February 25, 2021

TO: Leadership of all BC First Nations

**RE: A First Nations Data Governance Strategy: A Response to Direction Received from First Nations Leadership and Funded through Federal Budget 2018 in Support of the New Fiscal Relationship**

To Whom it May Concern:

On behalf of the First Nations Information Governance Centre’s Board of Directors, I am pleased to share the attached Executive Summary of the above-mentioned report. The full 110-page strategy document is available for downloading on FNIGC’s website at [www.fnigc.ca](http://www.fnigc.ca)

Federal Budget 2018 provided $2.5 million over three years to FNIGC and its regional partners to support the *“design of a national data governance strategy and coordination of efforts to establish regional data governance centres.”* This commitment came in response to series of resolutions passed in the years leading up to 2018 by Chiefs in Assembly, taking the federal government to task through the assertion of First Nations data sovereignty.

FNIGC receives its mandate from the Chiefs in Assembly. Our vision was ratified in 2018 and moved the organization more decisively into the data sovereignty space. *The FNIGC envisions that every First Nation will achieve data sovereignty in alignment with its distinct worldview*. We believe, as we articulate in the Strategy, that sovereignty can be wielded by rights holders only (i.e., First Nations governments), and while FNIGC and its regional partners take direction from duly elected Chiefs in Assembly, we are not a rights holding entity. Rather, as a First Nations controlled institution, FNIGC is a tool that rights holders can use at their discretion to assert sovereignty over their data and information.

As such, given the strategic importance of this document, FNIGC chose to advance the three-year timeline and completed the Strategy one year early, in the spring of 2020. The timing of this decision positions First Nations data sovereignty goals well, in what has become a rapidly changing global digital environment. Coincidentally, COVID-19 arrived in Canada at the same time the Strategy was submitted to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), dramatically underscoring the importance of all aspects of what is proposed in the document.

The Strategy tabled two key priorities for action: First, toestablish First Nations “Data Champions Teams”[[1]](#footnote-1) at the regional and national levels as a foundational stepping stone to a multi-year phased implementation, and second, to secure bridge funding for the necessary pre-implementation work. ISC has since approved the bridge funding request, unofficially endorsing the Strategy and allowing FNIGC and its partners to undertake the work needed to establish eleven (11) dedicated data governance champion teams across the country – teams that will be equipped with the minimum capacities necessary to unlock key elements of the Strategywith a focus on the most pressing and practical needs at each level for the next three fiscal years.

In correspondence with the federal government requesting official endorsement of our Data Governance Strategy, FNIGC has highlighted the fact that the role of the proposed data champion teams encompasses the very functions that would allow First Nations, in partnership with stakeholders, to best respond the current COVID-19 crisis, as well as future crises, should they occur. To this end FNIGC and its partners continue to leverage this Strategy to respond to the public health and other crises, while at the same time address the short, medium, and long term-goals that First Nations and Canada have committed to addressing in the context of the Nation to Nation fiscal relationship.

That being said, more than ever, we remain agile, innovative, and responsive to rapidly changing environments as we advance the Strategy through robust dialogue with our regional and federal partners and with you, First Nations leadership. Please feel free to contact FNIGC technical staff, or members of our Board of Directors for more information or if you have any questions about the Strategy or the work we are undertaking to move this important initiative forward.

Best regards,

Dr. Jonathan Dewar, CEO

FNIGC

Attached: A First Nations Data Governance Strategy, Executive Summary

1. The term “Data Champion Teams” originates with AFN’s Resolution #57/2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)