

**Kontinóhstats ne Kanien'kéha – Mohawk Language
Custodian Association (MLCA)**

**POSITION PAPER ON
THE RENEWAL OF QUEBEC'S CULTURAL POLICY**

**Submitted to
Culture et Communications Québec**

Focus Day – March 7, 2016

The Government of Quebec and its Ministry of Culture and Communications has set out an ambitious plan to confer with Indigenous Nations residing in what is now called Quebec in a one-day Focus to renew their Cultural Policy as it relates to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples do not see our languages and cultures as separate from one another but tightly braided – as one.

This Position Paper will attempt to flesh out responses as time restrictions apply to cover the fifty-one questions in the three Themes. Kontinóhstats ne Kanien'kéha is uniquely positioned to respond to these questions. The foci of our Cultural Centre are to ensure we are able to provide language courses for our community, the development of educational curriculum related to our culture, language and history.

We look forward to hearing from our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters as they present their issues and priorities unique to their Nation and geographic location.

Niawen.



Kaneratenhá:wi Hilda Nicholas, President, for

***Kontinóhstats ne Kanien'kéha – Mohawk Language Custodian Association
(MLCA) (August 8, 1999).***

Aboriginal languages are irreplaceable cultural resources that require protection and support. Literacy in aboriginal languages and in one or both official languages are of equal value and importance.

Commitment and partnership at all levels of government combined with community leadership are essential to the achievement of literacy in aboriginal languages and official languages.

“You Took My Talk, Aboriginal Literacy and Empowerment,” December 1990, House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Canada, iv.

Theme 1 – LANGUAGE: The Vehicle of a Culture

Ancestral language is generally considered one of the most important markers of culture and identity.

Strengths

Kanehsatà:ke has a Language Policy that has been fully supported by the Mohawk Council. We have also implemented the Mohawk Language Standardization Project developed through participation of six Mohawk communities since 1993.

- Priority – development and implementation of a Language Law for Kanehsatà:ke
- Key Issue – Provincial Indigenous Language Law, similar to the NWT. The Northwest Territories (NWT) is the only political region in Canada which recognizes 11 official languages. Of these, nine are Aboriginal and belong to three different language families: Dene, Inuit and Cree.

The Aboriginal languages were given equal status within all institutions of the Legislative Assembly and the Government of the Northwest Territories, as defined in the Act and any subsequent regulations.¹

There are an increased number of young people in the community who are taking Language courses through the Cultural Centre. We have been fortunate to be able to offer different time schedules to meet the diverse needs of our population – cegep students, working adults and older individuals. The strong support of the Mohawk

¹NWT Education, Culture and Employment. <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/official-languages/aboriginal-languages/nwt-official-aboriginal-languages>

Council in encouraging their employees to attend language classes has been pivotal in many employees also attending evening classes.

Indigenous speakers are encouraged to assist in translations of old words seldom used today as well as teaching elementary and secondary on-the-land cultural activities using our language as the medium of instruction. Art and Print Making shows, plays, historical presentations (War of 1812), cultural learning on the land – maple syrup making and cleaning and preparing white Indian corn are activities that use Mohawk as the medium of instruction.

Daily events are seen as teachable moments to link our culture and artistic expression. Native Studies, history, Mohawk language arts, physical education all encourage students and the learning community to learn the songs, the ancestral legends, and sacred sites of our traditional homelands, place names, traditional dances and more.

Challenges

Annual project-driven proposal writing and reporting that takes more than 9 months to know if your proposal has been accepted and funding received hinders efforts for long-term planning that highly successful language and cultural programming require. This does not lead to high levels of fluency being achieved.

However, due to our dedicated teachers and cultural knowledge keepers, they guarantee that objectives to protect and revitalize our language are successful and of the highest quality when projects are approved.

All ages of learners must be the focus of revitalization and preservation of Indigenous languages, taking a simultaneous and sustained approach.

Through dedicated cooperation between all parties, we can ensure that Indigenous children have access to high quality immersion and later high quality bilingual or trilingual education. International research, including Canada, has shown excellent educational and linguistic benefits gained for Indigenous learners. Bear Nicholas quoted research conducted by Magga et al (2005) as:

“If indigenous and minority children are taught additively, with their own language as the main teaching language during minimally the **first 6-8 years**, while they also receive good teaching in a dominant language as a second language (preferably given by

bilingual teachers), they have a very good chance of becoming high level bilinguals (or multilingual, if other languages are added later)."²

The Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) has six program components, the first component being Culture and Language. The AHSOR program has contributed to increased Indigenous language revitalization as reported by the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS). RHS 2002/03 reported that 19.3% of children age 3-11 years old could speak one or more First Nations languages; RHS Phase 2 – 2008/10 Preliminary Results note this same age group increased to 22.4% - a modest but critical growth of 3.1%.

Steps to achieve this requires a multi-pronged and sustained approach. Thus, Kanehsata:ke agrees with the findings of British Columbia's First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council, on actions to revitalize Indigenous languages:

1. **Protective legislation** – immediately create legislation and official recognition to protect Indigenous languages.
2. **Language Revitalization Programs** – it is imperative and urgent that resources at comparable rates to the funding afforded to the 2008 Roadmap for Linguistic Duality be provided immediately to Indigenous language champions; urgency is due to the loss of Elders and other Traditional Knowledge Keepers at an alarming rate. The following revitalization programs are recommended:
 - a. **Immersion Programming** – This is the most successful method of creating more speakers and increasing the fluency of semi-speakers of Indigenous languages by providing them with opportunities to be immersed in the language through daily and traditional cultural activities.
 - b. **Pre-School Language Nests** – Immersion pre-school for very young children and parents.
 - c. **Master-Apprentice Program** – One-on-one immersion program for learners committed to becoming fluent by intensively working with a fluent speaker.
 - d. **Language and Culture Immersion Camps** – Opportunities for fluent speakers of Indigenous languages to pass on their language and culture to younger generations through traditional cultural activities.
 - e. **Training and Certification** – Developing programs for training and certifying Indigenous language teachers and resource people in the community.
 - f. **Documentation of Language** – Recording, documenting and preserving Indigenous languages.

² Bear Nicholas, A. (March 2009). Quoted in *Linguistic Decline and the Educational Gap: A Single Solution is Possible in the Education of Indigenous Peoples*, p. 17.

- g. Development of Resource Materials –** Developing materials to increase languages use and proficiency.
- h. Archiving Development –** Language archiving using technology.

Barriers to cultural and/or artistic expression in Indigenous languages and cultures are:

- Inequality of opportunities through lack of financial and other resources to access avenues to express song, dance, art, plays, etc.
- Lack of educated non-Indigenous peoples on the unique cultural and/or artistic expressions in Indigenous languages – that can create the demand for such expressions.

Internet, video games and other technical media can be excellent opportunities to capture the interests of youth and adults in learning their language and culture but the development of various cultural and linguistic media is generally cost prohibitive to most communities. Accessing the finished product can also be problematic for youth and adults – Connectivity not available to all and may also be cost prohibitive.

Radio is an excellent medium to transmit Indigenous languages. To teach a language through radio or any other technical medium requires expertise in curriculum development – as would be required in educational settings. However, just hearing fluent Indigenous speakers provides listeners with an appreciation and pride of hearing community members provide news, views, cultural and historical content. It is evident that intrinsic value can also be applied to television, YouTube, webinars, etc.

EDUCATE EVERYONE – to ensure Indigenous languages are a source of pride for community and increased appreciation by non-Indigenous population for Indigenous peoples, their histories, languages, cultures and contributions to the world. Taught by Indigenous peoples.

- Provincial and federal recognition and/or implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

We can encourage members of the community to learn their Indigenous languages by providing equity of opportunities – **“to learn and earn”** a living in their Mother Tongue and/or to have opportunities to relearn.

- Opening doors to Quebec universities to offer Indigenous language, culture and history courses for credit, teacher training, including Indigenous early childhood education and language teachers – hiring Indigenous peoples to develop and

deliver these culturally appropriate and relevant courses – such individuals are vouched for by their community and Nation. It is important to certify and verify individuals to avoid “posers” who fraudulently identify themselves as Indigenous knowledge keepers.

- Opening doors to Quebec university or CEGEP's to Indigenous peoples to develop and deliver training programs, professional development programs such as Indigenous language courses for credit, training Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners to work in Indigenous communities for cultural competency (Social workers, nurses, doctors, educators such as elementary/secondary principals & Directors of Education, etc.).

EDUCATE EVERYONE: Response same as above.

The division of roles and responsibilities

Quebec stating that Indigenous rights, including language rights [and rights to culture] “fall within the jurisdiction of the federal government” is misleading. All levels of government within a State are bound to the international standards as ratified by the State. As stated in the United Nations *“Study of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Role of language and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of Indigenous peoples,”*

Cultural and language rights are indivisible and central to all the other [human] rights...³

Quebec and Band Councils can play an enormous part in being action oriented and visibly supportive of the dedication and specialized knowledge and skills possessed by our “Living Treasures,” our Indigenous knowledge speakers.

Quebec and Band Councils can provide the required resources to properly implement revitalization strategies and jointly work with Indigenous speakers/educators in monitoring and reporting on results.

³ United Nations. Human Rights Council. (16 August 2012). A/HRC/21/53, para. 8. Examples of other legally binding covenants and conventions are: Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Universal Declaration on Human Rights, etc.

Theme 2 – ART AND TRADITION: The Foundation of a Culture

We often hear about a break in the transmission of Indigenous culture – a generation gap. Thus, for many people, the term “Aboriginal art” calls to mind handicrafts, the technical know-how used in the production of objects that are both aesthetic and utilitarian. But what about Indigenous peoples practicing other forms of art, namely contemporary arts (visual arts, performing arts, digital arts, etc.)?

Strengths

Art and tradition contribute to social cohesion and a sense of “social welfare” by providing a solid foundation to develop a positive self-image, self-worth and identity as an honorable Indigenous person who has a connection to their ancestral past.

Iroquoian peoples are recognized for their agricultural and horticultural knowledge and skills – that is still being practiced by annual gardens of the Three Sisters. There is an increase in the number of individuals who are now gardening and collecting maple sap and making syrup. Teaching through legends and celebrating through ceremony are still practiced in the language.

Use of the word “allowed” is inflammatory. Traditions carry on through the dedication and pride to continue honoring our ancestral teachings despite the infamous efforts of Church and State to destroy traditional knowledge through Indian residential schools, the over representative numbers of children removed from family and community by social services and through forced assimilation through educational programming.

There is some support available for those wishing to learn or practice art in the community but resources are limited to successful annual proposal writing.

Traditional activities are timeless – legends, songs, dance of our ancestors are still practiced today and are as relevant now as in the past. Our legends teach the morals and values of our Nation – how to respect all life and walk in dignity.

Through cooperation, shared vision and providing urgently needed resources, more opportunities can result – while Indigenous peoples are the traditional knowledge keepers, governments and leadership can provide the venues and support needed to highlight the creativity of ancient civilizations.

Challenges

There is an urgency to revitalize, preserve and protect our languages and cultures. Forced assimilation has had a devastating effect on Indigenous peoples throughout the

world where colonizers have occupied or permanently settled traditional Indigenous homelands. UNESCO stated in 1996 that:

“Canada’s Aboriginal languages are among the most endangered in the world.”

There are some sacred traditions that cannot be shared.

No, there is no opposition to cultural dynamism and contemporary art – it is refreshing and seen with a 21st Century perspective. The only warning is against cultural and linguistic appropriation by non-Indigenous persons.

Young people see the world with a new perspective. Society in general has evolved - rapid changes in technology is only one area; they now must contend with climate change, GMOs, declining opportunities for full and meaningful employment. As long as they honor their ancestral teachings and do not demean the sacred, they are encouraged to paint/sing/dance what they know.

Educational institutions can be a place for encouraging children and teens to learn their traditions, in addition to support from their families. Measures must include financial resources and access to other supports. Concordia University’s Fine Art’s offered summer art courses in various mediums – with fees waived for Indigenous children living on reserve. Guided by university art students was a unique opportunity. A fully resourced art program should be available first to students to encourage and peak their interest.

Immense difficulty for Indigenous artists to obtain financial assistance. The avenue most available is the often difficult proposal driven. While many Indigenous students have amazing talent, they may have difficulty filling out the forms, or the criteria are too narrow and intimidating.

Most Indigenous artists cannot live on what they make from their art – there are exceptions but it is rare. They would need support of their families and a room or a building big enough to work from, and additional resources to buy the raw materials if required.

The term “professional skills” of Aboriginal artists is vague. Does this mean the skills needed to know the worth of their work and the skills to negotiate the price? Does this mean the “soft skills” required to meet and greet potential buyers?

Our organization, the MLCA Inc., had envisioned our planned **Kanehsatà:ke Heritage Centre** that would accommodate emerging artists, provide them with a place to work, a place to display their talents and host art shows. For singers, dancers and theatrical plays, a stage for their shows.

For relevancy - See attached *MLCA Position Paper on the Site Recommendations for the Kanehsatà:ke Heritage Centre Within Kanehsatà:ke, January 2015.*

An Indigenous art organization, structured by and for Indigenous artists could definitely provide for a wider reach of their products – that could easily have an international reach. The collectivity could also provide protection and promotion, safety and security, set professional rates that truly reflect the worth of the art.

Promotion of Indigenous artists' work can be negotiated with such an Indigenous art organization – in partnership with QC and other entities.

The division of roles and responsibilities

While the opinions of Kanehsatà:ke is only one voice, the support of the province and local Band Councils could provide strong advocacy for emerging and known artists. It is unclear who are the NGOs but support from all available government levels and organizations is very important to providing equity of opportunity for Indigenous artists and the possibility of sharing limited resources.

An important aspect of such a joint venture is approaching it from positions of respect and equality. If this is lacking, it will fail.

Theme 3 – LAND AND URBANITY – The Spaces of a Culture

Nature and culture are two elements commonly associated with "Aboriginal identity" – they are seen as inseparable from it, in fact. Land is a space that is both symbolic and physical, a component of identity and a living environment bound to geography. Is Aboriginal culture still so strongly defined by its relation to the land?

Strengths

Best practices in the cultural development of land means a return to communal and individual organic gardening, it means sustainable activities. A Heritage Centre that honors language, culture, history and traditional knowledge through daily use has been planned for by the Mohawk Language Custodian Association for many, many years. Our plans include communal gardens, teaching, developing curricula for schools and much more.

None that are known. Access to our traditional medicine and food gathering at the place now known as "Parc Nationale d'Oka is not always welcomed by park officials or "gate keepers" who sometimes attempt to charge admittance to our traditional lands.

As noted throughout, the Onkwehón:we are renown farmers. Many wild plants are food sources that are still gathered at various times during the year.

Will not respond to question on forest experiences essential to understanding Indigenous culture?

Yes, cultural tourism in Indigenous communities should be promoted. The MLCA Inc. has contracted prior research on this subject and it was found:

1. There is a demand for Aboriginal experiences and tourism but Aboriginal products are considered to be a niche market that has yet to be more fully developed.
2. Communities are not seizing opportunities for developing the tourism and there is a general feeling that offering tourism in communities will have a negative effect although some community leaders see the economic opportunities related to tourism.
3. Aboriginal experience tourism is at the centre of development for industry activities such as accommodations, transportation and arts and culture, and nature adventures opportunities for aboriginal people and communities and offers a second tier of benefits for similar non-aboriginal tourist operators and activities.
4. Aboriginal tourism in Quebec can be a robust industry and is perceived to be a way for stimulating economic development and jobs for communities. Quebec sees an opportunity for developing aboriginal tourism as international competitions increases.⁴

Increased interest in Indigenous cultures can contribute to strengthening identity and pride as long as tourists are respectful and knowledgeable of the histories of colonization, and do not approach Indigenous peoples as museum artifacts but are prepared to meet contemporary peoples who have unique cultures and languages.

Challenges

Will not respond to this question of land development through cultural knowledge of Indigenous peoples. History of ignoring Indigenous peoples territorial rights for capital gains.

Define “we.” Most cultural references and historical occupation of our people are ignored; interpretation of ancient artifacts has been hidden from Kanehsatà:ke, in particular. Pottery sherds, human bones have been discovered, then removed without notification of the proper owners – the community of Kanehsatà:ke. Oka Park does not invite our knowledge keepers to review their presentations they do when they present to tourists. Laws concerning these ancient discoveries are ignored, then disappear from

⁴ Whiteduck, F. (17 January 2013). *Kanehsatà:ke Language and Cultural Center Lessons Learned and Preliminary Market Analysis*.

the historical record that proves our ancient settlement. Items have also been found in St. Eustache, and surrounding area but never returned to our community.

Indigenous communities require a special place – separate from the politics – a calm environment to teach and learn in a culturally responsive and safe building.

Kanehsatà:ke needs to have a Heritage Centre so that we interpret our history. This is in keeping with the aspirations of all Indigenous peoples – the human right to define and interpret their histories.

Often, Indigenous peoples living away from their families, clans, and communities can become disconnected from their traditional teachings and languages. It is also a concern that Indigenous traditions of one Nation become mixed with another Nation's teachings. While many are similar, they have their unique teachings for their Nation and their geographic location.

- Provide opportunities to visit urban Friendship Centres to teach Indigenous-Nation specific cultural knowledge
- Communicate with Friendship Centres and other centres to invite Indigenous peoples living in urban centres to social gatherings to share legends, songs, art, etc.
- Assist in providing a way for people to connect by social media

The division of roles and responsibilities

Will not respond to this question – similar to above question.

There are many ways that Quebec, Band Councils, and NGOs can participate in On-the-land traditional teachings. However, there are within every Indigenous Nation, teachings that are sacred and cannot be shared outside the Nation.

Quebec can help urban Indigenous peoples by providing them with opportunities to participate in on the territories activities, working with local Cultural Centres to facilitate teaching and learning events.

Band Councils can work closely with their Cultural Centres to organize and extend invitations to urban Indigenous peoples. It would be possible to have an Elder or knowledge keepers to mentor them.

We suggest that:

- The renewed Indigenous Cultural and Language Policy must have clear implementation and reporting guidelines with firm timelines defined

- The Policy and all levels of government ensure there are equitable financial opportunities

**** One attachment.**

**Kontinónhstats ne Kanien'kéha – Mohawk Language
Custodian Association (MLCA)**

**Position Paper on the Site Recommendations for a
Kanehsatà:ke Heritage Centre within Kanehsatà:ke**

January 2015

Kontinónhstats ne Kanien'kéha or the MLCA strongly advocate for:

1. A Mohawk Heritage Centre; and,
2. That it be constructed at the former La Mennais School Site.

The rationale is simple. Residents of Kanehsatà:ke cannot point out to one clearly visible facility throughout the territory that tells a visitor or traveller on Route 344 - that *this is a Kanien'kehá:ka community*. There are no facilities that show that we have been living here for centuries. There is no dedicated space that has been set aside to celebrate and share our proud history, culture and language. There are no opportunities or local venue for our talented artists and craftspeople to demonstrate to visitors, the ancient and contemporary art and crafts that are still practiced today.

There is no permanent structure that our children, youth, Elders and community can all gather and point to with pride – that our ancestors and we, their descendants - have promised to keep our unique and precious civilization alive for future generations.

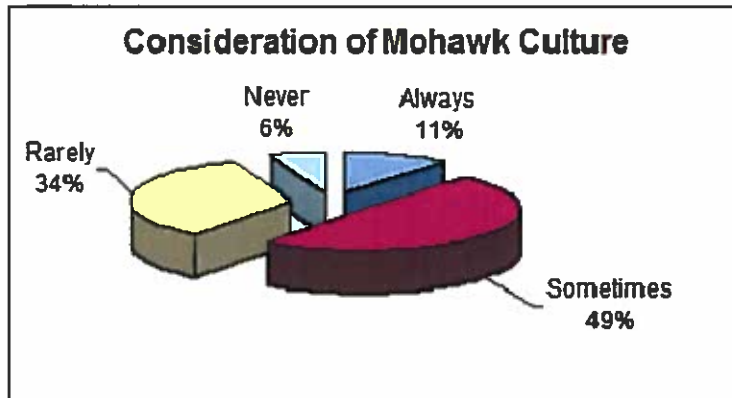
The time for action is now. Together, we can create a beautiful legacy for the future.

FINDINGS FROM A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

To illustrate the steady erosion of our proud history, culture and language within Kanehsatà:ke, First Line Services Advisory Committee distributed their “**Summary Report on Community Assessment, June 2011.**” Over 500 individuals from the community responded to two relevant questions:

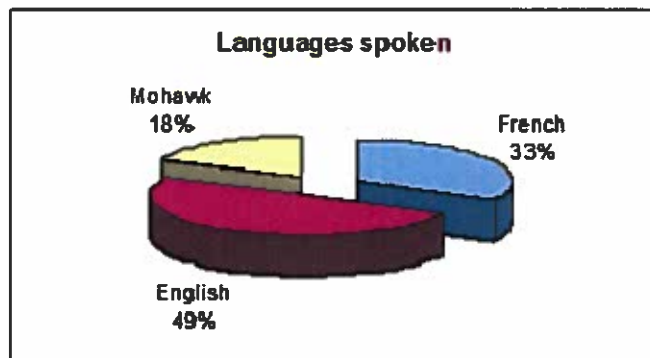
3.3 Consideration of Mohawk Culture

The respondents felt that Mohawk culture was considered only sometimes by the different workers and organizations in Kanehsatà:ke, with only 11% stating they “always” considered Mohawk culture.



1.4 Language

The majority (49%) of the respondents speak English, with 33% speaking French and 18% speaking Mohawk:



The First Line Services Advisory Committee’s Summary Report states that Kanehsatà:ke respondents provided suggested activities, such as:

- Culturally-based Recreational Programs
- Elder/youth interaction to verbally transfer aspects of our Mohawk culture
- Mohawk Language courses
- Vocational Education for Youth – wood working

- Farming & gardening.

The Summary Report further noted that to address social issues, they recommended, in order of choice:

#2 – Revitalizing Mohawk language

#4 – Increasing economic opportunities and employment

#6 – Increasing recreational and social programming

#10 – Providing positive role models

#15 – Creating cultural continuity.

It is the position of the Mohawk Language Custodian Association that all these recommended activities from the First Line Services Report are critical aspects that can be addressed through a Heritage Centre – working collaboratively with any service organization.

A Heritage Centre that is located in Kanehsatà:ke in a site that is visually prominent – as the La Mennais site would provide.

A Heritage Centre Should Provide:

ACCESSIBILITY

- Primary Users - First and Foremost: To our schools, students, teachers, parents, Elders and our community. A clear message that “We are still here!”
- To our traditional gardens, medicine walks, language and cultural workshops, including theatre productions

PROXIMITY: UNDER OUR FULL JURISDICTION AND CONTROL

- Our Kanien’kehá:ka history, culture and language - our voices determine the messages

- By working closely with our community schools, we can ensure our children, youth and adults have opportunities to learn and in turn, to teach others

MEANINGFUL JOBS – Culture and Language as Foundation

- On site venue to showcase our talented artists and craftspeople – demonstrations and meaningful interaction with our guests
- Honouring and valuing our Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers with employment – our teachers for the next seven generations.
- Encouraging our youth and adults to become fluent Mohawk, English and French speakers, who are culturally strong and proud of our Kanien'kehá:ka heritage.

IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED

There have been a number of studies, including a Feasibility Assessment, that have been done since 2005. Ten years have been lost and it is our recommendation that any further Feasibility Studies NOT be conducted. A clear roadmap of what we need to do is found within these documents.

MLCA strongly recommends the following actions begin immediately.

1. Community Consultation – Focus Groups of Youth, Elders, Adults to discuss:
 - a. Support for a Heritage Centre
 - i. Suggestions for design; key elements within the Heritage Centre, etc. [museum, gift shop, workshop, conference room, theatre, traditional gardens, medicine walking paths, café, archives for genealogical and historical research, etc.]
 - ii. Organizing a Planning Advisory Committee
 - b. Site recommendations - Heritage Centre and Traditional garden
 - c. Addressing the problems of vandalism and destruction of public property and other issues of concern that may arise from the community consultation.

Níawen'kó:wa

Kontínówhstats ne Kanien'ke:há Board of Directors