

# Research Excellence in the Northwest Territories:

Holistic, Relevant and Ethical Research  
in the Social Sciences, Humanities  
and Health Sciences



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 whose main purpose is “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 of research funding to include social sciences, humanities and health sciences (SSHHS) topics. The Association held meetings with the Yukon research community and knowledge users in 2016-17, and in early 2017, released the report *Research Excellence in Yukon: Increasing Capacity and Benefits to Yukoners in the Social Sciences, Humanities and Health Sciences*.

In 2017-18, ACUNS engaged with researchers and representatives of government departments, Indigenous organizations, and non-profit associations in the Northwest Territories to identify research principles, processes, and priorities that could inform ACUNS’ activities. In 2017, the Association organized a teleconference followed by a two-day face-to-face meeting in Yellowknife. The meeting in Yellowknife was held in conjunction with the ACUNS Annual General Meeting, allowing several board members to attend the engagement session. In early 2018, the ACUNS Executive Director travelled in the NWT and met with representatives of four Indigenous organizations who were not able to attend the face-to-face meeting. Participants in the engagement process are listed in Appendix A.

## Research Excellence in the NWT

Central to all research is advancing the well-being of the land, animals and people of the Northwest Territories. Overarching principles include taking an integrated, transparent, and inclusive approach and applying “nothing about us without us”. High quality research ensures that these three key components are addressed in the development, implementation, and reporting back of research:

1. **Forming and informing:** This includes getting background information, using local protocols, building relationships, using transformative methods, considering gender and age, and staying flexible.
2. **Relevant and useful:** Research should always be culturally relevant, responsive to needs, and appropriate to the community context in the NWT.
3. **Ethical and reciprocal:** Researchers must be accountable, collaborative, and connected, while recognizing privilege and re-balancing power in relationships; they share resources; and always report back to communities and partners.

Effective social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in the NWT will reflect the following themes and create an environment that:

- supports northern-led research;
- reflects a diversity of voices;
- recognizes local knowledge;
- prepares culturally competent researchers; and
- works ethically with communities.

## Research Priorities

In the consultations, engagement participants strongly advised researchers to connect with the appropriate stakeholder organizations to explore mutual research interests. New research should always build on existing findings and address an identified knowledge gap.

Some questions that might help in selecting research questions include:

1. What research focus would have the greatest positive impact and least negative impact on the population?
2. Is there a clear knowledge gap?
3. Is there a high level of agreement among stakeholders?
4. Is the issue urgent?
5. Does it address equity issues?
6. Is it actionable and applied?
7. Is there an opportunity for change?

## Recommendations

### Decolonization, Indigenization, and Reconciliation

Decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation in research would greatly enhance the quality and relevance of SSHHS research.

- Further explore how research can be designed and used to support decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation.
- Support SSHHS research that is holistic in nature, that is, research that considers the inter-connections and inter-dependence of lands, waters, natural resources, and people of the NWT.
- Expect researchers to respect and draw on place-based Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK).

- Provide opportunities for community-based Indigenous cultural immersion for researchers as one way to build cultural competency.

### **Support for SSHHS Research in NWT**

To better support SSHHS research that is of value in the NWT, change is needed in the ways in which research is designed, funded, conducted, and communicated.

- Co-create an NWT-specific SSHHS research fund that builds capacity in territorial institutions, supports northern resident researchers, and better responds to territorial research priorities.
- Develop a comprehensive database of NWT research findings so that new research projects build on existing knowledge and methodologies that work in the NWT.
- Develop a northern research funding index that accurately reflects the costs of doing high quality research in the territory and recommends allocations for: 1) research design and engagement; 2) project implementation; and 3) reporting back/knowledge-sharing.
- Ensure there are northern residents on all research funding adjudication panels.

### **Research Networks**

Research networks play a critical role in increasing research expertise and supporting holistic and inter-connected approaches to research, while making the best use of research resources.

- Create a formal NWT SSHHS research network to share information, identify research gaps and needs, form partnerships, and advocate for research that meets the needs of the territory.
- Develop processes to identify emerging knowledge needs in the territory and communicate them to research funding bodies.

- Support the NWT research community by helping it to build closer long-term relationships with southern researchers and research institutions.

### **Student Support**

Student researchers from within and outside the territory who are interested in SSHHS research require support to become competent northern researchers.

- Fund small summer research projects that enable post-secondary students to get experience working in the North, being on the land, and learning from local knowledge holders.
- Develop some core knowledge documents for student scholarship applicants that provide background on the historical and current context for doing research in the North and expectations for respectful research relationships.
- Ensure that student researchers are supervised by culturally competent senior researchers who ideally also travel to the North.
- Support northern organizations and communities to educate and mentor students.
- Provide concrete and coordinated support for NWT resident students.

### **Scholarship Design**

Scholarships can be designed to better reflect northern realities and needs in the NWT, and support more students from the territory.

- Develop mechanisms for the NWT research community to be involved in the development of national scholarships in SSHHS research.
- Design flexible, open-ended scholarships that enable students to cover different types of expenses related to travelling to and working in remote communities, and the time required for building relationships.



- Develop NWT-specific research scholarships based on the principles and priorities for research in the territory.
- In addition to ensuring good representation from the NWT on scholarship adjudication panels, also utilize small “expert panels” to advise on the feasibility and ethics of the proposed research.

## INTRODUCTION

The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies/Association universitaire canadienne d'études nordique (ACUNS/AUCEN) is a national charitable organization whose main purpose is “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 annual 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 of its awards programs to include social sciences, humanities, and health sciences (SSHHS) research and scholarship. SSHHS research includes a broad range of topics and methodologies such as archival research, media analysis, field archaeology, social policy research, health intervention studies, and economic development modeling.

The Association held meetings with the Yukon research community and knowledge users in 2016-17, and released the report *Research Excellence in*

*Yukon: Increasing Capacity and Benefits to Yukoners in the Social Sciences, Humanities and Health Sciences.* In 2017, ACUNS staff reached out to researchers and representatives of government departments, non-profits, and Indigenous organizations in the Northwest Territories (NWT) to identify research principles, processes and priorities that could inform the Association, its member institutions, other research bodies, research funders, and scholarship providers. A teleconference in late September resulted in a framework and process for a broader engagement meeting in Yellowknife on October 25-26, 2017. In order to ensure that a diversity of voices and perspectives were included, the ACUNS Executive Director travelled to the NWT in January, 2018 to conduct individual meetings with representatives of several organizations not able to attend the Yellowknife meeting.

This report is a synthesis of discussions from the engagement process. The report is intended 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 NWT; and
- Research funding and scholarship providers in supporting research that benefits residents of the Northwest Territories.

For a list of participants who attended the meetings and/or provided feedback to this report, please see Appendix A.

## THE NWT RESEARCH CONTEXT

While the 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 unique research environment in each of the territories. Successful research projects in the NWT will be based on a clear understanding and appreciation of this context.

*There is a difference between a “good idea” and what’s feasible and practical in the North.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

The Northwest Territories is a vibrant land comprised of its people, physical environment, waters and wildlife. It is a large territory that includes the Mackenzie Mountains, Mackenzie River, two of the planet’s largest lakes and numerous islands in the Arctic Ocean. Part of the territory is tundra above the Arctic Circle. Other areas are heavily forested, and others are a rolling landscape of Canadian Shield rock, rivers and lakes. The NWT has a population of 45,000, 52 per cent of whom are First Nations, Inuvialuit or Métis. The territory has 11 official languages – 9 Indigenous languages, French and English. It has a young population – almost one-quarter of residents are under age 15 and only one in 20 is older than 65. About 20,000 people live in the capital of Yellowknife, and the rest live in 32 fly- and-drive-in communities ranging in size from 100 to 3,700 residents (Government of the Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Government of the Northwest Territories Tourism, 2016; World Atlas, 2016).

*(Research in the NWT) needs to serve small groups of people in a vast area of land and do it well.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

The Northwest Territories is recognized as a world leader in the successful co-management of wildlife resources. The responsibility for wildlife management is shared between governments, users and renewable resources boards set up under land claim agreements. The NWT's diverse population and unique landscape provide opportunities for comprehensive social sciences, humanities and health sciences research.

## **The Research Community**

The Northwest Territories has an active and engaged research community that includes territorial bodies, community organizations, partnerships involving southern universities and national initiatives, and northern, Canadian and circumpolar research networks.

Aurora College offers a variety of certificate and diploma programs, two Bachelor's degree programs, apprenticeships, adult literacy and adult education courses delivered at three campuses and 23 community learning centres. The College is committed to supporting the development of northern society through excellence in education, training and research that is culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of the territory.

*Without neglecting the interests of southern scientists, it is time for northern interests to take their rightful place on the Research Institute's agenda.*

Aurora College, 2006, p. 42

As the research division of Aurora College, the Aurora Research Institute (ARI)'s mandate is to improve the quality of life for NWT residents by applying scientific, technological, and Indigenous knowledge to solve northern problems and advance social and economic goals. Through research centres in Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife, the ARI brings together resources through partnerships with universities, funding partners, government agencies, Indigenous organizations, northern researchers,

and communities. The Aurora Research Institute licenses and coordinates research in the territory in accordance with the NWT Scientists Act, and promotes communication between researchers and the people of the communities in which they work (Aurora Research Institute, 2016). The institute also produces an annual compendium of research conducted in the NWT (Aurora Research Institute, 2015).

The Institute for Circumpolar Health Research (ICHR) is an independent research organization registered under the NWT Societies Act. The governance of ICHR supports northern-based research, training and knowledge sharing through partnerships and agreements with the University of Alberta, University of Toronto, health authorities, Indigenous governments, international organizations and community groups. The Institute: conducts and facilitates ethical and rigorous research; synthesizes, disseminates, and facilitates the exchange of knowledge with decision-makers and researchers; and conducts training; and educates northern stakeholders and research partners across Canada on health research methodologies (Institute for Circumpolar Health Research, 2018, 2015).

*Many northern organizations have expertise and interest in community-based research and de-colonizing methodologies and can act as links to communities and issues.*

**NWT research priorities engagement participant**

A number of territorial government departments are actively involved in: coordinating, conducting and participating in research; funding studies and networks that support its policies, programs and services; and using knowledge created through research. Territorial government research is guided by a Knowledge Agenda (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2017a), which is described in the next section, and the current government's priorities and mandates. The GNWT also prepared a response to the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action which addresses reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2017b).

The Department of Health and Social Services recently created a Research Agenda which values research that increases cultural capacity, builds skills for local residents, improves knowledge translation tools, and targets improving the social determinants of health (Government of the Northwest Territories, no date). The Department's *Building a Culturally Respectful Health and Social Services System* (2016) also refers to the importance of research in developing a culturally safe health and social services system for Indigenous Peoples.

Through the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, NWT communities have been engaged in the development of an Agriculture Strategy that identified the need for research and innovation to “provide northern solutions for food production in the NWT” (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2017c, p. 2). This led to a goal of increasing investment in research related to northern agriculture and food production and new initiatives that enhance the agri-food culture, for example, in the area of cost-efficient power and heat sources.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment delivers a range of programs and services for the development of the people of the Northwest Territories. In the area of education and culture, the department is active in the promoting and preserving Indigenous languages and learning, early childhood development, and Francophone affairs. Research supports its policies and programs. In 2015(a), the Department released *Strong Cultures, Strong Territory: GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework 2015-2025* and in 2017(d), an Indigenous languages framework. An *NWT Indigenous Languages Action Plan* is forthcoming.

The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC) houses the Government of the Northwest Territories' museum which showcases the culture and heritage of the territory. It also manages the NWT Archives that contain both governmental and non-governmental documents related to the history of the territory. It supports research and scholarship and promotes

cultural exchange. The Community Cultural Development Office supports individuals and organizations that are actively involved in arts, cultural, and heritage activities. The PWNHC intends to expand its research and partnership roles in the coming years.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources promotes and supports the sustainable use and development of natural resources and protects, and conserves and enhances the NWT environment. It conducts and partners in research on conservation, forest management, water resources, and wildlife. Researchers from Canadian and international universities work with the department to develop a better understanding of Canada's Arctic, the Boreal forest ecosystem, and the impacts of climate change. The NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program (CIMP) at the Department coordinates, conducts, and funds the collection, analysis, and reporting of information on environmental conditions in the territory to support better resource management decision-making. NWT CIMP and Aurora Research Institute collaborated on the research guide *Working Together Towards Relevant Environmental Monitoring and Research in the NWT* (no date).

A number of Indigenous organizations and governments conduct, approve, and collaborate on research in their territories.

Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) manages the settlement outlined in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. IRC's goal is to continually improve the economic, social, and cultural well-being of Inuvialuit through implementation of the Agreement. A goal in the IRC Strategic Plan 2016-19 is to take an evidence-based decision-making approach to policy development and advocacy by developing and implementing a Research Agenda for the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Planned activities include: consolidating existing research; providing research services to Inuvialuit organizations; participating in relevant and priority research networks; communicating research findings; monitoring impact of IRC programs



and Inuvialuit conditions; protecting and preserving Arctic wildlife, environment and biological productivity; and ensuring that both Indigenous knowledge and western science are equally considered (Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, 2016).

*Inuvialuit/Inuit Traditional Knowledge stands on its own and does not need to be validated by western science.*

**NWT research priorities engagement participant**

The Tłı̨chǫ Government administers the land claim that was settled in 2005. The Tłı̨chǫ Research and Training Institute promotes the development and use of Indigenous research design and appropriate community methodologies such as narrative and participatory action research. The Institute is committed to advancing the study of Tłı̨chǫ lands, language, culture and way of life through the promotion of research and its use for training, education, and monitoring government commitments and responsibilities. It also conducts research of value to Tłı̨chǫ communities. The Institute is interested in building capacity to store and provide access to research results for both external researchers and the Tłı̨chǫ (Tłı̨chǫ Government, 2014).

The Akaitcho Treaty 8 Tribal Corporation represents the collective social, political, cultural, environmental and economic interests of its constituent First Nations. The Corporation assists Akaitcho communities as they develop the self-sufficiency required to realize their individual and collective future goals and objectives. Its prime function is to facilitate and coordinate the transitional efforts of its members as they move toward meaningful First Nation governance (Akaitcho Treaty 8 Tribal Corporation, no date).

The Dehcho First Nations (DFN) represents 10 First Nations and two Métis Locals. The primary objective of the DFN is to regain independence as a self-governing nation of people based on Indigenous values, customs and traditions. The philosophy, desires and ideals of the DFN are intended

to set the stage for future generations to benefit from the wealth and health of DFN people and Lands (Dehcho First Nations, 2018).

The Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC) represents Gwich'in Peoples in the Mackenzie-Delta of the Northwest Territories and across Canada. The Council's objectives include: overseeing the use, ownership and management of lands, waters, and resources in the Gwich'in Settlement Area; and retaining, preserving, and enhancing traditional and cultural values, customs, and language. The GTC Department of Cultural Heritage is the main contact for research. It oversees traditional knowledge research according to *Conducting Traditional Knowledge Research in the Gwich'in Settlement Area: A Guide for Researchers* (Gwich'in Tribal Council, 2011). The Department also conducts research in the areas of culture, language and traditional knowledge so that this body of knowledge is recorded and available for future generations.

The Northwest Territory Métis Nation (NTMN) is comprised of the Indigenous Métis originally from the South Slave region in the Northwest Territories. The NWT Interim Measures Agreement (IMA) allows Northwest Territory Métis Nation to be fully involved in the land, water, and research permitting activities. The organization uses a centralized review process for research applications and consults with research regulatory agencies. It has created several research policy documents including a Traditional Knowledge Policy, Consultation Guide, Engagement Policy and South Slave Research Policy (Northwest Territory Métis Nation, 2016).

The Sahtú Secretariat was formed by the seven Sahtú land corporations – four Dene land corporations and three Métis land corporations – on June 23, 1994 with the enactment of the Sahtú Dene and Métis Land Claims Settlement Act (SDMCLCA). Provisions in the land claim include the power to establish implementing bodies that are responsible for a range of services and activities within the Sahtú Settlement Area. The Sahtú Renewable Resources Board is responsible for wildlife management and is the only Sahtú organization with a research mandate and independent research capacity (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, no date).

## Frameworks and Best Practices

Research in NWT is guided by several overall frameworks and best practices. For example, in 2016, the NWT Government released *A Pan-Northern Approach to Science*, a collaborative strategy with the Governments of Yukon and Nunavut. The guiding document states that

*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 the Northwest Territories, and Government of Nunavut, 2016, p. 11

The framework provides this shared vision for northern science:

- support a strong northern science community that is solutions-driven, needs-oriented and partnership-based;
- broaden northerners' own understanding of the North;
- encourage both traditional knowledge as well as modern science;
- develop northern research capacity; and
- realize a prosperous, healthy and sustainable North that will benefit northerners and all Canadians, now and in the future.

The Government of the Northwest Territories developed a Science Agenda in 2009 that was updated as a Knowledge Agenda in 2017. *The Knowledge Agenda: Northern Research for Northern Priorities* supports the overall goal of:

*positioning the NWT as an active leader, practitioner, partner and promoter of all forms of research, including traditional knowledge and community-based research, necessary to inform relevant, timely and effective policy, planning and legislation.*

Government of the Northwest Territories, 2017a, p. 1

The new strategy purposefully shifts the focus from “science” to “knowledge”, noting that science is not an inclusive term in how knowledge is obtained.

*Knowledge on any subject can, and should, be obtained by research conducted using the most appropriate methodology for each specific research question. ... there are many different research methodologies and approaches that can be used to increase our collective knowledge about the physical, biological, and human environments in the NWT.*

Government of the Northwest Territories, 2017a, p. 3

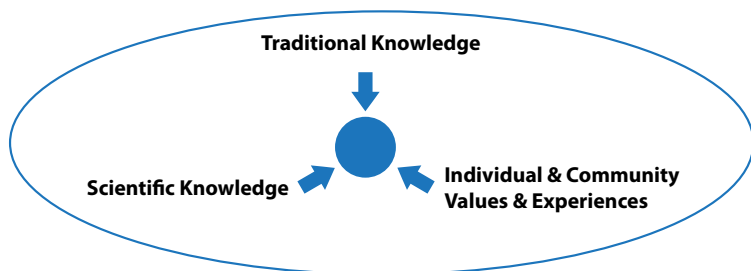
The Aurora College strategic plan describes a Northern Research Model in which community groups and individuals, government agencies and the private sector identify research needs. The model emphasizes the importance of including traditional knowledge, individual and community values and experiences, and scientific knowledge in research (Aurora College, 2006).

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment applied these complementary research approaches – learning from existing initiatives, learning from others and listening to residents – to create *Strong Cultures, Strong Territory: GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework* to guide the GNWT’s culture and heritage activities. Similar to other frameworks, its vision is “a strong, adaptive and forward-thinking territory whose people are healthy and capable, rooted in their heritage, and vibrant in their diverse cultural practices” (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2015a, p. 7). One of the priorities identified in the framework is to engage in culture and heritage research.

*Understanding the NWT’s past, the relationship of the past to the present, and how people have interacted with the landscape over time, requires research. Research uncovers and documents our past and provides insight for today’s challenges. Culture and heritage research comes in many forms, including anthropology, linguistics, sociology, biology, archaeology and other sciences.*

Government of the Northwest Territories, 2015a, p. 13

## Aurora College Northern Research Model



Community groups and individuals, government agencies and the private sector identify research needs. The Aurora Research Institute brings its resources to bear on research issues through partnerships with universities, funding partners, government agencies, Indigenous organizations, Northern researchers and communities. The research findings inform community decision-making and may be used to strengthen college curricula.

While not a framework per se, the Hotù ts'eeda Elèts'ehdèe *May 30-31, 2017 Final Report* describes an Indigenous-led approach to health research in the NWT. "Hotù ts'eeda" in Tlicho language

*... is about peace and wellbeing in mind, body and spirit, about moving beyond diplomacy to true collaboration so that when we part ways we leave each other in a state of grace. Hotù ts'eeda exists to revitalize and celebrate culture, improve capacity for individuals and families and support taking an evidence-based approach to policy. It is about moving control and ownership of research back to Indigenous peoples and communities.*

Hotù ts'eeda Governing Council, 2017, p. 3

Hotù ts'eeda Elèts'ehdèe, an inaugural gathering for a five-year initiative, was held on the land outside of Yellowknife and focused on Indigenous worldviews of health, effective research relationships, Indigenous and decolonized<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Decolonization generally refers to the reversal of current and past colonial practices that resulted in Canada's Indigenous Peoples losing sovereignty over their land, their livelihoods, languages, social and governance structures, and health and wellness.

methodologies, and knowledge translation. Hotì ts'eeda is part of a national network of Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) units.

*It's one thing to be aware of [Indigenous Knowledge] principles and another thing to apply them. Use Indigenous reference groups.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

### **International and National Guiding Documents Identified in the NWT SSHHC Engagement**

*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, United Nations, 2008.*

*Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014.*

*Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North, Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Research, 2003 (being revised).*

*National Inuit Strategy on Research, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018.*

*First Nations Principles of OCAP® (ownership, control, access and possession), First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017.*

*Integrating Arctic Research – A Roadmap for the Future, Arctic Council, 2016.*

*Circumpolar Inuit Health Priorities: Best Health Practices and Research, Inuit Circumpolar Council – Canada, 2012.*

## Barriers to Effective Research

Engagement participants identified some challenges and barriers to doing effective social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in the Northwest Territories.

- A relatively small population dispersed over a large land mass and the costs of air travel to remote communities create higher research costs compared to projects in the south.
- With a larger population in Yellowknife, smaller communities outside of the capital are often excluded from research because of costs and logistical challenges.
- The NWT has a robust research ethics approval and licensing process which ensures that relevant, high quality studies are conducted. However, researchers may be unprepared for the time and effort it takes to complete the licensing process.
- There have been difficulties in accessing health records and data from other jurisdictions.
- The absence of a university in the NWT makes it difficult to attract and administer large research grants.
- Research funding often does not provide adequate resources for:
  - translation/interpretation, particularly when working with Indigenous Elders;
  - building relationships and co-creating research projects with community<sup>2</sup> members; and
  - reporting back to communities and sharing knowledge in a variety of ways.
- Small non-profit organizations and Indigenous bodies may not have the capacity to adequately oversee research projects, facilitate connections with communities, and collaborate on multi-partner grants.

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<sup>2</sup> Community can refer to a geographical area, ethno-cultural group or Indigenous nation, or a population with common experiences and needs.

*There seems to be lots of money for data collection but none for pre- and post-collection engagement and the building of relationships.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

Participants also identified a number of strengths in the NWT research community:

- given its size, the number of ongoing partnerships and a commitment to collaboration and sharing of resources;
- the availability of NWT-specific ethical guidelines;
- Indigenous communities that are growing their research capacity and leading more studies; and
- strong local research institutes such as the Institute for Circumpolar Health Research and Aurora Research Institute.



## RESEARCH PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

This section of the report presents NWT perspectives on the purpose of research and some key principles and processes for holistic, relevant and ethical SSHHS research in the Northwest Territories.

### The Purpose of Research

The purpose of research was an important discussion topic at the NWT engagement sessions. Participants wanted to explore why we do research and how we use results. One purpose is to support sustainable communities in the territory and to address issues that matter to northerners. And done well, the knowledge created can be used at all levels – individual, community, territory- and nation-wide, and beyond for the benefit of humanity and the planet.

*Research relationships should be reciprocal [all parties benefit] from the beginning of the project until the end.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

An example of transformative research was the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry led by Justice Thomas Berger Commission in 1974-77, which took a broad and inclusive approach in examining the human, environmental and economic implications of a northern pipeline (Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, 1977). The Commission's report is considered to still be relevant today.

*Research should build capacity and show people how relevant and meaningful research can be, spurring interest among community members to do research themselves.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

Research should contribute to an understanding of the multiple facets of every issue and to evidence-informed decision-making. However, research must also be of practical and direct benefit to those who are involved.



Engagement participants emphasized that the research community must play its role in decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Presently, most research projects continue to privilege non-Indigenous world views that fail to draw on and honour Indigenous knowledge systems.

Large academic institutions and researchers retain greater power and control over research grants compared to Indigenous and community governing bodies and non-profit associations. Engagement participants spoke of the importance of “decolonizing” or restoring Indigenous worldviews, research and knowledge sharing methods, governing approaches and funding structures that emerged out of Canada’s colonial past and present. Decolonization requires a transformation of research and scholarship which would ultimately benefit all Canadians through a more holistic and integrated approach to the creation of knowledge.

Decolonization in research will lead to greater Indigenization of education and research institutions to the benefit of all. Indigenization comes about through greater numbers of Indigenous scholars, students and research adjudicators, contributing to a more holistic and balanced worldview in research.

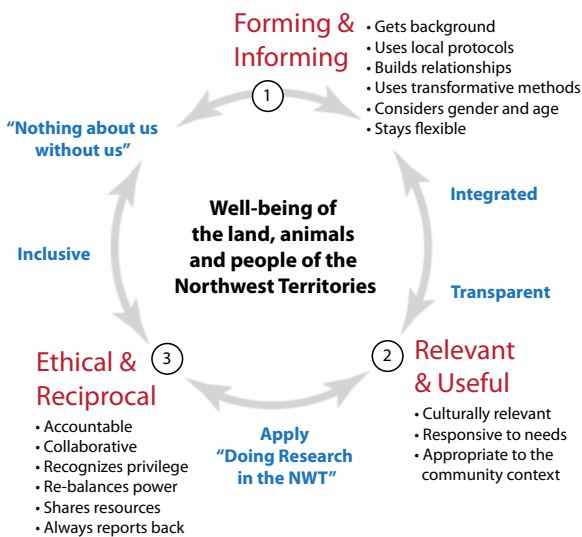
*Reconciliation... opens the door to different ways of doing.*

**NWT research priorities engagement participant**

If reconciliation requires establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) then reconciliation in research will require action and accountability by everyone involved in knowledge preservation, creation, and use in the Canadian context.

## Research Excellence in the Northwest Territories

Engagement participants developed a diagram that describes the key components of research excellence in the NWT.



Central to all research is advancing the well-being of the land, animals and people of the Northwest Territories. Overarching principles include taking an integrated, transparent and inclusive approach and applying the principle

of “nothing about us without us”. The Aurora Research Institute publication *Doing Research in the Northwest Territories: A Guide for Researchers Applying for a Scientific Research Licence* (2011) is an important resource for all researchers working in the NWT.

High quality research ensures that these three key components are addressed in the development, implementation and reporting back of research:

1. Forming and informing includes getting background information, using local protocols, building relationships, using transformative methods, considering gender and age, and staying flexible.
2. Relevant and useful: research should always be culturally relevant, responsive to needs and appropriate to the community context in the NWT.
3. Ethical and reciprocal: researchers are accountable, collaborative and connected, recognize privilege and re-balance power in relationships, share resources and always report back to communities and partners.

The bi-directional arrows in the diagram indicate the ideal of continual interactions of the key components of effective research, however the gaps between the arrows signify that in practice this process is not always complete.

## **Other Key Principles**

Effective social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in the NWT will create an environment that:

- supports northern-led research;
- reflects a diversity of voices;
- recognizes local knowledge;
- prepares culturally competent researchers; and
- works ethically with communities.

## Northern-Led Research

*Dependence on outsiders coming in as “knowledge experts” doesn’t bring truth to the community.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

The NWT research community imagines a future when more SSHHS research is conceived, developed, implemented and applied within and by the territory – in other words, self-determination in research. This does not preclude participation in cross-territorial, national and international partnerships and collaborations. In this scenario, research questions would come from communities and territorial knowledge users, funders would support both academic- and non-academic-led research projects, and research would inform policies and programs that directly benefit the Northwest Territories. Participants described this as a paradigm shift in how research is conceived and implemented.

## A Diversity of Voices

*True CBR [community-based research] would see researchers responding to established research needs of the community and communicated by the community itself; students need support in order to do research in this way.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

The NWT has a very diverse population comprised of First Nations, Inuit and Métis and many ethno-cultural groups, including long-time residents, recent immigrants and refugees. There is a strong Francophone community in the territory. Some regions in NWT have settled land claims and some have not. This makes a significant difference in how research relationships and processes are established. Those regions with a land claim are more likely to have processes in place for review, feedback and communications as well as some capacity to work with researchers. Those without a land

claim may not have established protocols, processes and capacity. Research that is conducted in the NWT needs to respect these different contexts and populations and reflect the diversity of experiences and needs among residents.

## **Local Knowledge**

*Research has to happen somewhere, but that space is already populated with knowledge about that place.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

Researchers and students need to ensure that they spend time in/with the communities in which they are working in order to gain an appreciation of their knowledge systems. Indigenous Peoples, who comprise about one-half of the Northwest Territories population, have a long and rich relationship with the natural environment. They have Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which is fundamental to understanding the territory, its people and their knowledge needs. High calibre researchers will recognize and respect all forms of cultural and local knowledge that comes from living in a geographical place and sharing a culture and common experiences. Within communities, attention needs to be paid to unique needs; for example, those of Elders; women; youth; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and two-spirit individuals; and those with disabilities.

## **Culturally Competent Researchers**

*Done right, research can be transformative for communities.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

Researchers in all stages of their careers (students, post-graduates, early career-researchers, and senior researchers) need to have a thorough

understanding of the communities they want to work in and with, before they commence their work. Then they need to invest the time to be present in the community, learn about the people and the values and beliefs of the community, and form direct relationships with community members. This is not a rapid process but is essential to developing research projects that benefit local communities and cultural groups.

Engagement participants talked about this as a process of both education and self-awareness. Researchers need to be able to let go of biases and assumptions. They need to acquire knowledge about colonialism in Canada, culturally harmful research from the past, and paths to reconciliation. Culturally competent researchers remain both humble and grateful to be working in a cross-cultural environment. With the right skills, knowledge and approaches, researchers can have a transformative effect on communities.

### **Working Ethically with Communities**

*A letter of support [from a community] isn't a free passage. Don't skip the relationship building process.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

There are many aspects to conducting research in an ethical manner. Engagement participants spoke of the importance of researchers respecting local governance structures and following protocols for community engagement. “Lone wolf” researchers who approach individual community members to garner support for projects have been very destructive. External researchers should work with a steering committee to oversee the project, ideally using existing structures and groups rather than creating new ones that draw on the resources of a community. Lone wolves become more effective when they join northern teams and networks.

Partners should develop written agreements that spell out the reciprocal benefits to communities and researchers, record respective roles and

responsibilities, and outline the ownership of intellectual property. They should build on what is already known, and work in ways that develop the capacity that the community desires and needs; for example, practical skills in photovoice and grant writing. In the NWT, research consent can be interpreted in different ways and research participants expect to be compensated. Most importantly, research projects need to remain flexible and adjust their timing to that of communities.

As new guidelines and protocols are being developed all the time, it is essential to check with relevant territorial organizations before developing research projects.

### **Territorial Guiding Documents Identified in the NWT SSHHS Research Engagement**

*Doing Research in the Northwest Territories: A Guide for Researchers Applying for a Scientific Research Licence*, Aurora Research Institute, 2011.

*Working Together Towards Relevant Environmental Monitoring and Research in the NWT*, NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program & Aurora Research Institute, no date.

*Hotii ts'eeda Elèts'ehdèe May 30-31, 2017 Final Report*, Hotii ts'eeda Governing Council, NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program & Aurora Research Institute. (no date). 2017.

*Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Subjects*, Aurora College, 2013.

*Conducting Traditional Knowledge Research in the Gwich'in Settlement Area: A Guide for Researchers*, Gwich'in Tribal Council, 2011.

*Policy Regarding the Gathering, Use and Distribution of Yúndit'òh (Traditional Knowledge)*, Samba K'e Dene Band, 2003.

*Guidelines for Research in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region*, Inuvialuit



## RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Engagement participants confirmed that there has not been a territory-wide, collaborative process to involve a broad group of stakeholders in identifying priority topic areas for social sciences, humanities and health sciences research. However, they also were reluctant to identify a list of priority topics, believing that these continue to change. They strongly advised researchers to connect with the appropriate stakeholder organizations to explore mutual research interests. New research should always build on existing findings and address an identified knowledge gap.

Some questions that might help in selecting research questions include:

1. What research focus would have the greatest positive impact and least negative impact on the population?
2. Is there a clear knowledge gap?
3. Is there significant agreement on the research need among stakeholders?
4. Is the issue urgent?
5. Does it address equity issues?
6. Is it actionable and applied?
7. Is there an opportunity for change?

## Current Research Themes

A number of organizations in Northwest Territories that conduct, oversee or use SSHHS research have published research priorities that can provide some high-level guidance to researchers. For example, the Institute for Circumpolar Health Research currently focuses on these research areas:

- mental health and wellness;
- health systems research;
- Indigenous knowledge research; and
- patient-oriented research networks (Institute for Circumpolar Health Research, 2015).

The NWT Knowledge Agenda identifies strategic goals and research priorities in each of five core subject areas to improve the quality of life of NWT residents and maintain the integrity of NWT cultures, ecosystems, environments and communities. The core subject areas are:

- cultural sustainability;
- environmental stewardship;
- health and wellness;
- natural resource management; and
- sustainable communities.

Themes that cross-cut these research areas are climate change, innovative and emerging technologies, and an enhanced role for NWT residents (Government of Northwest Territories, 2017a). Participants in the Hotì ts'eeda gathering suggested these research priorities:

- mould in housing and health effects, and environmental health;
- trauma and its links to health, homelessness and drug use;
- cancer;
- cultural values, land-based healing and medicine;
- use of health-related prevention campaigns;
- on-the-land treatment and follow up; and
- Indigenous healing and care (Hotì ts'eeda Governing Council, 2017).

Similarly, the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services (no date) has named these research priority areas:

- improving the health status of the population through prevention and education;
- improving access to primary care services;
- mental health and addictions;

- child and family services; and
- addressing disparities in Indigenous health.

SSHHS engagement participants also identified these current research interests (in no particular order).

### **Health and Environment:**

- access to food, country (harvested) food, food and economic development, and northern agriculture;
- environmental sustainability;
- potential impacts of new resource extraction projects;
- traditional and local environmental knowledge; and
- watershed governance.

### **Languages:**

- linguistic research;
- language policy; and
- language revitalization.

### **Culture:**

- impacts of climate change on heritage resources (archaeological sites);
- inventories of archaeology sites and cultural landscapes; and
- how to ensure community access to cultural heritage, museum collections and archives.

## **Research Gaps in Northwest Territories**

Some gaps or needs for social sciences, humanities and health sciences research in the NWT that engagement participants raised are:

- more clinical health research, for example, on *H. pylori* infection;
- research benefitting immigrant communities;
- social determinants of health, for example, education, school attendance, etc.;
- holistic, population-based research;
- Indigenous culture and heritage;
- protecting archaeological sites in the face of climate change; and
- social sciences research related to community water resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Decolonization, Indigenization, and Reconciliation

Decolonized research methodologies and processes, increased Indigenous presence and influence in academic institutions and research funding bodies, and action-oriented reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians would all greatly enhance the quality and relevance of SSHHS research. Some key considerations in these areas include:

- Further explore how research can be designed and used to support decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation.
- Support SSHHS research that is holistic in nature, that is, it considers the inter-connections and inter-dependence of the lands, waters, natural resources and people of the NWT.
- Expect researchers to respect and draw on place-based Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK).
- Provide opportunities for community-based Indigenous cultural immersion for researchers as one way to build cultural competency.

*Leave the community in a stronger place with increased knowledge and increased capacity to do research.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

### Support for SSHHS Research in NWT

To better support SSHHS research that is of value in the NWT, change is needed in the ways in which research is designed, funded, conducted and communicated.

- Co-create an NWT-specific SSHHS research fund that builds capacity in territorial institutions, supports northern resident researchers and better responds to territorial research priorities.

- Develop a comprehensive database of NWT research findings so that new research projects build on existing knowledge and methodologies that work in the NWT.
- Develop a northern research funding index that accurately reflects the costs of doing high quality research in the territory and recommends allocations for: 1) research design and engagement, 2) project implementation, and 3) reporting back/ knowledge sharing.
- Ensure there are northern residents on all research funding adjudication panels.

## **Research Networks**

Research networks play a critical role in increasing research expertise and supporting holistic and inter-connected approaches to research, while making the best use of research resources.

- Create a formal NWT SSHHS research network to share information, identify research gaps and needs, form partnerships, and advocate for research that meets the needs of the territory.
- Develop processes to identify emerging knowledge needs in the territory and communicate them to research funding bodies.
- Support the NWT research community building closer long-term relationships with southern researchers and research institutions.

## **Student Support**

Student researchers from within and outside the Territory who are interested in SSHHS research require support to become competent northern researchers. Students need adequate supervision by knowledgeable senior researchers, access to community learning, and experiences that help them grow and develop.

- Fund small summer research projects that enable post-secondary students to get experience working in the North, being on the land, and learning from local knowledge holders.
- Develop some core knowledge documents for student scholarship applicants that provide background on the historical and current context for doing research in the North and expectations for respectful research relationships.
- Ensure that student researchers are supervised by culturally competent senior researchers who ideally also travel to the North.
- Support northern organizations and communities to educate and mentor students.

*Established academics can pass on research relationships to emerging scholars.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

## Scholarship Design

Scholarships can be designed to better reflect northern realities and needs in the NWT, and support more students from the territory. This requires the NWT research community to be actively involved in designing and awarding scholarships.

*Create [scholarships] that allow students to grow and create connections with communities.*

NWT research priorities engagement participant

- Develop mechanisms for the NWT research community to be involved in the development of national scholarships in SSHS research.
- Design flexible, open-ended scholarships that enable students to cover different types of expenses related to travelling to and working in remote communities, and the time required for building relationships.

- Develop NWT-specific research scholarships based on the principles and priorities for research in the territory.
- In addition to ensuring good representation from NWT on scholarship adjudication panels, also utilize small “expert panels” to advise on the feasibility and ethics of the proposed research.



## **CONCLUSION**

In keeping with the diversity of the Northwest Territories, participants in the ACUNS social sciences, humanities and health sciences research engagement process provided rich, varied and thoughtful perspectives on research and knowledge creation in the NWT. ACUNS is committed to using these findings in its ongoing work and commits to promoting and distributing the results of this 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 for northern research.

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# APPENDIX A – PARTICIPANTS IN THE NWT SSHHS RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

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