

Research Excellence in Yukon:

Increasing Capacity and Benefits to Yukoners in
the Social Sciences, Humanities
and Health Sciences

Photo credit: Catherine Forest



Association of
Canadian Universities
for Northern Studies

Association
universitaire canadienne
d'études nordiques



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SUMMARY

The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies/ Association universitaire canadienne d'études nordique (ACUNS/ AUCEN) is a national charitable organization “contributing to the well-being of Canada’s North, its communities, and its inhabitants by sharing knowledge gained through leadership in northern research and education” (ACUNS vision). The Association represents more than 30 member institutions that are involved in northern research and scholarship. Together, they facilitate collaborative research, knowledge mobilization, and education, and operate the Canadian Northern Studies Trust, which provides a range of scholarships, fellowships and awards to students and early-career researchers.

Over the past several years, ACUNS members identified that most of the Association’s research awards focus on the natural sciences, and that there is a need to broaden the scope to include social sciences, humanities and health sciences (SSHHS) topics. The Association held two meetings with Yukon research community members and knowledge users, in October 2016 and February 2017, to identify research principles, processes, and priorities that could inform ACUNS, its member institutions, other research bodies, research funders, and scholarship providers. Participants in the meetings are listed in Appendix A.

Research Excellence

Meeting participants were unanimous in their view that identifying principles for how social sciences, humanities and health sciences research is done in Yukon is of more value than identifying priority research issues and topics. Some important principles and processes for researchers are:

- demonstrating commitment to ethical approaches;
- building Yukon capacity;
- being relevant and beneficial to Yukoners;

- effectively translating knowledge;
- mentoring and supporting students;
- allocating time and resources for community engagement; and
- reflecting the Yukon Context.

Research Themes

Multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to SSHHS research contribute multiple skill sets and expertise, and have the potential to create better knowledge. They also encourage researchers and partners to see the inter-connections among issues, and to better understand how issues affect individuals, families, and communities. Priority research themes include: climate change; child and adolescent issues; economic development; education; food and nutrition; governance; housing; First Nations languages; First Nations – non-Indigenous reconciliation; mental wellness; needs of marginalized populations; and rural and remote service delivery.

Recommendations

Research Priorities

Going forward it would be beneficial for the Yukon research community to:

- Develop a process for continuing to refine and prioritize Yukon research needs, recognizing there are limited resources available.
- Continue to collaborate as a Yukon research community to share perspectives, priorities, needs, and opportunities to develop Yukon research capacity.
- Repeat this consultation process and produce a similar report in five years.

Student Support

Senior researchers and academics working in Yukon should:

- Ensure that student supervisors have direct experience working in the North, and students are guided to have realistic expectations.
- Have a clear, written plan that includes mentorship and skill building opportunities with academic researchers, First Nations/ community knowledge holders, knowledge users, and subject experts.
- Provide opportunities to participate in different stages of a research project, including community engagement, partnership development, ethics design, data collection and analysis, and knowledge translation.
- Give incentives for post-graduate and graduate students to in turn mentor graduate and undergraduate university and college students, and find ways to involve high school students in research.
- Create experiential learning opportunities for students in the field, including internships in agencies and organizations, to ignite interest in northern research and overcome uncertainty among some students that they can do meaningful research and make contributions to their communities.
- Develop a mandatory one- or two-week program for scholarship recipients, delivered in Yukon, which includes an orientation to the territory, to northern and First Nations research ethics, and to First Nations cultural safety.

Scholarship Design

For facilitators of awards and scholarships, it will be important to:

- Design student scholarships to support local and territorial research needs and identified knowledge gaps in Yukon. This “niche” approach would complement other student- and discipline-driven scholarships.

- Better promote Yukon-specific and northern scholarships, both in Yukon and in universities involved in Northern Studies.
- Raise funds for new scholarships specific to social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in Yukon, and encourage Yukon-based students and students studying at southern institutions who are conducting research in Yukon to make use of these funds.

Yukon-Specific Research Funding

- In close collaboration with Yukoners, design a Yukon research fund that prioritizes integrated, holistic, multi-disciplinary research in the social sciences, humanities and health sciences.
- In funding research, apply principles and processes that are seen to contribute to research excellence in Yukon.
- Include Yukon-based researchers and knowledge users as adjudicators for the fund.
- Develop additional mechanisms to support college-based research, similar to the former SSHRC Community and College Social Innovation Fund.

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies/Association universitaire canadienne d'études nordique (ACUNS/AUCEN) is a national charitable organization “contributing to the well-being of Canada’s North, its communities, and its inhabitants by sharing knowledge gained through leadership in northern research and education” (ACUNS vision). The Association represents more than 30 member institutions that are involved in northern research and scholarship. Together, they facilitate collaborative research, knowledge mobilization, and education, and operate the Canadian Northern Studies Trust, which provides a range of scholarships, fellowships, and awards to students and early-career researchers.

As part of the Association’s organization and communications strategy, each member institution appoints an individual as its ACUNS Council Representative. Council members receive and distribute information from the Association and, in turn, represent their institution or organization at Association meetings. The ACUNS governing body is a Council of Representatives which meets annually to oversee the work of the Association. An elected Executive and Board of Directors are responsible for the activities of the Association between general meetings.

Over the past several years, ACUNS members identified that most of the Association’s research awards focused on the natural sciences, and that there was a need to broaden the scope to include social sciences, humanities and health sciences (SSHHS) research and scholarship. SSHHS research includes a broad range of topics and methodologies, for example, archival research, media analysis, field archeology, social policy research, health intervention studies, and economic development modeling.

After receiving encouragement and support from the Office of the Science Advisor, Yukon Government, ACUNS held a half-day roundtable in Ottawa on October 21, 2016 following its annual general meeting to explore

SSHHS research priorities in Yukon. This initial gathering confirmed interest among key territorial research community members and knowledge users for a process to identify research principles, processes, and priorities that could inform ACUNS' future work. The October meeting led to a framework and process for a broader engagement meeting that was held in Whitehorse on February 16-17, 2017. This report is the result of rich and lively deliberations during and after the meeting. For a list of participants who attended the meetings and/or provided feedback to this report, please see Appendix A.

The intent of the report is to provide guidance to:

- ACUNS in its role in promoting and supporting northern research and scholarship;
- ACUNS' member institutions and other research bodies in Canada in conducting SSHHS research in Yukon; and
- Funding and scholarship providers in supporting research that benefits Yukoners.

THE YUKON RESEARCH CONTEXT

While the northern territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut have much in common, each also has a distinct history and culture, geography, economic base, population size and distribution, and relationships with Indigenous Peoples. All of these factors create a particular research environment in each of the territories. Successful research projects in Yukon will be based on a clear understanding and appreciation of this context.

The context matters! Check your assumptions.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

Yukon is Canada's smallest northern territory in size, with a population in 2016 of 38,200. Three-quarters (77%) of residents live in the Whitehorse area, with others living in 15 rural and remote communities that have populations ranging from 53 to 2,200 (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Almost one-quarter (23%) of the population is Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2016). Yukon's population and diversity provides opportunities for comprehensive SSHHS research.

Yukon is unique in Canada in that 11 of 14 First Nations have achieved Self-Government Agreements, giving them the power to make and enact laws with respect to their lands and citizens, to provide for municipal planning, to manage or co-manage lands and resources, and to deliver services (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2017b). This provides an opportunity for researchers to form direct research relationships with one or more First Nations governments, and to investigate First Nations governance structures and service delivery models. First Nations and non-Indigenous Yukoners also are considering ways to “decolonize” research methodologies and relationships, to meaningfully implement recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and to “Indigenize” research, programs and services for First Nations.

The Research Community

Yukon has a robust research community that includes territorial bodies, community organizations, partnerships involving southern universities and national initiatives, and northern, Canadian and circumpolar research networks.

Yukon Research Centre, which is a part of Yukon College, strives to increase student capacity to conduct research throughout the College and the North. It works in partnership with government, industry, entrepreneurs, First Nations, and communities to improve the lives of northerners. Thematic areas include climate change, cold climate innovation, natural science, social science, and technology innovation (Yukon Research Centre, 2017).

Yukon College has an enrollment of more than 5,000 full- and part-time students at 13 campuses throughout the territory. It continues to lead the country in research conducted by Canadian colleges, ranking first among all colleges in Canada for research intensity, and third and fifth respectively for research funding and partnerships. Yukon College is on track to become Yukon University in five years (Yukon College, 2017).

Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research (AICBR) is an incorporated non-governmental organization that works with northern Indigenous communities, other NGOs, governments, academics, graduate students, research organizations, and the private sector on issues that are identified by and relevant to its partners. Its approach prioritizes the principles of community-based research, community capacity building, and inter-sectoral collaboration (Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, 2017a).

Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) is a non-profit society which helps to address the unique, varied and evolving mandates of its nine member First Nations. The Yukon First Nations Health and Social

Development Commission (chaired by CYFN) has identified a number of research priorities, and CYFN leadership adopted the First Nations research principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®) in 2006 (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2017a).

Yukon Government departments are involved in research in the fields of agriculture and forestry, business and economy, climate change, earth sciences, environment, health and well-being, heritage and culture, housing and infrastructure, and social sciences. The Office of the Science Advisor focuses on building strong partnerships with other governments and organizations to identify and address knowledge gaps of importance to Yukoners (Yukon Government, Office of the Science Advisor, 2017).

First Nations are actively involved in research. First Nation communities in Yukon, and groups such as Tetlit Gwich'in and Inuvialuit of the Northwest Territories with land claim agreements and settlement lands in Yukon, have interests in research conducted in their traditional territories. The Taku River Tlingit and Kaska Dena Council in northern British Columbia and the Deh Cho First Nation of the Northwest Territories who have unsettled trans-boundary land claims also undertake their own research on a variety of topics or have an interest in research conducted in the Yukon portion of their traditional lands.

Private sector organizations, including those in the building construction, cold climate technology, energy efficiency, agriculture, and resource extraction sectors are actively involved in research in Yukon. Not-for-profit organizations related to archeology, culture and heritage, conservation, and social and health issues may also conduct research.

Yukon organizations have formed strong research partnerships with universities in Canada and other countries, and work with the federal government, other provincial and territorial governments, and Canadian and international non-profit organizations with an interest in northern issues.

Yukon researchers and knowledge users also participate in numerous northern and national research networks, a few of which are the Canadian Mountain Network Yukon Initiating Group, Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic (ReSDA) Network, Yukon Social Sciences and Health Research Group, and the Science Community of Practice.

Frameworks and Best Practices

Research in Yukon is guided by some overall frameworks and best practices. For example, in 2016, the Yukon Government released both A Pan-Northern Approach to Science, a collaborative strategy with the Governments of Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and the Government of Yukon Science Strategy. The guiding principles of the Yukon Science Strategy are:

- recognizing the importance of science and innovation;
- incorporating traditional and local knowledge;
- focusing on needs;
- supporting improved coordination;
- providing appropriate resources for scientific activities;
- keeping pace with development;
- keeping current with scientific advances;
- promoting health and social sciences;
- fostering partnerships; and
- establishing and maintaining a strong Yukon-based science community (Government of Yukon, 2016).

Similarly, the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, Yukon Research Centre, and the Council of Yukon First Nations support strong investments in social sciences, humanities and health sciences research that directly benefits Yukoners, adheres to local research protocols and policies, and contributes to Yukon research capacity.

Principles of community-based¹ research are increasingly recognized as being important for many types of SSHHS research. Community-based research (CBR) is a participatory approach where research projects are driven by community priorities and those affected throughout the entire research process (communities can determine the extent and nature of their participation). CBR is a co-learning, empowering process that contributes to group capacity building, and that balances research and action through the co-production of knowledge. The Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research has developed considerable expertise in this approach (Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, 2017b). In research projects using methodologies other than community-based research, its principles of engagement, equal partnerships and capacity development remain central to success.

The Yukon research community also is committed to solution-oriented science.

Solution-oriented science considers from the start, while framing the research questions, how results can be implemented in policy, practice, and programs, and it selects research projects that will address pressing issues. It can include basic science (e.g., baseline monitoring across the North), better application of existing knowledge (improving knowledge transfer and mobilization), applied research, or a combination.

Pope, 2015, cited in Ogden, Schmidt, Van Dijken, & Kinnear, 2016, p. 210

¹ “Community” is defined in its broadest sense – it can refer to a geographic area, an Indigenous or ethno-cultural group, or a population that shares common characteristics, experiences or concerns, for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or two-spirit (LGBTQ2S) people; youth; those with mental health challenges, etc. The “community” is the group that is the subject of or is most directly affected by research.

Other research resources in Yukon include leadership from Yukon College (2012) concerning ethical research in Yukon, the Yukon Tourism and Culture (2013) *Guidebook on Scientific Research in the Yukon*, and the Council of Yukon First Nations (2012) *Yukon First Nations' Research Protocol*.

Barriers to Effective Research in Yukon

Both internal and external factors create barriers to effective research in Yukon. With no university located in Canada's North, Yukon researchers and knowledge users often rely on partnerships with Canadian universities to access research funds from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).²

While many important research projects have been completed, some Yukon organizations and communities are challenged to develop meaningful research partnerships with distant institutions and often very large, multi-university teams (which can include up to 90 investigators, knowledge users and community partners). These realities often do not allow for development of long-term, authentic relationships and a deep understanding of an issue. The need for a university-affiliated principal investigator; distinct funding streams that make it difficult to take a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach and use multiple sources of knowledge in projects; short grant submission times; and underfunding of project development costs also are barriers to high quality research in Yukon.

According to meeting participants, Yukoners are under-represented in research funding adjudication panels, and research expertise in Yukon is not being fully utilized in these processes. This impacts funding decisions,

² A welcome source of research development funding for colleges, including Yukon College, was the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's 2015-2017 Community and College Social Innovation Fund.

in terms of the types of research funded (methodologies appropriate to the territory), research topics, and team composition. Research funders seem to be willing to support “novel” research topics but not “novel” approaches to research, even if they are well established and proven methods in the territory.

As a result of these factors, it is more difficult for Yukon-resident post-secondary students to access scholarships and awards that would enable them to conduct research in their home territory, develop their expertise, and contribute to research capacity in Yukon.

Research Needs

In general, social sciences, humanities and health sciences research is considered to be underfunded in Yukon, although a systematic analysis is needed. Northern SSHHS research funding seems to be biased toward far northern and eastern Arctic needs. Compared to the other territories, Yukon may be perceived as having fewer economic, social and health challenges.

There also is a strong need to consider integrated and holistic approaches to these issues, and to avoid disciplinary silos. If research knowledge is to benefit Yukoners, it must contribute to a broad understanding of the strengths, challenges and unique opportunities in the territory.

It is not sufficient to study the North from afar. Broadening our understanding of the North, and drawing upon traditional knowledge as well as modern science, will improve our collective ability to operate in an environment that is fragile to begin with, and undergoing serious and rapid change.

Yukon Government, Government of Northwest Territories,
& Government of Nunavut, 2016, p. 11

RESEARCH PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

Participants in the Yukon research priorities meeting were unanimous in their view that identifying principles for how social sciences, humanities and health sciences research is done in the territory is of more value than identifying priority research issues and topics. This section of the report presents some key principles and processes for research excellence in Yukon, while the following section identifies some broad research themes and knowledge needs that came out of the consultation.

Important Considerations for SSHS Research in Yukon

In general, effective social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in Yukon follows these principles and processes, although not all of them apply to all projects. These are overall guidelines, and not intended to replace inclusive dialogue and joint planning among partners in each individual research project.

- The most important principle is that the research partners decide on the process and methods that work for them.
- The research topic/focus comes from those most directly affected by the research, or is developed as a partnership between researchers, knowledge users and those affected.
- The research team and partner organizations create a shared vision and goals for the project and work together to achieve them.
- There is a detailed written agreement that outlines expectations, roles, project governance (decision-making) structures, ethics processes, data management, and knowledge translation activities.

- Accountability and decision-making structures are transparent and supported by all partners.
- Researchers embrace ethical guidelines and protocols as essential to high quality research.
- Special considerations related to confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity in small communities are observed.
- Once research partners decide on the extent and nature of their involvement, participation is clearly articulated, and accommodates their capacity and abilities to participate.
- The research team takes the time to build authentic relationships with partners, and agrees in advance on conflict resolution processes.
- The data collection and analysis methods used are well thought out, and appropriate to the topic, the context, and the participants.
- There is reciprocal knowledge sharing and equitable resource allocation among partners.
- The researchers budget for compensation for community members who are a part of the research team.
- Students and community-based researchers are mentored and gain skills and knowledge as a result of the project.
- There is more research capacity among partners after the project is completed than before.
- Partners are given opportunities to contribute to interpretation of the data.
- Results are communicated first with partners and approved by them before wider dissemination.
- Whenever possible, research products are co-authored by academic and non-academic team members, and different formats are used to reach different knowledge users.
- The team builds in regular reflection to evaluate its process and its progress, and makes any needed adjustments.

Research Excellence in Yukon

Demonstrates Commitment to Ethical Approaches

Rather than seeing the ethics review process as an administrative burden, excellent research teams strive to achieve the highest ethical standards as expressed by community and research leaders and knowledge users in Yukon. Key guidance is provided by the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon College and Yukon Government. National principles and aspirations can be found in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) and *First Nations Principles of OCAP®* (ownership, control, access and possession)³ (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017).

Highly ethical projects respect local, professional and disciplinary research protocols, practices, and accountability structures, and make it a priority to develop respectful research relationships. Written “living” agreements that can be modified should spell out roles, responsibilities, resource allocation, capacity development, and mentoring and supervision expectations. Even if there is an existing relationship between a researcher and a partner, there is still a need to reach agreements on how to work together in an ethical manner.

If you say you use OCAP®, truly do so. Community-based research methods do not necessarily equate with OCAP®. OCAP® means the community owns the information and decides on every step of the research.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

³ OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) – www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP

Many of the principles and practices in Indigenous research can contribute to research excellence in general, for example, the 4 Rs of research – Respect, Reciprocity, Relevance, and Responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, cited in Estey, Smylie, & Macaulay, 2009).

Builds Yukon Capacity

If researchers come from out of the territory and don't have the appropriate sensibilities, then they leave with the knowledge and no capacity is built in the Yukon.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

To be truly beneficial to Yukoners, SSHHS research conducted in Yukon will build the capacity of Yukon organizations, communities and individuals. External researchers should recognize the strengths among Yukon research organizations, and work to use and build on existing skills and knowledge through a reciprocal learning process. Strong teams result from seeking out partners and team members who have complementary cultural, practice-based, and place-based knowledge.

Is Relevant and Beneficial to Yukoners

Social sciences, humanities and health sciences research conducted in Yukon should first and foremost contribute to the wellbeing of the people living there. Rather than coming in with a fully developed idea, researchers should engage with Yukon communities, however defined, as well as other relevant organizations to explore knowledge gaps and needs.

Consider a way to have [scholarship] applicants demonstrate that their substantive focus is important to the Yukon – according to the community, not simply a justification by the applicant. Maybe include a support letter from the community.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

Effectively Translates Knowledge

A high quality research team strives for impact and publication. Knowledge translation should be a central aspect of the project, following a detailed strategy developed early on. It also is important that local and territorial partners receive the results before they are released to a wider audience, and have the opportunity to provide feedback. Yukon knowledge users including territorial, municipal, and First Nations government policy makers and program developers; educational institutions; not-for-profit organizations related to the research topic (for example, conservation associations, arts and culture groups, economic development boards, professional groups); research networks and institutes, etc. are priorities for dissemination.

Investigators are encouraged to resist the research community's tendency to value academic contributions to knowledge over those of other partners, and acknowledge all contributors in publications and presentations.

Begin with the end in mind – agree at the beginning on how results will be communicated.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

Mentors and Supports Students

Yukon-resident university students (who must leave the territory to study) and Yukon College students need more opportunities to develop research skills and knowledge while conducting studies in the territory. This will also encourage new investigators to return to Yukon to conduct research, and if they desire, to settle there and continue to pursue scholarship for the benefit of their communities.

It is important to grow research capacity by building the pool of researchers from the bottom up.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

While research funding bodies look for student supervision and mentoring plans in proposals, these plans are not always well thought out or a priority

in field work, data analysis, and reporting. Much more could be done to truly educate and prepare students for research in the North, and to develop the skills and attributes that will make them valued researchers (see section below).

Allocates Time and Resources for Community Engagement

Most social sciences, humanities and health sciences research creates knowledge about individuals, families and communities, and addresses complex issues. Therefore, research teams require time to properly engage with and involve those most directly affected, establish relationships, and conduct research in a responsible manner. Successful projects engage with relevant organizations and people, which can include community representatives; service providers; patients/clients; local experts; First Nations knowledge holders, leaders, and Elders; and relevant territorial associations, research centres, and government departments. For example, additional resources may be needed for multiple trips to remote communities, and to compensate partners and local researchers who lack resources to fully participate otherwise. Good research plans will include realistic time lines and estimates of local and territorial capacity to participate in the project (for example, small organizations without core funding will find it difficult to do voluntary student supervision).

Community engagement means more than holding one community feast.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

Reflects the Yukon Context

Outstanding research is guided by the context in which it is conducted. Out of context, research questions, processes, methods and results have little meaning. In Yukon, this requires a solid understanding of the populations, history and culture, social and economic environment, and knowledge needs in the territory. For example, small isolated communities present different realities related to confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity, and community partners may be more able to contribute expertise and access to local

networks rather than significant time or resources. Important principles include taking holistic approaches to issues (resisting disciplinary silos), remaining open to Indigenous research methods and ways of knowing, and most importantly, remaining open and “humble” by recognizing the limits of your knowledge.

It's all about building relationships. There is no “cookie-cutter” solution but there are best practices and model projects to build on.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Overall Approach

Multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to social sciences, humanities and health sciences research contribute multiple skill sets and expertise, and have the potential to create better knowledge. They also encourage researchers and partners to see the inter-connections among issues, and to achieve a deeper understanding of how issues affect individuals, families, and communities.

The following diagrams try to capture some of the discussions that Yukon meeting participants had concerning research themes and issues. Individuals and families are at the centre, and knowledge needs related to improving their circumstances are placed in the context of community issues and concerns. All of these themes are best understood in the context of the larger environment.

Figure 1: Levels of Research Focus and Influence

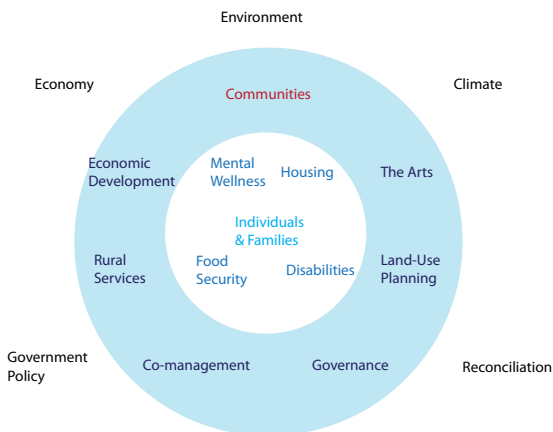


Figure 1 describes the levels of focus and influence, and the interconnections among example research themes. In this case, individuals and families might be affected by mental wellness, housing, food security, and disabilities issues (which also can be community-wide concerns). These individual and family needs can be influenced by community-wide issues such as rural services delivery, land use planning, and economic development, among others. All of these themes occur within the broader context of government policy, First Nations – non-Indigenous reconciliation, climate, and the economy.

Similarly, by considering the connections among issues, researchers, communities and knowledge users can examine topics from multiple perspectives, creating a better understanding of complex issues, and generating relevant new knowledge. As examples, the diagrams below show some of the factors that contribute to, and can result from access to harvested food and adequate housing.

Figure 2: Factors Influencing and Influenced by Access to Harvested Food

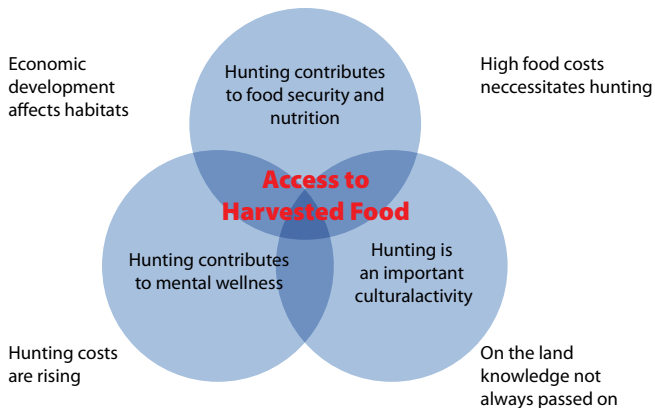
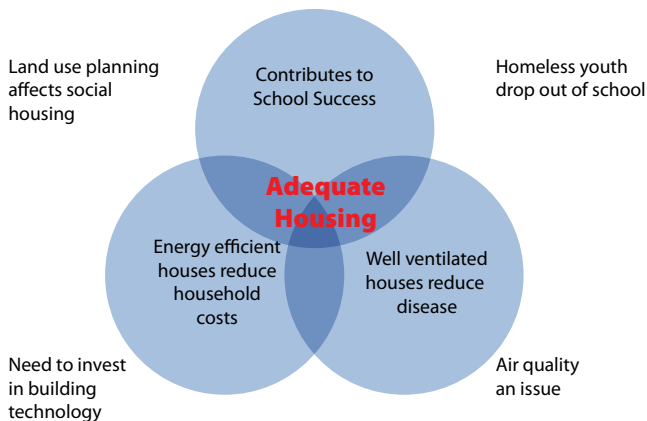


Figure 2 uses the issue of access to harvested food to illustrate the different factors that can be considered in an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to research. In this example, food access contributes to physical, mental and cultural health, and is influenced by economic, wildlife management, and First Nations knowledge factors.

Figure 3: Factors Influencing and Influenced by Adequate Housing



Similarly, in Figure 3, adequate housing has educational, financial and health implications, as well as land use, building technology, air quality, and homelessness dimensions in the larger context.

In both of these examples, economic factors, government policy decisions, and cultural considerations impact the issues to be studied. Models and perspectives from a variety of social sciences, humanities and health sciences disciplines can be used to illuminate these issues and create knowledge.

Research Themes

The research themes described below are not considered to be prescriptive or exhaustive, and are not listed in order of priority. They are intended to highlight some of the research needs and knowledge gaps identified by those participating in the research priorities meeting held in February 2017. As illustrated above, many of the themes and topics are interconnected.

Child and Adolescent Issues

Knowledge needs include: child mental health; child welfare issues; early childhood development models; how to support families; youth crime prevention and alternate intervention models for at-risk youth; and youth and elders working together.

Climate Change

Knowledge needs include: the significance of longer-term climate trends and human adaptation over time; proactive and systematic rather than reactive and situation-specific adaptation; impacts on heritage sites, infrastructure, food harvesting, and access to the land for cultural health and healing.

Economic Development

Knowledge needs include: “reimagining economic development” to take into account social development indexes and measures of community wellness; sustainable economic development; health and social impacts of natural resource extraction projects, and the effects of boom and bust economic cycles; looking beyond resource extraction to renewable energy; the role of arts and culture in the economy, and the pros and cons of cultural tourism; and how changes in the economy affect determinants of men’s and women’s health.

Education

Knowledge needs include: innovations in education; curricula for First Nations education; holistic approaches (mental, emotional, physical, spiritual); and the role of physical education in mental health.

Food and Nutrition

Knowledge needs include: food security; the importance of traditional food sources; spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional aspects of food and nutrition; effects of climate change on traditional food availability; and digestive wellness and intestinal health (for example, *H. pylori* bacteria).

Governance

Knowledge needs include: effects of federal devolution; First Nations self-government implementation; inter-governmental partnerships; and co-management of lands and resources.

Housing

Knowledge needs include: socio-economic issues and housing access; homelessness; culturally appropriate housing; effects of land use policies; and application of building science for northern climates.

First Nations Languages

Knowledge needs include: language as a vehicle for cultural and artistic expression; the role of performing arts in language revitalization; promotion of First Nations languages; and preservation of Indigenous knowledge.

First Nations – Non-Indigenous Reconciliation

Knowledge needs include: First Nations – non-Indigenous approaches and actions in support of reconciliation; contribution of heritage research; First Nations place names; moving forward positively from the legacy of residential schools; and Indigenous programs and services.

Mental Wellness

Knowledge needs include: effects of trauma on individuals and families; promising trauma-informed interventions; First Nations healing practices; youth mental health and addictions; the role of stress in chronic health conditions; integrated, culturally relevant mental health programs; and measuring impacts of on-the-land programs.

Needs of Marginalized Populations

Knowledge needs include: applying an equity lens in policies and programs; gender equality and diversity issues, gender differences in service use patterns and needs; aging; disabilities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S) issues.

Rural and Remote Service Delivery

Knowledge needs include: methods for assessing needs and gaps; rural wellness indicators; service delivery and professional practice models that work for Yukon; and appropriate use of technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Priorities

As Yukon research priorities will continue to evolve over time, it is important that the research community develop a means to re-visit the themes and topics explored in this report. This consultation process has led to a renewed commitment among research community members and knowledge users to communicate on a more regular basis to exchange views, highlight priorities and support each other. As meeting participants pointed out, the network could be expanded to include a broader group of governmental, not-for-profit, and private sector organizations involved in social sciences, humanities and health sciences research.

Recommendations

- Develop a process for continuing to refine and prioritize Yukon research needs, recognizing there are limited resources available.
- Continue to collaborate as a Yukon research community to share perspectives, priorities, needs, and opportunities to develop Yukon research capacity.
- Repeat this consultation process and produce a similar report in five years.

Student Support

Meeting participants generated a number of ideas to improve student learning and support in social sciences, humanities and health sciences research projects in Yukon. The territory offers a unique opportunity for post-secondary students to participate in meaningful and in some cases, career-changing research experiences. However, research teams

need to abandon the current “sink or swim” approach to student research and develop a model for support and training that prepares them to work ethically and competently with northern communities and organizations. Student support and education should be a shared responsibility among research partners.

What can the community offer to the researcher to make them more familiar with local culture?

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

Recommendations

- Ensure that student supervisors have direct experience working in the North, and students are guided to have realistic expectations.
- Have a clear, written plan that includes mentorship and skill building opportunities with academic researchers, First Nations/ community knowledge holders, knowledge users, and subject experts.
- Provide opportunities to participate in different stages of a research project, including community engagement, partnership development, ethics design, data collection and analysis, and knowledge translation.
- Give incentives for post-graduate and graduate students to in turn mentor graduate and undergraduate university and college students, and find ways to involve high school students in research.
- Create experiential learning opportunities for students in the field, including internships in agencies and organizations, to ignite interest in northern research and overcome uncertainty among some students that they can do meaningful research and make contributions to their communities.
- Develop a mandatory one- or two-week program for scholarship recipients, delivered in Yukon, which includes an orientation to the territory, to northern and First Nations research ethics, and to First Nations cultural safety.

Scholarship Design

Hopefully young Northerners can be more a part of the research being conducted here.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

Scholarships can be designed to better reflect northern realities and needs in the Yukon, and support more Yukon students. For example, funding levels should reflect the costs of doing social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in the North, including adequate lead times and reporting back to communities. Flexible, open-ended funding enables students to cover different types of expenses related to travelling to and working in remote communities, and the time required for building relationships. Different sized awards can fund different types of projects.

- Design student scholarships to support local and territorial research needs and identified knowledge gaps in Yukon. This “niche” approach would complement other student- and discipline-driven scholarships.
- Better promote Yukon-specific and northern scholarships, both in Yukon and in universities involved in Northern Studies.
- Raise funds for new scholarships specific to social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in Yukon, and encourage Yukon-based students and students studying at southern institutions who are conducting research in Yukon to make use of these funds.

Yukon-Specific Research Funding

Yukon-specific research funding would contribute to research excellence in Yukon, by creating knowledge that is directly relevant to Yukon needs and priorities, and contributes to evidence-based decision making. A Yukon-

specific fund also would enable funders to structure contributions in ways that respond to the opportunities and challenges in conducting research in the territory.

- In close collaboration with Yukoners, design a Yukon research fund that prioritizes integrated, holistic, multi-disciplinary research in the social sciences, humanities and health sciences.
- In funding research, apply principles and processes that are seen to contribute to research excellence in Yukon.
- Include Yukon-based researchers and knowledge users as adjudicators for the fund.
- Develop additional mechanisms to support college-based research, similar to the former SSHRC Community and College Social Innovation Fund.

CONCLUSION

Thank you to everyone from SSHRC and ACUNS for being here, for listening and caring. Your enthusiasm, support and keen interest were evident.

Yukon research priorities meeting participant

There is much enthusiasm for increasing and enhancing SSHHS research in Yukon among ACUNS members and the Yukon research community. An important role for ACUNS includes promoting and distributing the results of this consultation process to its member institutions, research funding and scholarship bodies, and northern research networks. ACUNS also is committed to seeking new funding to support social sciences, humanities and health sciences research scholarships and awards.

The Yukon research community can continue to network and share perspectives on knowledge needs, research principles and processes, as well as effective models for SSHHS research in the territory. It also can play a critical role in continuing to educate non-Yukoners on Yukon research principles, processes and priorities.

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