Gathering Together for Digital Language Support

ELP
Endangered Languages Project

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Hello!

First, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge that I am talking to you from the territories of the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin, Kalapuya, Molalla, and many other peoples who live and travel along the Columbia and Willamette River valleys. Chinuk Wawa is still spoken here.

Hello!

Who I am:

- Outreach Coordinator at the Endangered Languages Project
- Adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa
- A (socio)linguist who works on language documentation, revitalization, and African languages
- A settler whose language background is… just English 😴

Who ELP is:

- Founding partners are the First Peoples' Cultural Council (Victoria, BC, Canada) and the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa (Honolulu, Hawaiʻi)
- A global project to support language documentation and revitalization with information, learning resources, and digital community
- More about us at endangeredlanguages.com/about

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The worst of times, the best of times

Today, there are about 7,000 languages spoken on Earth[1]. Nearly half of them (about 46%) are currently at risk of falling silent.

The pressures facing Indigenous and endangered languages are myriad: overt suppression, economic and political disenfranchisement, dispossession of lands, state neglect, stigma, violence...

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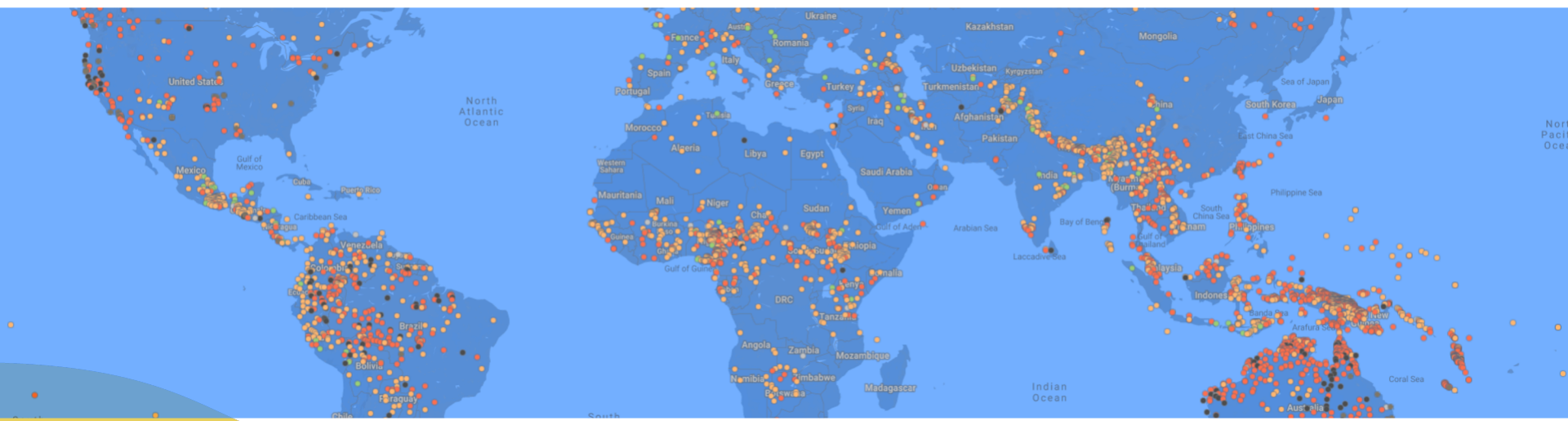
The worst of times, the best of times

We can't sugarcoat it: the situation of global language diversity is under more threat now than ever.

From all available data, the current rate and scope of language loss is higher than any time in known history. (Belew & Simpson 2018)

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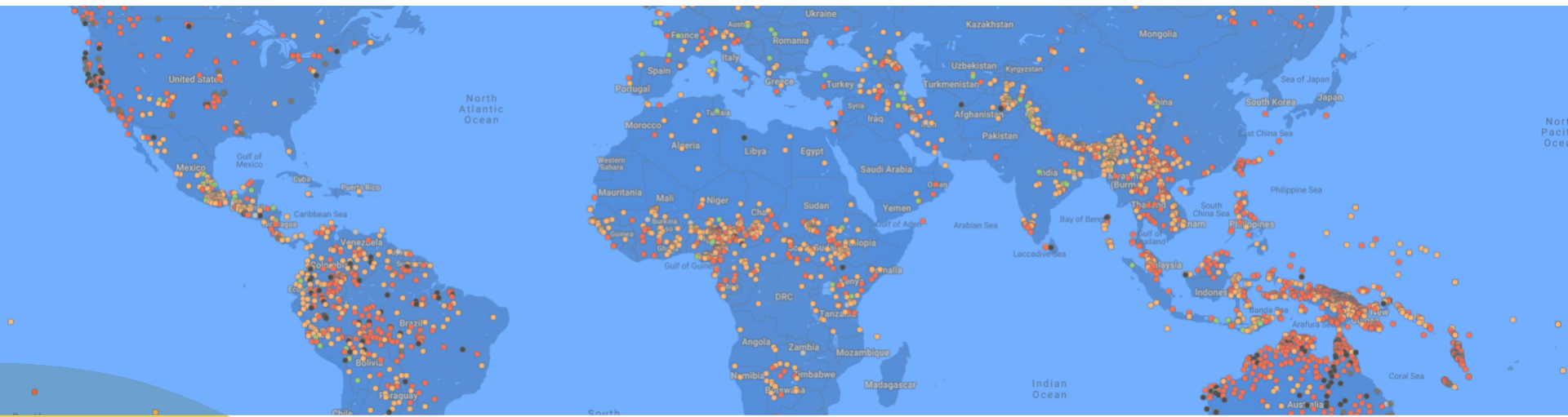
The worst of times, **the best of times**

But the rates of language reclamation and revitalization are also higher than ever.

[Pérez Báez et al. (2019)](#) presents an overview of language revitalization initiatives worldwide, drawn from a survey of 245 revitalization programs.
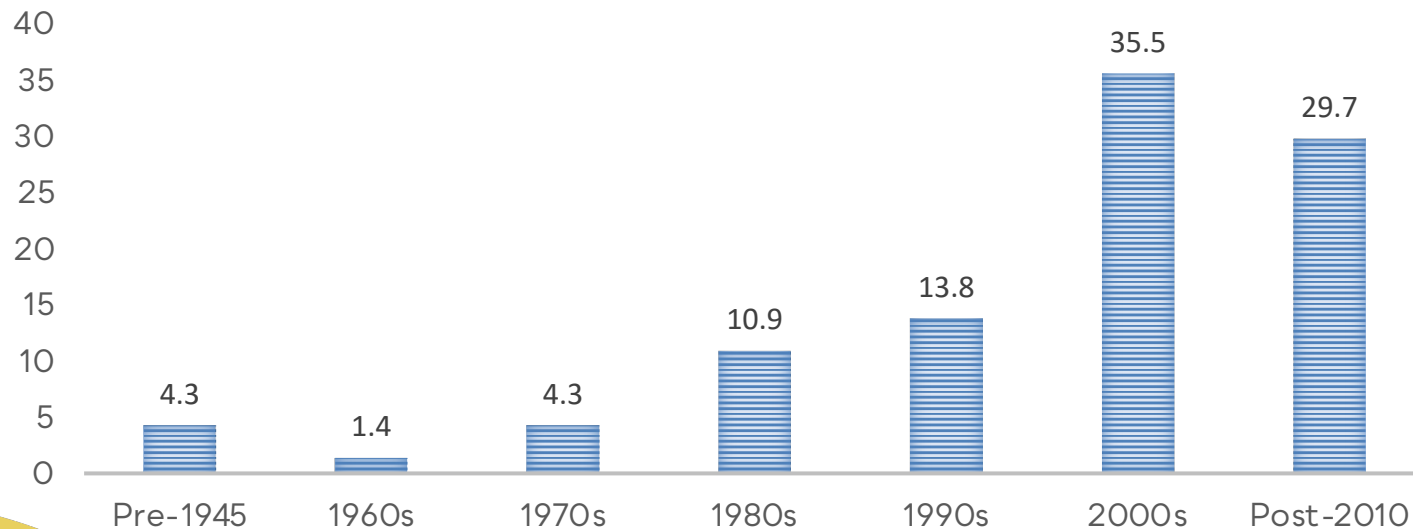
There are probably many existing revitalization initiatives not represented in this survey, and even more which will soon begin!

- (ELP is continuing and expanding the [Global Survey of Revitalization Efforts](#) – we invite you to share knowledge about your revitalization program, if you like!)
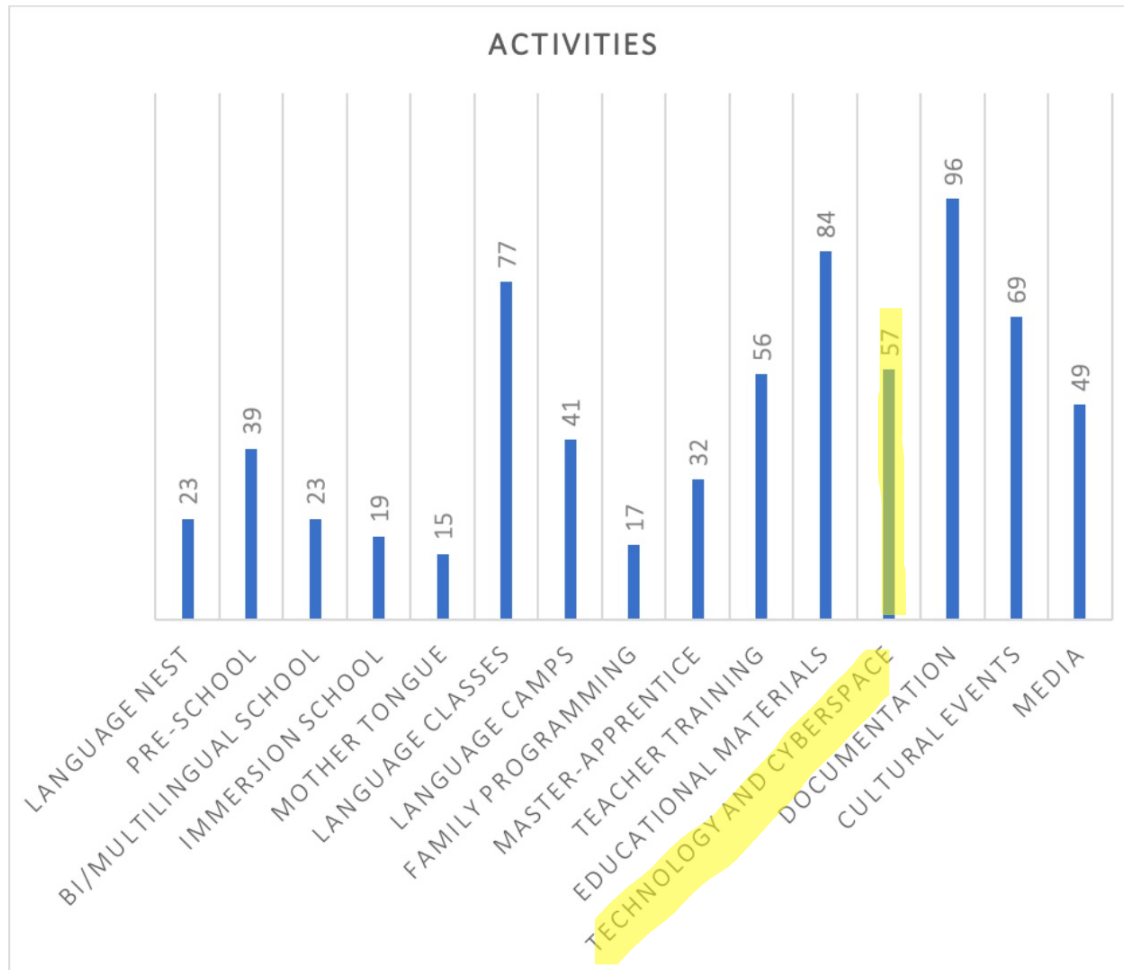
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The worst of times, **the best of times**

About 2/3 of known revitalization efforts have begun since 2000, and almost 1/3 of efforts have launched since 2010:

Percentage of revitalization programs by year begun (adapted from Pérez Báez et al. 2019)

Year begun	Percentage
Pre-1945	4.3
1960s	1.4
1970s	4.3
1980s	10.9
1990s	13.8
2000s	35.5
Post-2010	29.7

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The worst of times, **the best of times (for language tech)**

ACTIVITIES

Digital initiatives* are the fifth most common activity in revitalization programs.

*broadly speaking – "presence of the language on the Internet or in phone apps, social media, video games, etc., or use of these platforms for language learning"

Chart values by activity:
- LANGUAGE NEST: 23
- PRE-SCHOOL: 39
- BI/MULTILINGUAL SCHOOL: 23
- IMMERSION SCHOOL: 19
- MOTHER TONGUE: 15
- LANGUAGE CLASSES: 77
- LANGUAGE CAMPS: 41
- FAMILY PROGRAMMING: 17
- MASTER-APPRENTICE: 32
- TEACHER TRAINING: 56
- EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS: 84
- TECHNOLOGY AND CYBERSPACE: 57
- DOCUMENTATION: 96
- CULTURAL EVENTS: 69
- MEDIA: 49

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The worst of times, **the best of times (for language tech)**

And while this conference may not be specifically about revitalization of "endangered" languages, the underlying goal is shared:

To ensure that every language has the resources and support structures needed to thrive, now and in the future.

(Tech isn't a "magic bullet" for sustaining language, but it sure is a useful tool!)

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The worst of times, **the best of times (for language tech)**

Plans for the upcoming UN

2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
Indigenous Languages

highlight the importance of tech in supporting Indigenous and less-resourced languages:

"Language Technology is not just a niche issue, but something that has true impact on [Indigenous language] endangerment and can therefore help reverse those trends."

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The worst of times, **the best of times (for language tech)**

The work needs to be done, so how do we go about doing it? Where can we turn for learning?

This is a fairly new field – we've only got about 2 decades of widespread internet use behind us, and even less experience building tech tools for less-resourced languages.

We can turn to each other. We'll need to share ideas, inspiration, and lessons from our own work – and we'll need to do it internationally, **across borders and boundaries**.

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Inspiration from around the world: digital activism

Social media and digital language activism are recognized as a key part of supporting languages:

"Currently, digital activism plays a significant role in processes of language revitalisation, using information and communication technologies to increase the visibility of indigenous languages and populations and combat the stigma of IL as lacking or unsuitable for the modern era."

(UNESCO IYIL2019 assessment report)

Inspiration from around the world: digital activism

A dazzling number of current social media initiatives for language learning and awareness!

TikTok

Inspiration from around the world: digital activism

A dazzling number of current social media initiatives for language learning and awareness!

TikTok

Ian McCallum @IanMcCallum3 · May 13
Ehahkiiheet Niipaahum (planting moon)

Maalaxkwsiit (beans)
Waxkaniimal (seeds)
Neeka ahkiiheew maalaxkwsiit waxkaniimal. (He plants bean seeds)

Anushiik Mohawk seedkeepers for past sharing of your knowledge with the Munsee community seedkeeper.ca #indigenouslanguage

Twitter

Inspiration from around the world: digital activism

A dazzling number of current social media initiatives for language learning and awareness!

Instagram

Twitter

TikTok

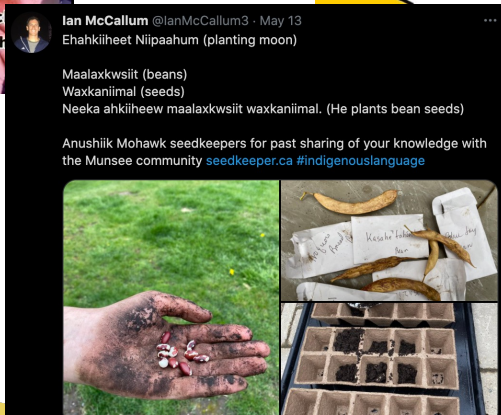# Inspiration from around the world: digital activism

A dazzling number of current social media initiatives for language learning and awareness!

Instagram

Facebook

Cornish phrase of the day

Eus now
da?

Twitter

Ian McCallum @IanMcCallum3 · May 13
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TikTok

215 215 215 215 215

Kahkiyaw lii zaañfaañ i sooñ sheer.
Kanaweeyimaataak kwayesh!

All children are precious.
Let's take care of them in a good way!

Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle

Inspiration from around the world: digital activism

A dazzling number of current social media initiatives for language learning and awareness!

Instagram

Twitter

Facebook

TikTok

Cornish phrase of the day

Eus nowodhow

is there good news?

...to know a word or phrase you haven't see... ...and we'll see what we can do...

🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 @learncornis...

Maalaxkwsiit (beans)
Waxkaniimal (seeds)

TikTok 4 Northwest Territories (NWT) Gwich'in communities

215 215 215 215 215

Kahkiyaw lii zaañfaañ i sooñ sheer.
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Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle

(We'll come back to the use of social media beyond just disseminating language information...)

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Inspiration from around the world: information access

Wikis have been an invaluable tool in disseminating information in less-resourced languages, and nurturing digital space for their use. (As y'all know.)

(Santhali)

(N'ko)

(Dzongkha)

(Cherokee)

Inspiration from around the world: computational tools

Computational linguistics is increasingly taking up the work of providing tools and resources for languages other than the largest ones. (Thank you all!)

And, importantly, we're seeing more computational linguists coming from Indigenous and less-resourced language communities.

INDIGENOUS AI

Masakhane

A grassroots NLP community for Africa, by Africans

(Masakhane)

(Indigenous AI)

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Inspiration from around the world: language learning

And, of course, the growing number of digital tools to support language learning!

Living Dictionaries

Kumoontun App
¡ Disponible para Android en Play Store !

FirstVoices
Language Archives

Mother Tongues

7000 Languages

...and many, many more

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Inspiration from around the world: guideposts

Technology presents immense opportunities and resources for sustaining languages.

It also presents unique new risks and challenges – ones that are beginning to be spoken and addressed among Indigenous and less-resourced language communities.

Dr. Te Taka Keegan, Māori computational linguist

THE TYEE

The New Corporate Threat to Indigenous Languages

First Nations, not companies like Google, should be in control of data, conference told.

(Link at The Tyee)

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Inspiration from around the world: guideposts

Coming together to clearly establish terms around data sovereignty, access rights, intellectual property, and the needs and goals of language communities isn't just a nice idea, if we have time for it.

It's **necessary** to make this work useful, sustainable, and ethical.

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Inspiration from around the world: guideposts

And it's the **coming together** to discuss these things that will allow us to...

- Learn from each other's hard-won lessons
- Gain inspiration from other successful initiatives
- Draw on the different strengths of different people, approaches, programs, and ways of thinking
- And form **relationships** that will keep us going through the challenges of achieving our language goals.

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Inspiration from around the world: guideposts

The role of social media and online spaces in language work isn't only to disseminate information – it's to form community.

This can be profoundly lonely work.

It can feel like you're the only one in your community, or province, or even country, who cares about keeping languages strong, and upholding language rights.

But **you're definitely not alone**.

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Inspiration from around the world: guideposts

Some of us are lucky enough to have attended physical events that bring together language technology and revitalization practitioners (ICLDC, ComputEL, HELISET TŦE SĶÁL, LT4All, AmericasNLP...)

"Nuk'want'uwal'wi – let us help each other. Gathering together lifted the spirits of the people so that they could continue doing the amazing, incredible, life-giving work that they're doing in their communities. We need to be able to share our knowledges, the ways we've created to save our languages."
-Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams

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Inspiration from around the world: guideposts

But access to these physical gatherings has been very unequal – especially when these events take place in the global north...

> **Friederike Lüpke**
> @FriederikeLupke
>
> Replying to @_ELProject
>
> And for once, we can turn the physical mobility imposed on us (which was never an option for most scholars from the global south!!!) into the opportunity to build more inclusive platforms for exchange. Your recent workshop was a great model!
>
> 8:34 AM · Jun 2, 2021 from Helsinki, Finland · Twitter for iPhone

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One more project: towards a Revitalization Helpdesk

People engaged in language work in different parts of the world sometimes feel like they're working in isolation.

A new initiative from ELP aims to help connect language champions with **information**, **resources**, and a **digital community of practice**.

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One more project: towards a Revitalization Helpdesk

It's daunting to begin a language revitalization or maintenance initiative!

Where to start? What methods would work for our language? What resources are needed? How do we fund this?

LANGUAGE NEST

LEARNING APP

MENTOR-APPRENTICE

There's a lot of great information out there – but it's not always accessible.

- Paywalled or not online
- Jargon or academic language
- Not in your language
- Not relevant to your cultural context
- Tough to navigate or apply to your language situation

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One more project: towards a Revitalization Helpdesk

The ELP Revitalization Helpdesk will be a free online resource, supporting language revitalization workers with:

Connections & community

Information & training

Stories & paths

Personalized assistance

(You can learn more in this talk)

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If you'd like to get involved, or share your knowledge:

Please write! We'd love to highlight your work, learn from your experience, translate resources into your languages, and talk about how this project can best support you.

anna@endangeredlanguages.com

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Thank you! [Akéva](#)! [Mahalo](#)! [Mahsie](#)!