Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2
Areas of Focus 3
Background
  Who We Are 3
  Our Languages, Our Lives 5
Reflecting Upon Our Past: Success & Challenges
  Highlights from Years 1 and 2 6
  Mapping our Challenges 8
Focus Areas: the Next Three Years (2015-2017)
  Focus Area 1: Data Gathering & Sharing 8
  Focus Area 2: Facilitating Collaborative Relationships 8
  Focus Area 3: Language Advocacy 9
  Focus Area 4: Program Service Delivery 9
A Plan of Action
  Getting the Work Done 10

Mission
To provide educational, career and cultural opportunities to enhance the identity and quality of life for Doyon shareholders.

Vision
Financial Sustainability – Effective and Collaborative Strategic Partnerships – Organizational Excellence – Every Shareholder’s Dream is Realized – Strong Demonstration of Native Traditional Language and Culture

Values
Traditional Native Values
Integrity
Quality
Community
Identity

Denaakk’e Language Camp, June 2015
Executive Summary

Less than one hundred years ago, the ancestral languages of the Doyon Region flourished and were the first languages spoken by everyone from children to the elderly. Embedded in these languages are the knowledge, culture, ideas, beliefs, and customs that enabled our Athabascan people to endure in this great land over many generations. These nine Athabascan languages include; Benhti Kenaga’ (Lower Tanana), Deg Xinag, Denaakk’e (Koyukon), Denak’i (Upper Kuskokwim), Dinjii Zhuh K’yaa (Gwich’in), Hän, Holikachuk, Tanacross and Née’aaaneegn’ (Upper Tanana).

Today, tragically, all of these languages are considered severely to critically endangered (UNESCO, 2000). The endangered status of our languages is one outcome of a long history of laws, policies, and institutions that sought to assimilate Alaska Natives into mainstream culture. If the current trend is allowed to persist, all nine of our Athabascan languages will be lost within the span of a few generations.

In recent years, Alaska Native leaders have increasingly begun rallying around the issue of language loss. Tribes have expressed their desire to have children learn their Native languages which has led to some school districts instituting bilingual programs as well as various organizations incorporating language programming into their missions. Significant progress was made on the statewide level in 2012, when the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council was created to advocate for the survival and revitalization of Alaska Native languages. Another step forward occurred in 2014 when the Alaska Legislature and former Governor Sean Parnell amended the 1988 Official Language Act to include all 20 Indigenous languages of Alaska.

As momentum continues to builds towards greater protection for and revitalization of Alaska Native languages across the state, Doyon Foundation is positioned to assume a leadership role in Interior Alaska. Our board and staff are committed to ensuring that current and future generations of Athabascan people have the opportunity to hear, to learn, and to speak the language of our ancestors.

The Doyon Foundation Language Revitalization Strategic Plan 2015-2017 is our roadmap towards that vision. The Plan provides a general strategy for moving forward through the identification of key areas of focus, long-term goals, and short-term actions. Doyon Foundation understands that the landscape of language revitalization is constantly changing and therefore we are committed to continually reflecting upon and adjusting our strategies to adapt to changing environments and conditions.

The strategic planning process began in an October 2014 gathering between the Doyon Foundation Language Revitalization Committee and the program staff. During the session, participants discussed the successes and challenges associated with implementing a newly established regional language program as well as articulated (4) key focus areas to help guide future program activities.
Areas of Focus for 2015-2017

Focus Area 1:
Data Gathering and Sharing; monitor the status of Athabascan Languages and leverage resources for language revitalization.

Focus Area 2:
Facilitating Collaborative Relationships; encourage a collective impact approach to Athabascan language revitalization.

Focus Area 3:
Language Advocacy; seek opportunities to elevate our languages to their rightful place.

Focus Area 4:
Program Service Delivery

Dinjii Zhuh K’ya (Gwich’in)
Benhti Kenaga’ (Tanana)
Hän (Eagle)
Deg Xinag
Denaakk’e (Koyukon)
Den’i (Upper Kuskokwim)
Holikachuk
Tanacross
Née’aaneegn’ (Upper Tanana)

Who We Are

The Doyon Foundation is a nonprofit charitable organization established in 1989 by Doyon, Limited. Doyon Foundation’s mission is to provide educational, career and cultural opportunities to enhance the identity and quality of life for Doyon’s 19,000+ shareholders. The Foundation carries out its mission by providing basic and competitive scholarships, works with organizations to place interns, and advances traditional Native knowledge by partnering with various organizations.

The Foundation’s work in the area of language revitalization came in response to shareholder concerns regarding the impending loss of our nine Athabascan languages.

A 2007 estimate by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Alaska Native Language Center, indicated there were less than 500 Dene’ Athabascan language speakers.

In 2010, the Interior Athabascan Council of Elders, Denakkanaaga, passed resolution #10-15 “Funding the Preservation of our Athabascan Languages and Culture”, which called for a concerted effort to preserve Athabascan languages. In 2011, Tanana Chiefs Conference (a consortium of 42 Interior tribes), passed two resolutions, one of which supported the development of computer assisted language resources and the other called on school districts and regional Native organizations to develop proposals for language preservation and documentation.

In 2012, the leadership of Doyon, Limited responded to this call for action by investing in the establishment of a regional language revitalization program. Under the direction of Doyon Foundation, the organization’s first step was to create a five-member volunteer committee representative of shareholders, descendants and tribal members who shared an expertise and passion for language revitalization.
Since its initial formation, the Doyon Language Revitalization Committee (DLRC) has played a key role in guiding the design and development of a regional language program. The DLRC meets monthly and is composed of the following members: Chair Paul Mountain, Koyukon (Nulato); Shyanne Beatty, Hän Gwich’in (Eagle); Beth Leonard, Deg Xinag (Shageluk); Stephanie Moe Tanacross (Tanacross); Betty Petruska Upper Kuskokwim (Nikolai); and Susan Paskvan, Koyukon (Koyukuk). It is the goal of the Foundation that the DLRC will eventually consist of representatives from all nine languages in the region.

In 2012, the Doyon, Limited governing board of directors, along with the support from President, Aaron Schutt, awarded start-up funding to Doyon Foundation to establish the Doyon Language Revitalization Program.

The initial goals of the Doyon Language Revitalization Program were to:
• expand the organizational capacity of Doyon Foundation to effectively and efficiently develop, implement, and sustain a Native language revitalization program.
• develop a language revitalization program that will ensure the cultures and languages of the Doyon region are taught, documented, and easily accessible.

Doyon Foundation recognizes that working towards the vision of revitalizing our nine Athabascan languages will require a collective effort on the part of many individuals and organizations. Key to our success will be the ability to better align efforts, maximize resources, and to embrace lessons learned and best practices from other Indigenous language revitalization initiatives.

Figure 1 shows the nine Athabascan dialects within the Doyon region of Interior Alaska.
Our Languages, Our Lives

Athabascan people have a long history in Interior Alaska with a traditional lifestyle based on seasonal subsistence activities. The various communities that identify as Athabascan have, and continue to be, very diverse with each region possessing its own distinct language or dialect, worldview, and cultural values.

Since the time of contact with Western society, Alaska Native people have experienced an unprecedented rate of change. The gradual settlement of Alaska over time introduced all manner of external influences including new populations, laws, policies, diseases, institutions, values, economies, and languages.

Beginning in the early 1900’s, the education of Alaska Natives became a growing priority for both missionary groups as well as federal and territorial governments. The establishment of both mission and government operated boarding schools across Alaska would eventually become a familiar part of the Alaska Native experience.

Generations of Athabascans attended boarding schools often experiencing historical trauma associated with the banning, punishment, and shaming of Native languages within these educational institutions. Many of these students left boarding school either no longer speaking or being fearful of speaking their Native language. As this generation eventually became parents, the majority were understandably unable or unwilling to pass on the language of their ancestors to their own children. These developments coupled with the growing prominence of English as the official language of Alaska served to displace Native languages. Compounding this history is the aging / loss of fluent speakers as well as the limited opportunities for new language learners.

Table 1. 2007 Native Language Populations & Speakers in the Doyon Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>Number of Villages</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Number of Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwich’in</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denaakk’e (Koyukon)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holikachuk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deg Xinag</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Kuskokwim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menhti Kenaga’ (Lower Tanana)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanacross</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Tanana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hän</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska Native Language Center

The figures above provide some quantitative evidence for why an intervention for language revitalization is sorely needed in the Doyon region however the numbers only tell one part of the story. Athabascan language revitalization is complex and involves many factors including identity, traditional knowledge, and cultural survival.

1. A strong connection to language gives indigenous people stronger self-identity and self-esteem; the loss of language significantly affects culture. Dene’ Athabascans identify with our culture through language since it holds our protocols, values, and beliefs. Knowledge of language validates our Athabascan way of
life. Stories told and recorded by speakers strengthen our culture. As the chance to record fluent elder speakers and the ability to translate disappears, so do the stories and the guidance they provide.

2. The declining number of Athabascan speakers translates to language loss and/or extinction. Table 1 shows the estimated number of speakers living in each of the nine language areas in the Doyon region based on the most recent 2007 data Alaska Native Language Center. This data is coupled with the project’s target population, which is the estimated percentage of adults equal to or over the age of 18. [1] This speaker data, the most recent available, is now seven years old. We have lost many elders in the past several years and our language situation continues to shift; currently there are only three Holikachuk speakers.

3. There are insufficient numbers of qualified Athabascan language teachers, which means a lack of language learning opportunities within the Doyon region. The ability to speak a language does not translate to the ability to teach it, so insufficient teacher numbers makes the potential for loss of languages even greater. Current programs within the Doyon region consist of classes through two rural school districts, limited afterschool programs, and classes offered at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. While worthwhile, the effort has not resulted in many new fluent speakers of Dene’ languages. How do we create opportunities to speak our languages? How do we create a regular time and space to use the language in the community?

These current realities all point to the need to undertake a revitalization effort that capitalizes on the growing support for Alaska Native languages across the state.

Reflecting Upon Our Past: Successes & Challenges

In the three years that the Doyon Language Revitalization Program has been in operation, we have been engaged in various language revitalization planning and delivery efforts. During the 2014 strategic planning process, the Doyon Language Revitalization Committee, program staff along with a partner representative were asked to identify both successes and lessons learned based on two years of program operation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highlights from Years 1 &amp; 2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Securing of program start-up funding from Doyon, Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hiring a full-time program director</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Delivery of several “Where are Your Keys?” (WAYK) trainings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Creating and publishing a WAYK evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implementing a Signs of the Land: Reaching Arctic Communities Facing Climate Change Camp (August 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visiting the First Peoples’ Cultural Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Delivering testimony to the Alaska Native Language Preservation Advisory Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observing a general paradigm shift in attitudes towards language revitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of strong partnerships (i.e. Alaska Native Language Center, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Alaska Native Preservation and Advisory Council, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A shift from a deficit approach to a strengths-based approach to language revitalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlight: “Where are Your Keys?” Trainings

A key partnership that evolved in the first two years of the program involved Mr. Evan Gardner, founder of “Where Are Your Keys” (WAYK). WAYK is an accelerated language-learning system which relies on a series of techniques and strategies that enhance and accelerate the process of learning while making activities fun and feasible for its players. Total immersion helps trainees stay engaged and encourages players to stray from using their primary languages but relying on communicating only in the target language or by using
one of WAYK’s techniques such as sign language when confronted with a challenging word or phrase.

Another strategic principle is keeping participants involved not only as learners, but also as teachers of the language. As players work their way through activities they must first learn the concept of the activity and then teach it to the next group that follows. This untraditional learning method strives to keep players working together and not separate. Additionally, having a relaxed environment is important in encouraging participants to make mistakes where no one is judged or graded on their development.

Doyon became interested in the WAYK method and enlisted Mr. Gardner to conduct a series of workshops in the region. In 2013, the first workshop was held in Fairbanks with approximately 30 attendees eager to learn the method for teaching/learning Alaska Native languages. Following the 2013 workshop, Doyon in partnership with Tanana Tribal Council and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Tok Center funded and leveraged resources to provide three additional WAYK training events. The first of three events started at the end of October 2014 in the village of Tanana, followed by a session in Tok, and ending early November in Fairbanks. The workshops were open to those willing to make a commitment to learning and using the WAYK process as a first step towards intervening in the current pattern of language loss.

Highlight: Exchange with First People’s Cultural Council
In 2014, several members of Doyon Foundation traveled to British Columbia to engage in dialogue with the First People’s Cultural Council (FPCC). The visit was an effort to continue to research and learn from other organizations’ best practices and continue to grow and improve our language revitalization program. During the visit, we discussed FPCC’s successful language revitalization efforts over the past 24 years and got valuable ideas for our own program development. FPCC provides language revitalization support and serves an area that encompasses 34 different languages. Comparatively, the Foundation language revitalization program serves an area with nine languages.

According to Doyon Foundation Executive Director, Doris Miller:

*We wanted to see what they were doing and get advice on what worked and what didn’t work over their 24 years of service.*

*It was a very successful visit. We were all inspired by the amount of work done by a small staff of committed individuals.*

As with any new program, Doyon’s Language Revitalization Program has encountered its share of external and internal challenges. During the strategic planning session, participants mapped out key challenges impacting our work in an effort to glean inform future strategies.
Mapping our Challenges

- Need to increase human and organizational capacity.
- Need for language revitalization efforts to become institutionalized, how will our regional and local organizations support language revitalization in the long term.
- Language revitalization is complex and includes a) collective and individual attitudes at the local, regional and state levels; b) the number, motivation and availability of speakers and learners; c) the existence, availability, quality and access of language resources and materials; and d) social and individual learning endeavors that require persistence over time.
- Federal grants are time and labor intensive for a small staff; Doyon Foundation may need to rethink its strategy for pursuing competitive funding.
- Language funding is highly competitive and defining and identifying language status is frequently required by funders.
- Given the size of the region, projects need to be piloted then scaled up according to capacity at multiple levels: language group, community, local organization and internally at Doyon Foundation.

Focus Areas: the Next Three Years (2015-2017)

The ability to be forward-thinking is a skill that the Athabascan people have practiced for thousands of years. The staff and Language Revitalization Committee applied this skill during the strategy session to articulate a powerful vision to inform the next phase of the program’s development. In order for the program to effectively achieve this vision, it was critical that priorities be identified. Key actions were identified for each priority area and were further broken down into “next steps” in order to guide implementation efforts.

Focus Area 1: Data gathering and sharing

**Goal:** Monitor the status of Athabascan Languages and leverage resources for language revitalization

**Action:** Develop a database of information on speakers, learners, and instructors by village

**Next Steps:**
- Develop survey to identify status of languages, i.e. how many speakers, how many learners, attitudes towards language, motivation, obstacles and opportunities
- Utilize Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) trainings as an opportunity to document initial language status of 3 villages
- Partner with First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) to develop Database framework
- Identify contacts with knowledge of language status in particular regions

**Action:** Continue to share information on language related events

**Next Steps:**
- Host a series of teleconferences via Skype to share information on language related events
- Maintain “language events” link on existing blog and Facebook
- Utilize radio to market the Doyon Foundation LRP

Focus Area 2: Facilitating collaborative relationships

**Goal:** To encourage a collective impact approach to Athabascan language revitalization

**Action:** Encourage a collective impact approach to Athabascan language revitalization
Next Steps:

• Develop talking points to share the concept of collective impact and its potential to strengthen Athabascan language revitalization efforts
• Identify opportunities (audio-conferences, potlucks, focus groups, etc.) to align language revitalization efforts and resources: Doyon Foundation, Tanana Chiefs Conference, University of Alaska, Tribes, Communities, Governments, and Village Corporations

Action: Foster opportunities for Athabascan language learning events

Next Steps:

• Enlist Kyle Worl (Tlingit) and Candace Branson (Sugpiaq) to share innovative language teaching and learning strategies
• Partner with Effie Kokrine Charter School in Fairbanks and other interested local area schools to support engaging language learning

Focus Area 4: Program Service Delivery

Action: Share Athabascan language learning tools

Next Steps:

• Create 1 to 3 minute video clips of WAYK trainings to be posted on Website (Year 3)
• Share existing clips on useful words and expressions in Athabascan languages (Year 3)
• Include other Athabascan languages in Word of the Month (Year 3)
• Include website links to existing software apps (Year 3)
• Develop new clips on useful words and expressions in Athabascan languages (ex: “Happy Birthday” song) (Year 4)

Action: Develop Athabascan language leaders

Next Steps:

• Form a working project development group committed to forwarding this effort

Phase I

• Continue sponsoring WAYK trainings for leaders to develop their teaching and learning skills

Phase II:

• Create an internship opportunity with WAYK and identify potential interns to travel to the Pacific Northwest to gain proficiency in the method
• Hire a coordinator to receive training from Transparent Languages to then train the cohort of Language Leaders

Focus Area 3: Language Advocacy

Goal: To seek opportunities to elevate our languages to their rightful place

Action: Documenting evidence based practices

Next Steps:

• Developing an Indigenous evaluation process to evaluate our program and projects
• Collaborate with the 2015 Alaska Native Studies Conference to be held in Fairbanks & COLANG
• Work with UAF to create opportunities for WAYK participants to receive credit
# Plan of Action

## Priority Area: Facilitating Collaborative Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Actions</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a database of information on speakers, learners, and instructors by village</td>
<td>Partner with First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) to collaborate on Database framework</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilize Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) trainings as an opportunity to document initial language status of 3 villages</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to share information on language related events</td>
<td>Identify contacts with knowledge of language status in particular regions</td>
<td>‘17–’18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintain “language events” link on existing blog and Facebook page</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Host a series of teleconferences via Skype to share information on language related events</td>
<td>‘14–’15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilize radio to market the Doyon Foundation Language Revitalization Program</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage a collective impact approach to Athabascan language revitalization</td>
<td>Develop talking points to share the concept of collective impact and its potential to strengthen Athabascan language revitalization efforts</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify opportunities (audio-conferences, potlucks, focus groups, etc.) to align language revitalization efforts and resources: Doyon Foundation, Tanana Chiefs Conference, University of Alaska, Tribes, Communities, Governments, and Village Corporations</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster opportunities for Athabascan language learning events</td>
<td>Create opportunities for Kyle Worl (Tlingit) and Candace Branson Sugpiaq to engage with WAYK participants</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner with Effie Kokrine and other interested schools to support engaging language learning</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Priority Area: Language Advocacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Actions</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documenting evidence based practices</td>
<td>Developing an Indigenous evaluation process to evaluate our program and projects</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborate with the 2015 Alaska Native Studies Conference to be held in Fairbanks &amp; COLANG</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work with UAF to create opportunities for WAYK participants to receive credit</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Priority Area: Program Service Delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Actions</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share Athabascan language learning tools</td>
<td>Create 1 to 3 minute video clips of WAYK trainings to be posted on Website</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share existing clips on useful words and expressions in Athabascan languages</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop new clips on useful words and expressions in Athabascan languages (ex: “Happy Birthday” song)</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include other Athabascan languages in Word of the Month</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Include website links to existing software apps</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Athabascan Language Leaders</td>
<td>Form a working project development group committed to forwarding this effort</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase I:**
- Continue sponsoring WAYK trainings for leaders to develop their teaching and learning skills

**Phase II:**
- Create an internship opportunity with WAYK and identify potential interns to travel to the Pacific Northwest to gain proficiency in the method
- Hire a coordinator to receive training from Transparent Languages to then train the cohort of Language Leaders