



"In our language, it is embedded, our philosophy of life and our technologies. There is a reason why we want our languages preserved and taught to our children - it is our survival."

Dr. Burt McKay, Nisga'a language teacher and Elder.

02/03

INFORMATION PACKAGE



02/03

Message from the Chair



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation (FPCF), I thank you for your strong interest in the important work that we are doing towards the revitalization of Aboriginal languages, arts and cultures.

Many of our Aboriginal languages are in danger of becoming extinct and we must work with our fluent speakers to archive them with the hope that they will be revitalized and spoken amongst our people now and for all generations to come. We have a web-based educational tool to help us do this.

FirstVoices' innovative multi-media environment will facilitate the archiving of any Aboriginal language by the speakers and guardians of that language. The situation is extremely urgent and this work must be undertaken while there are still fluent speakers able to contribute their irreplaceable knowledge. This suite of tools will evolve to accommodate individual community visions, while not requiring constant reinvention.

The FPCF's structure and history have shaped our strong connections with grass roots language, arts and culture initiatives. We are being recognized Canada-wide by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities for being, as put by Minister Sheila Copps, an 'avante garde model organization'.

The FPCF is a unique non-political Aboriginal directed non-profit society devoted to languages, arts and cultures. All of our work is done in conjunction with our sister organization, the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC), an Aboriginal provincial crown corporation. The FPHLCC has been delivering support to Aboriginal communities in the province of British Columbia for the past 11 years.

Thank you,

Elmer Derrick
FPCF Chair

FirstVoices Overview

"...indigenous languages in many parts of the world are verbal botanies. That's precisely why the loss of such languages with rich detailed knowledge about the environment is such a tragedy.....as in the case of species, languages urgently need documentation and monitoring" — Daniel Nettle & Suzanne Romaine, authors of "Vanishing Voices."

INTRODUCTION TO FIRSTVOICES.COM

The FirstVoices project is a set of web-based tools that enable Aboriginal language speakers to archive text, sound, pictures and video and present these resources in quality language teaching materials online. The FirstVoices project is an initiative of the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, a Canadian Aboriginal non-profit organization dedicated to Aboriginal language revitalization programs and services.

FirstVoices.com was designed by an international team of Aboriginal language teachers, linguists and educators as an easy, interesting and cost effective way to record and teach Indigenous language for anyone with access to a computer and the Internet.



FirstVoices.com screenshot

HOW FIRSTVOICES WORKS

At the core of the FirstVoices Web application is a sophisticated relational database housed on a powerful web server. In Phase I of FirstVoices, each language collection consists of an alphabet, dictionary and phrase book. The alphabet provides the written character set for a language, with sound files for each character. The dictionary provides a word list, with translations, definitions, sounds, images and video. The Phrase Book contains every-day conversational language with related text, sound, image and video files to support language learning.

USER CATAGORIES

Three categories of user have different levels of access to the FirstVoices application.

1. Language Recorder

A language Recorder is assigned by a community to collect and record the text, sound, image and video files of their language. Collaboration between fluent speakers and technically capable students from the local Aboriginal community are nurtured through the FirstVoices Training Program.

Language files are collected and digitized using a variety of tools including video camcorders, computers and digital sound recording devices. Once captured and edited, these files are uploaded to the FirstVoices database where they are archived in a language resource customized to the needs of the owners of the language. The tools for uploading files are designed to be user friendly, with tutorials enabling those unfamiliar with the technology to quickly grasp their function. A Language Recorder can customize the FirstVoices language resource for their community with

FirstVoices Overview Con't...

language name, art and logos to give the resource a unique look and feel for their users. Tools are also provided to enable the input of non-standard writing systems, including the unique orthographies of some language groups. Using the Unicode Standard*, FirstVoices enables users to both input and read virtually any orthography from any platform or browser.

Innovative developments in this field by FirstVoices are creating unprecedented web-based Indigenous language resource access.

The most valuable tool in the FirstVoices application allows users to record and play the sound of language speakers, to ensure that languages are passed on to the next generation by fluent speakers. It is imperative that FirstVoices is made available to indigenous language communities as soon as possible, while fluent speakers are still available to record their language. FirstVoices is also capable of storing and presenting data from archived recordings.

All Aboriginal language data entered in the FirstVoices database remains the copyright property of the language owners. An Aboriginal user group wishing to restrict access to their language resource to members of their own community can do so by assigning passwords to their users and excluding public access.

2. Registered User

A registered user of FirstVoices is able to customize the interface of their FirstVoices site to remember settings during their first access to the site so that on subsequent visits their interface automatically defaults to their choice of settings. As FirstVoices language teaching applications are developed to complement the Phase I tools, these applications will also be designed to 'remember' a registered user and provide feedback on progress and competency levels during language study.



FirstVoices training session, August 2002

3. Guest User

A guest user of FirstVoices can logon to FirstVoices.com and access one Aboriginal language at a time. Guest access is restricted to read-only use of the application to see and hear language files stored in the database. A guest user is not able to customize FirstVoices settings.

*Unicode Standard

Instead of relying on fonts, which do not always work on different computer platforms and browsers, the Unicode Standard is a new way of displaying text on computers, using a system of standardized computer code, so that all letters and characters are recognized by all computers. For more information about Unicode, please visit: <http://www.unicode.org/>

FirstVoices Overview Con't...

FOSTERING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

FirstVoices, as a web-based tool, fosters intergenerational interaction between Elders and youth. This intergenerational communication is essential to the survival of Aboriginal languages.

It is well known that young children are more apt to learn a language but as they get older it becomes increasingly harder. The Elders are the keepers of the language, culture and traditions. Today the Elders who are fluent in their language must spend time with the youth teaching them and encouraging them to speak their language.

As technology is second nature for most young people today it provides an excellent opportunity for a two-way mentorship between a youth and an Elder. The Elder can provide the words or phrases, the youth can record then enter this data in a multimedia format into the FirstVoices application. This data can then be expanded upon and utilized by the community to reactivate their language for generations to come.



Youth and Elder at the UVic FV training session

SUMMARY

The FirstVoices Project represents an excellent opportunity for governments, corporations, senior educational institutions and NGO's to combine their resources in one outstanding educational vehicle designed to reverse the loss of Aboriginal languages and cultures. A number of important features place the FirstVoices Project in a league of its own:

- a "Made in Canada" solution with wide appeal among language teachers and linguists
- fiscally responsible, professional management with carefully supported long term plan
- a design team representing Aboriginal communities, language specialists and linguists
- a leading-edge software development team
- highly creative and experienced on-line learning resource developers
- an experienced and committed "Train-the-Trainer" program and delivery team
- sound and growing support from various levels of government and major corporations
- strong interest and support from American and Australian Aboriginal organizations

PROJECT SUPPORTERS

Province of British Columbia
Heritage Canada
Shaw Communications Inc.
Secwepemc Cultural Education Society
University of Victoria
Centre for Education Information (CEISS)
BC Arts Council
Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (San Diego, USA)

National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation
Apple Canada
Saanich Native Heritage Society
University of California San Diego
Simon Fraser University
B.C. Museums Association

Visit the FirstVoices Aboriginal Language Resource at: www.FirstVoices.com.

FPCF History and Value Statement

British Columbia is home to over thirty languages and dialects making it one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the world. All of the languages spoken in BC are critically endangered. Many could disappear without record.

We would like to invite you to become a partner in an organization that can and is making a difference - SERVING BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FIRST PEOPLES:

The First Peoples' Cultural Foundation

(www.fpcf.ca)

Directed by an Aboriginal council comprised of respected leaders from across British Columbia, The First Peoples' Cultural Foundation (FPCF) and the First Peoples' Heritage, Language & Culture Council (FPHLCC) is intent on providing resources and support for the revitalization of Aboriginal languages, traditions and cultures in the province.

The resources and best practices that we are developing are being shared with other Indigenous people worldwide who are also working to archive, protect and revitalize their languages and cultures.

Value Statement

The First Peoples' Cultural Foundation is committed to the documentation, protection and revitalization of the full diversity of Aboriginal languages, arts and culture. These links to our cultural heritage, and the living expression of our identities, are integral to the health of all members of our communities, as well as the well-being of our region and world.

The FPCF will implement and support initiatives, which:

1. **Rekindle B.C. Aboriginal languages** through the respectful documentation and development of educational programs and tools.
2. **Support the continuation of traditional B.C. Aboriginal art forms** as well as the expression of contemporary Aboriginal artists.
3. **Develop and share language tools, programs and best practices** to sustain linguistic and biodiversity for the benefit of all people.
4. **Ensure understanding** of the local, regional and global value of these endangered Aboriginal languages and cultures **and secure support** for these vital human connections to our natural world.



About the FPHLCC



FPCF Delegation meet with Minister Coppins, November 2002

Overview

The First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC) was formed as a Provincial Crown Corporation in 1990 to administer the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Program, a program established by the government of British Columbia. (www.fpcf.ca)

The Council consists of nine representatives elected by tribal councils throughout BC. In addition, the Council maintains three seats for representatives from urban Aboriginal organizations, the business community, and the Provincial Government.

Enabling Legislation and Mandate

The First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Act establishes the mandate of the Council as follows:

- To provide funding to cultural and language programs.
- To support and advise government on initiatives, programs and services relating to Aboriginal heritage, language and culture.
- To advise government on the preservation and fostering of Aboriginal languages and other aspects of cultural development of Aboriginal peoples throughout British Columbia.

The First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Act can be viewed at http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/F/96147_01.htm

Value and Goals

- To provide resources which maintain BC Aboriginal language, art & culture programs.
- To receive, manage and distribute funds and property of every nature and kind from any source to further its goals.
- To support and advise BC Ministries on every initiative and service related to Aboriginal languages, arts and culture.
- To advise BC Government on the preservation and fostering of BC Aboriginal heritage, language, art and culture.
- To report its findings to the BC Government.

Contact Information

The **First Peoples' Cultural Foundation** is located on the traditional territories of the Songhees & Esquimalt First Nations at:

Lower Main, 31 Bastion Square
Victoria, BC, Canada V8W 1J1
Phone (250) 361-3456
Fax (250) 361-3467
www.fpcf.ca

For more information on the **Language Programs** please contact Deanna Daniels, Language Programs Coordinator (deanna@fpcf.ca).

For more information on the **Art Programs** please contact Cathi Charles Wherry, Art Programs Coordinator (cathi@fpcf.ca).

For more information on the **FirstVoices Program** please contact Peter Brand, FirstVoices Coordinator (Peter@fpcf.ca) or Tamara Knott, Project Manager (tknott@ceiss.org).

For all other inquiries, the **FPCF Development Team** will be pleased to meet with you to discuss the many opportunities for your valued patronage (info@fpcf.ca).



FPCF staff with Dr. David Suzuki during his recent visit, December 2002

FPCF & FirstVoices in the PRESS

News Articles (copies attached):

Web technology helps preserve, promote Indigenous languages Windspeaker, March 2002

Keeping Language Alive, Times Colonist, April 2002

First Nations Aboriginal languages live at Web site, Times Colonist, May 2002

Effort to preserve aboriginal languages honored, Times Colonist, December 2002

High-tech making heritage preservation possible, The Province, March 2003

Technology helps preserve native tongues, Globe and Mail, March 2003

Further Media attention includes features on NBC (San Diego, USA); CBC Radio; The New VI; The Daily (Shaw); The Times Colonist; The Weekender; The New Canoe (The New VI, APTN).

Copies of the additional listed media attention items may be available through the FPCF. Please contact the office by phone (250-361-3456) or via email (info@fpcf.ca) to request your copy.



Peter Brand and John Elliott recently received the Community Leadership Award from the University of Victoria for their work with FirstVoices, December, 2002.