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CoEvaluation Lab

Final Evaluation Report

*Fisheries for Environmental and
Economic Development in the North Project*

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Executive Summary

Project

This evaluation report explores the planning, implementation, and early outcomes of the *Fisheries for Environmental and Economic Development in the North (FEED the North)* project. The project was launched in March 2021 with funding from the Future Skills Center (FSC). The *FEED the North* project sought to co-design a unique approach to evaluating the environmental performance of Arctic small-scale fisheries (SSFs) in a culturally relevant manner that acknowledges the strengths of both Indigenous knowledge and Western scientific data. By collaborating with Northern Indigenous fishing communities, rightsholders, and stakeholders, the goal was to establish a novel framework that incorporates Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit¹ (IQ) alongside scientific data. This approach sought to enhance the efficacy and contextual responsiveness of existing seafood ratings systems in assessing the environmental performance of Arctic SSFs.

Project objectives

The proposed objectives of this project evolved to align with the shifting project context and community priorities. Notably, the objective of co-designing a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs was refined to co-developing a methodology for co-designing the assessment framework, through building an open dialogue and common understanding. Overall, the project objectives can be classified into four overarching categories:

- Facilitate youth development and capacity building.
- Assemble cross-cultural and cross-contextual networks and partnerships.
- Foster collaboration between Northern and Southern partners to bridge Western science and Indigenous Knowledge.
- Mobilize knowledge.

Project leads

Ocean Wise, leveraging its expertise in the fisheries industry and sustainability assessments, and **Ikaarvik**, who specializes in bridging Indigenous knowledge and Western science through the engagement and capacity building of Arctic communities and youth, partnered to co-lead this initiative. The project collaborated with Northern Indigenous communities of Uqsuqtuuq (Gjoa Haven) and Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet); and Inuit youth from these communities to establish priorities.

¹ The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH) defines IQ as “the term used to describe Inuit epistemology or the Indigenous knowledge of the Inuit. The term translates directly as “that which Inuit have always known to be true” (Tagalik, 2011).

Project activities

Three workshops were held throughout the project time horizon. The first two were hosted by Ikaarvik youth and staff in two Nunavut communities: Uqsuqtuuq (Gjoa Haven) and Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet). Ocean Wise staff travelled to these communities and co-created workshops with youth to explore what sustainability of fishing, and fisheries means in context, from youths' perspectives. The third workshop was held in Vancouver and provided an opportunity for Inuit youth to travel South and participate in discussions related to SSF sustainability alongside industry partners (e.g. Seafood Watch), as well as First Nations fisheries in BC.

Evaluation approach

CoEL was engaged in November 2023, and worked with Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik to understand and refine existing evaluation objectives and plan. We took a **developmental evaluation** approach (Patton, 2011) to explore both formative and some initial summative outcomes related to conducting community engagement, youth development, and framing a process for assessing sustainability in Arctic SSFs. To address key evaluation questions identified, CoEL synthesized information from secondary data sources including project planning and reporting documents, photographs and written reflections from workshops, and transcripts/notes from meetings throughout the project. In addition, CoEL conducted interviews with Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik staff (n=5) and youth (n=2), as well as representatives (n=3) from the industry partner who participated in the North-South workshop held in Vancouver.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation primarily reflects the perspectives of Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik project staff and youth. In the report you will find the evaluation results in full detail, which are categorized as follows:

- **Challenges, impacts and adaptations** were determined by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which heavily impacted travel and initial project timelines.
- **Lessons for community engagement projects and partnerships** involving collaboration and Northern workshops provided valuable learning, training, and experience for Ocean Wise staff alongside the Northern Indigenous youth.
- **Youth development** included ongoing engagement, relationship building, and capacity building with youth throughout the project.
- **Networking and partnerships** - a core vision, ensured remote Northern communities had an opportunity to have a place at the table.
- **Content-Toward and SSF framework** facilitated a shared understanding of the importance and impact of their work on SSFs and Northern Indigenous communities.

Implications for future work

Managing stakeholders to achieve a common goal across diverse contexts

Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik realized that the **stakeholders existed on a 'continuum' in several ways**, and that **there needs to be careful consideration of where the project focus falls on that continuum and what scope of stakeholder/industry involvement is most relevant and beneficial**. Two key axes of the continuum were where community fisheries were at in terms of their operations (e.g. active vs. inactive, engaged with industry vs. not); and trust between partners. Engagement in workshops 'moved at the speed of trust', and this had to be established between all parties prior to engaging in meaningful discussion.

Recommendations for non-Indigenous organizations seeking to engage with Indigenous communities

- **be flexible with funding, timelines, and project objectives;**
- be flexible in project plans and proposals; if you want to help communities you need to ask what is needed and **do not show up with a fully formed plan;**
- recognize **building relationships and networks with communities as an output** despite the inability to "measure" these as a metric. These intangibles need to be respected and recognized within organizations – a push for deliverables jeopardizes the prioritization of community needs and does not allow staff the time and space they need when they have to account for their time with a tangible product; and
- **commit to internal learning** from community engagement projects and commit to integrating and respecting the lessons learned within your own organizational processes and resources.

Recommendations for individuals from the South engaging with Northern Indigenous communities

- **Know and understand the history of colonialism and community relations**, and understand the onus is on you to demonstrate your commitment and intentions. It may take multiple visits to build trust. Be open to questions and be transparent.
- **Have cultural humility.** Remember and respect that your project and priorities may be low on the community's list, even during a scheduled visit.
- **Have patience.** You won't get as far as you think – building relationships takes time, and isn't always linear. Gaining buy-in, trust, and participation is an accomplishment. Having conversations and gathering information is only a step – turning it into something, checking and re-checking with participants and communities in iterative stages is a huge process.
- **Learn how to step into something uncomfortable.** Give power to folks with lived experience and accept feedback as you navigate community engagement and relationships.
- **Making an effort to learn and be respectful is valued by partners.**

Relevance to governments and systems

The initiative to co-develop accessible standards of sustainability for Northern SSFs has potential far-reaching impacts and implications. The findings and outputs of this project's broader objectives are not only significant for the sustainable development of SSFs in Northern communities but also resonate with broader policy frameworks, particularly the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (Government of Canada, 2019). Fisheries play a pivotal role in this context given their economic, social, and cultural significance in Northern regions (Kourantidou & Bailey, 2021). Fisheries offer a critical pathway for advancing responsive economic development in the North, however Indigenous governance of fisheries remains a complex and often contentious issue (Cadman et al., 2023). This project not only strives to help increase the market impact of Northern Indigenous SSFs, but in doing so focuses on building the capacity of communities and youth to research and lead decision-making regarding fisheries development and management in their own communities. This project is a first step toward realizing the broader objectives that align with the priorities and actions articulated by the federal government in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework.

Background

Project need and opportunity

Climate change is impacting the Arctic region disproportionately (Leduc et al., 2016). The loss of sea ice in the Arctic contributes to rising sea levels, affecting coastal areas worldwide. Arctic ecosystems and communities are particularly vulnerable and lack the ability to effectively adapt to these changes (Ford et al., 2015). The Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement, currently preventing fishing in international Arctic waters, is set to expire in 2037 (Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2018). As the region becomes more accessible due to decreasing sea ice, some countries have already expressed interest or engaged in fishing activities in Arctic waters (Arctic Council, 2020).

Arctic fisheries are a vital source of sustenance and livelihood for many Northern communities; fishing is central to Inuit culture, provides a critical food source, and allows for an abundance of locally harvested products to sustain the economic dynamism of the North. However, while consumer interest in sustainably harvested, small-scale farmed foods has increased considerably, Arctic fisheries have limited access to the growing market and have not been able to benefit economically from this trend.

Seafood products that receive formal recognition as being sustainably harvested benefit from greater market access and value. Arctic Indigenous small-scale fisheries (SSFs) generally already operate in environmentally sustainable ways, yet their products rarely receive formal recognition because current sustainability assessments are inaccessible. The cost of assessments is often prohibitive to SSFs, and they do not have the capacity or resources to collect the scientific data required by standards established in the South. Moreover, despite possessing valuable local Indigenous knowledge for effective fisheries management passed down through generations, the existing standards for data and sustainability do not consider alternative forms of knowledge or the unique context of the Northern region.

The remote Arctic has long been a focal point for researchers drawn by its dynamism, yet few spend time engaging with Arctic communities. This results in a gap between research priorities and community needs and excludes Arctic communities from contributing to or benefitting from the research (Wilson et al., 2020). This disconnect underscores the importance of aligning research with Inuit community values for sustainable solutions – for example, making fisheries accessible in this region in accordance with Inuit community values (Huntington et al., 2019).

Conducting research in the Canadian Arctic carries profound significance within the context of Truth and Reconciliation, a process addressing historical injustices against Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). It strives to make Indigenous communities partners in shaping research agendas, methodology, and outcomes. In accordance with Canada's [Arctic and Northern Policy Framework](#), by acknowledging the past and working together, research in the Arctic can contribute to healing, equity, and justice for Inuit and other Indigenous peoples, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Project overview

This evaluation report explores the planning, implementation, and early outcomes of the *Fisheries for Environmental and Economic Development in the North (FEED the North)* project. The project was launched in March 2021 with funding from the Future Skills Center (FSC). Initially set to end in August 2022, the project was extended and ultimately concluded in September 2023.

The *FEED the North* project sought to co-design a unique approach to evaluating the environmental performance of Arctic SSFs in a culturally relevant manner that acknowledges the strengths of both Indigenous knowledge and Western scientific data. By collaborating with Northern Indigenous fishing communities, rightsholders, and stakeholders, the goal was to establish a novel framework that incorporates Inuit Qaujimagatutqangit² (IQ) alongside scientific data. This approach sought to enhance the efficacy and contextual responsiveness of existing seafood ratings systems in assessing the environmental performance of Arctic SSFs.

Ocean Wise, leveraging its expertise in the fisheries industry and sustainability assessments, and **Ikaarvik**, who specializes in bridging Indigenous knowledge and Western science through the engagement and capacity building of Arctic communities and youth, partnered to co-lead this initiative. The project collaborated with Northern Indigenous communities, partners, and youth to establish priorities and facilitate the integration of IQ and Western science.

Project objectives

The proposed objectives of this project evolved to align with the shifting project context and community priorities.³ Notably, the objective of co-designing a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs was refined to *co-developing a methodology for co-designing the assessment framework*, through building an open dialogue and common understanding. Overall, the project objectives can be classified into four overarching categories:

- **Facilitate youth development and capacity building:** provide meaningful opportunities for Northern Indigenous youth to learn about fisheries within their communities and develop skills and capacity to engage with researchers and decision-makers to represent community priorities.
- **Assemble cross-cultural and cross-contextual networks and partnerships:** establish a network encompassing Northern Indigenous communities, fishing associations, other environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), researchers, and supply chain actors to promote collaboration and mobilization of knowledge.

² The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH) defines IQ as “the term used to describe Inuit epistemology or the Indigenous knowledge of the Inuit. The term translates directly as “that which Inuit have always known to be true” (Tagalik, 2011).

³ The details of these objectives and their modifications over time are documented in monthly narrative reports and the extension request form (March 2022) submitted to FSC.

- **Foster collaboration between Northern and Southern partners to bridge Western science and Indigenous Knowledge:** open dialogue between Northern and Southern partners to co-develop a common understanding of seafood sustainability goals and co-design a methodology to co-develop a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs.
- **Mobilize knowledge:** document and disseminate the lessons learned from this project about engaging Northern communities and youth, establishing cross-cultural and cross-contextual networks/partnerships, bridging Indigenous Knowledge and Western science, and the process of co-developing a Northern SSF sustainability assessment framework.

Project partners and communities

- **Ocean Wise Conservation Association** has over 16 years of experience in the sustainable seafood ratings space through the Ocean Wise Seafood program. Currently, they are working to build on-the-ground partnerships with coastal communities to tackle challenges relating to climate change, unsustainable resource use, and preserving the environment.
- **Ikaarvik Barriers to Bridges** is an independent, Indigenous-led and governed entity that empowers Northern Indigenous youth and their communities to identify and address their own local research priorities. They have experience integrating Indigenous knowledge into Western scientific approaches and acting as a “bridge” between southern-based researchers and Northern Indigenous communities.
- **Inuit youth** from the Arctic communities Gjoa Haven and Pond Inlet were engaged through Ikaarvik as workshop participants to co-design and achieve project objectives. The community youth engaged throughout the project were men and women between the ages of 18 and 30. In addition to being uniquely positioned as bridge-spanners between local Indigenous ways of knowing and Western scientific approaches, these youth represent the largest portion of Nunavut’s population, and are keen to preserve fishing as a livelihood and source of cultural identity.
- **Uqsuqtuuq (Gjoa Haven)** is a hamlet located above the Arctic Circle with a population of 1349 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). The community currently has a subsistence fishery and has participated in research studies to assess the feasibility of a commercial fishery with a processing plant. Ikaarvik has worked in Gjoa Haven on previous projects and has ties to and relationships in the community (National Indigenous Fisheries Institute, 2021).
- **Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet)** is a hamlet located on Baffin Island in the Qikiqtani region of Nunavut with a population of 1,555 (Statistics Canada, 2023b). The community has dock infrastructure and landing zones, with a new craft harbour constructed in 2022 (Advisian Worley Group, 2020). Like Gjoa Haven, Pond Inlet has interest in the potential of a future commercial fishery. Ikaarvik is located in Pond Inlet and has established deep relationships with the community and youth.

Project activities and stakeholders engaged

The table below outlines the activities conducted throughout the project and the stakeholders engaged in key activities.

Table 1. Overview of project activities and engagement

Project stage	Activities	Engagement
Project development and orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications planning and launch • Virtual meetings with project partner and funder • Training and onboarding staff – Project Manager, Northern Coordinator • Ikaarvik training Ocean Wise in Northern partnerships • Introducing the project to potential youth & communities (Ikaarvik) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting Ikaarvik youth in-person and online • Research and assembly of SSF knowledge from literature, industry partners 	<p><i>Communities engaged in planning / introduced to project:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kugluktuk (n=8 youth, 1 visit) • Pond Inlet (n=10 youth, 2 visits) <p><i>Partners engaged for advice, resources, building networks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale Fisheries Hub (researchers from Philippines, Indonesia, Peru, Portugal, and more) • SIKU (advice on project partners in communities) • SmartICE (advice on project partners in communities)
Engaging project partners and industry stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual meetings • Conferences (ArcticNet) • Press releases (social media, press releases, blogs) 	<p><i>Partners engaged about potential project involvement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish River Cree Nation (potential mentors) • Indigenous Services Canada (re: Manitoba/Saskatchewan freshwater fishers/managers) • Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (Director of Wildlife Management) • Monterey Bay Aquarium - Seafood Watch • Ha'oom Fisheries Society • Coastal Nations Fisheries • Skipper Otto

Project stage	Activities	Engagement
		<p><i>Partners engaged about knowledge mobilization:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baffin Fisheries Coalition • Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) • Ecology Action Center • Monterey Bay Aquarium - Seafood Watch
<p>Northern workshops and youth engagement</p>	<p><i>Workshops:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-workshop planning • One Pond Inlet workshop • Two Gjoa Haven workshops <p><i>Networking/engagement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented to Baffin Fisheries Coalition (Pond Inlet youth) • Attended ArcticNet conference in Toronto • Attended DFO workshop in Chesterfield Inlet 	<p><i>Workshop participants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ocean Wise staff (n=2) • Ikaarvik project staff (n=4) • Gjoa Haven youth (n=12) • Pond Inlet youth (n=8) <p><i>Conference & other workshop attendees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ArcticNet (n=8) • DFO workshop in Chesterfield Inlet (n=2 youth)
<p>North-South networking and workshop</p>	<p><i>Workshop:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-workshop meetings with Ikaarvik staff, youth, and Ocean Wise staff • Vancouver workshop 	<p><i>Workshop participants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ocean Wise (n=4) • Ikaarvik staff and youth (n=7) • Monterey Bay Aquarium/Seafood Watch (n=3) • Ha’oom Fisheries Society (n=3) • Coastal Nations Fisheries (n=2) • Skipper Otto (n=1)

Description of workshops

Northern workshops – Gjoa Haven

The first Gjoa Haven workshop was held in June 2022 over five days with 2 Ocean Wise staff, 2 Ikaarvik staff, and 9 youth from the community. The first day, prior to any workshop activities, was spent on the land learning about each other, telling stories, and introducing Ocean Wise staff to the community and culture. The project team also hosted dinners outside of the workshops. The main objectives were to build trust and relationships between Ocean Wise, Ikaarvik, and youth; open a dialogue about the project; and share knowledge and ideas about fisheries, Ocean Wise, IQ, and definitions of sustainability. Youth asked engaging questions about fish and fishing outside of the community and shared important information about their community, decision-making in the North, and the meaning of fish with Ocean Wise. Youth also suggested community contacts to involve in later stages of framework co-development.

Ikaarvik and Ocean Wise hoped to run the second Gjoa Haven workshop in March 2022, but it was ultimately delayed to October 2022 due to other research, activities, and engagements scheduled in the community which limited accommodations and youth availability. The workshop was held over four days with 4 youth. The initial objectives of this workshop were to build on prior relationships and discussions to dig deeper into key concepts and have youth present to the Hunters and Trappers Association. Due to an unexpected boil water advisory, ideal ice conditions, and prior youth engagements, most youth from the first workshop did not attend. Thus, building new and strengthening existing relationships was a more significant focus of the workshop than anticipated.

Northern workshop – Pond Inlet

The Pond Inlet workshop facilitated by Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik was held in August 2023 with 8 youth. The workshop lasted one week and included a bonfire on the beach as a bonding activity. The workshop began with co-setting the workshop agenda, which allowed youth and Ocean Wise staff to understand each other's priorities and identify knowledge gaps. The youth set up a table at the Co-op to engage with and poll community members. The youth were familiar with Ikaarvik and the topic of bridging IQ/Western science from previous Ikaarvik workshops hosted in the community, which led to deeper discussions on the cultural, spiritual, and economic importance of fish, defining sustainability in accordance with IQ principles, and understanding potential indicators of fishery operations.

North-South workshop – Vancouver

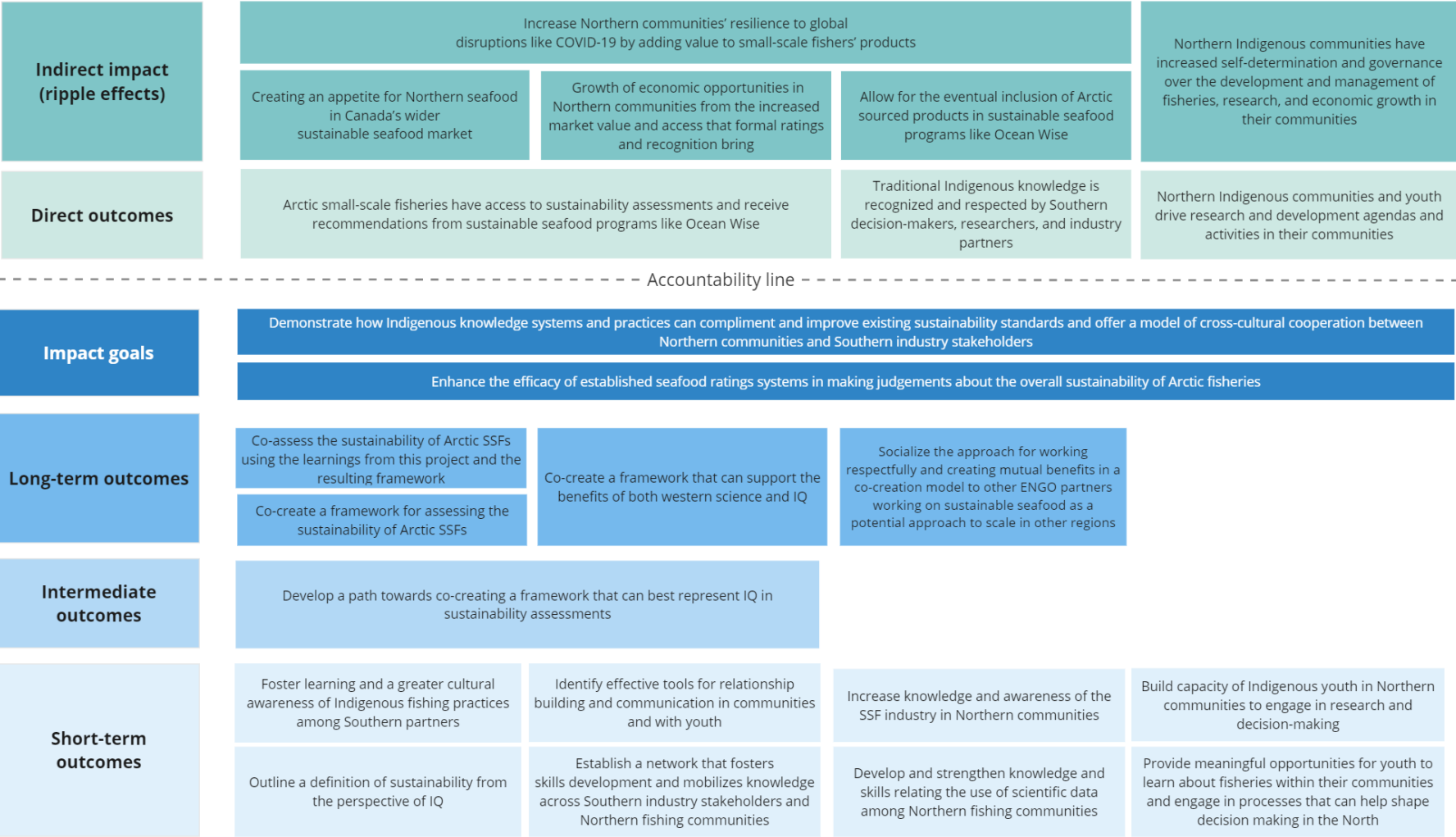
The circumstances and travel restrictions that delayed the Northern workshops also impacted the timing of the planned North-South workshops. With limited time remaining in the project, a single North-South workshop was held in Vancouver, British Columbia over four days in September 2023. Stakeholder selection was predicated largely on Ocean Wise's existing relationships and networks in Vancouver. Ultimately, there were 20 attendees representing Ocean Wise, Ikaarvik staff and youth from Nunavut, the Monterey Bay Aquarium (Seafood Watch), Coastal Nations Fisheries, Ha'oom Fisheries Society, and Skipper Otto. Two additional youth from Nunavut were unable to travel and did not attend as planned. The initial intent for the North-South workshop was to co-develop a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs with industry partners

from diverse regions and stages. However, the project's evolution prompted Northern workshops to focus outputs on establishing concepts of sustainability, traditional knowledge/Western science integration, and relationship building, deferring the co-development of the assessment framework. The meeting commenced with one day of introductions and co-setting the agenda. The following two days consisted of group discussions; presentations about SciQ and Northern research, Ha'oom Fisheries Society, and Seafood Watch criteria; and a visit to Skipper Otto. During the workshop, an Ikaarvik youth brought narwhal for participants to try and discussed traditional methods of harvesting and preparing food. The fourth day was an optional open-house, held at the Ocean Wise office to discuss Truth and Reconciliation, where participants beaded and shared stories, histories, and culture. Overall, workshop discussions built on those begun with Northern communities about what fish mean and how sustainability is defined; considered the barriers for merging Indigenous Knowledge with Western standards for data, indicators, and measurement in current assessments; identified potential next steps and key questions; and built relationships and networks among partners and communities.

Project outcomes

The following theory of change (Figure 1) illustrates the anticipated outcomes of the project as articulated by Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik when the project was extended, and its scope refined. At that time, the project's outcomes were categorized into short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes to delineate which were achievable within the project timeline and how these achievements would contribute to and build toward the longer-term outcomes in the future. The outcomes at the highest level are beyond the direct influence (or "accountability") of the project activities but were identified by Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik as 'ultimate' outcomes at the project's inception.

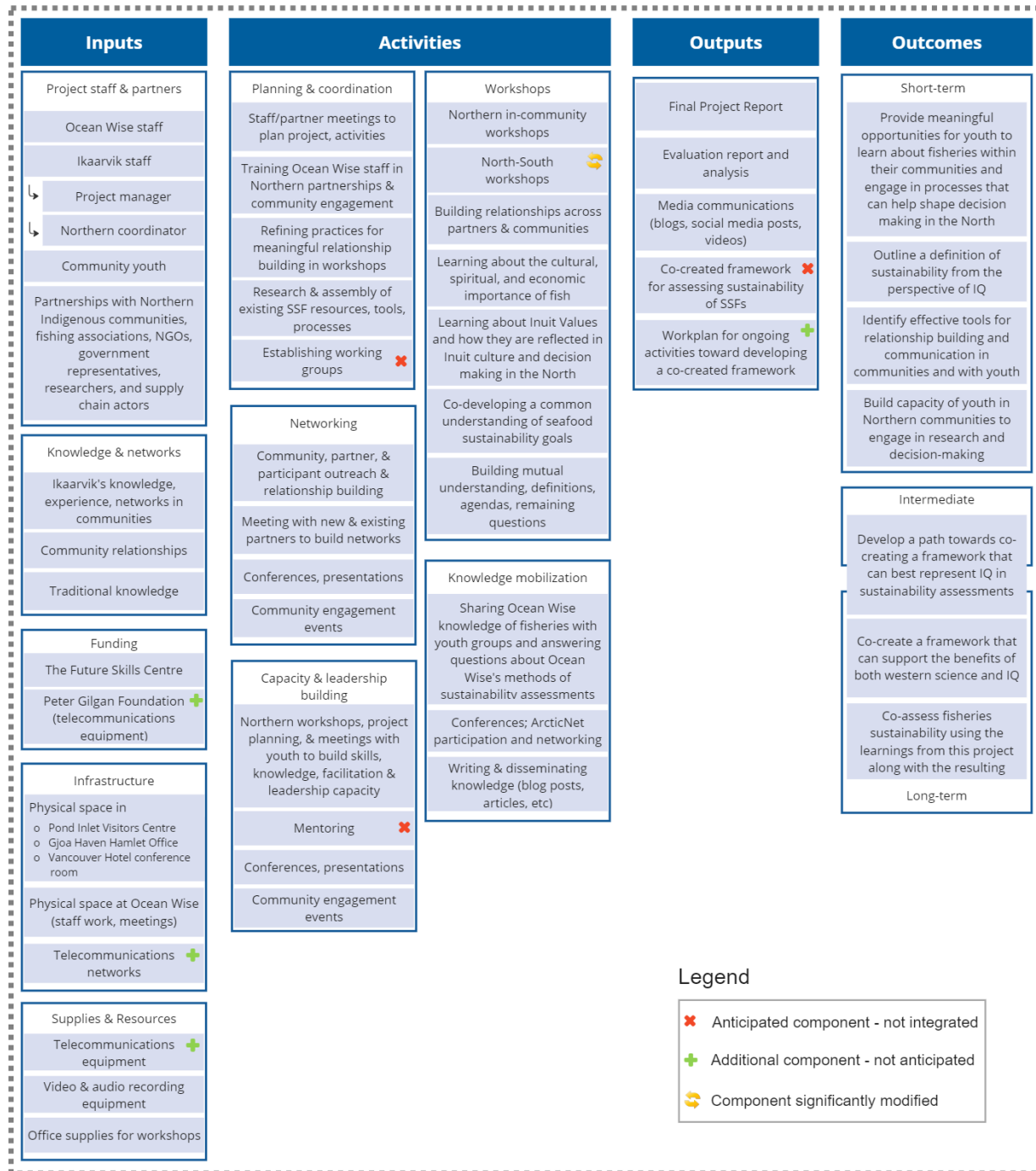
Figure 1. FEED the North project theory of change



Logic model

The logic model presented in Figure 2 is compiled from elements that were recorded by Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik project staff, in addition to those identified during the evaluation.

Figure 2. FEED the North project logic model



This report

This report presents the findings from an evaluation supported by the Co|Evaluation Lab (CoEL). The primary goals of this evaluation are to assess the success of the project approach and offer valuable insights and recommendations to guide future projects operating in similar contexts. This is the first time Ocean Wise has undertaken a research project that has been co-developed with project partners and participants from Northern Indigenous communities. Together with Ikaarvik, they hope to use lessons from this evaluation to inform a model for continued engagement with coastal communities to address their research priorities for fisheries. This report also shares the numerous process learnings that could benefit other programs, projects, organizations, and communities interested in enhancing cross-cultural collaboration and dialogue across various subject areas.

Evaluation approach

CoEL was engaged in November 2023 after project activities had concluded. As an initial step in our evaluation approach, we dedicated time to reviewing project materials, listening to project staff, and understanding what the project team had done to date to integrate and reflect on evaluation planning, indicators, and activities over the course of the project. We worked with Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik staff to co-develop and execute the evaluation plan with regular input and feedback.

Throughout the project, Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik explored both formative and some initial summative outcomes related to conducting community engagement, youth development, and framing a process for assessing sustainability in Arctic SSFs. This can best be described as a **developmental evaluation process** (Patton, 2011), which adapted to the evolving needs and circumstances as they developed throughout project's implementation.

We built on and refined the existing evaluation objectives and plan in November 2023 in collaboration with Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik staff. Although the evaluation plan provided guidance for key inquiries, methods, and tools, we recognized the project design was centred on providing culturally relevant and accessible capacity-building strategies and resources. As such, flexibility was built into the approach, meaning the evaluation could be informed by context, emerging findings, and continuous feedback and collaboration with project partners. We maintained ongoing discussions with project partners to collect data, identify and contact participants for key informant interviews, and refine the evaluation process to align with their needs, preferences for the evaluation, and scheduling.

Evaluation questions

We supported Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik to review the research questions they developed throughout the project, and together retroactively developed a set of final evaluation questions. This process incorporated and consolidated questions that were drafted previously to capture the lines of inquiry most relevant to the project process, outcomes, evaluation goals, and FSC guidance.

1. What was learned about what it takes to launch and implement a multi-stakeholder and rightsholder project centering the priorities of Northern Indigenous communities?
2. How, and to what extent, did the project empower and build the capacity of Northern Indigenous youth?
3. What was learned about fostering partnerships and networks cross-culturally and cross-contextually?
 - What was learned about bridging traditional Indigenous Knowledge and Western science?
4. What was learned about cross-cultural and cross-contextual concepts of sustainability, and co-developing a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs?

Data sources

We collected and analyzed primarily qualitative data from two sources: existing data compiled throughout the duration of the project, and key informant interviews conducted for the purpose of the evaluation.

CoEL staff conducted virtual semi-structured small group (n=1) and individual (n=6) interviews with a total of 10 participants in December 2023 and January 2024 (see Table 2). We interviewed key project participants from both Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik, including two youth mentors, as well as ENGO stakeholders (see Table 2).

Table 2. Semi-structured interview participant descriptions

Role	Project involvement	# of participants
Ocean Wise staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project staff ● Attended Northern workshops ● Facilitated North/South workshops 	2
Ocean Wise staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attended North/South workshop 	1
Ikaarvik staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project staff ● Facilitated Northern & North-South workshops 	2
Ikaarvik staff / youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project staff ● Facilitated Northern & North-South workshops 	2
Southern ENGO Staff (Seafood Watch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Networked virtually with Ocean Wise during project ● Attended North-South workshop 	1
Southern ENGO Staff (Seafood Watch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attended North-South workshop 	2

- The interviews explored participants' perceptions of the collaboration process; networking and partnership opportunities; youth engagement, skills, and development; feedback about engagement and facilitation; recommendations for next steps; and lessons learned on a professional, personal, and/or organizational level.

Additional data were collected from project documents, including:

- **Project workplans and extension requests:** Work plans, evidence generation forms, and signed project agreements submitted to FSC throughout the project offer detailed overviews of project objectives, timelines, and anticipated milestones at key points. They provide insights into the anticipated mechanisms of change linked to certain activities and outcomes. Change request forms and modification logs document the challenges faced and adjustments made to the project over time, specifying how additional time and/or resources were anticipated to impact progress toward objectives.
- **Project reports:** Annual and quarterly reports submitted to FSC provide detailed written accounts of the challenges, adaptations, lessons, and progress throughout each project phase. They also document changes in quantitative project metrics (such as workshops held, partners engaged, and training completed).
- **Meeting agendas and minutes:** Agendas and minutes from project planning meetings, partner meetings, etc., serve as records of key discussions, decisions, and collaboration efforts. They provide insights into decision-making processes, challenges faced, timelines, and input from various team members.
- **Workshop summaries and reflections:** Following each workshop, project staff wrote summaries and reflections in the form of personal reflections, articles, and PowerPoint presentations. These provide observational accounts of workshop dynamics, as well as detailed records of workshop processes, activities, and generated ideas/outputs.

Finally, secondary data collected during the project were analyzed:

- **Workshop outputs and notes:** Data were recorded on paper during the Northern and North-South workshops by facilitators and workshop participants. Photographs of these drawings and notes contain records of the workshop discussions, decisions, and questions that arose. Alongside summaries and reflections from the document review, these data capture the content generated in workshops and contribute to the definitions and understanding of sustainability and various elements of the co-development process, for example.

Evaluation matrix

An evaluation matrix mapping the indicators, methods, and data sources to each evaluation question can be found in Appendix A.

Data analysis

To address the evaluation questions, we first established a preliminary coding structure based on identified indicators (e.g., challenges, perceptions of success, definitions of sustainability, stakeholders, and experiences with workshops, facilitation, and partnership). We conducted a thematic analysis to categorize and interpret qualitative data, refining the coding structure as codes and themes emerged. We began analyzing project documents prior to conducting staggered key informant interviews, allowing emerging findings to guide iterative data collection and analysis. This approach emphasized relevant content, perceptions of significant events, and lessons of interest to stakeholders and project staff.

Limitations

We conservatively analyzed content from the workshop (i.e. notes and discussions documented on large sheets of paper); due to limited context, we refrained from interpreting beyond the data captured (apart from what was specifically referenced by youth in interviews). Notes were labelled by workshop, but few indicated which participants/rightsholders/stakeholders contributed which data. This limited our ability to compare contributions among participant types, except where attributed in raw data.

The evaluation primarily reflects the perspectives of Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik project staff and youth. Project staff generated most of the internal documents reviewed and comprised over half of interview participants; their perspectives are particularly pertinent to understand project planning and implementation. Their perspectives also provide additional understanding of youth engagement and development as mentors, facilitators, and workshop participants. We recognize a limitation of the evaluation regarding the representation of perspectives from the North-South workshop. The viewpoints presented mainly stem from project staff, Ikaarvik youth, and representatives from Southern ENGOs. The perspectives of other stakeholders and communities are not explicitly captured in this evaluation, and their input could provide diverse insights and reactions to the North-South workshop and the broader impact of networking and partnerships.

Evaluation results

Challenges, impacts, and adaptations

As with any project launched in 2020, several external shocks existed that changed the trajectory of the *FEED the North* project, namely the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on travel, communities’ capacity for research, and organizational turnover, among others. Throughout the project, team members met with each other, community members, and the funder (FSC) to review and revise the objectives, timelines, and activities, such that they remained in line with community needs and priorities while remaining feasible within the funded project period. This section reviews the progression of the project, challenges faced, and what adaptations were made. For a review of specific project activities and stakeholders engaged, see the above section [project activities and stakeholders engaged](#).

Project orientation and planning

The first year of the project heavily emphasized building networks and relationships, connecting and collaborating with project partners and communities to co-design the project moving forward, and establishing baselines for SSF content. In addition to travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19, the project encountered challenges with networking, organizational capacity, and turnover which delayed orientation and building momentum in project planning.

Despite these challenges, the constraints imposed by travel restrictions provided additional time for project orientation, research, and training before proceeding to subsequent project stages, such as in-person workshops. To overcome restrictions on in-person collaboration for project planning meetings, Ocean Wise secured additional funding for telecommunications equipment in Northern communities, facilitating virtual planning and communication when possible. Furthermore, Ocean Wise staff underwent virtual training from Ikaarvik on Northern partnerships and engagement. Ikaarvik leveraged existing relationships with youth in Pond Inlet and Gjoa Haven, with additional meetings held with youth from Kugluktuk as potential participants. These established networks proved advantageous for the project, allowing Ikaarvik to informally engage with youth about the project and gather early feedback before formal participation.

Challenge	Impact	Adaptations
Covid-19 (travel restrictions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed in-person meetings, building relationships • Delayed identification and engagement of Northern community partners • Delayed workshop timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked in communities with pre-established relationships through Ikaarvik, rather than anticipated/ communities (Cambridge Bay, Arctic Bay, Pangnirtung) • Worked collaboratively with partners, communities, funders to re-work timelines/deliverables

Covid-19 (communications/virtual work)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online relationships harder to build with communities, limited type of work and planning possible • Telecommunications in Northern communities may not have bandwidth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sourced funding for telecommunications equipment • Explored preferred methods of contact with community partners
Loss of key partner (Project Nunavut)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in initial project momentum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued networking with potential partners
Organizational change/turnover (e.g., losing project staff with content expertise; Ikaarvik became an independent organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time delay in project momentum • Behind on spending and objectives • Pressure on new leads to ensure the integrity of the project remains intact, but lack of organization-wide guidelines on working with Indigenous communities/partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ocean Wise staff received virtual training on Northern partnerships, Indigenous Knowledge and Western science • Clarified project roles and responsibilities between project staff and organizations
Delays orientating to funder processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in initial project momentum 	

Engaging project partners and industry stakeholders

As planned, partnerships with various industry stakeholders were developed through Ocean Wise’s existing industry networks, outreach from a ‘communications blitz’ (press release, social media and blog posts) and, when travel permitted, conferences (i.e., ArcticNet). Ocean Wise maintained contact and met virtually with partners at various points in the project to collect insight and advice, engage possible project and workshop participants, and raise awareness of the project to build knowledge dissemination networks.

Challenge	Impact	Adaptations
Covid-19 (travel restrictions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer opportunities for in-person collaborations, participation in conferences and meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated virtual meetings with partners • Attended conferences when travel permitted

Northern workshops and youth engagement

Due largely to travel restrictions, and with a commitment to prioritize in-person relationship-building, Northern workshops were held later than anticipated. Upon the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, Ocean Wise staff faced challenges arranging travel to Northern communities, navigating issues such as weather, competing community priorities, and limited community resources amid numerous research initiatives. Despite these obstacles, Ikaarvik’s pre-established

relationships with communities, coupled with their ability to initiate and sustain engagement with youth prior to travelling for this project, laid a foundation for relationship-building, project planning, and youth capacity development to progress to a more advanced stage once workshops became feasible.

Challenge	Impact	Adaptations
Covid-19 (travel restrictions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed in-person meetings, building relationships • Delayed workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked in communities with pre-established relationships through Ikaarvik (Pond Inlet, Gjoa Haven); youth had baseline knowledge and rapport • Met virtually with youth in advance of workshops • Worked collaboratively with partners, communities, funders to re-work timelines/deliverables
Timing in community (youth obligations, hunting season, weather, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time window for in-person work • Turnover in youth participants between workshops (Gjoa Haven) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility with timeline, funding to reschedule • Shifted workshop objectives and discussions based on youth involved and community relevance (i.e., no existing commercial SSF); focus on building relationships
Competing research priorities for limited community capacity, infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time window for in-person work • Delayed workshops (no accommodations available in community when planned) • High demand for Ikaarvik’s resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divided planning among partners; on-the-ground partners to coordinate accommodations, participants • Revised project timelines, revisited and adjusted objectives/outcomes with funder and communities

North-South workshop and networking

Delays in travel and Northern workshops resulted in a compressed timeline for the North-South collaboration. The initial intention was to slowly integrate Northern and Southern partners by bringing them together at key project intervals, hosting a first workshop in the North, building mentoring relationships and working groups over time, and hosting a second workshop in the South. Instead, Northern and Southern stakeholders were introduced in a single workshop hosted in Vancouver, British Columbia. Participant selection for the North-South workshop was largely determined by location and availability, with Ocean Wise drawing on existing networks and relationships in and around Vancouver in the sustainable seafood industry.

Challenge	Impact	Adaptations
Compressed timeline due to delays in travel, Northern workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One North-South workshop held instead of two • Location chosen based on opportunity and availability – Southern location rather than North 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders selected based on location, existing Ocean Wise networks (e.g., DFO not included) • Objective of workshop revised to ensure feasible outputs related to networking and framework co-development • Larger focus on relationship building and context setting during workshop
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mentorship component between youth and Southern partners • No working groups established between workshops • Workshop not facilitated by youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ikaarvik worked closely with youth during other opportunities to build skills and capacity, including Northern workshops, presentations, and conferences
2 Nunavut youth unable to travel due to weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer Northern youth represented in balance of workshop stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ikaarvik’s youth staff offered dual representation

Project-level outputs and content

Ultimately, the project was most heavily impacted by travel restrictions which delayed in-person relationship building, workshops, and planning sessions. Flexibility in project timelines and objectives allowed the project to remain focused on the best interests and wellbeing of communities. Despite a compressed timeframe to conduct workshops and integrate Northern and Southern partners, Ikaarvik supported Ocean Wise to build capacity and learn valuable lessons for engaging with Indigenous communities and facilitation. Youth, likewise, developed skills in facilitation, engagement with Southern organizations, and built fisheries knowledge and networks.

The project objectives and outputs were modified to suit the pace of relationship building and community needs. Ocean Wise recognized the need to invest more time in building trust and a shared understanding of contexts, concepts, and priorities. Although the project did not produce a co-developed assessment framework as initially planned, the project activities culminated in an understanding of the essential components and next steps necessary to do so. This includes recognition that developing a genuinely collaborative and beneficial framework for all stakeholders is a time-intensive process. They also explored shared understandings of sustainability, what fish and fishing mean to communities, and lessons about barriers and facilitators to co-developing an assessment framework in the future. Networks and partnerships have been established with and among industry stakeholders and communities to promote awareness of and support for the development of this framework, through which project lessons can be shared and future work can be explored.

Lessons for community engagement projects and partnerships

The collaboration and Northern workshops provided valuable learning, training, and experience for Ocean Wise staff alongside the Northern Indigenous youth. Ocean Wise staff had opportunities to understand and apply ways to meaningfully, appropriately, and effectively build trusting and collaborative relationships with Indigenous youth, communities, and project partners. The lessons learned through this experience also capture lessons from Ikaarvik's perspective and process.

Building project partnerships

Ocean Wise project staff did not have formal organizational guidelines or standardized resources to consult when engaging with Northern Indigenous communities. Ocean Wise staff noted that Ikaarvik played a crucial mentorship role in both community engagement and managing a project of this scale and nature. At the project's outset, Ikaarvik provided training in Northern partnerships and community engagement, and throughout the project Ocean Wise staff built engagement and facilitation capacity in the workshops.

Ikaarvik played crucial roles in bridging connections between Ocean Wise staff and youth, Northern and Southern project partners, and Indigenous Knowledge and Western science. They also guided community engagement, planning Northern travel, and youth development. On learning how to approach engagement with communities, Ocean Wise staff felt successful:

"I think we got there – the how to engage or start this type of relationship piece ... I would feel way more credible and way more prepared to start those conversations. ... I feel as an employee of Ocean Wise way more educated on how to establish a relationship from basically scratch within a setting where I know now that I don't have any of the answers for a lot of these fisheries ... [We] couldn't have gotten there without Ikaarvik on this project."

Ikaarvik staff **highlighted the importance of Southern partners' intentions and attitudes**. One team member indicated that their choice to partner with Ocean Wise on this project was influenced by knowing the project *"was being done by really good people with really good intentions."* This perception was reinforced when Ocean Wise staff visited communities and interacted with the communities and youth:

"With C & S there was a legitimate connection that was made. And when C broke into tears not once but twice in the workshop just because she was overwhelmed by her understanding ... then you know you're working with the right people, you know that that person is sitting there not just as this casual observer ... [they] understand how critical the decision making is around this and when you know that it's really hard to not then do your best. ... It's also very important to say that they didn't walk away saying 'okay cool, so we'll tell the world your story' ... a lot of the time you get people who come up and are like 'oh I'm gonna tell the story of what's happening to the Inuit!'"

Selecting stakeholders & participants

Ikaarvik only works where they are invited. Therefore, having **pre-established relationships, familiarity, and reputation in communities** was key to recruiting youth and gaining community buy-in and support.

Ocean Wise staff reflected on having only engaged youth in communities and pondered the potential benefits of more extensive involvement with Hunters and Trappers Organizations, Elders, and other community groups. However, while planning the North-South workshop, Ikaarvik cautioned that including Elders in the early stages might inhibit the depth of discussions and relationship-building with youth, potentially leading to reduced contributions from the youth. Waiting to ensure that relationships were sufficiently developed, and timing was right supported a conducive environment for having deep discussions with youth in Northern workshops.

The location-based selection of participants for the North-South workshop inadvertently diluted the focus and broadened the scope of the workshop. While some participants considered the workshop successful in finding common ground and engaging in interesting discussions, Ikaarvik believed the workshop fell short in representing youths' stories and lost its focus on the North. **A more targeted group of stakeholders** relevant to Nunavut's current SSF context and community progress **could have resulted in a more meaningful conversation at this stage of the project.**

Based on the Southern location and condensed timeline, Ocean Wise suggested many of the participants from within existing local networks. Although project planners were cautious not to include participants who might dominate the conversation or create tension, Ikaarvik anticipated potential issues among some invitees, suggesting that perspectives on potential dynamics may have been influenced by a predominantly Southern viewpoint. Ocean Wise staff recognized that if the workshop had taken place in the North there would have been more discussion about who to invite. The project team would benefit from **defined decision-making processes in stakeholder selection at each stage**, particularly when faced with a compressed timeline, or when there has been a departure from the intended location or target stakeholder group.

Building relationships and trust

Participants of both Northern and North-South workshops recommended **setting time before “business talk” to build relationships**. Spending the first full day of the Gjoa Haven workshop helped build comfort and fostered a conducive atmosphere for meaningful discussions:

“After that [first day on the land] it was much easier to discuss things about the workshop when you know we can get all the awkward getting to know each other part of the way, which is typically how we would show up ... in the South to literally any other workshop or meeting.”

In cases where time does not allow extensive relationship building at the beginning of the workshop, North-South participants responded positively to **taking the time to “meet as people” before representatives of their community/organization.**

Location and setting had a profound impact on the speed of building relationships and comfort, particularly for the Inuit youth. When workshops were held in the youths' communities, they felt more at ease to share experiences and develop trust and relationships. In Vancouver, youth were less familiar with the context and setting of a conference boardroom than other stakeholders. The youth required a more gradual approach to build comfort and preferred to listen at the beginning of the workshop before fully engaging. An Ikaarvik staff member noted:

"...youth [are] coming from Gjoa Haven into a big group meeting with people they've never met, and their tendency is to do what Inuit youth do, which is listen. [People asked] why weren't the youth talking? Because they're trying to feel out this relationship."

Southern participants noted that **opportunities to hear, experience, and witness cultural activities and community contexts were particularly impactful and brought people together**. Sharing stories and culture engaged participants in different ways than workshop discussions and helped build a foundation for relationships. This was true for some youth despite the unfamiliar context, one of whom described the experience of sharing narwhal and seeing everyone's reactions as *"magical."* When not in community, activities such as beading, storytelling, and sharing histories at the Truth and Reconciliation gathering during the North-South Workshop were recommended as an introductory activity.

Visiting communities

From the outset, project partners knew that the establishment of relationships and trust with Northern participants hinged on in-person presence in communities. Ikaarvik noted from their experiences in Gjoa Haven and Pond Inlet that **while familiarity and trust within communities can support networking and move projects along, the relationships need to be actively maintained**: *"to maintain relationships over time [through Covid] we have to be doing things – just being present isn't sufficient really."*

Ocean Wise staff heavily emphasized the positive impact that visiting communities had on their capacity building and understanding. Visiting in person and engaging with the community members, culture, and land first-hand was a critical component for them to understand the community context: *"the experience of going and seeing is so impactful, it's really different than hearing about it."* One Southern participant at the North-South workshop acknowledged the limitations set by meeting outside of communities:

"You always go away with the feeling that it's never enough because and you won't really ever learn about the community until you go visit them and you immerse yourself in their culture. But I do feel it was a nice little sort of crash course in understanding where they came from and I think we were, in that respect, as successful as we could have been because ... they are out of their own community, we are out of our spaces."

Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik speculated that hosting the North-South workshop in the North would have impacted the dynamics between participants, set context for discussions, and narrowed the

focus to the Arctic. This may have driven conversations that were more relevant for the youth to contribute to, and reduced the need for context-setting:

“Things would be more pointed and deliberate if people could look around and say ‘oh I see why you’re saying these fisheries feed the community first and industry second, okay I’ve stood in your store and I get why this is a condition of sustainability for you.’”

Ikaarvik staff suggested that movement forward will require smaller groups coming to the North for future workshops. While hosting in the North may limit the relevance and ability for some industry stakeholders to attend, some ENGO staff noted they would enthusiastically participate and welcome a workshop hosted in the Arctic.

Ocean Wise staff learned key logistical considerations for planning Northern travel; however, **having a partner familiar with or in the community** is most helpful to be aware of specific community considerations, needs, and available accommodations. Even when travel is well planned, unexpected circumstances or a shift in community priorities may mean project activities do happen as anticipated. Overall, **remain flexible with travel – plan well but be prepared for plans to change.**

Preparing for workshops/meetings

Ocean Wise staff approached the first Northern workshop with prepared discussion topics and PowerPoint presentations, however discovered that there were different knowledge gaps than they anticipated on either side. Ultimately, the Southern facilitators learned to **come prepared with content – particularly visuals – and a plan, but to build in flexibility to allow time for organic conversations.** Ikaarvik youth prepared a list of things they wanted the Ocean Wise staff to know about their community, which both the youth and Ocean Wise staff found helpful.

With limited time to prepare for the North-South workshop, project staff felt they would have benefitted from having a more **defined preparation plan** and **designated point people for specific responsibilities** (such as scheduling, outreach, travel, etc.) to help clarify roles and decision-making processes.

Although the North-South agenda was co-set by participants, the North-South workshop would have benefitted from a more **defined objective, approach, and workplan.** As stakeholders were selected for the North-South workshop, the intention of the workshop shifted toward multi-directional learning. Ikaarvik noted that North was not centered as initially planned and the youth did not have a chance to share everything they wanted. This highlighted a valuable lesson: when stakeholders bring diverse perspectives, **it's essential to clarify the workshop's scope, intended learning dynamics, and whose voices should be prioritized** – both while planning the workshop and selecting stakeholders, and when preparing participants for the workshop by setting expectations.

Facilitating workshops

The practice of **co-setting the agenda** in Pond Inlet was pivotal, fostering more productive conversations and allowing key topics to arise earlier than Ocean Wise staff had anticipated. It also provided an opportunity to see each other's perspectives; one youth reflected that *"it's awesome to see what you think is important and realize that so often you're missing what someone else thinks is important, and then you collaborate and create this agenda."* Similarly, facilitators should work around participant and community schedules rather than setting the workshop schedule in advance. **Come to a consensus on workshop timing** that gives everyone a chance to express their preference, and to hold each other accountable as a group.

At the North-South workshop, Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik learned that facilitation **approaches that work in the North do not necessarily work with other groups or in other contexts**. Despite explaining the purpose and intentionality of co-setting the agenda, facilitators felt many stakeholders were getting frustrated with a less structured schedule and co-facilitation approach: *"the nature of [flexibility and a free-flowing agenda] I think gave people a subconscious impression that we were unprepared."* These differences may stem from an element of culture shock or contextual differences, wherein the Northern meetings had less diverse stakeholder groups, a more defined purpose, and smaller groups of researchers in the community at a time. Despite mixed reactions to the exercise, ENGO staff appreciated the practice and indicated they may try it while facilitating meetings with multi-stakeholder groups in other countries.

Facilitators at the North-South workshop stressed the importance of context setting to build a shared understanding and its potential impact on relationship dynamics. **Early context setting may alleviate tensions resulting from limited time and relationship building opportunities**. Ocean Wise facilitators noted that participants made important strides toward understanding each others' experiences and circumstances through cultural activities and storytelling on the final day. Prior, they hadn't recognized that the stakeholder groups were not aware of each others' contexts, histories, and governance structures, which may have contributed to assumptions that hindered finding a common language and understanding during workshop discussions.

Feedback highlighted discomfort felt among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders when white facilitators spoke on behalf of Inuit youth on the first day of the workshop. It was not clearly communicated to participants that the youth had granted permission to facilitators in order to build comfort before engaging themselves. This initial negative impression of the facilitation approach left some participants feeling guarded. This lesson underscored the crucial role of both **explicit transparency and self-awareness of one's positionality**, especially when engagement with Indigenous communities is led by white, Southern facilitators.

While Ocean Wise staff learned significant lessons between workshops, they acknowledged **that seeking explicit feedback from participants about elements of facilitation** would have been exceedingly beneficial to help them improve. As relationships developed, especially between Ikaarvik staff and youth, facilitators found it easier to gauge the youths' comfort levels, and the youth, in turn, became more at ease providing feedback on approaches and participating in discussions.

Youth Development

Throughout the project a total of 20 youth from two communities, and an additional 3 youth working as Ikaarvik staff, were actively engaged in project planning, workshop preparation, facilitation, networking, and community outreach (see Table 3). These activities aligned with the project’s core goal of preparing youth for future interactions with researchers/decision-makers and building skills for research and facilitation. As the pace and scale of the project evolved, virtual and in-person meetings were held with youth to continue ongoing engagement, relationship building, and capacity building.

Table 3. Overview of youth engagement

Activity	Youth engagement
Project planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Networking and project introduction ● Virtual planning meetings ● Pre-workshop planning with youth
Workshops	<p><i>Northern workshops (n=3)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 20 youth <p><i>North-South workshop (n=1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 youth
Attendance at conferences and presentations	<p><i>ArcticNet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 youth <p><i>DFO workshop in Chesterfield Inlet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 youth
Hosting presentations/engagements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Baffin Fisheries Coalition (Pond Inlet) ● Co-op table (Pond Inlet)

Ikaarvik’s approach to capacity and leadership development with youth is not to “teach them” but to build on their existing skills and confidence, *“show [them] the ropes, and bring out the best in them, what they don’t see in themselves. There’s so much potential in lots of youth and not everyone, even themselves, can see that. So we give them an opportunity to showcase that brilliance and being able to see a lot of these youth grow into fine, smart, really cool people is just awesome.”* The Northern workshops created an environment for youth to experience and practice skills engaging with Southern stakeholders, co-setting agendas, and showcasing their communities, culture, and perspectives impactfully. Providing opportunities for youth to define project directions was crucial for reinforcing the importance of their perspectives, as were opportunities to engage with the community and showcase their work (such as tabling an event at the Co-op and presenting to Baffin Fisheries Coalition).

Pre-established relationships with youth were identified as a key facilitator of successful engagement, particularly with limited opportunities for in-person travel. Knowing the youth on a personal level allowed facilitators to anticipate their needs, build trust, and support individual approaches to engagement. Additionally, careful consideration for the pace and environment of engagement was important; the wrong stakeholders or too large a group could hinder progress

and youth confidence if introduced too soon: *“we don’t put youth in the firing line of people with [their own] agendas ... because that’s not helpful.”*

The importance of building from established relationships and confidence was emphasized in the North-South and second Gjoa Haven workshops, where a lack of time to build trust and comfort impacted youth’s confidence to participate openly in discussions: *“it’s about them getting comfortable to really bring it out of themselves and that takes time.”*

Lessons for youth

...about SSFs in a global context

The project significantly contributed to content learning, exposing youth to global fishing practices and large-scale industry operations: *“on our side learning about different types of fisheries and how they [operate] really opened up mine and the youth’s eyes when it came to how fish are fished en masse all around the world ... How [the big companies] do it in ways they’re not supposed to and they get away with it ... it’s surprising.”* This exposure broadened their perspectives and understanding of the fishing industry and provided opportunities to reflect on the relevance of industry standards compared to their own experiences.



Figure 3. Drawing from a youth workshop participant. *“The message I wanted to convey with this drawing is that a lot of Western institutions, companies, organizations – with science it’s almost like written proof has a higher value than in-person experiences. And so with the Inuk, with only the one fish – even though it is in practice more sustainable compared to a large fishing ship with big nets – the fact that you cannot ‘prove’ it or write it down says a lot about the values of Western capitalism with having written laws as higher regarded than in-person, actual empirical data.”*

...about the power of their perspectives

The youth showcased their communities, cultures, and perspectives, actively participating in the preparation for Northern workshops. They co-set agendas, collaborated on workshop intentions, and brainstormed ways to convey messages effectively to Southern visitors and facilitators prior to Ocean Wise's arrival.

During workshops youth had the opportunity to consider and share their perspectives, and influenced the project direction through emphasizing the importance of fish and defining sustainability in their own communities. The Ocean Wise staff reported that hearing these perspectives and experiencing the community context changed their own perspectives profoundly, and demonstrated to the youth the immense impact their stories and experience can have:

“C cried because she has never met people that had an emotional family connection to fish, just fish – fish that people spend hours just catching and throwing back into water. It’s a family thing, but for us it’s a much deeper cultural, family-rooted thing that they got to see [and] experience in that workshop.”

After the Northern workshops, the Ocean Wise staff told Ikaarvik that “they’re going to do everything they can do to make this right,” and consistently emphasized the power that the youth sharing their stories, culture, and communities can have on a decision-maker in considering the impact of their work on Northern communities in their everyday job moving forward.

...in preparation for future engagement

One goal articulated by an Ikaarvik staff member was for youth to experience the size of meetings and networking events, meet people in high-level positions, and understand decision-making processes in the industry. Youth began building comfort engaging with industry stakeholders in Northern workshops, where they worked with the two Ocean Wise project staff to discuss SSFs, the assessment process, and share their perspectives. Over time, youth attended conferences and the larger North-South workshop meeting. Through these engagements, youth met a wide array of industry partners, researchers, government representatives, and decision-makers. However, an Ikaarvik staff member cautioned that without the proper lead-time to build trust and relationships, stepping into large Southern meetings can be overwhelming and set youth back, therefore they typically start engagement in smaller groups to build confidence and comfort.

Ikaarvik noted that preparation can be a key skill for engaging with decision-makers, as often they come into communities later in the decision-making process and there is little opportunity in advance to prepare for discussions. One youth shared with facilitators that they enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss fish and address topics proactively “rather than reactively,” in contrast to the usual community engagement styles that elicit facilitation only after decisions have been made. Youth felt more equipped to engage in and influence future discussions with SSF partners coming to community, seeing an opportunity to figure things out now and ‘get ahead of the questions’ before stakeholders enter the community.

Networking & partnerships

A core vision of the *FEED the North* project was to get partners together from disparate geographical areas to hear and understand each other, such that remote Northern communities had an opportunity to have a place at the table. For a comprehensive list of networking opportunities and stakeholders engaged throughout the project, see Table 1 in the [project activities and stakeholders engaged](#) section above.

Building and brokering networks

This project provided unique networking opportunities among communities, ENGOs, government representatives, researchers, and industry stakeholders across Canada and globally. At the North-South workshop, participants reported building relationships that extend beyond the project's scope, sharing links between relevant interests and ongoing industry projects that may lead to future collaborations. An ENGO participant valued the connections they made with communities at the North-South workshop, acknowledging the challenge of initiating relationships with communities without prior contact or invitation. Similarly, Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik strengthened ties with Northern Indigenous youth and communities, strengthening the foundation for future partnerships and engagements.

North-South workshop participants networked during scheduled 'down time' and expressed a desire for more dedicated time for this purpose. Immediately following the workshop, **Ocean Wise could have further supported networking by facilitating the exchange of contact information.** Participants stressed the importance of leveraging the momentum of the workshop, and indicated they would be more likely to maintain networks and pursue collaborations if connected promptly. Similarly, **timely follow-up communication with workshop participants and articulation of a clear goal or next steps is important.**

Ocean Wise collaborated with a wide range of industry stakeholders, some of whom were not relevant in every stage of the project. Some consulted during planning and research phases, while others will be engaged later on for knowledge dissemination. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of **maintaining these networks over time by keeping them informed of project progress or updates, even when they are not actively engaged.** This keeps the project, and organization, on their 'radar' and keeps the door open for active engagement down the line. During staff turnover, introducing contacts to the new project team fosters ongoing connections, extending networks beyond individuals to organizations.

Building and managing networks cross-culturally and cross-contextually

Establishing cross-cultural and cross-contextual partnerships and networks necessitates careful consideration of group dynamics, context, timing, preparation, and objectives. This project illustrates pertinent questions and considerations when convening stakeholder groups for collaboration during critical project phases:

- **Stakeholder relevance.** Careful consideration must be given to the objective of the collaboration at each project stage. Consider how a specific workshop or output will support that objective; then, whose experience is most relevant to consult, and for whom is the workshop most relevant?
- **Preparation.** Prepare stakeholders on what to expect, particularly when there is a broad scope of relevance across stakeholders; what is the scope of the workshop/meeting? Who is learning from whom? What is their role/relevance in this specific collaboration?
- **Location/setting.** Consider who is comfortable and who is benefitting from the meeting environment. Who is at a disadvantage or out of their comfort zone? If location choice is restricted, a focus on context-setting and relationship building can be helpful.
- **Existing dynamics.** Are there existing relationships, histories, or tensions among participants? Understanding the balance of voices, power dynamics, and personalities is important to ensure one person or group does not dominate the conversation or agenda. Awareness of these elements require an understanding of the industry, landscape, communities, and histories – utilize the knowledge and experience of all partners and perspectives available, particularly from other contexts and cultures.
- **Relationships and trust.** If working at the “speed of trust,” do all stakeholders have the same level of trust in and familiarity with the facilitators, the project, and each other?

The lessons learned across workshops emphasize the importance of **starting small, maintaining focus, and ensuring all stakeholders are aligned** when facilitating collaborations – especially in the project's early stages.

Bridging Indigenous Knowledge and Western science

Southern participants, particularly Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch staff, learned that bridging Indigenous Knowledge and Western science is an incredibly complex task with many layers of definitions, understandings, needs, and contexts to be considered. This is, in part, why the objective of the project shifted from co-developing a framework to opening a dialogue, recognizing that there needs to be much more time to build collaboration and understanding.

Similarly, Seafood Watch staff reported that bridging these two knowledge systems was of interest and relevance to them as they approach a review of their standard. As a result of the workshop, they are now aware of Ikaarvik's work and intend to explore relevant resources. Multiple stakeholders were struck by the metaphor of trying to “fit a square peg into a round hole” to understand how definitions and assessments have been built to privilege Western science and data. Some Seafood Watch staff concluded that their original intention to explore incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the current standard is unlikely to be helpful or equitable, and that they perhaps need to consider designing a different assessment system for different contexts.

The workshop modelled that incorporating diverse and critical voices, such as youth and fishers is possible, and that *“successfully having those voices at the table involves restructuring how we meet and converse in a way that that Ocean Wise is pushing for ... I really appreciate that.”*

Content – Toward a SSF assessment framework

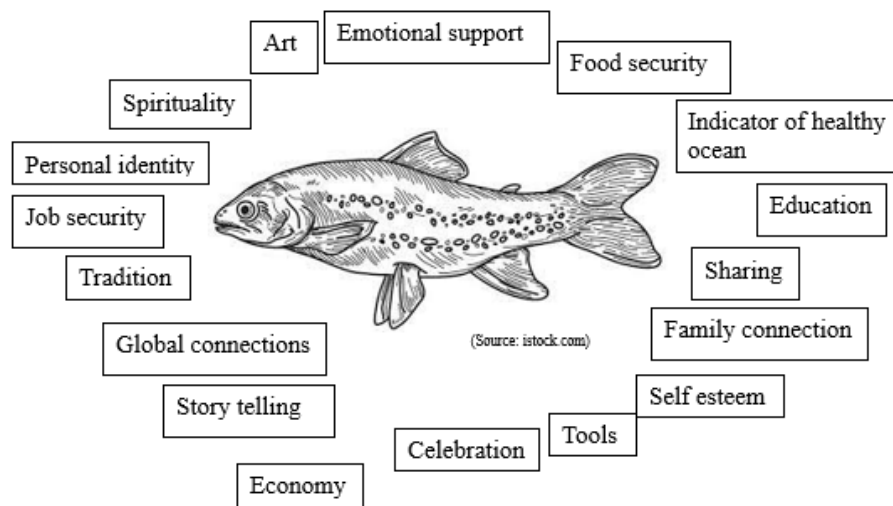
“We’re all learning stuff, we’re all trying to get towards the end goal of why small-scale fisheries getting that brand is important. But, before that, let me explain to you why it’s important to us as a people first.” – Ikaarvik youth

Despite not articulating a common goal or concrete next steps at the end of the North-South workshop, industry partners, including SFW and OW staff, left with a shared understanding of the importance and impact of their work on SSFs and Northern Indigenous communities. One Ikaarvik youth hoped the workshop would result in *“the non-Inuit in the room that hold these positions to understand what Inuit go through and give them understanding and a different perspective.”* Participants affirmed that interacting with youth, building relationships, and experiencing Inuit culture (e.g., hearing histories, beading, preparing and eating narwhal) increased awareness of the impact of their work, the power their decisions have, and gave them a renewed passion for working to create inclusive systems and standards.

Outputs from the three Northern workshops and one North-South workshop inform and explore aspects of what is necessary to understand and be aware of for the development of a commercial Arctic SSF and the co-development of a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs, in addition to guidance for next steps in the process.

The importance of fish (char)

Not only are fish, particularly char, an important and healthy food source for communities in Nunavut, but they also hold a strong cultural and individual connection. The diagram below compiles the keywords that participants shared about the importance of fish for themselves, communities, culture, and the environment.



Youth compared what they learned in workshops about worldwide commercial fishing practices to their own experiences to reflect on the meaning of fish:

“My first time catching char with an actual fishing rod I got for birthday, I went out with my family and I caught a char ... my stepdad helped me butcher it, [prepare it], and then just add some soy sauce and eat it raw, just like that. When living in [the South] my biggest craving was raw char. To me that is a sense of nostalgia, that’s home, that’s who I am. That’s a part of me. Char holds a very dear spot in my heart because of that.”

Multiple ENGO participants remarked that their biggest take-away was the meaning of fish to communities, individuals, and families. Hearing stories and experiencing the sharing of food reinforced the importance, meaning, and context of fish, and these Southern participants noted how important these lessons were when reflecting on the impact their decisions and systems have as practitioners in sustainable seafood:

“Char is not just food, it is not just a resource. It permeates every aspect of the relationship these communities have with their natural environment and teaches lessons on how to maintain that balance.”

Considerations for developing small-scale fisheries in Northern communities

Northern workshop participants were asked what elements are important to highlight and promote for the development of a SSF in Northern Indigenous communities, shared in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Youth reflections on fundamental conditions for an Arctic small-scale fishery

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use small vessels • Have zero waste & no pollution • Benefit the community • Follow Inuit values & local laws • Promote environmental stewardship • Support shareholder nations • Have financial support • Training and capacity building (i.e., local processing) • Science as a priority • Bridge gaps • Promote co-creation and allow for local decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use big vessels • Allow for waste & pollution • Benefits go to southern Canada • Disrespect IQ • Cause environmental damage • Overfish • Trawl nets • Poor working conditions • Profit over culture • Lack of employment and local infrastructure

Participants noted questions of scalability and sustainability that need to be addressed and further explored before the development or assessment of a Northern SSF can take place:

- What scale is adoptable to balance local food needs and the economy?
- How can sustainability for the food chain not be jeopardized?

Conceptualizing sustainability

A primary issue raised in the workshops was that southern institutions and actors often define, implement, and enforce sustainability practices that do not align with specific conditions found in the North, specifically Nunavut. IQ is largely based on observations over large periods of time, and discussions throughout workshops emphasized the importance of considering community-specific context when defining sustainability for Arctic SSFs. Further to this tension between the two systems, participants raised several concerns related to sustainability:

- There can be vital differences between how sustainability is measured in Northern and Southern contexts.
- Western science methods and data might not measure what matters to Inuit for sustainability.
- “Sustainability” might not be correct word to use in Inuit and Nunavut contexts.
- There needs to be a balance between the economy, food security, and the environment.

Though participants of the North-South workshop did not come to a consensus on how sustainability can be defined in a way that incorporates both the IQ needed to address community contexts and the Western science currently used in fisheries assessments, participants shared criteria considered in their own communities:

- *“Take some, but leave more.”*
- *“Use without using up.”*
- *“Catch only what is needed.”*
- *“Looking forward to what the future needs.”*

They also discussed considerations for sustainability in the context of fisheries:

- No trawls
- What is available year-round (how many fish are there – population levels)? What would the ‘quota’ be?
- Collective knowledge about where/how/when to fish

As a result of the Northern workshops, youth commented on how sustainability standards would need to apply to a fishery in their community context: *“the precondition that youth have determined is that to be truly sustainable, a fishery has to feed the people who live there first.”*

Two recommendations emerged to explore sustainability further:

1. Investigate if and how other Indigenous SSFs incorporate similar characteristics of importance into their operations; and
2. Consider how to balance the commonly held practice by Inuit to use all parts of a fish into a SSF that is selling products in markets where not all parts of a fish are typically available or desired for purchase.

Inuit observations of fish health

Several participants in the workshops shared local practices and observations of fish health that are informed by IQ. These practices and observations may help prevent overfishing, protect fish stocks, and serve as indicators of the health of fish populations:

- Practices:
 - Each species of fish should be caught at different times and different locations throughout the year.
 - By having a healthy ecosystem such as nutrient rich lakes there will more abundance of fish.
- Observations:
 - Predators will bite and release unhealthy fish.
 - Abnormal or thin skin on a fish means it is sick or infected by parasites.
 - More healthy fish means more seals, polar bears, narwhals, and orcas.

The benefits of fishing and the meaning of fish also make up a key component of what sustainability must consider. Workshop participants identified the following list of benefits of fishing based on IQ and community needs:

- Economic opportunities
- Link to culture, knowledge, and language
- Source of healthy food
- Emotional connection

It is noteworthy that during the workshop and presentation at the Co-op in Pond Inlet, several community members indicated that emotional connection, link to language, food for ecosystem, connection to family, food for people, and link of knowledge and culture are aspects of fishing that cannot be replaced by money.

Next steps in co-developing an assessment framework

A co-developed sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs was not produced as an output of this project. However, outputs from the workshop and other project components, including key informant interviews, provide direction for potential next steps. Workshop participants discussed the barriers to creating a framework. Next steps must consider barriers and pathways to both bridging Indigenous Knowledge and Western science at large, and in the specific context of bridging knowledge to develop an assessment framework. The content above provides an overview of concepts that are important to explore, define, and reflect on moving forward, as well as some key questions and challenges to address:

- How do we start to think about “measuring” the benefits of fishing beyond money, jobs, environmental performance?
 - How to treat different opinions on fishery performance?
- Information burdens of current tools/ways of looking at fisheries
 - Too many resources needed, many fisheries to consider – data is not accessible enough
 - Mismatch of tools to the fishery
- To incorporate and not overtake: how do we do this equitably? How to do this in a way that everyone is happy with/accepts?
- What counts as data?
 - How well does the system measure what's "real" / what matters?
 - Is local / Indigenous knowledge something that can be used in data (scientific)-poor cases

Potential approaches to adapting or creating an assessment framework

One overarching question led this workshop, and was broached by multiple participants: *Should SSFs and Indigenous-led fisheries have different standards? Do we try to integrate Indigenous Knowledge into the assessment framework, or design a whole new standard?*

This question is relevant to both Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch staff; SFW had been considering how to fit Indigenous Knowledge – in global contexts – into their standard for an upcoming standard review. The workshop did not conclude with an answer on what that may look like, but for multiple participants informed their approach and steered them in a clear direction:

“Before we [SFW staff] went to the workshop, we were of the opinion that we had to incorporate traditional knowledge into our standard. But after the workshop we realized that that was probably not a good idea. That we have to have a separate way of assessing and a separate output, a separate product for indigenous communities.”

Similarly, Ocean Wise staff concluded that “the infrastructure for assessing fisheries doesn't work in the context of small scale Indigenous-led fisheries.” Considering alternatives to integration, both SFW and OW have explored modified tools and assessment processes. SFW, for instance, has developed a 3-hour rapid assessment and has performed on-site visits to communities to gather knowledge where data already exists but is not readily accessible – a time-consuming yet thorough approach. Similarly, Ocean Wise has been actively working on a pre-assessment checklist to approximate a score based on the Seafood Watch standard, showcasing the feasibility of designing and implementing innovative approaches beyond traditional integration methods.

One SFW staff offered reflections on potential pathways to incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into an assessment framework/standard, based on their experience considering alternative

assessment approaches, previous experience with Traditional Knowledge in global contexts, and upon reflection of their experiences in this workshop:

1. One possibility is to **use the current standard as a framework and come up with rapid assessments** in which Indigenous Knowledge could be incorporated and used. This could potentially work, with some difficulty. This approach would likely be more applicable in Southern contexts or those where they have already integrated some extent of Western science, such as the BC fisheries.
1. In contrast, Northern Inuit communities “definitely need a whole different system.” **Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into a current assessment standard – such as finding different ways to collect or measure the required data – won’t work on a large scale.** The standard itself is very rigid and antithetical to the free-flowing nature of Indigenous Knowledge; the rigidity of the current standard needs to be overcome.
2. Another possibility is to **create a different recommendation/standard that is more free-flowing.** The nature of Indigenous Knowledge necessitates an assessment framework that is flexible in order to be applicable across contexts and communities. This may involve assessing individual fisheries based on the knowledge that you have and have more of a discussion, more of a relationship, and advise them on how they can improve. This may not necessarily use the same recommendation system as the current standard or be called a recommendation. This works toward the type of methodology that hasn’t been developed yet, and would be a departure from how we think of standards and recommendations currently.

Discussion and implications

The *FEED the North* project set out with ambitious goals to initiate the co-development of an assessment framework for the sustainability of Northern SSFs. The primary takeaway from this endeavor was the recognition of a crucial variable: the state and significance of fishing and fisheries within communities. Understanding of the significance of fishing and fish in these contexts goes beyond industry and to the heart of communities. This reinforces the importance of the project starting with individuals in communities to ground the initiative in human- and community-centered principles. This approach becomes particularly vital as the involvement of industry and the implementation of assessments introduce data-driven processes and stricter scientific standards. By prioritizing community perspectives from the outset, the project can ensure that the resulting framework remains centered around the unique needs and values of the communities it aims to serve.

This process highlighted the importance of taking an approach that does not focus on identifying ways that communities can meet data collection criteria set by external organizations; rather, it involves rethinking the criteria and measures in the short term to better align with community realities. In the long run, it's about understanding the diverse scopes of fishing activities within each community and ensuring that assessment methodologies are appropriately tailored to reflect these differences.

The project also yielded practical lessons about how to engage with communities, identify key stakeholders, and determine the appropriate timing for engagement. These major insights and their relevance to Ocean Wise and a broader stakeholder audience are explored in this section.

Understanding the continuum of stakeholders

When managing a vast network of stakeholders across cultures and contexts, determining the appropriate time and level of involvement to engage each stakeholder can be difficult. At the North-South workshop, Ocean Wise discovered that engaging a diverse group of stakeholders too early in the project had consequences; despite consensus that progress was made, the mix of stakeholders broadened the scope of the workshop and made objectives and direction unclear. This was attributed to the size and diversity of the group; stakeholders spanned across the fisheries industry, from communities without fisheries to those with established commercial fisheries. The result was initial tensions between participants with different agendas, decreased comfort levels for youth to engage, and a diverted focus from the North. While this diversity is beneficial across the scope of the project, participants and project staff agreed that stakeholders were in "too different of places" to inform the current narrow workshop objective relating to the Northern communities without SSFs. Some Southern participants noted that the content of the workshop was of interest, but at this theoretical stage or while still heavily context/location-based, it held less relevance to them professionally. On the other hand, technical discussions about fisheries management and certification were not relevant to the youth. Ultimately, Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik realized that the **stakeholders existed on a 'continuum' in several ways**, and that **there needs to be careful consideration of where the project focus falls on the continuum and what scope of stakeholder/industry involvement is most relevant and beneficial.**

- The **continuum across the fisheries industry** spans from communities without active fisheries (such as Pond Inlet and Gjoa Haven) to those with large commercial fisheries; it also extends beyond fisheries to include producers, suppliers, and more. The relevance and intricacies of the sustainability assessment process differ across the continuum and become more specific for stakeholders toward the right of the continuum. For them, the conversations were less theoretical and the barriers faced are much more focused and specific. Thus, as key project partners or communities move further along the continuum and discussions become more concrete and specific, a broader and more diverse group of stakeholders will become relevant to engage.
- The **continuum of trust** - regardless of industry, stakeholders had different levels of trust and comfort engaging with the project, context, and each other. At the North-South workshop some stakeholders had pre-existing relationships, and others were familiar with and comfortable in the meeting setting. Youth, in this case, did not have a chance to build relationships and were in an unfamiliar context which impacted their levels of engagement and comfort. With emphasis on the project and workshops “moving at the speed of trust,” it is therefore important that all participants in a workshop or discussion are at the same stage of trust and relationship building. When this is not the case, the pace of the workshop and emphasis on building trust should match the stakeholder(s) with whom relationships are still developing.

Relevance to Ocean Wise

Ocean wise is developing an internal Indigenous Engagement Policy. They intended for the lessons learned through this project to help guide the development of the policy to ensure it is informed by practice. To move forward in the current project, numerous defined and practical next steps emerged:

- **Go beyond youth:** in Pond Inlet and Gjoa Haven, talk to those that would be setting up fisheries and hold knowledge in the community.
- **Bring in Arctic communities with commercial fisheries** to start learning from their experiences.
 - Take the youth to Pangnirtung or Cambridge Bay where fisheries currently exist.
- **Proceed with multi-stakeholder collaboration by moving up the “continuum” in small steps** (e.g., Cambridge Bay and Pangnirtung, two communities with fisheries that would be able to supply commercially to the South; potential fishery in Taloyoak; re-engage DFO).
 - **Keep current networks engaged and updated.** Contact workshop participants to clarify the next steps, goals, and relevance to their contexts.
- **Host a fisher-to-fisher knowledge exchange once the Northern communities/project reach a relevant stage and the issues are specific and clear.** When the major problems to tackle are identified and communities have gathered the information they think is helpful, engage other fishers to think about the solution design together based on context/issues in the communities and from the perspective of others with similar context/experience.

Relevance to other organizations

Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik designed this project with the vision that the results will be pertinent to other Southern ENGOs, especially those focused on seafood sustainability. There is a growing emphasis on the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in evaluating the social, economic and environmental performance of fisheries. Simultaneously, there is a recognized need to establish pathways to meaningful employment aligned with the cultural context of youth in Northern and other remote communities. The findings from this project may be relevant to organizations or projects seeking to establish long-term connections in new geographies while considering diverse worldviews.

Organization-level lessons

In order to effectively support projects that seek to engage communities and youth, and to derive meaningful insights from the lessons outlined in this report, organizational buy-in and support are essential. In practice, this requires tangible actions and dedicated commitments.

This project emphasized the importance of following the pace of communities and centering community needs and priorities. For Southern organizations/partners, the reality of this means that relationship building can take a lot of time and resources, timelines are unpredictable, and deliverables/outputs may not be as expected. Organizational support for these initiatives means they must:

- **be flexible with funding, timelines, and project objectives;**
- be flexible in project plans and proposals; if you want to help communities you need to ask what is needed and **do not show up with a fully formed plan;**
- recognize **building relationships and networks with communities as an output** despite the inability to “measure” these as a metric. These intangibles need to be respected and recognized within organizations – a push for deliverables jeopardizes the prioritization of community needs and does not allow staff the time and space they need when they have to account for their time with a tangible product; and
- **commit to internal learning** from community engagement projects and commit to integrating and respecting the lessons learned within their own organizational processes and resources.

Individual/staff-level lessons

The lead Ocean Wise staff involved in this project had minimal to no prior experience with community engagement or Northern Indigenous contexts. Without organizational guidance or processes, they initially expressed hesitancy about their role in the project and whether their presence in the community or this work objective was appropriate. As the project progressed, Ocean Wise and Ikaarvik staff highlighted the importance of Southern partners’ approach, attitude, and intentions that individual staff bring to their work and into communities to build comfort and maximize impact in both directions. They provided the following reflections:

- **Know and understand the history of colonialism and community relations**, and understand the onus is on you to demonstrate your commitment and intentions to communities and partners. It may take multiple visits to build trust in your project. Be open to questions and be transparent about your priorities, objectives, and process.
- **Have cultural humility.** Remember and respect that your project and priorities may be low on the community's list, even during a scheduled visit. *"We lost some of our most active [Gjoa Haven workshop] participants because all of a sudden there was a boiled water advisory in town and people had to go harvest ice for drinking water. [...] And I'm not going to tell you that what I have to say is more important than that, because it's not."*
- **Have patience.** You won't get as far as you think – building relationships takes time, and isn't always linear. Gaining buy-in, trust, and participation is an accomplishment. Having conversations and gathering information is only a step – turning it into something, checking and re-checking with participants and communities in iterative stages is a huge process.
- **Learn how to step into something uncomfortable.** This includes giving power to folks who experience and live it every day, and accepting feedback as you navigate community engagement and relationships.
- **Making an effort to learn and be respectful is valued by partners.** Ocean Wise staff learned from working with Ikaarvik that *"as long as you try something with the right intention, nobody's going to be mad."* Ikaarvik underlined importance of *"their heart [being] in the right place. ... that's super important. It's the people that matter and they did a great job."*

Relevance to governments and systems

The initiative to co-develop accessible standards of sustainability for Northern SSFs has potential far-reaching impacts and implications (see the theory of change depicted in *Figure 1*). The findings and outputs of this project's broader objectives are not only significant for the sustainable development of SSFs in Northern communities but also resonate with broader policy frameworks, particularly the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (Government of Canada, 2019). Fisheries play a pivotal role in this context given their economic, social, and cultural significance in Northern regions (Kourantidou & Bailey, 2021). Fisheries offer a critical pathway for advancing responsive economic development in the North, however Indigenous governance of fisheries remains a complex and often contentious issue (Cadman et al., 2023). This project not only strives to help increase the market impact of Northern Indigenous SSFs, but in doing so focuses on building the capacity of communities and youth to research and lead decision-making regarding fisheries development and management in their own communities. This project is a first step toward realizing the broader objectives that align with the priorities and actions articulated by the federal government in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework.

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Appendix A: Evaluation matrix

Evaluation question	Indicators	Methods	Data sources
<p>1. What was learned about what it takes to launch and implement a multi-stakeholder and rightsholder project centering Northern Indigenous community priorities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges and modifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Records of planned and actual activities (e.g., # of workshops, timing of workshops and meetings, # and type of outputs) ○ Records of planned and actual outputs ○ Adjustments in resource allocation or capacity ○ Recorded changes in the project timeline or schedule ○ Nature and persistence of challenges, obstacles, and opportunities identified ○ Records and staff reports of adaptations to activities, objectives, and outcomes • Experiences of project planning and implementation (staff/youth) • Reports of initial expectations and realized outputs and outcomes (staff) • Transparency of decision-making processes (e.g., extent to which decision-making processes were clearly communicated and understood by staff/partners) • Opportunities youth and communities to influence project decision-making • Staff/partner perceptions of engagement and responsiveness to recommendations • Instances of recommendations being implemented/influencing project decisions • Level of community involvement in project activities and planning (# participants, # workshops, # partners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project staff ○ Youth ○ Stakeholders • Document review • Content analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcripts & notes • Project documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project workplans and extension documents ○ Modification logs or change request forms ○ Quarterly and annual reports ○ Meeting agendas and minutes ○ Workshop summaries • Workshop outputs & notes
<p>2. What was learned about fostering partnerships and networks cross-culturally and cross-contextually?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and diversity of stakeholders engaged • Number and capacity of stakeholders engaged at each stage of the project • Methods used to contact and sustain relationships with stakeholders • Stakeholders' perception of project relevance to their needs/context • Number and type of networking opportunities/events attended by staff/youth • Reflections on opportunities to network (staff/stakeholders/youth) • Reflections on workshop dynamics and relationship building (staff/stakeholders/youth) • Type, timing, and context of relationship-building opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project staff ○ Youth ○ Stakeholders • Document review • Content analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcripts & notes • Project documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quarterly and annual reports ○ Meeting agendas and minutes ○ Workshop summaries • Workshop outputs & notes

<p>2a. What was learned about bridging Traditional Indigenous Knowledge and Western science?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outputs from workshops that address or integrate Indigenous knowledge/Western science • Barriers and enablers to integrating Indigenous Knowledge/Western Science recorded in workshops or reported by participants • Reflections on relevance and success of workshop objectives and outputs (staff/stakeholders/youth) • Reflections on facilitating workshops (staff/ youth) • Methods used to prepare workshop materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project staff ○ Youth ○ Stakeholders • Document review • Content analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcripts & notes • Project documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quarterly and annual reports ○ Meeting agendas and minutes ○ Workshop summaries • Workshop outputs & notes
<p>3. How, and to what extent, did the project empower and build the capacity of Northern Indigenous youth?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of youth actively involved at each stage of the project • Number and type of networking opportunities provided to youth • Methods/activities used to prepare for and facilitate workshops • Demonstrated/reported skills, comfort, and confidence throughout the project • Opportunities provided for youth and communities to influence project decision-making • Reflections on project components that most directly influenced youth capacity/development (staff/youth) • Facilitators' reflections on and experiences of engaging youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project staff ○ Youth • Document review • Content analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcripts & notes • Project documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quarterly and annual reports ○ Meeting agendas and minutes ○ Workshop summaries • Workshop outputs & notes
<p>4. What was learned about cross-cultural and cross-contextual concepts of seafood sustainability, and co-developing a sustainability assessment framework for Northern SSFs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project staff/participants perceptions of.... • Recorded definitions and discussions • Reflections about the process currently • Staff/youth/participant reflections about significant lessons learned • Suggestions for next steps, or questions remaining • Reported barriers, challenges, and adaptations to project objectives re: co-development of framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project staff ○ Youth ○ Stakeholders • Document review • Content analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcripts & notes • Project documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project workplans and extension documents ○ Modification logs or change request forms ○ Quarterly and annual reports ○ Meeting agendas and minutes ○ Workshop summaries • Workshop outputs & notes