

4 Planning a Language Revitalization Project

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In the world of language revitalization, the importance of planning should never be underestimated; the need for good language planning is critical on many levels. Ideally communities who are engaged in reclaiming their languages should put a large-scale ‘strategic language plan’ in place. Such a plan specifies short- and long-term goals over several years and provides a structure within which to plan and implement a wide range of projects that support those goals. Within each project is a set of activities that help reach the goals for that project. However, as the well-known language revitalization expert, Leanne Hinton, has pointed out, this does not mean that a community needs to wait for such a large strategic plan to be in place before attempting any project. Every project aimed at language sustainability counts as a learning experience for all involved and will ideally serve to better inform and advance the efforts of the community.

Having an overarching strategic plan for a revitalization program contributes to the larger vision of language sustainability for the long term in important ways. But the careful planning of individual projects is equally important. Individual projects can be positioned and implemented to help best meet the long-term goals. The best language planning entails P-I-E (Planning, Implementation, Evaluation). Leanne Hinton credits Lucile Watahomogie, Hualapai educator and pioneer in language revitalization, with this approach, and it is certainly tried and true. Every individual project is best served if these three pieces are carefully put into place.

To focus on project planning, let’s begin by thinking about what a ‘project’ really is. At CoLang 2016 (Institute on Collaborative Language Research), Margaret Florey taught a course on project planning. Students were asked to generate ideas for projects. Here are a few of the ideas they shared:

- Start a Master-Apprentice Program.
- Record songs in my language.
- Create more language resources for my community.
- Develop a writing system for my language.

- Change the names of geographic landmarks in my community to their Indigenous names.
- Create an app for my language.
- Raise literacy efforts for my language.
- Start a language nest.
- Write a grammar.
- Make an online dictionary.
- Get young people involved in language work.
- Make signs and public materials in my language and more.
- Raise public awareness about Indigenous languages.
- Teach my language.

These are all good ideas for activities! But there are many more. Activities are initiated and sustained in accordance with the current needs of the specific community. Any given project may involve many activities. Remember that a project needs to be an achievable effort and planned to meet the language needs of the community.

Some of the ideas listed above may seem more like ‘projects’ to you than others. Strictly speaking, projects are a carefully planned set of activities within a specific time frame and with well-defined outcomes. Australian language activist Margaret Florey explains that a project must, ideally, have the following characteristics:

- definable and realistic goals,
- clear objectives,
- outcomes that can be measured,
- response to a specific need,
- fit into a larger strategic plan,
- an identifiable target audience, and
- a work plan with stages and a timeline and with an end date.

Planning a successful language revitalization project must entail, at least, the following steps:

Step 1: *The beginning of any good project begins with a good idea.* This is an idea that can be molded and shaped to fit the resources of the community and the capabilities of those involved. It is an idea that can be understood and shared with others and leads to something that will have understandable and useful outcomes when completed. A good idea, which motivates participants and guides the activities, can go a long way toward developing really important projects for communities. Such ideas are sometimes the work of a very motivated individual, or they may result from group meetings, committees, and the like. Regardless of its origin, a good idea is usually recognized by the excitement it generates. Community

settings where ‘brainstorming’ is encouraged are good places to generate valuable ideas for language revitalization projects.

Designing such meetings to generate ideas is a process that can occur often in revitalization contexts and can breathe new life into existing projects as well as launch new and exciting ones. Start by asking broad, general questions like ‘What can we do that would help with our immediate goals?’ or ‘What activities do you want to see continued?’ – which may or may not be language-specific – and see where these lead. Perhaps it will become clear what is most important to community members, how they want to see language efforts proceed, and then more focused activities can be built around those interests.

Let’s further this discussion by generating a possible project. Let’s say that the community is very concerned about losing traditional agricultural practices. A language project might be initiated which would try to identify how much information about agriculture is in the existing documentation for the language. Maybe it would also be possible to document how agricultural activities are or were talked about. This would entail plant names and uses, terminology for tools, seasons, understanding how the labor was divided, planting methods and activities such as harvesting and related ceremonies. It might be good to ask who taught these traditional practices, and how. These kinds of information can be gathered through interviews with speakers, and added to what information is already documented. This could lead to the building of a large database of language related to agricultural practices that could then form the basis for generating materials for language teaching.

As well, any one of the above questions could lead to a specific project that would require all the same planning steps, on a smaller scale. For example, maybe, beginning language students could learn a short dialogue about planting seeds and learn to incorporate new vocabulary related to tools or agricultural practices. Perhaps students or teachers could create a children’s book about harvesting activities, or organize a field trip to agricultural areas and have a hands-on demonstration, augmented or immersed in relevant language about traditional food sources, etc. All of this, and more, could be generated from just one good idea!

Step 2: *Decide what is already in place and what is needed.* A project can be started by an individual or a group (such as a language committee), but in any case it should respond to what is already in place within a speaking community and propose what else might be needed. If possible, begin by writing up a ‘background’ statement, a ‘needs’ statement, and a ‘purpose’ statement. These can be as simple as saying ‘Our language has (x) remaining first language speakers. We need to start offering classes to adults to reclaim our language’. This last statement establishes both

language status and existing work (and gives some background, need, and purpose). Then, look at what is *specifically* needed and propose how to accomplish it. For example, 'To continue revitalizing our language, we need to create a language nest' (or an online dictionary, or classes in schools, and so forth). These basic statements are important for several reasons: (1) they position the project you choose within any existing work that might be going on, (2) they form the base line information that will be needed for any proposals (grants or other funding requests), (3) they make clear the basic goal of the project and explain why it is needed to others in the community.

Step 3: Putting the idea into action. An idea is an abstract entity until it becomes a reality in the form of a serious project, which has expected tangible outcomes. This transformation usually happens when the interested parties begin to set specific goals. Goal setting is perhaps the most critical step in all language planning endeavors. It requires careful thinking and realistic considerations. If you are creating an overarching strategic plan, then you should think in terms of short-term goals such as: what can we accomplish in 6 months? 1 year? Or 2 years? And long-term goals like, what should have been accomplished by 3 years? 5 years? 10 years? Within each of those time frames would be a series of individual projects, also with goals. Within each project, there should be specific activities that will lead to the goal. This is a nested way of creating a framework to accomplish goals: the bottom tier are activities, which support a specific project, which forms a critical piece of the larger strategic plan.

Step 4: Outline your project. To help get started, write down the following things:

- a. In a short paragraph, describe your project and give it a title. Write this as if you were trying to explain it to someone who knows nothing about it. This short paragraph is very important. It might become part of a grant proposal, part of a letter of request for help with your project, or the basic statement you use to tell everyone and anyone who needs to know what you are planning to do (maybe a tribal council? School officials? Funding agencies?). It should be concise and clear and begin with a sentence that states what the project is about, such as 'The purpose of this project is _____'.
- b. List the needs your project addresses. The needs that your project responds to can be one or many. Your project should, however, clearly respond to needs stated in the larger strategic language plan (if there is one) or at least needs that the community has already identified. There is always one very broad need: 'We need to revitalize our language'. But individual projects respond to more specific needs. For example, a more

specific need might be stated as, 'We need to develop better teaching materials for the existing language revitalization classes'. Whatever the case, make it very clear which needs your project is addressing and as you write them down, explain why it is important to address these needs at this particular time.

- c. Consider the target audience for your project. Having a clear idea of who the project is intended to serve will help shape the project and the activities needed to complete it. For example, if you are hoping to provide language classes to adults, your project resources, locations, and leaders will be different than if you are planning language classes for school children.
- d. List at least three clear outcomes your project will achieve. Any journey is made easier if there is some clear idea of where it is leading you. Stating outcomes accomplishes several things:
 - It helps you plan for success.
 - It helps keep the project manageable (there should not be too many outcomes).
 - It informs people about the value of this project in terms of community goals for revitalization.
 - It sets up the structure needed to evaluate the project.

Well-established outcomes set the stage for more work – they create building blocks toward the larger, long-term goals.

- e. List the steps needed to achieve these outcomes. When you are beginning to plan a project, it is helpful just to make lists of what you need or plan to do. These can be expanded, revised, and changed in a number of ways, but they give you an initial overall picture that is really important to have. That may seem like an obvious thing to say but really, at this point, what you are creating is an outlined plan of the project you have in mind. You need a complete plan, in outline form, to start with. It helps set a picture in the minds of you and your team of the project from beginning to end in its entirety.

Sometimes it is useful to create a project template, which can guide the outline/planning for any project and which includes at least the following items (as discussed above);

Title of your project:

Description of the project: (That short paragraph mentioned above).

Purpose: (Why are you doing it?)

Objectives: (What you hope to accomplish. These also appear as expected outcomes.)

Activities: (How many? When? By whom?)

Target Audience: (Who is the project intended for?)

Dates: (When will it take place – beginning and end)

Location: (Where? What community or facility?)

Format: (Is it a class? A meeting? A workshop? A field trip?)

Budget: (Plan for all of the costs)

Partners: (Other organizations or groups to work with or who could be a resource)

Funding: (Decide if you need a grant or can get donations in time or money)

Marketing/Publicity: (How will you advertise this project? How will you recruit participants?)

Evaluation/Assessment: (Both summative and formative)

- f. Consider what resources will you need. It is one thing to have a good idea, and another thing to make your project happen smoothly. Any community-based project is dependent on the locally available resources. Is there someone or some group you might want to partner with? Resources can include people, equipment, food, teaching materials, travel vehicles, local institutions (schools, libraries, museums), and more. Anything that will help you develop and carry out your project is a 'resource'. There may be additional resources available outside the community – maybe there is a nearby university, or museum, or help from other similar communities. Maybe, there are financial resources available in your state, province, district, county, or other government agencies at the federal or national level. Whatever funding you need to carry out your project will have to be secured. There may be funds available through your community-level government.

In the planning process, it is at this point that you need to consider how you will fund your project and how much it will all cost. You might consider a grant (unlike a loan, grants don't have to be paid back). There are a number of online resources that can help you find grants that support specific types of work (see also Chapter 5). There are other options too – often local government and nonprofit organizations will help support community-based projects. Crowdfunding is also an option in some contexts. Remember that first paragraph you wrote describing your project? You can put it to use as a way to introduce what you want to do to people who might want to financially support it! It is also possible that people will be willing to donate – this is especially true when it comes to food. Most community events are more successful if there are, at the very least, refreshments involved. As you plan, the need for food, the amount, source, and type must also be taken into account. Plan carefully for anything

that might incur costs: food, salaries, honoraria, meeting space, travel, materials, equipment, etc.

- g. Create a potential timeline with a clear beginning and end dates – be realistic because an individual project is usually part of a bigger strategic plan. Creating a realistic timeline is critical. There may be several projects launched at the same time which need to be articulated together. Even if that's not the case, planning a project around a timeline is very useful. It allows for a clear beginning and a clear ending. This helps all those involved understand what is expected of them over the course of the project. The timeline should allow for a planning stage, an implementation phase, and an evaluation phase. Again, these three things – P-I-E – compose the foundation of any project.

Step 5: *Implement your project.* On the surface, implementing your project should be as simple as following the plan. However, we all know that things don't always go as planned. As you begin to implement your project, remember to be flexible, ready to make changes as you go, and keep track of the challenges you face. The first time through any endeavor may be a bit rough – there is always a lot to learn. Be sure you have some alternative choices such as other possible locations to hold activities, a longer list of resource people than you actually need, be ready to change activities, if needed, but not to the extent that you lose sight of your original goals. You have carefully outlined and developed Plan 'A' – make sure to also have a Plan 'B' – a set of possible alternative activities if others fail. If carefully outlined, the implementation of a project should go smoothly.

Step 6: *Plan how you will evaluate or assess your project.* Ask what assessment strategies will you use? There are both formal and informal approaches to assessment. Both can be *formative* (used to provide feedback as the project moves forward and they help shape the project – this is information that contributes to the *formation* of the project) or *summative* (done near the end of a project to provide feedback on the entire results of the project). Generally, a formal assessment means that you choose to involve someone unrelated to the project, an objective observer, to do an 'external' evaluation. This might be someone who does similar projects in other communities, or a professional who is familiar with language projects. Formal evaluations are sometimes costly and therefore may occur just once near the end of a project. It's good to do a formal evaluation if you need to prove the worth of your project for large grants or other major sources of funding. For the purposes of the community, informal evaluations are always important. These are done by the project organizers or

even by the project participants and take the form of a casual questionnaire or verbal feedback. Informal evaluations can occur at any stage during a project and should occur whether or not a formal evaluation is planned.

Finally, the project director or coordinator and the project team need to do their own evaluation. Take time to look back on various aspects of the project. Consider what worked well, what didn't and why. Write it all down so that if you decide to repeat the project it will probably go smoother than it did the first time. It is crucial to take the time to review the strengths and weaknesses of the project, as a project team, and to discuss what the next steps should be. Remember that revitalizing a language is just a step toward sustaining it for a very long time. Consider how your project has contributed to this effort and how will it lead to other projects aimed at this same long-range goal.

Language revitalization or reclamation takes a lot of commitment, vision, and just plain hard work. It really never ends so it is important to keep generating fresh ideas and implementing new projects. Projects should connect with each other or build on each other as they are all, ultimately, supporting the same long-range goal of keeping the language alive.

FURTHER READING

- Brandt, E. A. and Ayoungman, V. (1989). A practical guide to language renewal. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 16(2), 442–77.
- First People's Cultural Council. (2013). Guide to language policy and planning. This resource specifically targets British Columbia, Canada; however, it offers a wealth of ideas for communities who are engaged in planning projects aimed at revitalization. It is available at www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/Language_Policy_Guide/FPCC_Policy_Guide_2013.pdf.
- Hinton, L. and Hale, K., eds. (2001). *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill.
- Hornberger, N. (1997). *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom Up*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

4.1 Doing Things with Little Money

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Linguistic activism without funds is possible. It may happen that when you want to start revitalization efforts, you will be confronted with the specter of lack of economic resources; however, you just need to recognize that solutions are closer than you think. Below are a series of tips that have as a common point the maximum use of emotional resources and the minimum use of money. The purpose of these tips is to open possibilities to anyone interested in the revitalization of languages:

1. **Look for people who think like you.** People with the same interests with whom you can practice and study the language. You coincide in direction, actions, and results, regardless of the type of skills they have. It is also important that they all solve problems in the same way you do or perhaps can provide better solutions. Organize. Focus on talking about strengths and about what can be done together and begin to believe in that goal.
2. **Emotional resources of the group.** Share commitment, enthusiasm, identification, affection, respect, admiration, care, time, perseverance (credibility comes very close to it). Use all your ingenuity too. Build closeness and confidence. Always remember that working with minority languages involves the feelings of their speakers.
3. **Instruct yourself in the best possible way on the subject.** There is enough information on the Internet for you to develop a good understanding of the history and the specific context of your language. The damage a language could suffer occurs through multiple actions so the solutions must go in many directions too. Partial understanding only gives us partial answers. And there is also considerable information available on how speakers of other languages have gone about language revitalization.
4. **Get a compass.** Consult criteria such as those in UNESCO document 'Language vitality and Endangerment,' Paris 2003 (free material on the web) or other assessment tools. Make a table and diagnose your language's vitality: This will help you to have an overall vision. It is important to know where you are starting from to know where to go. Knowing the general score will give you an idea of the state of your language and the effort you will need to apply. Then choose which efforts must be undertaken first (see Susan Penfield's advice in the main part of this chapter). Aim for real and achievable results, both short- and long-term. Update your diagnosis/plan and compare the steps from time to time. Assess your achievements and reassess future plans.
5. **Visit the community often** – if you cannot live in it, keep in touch. Think with the people in the community to give the answers that the group needs. Avoid preaching to them.
6. **Generate speaker networks.** Open spaces to practice the language and make it visible: conversation clubs, hours in a local cafe, chats, and public forums in social networks. It is important that both activists and speakers share a sense of community. Being close to the speakers and being aware of activities, dates, or situations that are most attractive to them is highly recommended.
7. **Work on self-esteem and self-concept.** Keep sharing news of the appreciation that other people have for their language and toward the revitalization efforts.
8. **Always think of the youngest.** Propose many games that involve language for children; build an endearing link between games and language. Help teenagers to ensure effective intercultural contact, without trauma and without self-denial.

9. **Government attitudes and policies.** Echo the community work. The efforts must awake positive enthusiasm in the language community so that it attracts the favorable attention of decision-makers. Look for spaces to communicate with politicians.
10. **Make links** with language activists in other communities to get ideas and emotional support (see Chapter 12).
11. **Look back at the previous points** and check how many require money and how many require a positive attitude/commitment.