

# Leadership



## Introduction

The concept of consensus has guided Mi'kmaw governance since time immemorial. There are three levels of governance in Mi'kma'kik: the family, the community, and the Sante' Mawio'mi. Each level works together in order to create consensus and guide decision-making.

Family is at the heart of Mi'kmaw decision-making. Many important decisions, both historically and today, are worked out first within the family unit in a process often referred to as **family-based Mi'kmawey**. Unlike many communities across Mi'kma'kik, Mi'kmaw communities remain 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 with whom they are related.

Historically, 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 Saqmaq. Because of this authority, each treaty or other agreement has to be signed by each individual Saqmaq. No one Saqmaq speaks for or represents any other Saqmaq. When decisions require agreement among multiple bands, each Saqmaq must agree, and when it is required (in the case of a written treaty), sign their name to the agreement. The decision-making process today is similar to what happened when the Peace and Friendship Treaties were signed in the 18th century, though Saqmaq do not make decisions on behalf of communities without the documented support of Band Councils. Formal Mi'kmaw community decisions are expressed through Band Council Resolutions (BCRs). Today, the *Indian Act* dictates the election of Chiefs and Councils at the

## 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. This does not mean everyone has to think the same. Consensus is reached after much deliberation and compromise. It is not the same as majority rule. Consensus cannot be reached if one party is still voting "no."

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

**Saqmaq (Chief)** is the leader of a Mi'kmaw community (also called a Band). They work with Band Councillors to make decisions for the community.

**Councillors** support the Saqmaq in leading a Mi'kmaw community. They help make community decisions, which are often formalized through Band Council Resolutions, or BCRs.

**Band Council Resolutions (BCRs)** are written formal expressions of decisions made by a Chief and Council.

**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.

**Keptins** 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-Saqmaq** is the Grand Chief, who leads the Sante' Mawio'mi.

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'kik and its seven traditional districts, the Sante' Mawio'mi brings together leadership from across the Nation to resolve the concern. Along with a Keptin (Captain) from each district, roles within the Sante' Mawio'mi include the Kji-Saqmaq (Grand Chief), the Kji-Keptin (Grand Captain), and the Putu's. The Putu's is a knowledge keeper who keeps the official record of the Sante' Mawio'mi. While Saqmaq work together at this upper level, the final decisions continue to reside at the community level and with each individual Saqmaq and Council.

Rather than addressing day-to-day activities, today's Sante' 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 Alexander Denny explained, "Most problems were resolved with the extended family, not by the Mawio'mi or district chiefs. Solutions were likewise spontaneous and contextual."