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# **SMALL COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROGRAM PROGRAM REVIEW**

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***SUBMITTED TO:***

**GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES,  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT  
LABOUR DEVELOPMENT AND STANDARDS DIVISION**

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**ACRONYMS**

ATOC	Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupation Certification
DCA	Designated Community Authorities
ECE	Department of Education, Culture and Employment
GNWT	Government of the Northwest Territories
HQ	Headquarters
ISSET	Indigenous Skills and Employment Training
ITI	Department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreement
NWT	Northwest Territories
NTNP	Northwest Territories Nominee Program
SCES	Small Communities Employment Support
WDA	Workforce Development Agreement

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### INTRODUCTION

The Small Community Employment Support (SCES) program is a six-year initiative linked to, and building on, the Skills 4 Success vision. A GNWT-funded program, the SCES aims to enhance employment and training opportunities and outcomes in small communities in the Northwest Territories. It does this through supporting small NWT communities and regional centres in developing job opportunities, which may include on-the-work training, for their residents.

SCES funds can be used to support job creation in small NWT communities, to support the implementation of community-based labour market development plans, and to integrate supports into the development and implementation of community infrastructure and economic development projects.

The purpose of the review was to assess the SCES program to determine the extent to which it is meeting its four objectives:

- (1) Support job creation and labour market development in small NWT communities and smaller regional centres;
- (2) Enable individuals to obtain and improve essential skills needed in the workplace;
- (3) Support small communities and smaller regional centres in implementing respective local labour market development plans; and,
- (4) Grow the NWT workforce through partnerships and to identify best practices and program recommendations for the improvement of SCES program delivery moving forward.

### APPROACH AND METHODS

The SCES program review was guided by a review matrix which identified the high-level review questions, indicators, data sources, methodologies, timing of data collection and stakeholders involved in collection.

Two key methods were implemented:

- Documents and data review (e.g., 2018/19 annual report data, annual plans, administrative information (programs guidelines, application forms)
- Key stakeholder telephone interviews with individuals representing: Designated Community Authorities (DCAs), community employers, Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) Headquarters (HQ) and Regional ECE Service Centre staff (n=30 interviews)

Quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel while qualitative data was analyzed using NVivo - Qualitative Data Analysis Software.

## REVIEW FINDINGS

Overall, the evidence suggests that the SCES program is: a beneficial program for small communities; contributing towards the broader Small Communities Employment Strategy, being implemented as intended; and, achieving its intended purpose and to some extent its objectives. DCAs and community employers are very thankful that the program funds exist; noting that without the funds many new positions could not have been created and many employees could not have gained important essential employment skills.

The majority of stakeholders involved in the review believe that the program is being implemented in alignment with the guidelines and is providing value for money. While there was consensus that the program is creating new jobs, there was disagreement across the stakeholder groups that the program is creating sustainable jobs. Employers, especially those in communities with limited opportunities for economic activity, spoke about the challenges they encounter using the SCES funding because the program guidelines stipulate funding must be applied to new positions only (i.e., there are only so many new positions that be created in some small communities).

With respect to the four program objectives, the review indicates that the program is showing success in achieving some of the objectives. Overall, key stakeholders were in agreement that the SCES program was supporting job creation and labour market development in small NWT communities and smaller regional centres and that it was enabling individuals to obtain and improve essential skills needed in the workplace. There was disagreement regarding the program's ability to support small communities and smaller regional centres in implementing local labour market development plans. DCAs and ECE staff noted the efforts of ECE to support communities in getting their local labour market development plans in place with available funding and support. However, many communities have not yet completed the process and many community employers were unaware of the process or the existence of the community labour market development plans. Regarding growing the workforce through partnerships, the review indicated that this program is supporting a growing workforce in small communities through the creation of new employment opportunities and building the skills of individuals new to the workforce. However, the review identified opportunities for creating and leveraging more partnerships within the small communities, regions, and Territory. A summary of key stakeholder feedback on the questions guiding the review is found below.

Stakeholders	ECE HQ	Regional ECE	Opt-in DCA	Opt-Out DCA	Community Employers (Opt-in)	Community Employers (Opt-out)
Is the SCES program funding being utilized according to the purpose and guidelines established for the SCES program?	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Is the SCES program providing value for money spent?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Is the SCES program creating new jobs in the NWT small communities?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Is the SCES program creating sustainable jobs in the NWT small communities?						
Is the SCES program adhering to the Small Communities Employment Strategy?						
Is the SCES program accomplishing the objectives stated with the SCES program?						

[Legend: The green circles indicate that the majority of the stakeholders responded positively to the question. The yellow circles indicate that there were mixed responses with no majority. Red circles indicate that the majority of stakeholders provided a negative response to the question.]

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this review, several recommendations are put forth for consideration by GNWT, ECE.

**Recommendation #1: Conduct Additional Stakeholder Engagement**

- Because changes to the SCES program were implement in the 2018/19 fiscal year, and given the current COVID-19 situation, it is recommended that consideration be given to delaying any changes to the program until more information can be collected from key stakeholders, specifically DCAs and community employers.
  - While some DCAs and community employers were engaged in this review process, their numbers were small and not equally representative of all regions. To ensure that more robust feedback is obtained about the program from all communities and regions across the Territory, further engagement should be considered.

**Recommendation #2: Transfer Annual Plan Decision-Making Authority to Regional ECE Service Centre Staff**

- Regional ECE Service Centre staff have direct access to the communities utilizing the SCES program and work directly with the DCAs and community employers. It is recommended that consideration be given to providing the Regional ECE Service Centres with the authority to review the annual plans and make decision regarding the allocation of SCES funding.
  - Due to their existing role in the SCES program, Regional staff have a better understanding of the regional and community labour market context which allows them to make more informed decisions about how the SCES funding can be distributed and optimized within local communities.
  - This change in program administration would potentially improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the application process thereby allowing funds and new positions to be rolled out in a timely manner.

- This change would also position Regional staff to be able to explain more easily to DCAs and community employers the rationale behind the decisions made regarding the distribution of funding.

### Recommendation #3: Enter into Multi-Year Contribution Agreements

- Given that DCAs and community employers find it difficult to plan for and sustain positions long-term, it is recommended that consideration be given to entering into multi-year contribution agreements that align with approved community-based labour market development plans.
  - This would require that all communities develop a community-based labour market development plan in collaboration with community organizations and businesses to ensure alignment within the community on local market needs and demands.
  - By offering multi-year funding, regions and communities would be better positioned to make longer term plans as they relate to employment and free them of creating new jobs on an annual basis. This will contribute to job sustainability, particularly for small communities with limited economic activity, by ensuring availability of funding to support essential positions year to year.
  - By aligning the funding with the community labour market development plans, it would simplify the process of creating annual plans because they would be required to flow directly from the broader labour market plan.
  - To monitor the spending, more robust reporting on the part of DCAs and community employers would be required to ensure funds are being spent as intended on a regular basis.

### Recommendation #4: Revise the Reporting Requirements

- Based on the available data for this review and input from key stakeholders, it is recommended that consideration be given to revising the annual reporting templates to allow for more robust information to be collected (e.g., how the funds are actually being spent, who the funds are being spent on, sustainability of position).
  - Better quality reporting would provide ECE with much needed information on progress to, or achievement of, program objectives, and would enhance their understanding of program's value for money.
  - Changes to the template will require identifying key performance indicators for each program objectives to assist with the measurement of success. Revising the reporting requirements for those accessing the SCES funding will enhance the accountability on the part of the DCAs and community employers.
  - In addition to collecting more targeted information from stakeholders through reporting templates, it is also recommended that consideration be given to implementing, as a best practice, ongoing communication and reporting through the introduction of regular meeting between DCAs and community employers or Regional ECE Services Centre staff and community employers. This will provide an opportunity for DCAs and the Regional Centres to offer support to community employers, while also increasing accountability.

**Recommendation #5: Create More Formalized Territorial, Regional and Local Partnerships**

- There are several important initiatives being offered in small communities that are necessary for supporting economic activity and employment; however, there seems to be a disconnect between the agencies delivering the various programming. To increase effectiveness, efficiency, and collaboration, it is recommended for consideration that ECE foster and maintain more formalized partnerships with other GNWT departments (e.g., HSS, ENR, ITI), as well as regional and local organizations/industries to support the identification of new and emerging employment and training opportunities.

**Recommendation #6: Clarify the Program Criteria**

- Key stakeholders suggested there is a lack of clarity regarding the criteria that guide the SCES program funding decision-making process. Changes have recently been made to the guidelines that have not been effectively communicated nor equitably implemented. It is recommended that consideration be given to reviewing the program criteria to ensure the process is fair and justifiable, and to ensuring that any updates to the program criteria are widely disseminated to DCAs and community employers.

**Recommendation #7: Increase Community-level Program Promotion**

- In some instances, key stakeholders indicated that they were unaware that the program was running in their community and missed the deadline to submit an application. It is recommended that consideration be given to increasing program promotion at the community level to ensure all local employers are aware of the program funds in a timely manner so they have the time needed to prepare their application.
  - Particularly for employers who have not previously accessed this funding in the past, wide promotion of the program within communities is important to ensure equal opportunity.

**Recommendation 8: Improve Communications**

- It is recommended that consideration be given to improving the consistency and frequency of SCES program communication to Regional ECE Service Centres, DCAs and community employers. It is also recommended that roles and responsibilities regarding communication of SCES program information be defined and clearly articulated to ECE HQ and Regional staff.

Improving communication across all levels will ensure that stakeholders are getting accurate and up-to-date information.