

**Tsik'e daa de Enitle dee Ko
Land of the Northwest University**

**Response to GNWT Discussion Papers on Transforming Aurora College
to a Polytechnic University
November 2020**

Dr. Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, PhD
Scientific Director

Dr. John B. Zoe, LLD (Hon)
Chairperson



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Overview	5
Commentary on Governance Approach.....	7
Institutional Guardians.....	8
Knowledge Holders and Partners Council	8
Council of School Heads	8
Commentary on Areas of Specialization	9
School of Indigenous Resurgence.....	11
School of Post-Secondary Readiness and Continuing Studies.....	11
School of Human and Social Development	12
School of Land Connection and Sustainability	12
School of Applied Business and Technology	13
School of Applied Arts and Culture	13
Principles Shaping Institutional Development	14
Implementing the UN Declaration Within the Polytechnic.....	14
Land-Based Learning	15
Cultural Competency and Safety	16
Partnerships	16
Building Trust	17
Drawing on and Supporting Existing Resources	17
Considerations for Organizational Development.....	17
Responsive and Non-Static Programming.....	18
Frameworks for Accessing External Funding.....	18
Independence from GNWT	18
Conclusion	19
About Hotì ts'eeda.....	21
Endnotes	22

Introduction

“In Indigenous world views, every effort was in teaching, to arm future generations with stories, travel, harvesting, sharing, governance etc. When the early colonial teachings intruded into the North, it did not take into consideration the traditions of knowledge transfers. A University in the North begins with reconciliation of two knowledge systems in every step of the development.”

-John B. Zoe, LLD (Hon.),
Chair, Hotì ts'eeda

This paper responds to the GNWT *Discussion Paper - Polytechnic University Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization*, and *Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance* with great interest. We would like to begin by commending the thorough and thoughtful work that went into these papers, and appreciate the opportunity to respond. Hotì ts'eeda's response is informed by a mandate to promote patient-oriented health research, health systems, and wellness in the NWT, building on Indigenous strengths. Hotì ts'eeda partners have been clear that health and wellness is holistic and includes education. Education is a major part of providing NWT residents with opportunities to realize their full intellectual and personal potential, and importantly to improve their life circumstances and material conditions, and those of their families and communities. Education is one of the most impactful long-term economic inputs over which the GNWT has stewardship. As noted in the GNWT discussion paper on areas of teaching and research specialization, the polytechnic promises to be an anchor of the NWT knowledge economy, facilitating and networking an array of institutions, organizations, and industry partners who together have the potential to continue to grow the knowledge economy sector at a time when non-renewable resource based economic sectors face growing uncertainty.¹

Hotì ts'eeda partners have also been clear that dimensions of wellness such as education include and connect with families, communities, and culture. Student enrolment in educational programs is determined in part by how those options connect and resonate with their target audience as legitimate, relevant, and effective. Of critical importance in the polytechnic's development is including measures to address ongoing impacts of colonization. This is no small challenge, and as a feature of polytechnic operational values, should be structured as an ongoing process shaping programming and supports offered to polytechnic students.

We understand that the process of transforming the college to a polytechnic touches the lives of over 2000 Aurora College students each year: as full time, part time, and continuing education enrollees at the three main campuses and community based adult education centers in NWT communities.² Currently, the majority of Aurora College enrollments are considered part-time.³ These are important facts to consider. They tell us that currently, the college

impacts approximately 5% of the NWT population directly as students. This number does not include those who would be affected family and/or dependents of students. Clearly, the college has a significant impact economically, socially, and educationally within the NWT.

Hotì ts'eeda has found ways to support the present college and its students through its funding and programs, partnering with Aurora College to offer the Edets'sèèhdzà scholarship each year in the amount of \$20,000.00 per recipient to allow them to spend their summer learning about health research as a Research Assistant to Aurora College based research projects. To date, three of these scholarships have been awarded to Aurora College nursing students. Hotì ts'eeda has also offered bursaries during 2020-2021 intended to offset Covid pandemic precaution impacts on students. Hotì ts'eeda is an affiliated institution of the college through the Aurora Research Institute, and Hotì ts'eeda staff are ARI Research Associates.

It is important to note that a number of other college and university level programs, as well as applied training, have continually been offered by other institutions and organizations in the NWT in recent years, some of which Hotì ts'eeda has also supported.⁴ This speaks to growing and diverse post-secondary needs in the NWT that the college currently cannot fulfill, and indicates that the College is not structured to easily accommodate potential partners seeking to establish innovative post-secondary and research programming in the NWT. This is a fact that should give cause for reflection, and a starting point for seeking to understand how expectations and needs of the polytechnic's potential partners can work collaboratively within a transformed institution.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that the polytechnic will enroll mainly NWT students who currently come from one of two high school education systems in the NWT: a well-resourced system in Yellowknife, and an under-resourced system outside of Yellowknife. We believe that we are long past a time where NWT residents, its government, or the federal government can pretend that a two-tier K-12 education system does not exist in the NWT, or defend the *status quo* as somehow either adequate or equitable. Being open and honest about this reality is a fundamentally important first step in allocating resources and imagining a polytechnic that is responsive to existing needs. As a result, the polytechnic must take innovative and bold steps to address the resulting lack of readiness for post-secondary education among NWT school leavers, for example by pledging to enroll any NWT grade 10-12 school leavers, as well as NWT high school graduates, who apply to the polytechnic's programs. Further, students who left or graduated from schools in communities outside of Yellowknife and require post-secondary readiness supports should be able to access educational programming without paying tuition fees.

This paper addresses both governance and areas of specialization for teaching and research. Hotì ts'eeda views reflect partner insights and priorities communicated over the past five years with respect to what is needed in the NWT to develop effective and impactful approaches to health research and developing the health system, including building greater trust between Indigenous peoples and the health system, including in post-secondary education, particularly for health and wellness related professions. The polytechnic will be an ongoing work in

progress, a dynamic and growing institution that will progressively evolve and change. The vision we present here recognizes that establishing an effective organization, and gradually building programming to meet the needs of NWT students, will require developing trust and strong partnerships that will be able to weather the inevitable successes, failures, and re-imaginings that are to be expected in the initial growth period of any new organization. Creating the polytechnic should be done in collaboration with partners, and will likely require compromise, including supporting its development even though it will be built over time, meaning that the interests of some of its partners may not be met in the short term. Building on existing strengths to establish a stable and viable institution will be essential to creating opportunities to build a better institution over the long term.

The paper also reflects Hotì ts'eeda's guiding principle for all of its work: namely, to implement the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, with respect to health and wellness (understood broadly) research, including the restoration of health research governance to Indigenous governments. At the core of creating the circumstances for better health research and increasing local participation and control in research and health-related initiatives, is the reclamation of authority by Indigenous governments. Indigenous governance of health research and programs is a necessary foundation for creating a health system and health research landscape that is culturally safe and clinically and scientifically effective. For the polytechnic, this means that Indigenous governments must be part of its governance structure, and that the way the institution operates, the programming it offers, and student and university staff must be supported and encouraged to do their part to bring the UN Declaration to life.

In our view, the most effective way of ensuring a culturally safe polytechnic, and a polytechnic that can lead nationally with respect to innovative and productive approaches to connecting with its mainly Indigenous students, is to incorporate and privilege Indigenous knowledges and strengths equally with non-Indigenous ones. This will be a challenging task, and will require commitment to take such as approach within administrative structures, program choices, and governance of the polytechnic.

Overview

This paper responds to both the current thinking on governance and with respect to areas of specialization, as reflected in the two GNWT discussion papers. It reflects thinking which builds on the current proposals, and offers constructive alternatives and enhancements for consideration. Generally, we recommend that the transformation process be done through an Indigenous lens, which is challenging, given that currently the process is being led from within the GNWT. That needs to change. The transformation is a moment for creativity and imagining the long-term potential of a renewed institution. This needs to feed off of new energy, new ideas, and be done in ways fostering partnership with key players through consensus-building approaches. This will only work if partnership is authentic, where the GNWT contributes to, instead of controls, the outcomes. Such an approach needs an independent, reputable

transformation-focused leadership within the college itself rather than the GNWT Department of Education.⁵

In this, we would recommend appointing a president and appointing a chancellor consistent with these values. For the presidency, we recommend looking within the NWT for a new president, who should hold a PhD.⁶ The new leader should have a record of research and publication that is recognized as outstanding in their field, and who has experience working in culturally safe ways with Indigenous communities and creating or leading organization(s). Supports should ensure that an Indigenous lens will be respected in all aspects of transformation and institutional planning; this is why appointing a chancellor who is an Indigenous knowledge holder with experience in research would be important. The chancellor would be an Indigenous individual recognized by their own community as having the requisite expertise and experience relevant to working collaboratively with the president.

The first section of this paper responds to the proposed governance approach, proposing two distinct councils interacting with a President and a council of heads of schools. One council would act similar to a board of directors, and the other would provide advice and strategic direction.

The second section proposes six schools, or areas of teaching and specialization. The vision we present represents a framework that would be built over time. It is important to note that we do not see a fully functioning institution on day one. Implementation will be an ongoing process. The six areas identified are based on current capacities within the NWT, as a basis for further development.

The next two sections offer, for consideration, principles for institutional development and organizational development. These are oriented to the specific context of the NWT, and the approach that should be taken to inform the development of programming and how it is delivered, and that should be taken to set the parameters on how the organization can develop in relation to the strengths, needs, and priorities of the NWT now and in the future.

Commentary on Governance Approach

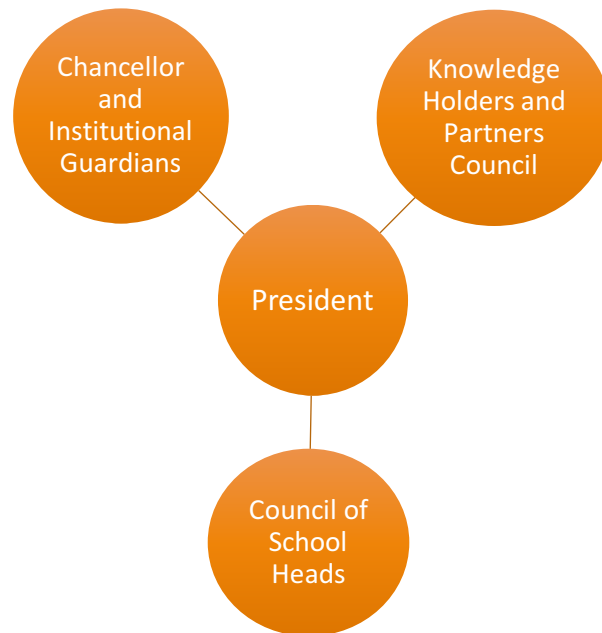


Figure 1: Polytechnic Governance

Above is a schematic of basic governance for the polytechnic that we offer for consideration. Adopting Indigenous language names for the governance councils and all roles (above we use English terms that would be replaced) that connect with Indigenous understandings of the councils' and leadership roles would be important for communicating polytechnic identity as one which is rooted in and respects the place and the people it serves. This would require re-thinking in particular using terms such as "Chancellor", "President", "Board of Governors", and "Senate". As a new and uniquely Northern institution, there is a rare opportunity to depart from other governance models built in different times and places and according to values and understandings of the world that often exclude multiple world views, and certainly Indigenous ones. We strongly advise GNWT to move away from such outdated markers of ideology and cultures that do not connect with current NWT circumstances, and that are evocative of systems institutionalizing exclusion and inequitable access, particularly for Indigenous peoples and individuals, as well as their strengths and values. The polytechnic transformation is an opportunity to be bold and to be true to the identities of Northerners, and honor the strengths that for so long have been shut out by post-secondary education systems in Canada. While post-secondary institutions across Canada are taking bold steps to embrace Indigenous

strengths and peoples, it would be ironic for a new NWT based polytechnic to reflect structural elements and ideological values of a bygone era.⁷

Institutional Guardians

This body would function similarly to a Board of Governors. These would be individuals drawn from the NWT community, who would offer a mix of skills desirable for any large corporate entity, and taking into account the important social, societal, and economic impacts of a polytechnic over the long term; functioning as a board of directors responsible for ensuring the institution operates in accordance with its legal authorities and budget, while fulfilling its broad mandate to the NWT as a whole to a national standard observed by all Canadian post-secondary institutions. Students and staff would also be represented on this body.

Knowledge Holders and Partners Council

This council would function similar to a university senate, setting the broad strategic direction of the institution. This would be a mix of knowledge holders from academia and Indigenous cultural communities who would have experience in post-secondary and land-based education and be recognized experts in their respective fields. They would have broad authority in setting the development of the academic direction and development of the programming of the polytechnic. These individuals would be drawn from inside and outside of the NWT.

It is expected that Indigenous governments, industry, and the federal and territorial governments would be positioned to partner in various ways, including providing funds for polytechnic programming. They would also be well positioned to forecast economic and educational needs. As well, Indigenous governments in particular have an interest in ensuring a strong, legitimate, and relevant post-secondary institution which will produce future workers and leaders. The Knowledge Holders and Partners Council would reserve seats for all self-governing Indigenous governments, and for all regional land claim organizations. Seats would also be reserved for the NWT government, and rotating seats for major industry partners or economic sector representative organizations (NWT chamber of commerce, chamber of mines) and rotating seats for major NGO and social sector organizations.

Council of School Heads

This body would advise on how to implement the strategic direction provided by the Institutional Guardians and the Council of Partners. As academic heads of schools, these individuals require a forum to work together as polytechnic leadership to implement the vision set out by the councils. The council would include all heads of schools as well as student and staff representatives.

Commentary on Areas of Specialization

Transforming to a polytechnic provides an opportunity to establish a framework for institutional growth and development over time. It must be future-focused, and positioned for responsiveness to evolving circumstances in the NWT economy and society. The proposed areas of specialization reflect an existing institutional subject matter and approaches that do not take advantage of the extensive resources and strengths that the NWT has to offer.

It is important that the polytechnic be conceived in relation to its place within a national network of post-secondary institutions in Canada. It must build on strengths we have here rather than attempt to poorly mimic abstract ideals of polytechnics elsewhere. Taking a bold approach that embraces the NWT's uniqueness and validates the cultures and identities of the majority Indigenous students who the polytechnic can expect to enroll will be essential. It is likely that only such uniqueness would have the ability to attract students nationally (primarily from Indigenous communities) and internationally, particularly for students interested in areas of study relating to the North and Indigenous peoples. We must be realistic that while the potential for partnership with Yukon University exists, that is also the institution that will be in direct competition to attract students from other countries and other parts of Canada who are seeking a northern university experience, and as current enrolment numbers show, Yukon U is currently attracting NWT students. Therefore, we would see a polytechnic adopting a name, governance approach and institutions, and operational elements that leverage Indigenous cultural strengths, identity, and land relationship as primary drivers of institutional design and operation, as well as being important polytechnic philosophy and design elements that would distinguish the NWT polytechnic from its nearest competitor.

Hotìì ts'eeda proposes that the transformation process take an approach that responds to actual demands of growing economic sectors, new opportunities, and existing and under-utilized resources. While the existing proposed approach to program offerings covers areas that have been the focus of the college for many years, during which enrolment has steadily declined.⁸ A new polytechnic is an opportunity to improve what works, and innovate in order to respond to the changes that can be anticipated. The NWT will always need trades, post-secondary readiness, and nurses. However, there are new areas of research, applied technology and trades, and an increasing need for workers who can fulfill the demands of growing Indigenous governments and new business challenges and opportunities that are both unique to the NWT and reflective of broader social and economic shifts in Canada. This paper proposes a polytechnic divided into six schools of study, that will provide a basic structure to accommodate future growth and change as the polytechnic is built.



Figure 2 Proposed Polytechnic Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization

The above diagram provides an overview of the six areas of teaching specialization we see for a new polytechnic. Below in bullet form, is an overview of the types of program offerings that we would see being grouped together. This provides a snapshot of the institution being organized into distinct schools with mandates to offer courses, conduct research, and develop partnerships. The six schools may in some cases naturally correlate with the resources at existing campuses. In other cases, different elements of each school's offerings could take place at different campuses. A key principle would be positioning the polytechnic for flexibility in building on local resource capacity and student demand. A general description of each school is offered below the bullet-based snapshot.

School of Indigenous Resurgence

- Land-Based education planning and services
- Indigenous studies (Bachelors, Masters)
- Indigenous Governance (Bachelors, Masters)
 - Indigenous Government Administration
 - Negotiation skills
 - Contract and administrative law
 - Indigenous law
- Indigenous Knowledge and Culture
 - Indigenous methodologies
 - Indigenous knowledge studies
 - NWT history and development

School of Human and Social Development

- Nursing (Bachelors, Masters, Personal Support Worker, CHR and health care administration)
 - First Aid, Wilderness First Aid
- Re-established Social Work (Bachelors, Masters, counselling, administration)
 - Mental health skill development
- Re-established Education (Bachelors, assistants, Land-Based education skills)
- Sport and recreation studies
- Health science research partnerships

School of Land Connection and Sustainability

- BSc General Science
- Diploma Applied Science and Research Skills
 - Land Administration
 - Land claim and self government based land management
- NRTP Diploma articulated with similar diplomas
- Indigenous Guardians program skill development
- Climate change and science research partnerships
- Northern agriculture

School of Applied Arts and Culture

- Bachelor of Arts (general; specializations in collaboration with other Schools)
- Applied Indigenous arts and culture practices
 - Moose hide tanning and traditional arts
- Visual arts and communication
 - Community radio
 - Community film
 - Creative writing
 - Cultural Communication and expression
- Applied language teaching/immersion programs and planning

School of Applied Business and Technology

- Business Administration (Diploma)
- Financial and organizational management
- Applied diplomas and courses
 - Wilderness Adventure and Ecotourism programming and management
 - Aurora science and tourism studies
 - Wild food processing and marketing
- Applied technology studies
 - Trades apprenticeship training
 - Energy and technology studies

School of Post-Secondary Readiness and Continuing Studies

- Academic grades 10-12 courses
- Continuing Studies for high school graduates
- On demand and diploma language instruction and ESL
- General interest courses
- Targeted Indigenous translation workshops in partnership with Schools (health, governance, business)

School of Indigenous Resurgence

This school would provide degree and diploma programs; provide important planning and structural elements for land-based learning, and have responsibility for offering programming responsive to the needs of Indigenous governments, organizations, and peoples of the NWT. The NWT has the largest number of distinct land claim and self government agreements of any jurisdiction in Canada, providing a wealth of opportunities for innovative research on Indigenous government innovation and implementation. In addition, as new agreements are reached and the federal governments provides adequate funding to support their implementation, the need for skills particular to constitutionally based land claim and self government authorities will grow. While these agreements increase demand for western-based legal and administrative skills, they also increase demands for cultural knowledge and land-based fluency. The School would be ideally placed to offer academic and applied degree programs and courses that meet these needs, while also developing capacities that would be drawn on by other schools within the polytechnic.

School of Post-Secondary Readiness and Continuing Studies

A school of post-secondary readiness and continuing studies would address the critically important reality that the NWT for many years has operated two school systems: one marked

by adequate and in some cases an excess of resources in Yellowknife,⁹ and the school system outside of Yellowknife characterized by low attendance and achievement rates commensurate with a lack of general resources, infrastructure, and targeted resources to address unique needs. Grade 12 equivalency diploma and related courses should be offered on a regular basis in every community in the NWT outside of Yellowknife, to compensate for the lack of K-12 educational investment in small communities. The polytechnic should offer a dedicated suite of high school upgrading and land-based summer schools at regional campuses each year free of charge to any student registered in high school outside of Yellowknife in partnership with Indigenous governments, industry, and philanthropic organizations.

Continuing education courses should receive renewed focus within a polytechnic, particularly as a potential income stream for the polytechnic, which could also function as a basis for drawing in more NWT residents to life-long learning. There is a possibility to draw on many existing talents among residents, and provide communities of interest with administrative support necessary to offer educational courses to the general public. From fine arts and language to basic land-based skills or mechanics, a continuing education school could coordinate community-focused learning opportunities across all of the polytechnic's schools.

School of Human and Social Development

This school would provide a home for programs that are currently (or have been) well established within Aurora College and that should continue to be improved and built on into the future. These include areas such as teaching, social work, education, and certification programs positioning residents for employment in health and social fields.

It is important to recognize that while some programs might carry significant costs, the benefits of producing for example, social workers and nurses who are NWT residents, with established homes and family ties, mitigates costs associated with recruitment and retention when such professionals are recruited from outside of the NWT. This school would provide an opportunity for programs to be marketed as high quality, less expensive, Indigenous culture rooted options, distinguishing them from programs offered at other universities in Canada. Exchange programs within and beyond Canada could also position the programs for important academic exposure, innovation, and beneficial partnerships with other post-secondary institutions, over the longer term. As more health programs across Canada begin to understand the significance of cultural safety in health, the NWT is well-positioned to establish itself as a leader in this area of teaching and research, which will attract funding, partnerships, and students.

School of Land Connection and Sustainability

This school would be devoted to academic and applied programs focusing on natural and physical science; land monitoring, management and enforcement; climate change; and land claims and co-management implementation skills. As land claim and self government agreements and their associated authorities are implemented, the territory will see a growing demand for skilled workers in the above areas, in addition to ongoing need for land-based

researchers, geographic information systems skills, and land-based survival and cultural skills and knowledge. Indigenous governments, university research programs, and new funding associated with natural and physical science research would benefit from and contribute to the school's programming and initiatives. In this area in particular, the NWT could be a national leader, an institutional element that would be important for distinguishing the polytechnic in Canada. Innovative offerings based on strengths unique to the NWT should be an important strategic consideration in implementation planning.

School of Applied Business and Technology

This school would build on the successful business administration diploma program, and the trades apprenticeship training successes, as well as other courses associated with readiness for careers in trades, mining and the business sector. New areas in eco-tourism, marketing, and wilderness-based businesses would also be associated with this school. This school could also provide responsive partnerships and programming with industry, as well as build on existing strengths within various communities, and become a catalyst for local economic development such as providing access to infrastructure such as maker space areas and other business supports.

Of fundamental importance in terms of course offerings would be financial and organizational management. Particularly as self government and land claim agreements are implemented, with unique authorities distinct from mere municipalities, the ability for workers in these organizations to have sound financial and management skills will help to determine the level of positive impact land claim and self government implementation will have in the lives of residents and for the overall NWT economy.

School of Applied Arts and Culture

Arts and culture in the NWT spans fine arts, film, radio, television, digital platforms, and land-based cultural practices. This school could potentially provide Bachelor of Arts degrees in specialized areas, as well as provide diploma and technical training in arts, culture, and communications in demand across the NWT.

The school could be a catalyst for accessing arts and communication funding and opportunities, disseminating best practices, short courses, and post-secondary study pathways for students, and employment and professional development pathways for practitioners seeking skill development and sharing best practices. There are many opportunities to partner with well-established existing academic and practical programs at other institutions currently offering applied arts and culture programming in Canada.

Providing an academic pathway for students who intend to stay in the NWT and seek employment with Indigenous, federal, territorial, and community governments, to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree would make an important contribution to developing a Northern work

force. This would also prepare more NWT residents to undertake advanced professional and graduate degrees, without having to leave the NWT.

Principles Shaping Institutional Development

The following principles should be considered as fundamental to the institutional development of the polytechnic. While we appreciate the guiding principles identified in the GNWT discussion paper on areas of specialization, we have serious concerns that these are not adequately responsive to the particular situation of the NWT.

In particular we are concerned that the principles make no mention of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration), despite its implementation being a priority of the GNWT, and despite critical recommendations for its implementation by the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Inquiry Final Report* (2019), and the calls to action of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada* (2015). If the GNWT is serious about implementing the UN Declaration, this oversight must be addressed in planning going forward. Below we offer constructive recommendations on expanding the current universal principles to also take into account the particular history, experiences, and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples in the NWT. To be clear: a principle of “cultural responsiveness” is out of step with the significant advances made within academia, and politically, and socially over the last decade. An NWT polytechnic must be a thought and action leader, not a follower, or worse, a laggard.

As the NWT economy changes, and global warming impacts culture, ways of life, infrastructure and climate in the NWT, and Indigenous governments’ rights recognition result in a growing federation of governments with new sources of funding to match shifts and growth in responsibilities, the polytechnic promises to be a catalyst for cooperation and collaboration in response to educational and economic needs of NWT residents. Public post-secondary institutions are often at the forefront of social and economic progress. We see the following principles as essential for harnessing the energy, partnerships, and funding opportunities that positive collaborations and partnerships can bring. These principles are also essential to create a context for thought leadership on the pressing social, economic, wellness, and political issues facing NWT residents.

Implementing the UN Declaration Within the Polytechnic

The 46 articles of the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples “constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous people of the world.”¹⁰ The federal government, and now the Government of the Northwest Territories, have recognized the need to implement the UN Declaration and have prioritized it. The transformation of the Aurora College to a polytechnic should be guided by the GNWT’s stated commitment to implementing the UN Declaration. Several of the principles we list below are

drawn directly from the UN Declaration. Recommendations regarding areas of teaching we recommended above also contribute to implementing the UN Declaration.

The polytechnic should commit to hiring Indigenous professors and heads of its schools where possible. With a majority of students who are Indigenous, it is important for students to interact with Indigenous professors and institutional leaders who are Indigenous academics and knowledge holders. Indigenous cultural knowledge holders should be incorporated into the schools as instructors where possible. Student assistance should include access to Elders for guidance and personal development opportunities where possible.

Instructors and staff should also have the benefit of Elders' guidance and insight as part of their professional development, and to consult with about how to more effectively teach and interact with students.

GNWT should consider establishing a Vice President Academic, Indigenous Programming to advise on how the polytechnic's programming could meaningfully and effectively build on Indigenous strengths and incorporate Indigenous knowledge. They would be responsible for recommending and planning how to implement the UN Declaration in the delivery of academic content, and with respect to ongoing institutional development. We also recommend as a matter of priority, appointing a chancellor who would be an individual with demonstrated Indigenous language and cultural knowledge based skills and a demonstrated interest in research and leadership. Ensuring Indigenous individuals with mandates for building on Indigenous strengths will be critical at the level of leadership and executive decision making at the college, to ensure the integrity of an approach that incorporates Indigenous knowledge and strengths throughout the institution and its operations.

Land-Based Learning

Land based learning should be a cornerstone of the polytechnic. There are a variety of NWT initiatives – educational, philanthropic, Indigenous government and community based - that currently exist which in partnership, could form the basis for a well-coordinated and well - developed approach to land-based learning opportunities within all schools of the polytechnic. This paper recommends that leadership in this area should rest with the School of Indigenous Resurgence. This would provide a home for the development of policy, planning, material and physical equipment, advice, and capacity that other Schools could draw on for their own land-based initiatives. It would also provide a catalyst for a variety of partners to work together to share experiences, resources, and tools utilized for land-based initiatives. The school as a catalyst would likely result in partners being able to leverage the experience and capacity of each other, and for students to gain greater access and experiences in land-based learning, and insights that will prove valuable for teaching, learning, and research.

Cultural Competency and Safety

Cultural safety and competency, including cultural humility, must be a key feature of the polytechnic as an institution and in terms of the way that it operates. Given the experiences and ongoing impacts of residential schooling on Indigenous peoples in the NWT, creating a culturally safe space for students and staff will be essential. Fortunately, the transformation process has significant progress to build on in this area, through work that has already been accomplished by Aurora College staff, students, and leadership. For example, there are strong potential linkages between cultural safety initiatives within GNWT departments such as Health and Social Services with the Schools of Human and Social Development, and Continuing Education and Post-Secondary Readiness, with respect to developing and delivering curriculum and training relevant to front line health care workers.

A Vice President Academic, Indigenous Programming, would be positioned within a leadership role to make recommendations and advise on budgetary resources for implementing cultural safety protocols, practices, and training for staff and students to ensure the institution provides opportunities for everyone to engage in cultural safety training and practice cultural safety in their respective roles.

Partnerships

Partnerships will be essential to a new polytechnic. We provided extensive commentary on the potential of partnerships – for expertise, funding, and collaborations that could catalyze and attract significant new funding flows in the NWT – in a previous paper on the Knowledge Economy.¹¹ We encourage review of this paper as a basis for considering institutional policy and functional authorities development that would encourage and enable polytechnic leadership and staff to build on existing strengths, and create a polytechnic that is a network rather than a hierarchy. Resources are too few, demands are great, and it is pointless to envision a polytechnic that may duplicate existing programs and organizations, or worse – not engage with them, effectively creating silos where there could be highly productive collaborations and cost savings.

In summary, partnerships would be a cornerstone of the development of each school within the polytechnic. Indigenous governments, industry, existing educational and research organizations, NGOs, research institutes – all of these could bring expertise, funding, and students to the polytechnic, and significantly benefit from interdisciplinary cross-collaborations that a single institutional and administrative umbrella could provide. A number of universities outside of the NWT have already demonstrated significant interest and investment in research in the NWT; such partnerships could enhance and catalyze potential capabilities of the polytechnic.

Building Trust

Residential schooling has become a reference point and framework for understanding the implications for Indigenous peoples' interactions with many government and non-government institutions that originate outside of Indigenous societies or thought frameworks, which hold power, and which potentially exert significant power and resources over Indigenous peoples. Trust building between institutions that serve all residents, and Indigenous peoples, is an ongoing project. The principles and all recommendations and suggestions made in this paper assume that trust building, and specific methods, tools, and practices for building trust between the institution and Indigenous communities, will be a foundational concern as the polytechnic develops.

Drawing on and Supporting Existing Resources

As of 2015 in Yellowknife alone, there are approximately 65 PhD holders, and over 1000 residents with Masters degrees.¹² Approximately 69% of adult Yellowknifers hold some sort of post-secondary certification, including trades, college, and university education.¹³ For the whole NWT, the number of PhD holders rises to 95, with approximately 16,500 NWT residents holding a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree including trades, college, and university education. These statistics do not include Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders who have extensive cultural and land-based expertise gained over many decades of learning and practice.

Many resident NWT PhD holders work outside of the college as an institution: within the federal and territorial governments, Indigenous governments, land claim institutions, and in the private sector. PhD holders can provide highly specialized teaching and research skills. Similarly, professions such as law, accounting, medicine, health care, counselling, language experts, and culture experts can also provide instruction within a polytechnic. This would require innovation in partnerships with individuals, their existing employers, and the potential for secondments and other agreements with employers to draw on resident expertise in the NWT, and promote capacity flows between organizations and employers. A polytechnic would be well positioned to promote learning opportunities and knowledge transfer between potential employers and the polytechnic students and staff, by drawing on those same employers for the expertise that students will need for successful careers. Leveraging existing resources in this way would lead to the creation of new employment, and attract new research and private sector funding to support ongoing and sustained teaching and research.

Considerations for Organizational Development

The following are recommended elements that we recommend for consideration in designing the polytechnic's operations and programming.

Responsive and Non-Static Programming

Core programs would anchor the polytechnic's reputation and core focus, while also providing a basis for responding to programming that meets shifting needs within the NWT economy. Aurora College has engaged in this approach for a number of years, particularly in relation to the mining sector, offering mobile trades and training. We would encourage the continuation of this approach across all schools within the polytechnic. Expanding the polytechnic's reach and establishing its reputation could also be enhanced by offering MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that build on unique NWT expertise in areas such as Indigenous governance, land-based education, climate change adaptations, and Indigenous language instruction.

Developing responsive programming through various schools and the School of Post-Secondary Readiness and Continuing Education would provide opportunities to build on local and Indigenous strengths. Affiliated sites at existing organizations, for example, community greenhouses, could benefit from program development and instructor training within the School of Land Connection and Sustainability. Similarly, Indigenous governments may seek to pool resources to support the development and delivery of training specific to self government and land claim implementation authorities, which lie outside of municipal or territorial government legal frameworks and responsibilities, and such needs may change over time.

Frameworks for Accessing External Funding

Universities, colleges and polytechnics across Canada have the potential to draw on significant federal funding, and funding from industry and philanthropic sources to build their institutions. In the NWT, federal tri-council significantly under-funds research in the NWT.¹⁴ This could change if the polytechnic develops a dedicated research funding access initiative, to position Indigenous governments and other organizations to directly receive research dollars. The institution could also seek funding for research chairs, PhDs and Indigenous Knowledge Holders resident in the North with a mandate to teach and research in the NWT. Without a mechanism for working with Indigenous governments and other organizations to establish eligibility for research funding, significant research resources are bypassing the NWT each year. The Aurora Research Institute and Aurora College have taken steps to seek additional federal research funding for their internal programs which is an essential first step in capacity building. This effort must be expanded and must take a partner-oriented approach to its continued development within a new polytechnic.

Independence from GNWT

A hallmark of the legitimacy of a polytechnic will be its governance independence from the GNWT. Publicly funded post-secondary institutions in Canada are free of political and bureaucratic control. While this is partly a function of significant external funding, it is also a basic principle of academic freedom. If the GNWT wishes to establish a polytechnic that can

flourish and will establish a national reputation as a legitimate, high quality educational institution, it must be without political or bureaucratic control or interference.

This will require a shift in governance; it will require shifting employment of staff from the GNWT to the polytechnic as a standalone institution; it will require an academic staff cohort able to represent itself to the polytechnic leadership and governance structure; and will require an approach to academic and support staff employment consistent with the specific needs and requirements of academic and support staff in Canada. Academic freedom will be essential for the polytechnic to be part of the post-secondary family of institutions in Canada.

The polytechnic will also require an administrative and financial structure that can receive funds from and enter into partnerships with industry, such as access to charitable status that can benefit from donations, gifts, and bequests; and, the ability to work with local authorities to establish needed infrastructure, tax arrangements, and other local services.

Finally, the issue of a headquarters is a distraction from political support for the transformation. As per our previous public discussion on the future of the polytechnic and the Knowledge Economy, we do not see the need for a headquarters. No one can deny that it is simply bizarre that Yellowknife lacks a purpose-built campus, which is hampering the overall development of the college and likely a polytechnic, and disadvantaging Yellowknife-based students who come from all over the NWT, for no good reason. That must be rectified. However, that does not mean that the infrastructure or programming established in Fort Smith, or administrative positions, should move. There should not be a “headquarters” *per se*, as that structural frame is an administrative ordering reflecting static, bureaucratic structures incompatible with a forward looking and flexibly operating institution. Current administrative services may stay as they are; however, the community that a president or heads of schools choose to reside in, should be flexible. At least one head of school should reside in each regional centers of Inuvik, Fort Smith, and Yellowknife. In addition, we would recommend that heads of schools should also reside in Norman Wells and Hay River.

Conclusion

At a time when the NWT is facing an uncertain economic future, and with a burgeoning debt load, the college to polytechnic transformation process must provide a basis for an effective, legitimate institution which has the broad-based support of residents and partners. The process must create an institution that builds on existing strengths, to position the institution to achieve excellence where it can in its early stage of implementation, and over time build toward its full potential.

In this paper we have provided alternative and complementary views and insights on how this can be achieved, in response to the two discussion papers provided by the GNWT with respect to governance and areas of teaching and research. The response is shaped by our combined five decades of research, teaching and advocacy in and outside of academia, and within a variety of research and institutional contexts, and creating and implementing new institutions.

Fundamental to the contributions in this paper, are a polytechnic transformation process that has the following characteristics:

1. It should be led by credible leadership within both academia and Indigenous communities, who do not work within the GNWT, as president and chancellor, respectively;
2. It is shaped by the fundamental principles of building on Indigenous strengths and implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as per the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the final report of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry (2019), and the mandate priorities of the Government of the Northwest Territories (2019);
3. It must be rooted in collaboration with partners who will form a core of support as the polytechnic is built over time, and who must commit to supporting the compromises required to implement such a large, long term project;
4. Building trust between GNWT and partners is a foundational requirement to a successful process, which will be done in part by bringing to life the above characteristics of a transformation process.

About Hotìì ts'eeda

Hotìì ts'eeda is a research support centre for community members, organizations and researchers involved in Northwest Territories health and health research. One of 11 Units in Canada, it is the only one hosted by a self-governing Indigenous government, the Tłìchq Government, and governed by a council including a majority of NWT Indigenous governments.

Hotìì ts'eeda's vision is to support health research and training that is rooted in Dene Naowo, Inuvialuit and Metis knowledge and responds to the needs of patients, communities and governments. Hotìì 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.

Hotìì ts'eeda aims to connect researchers and communities, build capacity and contribute to a health system that is culturally competent and inclusive of Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing. We do this by acting as a connector: connecting researchers with communities, Indigenous organizations, and NWT health research priorities.

Hotìì ts'eeda is a Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) SUPPORT Unit led by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). SPOR's aims are to engage patients as partners in health research, ensure that health research is relevant to patients' and policy-makers' priorities, and ensure that research results are used to improve healthcare systems and practices.

Visit www.nwtspor.ca for more information about Hotìì ts'eeda.

Contact us at HTAdmin@tlichogov.ca with any inquiries or requests for further information.



Endnotes

¹ See Hotì ts'eeda 's knowledge economy paper Irlbacher-Fox, Stephanie, *Developing a Sustainable Knowledge Economy in the Northwest Territories*, March 2019. Access the paper at: <https://nwtsp.or.ca/developing-sustainable-knowledge-economy-northwest-territories>

² Aurora College 2018-19 Annual Report, page 15, as accessed at https://www.ntassembly.ca/sites/assembly/files/td_30-191.pdf

³ Aurora College 2018-19 Annual Report, page 15, as accessed at https://www.ntassembly.ca/sites/assembly/files/td_30-191.pdf

⁴ There are a variety of southern based Canadian universities with well-established research programs in the NWT, such as the University of Alberta Indigenous and Global Health Group; Wilfrid Laurier University's partnership with GNWT and research on climate change, which Hotì ts'eeda has supported. Hotì ts'eeda has currently provided bursary funding to students in the Northern Indigenous Counselling Initiative which is a partnership with Rhodes College in Vancouver. The Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation is an example of a local independent organization offering land-based services supported by Hotì ts'eeda in the past through funding and in kind supports.

⁵ It is important to say here that in the absence of an external leader, the current lead and GNWT officials have made solid progress on this initiative and that deserves recognition; it is not an easy job, and those involved are to be commended and supported to continue to make important contributions to this project.

⁶ The president should hold a PhD, not an earned doctorate. This is an important distinction, since a PhD holder is expert in the creation of knowledge, while an earned doctorate (EdD, DBA, JD) is expert in using knowledge. A new president must have credibility within academia in their field of expertise, with publications attesting to that. GNWT should seek appropriate advice on ensuring that academic leadership is credible nationally if not internationally, and understand the credentials as well as competencies appropriate to the task.

⁷ See Ottman, Jacqueline, 2017. "Canada's Indigenous Peoples' access to post-secondary education: Sprit of the New Buffalo", In Fawley et al. *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education: From Policy to Practice*. (Toronto: Springer). Open access at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_7; an Wilson, Kory, 2018 "Pulling Together: Foundations Guide: A guide for Indigenization of post secondary institutions". Open access at: <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/>; and Trealeven, Sarah, in *Maclean's*, December 07, 2018 "How Canadian Universities are Responding to the TRC's Calls to Action" as found at <https://www.macleans.ca/education/how-canadian-universities-are-responding-to-the-trcs-calls-to-action/>

⁸ Aurora College 2018-2019 Annual Report, page 15 "Full Time Equivalent Enrolments by Campus" table. https://www.ntassembly.ca/sites/assembly/files/td_30-191.pdf

⁹ See for example the most recent audited financial statements of all NWT school boards publicly available as of October 15 2020 as found at https://www.ntassembly.ca/sites/assembly/files/td_12-191.pdf. These indicate significant gaps in resources between Yellowknife school boards and those outside of Yellowknife.

¹⁰ The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can be found here: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

¹¹ See Hotiì ts'eeda 's knowledge economy paper Irlbacher-Fox, Stephanie, *Developing a Sustainable Knowledge Economy in the Northwest Territories*, March 2019. Access the paper at: <https://nwtspor.ca/developing-sustainable-knowledge-economy-northwest-territories>

¹² Statistics Canada, 2016 Census. "Highest certificate, diploma, or degree", as found October 15, 2020 at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=995&Geo2=PR&Code2=61&SearchText=Yellowknife&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=995&TABID=1&type=0>

¹³ NWT Statistics Bureau. "Education and Labour Market Activity, 2016 Census" as found October 15, 2020 at

https://www.statsnwt.ca/census/2016/Labour%20and%20Education%202016_Final.pdf

¹⁴ See See Hotiì ts'eeda 's knowledge economy paper: *Developing a Sustainable Knowledge Economy in the Northwest Territories*, March 2019. Access the paper at: <https://nwtspor.ca/developing-sustainable-knowledge-economy-northwest-territories> for a discussion on the implications of research funds in the NWT currently, and how the lack of data and understanding research funding impacts undersells the economic significance of research and associated activities in the NWT, and impairs NWT organizations' ability to leverage such funds or to access additional research funds available.