



# Northwest Territories Polytechnic University Facilities Master Plan Engagement

## WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

Plan directeur des  
installations de l'Université  
polytechnique des TNO

**RAPPORT SUR CE QUE NOUS  
AVONS ENTENDU**

*Le présent document contient la traduction française du sommaire.*

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English

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French

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Kīspin ki nitawihitīn ē nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.

Cree

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Tłıchq̄ yatı k'èè. Dı wegodi newq̄ dè, gots'ō gonede.

Tłıchq̄

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ʔerihł'ı́s Dēne Sų́lıné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theᑭᑭ ʔat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yółtı. Chipewyan

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Edı gondı dehgáh got'ıe zhatıé k'éé edat'éh enahddhę nıde naxets'é edahlı́.

South Slavey

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K'áhshó got'ıne xədə k'é hederı ʔedıhtı'é yerıniwę ní dé dúle.

North Slavey

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Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijāhch'uu zhit yinothan jı', diits'àt ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

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Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqłuta.

Inuvialuktun

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Inuktitut

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Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit. Inuinnaqtun

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# Table of Content

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	i
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	iii
<b>Sommaire</b> .....	v
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
Background.....	1
Methodology.....	2
<b>Themes Emerging From Engagement</b> .....	7
1. Indigenization of the polytechnic university.....	7
2. Sufficient support for northern students.....	8
3. Community connections.....	13
4. Family supportive.....	14
5. Unique place for research.....	15
6. Learning-in-place.....	15
7. Relevant programming.....	16
8. Animated student spaces.....	18
9. Amenities and recreation.....	19
10. Teaching and learning spaces.....	20
11. Leveraging partnerships.....	21
12. Student housing.....	22
13. Additional important themes.....	24
<b>Campus-specific themes</b> .....	26
Thebacha Campus (Fort Smith).....	26
North Slave Campus (Yellowknife).....	27
Aurora Campus (Inuvik).....	29
Community Learning Centres.....	29

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# Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of feedback collected during the engagement process of the Facilities Master Plan development for the Aurora College transformation into a polytechnic university. Facilities master planning, initiated in summer 2021, is one project among many that is moving transformation forward.

Engagement was broad, including stakeholders within Aurora College, as well as regional, community and Indigenous governments, community members, research organisations, educators and students across the Northwest Territories. Discussions focused on facilities and space planning, to inform conceptual planning for the growth and renovation of existing Aurora College facilities and the future polytechnic university's built form.

Feedback from participants throughout the engagement process was analysed, and insights, ideas and recommendations are summarised in this report.

## KEY THEMES

**Indigenization of the polytechnic university:** we heard from participants across the Northwest Territories that the polytechnic university is in a unique position to integrate Indigenous ways of teaching and learning into its physical form and operation, programming and governance structure.

**Sufficient support for northern students:** the unique needs of northern students were highlighted and recommended for prioritisation within the polytechnic university.

**Community connections:** strong connections between Northwest Territories communities and campuses are needed to help Northerners feel comfortable and familiar with the polytechnic university.

**Family supportive:** creating a post-secondary environment that includes support for students who are also parents is a key factor in supporting northern learners.

**Unique place for research:** the Northwest Territories already draws significant interest from the national and international research community; the polytechnic university is well-positioned to provide enhanced access to remote communities and areas of the territory, while supporting northern research priorities.

**Learning-in-place:** we heard from many Northerners that learning opportunities that are relevant and accessible at home are a priority for northern learners and necessary to bridge the gap between secondary and post-secondary education.

**Relevant programming:** participants emphasised the importance of programming that prepares Northerners for jobs relevant to northern and community life; participants recommended a focus on hands-on vocational training and leadership development.

**Animated student spaces:** in order to create vibrant campus spaces, participants recommended that the polytechnic university offer spaces for events and activities that encourage community members and students to interact on campus.

**Amenities and recreation:** we heard from northern students that a varied and high-quality student experience is an important factor in attracting students to the polytechnic university.

**Teaching and learning spaces:** as teaching and learning moves online or integrates hybrid online and in-person learning, flexible and multi-modal spaces are needed.

**Leveraging partnerships:** partnerships can help to provide additional resources on campus, make more efficient use of campus resources and create a vibrant campus environment.

**Student housing:** good quality, affordable housing, especially with adequate space for families, is needed in all campus communities. We heard that community learning centres would also benefit from staff, temporary researcher and practicum student housing.

The report concludes with a section dedicated to key messages specific to each of the three campus communities as well as those broadly addressing community learning centres.

*Thebacha campus:* feedback centred around expansion of trades spaces, office and meeting spaces and integration of family-supportive spaces on campus. Student housing and the future of the Breynat Hall site was also a focus of discussion.

*Yellowknife North Slave campus:* outdoor learning spaces and greater connections with communities both in close proximity to the new campus as well as across the territory were highlighted as priorities.

*Aurora campus:* family housing was a focus of discussions for the Aurora campus, as well as investment in trades and crafts facilities and a community-use space that can incorporate student support services.

*Community Learning Centres:* We heard that community learning centres need to be reimaged to incorporate community connections and provide more relevant learning opportunities, including acting as a bridge to the main campuses.

In addition to this report, these findings are informing the future polytechnic university's Facilities Master Plan as part of the overall Aurora College transformation.

# Sommaire

Le présent rapport résume les commentaires recueillis durant le processus d'échange avec le public lié à l'élaboration du plan directeur des installations pour la transformation du Collège Aurora en université polytechnique. Ce plan, dont l'élaboration a commencé en été 2021, est un des nombreux projets qui fait avancer le projet de transformation.

Nous avons mené un vaste échange avec le public et avons recueilli les commentaires des intervenants du Collège Aurora ainsi que des administrations régionales et communautaires, des gouvernements autochtones, du public, des organismes de recherche, des éducateurs et des étudiants des TNO. Les discussions portaient sur l'aménagement de l'espace qui permettrait d'orienter les plans conceptuels liés à l'agrandissement et à la rénovation des installations existantes du Collège Aurora et à la construction de la future université polytechnique.

Nous avons analysé les idées, les commentaires et les recommandations recueillis durant le processus d'échange avec le public et les avons résumés dans le présent rapport.

## THÈMES PRINCIPAUX

**Autochtonisation de l'université polytechnique** : Les participants de partout aux TNO ont souligné que l'université polytechnique sera très bien placée pour intégrer concrètement des méthodes d'enseignement et d'apprentissage autochtones dans les activités d'exploitation, les programmes et la structure de gouvernance.

**Soutien nécessaire aux étudiants ténois** : Les participants ont souligné les besoins uniques des étudiants ténois et ont recommandé que l'on accorde à ces besoins la priorité à l'université polytechnique.

**Liens avec les collectivités** : L'établissement de liens solides entre les collectivités des TNO et les campus sont nécessaires pour créer un environnement familier et confortable pour les Ténos à l'université polytechnique.

**Favorable à la famille** : La création d'un milieu d'enseignement postsecondaire qui soutient les étudiants qui sont également parents constitue un élément essentiel pour appuyer les étudiants ténois.

**Un endroit unique pour la recherche** : Les TNO suscitent déjà beaucoup d'intérêt du milieu national et international de la recherche. L'université polytechnique sera très bien placée pour favoriser l'accès des chercheurs aux collectivités et aux régions éloignées tout en tenant compte des priorités liées à la recherche dans le Nord.

**Apprentissage local** : Beaucoup de Ténos ont souligné qu'il est prioritaire pour les étudiants des TNO d'avoir des possibilités d'apprentissage pertinentes et locales afin de combler l'écart séparant les études secondaires et postsecondaires.

**Programmes pertinents** : Les participants ont souligné l'importance d'offrir des programmes qui préparent les Ténos à des emplois utiles à la vie dans le Nord et aux collectivités des TNO, et ont recommandé que l'accent soit mis sur les formations pratiques et professionnelles et les programmes de perfectionnement en leadership.



**Espaces animés pour les étudiants :** Pour insuffler un dynamisme à l'université polytechnique, les participants ont recommandé que des espaces soient consacrés à des événements et à des activités qui favorisent les interactions entre les membres de la collectivité et les étudiants.

**Installation et activités récréatives :** Les étudiants ténois ont souligné qu'une expérience riche et de haute qualité est importante pour attirer des étudiants.

**Espaces d'enseignement et d'apprentissage :** Comme l'enseignement et l'apprentissage virtuels et mixtes (virtuel et en personne) sont de plus en plus répandus, il est important de mettre en place des espaces polyvalents et adaptés à l'université polytechnique.

**Optimisation des partenariats :** Les partenariats peuvent fournir des ressources supplémentaires et contribuer à l'efficacité et au dynamisme de l'université.

**Logements pour étudiants :** Il est important d'offrir, sur tous les campus de l'université, des logements de bonne qualité, abordables et, surtout, adaptés aux familles. Les participants ont également souligné qu'il serait avantageux que les centres d'apprentissage communautaires offrent des logements au personnel, aux chercheurs temporaires et aux étudiants en stage.

La dernière partie du rapport contient des commentaires clés destinés aux collectivités où sont situés les trois campus et des commentaires plus généraux sur les centres d'apprentissage communautaires.

*Campus Thebacha :* Les commentaires des participants étaient axés sur l'agrandissement des locaux des programmes de métiers, des bureaux et des salles de conférence ainsi que l'intégration d'espaces qui tiennent compte des besoins des familles sur le campus. Les discussions ont également porté sur les logements pour étudiants et le futur emplacement de Breynat Hall.

*Campus du Slave Nord :* Dans leurs commentaires, les participants ont souligné qu'il serait prioritaire de créer des espaces d'apprentissage extérieurs et de rapprocher les nouveaux campus des collectivités pour établir un lien plus étroit avec celles-ci, et ce, dans le Slave Nord et partout aux TNO.

*Campus Aurora :* Les discussions ont porté particulièrement sur le logement familial ainsi que sur les investissements dans les installations des programmes de métiers et d'artisanat, et d'un espace communautaire où l'on peut obtenir des services de soutien aux étudiants.

*Centres d'apprentissage communautaires :* Les participants ont souligné que les centres d'apprentissage communautaires doivent être repensés pour y favoriser les liens avec la collectivité, fournir des possibilités d'apprentissage plus pertinentes et faciliter l'accès aux principaux campus.

En plus de permettre la rédaction du présent rapport, les commentaires recueillis lors de ces échanges avec le public permettent d'orienter l'élaboration du Plan directeur des installations de l'université polytechnique, un plan faisant partie intégrante de la transformation du Collège Aurora en université polytechnique.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

Post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories is evolving. In 2018, the Government of the Northwest Territories announced the transformation of Aurora College into a northern Canadian polytechnic university. This transformation will enable the institution to continue offering programming that meets the present and future needs of Northern residents to achieve the territorial vision for post-secondary education:

*“Every resident of the Territory has an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential by obtaining a post-secondary education from institutions that are student centred, accessible, high quality, relevant and accountable.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Aurora College transformation is a multi-year project, initiated in 2018 and intended for completion in 2026. The Facilities Master Plan is a document that will guide many of the infrastructure upgrades during the Aurora College transformation. Later stages of the Aurora College transformation will include plans for changes to all three campuses, as well as community learning centres. The Facilities Master Plan is one of many parallel projects ongoing to move the Aurora College transformation forward.

This report provides a summary of feedback heard throughout engagement for the facilities master planning process for the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university. Facilities master planning explores the relationship between the polytechnic university’s physical form and its ability to increase access to high-quality post-secondary education for Northerners, to foster research important to communities across the territory and to prepare people for jobs in the Northwest Territories.

Through the facilities master planning process, the Government of the Northwest Territories is developing a vision for the future polytechnic university at a conceptual level. This Plan will guide the incremental growth and transformation of the existing college facilities into a polytechnic university over the next 5, 10 and 20 years. Facilities master planning is a collaborative planning process and considers the physical growth and renovation of existing college facilities to evolve alongside improvements to academic programming. Facilities master planning is not intended to provide detailed design planning.

In the summer of 2021, the Government of Northwest Territories through the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and the Department of Infrastructure initiated the facilities master planning process for the transformation of Aurora College to a polytechnic university. A team of Architects and Planners led by Taylor Architecture Group, and including Urban Strategies Inc. and PlanIt North Inc., was retained to develop a Facilities Master Plan to support the transformation of Aurora College to a polytechnic university.

This report provides a summary of feedback from engagements that took place between October 2021 and June 2022. The report is organised into two sections. The first section explores themes that reflect ideas and recommendations we heard from multiple participants throughout engagement. In the second section, we summarise key themes specifically relevant to each of the three Aurora College campuses.

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<sup>1</sup> NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework 2019-2029

Feedback received through the facilities master planning engagement efforts is recorded in this report in order to ensure that it is available to decision-makers to inform both the Facilities Master Plan and the broader Aurora College transformation processes.

## Methodology

The objectives of the engagement activities for the facilities master planning process were to:

- Gather information/data required for the Facilities Master Plan
- Increase understanding and support for the polytechnic university
- Advance stakeholder readiness and adoption of the change
- Provide confidence that the facilities master planning process is comprehensive and incorporated many perspectives

The planning team undertook engagement in the facilities master planning process in a phased approach from the fall of 2021 through summer 2022.



The first step was to assess the governments, stakeholders and informants to determine who to engage with throughout the facilities master planning process. From there, initial engagements focused on gathering feedback on the vision and approach of the facilities master planning process. Subsequent engagement sessions explored participant perspectives and user needs in detail. Finally, later engagement sessions were used to reflect back to participants and validate what was gathered through the planning process. An online survey was circulated to validate what we heard throughout engagement sessions and reach participants that previous phases of engagement had not reached. All input is intended to inform the Facilities Master Plan.

Goals of the Aurora College transformation and priorities for the Facilities Master Plan were used as a starting place to frame the engagements.

The Facilities Master Plan will support these key transformation goals:

- Ensure every Northwest Territories resident feels they have a place at the polytechnic university.
- Create a cohesive sense of identity among all campuses and community learning centres.
- Maintain growth of northern student enrollment levels while attracting southern and international students.

- Ensure programs respond to Northwest Territories labour market demands.
- Promote a sense of community across all locations.
- Achieve operational coherence of facilities across all campuses.
- Establish a new Yellowknife Campus, with greater capacity, campus feel, community synergies and partnerships.

Some focus areas for the Facilities Master Plan are:

- Student housing at the Thebacha Campus.
- Development of a new Yellowknife North Slave Campus.
- Expansion of research facilities at the Aurora Campus.
- An approach to a network of community learning centres.

Engagement was led by PlanIt North Inc., with collaboration from Taylor Architecture Group and Urban Strategies Inc. Early engagements with Aurora College leadership and staff, as well as direction from the Aurora College Transformation Team, informed the development of an initial engagement plan.

Interviewees were asked for feedback on the engagement process and recommendations for participants to add to the engagement plan, utilising a snowball method to reach a wide range of participants. This helped to ensure that the engagement process was responsive to input from stakeholders.

Indigenous governments were invited to participate in the engagement early in the process. The engagement team later followed up with further communication and met with regional and/or local leadership and/or staff that were available.

Interviews and focus groups were held virtually where feasible. PlanIt North staff travelled to communities to meet with Indigenous governments and community members, ensuring that at least one community from each of the five Northwest Territories regions was represented among communities selected for a visit. Communities were selected based on availability of leadership to meet with PlanIt North staff, as well as the community's comfort level with having in-person visitors. Although the initial engagement plan included travel and engagement with a greater number of communities, three waves of Covid-19 outbreaks during the project's timeline significantly impacted the engagement team's ability to travel and communities' capacity to respond to meeting requests, whether in-person or virtual.

The engagement team has collected feedback from a diverse array of participants, including Aurora College leadership and staff, municipal governments in Yellowknife, Fort Smith and Inuvik; community leadership in Dettah and N'Dilo, Fort Good Hope, Aklavik, Fort Simpson and Behchokq; representatives from regional Indigenous governments; staff and students at community learning centres in Aklavik, Fort Good Hope, Behchokq and Fort Simpson; research and post-secondary education organisations across the Northwest Territories; high school staff and students in Yellowknife, Dettah, N'Dilo, Fort Smith, Fort Good Hope, Aklavik and Fort Simpson; Northwest Territories residents who are currently attending a post-secondary institution outside the territory; high school and current and former post-secondary students within the Northwest Territories; and various employers and organisations in Northwest Territories communities.

<b>Organisation / association</b>	<b># of individuals</b>
Aurora College Leadership (individuals)	17
Aurora College Staff & Faculty	24
Aurora College students and former students	52
Community learning centre staff and students	7
Indigenous Governments and organisations (leadership and staff)	43
City of Yellowknife (leadership and staff)	4
Town of Fort Smith (leadership and staff)	8
Town of Inuvik (leadership, staff, public)	15
Secondary school students/ youth	118
Teachers, educators and school staff	21
Northwest Territories residents currently attending a post-secondary institution outside the territory	132
Community members (general public)	185
Research and post-secondary educational institutions	17
Other organisations or business associations	3

*Table 1: Summary of engagement participants from October 2021 to June 2022*

Insights were gathered from participants through semi-structured, one-on-one and small group interviews, focus groups, workshops, presentations, meetings and an online survey. Each session was guided by a predetermined set of questions, from which follow-up questions were explored. A sample interview guide is included in Appendix A. Workshops with youth took place mainly within high schools and were structured using a classroom engagement plan. The online survey was circulated between May 30th and June 10th on social media, via Cabin Radio's website and through the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's Student Financial Assistance office.

Engagement sessions focused on questions relating to facilities and space planning for the future polytechnic university. However, the discussions naturally included related topics, such as programming, policy and governance. Where such insights were shared, questions attempted to focus on their implications for facilities and space planning. The summary below captures both facilities-related ideas and recommendations, as well as insights for the broader transformation process.

Detailed notes were recorded at all sessions. These notes were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a qualitative analysis method that ensures that outcomes are not presupposed. Participants' perspectives are analysed for key themes and new themes are created until the point that no new themes emerge from analysing the continued conversations. A grounded theory analysis also enables an iterative approach. As key themes emerge, new questions may evolve, and the planning team is able to ensure that future engagement addresses these. The themes presented here were determined based on an analysis of aggregated interview data and background research and reflect the most topical and recurring ideas and recommendations collected throughout engagement. This report presents a summary of the rich discussions that took place in relation to each theme.

The online survey was provided in both English and French and received a total of 348 responses (342 English and 6 French). The survey was broken into targeted sets of questions for five different audiences, which included:

- Residents currently attending high school in the territory (3 respondents)
- Residents currently attending post-secondary education within the territory (17 respondents)
- Residents attending a post-secondary institution outside the territory (132 respondents)
- Former Aurora College students (35 respondents)
- General public (161 respondents)

Each respondent was asked to self-identify which group they belonged to and were then presented with questions tailored to their specific experience. Although many of the questions for anyone identifying as a student were similar, questions for the general public audience were different from the rest of the audiences, to reflect how they may interact with the polytechnic university in the future.

Survey questions sought to clarify priorities and validate information heard throughout earlier phases of engagement, while also providing open comment areas for more general feedback. Questions were provided in either multiple choice or ranking format, in order to assess priorities from the many recommendations for services and features heard throughout earlier phases of engagement. For example, in order to understand what kind of student support services students valued most highly, recommendations emerging from earlier engagements were presented as a ranking question to all respondents who identified as current or former students while taking the survey. Respondents were asked to rank their top 3 priorities from each set of options. Ranking results were then assigned a points-

based score to reflect how each option was ranked (i.e. 3 points assigned for a first-place ranking, 2 points for a second-place ranking and 1 point for a third-place ranking). The weighted results were then compared across respondent groups, to note any variations in frequency.<sup>2</sup> The summary below has incorporated survey results and highlights key messages heard from survey respondents.

There were limitations to the engagement process. Decisions around future programming and enrollment levels will take place later in the Aurora College transformation; subsequently, this information was not available to share. Some participants found it difficult to discuss future facilities without a clearer understanding of the programming. This can be mitigated as engagement occurs throughout the Aurora College transformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that due to the limited sample sizes of Northwest Territories high school students and residents currently attending post-secondary education within the territory, responses from these two groups were combined to represent the views of residents currently in school in the Northwest Territories, whether that be in high school or post-secondary. Despite this, the sample size is still relatively small, and results should be read with that limitation in mind.

# Themes emerging from engagement

## 1. Indigenization of the polytechnic university

*“Not only can you go here, but you belong here.”*

– Interview participant

Several interview and focus group participants have shared a vision of the Northwest Territories polytechnic university as a unique institution within the Canadian post-secondary landscape, embracing and prioritising Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Here, Indigenous students will feel particularly at home, while non-Indigenous students will be attracted by the opportunity to learn from cutting edge pedagogy rooted in Indigenous knowledge and culture. In reflecting on the unique opportunity that a polytechnic university could create, many participants emphasised the importance of prioritising the needs of Northern students, while also catering to Indigenous students from elsewhere. A polytechnic university that embraces Indigenous ways of knowing would need to: reflect the diversity of Indigenous cultures, incorporate Indigenous teaching, create spaces that meaningfully support on-the-land learning and support Indigenous voices in governance and leadership.

### **Prioritise northern students**

Participants across the Northwest Territories, especially those who work with students in smaller communities, emphasised the need to maintain a focus on meeting the needs of Northern students. Interview participants noted that in some cases, the Junior Kindergarten to grade 12 education system does not adequately prepare Northern students for post-secondary education at southern institutions, requiring substantial investments in student mentoring and tutoring. In addition, the prevalence of intergenerational trauma among Northern students highlights the need for major investments in accessible, on-campus student supports for health, wellness and cultural resurgence.

### **All Northwest Territories Indigenous communities should be represented on campus**

A key message echoed throughout engagement is that students from across the Northwest Territories should feel at home at the polytechnic university, especially when they are far from home. This requires designing spaces, programs and processes with cultural elements and practices from regions across the both the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Each of the three campuses should reflect elements of Indigenous cultures and environments from all regions, in order to foster inclusive spaces for Northern students. Some participants also framed this as a priority of reconciliation, citing both past trauma of residential schools and enduring practices that often serve to exclude Indigenous people from post-secondary institutions today. In order to differentiate the polytechnic university from previous, harmful experiences within the colonial education system, the institution should pay particular attention to how programs, spaces and buildings will create a sense of safety and belonging for Indigenous students.



## **Integrate Indigenous teaching and learning into the polytechnic university**

A diversity of participants recommended that the polytechnic university should commit to integrating teaching and learning methodologies from both an Indigenous worldview and the standard western worldview. This will both help to set the institution apart and improve the institution's ability to meet student needs. We heard from participants that the Northwest Territories is uniquely situated to deliver innovative programs that will attract students from across the territory and Canada who are interested in learning more about Indigenous cultures and Indigenous ways of teaching, learning and knowing. Indigenous teaching and learning methods noted by participants include: on-the-land learning; incorporation of traditional activities, such as hide tanning, making and setting nets and processing country food; learning opportunities with Elders; storytelling and arts-based learning; and hands-on and field-based learning.

## **Land-based learning and implications for space design**

Integration of on-the-land learning, along with other methods of Indigenous teaching and learning, will shape the institution's built form. Recommendations for on-campus and campus adjacent spaces include: on-campus campsites, outdoor classrooms and recreation spaces; access to freshwater; snowmobile and sled trails; appropriate storage and access to vehicles and equipment used to go on the land; commercial kitchen facilities appropriate for country foods; and spaces for community members and Elders to visit the campus, such as indoor gathering spaces with appropriate ventilation for ceremonies, outdoor fire pits, and lounge spaces for informal cultural activities. Participants emphasised the importance of supporting both on and off campus land-based learning opportunities. The on-the-land learning lens can be applied to all aspects of the Facilities Master Plan; for instance, some participants pointed out that outdoor living and learning spaces need to be considered in relation to student housing, on-campus day care and early childhood education. Many participants emphasised that land-based learning can be established in partnership with Indigenous governments and organisations.

## **Define the role of Indigenous leadership in decision-making**

Some participants expressed concern for a lack of clarity around the role that Indigenous leadership will play in shaping the polytechnic university and questioned whether there will be opportunities for Indigenous Elders, scholars and leaders to participate in decision-making. These participants emphasised that if the institution aims to reflect Northern people and cultures, it is necessary to include Indigenous voices in governance in order to shape: operations, policy, processes and the built form.

## **2. Sufficient support for Northern students**

Engagement participants noted the need for robust student support in order to create a successful learning environment for Northern students. In some cases, these supports are currently offered at Aurora College but with limited reach, while in other cases they would be new integrated services. Although these student supports would have space planning and capital cost implications, participants emphasised more strongly the need to dedicate operational funding and qualified, experienced human

resources to ensure effective programming and services. These supports are wide ranging and include culturally appropriate wellness services, career and guidance counselling, transition support and academic support.

Survey respondents ranked student support services in order of importance to them (see figure 1). Although there was some variation in the types of student support services ranked most highly by the different respondent groups, all groups ranked academic counselling in their top 3 choices. Mental health services were also highly ranked by all three groups.

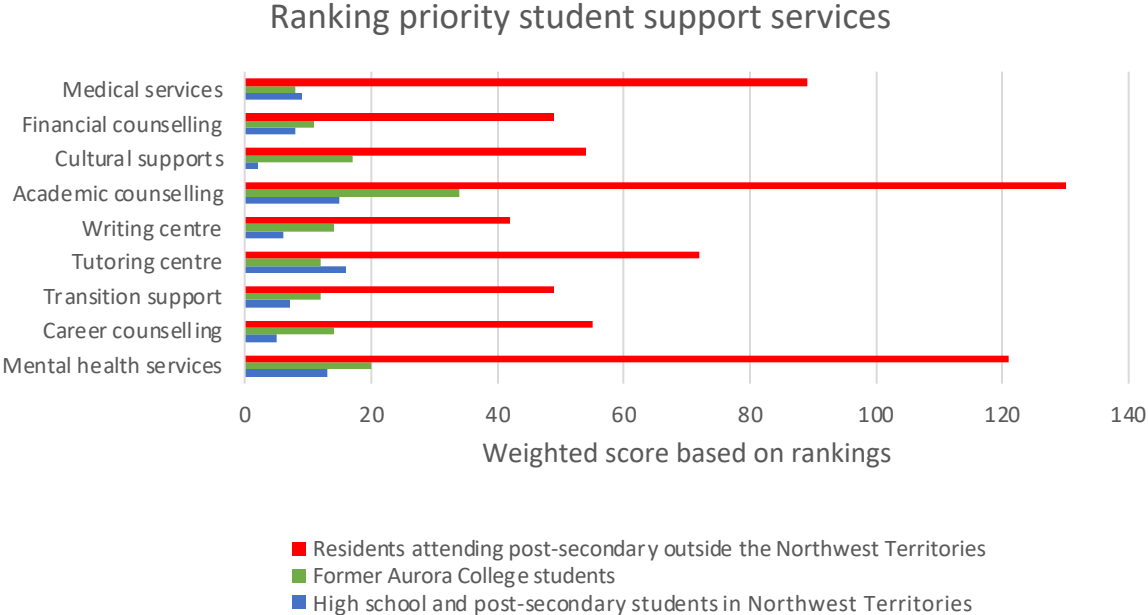


Figure 1: Graph showing ranking results for priority student support services

**Culturally appropriate wellness services**

Many participants emphasised the importance of supporting students’ mental, physical and spiritual health and ensuring that these supports are available on campus. These services are critical to meet the needs of Northern students, many of whom will come to post-secondary education with experiences of trauma and personal challenges. In addition, participants highlighted the need for culturally relevant supports – wellness services that are grounded in Indigenous traditions and that recognize the complexity of students’ experiences. In order to provide these services, the institution will need to secure specialised resources, such as trained counsellors, Elders and Indigenous wellness service providers, as well as plan for appropriate spaces. Some participants pointed out that it is important that students can easily access such services while maintaining privacy, otherwise the services will likely not be used. It is also important that students can access culturally relevant wellness spaces and support within student housing. For example, several participants recommended creating spaces for an Elder in Residence within student housing.

## **Career and guidance counselling**

We heard that integrated career and guidance counselling is a critical service needed to bridge the gap between high school and post-secondary education. Students in many high schools across the territory are not aware of post-secondary opportunities and not prepared for entry requirements. While this is a significant challenge for high school students, interviewees within Aurora College also noted a similar theme - that students in Adult Literacy, Basic Education and upgrading programs also struggle to find direction.

According to participants, integrated career and guidance counselling should be offered to students early in their education, beginning in elementary school and particularly emphasised in high school. Support should continue into the early years of post-secondary, with strong connections between high school counsellors and those at the post-secondary level. Helping students develop clear pathways with opportunities to explore a variety of programs along the way will help with recruitment and retention of students in high school through to post-secondary and support their academic success at each stage.

## **Transition support**

Students, and those working closely with students, emphasised the need for effective programs and services to enable Northern students to transition to post-secondary education with ease. Recommendations include: campus tours for both elementary and high school students; peer mentorship programs to help students create social networks while still in high school; access to funding to travel to school and back home; life skills workshops and reliable mentors when learning to live independently. Transition support for Northern students also includes services such as access to country foods on campus, and opportunities to learn from Elders and to participate in traditional activities. A holistic approach is needed to ensure students feel comfortable while on campus.

## **Academic support**

Several participants recommended workshops and mentorship or tutoring to teach students the necessary skills to be successful in post-secondary; for example, note-taking, writing, math, library and information systems and computer skills are all needed to enable effective learning and a positive post-secondary experience.

An accommodations office with qualified staff would provide assessment and accessibility services for students who need alternate academic support. Space considerations may include an alternate exam room, testing and assessment spaces, spaces for students to work closely with a tutor and spaces with specialised audio-visual equipment.

### 3. Community connections

We heard that strong connections between communities and the polytechnic university will encourage Northern students to access post-secondary education. These connections will also create a more vibrant and attractive campus.

#### **Youth exposure to post-secondary**

Many participants who work with youth noted that exposure to campuses and community learning centres should start as early as elementary school, so that attending the polytechnic university is normalised and feels like a natural transition and so that students set academic and career goals from a young age. We heard that today many high school students have never been to an Aurora College campus and are unaware of the opportunities available to them. Youth participants themselves noted that they made their post-secondary choices based on which institutions they felt connected to – connections fostered mainly through campus tours and activities and family or peer connections. Recommendations for how to expose youth to post-secondary education included: dedicated youth-focused activities such as summer camps and campus tours; opportunities to stay in student housing; and access to learning opportunities in community learning centre and campus spaces – either directly through polytechnic programming or through programs offered by partners at the polytechnic. Other recommendations included traditional activities on campus, access to library services and spaces, access to outdoor campus spaces and access to services hosted on campus (e.g. food service, notary services).

#### **Community access to polytechnic university spaces**

In addition to exposing youth to the polytechnic university, participants also pointed out that stronger connections between community members of any age and the polytechnic university would help with student recruitment and retention. Many Aurora College students today return to post-secondary after starting families, making it important that their families also feel welcomed. Participants discussed how campus environments that integrate vibrant community and cultural activities would be more attractive to students and would also help build the polytechnic's capacity to offer more services, such as cultural support and food amenities. Suggestions for how the polytechnic university can invite community members onto campus included hosting craft workshops and community feasts, inviting Elders to campus for storytelling, hosting drumming circles and hand-games tournaments, and offering spaces to process country foods. These activities could be offered as stand-alone events and short-term workshops, or they could be integrated into learning opportunities offered by the polytechnic, especially if the institution adopts a focus on Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Cultural events and activities on campus would create a unique, attractive and vibrant campus environment for students.

Survey respondents ranked public activities they wished to see at the polytechnic university in order of priority (see figure 2 below). The most popular public activities recommended for the polytechnic university, as ranked by the general public from across the North are lectures and speaker series, access to campus services and cultural activities.

## Ranking of public activities at the polytechnic university

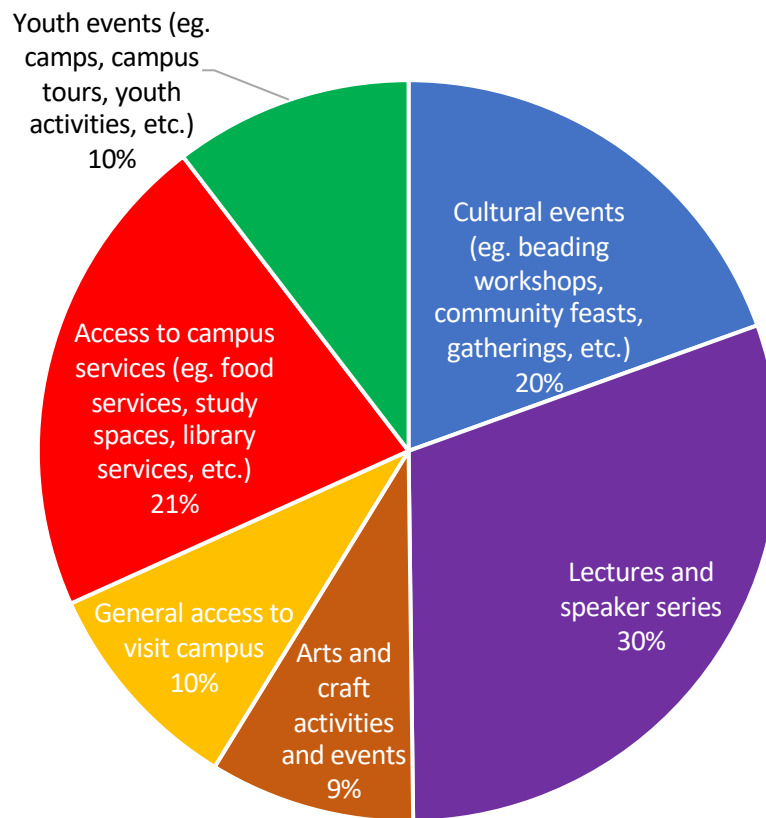


Figure 2: Graph showing weighted ranking results of options for public activities at the polytechnic university

### Community learning opportunities

Another opportunity to integrate the polytechnic university with the broader community is to offer a range of learning opportunities that are open to the public. Short-term evening courses, hands-on workshops for practical skills like snowmobile repairs and training opportunities through external partners where there is demand (e.g. wilderness first aid, worksite safety tickets, etc.) would bring more people onto campus, help to achieve economies of scale for campus services, and create a sense of safety and community for students who are away from home. Participants also noted that the polytechnic could benefit from partnering with community organisations to offer learning opportunities. For example, integration with a Makerspace such as the one being developed in Yellowknife, or similar to the Innovate Centre for Arts, Crafts and Technology in Inuvik could help to bring more students on to campus, and eventually, into post-secondary programs.

## 4. Family supportive

We heard from many participants that Northern students who attend post-secondary education often have families. The need for a family-friendly post-secondary institution was discussed by most participants, and recommendations for how to create learning environments that enable parents to focus on their studies include childcare and family friendly design for the campus, housing and outdoor spaces.

### **On campus childcare services**

Participants highlighted the need for on-campus, or easily accessible, affordable childcare. We heard that students are sometimes unable to come to class or have to leave early because of limited access to childcare. In other cases, Northerners are unable to enrol in courses because of a lack of affordable childcare. Childcare has implications for housing as well, as students may need larger housing units to accommodate bringing family members who can provide childcare (e.g. grandparents, aunts and uncles). This in turn puts pressure on student housing, as large units are limited. Existing childcare spaces in campus communities are few and expensive, and we heard that in Yellowknife and Fort Smith, an on-campus, or easily accessible, affordable childcare option is critical.

Recommended features to successfully meet post-secondary students' childcare needs include: childcare and after-school programming with extended hours to enable students to stay in class throughout the day and potentially in the evenings; proximity to campus to enable easy pick-ups and drop-offs; integrated cultural learning in childcare, such as an Elder in residence and language instruction; purposeful outdoor space for on-the-land learning; and affordability, as existing student financial aid is not always sufficient to cover childcare costs.

We heard that one of the critical reasons that childcare is limited even in larger communities like Fort Smith, is the lack of Early Childhood Education workers. The existing Early Learning and Childcare program at the North Slave Campus in Yellowknife is popular and already at capacity within its existing space. Several participants discussed how an on-campus, or easily accessible, affordable childcare service would not only be of benefit as a service to students, staff and potentially community members, but could also provide practical learning opportunities for the Early Learning and Childcare program.

### **Family friendly design**

We heard that a family-friendly lens can be applied to all aspects of the Facilities Master Plan. On campus, design elements such as breast-feeding spaces are a consideration. It will be important that the Facilities Master Plan considers enough family housing spaces, or spaces that are sufficiently flexible that they could be used by either singles and couples, or families with children. It is also important to incorporate family amenities into housing - indoor and outdoor play spaces in particular.

## 5. Unique place for research

The Northwest Territories is a unique place for research and participants noted that it will become increasingly so with climate change bringing new political and scientific focus to the Circumpolar region. We heard from participants that there is already a significant amount of research from southern and global institutions taking place across the territory; most of which does not include collaborations with Aurora College. As Aurora College transforms into a polytechnic university with a greater focus on research, participants recommended the institution should leverage the success of the Western Arctic Research Centre model and access remote regions to build research capacity in order to take on a greater role in research across the territory.

### **Access to remote areas**

With a renewed focus on research, the new polytechnic university will be uniquely positioned to facilitate access for researchers interested in remote regions. With some modifications, the institution's existing distributed campus and community learning centre model will facilitate researchers to access remote regions and form partnerships with communities across the Northwest Territories. Increased presence of researchers working in and with communities may also support youth exposure to post-secondary educational opportunities and spark an interest in pursuing further education.

### **Implications for storage space and equipment**

Research and potential co-location stakeholders discussed the need for vehicles and equipment to access remote areas. Facilitating access to remote locations will necessitate large vehicle storage areas, ideally close to highways or trails. Even for smaller pieces of equipment, access to storage was a big draw for certain interviewees (i.e. potential co-location and research partners).

### **Developing internal research capacity**

Participants also discussed unique research opportunities that the polytechnic university will offer faculty and future researchers, such as Northern and Indigenous education, business, place-based environmental research and other community-prioritised questions in the natural and social sciences. We heard that the polytechnic university will have a strong foundation on which to continue building its internal research capacity if it collaborates with partners to build on existing networks, resources and expertise.

### **Research hubs in strategic locations**

Participants highlighted the Aurora Research Institute - especially the Western Arctic Research Centre (WARC) in Inuvik - as a model that successfully facilitates productive exchange and cross-pollination amongst researchers. Shared housing and meeting spaces at WARC are critical for fostering such synergies. Participants familiar with this model recommended developing similar hubs in the other campus communities. Others discussed the potential for small research hubs co-located with community learning centres in key locations, raising considerations of access to: affordable housing, work and study spaces, common spaces and labs and equipment.

## 6. Learning-in-place

*“There are people here who haven’t left the community in 40 or 50 years, [they] are grounded here.”*

– Interview participant

Several engagement participants emphasised the importance of maintaining the focus on supporting adult learning and upgrading in communities, while continuing to strengthen early childhood and secondary education to improve student outcomes. In addition, learning opportunities in communities should more strongly link to post-secondary options. Participants emphasised that many Northerners want to access learning opportunities in their home community, but that amidst low enrollment, the current model of delivery in community learning centres needs to be reimagined. Supporting hands-on learning that builds on communities’ strengths is key to this transformation.

For the Aurora Campus in Inuvik, participants shared a vision of programming and facilities that were rooted in place, specific to the unique setting of the Arctic. Some survey respondents also noted that investments in high quality post-secondary education opportunities should be provided to communities and campuses in Fort Smith and Inuvik rather than centralizing in Yellowknife (while others supported centralization).

### **Effective, appropriate education at home**

In the North's remote communities, many potential students require strong wrap-around support to access and succeed in educational pursuits. Considering and appropriately incorporating wellness into local programming will be important if enrollment rates and outcomes are to improve. Some participants raised the question of how community learning centres can more effectively integrate education and wellness programs to support learners to strengthen their cultural ties and social networks. Others emphasised the opportunity to provide more programming that bridges to post-secondary opportunities at the main campuses - emphasising the need for partial or first year trades and early childhood education programming to be offered in communities, as examples. Whatever the program focus or delivery model, strengthened investment in internet access is key to improving community access to education.

### **Reimagine Community Learning Centres**

Community learning centres can be more flexible spaces that provide a variety of delivery models, integrating virtual learning for those who can succeed using that platform, while also ensuring that in-person teachers and mentors are in place for those who need additional support. Mobile services can be better structured to meet the needs of smaller communities that do not have community learning centres. There is an opportunity for community learning centres to be more open and welcoming spaces that better integrate with and support community life.



## **Hands-on and place-based learning to support Indigenous student needs**

Community learning needs can best be met by taking a strength-based approach that offers opportunities for hands-on, community integrated learning. This may mean revamping programs to align with community priorities. For instance, we heard enthusiastic visions for in-community programs that align with and support local environmental stewardship (often called Guardian) programs through land-based field courses, hands-on environmental and safety training and basic lab spaces that can allow for some preparation and analysis of field samples. Several participants emphasised the opportunity for unique and place-based Indigenous governance and leadership education, while several others emphasised that hands-on vocational and trades programming should be prioritised in communities. Some framed this as a broader opportunity for community partnership - creating workshop spaces for shared use that foster learning in arts, crafts, culture, construction trades and storytelling. Whatever the programming priority, many voices emphasised the need for community learning centres to be more community integrated and flexible in design and programming.

## **7. Relevant programming**

*“In order to really educate yourself, you have to be put in the environment, [this is] hands-on learning.”*

– Interview participant

Almost all participants commented on programming, though it was not the focus of engagement. The challenge of discussing facilities and spaces without having an understanding of programming specifics was a concern repeated throughout the engagement process. Participants emphasised that the polytechnic university should focus on delivering programs that will be relevant to Northerners and that will prepare Northerners for future roles across the Northwest Territories. Integrating Indigenous knowledge and culture into programs, and bringing back former Aurora College programs which served Northerners’ needs well (e.g. Education, Social Work, Practical Nursing) were key concerns among respondents.

### **Leadership and governance training to support future self-governance systems**

Communities across the North are working on achieving greater self-determination, and respondents highlighted the opportunity and need for the polytechnic university to prepare future generations for leadership and self-government. Relevant programs, we heard, would include: programs that develop strong leaders grounded in Indigenous traditions, as well as administration and business.

### **Vocational, hands-on training for northern jobs**

Participants across the territory highlighted a need to focus on education that prepares students for future employment - prioritising hands-on and experiential learning over classroom-based theoretical learning. Training in the trades, environmental monitoring and services, office administration, business and entrepreneurship, book-keeping and accounting and grant writing were highlighted as examples. Participants said that few students enrol in adult education programs in small, remote communities because they do not perceive programs as being relevant to their lives.

## Programs and practicums to meet community needs

We heard recommendations to develop stronger connections between main campuses and community learning centres to enable practicum placements for programs such as early childhood educators, nursing, and education. However, participants noted that the lack of housing in communities and the prohibitively high cost of travel are significant challenges.

## Quality of programs

Participants across the territory emphasized that Northerners are looking for high quality educational opportunities that are interesting, attractive and relevant to the local economy. This includes attracting and retaining qualified instructors; some participants expressed concern that program quality would be impacted by recruitment and retention challenges common across the North. Survey respondents especially highlighted program quality and access to interesting/ attractive programs as key factors informing post-secondary choices (see figure 3).

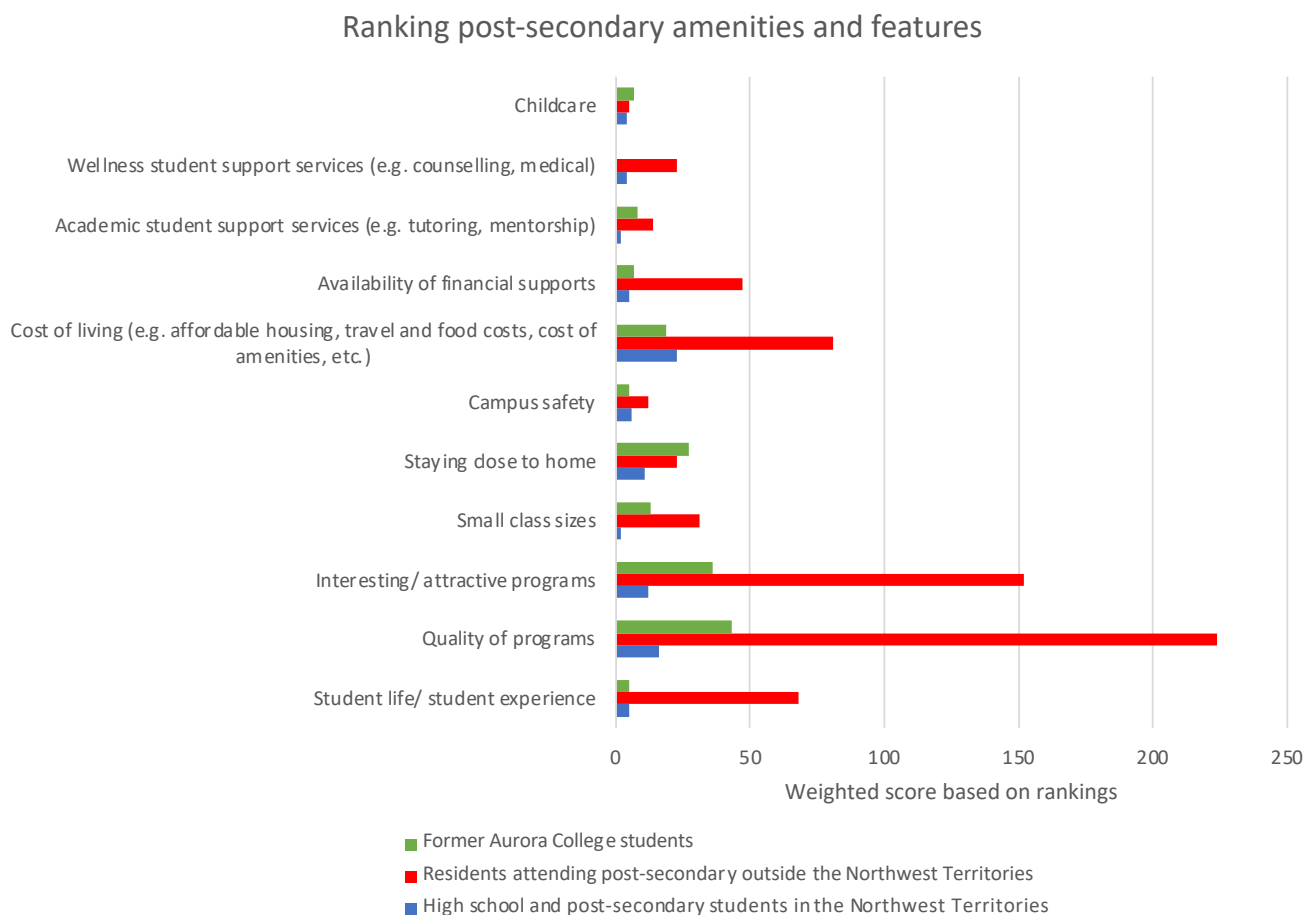


Figure 3: Graph showing rankings of priority post-secondary amenities and features

## 8. Animated student spaces

Some respondents from within Aurora College noted a lack of vibrancy on campuses today. Participants outside the College also noted that campus life was once more vibrant and inviting to community members, especially at the Thebacha campus in Fort Smith. Participants across the territory provided recommendations for how to renew a sense of community on campuses and in community learning centres; overall, suggestions centred around creating inviting spaces for students and community members to participate in events and activities together on campus. Participants also provided recommendations for how to create animated student spaces.

### **Gathering and event spaces for a vibrant campus**

We heard from many participants within Aurora College that the existing campuses lack gathering and social spaces. Event spaces to host community members, researchers, and student activities would go a long way towards creating a sense of community on campus. There are few gathering spaces within student housing as well. In addition, as an institution that follows business hours rather than an academic schedule, campuses tend to be empty in the evenings and on weekends, further contributing to the lack of vibrancy.

Participants offered recommendations for spaces that could help to animate the campus, including: a large central foyer or gathering hall for presentations, show cases, job fairs and other events; a dedicated convocation space with capacity for future growth of the campus; a lecture hall or conference space; food service/ kitchen and dining spaces; a campus shop; an art gallery or art wall featuring pieces from local museums; insulated garage space for community learning activities; arena for hand games tournaments; drumming spaces with appropriate acoustics; and spaces to host Elders on campus. Many of these suggestions were geared towards the new campus in Yellowknife; however, spaces to help build a sense of community are needed across all campuses.

### **Student autonomy and ownership over campus spaces**

We heard from respondents within Aurora College that although students have access to student union spaces on campus (confirmed in Yellowknife and Fort Smith), these spaces are generally underutilised. An existing Indigenous cultural room at the Thebacha campus is also rarely used. Participants suggested that this may be because students feel a lack of ownership and autonomy over these spaces. Participants familiar with the Fort Smith campus noted that there was a student-run campus bar and games room in the past that was very well used - participants suggested this was likely due to the fact that students had autonomy over those spaces. Survey results support this idea; respondents asked to rank features of an attractive student lounge space selected well-designed spaces with comfortable furniture, evening access and student autonomy over the space as their top priorities (see figure 4). Survey respondents also recommended creating opportunities for informal and unstructured peer relationships to form (in unsupervised spaces, for example). Creating a sense of campus spirit through developing campus traditions and offering diverse extra-curricular and recreational opportunities were popular recommendations. More engagement is needed to understand other approaches and design elements that would increase use of student spaces.

## Ranking student lounge preferences

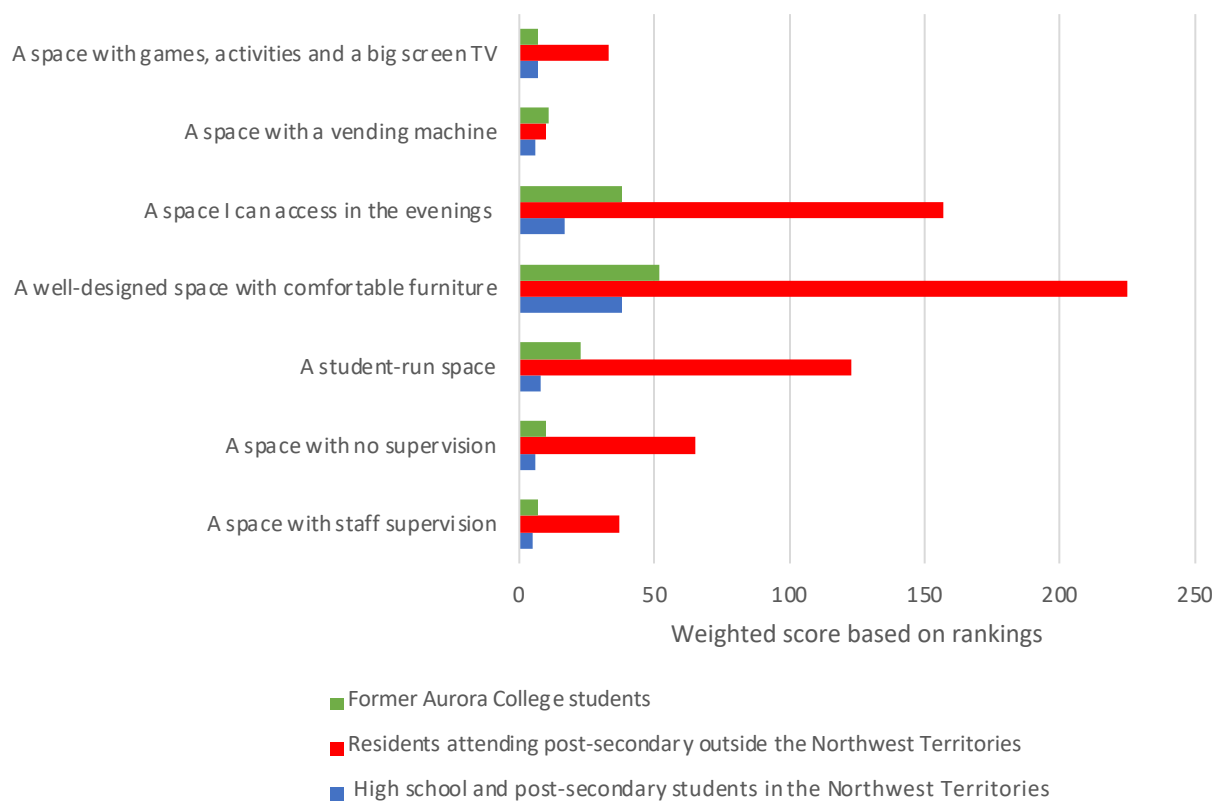


Figure 4: Graph showing ranking results for student lounge preferences

### Study spaces

Group and quiet study spaces are also limited on all three campuses. According to participants, the North Slave campus library has steadily lost student study spaces as office space needs have increased. Across all campuses, participants recommended adding group study rooms with updated technology to enable in-person and online collaboration. Quiet study spaces with internet access are also needed.

## 9. Amenities and recreation

Northern high school students told us what they expected from a post-secondary institution. Students are looking for a post-secondary experience to match those offered in southern Canada. Certain features of a Northern post-secondary experience may be more appealing to some students than a southern institution, such as access to country foods, on-the-land activities and access to nature. These, along with many other amenities and services standard at southern institutions are required in order to attract Northern students to the polytechnic university.

### **High quality student experience**

Northern students told us that they are looking for on-campus indoor amenities that include: clubs and student activities, a range of food services, a gym, climbing wall, arts and craft space, sauna and a multi-media space. Students told us that outdoor recreation spaces such as a skate park, sports facilities, on-campus campsites and access to hunting and trapping trips are also important. Students also noted that good quality, affordable housing and a vibrant student life outside campus are key considerations.

### **Market unique student offerings**

Respondents familiar with recreation opportunities within campus communities noted that the polytechnic university would need to work to secure partnerships in order to provide a well-rounded student experience. For example, respondents from Fort Smith highlighted the College's partnership with the recreation centre in town, which offers free access to College students. They also noted other nearby features including Wood Buffalo National Park, snowboard and ski hills, trails, paddling on the Slave River, local restaurants and a family-friendly community.

## **10. Teaching and learning spaces**

Aurora College staff noted limitations with existing teaching and learning spaces. They also shared lessons learned during COVID-19 about how to better facilitate online and hybrid (online and in-person) teaching and learning.

### **Flexible and multi-modal spaces**

As teaching and learning increasingly incorporates online tools, the institution will need spaces to accommodate multiple modes of delivery. Respondents working at the Yellowknife North Slave campus discussed the shortage of existing classroom space, as well as the challenges with reconfiguring the traditional classroom to enable different types of teaching and learning. For example, classrooms with fixed desks facing the front of the room may be sufficient for lecture-style teaching, but do not enable group work nor online learning.

Participants discussed the design implications of truly flexible classrooms, including considerations for acoustics and audio transmission quality; classroom design to maximise interaction between in-person and online participants; privacy and noise reduction when delivering online content; cameras, microphones and screens embedded in classroom structure; and effective lighting for online delivery. Participants noted that they are limited in their ability to use technology currently and that computer labs and associated technology need to be regularly updated.

### ***Specialised teaching and learning spaces***

Certain programs such as Nursing, Early Childhood Education, Trades and Environment and Natural Resources Technology require access to specialised teaching and learning spaces. Although all of these programs are currently offered between the North Slave and Thebacha campuses, respondents at each

campus pointed out that existing spaces are insufficient. The nursing program in particular is running out of space, and this impacts the program's accreditation reviews. Respondents told us that Nursing, Early Childhood Education and Trades are all programs in high demand and could be expanded if space would allow.

## 11. Leveraging partnerships

*"The most important thing is that we maintain autonomy of our decisions."*

– Interview Participant

We heard from many participants, especially those outside Aurora College, that partnerships with a broad range of organisations and institutions will be critical to the polytechnic university's success, providing the opportunity to create a more vibrant institution and leverage additional economic, human and other resources. Potential co-location partners highlighted the benefits of sharing space and resources, while also emphasizing the need to maintain institutional autonomy.

### **Access to research networks and faculty**

Existing researchers and potential co-location organisations discussed the benefits of partnerships, which would enable the polytechnic university to access national and international research networks, thereby raising its Canadian and global profile. Leveraging partnerships may also create student research, practicum and employment opportunities, further supporting faculty and student recruitment. We heard that partnerships can take many forms: co-location, guest lecturers, co-teaching arrangements and hosting graduate level research projects. Providing access to state-of-the-art labs, meeting and office spaces on campus or co-locating institutions and organizations who have an existing research presence in the North with the new polytechnic university buildings in Yellowknife is a key opportunity to integrate the future polytechnic university with the existing research community working in the Northwest Territories. Formal partnerships and relationships should be pursued as early as possible in polytechnic university planning and design stages.

### **Find economies of scale**

Co-location and community partnerships would enable the polytechnic university to offer more services at a lower cost per person. Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning and Collège Nordique francophone have a memorandum of understanding with the Government of the Northwest Territories to maintain open communications to explore opportunities for collaboration. We heard that co-location with other education institutions could create an overall larger student body, which would support all students to have a more vibrant experience and would improve economies of scale for services such as an on-campus childcare.

## Create unique educational pathways and opportunities

Participants from other educational organisations discussed how they could work with a polytechnic university to create learning networks. For instance, an entrance pathway to the polytechnic university could be established through a Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning’s on-the-land program, or partnerships could enable dual credit opportunities and accredited polytechnic courses offered in French. Dual credit options were recommended by participants working with high school students as well.

## 12. Student housing

Existing housing in campus communities is limited and often old and in poor condition. Almost every participant noted the many challenges with trying to access student housing, as well as challenges with losing access to housing in students’ home communities. Proximity to campus and services and affordability were the highest priorities chosen by survey respondents in looking to the future of student housing at the polytechnic university (see figure 5).

Ranking housing priorities

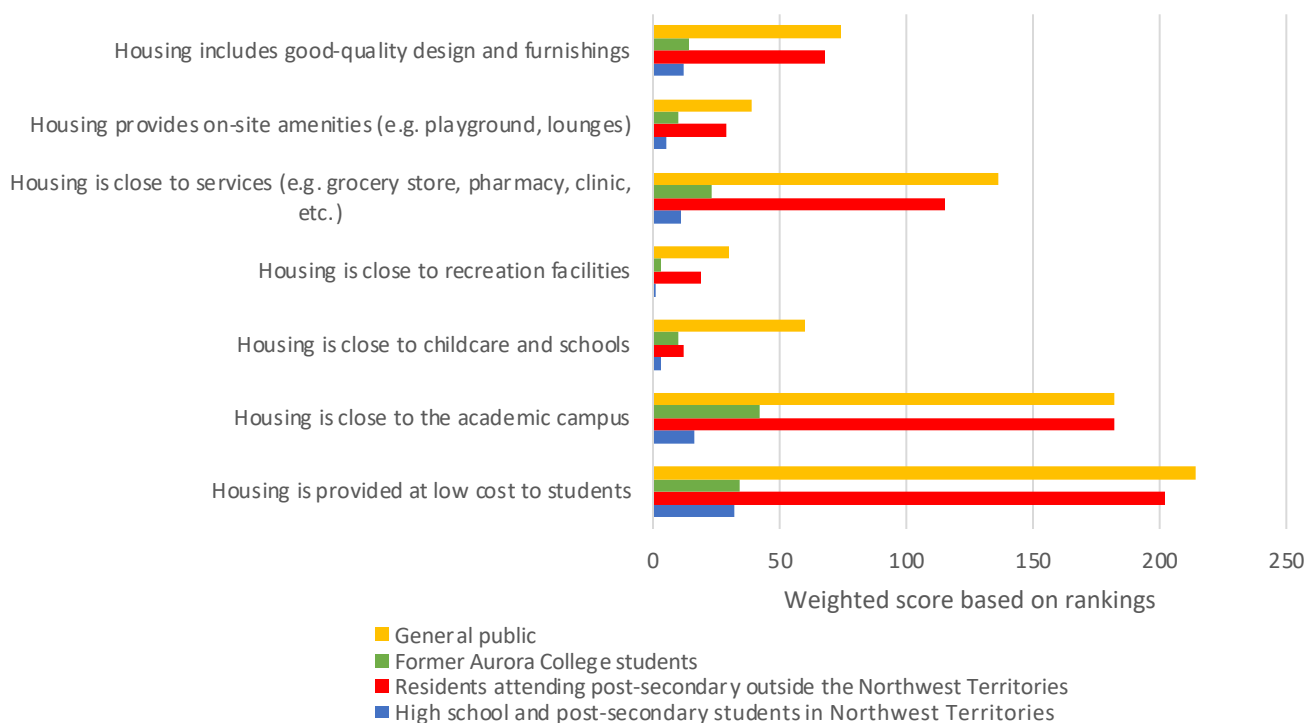


Figure 5: Graph showing ranked housing priorities

## **Low vacancy rates and high costs**

We heard from participants that high cost of housing combined with very limited availability leaves both students and staff reliant on Aurora College student and staff housing. This creates significant pressure on student housing, which is almost always fully occupied. Family housing, which tends to be larger units, typically operates with a waiting list, and participants told us that students sometimes have to leave school and return to their home communities due to the lack of housing. On the other hand, we also heard from several participants that a significant number of Aurora College students remain at school longer than intended, enrolling in consecutive programs, in order to maintain their housing. This creates further pressure on the limited housing stock. Aging housing stock falling into disrepair further exacerbates the issue.

## **Housing and wellness**

Participants discussed how quality affordable housing, especially housing that enables students to go to post-secondary while bringing their family members with them, is closely linked to student wellness. Unfortunately, inadequate housing can have the opposite effect on student wellness. Participants within Aurora College described how personal and generational challenges combined with housing insecurity negatively impact a student's ability to succeed academically. One participant noted that some of the already limited housing stock has been damaged by students themselves. When asked how to prevent this from happening in the future, several participants told us that access to wellness services in student housing and on campus could help to address the issue. An Elder in residence program within student housing was suggested and reinforced by several participants. Providing common spaces for students to socialise and develop a sense of community within student housing was also recommended.

## **Negative pressures of housing policy**

A critical challenge reported by several participants throughout engagement is the gap created by NWT Housing Corporation (NWT HC) policy regarding residency status and housing access. Students and staff told us that when students move to a campus community to attend Aurora College, they lose access to their NWT HC housing in their home community. However, the time they spend in student housing does not qualify them for resident status in a campus community, and they must wait six months after leaving student housing to become eligible for NWT HC housing - in either the campus community or their home community. This effectively leaves students without access to housing for six months after they finish their studies, since market housing is either non-existent or too costly for most recent graduates. This system becomes a major disincentive to leave home communities to access post-secondary education. For those who leave home to go to Aurora College, this becomes a disincentive to leave the College and their student housing. Those we interviewed seemed unaware of recent policy changes to rectify this challenge.



## **Staff, faculty and research housing**

Housing is also a challenge for staff who may be able to afford market housing, but who have few options, exacerbating recruitment and retention challenges. For example, one participant emphasised the challenge of finding instructors for trades programs, who tend to be hired on short-term contracts, in part because of housing issues. This challenge echoes across the territory, also impacting recruitment and retention at community learning centres. Lack of housing associated with community learning centres has also been noted previously as a limitation for community research and practicum placements.

## **13. Additional important themes**

### **Safety**

Students and staff at Aurora College emphasised the importance of considering student safety when planning for a new campus.<sup>3</sup> Safety considerations were also discussed by participants regarding the Thebacha campus in Fort Smith. Students' physical safety while on campus or around town has been a concern in the past in Fort Smith. We heard that different housing typologies tend to have varying expectations regarding security, with accompanying operational and cost implications. For instance, expectations for on-site security for dorms and apartments is likely greater than for townhomes.

### **Laboratories**

Lab space to support work in the natural sciences are important and are already in high demand in the Northwest Territories. Laboratories to support research in Yellowknife would be additional to those provided for teaching. A variety of lab types (wet labs, clean labs, dirty labs) are needed at each campus and there is sufficient existing demand to ensure that they would be well-used. For instance, it is estimated that current demand in Yellowknife alone could easily occupy five labs. Labs will need to be sufficient in space and numbers to accommodate classroom learning and research and will need to be designed in close collaboration with the intended users. Co-location partners have expressed interest in partnering to deliver lab spaces and equipment to support research needs in the north. Providing laboratory spaces may be a key component in integrating the new polytechnic university with existing research networks, generating revenue, developing internal research capacity for the institution, and attracting and retaining qualified instructors.

There is also a need for field labs in communities where significant research takes place. Participants discussed the need for facilities to process and package samples while out in the field, which could be made viable through investments in community learning centres. Further engagement is needed to understand the needs and opportunities of community learning centres as field stations for research.

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<sup>3</sup> Physical safety is discussed here; emotional / cultural safety has been discussed elsewhere and is therefore excluded from this section.

## **Community-centered approach to transformation and future engagement**

We heard from participants in Northwest Territories communities that more robust engagement with community members, learners, leadership and youth is needed in planning future phases of the Aurora College transformation, starting with direct communication to ensure all communities are aware of opportunities to participate in transformation discussions. Participants in small communities expressed concern that post-secondary education investments are being directed at the larger regional centres, which disadvantages those living outside those centres. A community-centered approach should be adopted, to ensure that community voices are able to influence any future polytechnic university planning processes. Communities have concerns around access to educational opportunities for their youth, effective support services, relevant programming and learning methods for life in communities and internal research priorities which may not always align with external researcher priorities.

# Campus-specific themes

## Thebacha Campus (Fort Smith)

### **Breynat Hall hostel site**

A key message heard throughout engagement in Fort Smith is that the Breynat Hall building needs replacing. However, Breynat Hall is the site of a former residential school hostel building, and therefore participants recommended that any plans for the site must involve local Indigenous leadership. These discussions have not yet taken place.

### **Family spaces on campus**

Participants at the Thebacha campus noted that Fort Smith is proud to host students and their families. However, the campus itself is not necessarily family friendly. In addition, in Fort Smith school-aged children are not permitted to stay on their school grounds during the lunch hour. This policy impacts a significant number of Aurora College students and staff, who are required to pick their kids up and then drop them off after lunch every day. Participants discussed how family spaces might be incorporated into the campus to create a more welcoming environment for children and visiting family and friends.

### **Office and meeting spaces**

We heard from participants at the Thebacha campus that staff office and meeting spaces are limited and will put a strain on expansion efforts as the College transforms. In addition, office and meeting space limitations within the South Slave Research Centre are already limiting opportunities for 1) collaboration among researchers, 2) between researchers and community members and 3) potential expansion with new researchers and summer students. A significantly larger space is needed to accommodate the growing needs of the research centre.

### **Trades - storage and other needs**

The 8-vehicle garage at the Thebacha campus that used to store vehicles used in heavy equipment operator training has been decommissioned. A replacement is needed, and the space must be big enough to accommodate the size of equipment into the future. It also needs to be heated and paved to enable minor repairs and vehicle maintenance. In addition, vehicle exhaust and its effect on nearby academic buildings will need to be considered with appropriate ventilation engineered. Pathways and driveways in the vicinity should also be paved to reduce dust and required maintenance in the adjacent buildings. With further collaboration, the shared use of these lots with the Department of Infrastructure could be clarified and rationalised, thereby improving the efficiency of space use for all.

Two of the three classroom blocks associated with trades and heavy equipment operator training are aging and should be slated for replacement. Ideally, students will be able to move from theoretical classroom study, to simulators, to real vehicles all in proximity to one another.

## Other Thebacha campus space considerations

With the replacement of Breynat Hall, there will be an opportunity to create vibrant community spaces. These spaces need to incorporate support for student wellness and academic success as previously described within the broader themes. Participants also flagged that it would ideally include an open indoor space for large gatherings and events as no similar space currently exists on campus.

## Yellowknife North Slave Campus

### Outdoor learning

With the new campus planned for Yellowknife, participants have emphasised the opportunity to integrate usable outdoor spaces. We heard that outdoor learning classrooms, on-campus campsites, access to trails and freshwater to enable land-based learning activities should all be priorities for a new purpose-built campus. Survey respondents ranked walking and biking trails, outdoor seating and outdoor sports facilities as priority outdoor spaces they would want to see on a new campus. High school and post-secondary students currently in the Northwest Territories also ranked space for on-the-land activities in their top 3 choices (see figure 6 below). In addition, participants noted that access to land-based activities both near and away from campus would require access to vehicles and equipment, with accessible storage spaces.

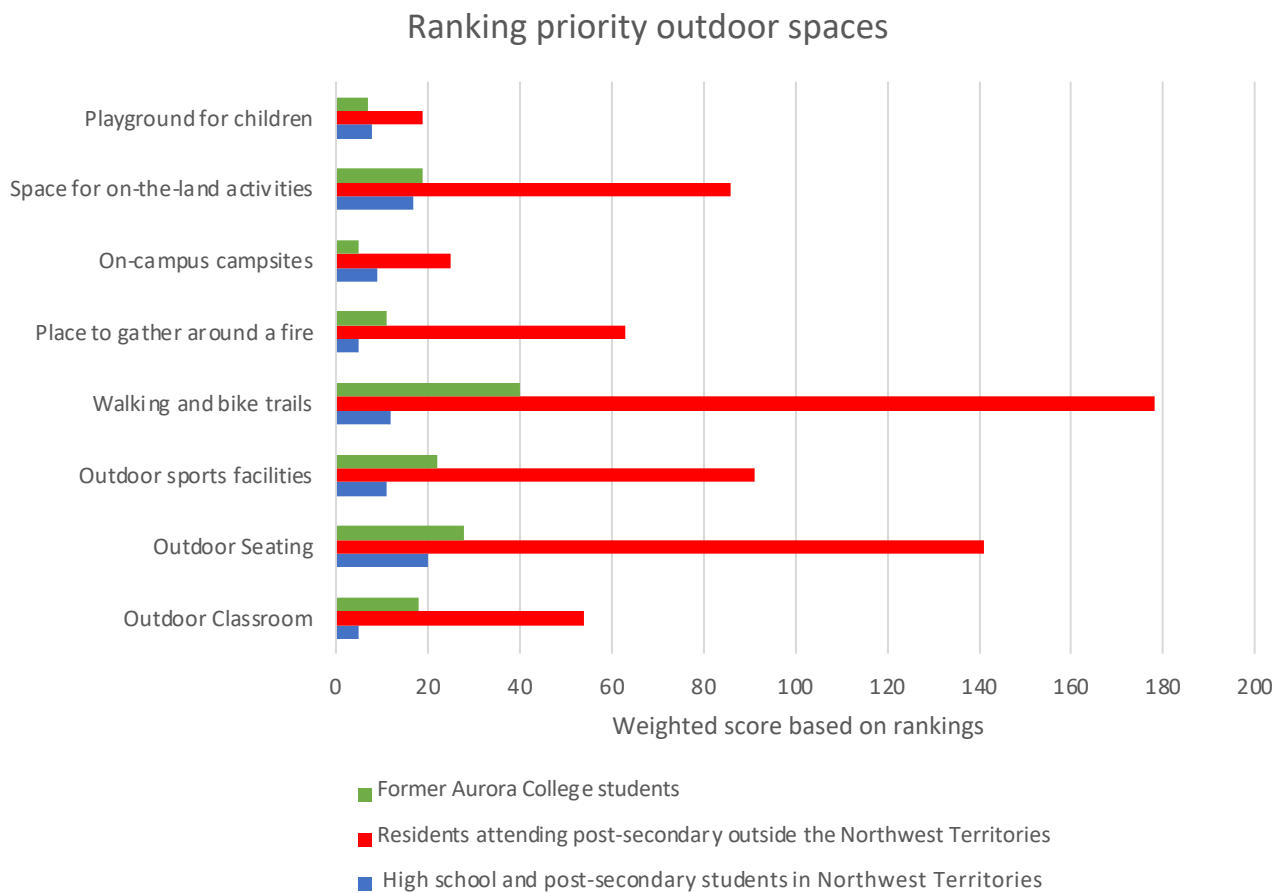


Figure 6: Graph showing ranking results prioritising outdoor campus spaces

## Community connections

As discussed in more detail in the Community Connections and Leveraging Partnerships sections, Yellowknife, as the location of the new purpose-built campus, is in a unique position to build connections with organisations within Yellowknife and across the territory. Educational institutions within Yellowknife and in communities, research organisations, governments and non-profits have expressed interest in partnering with the future polytechnic university. Participants have provided many recommendations on how to design campus spaces that will be inviting to community members and northern youth.

## Specific spaces in a new campus

We heard that the existing programming in Yellowknife (without expansion) could benefit from an additional fifty percent increase in space already. In planning for the new campus, participants felt that space will need to be considered for:

- A large gathering space that could double as an exam space and also be used for events such as convocation (ex. 500-1000 seats)
- Labs for researchers (discussed in other themes, but Yellowknife alone could likely fill five labs with space for 15-20 people each)
- Student gathering and meal spaces
- Flexible classrooms and computer labs
- A nursing simulation room and additional/ bigger classroom space meeting standards that will ensure continued accreditation
- More office spaces for faculty and administration
- A staff lounge and kitchen space
- Bookstore on campus with access to storage and receiving areas
- A loading dock / receiving area
- Quiet and group study rooms
- Kitchen facility for students/ commercial kitchen
- Gym and workout facilities
- Spaces for tutoring, accommodated exams, writing centre, math support
- Wellness spaces - counselling, prayer spaces, Elder in residence
- Health clinic
- Gathering and social spaces
- Flexible office spaces for visiting researchers

## Aurora Campus (Inuvik)

With additional housing envisioned on a medium-term horizon, participants have provided feedback on potential sites, with each site having a set of benefits or draw-backs. We have heard that criteria to be used in ultimately assessing a site should include: preserving greenspace and utilising cleared land, where possible; building Indigenous partnerships if feasible; revitalising neighbourhoods; and supporting student proximity to campus.

We have also heard that family housing is particularly in-demand and fully subscribed in Inuvik, whereas there has more often been vacant spaces for single student housing.

The most commonly requested spaces for the academic/ trades campus in Inuvik are:

- A permanent trades shop (to replace the former/ decommissioned trades shop and potentially supersede the mobile trades trailers)
- Heavy mechanics garage
- Crafts studio, combined with a community-use space
- Student amenities including wellness/ counselling spaces, study and academic tutoring spaces, food amenities, recreation and exercise facilities
- Information Technology office and storage space

## Community Learning Centres

### Fostering greater engagement with the community

Community learning centres in the communities visited for this engagement process were typically underused spaces with low program enrollments and little traffic from local residents. Community members noted either never having been inside the building, or generally being unaware of what is offered at the learning centre. Staff at the centres noted that it is challenging to attract students to the programs offered. Community members also cited challenges such as lack of evening courses, difficulty with online content delivery and a general lack of interest in the existing course offerings. They expressed interest in hands-on training opportunities, such as trades training or driver's education. Survey respondents (those who had previously attended or visited a community learning centre) ranked learning opportunities they would like to see (see figure 7 below); results indicate that access to college and university courses, upgrading, short-term training courses and trades courses are the most popular opportunities respondents wished to see at community learning centres. Staff and community members brainstormed ideas for how to increase the number of people coming through the door and offered recommendations such as making programs more relevant to local job requirements, hiring more local staff and hosting community events in the evenings to increase familiarity with the space. Survey respondents (those who had previously visited a community learning centre) ranked strategies to attract students to community learning centres (see figure 8 below). Highest ranked recommendations included offering more diverse university and college courses, opening community learning centres up for evening offerings and offering trades and hands-on training for students.

## Ranking learning opportunities at community learning centres

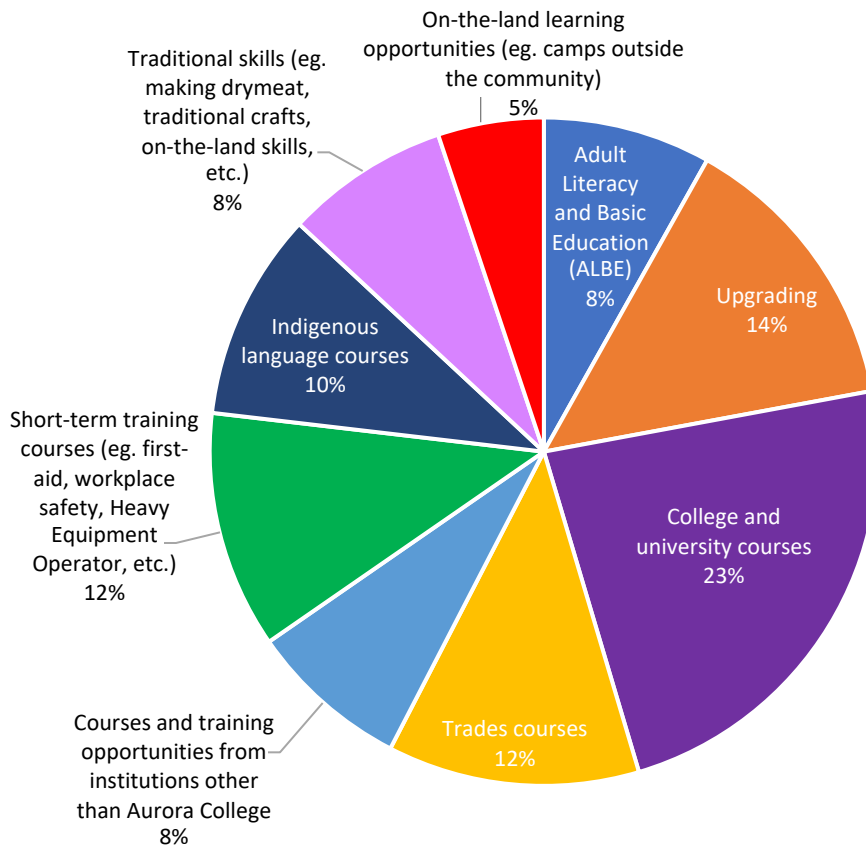


Figure 7: Chart showing weighted ranking results for learning opportunities at community learning centres

## Suggestions for attracting students to community learning centres

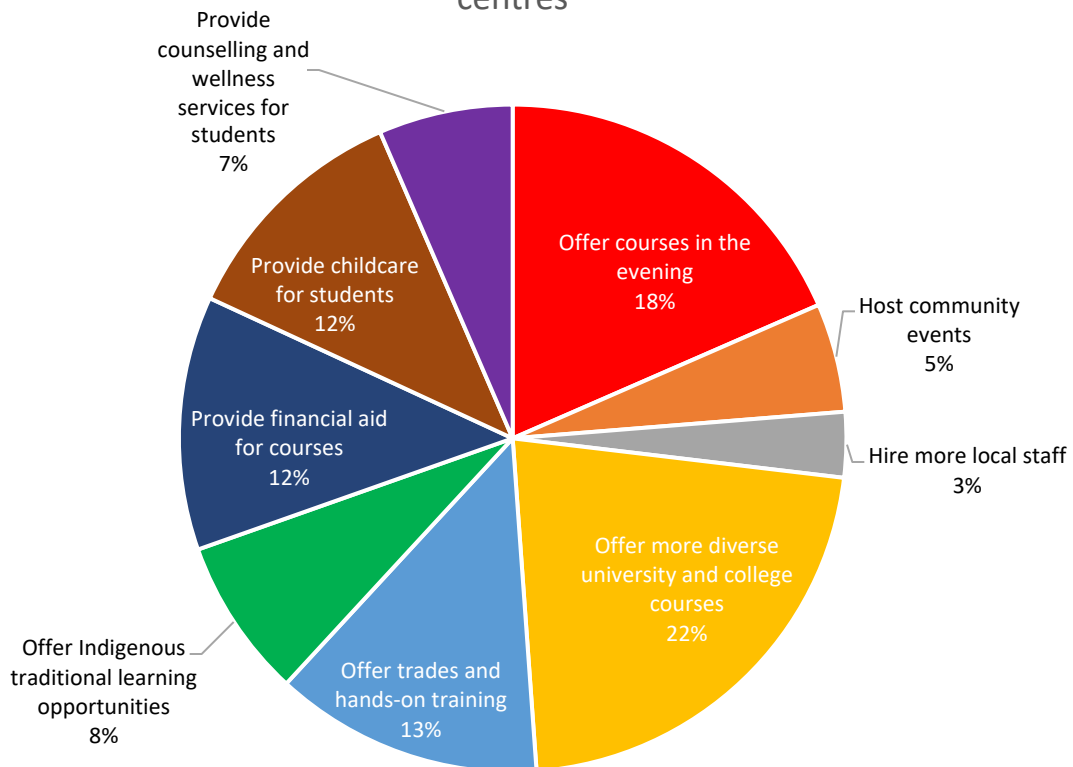


Figure 8: Chart showing weighted ranking results for strategies to attract students to community learning centres

Survey respondents also provided input on the types of public activities and events that they would like to see at community learning centres, as a member of the public. The highest ranked activities are access to training opportunities, in-person lectures and speaker series and cultural events (see figure 9 below).



## Ranking public activities at community learning centres

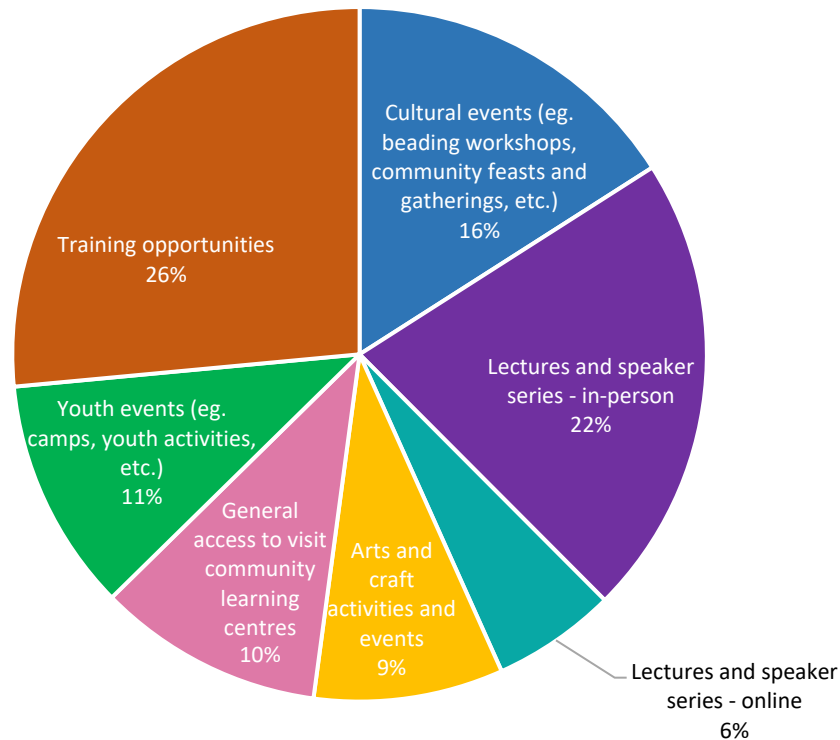


Figure 9: Chart showing weighted ranking results for public activities at community learning centres

### Space and amenity considerations

We heard that community learning centres should be developed to be flexible and open to community collaborations. Participants recommended thinking about laboratory spaces to support community-led or community-collaborative field work, where field samples could be processed or even, in some cases, analysed. In many Northwest Territories communities, strong community-led conservation and Guardian stewardship programs are emerging, often linked with community prioritized research and monitoring programs. Several community respondents highlighted the need to ensure that community learning centres are designed and operated in a way that supports these community-rooted programs. They suggested that the centres also be developed to support additional community priorities, including learning around language and culture. Space considerations for such uses include spaces with high internet connectivity and sound proofing to enable online learning and teaching - where community-based knowledge holders can be brought in remotely to support instruction at the main campus or on-line courses. Many participants also recommended that future facilities should include temporary housing, such as bunk housing for researchers or students doing

placements in communities.

### **Community leadership in community learning centres**

We heard that community learning centres are likely to be most successful if their governance and operating structure enables a high level of community participation in decision-making. There is an opportunity for to be satellites of their nearest main campus (Yellowknife, Inuvik, or Fort Smith) while also being open to strong community collaborations and community-led learning initiatives. Such collaborations will enable stronger cases for economic feasibility. For example, some participants shared the example of Kakisa - a small community that does not currently have a learning centre but that supports a diverse research agenda with numerous post-secondary partners. The community government has been able to maintain ownership of a home where student researchers stay while visiting, thanks to the ongoing funding of these partnerships. When not occupied by researchers, the community is able to open the home for rental to other collaborators such as government workers and consultants.

### **Next steps**

This report was used to inform the overall Facilities Master Plan. As the facilities master planning process has come to an end, so too has this engagement process; however, the Aurora College transformation is ongoing and there will be future opportunities to provide input.

Northwest Territories  
Polytechnic University Facilities Master Plan Engagement  
WHAT WE HEARD REPORT