

The Feeding Our Fire Gathering

SUMMARY REPORT
May 2025

Reimagining First
Nations Governance
to Realize Our
Inherent Right to
Self-Government



RFNG

Rebuilding
First Nations
Governance



centre for
**FIRST NATIONS
GOVERNANCE**

Igniting Inherent Rights-Based Governance



In May 2025, we gathered upon ləkʷəŋən territory (Victoria, BC) for the 2nd national gathering, **Feeding Our Fire**, hosted by Rebuilding First Nations Governance (RFNG) & the Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG). Rooted in our languages and laws, this movement is about educating and empowering First Nations on their inherent right to self-governance. Elders, youth, practitioners and leaders shared stories, meals, and visions: reflecting on where we come from, who we are and what's needed to move forward, together.

Objectives



- **Support** First Nations to transition out of the Indian Act to self-government.
- **Contribute** to the national dialogue on Indigenous jurisdiction and Section 35.
- **Reflect on & educate** about the intergenerational impacts of the Indian Act.
- **Strengthen** multi-generational relationships and shared values.
- **Advance a movement** for Indigenous self-determination grounded in our languages, laws, and traditions.



A POWERFUL JOURNEY



Reflecting on the Past

Colonial Disruption: The Indian Act fractured our traditional governance, our kinships, and our connections to territory, leaving First Nations to navigate imposed systems that were designed for us to fail.

Legal Jurisdiction: Section 35 creates space for self-determination but remains misunderstood, contested, and under-utilized.

Sharing Our Realities

Burnout and Barriers: Community leaders are experiencing exhaustion while navigating funding gaps, siloed systems and lateral violence.

Truth-Telling: Honest conversations surfaced shared pain, pride, and a need to rebuild trust across generations and Nations.



Consulting the Data

RFNG Special Projects: Community-Based Research through partnership agreements presents governance challenges linked to loss of language, imposed colonial systems & disconnection from clan systems.

Data Sovereignty: First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) emphasizes that Indigenous data must be governed by Indigenous Peoples and protocols in accordance with OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession).

Seeding the Future

Youth Visioning: The Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI) Constitution laid out a bold, joyful vision rooted in care, responsibility, and cultural strength.

Long-Term Commitment: The Nation to Nation to Nation workshop reminded us that transformation takes generations — and starts now.



87 PARTICIPANTS, spanning 8 First Nations, academia, Indigenous-led organizations, and philanthropy.

21 SESSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS, driving dialogue and knowledge exchange.

35 GUEST SPEAKERS, panelists, and presenters, including 6 Elders and 10 youth leaders.

TEACHINGS FROM PRESENTERS & NATIONS



Dr. Terry Lynn Fox Poucette Clan-Based Governance

How revitalizing traditional clan governance reconnects communities to ancestral laws and cultural roles, laying a strong foundation for self-governance beyond the Indian Act.



Albert Peeling Bill C-92 and Jurisdiction

An overview of Bill C-92, emphasizing First Nations' authority over child and family services, supporting Indigenous-led systems grounded in community values and law

Erin Corston & Harmony Johnson Indigenous Data Sovereignty

The importance of Indigenous control over data —“Our Data, Our Stories, Our Futures”—to ensure information reflects community priorities and strengthens self-governance.

Dr. Mason Ducharme Leadership Retention & Lateral Violence

Research on leadership retention in Indigenous organizations revealed lateral violence as a factor in departures and talent turnover, stressing the need for healing to rebuild strong, stable governance systems.

COMMUNITY VOICES HIGHLIGHTED

- The importance of **language** as the **foundation** for revitalizing **traditional laws and governance**.
- A **shared vision** amongst Nations for the inherent right to self-government and the need to **foster youth leadership**.
- The power of **collaboration and collective resilience** to heal and rebuild governance systems that reflect First Nation **values and ways of being**.

A Mindset & A Movement



We are the 8th generation born into the Indian Act. We must invest our time and energy into our children and youth, and remind the people how to be Inherent Rights leaders once again.

It is going to take a long time, and it is tough work. Together we can adopt an inherent rights mindset, recognizing that we are sovereign beings, worthy of a balanced life that honours all of our relations: past, present and future.



A Collective Shift:

From colonial structures → **to inherent rights governance.**
From imposed systems → **to traditional laws and languages.**
From isolation → **to collaboration and shared vision.**



The Two Big Questions



1. How do we transition into Section 35?

2. Once there, how do we declare ourselves?



Call to Action

Mobilize an Action Network

It is important to also define procedures in the law to drive **negotiations** between our **pre-existing sovereignty** and the assumed sovereignty of the Crown. There isn't one good policy that follows the laws and procedures under the Constitution, so it is necessary for us, the **right holders**, to create them. These are not just technical questions, but deeply **cultural, legal, and spiritual ones**. They will guide the path forward for Nations choosing self-governance beyond the Indian Act.



"The Creator placed us; the Queen displaced us. We need to express who we are in our own way".

- Sawt Elder Martina Pierre,
Lil'wat Nation

Nation to Nation to Nation

2050: Envisioning the
Best Possible Futures for
Our People



COMPLETING CONFEDERATION

Through the Participatory Futurism Workshop, the CFNG launched ***Nation to Nation to Nation (NNN)***: a multi-generational collective film and organizing tool imagining the future of Indigenous governance and completing confederation the way it should have been done.

Reclamation in Action

Participants travelled into the future through a Meditation on Generations, embodying futures that already exist:

- **Self-Government:** Our laws, constitutions, and leadership are recognized as sovereign.
- **Land & Food:** Returning home, stewarding land, sustaining traditional foods, and living well in reciprocity to territories.
- **Unity & Agreements:** Collaboration, connection, and respect at all levels. We have jurisdiction over lands, resources and waters.
- **Culture & Youth:** Languages, values, and youth leadership thriving. Our children have a strong sense of self and wellbeing.
- **Healing & Wellbeing:** Traditional healing, accessible homes, equality, and community wellness. Our people are the medicine.

Where We Go From Here

- **Next steps:** A community-driven short film, community workshops, and knowledge exchanges to make inherent rights governance tangible. We determine our futures.
- **NNN** provides a ***roadmap for action***, inspiring conversation, radical hope, and collective change. We embody it, now.





INHERENT RIGHTS YOUTH INITIATIVE



To close the gathering in a good way, the **Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI)** participated in the **“Passing the Torch” Panel**, where they shared their reflections, experiences and dreams for the future. Together, they highlighted key learnings from the 2024-2025 Workshop Series, declared their **IRYI Constitution**, and shared how mentorship opportunities through our initiative have shaped their journeys. These **Emerging Leaders** represent Nations from Coast to Coast, and have spent the last few years connected on their inherent rights reclamation journeys. As a group of First Nations youth who gather to support and empower one another, we believe our futures are in good hands. The Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG) & the Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project (RFNG) are committed to creating safe spaces for our youth to reclaim their languages and live beyond the Indian Act’s boundaries to occupy more of our ancestral places and flourish as leaders under our inherent rights. With their **inherent rights mindset**, the IRYI members can do anything!

IRYI CONSTITUTION

IRYI’s living constitution guides youth to learn from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, reclaim our languages, and write new stories. Our circle is open to all who come in a good way.

FUTURE SEEDS

Emerging Leaders are cultivating a mindset of leadership and collaboration while building an Inherent Rights movement in 2025 and beyond.

“We believe in writing new stories of sovereignty that reflect who we are and who we are becoming.”

Feast + Community Gift Exchange

Feasting Together

We closed the Gathering by coming together for a shared feast, celebrating culture, kinship, and the strength of community. Over food, songs, and laughter, we honoured the relationships built throughout the Gathering, reflected on the past, and looked ahead with gratitude and hope.

Grounded in Ceremony

The spirit of our gift exchange perfectly embodied the essence of the work the RFNG & CFNG are doing, which is about connecting communities while fostering best practices and Nation to Nation collaboration. Our relationships are stronger than ever.

“What torch are you carrying, and who are you passing it to?”

- Satsan



RFNG Timeline

2017
Inaugural
Think Tank

2020
SSHRC
Partnership Grant
(COVID)

2019
Building
Community
Workshop

2023
Rekindling the
Fire Gathering

WE ARE HERE
2025 🔥
Feeding Our Fire
Gathering

2026
Official End of
SSHRC Grant

2027
Year 7
& beyond

Closing Reflections

This Gathering was more than an event: it was a continuation of relationships and our shared purpose built over many years. The idea of RFNG first emerged at a small gathering in 2017, was strengthened again in 2019, affirmed in 2020, rekindled in 2023, and now returned to full flame in 2025. The trust, energy, and connection we felt here was rooted in our shared histories, making every conversation, song, and shared meal all the more meaningful. We are grateful to all that arrived, past, present and future.

**Meegwetch | Nya:wen | Kukstumkacw | Misiyh | Marsi cho | Huy ch q'u | Wela'lin |
Kinanâskomitin | Thank you | Merci**

Keep the Fire Burning

To explore deeper, we invite you to access external resources as this summary captures only a glimpse of the wisdom and vision shared at Feeding Our Fire.

Suggested Readings:

Indigenous Governance & Law

Data & Community Sovereignty

Community & Nation-to-Nation Practices

FULL FEEDING OUR FIRE REPORT (2025)

<https://carleton.ca/rfng/cu-files/feeding-our-fire-gathering-full-report/>

CONNECT WITH US

General Inquiries: info@fngovernance.org

<https://carleton.ca/rfng/about/contact-us/>

WEBSITES

CFNG: www.fngovernance.org

RFNG: www.carleton.ca/rfng