

National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance/Alliance nationale des connaissances et langues autochtones (NIKLA-ANCLA)

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History

For many years, there has been an acknowledged need in Canada for a national Indigenous association in areas related to Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. An association or an alliance that could bring together cross-disciplinary professionals, para-professionals, Indigenous knowledge keepers and Indigenous grass-roots community organizations to address matters of importance around Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) ways of knowing, knowledges, language and cultural memory/heritage is crucially needed.

Numerous conversations among Canadians attending the ATALM (Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums) conference from 2012 to 2017 took place about forming a Canadian “ATALM.” Many associations already have Indigenous groups, taskforces or networks, and often these groups were working very hard to advocate for and create change. They were often in silos and there were no national conversations occurring on a regular basis. Heather George, Tanis Hill, Taylor Gibson and Camille Callison hosted a well-attended roundtable at lunch titled, “ATALM North,” at the October 2017 ATALM conference, where many interested individuals put their names down to participate if there was an association formed.

Simultaneously, the National Reading Campaign hosted three roundtables (2013, 2014 and 2016)¹ with Executive Director, Sandy Crawley, guided by a Steering Committee of Aboriginal Literacy and Library Leaders (Sheri Mishibinijima, Marilyn Belhumeur, Jeff Burnham, Bernadette Dean, Miranda Jimmy, Daphne Johnston, Feather Maracle Luke, Arlene Perly-Rae, April Powless, Patricia Knockwood and others) to bring Indigenous librarians from First Nations public libraries together. The final roundtable National Reading Campaign hosted was in Halifax on February 29, 2016, to discuss the formation of NALA (National Aboriginal Library Association) and to provide input into a 3-year business plan being created by Beverly O’Neil to start the organization². At that meeting, we talked about making it more inclusive by using Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) rather than Aboriginal, and expanding the focus to include all cultural memory institutions (libraries, archives and museums) to better reflect an Indigenous worldview. Sadly, the NALA business plan wasn’t able to secure the desired funding, despite numerous attempts with support letters from the CFLA-FCAB (Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques) Indigenous Matters Committee, and many others.

In 2015, the University of Manitoba hosted the 9th International Indigenous Librarians Forum (IILF) Anikoo Gaagige Ganawendaasowin³ in Winnipeg co-chaired by Dave Courchene Jr. - Nii Gaani Aki

¹ More information: <http://nationalreadingcampaign.ca/aboriginal-policy-initiative/>

² More information: <http://campagnepourlalecture.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/NALA-Final-Report.pdf>

³ Anikoo Gaagige Ganawendaasowin - As Keepers of Knowledge that came from the Creator and that we are tied to our mothers through the umbilical cord, it is the responsibility of each child to pass down this knowledge from

Inini (Leading Earth Man, Turtle Lodge),⁴ Camille Callison (Tsesk'iye Clan, Tahltan Nation) and Elders from across Turtle Island. This gathering was a pivotal force in helping to create communication and cooperation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies working in libraries, archives and cultural memory institutions nationally. Over the same year, the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was finishing its work by publishing its report, the 94 Calls to Actions. The National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation was also established to care for the TRC archival records and Indian Residential School Survivor's testimonies. Simultaneously, the Canadian Library Association had become no longer fiscally viable and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB) was founded to become the national voice for libraries in Canada.

One of the first things the CFLA-FCAB did was to include a seat for an Indigenous representative on the Board of Directors (a first for Canada) and to make Truth & Reconciliation one of the top priorities of the newly-formed association, along with Copyright and Advocacy. CFLA-FCAB formed the Truth and Reconciliation Committee made up of 45 people from every province and territory in Canada who produced an 83-page report with 10 overarching recommendations and numerous "living" databases in 3 months. The Committee was organized by adapting an Indigenous model under the patient guidance of Elder Norman Meade, University of Manitoba. We had a real opportunity to change things for Indigenous people and libraries in Canada and despite time constraints and distance, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee delivered its final report and recommendations at the 2017 Annual General Meeting which opened with traditional acknowledgement and smudge of the International Indigenous Librarians' Forum (IILF)⁵ Mauri stone⁶ by Camille Callison (Chair), Jessie Loyer (Red Team Leader) and Feather Maracle-Luke (Yellow Team Leader). The IILF Mauri stone was brought to honour this auspicious occasion as the Truth & Reconciliation Committee's 10 overarching recommendations were read into record at the 2017 CFLA-FCAB AGM and endorsed in principle. The Board and those present were passed the Mauri stone to cement their commitment and respect for Indigenous peoples and knowledge before it was passed from Canada to Australia at the 10th International Indigenous Librarians Forum later in February 2017.

In this time period, in the museum sector, occurred the Indigenous Collections Symposium put on by the Ontario Museum Association.⁷ Heather George, Tanis Hill, Taylor Gibson were all involved in the planning, as were Janice Monture, Paula Whitlow, John Moses, Petal Furnace, and many individuals from the GRASAC network.

A discussion took place with attendees and colleagues during the informal lunch at the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) Forum with University Partners: *Exploring Decolonization on the Road to*

one generation to the next generation. In Anishnabe the words; aniko means to "extend," gaagige means "eternal," and gaanawendaasowin means "keeper."

⁴ More information: <http://onjisay-aki.org/turtle-lodge>

⁵ More information: <https://libguides.lib.umanitoba.ca/NinthInternationalIndigenousLibrariansForum2015#s-lg-page-section-1992602>

⁶ The IILF Mauri Stone is imbued with the spirit and knowledge from previous was being held by Turtle Lodge as traditional caretakers since the 2015 IILF at the University of Manitoba.

⁷ More information: <https://members.museumsontario.ca/programs-events/current-initiatives/indigenous-collections-symposium>

Reconciliation – a public event that took place at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa in October 2017.⁸ Those present for this informal gathering provided some good feedback and reflection. At this gathering, it was determined to continue to press forward trying to create an association, and to form a Board of Directors that consisted of having one board member being First Nations, Métis, Inuit and from each of the professional disciplines (libraries, archives, museum, language etc.) This is in addition to an elected executive of: President or Chair, past president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and an Elder and Youth council. There was a mutual desire to move forward in creating a network and community of practice recognizing our commonalities and our distinctiveness culturally, linguistically, geographically and politically. At this time there still hope for an International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) funding opportunity that NALA had applied for and CFLA-FCAB IMC-CQA supported but this funding didn't materialize.

In 2018 numerous informal meetings, and innumerable conversations via conference call and Zoom have occurred. Events such as: Making Meaning at University of Alberta (February 2018) and Decolonizing Description hosted by York & Ryerson Universities, and ATALM 2018 proved fruitful venues for conversation and evidence of a need for more formal organization. The CFLA-FCAB IMC-CQA⁹, has engaged in significant work in the area, notably those leading, and on the Yellow Medicine Wheel Teams dedicated to relationship building. The work included joining with Greg Younging and the Indigenous Knowledge Protection Working Group writing a SSHRC grant proposal to hold an initial meeting, focused on Indigenous Knowledge Protocols and creation of NIKLA-ANCLA. They also joined with the Indigenous Curriculum Working Group to write a SSHRC grant proposal with Michael McNally to fund the creation of website to host NIKLA-ANCLA, and create a community of practice, neither of which were successful. However, the groups are regrouping to revise and resubmit.

The decision was made to host an initial meeting and to begin using the term “alliance” so other associations, interest groups, etc. could join. This is a deliberate move away from using names related to colonial institutions such as library, archive or museum and use holistic terms such as “knowledge” and “language.”

The name: National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance/Alliance nationale des connaissances et langues autochtones (NIKLA-ANCLA) was agreed upon as a placeholder until a consensus for a permanent name could be arrived at during the first meeting.

NIKLA-ANCLA today

NIKLA is currently envisioned as a collegial network and community of practice of Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners and professionals with Indigenous knowledge, culture and language

⁸ More information: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/events/Pages/2017/forum-exploring-decolonization-road-reconciliation.aspx>

⁹ The Indigenous Matters Committee - Comité des questions autochtones (IMC-CQA) was formed as part of the CFLA-FCAB Truth & Reconciliation Committee (Comité de vérité et réconciliation) Report and Recommendations using the Medicine Wheel model so efforts were made to incorporate archives, cultural memory and language in preparation for the implementation of Recommendation #10 as it pertains to forming a national Indigenous association similar to NALA but for First Nations, Metis and Inuit on and off reserve (http://cfla-fcab.ca/en/indigenous/trc_report).

portfolios. The intent of this national Indigenous alliance is wide ranging. It will pull knowledge, language and cultural heritage practitioners and professionals together and provide a means through which to share and expand current knowledge systems; it will allow for networking and further develop organizational capacity; group members will provide guidance to available funding streams and opportunities for partnerships; and it will support the development of joint and complementary advocacy strategies. While NIKLA started off as a desire to create a Canadian “ATALM,” the vision was adapted to incorporate a holistic view of Indigenous knowledge, culture, history and language and may, or may not, offer conferences. The virtual presence of NIKLA is intended to be robust and rich in capacity and information sharing capabilities so as to offer all identified resources to the widest possible national audience at the lowest reasonable cost. Goals include bringing together interconnected disciplines to work together, to facilitate intergenerational sharing while supporting each other in advocating for change; to decolonize and indigenize existing structures; and to address the bias located inherently in mainstream institutions; research and discipline addressing Indigenous knowledge, language and cultural memory.

The National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance/Alliance nationale des connaissances et langues autochtones (NIKLA-ANCLA) is not yet an existing entity but its first meeting will be on January 29th at 1pm at Ryerson University Student Learning Centre (SLC) where the Alliance will be conceptualized. NIKLA is currently still in the very early stages of planning. In fact, even its name is a placeholder; an official name won't be chosen until the first steering committee meeting. NIKLA will be developed at a grass roots level by leaders in Indigenous heritage. It is the intent of these individuals to begin to collectively apply for grant support in 2019 to fund the first meeting of the NIKLA steering committee.

Desired outcomes from January 29, 2019 meeting:

1. Network with:

Other Indigenous professionals and allies working in the fields of (not an exhaustive list):

- Indigenous knowledge
- Indigenous languages
- Intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledges and language
- Cultural memory
- Preservation of Indigenous knowledge and language
- Copyright of Indigenous knowledge and language
- Archives
- Libraries
- Museums
- Oral History
- Authors, artists and publishers of books, oral histories, children's literature, comics, graphic novels, blogs, zines, etc.
- Filmmakers documenting Indigenous knowledge, history, culture and language

2. Create a unified voice around Indigenous knowledge, cultural memory, language and Indigenous ways of knowing as it relates to culture memory and heritage professionals working in libraries, archives, galleries, museums, oral history and language teaching and preservation.

3. Create a community of practice

Over the last decade, we have seen substantive movement as it relates to Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledge being held in mainstream archives, libraries and cultural memory institutions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report and Calls to Action have prompted and provided the catalyst for change. We desire to create a community of practice around the sharing, teaching and intergenerational transfer of knowledge and imbedding Indigenous epistemologies while honouring Indigenous voices and relationships by Indigenized cultural memory praxis. As Indigenous cultural activists and allies, our responsibilities include exploring the relationally and interconnectedness of Indigenous knowledge while attempting to unsettle, disrupt and sometimes dismantle existing frameworks and pedagogy to examine how to respectfully engage cultural memory professionals and academics working with Indigenous communities and their knowledge. The inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and methodologies into an ethical curriculum creating a synergistic model that integrates a multiplicity of ways of knowing, that can lay the groundwork and create a space for knowledge to be preserved and shared in its unbiased entirety, is crucial for meaningful change moving forward.