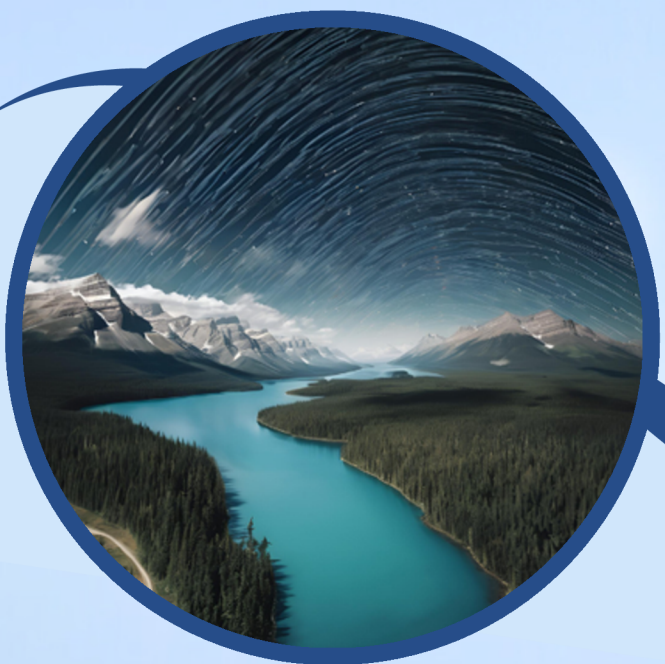


**National Indigenous
Connectivity Inc.**

Welcomes you to the



National Indigenous Connectivity Conference

February 26-27, 2026
Grey Eagle Event Centre
Tsuu'ina Nation, Calgary

Visit Our Website
www.nic-inc.ca

Program Guide

February 26-27, 2026
Grey Eagle Event Centre

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Welcome Message

The National Indigenous Connectivity Inc. (NICI) was created out of common-interests among Canada's First Nations communities for a strong and effective collective advocacy organization to support access to high-speed internet for remote and rural First Nations communities. Common interests or values such as respect, diversity, justice, and the sovereignty of all First Nations supporting the work of the NICI are foundational.

The NICI builds, develops, and maintains strong and productive networks and relationships with international, national, regional and local community First Nations leaders, technical connectivity specialists, feeder organizations, and interested communities, as well as relationships with government officials (federal, provincial, territorial and municipal).

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support we have received from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the 65 First Nations across Canada who openly expressed support for the NICI advocacy role.

I am encouraged that as First Peoples of Canada, through our First Nations, we will succeed in addressing our connectivity needs, big or small, in rural and remote First Nation communities.

Respectfully,
Leoni Rivers, CEO, NICI
leoni@nic-inc.ca



Leoni Rivers
*CEO, National Indigenous
Connectivity Inc.*



Our Vision

“Bridging the Digital Divide”

NICI
<https://nic-inc.ca/>



Our Mandate

The National Indigenous Connectivity Initiative (NICI) works alongside First Nations, governments, and industry partners to ensure equitable access to broadband and spectrum, empowering communities to lead in the digital age.

We believe that every First Nation deserves the opportunity to thrive in the digital age. Together, we can close the connectivity gap and build a stronger, more connected future for all.

Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

Tsuut'ina Nation Welcoming

**Minor Chief
LeeRoy Meguinis**

Tsuut'ina Nation



Elder Alex Crowchild

Tsuut'ina Nation



Elder Bernice Starlight

Tsuut'ina Nation



Dave Meguinis

*Drummer/Singer
Tsuut'ina Nation*



Assembly of First Nations National Chief



National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak

*Assembly of First Nations
Pinaymootang Nation,
Manitoba*

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak was born and raised in Pinaymootang First Nation, Manitoba. Her ancestor, Chief Richard Woodhouse, was an original signatory of Treaty No.2. She began her term as National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations on December 7, 2023, becoming the youngest woman and mother to hold the position.

National Chief Woodhouse Nepinak holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Winnipeg and has completed Harvard Business School's Tribal Leaders program.

In 2021, she was elected as the Regional Chief for the AFN Manitoba Region. During her tenure, she was the lead negotiator for the First Nations Child and Family Services and Jordan's Principle class action lawsuit, which resulted in over \$40 billion compensation for First Nations children and families.

Throughout her career, National Chief Woodhouse Nepinak has accumulated a wealth of experience lobbying the Senate, House of Commons, Cabinet Ministers, and the Prime Minister's Office to fulfill mandates from Chiefs. She continues to advocate for First Nations priorities, as directed by the First Nations-in-Assembly collaboratively with First Nations leadership, to protect collective rights—Treaty, inherent rights, title and jurisdiction, the right to self-determination, and all human rights.

Source: <https://afn.ca/about-us/our-leadership/national-chief/>

First Nations Regional Leadership Panel

Chris is a member of Kwanlin Dün First Nation located in Whitehorse, Yukon. Chris has 15 years of experience working in Indigenous Relations in the energy industry and has worked for companies such as Imperial Oil, Cenovus, Shell, and TC Energy. He has worked with Indigenous communities throughout Western Canada on offshore, in situ oil sands, and shale oil and gas projects.

Source: <https://nic-inc.ca/nic-inc/index.php/nici-board-of-directors-bios-new>



Chris Fry
Kwanlin Dün First Nation
Whitehorse, Yukon



Andrew Victor
Cheam First Nation
British Columbia

Sexómestel has served as a member of the Cheam First Nation Council since 2015 and as Chief since 2019 and also represents the Fraser Salish region at the First Nations Health Council. He is actively involved with Indigenous fisheries, justice, supporting children and families, and building relationships with other communities. His heart and vision is to see people come together to rise above the obstacles like the mountain goat and move forward in a good way.

Source: <https://nic-inc.ca/nic-inc/index.php/nici-board-of-directors-bios-new>

“The main focus for sure is development, and when I say development, we need to make sure that we invest in our people as much as we can by means of having proper facilities, proper access to housing and so forth,” said Young. “We are in talks with both governments and hopefully we can build more homes soon so that each family, especially the new ones, have a home base they can start from.”



Chief Aaron Young
Chiniki Nation, Alberta



Chief Cornell McLean
Lake Manitoba First Nation

Chief Cornell McLean is the chief of the Lake Manitoba First Nation and has also served as the acting grand chief of the Southern Chiefs Organization. He has previously served as Acting Grand Chief for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and has been involved in leadership through the Interlake Reserves Tribal Council. In all of his roles, he represents and advocates for the people of Lake Manitoba First Nation.

Source: <https://nic-inc.ca/nic-inc/index.php/nici-board-of-directors-bios-new>



Vice Chief Edward "Dutch" Lerat
Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN)

Edward (Dutch) Lerat is a member of the Cowessess First Nation of Saskatchewan, Canada. Edward has served Indian Governments of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations for 20+ years. During this time he served as Executive Assistant to the Chief of Saskatchewan Indians and served on many Boards and Commissions, and was Regional Vice-Chief to the Assembly of First Nations of Canada.



Michael Peters
*CEO, Glooscap Ventures,
Glooscap First Nation, NS*

Michael currently serves as the CEO at Glooscap Ventures, Glooscap First Nation's economic development corporation. His background is in business development where he contributed to the creation of Glooscap Landing, Glooscap Corner, Glooscap Energy and the Glooscap Seafood companies. Today these companies employ many community members and generate own source revenue for the community of Glooscap First Nation.

Source: <https://nic-inc.ca/nic-inc/index.php/nici-board-of-directors-bios-new>

First Nations Elders Panel



Elder Chuck Hume
Elder & Veteran, Yukon

Elder Chuck Hume is a survivor of Residential School as of 1948. He became a electrician at 22 years old, developing his trade in powerline and telephone line construction and instillation. After his electrician career, he became a National Park Warden Law Inforcement Officer for 17 years. In the interm he has been Councillor for his First Nation for 27 years. A skilled negotiater, Elder Hume now sits with the AFN as chair for the Knowledge Keepers Council.

Sempulyan Stewart Gonzales is a 62-year-old Indian Day School & Residential School survivor, a father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He is a member of our Syewen Winter Spirit dancing for 43 years and attended Sundance in Sioux Valley as well as, South Dakota where I received my Sundance name – Eagleday from my Sundance grandfather John Eagleday Sr.

Source: <https://www.bcafn.ca/about-bcafn/bcafn-representatives/elders-knowledge-keeper-representatives>



**Elder Sempulyan
(Stewart Gonzales)**
Squamish Nation, BC



Elder Alex Crowchild
Tsuut'ina Nation, AB

Alex Crowchild has grown up and lived in Tsuut'ina his entire life. He knows how to fluently speak the language, how to hunt and how to practice the traditions. Today, Alex remains a strong advocate of prayer. He prays for his family and the community and gives the simply powerful advice of "today, just enjoy it."

Source: <https://tsuutina.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Afternoon-with-an-Elder.pdf>

Tech Innovators & Service Providers Panel

KATLOTECH COMMUNICATIONS

The KatloTech team brings together a wealth of experience in telecommunications. This Northern Indigenous-owned enterprise in Yellowknife allows Indigenous businesses to attain proficient digital integration with fibre optic networks providing world-class telecommunications service. Lyle Fabian is devoted to offering Indigenous communities state-of-the-art broadband solutions. Lyle's broad knowledge and devotion to the community drive KatloTech Communications' success.



Lyle Fabian
CEO

HUWILP COMMUNICATIONS INC.

Ksigeiasu, Leoni is a registered member of the Squamish Nation and Gitxsan Nation. Leoni is in the Fireweed Clan, in the Wilp (House Group) Hanamuxw from Gitsegukla, Gitxsan Territories. Currently Leoni works with her consulting company as a Negotiator, Senior Advisor, in Indigenous Relations. Leoni continues to focus on Reconciliation as Relationship, supporting Business Leadership in the understanding, awareness and appreciation of Indigenous Knowledge within governments from an Indigenous worldview within a western worldview.



Leoni Rivers
Project Manager

OSOYOOS INDIAN BAND

John is an electronics engineer with a background in radar and telecommunications. During the 90's he worked in recording and broadcast doing sales and distribution of equipment and custom cabling. Since 2000 he has worked in the IT field in business development and management of general IT, datacentres, website development and hosting, online application and software development, both as an employee and as CEO of his own firm. Currently he manages the IT and infrastructure for Osoyoos Indian Band.



John Batyka
CEO

International Indigenous Spectrum Working Committee Panel

CANADA

Leoni's knowledge and evolving consultation requirements and current environmental context allows her to assist you define strategic objectives which result in you and your project team excel in project development success. LRC has the skill sets and expertise to design, implement, and document successful consultation strategies that not only meet government regulatory requirements, but assist your company in creating the foundation for legacy, mutually beneficial relationships with the First Nations leadership and communities in which you operate.



Leoni Rivers

*CEO, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc
Alberta, Canada*

Source: <https://nic-inc.ca/nic-inc/index.php/nici-board-of-directors-bios-new>



Erick Huerta Velázquez

*Joint General Coordinator &
Head of the area
Communication Development
REDES, Mexico*

Erick Huerta Velázquez has been working in the telecommunications sector for 20 years. His PhD research consisted in designing a training program for indigenous peoples in telecommunications, which has become a successful program on indigenous technicians. In the last years Erick has been working on new schemes in spectrum management approaches to connect the unconnected, getting spectrum assignment for the first indigenous mobile operator which communicates in a sustainable manner communities from 200 to 3000 inhabitants in rural Mexico.

Source: <https://academy.itu.int/itu-d/projects-activities/gcbi/membership/mr-erick-huerta-velazquez>

MEXICO



Antony Royal
CEO, Tū Ātea
New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND

Antony Royal is the Chief Executive of Tū Ātea, an Indigenous Māori telecommunications company in Aotearoa New Zealand dedicated to advancing Māori participation and leadership in the telecommunications sector. Tū Ātea holds spectrum rights on behalf of Māori following a landmark agreement with the New Zealand Crown in 2022, and under Antony's leadership has grown to employ over 120 staff. He is the Chair of Ngāti Tamatērā and affiliates with other Iwi (tribes) including Ngāti Raukawa, and Ngāpuhi.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Darrah Blackwater is from Farmington, New Mexico and is a citizen of the Navajo Nation. Darrah has extensively researched and written about the concept of spectrum sovereignty, the idea that Native Nations have exclusive rights to the electromagnetic spectrum on and over their lands. Darrah spent her summer after law school hiking the Colorado Trail to raise awareness about the digital divide and Indigenous issues. She spent a year of law school working on tribal issues in Washington D.C. and has assisted in building multiple community networks in Indigenous communities. She currently sits on the NFCB board.



Darrah Blackwater
Blackwater Consulting
New Mexico, USA

Source: <https://nfcg.org/darrah-blackwater-breakout-session/>

Conference Keynote Speakers



**Hon. Minister
Buckley Belanger**

*Secretary of State, Rural
Development, Innovation, Science
and Economic Development
Canada*

Harold "Buckley" Belanger is a Canadian politician who has been Secretary of State (Rural Development) since 2025. Belanger was elected to the House of Commons in the 2025 federal election and serves as the member of Parliament (MP) for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River in Saskatchewan. Belanger is of Métis descent and is a member of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Belanger previously served in provincial politics, as the member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Athabasca from 1995 to 2021. He was initially elected with the Saskatchewan Liberal Party before switching to the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1998. In 2021, Belanger resigned as MLA to run federally as a Liberal in Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, but lost to Conservative Gary Vidal. He ran again and won in 2025, becoming the only Liberal MP from Saskatchewan (a predominantly Conservative province).

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckley_Belanger

Conference Keynote Speakers

DeNeige Dojack is the Senior Director for Broadband Policy and Regulatory Frameworks in the Telecommunications Policy Branch at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. In this role, she is responsible for the development and oversight of Canada's connectivity strategy which is working to bring high speed internet to 100% of Canadians by 2030.

Source: <https://ca.linkedin.com/in/deneige-dojack-185b3a29>



DeNeige Dojack
*Sr Director, Senior Director,
Broadband Policy and
Regulatory Frameworks, ISED*



Robert Bellizzi
*Director, Sustainable
Operations, ISC*

Robert Bellizzi is a senior public sector leader with more than 20 years of experience spanning infrastructure, environmental management, international development, real property, and Indigenous services. For the past six years, he has served as a director in the federal public service and currently leads Sustainable Operations at Indigenous Services Canada.

Gregory Taylor is an associate professor in the University of Calgary's Department of Communication, Media, and Film. He is the author of *Shut Off: the Canadian Digital Television Transition*, co-editor of the book *Frequencies: International Spectrum Policy*, as well as the author of many published works in academic journals, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Hill Times*, and others.



Dr. Gregory Taylor
*Associate Professor
University of Calgary*

Critical Review of Digital Inclusion



Marwa Turabi
Director, Public Affairs

Marwa Turabi is the Director of Public Affairs at Iristel Inc., where she leads strategic communications and policy engagement on telecommunications and digital connectivity, with a focus on advancing equitable access for Northern, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. In this role, she works at the intersection of public policy and industry priorities, advocating for resilient and inclusive connectivity that strengthens national infrastructure and supports community-first outcomes.

Ksigegiasu, Leoni is a registered member of the Squamish Nation and Gitksan Nation. Leoni is in the Fireweed Clan, in the Wilp (House Group) Hanamuxw from Gitsegukla, Gitksan Territories. Currently Leoni works with her consulting company as a Negotiator, Senior Advisor, in Indigenous Relations. Leoni continues to focus on Reconciliation as Relationship, supporting Business Leadership in the understanding, awareness and appreciation of Indigenous Knowledge within governments from an Indigenous worldview within a western worldview.



Leoni Rivers
CEO, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc

Day 1

February 26, 2026
Grey Eagle Event Centre

7:30 AM

Breakfast & Networking

8:30 AM

Opening Prayer, Acknowledgement & Remarks

Elder Alex Crowchild, Tsuut'ina Nation

Leoni Rivers, CEO, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc.

Minor Chief Meguinis, Tsuut'ina Nation

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, Assembly of First Nations

Hon. Minister Buckley Belanger, Secretary of State, ISED

9:00 AM

Panel: International Indigenous Spectrum Working Committee

Facilitator: Michael Peters, CEO Glooscap Ventures, NS, Canada

Leoni Rivers, CEO, NICI, Calgary, AB, Canada

Erick Huerta Velázquez, General Coordinator, REDES, Mexico

Antony Royal, CEO, Tū Ātea, New Zealand

Darrah Blackwater, CEO, Blackwater Consulting, New Mexico, USA

10:00 AM

Questions/Answer Period

10:15 AM

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)

DeNeige Dojack, Broadband Policy & Regulatory Frameworks

10:30 AM

Nutrition & Health Break

10:45 AM

University of Calgary, Department of Communication, Media, and Film

Dr. Gregory Taylor, University of Calgary

11:15 AM

Breakout Groups

Why High Speed Internet? What is Digital Inclusion?

12:00 PM

Lunch

1:00 PM

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

Robert Bellizzi, Director, Sustainable Operations, ISC

1:15 PM

Critical Review of Digital Inclusion

Leoni Rivers, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc.
Marwa Turabi, Iristel Inc.

2:15 PM

Nutrition Break

2:30 PM

Breakout Groups

Provide Perspectives on Action Plan – Digital Inclusion

3:30 PM

Plenary Summary – What we Heard!

4:00 PM

Closing Remarks & Announcements

Leoni Rivers, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc.

4:15 PM

Day 1 Closing Prayer

Elder Bernice Starlight, Tsuut'ina Nation

~ Day 1 Conference Closed ~

5:00 PM

Networking Reception

Atrium, Grey Eagle Resort & Casino Hotel

6:00 PM

Banquet Dinner

Ballroom

Nate Glubish, Minister of Technology & Innovation

Day 2

February 27, 2026
Grey Eagle Event Centre

7:30 AM

Breakfast & Networking

8:30 AM

Opening Prayer, Acknowledgement & Remarks

Elder Bernice Starlight, Tsuut'ina Nation

Minor Chief Meguinis, Tsuut'ina Nation

Leoni Rivers, CEO, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc.

9:00 AM

Panel: First Nations Leadership Perspectives

on challenges with access to high-speed internet and AI security in remote and rural First Nations communities

Facilitator: Ryan Robb, CEO, Chiniki Group of Companies

Chris Fry, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Whitehorse, YT

Andrew Victor, Cheam First Nation, Rosedale, BC

Chief Aaron Young, Chiniki Nation, AB

Chief Cornell McLean, Lake Manitoba First Nation, MB

Vice Chief Dutch Lerat, Vice Chief, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), SK

Michael Peters, CEO, Glooscap First Nation, NS

10:00 AM

Nutrition & Health Break

10:15 AM

Panel: Elders & Youth Advisory

Facilitator: Andrew Victor, Cheam First Nation, Rosedale, BC

Yukon Elder - **Chuck Hume**, Veteran Elder, YT

British Columbia Elder - **Stewart Gonzales**, Squamish Nation, BC

Alberta Elder - **Alex Crowchild**, Tsuut'ina Nation, AB

Youth, Squamish Nation

Youth, Tsuut'ina Nation

11:00 AM

Breakout Groups

12:00 PM

Lunch

1:00 PM

Panel: What do the First Nations Tech Experts have to share?

on successes and best practices in Project Builds and new Projects awaiting government approval and or equipment approval mixed with investor certainty.

Facilitator: Dr. Gregory Taylor, University of Calgary

Lyle Fabian, KatloTech Communications, NWT

Leoni Rivers, Huwilp Communications Inc., BC

John Batyka, Osoyoos Indian Band, BC

Derrick Houle, Smoke Signal Communications Inc., AB

Elyse Krause & Rick DeZutter, Rural Connect Ltd., AB

Phil Steinhauser, Indigenous Connectivity Inc (ICI), AB

2:00 PM

Nutrition Break

2:15 PM

Tech Innovators & Service Providers Presentations

2:15 PM

Lyle Fabian, KatloTech Communications, Yellowknife, NWT

2:30 PM

Leoni Rivers, Huwilp Communications Inc., Gitsegukla, BC

2:45 PM

John Batyka, Osoyoos Indian Band, Osoyoos, BC

3:00 PM

Derrick Houle, Smoke Signal Communications Inc. Edmonton, AB

3:15 PM

Elyse Krause & Rick DeZutter, Rural Connect Ltd., Calgary, AB

3:30 PM

Phil Steinhauser, Indigenous Connectivity Inc., Calgary, AB

3:45 PM

Plenary Session - Breakout Groups

4:00 PM

What we Heard? Conference Outcomes

What are our Goals & Objectives

4:20 PM

Closing Remarks & Group Photos

Leoni Rivers, National Indigenous Connectivity Inc.

4:30 PM

Closing Prayer

Elder Alex Crowchild, Tsuut'ina Nation

Thank you

Trade Booth Tech Groups



Thank you

Trade Booth Artisans



Kirsten Waugh Creations



MaryRose Beading



Ellie's Star Blanket



Ivan Eagletail



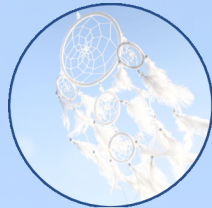
Moonstone Creation

Yvonne Jobin



Thank you Sponsors

Bell



**NATIONAL INDIGENOUS
CONNECTIVITY INC**



Special Thanks to our Conference Planning Committee:



*NICI Board
of Directors*

*Leoni Rivers
Consulting*

ADVINTIVE
transforming remote connectivity



Thank you for attending, on behalf of

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Ottawa, ON & Calgary, AB