

LEADERSHIP



Mi'kmaw governance has been guided by the concept of consensus since time immemorial. There are three levels of governance in Mi'km'aki that work together in order to create consensus and guide decision-making: **the family, the community and the Nation.**

Family is at the heart of Mi'kmaw decision-making. Many decisions both historically and today have been worked out first within the family unit in a process often referred to as family-based Mi'kmawey. Unlike many communities across Nova Scotia and Mi'kma'ki, Mi'kmaw communities continue to be clusters of extended kin families. It is this relatedness that most determines who makes up communities more than any other factor. While Mi'kmaw people live in urban centres, each person maintains membership with an individual band to whom they are related.

Saqmaq (Chiefs) hold the responsibility for the community, and it is with the Saqmaq that decision-making among families is reconciled. The final decision rests with the community Saqmaw. Because of this authority, each treaty or other agreement (even those made today) have to be signed by each individual Saqmaw. No one Saqmaw speaks for or represents any other Saqmaw. When decisions require agreement among multiple bands, each Saqmaw must agree, and when it is required (in the case of a written treaty), sign their name to the agreement. This is the same today as it was when the Peace and Friendship Treaties were signed in the 18th century. Today, the *Indian Act* dictates the election of Chiefs and Councils at the community level, although several communities have created their own election processes. Like Chiefs, Councillors are voted in through a popular election.

When an issue involves all of Mi'kma'ki and its seven traditional districts, or geographic areas, the Santé Mawio'mi (Grand Council) brings together leadership from across the Nation to resolve the concern. Along with a Keptin (Captain) from each district, roles within the Santé Mawio'mi include the Kji-Saqmaw (Grand Chief), the Kji-Keptin (Grand Caption), and the Putu's. The Putu's is a knowledge keeper who keeps the official record of the Santé Mawio'mi. While Saqmaq work together at this upper level, the final decisions continue to reside at the community level and with each individual Saqmaw (and council).

Rather than addressing day-to-day activities, today's Santé Mawio'mi continues to operate alongside the Saqmaq and councils. Its focus is now on guiding,

strengthening and protecting the Nation over many generations. As the late Kji-Keptin Alex Denny explained, "Most problems were resolved with the extended family, not by the Mawio'mi or district chiefs. Solutions were likewise spontaneous and contextual."

VOCABULARY FOR LEADERSHIP LES

This vocabulary review is a good place to begin any Learning Experience in this theme:

Consensus is when *everyone* involved in making a decision agrees with the decision.

Resiliency is the ability to deal with challenges over a long period of time.

Saqmaw (Chief) is the leader of a Mi'kmaw community (also called a Band). They have sole authority for the decisions for that community.

Sante Mawio'mi (Grand Council) is the broadest form of Mi'kmaw governance and is focused on the future over many generations.

Putu's is the record keeper for the Sante Mawio'mi, particularly for diplomatic events.

Keptin are the leaders of each Mi'kmaw district and make up the Sante Mawio'mi

Kji-Keptin is the Grand Keptin, a leadership position within the Sante Mawio'mi

Kji-Saqmaw is the Grand Chief, who leads the Sante Mawio'mi.