

Building Partnerships that Support Indigenous Languages

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WIDA Research

WIDA advances academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators.

The overarching goal of research at WIDA is to promote educational equity and academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

To achieve this goal, we work in partnership with districts, states, and national experts to conduct research focused on understanding and explaining the educational experiences and outcomes of language learners.

Through our research, we also aim to inform the decision-making needs of educators and policymakers who serve these children and youth.

The WIDA research team is housed within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER). Located at the highly ranked School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, WCER is one of the first and most productive education research centers in the world.

Introduction

The authors of this issue acknowledge that, given the rich diversity of the cultures highlighted here, some individuals or groups may prefer Alaska Native, American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Afro-Indigenous, First Nations, or other terms, depending on their regional and cultural context.

Collaboration in service of grow-your-own initiatives, particularly undertaken to support the revitalization and sustaining of Indigenous languages and cultures, has been a long-standing WIDA priority. This publication is dedicated to exploring and supporting the partnerships WIDA has with Indigenous communities. Insights from both WIDA's external Indigenous project partners and internal staff members are provided to highlight the work that has been done and generate recommendations for the continuing and future collaboratives.

Through collaboration with Indigenous project partners, WIDA aims to foster understanding and respect for the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Indigenous students, their educators, families, and community members. This collaboration is guided by the following principles:

1. **Community-Based and Inclusive:** Equitable, relevant, and non-hierarchical relationships among all participants (Koster et al., 2012; Leeuw et al., 2012; Smith, 2021).
2. **Self-Determination and Knowledge Translation:** Indigenous peoples as experts and creators in knowledge translation (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Indigenous Continuing Education Centre, 2024; Smith, 2021).
3. **Indigenous Methodologies:** Drawing upon Indigenous knowledge, ethics, and priorities (Beveridge et al., 2021).
4. **Respectful, Reciprocal, Relevant, Responsible (Four Rs), and Reflecting Cultural Humility:** Holding Indigenous knowledge in high regard by honoring the four Rs and ensuring ethical, accountable relationships (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2022; University of Calgary, 2024).
5. **Asset-Based and Grounded in Social and Historical Realities:** Acknowledging and valuing Indigenous beliefs, norms, and connections to ancestral lands (Brave Heart, 2011; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990; TallBear, 2013).
6. **Culturally Safe and Responsive:** Prioritizing the well-being and respect of Indigenous peoples (Billan et al., 2020; Wilson & Neville, 2009).
7. **Transparent and Iterative:** Engagement characterized by openness and continuous refinement (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2001).
8. **Privileging Indigenous Knowledges, Ways of Knowing, and Worldviews:** Respecting the development and continuity of Indigenous knowledge systems (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Smith, 2021).
9. **Reliable and Long-Term Oriented:** Building lasting, respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities (Hermes, Bang & Marin, 2012; Smith, 2021).

The goal of this publication is to share information about the partnerships WIDA has with Indigenous communities in service of Indigenous language and culture revitalization and sustaining. It also aims to provide practical guidance on collaborating with Indigenous communities to promote equitable opportunities for all learners.

Insights from the Partnership

The Indigenous project partners were asked to briefly describe their partnership with WIDA and the work this partnership entailed. They were also asked to offer recommendations or advice for those who are currently working in the field of Indigenous languages and cultures or are planning to embark on this work.

Nicole Bowman-Farrell (Lunaape/Mohican), Ph.D., Associate Scientist and Evaluator, Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative and WCER; President, Bowman Performance Consulting, Shawano, Wisconsin



Partnership with WIDA. Since 2019, I have worked as a colleague and Indigenous advocate with my colleague and sister, Dr. Rosalie Grant. Through WCER, I have learned from Dr. Grant about her extraordinary scientific, cultural, and community efforts to preserve and promote Indigenous language, co-create nationally normed language assessment instruments for Indigenous speakers, and have participated on multiple grants, collaborative educational initiatives, and engaged in building Indigenous/non-Indigenous systems, policy, and program capacities regarding the support of Indigenous students. Through mentoring, paid internships, generation of work products (i.e., language literature scan document in 2023), and with planning and programming, WIDA and Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) have been supportive of capacity and competency building and bridging amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous education, scientific, and funding partners.

Recommendations. WIDA, via Dr. Grant specifically, has cultural and scientific humility. She is there to support, generate resources, and celebrate Indigenous knowledge, theories, and practices in education and language programs. Both WIDA and WEC are on a journey to show humility by listening more, unpacking and addressing colonization in educational studies, program content, policies, curriculums, and assessments. Through co-creation, WEC and WIDA have partnered to help support the work of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and have continued to be active in changing behaviors, programming, resources, and operations that support Indigenous languages and public school learners in Wisconsin and beyond. Being ready requires preparation and years of experience before interfacing with Tribal scholars, community members, Nations, and students. Maintaining partnerships requires realistic and equitable resources, timelines, staffing, and expectations. Relationship building takes time, and maintaining true partnerships necessitates reciprocity, respect, and a responsibility to the communities, students, families, and Nations least represented in academia and the educational systems supporting Indigenous learners.

Sherry W. Kimball, Early Childhood Consultant

Partnership with WIDA. During the Circles of Reflection: Supporting Early Learning for Wisconsin’s Native Communities process, outcomes related to learning more about assessment tools, research, and supporting the revitalization of Indigenous Languages surfaced. Due to Dr. Rosalie Grant’s experience and knowledge, the Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) reached out to WIDA to address these outcomes. The core of WIDA’s partnership resulted in the creation of [Learning and Assessment of First Nations Languages: Overview and Annotated Bibliography](#) and sharing information gained with the Indigenous Nations and allies in Wisconsin.



Recommendations. To support the creation of trusting and respectful partnerships with citizens and members of Indigenous Nations, the below recommendation surfaced based upon my experiences.

- **View** the assets and gifts of each nation as foundational to your interactions and ongoing support. Identify and learn about these from the Indigenous perspectives and seek to understand the value they hold within each nation.
- **Regard** culture and language as a dyad and use elements of culture to support (or to prioritize) language development. This aligns with research that supports Indigenous language growth through learning about one’s culture.
- **Recognize** your skills and areas of expertise, identify what you have to offer to the partnership (or developing partnership); however, do not make these the focus of your engagement. Take (and plan for) time to listen and learn, to allow natural connections to evolve based upon what each nation is sharing. Sovereign nations have different structures, governance systems, and are at different points along their journeys for reawakening their languages. Your experiences with systems, governance structures and language development may be vastly different from each nation.
- **USE** what you learn as you are learning it. Be an ally through educating others about sovereign nations, their experiences, knowledge, and resilience.

Most importantly, be patient and embrace the shared learning that results from your partnerships and interactions with Indigenous Nations.

Steve Kimball, Ph.D., Co-Director, Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative; Principal Investigator, Region 10 Comprehensive Center

Partnership with WIDA. I have engaged with Dr. Rosalie Grant and colleagues at WIDA on the Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) Circles of Reflection project focused on language development and assessment for early learners. The project involved planning meetings with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to engage with Tribal educators as well as others for resource development to support efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages. Importantly, the process centered the voices of Native American educators. The R10CC and WIDA partnership helped facilitate Circles discussions and generate ideas for resources. One



WIDA developed resource was a [working paper](#) and annotated bibliography on First Nations' language learning and assessment. Additionally, WIDA supported R10CC "[impact stories](#)" and a draft report on early language efforts funded by the Young Learners Tribal Language Revitalization Grant administered by DPI. WIDA joined R10CC and members from the Ho-Chunk Nation Ee Cooni Learning Center for a presentation at the 2024 Wisconsin Indian Education Association annual conference.

Recommendations. My recommendations for work in the context of Indigenous language and culture are informed by my own evolving journey in this space. I have learned that Indigenous language revitalization efforts have important educational and cultural implications for Native American learners and their families. As such, the impetus and direction for these efforts must come from within First Nations communities. There are, however, roles for non-Indigenous partners. I have approached this work as a humble learner and ally. With support from my colleague, Dr. Nicole Bowman, I have learned the importance of fostering reciprocal relationships through listening, emphasis on trust building, and honoring the time and knowledge commitment of Indigenous colleagues. Our shared Circles of Reflection efforts have grown over time, with participants transitioning into and out of the Circles process. We have sought to maintain some continuity while also being flexible. For many, the meetings were beyond the scope of their day-to-day work. Given this reality, we have provided stipends or gifts, when possible, for First Nations participants who invested their time and shared knowledge and wisdom. While projects may differ in scope and context, these lessons may help others as they consider embarking on language development support efforts.

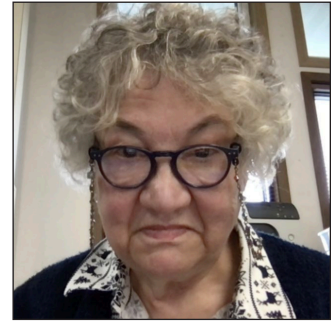
Monica Macaulay, Ph.D., Ada Deer Professor of Language Sciences; Co-Director, Wisconsin Indigenous Languages Lab; Co-Editor, Papers of the Algonquian Conference, Language Sciences Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison



Partnership with WIDA. I haven't been affiliated with WIDA, but I had the good fortune to meet Rosalie Grant and Rita MacDonald some years back, and learned about their work. Rita got interested in my work with the Menominee (in North-Central Wisconsin) and joined me in my trips up to their reservation for a couple of years, lending her expertise as an applied linguist to their language revitalization projects.

Recommendations. I would say the most important quality you can have is respect. Make sure you don't position yourself as an "expert," coming to "help." Make sure your approach is collaborative, and that you're sensitive to what the people you're working with are most interested in. If you're a non-Native person, don't be surprised if there's a period where you have to prove yourself and your sincerity. One thing I've learned from 25 years of working with the Menominee is that they (and probably most Indigenous people) have seen many researchers come, get data, and go. They value those who persist, who have skills they need, and who return something of significance to the community.

**Gayle Sheppard Miller, Retired, Teacher, Principal,
Director of Academic Programs, Lower Kuskokwim School
District, Bethel, Alaska; Current Alaska Native Education
Grant Director: Strengthening Our Language and Culture**



Partnership with WIDA. The partnership between the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) in Bethel, Alaska, and WIDA began in 2014. Dr. H. Gary Cook provided a WIDA standards setting workshop in Anchorage. Gayle Miller, then the Director of Academic Programs in LKSD, a rural Indigenous school district, was a participant in the workshop. A concern to Central Yup'ik Educators in the district was (and still is) a rapidly shifting language dominance from Central Yup'ik Language, Yugtun, to English. The shift began in this remote region of Alaska with outsider contact. However, the language shift accelerated with the advent of the congressional No Child Left Behind Act at the turn of the millennium, which set sanctions for schools not "proficient" academically within a 10-year period. Schools reacted to the prospect of sanctions with intense emphasis on English academics at all levels. No Child Left Behind actually resulted in our Indigenous language, Yugtun, being left behind. To preserve Yugtun language and culture, the LKSD was seeking an in-school bilingual program that would intentionally strengthen Yugtun and English and to create a Yugtun language proficiency test to monitor language revitalization efforts (Wyman et al., 2009). Through the Alaska Standards Setting Conference provided by WIDA, contact with Dr. Cook led to a Yugtun Language Proficiency Test-Making partnership between Dr. Rosalie Grant, a statistician employed by Dr. Cook, and LKSD. Dr. Grant first taught a series of workshops about standardized testing and then supported our group of Native Educators through the first round of pilot testing. Using a system of gradual release, Drs. Grant and Cook have persisted with our group of Yugtun language test writers for 10 years to create a valid, reliable language proficiency test for grades K-12, with subtests for listening, speaking, reading, writing and cultural awareness. In 2025, the complete test for grades K-12 will be given for the first time. Our local test writers are quite proficient at effective test writing and administration. This work has been good for all people involved in many ways.

Recommendations. The shared inquiry that went into this project was critical. The effort was a great collaboration with learning on both sides. The most important aspect of the work was that both sides listened and both sides spoke. There was never a time that WIDA did not encourage and support the opinions, information and knowledge provided by the Yup'ik people about their Worldview. There was never a time when the Yup'ik people were not willing to do what was required to meet the high standards set by WIDA or to ask questions until aspects of test making were understood. Do not undertake a partnership like this without making certain there is felt and spoken mutual respect.

**David J. O'Connor, M.S., Education Consultant, American
Indian Studies Program**



Partnership with WIDA. My work with WIDA began through a fortunate connection with Dr. Rosalie Grant, a passionate advocate for Indigenous language revitalization in Wisconsin, nationally, and internationally. We discussed how Indigenous languages, often indirectly affected by English learner classifications, require attention within education systems that would contribute to their revitalization. This partnership has allowed us

to address the unique educational needs of Indigenous nations and communities while respecting and incorporating cultural values. Collaborating with Dr. Tim Boals, we explored approaches that WIDA could support, specifically in early childhood language acquisition. This partnership has been invaluable, providing a platform for revitalization—what I refer to as reawakening—of languages dormant due to colonization, trauma, and boarding school impacts. WIDA’s role extended beyond professional support; it fostered meaningful relationships, for which I am profoundly grateful. Together, we aim to empower youth to reclaim their languages, cultures, and, ultimately, their identities.

Recommendations. This work requires dedication, resilience, and a clear understanding of your motivations. No good work should be easy to do. If you are Indigenous, expect it to touch you deeply, often in ways you do not anticipate. Challenges are part of the process; remember that our ancestors are with you, guiding and strengthening your resolve. This work is not only professional but profoundly personal, encompassing your identity, culture, and heritage. As one embarks on this journey, they need to think of future generations, focusing on their cultural and linguistic legacy. This mission is both a responsibility and a privilege, an opportunity to reconnect with traditions that endured significant hardships. As an ongoing learner of Ojibwemowin, I recognize the persistent effort this work demands; we are “language warriors,” steadfastly advancing despite challenges, always mindful of the ultimate mission—reawakening language and identity for those who came before us and those yet to come.

Jamie Shanley (Kam’aRaq), Assistant Director of Education, Sealaska Heritage Institute



Partnership with WIDA. Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) began working with WIDA in 2022 through a formal partnership. The partners have been collaborating to develop a Tlingit language proficiency assessment tool for use by Alaskan Native students and teachers from the Juneau School District’s Tlingit Culture, Language and Literacy (TCLL) program. WIDA provides technical support and shares technical expertise in developing the assessment design, framework, language proficiency levels, and rating scales with the goal of achieving a culturally relevant, valid, and reliable K-5 Tlingit Language Proficiency Assessment. A team of Tlingit language speakers, elders, and educators has worked to write assessment items and align the assessment to cultural values and their program’s curriculum. The work will ultimately produce a highly useful tool for Tlingit language education; however, the process of building the assessment has proven to be extremely beneficial to the teachers and their Tlingit language instructional methods.

Recommendations. SHI’s mission is to perpetuate and enhance the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures of Southeast Alaska. SHI’s goal is to promote cultural diversity and cross-cultural understanding through public services and events. The work with WIDA specifically enhances the Tlingit language methods of instruction and assessment—ultimately promoting its use and longevity. Partnerships are important in this language revitalization and reclamation work. Those partners include everyone from academic universities to consultations with cultural specialists and elders. We recognize that we aren’t alone in this tremendous effort and rely upon our Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to make strides. Indigenous language reclamation work can be taxing, so creating a network of support and healing is also integral.

Insights from WIDA Staff Members

Some WIDA researchers and leadership members were invited to respond to questions about Indigenous project partnerships. Their responses are included below.

Tim Boals, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist/Founder



How did WIDA start collaborating with Indigenous partners on assessment development and other research initiatives in the area of Indigenous languages and cultures? This work began with a call from an administrator in the Lower Kuskokwim School District of Southwest Alaska asking if we would be willing to help them develop a Yugtun language proficiency assessment for their native Yup'ik-speaking students. We were thrilled to take part, but with the caveat that we wanted them to take the lead in developing the test—with our role limited to informing them on the principles of test making to ensure validity, reliability, and cultural relevance.

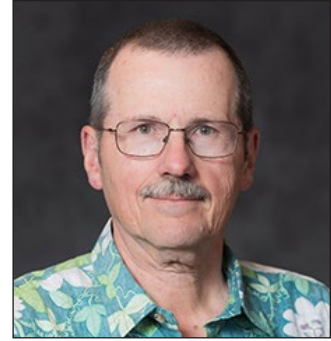
Could you describe WIDA's role in the partnerships established with Indigenous peoples, school districts, and language experts to support community goals of strengthening Indigenous languages and cultures through the creation of assessments of Indigenous languages? The cornerstone of our partnerships is always that we want the Tribes to take the lead and be empowered to develop what they need to further their goals for cultural and linguistic preservation and renewal. We are truly advisors with a specialty in language development. We are simply providing the “rules of the road” for developing quality assessments. Furthermore, we encourage the integration of cultural components into language assessments as a way to make those assessments even more relevant for the communities they serve.

What were some lessons you have learned from your collaboration with Indigenous partners? We have learned and seen first-hand that amazing things can happen when you encourage people to take pride in their language and culture and create assessment tools that really serve their own priorities for Indigenous language development and maintenance.

What do you see as the future direction for WIDA in the area of Indigenous language and culture education? We are hopeful that more Tribes will be interested in developing their own language assessments to measure the progress of their efforts to revive and sustain their languages and cultures. We stand ready to assist with these efforts. We would also love to develop more resources and professional learning opportunities for teachers in WIDA Consortium member states around issues of culturally and linguistically appropriate learning environments for Indigenous students. This would guarantee that Indigenous students have the very best learning opportunities available that value them completely as individuals and build upon the cultural and linguistic assets that they bring to school. We also have an interest in partnering for research with Indigenous communities in ways that empower these communities to research questions of value to them.

Is there anything else you would like to add? This is a pivotal time for many Tribes in the United States, where Native languages and cultures are endangered. It is an honor for us to assist Tribes with efforts to preserve and renew their heritage languages. As far as we are concerned, this effort is a top priority nationally.

H. Gary Cook, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow



How did WIDA start collaborating with Indigenous partners on assessment development and other research initiatives in the area of Indigenous languages and cultures?

I was working with the state of Alaska helping them establish reclassification criteria for ACCESS for ELLs. Ms. Gayle Miller, the curriculum coordinator for the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), was one of the participants. As the meeting concluded, Ms. Miller approached me and asked if WIDA would be interested in supporting the development of a Yup'ik language proficiency test. I said, "Yes, absolutely." Ms. Miller called me a couple months later and asked if WIDA would be interested in assisting LKSD in writing a grant to develop such an assessment. Again, I said, "Yes, absolutely." I asked Dr. Rosalie Grant to lead that project, and the rest is, as we say, history.

Could you describe WIDA's role in the partnerships established with Indigenous peoples, school districts, and language experts to support community goals of strengthening Indigenous languages and cultures through the creation of assessments of Indigenous languages?

WIDA's role in this project was to guide the school district and Yup'ik educators in the development of the assessment. We wanted to make clear that this was their test. We could help guide them in designing, developing, and analyzing the test, but what the test looked like, how it measured language, and how it was structured was uniquely their idea and their responsibility. One of the most gratifying comments I heard was, "You really want us to create this test. It really is our test." We did not define what language meant. We sought to understand how they viewed language. We listened. We learned. And only then could we meaningfully help guide them to create this test.

What were some lessons you have learned from your collaboration with Indigenous partners?

For me, the biggest lesson was learning to listen. I believe the project was successful because the first step in the process was to really listen to what our Indigenous partners wanted. We had to set aside our preconceived notions of what language tests were. We were not coming in as experts in Yugtun or even how to measure it. We came as novices. We did not come with an agenda, save to understand what our Indigenous colleagues wanted. Only after we understood that better, could we contribute to helping them develop the assessment.

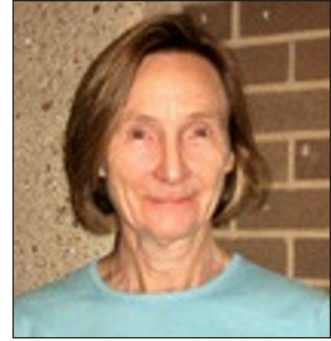
What do you see as the future direction for WIDA in the area of Indigenous language and culture education?

I have a narrow view of WIDA's role in this area. I would steer clear from involving ourselves in language and cultural education. What I believe WIDA does very well is develop language assessments. I did not say English language assessments but language assessments in general. I believe a future direction for WIDA is to assist Indigenous peoples in the creation of language assessment instruments to support Indigenous languages and cultures. This does not just include summative assessments but also interim and formative assessments. We also have deep expertise in the development of language standards. This is another area where we can provide expertise. Whatever direction WIDA chooses to go, we should do so humbly and as learners. We should engage with our Indigenous colleagues when asked. Our role should be to respond to the needs identified by our colleagues.

Rosalie Grant, Ph.D., Assistant Scientist

What key lessons have you learned about the process and the importance of community engagement when working with Indigenous educators to develop language assessment tools?

As a non-Indigenous researcher supporting Indigenous educators in developing an Indigenous language assessment instrument, I learned the importance of not only having a deep understanding and expertise in research techniques, but also a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Native community members. A research instrument that is restricted to the knowledge and experience of the researcher(s) may not adequately meet the needs of all community members. My experience taught me that the researcher needs to be engaged in the community as much as is practical to learn as much as possible about the project from the community's perspective.



How has your role as a researcher changed over the past years? My role as a researcher evolved, and I gained many insights as I continued to learn from supporting Yup'ik educators. In particular, I gained a greater appreciation of the complexity of the issues involved in studies in which values and beliefs held within the dominant culture have to be integrated with those held by Indigenous communities.

What were some challenges associated with this work? My key challenge was that I am not Indigenous, nor do I speak Indigenous languages. Although, from time to time, my professional life has involved supporting Indigenous peoples, my training as a physics teacher and my educational measurement and research expertise have been shaped by the dominant culture. Consequently, I realized I had much to learn if I was to fulfil my role as a researcher providing technical support to the group of Indigenous expert educators formed to develop the assessment.

What have your interactions with Indigenous people taught you about the role and approach of researchers in collaborative research projects? My interactions with Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, American Indians, and Alaska Natives have highlighted the importance of valuing their expertise, input, and perspective when undertaking research projects. The assumption that the researcher has all the answers, knows the important questions to consider, or has the most knowledge and expertise, is highly questionable. Researchers should not assume that they should always take the lead and be in control of research processes. Such a top-down approach does not result in the best outcomes for Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities. That approach omits consideration, and enactment, of many critical linguistic, cultural, and educational factors required for high-quality research.

Is there anything else you would like to add? Native elders, linguists, and educators are the experts in the inter-relationships connecting their language and culture. They know and understand their own culture, what they want the assessment to achieve, what is important for their children to learn and understand, and how best to use assessment results to achieve their linguistic, cultural, and educational goals. Native people are the individuals who need to drive the development of their Native language assessment—not me, a non-Indigenous person, trained in the dominant culture as a physics-trained teacher and researcher.

Edynn Sato, Ph.D., Director of Research and Psychometrics



How will WIDA collaborate with Indigenous partners on assessment development and other research initiatives in the area of Indigenous languages and cultures?

Recently, based on our collective experiences and information from the field, our team drafted a theory of action and set of principles to document our learnings and reflections and to guide how we contribute to and support work related to the revitalization and sustaining of Indigenous languages and cultures. These have implications for how we will continue our collaborations with Indigenous partners on assessment development and other research initiatives. Generally, foundational to all our collaborations will be the self-determination of our Indigenous partners, and our approach to collaboration will be community-based and inclusive and reflect the principles of Indigenous methodologies—being respectful, relevant, responsible, ensuring reciprocity, and reflecting cultural humility. Consistent with other work we do at WIDA, we will practice an asset-based approach that reflects and prioritizes the values, beliefs, norms, relationships, and ways of knowing of our Indigenous partners. We will aim to be as transparent as possible as we engage with our partners and follow necessary protocols to yield outcomes that are beneficial to the community and can support the revitalization, sustaining and/or strengthening of the community’s cultural practices, language, and knowledge systems. As collaborators, we hope to be a trusted resource and to build and maintain reliable, long-lasting relationships with our partners.

Describe WIDA’s role in partnerships established with Indigenous peoples, school districts, and language experts to support community goals of strengthening Indigenous languages and cultures through the creation of assessments of Indigenous languages.

WIDA’s role in our partnerships with Indigenous peoples, school districts, and language experts will be centered on fostering relationships that are community-based and inclusive, prioritizing Indigenous self-determination and the leveraging of the community’s cultural and linguistic assets, and generally will be in service of convening and facilitating work vis-a-vis the community’s goals. WIDA will offer holistic support in instruction and assessment as well as its technical knowledge and experience in measurement to help ensure the creation of valid, reliable, and meaningful assessments of Indigenous languages, while building capacity and related resources with the consent and guidance of the Indigenous community.

What were some lessons you have learned from your collaboration with Indigenous partners?

Key learnings are reflected in the theory of action and principles that our team drafted. In particular, one key learning is the importance of actively listening with cultural humility and shaping processes and outcomes of initiatives on the priorities, perspectives, and experiences of the Indigenous community. Another key learning is the importance of transparent and consistent relationships that extend beyond the scope of a given project or initiative. Such ongoing, long-term commitment supports mutual understanding, trust, and reciprocity.

What do you see as the future direction for WIDA in the area of Indigenous language and culture education?

The future direction of work is poised to continue facilitating the revitalization and sustaining of Indigenous languages through culturally responsive practices and community-driven initiatives. We hope to be a reliable partner in communities’ efforts to develop educational programs that emphasize or integrate Indigenous languages and cultural practices into curricula and establish

relevant, meaningful, and valid assessments. We also hope to support the leveraging of technology and digital platforms to create and share engaging language resources. We currently have a grant application with a few partners that is related to this, and we are hopeful that it will be funded. With our continued partnerships with Indigenous communities, educators, researchers, and policymakers, we hope to serve as a reliable resource for supportive practices and policies as well as funding opportunities that prioritize Indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies and support the self-determination and overall well-being of Indigenous peoples.

Is there anything else you would like to add? Our collective journey towards revitalizing and sustaining Indigenous languages and cultures is driven by a deep commitment to equity, respect, and collaboration. We are profoundly honored to be involved in this transformative work. Through this work, we are committed to helping to foster environments where Indigenous languages and cultures can thrive, ensure Indigenous voices are central, cultural practices are celebrated, and languages flourish. We remain committed to working with our partners to help ensure that future generations remain connected to their heritage and identity.

Conclusion

As we conclude this publication, it is crucial to emphasize our ongoing commitment to maintaining and further developing the partnerships that have been foundational to our work with Indigenous communities. WIDA will continue to prioritize equitable, respectful, and reciprocal relationships, ensuring that our collaborations are guided by the principles of self-determination, community-based approaches, and cultural humility. We are dedicated to being a responsible partner and sustaining our relationships through consistent engagement, transparent communication, and a commitment to supporting language and culture revitalization efforts, as well as by sustaining the goals and initiatives of our partners.

Moving forward, WIDA will actively seek opportunities to support Indigenous education through the development of resources and assessments that are culturally relevant and responsive. By listening to and learning from our Indigenous partners, we aim to create a supportive environment that honors and celebrates Indigenous knowledge, languages, and identities. Our work will persist through continuous refinement, capacity building, and the co-creation of innovative solutions to best ensure that Indigenous communities receive the support they need to thrive academically and culturally. Together, we will forge a path forward that strengthens these invaluable partnerships and works to promote the well-being and success of Indigenous learners for generations to come.

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