

Government of  
Northwest Territories

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# NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework 2019-2029





# Message from the Minister



To ensure a vibrant and successful post-secondary education system in the Northwest Territories, we must have a clear vision guiding the path forward. From our early childhood strategy, *Right from the Start*, to our JK-12 Education Renewal and Innovation Framework, our education system is guided by visions of how we can best support current and future generations of Northerners.

I am pleased to present a vision and goals for the post-secondary education system that are informed by more than 740 voices from all regions of the Northwest Territories, and that build on the substantive work already underway. As the central part of the Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework (Framework), the vision and goals will help to guide the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and post-secondary institutions as we work together to better meet the needs of northern residents and employers.

The Framework is strengthened by the diversity of voices we heard through our engagement.

The Northwest Territories is inclusive of multiple cultures, and the diverse views and experiences of our residents must be reflected in the education opportunities that are made available. Success in

our post-secondary education system means adapting this system to meet the needs of residents, not the other way around.

I thank those who took the time to share their ideas and perspectives on the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead. It takes a community to educate our children and we can only succeed in realizing the vision and goals for post-secondary education by working in collaboration.

There are many factors that make the Northwest Territories unique from other parts of Canada and this Framework recognizes that we need to do more to understand how we can both seize opportunities and overcome challenges as they arise. This Framework was developed with the understanding that this journey begins by understanding where

we are now and where we want to be as a territory.

We have a great opportunity to transform post-secondary education in the NWT for the long term to ensure NWT residents can get the skills and training they need to get the jobs NWT employers are hiring for today and into the future.

***Honourable Caroline Cochrane***  
*Minister of Education, Culture  
and Employment*



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# Executive Summary

Post-secondary education is any schooling or training that takes place after high school. The purpose of the NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework (Framework) is to identify the Government of the Northwest Territories vision and goals for post-secondary education for the next ten years.

A shared vision is fundamentally important in making changes to post-secondary education happen. It inspires individuals and organizations connected to post-secondary education to commit to the change. It also provides them with a guide or framework for setting goals, making decisions and coordinating work related to post-secondary education and research.

Connections between post-secondary education and research are addressed as part of the Framework. Post-secondary education and research are interdependent. Achieving and maintaining excellence in either area requires a coordinated approach.

Teaching and learning at post-secondary education institutions should be informed by current research and, to the greatest extent possible, educators should be participating in research projects. In turn, the success of research projects depends on a post-secondary education system that maintains a labour force

with the capacity to conduct the research. This relationship between research (knowledge creation), and teaching and learning (knowledge dissemination) is what makes the post-secondary education system central to any knowledge economy.

The Framework also supports increased collaboration between the post-secondary education and research institutions already operating in the NWT. Viewing post-secondary education as a system means supporting collaboration between public and private institutions, Indigenous governments, non-governmental organisations, communities and industry – each of which will benefit from the development of a strong post-secondary education system in the NWT.

Although the decision to develop a vision and goals for post-secondary education in the NWT came out of the Aurora College Foundational Review, the potential benefits of the Framework extend to all post-secondary education

stakeholders. The GNWT supports the growth and development of multiple post-secondary education institutions in the NWT, as well as partnerships with post-secondary education institutions from across Canada. Post-secondary education is a cooperative system that, in the context of the NWT, is dependent on continuous collaborations.

## 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.

## GOALS

1. Prioritize student success
2. Increase access to post-secondary education opportunities
3. Remain responsive to labour demands in the NWT
4. Remain responsive to local and regional needs
5. Support growth of the knowledge economy



# Background

Post-secondary education is an integral part of economic and social development. As countries around the world attempt to struggle with economic inequality, social disparities, climate change and declining health and well-being, increased participation in quality post-secondary education has become a priority of many governments. Canada is no exception, with federal, provincial and territorial governments working to create new opportunities for citizens to access a wide range of education and training opportunities.

The GNWT Mandate 2016-2019 recognizes that improvements to education play an important role in the economic and social development of the territory, and calls for a refocusing of support for post-secondary education institutions.

The need for a clearly articulated vision for post-secondary education was highlighted as part of the Aurora College Foundational Review. The Government Response to the Findings and Recommendations of the Aurora College Foundational Review (Government Response) accepted that Aurora College be transformed into a polytechnic university and noted the critical need to establish a territory-wide vision for post-secondary education to help guide the transformation:

*... the process of transforming Aurora College will begin with creation of a NWT-wide vision for post-secondary education. This vision will provide context for the College's vision, mission and goals and help shape the transformation process. (Government Response, P. 5).*

Although the decision to develop a vision and goals for post-secondary education in the NWT came out of the Aurora College Foundational Review, the potential benefits of the Framework extend to all post-secondary education partners and stakeholders. The GNWT supports the development and growth of multiple post-secondary education institutions in the NWT, as well as partnerships with post-secondary education institutions from across Canada.

Post-secondary education is a cooperative system that, in the context of the NWT, is dependent on continuous collaborations between public and private institutions, Indigenous governments, non-governmental organisations, communities and industry.

Establishing a vision and goals for post-secondary education is a major step in the GNWT's renewed approach to post-secondary education, namely one that sees post-secondary education as a primary economic and social driver in the NWT. First and foremost, the development and growth of the post-secondary education system is a means of engaging the NWT population more broadly in lifelong, integrated learning. Through this lens, investments in post-secondary education can be viewed as key to developing the skilled workforce required to engage in both current and future labour market opportunities, including those required to advance the knowledge economy. Many other benefits extend from success in this regard, including improvements to the physical and social well-being of NWT residents.



# Vision Process

## Leadership

This work has been coordinated by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), but support for the development and growth of post-secondary education extends across multiple GNWT departments. As such, the government's work around post-secondary education has been guided by inter-departmental oversight committees of Ministers and Deputy Ministers from the GNWT Departments of Executive and Indigenous Affairs (EIA); Finance (FIN); Industry Tourism and Investment (ITI); and ECE. The GNWT has also created the position of Associate Deputy Minister of Post-secondary Education Renewal within ECE to oversee the development of the vision and goals, and to guide the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university.

## A Continuum of Work

The development of a vision and goals for post-secondary education builds on significant work already undertaken by the GNWT over the past two years and will now guide continued work in this area moving forward.

The Foundational Review of Aurora College and the Government Response set the GNWT on a new path toward increasing opportunities for residents to access a quality post-secondary education inside the NWT, by committing to the transformation of Aurora College into a Polytechnic University.

For the new polytechnic university to be effective and sustainable, it was recognized that it must function as part of a post-secondary education system in the NWT and the vision and goals will help to frame how post-secondary education institutions can work together within that system. This will be achieved, in part, through overarching legislation outlining roles and responsibilities of the GNWT and institutions operating as part of the post-secondary education system in the NWT.

## Listening to NWT Residents

Development of the vision and goals began with the engagement of NWT residents and Indigenous governments. To build a vision, we needed to know what northerners think, believe and want when it comes to post-secondary education. Engagement with the public, stakeholders and Indigenous governments was conducted through a survey that was open from March 4 to April 28, 2019.

Members of the public and stakeholders could submit the short seven-question survey online or on paper, on their own, or with the assistance of a Government Services Officer or staff at any ECE Regional Service Centre. Indigenous governments were given the additional option of completing the survey through direct engagement with staff from ECE.





There were a total of 743 survey submissions received including submissions by Indigenous governments. Submissions were received from all regions of the NWT. As expected, the number of submissions was highest in regions where the population is greatest and where there are existing Aurora College campuses, namely North Slave, South Slave and Beaufort Delta.

In communicating the survey, particular attention was paid to those under the age of 29 given the importance of this age group to the future labour market in the NWT. The response rate of those under 29 years old was encouraging and greatly benefited the development of the vision and goals that will guide the post-secondary education sector moving forward.

By engaging directly with Indigenous governments, steps were taken to ensure participation by Indigenous residents with 28% of all respondents self-identifying as Indigenous.

Among survey participants, 78% have had some experience with post-secondary education. Input from a small number of participants that do not have post-secondary experience was also received which has added an important voice to the process of developing the vision and goals.



## Learning from Others

A public speaker series was designed to increase public discussion around the future of our post-secondary education system and inspire survey submissions by members of the public. It also provided post-secondary education stakeholders a venue to present their own ideas about the future of post-secondary education in the NWT.

A total of nine speaking events were held in Yellowknife, Fort Smith and Inuvik. Organizations that hosted events as part of the public speaker series included Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, University of Alberta North, Hoti ts'eeda, NWT Chamber of Commerce, Collège nordique francophone and Aurora College.

## Learning from Existing GNWT Initiatives

The development and growth of post-secondary education shares connections with a great deal of other work already underway. In developing a vision and goals for post-secondary education, existing GNWT policies and programs were examined in order to build on a foundation of success in areas related to post-secondary education, including:

- Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change
- Skills 4 Success 10-year Strategic Framework
- NWT Jobs in Demand: 15-Year Forecast
- NWT Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Strategy
- NWT Small Community Employment Strategy
- NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy
- Knowledge Agenda: Northern Research for Northern Priorities
- Strong Culture, Strong Territory: GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework





# Post-Secondary Education 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.

**Equitable opportunity** means that one's personal conditions do not interfere with their potential to achieve education goals. Equity occurs when everyone has what they need to succeed, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

**Student-centred** is a learning environment where the students and teacher interact equally and where the students learn to collaborate with their peers.

Students are pushed to become more independent and form a style of learning they can use throughout their lives.

**Accessible education** means programs, courses and teaching styles that meet the needs of students from a variety of backgrounds, abilities and learning styles. It also means that students from all communities in the NWT have access to a postsecondary education.

**High Quality** institutions follow national standards and best practices in the design and delivery of their programming.

They ensure that each student is supported, engaged and challenged throughout the learning process.

**Relevant** means that the range of available post-secondary education opportunities remains responsive to labour market demands and local needs.

**Accountable** means ensuring recognized post-secondary institutions are transparent and held accountable for achieving their own mission and goals.



# Post-Secondary Education Goals

Setting goals helps define the vision for post-secondary education and guide how that vision will be reached. They also serve as the basis for evaluating progress in developing and continually improving the NWT post-secondary education system.

## Goal 1: Prioritize student success

The needs of students must always come first. All residents have the potential to pursue some form of post-secondary education and should be provided with the encouragement, guidance and support to achieve their education goals.

There will always be limits on the availability of funds, infrastructure and qualified staff – as there are at all post-secondary education institutions across Canada. However, prioritizing student success means that all areas of a post-secondary education institution must consider their role in supporting student success, both while they are enrolled at the institution and during their transition to the labour market.

The student retention rate (number of students who come back each year of a program) and program completion rate (number of graduates from

a program compared to the number who started) should be primary indicators of success at post-secondary education institutions in the NWT. They demonstrate the ability of an institution to support students throughout their time at the institution. Increasing attention should also be paid to the employment rate of graduates from a post-secondary education program. This will demonstrate to students the long-term benefits of each program and support them in setting education goals.

Prioritizing student success also means actively engaging students in decision-making processes within institutions. Involving students, especially in matters that concern them directly, can make a big difference to the success of a post-secondary education institution. It can also strengthen the sense of belonging felt by students which, in turn, plays a significant part in improving retention and completion rates.

The need for students to come first and the need for ongoing encouragement, guidance and support for students should also be at the core of all Government programs and policies related to post-secondary education. The Government plays a critical role in supporting student success, often in collaboration with post-secondary institutions. For example, the Government continues to play an important role in the monitoring and reporting on the post-secondary education system and is responsible for holding institutions accountable for meeting established standards and following best practices.

## Goal 2: Increase access to post-secondary education opportunities

Ensuring NWT residents have access to quality post-secondary education opportunities begins by increasing options for them to access and complete programs at institutions inside and outside the territory. For some residents the ability to remain close to home and family is critical to their success. For others, the ability to experience new social and academic environments in other parts of Canada and around





the world is an important part of their overall education. When residents choose to stay local for their post-secondary education, this is where NWT culture and heritage can most readily be incorporated. GNWT investments in the development and growth of the post-secondary education system will ensure continued access to a diversity of options both inside and outside the NWT.

As we work to ensure access to post-secondary education for all residents, it is important to acknowledge that access has not been equitable in the past, particularly for Indigenous residents from the territory's smallest communities. Moving to a new community without family support can be overwhelming

and it is unreasonable to assume a standardized approach to post-secondary education will work in the NWT. Recognizing unique obstacles and how those can be overcome through both enhancements to our post-secondary education system and new approaches by post-secondary education institutions is integral to improving access to post-secondary education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents.

Connecting opportunities for employment with education goals is also challenging and can hold individuals back from achieving their full potential. Current and future students require guidance in making informed decisions that will keep them on track

for education and employment success. NWT labour market data forecasts between 28,500 and 36,700 job openings in the NWT from today until the year 2030 – with 78% of those jobs requiring post-secondary education. Focus should be given to bridging education and employment gaps with targeted individual student supports.

Students must have the required education and skills before being accepted to post-secondary education programs. In the short term, those who do not possess the required education or skills can participate in an Adult Basic Learning and Education Program, Occupations and College Access Program or University and College Access Program.



The success of students in post-secondary education is clearly tied to their success in the broader education system. Over the longer term, enhancements to the early childhood, primary and secondary school systems are expected to increase the graduation rates and provide students with more diverse pathways that prepare them for direct entry into a post-secondary education program. Such enhancements will, in turn, increase the ability of NWT residents to pursue post-secondary education opportunities.

Once accepted to a post-secondary education program, many students require access to financial support to achieve their educational goals. The NWT Student Financial Assistance (SFA) Program provides financial assistance to eligible NWT residents to assist with a range of postsecondary education related expenses. Increasing access to quality post-secondary education opportunities requires that the SFA Program continues to be responsive to the needs of students.

A lack of affordable student housing can also sometimes create a barrier to accessing post-secondary education in the NWT. An approach to the management of student housing that is able

to meet the immediate and long-term needs of students in a sustainable manner should be considered by all institutions.

### Goal 3: Remain responsive to labour demands in the NWT

Skilled workers are critical to the NWT's productivity, innovation and economic competitiveness. The labour market in the NWT, and the rest of Canada, will experience dramatic changes in the coming years with an aging workforce on the verge of retirement. This means the competition for skilled labour will only intensify as people begin to exit the labour force in large numbers. At the same time, there is a skills mismatch between the available labour supply and the needs of employers. While there is incredible potential in the NWT, segments of the current working age population are under-educated, under-skilled and unprepared to compete for the many job opportunities that already exist.

There is a growing recognition that the quality of education and training outcomes are more important than the quantity, and that more focus must be placed on developing a skilled

workforce. People want to see a post-secondary education system that prepares NWT residents for available job opportunities and develops a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.

### Goal 4: Remain responsive to local and regional needs

The NWT is experiencing a period of dynamic changes and challenges to our society, economy and environment. Post-secondary education institutions should play a part in addressing such challenges and support capacity building at the local and regional levels. In particular, post-secondary education institutions should facilitate the creation and sharing of knowledge required to respond to challenges as they arise.

To remain responsive to the needs of NWT communities there should be an ongoing process of engagement between post-secondary education institutions, Indigenous governments and communities. This ongoing engagement will best support the flow of ideas and the inclusion of traditional knowledge and Indigenous perspectives in the post-secondary education system. In addition, experience has shown that ongoing community





involvement in the development and delivery of post-secondary education programs is critical to the overall sustainability of the post-secondary education system.

Post-secondary education institutions have an obvious interest in building strong relationships with the communities that surround their campuses and regional community learning centres. The important role that institutions play in supporting economic development at the local level should be a consideration when planning development and growth of the post-secondary education system.

## Goal 5: Support growth of the knowledge economy

A knowledge economy can be broadly defined as an economy that creates, shares, and uses knowledge to enhance its growth and development. We know that an educated and skilled population is critical to these three activities and that post-secondary education institutions are central to the growth and sustainability of a knowledge economy. Working closely with government and industry, post-secondary institutions are well positioned to attract investments that will create jobs and support the expansion of infrastructure.

Post-secondary education institutions may also act as drivers of creativity and innovation. They have the potential to support local, regional, and national companies that are seeking to quickly get their products or services to market with research and development. This may be particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized enterprises that do not have those capabilities in-house. Indigenous governments and communities may also seek innovative solutions to social, economic and environmental concerns. By using faculty expertise, student creativity and entrepreneurship, post-secondary education intuitions can support the growth and diversification of knowledge to help address a wide range of real-world problems.



# Moving Forward

During the development and implementation of work related to post-secondary education over the past two years, ECE has been engaged with Indigenous and community leadership, post-secondary education institutions and other key stakeholders. Moving forward, this engagement will continue and is expected to play a more direct role in shaping the development and growth of the overall post-secondary education system.

We know that productivity and innovation depends upon a skilled workforce. Industry representatives and employers, in particular, will play an important role in the development of the post-secondary education system and will help to ensure that post-secondary institutions are responsive to labour demands and meeting the needs of the labour market.

Currently, the only public post-secondary education institution in the NWT is Aurora

College, an institution that is in the process of transforming into a polytechnic university. The transformation process offers new opportunities to advance the vision and goals in this Framework, including collaboration with private post-secondary education institutions in ways that help to develop and grow the overall post-secondary education system.

The next step in the transformation is the development of a Strategic Plan

for Aurora College, followed closely by an Implementation Plan to guide its transformation into a polytechnic university. It is recognized that the territory's only public post-secondary education institution will remain at the centre of our post-secondary education system and that the success of that system is largely dependent on that institution being effective and sustainable.

Public and private post-secondary education institutions operating in the NWT will benefit from a new overarching piece of legislation. This legislation will clarify the roles and accountabilities of both government and post-secondary education institutions in supporting the ongoing development and growth of the post-secondary education system.



English

French

Cree

Tłiç hq

Chipewyan

## South Slavey

## North Slavey

Gwich'in

Inuvialuktun

Inuktitut

## Inuinnaqtun



