



Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing (Those Who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference
August 19 - 20, 2026
Casino Rama Resort, Chippewas of Rama First Nation

Executive Summary

The Anishinabek Nation Governance Department hosted the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing (Those who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference on August 19-20, 2026.

The target audience of the E'Dbendaagzijing Conference was Anishinabek Nation First Nation Leadership, Governance Portfolio holders, Governance Managers/Coordinators, and First Nation Membership Clerks.

The anticipated goal of the E'Dbendaagzijing Conference was to engage Anishinabek First Nations on the inherent sovereign foundations of Anishinaabe Law and to review the revised draft Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewin to build unity, and positions of strength through collaboration on the following objectives:

- First Nation Engagement on Challenges Communities Face About E'Dbendaagzijing and *Indian Act* Membership
- Anishinaabe Traditions and Law (Belonging and Identity)
- Review Anishinaabe E'Dbendaagzijing Laws (First Nation Law and Anishinabek Nation Law)

The objectives guided the discussions to provide an overview and understanding of the impacts of *Indian Act* amendments (Bill S-2) on registration and citizenship as well to highlight the importance of Anishinaabe-led governance laws to determine who our own citizens are “E'Dbendaagzijing”.





Background

On August 19-20, 2026, 26 Anishinabek Nation member First Nations gathered to attend the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference that was held in Chippewas of Rama First Nation at the Casino Rama Resort.

All 39 Anishinabek Nation member First Nations were invited to attend the conference by an invitation letter from the Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief and Governance Department. 26 out of 39 Anishinabek Nation member First Nations attended the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference.

The following 26 First Nations participated in the two-day conference:

Southeast Region:	
• Alderville First Nation	• Curve Lake First Nation
• Algonquins of Pikwàkanagan First Nation	• Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation
• Beausoleil First Nation	• Moose Deer Point First Nation
• Chippewas of Rama First Nation	
Southwest Region:	
• Aamjiwnaang First Nation	• Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
Lake Huron Region:	
• Atikameksheng Anishnawbek	• Serpent River First Nation
• Aundeck Omni Kaning	• Sheguiandah First Nation
• Dokis First Nation	• Sheshegwaning First Nation
• Henvey Inlet First Nation	• Thessalon First Nation
• M'Chigeeng First Nation	• Wahnapiatae First Nation
• Magnetawan First Nation	• Whitefish River First Nation
• Nipissing First Nation	• Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory
• Garden River First Nation	• Zhiibaahaasing First Nation
Northern Superior Region:	
• Michipicoten First Nation	
Non-Member First Nation:	
• Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation	

The conference was well attended by approximately 130 attendees from across Turtle Island. Participants consisted of First Nation Leadership, Councillors, Membership Clerks, Governance Coordinators/Officers, First Nation Portfolios, and Anishinabek Nation Advisory Councils and Staff.





Below is a breakdown of the 130 participants:

Target Audience Attendance:
▪ First Nation Leadership – 12
▪ First Nation Councillors – 35
▪ Membership Clerks – 16
▪ Governance Managers/Coordinators/Officers – 24
▪ First Nation Portfolios – 13
▪ Presenters/Advisory Councils/Staff – 30

Day 1 Agenda: Wednesday, August 19, 2026

Opening Formality

The day began with a Sunrise Ceremony conducted by Mishoomis Gerard Sagassige, Anishinabek Nation Getzidjig Advisory Council. A Sunrise Ceremony was held each morning for participants throughout the 2-day event.

Thanksgiving prayer and recital of the Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe (One Anishinaabe Family) was done each morning by Anishinabek Nation Ookomish Donna Debassige, Getzidjig Advisory Council. The Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe is the Preamble to the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement Act*.

The conference facilitators Bob Goulais and Jeffrey Jacobs opened Day 1 of the E'Dbendaagzjig Conference by welcoming everyone to the Chippewas of Rama First Nation territory and called upon welcoming address speakers as follows:

Chief Ted Williams welcomed participants to his community of Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

Linda Debassige, Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief, welcomed everyone and expressed appreciation to Chief Williams and his community for hosting the conference in his community.

Grand Council Chief Debassige articulated the following key points in her welcoming and keynote address:

- Registration under the *Indian Act* is normally called having status that provides access to certain federal programs and services.





- She identified the second-generation cut-off clause in Bill C-31 as a major source of confusion and division for Anishinaabe people.
- She claimed that its generational rules have continued to deny registration to many First Nations people that perpetuates discrimination.
- Grand Council Chief Debassige noted that nearly 40 per cent of Anishinabek First Nation members have 6.2 Indian Status (One-Parent Rule) under the *Indian Act*.

Marsha Smoke, Southeast Regional Chief:

Southeast Regional Chief Smoke emphasized that Anishinaabe Nations have long-established laws and community knowledge defining belonging that predates the *Indian Act*. She also highlighted the importance of the E'Dbendaagzijing Conference objectives to start restoring our insight of belonging, mutual responsibilities, and the inherent jurisdiction of First Nations to determine who are citizens are.

Dr. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, E'Dbendaagzijing E-niiganwidood/Commissioner, Anishinabek Nation:

Dr. Corbiere Lavell voiced that belonging is determined by connection to our people, rather than by the government criteria, and stated we know who our people are. She affirmed the community's authority to identify its own members during the opening remarks of the E'Dbendaagzijing (Those Who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference on Day 1.

Day 1 Presentations:

Bill S-2: An Act to Amend the Indian Act Update

Southeast Regional Chief Smoke provided an update on Bill S-2 on Day 1 of the conference as follows:

Within our own families and First Nations, we have different experiences when it comes to E'Dbendaagzijing.

Some of our people have status, some do not. Some belong to a First Nation under its membership code but are not registered under the *Indian Act*, and others may be registered but disconnected from their community. Our people know exactly who they are, but





Canada does not recognize, and this reality is why we must always remember that registration and citizenship are not the same thing.

Southeast Regional Chief Smoke spoke to the mandate and background on the E'Dbendaagzijig Strategic Plan as follows:

Mandate: In January 2025, draft declaration was created and adopted unanimously by the Anishinabek Nation Grand Council in June 2025. A strategic work plan was approved in November 2025 that supports external advocacy and the development of citizenship laws within First Nation communities.

External Strategy: The strategy seeks recognition of Anishinabek inherent rights and jurisdiction over citizenship on the Second-Generation Cut-Off, and Section 10 of the *Indian Act*: Voting Thresholds, collaboration with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and other political organizations, monitoring of legal cases, and passage of Bill S-2 with the Senate amendments retained.

Internal Strategy: The strategy seeks development and implementation of Anishinabek Nation and First Nation Laws to exercise jurisdiction based on the principles of the Anishinabek Chi-Naaknigewin, E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin and the Anishinabek Nation Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijig.

Bill S-2 Advocacy: Bill S-2 passed second reading in the House of Commons on February 27, 2026, and was referred to the Standing Committee to study. The Anishinabek Nation's written brief and May 7 appearance before the committee supported eliminating discrimination, retaining the One-Parent Rule, ending the second-generation cut-off, and recognizing the effects of registration on land, housing, infrastructure, services, governance, and bringing people home.

Parliamentary Status: As of June 18, 2026, Bill S-2 had not passed the House of Commons and remained at committee consideration; it still required the report stage, third reading, and Royal Assent. The Senate amendments, including the One-Parent Rule addressing the Second-Generation Cut-Off, remained part of the bill.

Collaborative Process: In November 2023, ISC launched the Collaborative Process on the Second-Generation Cut-Off and Section 10 Voting Thresholds to examine possible solutions, and that work continued through 2024-2025.





The Anishinabek Nation has been involved in that process work, and throughout that work our position has remained consistent to examine registration solutions for First Nation jurisdiction over membership, traditional systems, citizenship codes, and possible future legislation outside the *Indian Act*.

Identified options include a single-parent rule, transferring control to First Nations, blood quantum and DNA, and eliminating registration categories, alongside several Section 10 Voting Threshold models.

Summary of Next Steps: The Anishinabek Nation continues developing E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin and exercising its own laws of belonging. Planned actions include monitoring Bill S-2 and continued engagement with ISC, along with Anishinabek Nation First Nation's and organizations on implementation of the strategic work plan, and regular communications to leadership and communities.

ISC Collaborative Process - Proposed Solutions:

Second-Generation Cut-off:

Crystal Stevens, Anishinabek Nation Legal Counsel, provided the following key points on the Second-Generation Cut-Off Under Section 6 of the *Indian Act* as follows:

The problem: Under Section 6 of the *Indian Act*, a person registered under 6(2) can't pass entitlement on unless the other parent is also entitled — so a child with a registered parent can lose status, splitting families and keeping federal control over First Nation identity.

Four reform options were assessed:

- A single-parent rule (immediate, direct remedy — backed by 26 of 39 final reports and 305 of 399 feedback respondents but keeps Canada in control).
- Transferring control to First Nations (19 of 39 reports, 160 of 399 respondents — most aligned with self-determination, contingent on funding and capacity).
- Blood quantum/DNA (not viable nationally; DNA useful only as limited parentage evidence); and eliminating the 6(1)/6(2) categories (2 of 39 reports, 115 of 399 — removes hierarchy but sets no entitlement criteria).
- Where it lands: conclusion is a sequenced approach — immediate relief via a single-parent rule, followed by a resourced transition to First Nations jurisdiction over citizenship and belonging.





Section 10 Voting Thresholds:

Dr. Damien Lee, PhD, Head of Indigenous Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, provided key points on the proposed solutions as follows:

Solution 1:

- **Simple majority vote** — Replace the current "double majority" requirement with a standard simple-majority vote to approve a transition to Section 10 membership governance.
 - Benefits - Reduces barriers to adopting membership codes. Consistent with common democratic voting practices. Could support self-determination if aligned with a Nation's own governance traditions.
 - Key concerns – Swaps one federally imposed model for another, risking low turnout letting a small fraction decide major membership changes.

Solution 2:

- **Transfer control to First Nations** — Makes First Nations the default authority over membership governance.
 - Benefits - Allows the determination of their own membership processes and decision-making frameworks. Shifts authority from the federal government to First Nations. Better aligns with United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples principles and Indigenous legal traditions. Allows Nations to define membership according to their own priorities and governance systems.
 - Concerns - Requires significant implementation planning, resources, and long-term funding. Must include safeguards for individual rights and off-reserve members. Risks creating inconsistent membership outcomes if transition mechanisms are unclear.

Solution 3:

- **Double majority with amendments** — Keeps the threshold but modernizes the process.
 - Benefits - online and advance voting, better outreach, accessibility for off-reserve members.
 - Concerns - Reframes the problem as participation rather than the threshold itself; preserves broad consent but may not remove existing barriers.





Three Approaches to Reforming Section 10 Voting Thresholds

1. Simple Majority Vote - Easier to achieve but may not provide sufficient legitimacy or reflect Indigenous governance traditions.
2. Transfer Control to First Nations - Most aligned with self-determination and Indigenous legal orders but requires significant implementation support and safeguards.
3. Maintain Double Majority with Improvements - Preserves broad community consent while improving voter participation, accessibility, and engagement.

Between Membership & Belonging: Life Under Section 10 of the *Indian Act*

Dr. Lee provided key points on Between Membership & Belonging as follows:

- The mechanism: Bill C-31 (1985) let bands write their own membership codes under Section 10 of the *Indian Act*, separating band membership from Indian status. Roughly 241 of 630+ First Nations did so — and many rebuilt the very colonial criteria (status, blood quantum) the reform was meant to loosen, driven by a "floodgates" fear of newly reinstated members.
- The human cost: Drawing on the Yellowhead Institute report by Dr. Lee and Kahente Horn-Miller, the report documents membership as an anchor of identity and belonging, and traces the harms of denial across health, kinship, economic, and social lines — including allegations of Section 10 being used to silence, dissent, or discriminate on sexual orientation and family status. Nearly 30 legal cases have followed since 1987.
- The forward question: With Bill S-2 poised to add 300,000+ status Indians, the "floodgates" fear is resurfacing even though it never materialized. The argument: a kinship-based approach to citizenship would serve Nations better than reproducing divisive Section 10 codes.

Challenging the Second-Generation Cut-Off

Justin Thompson, JFK Law Firm Associate and citizen of Nipissing First Nation, provided key points on Challenging the Second-Generation Cut-Off Legal Recourse following Senate amendments to Bill S-2 as follows:

- **The case:** JFK Law is exploring a Charter (Section 2 and Section 15) and possibly Section 35 challenge to section 6 of the *Indian Act*, arguing the Second-Generation





Cut-Off discriminates by race, family status, and sex — restricting who can pass on status, access services, and hold and transmit Treaty and reserve rights.

- **The timing:** Senate amendments in Bill S-2 would replace Section 6(2) with a single-parent rule and repeal the Cut-off, but the Bill is stalled in the House and the Government and ISC do not support the change; consultation since 2018 has been slow, with a promised First Nations Citizenship Law by end of 2026.
- **The ask:** This is an early-stage pitch to Anishinabek Nation delegates — seeking feedback and a representative plaintiff (individual, family, First Nation, or organization), with no guarantee of success given Section 1 limits.

E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin

Dr. Corbiere Lavell spoke on the purpose of the E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin, and provided an overview of the major findings from the consultation and 2010 report as follows:

- A major accomplishment is the completion and legal review of the draft revised E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin, including a framework/template to help First Nations develop their own citizenship laws.
- The work responds directly to harms caused by the *Indian Act*, especially the Second-Generation Cut-Off, Section 10 membership issues, and federal definitions of identity that conflict with Anishinaabe belonging.
- Engagement and education are underway through virtual sessions, recordings, workshops, and the August 2026 in-person conference focused on law-making, belonging, and strengthening unity.
- Bill S-2 and related federal changes make implementation urgent, because more people may become eligible for registration while First Nations still need clear citizenship laws to distinguish federal status from true Anishinaabe belonging.
- Next steps include presenting the revised Naaknigewin to Anishinabek Nation Grand Council in November 2026, continuing leadership collaboration, supporting First Nations with toolkits and communications, and maintaining regular updates to leadership and citizens.

The Anishinabek Nation's inherent right to determine citizenship through the E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin is grounded in Anishinaabe law, identity, kinship, language, ceremony, and responsibility.





Overview of The Consultation Report 2010

Dr. Corbiere Lavell provided an overview on the major findings on the 2010 consultations on creating an Anishinabek Nation Citizens Law as follows:

- **Mandate:** The core direction from the 2007 Anishinabek Nation Grand Council was to assert Anishinabek sovereignty by determining citizenship outside the limits of the *Indian Act*, including adoption of a One-Parent Rule and removal of the Second-Generation Cut-Off.
- **Consultation:** Reached more than 400 participants (from October 2008-April 2009) across 14 community sessions in urban centres, regional gatherings, and Nation-level conferences.
- Participants strongly preferred the language of citizenship over “membership,” linking citizenship to nationhood, land, governance, language, spirituality, and collective survival.
- Key themes included cultural criteria, clan and Elder involvement, dual citizenship, special exceptions, human rights, mobility across the Nation, and practical concerns such as funding and federal recognition.
- The proposed model is a two-tier system: the Anishinabek Nation sets broad standards, while individual First Nations enact their own citizenship codes.
- A fair process was emphasized: application or nomination, review by a representative committee, decision-making, appeals/redress, Nation acceptance, and regular review every 3–5 years.

The bottom line is that consultations showed broad support for a sovereign citizenship law grounded in language, culture, clan traditions, inclusiveness, and due process.

Clan Belonging and Identity:

Clayton King, Anishnaabe Historian from Beausoleil First Nation provided a presentation on the following key points with participants on Day 1 of the conference.

- Clan Belonging and Identity Using our Gifts
- All our Relations
- Clan Governance and gift of Reciprocity





Anishinaabe Law on E'Dbendaagzijig:

Mary Laronde, Assistant to Dr. Corbiere Lavell, provided an overview of the revised Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin 2009 as follows:

The revised draft Anishinabek Nation law on E'Dbendaagzijig strives to be grounded in Anishinaabe law, spirituality, sovereignty, kinship, land, language, culture, and the Clan System.

- It affirms the Anishinabek Nation's inherent right of self-determination, including the right to decide who belongs, independent of colonial laws or *Indian Act* status.
- Each Anishinabek Nation member First Nation retains authority to determine its own E'Dbendaagzijig according to its own laws, traditions, and governance processes.
- Belonging is based on Clan, family, descent, birth, adoption, maternal and paternal relationships, and other Anishinaabe-recognized family structures.
- The law emphasizes inclusion, equality, dignity, responsibilities to kin and community, and care for lands, waters, air, fire, and all relations.
- It proposes a Central Registry and Citizenship Office to record recognized E'Dbendaagzijig, support official citizenship documents, and protect personal information.
- Amendments may be proposed by First Nations, the Commissioner, or an Advisory Council, with adoption through Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Resolution.

Mary Laronde concluded her overview stating the next steps would be to present the draft revised Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin to the Anishinabek Nation Grand Council, Fall Assembly, anticipated to be held in November 2026 for discussion and acceptance.

Mentimeter Results:

Mentimeter is a web-based interactive engagement tool that allows the collection of real-time feedback from participants. On Day 1 of the conference participants had the opportunity to engage in real-time questions to collect their feedback on the following 10 questions:





1. What section of the Indian act deals with membership?

- 53 people identified Section 10 as the *Indian Act* dealing with membership, and 1 person identified Section 30. 54 people participated in this question.

2. Do you know of anyone denied membership due to the provisions of the *Indian Act*?

- 48 people said they knew someone who got denied membership because of the *Indian Act*, and five said they did not know anyone who got denied membership. 53 people participated in this question.

3. How might applications, reviews, appeals and redress processes be designed to uphold First Nation values and procedural fairness?

- 22 participants envision First Nation-led processes grounded in cultural values, procedural fairness, and community authority.
- Their recommendations emphasize independent oversight, traditional knowledge, and accessible resolution.
- They propose community-designed procedures involving Elders, leadership, circles, ceremony, medicines, and the 7 Grandfather teachings.
- They call for transparent criteria, equal treatment, clear explanations, alternatives after refusals, and appeals handled by independent or external knowledge holders.
- They stress that each Nation should determine its own dispute-resolution process while accounting for community capacity, history, bias, and inherent jurisdiction.

4. What role can families, clans, Elders, staff, and Chief & Council play in citizenship decisions and oversight?

- 23 participants described citizenship decisions as a collective responsibility requiring inclusive oversight, cultural guidance, and transparency. Their responses identify roles for families, clans, Elders, staff, Chief and Council, and citizens.
- Participants emphasize community participation through consultation, voting on recommendations, decision-making tables, appeals, and a potential citizenship oversight committee.
- Families and Elders are described as Knowledge Keepers who provide history, mentorship, ceremony, unbiased guidance, compassion, and direction grounded in Anishinaabe ways and the Seven Grandfather Teachings.





5. What Anishinaabe Aaadziwin, practices and supports are needed to ensure citizenship laws are grounded in Anishinaabe identity, language and kinship?

- 24 participants identify cultural, linguistic, and relational foundations for Anishinaabe citizenship laws grounded in identity and kinship. Participants emphasized shared learning, community guidance, and living cultural practices.
- Priorities included language access, ceremonies, teachings, the clan system, the Seven Grandfather components, Elders, knowledge holders, and historical knowledge.
- Suggested supports included meaningful engagement with on/off reserve citizens, collaboration among Nations, online teaching modules, community consultation, and recognition of family and community relationships rather than blood quantum.

6. Should your citizenship law institute a first-class/second-class citizenship system? Why or why not?

- 28 participants overwhelmingly opposed a first-class/second-class citizenship system, pointing out equality and warning that tiered status would create discrimination, division, inequality, or a colonial hierarchy.
- A small number of participants called for further definition or collective discussion, while others raised the need to protect First Nation qualification, prevent the Nation from becoming predominantly non-native in descent, and develop citizenship rules according to the Nation's own principles.

7. What steps might your band take to foster financial stability if citizenship entitlement does not depend on Indian Status?

- 28 participants primarily proposed strengthening own-source revenue through economic development corporations, businesses, investments, partnerships, taxation, user fees, tourism, land acquisition, and equity opportunities, while reducing reliance on federal funding.
- They also identified membership codes, staffing and mentorship, financial literacy, strategic use of settlements, additions to reserve, advocacy, collaboration, and long-term planning, while some noted that financial stability was uncertain or required further discussion.





8. What role, if any, should individual responsibility play in citizenship laws?

- 29 participants described citizenship as a balance between individual responsibility and belonging to the Nation. Their 29 answers highlighted cultural engagement, accountability, and community participation.
- Individuals should learn the culture and language, uphold the Seven Grandfather Teachings, follow citizenship laws, and understand responsibilities under Anishinaabe Law.
- Applicants were expected to research genealogy, provide lineage and supporting documents, establish proof of membership, and remain informed about changes.
- Participants supported community involvement through consultation, voting, education, and participation in developing or changing laws, while cautioning that responsibilities should not become barriers to belonging.

9. What are some considerations we need to include in our Anishinabek Nation law?

- 58 participants identify priorities for shaping Anishinabek Nation Law, particularly clear governance, community authority, cultural values, membership rules, and the resources needed for implementation.
- Clarity and authority: Participants call for language that is consistent, straightforward, and not open to broad interpretation, along with clear explanations of who governs and enforces the law, how appeals work, and how First Nation councils and community members will participate.
- Culture and self-determination: Key considerations include self-determination, community control, Anishinaabemowin, clan governance, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, family and kinship, cultural heritage, connection to land and other elements of the natural world, and the interests of children, youth, and future generations.
- Membership and implementation: Participants raise funding, resources, land, registration and entitlement criteria, genealogy, adoption, dual citizenship, community membership choices, status distinctions, an eventual cut-off, and the need to address increased membership capacity. They also emphasize protection from discrimination, inclusive but genuine connection, streamlined processing, education, and control of registration by First Nations rather than Indian Affairs.





10. Should Canada have any say in individual First Nation E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewinag?

- Participants opposed Canada having a say in individual First Nation E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin, with 44 of 64 answering no. Participants stressed sovereignty while identifying funding and implementation concerns.
 - Participants described the matter as First Nation law, supporting Canada's awareness or data collection but not involvement in lawmaking.
 - Some responses supported funding without strings, while others said funding should consider all citizens and acknowledged unresolved collective decisions or readiness for jurisdiction.
-

Day 2 Agenda: Thursday August 20, 2026

Day 2 Presentations:

Moose Deer Point First Nation Citizenship Law:

On Day 2 of the conference, Moose Deer Point First Nation Chief Tracy Hendrick provided key points on their citizenship law as follows:

- Moose Deer Point First Nation can trace their membership from two original families and four family groups.
- Chief Hendrick stated "We started working with a company called Roots Forward which is a database that assisted to create the family tree. I can take any member of the community and trace everyone up the tree."

B'Maakonigan Supporting First Nation Citizenship Law Development:

Hillary McGregor, Policy Analyst for B'Maakonigan, spoke about where inherent rights stand after the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement Act*, and what communities are telling us belonging means. B'Maakonigan is working with First Nations on what comes next.

Dwayne Nashkawa, Governance Development Director for B'Maakonigan, spoke about the work underway with citizenship such as engagement sessions, think tanks, citizenship registries, information management, and shared research and tools.

- The core message: Under the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement Act* (ANGA) (2022), signatory First Nations hold recognized authority to define their own





citizens through their own laws — a deliberate contrast to *Indian Act* membership, where Canada sets the criteria and Bill S-2 only amends federal rules on Parliament's timeline.

- What communities are saying: Belonging is relational — carried through language, ceremony, kinship, clan, and territory — and engagement since 2007 consistently says communities already know who their people are. Draft principles now taking shape to hold that every law is unique to its Nation, aligned to its Chi-Naaknigewin, and that citizenship counts won't trigger federal funding shortfalls.
- What's next and what it takes: Draft principles and a framework go to governance directors, then out to ANGA Nations for review, with each Nation making its own law. Passing a law is the starting line — registries, applications, appeals, records, and trained staff all need sustained resourcing, with B'Maakonigan supporting only where asked.

Regional Breakout Sessions Day 2:

Regional break-out sessions were held on Day 2 of the conference to gauge where each First Nation was in relation to their citizenship law.

The breakout-sessions focused on where participating First Nations are in relation to membership, citizenship, belonging laws, governance codes, and community-led Nation rebuilding as follows:

- Across the notes, communities are at different stages: Some are only beginning conversations, some are reviewing drafts, some have older membership codes that need updating, and others are moving from existing citizenship codes toward fuller laws under their own governance frameworks.
- A major topic is the desire to move beyond colonial membership systems and toward First Nation-defined citizenship and belonging.
- Several communities note that ISC still controls or heavily influences membership lists, registration, land, and status-related processes, which creates tension between federal systems and community understandings of identity, family, and belonging.
- Another clear takeaway is that community engagement must be broad, inclusive, and grounded in interaction.
- Communities highlighted speaking with members both on and off reserve, holding sessions in different urban locations, engaging Elders, and including youth and families.





- First Nations stated that citizenship work cannot simply be technical or legal, it must involve asking people what citizenship means to them and creating space for shared understanding.
- Communities discussed integrating children through hunting and fishing, practicing language together, storytelling, coordinating families, strengthening attachment and family ties, and rebuilding culture.
- A recurring concern is how to manage membership growth, family connection, and definitions of belonging.
- Some notes reference an influx of members with limited family connections, questions about membership versus status or citizenship, and the need to clarify who votes or participates in decision-making.
- The participants expressed how communities are grappling with how to welcome or recognize people while also protecting community integrity, cultural continuity, and accountability. Ideas raised included family-tree projects, genealogical history, clan ceremonies for new members, honorary membership, and defining the responsibilities of citizens as well as the responsibilities of Canada.
- The notes also point to a strong interest in learning from other First Nations rather than working in isolation.
- The notes acknowledge that change may take a long time, especially after 150 years under ISC systems. One discussion suggests starting with small, community supported changes, at the most three changes, and allowing amendments over time.
- Trust is named as a challenge: communities need to build confidence, trust themselves, and move together through mindset change.
- The participants also raised the need for procedural fairness, safeguards, legal capacity, and independent mechanisms.
- Participants discussed the need for legal support or funds for First Nations, options for third parties to reduce perceived conflicts, and systems for redress or appeals.
- Fairness is described as a loaded question, with a proposed response being to create a mechanism that is as independent as possible and endorsed by the community. The notes link fairness to community values, Chi-Naaknigewin, accountability to the people, and the need to review whether processes follow those values. B'Maakonigan is mentioned as a possible impartial option if needed.

Participants raised Anishinaabe Aaadziwin, clan systems, traditional knowledge, roles and responsibilities, youth leadership, Elders' roles, and the challenge of integrating traditional systems into "colonized ways of doing things." The notes acknowledge that communities have been separated from these systems and are now relearning them. The takeaway is





not simply to recreate the past, but to replicate core values and evolve them into the present day.

Key Directions Reflected:

- First Nations also reflected a broader governance question: How to restore Anishinaabe systems within today's realities.
- Communities generally support moving toward First Nation-led citizenship laws, belonging laws, or updated membership codes that better reflect their own values and identities.
- Engagement should include off-reserve members, Elders, youth, families, and community-wide discussions.
- Citizenship work should be tied to culture, language, family roles, genealogical knowledge, and traditional governance systems, not treated as only a legal exercise.
- Communities should learn from one another, share drafts and experiences, and proceed according to each Nation's readiness.
- Change should be incremental and community-supported, especially where trust, capacity, or legal uncertainty are concerns.
- Fairness mechanisms should be independent where possible, values-based, community-endorsed, and supported by redress or appeal processes.

Questions and Issues Raised

- Where is Canada at? The notes ask where Canada currently stands in relation to these issues.
- What is membership versus status versus citizenship? This distinction remains unresolved for at least one Section 10 First Nation.
- Who votes? Zhiibaahaasing First Nation specifically raises process questions around voting.
- What does citizenship mean to community members and Elders?
- What age groups are missing from these discussions?
- How can traditional systems, including clan systems, be integrated into current governance structures shaped by colonial systems?
- Have First Nations used clan systems productively, and what resources or supports exist?
- How can communities create fair, impartial redress or appeal mechanisms that reflect their values?





- Should communities do this work themselves, or allow government systems to continue doing it?

Below is the regional breakout sessions feedback from the First Nations:

Wahnapiatae First Nation:	
• Gather knowledge, learn impacts, • Speak with other First Nations, map out risks	• Where is Canada at
Atikameksheng Anishnawbek:	
• Draft put together • Discussion – community & Nation	• Universal engagement • comprehensive community plan, inclusive of definitions, community/Nation
M'Chigeeng First Nation:	
• Belonging law passed, community in the dark • Inclusive of off-reserve, session in various cities • Feeling of “Belonging” moving forward together	• Generational trauma, impact of registration according to ISC. • Still under ISC law for land, time to do something, find a way to work together
Zhiibaahaasing First Nation:	
• Citizenship barely on radar, starting from scratch • Took the template and used it was colonial paperwork, not reflective of Zhiibaahaasing, needs to be Zhiibaahaasing specific	• Process – who votes • speak to elders (small community), ask what citizenship means to them • September, Council meeting, more foundation for citizenship (2026-2027)
How do we start as a Reserve:	
• Integrate children – hunting, fishing • Loss of children – CAS • Practice language together • Story telling	• Coordinate families together • Attachment – stronger ties • Build our culture
Aundeck Omni Kaning:	
• Reviewing drafts, code development • Rebuilding our communities – “the art of visiting” • Story telling, learning history	• Quilting bees – lots of information sharing, training, teaching, solutions • Strength family, family roles (raise the little spirits – binoojiinh)
Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory:	
• Section 11 First Nation	• Two membership clerks





• One of the largest First Nations – 65% off reserve • Gather information to develop a citizenship law • ISC handles membership list currently	• Under expansion • Be proud to be a member of a First Nation • Encourage register babies as soon as possible
Sheshegwaning First Nation:	
• Moving forward with an election code first • Learn from sister Nations	• Research • Family tree projects – genealogical history
Whitefish River First Nation:	
• Citizenship code, 1984 began working on it, passed in 1985 • Many challenges, engagements off reserve • Yield to cultural beliefs and responsibilities • Part on ANGA – will move code to law	• Challenge – gain trust of community, we need to trust in ourselves • On the move to make positive changes, developing confidence • Mindset change – together
(FN was not identified) - Section 10 First Nation:	
• 1998 membership code has not been reviewed • What is membership vs status/citizenship	• Drafts have been brought forward • New 4-year council term – collaborate/learn from other First Nations
(FN was not identified) – Section 10 First Nation:	
• Membership code • Interesting conversations/perspective • Influx of members – no family connections • ISC still has final say • Consulted a lawyer – ISC has not been taken to task • Need to develop First Nation Citizenship Laws	• If a land code is adopted by First Nation, then able to transfer land title to non-status family members • Do small steps – 1 change that the community supports (at the most 3 changes) • Under ISC for 150 years, maybe it will take that long to get where we want to be • Change takes time – amendments over time
What is your capacity to revive your roles? What does it look like?	
• Anishinaabe Aaadziwin • Genealogical work – know where our families come from • Generational approach	• Roles/responsibilities/stages of life – connection of elders to youth, Council to youth





• We didn't have boarders – various gathering/camps at different locations – i.e. maple sugar camp • Intersections of family ties (community member but from another First Nation, honorary membership, provide the best for the visitor) • Foundations of our families – informing/mentoring our youth	• What age groups are missing from these discussion • We need youth to start stepping into leadership roles • Influx of membership (some First Nations created a moratorium) • Responsibility of members being voted in – clan ceremony (what are we doing for our new members) • Roles/responsibilities of our citizens, roles responsibilities of Canada
Procedural Fairness and Safeguards:	
• Legal capacity/fund to support First Nations • ANGA • No perceived conflict/3rd parties may be an option • Beyond borders – ask Betsy for website for resource • Clan systems – have First Nations seen/use these clan systems productively, each First Nation are at different places, resources/support vs provided • Response- We have been separated from our systems and recently Anishinabek Nation has been re-learning these systems • Our Traditional Knowledge and ways of being has to be shared. It's a difficult process • How do we integrate these systems into our colonized way of doing things	• We have to find a way – ensuring we replicate the values and evolve it into our world today • We rely on our people – accountability to our people based upon the values • Chi-Naaknigewin endorsed by our people • Point out immediately – when not being followed • Create system for redress/appeals – does it follow the values • Review the Chi-Naaknigewin – discuss whether or not it was followed • Fairness is a loaded questions – minimize by creating a mechanism that is as independent as possible (has to be endorsed by community) • Impartial – B'Maakonigan if needed • Do it ourselves or let the government do it





E'Dbendaagzijig Next Steps:

Southeast Regional Chief Smoke and Dr. Corbiere Lavell spoke about the next steps on Day 2 of the E'Dbendaagzijig (Those Who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference as follows:

Goal of E'Dbendaagzijig Strategic Workplan:

- **External and internal** approach: Pursuing Canada-to-Nation recognition of Anishinabek Citizenship Laws, a related fiscal relationship, and political advocacy, while developing and implementing Anishinabek Nation and First Nation laws grounded in specified Anishinaabek principles.
- **External next steps** include monitoring Bill S-2, legal cases, and proposed federal legislation on the Second-Generation Cut-off and Section 10 Voting Threshold; collaborating with ISC, Indigenous organizations, councils, and First Nations; and providing ongoing reports,
- **Internal next steps** include coordinating leadership and E'Dbendaagzijig meetings, supporting First Nations' law-making and communications, developing an awareness campaign, and continuing updates to leadership, First Nations, and E'Dbendaagzijig.

Dr. Corbiere Lavell stated at the conference "Anishinaabe E'Dbendaagzijig Laws are a living expression of Anishinaabe identity, responsibility and belonging."

E'Dbendaagzijig Conference Evaluation Form Results:

Participants were given an evaluation form to give feedback on their attendance and experience at the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference. Five questions were asked on the evaluation form as follows.

Please check-off your answers below	
Did you enjoy attending the Anishinabek Nation Governance E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin Conference?	Yes ☐ No ☐ 58/63 (yes) 92%





	4/63 (somewhat) 6%
Which days did you attend?	August 19 th 2/63 3%
	August 20 th
	Both Days 62/63 98%

	Yes	No	Somewhat
Were the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Conference objectives clearly stated and met?	49/63 77%	0/63	10/63 15%
Was the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Conference well organized?	49/63 77%	2/63 3%	10/63 15%
Was there sufficient time for networking?	33/63 52%	8/63 12%	21/63 33%
Did the Co-Chair(s) adhere to the agenda?	54/63 85%	0/63	8/63 12%
Were the presenter(s) provided adequate time for presentation/questions and answers?			
Marsha Smoke, Crystal Stevens, and Dr. Damien Lee	46/63 73%	9/63 14%	8/63 12%
Dr. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell	50/63	5/63	8/63





	79%	7%	12%
Clayton King	48/63 76%	2/63 3%	9/63 14%
Mary Laronde	51/63 80%	3/63 4%	9/63 14%
Ogimaa Kwe Tracey Hendrick, Tristyn Sandy, and Dawyne Nashkawa	51/63 80%	3/63 4%	5/63 7%
Regional Beak Out Session	50/63 79%	3/63 4%	6/63 9%

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Did the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzjig Conference increase your knowledge on Governance initiatives/processes?	4/63 6%	1/63 1%	7/63 11%	35/63 55%	19/63 30%
Was the resource materials provided at the E'Dbendaagzjig Conference relevant and useful?	6/63 9%		11/63 17%	34/63 53%	20/63 31%





Summary of Evaluation Feedback from the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference:

Attendees were given the opportunity to give feedback on their experience at the conference by completing an evaluation form. The following five questions were asked:

1. What did you like most about the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference:

Feedback on the conference highlighted the value of its information, presentations, networking, and opportunities to discuss membership and citizenship work. Participants also identified a need for more engaging delivery and additional time for presentations as follows:

- **Information and Presentations:** Participants valued the substantial and relevant information, including presentations by Clayton King, Dr. Corbiere Lavell, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Dr. Lee, and others. They highlighted historical research, clan belonging and identity, Section 10 and 6-1/6-2, membership administration, citizenship development, and examples from other First Nations.
- **Networking and Participation:** Breakout and discussion sessions allowed participants to exchange perspectives on membership codes, citizenship, and the approaches and challenges of other First Nations. Participants also appreciated networking with membership clerks, meeting the Anishinaabe Team, reconnecting with colleagues, and having opportunities for everyone to contribute.
- **Organization and Improvement Areas:** Participants praised the conference's scheduling, facilitation, printed materials, binders, accommodations, and efficient use of Post-it notes for questions. One respondent found Day 1's paper-based delivery too dry and difficult to sit through, while another wished Clayton King and Dr. Lee had more presentation time.

2. What did you like least about the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference:

Participants generally viewed the E'Dbendaagzijig Conference positively, while identifying opportunities to improve pacing, scheduling, accessibility, interaction, and content organization as follows:

- **Pacing and Scheduling:** Many respondents found the days and presentations too long or rushed, with insufficient breaks and limited networking time. Some presenters had to omit material or were cut off, and several respondents noted repetitive content.





- **Engagement and Organization:** Feedback called for more audience interaction, better-structured breakout sessions, earlier distribution of the agenda, and improved sequencing of presentations. Some respondents also found certain presentations less relevant, overly political, or too dependent on presenters reading from documents.
- **Accessibility and Logistics:** Respondents noted that some slides were difficult to see or were not designed for people with visual impairments, while some speakers were hard to hear. Other concerns included limited movement during long periods of sitting, hotel group-rate issues, and the wording of “citizenship,” which one respondent felt should use Anishinaabe terminology.

3. What is your suggestion for improvement?

Feedback described the conference as generally well organized and worthwhile, while identifying opportunities to improve timing, accessibility, participation, presentation formats, and practical content as follows:

- **Timing and logistics:** Participants suggested starting on time, adhering more closely to agenda and speaking times, shortening introductions, allowing more presentation and question time, and adding breaks without overcrowding or extending the conference. They also recommended providing agendas and presentation materials in advance, improving meal inclusivity, and arranging sunrise activities in a way that better accommodates Elders and participants with health or physical access needs.
- **Engagement and accessibility:** Suggestions included increasing attendee participation through discussions, group work, breakout sessions, activities, and community stories. Respondents also requested functioning microphones, clearer speaking volume, additional screens, more visual aids, shorter or more engaging material, and less repetition between presentations.
- **Content and knowledge sharing:** Participants proposed more grassroots and First Nations perspectives, feedback from communities that have implemented citizenship laws, resource tables, research and archival resources, and stronger inclusion of traditional knowledge and Elders in the subject matter.

4. What are other governance issues you would be interested in learning about?

Participants identify priority areas for learning about Indigenous governance, including law and leadership, self-governance and clan systems, and practical community capacity.





Participants also requested examples from other First Nations and more time for discussion as follows:

- **Laws and Leadership:** Participants expressed interest in land codes, custom election and election codes, leadership selection, child well-being, citizenship, marriage, trespassing, and other law-development topics. They also asked about elections, Chief and Council decisions, and possible timelines related to Bill S2.
- **Self-Governance and Culture:** Participants wanted more information about total self-governance/ANGA, Nationhood, Naaknigewin, traditional forms of government, and successful self-governing First Nations. They also sought training and practical scenarios for applying clan or Doodem systems in governance, along with continued attention to language and culture.
- **Community Capacity and Well-Being:** Suggested topics included impacts on seniors and Elders, strengthening trust, supporting enrolment departments, managing family-tree and membership databases, protecting privacy and confidentiality, and addressing membership, Section 10, citizenship, and appeals. Participants additionally raised housing, land use, food supplies, education, fiscal information, and related governance connections. One response described the conference as well organized and the information as important, while another recommended longer breakout sessions to allow conversations to develop.

5. Do you have any additional comments?

- Some participants made suggestions/comments for improvement and some participants recommended more small group sessions with focused input. A few noted that certain activities felt disconnected from the summit's core objectives and increased opportunities for participant voices and traditional teachings were suggested
- Attendees described the conference as well organized and informative, appreciating the presenters, breakout sessions, handouts, toolkit, and opportunities to learn and bring information back to their communities.
- Suggestions included adding more time or an extra day for discussion, providing a detailed agenda before registration, improving engagement through social events, varying lunch options, and offering dedicated spaces or optional individual smudges and sunrise activities.
- Participants also requested stronger communication about government issues and Anishinabek Nation activities, along with continued work on citizenship, clans and





family connections, language, culture, policy knowledge, Chi-Naaknigewin, and community food systems.

The participants stated that speakers were described as powerful and engaging, with meaningful audience participation. There was a strong desire to bring governance teachings back to local communities to deepen understanding.

First Nation Membership Clerks – Feedback/Input:

Here are the key takeaways from the Membership Clerks attending Conference:

1. Have these get together more often.
 - a. Having this circle after a long day with lots of information to take in is not ideal.
 - a. The Membership email chain will be a good way to get us together but need to ensure the right people are added to that distribution list.
 - b. B'Maakonigan will be engaging with membership clerks as we move towards the Intergovernmental Forum leadership meeting.
2. Do we have support from the Anishinabek Nation to develop a membership code?
 - a. The AN can support with a community visit and there is funding available to support, but they need to reach out to the AN with a request.
3. Is Canada going forward with the one parent rule and are FNs encouraged to include that in their membership codes?
 - a. That is up to the FN to decide.
 - b. The AN website has more information.
 - c. A Reference Guide was released by ISC on the Collaborative Process that outlines the proposed solutions, but they haven't decided on anything yet.

Other questions and points related to Bill S-2: Enfranchisement:

1. Are you encouraging citizens not currently eligible to apply for status now or wait for the 1-parent rule to pass?
 - a. Many clerks tell their members to wait and were told by ISC to wait.
 - b. SERC, Marsha Smoke advised them to apply now and get in the queue because once it passes they will be processed.
2. Ontario has such limited capacity to process applications with budget cuts - they need to improve this.
 - a. They are sending applications to other regional offices with more capacity like Nova Scotia.
 - b. "We don't control our band [membership] lists".





Conclusion

The outcome of the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Conference was successful in that it met the following set objectives;

- Analysis of Canada's First Nations Agenda:
 1. Canada's Action Plan to Repeal the *Indian Act*
 2. Bill S-2, with amendments
 3. ISC Collaborative Process
- Knowledge of Anishinaabe Laws and Traditions regarding E'Dbendaagzijing (Those Who Belong)
- A Practical Framework for First Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewinun.
- Increased Unity and a stronger Nation.

The Anishinabek Nation will be reviewing the E'Dbendaagzijing Strategic Workplan to confirm any additional activities to supports its implementation during the next fiscal year 2026-2027.

Based on the current National issues related to federal legislation initiatives led by the Government of Canada, the conference was a significant, meaningful, and timely event that fostered the importance of Anishinaabe-led governance and citizenship laws.

The Anishinabek Nation would like to acknowledge the outstanding support and assistance provided by all Leadership, key staff, stakeholders, and citizens for their participation that made the E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewin conference successful.

News Articles on the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewin Conference:

Anishinabek Nation gathers to discuss belonging and First Nation citizenship

August 26, 2026

<https://anishinabeknews.ca/2026/08/anishinabek-nation-gathers-to-discuss-belonging-and-first-nation-citizenship/>





(From left) Dr. Damien Lee, Head of Indigenous Studies at the University of Saskatchewan; Marsha Smoke, Anishinabek Nation Southeast Regional Chief; Crystal Stevens, Anishinabek Nation Legal Counsel; Justin Thompson, Associate at JFK Law Firm; and Fred Bellefeuille, Anishinabek Nation Legal Counsel formed an open discussion panel on Day 1 of the E'Dbendaagzijig (Those Who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference in Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

By Carley Lambert

CHIPPEWAS OF RAMA FIRST NATION — The Anishinabek Nation hosted the E'Dbendaagzijig (Those Who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference, a two-day gathering focused on belonging, identity, and First Nation citizenship, on August 19-20 at Casino Rama Resort in Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

The conference brought together Anishinabek Nation Leadership, champions, technicians, and First Nation membership clerks to discuss challenges communities face under the *Indian Act* and explore approaches based on Anishinaabe traditions, laws, and understandings of belonging.

In her welcoming remarks on Day 1 of the conference, Anishinabek Nation Southeast Regional Chief Marsha Smoke said that the work being discussed goes beyond changes to the federal registration system.

“This work is not simply about changing federal registration rules,” she said. “It is about restoring our understanding of belonging according to Anishinaabe law, our responsibilities to one another, and our inherent jurisdiction as Nations.”





Southeast Regional Chief Smoke said that the right of First Nations to determine who belongs to their Nations is inherent and does not come from the *Indian Act* or federal government.

Participants and guest speakers explored the issue of registration and the second-generation cut-off throughout the conference, with Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige addressing the issue during her keynote presentation, noting the impact section 6 of the *Indian Act* and Bill C-31, *An Act to amend the Indian Act*, have had on families and communities.

“Communities need to have the confidence to move away from colonial frameworks and adopt approaches grounded in our own traditions, Anishinaabe laws, and principles,” said Grand Council Chief Debassige, adding that section 10 membership codes can also mirror *Indian Act* definitions, which can exclude individuals who would belong under traditional kinship systems.

An update on Bill S-2, *An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)*, was provided by Southeast Regional Chief Smoke, and Anishinabek Nation Legal Counsel Crystal Stevens spoke about the collaborative process on proposed solutions to the second-generation cut-off under Section 6 of the *Indian Act*.

Justin Thompson, an associate with JFK Law Firm and a citizen of Nipissing First Nation, spoke about challenging the second-generation cut-off and legal resource following Senate amendments to Bill S-2.

Dr. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzjig E-niiganwidood/Commissioner, spoke about the purpose of the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzjig Naaknigewin, findings from consultation and the 2010 report, and the foundations of Anishinaabe law. She emphasized that belonging is connected to a person's family and community.

“If you think to where you belong, your people—that is where your connection is,” she said. “We know who our people are. We are determining who our people are.”

She also called on the federal government to act without further delays on issues affecting First Nation families.

Day 1 also included presentations that discussed belonging through historical, cultural, and academic perspectives.





Dr. Damien Lee, Head of Indigenous Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, presented *Between Membership and Belonging: Life under Section 10 of the Indian Act*. Anishinaabe Historian Clayton King of Beausoleil First Nation spoke about clan belonging and identity, including the importance of using traditional gifts.

Day 2 of the conference focused on the work currently underway within First Nations and the next steps for citizenship and belonging.

Moose Deer Point First Nation Chief Tracy Hendrick shared her community's experience tracing its membership through two original families and four family groups.

"I think it is a beautiful, messy family tree," she said, explaining that Moose Deer Point First Nation has been working with Roots Forward to create a family tree database that allows community members to trace their connections through generations. "I can take any member of the community and trace everyone up the tree."

The presentation provided an example of how communities can draw on their own histories and family connections when examining belonging.

Representatives from B'Maakonigan, the governing body of the signatory First Nations who ratified the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement Act*, also shared updates on their E'Dbendaagzjig work underway with First Nations.

Hillary McGregor, Policy Analyst for B'Maakonigan, spoke about where inherent rights stand following the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement Act*, what communities are saying belonging means, the work underway with First Nations, and what comes next.

Dwayne Nashkawa, Governance Development Director for B'Maakonigan, discussed the practical work being done around citizenship, including engagement sessions, think tanks, citizenship registries, information management, shared research, and tools.

The conference also highlighted the different experiences people can have with federal registration and First Nation membership.

"Some people have status, some do not," said Southeast Regional Chief Smoke. "Some belong to a First Nation under its membership code but are not registered under the *Indian Act*, others may be registered but disconnected from their community."

She said there are also children and grandchildren who have grown up knowing exactly who they are, even when Canada does not recognize their connection.





“Those realities are why we must always remember that registration and citizenship are not the same thing,” Southeast Regional Chief Smoke said.

The interactive conference was a welcomed opportunity for First Nations to share community experiences, examine the continuing impacts of the *Indian Act*, and discuss approaches to belonging in Anishinaabe law, clan, community, and the inherent jurisdiction of First Nations, and discuss next steps.

‘Anishinaabe E’Dbendaagzijing Laws are a living expression of Anishinaabe identity, responsibility, and belonging,’ says Citizenship Commissioner

August 21, 2026



Dr. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, Anishinabek Nation E’Dbendaagzijing Eniiganwidood Commissioner, spoke on Day 1 of the E’Dbendaagzijing (Those Who Belong) Naaknigewin Conference held in Chippewas of Rama First Nation from August 19-20. – Photo by Carley Lambert

By Marci Becking

CHIPPEWAS OF RAMA FIRST NATION – Anishinabek Nation E-niigaanwidood E’Dbendaagzijing (Citizenship Commissioner) Dr. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell addressed over 100 participants on day one of the E’Dbendaagzijing (Those who belong) Conference in Chippewas of Rama First Nation from August 19-20.

Commissioner Corbiere Lavell says that within the Anishinabek Nation, First Nations’ inherent jurisdiction is recognized; First Nations decide who belongs, eliminating the imposed second-





generation cut-off via the *Indian Act*, and follow a One-Parent Rule, adopted by the Anishinabek Nation.

“Anishinaabe principles are the roots that will support the practical work we will do to further develop our Laws on Those Who Belong,” said Dr. Corbiere Lavell. “This is a renewal process. This is about renewal of Anishinabek authority and Peoplehood, Nationhood, renewal of our families and communities and our Nation because the *Indian Act* was meant to oppress, dispossess, and force assimilation.”

In 2009, the Anishinabek Nation Grand Council adopted the E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewin, a framework for Anishinabek First Nation citizenship laws. This framework law centres on the One-Parent Rule and is based on the inherent right of self-determination. The Citizenship Law, with the support of the E-Niiganwidood E'Dbendaagzijing Dr. Corbiere Lavell, was the response to the Government of Canada's Indian Status termination policies. The proposed law is a guiding document, akin to integrating Anishinaabe Law and principles as expressed in Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe (One Anishinaabe Family). More recently, a Declaration was established in 2025 to advance the law.

“As Commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation, I advocate for E'Dbendaagzijing,” stated Commissioner Corbiere Lavell. “In February 2025, we adopted the Anishinabek Nation Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijing, which expresses the foundation of our jurisdiction and First Nations citizenship laws.”

“The *Anishinabek Nation Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijing* further supports Anishinabek First Nations to assert our nationhood and implement our Anishinaabe citizenship laws,” said Dr. Corbiere Lavell.

“Anishinaabe E'Dbendaagzijing Laws are a living expression of Anishinaabe identity, responsibility, and belonging. This framework outlines what should be included in First Nation Law. Whether a First Nation will transition to Anishinaabe practices and laws of Belonging, or whether the First Nation intends to control membership through a federal law or *Indian Act* model.”

The Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijing states that only Anishinabek First Nations have the right to decide who belongs within their communities, and that the Government of Canada has an obligation to recognize and support inherent, Aboriginal, and treaty rights by recognizing First Nation rights. This will require land and financial resources to support recognizing their citizens.

“In our original governance system, the Doodemaag (Clan) system, we have the gift of reciprocity. We can shift from colonial concepts of rights and benefits toward the Anishinaabe concept of giving and using our gifts for the collective. Belonging is maintained through what we give to our clan and community. Anishinaabe Principles are the routes that will support the practical work we will do to further develop our laws on those who belong. This is about renewal of the Anishinabek Nation.





“It is our inherent right to self-determination and our sovereign right to adhere to our own governance laws. As shared by our Elders from our traditional teachings, it requires our attention now,” stated Commissioner Corbiere Lavell. “I want to stress that the foundations of the work we have done is grounded in the Anishinabek Nation Chi-Naaknigewin and our Declaration on E’Dbendaagzijig.”

The second-generation cut-off provides that after two generations of out-parenting (parenting with a person who is not registered as an Indian), the descendants cannot be registered as Indians. First Nations citizens registered under Section 6(1) (full status) can pass on their Indian status, but those registered under Section 6(2) (half-status) cannot transmit status in their own right. Due to decades of historical sex and racial discrimination, this cut-off impacts First Nation women and their descendants sooner and more harshly than the descendants of First Nation men.

For more information on E’Dbendaagzijig or Bill S-2, *An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)*, please visit the **Anishinabek Nation website**.

