



Aurora College Foundational Review

Terms of Reference



1. Rationale and Background

Rationale

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is working to ensure “NWT residents have the skills, knowledge and attitudes for employment success” (Vision of Skills 4 Success (S4S) Initiative). This means building and expanding a skilled workforce to meet future labour demand. To do this, the GNWT recognizes that it must ensure that education and training systems keeps pace with the changing dynamics of the labour market.

This Foundational Review (Review) will recommend changes that provide clear direction for Aurora College’s (College) future development. In doing so, the review process will require an examination of College operations and governance structures, and will consider how the College develops and maintains programs that meet the diverse range of needs of students and are relevant to current labour market demands.

Background

The College is established through the *Aurora College Act* and follows the direction of the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE). It is the only public postsecondary institution in the Northwest Territories (NWT). The majority of students are Aboriginal and many are from small, remote communities. The College delivers programs and services as close to NWT communities as possible through a network of three campuses (Thebacha in Fort Smith, North Slave in Yellowknife and Aurora in Inuvik) and 23 community learning centres.

The College offers additional programs through transfer agreements and partnerships with a network of technical schools, colleges and universities across Canada and the Circumpolar Region.

The Aurora Research Institute (ARI) is the research division of the College and shares responsibility for implementation of the *Scientists Act*. ARI, formerly the Science Institute of the NWT, merged with the College in 1995. ARI continues to play a unique role within the College, particularly as it holds statutorily defined responsibilities that distinguish it from other divisions.

A goal of the recent GNWT S4S Initiative is to connect northern residents with adult and postsecondary education and skills training programs and pathways that lead to employment. The goal’s priority is to ensure that the skills development and postsecondary education programs are aligned with NWT labour market demands.



As part of the S4S Initiative, the GNWT partnered with The Conference Board of Canada to produce the comprehensive Northwest Territories Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment and accompanying Labour Market Information Resource. The 15-year forecast tells us there will be between 28,500 and 36,700 job openings in the NWT. This represents a major challenge; however, this foresight provides an opportunity to prepare so that NWT residents have the skills to be first in line for these future job openings.

2. Objective

The objective of this Review is to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the operations and governance structure of the College in order to ensure programs are managed effectively and efficiently, are meeting the diverse needs of students and are responsive to changes in the labour market.

3. Scope

A. Examine academic program management processes

- i. How well does the current decision-making around academic programming account for changing labour market demand?
- ii. What methodology, including additional decision criteria, is most appropriate for making decisions about the creation or elimination of academic programs or courses?
- iii. What is an appropriate process for reviewing and taking action when programs are not deemed to be effective or efficient?
- iv. How should the College's ongoing strategic planning process be structured in order to ensure that academic programs continue to meet future NWT labour market demands?
- v. How can strategic partnerships with other postsecondary institutions be leveraged to increase opportunities for College students?

B. Examine operations

- i. Are the current policies and procedures clearly defined and accessible?
- ii. Do the policies and procedures demonstrate best practices?
- iii. Are there additions or amendments required to close any identified gaps?
- iv. Does the *Aurora College Act* align with the operational needs of the College?



- v. Is the current multi-location delivery model for the College effective and efficient (North Slave, Thebacha and Aurora campuses and 23 community learning centres)?
- vi. Are there other models that would better meet the needs of NWT residents?
- vii. How effective has the College been in establishing and maintaining partnerships with other postsecondary institutions?

C. Examine the governance structure

- i. Is the governance structure operating effectively (i.e. Board of Governors, Research Advisory Council, senior management, divisions, schools, committees and staff)?
- ii. Does this structure allow for the establishment and pursuit of educational and research priorities?
- iii. Does the current division of roles and responsibilities allow the College to operate effectively and efficiently?
- iv. As a division of the College, are the role and responsibilities of ARI clearly defined?
- v. Does the governance structure support effective operations of the College?

D. Examine the accountability measures

- i. What are the requisite parts of an effective accountability framework for postsecondary education institutions such as Aurora College?
- ii. Are there innovative accountability measures for postsecondary education intuitions that incentivise student success in a way that would work in the NWT?

E. Examine the policies and practices used to recruit and retain students

- i. What changes to the College, including to programs and services, would make it more attractive to local, national and international students?
- ii. What are the major factors impacting student retention at the College?
- iii. Are student services considerate of human rights, including the needs of persons with disabilities, culture and gender?
- iv. Do student services adequately support physical and mental health?
- v. Are the current library resources and supports meeting student needs?
- vi. Are student accommodations needs being met and are child care and family supports sufficient?
- vii. Do students have adequate access to technology and technology supports?
- viii. Are there service improvements that would improve graduation rates and assist students with career choices?



4. Guiding Principles

In keeping with the following principles, the work of the Contractor in conducting this Review shall:

1. Employ sound methodological design and analysis that is comprehensive, reliable, valid and appropriate for this Review's purpose;
2. Whenever possible, use both quantitative and qualitative methods;
3. Provide fiscal and operationally sustainable options that are realistic given the broader fiscal framework of the GNWT;
4. Consider cultural differences in communities across the territory and how such differences may have an impact on the operations and activities of the College;
5. Consider the unique challenges pertaining to the NWT including: geography, climate, cost of living and population projections;
6. Provide complete transparency and disclosure related to the limitations of the review;
7. Provide findings, recommendations and conclusions that are clear and evidence-based;
8. Be responsive to individuals and groups who have a stake in the review, while being able to recognize, monitor and guard against any political or individual interests, misconceptions, biases, distortions or errors;
9. Be conducted by qualified credentialed and certified staff, as outlined in the Contractors Qualification's section of this document; and
10. Be guided by standards employed by the professional fields listed under the Contractor's Qualifications.

5. Methods

The Contractor should demonstrate their understanding of the work involved and explain their approach to meeting the stated objectives by identifying significant factors or concerns, travel plans, meeting schedule, client reporting process, approach to communicating with stakeholders, and other significant events or objectives.

6. Contractor's Qualifications

This is to be an independent Review. Independent means that the Contractor or the Contractor's team must not have been involved or linked, at any time or in any way, with the College. This does not preclude the fact that the Contractor or a member of



the Contractor's team may have worked in the NWT. However, the Contractor and members of the Contractor's team must not have been an employee of the College or ECE.

A solid mix of knowledge, skills and experience is required to complete this Review. However, some members of the Contractor's team must have demonstrated knowledge and experience in postsecondary education, preferably at the community college level.

This is a comprehensive project that will involve a large amount of time and resources to complete. The Contractor must identify a Project Manager that will work with the ECE Project Manager to ensure an organized, continual flow of information between the Contractor and ECE.

Skills

Members of the contractor's team should possess strong skills in the areas of:

- Project management;
- Evaluation and performance measurement;
- Financial analysis;
- Facilitation; and
- Public communications.

Experience

Members of the contractor's team should possess experience:

- In a leadership role at a postsecondary institution (e.g. as president or dean);
- Evaluation and performance measurement;
- Financial management and auditing;
- Business management and best practices; and
- Policy analysis.

Knowledge

Members of the contractor's team should possess and understanding of:

- Community colleges, including their governance, policies, administrative structures, delivery models, funding formulas, accountability measures, programs and services, learning technologies, scientific research and postsecondary legislation; and
- An understanding of the various cultures in the NWT and how culture may impact the activities of the College, including the legacy of residential schools.



Qualifications

The Contractor's team should also include:

- Credentialed accountant(s);
- Credentialed auditor(s);
- Credentialed financial analyst(s); and
- Certified project manager(s).

Other

The Contractor must provide:

- Resumes or curriculum vitae for the senior staff;
- Summary biographies of other team members;
- Examples of past reports of similar scope; and
- Three references.

7. Team

ECE Project Manager

The successful Contractor will work directly with, and be supported by, the Director of Labour Development and Standards, Adult and Postsecondary Education, who will be the Project Manager for ECE. The duties of the ECE Project Manager include:

- Ensuring ECE and College staff are appropriately informed throughout the review;
- Providing documents and information to the Contractor;
- Providing updates and documents for approval to the Steering Committee; and
- Reviewing and communicating approval of the deliverables at every stage.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will consist of:

- Deputy Minister, ECE;
- Assistant Deputy Minister, Labour and Income Security, ECE;
- Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, ECE;
- Deputy Minister, Finance; and
- Deputy Minister, Industry, Tourism and Investment.

The Steering Committee will review and provide final approval of the Contractor's deliverables including: scope of work; work plan and completion of draft reports for



the sole purpose of ensuring the conditions of the Terms of Reference and Request for Proposal are met.

8. Constraints

There are eight (8) constraints related to this Review which the Contractor may have to mitigate:

1. The Contractor will be required to manage this broad and diverse Review in a short timeframe;
2. This Review is expected to be both comprehensive and complex in terms of scope;
3. In order to maintain transparency, all recommendations, conclusions or other key findings must be attributable, either directly or indirectly, to the background research, primary research or specific stakeholder engagements conducted as part of this review;
4. The College's student record system is known to be outdated and does not generate accurate data related to operations, student registration or completions. As such, data acquisition will be challenging;
5. The stakeholder engagement expected of this review is both comprehensive and complex in terms of the breadth of the stakeholders to be consulted, the sensitivity of the issues that may arise. It may also be difficult to reach some key stakeholders;
6. The Contractor shall not communicate in any way with the media unless at the explicit request of ECE;
7. Introductions to stakeholders will be managed by ECE's Project Manager under the direction of the Steering Committee; and
8. This Review is taking place during the spring to fall months. Stakeholders and staff may not always be readily available.

9. Project Schedule

- Initial meeting with the ECE Project Manager to identify stakeholders, documents to be reviewed and finalize dates and deliverables through a detailed workplan before the end of July 2017;
- Monthly updates as scheduled August through to November 2017;
- First draft of Review submitted to ECE on or before December 01, 2017; and
- Final Review submitted to ECE on or before December 15, 2017.



10. Term of the Contract

The contract term will run from approximately June to December 2017. There will be no option to extend this contract once dates are agreed.

11. Deliverables

The Contractor's deliverables will include:

- A detailed plan that incorporates:
 - A description of the approach for this Review;
 - A detailed work plan and schedule;
 - A communications strategy for engaging stakeholders;
 - A description of methodologies that will be used to complete the Review;
 - A list and description of mitigation measures to help ensure the completion of the Review, and
 - A fee and expense schedule that outlines the level of staff and number of person days that will be utilized to complete each deliverable.
- Monthly status updates.
- Presentations at preliminary stages to be determined by the Contractor in consultation with the ECE Project Manager.
- Presentation of Final Report to ECE.
- A Final Report that includes detailed:
 - Background;
 - Methodology and limitations;
 - Findings;
 - Analysis;
 - Conclusions, recommendations and/or options; and
 - Executive summary.
- A Communications Plan to accompany the final report.

12. Budget and Fees and Expenses

The GNWT has elected not to identify a budget for this project.

Invoices will be paid at intervals related to Steering Committee approval of each deliverable.



13.GNWT Resources

To assist the successful Contractor in conducting this Review and to better understand the social and economic contexts, ECE will provide various research materials and reports to the Contractor.

14.Community Engagement

The approach for communication and collaboration with Aboriginal Governments and Organizations will follow the established GNWT protocol and occur under the guidance of the ECE Project Manager.

Recently, the College hired a Contractor, TAIT Consulting Ltd., to assist in the development of the College's 10-Year Strategic Plan. TAIT conducted an extensive survey across the NWT. The survey reports related to this work will be released to the Contractor and may be incorporated into the review (note that the Strategic Planning process has been put on hold until completion of this Review).

ECE will require the Contractor to collect input from a defined set of stakeholder groups in the NWT including:

- Postsecondary institutions and research centres affiliated with the College;
- Aboriginal Governments and Organizations;
- All NWT Friendship Centres;
- Collège nordique francophone;
- Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning;
- The Council for Persons with Disabilities;
- The Literacy Council;
- College Students;
- College Staff;
- College Board Members;
- Licenced researchers;
- Other GNWT Departments;
- NWT Chamber of Commerce;
- NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines;
- Mine Training Society NWT;
- NWT and Nunavut Construction Association;
- NWT Tourism;
- NWT Association of Communities; and



- Northern Farm Training Institute.

Additional stakeholder groups may be approved by the Steering Committee upon recommendation by the Contractor.

All references to stakeholder input should, to the greatest extent possible, distinguish between which group provided the input in order to avoid confusion and maintain transparency. As such, the methodology should allow for input to be distinguished in this way.