



What is Sustain Oneida?

By: The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee

This series of articles is designed to inform Oneida citizens about enrollment issues. The total number of Oneida enrolled members is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The goal of these articles is to generate community conversations about citizenship and belonging so that we may explore our options.

The enrolled membership of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The Tribe currently faces a diminishing population with the enrollment criteria of 1/4 Oneida blood. According to Oneida Enrollment records, only 42% of all enrolled Oneida members had at least 1/2 Oneida blood at the end of 2013. Only 23% of new Oneida enrollees in 2013 had at least 1/2 blood degree. If we continue on the same course, we enroll ourselves out of Tribal members. Or we can take action now by starting to explore our options.

The Sustain Oneida initiative was launched in 2012 to help the Oneida determine our future citizenship and belonging to *Onyota'a:ka*. The initiative includes and Enrollment committee members and Tribal staff. According to the Comprehensive Communication Plan created by Sustain Oneida, the two main objectives are to:

- 1) Increase awareness and provide opportunities and events for Oneida Citizens to participate in a conversation about membership criteria and its effect on our long-term survival and,
- 2) Increase the General Tribal Council and the Tribal organization's awareness of enrollment issues and population trends. These conversations will promote the survival of *Onyota'a:ka* into the future.

It is clear that continuing our current enrollment requirements means supporting self-termination. So what can we do instead? The Sustain Oneida group has planned some activities and events to get this discussion going in the Oneida community. One event is the Sustain Oneida Summit in Fall 2013. The focus will be on Oneida identity, values, language and culture. All Oneidas are invited to participate: people of every age, background, religion and way of life. We urge everyone to offer their ideas and to listen respectfully to the ideas of others. The goal of these discussions is to inform Oneida

citizens about Tribal enrollment issues and explore potential solutions for citizenship and belonging.

At the heart of this issue are two questions: 'What does it mean to belong to a Tribe?' and 'What responsibilities does that belonging involve?' Before the Sustain Oneida Summit, a number of community meetings will be held to discuss big questions such as, 'What does it mean to be Oneida?' 'What should enrollment criteria look like?' and 'How should we define Oneida citizenship?'

We recognize that this is one of the most complex and challenging issues the Tribe will face. We will need to share all of our ideas, energy, and our commitment to our Tribe. To move forward, many options must be considered, and patience and understanding is essential. The Oneida community should talk about this as long as is needed to reach a final decision that benefits the Tribe as a whole. Although these conversations will be challenging, we must have them to ensure the future existence of *Onyota'a:ka*.

For more information about Sustain Oneida please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/OneidaTrust>

<https://oneida-nsn.gov/bcc/TrustEnrollmentCommittee/>

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