



BMO Financial Group

2025 Indigenous Partnerships and Progress Report





wîcihitowin

(pronounced: wee-chih-hito-win) is a nehiyawewin/Cree term meaning “helping and supporting each other.”



Read our
Sustainability
Report



Access
Nisitohtamowin
eLearning



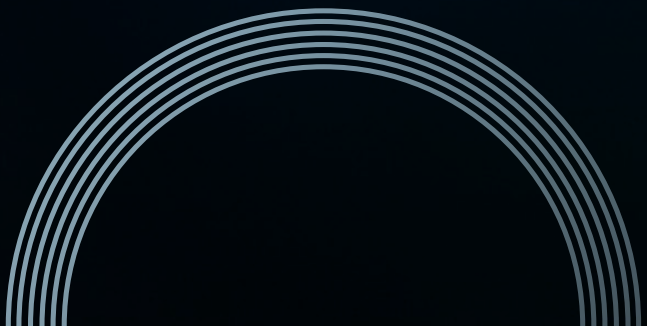
On the cover


The bison holds deep cultural, spiritual, and practical significance. It symbolizes respect for nature, resilience, and a deep connection to the land. Historically, bison were a vital source of sustenance – providing food, clothing, shelter, and tools – and played a central role in spiritual ceremonies and teachings.

The illustration, with its layered elements and sense of motion, reflects the spirit of building. Architectural motifs such as tipis and a sea wall further anchor this theme.

Design & illustration

by: Vincent Design
vincentdesign.ca





Land acknowledgement


From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territories of the First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples who call this Land home.

We recognize the original Peoples of Turtle Island who live, work and care for this Land, and we honour Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

The Land on which BMO headquarters sits in Toronto was once known as Tkaronto, meaning, in Mohawk, “where there are trees standing in the water.” It was originally inhabited by many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat Peoples.

Today, the greater Toronto area is covered by Treaty 13 and the Williams Treaties. We realize our accountability to uphold the treaties of this Land and to engage in a meaningful, continuous process of reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples who retain their jurisdiction and relationships with the Land.

We strive to engage in reconciliation purposefully. Everyone is invited to learn and reflect on history from Indigenous perspectives by exploring Nisitohtamowin $\sigma\prime\mathcal{D}^{\prime}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{J}\Delta\cdot\mathcal{P}$, a free public resource created in partnership with First Nations University of Canada and Reconciliation Education.



Note to readers

There are more than 630 First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities in Canada, which represent more than 50 Nations – and among these many communities in Canada, there are more than 70 distinct Indigenous languages currently spoken. Additionally, depending on the traditions of any given community, one may encounter several spelling variations for a single term – such as Ojibway, Ojibwe and Ojibwa. When Indigenous words appear in an article in this report, please note that we have adopted the spelling preferred by the Indigenous community to which the person featured in the article belongs. Similarly, the headline for each article is rendered in the language of the person featured and the map identifies his or her ancestral home.

In keeping with the spirit of building that infuses this report, you will find illustrations interspersed throughout of traditional Indigenous dwelling and ceremonial places.

We offer sincere thanks to several individuals who have made special contributions to the production of this report:

- Shaun Vincent (from the Métis community of St. Laurent in Manitoba) and the team at Vincent Design, in Winnipeg, for designing this beautiful report from cover to cover, including the illustrations;
- Our editorial consultant, Jennifer Ashawasegai (from Henvey Inlet First Nation), who reviewed

all the content and recommended many important improvements;

- The team at NATIONS Translation Group, a 100% Indigenous-owned firm, for their assistance interpreting the headlines in various Indigenous dialects;
- Councillor Jordan Coble (of Westbank First Nation); Eugene Alexis (Director of Language, Heritage and Language Department at Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation); Äyetth'Āna and Khásha (language keepers and citizens of Champagne and Aishihik First Nations), Adam Werle (of the Wakashan Language Circle – part of the Tashii-TeXela Language Society at University of Victoria's Linguistics department) and the language keepers at Whapmagoostui Cree Nation and Kuujjuaraapik – all of whom generously assisted with interpretations throughout the report;
- John Chabot (Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation) and the team at Anish Branding for printing the report;
- Numerous photographers of Indigenous descent, whose photo credits appear alongside their brilliant images throughout this report.

And, of course, we offer heartfelt thanks to the many customers, colleagues and friends across this Land whose stories are featured.

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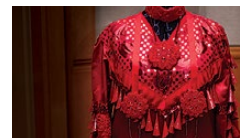
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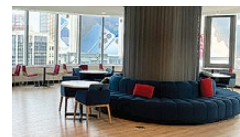
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Strengthening Relationships



We've worked to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples through mutual respect and trust, listening to different perspectives, learning about unmet needs and understanding the importance of advocating for new ways of working together.

wícihitowin ᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ presents an opportunity to report on our progress working and growing alongside Indigenous colleagues and communities. Strengthening these relationships helps create a thriving economy, a sustainable future and an inclusive society where everyone has access to opportunities.

Strong partnerships with Indigenous customers, colleagues and communities require openness and honesty. This is why, across BMO, we've worked to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples through mutual respect and trust, listening to different perspectives, learning about unmet needs and understanding the importance of advocating for new ways of working together.

Within the education, employment and economic empowerment pillars of our Enterprise Indigenous Strategy, we collaborate closely with First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples to eliminate barriers to inclusion, in line with our Purpose to **Boldly Grow the Good in business and life.**

The contributions of past, present and future Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) members are critical to our progress. As we continue to advance our reconciliation efforts across the bank in alignment with our strategy, we look to the IAC for guidance and advice. I, personally, have benefitted from their words and wisdom.

To the five founding IAC members whose terms are expiring this year: Chief Roy Whitney-Onespot, Professor Claudette Commanda, Chief Don Maracle, Sara Leo and K'ána Deborah Baker – thank you. You have all made an impact within BMO and beyond, encouraging understanding, respect and celebration of Indigenous Peoples and cultures. You will always be honorary members of the IAC.

Darryl White

Chief Executive Officer, BMO Financial Group

Learning from Indigenous Stories and Perspectives



Sharon Haward-Laird
General Counsel

Executive Sponsor, BMO Indigenous
Advisory Council

BMO chose to publish wíchítowin in June this year to honour Indigenous History Month in Canada – a time to celebrate the heritage, cultures and outstanding contributions of First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples across Canada. But our commitment goes far beyond this month. Listening, learning and acting in partnership with Indigenous communities is a year-round priority, embedded in our strategy and aligned with the Truth

and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 92.

Through my work on the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC), I've witnessed important leadership transitions that reflect this commitment.

First, on behalf of BMO, I thank Clio Straram for her years of service as Head of the Indigenous Banking Unit (IBU) and for her thoughtful contributions to the IAC. She is one of the best listeners I know, and we greatly benefited from her perspective bank wide.

Danny Menard has stepped into the role of Head of the IBU and joins the IAC. Danny brings a wealth of experience and is deeply committed to Indigenous economic empowerment. His leadership will further strengthen our partnership and empower communities.

I also wish to announce the creation of the Office of Reconciliation (OR) and to congratulate Dan Adams on his appointment as Head, Office of

Reconciliation. The OR will report to Michael Torrance, BMO Chief Sustainability Officer, who will oversee BMO's adherence to regulatory commitments and sustainable growth. In this new role, Dan will join the IAC as Council Secretary and will support Mike Bonner, Head, Enterprise Indigenous Strategy, Co-chair of the IAC and Executive Sponsor of BMO's Employee Resource Group Sharing Circle, to lead and execute on the three pillars of our Indigenous strategy: economic empowerment, employment and education.

These appointments signal a powerful next chapter. With advice and guidance from IAC members representing First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities, our focus remains on delivering bold outcomes in education, employment and economic empowerment. The stories in this report highlight the positive changes that are happening across Canada – and the transformative impact of working together to dismantle systemic barriers.



Mike Bonner
Head, Canadian Personal & Business
Banking Distribution

Head, Enterprise Indigenous Strategy

Co-chair, BMO Indigenous Advisory Council

Executive Sponsor, BMO Sharing Circle

At BMO, we are honoured to walk alongside Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations as allies – listening, learning and taking action together. Our allyship is not a passive role. It asks each of us to show up with humility, to build trust through consistent action, and to use our voices and platforms to support the goals of Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Every year we look to highlight and share what allyship looks like in practice – stories of partnerships that advance economic self-determination, support community-led solutions, and help create new opportunities for the next generation. These projects are rooted in respect for Indigenous rights, cultures and knowledge, and they remind us that true progress happens when we work together.

We are grateful to the Indigenous communities and partners who continue to share their wisdom and invite us to walk this path with them. It's a privilege – and a responsibility – to be an ally.

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Indigenous Advisory Council

The BMO Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) represents a bold step forward in reshaping the future of Indigenous inclusion in Canada's financial sector. Comprised of respected Indigenous leaders and changemakers from across the country, the IAC brings a wealth of lived experience, cultural insight and community knowledge directly into BMO's decision-making processes. This dynamic collaboration ensures that BMO's strategies and services are not only inclusive, but also culturally informed and community driven. It's a progressive model that puts reconciliation into action – not as a concept, but as a commitment.

By bringing diverse Indigenous perspectives into discussions that respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 92, BMO is able to provide programs and services to meet the needs of Indigenous customers, communities and colleagues. Economic reconciliation is a priority for BMO, and we recognize the role that we must play in supporting Indigenous employees, customers and communities.

With a focus on innovation, the IAC is helping BMO unlock new pathways for economic empowerment, leadership development and generational prosperity for Indigenous Peoples. From influencing inclusive hiring practices to shaping impactful investments in Indigenous-led initiatives, the IAC is a catalyst for meaningful transformation. Together, they are working toward a future where Indigenous voices lead, business practices evolve, and financial institutions remain trusted allies in the journey toward equity and reconciliation.

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Learn more about the IAC

Membership

The IAC is co-chaired by Chief Roy Whitney-Onespot (of Tsuut'ina Nation) and Mike Bonner, BMO's Head, Canadian Personal & Business Banking Distribution, and Head of BMO's Enterprise Indigenous Strategy. Chief Roy is stepping down from IAC and his successor as Co-chair will be announced later this year. The IAC is sponsored by Sharon Haward-Laird, BMO's General Counsel. BMO wishes to express our gratitude to current and former members of the IAC for sharing their unique Indigenous experiences and offering ongoing wisdom and invaluable insights to guide BMO and build upon our commitment to listening, learning and working collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples.

External IAC members across the Land



Chief Willie Sellars
Williams Lake First Nation, BC



Carol Anne Hilton
CEO, The Indigenomics Institute
Hesquiaht Nation, BC



Deborah Anne Baker (K'ana)
Squamish First Nation, BC



Chief Roy Whitney-Onespot
Tsuut'ina Nation, AB

Internal IAC members



Sharon Haward-Laird
Executive Sponsor,
Indigenous Advisory Council



Mike Bonner
Co-chair, Indigenous
Advisory Council



Amanda Ens
Secretary, Indigenous
Advisory Council

Building Progress, Empowering Indigenous Economies

hupii takaas, haa?aksap qu?aciic wiiciqmis

CENTRAL NUU-CHAH-NULTH
(NUUČAANUL)

Reconciliation is more than a goal – it is a journey, one that must be led by Indigenous voices, guided by truth and strengthened by partnerships built on understanding. Across Indigenous communities, there are stories of resilience, perseverance and success – stories of businesses that have defied barriers that non-Indigenous businesses do not face. These stories are not just inspiring: they are vital examples of economic empowerment and transformation.

BMO recognizes that reconciliation is impossible without truth. That is why the organization is committed to listening,

BMO embraces Indigenous perspectives through ongoing dialogue, which informs the development of BMO programs and products that create meaningful, lasting impact.

learning and evolving, and ensuring that the bank's relationship with Indigenous entrepreneurs, businesses and vendors reflects both the realities and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples. BMO embraces Indigenous perspectives through ongoing dialogue, which informs the development of BMO programs and products that create meaningful, lasting impact.



Progress is underway. Across the country, Indigenous businesses are driving economic change, closing gaps and fostering renewed relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. The increased rate of growth for Indigenous women-owned businesses is indicative of this progress. BMO shares a vision with many Indigenous organizations and valued partners, and together, we believe in the economic sustainability of Indigenous communities. The bank is actively seeking opportunities to collaborate while enabling access to tailored banking solutions, from BMO for Indigenous Entrepreneurs to the On-Reserve Housing and Home Renovation Loan Programs and the Virtual Indigenous Branch.

By reviewing our progress, refining our commitments and remaining steadfast in our pursuit of positive outcomes, we move closer to a future where Indigenous economic empowerment is not an aspiration, but a reality.

Carol Anne Hilton

CEO, The Indigenomics Institute,
Hesquiaht Nation, BC



Sarah Leo
COO, Nunatsiavut Group
of Companies
Nain, Nunatsiavut, NU



Denis Carignan
President and Co-founder,
PLATO
Pasqua First Nation, SK

Professor Claudette Commanda
Chancellor of the University of Ottawa
Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, QC



Nadir André
Partner/Lawyer
JFK Law LLP
Innu Nation of Matimekush-
Lac John, QC



Chief Donald Maracle
Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, ON



Tabatha Bull
President & CEO, Canadian Council
for Indigenous Business
Nipissing First Nation, ON

Three Pillars to Boldly Grow the Good: Indigenous Strategy Progress



BMO remains steadfast in our commitments on Zero Barriers to Inclusion. Our engagement with Indigenous customers, colleagues and communities is framed by three pillars – education, employment and economic empowerment. We are advancing the actions we have committed to, and responding to the Calls to Action set out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to advance reconciliation across the country.

Measuring progress in advancing reconciliation with Indigenous communities requires tracking of tangible outcomes across areas such as economic inclusion, employment, procurement, governance and community investment. BMO is pleased to share our indicators of progress over the past year.



EDUCATION

Hosted internal Indigenous cultural competency and shared history training led by the Indigenous Banking Unit. Training has focused on internal audiences including **330+** employees. External Indigenous consultants have provided expertise to the bank through experiential training sessions. Additionally, 29,163 employees have participated in Nisitohamowin.

\$15 million

contributed to Indigenous education-based initiatives, out of a total of **\$28 million** in donations and pledges in support of Indigenous causes across Canada since 2021. Supports to Indigenous scholarships and awards total **\$6.7 million**.

500+ hours

committed to learning about core personal finance topics, such as budgeting, credit management and homeownership. BMO SmartProgress™ for Indigenous communities was launched in 2024 to provide **20+** interactive and on-demand financial education modules.



EMPLOYMENT

92.1% retention

among Indigenous employees enrolled in BMO's Miikana Career Pathways Program – Indigenous employees who join the program are retained at 2.76 times the rate of those who do not participate in the program.

1.66% promotion share

for Indigenous employees is keeping pace with the overall rate of promotions. Indigenous employees are represented in the bank in all lines of business and at all levels, including senior leadership.

Indigenous inclusion activities

The Indigenous Inclusion Speakers Series was introduced in 2024, and focuses on topics requested by Indigenous employees.

Through the Employee Resource Group, BMO Sharing Circle, the enterprise has commemorated a variety of events and campaigns, including National Indigenous History Month, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Indigenous Veterans Day and the Moose Hide Campaign.



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Investing in business

Since exceeding our original commitment to spend \$10 million from 2021 – 2023 with Indigenous-owned businesses (achieved \$77 million), total spending was more than \$125 million by January 2025.

We continue to improve access for Indigenous-owned businesses to BMO Elevate, our business development program. To date, six Indigenous-owned businesses have been supported with networking, mentoring, education and development opportunities.

\$16.4 billion

in Indigenous banking services extended to customers to advance economic self-determination in partnership with Indigenous communities nationwide, maintaining momentum achieved in previous years.

\$264 million

in authorized loans for housing in First Nations communities through BMO's On-Reserve Housing and Home Renovation Loan Programs. More than 300 Indigenous Nations and communities in Canada have a banking relationship with BMO.

This beaded medallion with the BMO logo, prepared by a local artisan in Thunder Bay, was a gift to the bank from Luke Reynolds, Board Chair of First Nations-owned Wasaya Airways.



Learn more about our commitments to Indigenous customers, colleagues and communities

New Growth from the Ashes

Tsítslem te skweńllq ne sqwlúlecw

SHUSWAP

Everyone in the Skwłāx te Secwepemcúlecw First Nation remembers where they were when the Bush Creek East wildfire swept through their community on August 18, 2023.

They thought they were ready for it, but as Kúkpí7 (Chief) James Tomma later recounted to a reporter from the *South Shuswap Scoop*, “The fire people, they were dancing that day, announced by the wind people. They were not going to be denied that day.”

In a matter of hours, the wildfire overcame the defences and devastated the community – damaging the graveyard and destroying infrastructure and vital local businesses. Worst of all, 34 homes burned to the ground. When it was over, everyone knew what they had to do. Rebuild. And they had to rebuild *fast*.



Trevor Delorey (far left) with the SRM team that helped rebuild the community in record time after the devastating wildfire of August 2023.



With financial assistance from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), the Nation launched a Rapid Housing Initiative to restore people's homes. But even by "rapid housing" standards, the speed of the rebuilding effort was unprecedented. Construction began in December and four months later, they cut the ribbon on the newly developed Dancing Fawn II subdivision – one of four subdivisions that would be built in 2024. The final structure, a five-plex, was completed and occupied by February 2025.

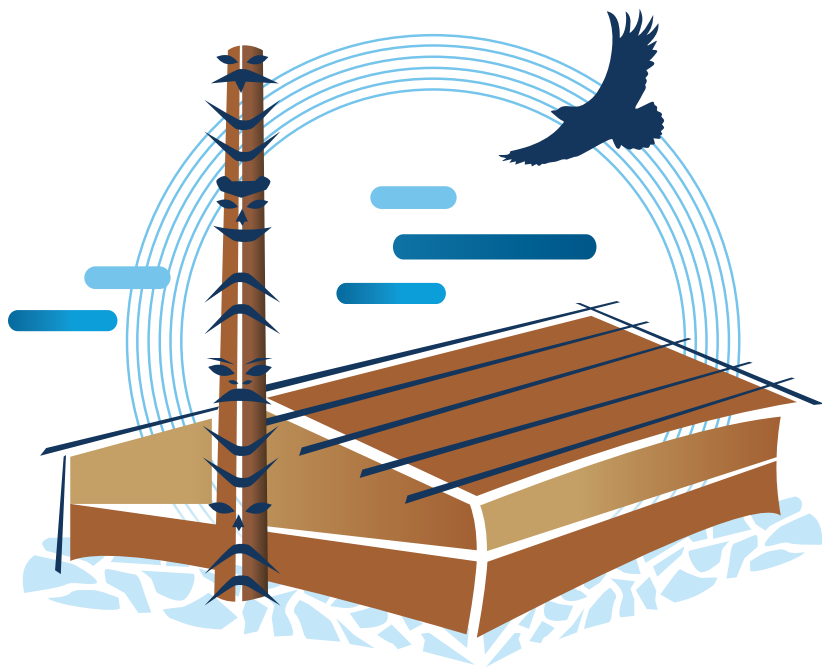
Trevor Delorey, CEO of Skwłax Resource Management (SRM) – a 100% Skwłax te Secwepemcúlecw-owned company – played a leading role in the initiative. He emphasized that the rebuild was Nation-led from start to finish. Council and leadership selected contractors, directed planning, and remained firmly in the decision-making seat throughout the process. "The Nation drove the bus the whole time," Trevor says.

ISC's willingness to honour the Nation's leadership in procurement processes and decision-making marked a notable shift. Rather than relying on conventional public tender models, ISC worked collaboratively with the Nation on procurement, trusting in local expertise. The results spoke for themselves: despite a marginally higher up-front cost, the rebuild outpaced timelines seen in other communities facing similar devastation.

"It's really the end result [that matters]," says Trevor. "It showed that there is a better way. With the right people and companies at the table, the Nation can lead their own recovery."

"Getting the Nation's members back in the community quickly was valuable beyond measure," says Barbara Doney, SRM's Manager of Finance. "The biggest thing is your mental health. It is very important to bring people back together after a wildfire like the one we experienced."

Trevor agrees. Apart from the financial costs of not being home for extended periods, there are so many other costs that are hard to quantify. "Social disconnection and financial strain all contribute to a heavy, often unseen, cost in post-disaster scenarios," Trevor points out. "This project challenged traditional definitions of value. It wasn't just about dollars – it was



"You can feel a sense of pride in those communities because the Nation worked on it."

– Margaret Chartrand-Poteet

HAIDA HOUSE

A Haida house is a large, post-and-beam structure traditionally built by the Haida Nation on the Northwest Coast, made from massive cedar planks and often adorned with carved totem poles. These homes served as communal spaces that embodied social structure, cultural identity and connection to the land and ancestors.

about restoring dignity, routine and belonging. "So, did it really cost more?" Trevor wonders.

The big intangible is the renewed sense of pride felt by members of the community. Margaret Chartrand-Poteet is a newcomer to Skwłax te Secwepemcúlecw, where she works as the Marketing & Engagement Coordinator for SRM. Visiting the new subdivisions, Margaret says, "You can feel a sense of pride in those communities because the Nation worked on it."

A major point of pride is the quality of the new construction. Although conceived as temporary housing, Council focused on design and using quality materials. Most returning residents have chosen to keep their new homes rather than build permanent homes on their land.

The whole team feels the pride of a job well done.

For SRM and the Nation, the rebuild represents more than just recovery. With over 50% Indigenous employment – 30% of whom are Skwłax members – SRM is proving what community-owned enterprise can achieve.

"Our investment stays right here in the community. It's in the homes, the jobs, the hope we've rebuilt together. It truly exemplifies SRM's mission statement, *'Building a Balanced and Prosperous Future'*."

Building the Community

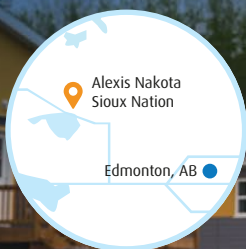
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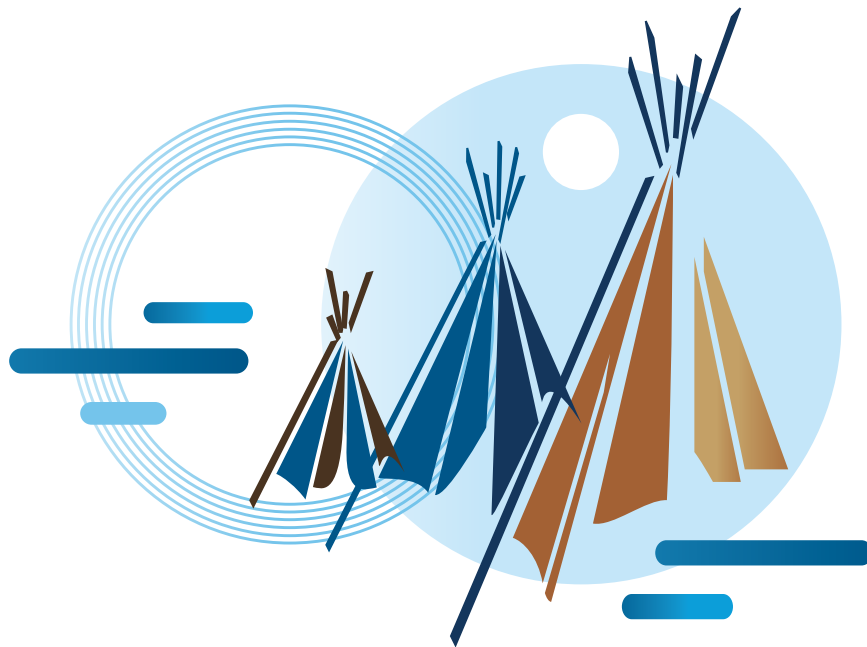
STONEY (ISGA DIALECT)

The Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation is situated on Treaty 6 territory near Edmonton. Like many communities across Canada, they have faced chronic housing shortages and the need for more affordable housing. To help address this, the Council accessed Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Rapid Housing Initiative. The resulting building project became the largest ever undertaken by a First Nation through the program.

"It was a significant day for Alexis," says Chief Tony Alexis.

Chief Tony Alexis, leader of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, stands in front of recently completed homes, built by the Nation through CMHC's Rapid Housing Initiative.





“This project wasn’t just about building homes; it was about taking control of our future and ensuring our community has access to the things we need,” Chief Tony Alexis adds. “It’s a reflection of the hard work, determination and resilience of our people. Seeing these homes being built and knowing they’re for our members is a true step forward in the growth and development of Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation.”

Since the project’s approval in 2023, 72 modular and precast homes have been constructed for community members. BMO, which has partnered with the First Nation for over 20 years, stepped in toward the end of the project to finance some of the costs not covered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

The success of the project is typical of Alexis Nakota, which is consistently focused on economic development initiatives that benefit the community. While the construction of new affordable homes was an important achievement in itself, the Nation also sought to leverage the project to maximize its impact. To do so, it created its own strategy for managing the construction work, ensuring that community members had access to the employment opportunities created by the housing project.

“We learned a lesson when the new school was built,” Chief Tony Alexis explains. “We had outside workers come in, do the work, and leave. We said, this won’t happen again. So, we created a strategy to manage it ourselves.”

Being alert to opportunities is crucial to the Nation’s economic development. When the

“Their approach is always collaborative – they don’t simply direct us to work; they engage with us, ensuring that we are supported in overcoming any challenges along the way.”

– Chief Tony Alexis
Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation

THE TIPI

A tipi is a conical, portable dwelling traditionally used by Plains Indigenous Peoples, designed to be easily assembled and disassembled to support a nomadic lifestyle. Constructed from wooden poles and animal hides, it reflects deep environmental adaptation, practicality, and cultural symbolism tied to home, family and the natural world.

Trans Mountain Expansion Project (TMX) passed through Alexis Nakota lands, the Nation made sure to maximize the benefits of the project by gaining full ownership of Backwoods Energy Services, which was a supplier to the pipeline company. Backwoods grew quickly, generating revenues for the community and providing well-paying jobs. Though there were setbacks along the way, strong leadership and management have ensured that Backwoods will continue to grow and provide for the community.

Chief Tony Alexis also values the partnership with BMO. “Customer service is a cornerstone of our partnership with BMO,” he says. “They consistently demonstrate a high level of professionalism, taking the time to fully understand the issues we face and providing thoughtful, practical solutions. Their approach is always collaborative – they don’t simply direct us to work; they engage with us, ensuring that we are supported in overcoming any challenges along the way.”

Cloyd Bathen, Vice-President of BMO’s Indigenous Banking Unit, who works closely with Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, says BMO plans to continue to build a relationship with the First Nation.

“We’ve been there for over 20 years, and we plan to be there whenever the need arises.”

For Chief Tony Alexis, the goal is clear: continue to build the Nation’s businesses and achieve financial independence. “That’s the goal,” he says. “If we reach that point, everyone – whether banks, companies, or governments – will want to partner with us.”

NSYILXCƏN

(This page) BMO's Joel Neustaeter (left) meets with Pat Fosbery (second from right) and ANTCO finance team members Melissa Mongrain and Dean Chalmers-Owega (Facing page) ANTCO's head office in Kamloops, BC.



Because of its Indigenous ownership, ANTCO has close ties to more than 85 Indigenous communities in its market and more than 20 Métis societies. Chief Executive Officer Pat Fosbery recognized a growing need to finance more projects, and more complex projects, in communities but recognized that the company didn't have enough capital to take on large-scale loans. "What we run into many times," he says, "is the client who says, 'You know what, we are looking at doing some financing,' but then it's in the \$5 million, \$10 million or \$15 million range... and it's just too much capital for us.

"We'd love to participate in these deals," Pat adds, "– and in many cases, these clients are shareholders of All Nations Trust Company – but we're unable to."

To address this opportunity, he considered forging a strategic alliance with a larger partner but worried that ANTCO would be left out in the end. "Maybe at the beginning, it's a friendly conversation," Pat explained, "but as the deal progresses, it becomes, 'Do we really need ANTCO on board? We're doing \$20 million, why bring ANTCO in for just a million dollars?'"

Pat's long-standing relationship with BMO – where he'd started working right out of university – offered a potential solution. His community of Westbank First Nation (by Kelowna, in the Okanagan Valley) also has an existing relationship with BMO as the Nation's financial provider – so Pat decided to approach his contacts at BMO, including Joel Neustaeter, a vice-president in the Indigenous Banking Unit. "When I raised the idea of this strategic partnership," Pat says, "it was immediately embraced."

Even more promising, what Pat thought might take years – negotiating and signing a Memorandum of Understanding – was completed in a matter of months.

"It was a natural fit for me to connect with BMO and seek their partnership," Pat says.



"It was a natural fit for me to connect with BMO and seek their partnership."

– Pat Fosbery
Chief Executive Officer
ANTCO

Joel agrees. "The ability both to partner with ANTCO and to direct customers to the organization for their expertise is a win-win."

It's a two-way street, with both referring business to the other, or working together to lend to clients. Now ANTCO can participate in loans that were previously out of reach – and BMO is able to help clients access funding that ANTCO can provide, and BMO cannot, such as grant funding.

The two companies have already begun working on their first co-lending transaction and both parties are confident that the new partnership has huge potential. For ANTCO, the prospect of faster growth is compelling. "With that growth comes greater experience," says Pat. "It provides ANTCO with the financial resources to expand our offerings to clients."

Ultimately, the partnership contributes to BMO and ANTCO's common goal: to provide more economic opportunities in collaboration with Indigenous businesses and communities.

Esgenoôpetitj Securing the Future

Kelpitmk ta'n Elmi'knik

MI'KMAQ

Economic development isn't always about building something new.

Sometimes, it's about building to protect what you already have.

At Esgenoôpetitj First Nation, where the Miramichi River widens into Miramichi Bay before flowing into the Gulf, the constant motion of the tides had been taking its toll. The cliff face dropping down to the water was getting dangerously close to the shoulder of Bayview Drive, a major road. The deterioration was so extensive that as parents watched from their windows as the yellow school bus took their children off to school, they were in constant dread that the road would give way.

(This page and facing page) Heavy construction vehicles were required to complete the five-kilometre sea wall that now protects Esgenoôpetitj First Nation from the encroaching waters.



With financial assistance from BMO, Councillors in the Mi'kmaq community embarked on an ambitious project in 2019 to build a seawall to arrest the erosion, allowing them to reclaim the land they had lost.

Six years later, the project is nearly 98 per cent complete. More than 30,000 tonnes of armour stone – massive pieces of rock blasted from a nearby quarry – and 15,000 tonnes of sandstone were hauled to Esgenoôpetitj to create barriers stretching nearly five kilometres along the shore, protecting the road from further erosion.

In addition to securing Bayview Drive, a main lifeline to the community, the project has provided good jobs for members of the First Nation, including those who had access to heavy equipment, and others who were hired to work on construction.

Guaranteeing the integrity of the shoreline along the bay and into the river has started the First Nation thinking about other projects that will strengthen the economy of Esgenoôpetitj. With their proximity to the sea, the residents of Esgenoôpetitj have long been involved in the fishing industry, harvesting much-sought-after snow crabs and lobster. What the community is lacking is a wharf that will accommodate their fishing fleet.

Currently, the fleet comprises about 40 vessels, plus several more that are involved in the snow crab fishery. The plan is to build a wharf to hold those vessels and to house a top-grade lobster pound, alongside other facilities. Council members note that the Nation is perfectly located for a wharf to be built, and the seawall infrastructure project will contribute to the wharf's stability.

BMO has been involved in the community's economic development projects for more than 15 years, since first providing financing to the First Nation when it wanted to open a major bingo complex to attract players from the surrounding communities. The bank also provided support when Esgenoôpetitj acquired a crab processing plant.

"There's steady employment all the time. There's a lot of work in the fisheries industry – from getting onto vessels and going out to sea, to the processing plants and working at the plant – and also with the construction of homes and other businesses for the community."



"The upgrade was in the millions of dollars, but the plant now is one of the top processing plants in the eastern provinces," say the Chief and Council. The First Nation's products, which are marketed under the brand name "Native Pride," have attracted discerning buyers from as far away as Japan.

According to the Chief and Council, conditions at Esgenoôpetitj have steadily improved.

"There's steady employment all the time," they note. "There's a lot of work in the fisheries industry – from getting onto vessels and going out to sea, to the processing plants and working at the plant – and also with the construction of homes and other businesses for the community."

The seawall project is just the latest improvement.

"The atmosphere and the life in our First Nation have prospered," they conclude, saying BMO has played an important role in their success.

No Borders

Gaawiin ayaamagazinoon ji-aagawishkaageng

WESTERN OJIBWE

While the Jay Treaty and other legislation enacted and agreed upon by the governments of Canada and the U.S. allow some freedom of movement to Indigenous Peoples in North America, the international boundary line separating the two countries has very real and practical consequences.

Elizabeth King, originally from Batchewana First Nation, has lived and worked in Arizona since the 1990s.



Photo: courtesy of Elizabeth King

Elizabeth King, an Anishinaabe woman, ran headlong into this reality when she tried to receive the funding to which she was entitled as a member of the Batchewana First Nation which was part of the Robinson Huron Treaty settlement recently negotiated with Canada.

Elizabeth currently resides in Arizona. To receive her share of Batchewana's settlement funds, she was told she needed a Canadian bank account – Canada would not transfer the funds to a non-Canadian financial institution. To open a bank account at the institution she had used before she left Canada more than 30 years ago (one of BMO's competitors), she was told she would have to travel to Canada, in person, to present her identification.

Elizabeth finally made the reluctant decision that she would have to make travel arrangements back to Canada. "There's all this expense for me to get up there and we don't even have the money yet," she told herself, as she became more frustrated with each passing day.

It was only by coincidence that she happened to be speaking to her cousin in Batchewana (who had recently become Chief) and learned that he was meeting with BMO, the Nation's banker, to discuss the Nation's business. Her cousin offered to send Elizabeth the banker's contact information, and she decided to give BMO a try. "From the second that I called him," Elizabeth says, "it was, 'Don't you worry, we've got you. This is what you're going to do.'" He put her in touch with the bank's newly created Virtual Indigenous Branch where she spoke with Christine Dicke, a virtual banker with Métis roots in Alberta. "It seemed like five minutes, and I had my bank account," Elizabeth marvels.

Christine was the first BMO employee recruited to work in the Virtual Indigenous Branch, which is staffed largely by employees with Indigenous backgrounds to ensure that they are not only knowledgeable about banking, but also about responding to the unique issues that may arise with Indigenous customers, such as Elizabeth's situation.



"From the second that I called him, it was, 'Don't you worry, we've got you. This is what you're going to do.'"

– Elizabeth King
Batchewana First Nation



Get in touch with a
BMO Virtual Banker

WIGWAM

A wigwam is a domed, single-room structure traditionally used by various Indigenous Peoples in the Eastern Woodlands, built from a frame of bent wooden poles and covered with bark, hides, or mats. It reflects deep knowledge of local materials and a connection to the land.

Based on her knowledge and experience, Christine immediately recognized that Elizabeth had all the necessary documentation. "There are regulatory measures we have to do across banking," Christine acknowledges, "but Elizabeth had all the right identification information required to have access to banking." She had her passport. She had her status card – although, as Christine points out, some employees at financial institutions with less experience dealing with Indigenous customers may not be familiar with the variety of status cards that are acceptable forms of identification.

Not only was Christine able to open an account over the phone for Elizabeth so she could receive her share of the settlement funds, but she was also able to set her up with BMO in the U.S., which allowed Elizabeth to move her money seamlessly to a BMO branch in Phoenix, AZ. If more settlement funds are disbursed in the future, Elizabeth and her family will have access to it easily.

The original concept of the Virtual Indigenous Branch was to provide an efficient alternative for people living in remote Indigenous communities, often located long distances from a physical BMO branch.

Elizabeth's experience demonstrates that Indigenous customers don't necessarily have to live in remote communities to need good banking alternatives – and the Virtual Indigenous Branch will be there to serve them as well.

Unexpected Path

Koshkwíhiwe Míkóns ALGONQUIN

Kátai kaiyissítápai sópowátsi
stóto'ohsao'pi mo'ohsókoí

NIITSITAPI

What if it were possible to find a job where you're paid to do something you love?

That's what most of us are searching for – and Sean Frame has found it.

A passionate gaming enthusiast from the age of three, Sean now has a unique job in the Canadian banking industry. Sean is BMO's Gaming Relations Specialist, tasked with building relations with the growing community of gamers, whose passion for online games is driving an industry that eclipses the film industry in attracting entertainment dollars.

(This page) Sean Frame revels in his unique role as BMO's "Gaming Relations Specialist".
(Facing page) Sean, at a recent on-campus meeting with fellow gamers.



Sean has mixed ancestry, including matrilineal Algonquin and Blackfoot roots, along with patrilineal Scottish and Irish lineage. He grew up in Windsor. After deciding a business career wasn't for him, he switched his college major from accounting to journalism and began working in radio news. Then, to secure benefits and additional income stability, he took a part-time job at BMO – and soon discovered that he enjoyed the work. Sean left his journalism career behind and started working full-time at the bank.

A career at BMO offers a wide array of opportunities – even something as unique as becoming a Gaming Relations Specialist. Sean learned about the job when he saw a post on the bank's internal network, announcing a job opportunity for gamers.

"All you had to do was submit a video of yourself playing a video game and relating it to finance," Seans says, "and explaining the financial topic you chose in video game terms." He used his video production skills from his journalism training to create a video of him playing the popular video game, "Elden Ring," and relating how it was wiser to invest the game currency ("Runes") than risk losing them all, and comparing one of the battles to a fight against inflation. He successfully landed the job in 2022 and has been building BMO's presence in the gaming-verse ever since.

Every Thursday, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., you can find Sean hosting a livestream on BMO NXT LVL, BMO's dedicated channel on Twitch, the platform best known for its video game content, but also for its "in real life" streams that allow users to chat directly with the streamers. For his weekly livestream, he prepares content on a particular financial literacy subject and then he takes the lead from the participants.

"We hop in to playing games and that's usually when, if there's a lull in the chat, I'll give some financial information that's relevant," Sean explains.

Twitch users were skeptical at first. Some thought BMO was stepping into a space "where we didn't belong," Sean admits. "But we're all about authenticity."



"Now, people – especially people who are BMO clients – will come into the chat and say, 'Oh, this is awesome. My bank is on Twitch.' They say, 'This makes tons of sense, this is great.'"

– Sean Frame
Gaming Relations
Specialist



Join Sean live
on BMO NXT
LVL Gaming

He recalls an early critic who attended one of the livestreams and complained about BMO. "Why is a bank on here?" he would ask. "But he kept showing up every stream, he was there in the comments, and by the third stream, he was defending us," Sean says. "He was, 'Oh, that's not why they're here. They're not trying to sell us anything. They're just here to promote financial literacy.'"

"Now, people – especially people who are BMO clients – will come into the chat and say, 'Oh, this is awesome. My bank is on Twitch,'" Sean says. "As they watch, and as they see what we're doing, they say, 'This makes tons of sense, this is great.'"

Users can access the content on BMO's Twitch channel at any time, whether they want to review previous streams or leave questions for Sean to answer. The content is also available on various other social media channels, such as X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok.

Sean loves his job, and urges others, including Indigenous Peoples considering a career switch, to give banking a second look.

"I never could have imagined that I would be playing video games for a bank," says Sean. "It doesn't seem like a career trajectory that you could even dream of."

A Life of Service: Honouring Veterans

Tsi niiakónhnhes waon'thónkaria'ke MOHAWK

BMO has a long association with the Canadian Armed Forces – and today, BMO is proud to be the official bank of the Canadian Defence Community.

As part of that support, BMO recognizes the outsized role played by Indigenous Peoples over the decades in the Canadian and United States Armed Forces. Every year, the BMO Sharing Circle, a voluntary, employee-led group that brings together people in the bank who are interested in matters affecting Indigenous Peoples,

organizes events to commemorate Indigenous Veterans Day (observed annually on November 8). At last year's commemorative event, members of the Six Nations Veterans Association (SNVA) were invited to participate.



Canadian Armed Forces veterans (L to R) Ike Isaacs, Jessica Miller, SNVA President Bruce Paterson and Rick Mt. Pleasant at Six Nations Veterans Memorial Park in Ohsweken, ON



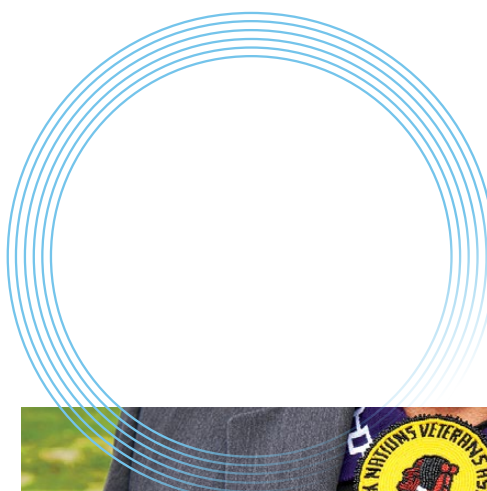
Six Nations Veterans Association is one of the largest associations representing Indigenous veterans. It is affiliated with Six Nations of the Grand River and the Veterans Hall is in Ohsweken, ON. Its members include the many women and men who served in uniform in Canada and the U.S. Among its members, SNVA still has several Vietnam War veterans who served in the U.S. armed forces.

Welby Isaacs, known to most by his nickname “Ike,” is the eldest living veteran in Six Nations. At 86 years of age, he considers himself fortunate to have been allowed to join the army in 1956. “There were 30 of us at the recruiting station in London that week,” he recalls, “and only five of us got sworn in; 25 were returned back home.” Ike went on to serve on a Canadian base in Germany, as a United Nations peacekeeper on the Gaza Strip, and finished his service at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in New Brunswick.

Rick Mt. Pleasant spent his entire career in the Canadian Armed Forces, joining the army through the Soldier Apprentice Training Program, rising through the ranks and retiring as a lieutenant-colonel after 43 years of service. He is also a member of Six Nations Veterans Association. Like Ike, he served on the Gaza Strip, as well as completing two tours in Germany. Before he retired, Rick was the most senior Indigenous officer in the Canadian Armed Forces and was often called upon to assist recruiters.

“We’d go to different reserves in Northern communities and talk about the military and various careers that were open to the community members,” Rick says, and there was a lot of interest.

Indigenous veterans share a common bond. With a shared experience in the armed forces, they have developed friendships and connections from coast to coast that endure long after they leave the military.



Ike Isaacs proudly wears the decorations he earned for service in the Canadian Armed Forces, including his time as a UN peacekeeper. He was also the first recipient of the USS Arizona Medal of Freedom.



**“I come to this hall.
I wear the uniform.
I participate in
remembrance services.
I feel like that sense
of pride is only there
because I am welcome
into this home.”**

**– Jessica Miller
Veteran**

As she enters civilian life, Jessica Miller, who retired two years ago after a 25-year career both in the navy and army, is conscious of the bond with her fellow veterans. She values the role of the SNVA and was chosen by her fellow veterans to be the association’s Sergeant-at-Arms. For her, the Veterans Hall at Six Nations has become a home away from home. “It’s nice to come into a meeting ground where we all have the same mentality, the same train of thought,” Jessica explains. “I come to this hall. I wear the uniform. I participate in remembrance services. I feel like that sense of pride is only there because I am welcome into this home.”

The SNVA looks after its members – checking on their health, providing assistance when the need arises, working with the hospice, and keeping the memory of their members’ service alive after they are gone. At Six Nations, their veterans’ service is recognized every year on the last Sunday in October. The veterans parade along flag-lined streets, the names of Indigenous war dead are read aloud, there is a gun salute and a fly-past – all followed by a community feast and entertainment. It is a fitting thanks for everything the veterans have done for the benefit of Canadians and Americans.

The Grandmother Earth Dress

Ookomimaa Akii-magood

WESTERN OJIBWE

Collin Graham considers himself to be a pragmatic person, engaged in a very Western-based profession: social work. He works as Community Development Manager with the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) in Thunder Bay.

Born as a member of the Caribou Clan of the Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation, which is situated in Treaty 3 territory, closer to Kenora, ON, Collin was given the spirit name Niigaanigaabo which translates as "the one who stands first" in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe language). "The beautiful thing about our names is that our names aren't just given to you," Collin says, "you have to live up to your name" – in his case, a difficult task for someone who also describes himself as "shy."

The Grandmother Earth Dress. Her healing spirit "changes your perspective."



Photo: courtesy Ontario Native Women's Association



Warning: Sensitive subject matter

This story includes references to human trafficking and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. For immediate support, call the toll-free 24/7 hotline at 1-844-413-6649 to speak to a counsellor.

www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/

Learn more about the National Inquiry

In 2017, as people in Thunder Bay prepared to make their presentations before the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), Collin had turned to ceremony to seek guidance, “and in that ceremony I ended up having a vision and I knew that we had to make this red dress.” So, he followed his vision.

The dress in his vision was a “jingle” dress – a traditional healing dress, well known in Indigenous cultures – but one with tangible differences. For one, the zippered opening was on the back, not (as usual) on the front. For another, it was just one colour (typically jingle dresses are multi-coloured), and that colour was red, “something we typically wouldn’t do, because red calls back spirits,” says Collin. “It’s the beacon for spirits.”

Elders in the community later asked Collin to explain why he was inspired to make the dress in this way, and he had no other explanation, except that what he made, is what he had seen in his vision. It was only then that the Elders he was working with, revealed to him that it was the spirit of Grandmother Earth who had come back in the form of the dress to bring healing, and that Collin was now to be her keeper.

He quickly discovered the healing power of the Grandmother Spirit when he brought the Grandmother Earth Dress to a meeting in Thunder Bay with survivors of human trafficking. As part of his responsibility overseeing the Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison program, Collin engages with the survivors on the street, who are especially likely to be Indigenous women and girls. Collin discovered that they felt they were never given the opportunity to grieve their “street sisters”

“The Grandmother has been a beacon for Indigenous women to be able to connect with; to know that despite the painful circumstances that they may be facing, Grandmother was always there to bring them in with an embrace, to let them know they’re always welcome home.”

– Collin Graham
Community Development
Manager, The Ontario
Native Women's Association
(ONWA) Thunder Bay.

– women who, like them, were experiencing homelessness and exploitation.

“Oftentimes, the conversation on MMIWG was reserved only for people of the loved ones,” Collin says. The survivors often felt that “they were an afterthought; that they were purposely excluded from the grieving process.”

The minute Collin revealed the dress to them, the women began offering their tobacco to the dress. “The women began to cry and they told me that they finally felt that their voice was heard” – that even though they didn’t know where their street sisters were, “they had something to connect them, to be able to show their love ... that they had a place to make their cultural offerings.”

The Elders explained to Collin that the Grandmother Earth Dress is both a healing dress and a way of raising awareness and connecting Indigenous women to their culture. “The Grandmother has been a beacon for Indigenous women to be able to connect with; to know that despite the painful circumstances that they may be facing, Grandmother was always there to bring them in with an embrace, to let them know they’re always welcome home.”

Since then, Collin’s work is consistent in walking with the Grandmother Earth Dress and travelling to gatherings where her healing spirit can be felt, including a recent meeting of BMO’s Sharing Circle Employee Resource Group. Collin realizes that the Grandmother Earth Dress is having an impact, and she is bringing awareness of MMIWG to more people, beyond Indigenous communities. “When you sit with the Grandmother Earth Dress, it changes your perspective.”

Being There for Everyone

Ji-ayaang imaa gakina awiya ji-wiiji'ind

WESTERN OJIBWE

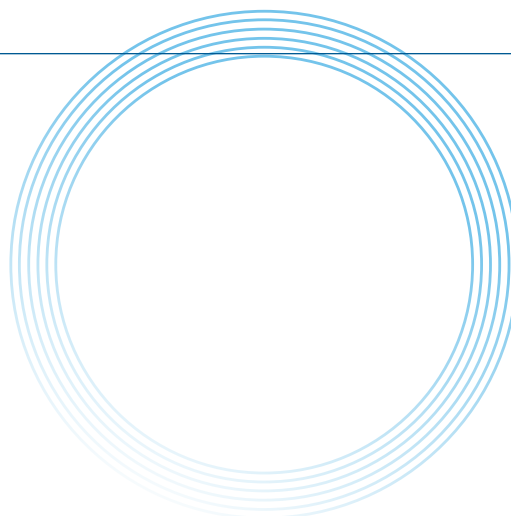
Providing banking services to people in remote communities remains an ongoing challenge – but we see this as an important priority and an opportunity to provide differentiated service.

BMO has continually sought new ways to bring our banking services to customers across Canada.

BMO's Mobile Branch visits communities across Canada, and features the latest technology.



Photo: BMO archives



Innovations include BMO's mobile banking unit and, most recently, the creation of the Virtual Indigenous Branch. Staffed by people who know what it's like to live and work in a remote community, Virtual Bankers are themselves of Indigenous background, or close allies.

Responding effectively to unforeseen situations is the real measure of operational agility. Elizabeth King's story [see *"No Borders,"* p. 18] is one example. For many born in remote communities, even having access to "official identification" to sign up for banking services can be a challenge. Not all births in remote communities are registered officially (indeed, this phenomenon isn't unique to remote communities). Although in small, remote communities an individual's identity is usually well known to everyone in the community, having a second piece of photo identification (or even a first) is not always the norm. While it is a banking requirement to "know your client," does that always require a document issued by the federal or provincial government? We asked the same question.

BMO sought an innovative alternative and recently introduced a refinement to our "Acceptable Identification" policy, which allows the bank to work with local Indigenous governments in remote communities to confirm a customer's identity.

"This enhancement allows people who don't have federal or provincial identification, and minimal access to banking services, to open chequing and savings accounts," says Mike Bonner, the head of BMO's Canadian Personal & Business Banking Distribution. "This is an essential first step if they are to be able to make real financial progress in their lives just like anyone else."

"This was an important change for members of my community," says Chief Mark McCoy of Batchewana First Nation. "Our members needed bank accounts but didn't always have the right identification. Working with Council, BMO was

"This was an important change for members of my community. Our members needed bank accounts but didn't always have the right identification. Working with Council, BMO was able to confirm everyone's identity and set them up with an account."

– Chief Mark McCoy
Batchewana First Nation



Access BMO
SmartProgress



Learn more
about BMO's
Indigenous
Banking Services

able to confirm everyone's identity and set them up with an account." Having access to a bank account is especially relevant now as more and more Indigenous Peoples are reaching long-negotiated financial settlements with the Government of Canada and the provinces for past treaty obligations, and compensation for land and resources that were taken from them.

Many members of communities where such settlements have been reached are seeing their financial situation improve dramatically – and most are also looking for good advice on how best to manage it. In response, BMO has developed tools to help customers improve their financial knowledge and manage the many financial decisions they will face.

For example, BMO SmartProgress™, the online financial education platform featuring more than 40 customized, interactive learning modules on various financial planning topics, has been very well received because it provides a seamless way to get content to people, when they want it, when they need it, at their own pace.

Not everyone wants to go online for financial education; sometimes, it's better to meet face to face, and to be able to ask questions on educational materials.

Working with community leaders, BMO specialists often travel to communities and deliver a series of presentations, in person, on financial education topics that respond to the communities' needs. BMO has offered financial learning sessions on multiple topics to support residents in gaining knowledge to improve their financial acumen.

"We appreciate it when the bank takes this holistic approach to working with members of our community," says Chief McCoy.

"BMO will continue to look for innovative ways to respond to the needs of Indigenous customers," says Mike Bonner.

The Changing Landscape

Nän ndų kwädätth'ät

DÄN K\`E

One of the most tangible impacts of climate change, worldwide, is being felt in the Arctic, where steadily rising temperatures are causing an alarming acceleration in the melting of permafrost layers that may have existed for centuries. The consequences are far-reaching – and are having an immediate and direct impact on the inhabitants of the North.

(This page) Dr. Calmels and his team conduct most of their permafrost research in the field. (Facing page) The Permafrost and Geoscience Field Unit at YukonU.



The most obvious impact is on infrastructure. Asphalt laid over permafrost absorbs heat, accelerating the thaw below, and jeopardizing the structural integrity of the roadway. Houses and other buildings erected on thawing ice-rich permafrost experience shifting and settling. Damaged roads make travel less safe and could potentially limit access to supplies. Softening foundations make buildings more expensive to build, maintain and insure.

Researchers at Yukon University are determined to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. With assistance from BMO, the university is establishing a Permafrost Institute and working with local First Nations and Indigenous organizations to record the changes, conduct research and assess the impact. BMO has been working with the researchers since 2021 and contributed to the development of the Institute which opens this year.

Led by Dr. Fabrice Calmels, Research Chair in Permafrost and Geoscience at the YukonU Research Centre of Yukon University, a Permafrost and Geoscience mobile field unit had already been created to conduct field research. The team now includes five researchers and one project officer, and the members have a wide range of expertise in geotechnics, telemetry, geophysics, UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, or “drone”) technology, and geospatial analysis – expertise that is ideally positioned in the Canadian North to assist northerners facing challenges caused by climate change and permafrost degradation.

Last year BMO helped the unit acquire an advanced drone, equipped with the latest sensor technology, to survey areas at risk. Using the drone, the research group has integrated new approaches for geoscience investigation using airborne LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) and thermography imagery technology.

“Permafrost underlies our northern infrastructure,” says Dr. Calmels. “We are working to help communities manage the impacts of its thawing on life and lifestyle. The support provided by BMO has allowed us to significantly increase our capacity to assist our partners with innovative means and manners.”



“Monitoring permafrost is our window into the North’s changing soul, revealing how thawing landscapes reshape ecosystems and challenge life in the North.”

– Trish Hume
CAFN Environmental
Assessment and Natural
Resources Manager

Key to the success of the work of Dr. Calmels and his colleagues is the involvement of Indigenous Peoples – those who feel the impact of climate change most acutely. Since 2018, the researchers from YukonU have been working with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN), training and equipping members of the community to collect data to monitor and study permafrost. This is information the community can use to develop strategies to adapt. Experience gained here will also provide a template for study of other permafrost-thaw affected regions in the North.

“Permafrost and ice have always been part of the land and part of our country,” says Trish Hume, CAFN’s Environmental Assessment and Natural Resources Manager. “Monitoring permafrost is our window into the North’s changing soul, revealing how thawing landscapes reshape ecosystems and challenge life in the North. In collaboration with Yukon University and guided by indigenous knowledge, we cultivate a shared commitment to safeguarding our icy homeland, blending ancestral wisdom with scientific inquiry to protect our shared future.”

Good Medicine

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INUKTITUT

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NORTHERN CREE

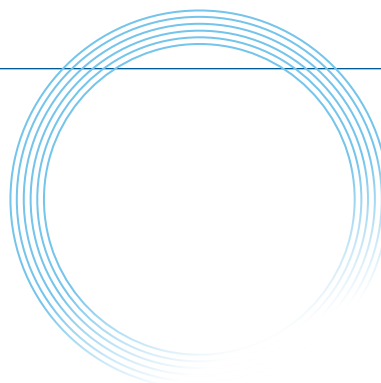
The neighbouring communities of Kuujuaaraapik and Whapmagoostui are special.

Sitting on the shore at the mouth of a river that flows into Hudson Bay, Whapmagoostui is a Cree settlement, while Kuujuaaraapik is an Inuit settlement. Though they speak different languages and have different customs and traditions, the two communities have long lived next to one another, and they have much in common. They live close to the land, benefit from wisdom passed on by elders, and value the importance of community.

Dr. Johanne Morel meets with Sarah Kawapit (of Whapmagoostui Cree Nation), a young patient at Minnie's Hope.



Photo: courtesy Minnie's Hope



They also share a common challenge: access to healthcare. There are many physicians and nurses serving these remote communities, yet they strive for better health outcomes.

As a young general practitioner, Dr. Johanne Morel began visiting Northern communities in Quebec in 1981. She chose to specialize in pediatrics and has spent the past 38 years helping families in Indigenous communities across the North. Over time, however, she became frustrated because, no matter how much energy she devoted to her practice, nagging health problems persisted. She thought there had to be a better way.

"I felt that if we did not include the social aspect in the care we were providing, we would not reach our goals," says The Montreal Children's Hospital (The Children's) pediatrician. "Maybe we should try to provide care that is more holistic and not just focus on Western medicine. Why not have medicine join hands [with others], breaking silos, working very closely with social workers and then inviting other people working with children – the daycare educators and the schoolteachers – to get involved?"

And so, Minnie's Hope's Social Pediatric Centre ("Minnie's Hope") was born – a unique centre established in 2014 to serve both communities. "We're one of the few organizations that offer services to both clienteles," says Marianne Martin, Director of Minnie's Hope, noting that Inuit and Cree have different governance, different cultures, different languages.

"But at Minnie's Hope," she explains, "many of our programs are inclusive." The Centre deals with children's health issues holistically. Marianne explains this is more in keeping with the traditions, values and cultures of Indigenous Peoples and their approaches to healthcare. "When we do a social pediatric clinic, we invite the child, the parents, the caregiver, but we

"Minnie's Hope helped me get through my eczema trauma. The therapists helped me come out to the world by being comfortable and not feeling ashamed. Thank you for helping me conquer my anxiety."

– Legend Iserhoff
patient

also ask them for permission to invite others who could be significant to the conversation – if they want to bring grandma, auntie, whomever, that's more than fine."

Legend Iserhoff, a young Cree girl, uses the services at Minnie's Hope and she gives the team five stars. "Minnie's Hope helped me get through my eczema trauma," she says. "The therapists helped me come out to the world by being comfortable and not feeling ashamed." To her therapists and teachers, Legend says, "Thank you for helping me conquer my anxiety."

In 2019, The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation began looking for visionary projects to support during its major "Unexpected Ways to Heal" fundraising campaign. Minnie's Hope was struggling financially at the time and needed to find a permanent home. It was at this fortuitous moment that Dr. Morel approached The Children's Foundation President Renée Vézina and told her the story of Minnie's Hope. Enlisting the support of BMO, The Children's Foundation committed to fund and coordinate the construction of a purpose-built facility for Minnie's Hope, on land supplied by the Whapmagoostui Nation.

"This project has helped us think outside the box," says Renée. "It made us think, 'Okay, maybe the Foundation can support other pediatric projects outside of the walls of The Children's.'"

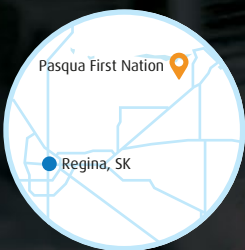
Dr. Morel, meanwhile, is looking for other communities where the Minnie's Hope model can be replicated – including a social pediatric centre that opened recently in Montreal to serve Indigenous children. "Now I've started to travel to other Indigenous communities, and I feel empowered," she says. "When I talk now, I can say, 'We've made it, we've done it, so can you!' It's really empowering for other Indigenous communities."

Asahtowikamik

SAULTEAUX CREE

Food banks have been around in Canada for more than 40 years and, sadly, there is no evidence that the need for their services is diminishing. There are now more than 700 food banks and 3,000 food programs in Canada, and more than 2 million Canadians monthly are reported to be using a food bank – a significant jump from the previous year. Through corporate giving and annual employee fundraising campaigns, BMO supports food banks in communities across Canada.

Evelyn Cerda, Vice President, Impact & Partnerships, greets customers at the Community Food Hub



Regina Food Bank is one of the organizations BMO supports, and the work they do is particularly important for Indigenous families – not only for the support the food bank provides, but for the way it is delivered.

The food bank's Community Food Hub, which opened in 2024 at 12th Avenue and Broad Street in Regina, aims to bring more dignity to the vital service it provides, by offering something more akin to a grocery store "shopping" experience. Food bank users can select the food they want.

Chantel Obey was named manager of the Hub after years of volunteering with the food bank, making food deliveries to families around Regina. "Growing up, I relied on the food bank myself," says Chantel. "They needed a delivery driver a few years ago and I said, 'Well, I can do it' and ever since I started delivery-driving for the food bank, I was able to connect with so much of the community and my own people and build relationships – and so it started off there."

The Hub has a special relationship with the urban Indigenous community in Regina, many of whom, like Chantel, are Saulteaux/Cree from Pasqua First Nation. Following Cree protocols, including a pipe ceremony and a sweat lodge, Elder Murray Ironchild of Piapot First Nation gifted the Hub with a Cree name – Asahtowikamik – which loosely translates to 'feeding lodge.'

"Through following ceremonial protocols, the food bank has not only 'gained' the name but has also agreed to make sure we're doing the right things to 'feed' the name," says Regina Food Bank Chief Executive Officer John Bailey. In addition to distributing food to families who need it, the Hub space will be used for ongoing ceremony as well as Indigenous-led programming, "to make sure we're able to make this a community space, in addition to a food bank."

John sees this as another step on a journey towards reconciliation – "to be gifted and earn the right to use that name, knowing that we



"I felt a little shy to use the food bank. Now, working here, I encourage anyone who is struggling, if they really need food, to come and reach out to us. There's nothing to be ashamed about when you're hungry."

– Chantel Obey
Hub manager

are all Treaty people here in Treaty 4 and making sure that we live up to the associated expectations."

Chantel's mission is to make it easier for people who may feel uncomfortable using food bank services. "When I was younger, we were always grateful for the food bank and what we got, but as I grew older and became a young mother, I felt a little shy to use the food bank," Chantel recalls. "Now, working here, I encourage anyone who is struggling, if they really need food, to come and reach out to us. There's nothing to be ashamed about when you're hungry."

Since opening in 2024, the number of families coming to the Hub for food has more than doubled. The approach – choosing their own food – is a big draw, but so, too, is the way visitors are treated.

"I like to call our visitors 'customers' instead of clients," Chantel adds, "because it gives them more dignity and respect. And when people come in, they tell us how comfortable and clean it is, and it's a safe environment for them. It's just a great, great place – and it's all volunteer run."

A Space to Bring Us Together

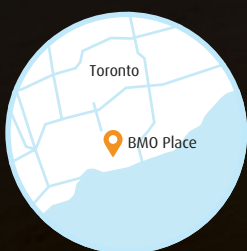
Lispass chi-mamawitoyahk

MICHIF

Work is currently underway on the first of BMO's Legacy Spaces – safe, welcoming places where conversations and education about Indigenous history and our collective journey toward reconciliation are encouraged and supported – a concept that emerged in response to the vision of the late Gordon Downie.

The former frontman for Canadian rock legends, The Tragically Hip, Gord was passionate about improving relations with Indigenous Peoples. Gord was deeply moved by the story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy who, in 1966, ran away from a residential school to try to be reunited with his family and perished on the journey home. Gord and his brother, Mike, met with members of Chanie's family and, in 2016, they created The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF) to promote reconciliation and understanding among us all.

Plans have been drawn up and construction is underway to create BMO's first Legacy Space at BMO Place in Toronto



It was DWF that conceived the idea of creating Legacy Spaces; BMO supports DWF and has embraced the idea.

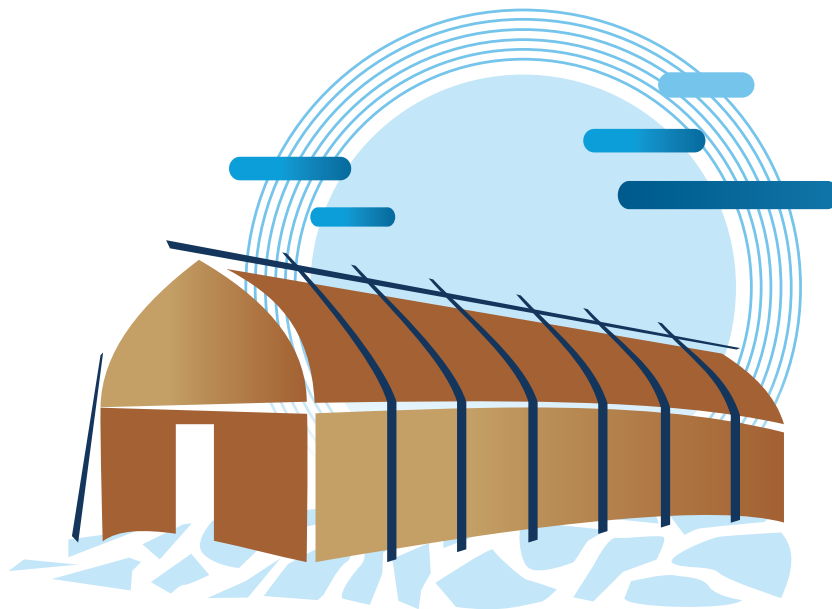
The site for the first Legacy Space at BMO was carefully selected – a round, sunlit space in BMO Place, the bank's newest headquarters location in downtown Toronto. The room, with its distinctive architectural features, leads to an outdoor area overlooking Sankofa Square – itself a Legacy Space for the City of Toronto – reminding us of the connections we have to our surrounding community.

The interior design of the space was entrusted to Nicole Matos, a Métis woman from Edmonton, who is President and CEO of Rivet Construction, a certified women-owned and Indigenous-owned business, with more than 15 years' experience in commercial construction. [see *"Pursuing a Dream,"* p. 36.] Consulting with a broad range of BMO stakeholders, Nicole developed a concept for the space that was enthusiastically adopted by the bank.

The design is centred on a column in the middle of the room, which will become the embodiment of "the tree of truth and reconciliation" – incorporating natural colours and textures that draw inspiration from our nations' rich and diverse landscapes. The rings around the top of the column will suggest tree rings and growth. The 94 vertical slats on the tree will represent the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. Around the base of the tree will be rounded sofas, facing outward, encouraging the creation of small talking circles around the tree.

The tree is a work of art designed by Nicole and her 21-year-old daughter, Allie. Nicole's description of the inspiration for the tree is a poignant account of her experience as a Métis woman.

"It is an expression of the complex and often painful emotions that many of us carry as Métis people," Nicole writes. "The same world that made us feel 'too Native' in mainstream society now makes us feel 'not Native enough' when we try to reconnect. It is a wound that many of us share, though few speak about it openly."



"The space is designed to evoke a sense of healing and renewal. The theme of trees represents our continuous growth journeys."

– Nicole Matos
President and CEO,
Rivet Construction

LONGHOUSE

A Longhouse is a traditional, elongated dwelling used by several Indigenous Peoples, notably in the Pacific Northwest and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) cultures. Built from natural materials like wood and bark, it served as a communal home, reflecting the values of kinship, cooperation and connection to the land.

The tree is decorated with bold geometric patterns that evoke Métis beadwork. "This pattern is our story carved into wood."

Noting that the space is designed to evoke a sense of healing and renewal, Nicole says the theme of trees represents our continuous growth journeys.

In keeping with DWF's desire that these Legacy Spaces be used throughout the year for "reconciliACTIONS" – which the Fund defines as "a meaningful action that moves reconciliation forward" – BMO's Legacy Space will be used as a work lounge, event space and space for learning and reflection. It will be welcoming and inclusive, signalling that reconciliation requires a collective approach.

Construction began on the space in May 2025 and is expected to conclude by September. BMO's Sharing Circle is currently developing plans for an appropriate ceremonial opening to mark the significance of this project.

"This Legacy Space reflects BMO's commitment to reconciliation by honouring Indigenous cultures and histories," says Luke Anderson, a member of Alderville First Nation near Rice Lake, ON, and a Toronto-based member of the Sharing Circle. Fellow Sharing Circle member Kristin Leis, a Mohawk of the Six Nations Confederacy, adds: "I look forward to making this inclusive space my home away from home when I journey to BMO Place."

Pursuing a Dream

Nawashiwatamouwin ishwawpastamoiwin

MICHIF



Since she was a little girl, Nicole Matos has been fascinated by design and construction. As a child, she couldn't get enough of the renovation and interior design shows on HGTV. Looking back, her career path seems obvious.

Nicole is now a successful entrepreneur, the owner of Edmonton-based Rivet Construction, which she founded in 2009. She is embarking on her first project as a supplier for BMO, the creation of BMO's first Legacy Space in Toronto [see "A Space to Bring Us Together," p. 34].

Nicole is Métis – her father a direct descendant of Gabriel Dumont, the 19th Century Métis leader who stood beside Louis Riel at the battles of Duck Lake, Fish Creek and Batoche. Though her parents separated when she was young, and she was raised by her non-Indigenous mother, her connection and draw to her Métis identity were gently sustained through stories, values and acknowledgment.

Having always dreamed of becoming an architect, Nicole found her path to design through construction, driven by creativity and necessity. Pregnant with her second child and out of work during a downturn, she launched a business from

"Being more successful also gave me an opportunity to be able to say, 'This is who I am. And if you're not okay with it, then that's okay with us not working together.'"

– Nicole Matos
President and CEO,
Rivet Construction



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Entrepreneurs

home. "I'd be in the garage with the kids crying inside, pretending I was in an office," she recalls.

One of her first clients was a past contact who had noticed her talent who awarded her a million-dollar contract in her first year. It was a leap, but one grounded in hard work. "It wasn't easy to be a woman in this industry, especially with young kids," she says. "And being Indigenous added layers most people didn't see. But I kept showing up."

Nicole had not always been up-front about her Indigenous heritage. Thinking back, she says it was only when she was in business on her own that she felt truly comfortable declaring her Métis heritage publicly. "I felt I had a little more confidence. I felt I had a little bit more control over being 'judged' and how that could impact me," she says. "Being more successful also gave me an opportunity to be able to say, 'This is who I am. And if you're not okay with it, then that's okay with us not working together.'"

Working with BMO, she says, has been a positive experience. She was invited to be part of BMO Elevate, the bank's business development program offering executive mentoring, education and networking opportunities to a group of small businesses. "My favourite part was getting the mentorship," she says.

Her participation brought her to the attention of decision-makers in the bank. With her involvement in the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business and a referral from an executive at construction giant EllisDon, all the pieces started to fall into place. Nicole's firm was invited to bid on the BMO Legacy Space project, and hers was the winning proposal.

Now embracing her Métis background, Nicole realizes that it has always shaped her and the way she does business. Her focus on sustainable practices, her approach to health and well-being and inclusivity – "All are grounded in my Indigenous identity and values," she says. Nicole is proud of the Legacy Space she has designed for BMO. It was a first for Nicole and her team. But with Nicole's talent and drive, it seems likely her firm will be sought out to work on others.

About BMO

BMO is a leading North American bank guided by a single purpose

Our Purpose, to **Boldly Grow the Good in business and life**, informs our strategy, drives our ambition, and reinforces our commitments to progress: for a thriving economy, a sustainable future and an inclusive society. For more than 30 years, we've provided dedicated banking services to Indigenous customers across Canada. Through trusted relationships built on mutual respect, we work to advance reconciliation and the economic self-determination and prosperity of Indigenous clients, colleagues and communities.

Serving Indigenous Communities

BMO Indigenous branches and business banking locations

Newfoundland and Labrador

**Happy Valley Goose Bay
(In Community, Off-Reserve)**
Goose Bay, NL
709-896-4411

Quebec

Wemindji Branch (On-Reserve)
Cree Nation of Wemindji (Wemindji)
819-978-3588

Pessamit Branch (On-Reserve)
Pessamit (La réserve indienne
de Pessamit)
418-567-9543

Waskaganish Branch (On-Reserve)
The Crees of Waskaganish First Nation
(Waskaganish)
819-895-2177

Ontario

Ohsweken Branch (On-Reserve)
Six Nations of the Grand River
(Ohsweken)
519-445-4733

**Peace Tree Trade Centre Branch
(On-Reserve)**
Akwesasne Mohawk Territory
(Cornwall Island)
613-938-5634

**Commercial Banking Office
(On-Reserve)**
500 Gran Street, 2nd Floor
Batchewana First Nation, ON
705-949-5230

Northwest Territories

**Fort Smith Branch
(In Community, Off-Reserve)**
Fort Smith, NWT
867-872-2001

Alberta

Buffalo Run Branch (On-Reserve)
Tsuut'ina Nation (Tsuut'ina)
403-234-1869

Siksika Branch (On-Reserve)
Siksika Nation (Siksika)
403-734-3600

British Columbia

Tsahaheh Branch (On-Reserve)
Tseshah First Nation (Port Alberni)
250-724-7100

Park Royal Branch (On-Reserve)
Squamish Nation (West Vancouver)
604-668-1277

Eagle Landing Branch (On-Reserve)
Squiala First Nation (Chilliwack)
604-792-1971

Westbank Branch (On-Reserve)
Westbank First Nation (Kelowna)
250-861-1670



Photo: SE Image Patrick Hinton

Above, Left to right: Roddy Nardeo, Dan Adams, Jeffrey A. McAulay, Cloyd Bathen, Joel Neustaeter, Mark Shadeed, D. K. (Doug) Bourque, Inset: Danny Menard

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We are dedicated to working toward the economic self-sufficiency of Indigenous communities across Canada.

We are in your communities. A business partnership with us creates better options and outcomes.



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