

The Languages and Cultures of the People of the Northwest Territories

A people's culture and language are the foundation for learning and identity. Even though cultural groups have different languages, traditions and histories, there is a similar perspective among Aboriginal people – a perspective that describes their place, knowledge, and skills of the world.

Fifty percent of the people living in the Northwest Territories are Aboriginal. This is the second largest percentage Aboriginal population of all provinces and territories reported in the 2001 Census. Nationally, just under one million people reported having at least some Aboriginal identity in 2001, representing 3.3% of the total population. This is a rise in the Aboriginal population in Canada from 2.8% in 1996.

Of the Aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories, 57% reported North American Indian, 19% reported Métis and 21% reported Inuit as their Aboriginal identity. Overall, the Aboriginal population in the NWT represents 2% of the total Aboriginal population in Canada. For specific groups, territorial Aboriginal people comprise 2% of the North American Indians, 1% of the Métis and 9% of the Inuit population of Canada.

Forty-four percent of Aboriginal people aged 15 years or older speak an Aboriginal language. More people reported using an Aboriginal language as their first language at home. The proportion of people speaking an Aboriginal language at home is higher in smaller communities than in Yellowknife or the regional centres. Given the rich oral tradition

of Aboriginal languages, more people speak an Aboriginal language than read and write it.

The Official Languages of the NWT are Chipewyan, Cree, Tâichô (Dogrib), English, French, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey and South Slavey. English is the most common language spoken in the NWT, with 77% of the population reporting English as their first language (mother tongue). Another 3% of the population reported that French is their first language. The proportion of people speaking English or French is higher in larger centres than in the communities.

The 2004 NWT Community Survey indicates that for the population 15 & older, 14,440 are Aboriginal people. The Dene language family consists of Tâichô, Chipewyan, North Slavey, South Slavey and Gwich'in. Approximately 2,134 (14.8%) people have the ability to speak Tâichô, 1,326 (9.2%) speak South Slavey and 1,017 (7.0%) speak North Slavey. There are fewer Aboriginal people who speak Chipewyan and Gwich'in, 716 (5.0%) and 264 (1.8%) respectively. About 371 (2.6%) Aboriginal people speak Cree, which belongs to the Algonquian language family.

About 25% of the 3,910 Inuit living in the NWT, speak an Inuit language. The Inuit language family extends into much of the Circumpolar world, including Northern Quebec, Labrador, Alaska, Greenland and the Siberian Peninsula. The Aboriginal language most commonly spoken by Inuit throughout the Beaufort-Delta region is Inuvialuktun, with Inuinnaqtun spoken in the community of Holman.

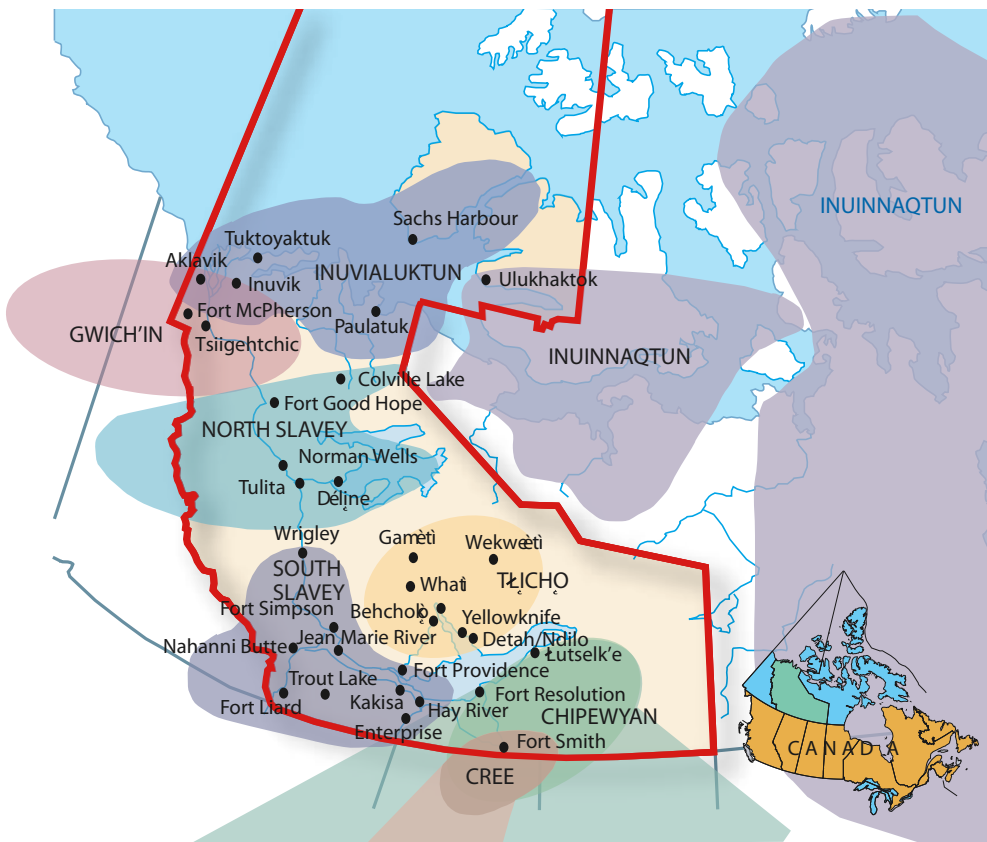
The Francophone community also seeks to be rooted firmly in its own unique history.

In the 2001 Census, 950 (2%) of the population stated that their first language was French; 450 (1%) of the population stated that French was the language most frequently spoken in the home.

Language is a fundamental requirement if people are to maintain or enhance their cultural diversity. Education programs and services, therefore, must be culturally appropriate.

Source:

Census of Canada, 1996 and 2001
2004 NWT Community Survey
'05 Towards Excellence: A Report on Education in the NWT. (2005)



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- Chipewyan
- Cree
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- English
- French
- Gwich'in
- Inuinnaqtun
- Inuktitut
- Inuvialuktun
- North Slavey
- South Slavey

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