

2025 SILR GATHERING REPORT



SILR



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

A photograph of Pamela McCoy Jones, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black and white patterned jacket and a lanyard with a badge. She is speaking into a microphone at a podium. The background is blurred with warm lights.

Pamela McCoy Jones

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is my pleasure to share the summary of the 2025 Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (SILR) Gathering, held on March 17 & 18 at the Fantasyland Hotel in amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta).

Over two days, language speakers, learners and advocates from across Turtle Island came together to share stories, teachings and strategies. Our goal was to create a welcoming environment where meaningful connections could take root and grow.

This year's theme, *Our Languages Are Healing Us*, was inspired by Dene Tha' Elder and SILR Advisory Council member Molly Chisaakay. Her words reminded us that Indigenous language revitalization is a journey of reclamation, identity, and healing. Our languages help restore balance between mind, body, spirit, and land. This theme shaped every part of our planning, centring language as a source of strength for individuals, families, and communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

The Gathering was grounded in ceremony. Each morning began with a Pipe Ceremony led by SILR Advisory Council members, Lyndon Aginas and Doreen Frencheater, followed by the lighting of the qulliq by Myna Manniapik. Drum songs and singing by Sterlling Daychief, William Arcand, and Tyler Edwards opened and closed the event. Throughout, Lyndon Aginas guided us as Master of Ceremonies, bringing warmth and sincerity to every moment.

Now in its third year, the SILR Gathering continues to grow as a space for learning and building relationships. Feedback from attendees reminds us that the Gathering is a source of motivation and encouragement. We are committed to sustaining that spirit in the years ahead.

Miigwetch to all who joined us, travelled far to be here, and contributed to the Gathering. We look forward to gathering with you again soon.

*Pamela McCoy Jones, Executive Director
Supporting Indigenous Language
Revitalization (SILR)
University of Alberta*



Sterlling Daychief



Rohahiyo Jordan Brant



Aiyana Twigg

Introduction

The 2025 SILR Gathering brought together 291 registered participants from across Alberta, the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, Saskatchewan, Quebec, British Columbia, and Ontario.

As in past years, the majority of attendees were First Nations women over the age of 45, with nehiyawewin, Dene languages, and Blackfoot as the most represented language groups. The event welcomed a diverse audience of language learners, teachers, Elders, advocates, and linguists. Of the 100 evaluation surveys completed, 77% of respondents identified as fluent speakers or active learners of an Indigenous language.

This report shares how the 2025 Gathering was planned and delivered, along with key insights from attendees. It reflects SILR's ongoing work to support Indigenous language revitalization and will guide future programming and community engagement.



Elders and Youth Panel: Roberta Alook, Reuben Quinn, Katerina Rain, Jerry Rain and Yazmín Novelo

Joan Greyeyes, OCIL Director



Glenn Jim



HIGHLIGHTS

Key Outcomes from the 3rd Annual Event

Theme: Our Languages Are Healing Us

March 17-18, 2025 | Fantasyland Hotel, amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton, AB)

Participants

- 291 registered participants
- Representation from 7 provinces/territories
- Majority First Nations women aged 45+
- 77% identified as fluent speakers or active language learners

Programming

- 8 sessions + 2 keynote addresses
- Topics included: immersion, AI, technology, curriculum, strategic planning, wellness
- Panels on Elders & Youth, and Language and Wellness

Ceremony & Cultural Grounding

- Pipe ceremony each day led by Lyndon Aginas and Doreen Frencheater
- Qulliq lighting by Myna Manniapik
- Drum songs and singing at the start and close

Evaluation Highlights

- 100 completed surveys
- Attendees described the event as *“grounding,” “motivating,” and “inspiring.”*
- Voices from the Gathering:
 - *“Languages strengthen us as people. Language revitalization is a key component of the survival and evolution of our ways of life.”*
 - *“Greatly appreciated being able to attend SILR... made me feel very fortunate for these opportunities and strengthened my ambition to continue striving in my language reclamation process. Ay-hiy!”*

What Made This Gathering Unique

- Indigenous youth volunteers supporting the event
- Dedicated Elders Wellness Space in partnership with the Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Alberta
- Practical take-home resources
- Integration of AI and emerging technologies in language revitalization

Michael Running Wolf



Yazmín Novelo



Sharing Knowledge and Strategies

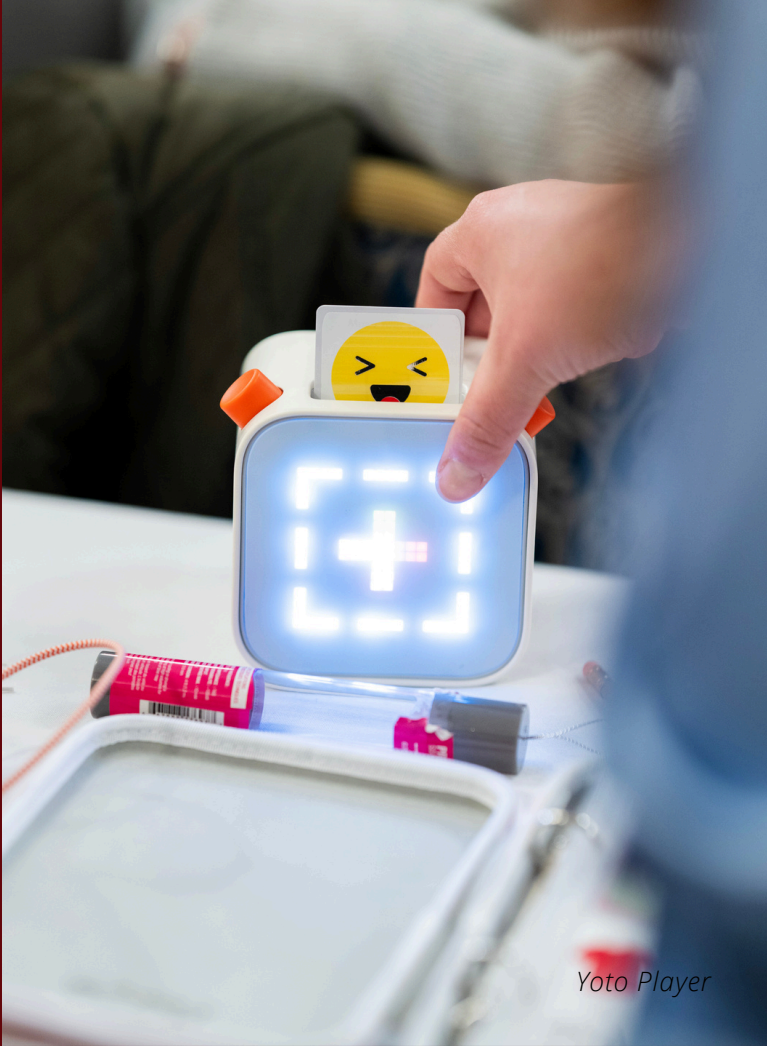
An Overview of the Programming

From technology and policy to mentorship and well-being, the SILR Gathering reflected the diverse strategies that communities use to revitalize languages.

- We featured 8 sessions on topics including:
 - Immersion teaching models
 - Curriculum and resource development
 - Language technology and documentation
 - AI and Indigenous languages
 - Strategic Planning
 - Mentor-apprenticeship programs
- The keynote address by Joan Greyeyes highlighted policy and advocacy efforts supporting Indigenous language revitalization.
- Michael Running Wolf's keynote addressed the digital divide between Indigenous languages and artificial intelligence, sharing insight into emerging AI tools and ethical considerations
- The Elders and Youth Panel featured father-daughter duo Jerry and Katerina Rain, alongside mentor and student Reuben Quinn and Roberta Alook, highlighting intergenerational relationships, learning through mentorship, and healing through language.
- The Search for Wellness Through Ancestral Languages panel shared insights from SILR's research into how knowing and speaking one's Ancestral Language(s) supports holistic wellbeing—mind, body, spirit, and emotions.
- A special 3-hour hands-on workshop introduced participants to Yoto players as tools for early language learning, spotlighting the innovative work of the Maskwac's Curriculum Department at the Maskwac's Education Schools Commission.



Utilizing & Creating Community-Based Oral Stations with Yoto Players



Yoto Player



The Search for Wellness Through Ancestral Languages panel: Molly Chisaakay, Elmer Ghostkeeper, Doreen Frencheater, Sharlene Alook, Joline Bull, Crystal Wood

From Feedback to Action: What Changed in 2025

In response to attendee feedback from the 2024 Gathering, we focused on making the experience more hands-on and supportive. We expanded learning opportunities, introduced resources for participants to take home, created intentional spaces for youth and Elders, and continued to diversify our programming.

Take-Home Resources

Each attendee received a copy of *Safeguarding Your Language Through Documentation*, published by The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) and Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization (SILR) at the University of Alberta. Aiyana Twigg writes the toolkit to support community-based language documentation using accessible technology. Aiyana also led a session based on the toolkit, offering participants a chance to engage deeply with the material and bridge the gap between learning and action.

Opportunities for Youth to Learn

Indigenous students from amiskwaciy Academy, a local high school that centres Indigenous culture, language and traditions, were invited to attend the Gathering and volunteer as Elders' helpers. The goal was to offer them a meaningful learning experience and opportunities to connect with Elders and community members. Indigenous students from Yellowhead Tribal College also volunteered, gaining a chance to observe the sessions and participate in the event.

Elders Wellness Space

For the second year, the SILR Gathering featured an Elders Wellness Space, made possible with support from the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Alberta. With the help of student volunteers, the wellness space offered warm wax hand massage therapy, a drop-in guided beading circle, and a quiet area for smudging, rest and relaxation.



NWT Mentor-Aprentice Program



Peigan Board of Education

EMERGING THEMES

Healing and Cultural Pride

Indigenous language revitalization was described as a personal and collective journey, one that is both healing and at times challenging, while also inspiring cultural pride and connection.

Community and Connections

Meeting others who are actively engaged in Indigenous language revitalization fosters a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. Gatherings create vital spaces for like-minded people to connect, build supportive relationships, and learn through mentorship and intergenerational exchange.

Supporting Language Teaching

Communities need more support to teach Indigenous languages in schools and in communities. There is strong interest in adapting successful models for immersion and mentor-apprenticeship to fit local contexts.

Strategic Planning and Taking Action

Attendees valued learning practical tools to turn vision into action and emphasized the need for tangible takeaways to guide long-term efforts.

Hearing the Language is Important

Hearing fluent speakers had a powerful impact, inspiring learning and underscoring the importance of making language audible and alive.

Technology and Data Sovereignty

Participants expressed strong interest in using technology to support language revitalization, from everyday tools to advanced technologies like AI. Data sovereignty emerged as a shared consideration, highlighting the need for communities to maintain control over their languages.

Inspiration and Motivation

Attendees left the Gathering feeling energized and renewed. Bringing language champions together helps spark motivation, reignite passion, and support ongoing learning.

I feel more confident in my position as a Cree curriculum coordinator, getting to see others are doing the same thing.

Participant feedback, 2025 SILR Gathering



Florence Glanfield



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offer more educational events throughout the year, especially for land-based learning as this is a strong and shared interest among SILR's audience.
- Prioritize topics for next year's Gathering, including:
 - Hands on language learning sessions
 - Community innovations and new developments in language work
 - Teaching strategies for Educators
 - Technology and digital tools,
 - Take-home resources,
 - Resource development for Indigenous languages
- Increase gender diversity among speakers, facilitators and participants.
- Ensure meaningful representation of languages across programming.
- Explore opportunities to livestream and/or record sessions for remote participation and broader access.
- Adjust the agenda for longer breaks, shorter session lengths, and more dynamic and engaging formats.
- Ensure venue layout and event logistics prioritize the comfort and accessibility needs of Elders.
- Expand wellness services to include mental wellness support, acknowledging that language revitalization can bring up difficult topics, including residential school experiences.



miigwetch, ay-hiy, ish-nish, mahsi cho, maarsii

Thank you to everyone who made the 2025 SILR Gathering possible. We are especially grateful to Lyndon Aginas, Doreen Frencheater, and Myna Manniapik for grounding us in ceremony; to our presenters and speakers for sharing your knowledge; to the SILR Advisory Council for your guidance; to our volunteers for your generous support; and to the SILR team for all your work behind the scenes. Finally, thank you to all who attended. Your voices brought the Gathering to life.







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info@silr.ca

Supporting Indigenous
Language Revitalization
(SILR)

11011 - 88 Ave NW
Edmonton, AB CAN
T6G 2G5

www.silr.ca



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