

Aurora College Transformation

Approach to Indigenous Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has committed to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university over the next five to six years. The intent of this document is to outline the GNWT's and Aurora College's approach to engage Indigenous governments during the transformation process. It is hoped that engagement will occur in the spirit of collaboration and a shared commitment to provide all residents with increased opportunities to gain a quality post-secondary education.

The GNWT has started work to strengthen the foundations of Aurora College and plan for change. This is the first phase of the transformation and will include short-term improvements to student support and programming. It will also include decisions about the overall strategic direction, future programming and capital planning of Aurora College as it begins the transformation process. For the polytechnic university to be effective, efficient and sustainable, such decisions must be made in the right order and at the right time. Success of the transformation also relies on decisions being informed by genuine engagement with Indigenous governments.

Knowledge shared by Indigenous governments will help to strengthen Aurora College and create a polytechnic university that is reflective of the people it serves. For engagement to be genuine it must occur on the right topics, in the right way and at the right time.

The *United National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* provide the basis for how GNWT and Aurora College will engage Indigenous government during the transformation process. Wording from these documents has been incorporated and will guide the conduct of GNWT and Aurora College staff involved with the transformation. Moving forward, staff will continue to learn from their success and failures during the transformation process and continuously seek improvements to their approach to engagement.

This approach is not an agreement or contract; rather it is a public statement of how the GNWT and Aurora College aspire to engage with Indigenous governments during the transformation process. It is important to note also that this document applies only to the development and implementation of a plan to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university. It does not necessarily reflect how GNWT, Aurora College or the future polytechnic university may engage Indigenous governments outside of this project.

NWT POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2019-2029

The GNWT released the vision and goals for the entire post-secondary education system in August 2019 in the NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework, 2019-2029. These will guide the government and all post-secondary institutions, including Aurora College, as we work to better meet the needs of northern residents and employers.

Vision

Every resident of the Northwest Territories has an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential by obtaining a post-secondary education from institutions that are student-centred, accessible, high quality, relevant and accountable.

Prioritize Student Success

Prioritizing student success means that students will be met where they are in their educational journey when they arrive, with a support system and opportunities for success along the way. A student-centred institution also reflects the people it serves and engagement with Indigenous governments will help better reflect the significant portion of the current student body who are Indigenous.

Increase Access to Post-Secondary Education Opportunities

Along with being accountable, efficient and sustainable, one of the main reasons for the transformation itself is to increase opportunities for NWT residents. Through an expansion of program options, students will have a great deal of flexibility within a range of programs from developmental studies, certificate, diploma, degree to trade programs.

Remain Responsive to Labour Demands in the NWT

We know that 78 percent of jobs in the NWT will require some level of post-secondary education in the next 10 years. Strong partnerships with industry, and Indigenous, community and territorial governments will help ensure the polytechnic university is preparing Northerners to be first in line for northern jobs.

Remain Responsive to Local and Regional Needs

To facilitate the creation and sharing of knowledge required to respond to challenges – both territorial and regional, as they arise – the transformation of Aurora College must include on-going engagement with Indigenous governments and communities. This approach will support the flow of ideas and the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the polytechnic university.

Support Growth of the Knowledge Economy

An educated and skilled population is critical to creating, sharing and using knowledge to enhance the growth and development of the territory. The polytechnic university will use faculty expertise and student creativity and entrepreneurship to support growth and diversity of knowledge to help address a range of real-world problems here in the NWT. Seventy-five per cent of Aurora College students are Indigenous and engaging with Indigenous governments can provide insight into how we can inspire creativity and entrepreneurship.

AURORA COLLEGE TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW

In October 2018, the GNWT committed to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university over 5-6 years – a process that is aligned with the vision and goals outlined in the NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework.

Generally, a polytechnic university combines the practical approach of a college education and the depth of study usually associated with a university program. Polytechnic programs are skills-intensive and technology-based. Hands-on learning opportunities provide students with practical training for in-demand jobs. Program and curriculum decisions at polytechnic universities are also made in close collaboration with representatives from industry, government and Indigenous organizations in to ensure graduates attain skills that are relevant to the current job market.

The GNWT and Aurora College are working together to create a post-secondary education institution that provides more opportunities to prepare northerners for northern jobs. A polytechnic university is about meeting students where they are in their education journey and providing them with opportunities that will help them reach their immediate and long-term education and employment goals.

Serving the communities in the NWT has been a core part of the Aurora College mandate and this will remain a fundamental component of a polytechnic university. The College's transformation will require a re-examination of the Community Learning Centres (CLCs) to better understand how small community residents are able to more readily access and complete a postsecondary education.

Attention will also be given to the need for student pathways extending from the secondary school system into the post-secondary education system. This is a key element of the transformation as it will allow students, if they choose, to begin working toward post-secondary education before completing high school. Collaboration with Indigenous governments will help to ensure the accessibility of post-secondary education and that prospective students are given the opportunity to enter the polytechnic university having already met some of the educational and training requirements of their chosen program.

Research is also a critical component of a polytechnic university and focuses on practical and commercial research generally based on industry and community needs. Research isn't undertaken solely for its own sake, but to develop products and processes to fulfill a defined need.

ENGAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Engagement priorities guide the conduct of GNWT and Aurora College staff during the process of transforming Aurora College into a polytechnic university. They include support good governance, support reconciliation, reflect cultural values and practices, and build trust. These priorities help to ensure engagement is conducted with integrity toward an effective, efficient and sustainable polytechnic university that serves all residents of the NWT.

Priority 1: Support Good Governance

- The future polytechnic university will be a public post-secondary education institution accountable to the GNWT for meeting the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents from across the NWT.
- GNWT and Aurora College will engage with representatives from Indigenous governments, communities and industry to better understand the needs of NWT residents as they pertain to post-secondary education.
- The GNWT will build responsible and accountable government-to government relationships that are responsive and flexible, and reflect the unique interests and challenges of Indigenous governments.
- The GNWT and Aurora College will recognize diverse governance structures of Indigenous governments and be open to engaging with the governments and community leaders that represent Indigenous peoples in each region.

Priority 2: Support Reconciliation

- Reconciliation is an obligation and opportunity faced by all public institutions in Canada, including GNWT and Aurora College.
- Through the transformation process, GNWT and Aurora College will work to ensure that staff involved in the transformation will be open to learning and changing worldviews through engagement in education about the history of Indigenous peoples.
- All those involved in the transformation process should maintain an ongoing personal practice of critical self-reflection, paying attention to how social and historical contexts shape the post-secondary education system and attempt to recognize how power and privilege have impacted opportunities for Indigenous people.

Priority 3: Reflect Cultural Values and Practices

- To be effective, efficient and sustainable, the development of a polytechnic university will focus resources to develop academic and research programs within defined areas of specialization.
- During the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university, the GNWT and Aurora College will respect the rights of Indigenous governments to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, knowledge and expressions.
- GNWT and Aurora College will consider the diversity of Indigenous cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations that exist across the NWT and work to reflect the value of this diversity when establishing the polytechnic university.

Priority 4: Build Trust

- GNWT and Aurora College will work to ensure Indigenous governments understand the transformation process and are aware of opportunities to participate.
- Through the establishment of a polytechnic university, GNWT and Aurora College will work toward ensuring that post-secondary education opportunities are accessible, without discrimination.
- GNWT and Aurora College will engage in a manner that will encourage a diversity of views to be presented and will respect and understand those views through genuine, respectful dialogue that incorporates listening and honesty.
- GNWT and Aurora College will work to ensure Indigenous governments understand the participation rates and educational outcomes of the people they represent.

PROPOSED METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

GNWT and Aurora College will work collaboratively with Indigenous governments to determine the engagement opportunities that will help to inform the transformation of the College into a polytechnic university—an institution that is built by the north, for the north, across the north.

Engagement with Indigenous governments will be conducted with integrity and in good faith by making the process transparent, being accountable for the commitments made and not engaging on issues that have already been decided.

Acknowledging that collaboration is not necessarily about agreement but about having an understanding of each partners' roles and responsibilities in reaching a common goal, there is a need to establish a common understanding between the GNWT, Aurora College and Indigenous governments on why, how and when engagement will occur.

GNWT and Aurora College recognize the diverse governance structures of Indigenous governments and are open to engaging with governments and community leaders that represent Indigenous peoples in

each region. In addition, GNWT and Aurora College will routinely ask Indigenous governments to identify additional opportunities for engagement. As such, this section outlines examples of how GNWT and Aurora College may engage, but the method of engagement should be, to the extent possible, adapted to the needs of this involved.

Engagement with Indigenous governments will help ensure that the polytechnic university reflects the value of the diversity of Indigenous cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations that exist across the NWT. This may be achieved through engagement at different levels, including the leadership, staff and community levels.

Leadership Engagement

The Minister of Education, Culture and Employment (Minister); Associate Deputy Minister of Post-Secondary Education Renewal (Associate DM) and Indigenous government leaders may continue to engage directly on matters related to the Aurora College Transformation. Regular engagement at the leadership level is important to maintaining a common understanding of the Aurora College Transformation including current work and overall timeline for completion of the transformation process.

Key Features:

- The GNWT and Aurora College will continue to respect existing agreement and memorandums of understanding around government-to-government engagements.
- Leadership engagement may occur through meetings dedicated to the topic of the Aurora College Transformation or as part of another broader meeting such as a bi-lateral meeting of governments.
- Indigenous government leaders may request meetings when issues arise or to receive an update on the overall transformation process.
- The Minister and Associate DM may request meetings when issues arise or to provide an overall update on the transformation process.
- The Minister or Associate DM may send Indigenous leaders a written request for their review of matters related to the transformation.

Ongoing Staff Collaboration

Ongoing collaboration among staff will allow the GNWT, Aurora College and Indigenous governments to work together in addressing issues and be proactive in maximizing opportunities. For this collaboration to be successful, it must be a truly collaborative approach and not simply an information sharing exercise. Working together in the areas of post-secondary education will also help to build and maintain expertise among Indigenous governments that will benefit engagement beyond the transformation process.

Each Indigenous government may wish to identify 1-2 key individuals from their organization to collaborate with GNWT and Aurora College staff on specified parts of the Aurora College Transformation. The individuals will be provided regular updates and engaged directly around specific aspects of the transformation.

Key Features:

- GNWT will facilitate and support ongoing collaboration to help ensure full participation by all those nominated to collaborate on the Aurora College transformation.
- Such collaboration may occur through virtual meetings (phone or video conference), in-person meetings or extended workshops.
- GNWT will provide a summary of outcomes from staff-level meetings to ensure GNWT, Aurora College and Indigenous government leadership are up-to-date on progress being made and aware of any arising issues.

Community Engagement

When more specific information needs to be gathered or disseminated, GNWT and Aurora College may determine that broader engagement is required in order to best inform their decision-making. This type of engagement could include public announcements, conducting surveys or hosting public meetings.

Key Features:

- The GNWT and Aurora College will ensure Indigenous leadership is aware of upcoming community engagements.
- The GNWT and Aurora College will be responsible for all official public communications regarding the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university.
- The GNWT and Aurora College will work with Indigenous governments to help ensure information related to the transformation is accessible to all residents.