



ANISHINABEK NATION MEETINGS

E-Niigaanwidoon E'Dbendaagzijiig – Commissioner on Citizenship Report

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Introduction

The Anishinabek Nation adopted the E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin in 2009. Our “Naaknigewin of Those Who Belong” is based on the sovereign, inherent right of Anishinabek nations to determine citizenship.

Through the E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin, the Anishinabek Nation Grand Council adopted the One-Parent Rule. The One-Parent Rule is our response to “the second-generation cut-off”, the erasure of “Indians”, and the legislated extinction of First Nations under Canada’s Naaknigewin.

Recently, one Anishinabek First Nation reported that 46 percent of the registered or status Indian population is under the age of 40 and 85% of those have 6.2 status. After many legal victories and constitutional challenges of the discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act, the result is that the loss of Indian status was pushed back by two generations. This is the tragedy we face today, especially our youth.

Since becoming the Commissioner on Citizenship in 2007, I have heard consistently that we must look after one another. I have also heard that we need our language and traditions (ceremonies). To quote our Anishinaabemowin E’Niigaanwidoon (Language Commissioner) Barbara Nolan, “We have to save our language if we are to save who we are.”

Mandate and Background

My current mandate is from Grand Council Resolution 2023-10 which directs the revision and renewal of the E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin 2009 and the development of processes and tools to help First Nations to create creating their citizenship laws.

In January 2025, a gathering was held at Bawating (Sault Ste. Marie) and a draft Anishinabek Nation Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijiig was created. Following virtual engagements in each Region of the Anishinabek Nation, the Declaration was adopted unanimously by the Anishinabek Grand Council in June 2025.

There was a ceremony to amend the E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin 2009 by adding the Anishinabek Nation Declaration on Citizenship as the Preamble. In The Pipe Ceremony a Scroll was prepared and added to our Nation Bundle. I am honoured to carry responsibility for the E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin Scroll.

In June 2025, my mandate was expanded to create a strategic plan to implement the 2023 resolution, among other related work. At the November 2025 Grand Council Assembly, the E'Dbendaagzijing Strategic Work Plan was approved.

E'Dbendaagzijing Strategic Work Plan

Because ISC's Collaborative Process has become enmeshed with Bill S-2, it became prudent to create an Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Strategy that was both external – to deal with Canada and ISC – and internal – to develop and implement Anishinabek Citizenship Laws, grounded in the Anishinaabe Law; particularly the Anishinaabe Chi-Naaknigewin, 2012. Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe.

A. External Political Strategy

- Advocate for recognition of Anishinabek Inherent Rights and Laws and the inherent right to decide citizenship
- Address the Second-Generation Cut-Off and Section 10 Voting Thresholds
- Collaborate with ISC, AFN, COO and other political bodies
- Monitor legal cases around identity theft and fraud issues, especially the infringements by the Metis Nation of Ontario
- Support the Senate amendments of Bill S-2

B. Internal Anishinabek Nation Strategy

- Cooperation among Leadership Council, Commissioners, and Governance bodies
- Pipe Ceremony and Grand Council reporting and direction
- Revise and expand the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewin, 2009
- Develop a First Nation Citizenship Naaknigewin template
- Develop tools, resources and engagement sessions, workshops and virtual events to support and educate about the Anishinabek E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewinuk and their foundation as expressed in the Anishinaabe Chi-Naaknigewin and the Anishinabek Nation Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijing
- Communications and Awareness Plan to include website with updates and resources, monthly communiques, podcasts, video clips, social media posts, and promotional items such as posters
[https://anishinabek.ca/departments/governanceactivities/edbendaagzijing/;](https://anishinabek.ca/departments/governanceactivities/edbendaagzijing/)

The main objective of the internal strategy is to engage leaders and citizens and get inspired to create our First Nation E'Dbendaagzijing Naaknigewinuk. Anishinabek have a sacred responsibility to protect our children and to honour the past, present, and future.

It is fortunate that we identified external and internal strategies in the Strategic Plan because in February 2026, Southeast Regional Chief Marsha Smoke led the external and

political activities so that I could focus on the main objectives of the internal plan and my core mandate to assert and implement Anishinaabe E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewinuk.

Accomplishments/Status of the E'Dbendaagzijiig Strategic Plan:

The Draft Revised Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin

The major accomplishment is that the revised draft Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin is complete and has received legal review and input to help finalize the draft for its engagement with Leaders and citizens.

The draft Revised Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin is a set of guiding principles and includes an Appendix that is the actual template, a suggested Framework for First Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewinun.

Virtual Engagement Sessions

Four virtual sessions were implemented to help build awareness and context to begin drafting First Nation Citizenship Laws. Each session ran about 1.5 hours from 6:30 to 8 PM.

The dates and topics for each virtual event include:

- Clan Belongings: Roles and Responsibilities – May 14
- Indian Act to E'Dbendaagzijiig: Identify and Belonging - May 21
- Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin – June 11
- Framework for First Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewinun - A Template: – June 18

The events have been recorded and can be found on the Anishinabek Nation website.

<https://anishinabek.ca/departments/governanceactivities/edbendaagzijiig/>.

E'Dbendaagzijiig Conference and Workshops

An in-person conference was held in Rama First Nation, August 19 & 20, 2026 to implement the following objectives:

- Knowledge of Anishinaabe Laws and Traditions regarding E'Dbendaagzijiig (Those Who Belong)
- A Practical Framework for First Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewinun
- Analysis of Canada's First Nations Agenda:
 - Bill S-2;
 - ISC Collaborative Process; and
 - Canada's Action Plan and Repeal of the *Indian Act*
- Increased Unity and a Stronger Nation

Spirit and Intent of the Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin

The E'Dbendaagzijiig Naaknigewin is a living expression of Anishinaabe identity, responsibility, and belonging. It supports First Nations as they reclaim their authority to determine who belongs, grounded in teachings from the Creator, the land, and the Clan System.

The Framework for First Nation E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewinuk template helps communities:

- Understand the E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin
- Prepare their own citizenship Naaknigewinuk or codes
- Restore relationships with Clans, families, and communities
- Move away from colonial ideas about identity
- Strengthen unity as One Anishinaabe Family

Implementing the E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin must begin with a strong foundation. This foundation is not created by governments or policies. It comes from the teachings that have guided the Anishinabek since the beginning of time. These teachings explain how people relate to one another, how decisions are made, and how responsibilities are carried out. They also remind us that belonging is not a matter of paperwork. It is a matter of spirit, kinship, and duty.

The E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin is rooted in:

- The Creation Story
- Chi-Naaknigewin - Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe
- The Seven Sacred Gifts
- The Clan System of Government
- The authority given by the Creator
- The Pipe Ceremony at the Grand Council Fire
- Anishinabek Nation Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijig

These teachings shape how the Naaknigewin is understood and applied.

The E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin marks an important step for the Anishinabek Nation and its First Nations. It restores authority over citizenship to the communities that hold this responsibility under Anishinaabe Naaknigewin.

For generations, the Indian Act controlled identity, family connections, and community belonging through federal rules that did not reflect Anishinaabe teachings. These rules separated families, created divisions, and weakened traditional systems of kinship and responsibility.

The approval of the E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewin allows First Nations to reclaim this authority and return decision-making about belonging to the people and the First Nations. The One Parent Rule aligns with Anishinaabe teachings and the Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijig. It supports the principle that communities should determine their own members and helps address the exclusions created by the second-generation cutoff. These developments influence the implementation process and highlight the importance of robust First Nation citizenship laws.

The One Parent Rule aligns with Anishinaabe Naaknigewin and the Declaration on E'Dbendaagzijig.

Since the adoption of the One-Parent Rule in 2009, First Nations leaders support Anishinaabe Citizenship Laws as the way to take up our responsibilities, assert the inherent right of self-determination, and end the discriminatory exclusions associated with the second-generation cutoff. It reinforces the principle that communities have the authority to determine their own members.

Section 10 Membership Codes: Duplicating the Indian Act?

The Yellowhead Institute's report, *Between Membership and Belonging: Life Under Section 10 of the Indian Act* (Lee and Horn-Miller, 2022), reveals that many Section 10 membership codes perpetuate Indian Act thinking instead of reflecting Indigenous legal orders. The report highlights a significant gap between membership and belonging, whereby individuals with strong kinship ties may be excluded due to administrative criteria.

The authors highlight the detrimental impacts on health, family relationships, economic stability, and social well-being. They emphasize that communities need support to move away from colonial frameworks and adopt approaches grounded in their own laws. Section 10 membership codes often mirrored Indian Act definitions, which led to the exclusion of individuals who would belong under traditional kinship systems. The report identifies harms related to health, kinship, economic stability, and social well-being. These findings reinforce the need for citizenship laws grounded in Indigenous legal orders rather than federal categories.

On-Going Implementation of the E'Dbendaagzijig Strategic Plan

We will need a team that has responsibility for guiding implementation. This work ensures that First Nations have the tools, information, and support needed to bring the E'Dbendaagzijig Naaknigewinuk into practice in ways that reflect community values, Anishinaabe governance principles, and the teachings that guide belonging.

Implementation is currently underway amid significant changes in federal policy and the politics surrounding Indigenous identity. Bill S-2 proposes major amendments to the Indian Act registration process, including restoring status to the descendants of enfranchised individuals and introducing a One-Parent Rule to eliminate the second-generation cutoff.

These changes will increase the number of people eligible for registration, but they do not address the deeper issue that registration is a federal designation rather than a reflection of belonging under Anishinaabe Naaknigewinuk.

Without clear First Nations citizenship laws, communities may experience confusion about federal status and true citizenship.

Urgency to Implement Self-Determination

Bill S-2 proposes significant changes to the Indian Act registration, including restoring status to descendants of enfranchised individuals and allowing for deregistration and reaffiliation with their natal First Nations. These changes respond to court decisions, such as *Nicholas v. Canada*, and ongoing concerns about enfranchisement.

Senate amendments introduce a One Parent Rule, which removes the second-generation cutoff and expands eligibility for registration. These changes will increase the number of people eligible for registration and create pressure for First Nations to assert their own citizenship laws in order to avoid confusion between status and citizenship.

The Revised Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzjig Naaknigewin provides a clear Anishinaabe framework for defining citizenship, which is necessary to protect First Nation rights and ensure belonging is determined by the Nation, ~~not by external claims or federal definitions.~~

Next Steps

1. Present the draft Revised Anishinabek Nation E'Dbendaagzjig Naaknigewin to the Anishinabek Grand Council in November 2026 for discussion and acceptance.
2. Continued collaboration with AN Leadership Council, Kinoomaadziwin Education Body (KEB), B'Maakonigan, Koganaawsawin, Nation Advisory Councils, E-Niigaanwidoowaad/Commissioners – for the implementation of Internal Objectives of the E'Dbendaagzjig Strategic Workplan.
3. Coordination of Leadership and E'Dbendaagzjig meetings – to provide updates on External issues related to Bill S-2, Second-Generation Cut-Off, Section 10 Voting Thresholds, Federal Legislation to amend the Indian Act, and to support the implementation of Internal Strategic Objectives - AN Solutions specific to the E'Dbendaagzjig Naaknigewin and First Nation E'Dbendaagzjig Law-making Framework.
4. Assist First Nations with Law-making Toolkit, communications and awareness strategies/workplans, leadership/champions/technical supports.
5. Develop and implement Leadership and E'Dbendaagzjig Awareness Campaign on E'Dbendaagzjig/Citizenship issues - External and Internal.
6. Continued ongoing updates/communications/reports to AN Leadership, First Nations and E'Dbendaagzjig.