

Premier's Message

Over the coming decades, the NWT will face significant social, economic and environmental challenges as well as great opportunities. How Northerners respond will shape our future prosperity and self-reliance. I reach out to every Northerner and invite you to join us in building common ground. Let us navigate the future together, for we are stronger when we stand together and focus on what unites us. Let us believe in each other and the power of strong relationships.

The land continues to shape us as it has for centuries but it is our enduring values of mutual respect and reliance that truly defines us as Northerners.

Northerners' mutual reliance and cooperation comes from our common belief in fairness and equality for all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons. We enjoy individual and collective rights, as well as privileges and responsibilities. We also share in many common challenges. Cooperation and partnerships between citizens, communities, regions and all levels of government is increasingly needed to respond to these challenges and to seize opportunities.

Aboriginal and Treaty rights are recognized by the *Constitution Act 1982*, by the courts, the Government of the NWT (GNWT), and by the federal government. The GNWT recognizes the inherent right of self-government as an existing Aboriginal right under section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982*. Aboriginal governments in the NWT are not only major landowners who control significant natural resources, they are essential partners in shaping the future and creating opportunities and prosperity in communities and regions.

The GNWT, as a public government, has an important responsibility in guiding the future of the NWT. As part of the 17th Legislative Assembly's vision of 'Believing in People and Building on the Strength of Northerners', a key priority is strengthening relationships with Aboriginal governments. The release of this strategy – "Respect, Recognition and Responsibility: The GNWT's Approach to Engaging with Aboriginal Governments" is our public expression of that commitment.

Sincerely,



Robert R. McLeod
Premier



respect
recognition
responsibility

The Government of the Northwest Territories' Approach to Engaging with Aboriginal Governments

Kispin ki nitawihtin ā nihiyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwēsīnēn.

Cree

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Chipewyan

If you would like this information in another official language, call us.

English

Si vous voulez ces renseignements en français, contactez-nous.

Français

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijahch'uu zhit yinothan ji', diits'at ginohkni.

Gwich'in

Hapkaa titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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Inuktitut

UVANITTUAQ ILTCHURISUKUPKU INUVIALUKTUN, QUQUAQLUTA.

Inuvialuktun

K'ēhshó got'ine xadó k'ē hederi ᑭᑦᑭᑦᑭᑦᑭᑦ yeriniwē nidé dúle.

North Slavey

Edí gondi dehgéh got'ie zhatié k'ēé edat'éh enahddhé nide.

South Slavey

Ṯẖcẖo yati k'èè dè wegodi̱ wek'èhoi̱ẕo̱ ṉe̱w̱o̱ ḏè, gots'ò goahde.

Ṯẖcẖo

Back Panel Photo Credits (Left to Right): GNWT, Dan Heringa, GNWT

Front Panel Photo Credits (Left to Right): Dene drummer in Fort Simpson, National Aboriginal Day 2011 – GNWT; Inuvialuit dancers in Tuktoyaktuk – J.F. Bergeron/GNWT; Youth fiddler in Fort Simpson, National Aboriginal Day 2011 – GNWT



Introduction

Northerners' mutual reliance and cooperative spirit comes from our common belief in fairness and equality. Throughout our history when progress was made, it was when our relationships were strong and we shared a collective commitment to improving the health and safety of all Northerners and the protection of this vast land.

Our Northern society is comprised of an equal population of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons that share in rights, privileges and responsibilities. We also share in common challenges and opportunities. Cooperation and partnerships between citizens, communities, regions and all levels of government is important for the future of the north.

Aboriginal and Treaty rights are recognized by the *Constitution Act 1982*, by the GNWT, and the federal government. The GNWT recognizes the inherent right of self-government as an Aboriginal right under the section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982*. The GNWT is party to the negotiation and the implementation of Aboriginal rights agreements in all regions of the NWT.

In the NWT, we live in a place where everyone has a voice and a role in shaping our future. As a public government, the GNWT represents all Northerners and seeks to balance the interests of all groups, organizations and individuals. Our efforts support increased individual and organizational understanding, accountability and self-reliance through the engagement of local government leaders, non-governmental organizations, and the business community, as well as seeking public consultation, in developing programs and policies that affect NWT residents.

Government-to-government cooperation is an essential part of the North's foundation and legacy. Each level of government and organization has an important role to play and responsibilities to deliver upon.

Cooperation and partnerships are also matters of practical necessity. There are reasons to cooperate, including the shared interests and interdependence of the people who live in the communities. As well, the effectiveness of public programs and services increases through coordination, alliances and strengthened capacities.

We all have a role to play, and the GNWT has signaled our commitment to observe engagement principles that recognize and respect our relationships with Aboriginal governments, and set out a promise to take measures to show this commitment in our everyday actions.

The GNWT Principles of Engagement

The GNWT recognizes and respects the diverse interests expressed by Aboriginal leaders since the election of the 17th Legislative Assembly and commits to the following principles of engagement.

Recognition of Constitutionally Protected Rights: The GNWT recognizes that section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982* recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and Treaty rights of Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

Recognition of the Inherent Right to Self-Government: The GNWT recognizes that the inherent right of self-government is an existing Aboriginal right under section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982*.

Building Mutually Respectful Relationships: The GNWT is committed to building and maintaining mutually respectful government-to-government relationships with Aboriginal governments.

Recognition of Aboriginal Rights Agreements: Where Aboriginal rights agreements have been signed, these agreements will form the basis of the GNWT's engagement with that Aboriginal government.

Respecting Diverse Governance Structures: The GNWT respects the diverse governance structures of Aboriginal governments and is open to engaging with the governments and community leaders that represent Aboriginal peoples in each region.

Responsible, Accountable and Flexible Government-to-Government Relationships: The GNWT will build responsible and accountable government-to-government relationships that are responsive and flexible, and reflect the unique interests and challenges of Aboriginal governments.

Sharing Knowledge and Understanding: The GNWT, through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations (DAAIR), will continue to share knowledge and understanding.

Respecting the Importance of a Healthy and Sustainable Environment: The GNWT will continue our commitment to working with Aboriginal governments to ensure responsible stewardship over NWT lands, water and air.

The GNWT Commitment

While working together for the benefit of all Northerners, it is essential that our government-to-government relationships be based on mutual respect, recognition and shared responsibilities.

A priority of the 17th Legislative Assembly's vision of *'Believing in People and Building on the Strength of Northerners'*, is strengthening relationships with Aboriginal governments. We have many examples that we can build on, where our governments have achieved success by working together, such as the GNWT Education Partnership Declaration, the co-drafting of critical legislation, and the development of a NWT Water Stewardship Strategy. To further strengthen our relationships, the GNWT has undertaken many meetings with leaders from every region of the NWT to discuss ways we can better work together. We have heard that a number of key areas need to be strengthened as we move forward. These include:

- Committing GNWT departments to undertake appropriate consultation when proposing actions that may impact on Aboriginal governments. This strategy does not replace the GNWT's existing consultation obligations;
- Continuing the GNWT's commitment to the negotiation and implementation of Aboriginal rights agreements in all regions of the NWT;
- Engaging in a way that acknowledges the unique governance structures, status of Aboriginal rights negotiations, economic opportunities, and culture in each community;
- Recognizing and contributing to addressing capacity challenges faced by Aboriginal governments in terms of human and financial resources that make it difficult to effectively engage;
- Committing to sharing information with Aboriginal governments;
- Continuing the GNWT's commitment to working with all governments to ensure decisions support healthy and diverse ecosystems;
- Supporting GNWT participation at Aboriginal government assemblies and other initiatives; and
- Committing to work with those Aboriginal governments who are interested, for example the Tłıchǫ Government and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, in formalizing our intergovernmental relations through the development of intergovernmental cooperation accords.

Each government has their respective authorities, as well as priorities and interests unique to their organizations. Sometimes our individual priorities align and sometimes it is more difficult to find consensus on specific issues. Over the coming decades, the NWT will face significant social, economic and environmental challenges as well as great opportunities. How we as citizens, organizations, businesses and governments unite in partnerships will help shape our common future. Let us navigate the future together, for we are stronger when we stand together and focus on what unites us. Let us believe in each other and the power of strong relationships.