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Enhancing Support for Indigenous Land-based Programming in the Northwest Territories

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Value and Benefits

Human beings are happier and healthier when they experience connection with the natural world. There is an increasing body of scientific literature rooted in western knowledge systems that validates this assertion, as summarized for example by the Canadian Parks Council's 2014 Report, *Connecting Canadians with Nature*, which highlighted the importance of contact with nature as a factor in personal and societal well-being (Canadian Parks Council, 2014).

Recognition and understanding of the importance of land-based programming in Indigenous cultural contexts is growing in Canada. Land-based programs may be designed and delivered to achieve a variety of objectives in Indigenous communities, and provide a range of benefits including intergenerational connection, transmission of traditional knowledge, and healing opportunities (McDonald 2023; Redvers, 2020; Walsh & Sommerfield, 2018; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbcher-Fox & Coulthard, 2014; Zoe, 2018). A land-based program is:

A culturally defined program or service that takes place in an urban, nature-based, rural, or remote location, which involves cultural teachings and intergenerational knowledge transfer combined with any number of other activities or goals. Programs are informed by an Indigenous pedagogy wherein the land is the main source of knowledge and healing (Redvers, 2020, p. 90).

A recent report published by the Yellowhead Institute provides a comprehensive overview of the current literature related to the value and benefits of Indigenous land-based programming, noting that,

Most, if not all, land-based programs are designed to result in multiple interrelated outcomes and benefits for human mental, emotional, and physical health; environmental stewardship; cultural confidence and Indigenous knowledge; technical and practical skills; and enhanced understanding of and proficiency with critical concepts like settler-colonialism, governance, and Indigenous self-determination (McDonald, 2023, p. 9).

Indigenous authors distinguish between outdoor learning or place-based programs, where curricula may be informed by local environmental contexts, but are based on a western approach to learning, and Indigenous land-based programming, which is grounded in Indigenous pedagogies, informed by Indigenous world views, and often includes a goal of strengthening connection to land, culture, and Indigenous self-determination (Cluderay, Mainville, Simpson & Wrightson, 2022; McDonald, 2023). Cluderay et al (2022) note that, while outdoor learning and land-based programming share many of the same characteristics, “Outdoor education is not land-based education, because it does not centre Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. Simply taking people outside for activities like canoeing, hiking, or skiing, does not make those activities ‘land-based’” (Cluderay et al, 2022, p. 52).

This chapter focuses on programming that is land-based as described by Redvers (2020, p.

95), i.e. grounded in, “...a lived connection built over generations, shared through the oral tradition, and understood only through direct practices or experiences.”

The value of Indigenous land-based programs is widely recognized as a contributing factor to individual and community well-being, as well as to Indigenous cultural resurgence. Its importance has been highlighted in numerous academic articles and reports commissioned by various government agencies (DeLancey, 2023; Government of Northwest Territories, 2013; McDonald, 2023; Redvers, 2020; Walsh & Sommerfield, 2018). In the Northwest Territories alone, several major government reports in the past decade have highlighted the critical role that land-based programming plays in individual and community well-being. As examples, a 2013 report on the results of a citizen-led panel on Addictions and Community Wellness focused on increased investment in on-the-land programs as the single most important response to combatting addictions (Government of Northwest Territories, 2013), while a 2022 review of child and family services found that territorial residents saw land-based programming as the most highly rated resource for families in need of support (Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly, 2022).

Land-based programs are often cited in Canadian media as evidence of Indigenous cultural resurgence and resilience. (e.g. Galloway, 2018; Johnson, 2019). As Broadhead (personal communication, 2023) explains, Indigenous peoples in the north lost opportunities to engage in and experience what was once a traditional way of life due to colonization. Engaging in land-based programming results in, “bringing back pieces of ourselves that are lost,” connecting people to their families and history, and rebuilding connection to land, culture, and way of life after generations were deprived of that experience.

In spite of the widespread recognition of the importance and effectiveness of on-the-land programs, Indigenous groups and organizations are challenged to meet the demand, primarily due to funding and capacity issues. Land-based pro-

gramming represents, “...an intricate, cross-disciplinary, and highly developed field of professional practice,” (Redvers, 2020, p. 95), and delivering land-based programs in a contemporary context requires investment in infrastructure, transportation, program staff and support staff, and insurance, among other costs (Wildcat et al., 2014; Jensen, Andrew & Simmons, 2021). Due to the multi-generational legacy of colonization and dispossession from land, many Indigenous people today lack not only the experience and skills, but also the basic equipment, required for land-based activities. Program delivery agencies are thus often required to outfit participants, including providing for example appropriate winter clothing, tools, tents, life jackets, etc.

Most programs rely on external funding support from government agencies or philanthropic organizations, which creates an additional administrative burden associated with preparing funding submissions, and meeting evaluation and reporting requirements. Programs are usually delivered by community-based Indigenous governments, or local or regional non-profit groups, with limited capacity to meet these demands. A further challenge is that Indigenous communities view land-based activities as having inherent value, while mainstream funding agencies tend to target a specific desired outcome or activity, such as supporting at-risk youth, offering Indigenous language instruction, or providing healing for addictions. Thus, local organizations may have to access funding through a variety of sources in order to deliver integrated programming that meets the needs of community residents (Dotto, 2020; Redvers, 2020).

In response to these challenges, institutional supports for Indigenous land-based programs are emerging across Canada. For example, the federal government’s recent announcement of a national network to streamline funding and capacity-building for Indigenous guardian programs, funded in large part by the Government of Canada (Wood and Cruikshank, 2022). This chapter describes collaborative policy work and focuses on two innovations in the Northwest Territories (NWT) that are designed to address

these challenges and provide enhanced support for Indigenous organizations and communities seeking to provide access to on-the-land programs. Discussed later in this chapter, these two innovations are the NWT On The Land Collaborative and Supporting Wellbeing.

Collaborative Policy Development

In 2018, a workshop was convened in Yellowknife NWT that brought together on-the-land practitioners from across northern Canada to discuss culturally appropriate and effective evaluation approaches for Indigenous-led on-the-land programs. The workshop was a collaboration among the Government of the Northwest (GNWT) Department of Health and Social Services (HSS), Tides Canada (now MakeWay), the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, Hotì ts’eeda, and the NWT Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA). Meeting organizers hoped to begin the work of developing common approaches to evaluating land-based programs, setting the stage for the development of a set of tools and methods that could be used by on-the-land program practitioners across Canada’s North. Participants shared existing experience with evaluating and reporting on their programs, and explored what external supports could help with this work.

The meeting resulted in agreement that further work to provide on-the-land programs with evaluation tools and support would be useful. Another key outcome was that participants identified a gap in the available literature on land-based programming and felt that having access to a shared resource which brings together evidence about the effectiveness of on-the-land programs would be a useful support for program providers. Participants expressed frustration about the amount of administrative time and effort that their communities and organizations had to put into “making the case” for the value of on-the-land programming in funding submissions, especially as most rely on a variety of external funding sources to deliver their programming. A single, compelling document that can serve as both literature review and narrative description

of the impact of land-based programming could not only ease the administrative burden on program deliverers, but could also help to influence government and philanthropic funders.

The idea was not forgotten and in 2021, four of the workshop sponsors (MakeWay, NWTRPA, HSS and Hotì ts'eeda) allocated funding and in-kind support for this initiative and began the process of identifying an Indigenous scholar with extensive experience and expertise in planning and delivering land-based programming to take on the challenge. Their efforts resulted in the recent publication of *“Indigenous Land-Based Education in Theory and Practice”*, a Special Report made available through a partnership with the Yellowhead Institute (McDonald, 2023). The report draws on recent academic and publicly available literature to outline the benefits of land-based programming through five specific themes: Indigenous Self-Determination, Health and Well-Being, Environmental Stewardship, Reconciliation and Climate justice, and Evaluation Methodologies. Though several years in the making, this seminal document is now available as a public resource to support land-based program providers, and to provide a policy touchstone for funding agencies and policymakers who wish to better understand the importance of investment in on-the-land initiatives.

NWT On The Land Collaborative

The Northwest Territories On The Land Collaborative (OTLC) is a partnership among governments, charitable and non-government organizations, and corporations which provides a mechanism for them to combine efforts and make it easier for Indigenous governments, communities and community-based organizations to access money and other resources for on-the-land projects. In 2014, TIDES Canada (now MakeWay) and the GNWT’s Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) convened a workshop that brought together representatives of government, corporate, and philanthropic funders to hear directly from organizations involved in delivering land-based programs about how best to support them. Participants concluded that collaboration

among funders could result in benefits to both funders and program providers, by increasing the amount of funding available, increasing efficiency for funders, minimizing administration for applicants, and providing shared opportunities for learning. Out of that discussion, the OTLC was born.

The initial OTLC partners included TIDES Canada and the GNWT, who jointly led the development of the fund, along with Dominion Diamond Ekati Corporation, the NWT Recreation and Parks Association, TNC Canada, the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, and seven regional Indigenous Governments (Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Gwich’in Tribal Council, NWT Métis Nation, Dehcho First Nations, Tłı̨chǫ Government, Sahtú Secretariat Inc., and Akaitcho Territory Government), each of whom appointed a Community Advisor to participate in OTLC meetings. Collaborative partners spent 2015 designing the structure and operations of the Collaborative, with partners meeting frequently to explore models from other jurisdictions, and design a funding process that would be user-friendly and straightforward. Discussions focused on the following key design elements.

- Governance and decision-making processes
- Role of the Community Advisors
- Roles and responsibilities of funding partners
- Details of a user-friendly inquiry and proposal submission process
- How to effectively communicate the call for applications

By late 2015, the partners were ready to test a pilot of the Collaborative, and the first call for applications was issued. The application process was designed to be simple and straightforward, reducing the administrative burden on applicants. The pilot intake was intended to help focus and refine the application and decision-making processes, but a few guidelines were developed – for example, partners decided to give priority to projects that actually got people out on the land, as opposed to investing in equipment or

infrastructure; and set a minimum threshold of \$1,000 for eligible projects. A key role for the Community Advisors was to answer questions and support applicants in their respective geographic regions in the development of their proposals.

For the first funding call, the OTLC had funding of just over \$380,000 to allocate. The call for applications was issued in November 2015, with an application intake period of two months. When the application period closed, more than 200 applications had been received from across the NWT, with requests for funding totalling almost \$9 million. Reviewing this first batch of applications provided guidance for further development of decision-making criteria, including excluding any projects that resulted in personal financial gain for the proponents.

Twenty seven projects were funded in 2016, at a total value of \$385,000, which was slightly more than the original amount that partners had put on the table. This increase highlights an unanticipated benefit of the OTLC process, which is that partners sometimes choose to top up their contribution to support a specific project that fits well with their organization's funding priorities. Another benefit to applicants is that partners may be able to use their networks and expertise to direct applicants to other funding sources, or connect them with local resources to access infrastructure or equipment. For example, when community applications include a request for outdoor leadership training in their proposals (e.g. wilderness first aid, or canoe safety), the NWT Recreation and Parks Association is often able to cover this portion of the funding request from within its existing funding streams.

Since that initial call in 2016, the NWT OTLC has increased the amount of funding available on an annual basis, refined its funding processes, and increased the number of contributing partners. From 2016 through 2022, the OTLC has funded 323 projects in all regions of the NWT, allocating total funding of \$5.9 million to Indigenous organizations and governments, schools, non-government organizations, community governments

and individuals to deliver land-based projects. Grants ranged in size, with an average per-project amount of \$18,000. An in-depth review of 132 projects show that activities supported by the Collaborative include a wide variety of outdoor and traditional skills, including camp set-up, Indigenous food preparation, harvesting of wild-life, plants and trees, sewing, drumming, snowshoeing, outdoor safety, learning Indigenous languages, and sharing oral history (Dotto 2021).

All but one of the original partners remained active (although some organizations have evolved and changed their names); and new partners have joined, including RBC, the Gordon Foundation, and several additional departments of the Government of the Northwest Territories. Annual funding available has fluctuated somewhat from year to year, due to the occasional time-limited injection of special project funding, but generally sits between \$900,000 and \$1 million. Over time, the OTLC vision has crystallized and is described on their website:

Today, the NWT On The Land Collaborative provides funding, resources, and support for programs that centre land-based education and cultural revitalization. Youth engagement is a very important component of these programs as is the development of skills and knowledge that enhance community strength and resiliency. We support projects that restore traditional ways, foster justice, and build better economies. Grants also help with environmental monitoring and stewardship programs that ensure the health of the land for future generations. Mental health, addictions, healing, and family wellness are concerns in communities across the NWT; they are also priorities for the Collaborative (NWT On The Land Collaborative, n.d.).

The OTLC's administrative processes have been refined over time, evolving into an annual decision-making process that begins in September of each year with an open call for applications, with a submission deadline of early November. OTLC partners then engage in an intensive three-

day review process, with Community Advisors meeting first to assess all applications and rank them into three categories for consideration by funders. The next day, all OTLC partners meet and Community Advisors provide a summary of their review to the funding partners, who then convene the next day to decide among themselves how to allocate the available funding to the recommended projects. The process works by consensus – every member of the OTLC has an equal voice at the table, regardless of their contribution to administrative support or to the actual funding pot.

In 2019, the OTLC commissioned a retrospective summary report to assess the impact of their work and guide future programming, and the report was updated in 2021 to encompass findings from 132 individual project reports received from 80 different grant recipients. That review summarized the impacts of on-the-land programs, as evidenced by the project reports, as follows (Dotto, 2021, p. 4-16):

- *Spending time on-the-land revitalizes and strengthens relations between program participants and the land that are traditional, radical, and anti-colonial...*
- *On-the-land programs create diverse opportunities in all seasons for community members, but particularly youth, to learn land-based skills and connect with Indigenous culture and way of life...*
- *On-the-land programs bring Elders together with youth and other community members, strengthening intergenerational relations and giving Elders the opportunity to share knowledge, skills, and language...*
- *On-the-land programs foster self-esteem, perseverance, confidence, leadership, and cooperation...*
- *On-the-land programs provide communities and community members with vital resources like traditional food and firewood...*
- *On-the-land programs foster attitudes of stewardship amongst participants, who subsequently work to conserve and improve the well-being of the land itself.*

First and foremost, the OTLC's very existence is grounded in the belief that inherent value exists in land-based programming, and that Indigenous communities are the experts in understanding what programs will best fit their needs. This removes the onus from applicants to make the case for why on-the-land programs are valuable and should be supported. From a practical perspective, aggregating available funding into one pot with one application process also lessens the workload for applicants, who might otherwise be preparing several funding requests for several agencies, all with slightly different application forms and eligibility criteria.

One key design principle differentiates the OTLC from almost all other funding opportunities for Indigenous land-based programs: it allows applicants to describe their proposed programs from their own perspective, emphasizing what they believe to be the value and benefits, without requiring programs to fit a pre-determined category of anticipated outcomes. Redvers (2020, p. 96) describes the "unfortunate irony" of the tendency to silo activities into programs, noting that land-based practitioners feel, "they now have to tailor their way of life into the Western concept of a 'program' in order for this way of life to continue." Giving applicants this space allows funding organizations to respond to community priorities and needs, rather than expecting communities to adapt their programs to fit funder priorities. Long-time OTLC members note that as representatives of funding agencies join the OTLC, they often want to push OTLC to establish program streams that better fit their organizational priorities, but OTLC has resisted this pressure and remained true to its underlying value of privileging Indigenous perspectives.

The way in which the OTLC is structured, with funding partners sharing administrative processes, provides enhanced flexibility and allows the Collaborative to leverage the full range of funding tools available to all partners. Both government and philanthropic funders are constrained by financial policies and regulations that limit their ability to support some applicants, but by working together funders are able to use

the most appropriate tools for each situation. Government accountability requirements may create an administrative burden for community programs, so the majority of OTLC funds are channeled to MakeWay, who is able to provide funding to successful applicants in the form of a grant, with very limited reporting requirements. But as a registered charity, MakeWay can only provide funding to organizations that are categorized as qualified donees by the Canada Revenue Agency. If a successful applicant does not meet the CRA test, then their funding is provided through a Contribution Agreement with the one of the participating departments of the GNWT.

Another innovative feature of the Collaborative is that applicants receive benefits beyond program funding. Community advisors appointed by regional Indigenous governments are extremely knowledgeable on-the-land leaders, and not only act as a first point of contact for funding proposals, but also provide advice about a range of topics related to program development. Community advisors also work with community applicants to identify gaps or weaknesses in draft proposals, giving them the opportunity to revise and expand applications based on this feedback prior to submitting them. Community advisors are often able to put program proponents in touch with other local or regional groups who may be able to share infrastructure, knowledge, training, or other resources. Funding agencies who sit at the OTLC table often agree to fund specific proposals that have not been recommended for funding by the Community Advisors, but fit within other funding streams. Finally, the structure of the OTLC provides a forum for sharing perspectives and learnings, and for funders to develop a more nuanced understanding of the importance of land-based programming.

The success of the OTLC concept and approach is evident. In eight years of operation, the Collaborative has maintained a stable membership, attracted new funders, and more than doubled the amount of funding available for community-driven on-the-land programs through this unique approach. Collaborative members have resisted the pressure to revert to a more traditional fund-

ing model where success is tied to funder priorities, and through active in-kind administrative contributions by funding members have been able to keep the operation administratively lean and avoided siphoning off available funds for administrative purposes.

As Community Advisors have developed their networks and supported local and regional organizations with their program proposals, OTLC members have seen a gradual increase in the quality of submissions and the capacity of local organizations to deliver effective, well-organized land-based programs.

This success has received recognition at the territorial and national levels. The OTLC was awarded the Government of the Northwest Territories' Premier's Award for Excellence in 2017-2018, which is given to partnerships that "demonstrate, excellence, innovation and dedication" (Government of Northwest Territories, n.d.); and in 2021 it received the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Partner Award, which recognizes partners "whose collaboration, creativity and innovation enriches individual health and community well-being and enhances the parks and recreation community in Canada" (NWT OTLC Annual Report, 2022, p. 6).

The growth of the OTLC has not been without challenges. There continues to be discussion about what constitutes "On-the-land" programming, as described here.

Determining what qualifies as "On-the-land" continues to be an area of discussion for the Collaborative. In general, the Collaborative would like to see projects that take place beyond municipal limits. However, we recognize there are a number of factors (i.e. safety, type of group, equipment, and funds) that can restrict organizations from doing this. Understanding "On-the-land" in the context of the applicant and the people they are serving is essential (NWT OTLC Annual Report, 2017, p. 4).

The Collaborative has focused on learning through experience, starting with a fairly limited set of policies and requirements, and developing guidelines over time. After nearly 10 years of operation, members recognize that it may be time to codify more of their guidelines and operational assumptions and practices, especially as new funding partners are encouraged to join.

As is the case with many organizations and projects, the past few years have provided limited opportunity for outreach, networking and growth as activities were constrained by the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Recently the OTLC has attracted three new funding partners – Transport Canada, Google.com, and BHP Foundation – and as operations return to normal they hope to once again engage in active outreach and recruitment to attract more.

An opportunity for existing funders to increase their contributions is available. Currently, there is significant variation among funder contributions, ranging from \$10,000 per year to \$300,000 per year. To date the OTLC has not set a minimum contribution, and has granted an equal voice in decision-making to all funding agencies. While some funders have increased their annual contribution over time, as the Collaborative has proved its value, others have not; and some members believe that it may be time to set minimum requirements for funders who have the capacity to contribute more.

Other jurisdictions are taking note of the success of the OTLC model and seeking information from partners about its operations. Based on the success of the OTLC, plans are under way for a future workshop to share the successes and lessons learned with interested parties in other territories.

Supporting Wellbeing

Supporting Wellbeing is a training program that provides tools and resources for people who deliver land-based programming, to prepare them to mitigate and respond to mental health challenges of program participants while on-the-

land. The program grew out of the experience of several land-based program leaders in the NWT, who came together in 2018 in a workshop sponsored by the Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA), and the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, to discuss challenges they faced in their programs. A common theme at that workshop was, “...that many program participants and staff struggle with trauma, and program leaders were calling for made-in-the-north training on trauma-informed care and responding to mental health challenges” (Supporting Wellbeing website, n.d.).

Staff representatives from the NWTRPA, Inuvialuit Regional Council (IRC) and Dehcho First Nations (DCFN), all of whom are recognized leaders in supporting Indigenous land-based programming in the NWT, subsequently joined forces in 2020 to establish a Steering Committee and begin the work of developing a comprehensive, made-in-the-north training curriculum grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogy.

Steering Committee members were drawn from across the NWT and included representatives from Indigenous governments and organizations, as well as committed individuals with experience in delivering land-based programs. Seed funding for the project came from a number of sources, including Rio Tinto, the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, MakeWay, Nature United, Hotì ts’eeda (the NWT SPOR SUPPORT Unit), the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and the NWT and Nunavut Lotteries (Supporting Wellbeing website, n.d.). The Steering Committee established some early ground rules for training.

1. Supporting Wellbeing training would be made in the North, rooted in Indigenous experiences and expertise.
2. The curriculum would be modular, allowing facilitators to adapt it to the needs of communities and specific groups.
3. Training would be culturally competent – as an act of decolonization, and to promote cultural safety, the training would centre Indigenous approaches to preventing, responding to, and healing from trauma.

4. Training would be trauma-informed (Supporting Wellbeing, 2022).

These early decisions informed the project's Values, as posted on the website:

- **Reciprocity:** With oneself, the Land, and each other.
- **Inclusiveness:** Accepting, welcoming, and being intentional about diversity, and celebrating one's strengths.
- **Accountability:** Mutual accountability to each other, the Land, our partners, and ourselves.
- **Wellbeing:** Mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual facets are balanced and nurtured together to create a holistic level of wellbeing in which all four areas are strong and healthy.
- **Indigenous self-determination:** Supporting Indigenous sovereignty, rights and the value of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being (Supporting Wellbeing website, n.d.).

Through staff support located in the NWTRPA, the Steering Committee issued a request for proposals to begin the work of developing the training curriculum, and by the end of 2021, a draft training program was completed under the leadership of an experienced Indigenous counsellor and on-the-land program leader, working in partnership with a northern adult educator with expertise in curriculum development. The Supporting Wellbeing training modules blend clinically researched practices in mental health group work with Indigenous practices and expertise. In March 2021, the first pilot training session was held on-the-land near Inuvik NWT, at a camp maintained by the IRC 17 on-the-land program leaders and Elders came together with the Supporting Wellbeing Steering Committee and curriculum consultants for seven days, during which they undertook training in the Supporting Wellbeing skills while also providing feedback on the curriculum.

Through 2021, although somewhat constrained by pandemic restrictions, the initial cadre of trainees used their new-found skills while de-

livering programs on-the-land across the NWT. Meanwhile, the administrative structure for the program continued to develop and in early 2022, the project was awarded \$500,000 from the Arctic Inspiration Prize. This investment has enabled the project to establish itself as an independent project on the MakeWay Shared Platform.

Supporting Wellbeing's original five-year plan included not only developing the training curriculum for on-the-land program leaders, but also developing a train-the-trainer curriculum for program leaders who have taken the Supporting Wellbeing training and want to become trainers themselves, capable of delivering the program in their regions. The Supporting Wellbeing Facilitator's Guide was completed in early 2022, and in the fall of 2022 the first group of potential trainers gathered on-the-land near Fort Simpson NWT for a week-long pilot test of the new curriculum. Consistent with the project philosophy, learning activities were interspersed with land-based learning opportunities including a trip on the Mackenzie River to visit the traditional homesite of local families, gathering plants and making medicine with local Elders, and learning skills such as setting up a tent frame and making dry meat. The project will continue to deliver Supporting Wellbeing for on-the-land program leaders in all regions of the NWT, and plans to hold another train-the-trainer opportunity in late 2023 or early 2024.

Supporting Wellbeing has demonstrated significant success in its first two years of operation, drawing on the resources of committed partners and dedicated individuals to establish a governance structure, obtaining funding and delivering products on a timely basis. Supporting Wellbeing's curriculum contents and training approach respond to the unique needs, capacities, and social infrastructure of remote northern Indigenous communities. Although some land-based healing programs are able to include western trained mental health professionals in the agendas, this is not the case for the vast majority of on-the-land programs, for two reasons: many programs are not designed to focus on a siloed concept of mental wellness, but are wholistic in

nature, with connection to land and culture the primary focus; and there is a serious shortage of trained counsellors in the NWT, making it a challenge even for programs with resources to find this kind of expertise.

The modular curriculum design allows the training program to be adapted to the needs of local communities and organizations, both with respect to timing of delivery and to what components are prioritized. The training materials are also designed to be customized so that knowledge holders and Elders in each region can provide a culturally appropriate perspective. In addition to being successful in its application for the Arctic Inspiration Prize, in 2022 Supporting Wellbeing was selected by Canada's Premiers as the NWT winner of an award for innovation in mental health and addictions care.

This success has not been without its challenges, as noted in the project's 2022 interim evaluation report. Like any new organization, the administrative leads have run into policy gaps that require continual adjustment and development of a policy framework. For example, some Steering Committee members are supported to participate through their jobs with Indigenous organizations, while others are consultants who require some form of compensation to dedicate time to the project, so a compensation policy was required. The transition to the administrative mechanisms of the MakeWay Shared Platform have also required an investment of staff time and effort. Another challenge is that the excitement generated by the project has led to a demand for the training that, in the short term, exceeds the organization's capacity.

Conclusion

In the Northwest Territories, organizations with a commitment to promoting land-based programming have joined forces in a number of unique collaborations specifically intended to build community capacity, streamline administration, increase the resources available, and influence government and philanthropic policymakers. These innovations respond to an identified prior-

ity of northern Indigenous communities and governing organizations, and are tailored to leverage the strengths of northern communities and respond to shared capacity challenges across the north.

These collaborations have common themes. All of the initiatives described start from a place of recognizing the inherent value of land-based programming for Indigenous communities, and the critical role it plays in fostering individual and community well-being, strength, resilience, and success. All the participating organizations seek to support Indigenous community priorities and needs, rather than requiring compliance or congruence with their own organizational mandates. All seek to support community-driven programs by streamlining and reducing administrative requirements while building capacity for the delivery of effective land-based programs. While the underlying philosophy of valuing being on-the-land as an outcome in itself, without focusing on siloed program objectives, may be considered an innovation for government and philanthropic funders, for Indigenous communities it represents a return to traditional practices and values that have always existed to support learning, physical or mental well-being, and connection to culture.

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