Northern Development Ministers Forum
Youth Leadership Priority Project: Status Report 2023

Summary Document

The Youth Leadership priority project is a multi-year initiative to develop, implement, and evaluate a youth leadership model for northern youth. The project team has developed a draft model which emphasizes three content components that can be implemented individually or collectively:

1. Leadership training (core skills).
2. Practical experience.
3. Mentorship.

The delivery approach for the model would a) involve engagement with youth, parents and the community, b) ensure the content is scalable, adjusting to group size, and c) be flexible in the context, approach, and target age ranges. Youth leadership capacity will have to be assessed before and after the model is tested.

The content components and the delivery approach were identified in research completed prior to the pandemic. The research included a review of northern demographics, a literature review on youth leadership programs across Canada, and an interjurisdictional scan of youth leadership programs delivered in the north. The project team identified lessons learned in multiple areas based on the research findings and incorporated that learning into the model. The research also noted that a wide variety of approaches were found in delivering youth leadership programming: conferences and workshops, internships, cultural awareness, land-based learning, advisory groups, mentoring and networking.

Lessons learned through this research also included the importance of community involvement and the need for flexibility in design and delivery. The most common challenges identified for youth leadership initiatives were related to the capacity to implement programs (i.e., insufficient funding, technology, and/or people).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, jurisdictions realigned resources in order to address emergent needs. The 2020 Forum was postponed and work on the Youth Leadership Priority Project was largely paused from the summer of 2020 through to the fall of 2022.

Future steps of this multi-year project include engaging with youth on the draft model to ensure their perspectives and needs are considered early in formation of the model. The Forum will then pilot the model in one or more select northern jurisdictions, evaluate results, and develop a tool kit for the model.

The model and toolkit will provide a framework for building local youth leadership programs, which can be tailored to the unique needs and strengths of participating youth and their community.

The full report is available on request from the lead jurisdiction, Saskatchewan.

Defining "youth"

For research purposes, the project team used a broad definition of youth, capturing information on all programs that described themselves as targeting youth.

For the pilot project, the project team recommends proceeding with a broad definition as this allows the most options for adapting a program based on community needs and strengths. Research highlighted that this sort of flexibility is important to program success.

1. Impact of the Pandemic on Youth Leadership Programs

The implementation of public health measures and restrictions during the pandemic modified youth participation in school, work, and other activities. Some youth programs halted activities or shifted to virtual participation where possible.

Initial information on the pandemic's impact on programs varies. While some youth leadership programs are operating in-person activities at pre-pandemic levels, many are facing resource challenges and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels of service. A few of the programs surveyed for this project prior to the pandemic have ceased operations; however, based on the data currently available, it is not possible to determine if they stopped due to the pandemic, or for unrelated reasons.

2. Proposed Youth Leadership Model: Design and Delivery

The proposed youth leadership model is based on three content components: leadership training (core skills), practical experience, and mentorship. Elements of the design and delivery of programs based on the model include engagement, scalability based on context, and flexibility in the delivery approach. A pre-assessment and post-assessment would be included.

Engagement

A key element of the model's delivery approach is engagement, and seeking perspectives of northern youth, parents, the Indigenous and local community, and subject matter experts. Engagement will help identify the interests, needs, and challenges of the community – to help create a program *custom fit* for the community/region.

Scalability

Scalability will enable a single, or multiple, content components to be implemented, considering resources, time, or capacity to deliver an initiative.

The leadership training would include lessons on self-awareness and practical leadership skills which would be core to all initiatives. However, there would be flexibility to include lessons on culture and leadership in context. For example, a leadership program focused on the parliamentary system would have different supplementary training than a program focused on physical sport, art, or music. The practical experience component would provide participants the opportunity to practice their leadership skills, whether through a project or leadership opportunities. Finally, the

mentorship component will enable skilled leaders in the community or a particular area of expertise to provide guidance and advice to participants.

Flexibility
The model allows for flexibility in the context, approach, and age ranges of program delivery. Leadership may be taught in different contexts, whether through community involvement, career connections, reconciliation and land-based learning, sport and recreation, etc. A variety of delivery approaches could be chosen whether in-person learning, online meetings, land-based learning, etc. Training could focus on different age ranges, whether elementary, high school, or youth adults.

Pre- and Post- Assessments
Integrating pre- and post- assessments will help explore the impact of the initiative and identify opportunities to improve the model. For example, is there a difference in the impact of one leadership training component implemented versus multiple components? Any factors that will influence the results will need to be considered.

Multiple Phases
Implementation of a youth leadership model would include multiple phases to provide the opportunity to learn, and improve. If the youth model is accepted, implementation would occur in two stages. Subject to approval by jurisdictions, the stages could look like this:
- Phase 2 would engage youth in the creation of the training and/or youth innovation projects, and potentially a mentorship component. The described innovation projects could be presented to the NDMF, with a set funding amount awarded to the best idea(s) to implement.
- Phase 3 would include implementation of the innovation project(s) identified by youth, with the lessons learned shared with the NDMF. Along with implementation of the innovaton project(s) would include another cycle of training, new youth innovation projects, and/or mentorship.

The model will be assessed following Phase 3.

Recommendations and Next Steps
1. Approve the NDMF youth leadership model.

2. Proceed with Phase 2 of the youth leadership model:
   - Identify jurisdictions who are interested in implementing the scalable youth leadership model and to work with at least one community in their jurisdiction to deliver Phase 2.
   - Consider existing leadership/engagement initiatives in member jurisdictions and possible options to align the project with those existing initiatives.
   - Engage with youth at the community level to inform the creation of the training and innovation project.
   - Develop a process to assess innovation projects.
   - Provide semi-annual updates to the NDMF Deputy Ministers.

3. Assess future phases at the completion of each phase.