Johnston Research

Yukon University: Evaluation Report

Prepared for: Future Skills Centre

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Future Skills Centre Centre des
Compétences
Skills **futures**
Centre

Canadä

Overview:

Project: Shock Proofing Yukon: Northern Entrepreneur Development Network
Duration: March 2021 - March 2023
Population: People from rural, remote, and northern communities, Indigenous Peoples, underrepresented/racialized groups and newcomers
Industry Sectors: Economic development
Region(s): Yukon

The project aims to . . .
- Develop a network of support for entrepreneurs, enabling knowledge mobilization and mentorship opportunities within the existing entrepreneur ecosystem

Beginning / Past: Where the Project started

> **#Spirit:** the team began the project with a strong emphasis on spirit and meeting community needs.
> **#Relationships:** the team set out to build relationships with the communities built on the Indigenous values and culture, specific to each community.
> **#Process:** Planning came from a place of community strengths.

Yukon University, began with a partnership and a shared desire to have an impact on / benefit the Yukon as whole, not just Whitehorse. The project team identified a need to effectively and holistically support rural entrepreneurs; providing the backing they need to create thriving self-employment and grow businesses in an age when interconnection and community are more important than ever. The overarching goal of the project is to provide one-on-one business support. However, the team recognized that they did not have the tools and resources that would benefit start-up and entrepreneurs; in particular they needed staff. Through the FSC, they were able to create two roles. In the beginning stages, the two roles were completely dedicated to traveling to communities and building relationships through explaining the program, and learning about community needs and the current level of support received at that time.

Experiences / Present: Program Impacts and Barriers/Gaps

> **#Spirit:** the team is flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of each community, there is time built into the processes for reflection from a place of spirit.
> **#Relationships:** the team has built relationships with the communities that are grounded in connection and Indigenous-led methods. Relationships are supportive and reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing that are specific to the communities.
> **#Process:** Planning continues to be done from a place of community strengths, opportunities and sovereignty.

When YukonU started, the team set out a number of measurable objectives (e.g., number of people they intended to contact, mentors recruited, organizations to work with, etc.). As the project has evolved, the team realized this approach did not work, so they to building

relationships with fewer people, and prioritizing repeat meetings, workshops, questions and interactions over making new connections. The YukonU team effectively exemplified the spirit of Indigenous evaluation approaches reflexively through remaining adaptable and prioritizing relationship building. Through these methods they found success and were able to reach their goals; and perhaps most importantly they were able to hire local community members to ensure relevance, empower and build capacity.

Impacts:

YukonU has created an outreach plan, and built critical relationships among existing entrepreneurs and relevant local, national and place-based champions and mentors through connecting organizations, partners and entrepreneurs.

YukonU has been successful in enrolling organizations (12 organizations have enrolled as of 2022) and engaging with 14 partner organizations. They have also been successful in knowledge mobilization activities, having conducted:
- Three (3) workshop sessions with 55 participants overall
- Several small group meetings to gather suggestions for community champions, mentors, instructors and workshop topics, and meetings to introduce the initiative with rural YukonU campuses and First Nations governments
- Two (2) webinars; an Introduction to Entrepreneurship for YFNAC students, and Innovation Week talks, interviews and Q&A. In addition to an entrepreneurship speaker series
- Two (2) feedback surveys

Through its positive relationship building, the project has also been successful in:
- Employing, and sub-contracting work to community members. This has allowed them to gain and/or improve upon valuable skills and work experience.
- Significantly transforming the involvement of rural communities within the University.
- Increasing capacity of the UConstruct team. In the past two years the team has went from having three staff to 15 staff. This increase in staff has improved their ability to reach out to people one-on-one and invite people into our university-based space.
- Connecting with, and having a positive impact on national programs. The team has been successful in connecting national programs to the communities. *"Tourism and Economic Development does not have the capacity to build relationships. So, UConstruct acts as a bridge to connect them easily to the communities."* This also supports the communities through inviting them to enrol in tourism and economic development courses.
- Implementing a Yukon innovation Prize; celebrating innovation and finding new ways to make things work in a rural community. In addition to a Hall of Innovators Awards. Both of these have contributed to a major shift in participation, changing mindsets on what it means to be an Entrepreneur.

Barriers/Gaps:

When conceptualizing the strategy and planning for the *Northern Entrepreneur Development Network*, the team determined that the network should be comprised of a diverse range of mentors, coaches, and peer support with varied skills, expertise and cultural backgrounds. The network set out to expand current programs, pathfinding and other wrap around services to Yukon's rural communities in an accessible and culturally relevant way. However, in practice they found that devising a mentorship program was challenging, give technology use, or lack thereof, and differences in how the terms "mentor" and "entrepreneur" were viewed and defined. The team found that the mentorship program has not completed a change in direction; however, the leaders in the communities that project team has been working with have been the mentors. They also found that in the Yukon, "entrepreneur" is more community based and not a singular individual/business person.

Additionally, the team had difficulty in building relationships. They initially thought that having lived in a community for so long that they could fast track the programming to set up mentorship opportunities quickly. However, they found that regardless of the rapport built from living in the communities, the team still needed to take time to build trust, especially when the communities felt that *"other people parachute in, and do this and that. But then in a year they are gone. . .it's not long lasting, the programs had been too short."* It also took time to determine community needs without leading them or trying to fulfil their own agenda.

Key Learnings:

- **Building relationships takes time.** The team found that building relationships took far more time than they expected. However, relationships built on trust as critical as they build the foundation of the project in supporting communities needs and upholding the notion of "nothing about us, without us."
    - These relationships also support community members in carrying on work when project staff are unable to access communities (i.e. seasonal considerations - hunting in the fall, treacherous winter conditions etc.)
    - When in meetings/sessions make sure to spend ample time on introductions and getting to know each other. Consider starting with traditional crafts (e.g. making leather key fobs, beading etc.)
- **Be flexible and adaptable.** Maintaining awareness of community differences and adapting to the unique needs of each community. (i.e. be prepared with a PowerPoint presentation, but understand you may not use it)
    - Recognize that communities have a varying amount of capacity and resources, and some might need more support than others. Work with participants to find out where they are at, and what they need.
    - Don't be afraid to get creative in finding solutions to challenges.
- **The importance of two-way communication.** Maintain multiple modes of collecting feedback beyond follow-up surveys, which typically have low rates of participation.
    - Ensure that knowledge mobilization and dissemination of results is led by, and comes from the community in ways that feel most meaningful to them.

- **The need for inclusive and accessible resources.** The importance of having resources on a platform that is accessible and inclusive (i.e. beyond social media)
- **The importance of using in-person events**, as they allow for valuable and substantial conversation and two-way knowledge transfer.
- **The need for cross-functional administration.** When working with multiple locations where clients move between programs, it is important to develop methods to effectively share data (i.e. central database).

Transition: Primary Data Collection

#Spirit: The team built in, and took time to, reflect on the process from a place of spirit. Uncovering how the project impacted them, and the communities served. Ensuring that entrepreneurs feel valued and supported in their work.

#Relationships: relationships were supportive; with open two-way lines of communication between the project team, partners and communities. Two team roles were completely dedicated to traveling to communities, building relationships and understanding community needs.

#Process: Processes were evaluated using Indigenous values and community sovereignty in whatever way that looked like for each community. The processes were validated by the communities and project partners to ensure relevance and utility.

The YukonU team also found that there has been a transition in spirit and relationships throughout the project lifecycle.

Early on, the YukonU team transitioned from a structured work plan and a set curriculum to a process that slow downed their implementation plan. They took on longer and deeper approach to mindful engagement of listening, observing keenly and establishing long-lasting relationships. The team found that the relationships built were a key component of the work. In that through taking the time to slowly build deeper, trusting relationships with the communities, the team has been able to change mindsets on community members definitions of entrepreneurship and mentorship. They were also able to better include the communities in the process planning. The project team engaged locals to design lesson plans, training and activity skill-based workshops, which in-turn allowed the communities to fully participate in the programming.

In fact, the team illustrated major shift in participation and attendance from First Nations and rural communities over the last two years. This increase in participation has had a positive effect on the team's community work, and on the communities themselves. The team has also noticed that connections with the University have improved, with individual enrolling in new University courses and attending University events, in addition to just dropping by the program office.

Future State: Next Steps

#Spirit: Team members are culturally competent and inclusive. These values are reflected into the work they do. They are enthusiastic and have confidence that they can do what they set out to. All of which leads back to spirit.
#Relationships: the team continues to build relationships with the communities while applying principles of Indigenous position, equity and inclusion.
**#Process:** Planning continues to be done from a place of community strengths, opportunities and sovereignty.

YukonU will continue to collect data and record notes from community visits to inform the overall evaluation of the programing. The team intends to continue to community outreach and advocate for the needs of rural communities, and act as a bridge to enable outsiders to understand what is happening in the communities. They are seeking to onboard individuals who are viewed as experts and facilitators in the communities themselves to led and support the programming/events.
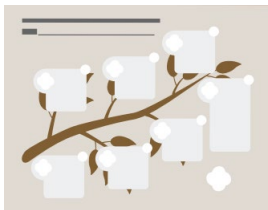
YukonU is hoping to find funding to continue to reach out to communities, to learn how to move forward with the work accomplished, and continue to be present in the communities, to avoid being "one of those fly-in and fly-out" programs. The team has also expressed an interest in sharing their key learnings, successes and challenges with the wider FSC community as a mechanism to build capacity, improve knowledge translation and mitigate siloed work across Indigenous communities in Canada.

Appendix A: Documents Provided to Organizations

Data Collection Tools to review:

- 1 Western Psychology n Evaluation as an Innate ...
- 4 Indigenous Evaluation Methodology.pptx
- 5 Going Deeper into What is Evaluation.pptx
- AJS Photovoice - summary (2018_06_03 03_05_53 U...
- JR Your Voices Evaluation Self & Family Tools P...
- JR Your Voices Evaluation Self and Family Tools...
- JRI HRE IEF Awakening the Journey Vision Model ...

1. The Waawiyeyaa storytelling tool which participants the opportunity to share their stories on a linear path through the past/present/transition and future states

2. The Medicine Wheel tool with gives participants the opportunity to share their reflections wholistically through the lens of spirit, mind and body