

DISCUSSION PAPER

Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance



SUMMARY

As part of the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) committed to establishing a new governance system for the institution. In order to support input from Indigenous governments and key stakeholders, the GNWT has drafted a discussion paper that describes a proposed governance system and how it will help ensure an effective, efficient and sustainable Aurora College and polytechnic university that are able to operate at arm's length from government.

The full discussion paper and instructions on how to provide input can be found online at:

<https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/have-your-say>

Proposed changes to the governance system are anticipated through interim changes to the *Aurora College Act* and the eventual replacement of this legislation with a *Polytechnic University Act*. This will allow for incremental change and provide additional opportunity for public engagement through the respective legislative processes.

Bicameral Governance

The discussion paper describes a “bicameral” governance system that has two decision-making bodies. A Board of Governors (Board) will be the most senior body and will be responsible for oversight of the management and control of the polytechnic university, including its property, revenues and expenditures. The polytechnic university Senate will be responsible for establishing and overseeing academic programs, research programs and associated supports.

Board Competencies

As part of the Government Response to the Findings and Recommendations of the Aurora College Foundational Review, a commitment was made to establish a skills matrix to ensure Board members have the necessary competencies and, as a whole, have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to provide strategic direction and oversight.

Competencies are a combination of observable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes that contribute to performance, and ultimately result in organizational success. The discussion paper proposes that Board members will collectively possess a defined set of competencies that includes facilities management, financial, governance, leadership, legal, market strategy, northern social and economic development, post-secondary education, reconciliation and risk management.

Representative Governance

It is important that the governing body of any PSE institution understand, reflect and respond effectively to the needs of those it serves. Representative governance means having a governance system that is able to ensure decisions and actions reflect the interest of those it serves.

The past approach to regional representation on the Aurora College Board was a form of representative governance, with one representative selected from each of the five GNWT administrative regions. The proposed Board for the polytechnic university takes a different approach to regional representation by focusing instead on NWT residents, and also specifically Indigenous NWT residents.

This new approach to regional representation supports the flexibility required in finding NWT residents that possess one or more of the required Board competencies and, for the first time, makes an explicit commitment that three or more of these Board members must be Indigenous residents of the NWT. This is a required minimum and indeed all Board members could potentially be selected from within the NWT and may be representative of Indigenous peoples.

Board Members

The discussion paper proposes a Board that would include:

- President, Aurora College;
- one Aurora College instructor elected by instructors;
- one Aurora College employee elected by employees who are not instructors;
- one student elected by students;
- eight people appointed by the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, based on the competencies and attributes, of which at least 5 are resident in the NWT and, of those 5, at least three are Indigenous; and
- any additional members with expertise that would contribute to the operation of Aurora College.

President

The President will be the chief executive officer and have supervision over all academic work and general administration of the polytechnic university. The President will continue to be accountable to the Board, but an important change to the *Aurora College Act* will also see the President appointed by the Board.

Chancellor

As with other universities in Canada, the polytechnic university will have a Chancellor. This person will be responsible for carrying out the ceremonial and official functions of the polytechnic university.