



FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 21, 2024

FirstVoices celebrates International Mother Language Day with the launch of a new version of its free, open-source, Indigenous language platform

The First Peoples' Cultural Council continues its commitment to developing technology to support language revitalization for all First Nations in B.C.

WJOLEŁP, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF WSÁNEĆ NATION / BRENTWOOD BAY, B.C. — Today, on International Mother Language Day, Indigenous-led technology platform **FirstVoices** releases its latest features and advanced design, further driving opportunities for Indigenous language revitalization and learning for B.C. First Nations.

First created 20 years ago, FirstVoices is a joint initiative of the **First Peoples' Cultural Council** (FPCC) and the **First Peoples' Cultural Foundation**.

In collaboration with B.C. First Nations, FirstVoices is a suite of open-source technology tools for Indigenous language learning designed to support multiple languages, dialects, written and spoken materials, keyboards, apps and recordings on FirstVoices.com. The languages sites are customizable, and Nations retain full ownership and control of their data.

FPCC is recognized worldwide as a leader in community-based technology development that supports Indigenous language revitalization. The organization developed the FirstVoices platform so all B.C. First Nations would have access to robust language technology tools, free of cost, enabling Nations to build their respective sites and guaranteeing them legacy access to their language materials.

The new FirstVoices site design is more user-friendly and provides better customization options and the opportunity for mobile apps and keyboards for all language sites with offline access in urban and remote areas. FPCC's FirstVoices development team consulted with more than 250 B.C. First Nations users to create the latest site upgrades.

FPCC's Language Technology Program complements FirstVoices content development by providing funding and equipment to communities to support language revitalization. For example, tech-savvy youth are expanding their technology skills while recording and uploading

COMMITTED TO THE REVITALIZATION OF B.C. FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES, ARTS, CULTURES AND HERITAGE

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content to FirstVoices, and learning their languages as they work with Elders and speakers. The program creates jobs in communities and includes skill-building and career development opportunities along with tech training, equipment and ongoing support from FPCC staff.

Tracey Herbert, CEO, First Peoples' Cultural Council —

“For 20 years, FirstVoices has brought B.C. First Nations together to share a single software that meets the diverse language revitalization needs of our communities. The First Peoples' Cultural Council is committed to continuing to invest in and improve this platform to ensure the language sites and the resources it holds are here long-term. FPCC is honoured to see youth and Elders alike embracing the technology and working with the site administrators to create vital language resources to support language learning and fluency now and for generations to come.”

Dr. Lorna Wánosts'a7 Williams, Board Chair, First Peoples' Cultural Foundation —

“FirstVoices is a great example of how First Peoples all over the planet have used new technologies to protect and maintain their knowledge systems, languages and relationships. It is also an example of people working together across the ages, making use of all expertise and being adaptable to diversity. In FirstVoices, you can hear and see your language, and work with your language as you need.”

Honourable Pascale St-Onge, Minister of Canadian Heritage —

“With the launch of its latest version, FirstVoices continues to lead the way in Indigenous language revitalization. This International Mother Language Day, we not only celebrate 20 years of innovative technology that preserves and shares linguistic heritage, but also recognize how it empowers communities with essential tools for connection and cultural enrichment. This initiative by the First Peoples' Cultural Council is a prime example of our commitment to supporting and nurturing Indigenous languages by showcasing the enduring strength and vibrancy of these languages throughout Canada.”

Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation —

“For the last 20 years, the development of language technology by the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and the First Peoples' Cultural Council has supported the revitalization of First Nations' languages and helped Nations throughout the province to retain and share their languages and the voices of language speakers. The launch of the redesigned FirstVoices

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website and mobile app will make it even easier for everyone to learn Indigenous languages. I'm incredibly proud of this work, and I raise my hands to all those who have contributed to the revitalization of First Nations' languages in B.C."

FirstVoices Community Site Administrative Teams

Eleanor Nooski, Dennis Patrick and Travis Ketlo, Nadleh Stella FirstVoices Administrative Team —

"When we first applied for FirstVoices grants with the First Peoples' Cultural Council in 2017, we did not know how beneficial it would be for our communities in documenting, restoring and revitalizing our Dakelh language and cultural teachings. Over the years, we have connected fluent speakers with youth to increase our FirstVoices resources to use our language as a valuable language teaching tool in classrooms and cultural activities, in video games, community newsletters and more. As a result of our increased language revitalization efforts, we have developed numerous Dakelh Language Champions in our community and globally; we all have one Dakelh voice as silent speakers, youth and Elders. We greatly appreciate this gift. *Nenuchailya* - Thank you very much."

Betty Wilson, Sliammon FirstVoices Site Administrator, Tla'amin First Nation —

"Members of our community, Randy Timothy Sr., Karen Galligos (deceased), Gail Blaney, David Louie and Betty Wilson have been involved with FirstVoices since its inception. We are thankful to have been able to archive fluent speakers who are now gone. The recordings are treasures for our community members and their families. Our Sliammon FirstVoices team has grown in terms of technical expertise, clarifying our words and phrases and realizing how much more work we have to do to keep our language. Our FirstVoices app is used by not only our community members but also the wider community. For this, we are thankful to have been able to archive the words, phrases and stories from fluent speakers who are now gone and continue this work as our fluent speakers become fewer every year."

Sicarii, Leeland Askew, Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim FirstVoices Site Administrator, Xwemelch'stn Village —

"We did not lose our Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim language, it was taken from us, so our Elders wouldn't speak the language and they wouldn't encourage their children to speak the language. This caused a real regression to the progress of our language, but now there seems to be this

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uprising. In our home, with my daughter, we use FirstVoices to bring the language back and make our Ancestors proud.”

The First Peoples' Cultural Council administers FirstVoices with funding from the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

Learn More:

The First Peoples' Cultural Council: fpcc.ca

FirstVoices: firstvoices.com

FPCC's Language Technology Program

The First Peoples' Cultural Foundation: fpcf.ca

FirstVoices Fact Sheet: fpcc.ca/stories/firstvoices

A backgrounder follows.

For Photo and Video footage to be used by media click here: [FirstVoices Media](#)

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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

FirstVoices celebrates International Mother Language Day and its 20th anniversary with the launch of a state-of-the-art version of its free, open-source, Indigenous language platform

The First Peoples' Cultural Council continues its commitment to developing technology to support language revitalization for all B.C. First Nations

February 21, 2024

About FirstVoices.com

FirstVoices.com is an online space for communities to share and promote their language, oral culture and linguistic history. Communities create secure, interactive language sites online by uploading audio recordings, words, phrases, songs and stories to be shared with others.

The inception of the FirstVoices platform came from a collaboration with Peter Brand (Co-founder) and J'SINTEN (Dr. John Elliott, Co-founder). In 1999, the two were teaching at ŁÁU, WELNEW TRIBAL SCHOOL on WŚÁNEĆ territory and were strategizing ways to digitize the SENĆOŦEN language online. The First Peoples' Cultural Council and First Peoples' Cultural Foundation launched FirstVoices.com as a joint initiative in 2003 with 15 language sites.

In 2016, the FirstVoices development team at FPCC worked with over 50 community partners from across B.C. to significantly improve the back-end system.

In 2018, FirstVoices soft-launched a beta version 2.0 after collaborating with over 50 First Nations community partners from across B.C.

On February 21, 2024, FPCC is announcing the new FirstVoices site design, improved customization and content management tools, apps for language sites, keyboards and more.

Throughout its 20 years, the platform has grown to include over 85 language sites (of which 65 are public sites and 17 private). Sites include 33 B.C. First Nations languages and over a dozen languages from elsewhere in Canada and around the globe.

Community sites

Member groups represent over 50 Indigenous and First Nations communities, bands and other non-profit organizations. The language content they create, hosted on pages called "language

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sites,” is unique and promotes linguistic diversity of Indigenous and First Nations language and culture. Importantly, members retain ownership of content created by them for use on their community sites. The goal of FirstVoices.com is to help Indigenous and First Nations languages succeed with state-of-the-art software and technical support for communities.

Public and private content

While most language sites on FirstVoices are visible to the public, members can choose to create content that can be accessed only through a secure login. Examples of this type of content can include family stories, sacred songs or place names, prayers, images of ceremonial regalia, or dances seen only in community ceremonies.

Elders and youth team up for language preservation

The FirstVoices team works with experienced language educators, band councils and language communities to plan revitalization programs. Using digital recording, many of these Elders’ voices are preserved and accessed online by computer, tablet or mobile phone. Younger, tech-savvy community members become engaged through training in professional audio recording and archiving techniques. Physical archives, such as audio cassettes, photos and written sources, can also be digitally archived through federal and provincial grant programs.

Projects

- FirstVoices website – This web-based platform is where communities can create, edit, host and maintain content on their own interactive “language site,” featuring a suite of online tools such as the interactive dictionary, custom search, games, kids’ area and more.
- FirstVoices apps – Interactive dictionary apps for mobile devices, which pull content from FirstVoices language sites. The apps contain text, audio, image and video content and are available to download for free.
- FirstVoices keyboards – Keyboard software designed in partnership between language communities and the Keyman keyboard development team are downloadable on Mac and PC computers.
- FirstVoices keyboard app – Keyboard software for all FirstVoices keyboards within one easy-to-use app. Once the FirstVoices keyboard app is installed on a mobile device, any one of the 100+ custom keyboards can be activated. Users are then able to select their keyboard(s) of choice within their email, social media, word processing or other apps.

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New design and added features to FirstVoices.com

Website platform:

- Complete redesign of the website was completed in consultation with over 250 FirstVoices users and administrators from First Nations across B.C.
- Improved navigation and updated views for all language content, including a “drawer” for content quick view
- Improved site search functionality
- Enhanced content management tools, including the ability to create custom webpages and embed videos from YouTube and Vimeo
- Social media sharing options, automatically generated QR codes and a 1-click copy button
- Mobile optimization for on-the-go access
- The ability to translate parts of the user interface into Indigenous languages using Immersion Mode

Mobile apps:

- Language materials available offline using mobile devices
- Offline access and automated syncing for new content when the user has access to the internet, includes dictionary content (words/phrases), search, flashcards, bookmarks and the addition of songs and stories
- An option for all language sites on FirstVoices.com

Terminology:

- **Data points** consist of all language information owned by and stored on community language sites. This information is inclusive of words, phrases, audio, recordings, songs and stories, photos and videos. With all the language data from every community site combined, more than 600,000 data points are stored on FirstVoices.
- **PWAs** stand for “progressive web apps,” which is application software that allows the download of a mobile version of the website interface directly through FirstVoices.com. This alleviates the need to download the app through an “app store” like the Apple App Store (iOS) or Google Play (Android).

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About FPCC's Language Technology Program

The [Language Technology Program](#) grant supports language revitalization using technology by providing funding and equipment to B.C. First Nations, bands, governments, tribal councils and organizations. There are three components within this grant: FirstVoices, digitization and development. These projects mobilize First Nations language data for new learnings and community sharing.

- **FirstVoices** projects: involve using the platform to document and administer a community's language revitalization work through its language site
- **Digitization** projects: involve converting analog language materials into a digital format
- **Development** projects: use a community's FirstVoices language site content to develop community-specific tools for further use, such as mobile apps and games

The program includes skills-building and career development opportunities along with tech training, equipment and ongoing support from FPCC staff. This unique funding stream supports app and web development projects that mobilize First Nations language data in new and meaningful ways. In the 2022/23 program year, over \$5.5 million was delivered to fund 59 Language Technology Program grants.

About the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation

The Foundation is an Indigenous-led charitable society that provides funding to Indigenous organizations and communities to protect and revitalize their languages, arts, cultures and heritage. The Foundation's sister organization is the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC). Foundation funding allows FPCC to provide training, programming and resources to B.C. First Nations communities to elevate their efforts to protect and rebuild their cultural systems. The Foundation will continue to work alongside FPCC towards our shared goal of thriving Indigenous cultures that are passed on from generation to generation. To learn more visit: fpcf.ca

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FirstVoices.com Language Sites for B.C. First Nations

*Please note that communities decide if their site is public or for their members only. This list is arranged in alphabetical order with public sites listed first.

Language Site	Private/Public	Region
c̓iṣaaʔatḥ	Public	Vancouver Island
Cree (Saulteau First Nation)	Public	Northeast
Dakelh / Southern Carrier	Public	Central Interior
Dene	Public	Northern B.C. / WT
Denek'éh/Kaska	Public	North
diiʔdiitidq	Public	Vancouver Island
Ehattesaht Nuchatlaht	Public	Vancouver Island
Gitsenimx	Public	Northwestern B.C.
Hai sla	Public	North Coast
Haítzaqv̓ja	Public	North Coast
Halq'eméylem	Public	Vancouver Island/Mainland

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Sliammon	Public	Vancouver Island
Sm'algyax	Public	North Coast
Southern Tutchone	Public	Northern B.C. / Yukon
Splatsin (Eastern dialect)	Public	Thompson/Okanagan
Stz'uminus	Public	Vancouver Island
Syilx	Public	Okanagan
Tagish	Public	Yukon
Tāltān	Public	Northwest
Tl'azt'en-ne Bughuni	Public	Central Interior
Tsaa? Dane - Beaver People	Public	Northeast
Tse'Khene (McLeod Lake)	Public	Central Interior
Tsilhqot'in (Xeni Gwet'in)	Public	Central Interior
Vuntut Gwich'in	Public	Yukon
Witsuwit'en	Public	Northern Central Interior
Wuik'ala	Public	Vancouver Island
xaad kil (Masset Haida)	Public	North Coast
Xai'xais	Public	North Coast
x ^w sépsəm lək ^w áŋən	Public	Vancouver Island
Yekooche	Public	Central Interior
Dene K'eh/Slavey	Private	Northeast
Denek'éh/Kaska - Lower Liard	Private	Northeast
hwulmuhwqun	Private	Lower Mainland
K'áhshó got'íne xədə	Private	Northeast
kitsumkalum sm'algyax	Private	Northwest
Kwakiutl	Private	Vancouver Island
Kyuquot-Checleset	Private	Vancouver Island
Liq'wala	Private	Vancouver Island

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Metlakatla Sm'algyax	Private	Northwest
Nakwala & Gwa'sala	Private	Vancouver Island
Nkúkwtsa Stl'atl'imx	Private	Northwest
Nlakapamuxcheen	Private	Thompson/Okanagan
Northern Tutchone (Na-Cho Nyak Dun)	Private	Northern B.C. / Yukon
Penelakut Hul'q'umi'num'	Private	Lower Mainland
Sḵwxwú7mesh	Private	North Shore
Snuneymuxw First Nation	Private	Vancouver Island

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