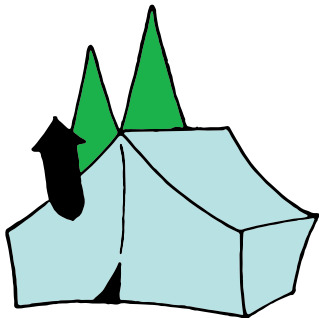


Evaluative Review of Collaborative Grant Reports



ON THE LAND
programs



**NWT
RECREATION
& PARKS
ASSOCIATION**

Prepared for:

**NWT Recreation and Parks Association
on behalf of
the NWT On The Land Collaborative**

By: Stephanie Dotto

Updated: April 30, 2021

Executive Summary

1. Impacts of On The Land Programs

- a. Revitalize and strengthen relations between program participants and the land that are traditional, radical, and anti-colonial.
- b. Create diverse opportunities in all seasons for community members, but particularly youth, to learn land-based skills and engage in their culture and way of life.
- c. Bring Elders together with youth and other community members, strengthening intergenerational relations and giving Elders the opportunity to share knowledge, skills, and language.
- d. Foster self-esteem, perseverance, confidence, leadership, and cooperation.
- e. Provide communities and community members with vital resources like traditional food and firewood.
- f. Foster attitudes of stewardship over the land and the community.

2. Challenges Grant Recipients Face in Delivering On The Land Programs

- a. Weather, environmental conditions, and wildlife.
- b. Scheduling and timing.
- c. Participant levels.
 - i. Youth participation.
- d. Staffing.
- e. Resources.
- f. Balancing Indigenous and Western worldviews.

3. Lessons Learned from Delivering On The Land Programs

- a. Participants need more time to be on the land.
- b. “Outsiders” can learn to better serve their host communities when they participate in on the land programming.
- c. Partnerships contribute to the successful delivery of on the land programs.
- d. Consistent, ongoing programming is important.
- e. Community members of all ages benefit from on the land programming.
- f. Delivering different kinds of programs can make spending time on the land more accessible to a wider range of community members.
- g. Mental health on the land is important.

4. Future Needs to Support Delivery of On The Land Programs

- a. Increase available funding for on the land programs in the NWT.
- b. Continue to be flexible with grant recipients.
- c. Create opportunities for grant recipients to connect with community groups, integrate further in their communities, and learn from one another.
- d. Support organizations to build and access permanent sites.
- e. Refine and expand the feedback process so that grant recipients can provide feedback to the Collaborative at different points in the grant cycle.

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*Northern Youth Leadership's
Youth Gana Hiking Trip.*

Introduction

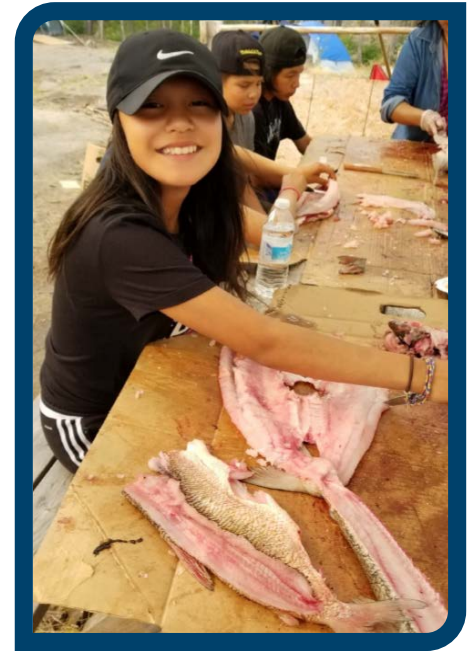
The NWT On The Land Collaborative (the Collaborative asks grant recipients to submit a report at project's end that addresses the following questions:

- Who was affected by the project and in what way?
- How did your project affect the community/organization as a whole?
- What went well?
- What challenges did you face or lessons did you learn?
- What is next for you and those involved in this project?

Grant recipients are encouraged to respond to the questions in a format that best suits their project (narrative, video, photo essay, PowerPoint, etc.). They are also asked to provide a final budget and images from their program.

To better understand the experiences, successes, and needs of grant recipients, the Collaborative undertook two reviews of grant reports: one in 2018–2019, reviewing 54 projects from 2016–2018, and one in 2020–2021, reviewing 78 additional projects from 2016–2019. This report is an updated version of the initial report submitted in 2019, and discusses 132 reports total: 28 from 2016, 7 from 2017, 40 from 2018, and 37 from 2019.¹ The 132 reports were received from 80 different grant recipients. Of the total reports reviewed, 37% of the recipient organizations were schools; 35% were Indigenous governments or organizations; 25% were non-profits; and 3% were municipal governments or departments. Grant amounts for the projects being reported on ranged from \$1,000–\$60,000; the average grant amount was \$17,429.17. 62% of grant recipients who included a budget spent all their Collaborative funding. Those who did not spent an average of \$2,723.75 below their funded amounts.²

Most of these reports consisted of the grant recipients' responses to the five questions outlined above, an accounting of how they spent their grant money, and photos of their programs in action. Some organizations also chose to submit other media in their reports, including participant narratives and testimonials, Elders' reports, videos, slideshows, newspaper clippings, and event schedules. The reports were reviewed in conjunction with the grant applications of all projects, in order to compare goals and outcomes. Importantly, the grant applications contained a section where the Collaborative asked applicants to discuss their satisfaction with the application's clarity, the funding timelines, the reporting process, and their communication with the Collaborative. Their responses are discussed further in [Appendix 1](#).



*Sahdeh Youth Boating Program
hosted by the Community Presence
Office of Behchokò.*

1. This number accounts for the grant recipients who significantly underspent (>\$1000) due to reduced participant levels or cancelled, postponed, minimized or changed plans. All of these grant recipients were working with the Collaborative at the time of their reporting in order to design programming that could make use of remaining funds.

2. Programs are grouped by year funding was received, which is not always the year programming occurred.

Using the data in the reports and applications, this report addresses the following four key questions:

- What evidence is there of the impact that On The Land programs are having in communities?
- What challenges are organizations and communities facing in delivering on the land programs?
- What lessons have been learned from those delivering programs?
- What are the future needs of organizations looking to continue to deliver on the land programs?

Part I: Impacts of On the Land Programs

a. Spending time on the land revitalizes and strengthens relations between program participants and the land that are traditional, radical, and anti-colonial.

A key aim of colonization has been to destroy the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their territories. First and foremost, the programs supported by the Collaborative create opportunities for NWT residents' young and old, but especially Indigenous residents, to spend time on the land. These experiences are central to revitalizing relations between participants and the land.

Many of the funded projects gave community members an opportunity they may not have otherwise had to be on the land. The Hamlet of Aklavik held community camps in 2016, and found that Elders greatly appreciated the experience, particularly since many “don't have access to being out on the land like they used to.”

Half of the participants during the hunting trip facilitated by Moose Kerr School (Akłarvik/Aklavik) in 2016 had rarely been on the land, “either due to the high costs of equipment/fuel or because they don't really have anyone in their family willing to take them out.”



Chief Paul Niditchie School's Rediscovering Tsiijehnjik canoe trip. Photo by Amos Scott.

For many participants, being on the land meant being in a healthier environment. In 2016, the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (SRRB) provided youth who attended their camp at Dəocha/Bennet Field with an “environment free of drugs and alcohol.” They attributed this environment with encouraging friendships “among youth and between youth, elders, and adults.”

Similarly, Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School (Zhatié Kúé/Fort Providence) said their month-long family camp in 2016 gave participants the time necessary to “adjust to the new rhythm and to detoxify their bodies from sugar, drugs and alcohol.” K'ásho Got'ıne Charter Community (Rádeyılıkóé/Fort Good Hope) reported that after their 2017 healing camp, aimed at addressing the mental health issues of youth in the community, “a few members of our community have left and begun their own journey of healing through treatment programs.”

Even very young children received health benefits from being on the land. In 2016, Children First Society (Inuvik/Inuvik) took children aged 2–5 out on the land for day trips, an experience that led one parent to remark, “What a wonderful day they had. All the fresh air—they had a great sleep last night.”

Often, the experience of being on the land involved detaching from technology. The Hamlet of Aklavik introduced a “no electronics” rule during their 2016 camps, which encouraged the youth involved to engage, as they “got to help the Elders, talk to them, go and trap, chop wood, etc.” Parents and guardians of youth taking part in the weekly swimming trips hosted by the YWCA (Sòmba K'è/Yellowknife) in 2017 said that “their daughters would be home all day on their electronics if this [programming] was not offered.”

Those programs that did incorporate electronic communications technology often did so in order to preserve and share Indigenous knowledge or their experiences of being on the land.

At their 2017 camp, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation (T'è?ehdaà/Dettah and N'dilq) trained participating youth in “story and scene development, audio recording and interview techniques, 360 degree virtual reality camera, underwater camera, hand-held digital camera, and hand-held video camera” so they would be able to create short movies about the “on-the-land strengths” of their nation.

Perhaps most importantly, being on the land deepened participants’ connections to their culture, their history, and their land. Dene Nahjo (2018) asked their Women’s Rites of Passage Camp participants in an anonymous survey about how the camp had affected the participants. All participants stated that they had a “deepened connection” to their culture and all but one “said that their connection to the land was strengthened.” One participant claimed, “I feel so much more connected to my ancestors, smelling the spruce boughs, wood stove and bush,” and another remarked, “the gathering gave me the strength and knowledge to be a better Indigenous woman aware of so many more traditions and knowledge that I was only invited to hear.”

Furthermore, a journal excerpt from a Chief Paul Niditchie School student who participated in their 2018 Tsiigehnjik canoe trip stated:

“I am happy here out on the land. [...] I hear my language out here and see people working together. The land is so beautiful, it is untouched and perfect and we are so lucky to wake up to it each day. I am glad I am here, I feel blessed.”

By “reviving,” we mean teaching the traditional knowledge of the cultural landscape along the route from the Elders to younger generations while we travel; thus, maintaining the spirit of the trail by reviving the language, knowledge and oral traditions of the trail network in the collective memory of the Tłı̨chǫ community.

– Reviving Trails Project

Similarly, youth presenting on the Dehcho First Nations' Yundaa Gogha canoe trip at the Dehcho Assembly "stated that being on the land helped them 'be Dene,'" which brought "many of the Dehcho leadership ... to tears."



Dehcho First Nations' Yundaa Gogha canoe trip.

These connections to the land provided participants with the opportunity to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous practices and ways of life. Moose Kerr specifically described their hunting trip in 2016 as a "de-colonizing activity," where students could "start to re-appropriate their land and their identity." During the trip, the students and staff had discussions with Elder Billy Archie about "Indigenizing education," and found that "these types of lessons have much more impact on the land as opposed to taking place in the classroom." Staff at the Trailcross Treatment Centre (Tthebacha/Fort Smith) noted after their 2016 inter-family

camp at a cabin near Tthebacha/Fort Smith, one youth started to often talk about ways that things are done in her culture, something we have not heard before."

Similarly, The Salvation Army of Yellowknife (2018) noted that during their outdoor recreation activities, "clients were able to show their interests, skills & knowledge we would not have known they had otherwise. [...] A client shared why the Dene feed the fire and whom they are giving thanks to when this is being done." Even very young children were able to learn culture from time on the land. A three-year-old participant in Children First Society's 2019 First Steps on the Land program said, "We had medicine from a tree! I brought some back."

A mother of a participant from the same program stated,

"[My daughter] still talks about the trip and the elders. She shows me the medicine plants when we are out walking. When I had a sore throat she said I should go to the bush and get some medicine."



Back to the Land Cultural Camp hosted by K'asho Got'ine Charter Community

b. On the land programs create diverse opportunities in all seasons for community members, but particularly youth, to learn land-based skills and connect with Indigenous culture and way of life.

At the 132 programs covered in these reports, participants learned and/or practiced many skills as they spent time on the land.¹

- **Seventy-eight projects** taught **Indigenous food preparation**, including making dry meat or fish, building smoke houses, preparing fish and birds, baking bannock, and making preserves.
- **Sixty-six projects** involved **fishing**, including ice fishing and the use of ice augers and jiggers, setting and checking nets, and using rods and reels.
- **Fifty programs** had participants **find, gather, and chop firewood, and/or make fires**.
- **Forty-nine programs** involved learning to **identify and gather plants** and/or berries for Indigenous food and medicine.
- **Forty-three programs** involved **trapping and snaring** animals, including rabbit, beaver, and muskrat.
- **Forty programs** taught some version of **outdoor safety**, such as firearms safety, boat/canoe safety, water safety, bear safety, and wilderness first aid.
- **Thirty-five programs** taught **sewing and/or beading**. Participants made items like fur mittens, mukluks, and hunting bags.
- **Thirty-four programs** involved **hunting** birds (e.g. ptarmigan, duck) and/or big game (e.g. moose, muskox).
- **Thirty-three programs** had participants **make and/or break camp**.
- **Thirty programs** involved **canoeing**.
- **Twenty-two programs** involved **hide preparation**, including moose, reindeer, caribou, muskox, wolverine, and wolf hides.
- **Twelve programs** had **wayfinding activities**, either using Indigenous methods or GPS devices.
- **Eleven projects** went **hiking**.
- **Eleven projects** involved **swimming**.
- **Nine groups** went **snowshoeing**.
- **Eight groups** did **carpentry** projects.
- **Five groups** went **dog-sledding**.
- **Four programs** involved **photography**.
- **Four groups** learned about **Indigenous and/or Western ways of conservation**.
- **Two groups** cleared **traditional trails**.
- **One group** learned **archery** skills.

1. Because of the open-ended nature of the questions, and overlap between activities (e.g., nature walks and hiking), many projects likely involved skills and experiences not listed in reports. For example, while only 33 groups stated that their participants learned to make camp, the majority of camp-based programs would have conceivably involved at least some learning of this skill. All numbers listed thus represent minimums, not maximums.

Connections to Indigenous history, language, and culture also featured prominently in these programs:

- **Sixty-six projects** involved **Indigenous story-telling, Indigenous spirituality**, and/or the learning of **Indigenous history**.
- **Thirty-two projects** taught **Indigenous language**, including Inuvialuktun (4), Gwich'in (6), Tłıchq̓ (2), Dene K'e (Slavey) (1), Dene Zhatie (South Slavey) (11), Wıłııdeh (4), and Inuinnaqtun (3).
- **Twenty projects** involved **drumming**.
- **Eighteen projects** involved **hand games**.
- **Two projects** included lessons in **land claims** and **Indigenous governance**.

c. On the land programs bring Elders together with youth and other community members, strengthening intergenerational relations and giving Elders the opportunity to share knowledge, skills, and language.

One of the most important impacts of on the land programming is the relationship it builds between youth and Elders. At least 80% of the projects involved Elders. In most programs, they served as leaders and teachers. Being around Elders positively impacted many young people during on the land programs, from small children to older youth. The Children First Society of Inuvik/Inuvik (2019), which serves children ages 2–10, remarked of their First Steps on the Land program,

Bringing Elders and youth together is always a valuable experience. Put the two together and watch the magic and learning take place authentically.

– Moose Kerr High School

“Every time we go out, we learn how important these days are and are encouraged to add more on [...] The connections between the Elders and the children are incomparable.”

In both 2016 and 2018, the Children First Society also praised the Elders' ability to engage young children, stating they “knew how to read children’s energy and attention span.” One of the children from the 2016 program commented on the Elder leading the program, “Freddie is the best, he has great stories.”

Similarly, Princess Alexandra School (2018), who facilitated day camps for students in Grades 4–7, stated that “being able to watch the relationships grow between Elders and students, the immense knowledge of the culture being embraced and shared was truly enough to show how successful the project really was.”

Elders had a similar impact on older youth. The Rainbow Gay-Straight Alliance of Fort Smith, which hosted a 2018 land-based retreat for high-school-aged youth, noted that “our retreat allowed youth to spend time with Elders, to talk freely, ask questions and learn. This was a very important component as the young learn so much from these stories.” In the report from

their 2016 Transition to Adulthood Camp, staff from École St. Patrick's High School described a Grade 11 student who had "been exploring his Indigenous ancestry for quite some time." The student asked an Elder at the camp to teach him how to smudge.

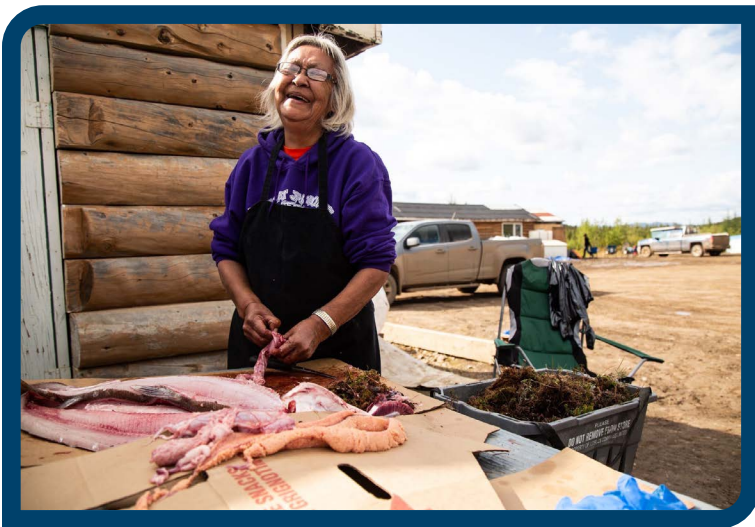
The report remarked, "We were all privileged to learn with him and have the opportunity as a group to be smudged by him. For all of us, this impromptu activity was perhaps the most meaningful event of the camp." Similarly, Moose Kerr High School hosted a shared meal between Elders and students after their 2016 hunting trip, stating, "Bringing Elders and youth together is always a valuable experience. Put the two together and watch the magic and learning take place authentically."

The connection between youth and Elders is particularly important, since it is through these relationships that vital Indigenous knowledge is communicated, learned, and passed on.

Chief Julius School (2018) noted that during a four-night stay at an Elder's fish camp, not only did children learn "how to check nets, how to clean, cut, and gut fish, [and] work fish in different ways (dry fish, smoked fish, fish patties, fish strips, cooked over fire)" but they learned via Indigenous methods—namely an emphasis on observing Elders. Alice Vittrekwa, an Elder

working with Ecology North's 2016 program in Teet'it Zeh/ Fort McPherson, taught "youth at the camp how to use the land as a resource [...] including using moss for 'paper towel,' rose hips and local plants for tea, and shar[ing] a meal of fresh bannock and fish with us around a fire." Elders also taught youth how to respond to adversity, fostering internal strength.

Staff from Trailcross Treatment Centre (Thebacha/Fort Smith) described youth working with an Elder to create birch bark baskets "from harvesting to completion": "With patience, [the Elder] guided the youth through their frustrations and



Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council's Youth Midway Lake Retreat.

helped them complete the task."

Some programs have found ways to spur knowledge sharing between Elders and youth even when Elders cannot be on the land, such as Chief Paul Niditchie School's 2019 canoe trip, where students built a Gwich'in fish trap and Elders were "actively engaged by: advising us on the plans for the construction of the trap based on their memories, evaluating the completed trap upon our return, and providing feedback about how the trap could be improved."

In addition to teaching skills, Elders passed on a sense of cultural identity, as Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (2016) reported "The Elders were instrumental in helping the youth to

contextualize Dene ts'ı́ı and thus solidify the youth's sense of identity as Dene across time."¹ Teachings are deeply intertwined not just with identity but with a sense of place, as during Chief Jimmy Bruneau School's camp, when the Elders "discussed the history of the campsites around the region and the tales they have experience over the many years of being on the land." Some programs involved Elders and youth visiting specific sites of importance, such as Chief Paul Niditchie School's 2018 trip to the gravesite at Marten House, where they "shared stories and information about the significance of the site for the Gwich'ya Gwich'in people."

This canoe trip helped us connect with our land. ... We were taught what different traditional medicines were used for. We have learned how to take the bark off of a spruce tree. The bark from the tree was actually used for shingles on a cabin before actual shingles, I was shocked when I was told that. We have been able to spend a lot of time with Elders, this is important because they will not be here forever.

– Student, Chief Paul Niditchie School

Elders provide knowledge to youth about vital skills, their culture, their home, and sometimes even themselves and their families. Yellowknife Catholic Schools (2019) hosted a camp involving 11 male youth where "Elders shared stories of the youths' families and showed them on maps where their grandparents lived."

Given the past and present systemic attacks on Indigenous cultures and families in Canada, the knowledge and connections Elders provide to youth and communities is sometimes endangered, and therefore all the more vital. Similarly, Łútsël K'é Women's Group (2019) stated that their hide camp enabled them to re-centre the knowledge of Elders:

"We notice how the Elders who are the knowledge holders enjoy being respected and honored for their knowledge. This type of skill was not valued as it should have been for a long time, but now a new generation and those that missed out due to residential school want to reconnect and learn this ancient skill."

Elders greatly benefited from time on the land, as well as participants, particularly as they often experience both physical and financial barriers to being on the land. For some, on the land programs create opportunities for them to step into positions as knowledge holders and cultural experts. Helen Kalvak School remarked that while the "Elders who currently are our knowledge holders" were not able to work with the school as much as they once did, their language immersion camp encouraged "younger Elders," who "have a lack of confidence in their own ability to teach" to "develop quality relationships with the school and several students." Some of the other benefits to Elders come from the pure enjoyment of being on the land.

An Elder who worked with young children during Children First Society's programming commented simply, "It was so good to get out on the land. The children were fun."

1. Dene ts'ı́ı means "what it means to be Dene" (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board 2016).

I love it out here at camp. I have not been in the bush since I was 13. First time skinning a beaver, seeing fish under the ice. I am doing things I used to see as a kid and that I could not do because of residential school.

*– Elder Participant,
Trailcross OTL Program*

Similarly, the Tuktoyaktuk Elders Committee (2019) noted that during their fishing trip, “The Elders and youth were in great spirits, very happy to be in Husky Lakes and anticipating going fishing as all but one haven’t been there in several years.” On the land programs can also address isolation.

The Hamlet of Aklavik held culture camps in 2016, which gave Elders who did not get to see each other often the opportunity to talk things over and solve community problems. Coming in the wake of a major community tragedy, these were much-needed.

In conclusion, land-based programming offers Elders the opportunity to connect with their culture, their land, and their Indigenous practices.

Again, given colonial disruptions to Indigenous culture, these opportunities are important and also too rare for some. Łútsël K’é Women’s Group (2019) explained:

“It’s remarkable how this hide camp has brought the art of hide tanning back into the forefront and how it is now part of so many people’s lives. We had a couple of Elders, who actually completed their first ever tanned moose hide through this camp. The pride on their faces was priceless to see.”

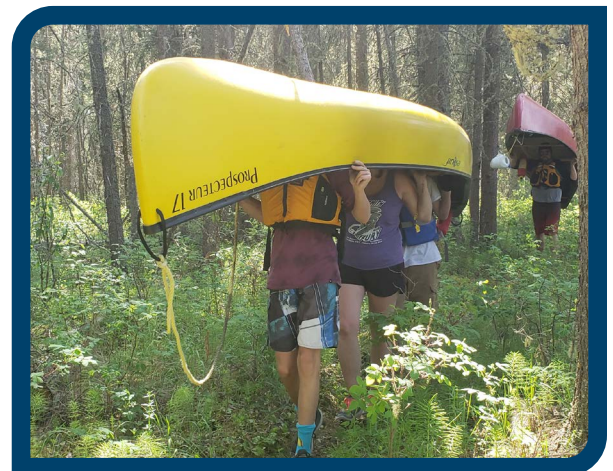
d. On the land programs foster self-esteem, perseverance, confidence, leadership, and cooperation.

Being on the land not only imparted Indigenous skills and knowledge to participants, but encouraged the development of qualities like perseverance and leadership.

Perseverance

Hiking and canoeing trips were particularly noteworthy for teaching participants the value of perseverance. A common theme amongst the reports were youth who doubted their abilities at the beginning of these trips, but who ultimately overcame their struggles.

Participants on a Northern Youth Leadership canoe trip in 2016 were “a bit reticent and cautious in the canoes” at the beginning of their trip, but by the end, “they were excited to get going, packed up their canoes easily in the morning, and begged to go farther and farther each day.”



PWK High School Grade 9 Canoe Trip.

Participants in Northern Youth Leadership's 2018 summer camp/canoe trip responded to a question asking what they had learned about themselves by reflecting on their capacity to persevere.

PWK High School (Tthebacha/Fort Smith) took students to Four Mile Lake to practice prior to their 2018 canoeing trip at Kettle Point, and found that while many struggled during practice paddles, "by the end of trip they were all doing multiple different strokes." One youth, participating in a hike at a Northern Youth Leadership camp in 2017 "had struggled earlier in the trip with a shorter hike and was really doubtful that she would be able to make it 13 kilometres." However, "with the support of the other participants and NYL staff, [she] accomplished the entire hike and even commented on how beautiful it was. She was extremely proud of her accomplishment and was excited to tell her family about it." After this hiking trip, one participant reported that she had learned, "I try my best and don't give up."

It was not only strenuous outdoor activities that taught perseverance. In 2017, land-based programming at École St. Patrick High School (Sòmba K'è/Yellowknife) included students making mittens and drums under the calm guidance of an Elder. The youth found that the "traditional projects helped develop their patience and perseverance."

Leadership

Being on the land created opportunities for participants, particularly youth participants, to take initiative and show leadership. Several teachers of school-directed on the land programs remarked that youth who had difficulty in conventional classroom settings thrived on the land. A teacher at Chief Julius School (Teet'it Zehh/Fort McPherson) found that the students did not need staff to provide the usual amount of structure during their 2016 winter camp: "the students worked and created their own activities without being asked. They even set rabbit snares on their own, made dry meat poles, set the tents, cut wood, collected spruce gum, cooked meals, etc."

An Elder on that same trip remarked, "These boys and girls are very good workers. [This experience] brought me back to when I was a young girl setting up camp. No one argued, no one was sitting around, they just worked and did what they had to do."

Being on the land allowed participants young and old to demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of land-based skills. During Łútsel K'é Dene School's 2017 cultural camp, the students "learned that being on the land is a great way to teach one another important lessons they have learned."

I can push through the hard parts... I like canoeing a lot, I wanna be a canoe guide, I am a good leader... I am very independent and can manage myself very well... I'm strong... I can portage, didn't think I would do that... I have muscles... I can do 4 portages.

– Northern Youth Leadership participants

A teacher recounted that a Grade 6 boy was able to "lead our group to the camp by skidoo and got to show off his knowledge of the land and his ability to drive skidoo." PWK High

School staff reported watching some students emerge as leaders during their 2018 trip to Wood Buffalo National Park. The stronger canoeists “helped their peers by modeling, instructing, and encouraging.”

Other programs created formal opportunities for participants to demonstrate leadership. Chief Paul Niditchie School made use of the increased leadership capacity of participants by having past participants act as leaders on their 2019 Tsiigehnjik canoe trip, remarking, “Pairing these young leaders with our students for paddling, and creating opportunities throughout the trip for them to share knowledge and perspectives about their relationship with Tsiigehnjik was a very successful element of the trip.” Similarly, Northern Youth Leadership hired three “leaders in training” under 18 who were paid to develop their leadership skills during their 2018 summer camps and canoe expeditions.

Confidence

As participants learned more about their culture, as they practiced traditional skills, and as they were given opportunities to be leaders, program staff noticed improvements in the self-esteem and confidence of participants. For example, a teacher at Colville Lake School said that “watching a struggling student excel in the bush” during a 10-day camp in 2018 was an experience they would never forget because “it does wonders for the child’s self-esteem and self-concept.” Parents also noticed changes in their children. A parent of a participant in a 2017 Northern Youth Leadership camp said that she “couldn’t believe the change in her child,” particularly in terms of “how comfortable they had become working with new people and expressing their opinions in a group.”

Both Northern Youth Leadership (2018) and the Foster Family Coalition of the NWT (2018 and 2019) noted increased resiliency and confidence in their participants during their respective canoe trips. Northern Youth Leadership stated that adverse weather conditions “presented opportunities for youth to develop their skills in communication, problem solving, emotional-regulation, and overcoming frustration. It was inspiring to watch the personal development in youth.”

Similarly, the Foster Family Coalition remarked that they were delighted to hear youth exclaim, “I didn’t think I would be able to do that!” The coalition explained, “[The youth] really got the chance to learn just how capable they are, and to be proud of their accomplishments.” In particular, on the land programs make participants feel more confident in the bush. A week after the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board’s Dene Ts’ı̨ School (2016), which involved formal and informal hunter education, one student, who previously “had very little experience in the bush,”



The annual Łútsël K'é Hide Tanning Camp organized by the Łútsël K'é Women's Group.

shot his first moose. Another had enrolled in Dechinta Bush University, inspired to apply by their experience on the land.

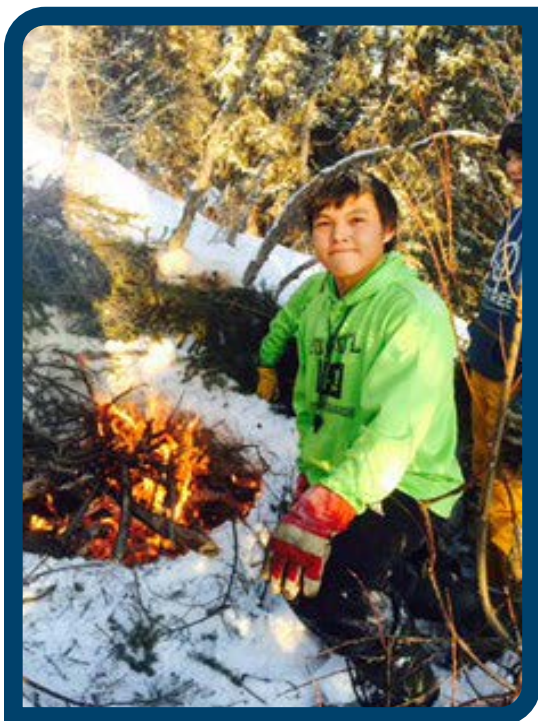
Cooperation

Grant recipients reported that on the land programming encouraged cohesion and cooperation, creating opportunities for participants to grow not only as individuals, but also as members of a community. The spirit of cooperation fed back into participants' sense of themselves. A participant on a 2016 Northern Youth Leadership hike shared that the experience taught them "that I can be helpful," and "that I'm nice to people."



Deh Gáh School's Experimental Culture-Based Education On The Land program.

Several programs remarked that simply being on the land seemed to encourage a collegial and cooperative atmosphere. PWK High School's trip to Wood Buffalo National Park in 2018 included French immersion students for the first time, and the two groups came together well. The report describes one student who "spent most of her first day isolating herself," but was "swimming and laughing with the group ... teaching others how to play card games" by the second day. Ecology North (2017) found that at their environmental adventure camp in Enterprise, cooking and sharing meals around the fire offered "a great opportunity to work together and learn more about each other, creating a sense of belonging and helping to build trust among camp participants and facilitators."



Similarly, the Łútsël K'é Women's Group observed "a real sense of camaraderie" at their hide tanning camp, where "the women really enjoyed spending a week in such a supportive, positive, encouraging environment where everybody is willing to help one another." They also noted that these annual camps were building "more awareness in the hunters as to the value of a properly skinned hide." This was shown through the young hunters skinning moose more carefully, "because they remember that [the women making hides] don't want any knife marks in the hides."

Conclusion

These programs do not just build capacity in youth—they give them the space and support to rebuild capacities that are sometimes put under extreme stress.

The Wood for Elders program at East Three Schools.

Two participants in the Gwich'in Tribal Council /Regional Youth Council's on the land camp (2019) noted that they needed on the land programming to regain hope, energy, and purpose:

"I felt rejuvenated. I needed this experience to keep me going. I rarely sleep or rest when I am home in my community or when I represent my community. It is exhausting work but I do it because I love my people, culture, and land. I have never slept so good, laughed so hard, ate so much, and drank so much good tea in a long time."

"It is hard to reconnect with my cultural identity. I don't know where to start. I feel overwhelmed. I feel like I am alone when others around me just want to continue living and accepting what we see in our communities. [...] I want to change but I need help. This weekend inspired me. It gave me hope. I know I am not alone in this."

The ways in which these programs are building capacity are evident in both individual and community growth witnessed both during and after programs.

The day started with drumming and a feeding-the-fire ceremony and a prayer. Joe welcomed us to the camp and spoke about the healing power of being on the land. The ceremonial opening set the tone for the day. Many participants, including Elders, staff and students commented how the whole day was peaceful, without "drama" and how the tone of respect permeated everything we did.

– Diamond Jenness School Report

e. On the land programs provide communities and community members with vital resources like traditional food and firewood.

On the land programming brings food and other resources from the land to the community. A 2017 harvesting trip led by West Point First Nation produced cranberries stored for a future community feast; participants at a 2017 camp organized by Pedzéh Kí First Nation dried, cut up, and distributed moose meat (contributed by a hunter) to the community; and youth at the Inuvik Community Corporation's 2017 camp brought home fish they had helped to harvest, cut up, and dry. During the outdoor programming delivered by the Salvation Army (Sòm̄ba K'è / Yellowknife) in 2016, participants tended a community garden and shared its produce with a local shelter and transitional housing.

The students who collected the wood ... enjoyed being able to make the Elders happy.

– Wood For Elders Report

Similarly, Hay River Library hosted food foraging and cooking workshops in 2017, where participants learned to use local plants for tea, cooking, and health and beauty products.

Elders, in particular, have benefitted from the harvesting activities associated with on the land programs in their communities. With continued support from the Collaborative, East Three School's Wood for Elders program has brought firewood, an affordable and accessible source of heat, to Inuvik/Inuvik Elders in need. The 2017 report attests, "the Elders [...] loved it, and the students who collected the wood saw the need and enjoyed being able to make the Elders happy."

Other land-based programs bring traditional food to Elders. Moose Kerr School's hunting trip in 2016 culminated in a shared meal with five Elders, where together they prepared the animals from their hunt:

"One Elder said that she hadn't had any rabbit in over a year so this was a very special meal for her. She loved it and we made sure to send her home with lots of cleaned and cut up rabbit ready to be cooked."

f. On the land programs foster attitudes of stewardship amongst participants, who subsequently work to conserve and improve the well-being of the land itself.

On the land programming helps participants connect to their land, their culture, and their community. That connection includes a sense of responsibility and stewardship. This section discusses in greater detail the attitude of stewardship that on the land programs develop.



Life as Akaitcho Dene hosted by Akaitcho Territory Government.

Many programs use discussion, sharing circles, and story-telling with Elders to impart to younger participants the importance of caring for the land, and to educate them on issues facing the land. These discussions draw on both Indigenous knowledge as well as Western scientific paradigms.

For example, the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board's 2016 Youth Network Culture Camp had staff from the Government of the NWT's Environment and Natural Resources office teach hunter education, which included conservation values. The North Slave Métis Alliance discussed "land use planning" during their 2016 cultural camp at Old Fort Rae, and Délı̨ne Got'ı̨ne Government held visioning workshops integrating Indigenous knowledge and Western science to discuss the future of Sahtú/Great Bear Lake during their 2019 summer culture camp. Finally, the Akaitcho Territory Government hosted discussions about local signs of climate change during their 2019 Life as Akaitcho Dene camp, and the youth "were encouraged to use the land more, travel on it, harvest from it, so that they will know it, see the changes, and be able to adapt to them."

Youth learned in these programs to be stewards not just of the land, but of sacred and historical sites, like the participants at Chief Paul Niditchie School in 2019, who took part in a gravesite renewal project, or the youth on the Yellowknives Dene First Nation 2018 Dechita Naowo trip, who learned "where some sacred sites are located and how to behave around those areas and preserve the archaeological remains." Project participants in the Tłı̨chq Re-

search and Training Institute’s Reviving Trails Project travelled more than 500 kilometres by canoe from Behchokò along the Mowhi Trail to the barrenlands and back to Wekweètì in 2016. Along the way, participants “cut down new growth and remove[d] old logs, re-mark[ed] the trees at the entrances and exits of the portages, and thus maintain[ed] the extensive network of traditional trails that the Tłı̨chǫ have built and travelled since time immemorial.” Finally, youth at Weledeh Catholic School’s Creating New Roots camp learned to be stewards of stories, working with Elders to document the story of Yamoze and the sacred tree, creating a virtual 3D tour that would tell the tale. On the land programs are thus preparing and encouraging participants to be stewards of their land and culture.

Part II: Challenges Faced in Delivering On the Land Programs

a. *Weather, environmental conditions, and wildlife.*

- *Forty-seven organizations indicated that weather and wildlife posed challenges to their programming.*
- *Fifteen organizations stated that weather conditions forced them to cancel or postpone programming.*
- *Eight organizations noted that weather conditions prevented them from doing certain activities. Most of the cancelled activities were water-based, including fishing and canoeing. In other cases, there were issues with hot weather, wildfires, and rain making roads impassable.*
- *Three programs had issues with bears in the area.*
- *One program stayed on the land five days longer than anticipated due to inclement weather.*

Challenges associated with weather, environmental conditions, and wildlife occurred in all years and all seasons. The summer of 2017 was particularly difficult. Forest fires on the last days of the Chief Paul Niditchie School canoe trip prompted the group to paddle late into the night so they could stay ahead of their fire and finish their trip. Trailcross Treatment Centre had to cancel their summer camp in 2017 because of wildfires. Ka’a’gee Tu First Nation ended their 2017 camp early due to hot weather, which also limited the participation of Elders. Hot weather that same year curtailed activities during Ecology North’s Hay River day camps; they had to cut their visit to the Northern Farm Training Institute short, and spend less time outdoors than originally planned. By contrast, extreme cold weather prompted West Point First Nation to cancel some of their planned events in the same year.

The following year, both PWK High School (Tthebacha/Fort Smith) and East Three Secondary (Inuvik/Inuvik) had to reroute planned trips because of environmental conditions. PWK went to Kettle Point at Pine Lake instead of undertaking a river trip after three weeks of rain made roads impassable. East Three School went to Semmler Channel instead of Reindeer Station due

to a dearth of safe ice roads. The warmer-than-expected winter in the Delta region also made it difficult for students who were part of the Wood for Elders program to travel through the town and deliver wood without causing debilitating wear-and-tear to their equipment, delaying the distribution of wood until after the fall freeze-over.

Although residents of the NWT are used to having to change plans due to weather, climate change has brought increasingly unpredictable and difficult weather conditions to the North. Ecology North, in collaboration with the Tłı̨chǫ Government, found that the effects of climate change in the North include “shorter, warmer winters,” “increased rain and snowfall,” “more extreme fall and winter storms,” “less predictable weather,” “increased winds,” and “more forest fires”.



Colville Lake School's Spring On The Land Camp.

“All though no organization attributed difficulties to climate change specifically, elsewhere communities have reported on the ways in which climate change is affecting access to the land.”

b. Scheduling and Timing

- ***Eleven*** organizations reported having difficulties finding an appropriate time to schedule their camp, or having to change their schedule in response to unforeseen events (mostly unrelated to weather).
- ***Eight*** organizations reported that deaths in the community caused them to change the timing of programming.
- ***Five*** organizations indicated that they did not have time to complete all of their planned activities (or everything participants wanted to do) in their schedule.

Organization often find scheduling a major challenge. Organizing programming around other events, both planned and unplanned, can be difficult. Some organizations, including Behdzi Ahda First Nation (2018) and Inuvik Community Corporation (2017), found that they had to change the timing of their trips to work around other community trips or events. Furthermore, when the dates of the Dene National Assembly changed to the same dates as Dene Nahjo’s 2019 camp, Dene Nahjo lost participants who were going to work at the assembly.

However, one of the largest causes of program scheduling changes was death in the community. The Hamlet of Sachs Harbour (2019) were on the point of leaving for their May camp when they discovered that their mayor had died suddenly. They wound up rescheduling their trip for July. Yellowknives Dene First Nation (2018) also postponed their camp “due to the passing of two Elders in our community,” and the Gwich’in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council delayed their camps after “losses to illnesses and suicide in the region,” wanting “to be mindful and respectful for time to mourn and grieve.” In some cases, rescheduling meant that programs lost participants or facilitators (as was the case for the Gwich’in Tribal Council).

Many organizations stated that these experiences taught them the importance of flexibility, with the Hamlet of Sachs Harbour (2019) stating, “We learned that things are never predictable and how to shift gears when necessary to try to salvage what we can and start over.”

c. Participant levels.

• *Thirty-four organizations indicated that participant levels were a challenge.*

Some organizations found it challenging to recruit participants. The Community Presence Office of Wekweètì (2017) had issues with adult participation levels. They organized a healing camp in 2017 that experienced poor attendance as many adult participants backed out last minute. Similarly, Children First Society (2018) had difficulty finding new families to take part in their programming, despite reaching out through Income Support, the Friendship Centre, and Healthy Families.

Many groups found that accessibility was a factor in participation levels. The YWCA of Yellowknife found that their programs had the best turn-out “when transportation assistance is provided,” indicating that transportation might be a barrier to participation. Another important barrier was the cost of missed work when on the land.

When the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board’s Dene Ts’ı̨ı̨ı̨ School experienced difficulty recruiting youth participants, they offered a funding incentive of \$500 to participants, and wound up with ten participating youth as a result. Other programs addressed these programs by enabling participants to work during the day and then attend the camp at night, as Behdzi Ahda First Nation did during their 2018 North End Spring Camp.

However, Behdzi Ahda First Nation also found that closeness to the community meant that participants could leave whenever they wished for the comforts of the town, meaning they experienced the proximity of the camp to town as a positive and a negative.

Other barriers to participation were mental health struggles, as well as anxiety and fear about the experience of being on the land. Tı̨ı̨ı̨ı̨ Łeàgı̨ı̨ı̨ Ts’ı̨ı̨ı̨ı̨ Kq’s On-the-Land Healing program, which targeted people who are homeless with mental health and addiction concerns, found that their numbers “dwindled to half,” from 10 to 5, as their week of programming went on. They struggled particularly with their program that paired clients with hunters, as clients had to be ready to drop

everything and go at a moment's notice once the conditions were right, and some clients were not locatable. From this experience they learned a lesson in the "importance of immediacy" when "working with vulnerable populations," who would benefit from more consistent, structured programming. Programs also sometimes changed to locations closer to town to serve participants who were anxious about being on the land (as West Point First Nation did in 2019) or reduced the duration of the camp (as Yellowknife Women's Society did in 2018).

Some programs were challenged by participant levels that were close to being more than they could accommodate. Délıne Got'ıne Government noted that the participation of so many community members was both a strength and a challenge, "as only so much can be fit into a week." Similarly, Łútsel K'é Women's Group (2019) found that even though they were not advertising their hide camp widely, it was becoming increasingly well-known. They had to increase the number of camp workers, "open up new camping spots and make sure we have enough firewood and food to go around."

Sahtú Renewable Resources Board's Dene ts'ıı program.



c. (i) Youth Participation

- Twenty-four programs indicated that they had issues with recruiting youth or sustaining youth participation (namely high-school-aged youth).

Youth, and specifically teens, were the population identified as having the most resistance to being on the land. This is likely due at least in part to the fact that so much on the land programming is taking place through schools, who target teenage students as potential participants in a way that they can't target other, older populations.

Mangilaluk School (2018), PWK School (2018), Łútsel K'é Dene School (2019), and ʔehtseo Ayha School (2019) all stated that they had difficulties getting high school students to participate in land-based programming. East Three Secondary identified inconsistent attendance as a challenge for the Wood for Elders program, and ehtseo Ayha School in Délıne (2017) had difficulty interesting youth in their outdoor excursions. ʔehtseo Ayha also struggled to have permission forms returned for each activity. Many of these schools had high levels of buy-in from younger students; however, they experience issues specifically with the older students. Interestingly, not many schools reflected on the question of why high school students did not participate on the land.

Many, like a staff member at Mangilaluk School (2017), ascribed this to teenage indifference:

“In total we had 6 high school students join us on the trip. I had a few chances to speak to the high school [...] and it seemed like their biggest woes about going were that they had to be here on time in the morning and that they felt like they would be babysitting the younger kids. I did have a conversation about the importance of mentoring their younger peers and how important mentoring is to Inuvialuit culture and tradition, but I could not change their minds.”

However, Łútsël K'é Dene School (2019) addressed the greater struggles their high school students were facing.

It's possible, and even likely, that high school-aged youth face the same barriers to participation identified by other groups: responsibilities in town (including paid work); mental health concerns; and anxiety/fear about being in an unfamiliar situation. When organizations, particularly schools, experience low youth participation as a challenge, it may be worthwhile for them to explore what other challenges the youth are facing, in order to better address and surmount barriers to participation.

We struggle to get the high school students on the land. In fact, this past year, we have struggled to get them in the building at all. We are fighting against gambling, drugs, alcohol, and technology and we are losing that fight.

– Łútsël K'é Dene School

Organizations that had issues with child and youth attendance often remarked on concurrent difficulties with community and parental caregiver support. Ɣehtseo Ayha School, Alexis Arrowmaker School, Behdzi Ahda First Nation, Yellowknife Education District #1, and the Hay River Métis Government Council all noted issues with positive caregiver or community support. Many thought that issues stemmed from a lack of understanding about being on the land. Yellowknife Education District #1 commented, “When people do not understand the purpose and value of a canoe trip, it is often difficult to foster the commitment to the training and preparation.” Alexis Arrowmaker stated that parents of their students “were not familiar” with the type of ice fishing they were doing and were thus “uncertain that their children would be warm enough on the lake.”

Organizations have employed a number of different strategies to address the issue of participation. For example, when no local youth signed up for their on the land programs, the Inuvik Youth Centre decided to organize a series of day trips rather than an overnight camp, making it more accessible for a broader range of youth. After struggling to build student interest in their 2017 camp, Łútsël K'é Dene School learned that “older youth aren't as interested in going on the land unless it's an authentic experience with a significant outcome and with a guide that they all respect,” like “going hunting a significant distance from town, while being led by a highly respected hunter from the community.”

Many organizations found that interest in their land-based programming grew when others in the community heard about the experiences of participants through photos and stories on social media, pictures posted in public spaces, word-of-mouth, and local newspaper articles.

For example, Alexis Arrowmaker School stated, “Having [...] had the students come back and speak very highly about the program, many more are interested in going again this year.”

d. Staffing

- *Sixteen programs indicated issues accessing other staff/facilitators*
- *Five programs indicated issues accessing Elders.*

Many groups identified staffing as a challenge they faced in delivering successful programs. Some groups simply had trouble finding people to fill positions. In 2016, the Foster Family Coalition struggled to find someone who could commit to the cultural coordinator role. In other cases, Elders, cultural knowledge holders, or staff became ill or had emergencies that caused them to pull out at the last minute. For example, Trailcross Treatment Centre (2017) had to cancel their winter camp after cultural advisors fell ill and replacements could not be found.

Frequent staff turnover also affected program delivery. Moose Kerr School had a major staff turnover in the fall of 2017, when the programming for which they had received a grant was supposed to take place. They did not realize that the project had been missed until January 2018. Thankfully, they were able to work with the Collaborative to re-designate their funds for a spring cultural exchange program with a school visiting the Delta from Toronto.

Programs do their best to train new staff or adapt programming to reflect the strengths of the new hires. However, this remains a challenge.



*Edehzhéh/Willow Lake Camp
hosted by Deh Gáh School.*

e. Resources

- *Thirty-five programs found supplies, shelter and/or funding to be a challenge.*
- *Fifteen organizations had inadequate or insufficient supplies or shelter. Most of the issues revolved around the number of ski-doo/snowmobiles, or the condition of those vehicles. Other organizations needed more cabins, more boats, winter gear for participants, and better tents, tent heaters, and cooking supplies.*
- *Eight organizations indicated that their costs were higher than expected.*
- *Six organizations indicated that they had to scale back the length or frequency of their camps to match funding limitations.*

Organizations were challenged by their limited access to funds and supplies. Both Deh Gáh Gotie First Nation and Łútsël K'é School found during their 2017 camps that youth lacked the necessary clothing and equipment to be out on the land, especially in the winter.

Several schools, including ʔehtseo Ayha School (2019), Angik School (2019), Alexis Arrowmaker School (2018) and East Three Secondary (2019), identified access to skidoos as a challenge. While East Three School had three skidoos, they had been “put through the ringer and back, especially with our Wood for Elders program,” which involved travelling through “low-lying brush.” East Three School expected that their skidoos would “eventually need to be replaced.” East Three School also lamented their lack of access to a trailer that would have helped them deliver wood to Elders in all sorts of weather, but which the school board had repossessed for their own use.

For many organizations, shortfalls were the result of unexpected events increasing the cost of a program. The Yellowknives Dene First Nation had to rent boats for longer than anticipated for their 2018 Dechita Naowo because of difficulties they encountered in transporting materials for a tent frame and an

outhouse to their campsite. Likewise, Diamond Jenness Secondary School (Hay River) had to move to a more expensive retreat centre in 2016 after their prospective camp leader had an emergency and was unable to host them at his camp. In other cases, the shortfall was a function of the popularity of the program. The Tłı̨chq̓ Government’s three-week-long camps in 2017 found they needed one more bunkhouse cabin, and East Three



Edehzhéh/Willow Lake Camp hosted by Deh Gáh School.

School found that their cabins were over capacity during their 2018 trip to Semmler Channel. In some cases, a lack of resources is preventing the continuation or growth of a program. Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School ran a month-long camp at Willow Lake, a fly-in location, in 2016, and wanted to continue to offer the experience to students, but worried that the cost of air travel was prohibitive.

Organizations also had difficulty with funding and cash flow. Northern Youth Leadership found that the fact that they received most of their funding “at the end of June/beginning of July” meant that they could not spread their camps out over the spring and summer and provide “staff with employment over their entire university summer break.” They stated that they were “exploring different options and [...] applying for different funding pots” in order to remedy this situation.

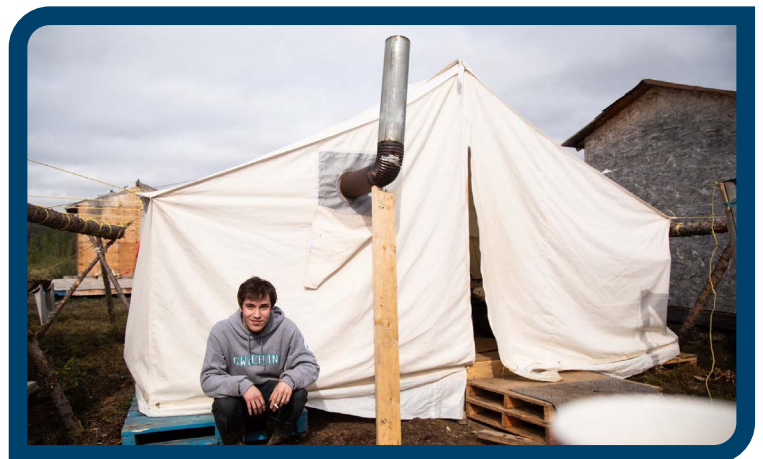
Northern Youth Leadership also found that their current donors were “hinting that we need to find other sources of sustainable funding because theirs is not meant to be core support,” but they could not find funding sources “offering core support.” Similarly, Ulukhaktok Community Corporation was having difficulty funding their yearly summer language camp “due to ongoing budget cuts.” Given that programs develop capacity and community buy-in over time and benefit from being a consistent and permanent fixture of their communities (see Section 3d), having steady funding sources is extremely important to the health of on the land programming in the territory.

f. Balancing Indigenous and Western Worldviews

The final challenge discussed in this section is the question of integrating the Indigenous and Western worldviews—whether it be food, protocols, practices, etc. Sometimes there was disagreement between organizations (particularly schools) and community members, as was the case for Chief Paul Niditchie School (2018):

Some community members have expressed that they would like the trip to be more traditional, using only traditional foods and canvas-wall prospector tents [...] however traditional protocols and school-based “risk management” protocols may not always cohere.

In other cases, the conflict occurred amongst program participants, as was the case during the Dehcho First Nations 2018 Yundaa Gogha canoe trip, where not all women agreed with the “cultural rules” around menstruation. Finally, it was sometimes difficult for program facilitators to provide culturally appropriate programming. The Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (2016) found it challenging to plan “a schedule with traditional and non-traditional



Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council's Youth Midway Lake Retreat.

activities,” opting for a flexible schedule that spaced “classroom-based activities, so that participants would have more opportunities to do traditional activities,” and so that Dene teachers would “have more agency in the running of the camp.” However, they found that “participants were requesting more structure.”



Sahtú Renewable Resources Board's Dene ts'ı̄łı̄ program. Photo by Pat Kane

This is not to say that all programs struggled with this issue, or that organizations that integrated Indigenous and Western methods found it uniformly difficult. Many organizations, including Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (2016, 2017), PWK High School (2017), Yellowknives Dene First Nation (2018), Dehcho First Nations (2019), and East Three School (2018), found that participants responded well to an integration of Western knowledge in Indigenous camps, particularly when it came to obtaining certifications (such as firearms or boat licenses), learning

about science and conservation (through ENR or other organizations), or learning how to use specific technology (such as digital recording equipment, GPS systems, or water sampling devices). A Sahtú Renewable Resources Board workshop on digital storytelling was initially met with skepticism “about the relevance of the workshop to Dene ts'ı̄łı̄,” but participants ultimately found it both enjoyable and “relevant to Dene ts'ı̄łı̄” as the videos expressed the participants’ “sense of cultural pride and belonging.”

Ultimately, programs found that while negotiating the differences between Indigenous and Western program delivery could be difficult, it could also lead to fruitful discussions about the role of Indigenous knowledge in today’s world. For example, Délı̄nę Got'ı̄nę (2019) remarked that in visioning workshops about stewardship of Great Bear Lake, a “major theme” was “integrating traditional knowledge and western science” in order to best secure the lake’s future.

Similarly, during the Akaitcho Territory Government (2019) Life as Akaitcho Dene camp, chiefs “spoke about the importance of continuing to walk in two worlds, that the knowledge learned on the land does have strong importance in guiding decisions about how the communities will operate in the colonial system.” They pointed out that “in the end, the colonial system can fail, but the Dene way of life has been proven to sustain for thousands of years.” This idea was reflected in the comments of a program participant doing inReach GPS training later in the trip, who “noted that it is important for safety to have these with you, but that you shouldn’t rely on these things ... you have to know the land where you travel because that knowledge doesn’t have batteries that can die.” Ultimately, it seems that programs found the best balance when they contextualized western science and technology as useful but still limited tools that can work to supplement Indigenous practices and knowledges.

Part III: Lessons Learned from Delivering On the Land Programs

a. Participants need more time on the land.

Some organizations noted increased interest in land-based programs as the program was occurring, with participants eager to return to programming the next day. Angik School (2018) reflected, “The encouraging sign was [when] the students, who participated the first day, asked if they could participate the second day. That tells us that the activity was successful.” Similarly, a knowledge holder facilitating at a Gwich’in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council camp (2019) stated, “By end of the night, no one wanted to leave, it was always hard to end the day when we all just wanted to stay.” Finally, the Salvation Army of Yellowknife (2018) noticed enthusiasm for their outdoor recreation programming reflected in participation levels:

“It is normally a challenge to motivate our clients; we did find that with the On the Land programming we had an increased participation from the clients. The clients were engaged and enthralled with the outdoor and cultural activities.”

Participants also shared their desire to return to on the land programs in the future, sometimes in formal evaluations. Chief Julius School (2019) reported that of ten student surveys, eight said they wanted to do the Midway Lake camp again, and one said they might want to do it again. Similarly, the Yellowknife Women’s Society (2018) found that “the twelve women who attended the camp all reported having enjoyed the camp, with many expressing a desire for another, longer camp.”

Participants (and participants’ families) also communicated their enthusiasm more informally. The Yellowknife YWCA (2018) reported that during their cultural day trips, “the girls and their families raved about the experiences they had, and very much wanted more similar programming.”

During Chief Jimmy Bruneau School’s (2019) winter camp, “Many students exclaimed that camp was great; they loved being there and wanted to stay longer.” The youth on the trip “shared that they would love to see an annual gathering ... continue in coming years,” and a mother of a child in the Children First Society’s First Steps on the Land program said,

“This is amazing; we need to do more of these experiences.”



Nitso Nankat Tr’iqwandaih / Land of the Midnight Sun project hosted by Chief Julius School.

Several organizations, including Children First Society (2016 and 2018), Diamond Jenness Secondary School (2016), the Presence Office of Wekweètì (2017), and the Inuvik Community Corporation (2017), specifically mentioned the need for more time on the land, or the challenge of fitting all of the planned activities into their time frame. After getting a taste of being on the land, participants often had a desire for more activities and programming, like participants in the Inuvik Community Corporation's camps, who wanted to do more traditional sewing and cooking projects. Children First Society found that even young children needed more time on the land. They explained that after spending a day at their 2016 camp, their young participants wanted to go every day, and "could easily spend a month" there.

Other programs reported wanting to expand their programming. Participants in Yamozha Kue Society's South Slavey immersion camp (2018) suggested an "on the land program for each season of the year," while participants in Tulít'a Dene Band's camp at Stewart Lake (2018) asked to do a winter camp next time.

My child keeps talking about the camp every day.

– Parent of a First Steps On The Land participant

Others wanted to explore new areas, like the youth on the Akaitcho Territory Government's (2019) Life as Akaitcho Dene camp, who "were excited to do more of this travel and see more areas of the land, and wanted to go to the barrenlands on the next trip."

Children First Society (2016) wanted to add a summer camp; Diamond Jenness Secondary School (2016) wanted to add a follow-up camp with a focus on "trauma and the brain"; the Łútsël K'éDene First Nation (2016) wanted to do a Families on the Land event during the fall hunt, a plant and berry-gathering trip, and a traditional meat preparation workshop; the Inuvik Youth Centre (2016) wanted to offer day trips for ice-fishing, trapping, dog-sledding, and firearm safety; PWK School (2018) wanted to create a yearly "Three Cs" (Culture, Canoeing, and Career) event for grade nines, and expand their canoe trip to the Grade 10–12 population; and the YWCA (2018) wanted to host several events, including a Cameron Falls medicine walk and hike, and an antler jewelry-making workshop.

Still others were excited to bring this programming to more people in their community. Youth participants in the Community Government of Wekweètì youth camp (2018) requested that the project be brought to other youth in the community.

These findings suggest that satisfaction for on the land programming is very high, and that if these programs are able to reach youth in particular, they can generate in those youth a love of the land and a desire to be on the land more.

b. “Outsiders” can learn to better serve their host communities when they participate in on the land programming.

On the land programming helps staff to better serve their clients, participants, and students, particularly when those staff members are not from the communities in which they work.



Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School's on the land programs.

The Salvation Army remarked that when their clients were on the land during their outdoor recreation programming in 2016, they showed skills and interests the organization did not previously know about. A land-based camp in 2016 enabled Trailcross staff, none of whom were Indigenous or from the Northwest Territories, to build connection with the families they served, as well as community members. The Inuvik Youth Centre (2016) reported that on the land programming helped their young staff to bond and build confidence, which improved program delivery. It also increased parents' confidence in the staff.

Many school reports remarked that on the land experiences greatly benefited teachers, many of whom were also not from the communities in which they were teaching. Chief Julius School (2017) found that their various camps, for grades K–12, strengthened relationships between teachers and students.

In 2016, Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School (Behchokò) reported that teachers, no less than students, learned about the land through the teachings of the Elders at their spring camps. Teachers “had the opportunity to observe students in a different element of learning [... and] enjoyed learning with their students outside of a classroom setting.” On the land trips also provided an important opportunity for teachers to notice and nurture potential in their students, particularly those who experienced difficulty in conventional school environments.

c. Partnerships contribute to the successful delivery of on the land programs.

A number of grant recipients noted that their projects happened and were successful because of a wide range of community partners. For example, PWK High School noted that their Grade 9 canoe trip in 2017 required the support of parents (to help their children pack and transport them), teachers (one of whom built a canoe trailer for the trip), Parks Canada staff (who provided guidance and maps), and GNWT Environment and Natural Resources (who provided a guide and a safety boat).

Similarly, Chief Paul Niditchie School's canoe trip in 2017 made use of the support of a “recreation director, wellness worker [...] local chief, and

Watching a struggling student excel in the bush is an experience I will never forget.

– Teacher, Colville Lake School

mayor, Gwich'in Organization president, bylaw officer, and Elders," all of whom "came together to overcome funding shortfalls."

Programs require the support of the community, but they also create opportunities to bring the community together. A winter camp organized by Łíídlıı Kúé Elementary in 2016 was an impetus for the school to partner with the local band for land use and resource sharing. After initial cultural teachers fell through for Trailcross' 2017 camp, the treatment centre forged new relationships with cultural teachers and Elders. This experience taught the organization that they would greatly benefit from being less insular and fostering new relationships.

Chief Paul Niditchie School credited their 2017 canoe trip with opening "broken lines of communication" between the school and community partners, as the "school shifted from an independent institution to a seat of community collaboration."

d. Importance of Consistent, Ongoing Programming

Closely related to the previous lesson is the finding that programs benefit from being ongoing, permanent fixtures in their communities. Many find it easier to generate support or interest once they have been in place for a few years and benefited from word-of-mouth. For example, the Grade Eight canoe trip (2016) organized by William McDonald Middle School (Sòmba K'è/ Yellowknife) was "building momentum" into something that students came to anticipate and look forward to every year. And the Wood for Elders program at East Three Secondary School (2019) "has become well-known and respected within [...] Inuvik. Originally, our Elders' list was quite small but as word traveled it has grown substantially." The growth of the Wood for Elders points to another reason that it is important that organizations offer continual programming: community members can come to rely on the vital services they provide.



Whatì Annual Boat Trip hosted by the Whatì Justice Committee

The relationships that form in these programs also benefit greatly from longevity, strengthening the bonds through which knowledge is shared and community is formed. For example, Princess Alexandra School noted that having a permanent camp "enabled the schools to hire Elders more frequently," increasing the cultural experiences for the students. Moreover, Yellowknife YWCA (2018) stated that their ability to "hire the same Elders that have worked well with GirlSpace in the past" is

"great for relationship-building between Elders and the participants."

Whatì Justice Committee (2019) noted that having knowledge holders who had "worked with youth" in other programs made a huge difference in engaging the youth on their annual boat trip. Furthermore, having consistent programming and consistent relationships is particularly important for participants who are engaging in programs designed to address trauma and mental health. Denínu Kúé First Nation (2017) noted that the participants in their Youth High

Risk Development Program felt safe, thanks to “the year and a half” of engaging with each other in workshops and sessions.

Offering consistent, ongoing programming also enables participants to benefit from the capacity they build through prior participation. West Point First Nation (Hay River) pointed this out in both their 2018 and 2019 reports. They stated that while “many of the community members were not comfortable spending the night on the land [...] these same community members [were] excited and looking forward to the next community camp” by the end of 2018. Chief Paul Niditchie School used the capacity of previous participants to teach new participants in their program. They stated they were “fortunate to enlist the help of [...] a collection of youth that had participated in a number of paddling trips in the Peel River Watershed.” They continued, “Pairing these young leaders with our students for paddling, and creating opportunities throughout the trip for them to share knowledge and perspectives about their relationship with Tsiigejnijk was a very successful element of the trip.”

Finally, ongoing programming builds not only individual capacity to participate in and lead on the land experiences, but it also builds the capacity of the community to support these projects, thereby making it easier for the host organization to implement. Angik School (2019) noted that since their ice fishing trip had become an annual event, they had “more participation from the students and community members”; “general excitement among the parents and students”; and “community members [who] were quite willing to act as guides and teach the students about ice fishing.” Similarly, Chief Paul Niditchie School noted that after hosting a canoeing trip on the Tsiigejnijk for several years, “Community volunteerism for the trip increased exponentially.” Having the capacity to offer a program year after year, as opposed to as a one-off, gives organizations the time to learn from mistakes, improve programming, grow leadership capabilities among participants, and grow with their communities.

e. Community members of all ages benefit from on the land programming.

The majority of the programs reviewed in this report are focused on serving children and youth. While land-based programming for young people is vital, grant reports reveal the value of on the land programs for people of all ages, including Elders and adults, and also the value of family-oriented programming.

Elders were involved in most programs as leaders, advisors, facilitators, and teachers. On the land programs provide Elders with a source of income, as well as opportunities to pass down their knowledge, history, and skills. However, Elders also benefit from programming where they act as lay participants, particularly as they often experience both physical and financial barriers to being on the land.

Adults also face barriers to participating in on the land programs. For example, it may be difficult for them to participate in longer camps due to work or childcare



Ice fishing with students from Angik School.

responsibilities. Organizations might consider different scheduling arrangements, providing childcare, or using funding to defray the costs of missed work, in order to increase participation of adults in on the land programs.

It was so amazing when we rounded the corner on the last day. The Gwich'in Nation flag was flying on the support boat, people were on top of Church Hill and on the bank, truck horns were honking, and everyone was cheering. The students were so proud as they pulled in. An eagle joined the trip on the second day of paddling, and as we pulled in, an eagle (the students were sure it was the same one) was circling overhead. Family and community mobbed the students as they pulled their canoes up.

– Principal, Chief Paul Niditchie School

Programming that targets the whole family can address issues of childcare. Family-centred programming is also important because families are an important site of intervention in addressing the harms of colonialism. A minority of the projects were family-oriented programs. Nevertheless, many enjoyed great success. For example, Deh Gáh School described their month-long family camp at Willow Lake in 2016 as “essential in the healing of our community.” They stated that youth became “more grounded, proud, willing to help” through the experience.

Similarly, Trailcross found that youth participants learned to interact and relate with adults during their winter family camp, something the youth had often struggled with in the past. Having connected with both relatives and her culture at the camp, a 13-year-old youth stated, “Out here you learn the story of your family.” The Łútsël K'é Women's Group noted that their 2017 hide tanning camp brought children together with their parents, so that “we now see children growing up around the practice of hide tanning again, something that was almost lost just a few years ago.”



The annual Łútsël K'é Hide Tanning Camp organized by the Łútsël K'é Women's Group.

Many of the projects targeting families were day- or evening-based trips, like Łútsël K'é Dene First Nation's 2016 gathering, which enabled family members, friends, and community members to reconnect over group projects, including arts and crafts and a community potluck. The Hay River Library Committee's after-school programming in 2017 provided activities for the whole family, including social paddling, foraging and cooking workshops, mukluk and mitten making, and the wildly popular fossil hunting expeditions.

f. Delivering different kinds of programs can make spending time on the land more accessible to a wider range of community members.

The majority of programs funded were multi-day camps. These camps offered an unparalleled experience for participants to learn various land-based skills in an interdependent and immersive environment. Much less common were programs offering regular (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly or monthly) daytime or evening programming. Yet such programming has its own unique benefits. Regular daytime/evening programming may be more accessible to certain populations who do not have the time to go out on the land for multiple days; it creates ongoing opportunities to learn and practice skills; it gives organizations the opportunity to offer a variety of experiences, and adjust their programming as they go; it encourages participants to enjoy the land near to their communities; and it offers important structure and consistency in the daily lives of participants.

Programs that offered regular daytime/evening programming had great success, and managed to include a diverse array of activities. A collective of organizations in Hay River ran a drop-in after-school nature club in 2016, with 5 to 18 participants per session, featuring activities that included nature hikes, bird feeder-making, compass orienteering, survival skills, rope knots, and tree identification. The Hay River Library Committee also ran evening and afterschool programming for all ages in 2017, including a social paddle with a stop for a campfire meal, fossil hunting, forest foraging and cooking workshops, and mitten and mukluk making. These programs were popular, bringing out anywhere from 10 to 40 people, and often had large waitlists.

Day-time/evening programs offer opportunities for the people to come together, cooperate, and build relationships just the same as immersive, multi-day camps. Unlike some camps, however, day-time/evening programs enable participants to come together right in their own communities. The Hay River Library Committee found that their programming encouraged participants to enjoy the natural resources and beauty of their local waterfalls, rivers, and beaches, and remarked that they saw “participants share stories over a campfire and build a sense of community with one another.” Similarly, the consistent programming facilitated by the Salvation Army (Sòmba K’è/Yellowknife) in 2016 encouraged their clients to maintain a healthy lifestyle and increased their social interaction and community inclusion, as clients opened up and shared more of themselves by telling stories around the campfire, and worked in the community garden to grow produce for various local shelters. The YWCA (Sòmba K’è/Yellowknife) ran a 2017 program that involved a mix of consistent daytime events and overnight camps, but the weekly swimming trip was particularly beloved.



Thìchq Government's Reviving Trails project.

g. The importance of mental health on the land

Many programs do incorporate mental health components, either as part of their program or as its main focus. Deh Gáh School (2019), for example, hosted a spring trauma camp specifically to “offer a healing space for youth in the community who are dealing with the intergenerational effects of residential school,” as well as “depression and suicidal ideation due to COVID-19.” This camp involved the presence of trained counsellors available to speak with youth, as well as “traditional ceremonies, harvesting activities, and reflection circles.” Another camp, put on by Tłı̄chǫ Łeàgı̄ Ts’ı̄ı̄ı̄ Ko (2016), focused on helping people who are homeless heal from mental illness, trauma, and addictions. This included having “staff of the friendship centre [...] on stand-by to provide supportive counselling,” including “after-hours, in case any participant got triggered during program downtime.”

While some organizations did not make addressing mental illness their primary focus, they incorporated mental wellness activities into their programming. This was the case for both Dehcho First Nations, who included “health and wellness facilitation focused on sharing circles around addictions, identification of feelings and group check-ins” during their 2018 Yundaa Gogha canoe trip, and the Foster Family Coalition, who started every day of their 2018 and 2019 canoe trips with “I Am” statements that aimed to build resiliency and self-confidence in their youth.

However, there were also programs who found that they suddenly had to implement mental health programming or be more attentive to participants’ mental health. The Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (2017) discovered this after their first two camp sessions, and provided a summary of why attending to mental health on the land is important.

Many Sahtú youth are struggling with addictions, intergenerational impacts of residential school and colonialism, and related experiences of trauma or stress. Leadership team members also struggle with these same challenges. Living on the land is not in itself a path to wellness, as is often assumed. In fact, being on the land can be triggering—and people continue to be affected by what happens in town.

– Sahtú Renewable Resources Board

The Sahtú Renewable Resources Board stated that triggers for their participants included “intoxication and detox symptoms while at camp; a crisis provoked by a traumatic event that took place in one of the Sahtú communities; and risk caused by sharing circles leading people to become vulnerable and also to know sensitive things about each other.”

And it is not just youth who are affected by trauma or distressing emotional responses on the land: the Tulít’a Dene Band (2018) found that the “first night at camp was emotional for some Elders, due to memories of their parents, tribes, and the amount of work they did when they were young”. Moreover, the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board pointed out that adequately

addressing mental wellness wasn't simple, and required hiring new staff, training existing staff, and providing aftercare services for youth returning to town.

Parents and guardians were so happy that their daughters had healthy and fun experiences at the Yellowknife River [...] The girls loved the weekly activity and spoke of wishing it was every day. Some parents said it was the only thing their children were interested in that month.

– YWCA GirlSpace

The Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council had to increase their focus on mental health and therapeutic support after a suicide in the community. They found that “the theme of grief overpowered all other programming as nearly every single individual was in a stage of grief from recent or past losses.”

They included sharing circles, ceremony, and prayer “to unpack what individuals were carrying.” As with the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, the Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council found that youth were experiencing great pressure and hardship.

Participants in the Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council (2019) camp found it healing to be able to openly grieve and share their feelings on the land, with one participant reflecting, “I needed to be on the land surrounded by good people that accepted me, hugged me, loved me, and took care of me.”

However, what is clear from both the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board and Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council narratives is that the need for psychological support does not decrease when participants go out on the land, that programs need to be ready to address the psychological and emotional needs of their participants, and that addressing those needs can involve a significant investment of resources.



Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council's Youth Midway Lake Retreat.

Many youth shared the amount of grief, trauma, sadness, sense of hopelessness, frustration and anger that they carry personally or for others in their communities is overwhelming and challenging to cope with in a good way. Many youth shared they feel overwhelming amounts of pressure to be leaders, advocates, complete high school, attend college, have a family as well as maintaining or practicing their culture and language, learning their history and traditions, and break the cycle of violence. Many of the participants shared they experience lateral violence on social media and in their communities.

– Gwich'in Tribal Council/Regional Youth Council

Part IV: Future Needs to Support Delivery of On the Land Programs

a. Increase available funding for on the land programs in the NWT.

The NWT On The Land Collaborative has become an important source of funds for land-based initiatives in the NWT. In order to sustain current on the land program opportunities and support new initiatives, the Collaborative needs to grow its funding pot. This requires engaging new partners and encouraging existing partners to increase their support for the Collaborative.

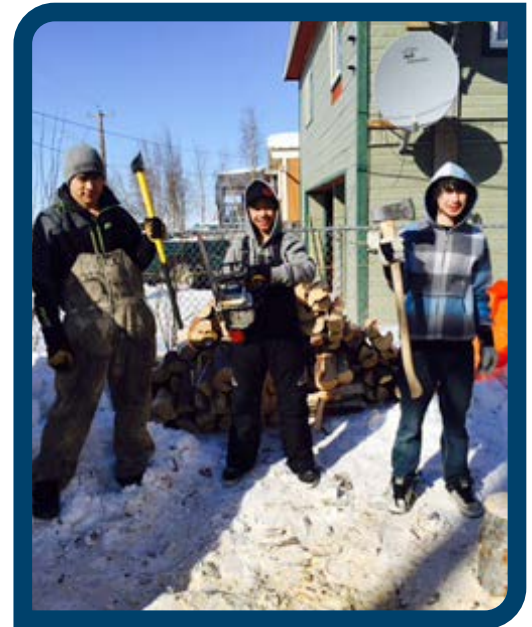
b. Continue to be flexible with grant recipients.

Programs need the Collaborative to continue to be flexible. Flexibility is particularly necessary when weather conditions are unpredictable, when there are community crises, or when organizations have issues finding and booking locations.

Unpredictable weather demands flexibility. Tetlit Gwich'in Council wanted to host their trek in the last week of February, but "due to warm weather conditions and a lot of open water," they "were advised by the Elders not to proceed until colder weather." Helen Kalvak School had to change their plans twice due to weather. They turned their weeklong language immersion camp into six separate day trips after "poor ice conditions" and "bad weather" rendered them "unable to provide the experience as originally designed." However, they were only able to do two days of programming because of continued weather conditions. They wound up moving their camp to the fall.

As discussed in [Section 2b](#), community crises and losses can also cause organizations to need to reschedule their plans. Several organizations, including West Point First Nation (2018), Yellowknives Dene First Nation (2018), Gwich'in Tribal Council/ Regional Youth Council (2018), and the Hamlet of Sachs Harbour (2019), had to exercise flexibility and change dates in response to losses in the community.

Participants also need to be supported to be flexible when they have to change locations. Reasons for having to change locations vary, but include needing "to match the comfort level of community participants," as was the case for West Point First Nation, or having their booking cancelled in favour of "more lucrative bookings" (Yellowknife Women's Society, 2018). Changing location can add costs (as it did for Yellowknife Women's Society) and can also change the dates of programs, as it did from Weledah Catholic School (2019). Location and site issues can thus require both organizations and funders to be flexible, though having a permanent site can also help address many of these issues (see [Section 4d](#)).



The Wood for Elders program at East Three Schools.

Many groups stated that they appreciated the Collaborative's flexibility in the face of these changes. Moose Kerr School, for example, received funding in 2017 to implement Wilderness Survival and Game Management in their high school curriculum, courses that would include a fall camp. However, after staff turnover at the beginning of the school year caused those plans to fall through, the Collaborative allowed them to use the funds to do a cultural exchange, with



Colville Lake School's Spring On The Land Camp.

students from Toronto spending a week in Akłarvik/Aklavik, and students at Moose Kerr then spending a week in Toronto. Moose Kerr stated that they were "appreciative of the Collaborative Committee to allow Moose Kerr School to adjust the proposal for a winter one." Chief Julius School credited the Collaborative's flexibility with enabling them "to have most students participate." Finally, when the North Slave Métis Alliance had to delay their camps "from taking place in 2016/2017 as planned" due to "administrative hurdles," they specifically remarked that they appreciated the Collaborative's "flexibility to accommodate our needs."

The Collaborative's flexibility meant that some organizations could offer extra programming with leftover funds, after their initial programs had been fulfilled. Trailcross was able to use funds that remained after Feeding Our Spirits to run a four-day camping trip at Sweetgrass Landing and École St. Patrick School used funds left over from their 2017 coming-of-age camps to do day trips with the Indigenous Leadership Group, Grade 8 leadership camp students, and students in Experiential Science 20. After Dehcho First Nations found they were unable to use funding for their Water Guardians programs, they were able to reallocate it to a canoe trip, and Tłı̄chq Łeàgłq Ts'ı̄ı̄ı̄ Kq (2016) used leftover money to create a program where they paired participants with community hunters. Ecology North allocated their funding surplus in 2017 to their forest camps. Finally, Sahtú Renewable Resources Board used "an extension in the deadline for spending OTL funds" to extend their 2017 culture camp programming from one month to six weeks.

c. Create opportunities for grant recipients to connect with community groups, integrate further in their communities, and learn from one another.

Organizations delivering on the land programming need community support. They benefit greatly from it, and communities often benefit greatly from coming together for these projects. Other [sections of this report](#) have discussed the importance of community support ([including 2d](#)) which discusses how participant levels, particularly among youth, are influenced by levels of family and community buy-in.

Organizations who found their programs successful often attributed that success to community support. The Hamlet of Sachs Harbour (2019) stated, "We all worked together to plan, organize, implement, and participate in the project. It definitely was a community and group effort." When asked to identify what went well, they stated, "People and youth working together to make the trips and camp possible."

The YWCA of Yellowknife reflected similar sentiments, stating, “It is also nice and helpful to have many adults available to help interact with participants, supervise and build relationships. We have had both staff, volunteers and family members help out for the events.” Dene Nahjo even pointed out that such community involvement not only benefits the programs, but also strengthens relationships, noting that “the relationships between Dene Nahjo and the workshop leads, project participants, and our funding partners are stronger.”



Dene Nahjo's Women's Rites of Passage Camp.

An important way of gaining community buy-in is through community outreach. That outreach can take the form of inviting visitors to “drop in” on nearby camps for a day or even a few hours. For example, Yamoza Kue Society attributed the success of their 2018 cultural immersion camp to “community support,” stating that “a lot of parents ... and other community members came out to Sandy Creek to support the camp.” Other organizations had success with hosting events after camps and trips. Chief Paul Niditchie School “hosted a community supper and a presentation about the trip where three students who went on the trip shared their experience.” They were pleased to have “about 40 people” in attendance and described how “the whole room swelled with pride as the students described how this trip has helped them to reconnect with their history.” As discussed in the next paragraph, Chief Paul Niditchie School benefited greatly from increased community support during the following year of programming.



Elizabeth Mackenzie School's Winter On The Land Program.

The need to incorporate community support is particularly important for schools, who sometimes have a high turnover in staff, few of whom are longstanding community members, and who operate at a distance from the community as a result.

As discussed above, Chief Paul Niditchie School credited their canoeing trips with “easing the school’s transition from that of a separate institution to a seat of collaboration within the community.”

Their trip not only included the participation of “the local Member of the Legislative Assembly, the Chief and Mayor, the Designated Gwich’in Organization President, the Bylaw officer, the Environment & Natural Resources officer, the Renewable Resources Council, the Tsiigehtchic Charter Community staff, and other community members and Elders,” but they were also “able to hire local guides and resource people with a focus on young people who are eager to develop their leadership and marketable traditional skills, as well as Elders who used Tsiigehnjik traditionally.”

Angik School also cited “support from the community” as a highlight of their 2018 day trips, stating that “the guides, Elders, and RCMP helped to make the outing memorable for the students.” Finally, Łútsël K’é Dene School said the parents and community members were “happy with the focus the school has taken to ensure culture and language remains a focus.” Overall, it is clear that organizations need community support, just as communities need the programming these organizations offer.

d. Support organizations to build and access permanent sites.

Several organizations identified their need for a permanent campsite, with Mangilaluk School (2017) remarking, “I think it would be amazing to be able to build our cabin/site that was readily available for the school to use at any time.” Délıne Got’ıne Government also stated they would like to build a cultural camp near the community, and Chief Paul Niditchie School wanted “to investigate additional partnerships to try to develop a more permanent camp at Marten House for community use,” as it was “a great site to develop as a base camp.”

The benefits of having permanent cabins or sites (often close to the community) are many, and include easy access, not having to worry about securing location bookings, being able to act as a hub for all community on the land activity, strengthening bonds between the host organization and the rest of the community, and being able to reallocate money away from bookings and transport and towards staffing and programming. The experiences of Łútsël K’é Dene School and Princess Alexandra School, who both have permanent campsites, bear out these advantages. Princess Alexandra has a camp “complete with teepees, trapper’s tents, campfire pits, canoes, fishing rods, archery, racks for drying fish and meat and meeting areas suitable for several classes of students.” They “rotated” classes of students through the camp on a regular basis, and were able to devote the majority of their funding to “Elders [and] resources, as opposed to bussing and transport.” This led to more student contact with Elders and more programming. Princess Alexandra also had plans for the camp to become a fixture of the community, “open and available to others community groups for their use in the evenings, on weekends and during summer programming.” Łútsël K’é Dene School had already opened their camp to the community, as “often different community organizations utilize the camp for other events.” They found that having the camp “helped build and strengthen our school/community relationship.”

Having permanent designated camp sites helps eliminate certain planning concerns, offers programs stability and consistency, and brings on the land experiences to the community as a whole.

e. Refine and expand the feedback process so that grant recipients can provide feedback to the Collaborative at different points in the grant cycle.

Currently, each organization can provide formal feedback to the Collaborative by filling out a short survey at the bottom of their grant application, consisting of the following questions:

- How did you hear about the Collaborative/this opportunity?
- What are your preferred timelines for funding?
- Was this application easy to use? What could we do to improve the application process?
- Do you have suggestions about the reporting process?
- Did you talk to a Community Advisor or anyone else from the Collaborative before submitting your application?

Sixty-percent of the applications submitted (80 of 132) answered these questions.

Organizations generally found the application easy to complete (the 2017 and 2018 application did not receive any criticism), and unanimously agreed that the Collaborative was accessible and helpful in answering any questions that arose during the application process.

Preferred funding timelines varied considerably. Organizations learned about Collaborative grants through the NWT Teachers' Association, social media, posters in community spaces, word of mouth, emails forwarded from other institutions or community leaders, and from members of the Collaborative themselves.

While the feedback gathered from this short survey is useful, the Collaborative might also consider asking applicants for feedback as part of the reporting process, after organizations have had a more sustained experience with the Collaborative:

- Having completed the reporting process, do you have any suggestions for improving it?
- As you carried out your program, how did you find the accessibility and helpfulness of the Collaborative?
- What do you think the Collaborative did well?
- Did you face any challenges in your interactions with the Collaborative?
- How did you find the process of receiving your funds? Was it relatively uncomplicated and timely?
- What can we do to better support your future on the land programs?

Appendix 1

Currently, each organization can provide formal feedback to the NWT On the Land Collaborative by filling out a short survey at the bottom of their grant application, consisting of the following questions. Eighty out of 132 applications (60%) offered feedback for the Collaborative in their applications. The following is an overview of the questions and responses.

Question 1: How did you hear about us?

- Thirty organizations learned about the Collaborative through email.
- Seventeen organizations learned through social media/internet.
- Seventeen learned through word of mouth (from Dehcho First Nations; superintendent of schools; NWT Seniors Society; Diavik; Tlicho Government; school district Indigenous culture coordinator)
- Eleven had previously applied.
- Four learned through conferences
- Four learned through posters
- Two learned through media or News North

Question 2: What are your preferred timelines for funding?

Answers to this question varied widely:

- Twenty-one organizations said they preferred a funding timeline that matched the fiscal year, receiving funding around the beginning of April.
 - However, one organization said they preferred a timeline that “avoided the busy times around the end of the government fiscal year.
 - And two organizations said they wanted open timelines, where they could use funds past the end of the fiscal year.
- Five indicated they would like funding to match the school year.
- Four organizations said they needed funding by February/March, before the beginning of the fiscal year.
- Four said they needed funding as soon as possible.
- One indicated they would like funding to match the calendar year.

Question 3: Was this application easy to use? What could we do to improve the application process?

- Seventy-four organizations found the application easy to use.
- Sixty-three organizations had no suggestions for improvement.

Suggestions for improvement included the following:

- "I struggled with some of it because it was unclear what you were looking for ie. budget/in-kind"

- wished it was in a form-fillable format
- could use "list of items or ideas committee excludes from consideration"
- "project title repeats itself on first page"
- tweaked a few budget tables for clarity
- space limitation made it difficult to get in all necessary information
- "need a place to expand on the program offerings instead of 1–2 paragraphs"
- not a lot of information on funder's goals
- wanted information on when funding decisions would be made public

Question 4: Do you have suggestions about the reporting process?

- Fifty-eight had no suggestions
- Seven said they enjoyed the reporting format on previous Collaborative reports:
 - "It has been very easy to use in the past and the questions are very reflective. It is nice to think back on the 'story' of the project months afterwards"
 - "Your reporting has been great in the past. Simple and geared towards telling great stories."
 - "The reporting process has been quite easy in the past."

Some organizations offered minor suggestions:

- a few groups had questions about pictures/videos and confidentiality, particularly when youth were involved
- one group wanted to involve youth in reporting process
- one group wanted to do external reviews "to add to the richness of future program possibilities"
- one group suggested compiling a photo book of all funded projects
- "we sometimes struggle to submit our (larger) media files"
- "an easy template would be nice; some are a bit too complicated"
- some groups wondered about reporting due dates

Question 5: Did you talk to anyone before submitting?

- This question only appeared on reports from earlier years, so there were only twenty-nine responses
- Names mentioned included Kyle Napier (5), Steve Ellis (3), Velma Illasiak (1), Sarah True (1), "community advisor" (2), and "local representative" (1).