



CWEIA STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020



Message from the President

Kwey!

It is an exciting time for the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA)! We are planning for the future of the state and well-being of our girls and women, families, communities and Eeyou-Eenou nation. We believe that the message by our ancestors was clearly stated and provided direction for CWEIA to lead towards healing in Eeyou Istchee. Meanwhile, we are creating an organizational “road map” for the next several years through an extensive strategic planning effort that will sustain our program development and strengthen the need for healthy and balanced families (and communities) based on strong cultural Eeyou/Eenou values and traditions.

As a President since September 2015 and in consideration of my previous opportunity of having to work for CWEIA, I was always mindful as the organization continuously cultivates and evolves along with our many Eeyou-Eenou Iskwaach (Cree Women) who are driven, amplified and passionately striving towards a positive transformation for not only themselves as women, but also, wholeheartedly to enrich their fellow Iskwaach (Women) and Iskwaess'ch (Girls) status and roles in Eeyou Istchee, in Quebec and in Canadian societies. The organization today represents a voice and an advocate to solve women issues and we play a very significant role in developing and sustaining Eeyou-Eenou Iskwaach (Cree Women). One thing all Eeyou-Eenou Iskwaach (Cree Women) have in common, that is, we are the backbone of our respected families, communities and nation, and we definitely have a genuine desire to help improve and heal our families, our communities and our nation as Eeyouch-Eenouch, while connecting with other Iskwaach who have the same interests.

Eeyou-Eenou Iskwaach (Cree Woman) are progressively stepping up to lead through their successes in professional work, nonprofit boards or civic involvement and especially, with their involvement at community level and their commitment with CWEIA is an ever present of a beautiful reminder of our collective vision, *“We are strong, united and resilient Eeyou-Eenou Iskwaach, as we embrace our nurturing roles towards sustaining harmonious families, communities and nation”* is truly an honorable responsibility that brings value to our rightful roles that continuously uplifts and supports these endeavors.

It is an honor and I am deeply humbled to serve this organization as a leader. I am looking forward to meaningful and memorable years ahead and the challenges that will derive throughout my four-year term. With this said, I leave you with what my version of an honorable and a strong Eeyou/Eenou Woman is....Meegwetch!

In Nishiiyu Spirit,

Linda L. Shecapio, B.A.

President - CWEIA

‘I am Eeyou/Eenou Woman’



I recognize my own power and the important balance of my body, mind, emotions and spirit. My self-love, self-respect and self-acceptance influence my beliefs, choices, feelings, and my level of strength and self-confidence; together, these qualities dictate my place in the world and allow me to reach for my dreams.

My awareness also guides me towards my inherent worth. At times, I fall but I will not give up on myself. I treat myself, and others, as sacred beings. I will honor my truth and respect myself. I am a life-giver, life-nurturer, and a life-educator. My health and wellness is vital to my family. I am a role model of good and positive behavior. The life skill teachings I received provide me with direction and are rooted in my Eeyou/Eenou identity, language and cultural values supporting me as I grow strong and resilient.

I must honor my responsibility to teach and live the teachings given to me by my mother, grandmothers and my ancestors. My role as a woman and a mother is fundamental to my family and community, as it is vital for the health and wellness of the Eeyou/Eenou nation. I strive to cultivate dynamic and vibrant future generations. I am Eeyou/Eenou woman.

Linda Shecapio



Foreword

At the 2015 Board retreat, our women have spoken, they talked about the strengths of our organization that matter to them and that we could tap into, what they saw as opportunities in the environment, what their aspirations were for Cree women in the future, and where they wanted to be headed from there.

We are happy to present our strategic plan which will guide us in the next five years. Our women have shown us the way we want to go, and it is with great enthusiasm that we will walk the path, with our eyes and hearts open and putting our Cree culture and traditions first.

In five years, I hope CWEIA will become a household name, a sought-after partner and an independent and dynamic organization who has a positive influence and impact on women and children, so that we can keep helping Cree families be stronger.

To get there, we will continue being an advocate and we will build a living and striving organization that offers programs and services to respond to the needs of Cree women. We will work together with other Cree entities towards a shared vision for a healthy nation of which women are an active and valued part.

We look forward to working with our allies and all Cree women to be part of shaping a positive future for Cree women!

AS FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE, WE HAVE
KNOWN DEFEAT, SUFFERING, STRUGGLE
AND LOSS BUT WE MUST ALSO KNOW
THAT WE ARE A RESILIENT NATION. WE
ARE KNOWLEDGE-KEEPERS AND MAY WE
CONTINUE TOWARDS OUR HEALING
AMONG OUR PEOPLE AND RISE
STRONGER TO DEFEND OUR RIGHTS.

- LINDA SHECAPIO



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1. GETTING TO KNOW CREE WOMEN OF EYYOU ISTCHEE ASSOCIATION

a. Who we are and Where we come from

History

In the early 90's, at the Annual General Meeting of Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and the Cree Regional Authority which was held in Whapmagoostui; the Regional Director who advocated for Women's rights, Mrs. Bella Mianscum, requested a resolution to be passed to recognize the Cree Women in Eeyou Istchee which received unanimous support from all Chiefs in assembly. After this, no further action was taken as to requiring funding or other support needed to bring forth the Cree Women. So they continued to associate through the Quebec Native Women with the little funding allocated to each Quebec nation/tribe. There was no continuation of the business affairs regarding Cree Women except at the Annual Gatherings and usually these gatherings were held around the end of summer and at this time most women were out on their goose/moose breaks.

The process in developing our Mission Statement and logo took many years. However, just recently the former Board of Directors of the newly incorporated CWEIA came up with a revised Mission and Vision Statements, as well as values as an organization. Our former President Mrs. Doris A. Bobbish, who was the former Quebec Native Women's Association Nation's Director was elected in 2007 and this is when we, as the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee, started networking to seek funding. At this time, this was the turning point for CWEIA; various government agencies and the CRA approached us. This was seen as support for us to apply for certain funding through various initiatives at the regional and provincial levels.

In 2008, contact was finally made with the Ministry of Culture, Communications and Status of Women of Quebec (MCCCFQ) at the Quebec Government to sign an agreement to provide us with funding to build on our capacity as well as develop programs and services through five objectives that was developed with the CWEIA in collaboration with the MCCCFQ program officer.

Then in 2009, the GCC/CRA Executive Board passed a resolution to accept the Agreement and also took the bold move to provide funding to the CWEIA to allow us to develop as an organization. In January of 2009, we signed and became an Association under the provincial government and at that same time signed a service agreement with the CRA and an agreement with the MCCCFQ.

Last but not least, CWEIA has entered into a four-year agreement with MCCCFQ, the *2011-2015 Agreement on Equality between women and men in Northern Quebec region*, which will allow for continuity and time to carry out the objectives within the Strategic Plan of our Association.

Membership and Governance

In 2015-2016, CWEIA's membership was made out of 134 members and 15 friend members, coming from all the Cree communities. In 2011, there were 4105 women aged 25 and over in Eeyou Istchee, plus 2600 girls aged 0-14 and 1415 aged 15-24. That brings the total of women and girls to 8120. Cree women take care of our families; in 2011, in addition to the young girls, there were 2815 boys aged 0-14 and 1430 aged 15-24 in our region, meaning our 4105 women are collectively responsible for 8260 children and youth. We at CWEIA, as wives and mothers,



we work for these women and also, for the wellbeing of their children, to make sure that they are loved and they can stay with their family and their community.

Our regional organization is governed by a Board of Directors made out of a president, elder representative, youth representative, plus one representative for each of the 10 Cree communities, plus one representative of urban Cree women from each of the following cities: Senneterre, Chibougamau and Val d'Or. There are thus sixteen directors, including five executives, who are working hard for women and children's wellbeing in Eeyou Istchee, and who are present, regionally and in their community, to bear the voice of women, to work together with men and our Cree entities to enact our dream of gender equality. Our leadership receives wisdom from the Goukumnouch Council, made out of four members including the Elder representative who also sits on the Board and the Executive.

Where we come from...

Before looking into the future, it is important to look at where we come from as an organization, and what we have achieved so far. It is a good space to celebrate successes and see how far we have come! This section highlights a summary of our realizations since our creation.

We have promoted gender equality through various multimedia sources, including providing information to support Cree women on our website and through our newsletter, and broadcasting radio programs and stories in the nation at least twice a year.

We have done a lot of work on healing. We hosted the Chisasibi Residential Healing Gathering as well as the Eeyou Healing Retreat in Wemindji. To get inspiration from this work, we sent a nine people delegation to *Healing our Spirit Worldwide* in New Zealand and a four women delegation for Dialogue for life.

We have been present at strategic tables and events. Three Board members participated at the Regional Residential School Gathering, and others at the Women Leadership Conference. We have been sitting on the Cree Social Economy Regional Table since its creation in 2012. We have been active on the Regional Cree Governance Board, the Quebec Native Women Board, the Aboriginal Shelter Network of Quebec, the Regional Elders' Council, and we had one of our youth present at the Cree Nation Youth Council Board. We also worked closely with the Cree Health Board and CRA Justice Working Group on Best Practices for Women Shelters. In February 2014, we were granted observer status at the Council level of the Cree Nation.

We have also conducted several events and special projects. We also hosted the 1st International Women's Day Event on March 8th, 2014 in Val d'Or, to honour and support women's rights advocates of our times. We also held our 1st Golf event on July 18, 2013 in honour of Abby Masty to give recognition to the youth who have displayed courage and dedication to create awareness of the issues facing aboriginal people. We also participated in the Bi-Annual and Awards Reception for women in Eeyou Istchee, held in partnership with Eeyou Economic Group. In terms of Cree women entrepreneurs, we have approved three business projects, and promoted our Filaction program by honouring outstanding women in business. Furthermore,

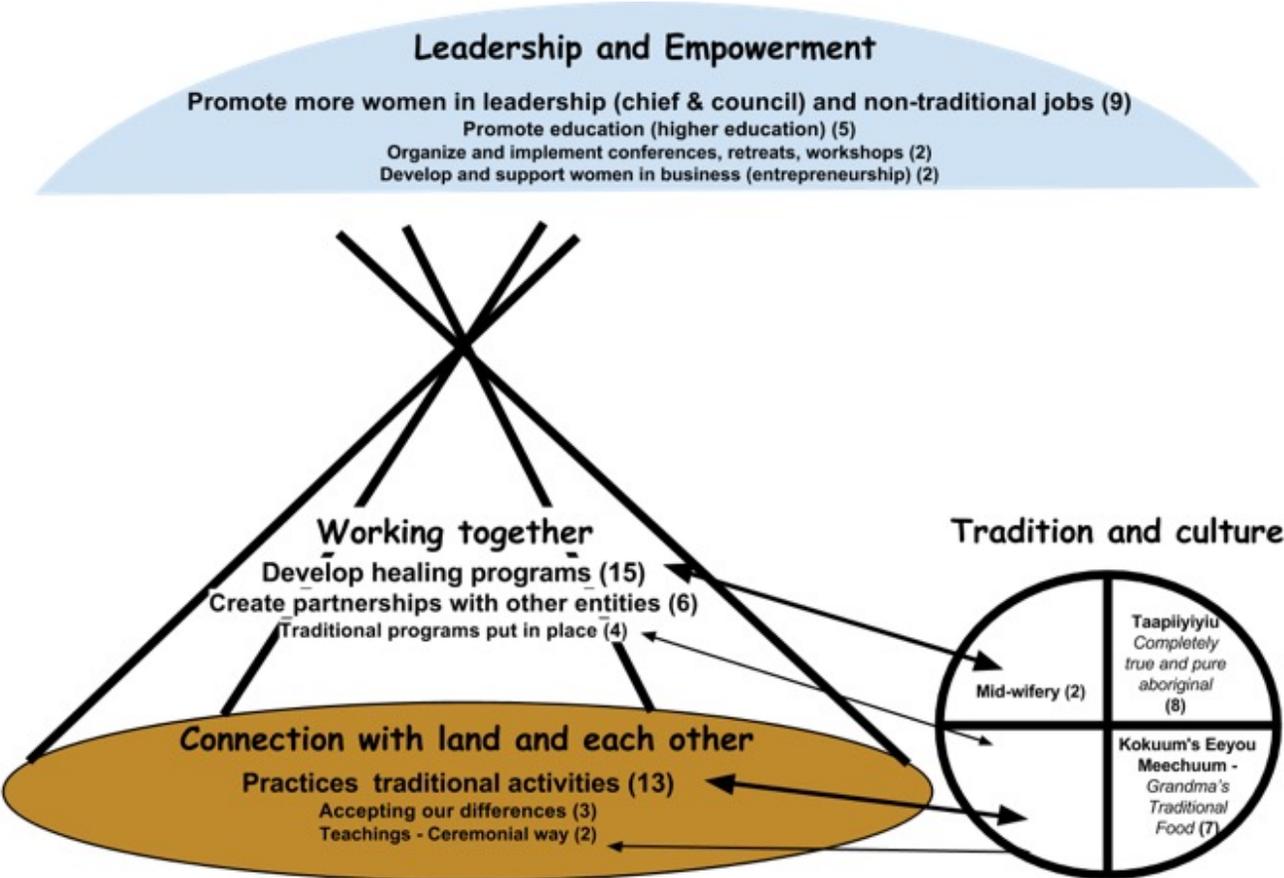
we have developed a midwifery research project and we conducted community consultations on Gender-based analysis on the topic of violence against women and girls in three communities.

We also worked with other organizations to upkeep our traditions and culture. We supported the Regional Nishiiyuu Council of Elders in organizing the 5th Annual Nishiiyuu Traditional Gathering in Whapmagoostui, we invited the Council to our Gookumnouch gathering, and helped promote International Men's Day.



We paid special attention to our internal processes, for they need to reflect our values and culture. We have clarified and established more adapted governance tools and procedures, such as a revised bylaws, a revised service agreement with the CNG and new reporting routine. We have also worked on improving communications channels through the creation and use of a virtual server. We have also created a new organigram with key positions we seek to add to the team in the short term. We have obtained funding from the Board of Compensation and signed a new agreement with the Ministry of Economy, Innovation and Exportation in December 2015. We have taken steps to work more closely with Local Women Associations.

The figure below illustrates our attitude of how we work from the past and it also connects our vision in the future.

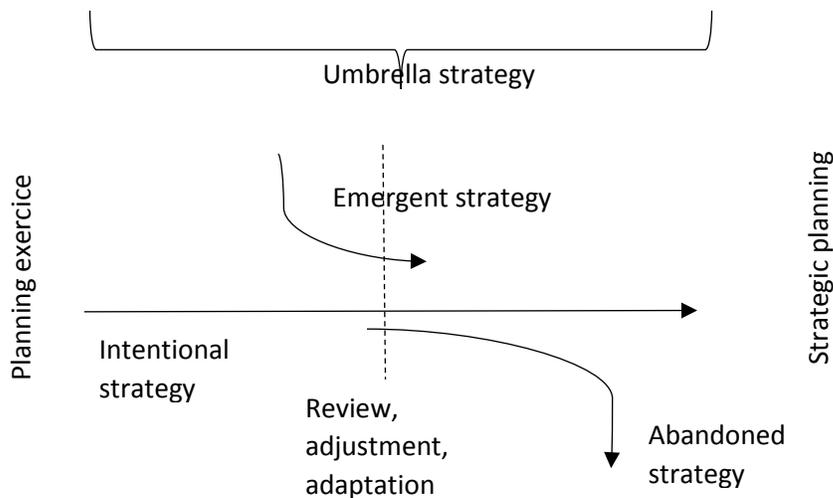


b. About this strategic plan



Our organization operates from the heart. Readers will detect that tone in our document, which is meant to appeal to the whole individual, not just the rational mind.

In our experience, we have found that the context in which we operate is constantly changing. As a result, it is important for us to be agile, and not get stuck in rigid planning. Our approach to this strategic plan is inspired by Henry Mintzberg’s work on strategy. Mintzberg is a worldwide leading expert on management at McGill University, known for having debunked classic views of managers as planners, after observing what managers actually do in their daily jobs. Mintzberg’s views on strategic planning is in line with seeing organizations as living entities, and it describes various types of strategies:



Intentional strategies are defined at the beginning of the planning exercise, and guide the organization for the duration of the plan. Umbrella strategies define large strategic boundaries or targets that are controlled through yearly plans and budgets. Emerging strategies come up during the span of the strategic plan, and are incorporated in a continuous way as the organization stays connected with its evolving environment. Finally, some strategies are abandoned along the way when they are no longer deemed to be adequate to suit the organization’s purposes. Following this framework, it has to be said that readers should not expect a detailed strategic plan. We want to keep this a living document that is inspiring for Cree women and our partners. We understand the importance of detailed planning, which we will integrate in our yearly action plans. We based this strategic plan on four main sources of information:

1. Our past experience acting for gender equality;
2. Our knowledge of the environment of the sector and our communities;
3. A strategic retreat undertaken with the Board of Directors and some past executives in January 2015;
4. Knowledge gathered in conversations with CWEIA’s leadership and elders.

Our strategic planning retreat used the SOAR (Strengths-Opportunities-Aspirations-Results) model which is a strength-based approach. We believe and we have seen that when organisations focus their attention on what they do best, they empower themselves by creating opportunities to realize what they are truly meant to be. The SOAR model is based on the theoretical foundation of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) paradigm in organizational development.



We have lived a two-day transformational experience for the current Board members and past executives that have created a safe space for the members of the organization to learn to interact differently, and create new generative patterns of interactions.

We a unique opportunity connect with the essence of the CWEIA and to dream our future by tapping into the hidden potential of our organization. We also explored what initiatives can support our vision and see how we could start transitioning there. Our experience led through five phases: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine, Innovate and Inspire to Implement. More recently, we completed the work with a day of workshops to precise the mission statement, vision the core values. Finally, each Director sought comments from each of their local committee in order to validate and orient the strategic plan. This strategic plan is hence a product of a participatory process at the BOD as well as in each community.



c. Mission and Vision

Mission statement of CWEIA

« To inspire and value Eeyou-Eenou Iskwew through healing, culture and socio-economic development ».

This mission is short but meaningful. As an organization, we strive to inspire Cree women to empower and to self-develop themselves. We can not empower every woman on their behalf, but as an organization, we can inspire by setting up services and projects for women. Empowerment contains the idea of capacity building for individual and women groups to self-sustain their development as well as working toward gender equality. CWEIA want to be part of a positive transformation of woman status and roles in Cree and Canadian societies.

We stand to be the voice for all Cree women. In fact, we value women by representing and advocating for gender equity and equality because it's part of our DNA as an organization that represents women. In our mission, valuing women means we advocate to solve women issues and we play a very significant role in developing and sustaining *Eeyou-Eenou Iskwew*. We do so through representations but also through significant initiatives of healing, culture and socio-economic development. We support aboriginal women entrepreneurship, either individually or collectively. We support women entrepreneurship in a spirit of solidarity and collectiveness. Hence, social-economy takes a special place in our mission in regard to entrepreneurship.

Vision statement

« We are strong, united and resilient Eeyou-Eenou Iskwaach as we embrace our nurturing roles towards sustaining harmonious families, communities and nation ».

This short vision is external oriented; it is expressive of where we want Cree women. It provides an ideal situation for CWEIA to strive for over the next decades. It is meaningful for us women for several reasons.

1. Firstly, in the future, we aspire Cree women to be strong, united and resilient. If women could embrace these qualities, we will build healthy and balanced families and communities. To become strong and resilient, we must know ourselves and be reconnected with our history and cultural roles. We must take care of ourselves, heal and decolonize ourselves and build our identity as Cree women in a contemporary world. We must also defend and promote our interests in order to build gender equality and equity. We must promote women leadership in all sphere of governance.
2. Secondly, our vision is not centred only on ourselves as Cree women, we also set focus on harmonious relationships with our men, our families and our communities. Cree women are by nature empathic, generous and altruistic. Sustainability and harmony either with regard to our families, our communities or to the environment are very important aspirations of our vision.
3. Thirdly, resilient women mean healthy women and families and as so, we embrace the Aboriginal holistic dimensions of a human being: physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual. It also implies a process of healing and decolonization of past trauma. Translated at the community level, these notions could be understood as sustainable community development.



4. Fourthly, healthy and balanced families (and communities) require strong cultural values and traditions, which implies that Cree individuals and organisations such as CWEIA must work continuously on one common background: Cree culture. A strong Cree culture implies necessarily Cree language and traditions.

d. Core values

Below are ten core values we seek to live and work together or with other Cree and non Cree entities. At the personal level, there are some core values:

- Strong identity and self-cared women;
- Empowerment and healthy women;
- Strong culture and traditions as guidelines for actions;
- Respectful attitude and relationships with each other.

Moreover, as an organization, there are also additional guiding values in daily life and interactions with each other:

- Unity and supportive of one another;
- Openness for change, innovative ideas and on sensitive issues;
- Fair and consensus oriented in the decision making process considering all aspects of the issue(s)
- Shared leadership roles;
- Clear communication and honesty.



Some qualities to be expressed:

Courage, love, respect, wisdom, honestly,
humility, truth, joy, empowerment,
perseverance, collaboration, unity, health...



2. STRENGTHS

Our Board sees CWEIA as a **loving and caring** organization, made out of women from each community who are **passionate and compassionate**, and who really want to make a difference towards healthy living! When the Board thinks of CWEIA, they think of nature: trees, flowers and **life**. They saw the strength of CWEIA being the **joy and perseverance** of the women involved, the **power and empowerment** and the **voice** that the organization provides for Cree women. CWEIA is made out of **dedicated movers and shakers**, who want to nurture the capacity for change that exist in every woman and who don't hesitate to **support** one another! Also, the **cultural and traditional grounding** of CWEIA are strengths for we must tap into: the involvement and guidance of the **Elders' Council** is much appreciated. We are advocates, not politicians; we **unite** our voices to make things happen with others in our nation.

CWEIA raises awareness on the **traditional role of women**, and that is important. Other strengths are that the organization is **grassroots**, and that the local and regional levels **work together** and communicate with one another well. CWEIA is a healthy organization rooted in our **values** and taking **action** for the greater good of all the people, men, women and children in Eeyou Istchee. We take these matters at **heart**. We women are **life givers**, and we want to act in peace, spirit, unity, respect, compassion and love for our children and communities. The Board is very proud of **events** such as the Recognition Gala held on International Women's Day, the Eeyou Healing Retreat and the Retreat on Violence, or endeavours such as the **maternity project**. CWEIA stands strong and creates opportunities for healing, teaching, sharing wisdom and knowledge with one another. CWEIA makes us feel **proud of being a woman**; we have many strengths to build on!



3. OPPORTUNITIES

We see four main opportunities in our environment.

1. Partnerships & Collaboration

We are not alone to wish for our vision to be attained, for our mission to be completed. Many Cree entities work in the same direction as us and have similar mission statements. There are opportunities to work together with organizations in providing training and education on family life and rites of passage in the Cree language, in holding multigenerational ceremonies, in contributing to health and self-care programs, in raising awareness and responding to violence... possibilities are endless and we can approach other organizations as well as the existing leadership to recognize and respond to needs in our communities. We do not want to compete; we want to collaborate. But we are legitimate when we develop services and projects for Cree women especially if women need and women issues are not well currently served.

2. Equal Opportunity for Representation

In 2016, there is a window of opportunity for more women to participate in decision making at all levels of government around the world, including in the Cree world, on organizations' Boards and on Chief and Council. There is room for more women and there is a demand to bring their expertise, their strengths and their point of view. We can also be a united voice for traditional values and teachings from elders to be integrated in our governance, as we want to connect with our culture.

3. Diversify Funding

As times change and organizations and funders seek to find ways to have a bigger impact while dealing with annual funding cutbacks from local, regional and provincial government organizations, we have a chance to become more innovative in our approach to support our work financially. The social economy is more and more well-known in Eeyou Istchee, and we have all the expertise it takes to be part of the movement and generate part of our own funding. One of our funders, *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*, is reviewing its programs and its planning, which makes new opportunities available for the future.

4. Change in Tone at the Federal Level

We are noticing an increase in the presence of aboriginal issues at the federal level, which is happening concurrently with the rise of movements standing to honour Indigenous sovereignty, such as *Idle no More* and the Journey of Nishiyuu. The government is changing tones, starting with Prime Minister Harper's statement of apology to former students of Indian residential schools, and going on with the completion of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, meant to shed light on the truth of residential schools and their legacy. More recently, the government has launched a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and girls. All that lead us to believe that the earth is ripe for new dialogs and new avenues for collaboration and respect with Canadian authorities to be opened.

We also want to connect with provincial and national women' associations, because we find that we work in the same direction. Below are some themes other organizations are working in that we also work in.



Quebec Native Women Inc.

- Training and jobs
- Health
- International Relations
- Justice and public safety
- Promotion of non-violent and network of women shelters
- Youth

Secrétariat à la condition féminine

- Work-life balance
- Education and training
- Economic equality
- Power sharing
- Diverse and healthy body image
- Equality and cultures
- Health
- Egalitarian models and behaviours
- Violence

Status of Women Canada

- Women's Economic Security and Prosperity
- Women in Non-Traditional Occupations
- Women's Leadership and Democratic Participation
- Women on Boards
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Native Women's Association of Canada

- Human Rights & Legal
- Health & Environment
- Violence Prevention and Safety
- Economic & Education



4. ASPIRATIONS

What is our vision for CWEIA in 2030?

Here is the change we want to see for women and children in Eeyou Istchee, the change we want to be a part of!

We see...

- Traditional social structures
- Closeness with Mother Earth
- Connection to each other, the land and Creation
- Good communications

We want to work...

- Together, in unity and harmony
- Respect of our Cree culture, traditional ways of living, our language and our values
- To revive, recapture, rediscover, rekindle and relearn wisdom from the Medicine Wheel
- To keep our tradition alive and strong

Our communities have changed too...

- Youth have risen to be leaders
- Tipis beside each modern home
- Healthy plant life and fresh water
- Families and communities are united
- Children are free, safe and happy
- Men and women are treated equally
- Elders' roles are more important, they are teaching our youth
- People are eating more traditional food
- People are connecting to all creation

We want to contribute to...

- Economic development for women
- Healthy living and lifestyles for families
- Teaching children about being responsible adults, free from illness
- Continued leadership within women
- Knowledge being passed down



5. RESULTS

a. Orientations

Orientation 1: Promote the Reappropriation of a Living Tradition and Culture for Cree Women

At CWEIA, we want to act from the heart and from the spirit, and teach our women and children the authentic Cree way. The center piece of our well-being relies on our culture, traditions and language. We must recapture and express our living culture. In order to do so, we should also strive to heal ourselves from the long intergenerational oppression, consequence of the colonization. In this process of decolonization, we must reconnect and learn our true history from our knowledgeable elders and grandmothers. We must share our Eeyouch values and culture, through ceremonies and rites of passage. We want to create occasions to gather and practice our traditional ways. We must build or rebuild our women identity as proud Cree women, we need to learn and transfer our positive roles as a person, a wife, a mother, a grand-mother, a community member.

Orientation 1: Promote the Reappropriation of a Living Tradition and Culture for Cree Women
1.1 Initiate gatherings to share traditional knowledge relevant to Cree women as widely as possible
1.2 Develop healing programs incorporating women circles, ceremonies and rites of passage
1.3 Provide educational opportunities to transfer traditional knowledge on midwifery and early childhood education

WE ARE PART OF THE EARTH AND IT IS PART OF US

Our organization will live through the principles of Deb Eeyou, **the authentic Cree way**. We need to bring back and reappropriate **Eeyou values** and do things our Nishiyuu way by the way we meet with each other, and in the way we feed and heal ourselves. We need to bring back the traditional drum, the legends, the stories in our day-to-day. We believe that for Cree women to be healthy, they need to know who they truly are and where they come from. Many of us were brought up on the land, where we had a traditional active lifestyle and ate healthy food from the land such as fish and berries. We can and we should provide opportunities for women to connect to the land, to each other and to our elders' teachings. We can do that through organizing gatherings **to practice traditional activities out on the land**. Some programs should have a focus on healing which can be done with the help of our own people and culture, because there is much work that still needs to be done to heal the trauma from residential schools and other events in our recent history which have resulted in the loss of our aboriginal mindset. We also wish to play our part in capturing our traditional knowledge so that it can be shared with as many Cree women as possible, so that we can be proud of it and walk on, with our heads up!



We want to **work from the heart and with spirit**, and teach our women and children who we are as a people, where we come from and have them learn our values, our beliefs, our practices. Our elders' representative, Irene House, reminds us of something very important for us to be whole:

“Each race was given gifts to learn to teach the world. One of the gifts that we as aboriginals have is spirituality is the way of life. We were given that to teach the world. We came here with unconditional love, our ancestors talked to all creation including animals, everything that had life, everything that God put here for us to use. The hardest thing for us to learn is judgement, we had forgotten that part. We judge ourselves and mock ourselves every now and then but we are still learning. We need to tell our people and our elders have said it, it's time to stand with our elders and tell people “Its ok who you are, who we are?” We are all God's children. Those elders once said “You have to pick up that medicine and the woman has to do that”. I envision that when women come together they come to an agreement that culture is our medicine. The way of life and spirituality is our way of life. Our culture is our way of life and it is also to honour our way of life. Everyday we need to remind ourselves about who we are.”

We don't have many occasions to participate in ceremonies and **rites of passage** about the women's roles in our society as partners and parents and about holistic health. There are many teachings around delivering our children and supporting them in their early years, and these should be made more accessible in order for our families to be healthy. Women are after all the **life givers, the life nurturers and the educators**, and we have a responsibility to preserve our traditional ways, our Kokkum's Eeyou Meechum. In the past, we have initiated healing retreats and Goukums' Gatherings to do just that, and people keep telling us that we need more gatherings like that, such as more sharing circles for men, women and couples, more sweats and ceremonies, and more counseling sessions... We need to do it again and again, because there is such a need for that knowledge and a need for healing. We must do so in a way that respects and utilizes our Eeyou/Eenou and other **indigenous healing methods**.

THE HEART OF A FAMILY IS A MOTHER
BECAUSE LIFE COMES FROM THEM. -
ONONDAGA PROVERB



Orientation 2: Nourish the Ground for Women’s Empowerment

We want to provide a human, loving spaces in the communities for women to develop themselves as individuals and access information on their rights as well as programs they can tap into. We want to nurture local women's organizations and create opportunities for young women to learn from their grand-mothers. We will be a leading agent for women's economic empowerment, through investing in stimulating women's individual and collective entrepreneurship.

Orientation 2: Nourish the Ground for Women’s Empowerment
2.1 Ensure there is a safe space in each community where women can access support, information and resources
2.2 Provide guidance and support to local women’s associations in each community
2.3 Organize and implement conferences, retreats and workshops to foster a sense of empowerment in Cree women
2.4 Develop and support women’s individual and collective entrepreneurship

Women need to **know their rights** in order to feel like they can do something about a difficult situation they are in. **Access to information** is the foundation that is required for women to overcome their challenges and have their voices heard and needs met. We believe there should be a safe space in each community where women can go to be listened to with empathy and guided towards services and resources that are available. Our work makes resources available for every Cree woman to heal herself, to find herself, and to **develop herself** to find the true way of our people in order to have a positive influence and impact on other women and our children, grand children and the seven generations to come.

At CWEIA, we believe in the potential for **local women’s associations** to be the **natural space** where our members connect and organize, where they meet to discuss, participate in the community life and take action such as organizing fundraising and feasts when there are births and mourning in their community. We see the regional level acting as a support to the grassroots level, where we can be an ally in bringing the local associations up to the level where they can bring services to their community. The local Cree women associations can be our place where our women go to be listened to, to take part in sharing circles

so that what they are living through doesn’t go unnoticed anymore. It can be a place that is **human**, where they can speak the truth about what is happening to them and the community, and get some love and support. It can be the place where young girls and boys can **learn from their grand-mothers**, where we can be the Goukums

THERE IS NO TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.

our young people need. We can teach them about where we come from and who we are as a people. A space for sharing and talking of issues and solutions does not necessarily need to be an infrastructure costing millions of dollars.

We believe **economic empowerment** to be at the heart of our work for women and for our organization. We will strive to develop programs and educational opportunities that will inspire women to



take charge of their lives, to use their work as a stepping point to be independent and autonomous while keeping the right balance with their family life. We need our women to be financially secure. Although they lack the knowledge, we know they can be successful! We can help them learn about management, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and leadership.

We have organized a few workshops on the **social economy** in the last few years, and we know our members and our elders think it is the way to go for our association. We want to create a business arm for CWEIA that supports our mission and generates revenue for our activities. We want to fulfill the long need expressed in arts and crafts. We want to help structure and implement a collective business in arts and crafts in the upcoming years. But there are much more to do beyond arts and crafts such as catering, homecare services to elders, natural resources and environment, etc. We want to grab the opportunity to learn in our traditional field of excellence in arts and crafts because we can expand our work in other opportunities.

We also want to support and deliver services to support **women’s individual and collective entrepreneurship**; we realize there is a lack of knowledge on this question and that it is challenging to support women entrepreneurs in our region given the distances, literacy levels and access to capital. We want to learn how to join forces with other organizations to support more efficiently women’s entrepreneurship. We can create partnerships with existing support systems to Cree entrepreneurs or we can develop and improve our own system dedicated to women entrepreneurs.

Orientation 3: Act as a Leader and Nourish Leadership for Cree Women’s Rights and Wellbeing



HEALING DOESN’T MEAN THE DAMAGE NEVER EXISTED. IT MEANS THE DAMAGE NO LONGER CONTROLS OUR LIVES.

This orientation is the expression of valuing women which is in our mission. CWEIA stands to be the voice for women in Eeyou Istchee. We are taking action to share women’s vision and perspective with other organizations, so that gender equality becomes a norm. Respect for the sacred partnership between men and women starts at a young age, and so we want to teach young women about their traditional roles. We will also continue to be an unfaltering ally

in the fight against violence in our nation.

Orientation 3: Act as a Leader and Nourish Leadership for Cree Women’s Rights and Wellbeing
3.1 Be a visible and collaborative voice for women’s rights and gender equality in Cree structures
3.2 Encourage women to pursue leadership positions and non-traditional jobs
3.3 Join forces with our allies to raise awareness and reduce violence against women

At CWEIA, we believe that women and men can work together in **harmony**, and **collaborate** so that their mutual roles are respected. However, too often women’s contributions are still not valued enough. As a regional women’s association, we want to be the **voice for women** and share the message that



womens' rights need to be respected, and that their work should be compensated fairly. It is important for us to bring our vision to other Cree entities, so we can work together to improve women's status in our Nation. We also stand for women taking their place in Eeyou society as we are traditionally a matriarchal society. Women need to get back their autonomy to shine and play the important **role** they have to play for their families and their communities. We aim for more **female representation in circles of power**, and promoting **gender equality** within local and regional governance structures. We have worked very hard in the last few years to raise concerns from women's perspectives in various fields, including health (midwifery, women shelters, elders knowledge, suicide, healing), justice (gender-based analysis, missing and murdered aboriginal women), environment, social economy and labour. We need to keep bringing the women's voice to these tribunals through **representation** on various Boards and committees. We are not fighting against men, but rather we are complementary to our men and we want to strengthen our good traditional roles as well as the modern roles of women in the 21st century. We need our elders to help us re-appropriate and re-connect with our own ways of governing ourselves, in a way that is holistic and resembles us.

We need our grand-mothers to help us **teach young women**, starting from a young age (9-15), about their role so that they know about the traditional way of being that is egalitarian. That is the way in which women and men complement each other, where family responsibilities are fairly shared between the two, because the connection between women and men is a **sacred partnership**. We want to provide training and leadership development opportunities for women of all ages, especially young women, no matter what their family situation is. We would like to elevate their skills so they can come out of the shadows, become confident in themselves, whether they are working outside the home or not. Being a woman or a man shouldn't influence the possibilities young people have for their futures. Consequentially, there are a lot of stereotypes which need to be broken to promote nonsexist roles and behaviours.

This is also true in our continuing **fight against violence**. We know that women and girls experience a rate of family violence and victimization at three times the rate of men and boys, and four times for sexual abuse. Aboriginal women and girls are three and a half times more likely to suffer some form of family violence than non-Aboriginal women and girls. That is why our very own 11 year old Abby Masty walked 11 000 km from Chisasibi to Ottawa, to raise awareness on domestic violence. Sexual abuse is the cause of many of our social issues. There is a lot of incest, and it is hidden. We need to stop it, because of the hurt it causes and the devastating impacts it has on the lives of victims. These include depression, anxiety, anger, addiction, loneliness, suicide, neglect... Violence against women is an issue for all of our Nation, and we at CWEIA need to raise awareness and start prevention programs. There is a lot of trauma from residential schools passed on to our younger generations, and we can help our young girls break the cycle of violence. We would like girls to know what they need to watch out for, when they need to turn to an adult when they see or experience something that feels wrong, so that they feel secure, and they feel that they belong. We can help reach Abby Masty's dream to help women of all ages who are victims of domestic violence in our Nation and who are suffering. We will act, not just talk about ways to **build women and girl's self-confidence**, self-esteem and awareness, so they can speak up, break the taboos, rebuild themselves, resolve and make peace with trauma, so that they don't think running away from the community is the only solution for them. This is the foundation that is needed for us to do things the right way, for the good of the people, especially those who live in poverty.

Orientation 4: Build our Organization in order to Provide Programs and Services

We are very excited about what is ahead of us for the next five years! We are entering a phase of growth, from being seen as an advocacy group to a solid organization providing programs and



services to our nation. We will strive to increase our internal capacity to fulfill our mission and vision through having a paid-president position and growing our staff with incorporating a few strategic positions. We will strive to become an autonomous organization with a diverse funding base enabling us to conduct our core business and special projects with ease.

Orientation 4: Build our organization in order to provide programs and services
4.1 Promote and grow the membership
4.2 Diversify and increase core funding
4.3 Develop and secure major projects and their associated funding
4.4 Grow and develop the internal team

Every organization goes through cycles of birth, growth and death. At this moment, it is an exciting time for CWEIA for we are entering our years of **growth and development**. We started as an intention, and as we see in our past actions, we have already come a long way! However, we need **our internal capacity** to reflect our ambitions for the future. Knowing that representation on Boards and committees is a strategic action for us, we want to have the resources to bring the voice of women where it needs to be heard. We **need to build and grow our membership in order to develop a stronger voice**. We must represent more and more Cree women. To do do, we must grow exponentially our members and we must all support and strengthen the women local committees in all Cree communities. We also think it is key to have a **paid president position** to act as the voice of CWEIA and the voice of all Cree women.

Build ourselves up also mean having **regional office** and **growing our staff**. As a human organization, we know that our best resources and our best assets are our people. We have been blessed with a committed and passionate Board for many years, yet our staff has been small, with only one stable position, that of the regional coordinator. The regional coordinator has been supported by a regional economic development coordinator and at least one special project officer for some time; it would be important that these two or three strategic positions, along with a contractual research and development position and an administrative staff or corporate secretary position, become stable, in order for our important projects to become more solid and stable through time. Ideally, we should hire at least 4 to 7 additional employees to oversee programs and services, administration, human resources and finances. The next five years will see a shift from CWEIA being seen as an advocacy group to an organization providing **programs and services to Cree women**. In our initial five year business plan (2011-2016), we had planned to develop and deliver year round programs and services in Economic Development, Political Awareness, Training and Employment Programs, Violence prevention and Awareness projects, Health Promotion Programs, Annual Gatherings such as the Annual AGM, Annual Women’s Summit/Retreats, Annual Golf Benefits for fundraising purposes. Many of these ideas are still relevant today.

In the future, we see CWEIA as a strong living organization which is capable of responding to the needs of our members. We think this has to happen in a perspective where we gradually leave our agreement with the CNG, which has served us for many years, but now the time has come to take flight and become an **autonomous organization**. Independence from the CNG will enable us to really take roots in our



IF WE CARRY INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA (AND WE DO), THEN WE ALSO CARRY INTERGENERATIONAL WISDOM. IT IS IN OUR GENES AND IN OUR DNA.

- KAZU HAGA

mission and vision, and have more flexibility in how we respond to trends and follow emerging strategies. We believe we should have the same level of standing than the regional organizations created from the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement: the Cree Outfitters and Tourism Association, the Cree Trappers' Association and Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association. We are bearers of our Cree culture as much as these other regional entities, and we have an important role to

play that brings value and should be **recognized** as such. We are at the stage of opening up dialogs with our leadership so that this transition happens as smoothly as possible.

In order to build our organization, we will need to **secure our core and program funding**. We need to find the means to make our vision come true in Eeyou Istchee. As we progress into our strategic plan and enter action planning, we will detail our funding requirements for the programs and services we will develop to serve our nation. In so doing, we will respect what other organizations are doing, and take our place in the landscape.

The table below shows of a minimum annual budget so we can deliver our aspirations.

Table 1: Annual budget estimation

Items	Amount
Salaries and benefits	350 000 \$
Projects/events and programs	550 000 \$
Travel and representation	300 000 \$
Office and operations	100 000 \$
Total	1 300 000 \$



b. Strategic Orientations - SUMMARY OF ORIENTATIONS

	Period	Potential Partners
Orientation 1: Promote the Reappropriation of a Living Tradition and Culture for Cree Women		
1.1 Initiate gatherings to share traditional knowledge relevant to Cree women as widely as possible	Short term	Cree Cultural Institute, Elders Council, etc.
1.2 Develop healing programs incorporating women circles, ceremonies and rites of passage	Short term	Cree Health Board, Nishiyuu Elders Council, etc.
1.3 Provide educational opportunities to transfer traditional knowledge on midwifery and early childhood education	Medium term	Cree Health Board, Early Childhood Committee, etc.
Orientation 2: Nourish the Ground for Women’s Empowerment		
2.1 Ensure there is a safe space in each community where women can access support, information and resources	Medium term	Cree Justice, Cree Health Board
2.2 Provide guidance and support to local women’s associations in each community	Medium term	Cree Health Board, Femmes, etc.
2.3 Organize and implement conferences, retreats and workshops to foster a sense of empowerment in Cree women	Medium term	Cree School Board, Board of Compensation, etc.
2.4 Develop and support women’s individual and collective entrepreneurship	Medium term	Eeyou Economic Group, Cree Social Economy Regional Table, etc.
Orientation 3: Act as a Leader and Nourish Leadership for Cree Women’s Rights and Wellbeing		
3.1 Be a visible and collaborative voice for women’s rights and gender equality in Cree structures	Medium term	Cree Nation Government, etc.
3.2 Encourage women to pursue leadership positions and non-traditional jobs	Short term	Cree Nation Government, Cree School Board, Cree Human Resources Development, etc.
3.3 Join forces with our allies to raise awareness and reduce violence against women	Medium term	Cree Health Board, Cree Justice, etc.
Orientation 4: Build our organization in order to provide programs and services		
4.1 Promote and grow membership	Medium term	Cree communities
4.2 Diversify and increase core funding	Short term	Financial partners
4.3 Develop and secure major projects and their associated funding	Medium term	Financial partners
4.4 Grow and develop the internal team	Short term	Financial partners, CHRD



«*INVESTING IN WOMEN IS NOT ONLY THE RIGHT
THING TO DO – IT IS THE SMART THING TO DO !*»

UN SECRETARY GENERAL BAN KI-MOON, NEW YORK,
8 MARCH 2011

