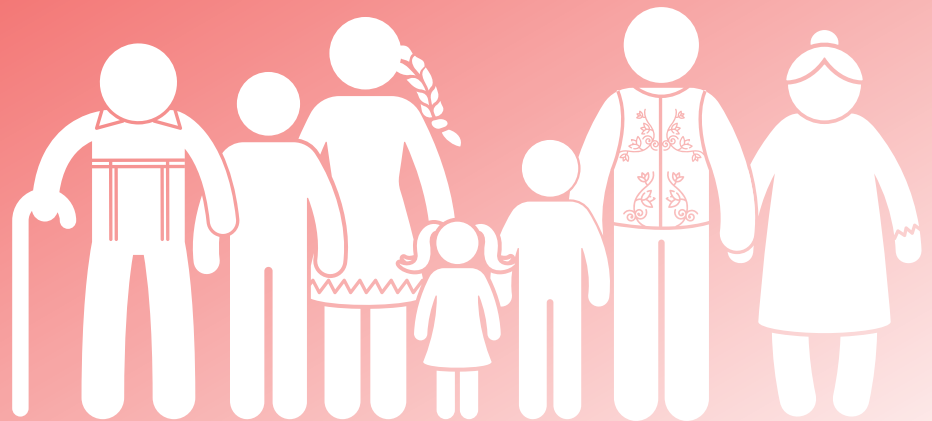


Toward Information Governance by and for First Nations in Quebec

A Collective Vision That Respects the Local
Autonomy of First Nations



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



Commission de développement
des ressources humaines des
Premières Nations du Québec
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Quebec Labrador
Youth Network

AUTHORS

ÉMILIE GRANTHAM, Research Sector Team Leader, FNQLHSSC

GUILLAUME PLANTE, Information Management Project Manager, FNQLHSSC

CONTRIBUTORS

SUZY BASILE, Professor, School of Indigenous Studies, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue

ANNIE BRISSON-PROULX, Communications Advisor, FNQLHSSC

DAVID COUTURIER, Communications Strategist

PATRICIA MATHIAS, Communications Project Coordinator

NANCY GROS-LOUIS MCHUGH, Research Sector Manager, FNQLHSSC

Members of the regional working group for the implementation of the regional information governance strategy:

SHUKAPESH ANDRÉ, Director, Research, Development and Innovation, Institut Tshakapesh

ALAIN BÉDARD, Interim Director, FNQLSDI

CATHERINE BÉLAND, Planning Coordinator, FNQLSDI

JEAN-DENIS GILL, Governance Advisor, FNQLHSSC

GUY LATOUCHE, Urban Planner and Housing and Infrastructure Advisor, AFNQL

CARL SIMARD, Information Resources Manager, FNQLHSSC

MARIE-CHRISTINE TREMBLAY, Team Leader – Communications and Strategic Projects, FNOLEDC

TIM WHITEDUCK, Technology Director, FNEC

TRANSLATION

EVOQ COMMUNICATIONS

CHAD O'BRIEN

GRAPHIC DESIGN

KARINE POTVIN

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All requests must be sent to the FNQLHSSC by mail or by email, at the following addresses:

FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

250 Place Chef-Michel-Laveau, Suite 102, Wendake, Quebec G0A 4V0

info@cssspnql.com

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CONTEXT AND DEFINITION

- Information governance refers to the structure, processes and protocols under which First Nations are involved in making decisions about the collection, use, sharing, management, protection and accessibility of their information.
- In harmony with their right to self-determination and their sovereignty of information, First Nations in Quebec organize, structure, control and manage their information assets according to their values, worldview and practices so that they can make informed decisions and guide their actions to effectively serve their populations.

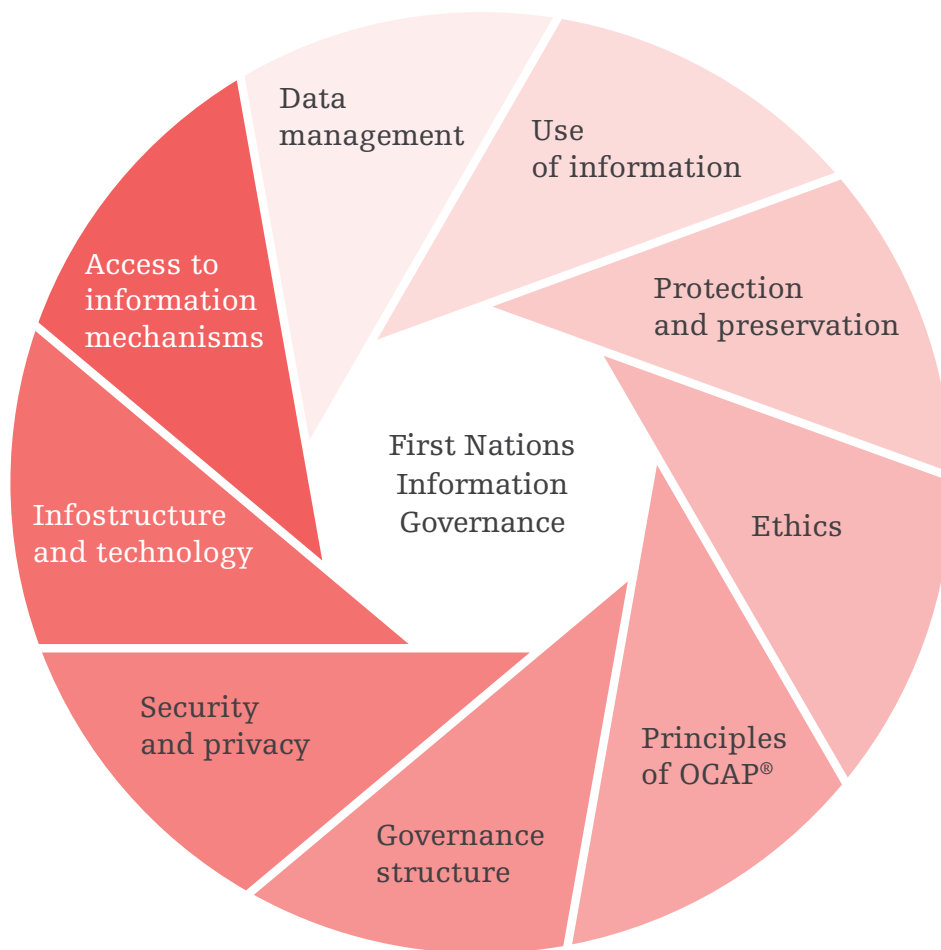
What are information assets?

Any tangible or intangible information regarding a First Nations group of individuals, community or organization, regardless of whether it is held by First Nations or a third party. Information assets include four types of information:

1. Personal information, such as medical or school records.
2. Administrative information, such as band lists, financial reports and minutes.
3. Cultural and traditional information, including language, ceremonies, stories and legends, songs, and traditional know-how including medicine and traditional healing, etc.
4. Information about the territory, resources and environment, such as knowledge about plants and animals, cartography, and hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping.

COLLECTIVE VISION OF INFORMATION GOVERNANCE

The regional strategy of First Nations in Quebec aims to break down data and information silos and create a governance structure to harness complementary knowledge in order to support and protect all First Nations information assets. Stakeholders across the board will therefore have a role to play in ensuring that the full spectrum of challenges and ambitions of every nation is taken into account.



The proposed regional strategy is therefore part of a broader coordinated initiative that is national in scope but embraces a vision and tone that reflect the realities, needs, strengths and cultures of First Nations in Quebec. This strategy will be firmly rooted in the principles outlined in the *Quebec First Nations Information Governance Framework* while respecting the local autonomy of each community and organization, strengthening existing capacities, and promoting and protecting traditional knowledge.

Once implemented, this regional strategy will be vital in overcoming numerous obstacles that currently hinder First Nations in Quebec from managing and governing their information assets, including:¹

- No recurrent funding in this area.
- Lack of sustainable infrastructure to support sound information governance (dedicated human resources, technological aspects, etc.).
- Information management tools and systems ill adapted to the needs, processes and cultures of First Nations.
- Under-optimized data, information and knowledge.
- Lack of government measures despite numerous reports proving First Nations must have greater access to and control over information.
- Few mechanisms in place to apply the principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP®) or to properly manage and control information assets.

¹ FNQLHSSC, *Quebec First Nations Health and Social Services Governance Process: Summary Report Pre-Annual General Assembly, July 2016* (Wendake: FNQLHSSC, 2016), https://gouvernance.cssspnql.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/gouv_rap_som_07_2016_en_web.pdf; FNQLHSSC, *Quebec First Nations Health and Social Services Governance Process: Summary Report Pre-Annual General Assembly, July 2017* (Wendake: FNQLHSSC, 2017), https://gouvernance.cssspnql.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/pre-aga_juillet2017_en_web.pdf

BENEFITS FOR LEADERS AND THE POPULATION

The regional information governance strategy will yield a number of benefits for First Nations leaders and population, including the following:

Benefits for LEADERS



- **Making decisions** using data that incorporates First Nations knowledge.
- **Improving the services offered** and contributing to the wellness of the population.
- **Facilitating decision-making** in all priority areas and fields through the use of reliable and validated data in the provision of services to the population, in defending their interests and for self-determination.
- **Having better access to information, data and statistics** to meet the needs of communities and regional organizations, for example to provide community portraits, set up various initiatives, create social programs and support any planning.
- **Collecting, indexing and structuring data** to better meet the needs of communities in the following areas: health, wellness, culture, education, land use planning, economic and sustainable development, community life, demography, housing, etc.
- **Recovering data** from governments and institutions so that First Nations have access to it.



Benefits for THE POPULATION

- **Protecting and promoting** First Nations culture, knowledge and skills.
- **Preserving** the intergenerational transmission of information assets.
- **Benefiting from an improved service** offer in all areas: health, social services, education, housing, recreation, educational services, community infrastructure, territory, etc.
- **Creating new services** in the communities and **creating jobs in technology** and related fields.
- **Increasing confidence** in services and the management of personal information.
- **Better understanding** the issues and progress made.
- **Strengthening** the sense of belonging and building capacity.

HISTORY

In the past 30 years, First Nations in Canada have asserted and demonstrated their claim to self-determination and sovereignty over their own data and all of their information assets through numerous initiatives. These include the creation of a National Steering Committee in 1996 by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to administer a national First Nations health survey and the development of First Nations principles of OCAP® in 1998 to determine how First Nations data and information should be collected, protected, used and shared.

A NATIONAL STRATEGY BY AND FOR FIRST NATIONS

Adoption of Resolution no. 57

In 2016, 20 years after the first information stewardship and governance initiatives were introduced with regard to First Nations in Canada, the AFN adopted Resolution no. 57 to direct the federal government to fund a national First Nations data governance strategy. The resolution recognizes that data sovereignty is a cornerstone of nation rebuilding and that access to information is essential to making decisions aimed at improving people's social and economic well-being.

Submission of a First Nations Data Governance Strategy

Funding was earmarked in the 2018 federal budget to support the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) and its partners in designing such a strategy. This was followed by a 2019 national summit attended by First Nations representatives from across the country, during which the importance of ensuring that the strategy would be centred on the culture and needs of each nation was emphasized. FNIGC presented *A First Nations Data Governance Strategy* to Indigenous Services Canada on March 31, 2020.

The strategy includes an explanation of how First Nations perceive data governance, specifically through the lens of decolonization:

“Beyond self-determination and self-governance, data decolonization is equally important for First Nations addressing the gap between the life we are living today and the life Creator intended us to live.”²

The strategy also sets forth First Nations’ vision of data sovereignty, i.e., the right of Indigenous peoples to determine the means of collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of data pertaining to them.

Following the submission of the strategy, funding for the continued work involved in developing and implementing the national strategy was announced in the 2021 federal budget. These funds were allocated to FNIGC and then redistributed so that a national network of regional information governance centres could be set up by the end of the process. Each of these regional centres will be uniquely attuned to the communities and Nations they serve, in terms of cultures, connection to the land, relationships, languages, knowledge, and political and legal landscape. Among the goals and benefits of these centres were:

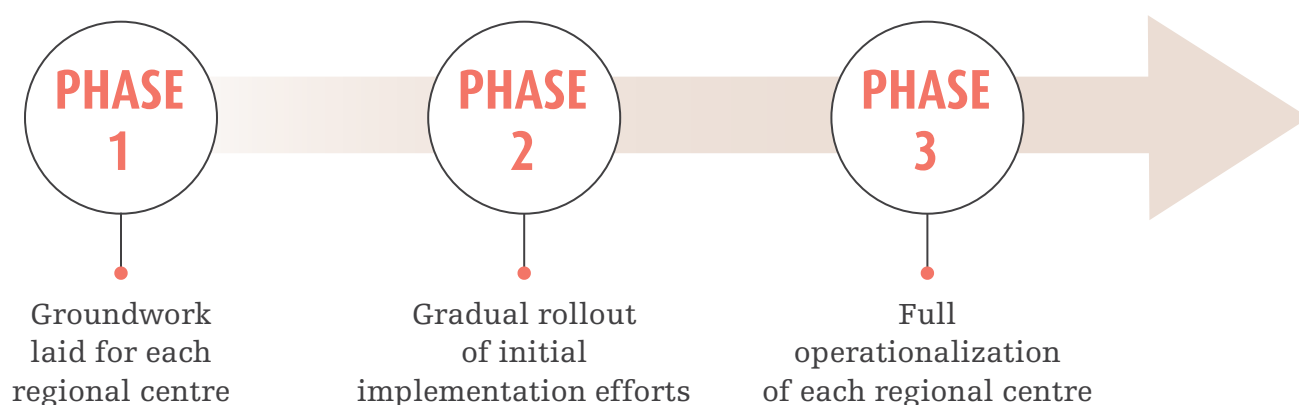
- Building capacity and asserting self-determination within communities, Nations and organizations with regard to information stewardship and governance.
- Achieving data sovereignty in alignment with First Nations’ distinct worldview.
- Continuing to decolonize research and governing information assets more effectively.

² First Nations Information Governance Centre, *A First Nations Data Governance Strategy: Strengthening First Nations Institutions and Community Capacity* (Akwasasne: FNIGC, 2020), 12, https://fnigc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/fnigc_fndgs_fr_final.pdf

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: NEXT STEPS

The network of regional information governance centres will be rolled out in three phrases:

- During Phase 1, ongoing through 2025, the groundwork (service offer, form, structure, etc.) for each of the regional information governance centres will be laid.
- During Phase 2, the initial implementation efforts for each of the entities will gradually be put in place.
- In the third and final phase, all of the regional centres will be completely up and running.



Based on the scenarios proposed, the final decision will be made by the Grand Chiefs and Chiefs.

PHASE 1

2022-2025

During Phase 1, the regional working team for Quebec will be integrated into the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) research sector. The working team will coordinate with various parties at the local, regional and national level and provide First Nations decision makers with the information they need to move forward with the implementation of the regional centre.

A national coordination team has been set up and is working out of the First Nations Information Governance Centre. The team will provide support to and liaise with each of the regions to ensure efforts are aligned and expertise is pooled in the lead-up to the rollout of the network linking the regional centres.

Collaboration with a regional work group

The team assigned to the regional information governance strategy will rely heavily on the input of a regional work group made up of representatives from the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) commissions and First Nations regional organizations.

The purpose of this group will be to ensure the working team is advancing in the right direction and to consider ways forward that will make it possible to introduce or improve processes and structures that will strengthen and revitalize information governance. The committee's involvement will be ongoing throughout the first phase of the strategy.

Three main focuses

The following three main focuses guiding the efforts in Phase 1 will be addressed jointly and simultaneously.

FOCUS A • COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This will involve reaching out to communities, regional commissions and organizations, as well as First Nations leaders in Quebec to obtain their buy-in with regard to the regional information governance strategy so that everyone is thinking and working together. A communication and engagement strategy will be developed, and outreach and discussion sessions will be held with First Nations communities and organizations.

FOCUS B • GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF THE REGIONAL CENTRE

Focus B will be on figuring out the governance structure of the regional information governance centre, including the decision-making model, accountability framework and legal structure. This will entail a review of the features, contexts and circumstances specific to related organizations around the world. This report will help guide the development of the governance structure so that it is aligned with the issues, needs and priorities of First Nations communities and organizations.

FOCUS C • REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION ASSET STEWARDSHIP AND GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

Focus C will involve drafting a report on how the information assets of First Nations in Quebec are currently managed and governed. This regional overview will be prepared using detailed information gathered from First Nations communities and organizations as well as their partners. This will then be used to:

- Identify needs and priorities in terms of information stewardship and governance.
- Determine the services offered by the regional centre and the corresponding expertise that will be required.
- Compile an inventory of data and knowledge concerning First Nations to set out the priorities for the data to be repatriated by the regional information governance centre.

Throughout this first phase, First Nations communities and organizations will play a central role in the brainstorming process and work together to put the foundations in place for a regional centre that services their needs. The working team will therefore be responsible for facilitating these joint efforts and supporting First Nations in their analyses.

PHASES 2.3

As Phase 1 progresses, the main thrusts for the next two phases will come to light and the focuses moving forward will be determined by First Nations.

CONCLUSION

This is a critical juncture for First Nations. International, national and regional stakeholders are all unequivocal in their views about the importance of First Nations information governance, data sovereignty and self-determination.

For First Nations leaders and the population, better access to and greater control over data pertaining to them comes with multiple benefits. Never has the saying “Information is power” been more relevant. This power belongs not only to those who control information but to those who wield it wisely. As First Nations leaders are faced with decisions about the wellness and future of their communities, and how to best serve their needs, the opportunities that come hand in hand with information governance must not go untapped.

For more information about the regional information governance strategy of First Nations in Quebec, contact the FNQLHSSC at info@cssspnql.com.

FURTHER READING

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