immersion programs, language camps, and integrating cultural knowledge into curricula will help sustain these efforts. A key aspect of this is the ongoing empowerment of the Advisory Council, which grounds SILR's work in Indigenous knowledge systems and prioritizes cultural leadership. Strengthening its role in decision-making processes will further reinforce SILR's community-driven approach.

Second, SILR has effectively integrated language learning with cultural and spiritual activities, such as traditional ceremonies and land-based practices. These holistic approaches deepen learners' connection to their heritage and ensure language is revived within the broader context of cultural resurgence. Expanding intergenerational knowledge sharing between Elders and youth through mentorship programs and leadership opportunities will foster future language champions and sustain cultural transmission across generations.

Capacity building is another essential component of SILR's success. The training and support provided to language teachers have been critical for ensuring that language programs are sustained by knowledgeable, culturally responsive educators. Offering further professional development for teachers, including leadership and advanced proficiency training, will enhance these efforts. Additionally, SILR's commitment to creating safe and inclusive learning spaces has allowed participants to reconnect with their language without fear of judgment. Expanding these culturally safe spaces will support more community members in their language journeys.

Lastly, SILR's emphasis on data sovereignty ensures that knowledge generated from language revitalization efforts remains under community control. Continuing to develop protocols that protect cultural data and empowering communities to lead research processes will strengthen community ownership. SILR should also focus on building stronger collaborative networks for shared learning across Indigenous language programs and regions. These partnerships will help sustain collective progress and ensure the continued growth of revitalization efforts.

Conclusion

The evaluation highlighted SILR's success in promoting Indigenous language revitalization through community-led approaches and relational accountability. It emphasized the importance of Elders' teachings, intergenerational knowledge sharing, the creation of safe learning environments, and more. By continuing to honour Indigenous knowledge systems and strengthening partnerships, SILR is well-positioned for long-term success.

MID-TERM EVALUATION

BY INDIGENOUS INSIGHTS IN COLLABORATION WITH TAYLOR WILSON & LANA KLOK

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS REVITALIZATION



VALUES FOUNDATIONS



Purpose



The purpose of this external mid-term evaluation is to assess the progress of the Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (SILR) project in achieving its goals of building community capacity, supporting Indigenous language revitalization, and promoting cultural resurgence. Guided by Indigenous and decolonial evaluation principles, this evaluation emphasizes relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect for community leadership.

This evaluation serves multiple functions:

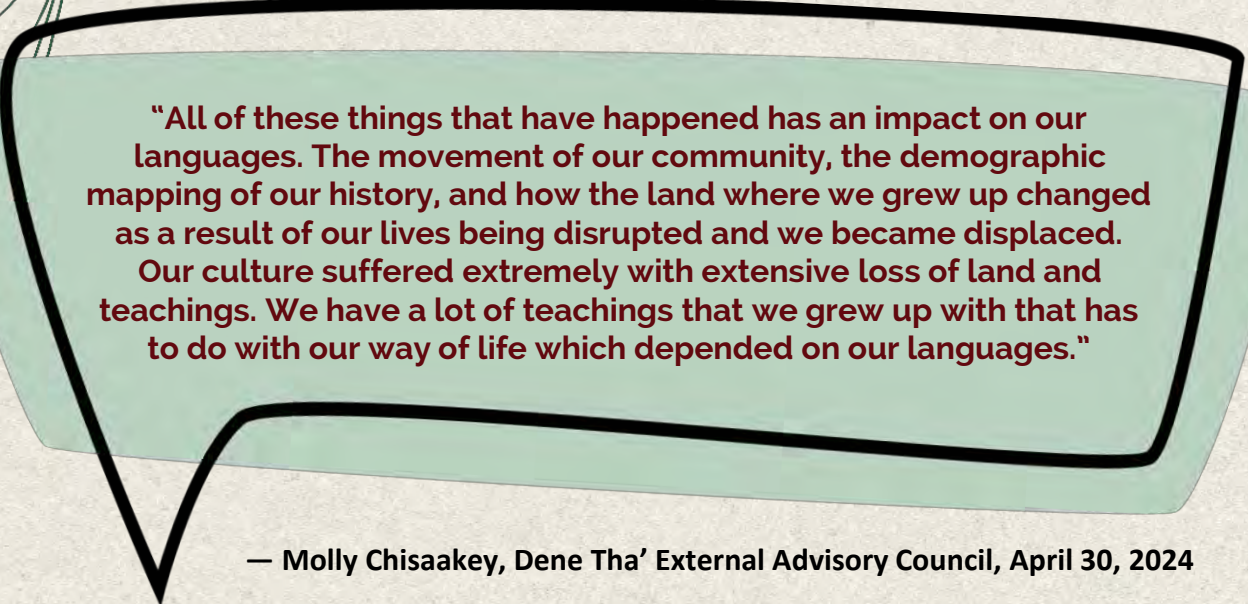
1. Provides a holistic reflection on how SILR has progressed toward its intermediate outcomes and theory of change.
2. Identifies strengths and challenges in the project's current strategies.
3. Offers actionable insights to support SILR in refining its work to increase its long-term impact on Indigenous language revitalization efforts.

The findings from this evaluation are meant to inform the next steps for SILR, ensuring that the project continues to evolve in response to the needs and aspirations of the communities it serves. By centering community voices and culturally aligned evaluation methods, SILR can use the learnings from this evaluation to enhance sustainability, foster intergenerational language transmission, and strengthen collaborative partnerships moving forward.

This work is about centering stories. Stories ask us to show up as our whole selves — mind, body, heart, spirit. We invite you to approach what is shared in this report with care, to take your time, to sit with the stories, and to consider what is being offered on these pages. We ask you to notice what is coming up as you make time to reflect on and listen to the questions and curiosities that emerge.

A full-page background image showing a vibrant Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) display in shades of green and yellow over a dark, starry night sky. Below the sky, a range of snow-capped mountains is visible, with a dark forest line at their base. In the foreground, a calm body of water reflects the lights from the sky and mountains. The overall scene is serene and majestic.

Background and Historical Context

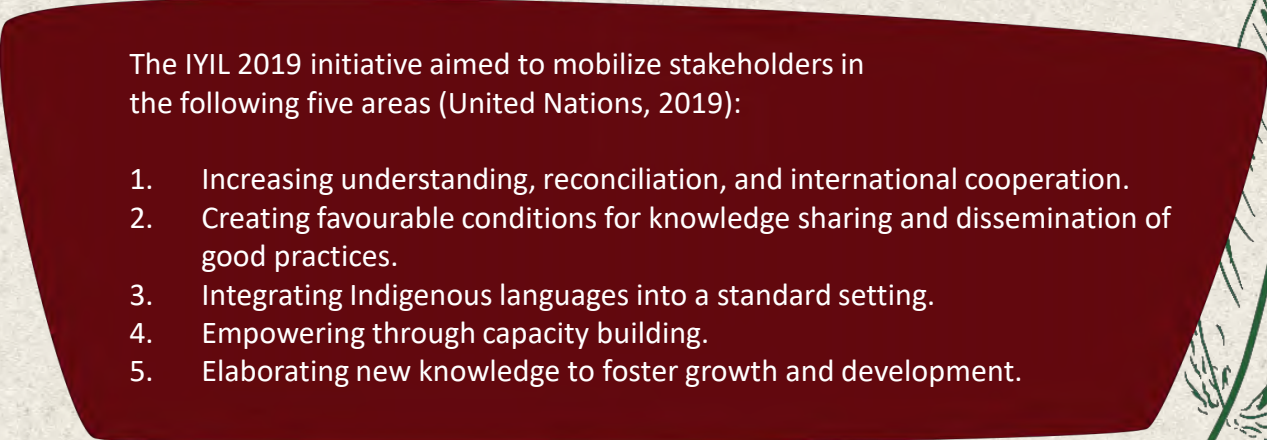


"All of these things that have happened has an impact on our languages. The movement of our community, the demographic mapping of our history, and how the land where we grew up changed as a result of our lives being disrupted and we became displaced. Our culture suffered extremely with extensive loss of land and teachings. We have a lot of teachings that we grew up with that has to do with our way of life which depended on our languages."

— Molly Chisaakey, Dene Tha' External Advisory Council, April 30, 2024

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its 94 Calls to Action following a six-year inquiry into the Indigenous Residential School (IRS) system in Canada. Based on thousands of hours of testimony from over 6,000 survivors, the TRC's final report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, exposed the IRS system's long history and devastating impacts on Indigenous communities. The 94 Calls to Action are divided into two categories: Legacy (Calls 1-42), which addresses the systemic effects of the IRS on child welfare, education, health, justice, language, and culture; and Reconciliation (Calls 43-94), which focuses on dismantling systemic racism and establishing a new foundation for Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. Several of these Calls emphasize the importance of Indigenous language revitalization (Appendix B - Table 1).

Following the TRC report, a significant global initiative took place in 2019, when the United Nations declared it the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL 2019). This movement recognized the need for revitalization efforts for Indigenous languages on regional, national, and international levels (United Nations, 2019). IYIL 2019 also highlighted the central role that Indigenous languages play in preserving complex systems of history, culture, knowledge, and communication, which are invaluable for building global cultural diversity, protecting environments, and supporting community health and well-being (United Nations, 2019).



The IYIL 2019 initiative aimed to mobilize stakeholders in the following five areas (United Nations, 2019):

1. Increasing understanding, reconciliation, and international cooperation.
 2. Creating favourable conditions for knowledge sharing and dissemination of good practices.
 3. Integrating Indigenous languages into a standard setting.
 4. Empowering through capacity building.
 5. Elaborating new knowledge to foster growth and development.
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This effort aligned with previous United Nations initiatives to support Indigenous languages globally, including the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (Appendix B - Table 2).

A key development following IYIL 2019 was the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), which highlighted the critical state of Indigenous languages globally. In December 2019, based on a recommendation by the PFII, the United Nations declared 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, further acknowledging the importance of Indigenous languages worldwide. This proclamation was a critical step in the ongoing process of recognizing and strengthening Indigenous languages, including policy recommendations such as proclaiming Indigenous languages as co-official, developing educational policies and intercultural education, supporting Indigenous initiatives, facilitating access to public services in Indigenous languages, and advocating for Indigenous-led language preservation, revitalization and promotion (Requesens-Galnares, 2023).

In June 2019, the Government of Canada introduced and passed the Indigenous Languages Act (ILA), which aims to “reclaim, revitalize, maintain, and strengthen Indigenous languages in Canada” (Government of Canada, 2024, para. 1). The ILA affirmed Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, to include rights related to Indigenous language.

In response to both national and global initiatives on Indigenous languages, a partnership was formed in 2021 among the SILR project, the University of Alberta, and the BHP Foundation to promote and support the revitalization of Indigenous languages across Canada.

Indigenous Language Revitalization in Canada

“I think this language revitalization is not only language revitalization. I think it's cultural revitalization because our community has been just so poor, so devoid of our cultural practices because of the religious influence by the Church that forbade our people to practice their cultural traditions. They were even trying to say that drumming and smudging were not our culture.”

— Lynda Minoose, Cree SILR External Advisory Council, April 30, 2024

Since early colonization, Indigenous peoples in Canada have been resilient in their efforts to maintain their languages, despite extensive loss due to assimilative policies and practices. The impacts of this loss have been devastating, leaving lasting effects on individuals and communities, including the loss of knowledge, cultural dislocation, the severing of kinship ties, changes in worldviews, and the loss of cultural memory and history (NAFC, 2018). However, for the past 60 years, long before the implementation of the TRC Calls to Action, the ILA, and the international year and decade for Indigenous languages, Indigenous peoples in Canada have admirably initiated concerted efforts to reclaim and revitalize their languages.



Indigenous language revitalization involves a variety of methods, including community-driven initiatives such as language nests, immersion programs, and cultural camps. These efforts engage Elders, focus on community involvement, and standardize orthography, emphasizing the holistic and interconnected nature of revitalization (Burge et al., 2023). However, despite the recognized need for these efforts, there are significant barriers. These include cultural beliefs about how to approach language acquisition, historical traumas tied to language use, questions about whether academic settings are suitable for Indigenous language learning, the use of technology, the challenges of documenting languages and creating curricula, limited access to Elders, and the high costs of developing new language programs (Passmore, 2021).

Languages

According to the 2021 Canadian census, 1.8 million people in Canada identified as Indigenous, and of that number, 237,420 (13.1%) reported speaking an Indigenous language.

**"Ancestral languages instead of
Indigenous languages."**

— Davina Roussel, Research Lead, May 14, 2024

This is a 4.3% decrease from 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Prior to colonization, an estimated 450 Indigenous languages were spoken in what is now Canada (McIvor, 1998), but as of 2024, just over 70 remain (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

Using the number of language speakers as the sole indicator of language vitality can be misleading (McIvor, 1998; Barrena et al., 2007; Norris, 2003). Recent data suggests that the rate at which new speakers of Indigenous languages are emerging may now surpass the rate at which language loss is occurring (Dunlop et al., 2018). Indigenous languages are not simply tools for communication but are vital to Indigenous identities, embodying cultural knowledge, worldviews, and expressions of sovereignty. The loss of Indigenous languages not only diminishes cultural diversity but also eliminates opportunities for preserving unique knowledge systems that can contribute to global innovation and diversity (NAFC, 2018).



Institutions

Indigenous language programs have been popping up at academic institutions in Canada since the 1970s, with one of the earliest being the Native Indian Language program at the University of Victoria (University of Victoria, 2024). Since then, the number of language programs across Canada has steadily increased, offering language courses, certificates, degrees, and community partnerships (Blair & Fredeen, 2009; Czaykowska-Higgins et al., 2017; Fayant & Sterzuk, 2018). In Canada, 33 prominent Indigenous language initiatives are hosted by community organizations, while 116 accredited post-secondary Indigenous language programs are offered by academic institutions (FEL, 2019; OCIL, 2023). These figures do not include the many small-scale, community-based programs that exist across the country. As of 2022, approximately 59,355 students were enrolled in regular Indigenous language programs, with 8,238 participating in immersion programs at the elementary and secondary levels (Statistics Canada, 2023b).

At the core of these programs is the need for strong collaboration between institutions and Indigenous communities, especially with language speakers, knowledge holders, and Elders. Since the publication of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action and the launch of the year and decade for Indigenous languages, many institutions have deepened their engagement with communities to develop and implement language programming. Desmoulin et al. (2019) describe the concept of a “third space” within institutions, where relationships between institutions and Indigenous communities foster shared learning beyond traditional education models (Dugeon & Fielder, 2006; Gutierrez et al., 1999). This third space promotes genuine cultural engagement and dynamic learning environments.

Desmoulin et al. (2019, p. 58) suggest three key approaches for institutions to successfully develop and implement Indigenous language programs:

1. Respond to and collaborate with local Indigenous communities.
2. Employ functional and immersive learning environments.
3. Support Indigenous language instructors and communities through modern learning and teaching tools.

Despite these efforts, Indigenous language programs continue to face significant challenges (Ball & McIvor, 2013; Desmoulin et al., 2019; McIvor & Ball, 2019). These include:

- Lack of adequate support, planning, infrastructure, and funding.
- Limited availability of comprehensive Indigenous language curricula and resources.
- Insufficient numbers of Indigenous language instructors, as well as poor retention rates.
- Concerns over whether academic institutions are the most appropriate places for Indigenous language programs.

Funding

Funding is crucial for the success of Indigenous language programs, whether they are housed in academic or community settings. Many of these programs operate on insufficient budgets and are subject to the priorities of external funders, which often leads to instability. Programs are frequently established, only to close when funding is withdrawn (NAFC, 2019). This cycle forces many practitioners to focus on short-term survival rather than long-term sustainability. For years, language revitalization practitioners have advocated for permanent, long-term funding that aligns with community needs and realities (NAFC, 2019, p. 16). Unfortunately, many programs remain dependent on government and private funding sources.

Call to Action 14.3 from the TRC (2015) urges the Canadian federal government to provide adequate funding for Indigenous language revitalization. Similarly, during the launch of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, the United Nations called on nations to ensure sufficient funding to support language programs (Requesens-Galnares, 2023). In 2015, the Canadian government pledged to contribute financially to language revitalization efforts, committing \$2.6 billion over five years for First Nations primary and secondary education (Indigenous Services, 2019). However, this investment did not meet the needs of Inuit, Métis, post-secondary, or community-based programs. In 2017, the federal government allocated nearly \$90 million to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures (Government of Canada, 2017). However, this funding is set to expire in 2024, and as of March 2024, there has been no serious plan to extend funding for Indigenous language programs (Rao, 2024).

Though challenges remain, Indigenous communities and organizations continue to demonstrate resourcefulness and innovation to achieve their language revitalization goals.

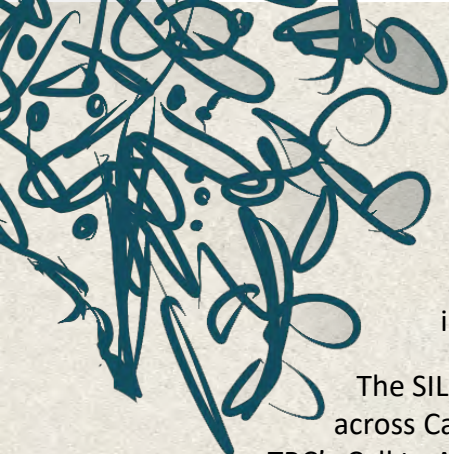
They have also identified ways to improve funding processes (McIvor & Ball, 2019; NAFC, 2019; Rao, 2024), including:

- Establishing a department to oversee the dissemination of funding for Indigenous language revitalization, with input from Indigenous communities, leaders, and organizations.
- Developing policies that empower Indigenous communities to self-determine and provide oversight for programming, funding, and curriculum development.
- Creating clear strategies and identifying key actors to implement sustainable language programs.

As such, funding for Indigenous language programming has improved significantly in the past decade. The financial support that has been provided has created opportunities for Indigenous language speakers, teachers, and learners to preserve cultural knowledge, worldviews, and the deep connections between people, the land, and the universe (McIvor & Ball, 2019, p. 19).



The Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization Project



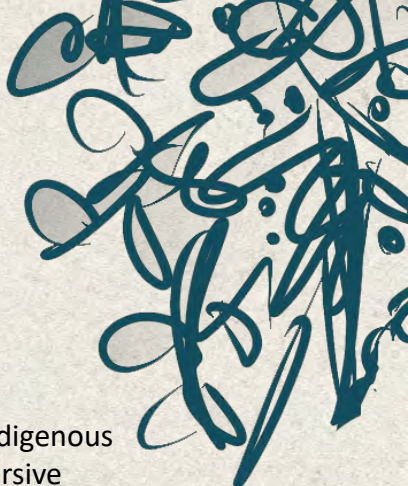
For this mid-term evaluation, the team completed a document review to both build an understanding of the context of SILR's work and to identify the progress and learnings to date. The following sections include highlights of SILR's work and a summary of observations from the review that are important to note in the evaluation.

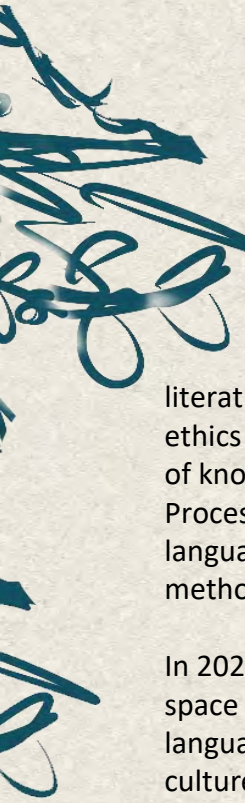
The SILR project, led by the University of Alberta, empowers Indigenous communities across Canada to preserve and revitalize their languages. The project aligns with the TRC's Call to Action 16, which urges post-secondary institutions to develop Indigenous language programs, and UNESCO's designation of 2022-2032 as the Decade of Indigenous Languages. SILR addresses the critical need for Indigenous language preservation by building capacity, fostering partnerships, and supporting community-led revitalization efforts.

Since its inception, SILR has worked with seven of Alberta's 48 First Nations, including Paul First Nation, Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation, and Tsuut'ina, as well as students in Parkland School and Fort McMurray. SILR has also extended its reach to Saskatchewan and British Columbia through partnerships with the Ministikwan cohort and Tahltan First Nation (SILR, 2023c). While the focus has primarily been on Nehiyaw (Cree) programming, given the University of Alberta's location in Treaty 6 territory and the strong presence of Nehiyaw-speaking Elders and scholars, there are opportunities to expand into other Indigenous languages such as Na-Dené, Blackfoot, Michif, and Inuktitut (SILR, 2023c).

SILR is built on several established programs, each playing a unique role in language revitalization:

- **Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI):** Now in its 25th year, CILLDI supports Indigenous language revitalization through research, training, and community engagement. Programs like the Community Linguist Certificate (CLC) and summer institutes reach over 150 Indigenous communities. The pandemic highlighted the need for flexible, online learning, leading to the use of podcasts and mobile apps. CILLDI remains committed to expanding accessibility and supporting long-term Indigenous language sustainability.
 - **Young Indigenous Women's Circle of Leadership (YIWCL):** Empowers Indigenous girls aged 10 to 19 through cultural and language-based activities, focusing on Cree and Cree-Michif. Under the guidance of Dr. Trudy Cardinal, YIWCL offers year-round programs, including singing groups, beading workshops, and summer camps. In 2023, the camps were held at kihcihkaw aski in Edmonton, fostering leadership and cultural pride through language learning and connection. YIWCL continues to expand through collaborations with the City of Edmonton and other Indigenous communities.
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- **Braiding Stories to Live By (BStLB):** Provides spaces for young Indigenous women to engage in activities like ribbon skirt making, art journaling, and storytelling. Rooted in Indigenous teachings, BStLB promotes emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical well-being, helping participants build identity and resilience. In 2023, BStLB expanded partnerships with Girls Inc. in Fort McMurray, offering more opportunities for youth engagement.
 - **First Peoples House (FPH):** Fosters academic and personal growth among Indigenous students. Key to its mission is Nehiyawewin (Cree) revitalization, using immersive conversations with Elders and visual language cues to promote language practice on campus and at home. The Indigenous Languages Club provides tutoring and resources to reconnect students with their cultural identities.
 - **Weaving Holistic Learning Experiences Through Language Programming and Culture (WHoLE):** Creates culturally responsive, trauma-informed learning environments that strengthen Indigenous language engagement. WHoLE connects preservice teachers with community initiatives and supports professional development. The program also develops digital platforms to expand language learning resources and fosters leadership in language education.
 - **Language Assessment Project (LAP):** Develops Indigenous language assessment models to help fluent speakers gain advanced credits towards a Bachelor of Education degree, reducing barriers for accreditation. In partnership with Yellowhead Tribal College (YTC) and the University of Alberta, LAP has developed tools for Cree, Stoney, and Anishinaabe, with plans to expand. Despite pandemic-related challenges, LAP continues to grow through partnerships, symposiums, and workshops.
 - **Intensive Adult Language Immersion (IALI):** Aims to increase Indigenous language proficiency among young adults through full-immersion, community-led programs. IALI provides financial support to help participants focus on gaining fluency, addressing the need for more Indigenous language teachers. The program's long-term goal is to build a network of fluent speakers who will serve as teachers and mentors for future generations.
 - **The Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies – Indigenous Language Sustainability:** Designed to “provide students the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Indigenous language communities in Canada and around the world, as well as the strategies that can support the intergenerational sustainability of those languages.” The development of this course in partnership with the Faculty of Education and CILLDI brings together theory and practice to build upon foundational language revitalization efforts CILLDI has been leading for the past 25 years.
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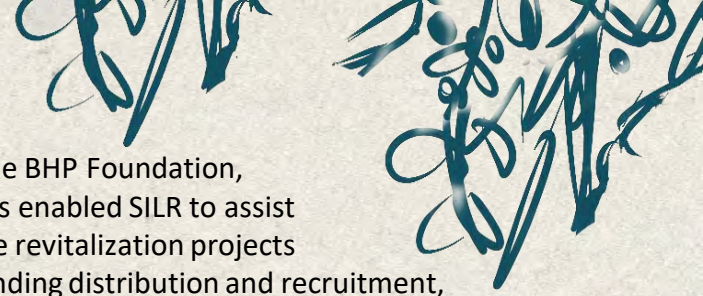


In addition to the progress made through the initiatives supported by SILR, a major outcome has been the development and implementation of the Searching Process within *The Search for Wellness through Ancestral Languages National Research Study*. This study posed the central question, “What is the relationship for Indigenous people in Canada between the knowledge and use of their traditional languages and their individual and communal well-being?” From January 2022 to June 2024, the Research Team systematically reviewed literature, consulted with the Advisory Council for guidance on the Searching Process, secured ethics approval, and conducted visits to verify findings. These efforts have led to the development of knowledge-sharing activities, which will convey the findings from the study. The Searching Process has resulted in innovative story-sharing methods, providing valuable insights into ancestral language revitalization and well-being, while also offering exemplary models of Indigenous research methodologies in action.

In 2023, SILR introduced the "Living in the Language" program, designed as a flexible, adaptable space for community-driven projects. This program reduces barriers and fosters Indigenous-led language revitalization (SILR, 2023b), emphasizing the deep connection between language, culture, and land (SILR, 2023a).

SILR is structured around five key objectives that guide its holistic approach to language revitalization:

1. **Speaking:** Increase the vitality of Indigenous languages, particularly among young adults aged 15-40, fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer (SILR, 2022).
2. **Teaching:** Develop both formal and informal teachers, enhancing their proficiency and training fluent speakers in teaching methods (SILR, 2022).
3. **Knowledge:** Co-develop culturally relevant tools and materials for Indigenous language teachers and learners, ensuring that resources meet community needs (SILR, 2022).
4. **Leadership:** Increase the number of educational leaders who can advance Indigenous language revitalization by shaping policies and curricula (SILR, 2022).
5. **Governance, Sustainability, Advocacy, and Policy:** Establish governance structures to ensure the long-term success of SILR projects, maintaining community relevance and ensuring Indigenous voices lead decision making (SILR, 2022).



In March 2021, SILR received a five-year agreement with the BHP Foundation, providing \$11.9 million in funding. This financial support has enabled SILR to assist Indigenous communities in carrying out long-term language revitalization projects (SILR, 2022). Despite initial challenges, such as delays in funding distribution and recruitment, SILR has been able to hire the consultants, language experts, and personnel critical to advancing its goals (SILR, 2023c). See Appendix C for a timeline of key SILR milestones and Appendix D for a list of SILR partners over time.

SILR's future success depends on maintaining sustainable funding, expanding community engagement, and adapting to the evolving needs of Indigenous communities. While the project has established a solid foundation, ongoing challenges such as data gathering and communication require continued collaboration to ensure culturally appropriate approaches (SILR, 2023a).

Ultimately, SILR envisions a future where Indigenous languages thrive—spoken in homes, schools, workplaces, and on the land—contributing to the cultural resilience of Indigenous peoples. By fostering community-led revitalization efforts, SILR aims to create a vibrant, sustained ecosystem for Indigenous language revitalization that can serve as a model for institutions across Canada (SILR, 2023b).

Goals

SILR is rooted in the belief that language is central to healing within Indigenous communities, as highlighted by Molly Chisaakey of the Dene Tha', who noted, "language is the root of a lot of healing that needs to happen" (External Advisory Council, April 30, 2024). SILR's goals reflect this understanding, focusing on fostering cultural pride, community belonging, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The SILR Framework, developed with advisors, uses the metaphor of a tree to symbolize the interconnectedness of language, culture, and land, reaffirming the project's commitment to revitalizing Indigenous languages in homes, schools, and workplaces, and on the land.

By 2023, SILR had made significant progress. Key accomplishments include establishing a Governance model, forming an External Advisory Council, creating a Steering Committee and Terms of Reference (TOR), and developing essential tools such as a log frame, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and an organizational chart. SILR also launched a website and produced two annual reports for its primary funder, the BHP Foundation (SILR, 2023c). The project's 2024 progress reflects its commitment to interconnected goals of connecting, speaking, teaching, learning, and leading, with each goal reinforcing the others in advancing language revitalization.

SILR's strategic goals are supported by qualitative and quantitative data processes, essential for ensuring long-term impact and advocacy. As Pamela McCoy Jones noted, "if we get this impact statement in order, and our quantitative and qualitative data processes in order, we will make more of an impact, and we will be able to look for future funding and sustainability practices" (Executive Director, Provost & Vice-President Academic, June 3, 2024). These efforts are crucial for securing future funding. The 2024 mid-year report highlighted achievements across multiple pillars, including fostering safe spaces for cultural pride, increasing Indigenous language use, and expanding educational capacities (SILR, 2024).



Looking ahead, SILR has identified several key focus areas for its next phases, including:

- Environmental Scanning (E-Scan)
- Engagement Plan
- Language Revitalization Planning Guide
- Tool Kits and Guides
- Resource Development
- Language Digitization
- Early Learning Programming Guide
- Online Dictionaries
- Communication Materials (websites, brochures, and booklets)
- New initiatives like the Young Men's Mentorship and Leadership Circle, and an Early Learning Program (SILR, 2023c)

In 2022, SILR prioritized opportunities to build awareness and establish relationships within Alberta and across Canada. These efforts continue as SILR expands its reach in Indigenous language revitalization (SILR, 2023a). In 2023, "Connecting" was added as a new pillar to SILR's framework, emphasizing the creation of safe spaces for healing, belonging, and cultural pride (SILR, 2023b). This pillar focuses on connecting youth, students, and young adults with language holders, fostering respectful community engagement and promoting long-term cultural sustainability.

SILR's efforts to improve communication and visibility include integrating websites, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing social media outreach. Tracking website analytics will also support planning by offering insights into user engagement (SILR, 2023c).

For 2023, SILR outlined key priorities:

- Launching the SILR Indigenous Language Revitalization Guide and further developing the website.
- Reporting on YIWCL Summer Camps, a key part of youth engagement.
- Partnering with the National Gathering of Elders (October 30 - November 2, 2023) to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities (SILR, 2023b).

Overall, SILR's goals reflect its commitment to fostering healing through language, building community connections, and creating a sustainable impact on Indigenous language preservation. The 2024 mid-year report shows that SILR is well on its way to achieving its vision of revitalized Indigenous languages across diverse domains.



Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (TOC) is a comprehensive framework used to map out the steps, interventions, and outcomes necessary to achieve long-term goals (CTC, 2023). It outlines how specific actions will lead to desired changes and identifies key assumptions and conditions required for success. In the context of SILR, the TOC serves as a strategic roadmap, illustrating how the project's activities will drive the revitalization of Indigenous languages across Canada.

The SILR TOC is designed to highlight the ripple effects that language revitalization efforts can generate. It acts as a guiding document, providing a clear vision for how SILR's interventions—whether in language education, community engagement, or policy advocacy—will contribute to the broader goal of empowering Indigenous communities to preserve their languages (SILR, 2023b). This TOC envisions a future where Indigenous languages are healthy, vibrant, and widely spoken across generations and domains, including homes, schools, workplaces, and the natural environment (SIL, 2023a).

SILR's TOC is both holistic and inclusive, recognizing the rich diversity of Indigenous languages and cultures across Canada. It respects the unique cultural identities of Indigenous communities while aiming to reclaim and revitalize languages impacted by colonization. The TOC outlines a community-driven, collaborative approach to language revitalization, empowering communities to take ownership of their languages and ensuring that programs reflect their needs and priorities. The process is not linear but evolves in response to the shifting landscape of Indigenous language revitalization (SILR, 2023a).

At its core, SILR's TOC focuses on creating a future where Indigenous languages are not only preserved but celebrated and actively spoken in daily life. By integrating language revitalization strategies into community and educational policies, SILR aims to normalize the use of Indigenous languages in multiple settings, fostering intergenerational language use (SILR, 2023a).

While the TOC offers a structured pathway for SILR's efforts, the 2023 Review and Recommendations document identified some potential limitations. There are concerns about whether the TOC remains fully aligned with the original proposal and whether it is flexible enough to address the evolving needs of language revitalization. This document recommends reassessing the TOC to ensure it continues to support SILR's long-term vision and meets the needs of the communities it serves.

The TOC also highlights SILR's accountability to the communities and funders it works with, particularly in areas of long-term and intermediate outcomes. These are areas where SILR has direct influence, such as improving language revitalization tools, supporting policy changes, and enhancing community-based programs. Through these outcomes, SILR seeks to make a tangible impact on language use and preservation in Indigenous communities (SILR, 2023b).

Ultimately, SILR's TOC represents a journey of reclamation, revitalization, and celebration of Indigenous languages. It contributes to broader goals of reconciliation and cultural preservation by empowering Indigenous communities to reclaim their linguistic heritage. This journey reflects SILR's commitment to supporting Indigenous languages as living, evolving entities that flourish across generations, from homes to workplaces and the land itself (SILR, 2023a).

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are measurable values that assess the effectiveness, progress, and impact of a project, program, or organization (KPI Institute, 2024). They can be qualitative or quantitative and are used to monitor how well a project is achieving its goals. For the SILR project, KPIs are critical for tracking progress in language revitalization, determining the effectiveness of programs, and identifying areas for improvement. They also play a key role in reporting to stakeholders and securing future funding by providing solid data on the project's impact.

KPIs are especially useful in language and Indigenous projects because they help program managers evaluate both linguistic progress and community engagement (KPI Institute, 2024). However, traditional Western approaches to KPIs may not always fit perfectly in Indigenous contexts. As scholars have noted, it's crucial that metrics for assessing success in language revitalization align with community goals and use culturally appropriate measures. Success in Indigenous language projects isn't always binary—focused solely on outcomes like the number of speakers—but may also include more nuanced goals such as increased cultural pride, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community engagement (Passmore, 2021).

SILR has integrated KPIs into its evaluation framework to measure both immediate and long-term outcomes. These indicators track key aspects of the project, such as language proficiency, resource development, and program expansion. SILR uses KPIs to ensure alignment with its TOC and to maintain a measurable impact on the communities it serves.

In its 2023 mid-year report, SILR identified several intermediate outcomes as key focus areas for its KPIs:

1. Supporting individuals to gain confidence and proficiency as Indigenous language speakers and teachers.
2. Developing effective models, practices, and tools for Elders, parents, and instructors to promote Indigenous language use.
3. Expanding language programs to support the use of Indigenous languages across multiple domains, including homes, schools, and workplaces, and on the land.
4. Sharing research and best practices across programs and policy spaces to enhance language revitalization efforts (SILR Mid-Year Report, 2023, p. 5).



These KPIs help SILR track the effectiveness of its programs and deepen its understanding of how the project is influencing language revitalization across Canada. For example, SILR aims to impact over 1,000 youth, 2,000 students, 400 teachers, 100 language speakers, and 1,500 gathering participants by 2026 (SILR, 2021). These targets reflect the project's broad-reaching goals and help assess its success both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The 2023 Review and Recommendations document suggested that SILR could strengthen its use of KPIs by merging the project's log frame with quarterly KPI reporting. This would streamline reporting and ensure KPIs are closely aligned with the project's objectives (SILR, 2023c). Additionally, while KPIs provide valuable insights into project performance, measuring success in Indigenous language revitalization can be challenging. Revitalization involves more than just increasing the number of speakers—it's also about creating environments that foster cultural pride, resilience, and long-term sustainability. As Passmore (2021) notes, it's essential that KPIs in Indigenous projects account for Indigenous ways of knowing and being, not just traditional Western metrics (p. 35).

In 2023, SILR hosted a one-day Indigenous language gathering in Edmonton, Alberta, bringing together Indigenous language leaders, educators, learners, and advocates. KPIs for the event included the number of attendees, participant feedback, and the effectiveness of resource-sharing among language speakers and learners. These indicators helped SILR evaluate the event's impact and inform future programming (SILR, 2023b).

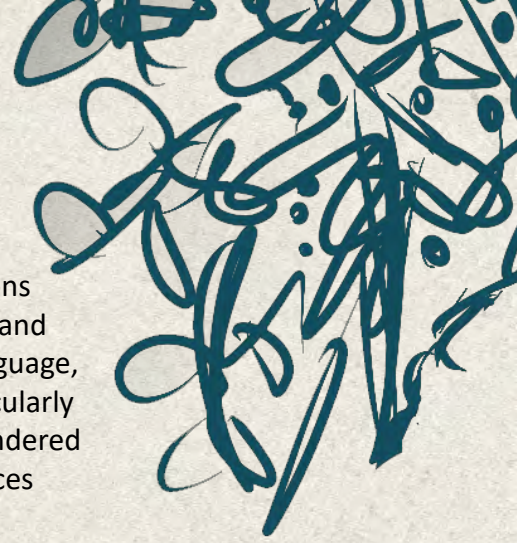
SILR has also created an indicators document that captures quantitative data on the progress of its programs, along with a Key Program Indicators document that details specific metrics related to language learning, teacher training, and community engagement. These KPIs are crucial for understanding how SILR's efforts are impacting Indigenous language revitalization and for ensuring the project remains accountable to both funders and communities.

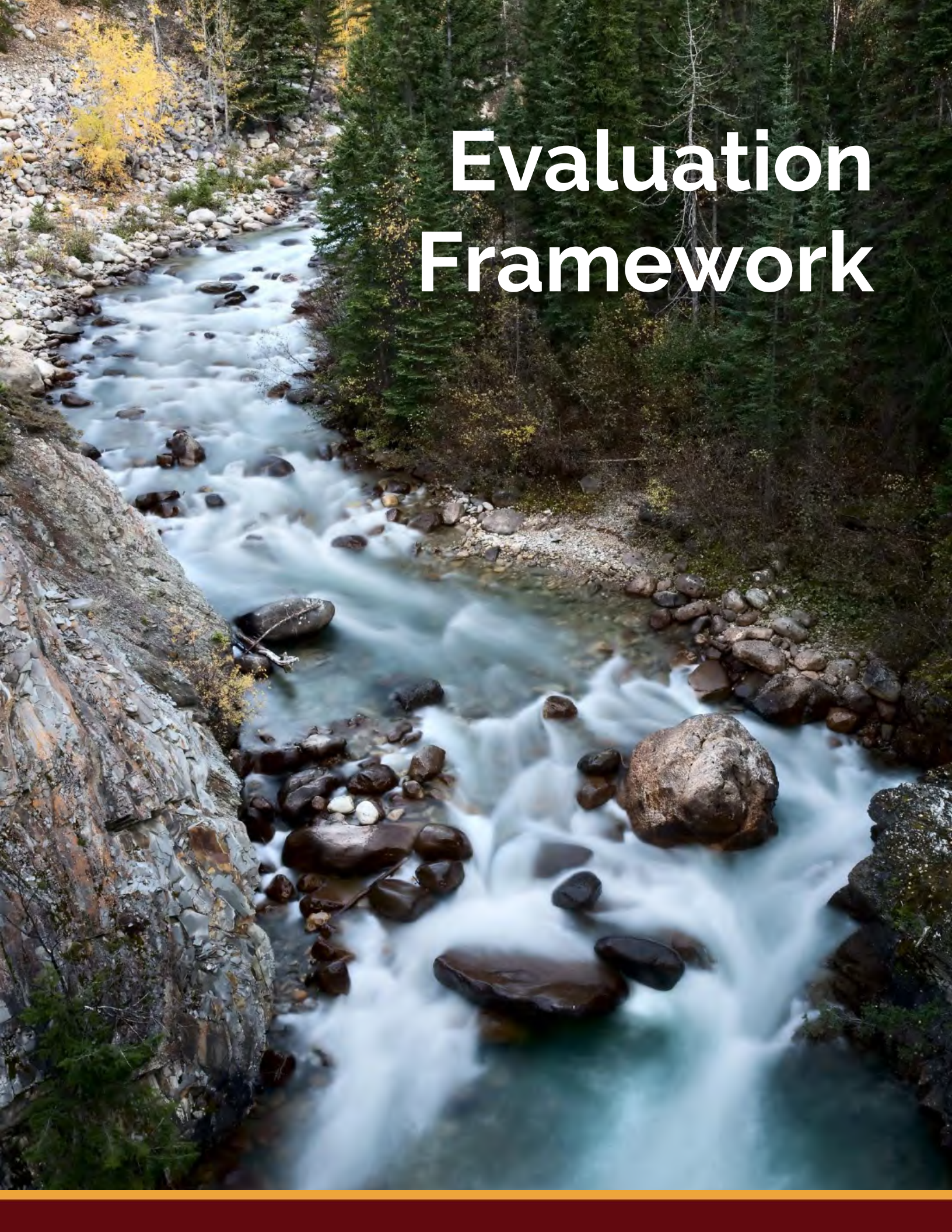
KPIs play a vital role in evaluating SILR's success and guiding its future direction. By tracking outcomes like language proficiency, program expansion, and community engagement, SILR can assess whether it's meeting its goals and making a meaningful impact. However, the project must continue to ensure its KPIs are culturally responsive and aligned with community-driven definitions of success. As SILR moves forward, integrating its KPIs with its log frame and refining its evaluation methods will be key to enhancing accountability, securing long-term sustainability, and fostering Indigenous language growth across Canada.

COVID Adjustments

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted SILR's engagement with Indigenous communities, including the suspension of in-person interactions vital for language revitalization. Restrictions limited meetings with Elders and Knowledge Keepers (SILR, 2021), who play a crucial role in passing on language, and the shift to online learning presented technological challenges, particularly in communities with limited digital access (SILR, 2021). These changes hindered the traditional transfer of intergenerational knowledge and cultural nuances (SILR, 2023c).

Despite these challenges, SILR demonstrated resilience by adapting its programs, developing innovative tools, and embracing virtual platforms. This pivot increased accessibility for remote and international students (SILR, 2021). As SILR continues to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, it has broadened its focus to include a new technology initiative aimed at developing resources and tools for community use. This initiative not only responds to the lessons learned during the pandemic but also addresses the increasing role of technology and artificial intelligence in academia and language learning (SILR, 2023b). By leveraging these tools, SILR aims to enhance the reach and impact of its language revitalization efforts while continuing to address the digital access barriers faced by many Indigenous communities. The project was granted a one-year extension to rebuild engagement and refine digital strategies, ensuring sustained support for Indigenous language revitalization in the post-pandemic era.





Evaluation Framework

In February 2024, Dr. Gladys Rowe and the team at Indigenous Insights were engaged to complete an external mid-term evaluation of SILR. Based on the SILR evaluation priorities, this evaluation framework was designed to help the SILR team reflect, assess progress, draw insights from the work done so far, and guide decision making for the remaining years of the project. SILR intentionally sought an evaluation grounded in an Indigenous evaluation framework that aligned with the project's vision.

The evaluation framework outlines the methodology developed to build relationships with the work of SILR. Grounded in Indigenous values like relational accountability and respect, and using a decolonial lens, the framework explains culturally aligned approaches that inform the evaluation. It ensures that the voices and stories of the community are honoured, and that the evaluation serves as a tool to highlight both the challenges and successes of the project, ensuring meaningful insights for learning and reflection.

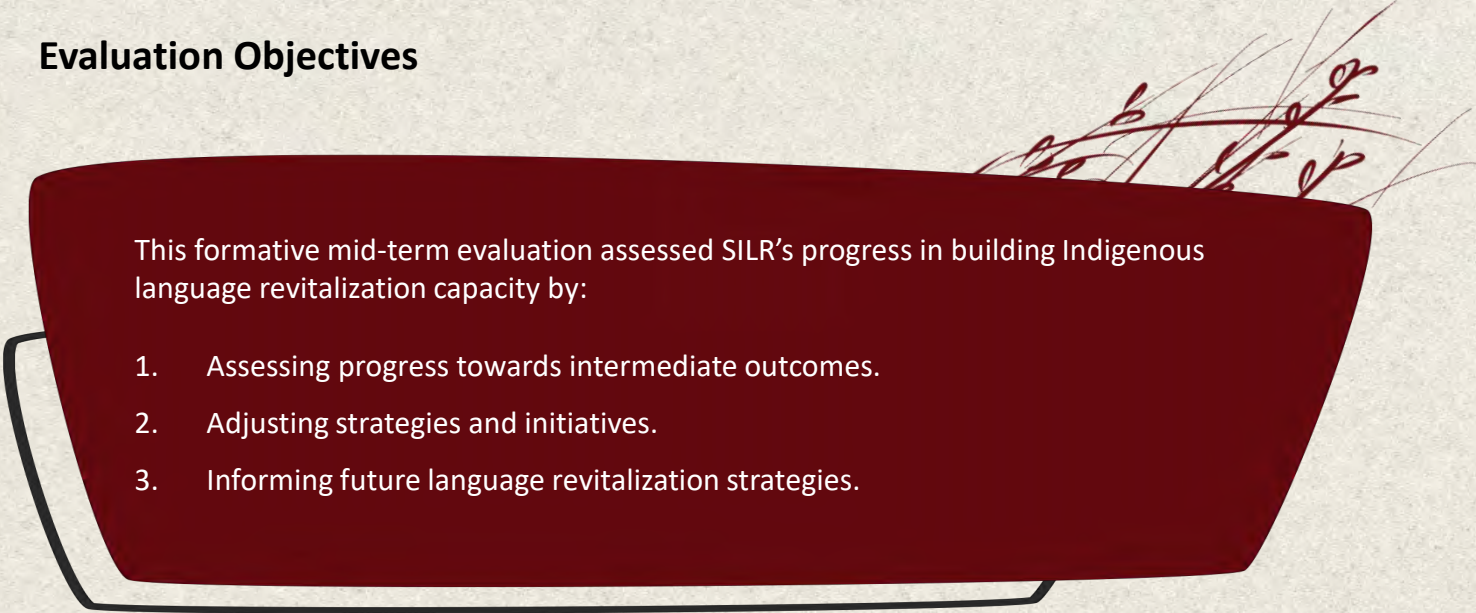
Indigenous evaluation frameworks aim to disrupt Euro-Western evaluation practices, prioritizing Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and relationality (MacKinnon & Indigenous Learning Circle, 2017; Rowe & Kirkpatrick, 2018; UIHI, 2022). These frameworks emphasize resilience, storytelling, and community well-being over deficit-based indicators of success (Nadeau et al., 2023; Rowe & Kirkpatrick, 2018; UIHI, 2022). The framework guiding SILR's evaluation is based on the following key principles of Indigenous evaluation:

- **Sovereignty and Self-Determination:** Indigenous evaluations support communities in defining their own success and well-being. Evaluation processes are co-developed with Indigenous communities to align with cultural traditions and priorities (Nadeau et al., 2023).
- **Relationality and Community-Driven Approaches:** Relationality, a core concept in Indigenous worldviews, guides the evaluation process. The Seven Grandfather Teachings (love, respect, humility, etc.) shape culturally responsive frameworks, ensuring evaluations sustain relationships within communities (Dodge Francis et al., 2023).
- **Storytelling as Data Collection:** Storytelling is a qualitative, culturally aligned method that captures community experiences often overlooked by quantitative measures. It honours knowledge-sharing traditions, supports healing, and passes knowledge across generations (UIHI Evaluation Guidelines, 2022).
- **Strength-Based Evaluation:** Indigenous evaluations focus on resilience, resistance, and positive outcomes. Frameworks like UIHI's integrate healing and cultural strengths to address community needs, supporting collective healing from historical trauma (UIHI Framework, 2022; Nadeau et al., 2023).



Indigenous frameworks call for decolonizing evaluation by rejecting imposed Western notions of "truth" and "objectivity." Instead, Indigenous communities define what success looks like for them and what constitutes valid evidence (Rowe & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Shepherd & Graham, 2020). This requires rethinking methods and prioritizing the needs of the community over external funder requirements (MacKinnon & the Indigenous Learning Circle, 2017).

Evaluation Objectives



This formative mid-term evaluation assessed SILR's progress in building Indigenous language revitalization capacity by:

1. Assessing progress towards intermediate outcomes.
2. Adjusting strategies and initiatives.
3. Informing future language revitalization strategies.

The evaluation supported the assessment of progress towards the following outcomes from the TOC:

1. Individuals gain confidence and proficiency as Indigenous language speakers and teachers.
2. Elders, parents, and instructors develop and use effective models and tools to promote Indigenous language use.
3. Language programs are adapted to support the use of Indigenous languages in homes, schools, and workplaces, and on the land.
4. Research and best practices are captured and shared across program and policy spaces.

Methodology

Evaluating Indigenous language revitalization projects requires culturally congruent methods that respect community values and practices. Indigenous Insights developed the evaluation framework in consultation with project members, ensuring alignment with cultural protocols. The framework emphasizes relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect for cultural, spiritual, and traditional practices. Participatory methods, robust data analysis, and partner engagement were key to the evaluation approach.

The methodology supported SILR's objectives by prioritizing relationship-building and employing conversational methods to gather experiences and stories. Techniques like storytelling, visiting, and deep listening created spaces for meaningful reflection, empowerment, and transformation.

Introducing Ourselves

The people doing the work of Indigenous language revitalization, and those doing the work of evaluation, matter. Evaluation is a process that produces what is held up as evidence, making it essential that the worldviews, principles, and methods guiding the work reflect the people they impact. The evaluation team understood the importance of walking alongside SILR with respect and accountability. See Appendix E for full biographies.

Dr. Gladys Rowe (*Muskego Inniniw from Fox Lake Cree Nation, Director of Indigenous Insights*) Dr. Rowe brings 16 years of experience as a facilitator, program designer, educator, and evaluator. She grounds her work in Indigenist paradigms and often uses arts-based mechanisms to engage communities and share insights.

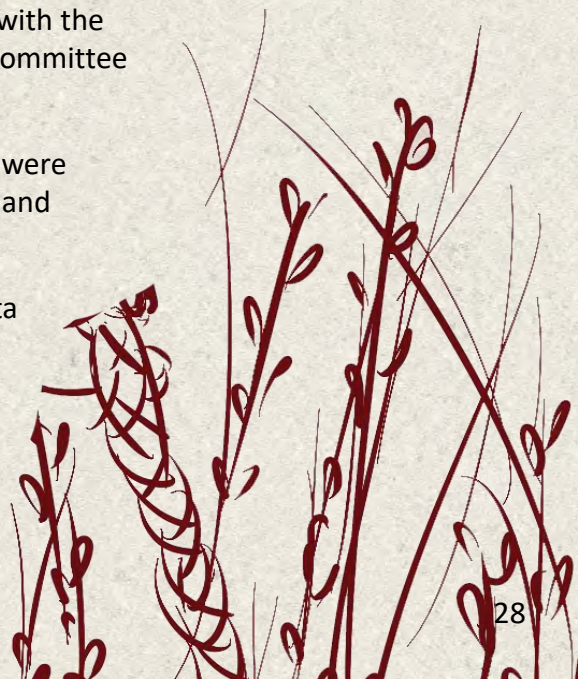
Lana Klok (*Dutch by birth, visitor on Turtle Island*) Lana is a strategic designer focused on social impact. She has worked across the globe and recently embraced Indigenous Evaluation practices, using her expertise to empower communities through creative facilitation and participatory design.

Taylor Wilson (*Ojibwe, Cree, and Filipina, member of Fisher River Cree Nation*) Taylor has nearly 10 years of experience in Indigenous-based research and evaluation, particularly in community-driven, trauma-informed, and decolonial frameworks. Her work emphasizes Indigenous knowledge systems, data sovereignty, and long-term community well-being.

Methods

The following methods were implemented for the evaluation:

1. **One-On-One Conversations:** Detailed interviews were conducted to gather narratives and insights, with 10 completed.
2. **Visiting:** Informal check-ins and conversations deepened understanding and relationship-building, with over 15 sessions conducted.
3. **Conversation Circles:** Five circles were completed, including with the Graduate Research Team, CILLDI Team, SILR Team, Steering Committee & Advisory Council, and CILLDI Summer Students.
4. **Descriptive Analysis of Metrics:** Key Impact Indicators (KPIs) were analyzed to provide empirical insight into the project's reach and effectiveness.
5. **Document Review:** Annual reports, feedback, and survey data were examined to assess progress (Appendix B – Table 4).



Sensemaking Process

Sensemaking is a method of analysis that supports holistic engagement with the stories and data gathered. It involves individual and collective reflection to identify emerging themes and interconnections. For this evaluation, the sensemaking process included:

- Reviewing materials and gathering stories.
- Deep listening and reviewing transcripts.
- Identifying themes and emergent areas of learning.
- Collective discussion to ensure holistic representation.
- Drawing forward quotes that highlight key insights.

This interconnected process asks each participant to bring their whole self into the circle—their experience, wisdom, and expertise—to review, assess, and question observations and insights that illuminate the overall goals of the project.

The following evaluation questions provided a guide for this sensemaking process:

1. To what extent has SILR achieved the intermediate outcomes in building community capacity for Indigenous Language Revitalization?
2. To what extent has SILR honoured the principles of being community-led and culturally responsive?
3. What worked well, and what could be improved?
4. How can the project be refined to increase its positive impact?
(What should we continue, stop, or do differently?)

The following sections of the evaluation report provide the SILR team with insights into the evaluation questions by highlighting key takeaways from the stories and learnings. Additionally, these sections offer reflections from the evaluation team on observed progress, identify promising practices, and present considerations to help SILR further enhance its positive impact.

Stories and Learning



This section presents stories shared by SILR leadership, Advisory Council members, staff, students, and community members during the evaluation process. These stories highlight lived experiences and reflections that complement the quantitative data, providing a deeper understanding of both the challenges and successes of the SILR project.

The stories emphasize themes such as resilience, cultural pride, and the deep connections among language, identity, and land. By bringing these experiences to light, this section provides valuable insights into how Indigenous language revitalization is experienced on a personal and communal level, offering lessons that can guide SILR's future work and adaptations.

Progress Towards Key Intermediate Outcomes

The stories reflect SILR's progress toward several key intermediate outcomes. The confidence and proficiency of individuals as Indigenous language speakers and teachers are highlighted through accounts from Advisory Council members, CILLDI Summer Students and Instructors, and the CILLDI Team. They identified diverse opportunities to share their language experiences with younger generations. These stories show that language revitalization is not only a technical process but also deeply connected to healing, identity, and cultural pride—directly supporting the outcome of **promoting language use across multiple domains, including homes, schools, and workplaces**.

For example, the intergenerational transmission of language was repeatedly emphasized, aligning with the outcome focused on **developing models and tools for Elders and instructors to promote language use**. The stories also show how language programs are adapted to meet the needs of specific communities, demonstrating that language revitalization is not a one-size-fits-all approach but must be flexible to support cultural, spiritual, and land-based knowledge.

Additionally, the theme of **sharing research and best practices**—another intermediate outcome—is reflected in how SILR engages in knowledge dissemination through community events, Elder gatherings, and collaborative frameworks that honour Indigenous ways of knowing.

The sensemaking process involved deep reflection on the stories shared by evaluation storytellers and led to the identification of four key themes that structure the analysis:

1. Language Revitalization
2. Values
3. Foundations
4. Tensions

These themes provide a holistic understanding of how Indigenous language revitalization is experienced, highlighting both the successes and challenges faced by the SILR project. This analysis directly connects to the evaluation objectives by assessing how SILR has advanced its intermediate outcomes, honoured community-led approaches, and adapted strategies to support long-term language revitalization. As these themes are explored in detail, they guide future refinements in SILR's strategies, ensuring that the project continues to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the communities it serves.



LANGUAGE

Theme 1: Language Revitalization (All That Language Embodies)

Language revitalization within SILR goes beyond linguistic preservation; it is a practice deeply tied to cultural, spiritual, and intergenerational survival. The stories reflect that language is not just a tool for communication but an essential component of identity, ceremony, and land-based knowledge. Indigenous languages are seen as living entities, sustained by tradition and cultural practice, even amidst colonial disruptions. This revitalization process is portrayed as a form of healing that restores connections across generations, revitalizes cultural practices, and reclaims sovereignty. As communities revive their languages, they also restore the spiritual and cultural frameworks embedded within those languages.

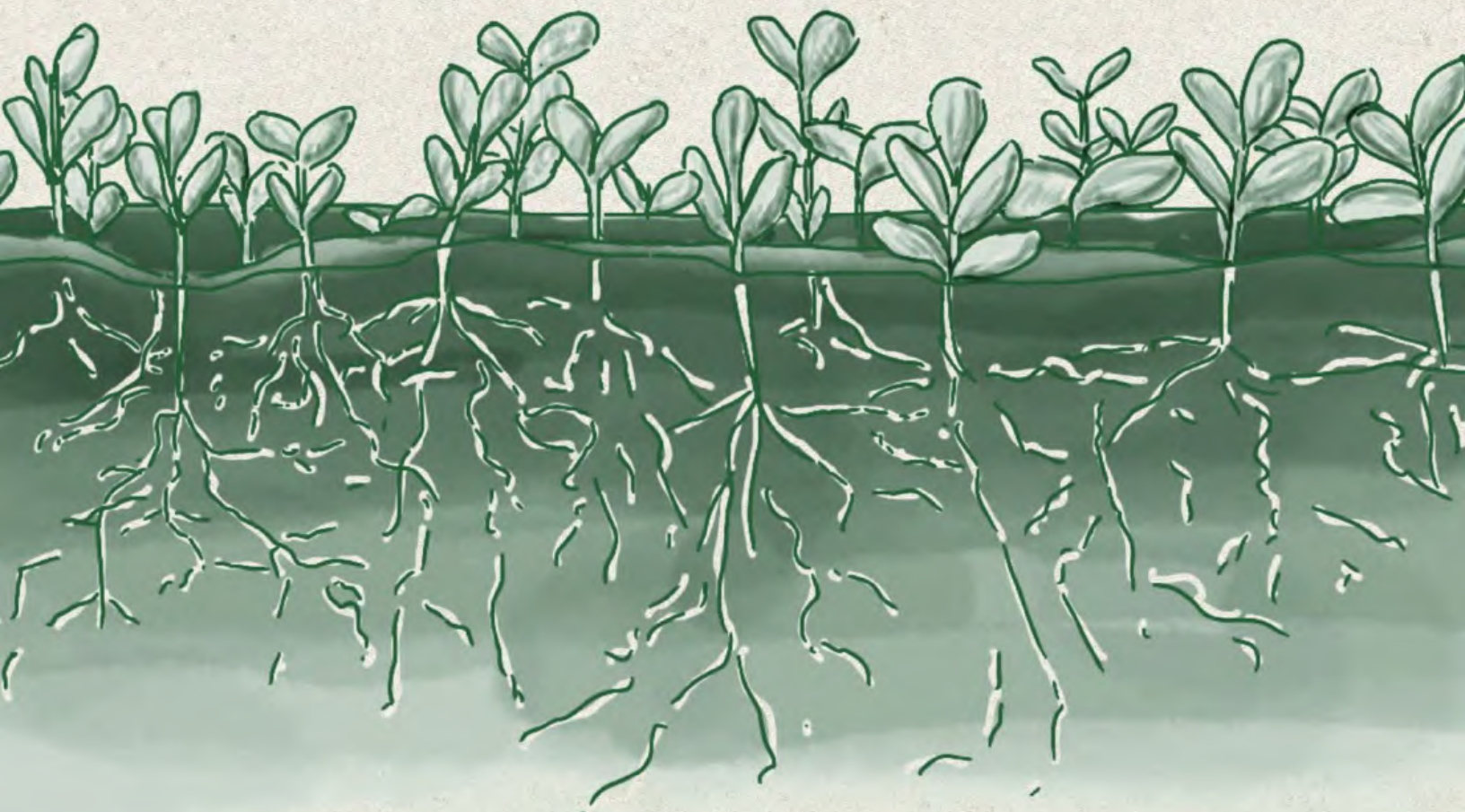
Within the theme of Language Revitalization, the stories cover topics such as healing, intergenerational roles, knowledge, culture and identity, language as a living entity, spirituality, and land-based practices. Each sub-theme speaks to the process through which individuals gain confidence and proficiency as Indigenous language speakers and teachers. The stories also highlight how Elders, parents, and instructors develop and use effective models to promote Indigenous language use. These narratives explain both the "why" and "how" of ancestral language revitalization.

Three key takeaways summarize this section and identify aligned promising practices witnessed in SILR's work, which are reviewed in the next section.

Key Takeaway 1: Language revitalization is integral to cultural survival and sovereignty. Language revitalization is not just about preserving linguistic structures—it is a vital tool for reclaiming cultural identity and sovereignty. By revitalizing ancestral languages, Indigenous communities reconnect with their traditions, spiritual practices, and cultural frameworks. This directly supports SILR’s intermediate outcome of promoting Indigenous language use across multiple domains and contributes to developing effective models and tools that allow communities to reclaim their languages in meaningful, culturally aligned ways. *Aligned Promising Practice: Community-led, culturally responsive approaches.*

Key Takeaway 2: Healing through language reclamation. Revitalizing Indigenous languages serves as a pathway for healing intergenerational trauma and restoring disrupted cultural and spiritual connections. The stories show that language recovery helps heal the impacts of colonization, restores bonds between generations, and helps younger Indigenous people reconnect with ancestral knowledge. This supports the intermediate outcome of empowering individuals to gain confidence and proficiency in their languages while fostering emotional, spiritual, and communal healing. *Aligned Promising Practice: Holistic integration of language, culture, and spirituality.*

Key Takeaway 3: The sacredness of language requires culturally responsive methods. The stories emphasize that Indigenous languages are sacred and connected to spiritual and land-based knowledge systems. This takeaway highlights the importance of culturally responsive language revitalization strategies that respect the sacredness of language and align with Indigenous worldviews. It supports the intermediate outcome of expanding language use across homes, schools, and workplaces, and on the land, ensuring that language learning is integrated into the spiritual and cultural lives of Indigenous communities. *Aligned Promising Practice: Relational and reciprocal approaches to evaluation.*



Healing

Language is a source of healing for Indigenous peoples. It serves as more than a means of communication; it is a vessel for cultural identity, ancestral knowledge, and spiritual connection. The revitalization of language is closely linked to personal and collective healing, as it reconnects individuals to their roots, land, and community. The recovery of language allows Indigenous peoples to heal from the traumas of colonization, including the loss of identity, cultural disconnection, and the historical suppression of traditional ways of knowing.

Molly captures this sentiment, stating, "Language is the root of a lot of healing that needs to happen" (April 30, 2024). Her words reflect the understanding that healing for Indigenous peoples is not solely physical or emotional—it is deeply spiritual and cultural. Reclaiming language allows individuals to reclaim their sense of self, reconnect with their communities, and restore their relationship with the land. This process of healing through language is essential to restoring balance and well-being within Indigenous lives.

Healing through language is also intertwined with the revitalization of traditional practices and cultural teachings. As language is reawakened, it brings with it ancestral wisdom, embedded in the words and expressions that convey teachings on living well, respecting the land, and maintaining harmonious relationships. Molly highlights the cultural practices passed down through language, including food gathering, medicine collection, and spiritual ceremonies, all of which contribute to maintaining a healthy, balanced life.

Through reconnecting with these land-based teachings, Indigenous peoples are able to restore a sense of purpose and wholeness that was disrupted by colonial practices.

Language also plays a vital role in healing intergenerational trauma. The loss of language has significantly impacted Indigenous communities, breaking the transmission of knowledge and cultural identity from one generation to the next. Revitalizing language serves as a bridge between the past and the present, allowing younger generations to reconnect with the teachings and values of their ancestors. This reconnection helps to rebuild bonds between generations, restoring a sense of continuity and belonging within the community.

Furthermore, language is seen as a pathway to reclaiming sovereignty and self-determination. As Elmer Ghostkeeper points out, "Our Indigenous languages give us sovereignty" (Bushland Cree & Michif, April 30, 2024). By reclaiming their languages, Indigenous peoples are also reclaiming their power, their right to define their identities, and their ability to shape their futures. This reclamation process is itself a healing journey, restoring dignity, pride, and agency to communities historically marginalized and oppressed.

Language revitalization is not just about preserving words or grammar. It is about restoring the cultural, spiritual, and emotional well-being of Indigenous peoples. Through language, individuals heal from the wounds of colonization, reconnect with their heritage, and strengthen their communities. In this way, language serves as both a source of healing and a tool for empowerment, allowing Indigenous peoples to reclaim their identities, sovereignty, and future.





Intergenerational Roles

In Indigenous communities, language is much more than a means of communication—it is a vital thread that connects generations. It carries the wisdom, values, and histories of the ancestors, serving as the primary vehicle for passing down cultural knowledge, genealogy, and the collective memory of a people. Through language, individuals maintain their connection to both their ancestors and future generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural identity and traditions.

Lynda captures this intergenerational role of language when reflecting on her family’s teachings: “She instilled in us, in me, our genealogy—who we were related to, who our relatives were, what our grandfather’s and grandmother’s names were. Where did they come from? Their stories? And so that’s what I’m passing on” (April 30, 2024). Lynda’s words highlight the responsibility of being a language carrier, as the stories and knowledge of past generations are actively passed down. Language serves as the conduit for this transmission, preserving the cultural inheritance of the community for future generations.

This passing on of knowledge is not just about facts or names—it encompasses identity, belonging, and connection to land and people. Through language, individuals learn their place within the community, their relationships with others, and their responsibilities as part of the collective. The sharing of stories, names, and genealogies through language creates a living lineage that links each generation, reinforcing a sense of continuity that transcends time.

Language also plays a crucial role in teaching younger generations how to live according to cultural values and practices. As Lynda reflects on the stories from her grandparents, she emphasizes how these teachings are passed forward. This reflects a core principle in Indigenous cultures: knowledge is not static but evolves as it is passed down from one generation to the next. Language carries these teachings, embedding them within younger generations, who will one day become the keepers of both culture and language.

The intergenerational transmission of language also strengthens the resilience of Indigenous cultures. By passing on language, communities sustain their cultural identity and resist the erasure imposed by colonization. Each generation becomes both a recipient and protector of the language, ensuring its survival for the next. This resilience is key to ongoing revitalization efforts, as language revitalization is fundamentally about creating pathways for future generations to engage with their culture and heritage.

Language is the medium through which cultural knowledge, genealogy, and values are passed down, keeping each generation connected to its ancestors and the traditions they upheld. As Lynda's reflection suggests, this transmission is both a responsibility and a gift, with each generation contributing to the ongoing story of their people. Through language, the past is kept alive, and the future is secured, as ancestral knowledge continues to guide and shape the lives of those who come after.





Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is central to SILR’s mission, as it encompasses not only language revitalization but also cultural, spiritual, and intergenerational continuity. The use, protection, and acknowledgment of Indigenous knowledge are fundamental to the success of SILR, as these knowledges are held by Elders and knowledge keepers who guide the community's efforts towards healing and resilience.

A key challenge identified is the need for institutions, particularly universities, to fully understand and appreciate the depth of Indigenous knowledge and its role in sustaining the project. A CILLDI team member emphasized this: “A key part of our sustainability is the university understanding everything that we do and being able to appreciate the value we bring to the university” (May 1, 2024). This reflects the necessity for academic institutions to go beyond simply accommodating Indigenous programs—they must recognize the profound cultural and intellectual contributions these programs make. For SILR, this institutional understanding is critical for its long-term success and sustainability.

Elders and knowledge holders are at the heart of SILR, and their role is both sacred and irreplaceable. As Lynda pointed out: “SILR has been taking seriously the Elders’ thoughts, what we believe, into consideration, and they validate that” (Cree, SILR External Advisory Council, April 30, 2024).

Lynda's reflection highlights the respect and validation shown to Elders by the project, recognizing their authority over the knowledge passed down through generations. This validation goes beyond acknowledging the Elders' insights—it ensures that their knowledge remains a guiding force in SILR's work.

This theme of rightful knowledge holders is further elaborated by Davina Rousell, who noted: "It became obvious to myself and to the team that that knowledge is not in there, nor should it be. It is held by the rightful knowledge holders who take care of that knowledge" (Research Lead, May 14, 2024). Davina's statement underscores a critical distinction: Indigenous knowledge does not belong within institutional structures; it is nurtured and protected by those within the community who are responsible for preserving and passing it on. SILR's success depends on respecting this knowledge sovereignty, ensuring that knowledge holders are recognized as essential to the revitalization process.

For SILR to continue thriving, this sacred Indigenous knowledge must be integrated in a way that maintains its integrity while being supported by institutional frameworks. Lynda articulated this, saying, "To have an organization like SILR within the university, I think they validate our Elders and traditional knowledge" (April 30, 2024). By incorporating Indigenous knowledge into academic spaces, universities not only acknowledge its importance but also help preserve and elevate it, ensuring it continues to shape future generations.

The sustainability of Indigenous knowledge is also tied to the broader vision of empowering younger generations to carry forward the work of language and cultural revitalization. Jordan Lachler, Director of CILLDI, expressed his vision: "My vision is there's no reason this university can't have something like that. We have an entire province full of people who need to see these pathways and need to have these options available to them... Their career is doing language revitalization in their communities" (April 29, 2024). This insight highlights the role institutional support can play in fostering new generations of Indigenous language revitalization experts, creating career pathways grounded in traditional knowledge and cultural continuity.

Indigenous knowledge within SILR speaks to the vital role of Elders, the protection of knowledge by rightful holders, and the need for academic institutions to actively support and validate these efforts. SILR's sustainability hinges on maintaining the sacredness of Indigenous knowledge while fostering its growth in future generations. The narratives shared by participants emphasize that the project's success is tied to the respectful integration of Indigenous knowledges into the university without compromising its cultural and spiritual significance.





Culture and Identity

The stories shared within the SILR project highlight that cultural identity is deeply tied to language. This identity is shaped not only by literature or academic knowledge but by lived experiences, traditions, and oral histories passed down through generations. Elders stress that language is a vessel for cultural practices, belonging, and kinship. Through language revitalization, Indigenous peoples reconnect with their cultural roots, ensuring that ancestral teachings continue to guide future generations.

Dr. Trudy Cardinal reflects on the complexity of identity, explaining: “Identity is formed by so many other things, and it was way more complex... the narrative conception of identity that I hold as stories to live by—stories told to, by, and about us, and how that impacts the way we live in the world, how we identify, and the stories we tell about ourselves or the ways we live” (Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, May 14, 2024). This view emphasizes the importance of stories, often shared in Indigenous languages, as foundational to how people understand themselves and their place in the world. Language revitalization, in this sense, is not just about reclaiming words, but about reclaiming the stories that shape cultural identity.

Pamela McCoy Jones highlights the profound link between language and identity, stating, “The very identity of people lies within the languages” (Executive Director, June 3, 2024). This reflects the understanding that language is the key to preserving cultural knowledge, oral traditions, and community histories. Without language, the threads that connect communities to their ancestors and cultural practices risk being lost. Pamela also shared how this connection was instilled in her from a young age: “She instilled in us, in me, our genealogy—who we were related to, who our relatives were, what our grandfather’s and grandmother’s names were. Where did they come from? Their stories? And so that’s what I’m passing on” (June 3, 2024). This intergenerational transmission of knowledge reinforces the idea that identity is preserved and strengthened through the sharing of language and family histories.

Molly Chisaakey expands on the cultural and spiritual significance of language in relation to identity. She explains, “The dreaming is part of our ceremonies and our culture and the dance, and the laughter, the sense of place and belonging. All of those are a very important part of who we are and where we come from, and why we are still here” (Dene Tha’, April 30, 2024). For Molly, language is not merely a communication tool—it is a gateway to ceremonies, connections, and stories that sustain Indigenous identity. Through language, communities maintain their cultural practices, their ties to the land, and their sense of belonging.

The connection between community and identity is also seen in the collective efforts of language revitalization. A CILLDI team member stressed the importance of fostering support within the community: “As much as we foster communities to help themselves, we foster our own community to help each other” (May 1, 2024). This ethic of mutual support and collective action is central to both cultural revitalization and the preservation of identity. Language revitalization is not just about individual learning but about strengthening the bonds between community members as they work together to reclaim their cultural heritage.

The narratives shared by SILR participants make it clear that cultural identity is deeply intertwined with language. As Indigenous communities work to revitalize their languages, they are also reclaiming the stories, ceremonies, and cultural practices passed down through generations. This process of reclaiming identity through language ensures that the teachings of the ancestors continue to guide and shape future generations.





Language as a Living Entity

Indigenous languages, as described by participants in the SILR project, are seen as living entities—dynamic, evolving, and inseparable from the people who speak them. This theme emphasizes that language is not static but a vibrant force that adapts to modern contexts while maintaining its spiritual and cultural roots. Revitalizing Indigenous languages is a lifelong commitment, where once-dormant knowledge is reawakened and passed on, creating continuity between generations and connecting the past, present, and future.

Davina captures this vibrancy by describing language as a form of art: "The vibrancy of languages is music, right?" (May 14, 2024). This metaphor highlights how language is more than a tool for communication—it is a living expression of culture, much like music, ever-changing and reflective of the experiences of its speakers. In Indigenous communities, language is intertwined with cultural practices, stories, and ways of knowing.

Molly emphasizes the importance of language in passing down the teachings of Elders, who allow learners to absorb knowledge over time without interference. "All the ways that the Elders have taught us through observation. They don't interfere with our learning" (April 30, 2024). In this way, language becomes a medium for sharing wisdom that individuals can interpret and internalize at their own pace.

Molly explains that when children hear a story, each will interpret it differently: "If you ask 5 or 6 children that were sitting there what the story was about, each one of them will tell you totally different versions of what they heard, what they understood... it will come back to you... and it's kinda helping you to become a survivor" (April 30, 2024). This flexibility in storytelling allows language to remain alive in memory, guiding individuals through life's challenges.

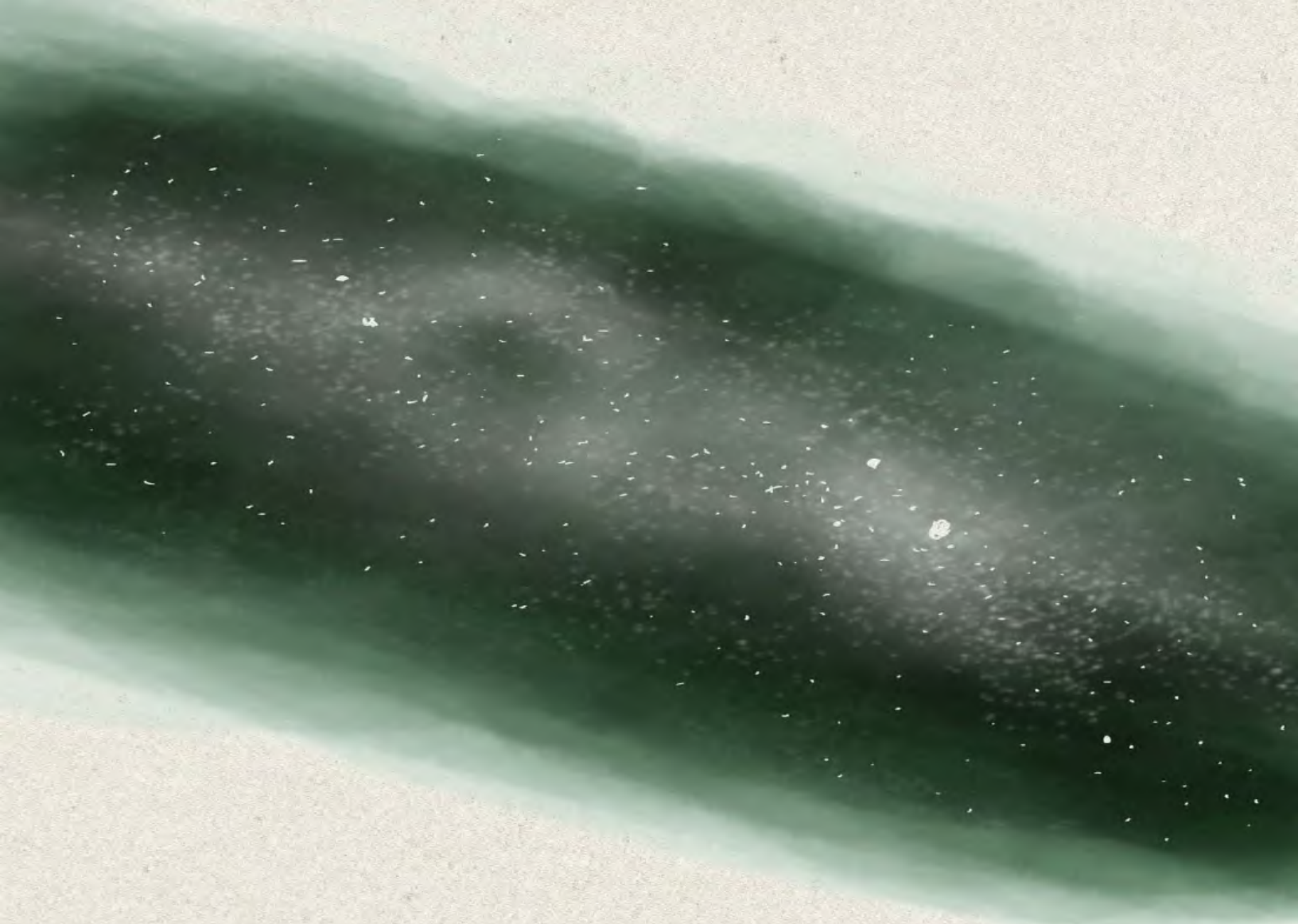
The dynamic nature of Indigenous languages is also reflected in their difference from English. Elmer explains, "English is a noun-based language, Indigenous languages are verb-based. You lose so much of the meaning when you use English" (April 30, 2024). Elmer points out that Indigenous languages view nature and the world as active, living forces: "It's hard to translate because it's all verbs; nature is a verb. To them, it's a noun. It's objectified, it's outside of itself, that's their disconnect. What I'm saying is that our Indigenous languages give us sovereignty" (April 30, 2024). By framing nature as an active process, Indigenous languages preserve the connection to the land and natural world, reinforcing that everything is interconnected and alive—unlike the static, objectified worldview often conveyed by English.

Crystal Wood also speaks to the emotional and spiritual resonance of hearing Indigenous languages: "When I hear the language, I feel it right, and it really resonates with me, it doesn't matter what ancestral language it is, especially when I hear drumming and singing with that as well" (Graduate Research Associate, May 1, 2024). This connection to language—alive and deeply rooted in the senses—shows that language is not just words but a living embodiment of culture and identity. Accompanied by drumming and singing, it carries an energy that reinforces the idea of it being alive and spiritually connected.

In these stories, language revitalization is portrayed as an evolving, lifelong process. Lynda reflects on the journey of finding one's purpose in this process: "Not all of us were born, and all of a sudden we know that's our purpose in life, you know. We kind of go all back and forth and all over the place... and here I am, 73 years old, finally dawned on me. I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing" (April 30, 2024). Lynda's reflection highlights that language revitalization and cultural identity are not linear; they unfold over time, revealing deeper meanings as individuals grow and learn. Molly adds that this ongoing process of "unraveling or uncovering" the layers of meaning embedded in language is essential to understanding the values, protocols, and teachings passed down by Elders (April 30, 2024). Language stays alive because it continues to teach, evolve, and adapt across generations.

The concept of community and mutual support also reinforces the idea of language as a living entity. A CILLDI team member noted, "As much as we foster communities to help themselves, we foster our own community to help each other" (May 1, 2024). This ethic of community support mirrors the way language functions—shared, nurtured, and sustained by the collective. Language revitalization is not an individual effort but a communal one, where the knowledge of the past is brought forward to ensure survival and resilience for the future.

Language is alive and living, constantly evolving with its speakers. Indigenous languages are not static relics of the past but vibrant, dynamic forces that carry cultural and spiritual significance. Through revitalization, these languages are reawakened, sustaining the identities, practices, and resilience of Indigenous communities. Language, like life itself, is a verb—active, ongoing, and intertwined with the world around it.



Spirituality

Spirituality is a central theme in the stories shared by the SILR storytellers. Language is described as sacred—something that must be honoured and awakened. Many storytellers highlight the spiritual responsibility of preserving and revitalizing languages, viewing it as a way to revive the spirit of the language itself. This reflects the organic, living nature of language, which is tied to both the land and the universe. The stories illustrate that language is more than just a communicative tool—it embodies spiritual power and plays a key role in ceremonies, rituals, and cultural survival.

Elmer captures the connection between language and the universe, describing it as a living song: "We see a living, moving universe. Uni equals one, verse is song. Universe is the one song, because all the million stars are making sounds" (April 30, 2024). This metaphor emphasizes that the universe is alive with energy and sound, much like language, which has its own spiritual vibration and connection to the world. Like the stars contributing to a larger harmony, language is essential to the spiritual existence of Indigenous peoples.

Shana Dion adds to the sacredness of language, voicing concern over how Indigenous languages are approached: "The language is sacred; how do we structure this? I don't want it to be like we need to fit it into a rubric. It's organic" (Assistant Dean for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students, May 27, 2024).

Her concern reflects the tension between Western educational frameworks and the spiritual, fluid nature of Indigenous languages. These languages cannot be confined to rigid academic structures—they are living, spiritual forces that need to be treated with reverence.

Shana also highlights the "spiritual responsibility" involved in language revitalization: "There is a spiritual responsibility to that language, and there's an honouring to that language that we can't lose sight of in this project" (May 27, 2024). This responsibility extends beyond teaching or learning the language; it involves honouring the ancestors, the land, and the cultural practices tied to the language. Revitalizing the language is seen as a sacred duty to ensure that its spirit is nurtured for future generations.

This duty involves not only preserving but also "awakening" the language. Shana emphasizes: "We need to uplift that language. We need to awaken it. We need to bring that spirit back into it" (May 27, 2024). In this view, language is not a static relic of the past but a living force that must be reconnected with its spiritual origins. Revitalizing the language is about spiritual restoration, breathing life back into something deeply meaningful for Indigenous communities.

Elmer's metaphor of the universe and Shana's reflections all point to a larger theme: language is sacred because it connects people to the land, the universe, and their ancestors. Through language, Indigenous peoples access the spiritual teachings embedded in ceremonies, rituals, and stories, which are essential for cultural survival. Elmer noted that language resonates with the rhythms of the universe, with everything connected in a sacred "one song."

Language, therefore, is not just a means of communication but a living, spiritual force that must be honoured, uplifted, and awakened. The process of revitalizing language is viewed as a spiritual responsibility—one that carries the weight of ensuring the survival of cultural traditions, practices, and knowledge for future generations. Through these stories and metaphors, it becomes clear that language is intertwined with the sacred rhythms of the universe, guiding Indigenous peoples in their connection to the land, their ancestors, and one another.



Land-Based Practices

Land and language are deeply intertwined in Indigenous cultures, and the stories shared by SILR storytellers emphasize this connection. Language is rooted in the land, and many teachings tied to daily practices, ceremonies, and survival are land-based. The storytellers show how language revitalization cannot be separated from the land, as traditional practices like hunting, gathering medicines, and engaging in ceremonies keep the language alive. These stories illustrate that revitalizing language also sustains land-based ways of knowing and preserving ecological knowledge.

Molly reflects on this deep connection between land and language, saying: "A lot of the teachings that we grew up with have to do with our way of life as we know depended on the land and the languages" (April 30, 2024). This statement emphasizes that Indigenous languages emerge from land-based practices essential for survival and well-being. Language is not just a system of communication but a living record of how to navigate, interact with, and care for the land. These teachings are passed down through generations, tied to both practical survival and the spiritual relationship with the natural world.

Molly highlights several traditional teachings related to land-based practices: "You never put your bag of food on the floor. You can't do that because that's food that you're gonna eat, and you have to bless your food because of how far you had to go to gather your berries, or to pick the fungus on the willow trees, or travel to get the bark for medicines" (April 30, 2024). This quote underscores how language and cultural protocols are tied to the land. Blessing food, for example, reflects respect for the labor of gathering and the land's generosity, as well as the sacredness of language that describes these practices.

Molly continues to describe how traditional land-based activities like scraping moose hides, making mukluks, and finding various medicines are linked to cultural identity and survival. She says, "We could go digging in on the land to drink water from the moss... that respect and acknowledgment of the land, and the spaces to be recognized as women, as mothers, grandmothers, sisters... help others to heal is really what is important in our practices as culture, knowing our language-based teachings and cultural ways of knowing" (April 30, 2024). These activities are more than survival techniques—they are cultural knowledge, affirming identity and contributing to the community's well-being. The language used to describe these practices is sacred, reflecting a worldview that sees the land as alive and intertwined with human life.

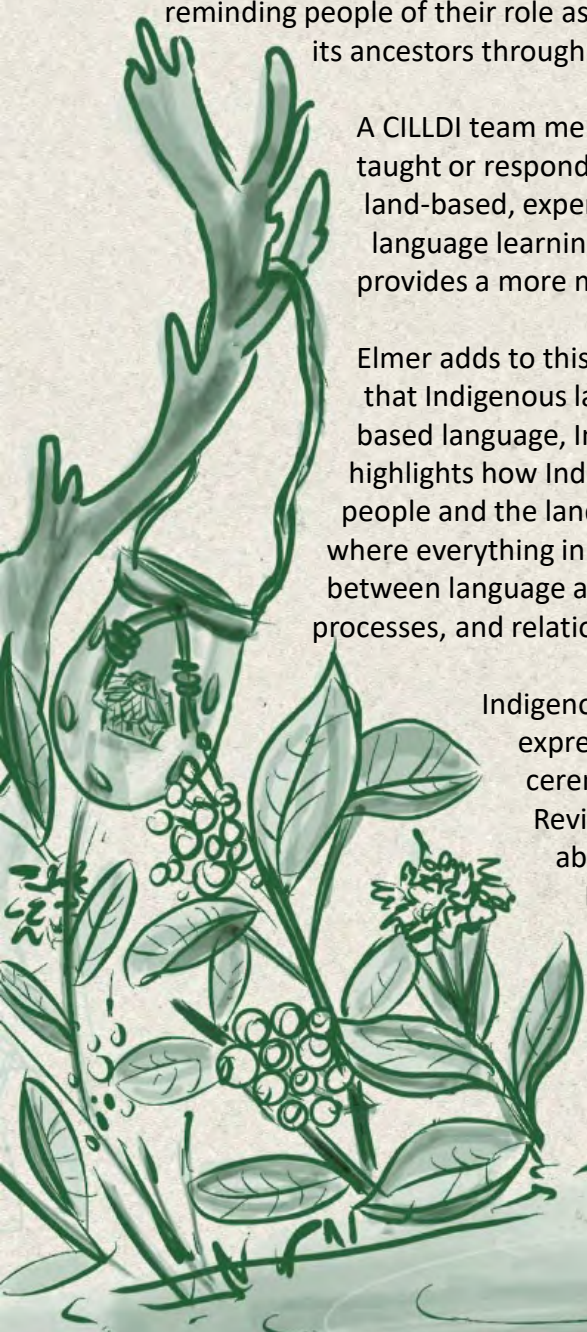
This generational transmission of land-based knowledge shows that language revitalization is not just about vocabulary—it's about bringing people back to the land and engaging in practices that have sustained Indigenous communities for generations. As Molly puts it, "These are some of the things that bring us to life in living" (April 30, 2024). Language carries the spirit of these practices, reminding people of their role as stewards of the land and members of a community that honours its ancestors through land-based teachings.

A CILLDI team member noted, "That's not how these communities tend to want to be taught or respond to being taught" (May 1, 2024), referring to the importance of land-based, experiential learning rather than instruction. This highlights the need for language learning to be embedded in daily life and connected to the land, which provides a more meaningful and authentic way to engage with Indigenous languages.

Elmer adds to this sacred connection between language and the land by explaining that Indigenous languages are structured differently from English: "English is a noun-based language, Indigenous languages are verb-based," he said. This distinction highlights how Indigenous languages reflect active, living relationships between people and the land. The verb-based structure of these languages mirrors a worldview where everything in nature is alive, in motion, and interconnected. The relationship between language and the land is dynamic, reflecting not just objects but the actions, processes, and relationships that animate them.

Indigenous languages are inherently land-based. They are living expressions of the land and its teachings, embedded in daily practices, ceremonies, and ecological knowledge that sustain Indigenous cultures. Revitalizing these languages is about more than preserving words—it's about reawakening the relationship between people and the land.

Language, as these stories show, is a sacred, living force that connects generations, ensures survival, and maintains the spiritual and ecological balance between communities and the land they inhabit.





Theme 2: Values (How We Show Up and What Drives Us)

Core values such as relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect are central to SILR's approach, as reflected in the stories. Storytellers emphasize the importance of building relationships based on mutual respect and the need for culturally aligned methods of teaching and learning. These values shape how language revitalization efforts are carried out, ensuring the work meets community needs rather than academic or institutional expectations.

Molly highlights the connection between values and language revitalization: "Revitalization, or the unraveling or uncovering of the deeper meaning and how those meaningful and respectful ways that our Elders have taught us—through their stories, oral telling, that give us values, protocols, how to live a good life" (April 30, 2024). This reflection shows how Elders' teachings, passed through language, serve as a guide for living well, imbuing the revitalization process with deep cultural and ethical significance.

The stories reflect a commitment to flexibility, community leadership, and honouring Elders and knowledge holders. These values are the foundation for long-term sustainability and success in language revitalization efforts. The "unraveling" of language's deeper meanings—rooted in values like reciprocity and respect—ensures that language revitalization is not only about recovering words but also about restoring the cultural frameworks that support Indigenous ways of life.

This theme brings forward values of commitment, passion, pride, flexibility, community leadership, collaboration, reciprocity, relational accountability, respect, empowerment, and trust. These values guide SILR toward future language revitalization strategies, illuminating how ancestral language revitalization can be applied across the community-led programs supported by SILR.

Three key takeaways summarize this section and identify aligned promising practices observed in SILR's work, which are reviewed in the next section.

Key Takeaway 1: Core values drive the success of language revitalization. The core values of relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect are essential to SILR's approach to language revitalization. These values ensure that the work is community-driven and culturally aligned, reflecting the needs and priorities of the communities. This directly supports SILR's intermediate outcome of developing effective models and tools for language instructors and Elders, ensuring these tools are culturally relevant and responsive to community expectations. *Aligned Promising Practice: Relational accountability and reciprocity.*

Key Takeaway 2: Flexibility and community leadership are critical for sustainability. The stories emphasize the importance of flexibility and community leadership in sustaining language revitalization efforts. SILR's commitment to allowing communities to define their own goals and lead the work ensures that the project remains adaptable and resilient to the changing needs of communities. This connects to the intermediate outcome of expanding language use across homes, schools, and communities by supporting community-driven initiatives that are flexible enough to meet local contexts. *Aligned Promising Practice: Community-led, culturally responsive approaches.*

Key Takeaway 3: Elders' teachings anchor language revitalization in cultural frameworks. Elders are central to the success of SILR's efforts, as their teachings offer guidance on how to live in accordance with cultural values and traditional protocols. The stories highlight how Elders' teachings provide a foundation for living well and passing down cultural wisdom, reinforcing the idea that language revitalization is deeply intertwined with cultural resurgence. This supports the intermediate outcome of helping individuals gain confidence and proficiency as speakers and teachers, as Elders instill a sense of purpose and cultural pride in learners. *Aligned Promising Practice: Capacity building and empowerment of language teachers.*



Commitment, Passion, and Pride

This theme highlights the deep commitment, passion, and pride driving those involved in language revitalization. Stories reflect the dedication of Elders, language learners, and community members who take on the responsibility of keeping their languages alive, often facing significant personal and systemic challenges. Storytellers express the pride they feel in their work and in their languages, seeing language revitalization as both a personal and collective mission. Their passion extends beyond language itself—it encompasses a broader commitment to cultural survival and intergenerational healing. This theme reinforces the idea that revitalization work is sustained by the heart and spirit of the people who engage in it.

Lynda's story captures this sense of purpose: "Here I am, 73 years old, finally dawned on me. I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing... reviving our language and sharing the teachings" (April 30, 2024). Her reflection reveals the profound sense of fulfillment and responsibility she feels in this work. Despite the personal challenges and long journey to realizing her purpose, Lynda's commitment to language revitalization remains unwavering. For her, this work is about more than recovering words; it's about fulfilling a life mission that honours her ancestors and ensures future generations have access to the teachings embedded in the language.

The pride felt by individuals involved in language revitalization is tied to a broader sense of cultural pride. Revitalizing language is seen as a powerful act of cultural resurgence, where each reclaimed word represents a victory against the forces that sought to erase Indigenous languages and identities. Storytellers often emphasize the importance of not only learning their languages but also teaching them to others. This commitment to passing on these languages is driven by a passion for ensuring that future generations continue to speak and live within their cultural frameworks.

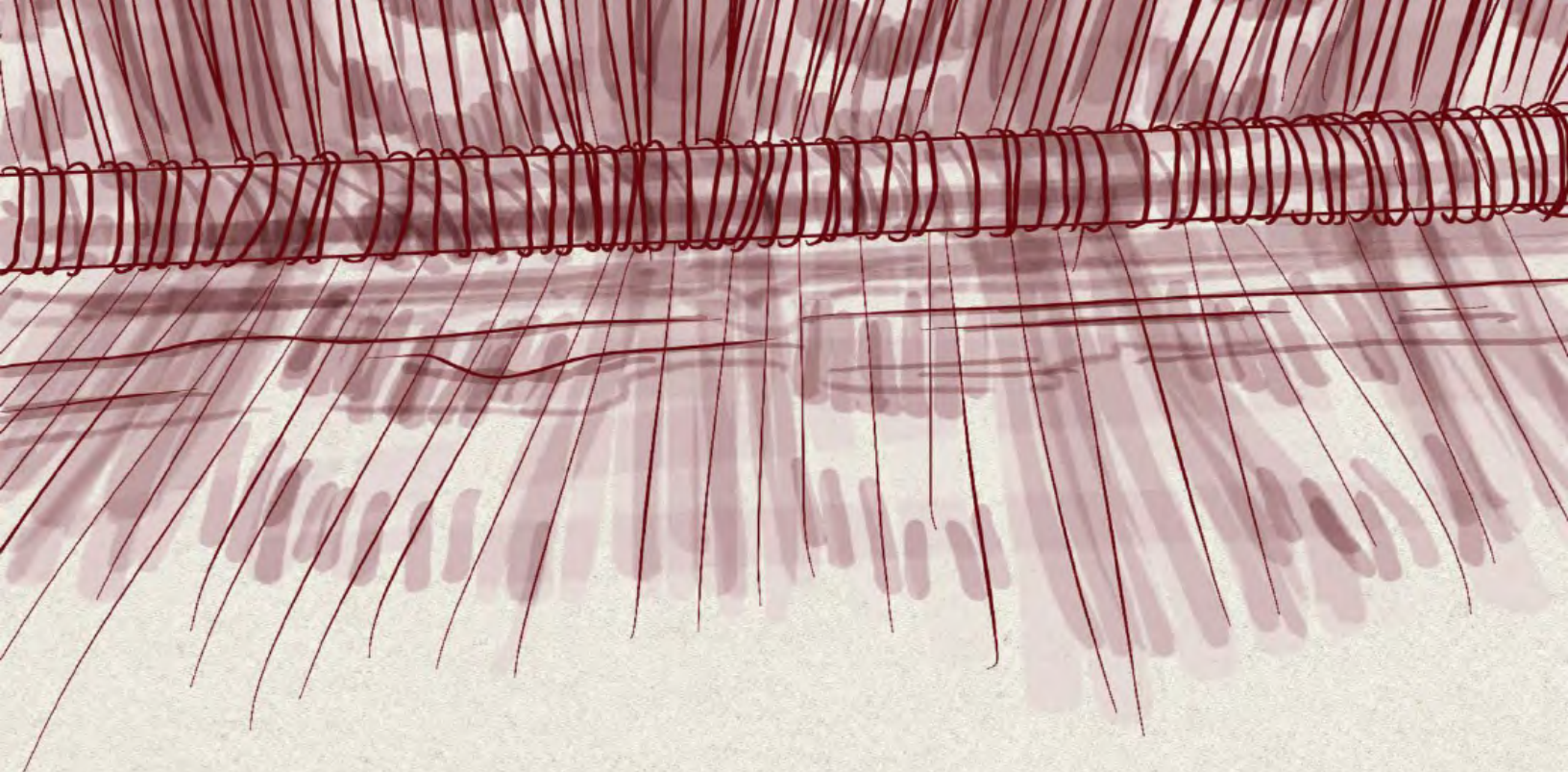
The stories also show how this commitment extends beyond the individual. Language revitalization is seen as a collective responsibility, shared by communities working together to preserve their cultural heritage. The passion and pride felt by one person, like Lynda, spread throughout the broader community, inspiring others to join in the work. The collective nature of this effort reinforces the idea that language revitalization is not a solitary mission but a shared journey towards healing and cultural survival.

Many storytellers express their passion through the joy of teaching and learning. Elders often speak about the pride they feel when younger generations embrace their languages. This reciprocal relationship between generations—where knowledge is passed down and carried forward—is a source of both pride and strength. Teaching is about more than language; it is about transmitting values, traditions, and ways of life that have sustained Indigenous communities for centuries.

The passion driving language revitalization is also linked to healing. As Lynda reflects, reviving language is an act of restoration—both for individuals and the community. The pride and commitment felt by those involved in this work come from the understanding that language has the power to heal intergenerational trauma, restore cultural identity, and rebuild a sense of belonging disrupted by colonization. This recognition fuels the passion behind language revitalization, as storytellers see their efforts as not only preserving the past but also healing the present and building the future.

The individuals involved in this work are driven by a deep sense of responsibility and cultural pride, sustaining their efforts even in the face of challenges. Their passion is contagious, inspiring others to take up the cause and ensuring that language revitalization becomes a collective movement towards healing, cultural survival, and intergenerational resilience. As Lynda's journey demonstrates, this work is deeply personal yet profoundly communal, rooted in a shared vision of cultural revitalization.





Flexibility

Flexibility is essential to the success of the SILR project. Storytellers share that language revitalization requires adaptability, as the needs of communities, Elders, and learners change over time. This flexibility allows the project to adjust focus, timelines, and methodologies when necessary, ensuring a more culturally responsive approach that is grounded in the realities of community life rather than rigid academic frameworks. This theme emphasizes the importance of maintaining an open, adaptable mindset in language revitalization efforts, where creativity and responsiveness help overcome challenges and foster success.

Jordan captures this spirit of flexibility when he describes the day-to-day efforts of keeping the program going: “day to day just trying to keep a program like this going (..) sort of hand-crafted (..) way that we make it, and not just turn it into a regular kind of university program” (April 29, 2024). His reflection highlights the need for a personalized and adaptable approach that resists the typical rigidity of institutional programming. The SILR project, with its handcrafted methodology, acknowledges that language revitalization is unique and cannot be standardized within traditional academic structures. This flexibility ensures that the program remains culturally aligned and responsive to the specific needs of each community.

Dr. Florence Glanfield echoes this need for adaptability, stating, “I want you to know that it was always imagined to be a responsive project” (Vice-Provost for Indigenous Programming and Research at the University of Alberta, April 30, 2024). Her comment underscores the importance of designing SILR with responsiveness in mind. By being open to change and willing to adapt to evolving community dynamics, the SILR project remains relevant and impactful. This responsiveness builds stronger relationships with community members, ensuring the project meets their needs rather than imposing external frameworks or timelines.

Flexibility is also reflected in the way the project adapts to build capacity and foster pride within communities. Dr. Cardinal notes that participants “feel pride in what they could do,” sharing stories of how the project led to other contracts and job opportunities for participants, such as those working with the Athabasca Tribal Council (May 14, 2024). This adaptability, which nurtures sustainability and capacity-building, demonstrates the broader impact of the program beyond language revitalization. It creates opportunities for personal and professional growth, empowering individuals and strengthening communities.

Dr. Cardinal also emphasizes the fluid nature of the *Braiding Stories to Live By* program's intergenerational gatherings, describing how the project tries to capture “kinship feeling, that relative feeling versus it's so multicultural” (May 14, 2024). This flexibility allows the program to foster stronger relationships between Indigenous families and schools, creating a sense of pride and continuity that extends beyond language. By allowing for a more organic, family-centered approach, the program strengthens community bonds and reinforces cultural connections in ways that more rigid structures cannot.

Working with different communities, such as the Stoney Nakoda Nations, demonstrates the importance of flexibility in adapting to diverse cultural contexts. A CILLDI team member shares how rewarding it has been to work alongside the Stoney people, helping them integrate their language back into their children's lives (May 1, 2024). This adaptability is critical for creating meaningful impacts across generations, showing that language revitalization is not a one-size-fits-all process. Each community's unique cultural context requires a tailored approach that evolves with its needs and priorities.

Elmer reflects on the honour of keeping the language alive, underscoring the need for flexible approaches that honour the spirit and significance of the language (April 30, 2024). His comment speaks to the deep cultural responsibility carried by those involved in revitalization and the need for adaptable approaches that respect the living nature of the language.

By remaining open and responsive, rather than following rigid academic or institutional models, the SILR project ensures its work is grounded in the realities and needs of the communities it serves. This flexibility fosters pride, builds capacity, and strengthens intergenerational connections, allowing the project to have a meaningful and lasting impact. As Jordan describes, the SILR project is “hand-crafted” to ensure its adaptability, ultimately supporting its long-term sustainability and success.



Community Leadership

Community leadership and responsiveness to local needs are central to SILR's approach. The stories emphasize that language revitalization must be driven by the communities themselves, not external forces or institutions. SILR remains accountable to the voices and needs of the communities it serves, making adjustments in response to their feedback. The project's success comes from its meaningful partnerships with communities, where Indigenous ways of knowing and doing take priority over institutional demands. This community-led approach ensures that the revitalization efforts are culturally relevant, sustainable, and effective.

A core principle of SILR is its responsiveness to communities rather than institutional hierarchies. As one SILR team member shared, "This is how we are responsive, not to academics, or the President of the University. This is about community" (April 29, 2024). This reflects SILR's commitment to centering Indigenous voices and rejecting top-down approaches often imposed by academic or institutional initiatives. By responding to community needs, SILR ensures that its work is meaningful and adaptable, remaining grounded in local contexts. This approach fosters trust and aligns language revitalization with the cultural and social priorities of the communities.

Pamela highlights the importance of this adaptability, stating, "This is why decisions were made. This is why we shifted. This is why we listen to the people we are serving. To make things better, more accessible, more relevant, more inspiring" (June 3, 2024). Her words underscore SILR's commitment to adjusting the program based on community feedback, allowing the project to remain aligned with evolving community needs. This ongoing flexibility strengthens the program's accessibility and relevance, ensuring its long-term sustainability.

The theme of shared responsibility also surfaces as critical. As one story notes, "Some of the departments pushed back. I wish people could understand this is a shared responsibility, not one person or one department" (April 29, 2024). Language revitalization is framed as a collective effort involving community members, Elders, and program facilitators. SILR's approach ensures that no single person or department bears the full burden of the work. Instead, it fosters collaboration and collective ownership of the project's success.

Scott Key adds that responsiveness also involves providing opportunities that resonate with participants: "It's really up to students. You can offer things. But, you want to offer things that are meaningful to people that will impact them as people, but as professionals as well" (Director, Professional Learning, Faculty of Education, April 29, 2024). His reflection reinforces the importance of designing programs that are both personally and professionally impactful, ensuring they resonate with the realities of learners and communities.

Respecting the knowledge and guidance of Elders is a key part of this community-led approach. Pamela discusses the responsibility to keep Elders on the Advisory Council like Mary Cardinal Collins updated: "Keeping her updated on things like our meetings and what's happening is the kind of thing that needs to happen that is so important. They're all connected to their own communities" (April 29, 2024). This attentiveness to Elder input reflects SILR's commitment to ensuring that the revitalization efforts are guided by those who hold deep cultural and linguistic knowledge, rather than imposing external expectations or timelines.

Elmer adds a spiritual dimension to community leadership, stating, "We have two places that we feel and think from—one is your brain and the other one's your heart. Your heart has feelings, and it has a mind. And we call that intuition" (April 30, 2024). His reflection speaks to the importance of leading with both the mind and the heart in language revitalization efforts, aligning with Indigenous ways of knowing where intuition plays a crucial role in decision making. By allowing the heart to guide the process, SILR remains true to its community-led roots, ensuring the work resonates emotionally and culturally.

By placing community needs at the forefront and remaining adaptable, SILR ensures its efforts are culturally relevant and effective. The stories shared highlight how responsiveness to feedback, shared responsibility, and honouring Elder and community voices create a foundation for sustainable, meaningful language revitalization. As Pamela articulates, this commitment to listening makes the project "more accessible, more relevant, and more inspiring," ensuring its success for generations to come.





Collaboration

Collaboration is a cornerstone of the SILR project, as seen in the partnerships among communities, institutions, Elders, and learners. This theme highlights the importance of collective efforts in language revitalization. Storytellers describe how working together strengthens the work and creates new opportunities for growth. Collaboration within and outside communities ensures that language revitalization efforts are more sustainable and impactful, driven by trust, shared knowledge, and reciprocal relationships.

Elmer emphasizes the value of consensus-driven decision making, noting, “Well, that's not our way. We're a collective. We sit around a round table and we make decisions on consensus. We don't have a class system. We're all equal” (April 30, 2024). This reflects the cultural importance of collaboration in Indigenous governance and decision making. The collective approach ensures that every voice is heard, and decisions are made with the community's best interests in mind. This strengthens language revitalization by fostering unity and shared ownership of the work.

The collaborative nature of SILR is evident in the partnerships between different stakeholders. Elders guide the work with their cultural and linguistic knowledge, while learners and community members contribute their energy and enthusiasm. Institutions provide resources, but as the stories show, these partnerships work best when institutions adapt to community needs. The success of SILR is built on these reciprocal relationships, where each partner contributes to the shared vision of revitalizing Indigenous languages.

Building trust is key to collaboration. The stories reveal that trust must be earned through consistent, respectful actions. By showing up for communities, respecting their knowledge systems, and responding to their needs, SILR fosters strong trust-based relationships. This trust allows for open communication and a greater willingness to collaborate, ensuring the work respects the values and priorities of the community.

Collaboration also involves sharing knowledge. Elders share linguistic and cultural wisdom, while younger generations bring new perspectives and skills. This intergenerational exchange enriches the revitalization process, ensuring traditional knowledge is preserved while allowing for innovation and adaptation. The stories highlight how collaboration strengthens the capacity of communities to sustain their languages across generations.

In addition to internal collaboration, SILR builds partnerships beyond the local level. Working with other Indigenous communities, academic institutions, and governmental bodies creates opportunities for resource sharing and capacity building. These collaborations expand the reach of language revitalization efforts, ensuring greater impact and sustainability. For example, partnering with universities enables the development of language programs and certifications, providing learners with formal recognition while keeping the programs rooted in community knowledge.

By fostering partnerships built on trust, respect, and reciprocity, SILR ensures that every partner—from Elders to learners to institutional partners—has a role in shaping the work. As Elmer highlights, collaboration is not just a strategy but a cultural value underpinning the collective approach to language revitalization. Through these collaborative efforts, communities pool resources and knowledge, creating a stronger, more sustainable foundation for the future of their languages.





Reciprocity

Reciprocity is central to many Indigenous worldviews and is deeply reflected in the stories shared within the SILR project. Storytellers describe how the give-and-take of knowledge and support underpins relationships between language learners, Elders, and communities. Reciprocity in this context highlights that language revitalization is not just about teaching—it is about ensuring that the process benefits everyone involved. Elders share their knowledge, and in return, they are honoured and respected for their contributions. This mutual exchange fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability, ensuring that the revitalization efforts are fair, ethical, and sustainable.

Davina captures the spirit of reciprocity in language revitalization: “We have moved mountains, and we’re not even done (...) with this knowledge mobilization that’s ahead of us. It’s this whole other aspect of the journey that brings life to work” (SILR Team, April 30, 2024). Her reflection emphasizes the ongoing exchange of knowledge within the SILR project, where progress is made not just through individual efforts but through the collective contributions of Elders, learners, and community members. This “knowledge mobilization” represents a collaborative process that brings language to life in a reciprocal cycle of learning and teaching, creating a living, evolving effort that benefits all participants.

Reciprocity also plays a crucial role in maintaining balance and respect. Elders, as primary knowledge holders, generously share their teachings with learners, but the giving is not one sided. In return, Elders are supported and honoured for their contributions, strengthening bonds between generations and ensuring that the language revitalization process is culturally respectful and sustainable. The stories show that language revitalization is about more than acquiring linguistic skills—it is about fostering relationships grounded in mutual care and responsibility.

This concept of reciprocity extends beyond the exchange between Elders and learners. It also applies to the relationships between institutions and communities. The stories emphasize that institutions involved in SILR are expected to reciprocate by providing resources, support, and opportunities that align with community needs. This reciprocal relationship ensures that academic institutions are not merely extracting knowledge from communities but actively contributing to the long-term success of language revitalization efforts.

Reciprocity fosters a strong sense of accountability in the revitalization process. Each party—Elders, learners, and institutional partners—understands that their contributions matter and that they are responsible for the well-being of the language, culture, and community. This mutual accountability ensures that the work is conducted in a way that respects cultural values and meets the needs of everyone involved. The stories demonstrate that prioritizing reciprocity makes language revitalization more ethical and culturally aligned, laying a foundation for long-term sustainability.

The stories make clear that language revitalization is not a one-way process but a dynamic, collaborative effort that benefits all participants. As Davina notes, reciprocity brings life to the work, ensuring that revitalizing ancestral languages honours the knowledge, contributions, and needs of everyone involved.





Relational Accountability

Relational accountability is a guiding principle of the SILR project's approach to language revitalization. The stories highlight that accountability in Indigenous contexts is about honouring the relationships among individuals, communities, and the land, rather than meeting institutional metrics. Storytellers describe how SILR prioritizes being accountable to the communities it serves, ensuring their needs and voices are respected throughout the process. This theme speaks to the importance of a relationship-based approach, where the success of language revitalization is measured by the strength of the connections built, not solely by external indicators or outputs.

Relational accountability is rooted in how people treat each other and work together. Dr. Cardinal illustrates this concept through her work with women in her community: "The team that I have supports women (...) So me, my daughter, there'd be somebody her age. I'd have somebody else closer to my age, we would have an Elder, and then that beautiful relationship and kinship. It was beautiful to see. Then the young people saw that, too, this relationship and the ways we treated each other and worked together" (May 14, 2024). This example shows that relational accountability is built through intergenerational relationships and mutual support. In this context, accountability is about ensuring that every generation learns to build and maintain meaningful relationships, passing on cultural values that are essential to language revitalization.

The stories also emphasize that being accountable to relationships means honouring the teachings passed down through generations. Lynda reflects on how her mother influenced her as a storyteller: "My mother was my biggest influence in my life. And I learned everything from her. All the stories. I'm a storyteller now, and that was because of her. She was a storyteller" (April 30, 2024). Lynda's reflection shows that relational accountability involves recognizing and respecting the lineage of knowledge. Her storytelling is not just a skill; it is a responsibility to her mother and her community, ensuring that the stories remain alive. This accountability helps sustain cultural practices as part of the larger goal of language and cultural revitalization.

Relational accountability is also reflected in the shared responsibility for language revitalization. Karen Delver stresses the collaborative nature of the work: "There's just so much work to do, and I don't think that should rest on the shoulders of SILR, that this is all your responsibility. I think what I learned, too, from that conference is it's a shared responsibility, and we can't do it alone" (SILR Project Coordinator, April 29, 2024). Recognizing that language revitalization is a collective effort, Karen's statement shows how relational accountability extends beyond individual roles. It is about ensuring that everyone—communities, institutions, Elders, and learners—shares responsibility for revitalization efforts. This collective accountability helps SILR sustain its work and keep the focus on the relationships that make language revitalization meaningful.

The emphasis on relationships within SILR means that accountability is driven by community needs and voices, rather than external pressures or timelines. This approach challenges traditional notions of accountability, which often focus on institutional goals or measurable outcomes. Instead, relational accountability centers on building trust, respecting knowledge holders, and ensuring the community feels heard and supported. By prioritizing relationships, SILR ensures its efforts are culturally relevant and responsive.

Whether through intergenerational teachings, mutual support, or shared responsibility, the stories show that language revitalization is most successful when rooted in strong, respectful, and reciprocal relationships. Relational accountability ensures that the work of revitalization is not just about the survival of language, but about honouring the connections among people, community, and culture that sustain Indigenous ways of life.





Respect

Respect emerges as a core value in the stories shared within the SILR project, particularly in recognizing the vital role of Elders and language speakers in the revitalization process. The stories highlight the deep reverence for the knowledge, wisdom, and responsibility carried by Elders and fluent speakers. They are seen as the foundation upon which the survival and revitalization of Indigenous languages rest. Their involvement is not only important but essential in ensuring that revitalization efforts are culturally grounded and aligned with teachings that have sustained Indigenous communities for generations.

Shana captures this sense of respect in her reflection: “The Elders, the language speakers, the ones who have carried this, and took on the responsibility of carrying the language, living the language for so long. To respect that is to honour them. It’s owed to them because without them we wouldn’t even have this conversation, because it would have been stripped away long ago” (May 27, 2024). Shana’s words highlight the ethical obligation to honour the contributions of Elders. Respecting Elders is not merely an expression of gratitude—it is an acknowledgment of their essential role in safeguarding language and culture in the face of efforts to erase them.

Within SILR, respect is shown by recognizing and valuing the work that Elders and language speakers have been doing long before formal revitalization efforts began. Their commitment to living and practicing the language has laid the groundwork for contemporary language revitalization. Respect is demonstrated not only by acknowledging their contributions but also by ensuring that their teachings guide the direction of SILR's efforts. By centering Elders' knowledge, SILR ensures that the language is revitalized in ways that respect its cultural and spiritual significance.

Elders serve as both guides and knowledge holders in SILR, generously offering not only linguistic skills but also cultural values and spiritual teachings. Their wisdom shapes the project, ensuring that language revitalization is a holistic process that incorporates cultural, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. Respect for Elders involves seeking their guidance and keeping their voices central to the revitalization work, which ensures that language efforts remain deeply connected to the values that sustain Indigenous ways of life.

Respect extends to the language itself. Elders and fluent speakers have carried the language through difficult times, and their stewardship reflects their deep respect for its cultural and spiritual power. Treating language with respect means ensuring that it is passed down in culturally appropriate ways and recognizing that its revitalization is part of a broader effort to sustain Indigenous ways of living. The reciprocal respect shown between Elders and learners strengthens the relationships within SILR, making language revitalization a collaborative and community-driven effort.





Empowerment

Empowerment is a key value reflected in the stories shared within the SILR project. Revitalizing ancestral languages is not only about preserving linguistic knowledge but about empowering individuals and communities to reconnect with their cultural roots, reclaim their identities, and regain control over their narratives. Empowerment, in this context, is closely tied to the transmission of knowledge from Elders to younger generations. The process equips learners with both language and the cultural values and teachings embedded within it.

Molly captures this sense of empowerment when she speaks of “the revitalization, or the unraveling or the uncovering of the deeper meaning, like the other Elder was talking about” (April 30, 2024). For Molly, language revitalization is a journey of uncovering deeper cultural and spiritual meanings. Learners are empowered to understand not only the words but the wisdom and values they carry. This “unraveling” allows individuals to engage with their language on a profound level, empowering them to live by the teachings of their ancestors.

The stories show that teachings passed down through language are inherently empowering because they offer learners more than just communication skills. They provide a guide to living in alignment with cultural values, fostering a sense of identity and belonging. Empowerment in language revitalization ensures that future generations have the tools to navigate life through the lens of their Indigenous worldview.

The role of Elders in empowering younger generations is crucial. By passing down not just words but values and cultural practices, Elders empower learners to carry forward their community's traditions. As Molly notes, Elders teach "meaningful and respectful ways" through their stories, fostering a sense of purpose and agency in the learners who receive this knowledge. Empowerment through language revitalization becomes a collective effort, ensuring that the process benefits both individuals and communities.

In addition, empowerment in this context is about reclaiming what was lost through colonization. The process of learning and revitalizing the language allows Indigenous peoples to take back control of their cultural narratives, reinforcing their sovereignty and cultural identity. As the stories show, empowerment through language revitalization connects individuals to their ancestors, land, and future generations.





Trust

Trust is a foundational element in the work of language revitalization, as reflected in the stories shared by storytellers within SILR. Building trust among Elders, learners, community members, and institutions is critical to creating meaningful collaboration. Trust creates a space where people feel safe to share knowledge and experiences, yet it is also fragile. The stories emphasize that trust must be nurtured through relational accountability, transparency, and respect.

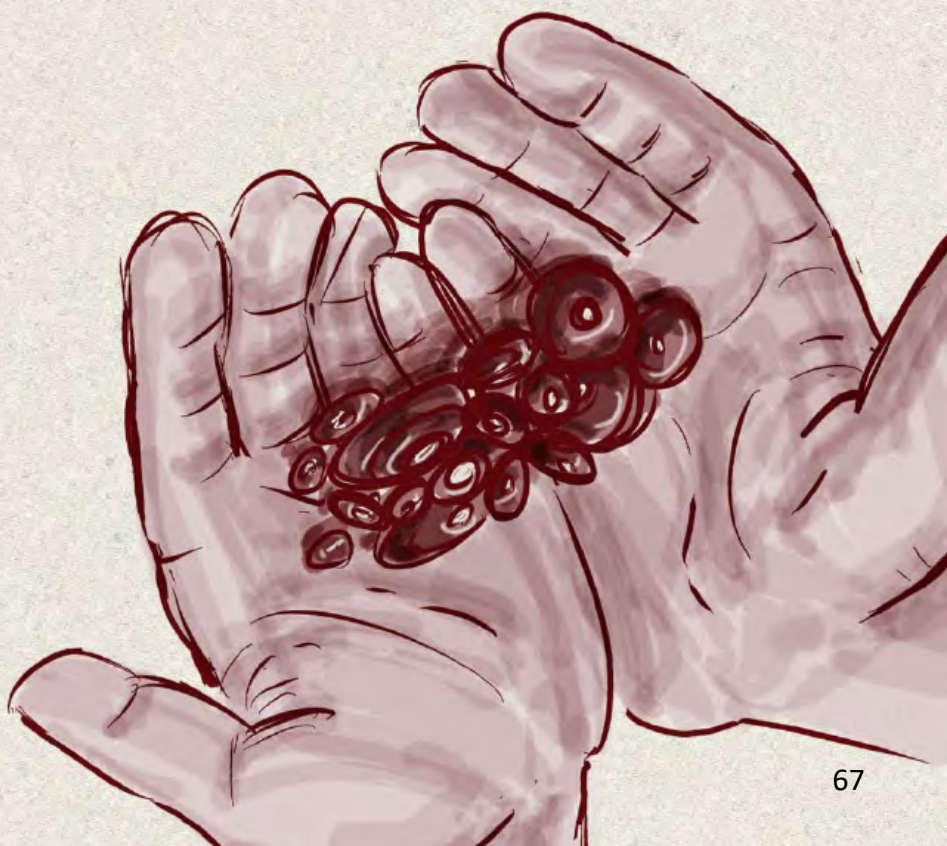
Davina captures this fragility when she notes, “Trust falls through the cracks too often” (May 14, 2024). Her reflection highlights the reality that trust, once broken, can be difficult to rebuild, especially in Indigenous communities with a history of harm caused by colonial systems. SILR’s language revitalization work requires ongoing efforts to build and maintain trust, particularly within institutional frameworks. The stories show that trust is not a given; it must be cultivated through actions that demonstrate accountability and respect for cultural knowledge.

Trust operates on multiple levels within SILR. Between teams, partners, and the communities they serve, building trust allows relationships to move beyond formal partnerships and become spaces of mutual learning. The stories reveal that trust fosters stronger, more sustainable language revitalization efforts, as partners feel their contributions are valued and respected.

Dr. Cardinal highlights the importance of trust within her team, noting that the trust they showed in her abilities helped her grow and develop throughout the project: “I really grew in it a lot because of the trust they showed, and constantly reassured me, even if I was crying, and I was burnt out, and I was mad. They just kept going” (May 14, 2024). This example shows how trust can create a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to overcome challenges and contribute their best to the work.

Trust is also essential in relationships between Elders and learners. Elders entrust younger generations with the responsibility to preserve and pass on the language. This trust is both a privilege and a responsibility, reinforcing the importance of respecting the teachings they receive. When Elders trust that their knowledge will be honoured, they are more willing to share, ensuring that revitalization efforts are rooted in cultural continuity.

At the heart of this work is the understanding that trust must be continually earned and nurtured. The stories emphasize that building trust takes time, transparency, and commitment. By being responsive to community feedback and respecting cultural protocols, SILR ensures that trust remains central to its revitalization efforts, fostering meaningful collaboration and cultural preservation.





Theme 3: Foundations (Everything That Is Needed)

Interwoven with the values that drive SILR's work, the foundational elements of its success are reflected throughout the stories. These elements—community involvement, collaboration, and support from Elders—are critical for building the capacity needed to sustain long-term language revitalization. The theme of "Foundations" underscores the importance of nurturing these relationships and highlights how partnerships within and across communities are essential to ensuring the longevity of these efforts. A key element of this foundation is the acknowledgment that capacity-building and sustainable practices are necessary so that Indigenous communities have what they need to lead their own revitalization initiatives.

Within this theme, stories are shared about a community of practice, relationship-building at individual, community, and partnership levels, how funding enables growth and innovation, time and timeliness, sustainability, capacity, data sovereignty, and safe spaces. These stories reflect the progress SILR is making toward its intermediate outcomes and identify strategies that are working, as well as those that need adjustment, to inform future language revitalization strategies.

Three key takeaways summarize this section and highlight aligned promising practices observed in SILR's work, which are reviewed in the next section.

Key Takeaway 1: Community involvement and collaboration are critical to sustaining language revitalization. The stories emphasize that community involvement and collaboration are foundational to successful language revitalization. Through partnerships with Elders, educators, and community leaders, SILR leverages diverse perspectives and expertise to advance its goals. This collective approach creates a strong foundation for sustaining long-term language revitalization efforts. Collaboration supports the development of tools and strategies aligned with community needs and goals, contributing to sustained progress across homes, schools, and workplaces. *Aligned Promising Practice: Building a "Community of Practice."*

Key Takeaway 2: Building a "Community of Practice" is essential for knowledge sharing and growth. The concept of building a "community of practice" within SILR reflects the collective engagement of Elders, language learners, educators, and community members working toward shared language revitalization goals. This collaborative model emphasizes mutual respect, accountability, and intergenerational learning as critical components of success. By fostering a community of practice, SILR enhances communities' ability to develop and share promising practices, strengthening the overall impact of language programs. This model promotes continuous learning and adaptation, ensuring revitalization strategies remain culturally relevant and responsive to community needs. *Aligned Promising Practice: Strengthening collaborative networks.*

Key Takeaway 3: Capacity building and sustainable practices support language revitalization within Indigenous communities. The stories underscore the importance of capacity-building initiatives that equip Indigenous communities with the skills, knowledge, and resources to lead their own language revitalization efforts. Empowering communities through sustainable practices ensures that they can maintain and expand language programs independently, without relying on external support. By prioritizing capacity building, SILR supports the development of effective models, practices, and tools for Elders, instructors, and community leaders. These sustainable practices ensure that communities are empowered to take ownership of revitalization efforts, building a foundation that can sustain lasting impact. *Aligned Promising Practice: Capacity building and empowerment of language teachers .*



Community of Practice

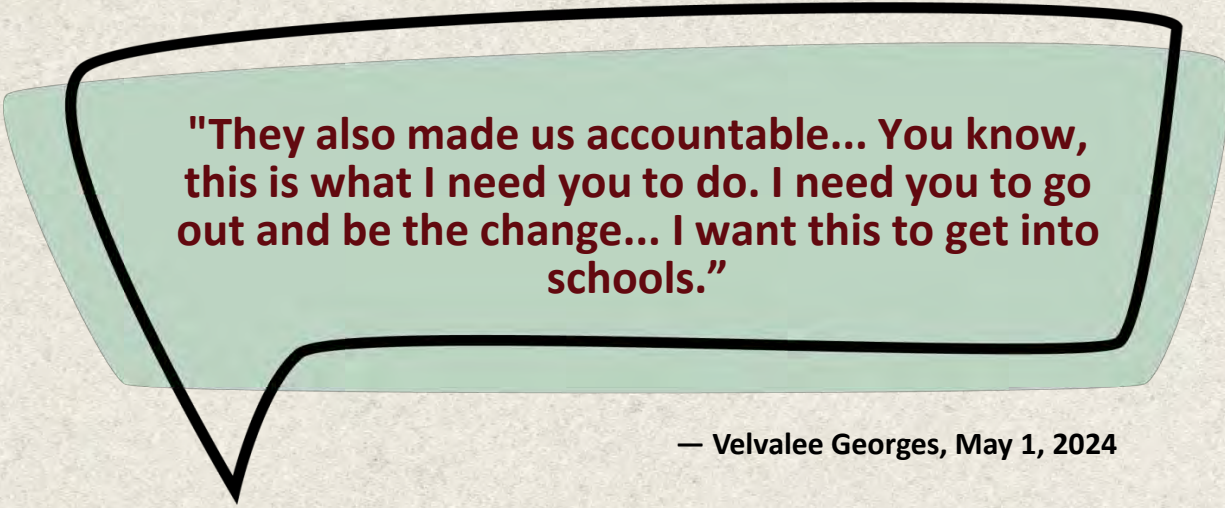
The concept of building a "community of practice" is central to the SILR project's success, as reflected in the stories of those involved. While this term may not be used explicitly, the idea is witnessed in how SILR operates. A community of practice refers to the collective engagement of Elders, language learners, educators, and community members working together towards the shared goal of language revitalization. This can be seen in the ongoing work of the Steering Committee, Advisory Council, community engagements, and the annual Gatherings. This community is grounded in mutual respect, accountability, intergenerational learning, and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. The stories reveal that involving the right people, fostering reciprocal relationships, and maintaining global connections are all critical to sustaining this community of practice.

Dr. Glanfield emphasizes the importance of having the right people involved when she states, "If you don't have the right people who can vision this with you, then you're not going to get the outcomes you want" (April 30, 2024). This reflection underscores the fact that the success of any community of practice relies on the people who participate. In particular, the involvement of Elders, who hold cultural and linguistic knowledge, is crucial.

Their teachings guide the process and ensure that the revitalization efforts remain culturally grounded and spiritually connected. Elders bring wisdom and spiritual insight that is vital to the work, as reflected by Lynda's statement: "Getting us Indigenous people together from the different language groups. Us Elders... what I hear, a lot of it is pretty deep and pretty spiritual" (April 30, 2024).

In this community of practice, intergenerational learning is key. Elders pass down their knowledge to younger generations, ensuring that language revitalization is not just about recovering the language itself but about transmitting values, cultural protocols, and ways of living. This exchange empowers younger participants while allowing them to learn from the wisdom of those who came before. Velvlee Georges, a member of the SILR Research Team captures this sentiment, observing, "After, reading and hearing so often about the generosity of Elders and knowledge and language keepers, as an Indigenous Research Assistant I was still struck by how incredibly generous our advisors and the people we interviewed were with their knowledge. They lovingly walked the talk embedded in our languages in so many ways...one language and knowledge keeper even gifted us with a song, which we learned, to help us along our research journey" (May 1, 2024). Velvlee's reflection highlights the importance of reciprocal relationships, where knowledge is shared freely, and participants honour the teachings they receive by applying them meaningfully.

Reciprocal relationships also foster accountability within the community of practice. Participants are not only recipients of knowledge but also bear the responsibility of carrying that knowledge forward. As Velvlee noted, Elders and advisors held participants accountable, providing guidance on how they should apply what they learned.



"They also made us accountable... You know, this is what I need you to do. I need you to go out and be the change... I want this to get into schools."

— Velvlee Georges, May 1, 2024

This expectation of accountability ensures that language revitalization is an active commitment to creating change within communities.

International relationships also play a critical role in building a strong community of practice. Jordan speaks to the value of global collaboration in language revitalization: "We can be a little bit of a conduit for information on language revitalization kind of circulating around the world from places to places. Then that's something we're well positioned to do" (April 29, 2024). This global exchange allows for the sharing of best practices and methodologies, enhancing local efforts. By connecting with other revitalization efforts worldwide, SILR strengthens its capacity and enriches its community of practice with diverse perspectives.

Finally, understanding roles and responsibilities is essential to the effective functioning of this community. As Lynda reflected, "I didn't really know where I was going... and I don't think they knew too much about what their role was, either" (April 30, 2024). This highlights the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities within the community and making space for clarity to emerge over time. When participants understand their responsibilities, they can contribute more effectively to the collective effort. This clarity, combined with support from Elders, ensures that the community of practice remains cohesive and focused on the shared goal of language revitalization.

The involvement of the right people, intergenerational learning, reciprocal relationships, and international collaboration are all key components of this community of practice. By fostering accountability, sharing knowledge generously, and understanding roles and responsibilities, the community of practice ensures that language revitalization efforts are sustainable and impactful. As the stories reflect, this community is not just about language—it is about strengthening relationships, honouring cultural teachings, and empowering participants to be agents of change.





Relationship Building

Relationship building is a central theme in the SILR project, shaping its approach to Indigenous language revitalization through individual connections, community partnerships, and broader collaborations. The stories emphasize that the success of language revitalization efforts is deeply tied to the relationships built among participants, communities, and academic institutions. These relationships—based on trust, reciprocity, and shared responsibility—enable the project to be both responsive to community needs and reflective of cultural values. The process of building relationships, whether on an individual or organizational level, is fundamental to creating sustainable and impactful language revitalization work.

Dr. Trudy Cardinal highlights the significance of long-term relationship building: “It was the ways we gathered and the ways we were building relationships that were long term” (Professor in the Faculty of Education, May 14, 2024). This sentiment reflects that relationship building in the context of language revitalization is not transactional or short term; instead, it focuses on fostering connections that will last for years, if not generations. These relationships form the backbone of the project, creating a foundation of trust and mutual support that sustains the work over time.

By focusing on long-term relationships, SILR ensures that language revitalization is not just a temporary initiative but a continuous, evolving process.

Individual relationships are integral to creating a sense of belonging and connection within the project. Lynda reflects on the personal importance of being able to share her language: “When I shared in my language, some of the old people that were there, they said I understood everything you said... It felt so good to be able to connect to people in my language and to share my own personal experience with them” (April 30, 2024). Lynda’s reflection highlights how language can serve as a powerful connector, fostering a deep sense of cultural continuity and identity. These individual relationships—built through shared language and experience—are crucial for creating a community of learners and speakers who support each other in the revitalization process.

At the community level, relationship building is key to ensuring that the project remains responsive to local needs. As Pamela explains, “We wanted to be able to give the project leads their autonomy to be able to build on their relationships in a way that was meaningful to them, which didn’t always look the same” (June 3, 2024). This emphasis on autonomy and meaningful relationship building reflects the project’s commitment to respecting the unique contexts of each community. By allowing communities to lead and build relationships in ways that align with their own values and priorities, SILR reinforces its role as a support system rather than an external authority imposing its vision.

Partnerships between communities and academic institutions are also vital to the project’s success. These partnerships are not only about providing resources but about creating a space for reciprocal learning and collaboration. Jordan underscores the value of collaboration across institutions and organizations: “There are lots of organizations, universities, and groups out there doing this type of work. We need more of these organizations... How do we create mechanisms or opportunities for sharing these kinds of ideas to improve the training, streamline it, and make it more effective?” (April 29, 2024). Jordan’s reflection highlights that relationship building within and across institutions is essential for expanding the reach of language revitalization efforts and lowering barriers to participation. By creating connections between different language revitalization programs, SILR not only strengthens its own work but contributes to a broader collective effort.

Word of mouth and community validation are also key indicators of success in relationship building. As one CILLDI team member shared, “They come back year after year, and they tell their family and friends in the community, and they bring new people year after year” (May 1, 2024). This type of organic, community-driven recruitment is a testament to the strength of the relationships built within the project.

When people feel connected to and valued by the project, they become its ambassadors, Encouraging others to join and ensuring that the work continues to grow and evolve.



Conferences and gatherings organized by SILR also play a significant role in fostering connections, both within local communities and broader networks. Jordan reflects on the importance of these events, asking, “How can we better reach out and connect? I wanna make that benefit not just for our little institute here, but the broader community of Indigenous language revitalization training institutes” (April 29, 2024). These gatherings serve as spaces for knowledge sharing and collaboration, allowing participants to build relationships that extend beyond the immediate scope of the project. By connecting with other language revitalization initiatives, SILR strengthens its network and enhances its ability to contribute to global efforts in language preservation.

Whether through individual connections, community partnerships, or broader collaborations with academic institutions, the stories reveal that strong, long-term relationships are key to the project’s success. These relationships create a foundation of trust, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, allowing the project to be responsive to community needs and reflective of cultural values. By prioritizing relationship building, SILR ensures that its work is not only impactful but also sustainable, rooted in the strength of the connections it fosters across individuals, communities, and institutions.





Funding for Growth and Innovation

Sufficient funding is critical to the success of the SILR project. The stories demonstrate how financial resources have expanded programming, supported staff, and increased community engagement opportunities. However, concerns remain about the sustainability of funding, with long-term commitments necessary to ensure the continuation of language revitalization efforts. This highlights the need for stable and adequate funding to foster innovation, build capacity, and ensure sustained impact.

Sufficient funding has allowed the SILR project to move beyond survival mode into a space of growth and experimentation. Jordan emphasizes how funding enables innovation by providing the time and resources for reflection: "What's really nice is that we've had the capacity, the time, the money to pay people to take the time to think about these things and not just be like, 'well, this is what we do, and this is all we have the time to do,' so we just keep doing the same thing and hope it works" (April 29, 2024). This reflection underscores the importance of time and financial resources in evaluating and evolving the work, allowing for experimentation rather than repeating past practices.

Funding has also expanded the project's reach and created new community opportunities. Pamela explains how financial resources have been reallocated to better support relational goals: "Different financial pieces have changed to be able to move that money into the community in a way that suits the relationships and suits the project" (June 3, 2024). This flexibility in fund management reflects the project's responsiveness to community needs, strengthening its capacity to support long-term language revitalization.

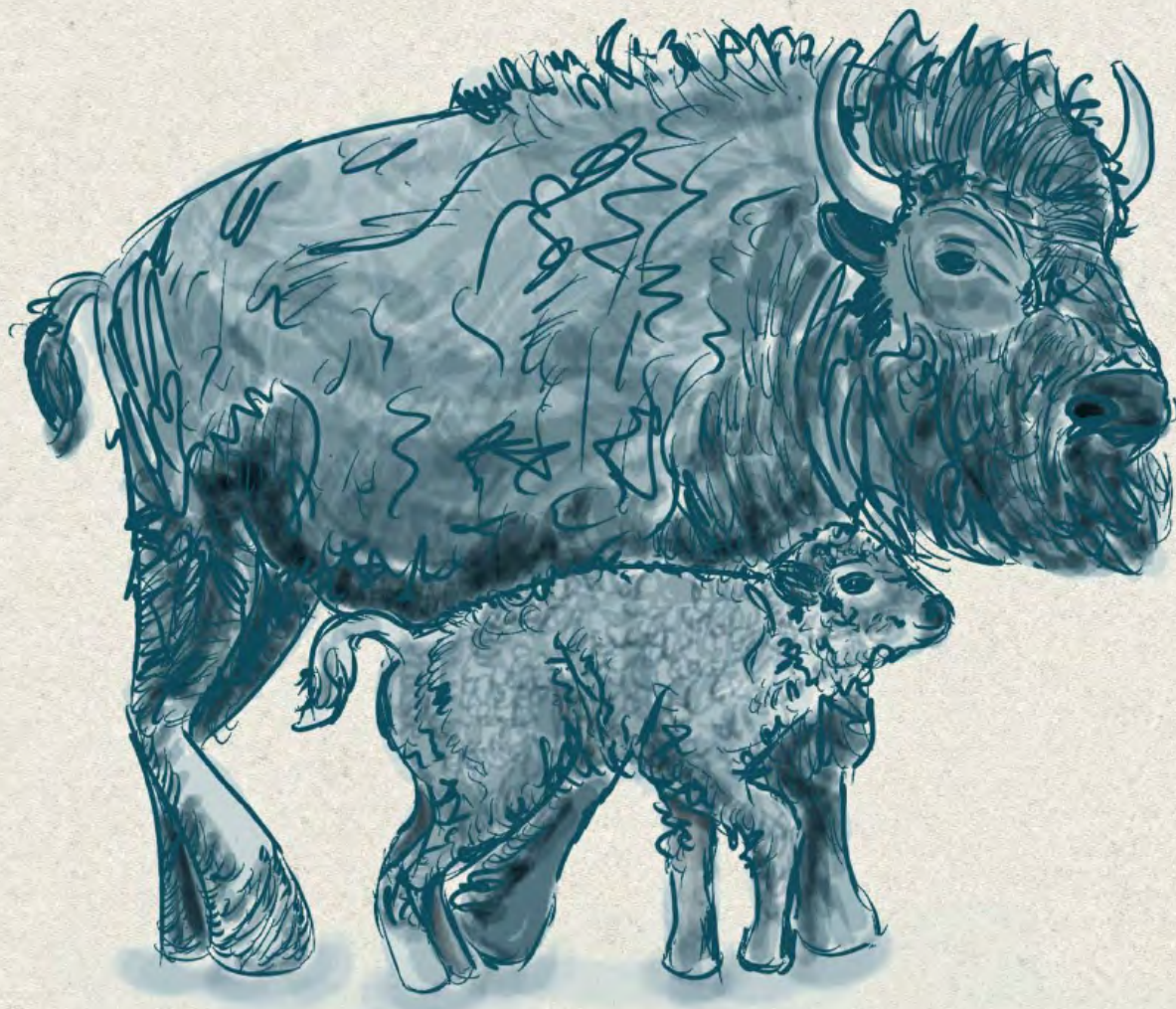
Storytellers also note that funding has empowered the project to bring in talented individuals. A CILLDI team member highlights how financial resources have opened doors: "I now have the possibility to take some very capable people who have amazing skills and could be successful in doing a million other things, to create possibilities for them to use those skills" (May 1, 2024). Sufficient funding enables the project to build a stronger, more capable team.

Despite these opportunities, concerns about funding sustainability remain. Jordan voices this worry: "We have this funding, and that's really great. But after that's gone, it's not like the university is stepping up to say, 'we'll help you at the same level of funding...'. As far as I know, we go back to what it was the day before we got the funding, and that's a big worry that sits at the back of my head" (April 29, 2024). Without sustained funding, the project risks reverting to limited capacity, potentially stalling progress in language revitalization.

Additionally, funding has allowed SILR to adapt its engagement with communities, offering flexibility in program delivery. Jordan explains how financial resources enable the project to meet community needs by bringing training directly to them: "We're moving more into an era where the community language programs are saying you all can benefit from this training. We can come to you, so we do that as much as we can" (April 29, 2024). This flexibility not only makes language revitalization more accessible but also aligns the work with community goals.

Financial resources have expanded the project's reach, built capacity, and enhanced community engagement. However, the sustainability of funding remains a concern, underscoring the need for long-term commitments to ensure the continuation of this vital work. Funding is not just about maintaining operations—it's about honouring relationships, fostering innovation, and ensuring language revitalization efforts thrive for future generations.





Sustainability

Sustainability is a recurring concern shared by storytellers in the SILR project. The theme emphasizes the need for long-term strategies that ensure language revitalization efforts continue beyond the duration of current funding or project timelines. Storytellers stress the importance of planning for the future, building community capacity, and creating structures that support ongoing language learning and teaching. This long-term vision ensures that the work being done today lays the foundation for future generations to continue revitalizing their languages.

Shana emphasizes the importance of strategic planning: "Having a strategic plan for 5 years was really important to our larger organization, and like I said, sometimes we can't plan past Sunday" (May 27, 2024). Shana's reflection highlights the challenge of balancing short-term operational needs with the necessity of a clear, long-term vision. Without sustained planning, efforts risk becoming reactive rather than proactive, which can undermine the lasting impact of language preservation. A strategic approach ensures programs continue to evolve and adapt, even when individual contributors leave or funding cycles end.

Sustainable funding is a consistent concern throughout the stories. Jordan discusses the critical role of funding in shaping the project's future: "We absolutely must keep the summer school going, or we're transitioning into community-delivered classes, or helping targeted communities implement long-term language programs to create new speakers" (April 29, 2024).

Jordan's comment reflects how financial resources shape the scope and strategy of language revitalization. Long-term sustainability requires not only securing initial funding but also developing funding models that ensure continuous support for evolving needs.

Jordan also highlights the importance of building community capacity to secure their own funding rather than relying indefinitely on external institutions: "We really have to look at sustainability. What do communities need to develop, get their own funding? We shouldn't be the middle person. We should be working our way out of a job" (April 30, 2024). This reflects the core idea of sustainability in Indigenous language revitalization—creating empowered communities that can lead their own efforts and secure the resources needed for long-term language maintenance. The goal is to equip communities with the tools and structures to sustain revitalization independently.

Storytellers also stress the need for continuous reflection and adaptation as part of sustaining efforts. Davina captures this ongoing process: "We have moved mountains, and we're not even done... with this knowledge mobilization that's ahead of us. It's this whole other aspect of the journey that brings life to work" (May 1, 2024). Davina's reflection highlights the importance of not becoming complacent with initial successes. Sustainability requires ongoing reflection, learning, and adaptation to ensure the work remains relevant and impactful.

Building a lasting legacy is another important aspect of sustainability. Dr. Cardinal reflects on the idea of legacy: "Legacy is just other people taking it over" (May 14, 2024). This sentiment emphasizes the ultimate goal of sustainability: creating a foundation that allows others to continue the work long after the original contributors have moved on. By fostering strong leadership within communities and creating durable structures, revitalization efforts can thrive across generations.

International partnerships also play a key role in sustaining language revitalization efforts. Jordan discusses the potential for expanding partnerships globally: "If there isn't a lot of support locally, it may be about looking internationally for partnerships and continuing the exchange of information across communities that otherwise wouldn't connect" (April 29, 2024). These collaborations allow programs to share resources, learn from each other, and strengthen efforts through global solidarity.

Finally, sustainability means moving from survival to thriving. A CILLDI team member expresses this vision: in 25 years, we won't be talking about language recognition, but language maintenance and thriving" (May 1, 2024). This long-term vision underscores sustainability's importance, not just for preserving languages today but for creating conditions where Indigenous languages flourish as an integral part of daily life for future generations.





Capacity

Building capacity within communities is a central theme in the stories shared by storytellers. They emphasize the importance of developing the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to sustain language revitalization. Capacity building is not only about training more language speakers and teachers but also empowering communities to take ownership of their own revitalization processes. SILR's efforts have helped foster increased confidence, self-determination, and resilience in the communities it serves.

Jordan highlights the need for a tailored approach to capacity building: "Having the capacity and the funding to partner with communities is definitely something I want to see us continue to do... The need is everywhere, but that is a big part of it" (April 29, 2024). Jordan's reflection shows that capacity building isn't one-size-fits-all; it requires meeting communities where they are and addressing their specific needs and challenges. This ensures the work remains relevant and meaningful, empowering communities to lead their own language revitalization efforts.

Dr. Cardinal reflects on the transformative impact of recognizing individuals as knowledge holders: "Their identity, seeing themselves as knowledge holders, understanding that I saw them as knowledge holders—even if we weren't experts—it doesn't matter, we'll learn together" (May 14, 2024). This collaborative approach to learning empowers individuals to see themselves as contributors rather than passive recipients. By fostering this sense of agency, SILR supports individuals and communities in taking the lead in their own revitalization journeys, building capacity for long-term sustainability.

Creating useful resources is another essential aspect of capacity building. Velvalee, shares how tools like the pictograph developed during the searching process with the SILR research team became pivotal in organizing the knowledge provided by speakers: "I didn't realize how important that pictograph was going to be until halfway through the process. It illuminated so much of what the speakers provided" (May 1, 2024). These resources help make knowledge accessible and actionable, allowing communities to continue their efforts in a structured and supported way. They provide a foundation for ongoing learning and teaching, ensuring that revitalization efforts extend beyond the project's immediate scope.

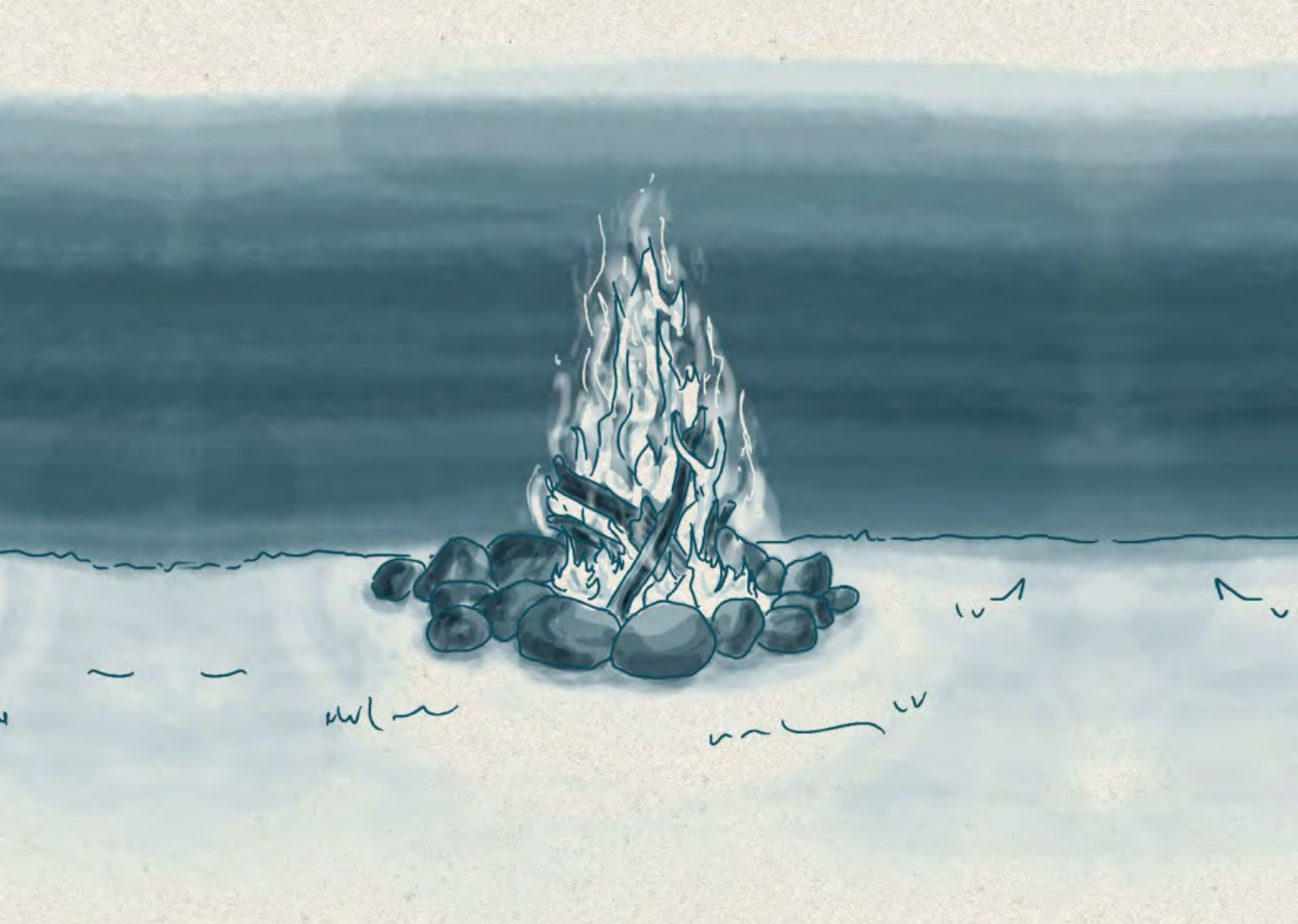
Capacity building also has a ripple effect, inspiring others to take up the work in ways participants may not have anticipated. Dr. Cardinal reflects on how her efforts sparked a broader movement: "...inspired them to continue that sort of sustainability and capacity building in ways I wasn't even thinking yet" (May 14, 2024). This ripple effect shows how empowering individuals and communities creates a self-sustaining process where those involved become advocates and leaders, further spreading the impact of revitalization.

The theme also emphasizes the importance of understanding the "how" of the work. Dr. Cardinal notes, "I was very protective of what I did because it wasn't about what I did, but why I did it and how I did it" (May 14, 2024). This reflection highlights that capacity building is about more than imparting skills or knowledge—it is about respecting the cultural, spiritual, and relational aspects of revitalization. The "how" is crucial to ensuring that efforts are culturally aligned and respectful of the communities involved.

Crystal reflects on the innovative approaches to capacity building that drive the project forward: "What our search process has been, and the findings are innovative... I hope it takes wind" (May 1, 2024). This forward-thinking approach ensures the work remains dynamic and responsive to emerging needs, allowing for continuous growth and adaptation.

Through partnerships with communities, the creation of resources, and empowering individuals as knowledge holders, SILR fosters ownership and self-determination. Capacity building is not just about increasing the number of speakers or teachers—it is about creating a foundation for sustained, community-led revitalization that can grow and evolve over time.





Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty is a key consideration in the SILR project. Storytellers express concerns about how data—especially stories, knowledge, and language recordings—are handled and by whom. Ensuring that Indigenous communities retain ownership and control over the data collected during language revitalization efforts is essential. This theme highlights the importance of culturally appropriate methods of data collection, storage, and sharing, with Indigenous knowledge systems respected throughout the process. Data sovereignty is not just about protecting information—it's about ensuring that the knowledge gathered serves the communities from which it originates.

Molly raises concerns about non-Indigenous people speaking for Indigenous communities: "I really don't like somebody who is not Indigenous speaking for us... It cuts off our tongue" (April 30, 2024). This reflects a core aspect of data sovereignty—ensuring that Indigenous peoples have the agency to tell their own stories and control their own narratives. Knowledge extraction without consent not only erodes trust but disempowers communities. For language revitalization, this means that stories, teachings, and recordings must be controlled by the community, ensuring they are used in ways that align with their values.

Elmer ties language directly to sovereignty, stating, "Our Indigenous languages give us sovereignty" (April 30, 2024). Elmer's reflection emphasizes that language itself is a form of data, and control over it is a critical aspect of self-determination. Language is more than communication—it carries culture, identity, and governance. Ensuring that Indigenous communities maintain control over their languages and related data is vital to maintaining sovereignty.

Dr. Glanfield expands on the role of data sovereignty in supporting community-driven initiatives: "We would have data that communities could draw from, and we could help them develop proposals for their own funding... This is also about sustainability for the work within the communities" (April 30, 2024). Data sovereignty is about empowering communities to use the knowledge generated to achieve their long-term goals. By ensuring access and control over data, communities are better positioned to secure funding, develop programming, and sustain revitalization efforts independently.

The ownership of stories and knowledge shared through SILR aligns with the principles of relational accountability and data sovereignty. Storytellers emphasize that the data collected during language revitalization efforts belongs to the communities. As Dr. Glanfield notes, "None of this research is valuable unless the communities can use it" (April 30, 2024). This reinforces the ethical responsibility to protect Indigenous knowledge holders and ensure their stories remain under their control.

The stories also highlight the ethical responsibility of researchers and institutions to avoid exploitative practices. Velvalee expresses her commitment to this responsibility: "I don't want to join the ranks of the researchers that take and don't really give anything back to the community" (May 1, 2024). Data sovereignty means ensuring that knowledge serves the communities, not just academic institutions or external stakeholders. This principle ensures that the knowledge shared is returned to the community in meaningful and useful ways, supporting their goals. However, there are challenges in advocating for data sovereignty within institutional frameworks. It is important for institutions to listen deeply to what data sovereignty must look like within the context of Indigenous language revitalization work. There are institutional gaps in protecting Indigenous knowledge, raising concerns about how data is managed and shared without formal agreements.

Data sovereignty is linked to the broader goal of avoiding extractive or exploitative practices in language revitalization. As communities share their knowledge, there's a collective understanding that this data must serve the communities from which it originates. Dr. Glanfield's vision of creating materials that communities can use to sustain their revitalization efforts reinforces this point. Data sovereignty ensures that the knowledge generated remains under the control of the community, serving its long-term goals.

Data sovereignty is not just about protecting information—it's about communities being well resourced, preserving their sovereignty, and ensuring that the knowledge shared remains under their control. The ethical responsibility to avoid exploitative practices and ensure that data serves the community is central to the success of language revitalization efforts.



Safe Spaces

Creating safe spaces for learning, reflection, and growth is a key theme in the stories shared by those involved in the SILR project. Storytellers describe how SILR has intentionally fostered environments where individuals feel supported and free from judgment. Safe spaces are essential for effective language learning, as they allow participants to engage in the revitalization process without fear of failure or criticism. These spaces are seen as nurturing and inclusive, particularly for Indigenous youth and community members reconnecting with their languages. The theme highlights the importance of emotional, cultural, and psychological safety in language revitalization, as well as the need to honour Indigenous ways of learning and being.

Dr. Cardinal emphasizes the need for spaces where individuals, especially Indigenous youth, can explore their identity in a supportive environment: “I wanted to create a space for what I called the town kids, you know, for all people to come and learn... creating safe spaces for them to explore who they were versus what I would say, culture camp style” (May 14, 2024). Her reflection shows that safe spaces go beyond language learning—they are about providing environments where participants can reconnect with their cultural roots and explore their identities without pressure.

These spaces offer the freedom to learn, make mistakes, and grow without fear of judgment. These spaces are particularly important given the emotional and psychological burdens Indigenous students and staff often carry. Indigenous staff, in particular, face the dual responsibility of being both educators and cultural and emotional supporters. Safe spaces help alleviate the burnout that can come with this work.

Moreover, safe spaces serve as inclusive environments where all participants feel welcome and supported. Jordan emphasizes this point: “What we strive to do right is to make this university and this campus a welcoming, friendly, and supportive environment for our students” (April 29, 2024). Creating a welcoming environment is especially important for Indigenous students, who may not always feel they belong in academic spaces that have historically excluded them. As one CILLDI team member notes, “Even students who don’t imagine themselves belonging in the university manage to make space here” (May 1, 2024). This sense of belonging is crucial, as these spaces are not just for language learning—they foster inclusion and acceptance within institutions that have often alienated Indigenous people.

Safe spaces are also vital for ensuring emotional and cultural safety in language revitalization efforts. Dr. Cardinal underscores this by focusing on the well-being of Indigenous young women: “I didn’t want it to turn into something that was so language-focused, when at the heart of this was safe spaces and the well-being of Indigenous young women” (May 14, 2024). This emphasis on well-being reflects a broader understanding that language revitalization is about more than linguistic knowledge—it is about healing, empowerment, and creating spaces where Indigenous peoples can thrive emotionally, culturally, and spiritually.

By fostering inclusive and supportive environments, SILR ensures that language revitalization is not just about learning words—it is about creating spaces for healing, empowerment, and growth. These safe spaces are essential for sustaining long-term success and ensuring Indigenous peoples thrive in their learning journeys.





Theme 4: Tensions (Challenges That Create Conflict or Discomfort)

The stories shared about SILR's work reveal challenges, particularly in navigating colonial institutions like universities and dealing with funding complexities. Storytellers reflect on the difficulties of working within systems that weren't designed for Indigenous ways of knowing or community-led projects. Challenges such as transactional relationships, distrust from past experiences, and the balancing of institutional expectations with community needs are common. These tensions create discomfort but also offer opportunities for growth, as SILR projects strive to remain accountable to their communities while operating within these structures.

This section addresses challenges related to acknowledging historical systems, worldviews, the belonging of Indigenous languages in post-secondary institutions, and accountability. Specific areas include roles and responsibilities, policies and agreements, finances and grants, and redefining success beyond traditional metrics. These stories provide SILR with insights for potential adjustments in current strategies, decision making, and future language revitalization priorities.

Three key takeaways summarize this section and identify aligned promising practices we have witnessed so far, which are reviewed in the next section.

Key Takeaway 1: Tensions between institutional frameworks and Indigenous knowledge systems. A recurring challenge highlighted in the stories is the tension between Indigenous language revitalization efforts and the bureaucratic, often colonial, structures of institutions like universities. Indigenous languages are tied to cultural, spiritual, and land-based knowledge, yet institutions tend to focus on academic or administrative priorities that may not align with Indigenous ways of knowing. This tension hinders progress, particularly when institutional goals do not fully account for the relational and cultural aspects of language revitalization.

This takeaway identifies the opportunity for SILR to develop strategies that help navigate these institutional challenges while staying true to Indigenous cultural protocols and community leadership. This supports the intermediate outcome of ensuring language revitalization is not limited by institutional constraints, but instead led by the cultural and spiritual needs of the communities involved. *Aligned Promising Practice: Navigating institutional challenges while staying true to Indigenous protocols.*

Key Takeaway 2: Balancing institutional demands with community accountability.

The stories illustrate a complex balancing act between accountability to academic institutions and funders (such as reporting and meeting measurable outcomes) and accountability to Indigenous communities, which is based on relational accountability and cultural integrity. Institutional demands often prioritize quantitative outcomes, while Indigenous communities value long-term relationships, trust, and cultural resurgence, which may not be easily measured by traditional metrics.

This is an opportunity to reflect community accountability in relationships with institutions and funders. Implementing the Indigenous Evaluation Framework will be pivotal in this progress. SILR can model innovative solutions, showing what a decolonized relationship could look like in these spaces. *Aligned Promising Practice: Relational and reciprocal approaches to evaluation.*

Key Takeaway 3: Navigating distrust rooted in colonial histories. Another key theme is the lingering distrust Indigenous communities have towards colonial institutions, including universities. Historical and ongoing traumas, such as land displacement and cultural erasure, contribute to skepticism about engaging with these institutions. Storytellers emphasize the need for universities and funders to recognize these historical injustices and work to create meaningful, culturally safe partnerships that rebuild trust.

To support the intermediate outcome of developing effective models for language revitalization, SILR can focus on fostering transparent, trust-based relationships with communities. Likewise, it is crucial that partner institutions actively engage with these promising practices through policies, practices, and resources. *Aligned Promising Practice: Building transparent, trust-based partnerships.*





Time and Timeliness

Time and timeliness are critical in Indigenous language revitalization, as shown by the stories in the SILR project. The urgency to act, driven by the rapid loss of fluent speakers, must be balanced with a holistic, inclusive approach. Storytellers reflect on the tension between moving quickly to prevent language erosion while ensuring the process remains thoughtful, community-driven, and inclusive. This highlights the delicate balance between urgency and patience, both necessary to create sustainable and impactful revitalization efforts.

Lynda underscores the critical state of her language, stressing the urgency: "In my community, only about 50 speakers left. Our language is in a very critical state" (April 30, 2024). The dwindling number of fluent speakers creates a ticking clock for language revitalization efforts, as each passing year risks losing more cultural and linguistic richness. The need to preserve what remains while revitalizing the language for future generations is keenly felt in communities like Lynda's, where time is of the essence.

However, while speed is necessary, the stories reveal challenges with working quickly. A SILR team member notes, "The time and how it's supposed to happen now... we do need to work quickly. But that's very challenging because quick work can seem like it can't be holistic, or it can't include everyone. You don't want to leave people behind" (April 29, 2024). This reflects the complexity of balancing the immediacy of the situation with the need for a comprehensive approach. While urgency demands swift action, rushing the process risks excluding important voices or neglecting the cultural, spiritual, and relational aspects of revitalization.

The challenge is to find an approach that is both timely and inclusive. On one hand, languages are disappearing rapidly, especially in communities with critically low numbers of fluent speakers. On the other hand, revitalization efforts must respect the pace of community involvement, ensuring Elders, learners, and community members all have a voice. Quick, reactive solutions may slow speaker loss but could undermine long-term sustainability if the deeper cultural values and practices that the language represents are not preserved.

The stories suggest that time in language revitalization is not just about speed, but also alignment with cultural timelines and processes. In Indigenous contexts, time is often understood differently from the linear, task-driven approach of Western institutions. Language revitalization must honour these cultural understandings of time, ensuring that the process isn't rushed at the expense of depth, inclusivity, or cultural alignment. As the SILR team member notes, "Quick work can seem like it can't be holistic," underscoring the importance of taking the time to do the work properly, even when the clock is ticking.

Time in language revitalization is also about intergenerational transmission. The stories reveal that revitalization is not just about preserving language for the current generation but ensuring future generations can inherit it. While the urgency is clear, the work must also be forward-looking, building a foundation for language and culture to thrive in the future. This requires immediate action to address the current crisis, alongside the patience to create a sustainable infrastructure that supports long-term revitalization.

Ultimately, the stories illustrate the challenge of balancing these competing pressures. Communities grapple with the critical state of their languages while striving to create revitalization processes that honour cultural values and include all members. The concept of time in language revitalization is not just about speed but finding the right pace to preserve, revitalize, and pass down languages in meaningful, sustainable ways.





Acknowledgement of Historical Systems

The stories shared in the SILR project reveal the deep challenges of working within colonial institutions, like universities, that were not designed to support Indigenous ways of knowing or community-driven projects. A central tension is the recognition of historical injustices—displacement, erasure, and marginalization of Indigenous peoples—and how these histories continue to shape present-day experiences. Storytellers reflect on how these legacies impact trust, relationships, and the ability to effectively navigate systems that have often ignored or devalued Indigenous voices.

Molly captures this sentiment, stating, “Being overlooked and undermined in our history, that we are just expendable, that is normalized and that should be changed” (April 30, 2024). Her reflection highlights how Indigenous peoples have been marginalized, with their contributions often deemed expendable by colonial powers. This disregard has led to both a loss of cultural and linguistic knowledge and normalized the mistreatment of Indigenous communities, fostering deep-rooted distrust towards institutions, including universities. Addressing this history requires more than acknowledgment of past wrongs; it demands a fundamental shift in how Indigenous peoples are valued and how their knowledge systems are integrated into these spaces.

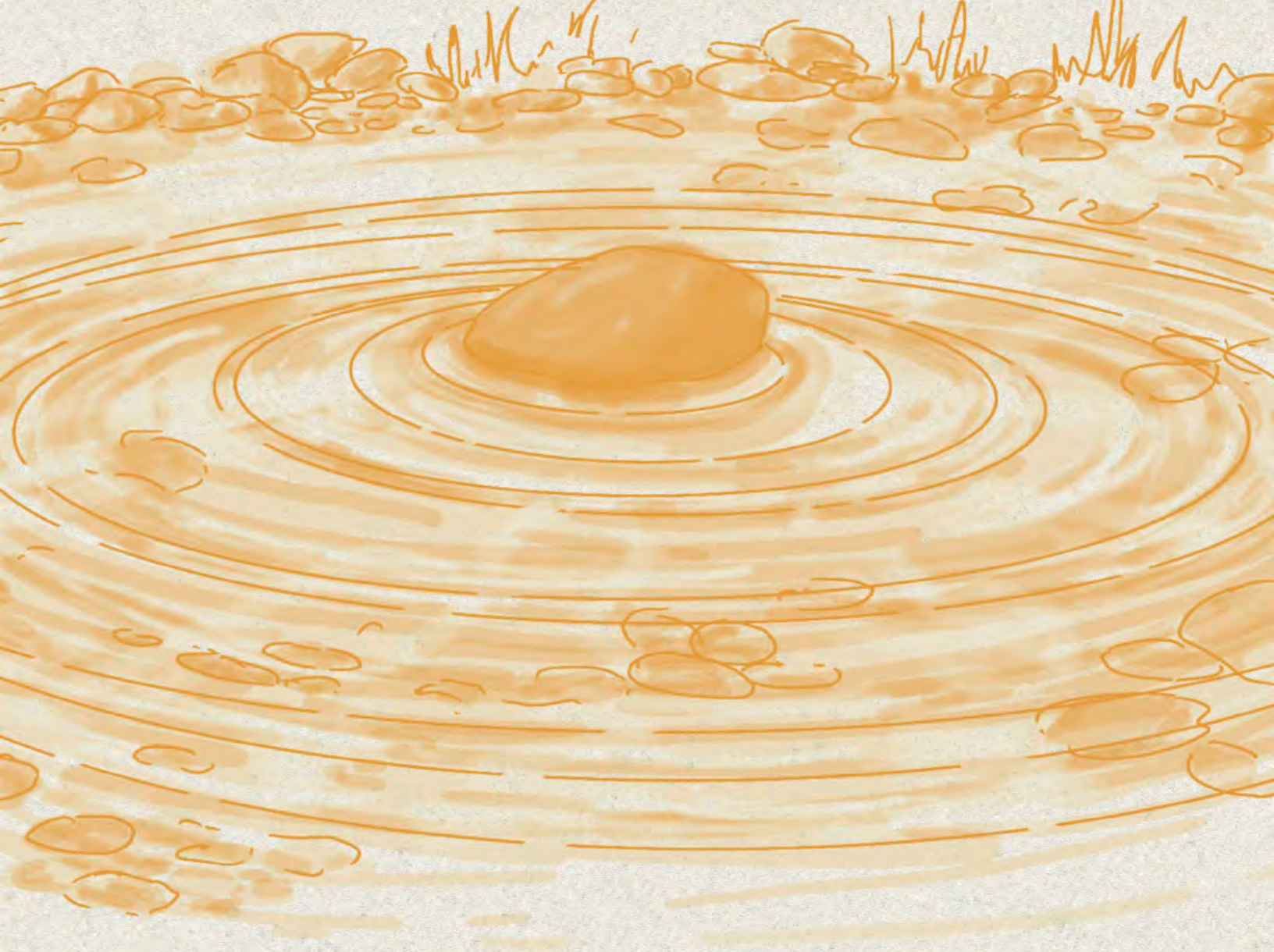
This distrust is compounded by the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the subsequent impact on their languages and cultures. Molly explains, “We became displaced and our languages were [lost] because of genocide, and our culture suffered extremely with the extensive loss to our land use or land-based teachings” (April 30, 2024). Colonization, enforced through policies of genocide, severed the connection between Indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge systems, including language. The universities that now seek to partner with Indigenous communities are often the same institutions that historically upheld or benefited from these systems of displacement and cultural erasure. This history creates tension for communities as they navigate engagement with institutions that were once part of their oppression.

This history of systemic injustice has disrupted the transmission of traditional knowledge, especially within matriarchal, language-based teachings. Molly reflects on how “mistakes made in the history of our communities... have impacts today on how the patriarchy of our language-based teachings in the oral history of who is who in community” (April 30, 2024). Colonial policies targeted Indigenous governance structures, disrupting oral traditions and eroding the foundations of language-based teachings. The loss of Elders, who are key carriers of these oral histories, compounds this problem. Molly notes, “With every Elder who passes away, we lose a large amount of information that is not passed on, and it is a very critical time to gather that information” (April 30, 2024). This urgency reflects both the historical losses and the ongoing need to preserve and pass down remaining knowledge.

Another challenge is the systemic racism and institutional policies that continue to shape the experiences of Indigenous peoples within educational systems. Molly’s reflections on “the policing of secrets” and the normalization of Indigenous peoples being “overlooked and undermined” point to the broader context of systemic oppression that Indigenous communities still face. Universities, as colonial institutions, often embody these systemic barriers, making it difficult for Indigenous communities to trust or fully engage with them without fearing further exploitation or marginalization.

Finally, Molly emphasizes the importance of confronting these truths, stating the need to “speak to those truths” (April 30, 2024). Acknowledging history is not just about recounting the past but about recognizing how colonial systems continue to affect Indigenous peoples today. It requires understanding the ongoing impacts of displacement, genocide, and systemic oppression and recognizing how these forces shape the present-day challenges faced by Indigenous communities as they engage in language revitalization and cultural preservation.

The deep distrust rooted in a history of displacement, genocide, and cultural erasure continues to influence how Indigenous communities interact with universities and other colonial institutions. Addressing these tensions demands a commitment to truth-telling, an acknowledgment of the ongoing effects of colonial policies, and a reimagining of how Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems are valued within these spaces.



Worldviews

The difference between Indigenous and Western worldviews is a recurring theme in SILR stories. Indigenous knowledge systems are relational and holistic, in contrast to the more quantitative, transactional perspectives often found in colonial institutions like universities. This shapes both the challenges and opportunities for language revitalization.

Molly describes the Indigenous worldview as “a scope of lens that sees all living beings as part of this. It’s like a wave... you can see it through a simple way, or you can see it from different angles” (April 30, 2024). Indigenous ways of knowing emphasize interconnectedness and relational accountability, where actions create ripples that affect the whole. This worldview is not linear but expansive, offering multiple perspectives and deeper layers of understanding.

Western worldviews, on the other hand, often prioritize data, measurable outcomes, and institutionalized knowledge. Jordan acknowledges that universities are “trapped inside the structures and the bureaucracy... there are some amazing people,” but the systemic foundations present challenges (April 29, 2024). Programs like SILR, based on relational Indigenous knowledge systems, struggle to fit within the rigid frameworks of academia, which can undermine their holistic approach.

Building relationships is central to the Indigenous worldview, requiring time, patience, and care. Indigenous knowledge transmission is based on mutual respect and reciprocity, unlike the often-transactional nature of relationships in colonial institutions. Practices like gift-giving and paying knowledge holders reflect a commitment to honouring these relationships, but these values can be overlooked in Western institutions, where outputs can be prioritized over the process of relationship-building.

Molly emphasizes the importance of viewing knowledge through an Indigenous lens: “All of these interdisciplinary ways of looking at things and through the lens of my Indigenous knowledge as a survivor” (April 30, 2024). Indigenous worldviews integrate oral histories, land-based knowledge, and lived experiences, contrasting with the compartmentalized, discipline-specific approaches in universities, which can limit understanding and creativity.

Sherryl Sewepagaham adds that the Advisory Council plays a crucial role in grounding the project in Indigenous knowledge systems, “always reminding us to really integrate the oral stories and their teachings” (Research Assistant, May 1, 2024). Elders and oral teachings are central to the Indigenous worldview, where knowledge is passed down relationally, emphasizing the need to maintain these traditions.

Despite the challenges, the stories express hope and possibility. A CILLDI team member notes, “Ignorance is curable” (May 1, 2024), suggesting that there is potential for institutions to learn and grow from Indigenous ways of knowing. While structural barriers within universities are significant, fostering a greater understanding of Indigenous worldviews offers opportunities for more supportive environments for language revitalization.





Belonging of Indigenous Languages in Post-Secondary Institutions

Storytellers frequently highlight the challenges of working within institutional settings, like universities, which are not always conducive to Indigenous ways of knowing. The stories reveal tensions between SILR's goals and the bureaucratic structures of academia, which can sometimes hinder progress. This theme reflects the difficulties of navigating colonial systems, where the pace, priorities, and expectations often conflict with the needs of Indigenous communities. Storytellers share experiences of balancing institutional demands with the cultural and relational aspects of language revitalization, pointing to the need for more flexible, community-driven approaches within these settings.

A key challenge discussed is the tension between land-based Indigenous language teachings and the institutional environments where these teachings are expected to take place. Indigenous languages are deeply tied to the land, culture, and relational ways of knowing, which are often at odds with the formal structures of post-secondary institutions.

Dr. Cardinal reflects, "Complexity is tied to whether language teaching should be in the schools, or that money should have gone right to the community... I just wanted to be a placeholder until we can apply for grants that allow it to be in the community again and still have its life" (May 14, 2024). Her comment reflects the challenge of bringing Indigenous language teaching into academic institutions that may not fully support the cultural and land-based practices essential to these languages.

This tension is compounded by the linguistic differences between Indigenous languages and English. Elmer highlights the fundamental disconnect between how these languages operate: "English is a noun-based language, Indigenous languages are verb-based. You lose so much of the meaning when you use English... What I'm saying is that our Indigenous languages give us sovereignty" (April 30, 2024). This linguistic difference complicates efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages within institutions largely dominated by English, as the language itself may not align with the methods used to teach it in post-secondary settings.

In addition to linguistic challenges, the stories reveal concerns about the lack of support for fostering Indigenous research and language revitalization efforts within universities. Davina points out, "Powerful research is being missed because this type of a space isn't being fostered in the university" (May 14, 2024). This reflection highlights the systemic limitations of academic institutions, which often focus on quantifiable outcomes and research productivity, stifling the relational work needed for Indigenous language revitalization.

Despite these challenges, some storytellers express hope that post-secondary institutions can become more welcoming and supportive. Jordan emphasizes the importance of creating pathways that meet both individual and community needs: "We're building options and pathways... let's see what's gonna work best for you. What are your needs? What are your goals? What does your community need at this stage of language revitalization?" (April 29, 2024). Jordan's approach suggests that institutions can become more flexible and responsive, allowing Indigenous students and communities to shape their learning according to their specific needs.

Ultimately, universities must adapt to the diverse needs of Indigenous communities rather than imposing rigid, colonial frameworks. As Dr. Cardinal reflects, the goal is for the revitalization work to return to the communities where it belongs, but until then, universities must support rather than hinder these efforts. While tensions exist, there is also recognition of the potential for growth and adaptation. Universities must become more flexible, responsive, and community-driven to support Indigenous languages and cultures.





Accountability: Roles and Responsibilities

Accountability is a central theme in the SILR project, shaping how responsibilities are defined, upheld, and shared among communities, universities, and funders. Storytellers emphasize the need for clear roles and responsibilities, ensuring that the project remains accountable to the communities it serves while navigating the expectations of academic institutions and funders. This theme highlights the challenge of balancing community needs with institutional demands and the importance of transparency, responsiveness, and continuous improvement in the language revitalization process.

A key aspect of accountability within the SILR project is responsibility to the community, which remains the primary focus. Lynda underscores the importance of community-led initiatives, stating, “The whole idea is for us in the community to access the funds, write our plans, and move forward with it” (April 30, 2024). Lynda’s reflection emphasizes the need for communities to have autonomy in shaping their language revitalization efforts. Accountability, in this context, means that the project must prioritize the needs and goals of the community, rather than being solely driven by institutional or funder expectations.

However, balancing accountability to the community with the expectations of funders and academic institutions presents challenges. Pamela reflects on the role of feedback and evaluation in maintaining accountability, stating, “I’m able to say this is why decisions were made.

"This is why we shifted. This is why we listen to the people that we are serving to make things better, more accessible, more relevant, and more inspiring" (June 3, 2024). Accountability involves not only being responsive to community feedback but also clearly communicating the rationale behind decisions, especially when shifting priorities.

Advisory councils, such as the SILR External Advisory Council, provide critical guidance and ensure the project remains rooted in Indigenous knowledge. As Pamela notes, "We've had to contract that out and [are] looking for very specific perspectives on Indigenous evaluation approaches" (April 29, 2024). Including Indigenous evaluation methods is essential for cultural accountability, ensuring that the project's success is measured through Indigenous ways of knowing.

Funders also play a significant role in shaping accountability. While funding provides essential resources, it often comes with expectations around measurable outcomes, which can conflict with on-the-ground realities. As Pamela reflects, "Asking the researchers and the project leads how they're gathering information and how they use that information to improve the project is an ongoing challenge" (June 3, 2024). Balancing funder requirements with community responsibilities requires careful navigation to maintain the project's cultural integrity.

Accountability to the university adds another layer of complexity. Universities provide technical expertise and platforms for language revitalization efforts, but they are also bound by institutional structures. As Pamela notes, "We've had to contract that out," referring to the technical expertise needed for evaluation (April 29, 2024). Universities must ensure their involvement supports, rather than hinders, the community-driven aspects of the project.

One recurring challenge is the assumption that all stakeholders understand the project's goals and processes. A SILR team member points out, "Inherently people don't like change... the biggest challenge for me is the assumptions that people understand all of these things" (April 29, 2024). Clear communication and shared understanding are crucial for maintaining accountability across all levels of the project.

The stories reveal that clear roles and responsibilities are essential for maintaining accountability, particularly in a complex environment where multiple stakeholders are involved. By prioritizing the community's needs and incorporating Indigenous evaluation approaches, the SILR project strives to create a framework that supports both short-term success and long-term sustainability in language revitalization.





Policies and Agreements

The stories shared in the SILR project reveal the challenges of navigating academic policies and agreements, which often create barriers to Indigenous language revitalization. This theme underscores the tension between working within systems that were not designed for Indigenous ways of knowing and the need to create frameworks that better support community-driven language revitalization. Storytellers reflect on how institutional policies, while necessary for navigating bureaucratic systems, often hinder progress and create additional burdens. Institutions must consider how to align their policies with Indigenous protocols, values, and ways of being.

Pamela highlights a key challenge, stating, "The most systemic foundational challenge is that we are trying to do this at a university... that was never designed for programs like this. We are shoehorning ourselves... into university rules" (April 29, 2024). Her comment captures the frustration of fitting Indigenous revitalization efforts into institutional policies that were not created with these programs in mind. Rather than fostering new policies that align with the goals of Indigenous communities, these initiatives often face constraints that limit flexibility and innovation.

This "shoehorning" reflects a broader issue within post-secondary institutions, where policies are often rigid and unadaptable to the unique needs of Indigenous programs. A CILLDI team member suggests that if the existing "vehicle" doesn't work, "let's build a new car" (May 1, 2024). This metaphor calls for institutions to rethink their approaches and develop new policies that are responsive to community needs, instead of forcing Indigenous programs to conform to outdated frameworks.

Dr. Cardinal expresses frustration over the administrative burdens imposed by these policies, stating, "I could do beautiful things if I weren't constantly doing paperwork" (May 14, 2024). The time and energy spent on administrative tasks detracts from core work like teaching and mentoring. These bureaucratic challenges are especially problematic in the context of Indigenous programs, which emphasize relational and community-driven processes that do not align well with procedural demands.

Navigating external funding adds another layer of complexity. Jordan points to the difficulty of making Indigenous language revitalization efforts "understandable and attractive to outside funders" (April 29, 2024). Funders often have expectations that do not fully appreciate the relational, long-term nature of the work. This can force programs to compromise or adapt their goals to secure funding, which may clash with the community-driven nature of the project.

The stories also highlight the complexity of working across multiple systems and stakeholders, each with its own priorities and expectations. Aligning community needs with institutional and funding requirements can be challenging. Storytellers express frustration with trying to work within systems not designed for Indigenous programs, which adds unnecessary administrative burdens and compromises program goals. Institutions must create more flexible policies that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities to better support the long-term success of revitalization initiatives.





Finances and Grants

The theme of finances and grants in the SILR project reflects the tension between community-driven approaches and the transactional nature of financial management required by Western institutions. Storytellers highlight the challenges of balancing fiscal responsibilities, meeting funder expectations, and maintaining community accountability, all while navigating institutional timelines, grant processes, and reporting requirements.

Dr. Cardinal captures the discomfort around money in language revitalization work, stating, "Complexity of money... it's a yucky feeling, right, cause it's not relational" (May 14, 2024). Indigenous communities often operate within frameworks of reciprocity and communal sharing, but money introduces a transactional element that disrupts these values. The process of managing funds is governed by Western norms, which can feel misaligned with Indigenous cultural practices and create tension as project leaders navigate both worlds.

A key challenge is balancing fiscal and community responsibility. Dr. Cardinal notes, "You're steward of that money... make sure that I'm using it in good ways" (May 14, 2024). Indigenous leaders must adhere to financial reporting and accountability structures imposed by funders and institutions, while also ensuring the money is used in ways that align with cultural and community values. This dual responsibility can be stressful, as leaders juggle competing expectations.

Finances and funding timelines often impose rigid structures that clash with the flexible, long-term nature of language revitalization work. Funders and universities operate on set timelines, requiring reports and measurable outcomes, but these deadlines may not align with the community's pace of work. Dr. Cardinal reflects on how financial structures "impact the good feeling of the work" (May 14, 2024). The pressure to meet deadlines can detract from the relational aspects of language revitalization, which are central to Indigenous practices.

Securing grants also presents challenges. Grant applications involve navigating bureaucratic processes that may not be accessible to all communities. This can create mistrust around who controls the funds and how they are distributed. Dr. Cardinal reflects, "I'm the budget holder, and responsible for it, and I have to, in a Western institution, make sure I'm using it in a good way" (May 14, 2024). This comment underscores the complexity of managing grants within institutions that are not designed to support relational or community-driven projects. The power dynamics embedded in the grant process often place Indigenous leaders in the position of having to justify their work through Western financial accountability standards, which can feel disconnected from the community-based goals of the project.

Additionally, the allocation of funds can create imbalances in reciprocity and responsibility. Dr. Cardinal comments, "They do impact the good feeling of the work... but I wasn't feeling a reciprocity" (May 14, 2024). When financial transactions become one-sided, with communities providing significant contributions without adequate support in return, it creates a sense of inequity and can damage relationships. This is especially true when the financial dynamics of a project are not aligned with the cultural values of mutual exchange and support.

Who controls the funds is another challenge. There is often a disconnect between who receives the grants—typically Western institutions—and the communities meant to benefit from the funding. This dynamic can create mistrust, as communities may feel they lack control over the resources intended for their revitalization efforts.

The transactional nature of financial management in Western institutions often conflicts with the relational, community-based approaches central to Indigenous ways of knowing. Navigating funder expectations, institutional timelines, and ensuring both fiscal and community responsibility adds layers of complexity. More flexible funding models are needed—ones that prioritize reciprocity, community autonomy, and the long-term nature of Indigenous language revitalization.





Redefining Success: Beyond Conventional Metrics

Measuring the success of language revitalization efforts is complex, as reflected in the stories from the SILR project. Storytellers express concerns that Western metrics, such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), don't fully capture the relational and long-term impacts of this work. Success in Indigenous language projects often goes beyond numbers, including cultural pride, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community resilience. The stories emphasize the need for evaluation frameworks that honour Indigenous definitions of success, focusing on relationships, cultural revival, and ongoing learning and adaptation.

A significant challenge lies in the rigidity of KPIs, which often prioritize quantitative metrics, such as student enrollment numbers or publications produced. Metrics that prioritize outputs like publications without a holistic view do not fully capture the depth of work being done and the time and care it takes to engage at that depth. While publications provide evidence of transformation within academia, they represent only a fraction of the project's broader impact—community healing, cultural continuity, and the strengthening of relationships.

Dr. Cardinal also critiques these metrics, saying, "They would want numbers only of new students. When I thought, it's more impactful to show how many came back to me than how many more" (May 14, 2024). For her, the return of students year after year signifies deeper engagement and commitment, a more meaningful indicator than new enrollments. This return reflects belonging, relationship building, and ongoing learning—qualities critical to language revitalization but difficult to quantify.

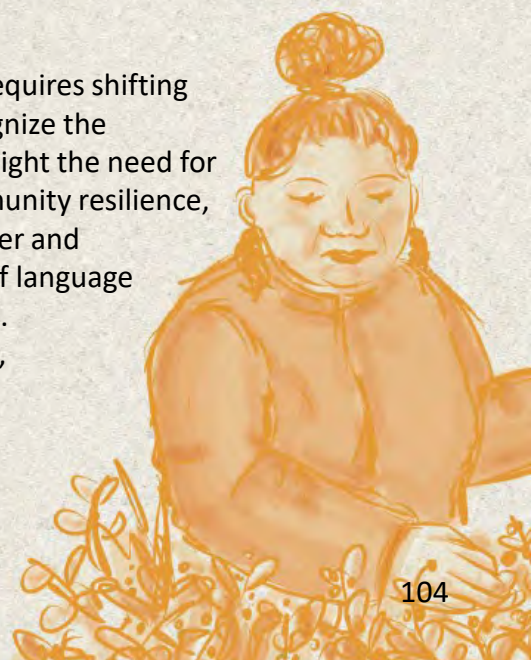
Storytellers emphasize that Indigenous language revitalization is relational and long term, not easily captured by short-term metrics or timelines. As a CILLDI team member states, “Whatever our goal is, we will not get there in the way that we plan to, we will not get there in the way we anticipate. But we are going to get there, and so that’s what motivates me to show up” (May 1, 2024). This reflection acknowledges the unpredictable nature of relational work and the importance of remaining adaptable and committed, even when goals are not met as expected. Success here is not linear; it emerges from ongoing engagement, adaptation, and growth.

Managing the expectations of funders and institutions can add complexity. Funders often expect tangible, measurable outcomes within specific timelines, while language revitalization requires time, flexibility, and responsiveness to community needs. These competing demands create tension for project leaders as they balance the relational nature of the work with pressures for quick results. A CILLDI team member notes, “It’s mostly like getting the institution out of the way, so each of them can do the things and the talents that they have” (May 1, 2024). This comment highlights the need for institutions to create space for Indigenous leaders to work according to their values, rather than imposing rigid expectations that may not align culturally.

The challenge of measuring success is further complicated by the intangible aspects of language revitalization. Dr. Cardinal reflects, “There’s some beautiful magic that happens in these anecdotal ways (i.e. making Bannock together). And then I try to capture that as part of the impact. You know, the ways that it ripples and still impacts identity” (May 14, 2024). This underscores the importance of acknowledging the less visible aspects of success, such as strengthening cultural identity and restoring community connections. These outcomes may not appear in reports or KPIs, but they are essential to long-term revitalization.

The stories also emphasize the need for time and space to reflect, learn, and adapt within the project. Elders, students, and staff need opportunities to slow down and engage deeply with the work, which is difficult when constrained by institutional timelines and expectations. The question of “how might time and space be made internally to slow down and reflect together with Elders, students, and staff?” points to the importance of creating flexible structures that allow for deep relational work to unfold at its own pace. Indigenous knowledge systems are inherently relational and process-oriented, and successful revitalization efforts depend on honouring these ways of working.

In conclusion, measuring success in Indigenous language revitalization requires shifting away from Western metrics like KPIs and towards frameworks that recognize the relational, cultural, and long-term impacts of the work. Storytellers highlight the need for evaluation methods that capture deeper, intangible outcomes like community resilience, cultural pride, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Managing funder and institutional expectations remains a challenge, as the relational nature of language revitalization often conflicts with demands for quick, quantifiable results. Ultimately, success must be understood as an ongoing, adaptive process, grounded in relationships and responsive to community needs.



Summary

The stories shared during the evaluation visits highlight the personal and collective experiences of community members, staff, Elders, and learners involved in SILR's efforts. These stories reveal the central role that reclaiming ancestral languages plays in healing, cultural revitalization, and sovereignty, while also emphasizing SILR's progress towards achieving key intermediate outcomes.

Confidence and Proficiency in Language Use and Teaching

Participants, including Advisory Council members and CILLDI instructors, shared their progress in language teaching and learning. Their stories demonstrate how SILR supports individuals in gaining confidence and proficiency. Programs such as the summer school and intergenerational learning spaces help participants reconnect with their languages and become effective teachers.

Culturally Relevant Models and Tools for Language Use

The stories emphasize the importance of community-responsive programs, such as Elder-guided immersion camps and language curricula rooted in traditional knowledges. SILR's adaptability allows for localized approaches that strengthen the connection between language and culture, showcasing progress towards developing culturally effective models, practices, and tools for Elders, parents, and instructors.

Expanding Language Use Across Domains

The stories also highlight how SILR promotes language use in homes, schools, and community spaces. These efforts enable learners to integrate language into their daily lives while reconnecting with cultural practices. The emphasis on supporting land-based programs further demonstrates SILR's work to embed language revitalization into everyday activities, contributing to expanding Indigenous language use across multiple domains, including homes, schools, and workplaces.

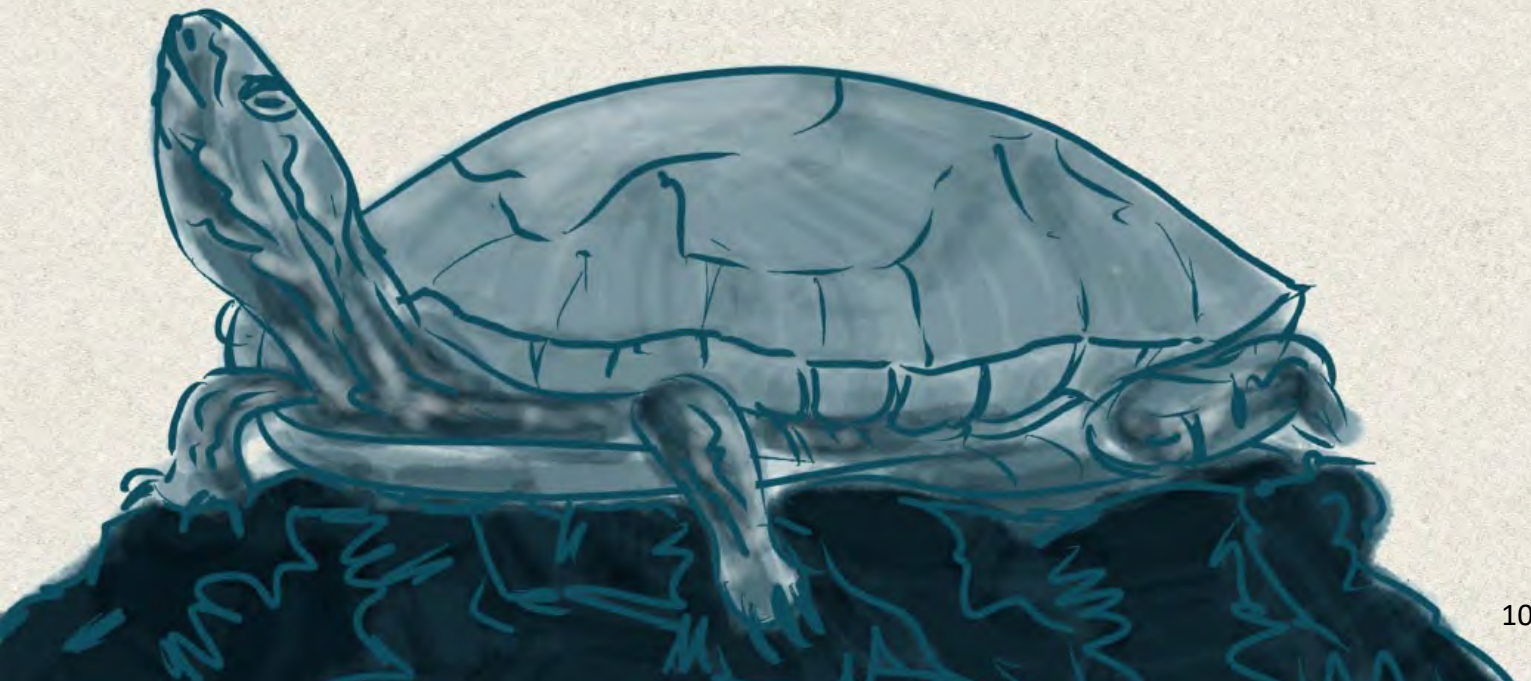
Knowledge Sharing and Research Dissemination

SILR's collaborative and innovative research, multimedia platforms, and annual gatherings provide spaces to share language revitalization strategies across programs and policy settings. This open sharing fosters a sense of community and helps co-create promising practices. These efforts align with SILR's goal of sharing research and best practices to enhance language revitalization.

Healing and Reconnecting Through Language Revitalization

The stories reveal how language reclamation serves as a pathway for healing intergenerational trauma, restoring cultural identity, and rebuilding spiritual connections. SILR's work reflects the belief that ancestral language revitalization is deeply tied to personal and collective well-being, supporting the goal of fostering emotional, spiritual, and communal healing through language use and cultural engagement.

These stories not only showcase SILR's tangible progress but also offer meaningful insights into how future efforts can continue aligning with the project's overarching goals. The recurring themes reinforce the importance of culturally embedded, community-led initiatives, demonstrating that SILR's approach is building a solid foundation for sustainable language revitalization.



A full-page photograph of a winter mountain landscape. In the foreground, there's a rocky, snow-covered slope with some low-lying shrubs. Two tall, dark evergreen trees stand prominently in the middle ground. The background features steep, snow-covered mountain peaks under a sky with soft purple and blue hues, suggesting dawn or dusk. The word "Reflections" is overlaid in white text on the right side.

Reflections

This section encourages reflection on the complexities of language revitalization, particularly the roles and responsibilities of partners, including the university, funders, and community members. It serves as a space to critically examine the project's relational accountability and what it means to do this work "in a good way," fostering ongoing reflection and growth.

Relational Accountability

Relational accountability is a guiding principle of the SILR project, rooted in Indigenous approaches to community engagement, research, evaluation, and learning. In Indigenous contexts, accountability isn't defined by external metrics or institutional reporting, but by the strength and integrity of relationships. The stories shared by Elders, community members, and language holders underscore the importance of honouring these relationships as a core component of the language revitalization process.

Throughout the SILR project, maintaining and nurturing relationships with Indigenous communities has been central to its success. The project's responsiveness to the needs and voices of the people it serves has created an environment where language revitalization isn't just about reclaiming words, but about fostering trust, respect, and mutual responsibility. Stories from participants highlight that when communities feel truly heard and valued, they're more empowered to take ownership of their language revitalization journey.

At the heart of relational accountability is the understanding that relationships must be reciprocal. The stories remind us that Elders, as knowledge holders, are not just imparting language skills—they're sharing invaluable cultural teachings and wisdom that must be honoured and respected. This requires more than a token acknowledgment; it demands a deep commitment to listening, responding, and adapting to the needs of the community as expressed by its members. When SILR honours these relationships, it strengthens the foundation of the project.

However, the stories also reveal challenges in maintaining relationships, particularly when navigating the complex dynamics between community-led efforts and institutional structures. These tensions can create barriers to fully honouring relational accountability. Moving forward, SILR must reflect on how it can continue to prioritize relationships in ways that are culturally aligned, ensuring that the voices and needs of communities remain central in decision-making processes.

As SILR continues its work, it's essential to ask how relational accountability can be more deeply embedded in the project's practices. This reflection calls for continuous learning and humility—recognizing that accountability is an ongoing process of listening, adjusting, and showing up in ways that are meaningful to the people and communities SILR serves.

Roles

The stories shared through the SILR project highlight the intricate roles and responsibilities involved in ancestral language revitalization. Central to these reflections is the recognition that language revitalization must be led by Indigenous communities, with external institutions like the University of Alberta playing a supportive rather than directive role. This balance is critical to ensuring that revitalization efforts remain grounded in community priorities and cultural practices.

Overview of Roles

Elders, as key knowledge holders, carry the responsibility of transmitting not only language but also the cultural, spiritual, and land-based knowledge embedded within it. Their role is vital, and the stories reflect the deep respect communities hold for them as both teachers and guardians of language. However, these stories also reveal the challenges Elders face, including the emotional and spiritual weight of carrying such knowledge and the difficulty of passing it on in an institutional context that may not fully recognize or support their contributions. SILR must continue reflecting on how to honour and ease the burden on Elders, ensuring their roles are respected and supported in meaningful ways.

The role of academic institutions like the University of Alberta is another central theme. While the university provides resources, infrastructure, and visibility for revitalization efforts, storytellers emphasize that its role should be carefully calibrated to avoid overshadowing community leadership. The university should act as a partner that facilitates rather than controls the process, allowing communities to define their own language revitalization journeys. This requires the university to adopt a more responsive and flexible approach, supporting the autonomy and sovereignty of the communities involved.

The stories also highlight the importance of clear and shared responsibilities across all partners. Community members, project leaders, Elders, students, and institutional partners each have a role to play, and the success of SILR depends on the careful alignment of these roles. SILR has an opportunity to reflect on how these responsibilities are distributed and whether adjustments are needed to ensure that power and leadership are shared equitably. Moving forward, it will be crucial to continue fostering environments where all voices are heard, and where each partner's role is clearly defined, respected, and supported.

As SILR advances, reflecting on roles and responsibilities will be key to maintaining the delicate balance between community-led initiatives and institutional support. The project's sustainability and effectiveness depend on ensuring that responsibilities remain rooted in Indigenous communities, while academic partners provide resources and capacity in a way that amplifies, rather than directs, the work.

Language Learning Participation

One of the ongoing challenges in the SILR project is determining who should participate in language learning. This question delves into deeper issues of ownership, leadership, and the roles of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in revitalizing Indigenous languages. The stories reveal a complex and often contested landscape, where decisions about access to language learning and leadership hold significant weight for communities and the future of Indigenous languages.

Lynda highlights the tension between external forces and community-led solutions. She recalls past experiences where non-Indigenous people entered her community with preconceived solutions for language revitalization, assuming they knew what was best. "A lot of people came into our community... with that idea."

These non-Indigenous people would come in saying, 'We've got a solution for you,' rather than getting the community to come up with their own solutions" (April 30, 2024). This reflects the frustration that arises when external actors attempt to take ownership of a process that should be grounded in the lived experiences and cultural realities of the community.

Lynda further emphasizes the belief that Indigenous language revitalization must be community-led: "If anybody's gonna save my language, it's gonna be our community. Not an outside force" (April 30, 2024). This sentiment reinforces the strong sense of ownership and responsibility that community members feel, positioning themselves as the rightful stewards of their language. It challenges the involvement of external actors, particularly non-Indigenous individuals or organizations, who may contribute to revitalization efforts but risk undermining community leadership if they do not approach this work with respect and humility.

The question of participation also extends to educational institutions like SILR, which play a key role in gathering research and sharing best practices. Lynda acknowledges, "SILR's role is to gather up all the research... and share the best practices" (April 30, 2024). However, the stories highlight the critical need to ensure that the knowledge generated through research remains in the hands of the community and that participation in language learning reflects the community's values and priorities.

The debate about participation is further complicated by discussions within educational spaces regarding who should have access to Indigenous language learning programs. Scott notes that offering graduate education in Indigenous languages is complex, raising questions about participation: "Should it be school leaders and community leaders, or just school leaders? Should it be Indigenous people only, or Indigenous and non-Indigenous?" These questions point to broader tensions around access, inclusion, and who has the right to engage in language revitalization efforts. Some argue that language revitalization should be reserved for Indigenous people with direct cultural and ancestral ties, while others believe that involving non-Indigenous allies or academic leaders could broaden the impact, though this approach risks diluting community leadership and cultural ownership.

This ongoing debate reflects broader concerns about who should have access to what is being created through language revitalization initiatives. Some fear that allowing non-Indigenous participation could lead to the commodification or academic appropriation of Indigenous languages, turning a sacred cultural practice into a transactional learning experience. Others hope that broadening participation could foster greater support for Indigenous languages and culture, especially in educational and public policy contexts.

Responsibilities

The stories from the SILR project emphasize the multifaceted responsibilities involved in ancestral language revitalization, highlighting the importance of collaboration, respect for the sacredness of language, and the challenges of working in siloed environments. Elders, community members, academic institutions, and students all carry unique responsibilities in this process. The stories stress the need to continuously reexamine and realign these roles to support not only the structural aspects of revitalization but also the spiritual and cultural dimensions embedded within the language.

A recurring theme in the stories is the siloed nature of the work. Storytellers reflect on how language revitalization efforts are often fragmented across different communities, departments, and institutions, making it difficult to foster the deep, collaborative relationships needed for sustainable progress. To address this, there must be intentional efforts to increase communication and collaboration among all parties involved in the SILR project. This includes creating more time and intentional spaces where community members, Elders, and academic partners can share knowledge, reflect on challenges, and co-create solutions. SILR has an opportunity to strengthen these connections, ensuring that language revitalization becomes a collective effort benefiting from the wisdom and resources of all stakeholders.

At the core of these reflections is the need to revitalize language in a way that honours its sacred nature. Language is more than a tool for communication—it is deeply tied to cultural identity, spiritual practices, and the worldview of Indigenous communities. The stories emphasize that language must be treated with reverence, and the revitalization process should respect the spiritual significance it carries.

Elders shoulder much of the responsibility of passing on not only the words but also the cultural teachings, ceremonies, and values interwoven with the language. This raises the important question: How can we structure language revitalization efforts to honour and uphold the sacredness of language?

SILR can consider developing frameworks and resourcing community-led spaces that allow for holistic language revitalization, where both the spirit and structure of the language are honoured. This could involve partnerships that incorporate culturally aligned practices, such as ceremonies or land-based learning, into the pedagogy of language teaching. The stories suggest that revitalizing language is not just a technical or academic endeavor; it requires a deep connection to the land, the people, and the spiritual aspects of culture. SILR's responsibility is to create environments that acknowledge and protect the sacredness of the language. Several examples, such as the searching work mentioned in the stories, highlight successful projects where this approach is evident. These learnings must be shared in multidimensional and accessible ways.

The stories also call for a balance in responsibilities. Language revitalization involves multiple layers of accountability—from personal responsibility in learning or teaching the language, to the collective responsibility of communities to maintain cultural continuity, to the institutional responsibility of universities and funders to support these efforts. These responsibilities must be distributed in ways that encourage collaboration rather than competition or fragmentation. SILR has a responsibility to act as a bridge, fostering collaboration among diverse groups while ensuring that Indigenous communities maintain leadership and autonomy.

We note that SILR leadership brings the strengths of relationship, critical reflection, and learning into this work. Looking ahead, SILR must continue asking itself: How can we bring together different voices and roles to collaborate more effectively? How can we honour the sacredness of language while navigating institutional and structural realities? And, ultimately, how can we ensure that language revitalization is guided by the spirit, values, and traditions of the communities themselves?

Offerings and Recommendations



This section presents actionable steps based on the findings of the evaluation, offering guidance for SILR's future strategies. It assesses promising practices and addresses challenges, providing a roadmap for sustaining the project's success. The section poses key questions and considerations for long-term sustainability, collaboration, and responsiveness to guide future decision-making and priority setting.

Promising Practices

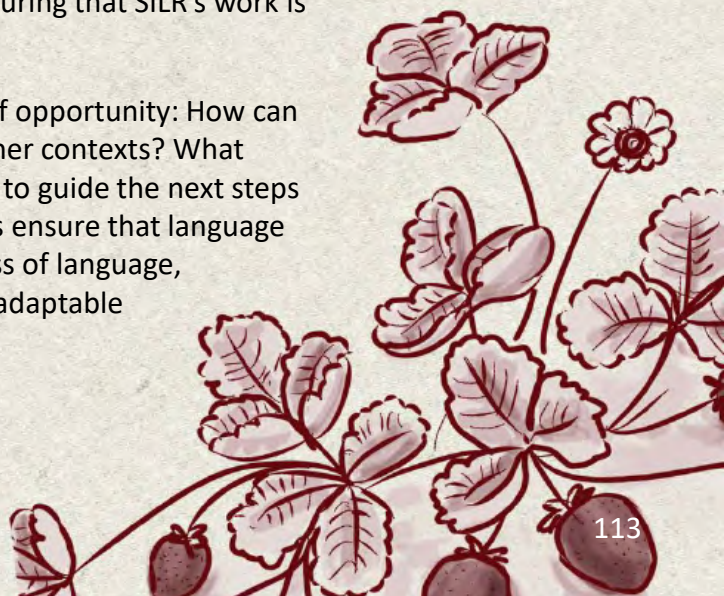
Promising practices are the actions, methods, and approaches that emerge from lived experiences, reflections, and community learnings, demonstrating their effectiveness in advancing language revitalization. These practices reflect not only what has worked well but also the values and principles that guide how to work in alignment with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. In the SILR project, promising practices are not static models but dynamic opportunities—born out of relationships, stories, and challenges—that can be carried forward to support ongoing and future language revitalization efforts.

The promising practices emerging from SILR are deeply rooted in the experiences shared by Elders, community members, students, and project leaders. Grounded in cultural protocols and relational accountability, these practices honour the sacred responsibility of revitalizing language in ways that respect its spiritual, cultural, and land-based dimensions. At their core, they focus on engaging communities, fostering collaboration, and creating environments where language and culture can thrive sustainably.

One key insight from the stories shared is that promising practices often emerge organically, sparked by moments of learning, reflection, or innovation in response to challenges. These sparks of opportunity—whether found in culturally aligned teaching methods, the sense of belonging created through summer language schools, or the flexibility in adapting to community priorities—illuminate important ways of working that can be strengthened and expanded as SILR continues its journey. These practices are not just technical solutions; they embody the relational and spiritual dimensions integral to Indigenous ways of working.

A promising practice is not just something that "works" but something that aligns with community values and is adaptable to different contexts and needs. It supports not only language revitalization but also strengthens cultural identity, fosters intergenerational relationships, and enhances community well-being. These practices are crucial for ensuring that SILR's work is sustainable, culturally resonant, and impactful.

Looking ahead, we invite SILR to reflect on these sparks of opportunity: How can these promising practices be nurtured and adapted to other contexts? What lessons can be learned from what is already working well to guide the next steps in the project? Most importantly, how can these practices ensure that language revitalization is done in a way that respects the sacredness of language, honours Indigenous community leadership, and remains adaptable and accountable?



By focusing on these key learnings, SILR can build a foundation of promising practices that not only support immediate outcomes but also ensure the sustainability of Indigenous languages for generations to come. These practices represent more than technical success; they are pathways to cultural resilience, healing, and thriving communities.

Community-Led Governance: Leading with Integrity

A key promising practice from the SILR project is the establishment and leadership of the Advisory Council. This council, composed of Elders, language speakers, cultural knowledge keepers, and community leaders, plays a pivotal role in guiding the project. Its leadership ensures that SILR's work is deeply rooted in Indigenous values, protocols, and ways of knowing. The Advisory Council not only strengthens the cultural alignment of the project but also serves as a model for how community-led governance can guide academic and community partnerships effectively.

The Advisory Council, alongside the Steering Committee, leads and shapes the project's direction. Members bring vast cultural, linguistic, and community knowledge that informs every aspect of SILR. They ensure that decisions around language revitalization are grounded in cultural protocols, represent community voices, and stay true to relational accountability.

The Advisory Council plays a critical role in building trust between SILR and the communities it serves, acting as both guide and protector of the cultural integrity of the work. This leadership model shifts traditional academic power dynamics, positioning Indigenous knowledge holders as primary decision-makers. It ensures that language revitalization is carried out with respect, care, and commitment to cultural resurgence.

Community-Led, Culturally Responsive Approaches

At the heart of SILR's promising practices is the principle that language revitalization must be community-led and culturally responsive. This involves placing Indigenous communities at the forefront of decision making and ensuring that revitalization efforts align with local contexts, priorities, traditions, and practices. By allowing communities to define the pace, structure, and content of language resources, SILR respects the autonomy and knowledge of the people it serves.

SILR has demonstrated this practice by responding to the voices of Elders, language speakers, and community members. SILR has adapted to the needs of each community, supporting initiatives such as immersion programs, language camps, and the integration of traditional knowledge into curricula. The flexibility shown by SILR has allowed for diverse approaches that meet communities where they are, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all solution.

Holistic Integration of Language, Culture, and Spirituality

Language revitalization is more than teaching words—it involves revitalizing the cultural and spiritual practices embedded within the language. A promising practice within SILR is the holistic integration of language with cultural activities, land-based learning, and ceremonial practices. This ensures that language is taught in ways that honour its sacredness and connection to the community's worldview and way of life.

The stories reveal how SILR has successfully integrated language with cultural practices, such as language camps that include traditional ceremonies, drumming, and storytelling. This holistic approach fosters a deeper connection between learners and their language, helping them see language as a living entity, not just an academic subject.

Emphasizing Wellness and Healing Through Language Revitalization

Language revitalization is intertwined with the well-being and healing of Indigenous communities. A key practice within SILR has been its focus on the holistic health of participants, addressing not only language learning but also the emotional and spiritual healing that comes from reconnecting with culture.

The stories show how language revitalization has contributed to personal and collective healing. SILR recognizes that language is a path to reclaiming identity, restoring cultural pride, and healing from the traumas of colonization.

Evaluating Through Relational Accountability

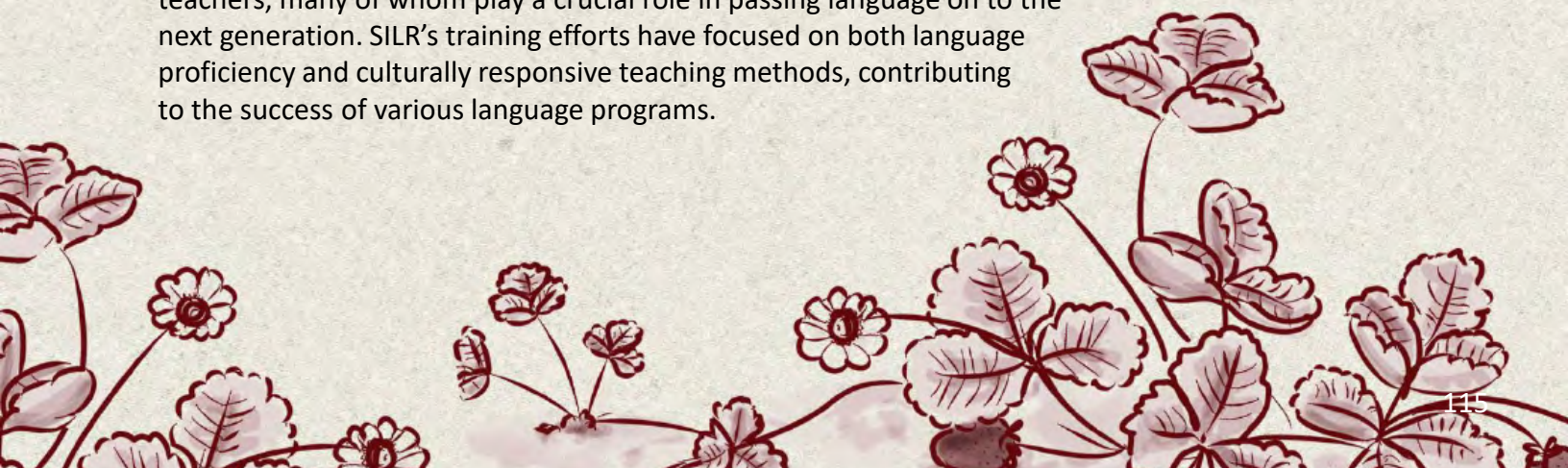
A promising practice in SILR is using relational and reciprocal approaches to evaluation. This means assessing success not through traditional metrics or numbers but by focusing on the strength of relationships, community empowerment, and the mutual exchange of knowledge. Relational accountability ensures that evaluation is respectful, collaborative, and culturally aligned.

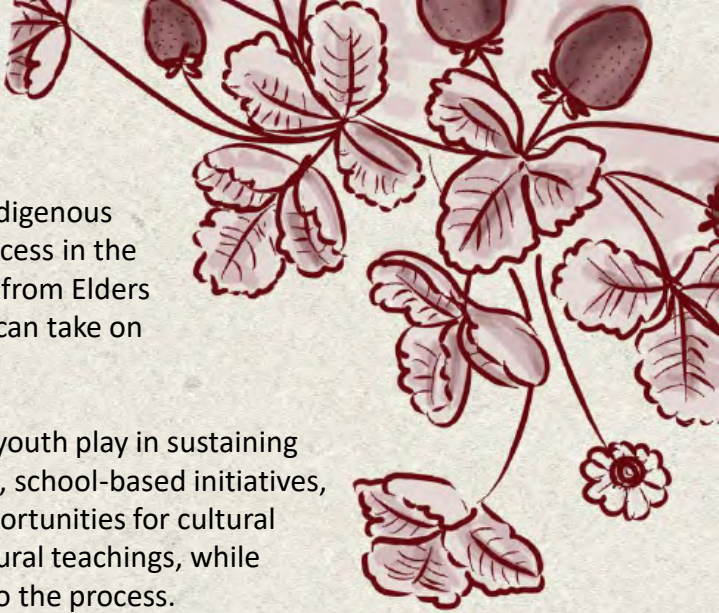
SILR's evaluation has been guided by Indigenous principles of relational accountability, as reflected in the stories shared by Elders and community members. SILR has prioritized participatory and reflective evaluation practices, focusing on lived experiences rather than solely on quantitative outcomes. This has created an environment where communities feel heard and where evaluation becomes a tool for growth, not critique.

Empowering Teachers Through Capacity Building

Building capacity within communities—particularly among language teachers—is a foundational practice for ensuring the long-term sustainability of language revitalization efforts. Capacity building involves training and resourcing community members while fostering confidence and leadership to take ownership of language programs.

SILR has made significant strides in supporting the development of language teachers through partnerships with communities and institutions. The stories highlight the importance of investing in teachers, many of whom play a crucial role in passing language on to the next generation. SILR's training efforts have focused on both language proficiency and culturally responsive teaching methods, contributing to the success of various language programs.





Intergenerational Learning and Leadership Development

Intergenerational learning is a foundational principle in Indigenous knowledge systems and has been a critical element of success in the SILR project. This practice emphasizes passing knowledge from Elders to younger generations and creating spaces where youth can take on leadership roles in language revitalization.

The stories reflect the essential role that both Elders and youth play in sustaining language revitalization. Programs such as language camps, school-based initiatives, and community gatherings have provided meaningful opportunities for cultural transmission. Elders share not only language but also cultural teachings, while younger generations bring energy, hope, and innovation to the process.

Creating Safe and Inclusive Learning Spaces

Creating safe spaces for learning, reflection, and growth is crucial. Safe spaces allow participants, particularly Indigenous youth and community members, to reconnect with their language without fear of judgment. These spaces are essential for nurturing emotional, cultural, and psychological safety in language revitalization.

SILR has made significant progress in fostering environments that are welcoming and supportive for learners of all backgrounds. By creating spaces where participants can explore their identities and reconnect with their cultural roots, SILR has empowered individuals on their language-learning journeys.

Innovations in Community-Led Research

Community-led research, completed by the SILR graduate research team, challenges the traditional Euro-Western approach to research. It emphasizes the importance of communities being in control of the research process, from data collection to analysis and dissemination.

The stories highlight the desire for communities to be more actively involved in the research that informs language revitalization. SILR has supported community-led research, providing time and resources to create offerings that serve as exemplary models of Indigenous research methodologies. This community-driven research process empowers communities to lead the way in shaping research questions, methodologies, and how findings are used.

Data Sovereignty and Ethical Knowledge Sharing

Data sovereignty emphasizes the need for Indigenous communities to retain control over the knowledge and data collected in language revitalization efforts. It ensures that data is not exploited by external researchers or institutions but used to serve the community's long-term goals.

The stories reflect the ongoing challenges of advocating for data sovereignty within institutional frameworks. SILR has begun to address this by working with communities to develop protocols around data use, ensuring that knowledge shared remains under community control.

Capacity Building for Community Ownership of Research and Evaluation

A key practice within SILR is supporting community-led research and evaluation. This practice emphasizes the importance of communities taking ownership of research processes, from defining questions to determining how findings are used.

SILR has demonstrated a commitment to capacity building by providing research support to communities. However, the stories show that communities desire even greater control over the research and evaluation processes.

Diverse and Multimedia Storytelling to Share Learning and Outcomes

A promising practice in SILR is the use of diverse, multimedia storytelling to share stories, learning, and outcomes. Storytelling is a powerful tool in Indigenous contexts for knowledge transmission, healing, and cultural preservation. SILR's commitment to elevating community voices through creative, multimedia approaches ensures that project outcomes are communicated in ways that resonate with Indigenous communities.

SILR has used film, photography, and graphic arts to gather and share stories from community members, helping to highlight personal experiences of language revitalization. These multimedia approaches offer a platform for community members to own their stories and share their priorities, successes, and cultural work in accessible and resonant ways. This storytelling practice has helped bridge generations, engaging younger participants with traditional stories and practices.

Strengthening Networks for Shared Learning

Building strong networks of collaboration among Indigenous language programs, organizations, and communities is essential for knowledge sharing and continued growth in language revitalization.

SILR partners and community members have recognized the value of shared learning experiences within the project and through the SILR Gathering. These networks allow communities to share best practices, resources, and challenges, helping everyone learn from each other's experiences.



Questions to Consider

We would like to offer questions for the SILR team to consider as it builds on the foundational work that has been completed in the first half of the project's grant period. We see many opportunities stemming from the innovative practices, models, and processes that have supported SILR's growth. These questions are offered as a guide for thought leadership: imagining the questions of what's next, with whom, and in what ways? We invite SILR to assess what might be a good fit and to leave the rest.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Accountabilities

How might SILR continue to center Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in the next stages of language revitalization?

- What responsibilities do each of the partners hold in supporting the next stages of this work? How might this be clarified?
- What next steps can SILR take to ensure that Indigenous communities maintain control over language programs and that their voices lead the work?
 - How can this build on the processes and structures developed to date?
 - How might this be embedded in the relationship the university has as a partner in this project?
- How can future partnerships with academic institutions, funders, and non-Indigenous allies continue to respect and reinforce Indigenous sovereignty in language revitalization efforts?
- What knowledge-sharing and advocacy products can be developed as demonstrations for future partnerships?

How can SILR enhance collaboration while ensuring cultural and relational accountability?

- As SILR expands its partnerships, how can it continue to ensure that partnerships reflect relational accountability and are grounded in community-led approaches?
 - What is it about the ways you are fostering these partnerships that can be shared and embedded?
- What practices can be implemented to foster trust and reciprocity in collaboration with Indigenous communities and other institutions?
 - What are appropriate actions based on the roles held in the partnership?

Expanding on Strengths

What are the most effective ways for SILR to support intergenerational knowledge transfer?

- How can the project expand its focus on connecting Elders and youth to ensure that cultural and linguistic knowledge is passed down?
- What strategies might strengthen mentorship programs, ensuring that younger generations feel empowered and prepared to take on leadership roles in language revitalization?
 - What might short- and long-term mentorship strategies and opportunities look like?

How might SILR strengthen its approaches to integrating spiritual and cultural aspects of language revitalization?

- What is the role of ceremony in institutional spaces?
 - What considerations need to be made?
- How can SILR ensure the sacred dimensions of language are honored and incorporated into every aspect of its programming?
- What practices or protocols need to be in place to respect the sacredness of Indigenous languages and the spiritual responsibility associated with their revitalization?
 - What responsibilities do each of the partners need to consider in how they prioritize the development and attention to these protocols?

How can SILR expand access and participation in language programs while respecting community boundaries?

- How can SILR navigate the ongoing debate about who should participate in language revitalization, ensuring that community leadership and voices guide these decisions?
- How can SILR create inclusive spaces for Indigenous people while also thoughtfully considering the involvement of non-Indigenous participants and partners?

Sustainability

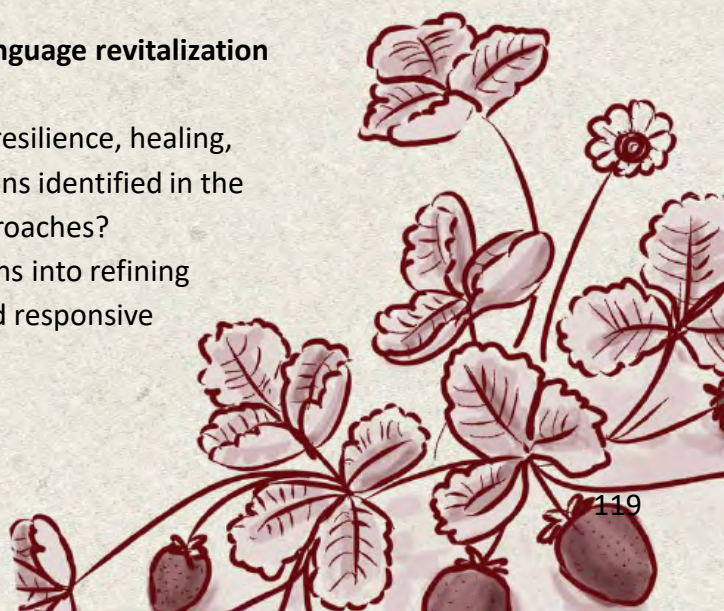
What steps can SILR take to sustain the momentum of language revitalization beyond the life of current funding?

- What steps are within SILR's scope of control?
 - What other relationships can be fostered within the broader language revitalization ecosystem?
- How can the project work with communities to build long-term sustainability, ensuring that language programs continue after funding cycles end?
- In what ways can SILR's capacity-building efforts empower communities to secure their own funding and resources to support ongoing language revitalization?

Evaluation

How might the lessons from the stories shared about language revitalization help SILR address current and future challenges?

- How can SILR apply the insights from stories about resilience, healing, and intergenerational learning to address the tensions identified in the project, such as balancing urgency with holistic approaches?
- What opportunities exist to incorporate these lessons into refining the program, ensuring that it remains adaptable and responsive to the needs of communities?



What additional innovative and decolonial methods can SILR explore to continue sharing learning and outcomes in ways that honor Indigenous storytelling traditions?

- How might the Indigenous evaluation framework be implemented, and what can be learned from this journey?
- What is SILR learning through its approach to integrating multimedia and arts-based methods in documenting and sharing stories, learnings, and best practices?
- In what ways can storytelling and creative reflection be used as both an evaluation tool and a method for community engagement moving forward?

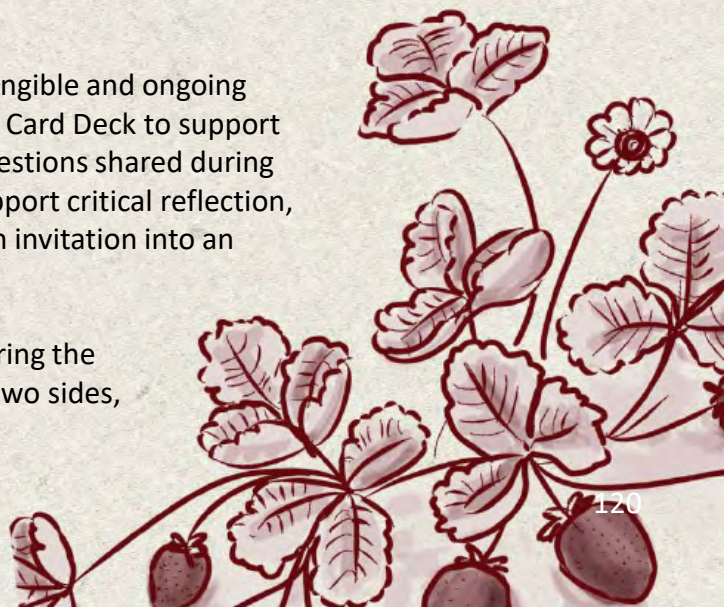
Reciprocity



Evaluation Facilitation Card Deck

With the aim of supporting the work of SILR in another tangible and ongoing manner, the evaluation team has developed a Facilitation Card Deck to support interactive learning based on the stories, insights, and questions shared during this evaluation. The Facilitation Card Deck is meant to support critical reflection, dialogue, priority setting, and decision-making through an invitation into an arts-based reflective space.

Many powerful stories were told, and lessons learned during the evaluation of SILR. This Card Deck intends to keep these two sides, together as one.



The front of the card represents the voices of those involved through text and images. While the other side of the card provides actionable insights via a thematic share back, including a brief explanation, a promising practice and reflective question. The card deck consists of four categories:

1. Language Revitalization (7)
2. Values (10)
3. Foundations (8)
4. Tension (8)

The number of cards per category is displayed above. In each of the categories, you'll also find an empty card template. This card is there to capture quotes and/or themes that you might feel are missing or arise as opportunities during your conversations.

With this card deck we want to respect and honour the stories told and help people to **receive those in reciprocity by supporting them to transition into action and set steps towards systems change.**

The card deck is designed to **bridge** various perspectives and **build** strength-based relationships that support you to move forward as a collective. You do so by literally laying the cards on the table for all to see and engage with. The intended interaction qualities and values for the card deck are Tangibility, Transparency, and Trust.

- **Tangible:** We all look at the world from our own perspective. Looking at the same cards and describing your own experience help to make these different perspectives tangible.
- **Transparent:** Through conversations that include both personal reflection and group sharing, various thoughts become transparent, and we can establish shared understanding.
- **Trust:** Having a better mutual understanding of other people's perspective helps to build trust and enable you to formulate actions using each other's differences as strengths to move forward together, rather than to divide.



Personal Reflections

Cree scholar Dr. Shawn Wilson (2008) has shared, in relation to Indigenous research methodologies, “If research hasn’t changed you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135). As we close our time together for this external mid-term evaluation, our team would like to acknowledge the ways we have been transformed because of being invited into this space that has prioritized learning. In many instances, Dr. Gladys Rowe has engaged poetic inquiry as a method of not only personal self-reflection but also demonstrating what she has learned through reciprocal learning relationships (Rowe, 2020). We have taken some time individually and as a team to reflect on the opportunity we’ve been provided by being invited into SILR and have created closing poems in gratitude.

To prepare for reflection in this way we considered:

- What stands out?
- What stories are we sitting with?
- How are we changed because of the time spent with these stories?

We gathered ideas and notes on these questions and brainstormed to prepare. We considered: What would we like the SILR team to know about our time being in relationship with these stories?

At the end of the inquiry, we each have prepared a poem that we would like to offer into this space.

I carry y(our) stories with me.

Glimmers of healing in-between the breaths
each heartbeat an invitation into safe spaces
paths home twinkle across the uni-verse
Kikiskisin-Na? (Do you remember?)

We’ve been waiting for you.

Thunderous sounds of home
on the banks of the Kettle River
Grandmothers and grandfathers
urging me
speak from your heart, it remembers.

Feel the love in the softness of the bannock.

Relationships wrapped like blankets across my shoulders
my story
my family
my language
woven together, gathered up in the learnings

This is about more than the languages on the walls.

Gladys (she/her)



Tending Stories, Sowing Seeds

I sit with stories not my own,
Yet they find a home in me—
Roots pushing through guilt-soaked soil,
For I have not yet learned the language
That binds thought to land,
That whispers old ways of knowing
Through the veins of mountains and rivers.

Gratitude fills my hands,
The weight of trust a delicate gift.
I learn to trust myself—
That I am enough to tend this garden,
To carry these teachings with care.

So, I plant.
I carry.
I grow.
And in the quiet spaces between words,
I listen to their stories,
Trusting that, one day,
I will speak their language too.

Taylor (She/They)

(W)here

I arrived white,
Like the colour of my skin,
My naivety

These are the real stories,
About the land,
About its people,
The Canada beyond "must visit"

To be humbled,
To feel honored
To hold discomfort,
A great space for learning,

The imposter in the room,
Draws parallels,
Gives Back

A universal language of images

Lana



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Appendices



Appendix A – Definitions

Capacity Building: Refers to the process of developing skills, knowledge, and resources within communities to support self-sufficiency and sustainability. In language revitalization, this often involves training language teachers, creating and distributing resources equitably, and strengthening community leadership to ensure the continuity of language programs.

Cultural Resurgence: The revitalization and strengthening of Indigenous cultures, languages, and practices that have been impacted by colonization. It involves reclaiming and renewing cultural identity and traditions as a means of healing, resistance, and renewal.

Data Sovereignty: Refers to the right of Indigenous communities to own, control, and manage the data and knowledge collected within their communities. It ensures that research and evaluation are conducted in a way that aligns with Indigenous values and that findings remain under the control of the community.

Decolonial Evaluation: Challenges traditional Western frameworks of evaluation, focusing on Indigenous communities who lead and define their own evaluation processes. It seeks to dismantle colonial power structures in research and assessment, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge systems are recognized and prioritized.

Elders: Respected knowledge holders and cultural leaders in Indigenous communities. They play a vital role in teaching language, culture, and traditional practices, serving as guides and mentors in transmitting knowledge across generations. The term Knowledge Keepers or Holders is also sometimes used.

Indigenous Evaluation: An approach to assessment grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems, values, and worldviews. It prioritizes community direction, relational accountability, and the use of culturally relevant methods to ensure evaluation processes are meaningful and respectful of Indigenous contexts.

Intergenerational Learning: The process of passing knowledge, skills, and values between different generations. In language revitalization, it often involves Elders teaching younger generations their language, culture, and traditions, ensuring cultural continuity in alignment with protocols and responsibilities.

Land-Based Learning: An educational approach that involves teaching and learning through direct engagement with the land. In Indigenous language revitalization, land-based learning connects language instruction with cultural practices tied to the land, such as hunting, gathering, and ceremonies.

Promising Practices: Strategies, methods, or approaches identified as highly effective based on experience and evidence. In the SILR context, promising practices refer to models and tools that promote successful language revitalization and can be shared across communities.

Reciprocity: The practice of mutual exchange, where giving and receiving are done in a balanced and respectful way. In language revitalization, reciprocity ensures that knowledge, resources, and support flow both ways between project leaders, community members, and participants.

Relational Accountability: Refers to the responsibility individuals and organizations have to maintain respectful, reciprocal, and culturally aligned relationships. In Indigenous evaluation, it emphasizes accountability to communities, relationships, and knowledge systems involved, ensuring all actions are guided by mutual respect and trust.

Safe Spaces: Environments where individuals feel emotionally, culturally, and physically supported, free from judgment or harm. In language learning, safe spaces allow participants to engage in revitalization with confidence, fostering growth and well-being.

Sensemaking: The process of interpreting and understanding experiences, stories, and data to draw meaningful insights. In Indigenous evaluation, sensemaking involves collective reflection, often guided by cultural protocols, to ensure insights align with community values and lived experiences.

Storytellers: In this report, refers to individuals who shared their experiences, knowledge, and cultural teachings through oral or written offerings during the evaluation process.

Appendix B – Tables

Table 1: Truth and Reconciliation Commission 94 Calls to Action on Language (2015)	
Call 10(iv)	Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
Call 13	We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.
Call 14(i-v)	We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles: i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them. ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties. iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation. iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities. v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.

Call 15	We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.
Call 16	We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages
Call 61(ii)	Community-controlled culture- and language-revitalization projects.
Call 84(i)	Increasing Aboriginal programming, including Aboriginal-language speakers.
Call 85(i)	Continuing to provide leadership in programming and organizational culture that reflects the diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples.

Table 2: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on Language (2007)

Article 13.1	Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
Article 14.1	Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
Article 14.3	States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.
Article 16	Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.

Table 3: Number of Indigenous people able to speak an Indigenous language in 2021 and percentage change from 2016 – Top 10 (Statistics Canada, 2023a)

<i>Indigenous Language</i>	<i>Number of Indigenous Speakers</i>	<i>Percentage Change from 2016 to 2021</i>
Cree Languages	86 475	-6.1%
Inuktituk	40 320	+1.4%
Ojibway Languages	25 440	-5.4%
Oji-Cree	15 210	-1.1%
Innu and Naskapi Languages	11 605	-0.4%
Dene	11 375	-10.9%
Mi'kmaq	9 000	+8.0%
Atikamekw	6 740	-2.2%
Blackfoot	6 585	+19.1%
Slavey-Hare Languages	2 215	-20.3%

Table 4: SILR Materials and Documents Reviewed	
<i>Year Published</i>	<i>Title</i>
2024	Mid-Year Report
2023	Annual Report
2023	Key Program Indicators
2023	Metrics Document
2023	Mid-Year Report
2023	Steering Committee Terms of Reference
2023	Theory of Change
2022	Annual Report
2021	Annual Report
n/a	Review and Recommendations

Appendix: C: Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (SILR) Project Timeline

2019-2020: Project Inception and Approval

Spring 2019 - August 2020: Proposal for *Building Capacity for Community-Led Indigenous Language Revitalization in Canada* is developed and submitted.

September 2020: BHP Foundation Board officially approves the project proposal.

March 2021: University of Alberta signs a five-year agreement with BHP Foundation to fund the project.

2021: Initial Program Launch and Development

Summer

Young Indigenous Women's Circle of Leadership (YIWCL): Hosts virtual summer programming.

Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI): Hosts the 22nd Annual Language Revitalization Summer School, offering 13 courses with 130 enrollments; hires a permanent project manager.

Fall

Bearspaw Stoney Language & Bilingual Education Program (BStLB): Hosts a summer gathering in Fort McMurray, attended by mentors and Elders.

First Peoples' House (FPH): Hosts its first Indigenous Language Club and hires four facilitators; planning for Indigenous Language Resource Kits begins; hires one Cree language tutor.

Weaving Holistic Learning Experiences (WHOLE): Hires an Indigenous Engagement Specialist and holds its first in-person professional development event.

Language Assessment Project (LAP): Negotiates an MOU between Yellowhead Tribal College and the University of Alberta for credit transfers; works on expanding the Language Assessment Tool.

The *External Advisory Board* is established.

2022: Expansion of Language Revitalization Programs

Spring

YIWCL: Hosts three Mentor Apprentice Program cohorts online and in person, followed by a Winter Camp.

Summer

YIWCL: Hosts its annual Two-Week Day Camp, along with workshops and events (Orange Shirt Day, Michif Theatre Weekend, Mossbag and Ribbon Skirts Workshop).

BStLB: Hosts language teachings with Fort Vermillion, Parkland School, and Fort McMurray communities; provides Mossbag teachings to ATEP students.

IALI (Indigenous Academic Leadership Initiative): Holds a Language Revitalization Land-Based Camp at Manitou Lake with Poundmaker Cree Nation; signed agreements for community-led language documentation with Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation and Îethka Îabi Institute.

Fall

CILLDI: Continues language documentation with Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation and Stoney Nakoda First Nation, drafting nearly a dozen Stoney storybooks; develops two mobile apps for language learning and transcription.

FPH: Launches a new Indigenous Language Club cohort with workshops and guest speakers.

WHOLE: Hosts two events featuring Métis and Dene Tha speakers, along with student gatherings, an Indigenous Language Revitalization Panel, and Indigenous Language Sharing Series.

LAP: Initiates regular meetings of the *Language Assessment Circle*, leading to a project plan and Terms of Reference.

CILLDI: Recruits 59 students for the Online Summer School in Language Revitalization; delivers custom courses for Tsuut'ina Nation; partners with Tsúut'ínà Gunáhà Institute to offer Tsuut'ina language courses.

SILR: Hosts the *Worldwide Universities Network Research Conference*, focusing on decolonizing Indigenous knowledge capture.

2023: Strengthening Programs and Community Engagement

Spring

WHOLE: Hosts the Tawa welcoming event and begins planning for five Indigenous Language Sharing Series and five Student Workshops.

CILLDI: Hosts an Indigenous Language Gathering.

Summer

YIWCL: Hosts summer immersion camps.

CILLDI: Doubles the enrollment for the Language Revitalization Summer School; continues delivering custom-designed language training courses for Cree and Stoney learners.

IALI: Continues language documentation partnerships and hosts book-writing workshops.

Fall

SILR: Holds the Language Assessment Symposium and expands partnerships with communities for language revitalization programs.

Teaching Theme: Provides 62 bursaries; partners with Indigenous communities to deliver training courses; records stories with Elders at Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation.

Speaking Theme: Partners with the Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission to develop an Oral Language Centre, delivers virtual Cree sessions, and records Indigenous language albums.

2024: Project Progress and Global Recognition

Spring

SILR: Hosts the *Indigenous Language Gathering* in Enoch, Alberta; hosts three events for the SILR Research Study: *The Search for Wellness through Ancestral Languages*.

Summer

CILLDI: Hosts the 25th Annual Summer School and launches the *Storytelling with Aunties* project. Delivers four CLC courses to Piikani First Nation.

SILR: Develops and launches the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies – Indigenous Language Sustainability; presents its research at the *Indigenous Research Symposium* at the University of Alberta, *Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA)* in Bodo, Norway, and at the University of Hawaii.

Appendix D: Partners and Collaborators

Communities and Nations

Alexis Nakota Nation
Fort McMurray
Fort Vermillion
Paul Band First Nation
Paul First Nation
Piikani First Nation
Poundmaker Cree Nation
Tsuut'ina Nation

Institutions, Organizations, and Programs

Canadian Council for the Arts
For McKay Youth Centre
Girls Inc Northern Alberta
îethka îabi Institute
Language and Heritage Program
Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission
Nêhiyawê Cultural Institute
Tsúut'ínà Gunáhà Institute
Yellowhead Tribal College

Schools

amiskwaciy Academy
Chief Aranazhi School
Parkland School
Prairie River Junior High School
St. Andrews School
St. Anne's School
St. Mary of the Lake School
Timberlea Public School
Walter Gladys Hill Public School

Appendix E: Introducing the Evaluation Team

Who is doing the work of Indigenous language revitalization and how this work is being done matters. Similarly, who is doing the work of evaluation and how it is being done also matters. Evaluation is a process that produces what is held up as evidence. As we work toward making visible the learning and promising practices in Indigenous language revitalization, the worldviews, principles, and methods that guide the evaluation process are critical. We aim to make visible the experiences we carry with us into this work by way of introduction, identifying the ways that our gifts and curiosities show up in this evaluation space. We understand that the responsibility we hold to do this work in a good way is a significant undertaking, and we have continuously reflected on our roles, accountabilities, and learnings during our time walking with SILR.



Dr. Gladys Rowe

Tansi! I am a Muskego Inniniw (Swampy Cree) and a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba, Canada. I also have ancestral relations from Ireland, England, Norway, and Ukraine. My educational background is in social work, and I hold a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies (Social Work, Indigenous Studies, and English, Film, & Theatre). I am the Director and Owner of Indigenous Insights, a consulting firm established in 2023. I bring over 16 years of experience as an Indigenous community facilitator, program designer, educator, researcher, and evaluator.

I support and lead learning, evaluation, innovation, and systems transformation work across Turtle Island. I am committed to supporting the growth of Indigenous and decolonial evaluation and love sharing knowledge through my podcast, [*Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast*](#), which has just completed its second full year with over 14,000 listens!

My work is grounded in and led by Indigenist paradigms and principles, centering co-creation, iterative reflection, learning, and capacity building. Who is in the room, who is leading change, and who is telling the story of change are all critically important to my vision for an equitable and just world. I often use arts-based mechanisms for reflection and sharing, including photovoice, collage, drawing, poetry, model design, film, and podcasting. These methods are vital for ensuring that diverse ways of knowing and sharing are included in evaluation practice.



Lana Klok

Hallo! I'm Dutch by birth and grew up in a town near Amsterdam, the Netherlands. While my roots are in the flattest country on earth, I've always been drawn to the mountains and other wonders of the world 'outside.' Last year, I moved to the ancestral lands of the səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), also known as North Vancouver. I'm still finding my way as a visitor to Turtle Island and life in Canada. Being here makes me reflect on my connection to my ancestors, realizing that the opportunity to be here is not something to take for granted.

My educational background is in Product and Interaction Design, with a master's degree in Design for Interaction from the Technical University of Delft. This essentially means finding answers to real-world questions using a psychological, analytical, and co-creative approach. Over the past 10 years, I've created empathic solutions, services, and systems in the Netherlands, Norway, Bangladesh, China, and Canada. I've worked with various organizations, including non-profits, universities, municipalities, governments, social housing corporations, and healthcare services for people with and without disabilities. I've held a variety of roles, including research assistant, social impact consultant, in-house innovator, and now, freelance strategic designer. Human-centered research and design have been the common thread throughout my career. For examples of my work, feel free to visit my portfolio.

While connection to people, their stories, and our natural surroundings interweaves my professional and personal life, I am new to Indigenous Evaluation. The deep dive into this approach has been both illuminating and a joy of recognition. As I gather new insights into Ancestral knowledge and culture, I find parallels in how we do the work that aligns with my own professional experiences. As a researcher and designer for social change, I believe design is a tool to connect. I design for and with people, valuing their expertise and perspectives. This includes in-depth interviews, creative facilitation, deep listening, and sharing back through visuals to ensure that the humans behind the stories are seen and their voices heard, sparking deep conversations that drive change. I always collaborate with the people at the heart of the challenges and aim to empower them to find and create positive collective impact, using images and imagination as our common language.



Taylor Wilson

Boozhoo/Tansi/Kumusta! I am an Ojibwe, Cree, and Filipina woman and a member of Fisher River Cree Nation (Ochekwi Sipi) along the southwest side of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. I also have connections to Fairford First Nation (Pinaymootang), Peguis First Nation (Oshki-ishkonigan), and the Ilocano region of the Philippines. My educational background is in Indigenous health and community development. I hold a master's in Development Practice: Indigenous Development and am currently pursuing a PhD in Public Health: Community-Based and Translational Research.

My master's thesis critiqued the applicability of the Canadian Food Guide in Indigenous communities using principles of Indigenous food sovereignty, and my PhD research continues this work by evaluating health education and promotion tools for chronic disease prevention and intervention in Indigenous populations.

I have nearly 10 years of experience supporting Indigenous-based and -led research and evaluation projects in areas such as early childhood development, child welfare, economic development, ethics, data sovereignty, and health and well-being in Canada, the United States, and Australia. Additionally, I have four years of experience teaching Indigenous Studies in higher education institutions in Alberta and Canada. Currently, I serve as an assistant evaluator while pursuing my PhD.

My approach to Indigenous research and evaluation is grounded in a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of language, culture, and land, with a focus on community-driven methodologies that center Indigenous knowledge systems. My connection to my communities and territories shapes my research practices. I emphasize the importance of culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and decolonial frameworks that respect Indigenous sovereignty and honor traditional teachings. Inspired by Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance," I aim to actively contribute to the thriving of Indigenous communities by supporting research that revitalizes Indigenous languages, cultural practices, and governance structures. My work in research ethics underscores the need for Indigenous data sovereignty and the importance of engaging in ethical research and evaluation that reflects the lived realities and values of Indigenous peoples.

Through my academic and professional journey, I have developed a holistic approach that bridges qualitative and quantitative research methodologies while prioritizing Indigenous voices and perspectives. I strive to challenge dominant paradigms by advocating for evaluation processes that not only meet academic and institutional standards but also serve the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities. Through this work, I seek to contribute to the long-term well-being and empowerment of Indigenous peoples, ensuring that our knowledge, languages, and cultures thrive for future generations.



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