WAASA INAABIDAA

(we look in all directions)
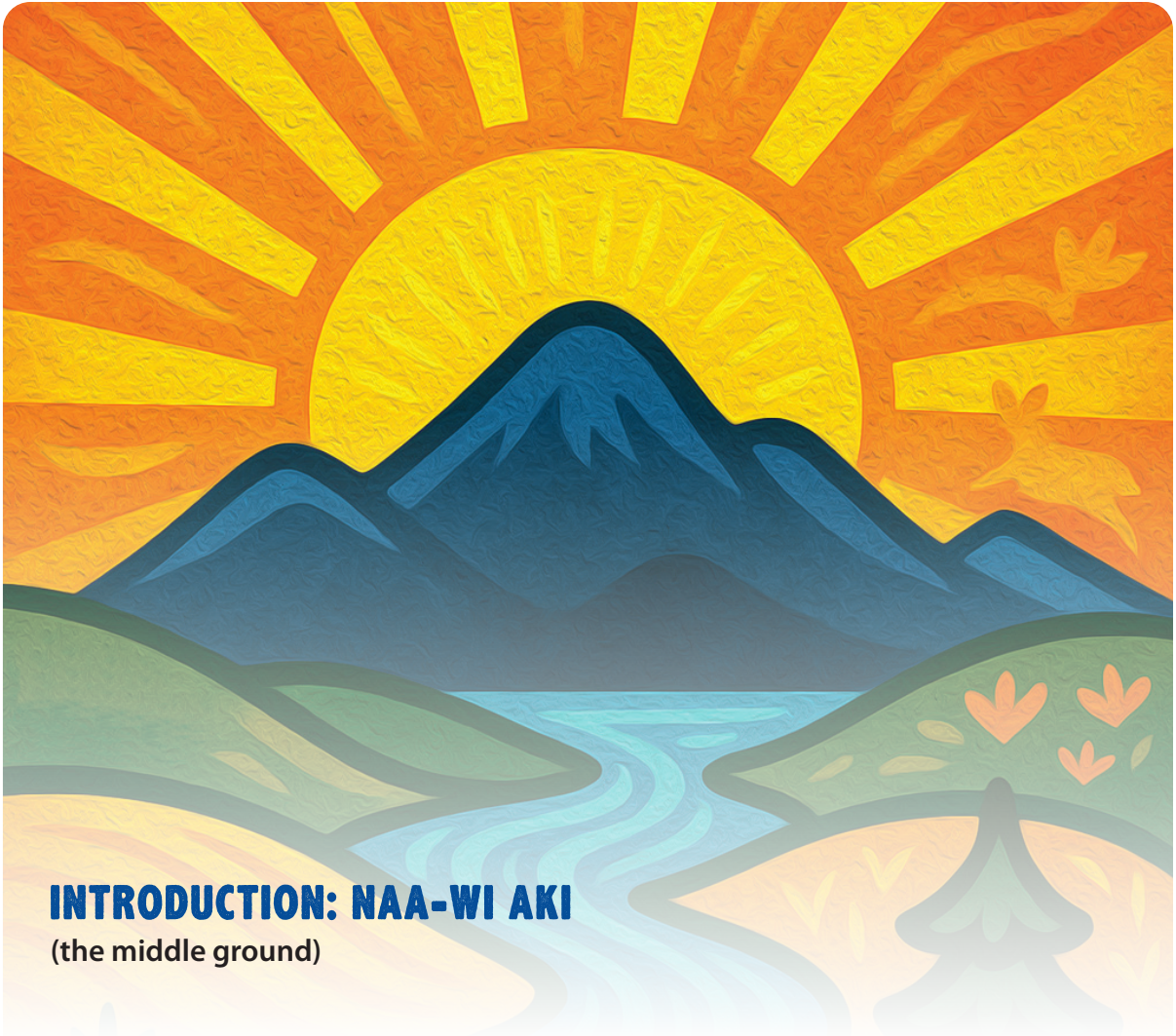
Strategic Plan 2025-2030

SHINGWAUK
KINOOMAAGE GAMIG

Centre of Excellence in Anishinaabe Education

INTRODUCTION: NAA-WI AKI
(the middle ground)

Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig (SKG) is an Indigenous Institute inspired and influenced by Chief Shingwauk's vision for a teaching lodge where Anishinaabe could learn at the 'middle ground' wherein education did not mean assimilation or the surrender of Anishinaabe identity. Shingwauk was known to travel to many different places by turning himself into a bird. His vision was unique, he had an Anishinaabe way of seeing the world and the events unfolding before him. His dream for a *kinoomaage gamig* (teaching lodge) was a clear vision during fasts where he was given guidance from his spirit helpers. Shingwauk was also given the name Sah-kah-odjew-wahg-sah (*Sun Rising over the Mountain*) by the *Wabanowiwin* (*Dream Medicine Society,* men/women who had the ability to manipulate fire and interpret dreams for healing, and who specialized in the natural order of the earth by studying the stars, the moon and the sun) to acknowledge that his power came from the sun, its position in the sky. Shingwauk's uncommon ability to straddle Anishinaabe society and colonizer/newcomer society was a gift for the Anishinaabe yet to come. He was a spiritual force resisting colonialism and was revered as a prophet because of his power to gaze into the future[1]. It is this unique cosmology and metaphysics of shape-shifting and time travel, and Chief Shingwauk's legacy, that continues to guide post-secondary education at SKG.

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Waasa inaabidaa is an Anishinaabe teaching, a teaching of intergenerational thinking. Looking in all directions teaches us to keep in mind (or look towards) the seven generations before us, the seven generations after us, and our current generation and to hold those multiple truths simultaneously. It collapses time and space, similar to theoretical physics. It is a contemporary journey of time travel and shape shifting that anchored the two collective wisdom journeys that informed this Strategic Plan (October 2024 and March 2025). Through systems thinking, complexity science, and future foresight methodologies including Three Horizons and Backcasting, community members were invited to contribute to this *miinigowiziiwin* (knowledge bundle). The bundle then offers a whole-system perspective.

During the strategic planning gatherings hosted by SKG in 2024 and 2025, it was agreed the focus of this bundle is the **sustainability** of Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig. In this bundle, sustainability is a reference to the ongoing existence and evolution of the teaching lodge and is meant to be illuminative, not definitive. The teaching lodge is a complex adaptive system (CAS) and therefore characterized by properties of uncertainty and emergence. This bundle then is iterative and dynamic, not static.

Bringing together past, present and future, the participants identified seven key priority areas for SKG to ensure its sustainability into the future. SKG is committed to being a change agent for Anishinaabe society and this bundle offers pathways for the organization to maintain a complexity mindset in the face of mounting internal and external obstacles to sustainability.

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

While strategic planning is a vital process for any organization that seeks to thrive in contemporary society, conventional planning models often fall short in addressing the complexities inherent in modern educational environments. This Strategic Plan embraces an approach to strategic planning that embodies a systems thinking and complexity-aware perspective. Another way to think about that is wholistic planning, considering the broader ecosystem in which Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig operates. We are one of several Indigenous Institutes and one of a myriad of universities across Turtle Island (North America). As such, we are planning with an eye to differentiating ourselves from other post-secondary institutions through the SKG Block Program for delivery, the SKG Anishinaabe Learning, Teaching and Research Model (ALTRM), and the SKG Model of Wellbeing.

Central to a systemic approach to strategic planning[2] is the recognition of feedback loops and nonlinear dynamics that characterize complex systems. Rather than viewing strategic planning as a static, linear process, SKG has chosen to engage in continuous learning and adaptation by committing to a Developmental Evaluation[3] approach to organizational learning.

SKG is seeking accreditation as a degree-granting body at a time characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, shifting consumer preferences, regulatory changes, commitments by partner organizations to Truth and Reconciliation, and a strong call for cultural and language revitalization in Anishinaabe communities that contribute to complexity, creating a dynamic and unpredictable environment. We are thus navigating several interconnected factors. Conventional approaches to planning that rely on cause-and-effect thinking are not fit for purpose any longer as SKG is experiencing multifaceted challenges to sustainability, including underfunding.

Critically, a systemic approach promotes **collaboration and inclusivity** in the strategic planning process. It recognizes that no single individual or department has all the answers, so SKG engaged with a range of community members in two sessions. We harnessed collective intelligence by utilizing the future foresight methodologies of Three Horizons[4] during the October 2024 session and Backcasting at the March 2025 session, led by Dr. Melanie Goodchild, a systems and complexity scholar, also a certified Three Horizons facilitator.

Complexity refers to the intricate and interconnected nature of the various elements and dynamics that influence SKG's organizational outcomes. It encompasses a multitude of factors including our unique Anishinaabe cosmology. Factors are both internal and external and complexity can arise from diverse sources, including technological advancements, geopolitics, threats to Indigenous sovereignty, intergenerational trauma, socio-cultural trends, and shifting educational needs of communities. At its core, complexity reflects the nonlinear relationships, feedback loops, and emergent behaviours that characterize modern society.

Systems thinking adopts a holistic perspective, recognizing that entities and phenomena are interconnected and part of larger systems. Systems are alive, interconnected and nested. *Instead of focusing on isolated parts or elements within a system, systems thinking focuses on the relationships between the system's components.* For example, how does language influence identity and vice versa? Small changes in one part of the system can have ripple effects across the system. Understanding these interconnections is essential for identifying patterns.

Identifying patterns in the collective intelligence of the first gathering in October led to the Backcasting elements of the second session in March. These two community sessions involved **an environmental scan systemically gathering and analyzing information about external and internal factors that could impact SKG's strategic objectives**. Comprehensive reports of both sessions are available on the SKG website. We **engaged with this diverse group**, however moving forward SKG must engage with ever more diversity of intelligence and lived experiences. This will build trust with Anishinaabe communities.

By understanding systems dynamics, SKG can design interventions that effectively address systemic challenges that take us away from our core mission. We **set clear goals and objectives**, based on pattern recognition of the first session themes, and hosted a Backcasting session with the community next. This helped provide a roadmap as we focused on horizon number two, the innovations that will guide us into the next phase of transition, horizon three. Backcasting also invited participants to explore potential future outcomes including **risks**. The next stage of this is to develop contingency plans to mitigate those risks.

Emergent properties of complex systems arise from the interactions of individual elements but cannot be understood by examining those elements in isolation. Emergent properties often manifest as new patterns, behaviours, or characteristics that emerge at higher levels of organization. By understanding these emergent properties at SKG, we can anticipate how systems might evolve and adapt to changing conditions. Hence our assertion that SKG is a complex adaptive system. It is self-organizing.

Feedback loops are mechanisms through which information about a system's output is fed back into the system, which influences system behaviour. Systems thinkers pay close attention to feedback loops because they can either reinforce or counteract existing patterns within a system. Positive feedback loops amplify change, leading to exponential growth or destabilization, while negative feedback loops dampen change, promoting stability and equilibrium.

Systems thinkers recognize the **non-linear** nature of complex systems, where small changes can lead to disproportionate effects or unexpected outcomes. Non-linear dynamics involve feedback loops, tipping points, and phase transitions that contribute to complexity. **Systems thinking and complexity provide a framework for reading this Strategic Plan**. Our systemic theory of change is that there are seven pathways to sustainability for SKG that need to be mapped and evaluated continually, as they are best understood *as interconnected and relational*.

VISION STATEMENT

Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig, an accredited University degree-granting Indigenous Institute, is an international and national leader in Anishinaabe education with sustainably generated own source revenue.

OUR MISSION

Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig, Centre of Excellence in Anishinaabe Education, honours Chief Shingwauk's vision of a teaching lodge and the legacy of the Shingwauk Residential School Survivors by revitalizing Anishinaabe identity through on the land education accredited via *Anishinaabe Aadziiwin* (Anishinaabe Ways of Being); the cultivation of strategic partnerships with Anishinaabe communities and with other institutions; a solid foundation of good governance with effective communication strategies; and a strong focus on language immersion programming.

IDENTITY

COMMUNICATIONS

LAND

ANISHINAABEMOWIN

Aaniin

GOVERNANCE

PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNITY

Waasa Inaabidaa (we look in all directions)

SEVEN PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Seven is a sacred number to the Anishinaabeg, seven generations, seven directions, seven Grandfather teachings, the seven levels of life and now seven pathways to sustainability for SKG. These pathways are not linear or reductionist, they are in deep relationship with each other. The intent is for these pathways to adapt to the realities of complex nonlinear dynamics rather than trying to impose order or certainty to the organization which exists within an uncertain world. Yet somewhat paradoxically, this bundle is our explicit change model, our logic model to show how we at SKG will attain our goals to realize Shingwauk's vision.

Each of the following seven pathways to sustainability represents a transformative, systemic change process at the teaching lodge. This represents our **adaptive strategy formulation**, of designing strategies that are flexible, dynamic and responsive to changing circumstances. Instead of relying on rigid, predetermined plans, SKG is embracing agility and adaptability, adjusting our strategies as new information emerges and circumstances evolve.

Continuous monitoring and feedback will systemically track progress against the objectives and goals outlined below:

IDENTITY

Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig will nurture in our learners their full capacities (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) to be Anishinaabeg, to understand where it is they come from.

Goals

SKG students will:

- learn their language, history, culture and stories to challenge colonial systems.

- after generations of colonial policies and assimilation, be given opportunities to heal, to mend their hearts and spirits, through ceremonies and time spent with knowledge holders and Elders.

- participate in ceremonies and spend significant time with aki (land) to be in relationship with the natural world like their ancestors.

SKG will:

- conduct a miniigowiziiwin (knowledge bundle) portfolio process to evaluate applicants' readiness to acquire Anishinaabe teachings and adhere to Anishinaabe protocols.

- prioritize the provision of supportive infrastructure (both tangible and intangible) for students in order to promote their overall wellbeing.

- design and implement an Anishinaabe Learning, Teaching and Research Model (ALTRM) that further enhances the SKG Model of Wellbeing.

LAND

SKG will ensure learners develop a deep re/connection to aki (land). Land is the primary shaper of Anishinaabe identity.

Goals

The design of curricular and pedagogical strategies for all programs at SKG will nurture a deep physical, emotional, mental and spiritual re/connection to aki (land). This will be accomplished through a Core Anishinaabe Curriculum that features on-the-land and seasonal classes delivered through the SKG Block Program, an innovative feature of SKG program delivery.

On the land activities, experiences, and curriculum will bridge Anishinaabe science and ceremony with other ways of knowing, including Euro-centric sciences.

SKG will continue to build and re-build (and maintain) the physical infrastructure that nurtures cultural belonging, supports Anishinaabe curriculum and pedagogy, and cultural safety for staff, students and faculty (SKG campus maintenance and improvement, fire arbour, teaching lodge, medicine garden, off-campus land camps).

GOVERNANCE

SKG will implement and solidify a skills-based governance structure to catalyze and animate systemic disruption and systemic transformation with a focus on people, programs and sustainability.

Goals

SKG will:

- create a Professional Development program for effective board governance including governance for complex adaptive systems.

- seek a diverse range of expertise to complement each other in leadership roles on its Board of Directors and in senior leadership roles, including an effective Student Council to represent student voice in leadership.

- prioritize and focus on the design, development and delivery of undergraduate and graduate level academic programs, micro credentials and additional qualifications, via its degree-granting accreditation from the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC).

PARTNERSHIPS

SKG is committed to diversifying partnerships with Indigenous and other post-secondary institutions to drive Anishinaabe educational excellence.

Goals

SKG will:

- create the conditions for generative partnerships between itself and Anishinaabe communities, Anishinaabe organizations and a variety of educational organizations and post-secondary institutions.

- sign agreements with partners that are initiated and concluded in ceremony with ceremonial artifacts to represent those covenants.

- partner with other Indigenous Institutes across Turtle Island to activate mutual aid and care arrangements to share resources and ideas in a respectful and appropriate manner.

COMMUNITY

The Anishinaabeg of Baawaating are the architects of their own learning so SKG will focus on complexity and systems-aware community engagement to drive policy change and educational leadership as we transition into an Anishinaabe university.

Goals

SKG will:

- prioritize the development and delivery of relationship building strategies and activities with Anishinaabe communities, including cultural events alongside scholarly events.

- design curriculum and pedagogy that develops and delivers impact-driven initiatives, capstone projects and field placements, to meet the expressed needs of local communities.

- focus on Anishinaabe style knowledge mobilization through partnerships with knowledge holders, storytellers, artists, scholars, Elders and medicine people through intergenerational learning circles.

ANISHINAABEMOWIN

Anishinaabemowin is our original way of speaking as Anishnaabe peoples. SKG will nurture our original ways of speaking in all aspects of our organizational culture, ensuring language immersion is at the core of our educational practice.

Goals

SKG will:

- be a language nest, with organized immersion learning and language tables.

- create partnerships with local, fluent speakers to support regular programming and to create a language immersion summer school.

- host an annual language conference and be an advocate for language revitalization.

COMMUNICATIONS

SKG will actively work to build and maintain trust by being honest, credible, transparent, authentic, reliable and accountable to the wider Anishinaabe community,

Goals

SKG will:

- continually update all marketing, promotions, recruitment and messaging materials utilizing the most accessible and appropriate technologies.

- create and deliver a Communications Strategy that enhances close relationships between SKG and communities, between staff and leadership, between students and faculty and between Elders and students.

- actively break down systemic barriers to the full implementation of data sovereignty for Anishinaabe communities and organizations in its own effective use of AI, surveys, data, and other research and communications technologies.

PATHWAYS FULFILLED

The performance indicators for all the above goals collectively may be summarized as follows:

- The physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of all SKG staff, students and faculty are supported through the pursuit of Anishinaabe mino bimaadiziiwin (the good life).

- Anishinaabe community is strengthened through SKG's contributions to the larger society.

All staff, students and faculty:

- retain a strong connection to Anishinaabe Izhichigewin (our Anishinaabe way of doing things) and aki (land).

- have regular opportunities to engage with Anishinaabe knowledge holders, language speakers, medicine people and Elders to enhance and improve their own cultural fluency.

All graduates of SKG:

- are knowledgeable about their identities and how their identity informs their own visions for the future.

- have more than an introductory level of fluency in Anishinaabemowin through regular participation in immersion activities and language camps.

- have more than an introductory level of proficiency in Anishinaabe ceremonial practice and protocols.

- have had more than one opportunity to be in relationship with local Anishinaabe communities and/or organizations through capstone projects and/or field trips and field placements.

SKG is:

- viewed as a world leader in Anishinaabe education and excellence as evidenced by the high number of applicants and graduates to our programs, both online and in-person.

- a go-to destination for scholars and practitioners to share their knowledge through annual conferences, camps and intercultural education workshops.

- an employer of choice and is a welcoming and inclusive workplace that hires SKG graduates, whenever possible.

- a model of good governance with its professional development program in "governing for complex systems" a signature program for micro credentialing.

- financially sustainable in the long term.

CONCLUSION

Taken together with the Final Reports of the Strategic Planning sessions at SKG campus in October 2024 and March 2025 (which also addresses risks faced by SKG), the SKG Model of Wellbeing 2022, and the SKG Anishinaabe Learning, Teaching and Research Model (ALTRM), all seven pathways described above offer SKG a solid foundation to reach its highest future potential in realizing Shingwauk's vision of a teaching lodge.

ENDNOTES

1   Fontaine, J. (2020). *Our Hearts Are As One Fire: An Ojibway-Anishinabe Vision for the Future*. UBC Press. (pps. 102-108).

2   See Kamaldeen, O. (2024). "A Systemic Approach to Strategic Planning: Navigating Complexity with Clarity" retrieved online from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379833454_A_Systemic_Approach_to_Strategic_Planning_Navigating_Complexity_with_Clarity

3   See Quinn Patton, M. (2011). Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use. The Guilford Press.

4   See more Three Horizons | International Futures Forum