

# Building and Learning Strategy

**Increasing Northerner Involvement in  
Building Construction Occupations**

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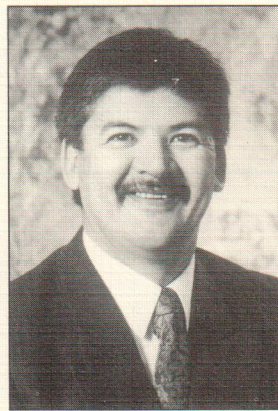
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## Ministers' Message



Every year, our government spends millions of dollars on capital projects. We build houses, schools, nursing stations, recreational facilities and other buildings that are needed in the communities. These capital projects have the potential to create much more benefit to the communities than just the buildings themselves. The jobs generated by construction work are needed by people in the communities. Jobs are scarce in many communities, and employment is needed so people can be self-sufficient and provide a better quality of life for themselves and their families.

Jobs, training and business opportunities for the communities are what the Building and Learning Strategy is all about. Government, communities and the NWT construction industry will work together to create new jobs for northerners on government-funded, local construction projects. Through these efforts, we will build a trained, skilled, northern construction workforce, and strengthened northern construction industry.

This important initiative is the result of months of hard work and collaboration between the NWT Housing Corporation and Departments of Public Works and Services, and Education, Culture and Employment. I would like to thank the Honourable Richard Nerysoo, and all those who contributed to the development of this strategy. We will continue to work together to ensure that government-funded construction projects result not only in quality buildings, but also in stronger, more self-sufficient northern communities, citizens and businesses.

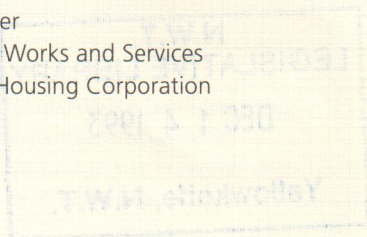
Honourable Don Morin  
Minister  
Public Works and Services  
NWT Housing Corporation

Construction is one of the largest industries in the Northwest Territories, and holds a great deal of potential for employment for our residents. There are more than 2,000 jobs in the construction industry in the NWT, and unlike many other jobs, these are available in even the very smallest communities.

An innovative approach is needed to ensure that residents of the NWT receive the necessary training to get the jobs they want in the construction industry. Linking job training with the Government of the Northwest Territories' capital building construction projects provides an opportunity for people of the NWT, particularly residents of our smaller communities, to receive certification and for the territorial government to establish a pool of highly-qualified local workers. Increasing the participation of northerners in the industry could mean millions of additional dollars in income every year.

My department and I are pleased to be partners in the Building and Learning Strategy. This strategy marks the first time the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the NWT Housing Corporation and the Department of Public Works and Services have worked together to develop a training program. I look forward to continued cooperation among our departments as we work to design training that meets the needs of industry and northerners.

Honourable Richard Nerysoo  
Minister  
Education, Culture and Employment



## Background

The emerging North, with its rapidly growing population and their requirements for buildings and engineering works, will see an increasing level of construction activity into the twenty-first century. Over the next five years it is estimated that the GNWT will spend nearly one billion dollars on capital construction projects. Added to this are many more millions of dollars from construction projects funded by the private sector and proceeds from land claim settlements. While it is important to build houses, schools and other private and public facilities in NWT communities, it is equally important to use this opportunity to build our self-sufficiency.

The construction industry is the third most important industry in the Northwest Territories, resulting in 14% of all economic activity. It is the fourth largest employer, with nearly 2000 people employed (Figure 1). The industry has shown constant growth over the last two decades (Figure 2), and provides a full range of jobs and career opportunities for all education and skill levels.

Current estimates indicate that roughly half of the wages paid on GNWT capital construction projects go to non-Northern workers. This is equal to about \$16 million annually. If this \$16 million per year remained in Northern communities, it would have a "spin-off" effect of about \$28 million in direct benefits to community-based small businesses. Greater numbers of employed Northerners would also contribute to fewer people on social assistance and associated costs to communities. Properly skilled and certified Northern workers should be developed to fully access these wages.

Data in the 1989 NWT Labour Force Surveys confirm that the highest unemployment figures and the lowest education levels can be found in Level 2 and 3 communities (Figure 3). Residents of these communities are mostly aboriginals who prefer not to relocate in order to get jobs or training.



It is in these communities that the building construction industry tends to have the greatest economic impact. Local people are able to work on building projects and acquire on-the-job training. This industry, therefore, has the potential for providing the most training opportunities at the community level.

Presently, there is no GNWT framework for coordinating programs, budgets, priorities and support services for training Northern residents in the building construction occupations. Government departments continue to provide formal and other training programs that are often the same as the efforts of other departments and agencies. Many programs do not consider the long term employment goals of both the communities and people involved. The need for a complete construction training strategy has been stated in several well-known Government reports <sup>(1)</sup> and is evident from NWT Labour Force Statistics. MLA's are increasingly being reminded by their constituents that communities wish to take a more active role in the planning and delivery of local training and employment programs. MLA's know that more people can be employed through building occupation training.

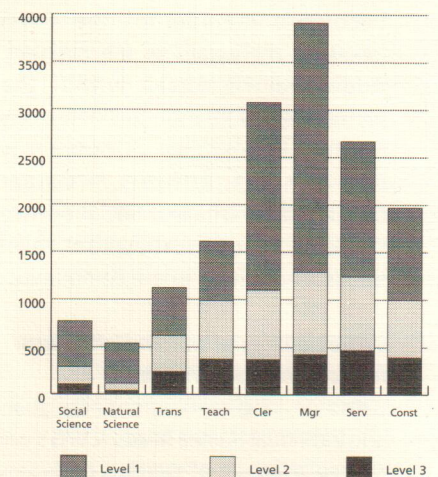
## The Strategy

On June 25, 1992, on the recommendation of a decision paper submitted by the Ministers responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWTHC), the Department of Public Works and Services (PW&S) and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), Cabinet ordered the development of a strategy on using GNWT capital projects for training Northerners in the building occupations. The goal was to improve employment opportunities for Northern workers.

A Steering Committee was formed comprised of the President of the NWTHC, the Deputy Ministers of PW&S and ECE, and as the Chairman, Mr. Gordon Wray. Mr. Wray is an experienced private-sector Northerner plus a former MLA and Cabinet Minister. The NWT Construction Association and several Northern contractors also provided input during the development of the strategy.

<sup>(1)</sup> Report by Special Committee on the Northern Economy, 1989, the 1990 Employment Development Strategy & the 1991 report, Strength at Two Levels.

Figure 1  
**Employment by Community Type and Occupational Group**



Source: 1989 Labour Force Surveys, NWT Bureau of Statistics

The concerns of the private and public sectors about training in the building construction occupations revealed five major challenges for the GNWT to address:

**1. How can GNWT legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks assure support for local training and employment initiatives?**

The construction industry employs the most trades people in the NWT, as well as many semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Many who work at semi-skilled or labouring jobs are able to perform at a higher level having gained their skills through practical on-the-job experience. These people go unrecognized as no system currently exists to certify semi-skilled workers. Many are prevented from entering apprenticeship programs by low literacy and low education levels.

These experienced workers are a valuable resource to the Northern construction industry. Their skills should be recognized through certification and they should be given the opportunity to advance their level of training. With recognized and certified skills these people would have better access to employment opportunities.

The GNWT capital planning process has traditionally set priorities for projects based on the need for facilities and not on the need for training. The result has been a fragmented approach to training and a "boom or bust" cycle of employment at the community level. When projects are finished, trainees are generally left with few options for continuing training and limited access to other employment. In addition, people working at on-the-job training soon discover many reasons to not work in the wage economy. For example, social assistance entitlement, public housing rent subsidies and daycare subsidies can be reduced or removed. When employees quit after only a few weeks work rather than risk losing their social benefits, employers become frustrated and lose interest in training.

**2. Can GNWT, Federal and construction industry training programs be better coordinated to support training and employment goals?**

In the NWT, building occupation training is provided mainly through the apprenticeship and trades programs administered by ECE. Training has also been encouraged both directly and indirectly through the GNWT Business

Incentive Policy, the use of negotiated contracts and construction management in project delivery, and the introduction (1992) of the NWT Construction Association's "Construction Worker Training Program" on selected projects. The Federal Government also administers a variety of training programs through the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission.

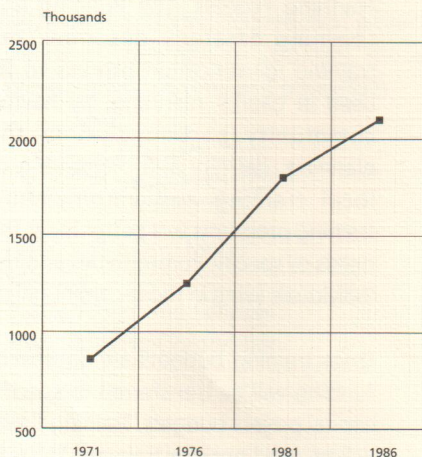
The challenge is to provide a framework for the long-term coordination of building occupation training programs in the NWT. Clear channels for interdepartmental and intergovernmental communication are needed to help ensure that duplication and gaps do not occur in the delivery of training services. A coordinated effort would also enable more effective use of existing resources and promote cost-sharing.

**3. How can the number and variety of opportunities for building occupation training be increased?**

Residents of remote Northern communities face language and academic barriers to building occupation training not normally found in the South. People living in Level 2 and 3 communities generally have a poor understanding of the process for accessing entry level and continuing education programs outside their communities. Importing Southern labour has meant fewer training opportunities for Northerners.

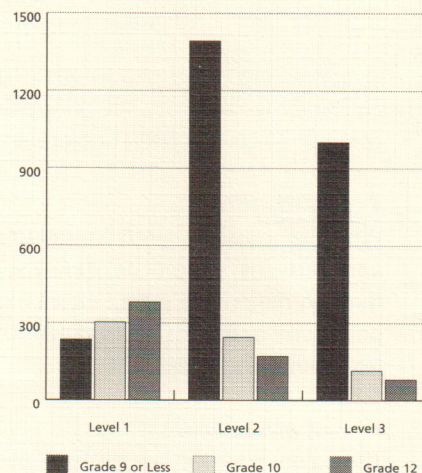
The challenge is to develop a unique, community-based approach to training that is easily accessed and meets the specific educational needs of aboriginal and non-native Northerners. This will most likely mean the development of a variety of specialized training programs that not only can be certified but can also be linked to existing Territorial and Federal programs.

Figure 2  
**Construction Industry Growth**



Source: 1989 Labour Force Surveys, NWT Bureau of Statistics

Figure 3  
**Comparison of Level of Education of the Unemployed by Community Type**



Source: 1989 Labour Force Surveys, NWT Bureau of Statistics



**4. How can the status and profile of training and working in the building occupations be increased?**

Similar to trends in Southern Canada, vocational or "blue-collar" training is perceived by Northern students, teachers and employers as lower in status than professional or management training.

The entry of women into non-traditional occupations such as the building trades continues to be hindered by negative attitudes held by employers, supervisors, tradesmen and society in general.

The challenge is to demonstrate to Northerners, particularly those living in Level 2 and 3 communities, that a career in the trades is not only desirable but also is more likely to provide ongoing employment that will help them achieve their career goals.

**5. How can communities participate in the planning, direction, coordination and monitoring of training programs?**

Communities throughout the North want to participate more directly in the planning, implementation and monitoring of local training programs. Senior community representatives

believe they are in the best position to identify local training needs, to recommend people for training and to monitor and evaluate their progress. Commonly, residents feel that local lifestyles and beliefs are more likely to be built into training programs if planning is community based. Local leadership in the co-management of training programs will be an important factor in assuring long-term success. This is consistent with the GNWT's high priority on transferring authority and accountability for programs to communities.

The challenge will be to provide administrative and technical support for the local group that takes responsibility for training.

In addressing these challenges it is important to recognize the principles common to current GNWT objectives:

- **privatization**

Wherever possible, GNWT programs and services should be delivered through the private sector, increasing opportunities for the development of Northern owned businesses.

- **cost effectiveness**

The value achieved for every public dollar spent should be as great as

possible. This will mean having all programs coordinated effectively to save money.

- **devolution**

Services should be delivered as close as possible to the people benefiting from those services. Services should be managed by community governments wherever possible. Local people better understand how programs can best be applied to local circumstances, and can therefore be more directly accountable for the results achieved through the training.

- **quality control**

The level and quality of government services should be maintained or improved.

Five strategic goals have been proposed as a framework for the Building and Learning Strategy. These goals meet the objective of increasing building construction occupation training while increasing Northern employment, as identified within the framework of current GNWT principles:

**1. Integrate the Capital Planning Process with the allocation of training funds.**

To help the Government take advantage of training opportunities on its capital projects, the GNWT must include training funds in the Capital Planning Process. The Building and Learning Strategy describes the training identification process to be used in capital planning. By having community participation in the planning, delivery and monitoring of local training and employment, training programs will better meet the needs of specific communities and the individuals living in those communities.

Once training budgets are approved, funding will be transferred to specific capital project budgets. Training funds will be used only for training. This will allow planners to schedule training programs several years into the future



as funding will be in place and not, as in the past, dependent on money left over after construction costs have been covered.

**2. Build effective partnerships involving communities, the GNWT and the construction industry in managing training.**

Through their MLAs, communities have said they want to plan and manage their own long-term training programs to be sure that programs match local goals, needs and opportunities. Under the Building and Learning Strategy, GNWT project personnel will help target communities establish a three party partnership called a Community Working Group (CWG).

The core members will be senior community representatives and regional GNWT personnel. The contractor will become a member of the CWG following the award of the contract. Additional resources within the partnership could include Community Adult Educators, Community Employment Officers, Career Development Officers, Social Service Workers and journeyman level tradespeople living in the community.

**3. Write delivery of training programs into contract documents.**

Based on long-term community goals and individual trainee needs, CWG's will choose a variety of training programs for delivery through construction

contract documents. Successful bidders will be required to deliver specified training packages along with construction. Contractual requirements presently included in GNWT documents would also apply to training.

The contractor will be expected to enter into a normal employer/employee relationship with trainees the contractor selects from a short list supplied by the CWG. He will also be responsible for progress reports.

**4. Develop, deliver and certify training programs that can open all job opportunities on GNWT construction projects to Northerners.**

There are many workers in Northern communities who have been involved

in the construction industry as either labourers, helpers or rough carpenters. They are mostly self-taught and have little, if any, formal trades training. Lack of certification has limited their opportunities for employment and/or advancement on major construction projects. This strategy will provide access to training for all levels of the building occupations from semi-skilled labourer to project superintendent and contractor. Existing apprenticeship training programs will be included in the strategy. This goal is intended to meet the need to consider training resources and gaps in current program delivery. Changes to training curriculum, where needed, will be made to meet both individual skill development needs and community priorities.

**5. Increase awareness of careers in the building occupations.**

Through the Building and Learning Strategy all partners will promote awareness of the building occupations through a number of activities.

These activities will include the development of labour market information materials, career promotion and counselling, workshops and presentations, special events and advertising. Emphasis will be placed on developing and distributing Northern-specific information and material on training opportunities and employment.

## Conclusion

The implementation of this strategy will benefit the present generation of Northerners and contribute to the establishment of a solid foundation for their future. It will encourage and stimulate further economic, social, political and human resource development in the Northwest Territories. By the year 2000 it is anticipated that importing Southern labour will be minimal since the Northern Construction Industry will be well on its way towards self-sufficiency. Wages spent in the North will promote expansion and

development of the small business sector. This will contribute to a reduction in social problems and associated costs to communities.

This strategy describes how competency based building occupation training should be developed and coordinated. By providing certification to trainees the outcome of this strategy will be to provide long-term employment opportunities. The GNWT is resolved to take full advantage of that opportunity.