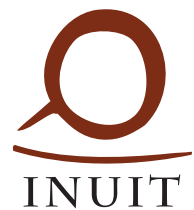


# Assessing, Monitoring and Promoting the Vitality of Arctic Indigenous Languages

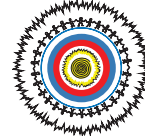
**Arctic Indigenous Languages Vitality Initiative  
during the Canadian chairmanship 2013–2015**

Report presented to the  
**Arctic Council's Sustainable  
Development Working Group**



**Inuit Circumpolar Council**  
February 2015





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This report could not have been possible without the support of the Arctic states in the Arctic Council, through its Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), and to whom this report is addressed. Please note that the views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Arctic Council or its Sustainable Development Working Group.

# INTRODUCTION

This report to the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) outlines the key activities and accomplishments of the Arctic Council's multi-year pan-Arctic project, Arctic Indigenous Languages Vitality Initiative from 2013 to February 2015.

The project's genesis lies in the recognition by the indigenous peoples organisations of the Arctic Council, the Permanent Participants, of the need for an indigenous-driven project to assess, monitor and promote the vitality of the indigenous languages found across the Arctic.

Based on the recommendations which came out of the Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium held in Tromsø, Norway in 2008, a proposal was developed for the SDWG by ICC in consultation with the other five Permanent Participants. With Canada, the USA and the Kingdom of Denmark as the Arctic State co-leads for the project, it was endorsed by the Arctic Council's Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) in November 2011.

Since the project's inception, ICC Canada has served as the project manager but with the strong support and collaboration of the other five Permanent Participants.

The project represents an important highlight of Canada's chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 2013 to 2015.

This report comprises a background to the development of the project (Chapter 2), the strategic and management approach that underpins its implementation (Chapter 3), highlights of the key activities undertaken over the reporting period (Chapter 4) and concludes with observations of the project's significance and next steps.

The Arctic Indigenous Languages Vitality Initiative is indigenous-driven. The project represents an important highlight of Canada's chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 2013-2015.

## BACKGROUND

The indigenous peoples organizations of the Arctic Council – Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Saami Council and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North – represent over 700,000 indigenous individuals living across the Arctic. Their indigenous languages, inherently interwoven with culture, heritage and environment, have enabled them to cope and thrive as their lifestyles and lands undergo drastic changes.

While the vitality of indigenous languages is evident in some Arctic indigenous communities, updated data and analysis is needed to understand better the trends and threats to the more than 50 indigenous languages across the Arctic, a number of which cross state boundaries. Appropriate action, policy and program development to reverse indigenous language loss where it is occurring depends on understanding the languages' current vitality and most significant factors contributing to vitality or loss.

The Arctic Indigenous Languages Vitality Initiative, also known as Assessing Monitoring and Promoting the Vitality of Arctic Indigenous Languages, comes out of the Permanent Participants' recognition that a pan-Arctic assessment and promotion of indigenous languages was urgently needed and should be undertaken under the auspices of the Arctic Council.

The Arctic Council had already supported indigenous-driven language initiatives as mandated through the Ministers' 2006 Salekhard Declaration. The Arctic Indigenous

The indigenous peoples organizations of the Arctic Council represent over 700,000 indigenous individuals living across the Arctic. Their indigenous languages, inherently interwoven with culture, heritage and environment, have enabled them to cope and thrive as their lifestyles and lands undergo drastic changes.

Ministers in their 2006 Salekhard Declaration gave support to indigenous language initiatives.

Languages Symposium held in Tromsø, Norway, in 2008 and organised by ICC Canada and locally hosted by the Saami Council was both endorsed and supported by the Arctic Council. Based on the recommendations coming out of the Tromsø symposium, a 2009–2010 Scoping a Way Forward study was completed and ICC Canada developed, in consultation with the other Permanent Participants, a proposal to the SDWG for a multi-year project on Assessing, Monitoring and Promoting the Vitality of Arctic Indigenous Languages that was officially endorsed by the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) in November 2011.


Soon after, project collaborators put out a call for potential steering committee members and generated further interest in the project. This led to an information and planning meeting in the margins of the April 2012 Montreal International Polar Year meeting.

ICC Canada has served as the project manager and was the de facto project lead since its inception, providing the bulk of the planning and framework development, as well as implementing many of its key activities. The Canadian Government, through AANDC and Canadian Heritage, has been the project's major funder. The USA government, through its National Science Foundation, provided funding for a series of three workshops held in Ottawa in 2012 to develop the project's framework while the Swedish Government funded a Saami Council-organized workshop in August 2014. The Kingdom of Denmark, through the Greenland Languages' Secretariat has provided in-kind support to the project. The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation have also contributed some funding.

Building on the momentum and success of past and ongoing circumpolar language initiatives, the project is a comprehensive program of research, communications, networking, advocacy and action. Its purpose is to identify priority areas for action and to highlight revitalization initiatives which are having a positive impact on language vitality. The emphasis of this indigenous-driven project is on collaboration and building strong partnership with the academic community. The project recognizes the importance of fostering communication among the various actors (such as indigenous peoples' organizations doing languages work and linguists), and further recognizing the existence of various, and perhaps, competing methodologies employed by linguists doing languages work in the Arctic.

Indigenously driven and managed, the project is putting a particular emphasis on working with Arctic indigenous youth and elders. This is based on the understanding of the critical importance elders play in passing on their language particularly in communities where few fluent speakers are still alive. It also recognizes the fundamental reality that unless indigenous youth embrace their own indigenous language, its future is at risk. Fortunately, there are numerous examples where youth are increasingly embracing their languages.

As an indigenous-driven project, working in collaboration with the academic community, it was important from the outset that it had an agreed approach and framework to move forward in achieving the project's objectives. Very soon after getting the SAO's endorsement, a series of three workshops hosted in Ottawa by the ICC in June 2012 led



to the development of three committees focusing on a) assessing the status of Arctic indigenous languages; b) assessing language policies; and c) assessing the state of language acquisition.

A steering committee was established bringing together representatives from the Permanent Participants and academics to oversee the direction of the project and follow-up workshops were held in Toronto, Canada in 2013 and Guovdageaidnu, Norway in 2014. An Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium was then held in Ottawa in February 2015 which enabled the committees to report on the work they had achieved since their establishment and for the project's stakeholders to identify the gaps and ways forward for the project.

A vital element of the work has been the communications strategy which was developed early in the life of the project to ensure information about the project, its research and findings were accessible to all the stakeholders right across the Arctic including through social media.

The details of these key approaches, activities and outcomes are discussed in detail in the following chapters.

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

To achieve the project's goals and objectives, an overall strategic approach to the management of the project's work has been developed to underpin the partnerships with other key stakeholders particularly linguists and other relevant academics.

A two-pronged or "pillar" management approach was adopted with Pillar 1 focused on research and Pillar 2 on community. In reality, however, the activities of both pillars overlap and inform each other in many places. A total of 18 activities were identified and developed as the project's proposed outcomes. Figure 1 on the following page shows a simplified representation of the project management structure.

Community-driven activities are undertaken alongside academic-focussed work.

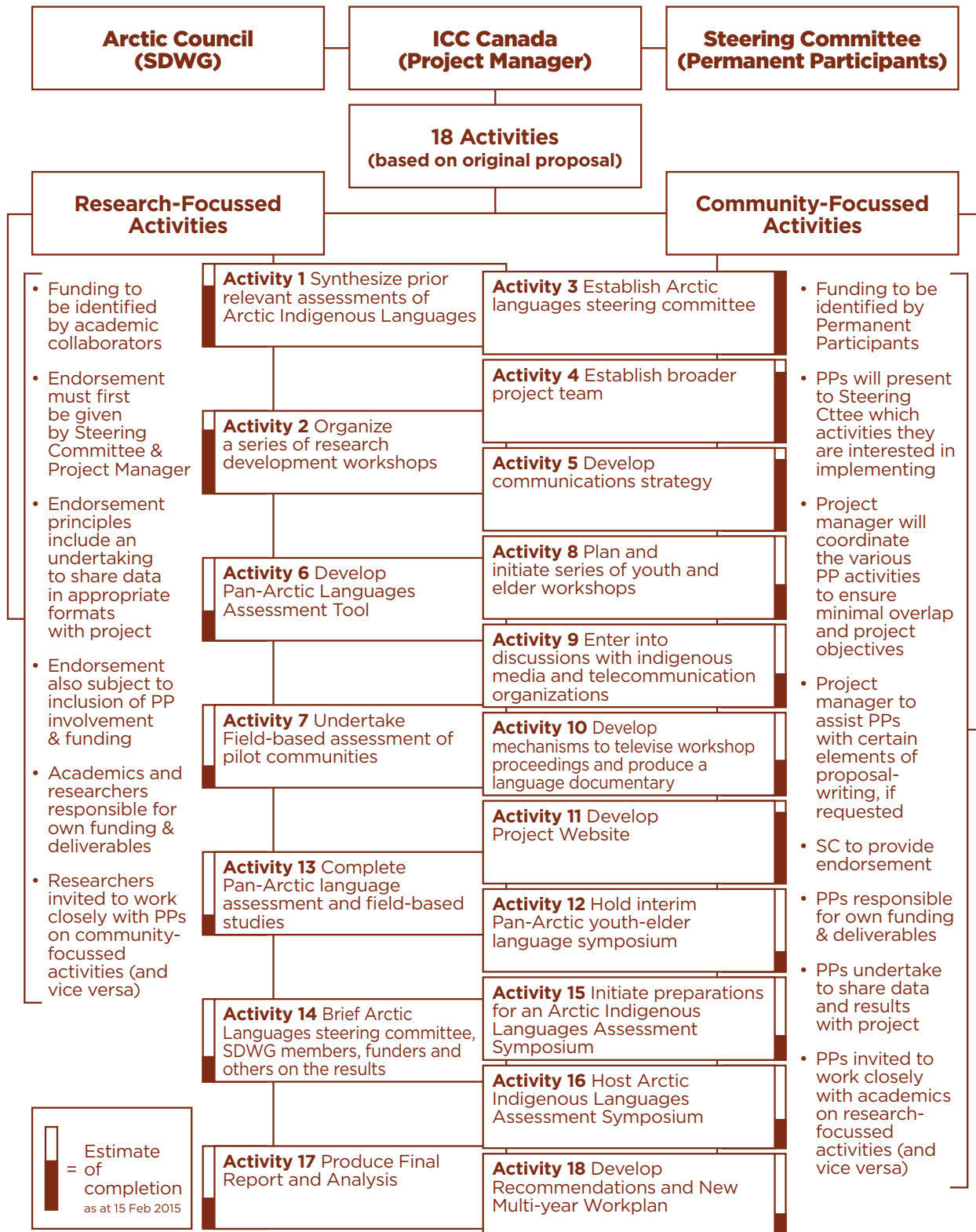
Funding provided by the Canadian Government as well as the USA, Sweden and others have been essential to moving the languages vitality initiative forward.

As the project evolved, some activities were merged while others were expanded. A table which sets out the status of the activities (see Annex – Status of Project Activities) shows a first attempt at this re-framing of project management. It is expected a further re-framing of the management of this multi-activity initiative will be undertaken shaped by feedback after the Canadian chairmanship is complete.

The indigenous-driven management structure has also been an important way of supporting the realization of the indigenous-focussed objectives. While the project was sponsored by three Arctic Council states (Canada, USA and the Kingdom of Denmark) as required by Arctic Council rules, ICC was asked to take on the project lead at the Arctic Council table and "on behalf of" Canada. The Canadian office of ICC (ICC Canada) was identified by ICC as the lead office for the management of the project. As an indigenous-driven project, ICC set up a steering committee with predominant representation from the six Permanent Participant organizations to guide the project's work.

Figure 1

## Managing, Endorsing and Funding the Activities of: Assessing, Monitoring and Promoting Arctic Indigenous Languages



The role of the steering committee is to give overall guidance to the project manager (ICC Canada) and other project players. The committee has met on a regular basis, using conference call facilities as well as face-to-face opportunities linked to other project events.

As a result of the funding provided by the Canadian Government (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada - AANDC), ICC has been able to reach out to the other Arctic Council Permanent Participants, to bring them along to play more substantial roles in the project, which is essential to the success of the initiative long term. For example, ICC reached out to the Saami Council to plan a research workshop for Saami language experts because they had been unable to attend the 2012 research development workshops. ICC worked with the Saami Council to develop a proposal to the Swedish Government which agreed to fund the workshop which was held in Norway in August 2014. ICC again worked with the Saami Council in early 2015 to assist them in developing a proposal to the Norwegian government for funding assistance to support the Saami Council's ongoing contribution to the project.

ICC also expended great effort to engage and brief the new RAIPON president after their former SDWG representative unexpectedly left, and to request that RAIPON appoint a steering committee member, which has recently happened.

The strong partnership among the six Permanent Participants was highlighted at the 2015 Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium with 38 representatives from all six attending the three-day event. These representatives were assisted by invited experts and policy makers, in total 90 participants attended.

Beyond the Permanent Participants, ICC has reached out to other potential partners notably Canada's National Film Board (NFB) to work with them on filming either a documentary on Arctic indigenous languages and/or promoting the project. This work was to have included possible filming of youth/elder workshops being held across the Arctic. Discussions with the NFB are continuing.

In addition to the Canadian Government, other Arctic States have also played important roles in supporting the project's work. The USA's National Science Foundation made a significant contribution which enabled the 2012 Ottawa workshops to be more comprehensive than originally envisaged and the Swedish Government funded the 2014 Saami research workshop in Norway. Aside from the Arctic States, the Gordon Foundation has also taken an active interest in the project providing seed funding to develop the framework for the youth-elder workshops. In-kind support has been provided by several other supporters including the University of Chicago, Toronto's York University, the Government of Nunavut, the Greenland Languages Secretariat and the University of Alaska - Fairbanks.

## **ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES**

Although the project has had an ambitious and extensive range of activities, much of what was originally envisaged has been achieved while there have been some changes in light of feedback and to fit the resources available.

A particular challenge relates to the early under-estimation of the work involved in the assessment processes linked to language status, policies and acquisition. As a result, it has been necessary to re-calibrate some of the approaches being applied.

Another important challenge has been the difficulty which Russian contributors continue to face in their efforts to participate in Canada-based events.

Another way of addressing some challenges is to ask the Permanent Participants (as they relate to the vitality of their languages) to formulate their own policies on languages. This may be addressed in future phases of the project.

Finally, while the project management structure has served the project well until now, we believe a re-framing of the way in which the project is managed will be necessary given the current stage of the project.

## ACTIVITY UPDATES

Over the 2013–2015 reporting period which coincides with Canada’s chairing of the Arctic Council, there has been a range of significant activities undertaken which will be described in this section in detail notably:

- February 2015 Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium
  - Findings of the three committees
  - Symposium outcomes
- Saami Council workshop, Norway, August 2014
- Involvement of Youth and Elders
- Implementing the Communications strategy

### **A. 2015 ARCTIC INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ASSESSMENT SYMPOSIUM**

One of the major events of the project was the Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium hosted by ICC in Ottawa from 10-12 February 2015. This symposium brought together 90 participants including 38 representatives from the six Arctic indigenous people’s organizations as well as four Arctic States – Canada, USA, Sweden and Kingdom of Denmark – and a number of the academics and other experts who have been working with the project. The aim of the symposium was to hear back from the three research committees which had been established at the 2012 Ottawa research development workshops and to identify gaps, opportunities and approaches to be addressed by the project in its future work. To recall, the three committees had

Three committees have been established. The first assesses the status of Arctic indigenous languages, the second focuses on policies and the third on language acquisition.

been established to 1) assess the status of Arctic indigenous languages; 2) assess existing indigenous policies at all levels – international, national and local; and 3) assess the status of acquiring the language.

A summary of i) the research committees' reports to the symposium and ii) the symposium outcomes follows. (Further details on these findings and conclusions will be available in a separate Symposium Proceedings document.)

## **i) Findings of the three research committees**

### Assessing Language Status Committee

This committee was charged with looking at the development of an indigenous-defined tool for assessing language vitality across the Arctic, gathering existing methods and reframing them in terms of indigenous values. One of the key elements of this work is assessment through collaborative evaluation and consensus rather than traditional language vitality assessment metrics which involve an individual's self-assessment in the absence of other in-put. In addition, the committee has been collecting existing assessments of Arctic indigenous language vitality. (More details will be included in the Proceedings of the 2015 Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium and posted on [www.arcticlanguages.com](http://www.arcticlanguages.com).)

The goals of the metric are to assess the state of Arctic indigenous languages that is relevant to, productive for, and respectful of indigenous communities.

#### **Summary of report by Assessing Language Status Committee**

co-chairs: Jeela Palluq-Cloutier and Lenore Grenoble

Because of the vastness of the Arctic region, the multitude of indigenous languages, and the diversity of each community's economic and political profile, there is no one-size-fits-all assessment metric that would be relevant for each community. Given this, the metric developed can be adapted to fit the needs, desires, and cultural contexts of these different communities. In this sense, the metric is more a template than a finished product. The metric will be coupled with an online question bank, through which communities can alter the assessment metric, and adapt it to fit their needs. Ideally, as the metric is carried out, the question bank will grow through input from different communities. Important questions of Internet access arise here, and will need to be addressed.

The goals of this metric are to assess the state of indigenous Arctic languages in a way that is relevant to, productive for, and respectful of these indigenous communities; to identify gaps in usage, accessibility of resources, and transmission of the language in question; bring these gaps to the attention of the community; help predict what

a realistic linguistic future is for different communities; and connect indigenous communities with each other to foster the sharing of resources and ideas.

The assessment metric helps communities collect information on language acquisition including how many languages are learned, who teaches them and who learns them as well as available resources. Networking – who speaks the language and with whom – is also looked at as well as domains – when and where the language is spoken – along with the level of multilingualism in the community and across individuals. A combination of closed and open questions facilitates the collection of qualitative and quantitative data.

The pilot metric is a nascent model of an indigenously defined metric, and it is our intention that it will be further developed using indigenous principles and priorities. It uses categories we hope will be broadly useful and legible to indigenous communities through:

- a focus on language as embodied and as used between people;
- acknowledgment of multilingualism as the default scenario in the majority of communities;
- recognition that not all languages are written; and
- recognition that not all futures will look the same for each language, and further, that there is no single ideal.

Communities will have input into the design and administration of their assessment metric, with the aid of the question bank. The results will be disseminated openly in the communities, and community members will referee and review the results. The designing, implementation, and reviewing of results is an integral part of this metric, and the process itself will affect attitudes & discourse in the community.

As this assessment metric is piloted, the following questions should be addressed:

- Should the questions be asked orally, or can responders write their answers?
- In what language will the questionnaire be administered?
- Who carries out the assessment of the result?
- Acknowledging that communities are not homogenous entities, how can equitable representation be established?

The metric is not an end result, but part of a larger, ongoing process of evaluation, feedback, action, and re-evaluation. The metric is therefore only one part in the process of taking stock of the indigenous languages of the Arctic. Future tasks include aiding communities in developing resources to address the gaps they identify and developing a question bank resource, or a similar wiki-type resource that communities can access with ease.

Work on the metric was informed by consulting with a wide range of existing surveys, including We Are Our Language (Profile of Yukon First Nation Languages) (2004), the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic, the Arctic Social Indicators report, and assessments undertaken in Hawaii and New Zealand as part of language revitalization

efforts, to name just a few. The committee consulted published scholarship on assessment methodologies and sociolinguistic interviews. We discussed general methodologies with stakeholders for their input on both content and form, and from these discussions derived the assessment tool. The draft questionnaire developed by the committee now needs to be pilot tested and further developed.

### Assessing Language Policies Committee

The second committee was charged with assessing pan-Arctic language policies, at the international, national and local level, and their implementation. In addition the committee was to compile language policy documents for trans-national organizations, including those servicing Arctic regions, international organizations with policies and recommendations targeting indigenous peoples and those coming from the Permanent Participants and other indigenous organizations. (More details will be included to the Proceedings of the 2015 Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium and posted on [www.arcticlanguages.com](http://www.arcticlanguages.com).)

Arctic indigenous language vitality and human rights are inextricably linked.

#### **Summary of report by Assessing Language Policies Committee**

Carl Christian Olsen (Puju), chair

The committee prefaced its summary of existing language policies with a reference to the human rights instruments for the protection of indigenous languages including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Indigenous Summit of 2014, as well as various UNESCO instruments relevant to indigenous languages (Please refer to Annex B for a partial list of documents consulted by the policy assessment committee). The committee also referred to the information that had been obtained through the Survey of Living Conditions in The Arctic (SLICA) including the findings that support of indigenous languages would lead to specific language policies as well as the need to establish institutions to implement policies. Elements of language policies were also considered including the standard usage of language in script, local recognition, dialogue across the generations and changing attitudes to one's own language.

Specific issues relevant to the implementation of language policy were listed including the recognition of language as a political issue. Other issues included legislative approaches, literacy, the use of media, the development of curricula and the availability of kindergarten teachers in the indigenous language.

Reference was made to the Greenland situation where a very high proportion of the population speaks the indigenous language, Greenlandic. The language is supported by the establishment of several committees dealing with the dynamics of the language, indigenous geographical names, indigenous personal names and curricula. Technology

is also advanced in supporting the use of Greenlandic. One important discussion taking place in Canada now is the issue of a unified writing system for Canadian Inuit. The territorial governments play an important role in this process.

The committee further noted the progress made in that Inuit languages now have official status in Greenland and Nunavut. The Alaska Native Languages Act recognizes the official status of indigenous languages in the State of Alaska. Participants at the Symposium expressed the need to have indigenous languages officially recognized in Canada on a par with English and French.

Overall, the committee had concluded that indigenous languages were not limited to expressing indigenous culture alone; that they were capable of expressing anything if developed as a complete language. That supported the determination to further develop the language to include all domains of language. And the complete recognition promotes the access to and tolerance of other languages. The impact of globalization on indigenous language use was also noted with the finding that it was important to assert one's own identity through the use of one's indigenous language.

### Assessing Language Acquisition Committee

The third committee was responsible for reporting on language teaching and reference materials with a particular focus on certain categories of potential users of such materials:

- language learners versus language pedagogues
- heritage language learners versus other language learners
- adult learners versus children
- online learners (often without access to a community of speakers)
- school teachers, university teachers, and community teachers (those engaged in less formal language instruction)
- researchers, linguists

A collection of electronic reference materials and language teaching resources directed toward online language learners has been placed on the project website. (More details will be included in the Proceedings of the 2015 Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium and posted on [www.arcticlanguages.com](http://www.arcticlanguages.com).)

The committee concluded that each community is different in their language needs and face different challenges.

### **Summary of report by Assessing Language Acquisition Committee**

Hinsinlai' Sikorksi and Yaayuk Alvanna Stimpfle, co-chairs

The committee's original areas of interest in looking at the state of acquisition are drawn from the 2012 Ottawa workshops: resources for learning as a first and second language, resources for adult learning, teacher training, additional written material online or in text, and community based learning. The committee looked at existing data on language acquisition – both from a learning and teaching perspective with a focus on:

- first language learning (language nests, intergenerational language transmission)
- secondary language learning (schools, master-apprentice)
- resources (dictionaries, grammars, booklets, recordings, media)
- teacher training

The goal was to research the status of the items in the Checklist for each Arctic Indigenous language, adapted from the languages listed on the project website in the Language Learning Resource section and from the Appendix of the report of the Ottawa 2012 meeting. This inventory itself was adapted from the chapter on Linguistic Diversity in the Arctic Biodiversity Report (Barry et al. 2013).

An overview of results has been detailed in the committee's full report which can be found as an Annex to the report of the Proceedings of the 2015 Ottawa Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium. In summary, in terms of reference materials, the most readily available resources include dictionaries in print or in digital format. Websites are also easy to find and contain descriptions of the languages and some linguistic information, but targeted at linguistic, and not language learners or teachers.

The committee concluded that each community is different in their language needs and face different challenges. Some challenges may include a lack of public awareness and the need to cultivate broad-based support. Other challenges include the lack of meeting space, people's existing levels of language skills and backgrounds, teacher recruitment and retention and the time allotted for teaching. The committee identified a need throughout the Arctic to provide substantive teacher training in both first (L1) and second (L2) language teaching methodologies for Arctic indigenous languages. Information for L1 and L2 classes for specific languages has been difficult to find when searching online or digital databases. The difficulty in locating such information suggests a need to make materials and information more readily findable and accessible to communities.

## ii) Symposium Outcomes

Opening the symposium was the chair of ICC, J. Okalik Eegeesiak, who recalled the centrality of indigenous languages to the culture, heritage and future of indigenous peoples across the Arctic. She reminded participants that indigenous languages were the medium for interpreting the unique Arctic world. This view was taken up by the SAO Chair, Vincent Rigby, who observed that indigenous languages were a key component of the Arctic's identity.

Much of the symposium was dedicated to hearing the reports of the three committees (summarized above). But each of these sessions also provided opportunities for a range of speakers, many representing the Permanent Participants as well as academics, to

give presentations on their own work and to highlight the lessons, successes and barriers that characterized their work on indigenous languages.

During the session focused on assessing the status of languages, the symposium was given an insight into the lessons which had come out of the Yukon Government's assessment in 2003 of its First Nations languages fluency project, the assumptions that had been made in developing that assessment approach and the ways in which it should have been approached. Another discussant talked about the fundamental importance of archiving the array of material linked to each indigenous language not just to preserve it but also to improve access. Another speaker highlighted the quantitative changes in the Saami language situation in Norway and the difficulties in determining what was happening because of the lack of reliable data.

In the open discussion that followed the session, participants shared their observations of the challenges that the pan-Arctic assessment would face, drawing on their own experiences of language and other Arctic assessments. Several highlighted the pitfalls in taking a uniform methodological approach across the Arctic; that it was important to recognize that what was appropriate to one region would not necessarily be appropriate to another. Suggestions included applying a two-step tool to support communities in assessing their own languages. At the same time, it would be important to have a methodology that would provide information that could be compared with other communities and across time.

Presenters in the session looking at existing language policies provided insights into the experiences of different regions in their efforts to support indigenous languages. The Hawaiian revitalization program was cited as one of the strongest programs in the USA, with Alaskan experts visiting Hawaii' to see their practices firsthand. The Canadian perspective was divided into the national, territorial and regional perspectives. Another presenter looked at the role of language policy across Sápmi, the Saami homeland stretching across, Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula of the Russian Federation. This presenter argued that language rights did not necessarily safeguard the future of the languages but safeguards the right to fight for indigenous languages adding that language laws and declarations didn't speak. The most important thing was to speak the language.

ICC Chair, J. Okalik Eegeesiak, reminded participants that indigenous languages were the medium for interpreting the unique Arctic world. This view was taken up by the SAO chair, Vincent Rigby, who observed that indigenous languages were a key component of the Arctic's identity.

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Addressing the psychological barriers to speaking one's own indigenous language was another area highlighted.

Speakers in the session reporting on the state of language acquisition included an insightful look at the transgenerational trauma inflicted by the loss of language fluency by the Skolt Saami who had endured major upheaval and loss of their traditional lands during the 20th century and who had adopted a negative attitude to their language. Language revitalization wasn't just about the language, it was also community building, bridging generations as younger generations reclaimed their language and elders could again feel valued. The efforts of indigenous peoples in Russia to promote their own languages were also described both through a dedicated presentation as well as part of the open discussion. Despite the banning of indigenous languages during the Soviet period, the recent efforts in Chukotka including a dedicated youth organization called the Native Word, exhibitions, the use of film, folk tradition expeditions and language courses were being used to revitalize Yupik.

Presentations in the fourth session looking at the next stage of the project highlighted the importance of promoting indigenous languages not just for the sake of language but because of the central role they played in the region's human development. As such, language retention was being used in the forthcoming SDWG-sponsored Arctic Human Development Report II to measure cultural integrity, cultural vitality and knowledge construction. An important finding of the report is that there is an increased use of indigenous languages in formal schooling and a growing recognition of its importance. The diversity of the Arctic was also noted during this session, with Greenland cited as an example of where the language was very institutionalized and laws existed to protect it but contrasting this with other communities where that was not the case. Another speaker focused on the connection between language and traditional knowledge, using the case study of Saami reindeer herding.

One of the important issues that was highlighted throughout the symposium by many of the participants was the way in which indigenous languages across the Arctic ran along a continuum starting at one end with some communities and languages being in the fortunate position of having resources and a critical mass of speakers to support its vitality through to the other end of the spectrum where there were very few fluent speakers left in already very small communities. One participant noted that she, herself an elder, was the youngest fluent speaker of her language.

However, despite this harsh reality confronting some communities, there was a strong theme of optimism that was evident throughout the symposium buoyed by the findings of the project to date and expressed in terms of changing the discourse from one of being a negative description of what was happening to Arctic indigenous languages to a positive narrative.

The symposium also highlighted some gaps in the project's work including the need to consider more extensively the

There was a strong theme of optimism evident throughout the symposium buoyed by the findings of the project to-date and the reframing of negative descriptions of what was happening to Arctic indigenous languages to a positive narrative.

Some initiatives show how important it was to make language learning fun and relevant.

deep-rooted traditional knowledge that is embedded in indigenous languages. Addressing the psychological barriers to speaking or learning one's own indigenous languages was another area that was highlighted for more attention by the project. The lessons coming out of some of the Saami and Inuit initiatives showed how important it was to make learning fun and relevant. Overall, there was strong agreement that the challenges, lessons and successes of indigenous language initiatives were not necessarily transferable from one indigenous language situation to another – even within the same language family.

The symposium also provided an important opportunity to involve indigenous youth both in the symposium's proceedings but also through a dedicated youth forum which was held on Day One. (This is discussed more fully in Section C below – Involving Youth and Elders.) The enthusiasm expressed by the youth representatives at the symposium's conclusion demonstrated the role it had played as a catalyst in encouraging ongoing collaboration by all the youth participants in a range of future initiatives including the next youth/elder workshops.

The participants were encouraged by statements made by the SDWG chair and an expert from the Smithsonian Institution participating in the symposium pointing to continuing support of the Arctic Council for indigenous languages as an important hallmark of the organization's agenda particularly through the SDWG's focus on the human dimensions of the Arctic. The importance of language as a focus of the Arctic Council was highlighted by a speaker in the final session who argued that the project's collaborators shouldn't just describe the work as about languages but as a trio – languages, cultures and identities – which enhanced diversity, tolerance and understanding across the Arctic.

At the conclusion of the symposium, participants were told that their recommendations would be shared with each of the Permanent Participants' communities to provide them the opportunity for feedback and to ensure that the project's future work responded to communities' needs and aspirations. The recommendations coming out of that next consultative step will then be passed onto the Arctic Council after the Ministers' meeting in April 2015.

## **B. RESEARCH WORKSHOP IN GUOVDAGEAIDNU, NORWAY, AUGUST 2014**

An important event whose discussions and findings fed into the work of the project's three research committees and the design of the 2015 Ottawa symposium's program was a two-day research workshop hosted by the Saami Council in Guovdageaidnu in August 2014. Funded by the Swedish Government, the research workshop was a follow up to the 2012 Ottawa workshops and the 2013 workshop in Toronto, and looked at Saami involvement in the project. In particular, the workshop's program comprised:

- Activity 1: bringing together Saami linguists, Saami language experts and project collaborators for a regionally-based research development workshop to discuss involvement from the Saami linguists and language experts involvement in the project; and

- Activity 2: hosting, in Sápmi, a “face-to-face” project steering committee meeting, of which the Saami Council is a member.

These two activities were designed to ensure that Saami interests, perspectives and extensive experience in language research and activities were fully incorporated into the activities of the overall project.

On the workshop’s first day, participants were updated on the project, the activities of its three assessment committees while the second day was dedicated to defining a pathway forward for Saami involvement and contribution to the project.

One of the workshop’s presentations focused on a language campaign which is encouraging Saami youth to use their indigenous language. Entitled *Speak Saami to Me*, the youth-initiated effort sets out to encourage young Saami to learn and use their language. It focuses on youth offering a friendly, rather than coercive, way to promote the Saami language by showing that it is “cool” to speak it.

Another presentation at the workshop focused on a project underway since 2001 – the southern Saami language revitalization project in Svahken Siite which is the southern most reindeer herding community in Norway. The southern Saami language has far fewer speakers than Northern Saami. But since the project started in 2001, the number of elementary school children receiving instruction in southern Saami has risen dramatically.

Recommendations coming out of the workshop included:

- the need for a better assessment of language use in Saami regions and a strong commitment from the Saami institutions that oversee them;
- ensuring that all of the Permanent Participants contribute to the project;
- enhancing networking and the promotion of various approaches to educating in indigenous languages, to teacher training, and to language survival more generally
- exploring opportunities to develop or exploit technologies that support communication in indigenous languages.

### **C. INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH AND ELDERS**

From the start of the project, it was recognized that to assess the state of the Arctic’s indigenous languages, it was essential to consult and actively listen to the Arctic’s indigenous youth and elders. To promote the vitality of the languages, it was also important to identify the effort that both youth and elders invest in taking their cultures forward and the role that their own languages play in that experience.

The Southern Saami language has few speakers. But since a revitalization project started in 2001, the number of children receiving instruction in Southern Saami has risen dramatically.

At the Guovdageaidnu workshop, youth presented the highly successful youth-initiated *Speak Saami To Me* campaign.

To ensure this full and ongoing engagement of youth and elders with the project's activities, ICC Canada designed in 2014 a specific approach which involves a series of youth/elder workshops across the Arctic. Each workshop would involve five or so youth aged 18 to 29 from a particular community meeting with a similar number of elders from the same community to talk about their shared indigenous language. A facilitator from either the project or community, depending on the community's preference, would ask a series of questions to guide the discussion.

Figure 2 illustrates the way in which it is envisaged the workshops will help others learn and to motivate them to contribute to the project's activities or even plan and implement their own workshops.

A pilot Inuit youth-elder workshop was held in Iqaluit, Nunavut in January 2015 with 6 Inuit youth invited to discuss with elders the aspects of language vitality that were important to them in their daily lives. The pilot workshop was designed to help define other workshops to be held across the Arctic in coming months and to pose questions that are contained in the project's assessment tool.

Planning for further work with youth and elders will be undertaken prior to Arctic Council ministerial in April 2015 and beyond.

Another aspect of the work with youth and elders is the production of videos from the workshops which can be used across the Arctic as a way to disseminate the perspectives and views coming out of the individual workshops. In line with this approach, Canada's National Film Board has been approached to determine their support. While the discussions have been promising, the Board's response has been slower than anticipated which has delayed their involvement in the implementation of this aspect of the activity.

However, video production still proceeded at the Iqaluit workshop and was screened at the 2015 Ottawa symposium that was attended by 14 youth representing all of the Permanent Participant organizations with the exception of RAIPON.

The symposium provided a very important opportunity for the youth from across the Arctic to come together. A youth forum was held on the morning prior to the symposium's opening. It enabled them to share their views and ideas amongst themselves that they then relayed to the other symposium participants during the next two and a half days. The symposium program also set aside two sessions dedicated to giving them the platform to a) share their views on Day One and then b) provide feedback at the conclusion of the symposium. The youth delegation injected a sense of both seriousness and fun into the proceedings. At one point during the symposium, they had everyone up dancing and simultaneously singing the words of a popular song, each participant doing this in their own language.

The forum (for youth only) enabled them to share their views amongst themselves which they then relayed to other symposium participants over the next two and a half days.

At one point during the symposium, the youth had everyone up dancing and simultaneously singing the words of a popular song, each in their own language.



The youth stressed both at the beginning and at the end of the three day symposium that youth were the key to the project's success. And they made it clear that they weren't just about the future; they were also essential for supporting indigenous languages right now. They called for equitable language policies backed by effective implementation; a commitment by leaders and the development of resources to back implementation. They saw the support of indigenous languages as a healing process, as a way of addressing discrimination and other societal injustices and as a way back from indigenous shame to pride. A full report of their contribution will be included in the Proceedings of the symposium.

#### **D. IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

An important outcome of the 2012 Ottawa workshops was the development of the project's communications strategy to exchange information and share data among project stakeholders and with all those concerned about Arctic indigenous languages. This has been seen as a critical element of the project – both in terms of a major activity in itself but essential for supporting and promoting other activities being implemented under the project.

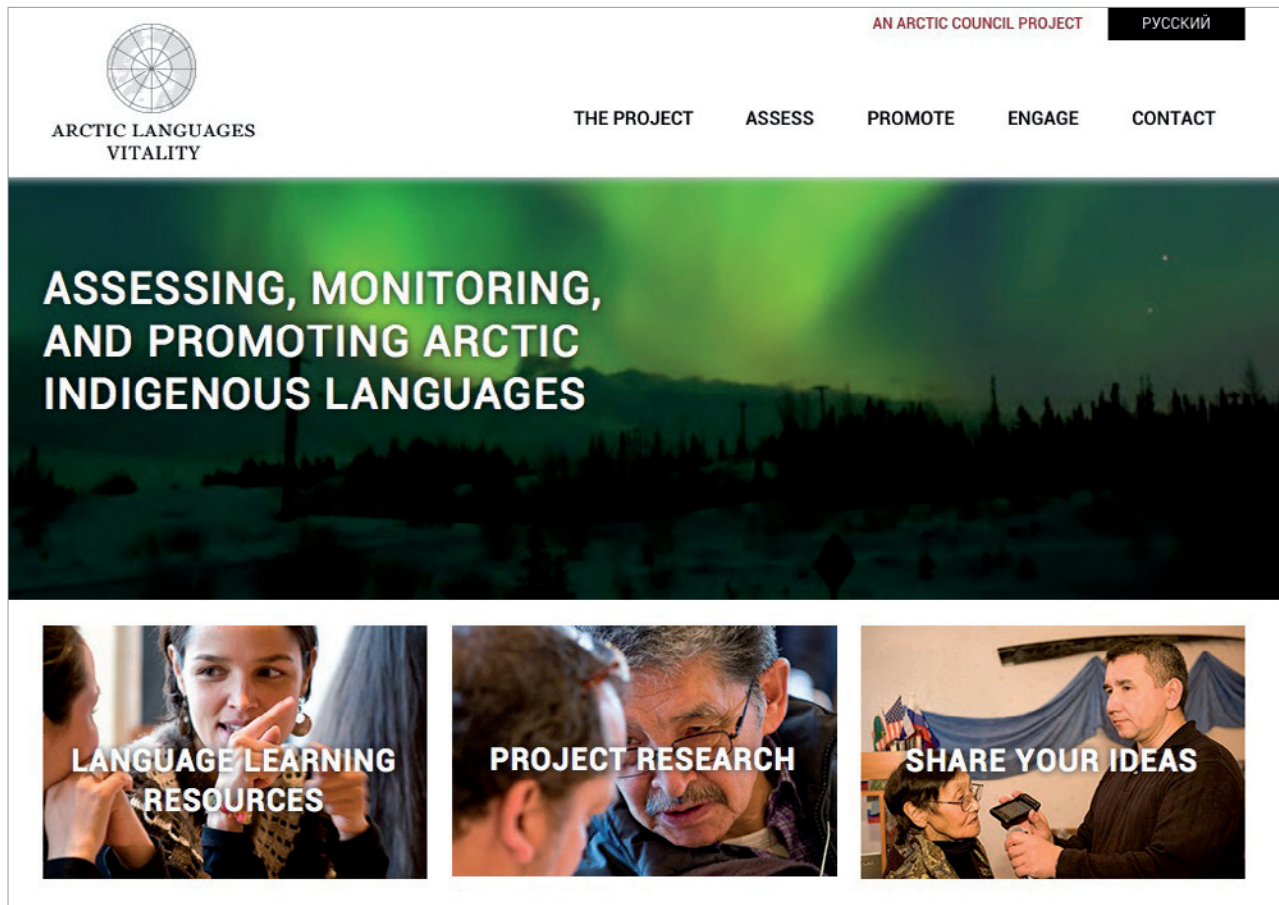
The website has provided an invaluable and immediate pathway for the project's stakeholders to exchange information, review developments and access and share papers, documents and other resource material.

Since the 2012 workshops, and particularly during the past two years, there has been significant work undertaken to implement the strategy.

An important achievement of the communications' strategy has been the development of a project-specific website [www.arcticlanguages.com](http://www.arcticlanguages.com) which was launched in February 2014. The website is a repository and communications vehicle of the many activities of the project as a whole. It is designed to highlight the project's goals of assessing the state of Arctic indigenous languages, promoting their vitality, and engaging with Arctic communities, researchers and policy makers.

The website has provided an invaluable and immediate pathway for the project's stakeholders to exchange information, review developments and access and share papers, documents and other resource material. It has a detailed description of the project, its governance and activities as well as the Permanent Participants, other collaborators and donors. It also has a dedicated section on language learning resources which provides information on language tools and resources. Under the project research section, stakeholders are given four ways to interact via the website:

1. contribute a research document to the project or browse the group archives;
2. apply to have a language vitality research project endorsed;
3. consult a list of current resources for language learning
4. send a link or file that may be of interest to other users.



Website visitors can also use links to be directed to other websites containing information on indigenous languages and reports.

The website was also a very efficient avenue for promoting the 2015 symposium providing information on the symposium’s goals and an on-line application facility enabling an accessible and easy way for potential participants to signal their interest in attending the symposium. Given the sheer distance and physical geographic challenges that many face located in remote parts of the Arctic, the website has been an invaluable means of communication for many involved and interested in the project.

In addition to providing a general presentation of the project to the public, the website serves as a repository of the information collected for the project. Such information is captured in two places. First there is a Zotero database of publications on all aspects of Arctic languages; these serve as a digital library. This is a particularly useful tool for those who do not have access to a major research library. Second, there are collected links to online digital resources of language learning and revitalization. Collecting of both sets of resources is very important, not just as a resource for language learners and researchers. Critically, this compilation is a necessary first step in evaluating the effectiveness of existing resources and identifying gaps in the materials.

In addition to the website, three social media – Facebook, Twitter and YouTube – have been active since December 2013 to raise awareness about news, events, funding opportunities, documentary films, language learning resources and other project news.

The dedicated Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Arctic-Languages-Vitality/508214695902270> has been an effective and popular way to disseminate and exchange latest developments relevant to Arctic indigenous language work. Similarly the Twitter account – @ArcticLanguages – is used to tweet and retweet important developments in the project and breaking news. It was particularly useful in the lead up to and during the 2015 Ottawa symposium to highlight key aspects of the agenda. The dedicated YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/user/ArcticLanguages> has enabled video uploads and the creation of playlists.

While this report is presented to the SDWG well in advance of the April 2015 Arctic Council ministerial, it should be noted that additional work based on funding from Canada will continue until the end of the Canadian fiscal year, 31 March 2015. During that period, ICC Canada will continue to make modifications to the project website, add content, and communicate its usefulness as a tool for networking and understanding of the project.

## **E. FIELD-BASED ASSESSMENT OF PILOT COMMUNITIES**

A contributing activity to the project is the field-based assessment of pilot communities. Building on the success of the *Khwankuta Igaput*, the Chukotka based pilot, ICC has planned further investigations. For example, ICC has worked with the Saami Council in planning for field-based community studies and the Saami Council has included them in a project proposal very recently submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

These pilots provide a rich community-focussed texture to the project and at the same time inform the work of the academically-driven assessment committees.

While each field-based pilot study will be implemented differently, recalling the *Khwankuta Igaput* is informative. ICC, concerned with the disappearance of indigenous languages launched an effort to promote and stimulate interest in the indigenous Yupik language encouraging youth and elders to be part of the effort. 2012 marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Khwankuta Igaput which was the very first alphabet used at the Inuit schools of Chukotka. It was decided to host an activity to commemorate the anniversary of the Yupik ABC. An exhibition was mounted with material about the history of the development of the alphabet. A week-long program of activities was organized in the village of Novoie Chaplino, an important centre for Chukotkan Inuit. The aim of the celebration was to cultivate and strengthen interest in the Yupik language. A concluding concert featured Yupik poems, folk stories indigenous songs and dances.

These pilots provide a rich community-focussed texture to the project and at the same time inform the work of the academically-driven assessment committees.

## CONCLUSION

The support provided the by Canadian Government has given ICC Canada the means to manage this Arctic Council project, take the lead in determining strategic direction, communicate with stakeholders and participants, and develop fundraising possibilities. Critical too has been the supplementary funding from the USA Government through the National Science Foundation for the 2012 Ottawa workshops, the Swedish Government funding of the August 2014 Saami Council workshop and the Gordon Foundation's seed money support for the project's work with youth and elders.

Much has been achieved through this project and a firm foundation has been laid in taking forward the ambitions of the SDWG in supporting indigenous-language initiatives as part of its mandate to keep the human dimension of changes in the Arctic at the forefront.

Looking to the future, the recommendations coming out of the 2015 Arctic Indigenous Languages Assessment Symposium will be considered by the communities of the Arctic indigenous organizations as part of the consultative process to be undertaken in developing the next steps for the project. The final recommendations will be provided to the Arctic Council after the Ministers' meeting in April which will see Canada's passing of the chairmanship to the USA.

## ANNEX A - STATUS OF THE PROJECT'S ACTIVITIES

Project Activity	Status
1. Synthesize prior relevant assessments of Arctic indigenous languages	This has been mostly accomplished. This activity helped create an understanding of many of the research and data gaps that need addressing. Most of the information has been uploaded to the Zotero database for access by accredited researchers. Further synthesis is on going.
2. Hold a series of research development workshops	This has been accomplished. The Ottawa workshops held in 2012 enabled academic and indigenous researchers to map out a way forward on the methodologies of the project. (Detail on these workshops is discussed below.) A Saami Council-sponsored workshop was held in Norway in 2014. (Detail on its outcomes discussed below.)
3 & 4. Establish Steering C'tee & Team	This was accomplished early in the project in 2012.
5. Develop communications strategy	This has been accomplished. A website was launched - see <a href="http://www.arcticlanguages.com/">http://www.arcticlanguages.com/</a> Also social media used extensively comprising Twitter - @ArcticLanguages; Facebook - Arctic Languages Vitality; and YouTube - <a href="http://www.youtube.com/user/ArcticLanguages">http://www.youtube.com/user/ArcticLanguages</a> Further details below.
6. A pan-Arctic languages assessment tool	Significant work achieved and reported on at 2015 Ottawa symposium. However, a longer time-frame and a more robust funding model will be required. As such, the presentation provided interim results only.
7. Field-based assessment of pilot communities:	This activity is underway and includes the drawing of data from Chukotka linked to the 80 <sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012 of the use of the Inuit alphabet in Chukotkan school. Youth/elder workshops have also started, the first being in Nunavut in January 2015.
8. Plan and initiate series of youth and elder workshops	Designed in 2014, a pilot workshop has been held in Nunavut in January 2015 with other workshops planned for implementation in other Arctic regions throughout 2015.
9. Media and outreach products	Outreach has been largely via social media - Facebook, Tweeter and YouTube - and particularly via the dedicated website with the aim of raising awareness of the project and engaging the youth. Discussions also took place with the National Film Board of Canada.
10. Develop mechanisms to televise workshops and develop languages documentary	Ongoing discussions with filmmakers and media service providers to determine their capacity and availability.
11. Develop project website	This has been accomplished as discussed in 5 above and in detail below.
12. Hold pan-Arctic youth-elder symposium	A pan-Arctic youth forum was held in conjunction with the 2015 Ottawa symposium.
13. Undertake pan-Arctic languages assessment	Significant work achieved and reported on at 2015 Ottawa symposium. However, a longer time-frame and a more robust funding model will be required. As such, the presentation provided interim results only.
14. Briefing stakeholders on results	Ongoing and regular including at SDWG meetings, regular reporting and the 2015 Ottawa language symposium.
15, 16 & 17. Prepare, host and report on Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium	A symposium was held in Ottawa on 10-12 February 2015. It achieved its objectives and recommendations on the future direction of the Arctic indigenous language project were put considered. Future symposia will be necessary.
18. Develop recommendations and new multi-year work plan	In the process of being developed in wake of the findings of the February 2015 symposium in Ottawa.

## **ANNEX B - SAMPLE LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED BY THE POLICY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE**

UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights ICC signatory

Nordic Language Convention

Declaration of Nordic Language Policy (2006)

European Charter for Minority Languages

UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous (2008)

Arctic Council Sustainable Working Group, Symposium on Indigenous Languages (2008)

International Labour Organization Convention no. 169 (1989)

RAIPON Current Bylaws

RAIPON Meeting Recommendations (2013)

Salekhard Declaration to the International Conference on Indigenous People (2014)

Inuit Circumpolar Council Resolution 9 & 14 of General Assembly (1998)

Nunavut Official Languages Act (2013)

Northwest Territories Official Language Act (1990) updated (2004)

Alaska Regional Policy (as of 2014)