

POLICY RESEARCH IN THE NORTH

A DISCUSSION PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

How feasible is the establishment of a policy research network, or other such independent policy research and dissemination mechanism, *based in* the Canadian North, conducting research *about* the Canadian North, *by* (primarily) Northern researchers and *for* an audience that includes northerners?

Political development in northern Canada has followed a distinctive path. There is nothing comparable in Canadian history, and many of the potentially more consequential features of this development have yet to be fully realized, or even fully understood. The structures of northern government are being shaped by the realization of Indigenous peoples' right of self-determination at the same time as all northerners work to eliminate the lingering features of colonial northern administration.

The Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation provides grants and other forms of support for research and education endeavours that enhance northern Canadians' ability to participate in and help shape public policy. In the course of supporting such activities, many have remarked on the need to develop some kind of northern-based policy research support system. This report was written because the Foundation wished to consider how to better support northern residents in their quest to develop, understand and use policy analysis in an effective and democratic way. The Foundation cited the following observations as reasons for pursuing this inquiry:

- There are a host of major public policy issues important common to much or all of the north (and important to Canada) which demand proper reflection, discussion and broader dissemination: For example, devolution and resource revenue sharing, unique education and health challenges and approaches, land claims implementation, self-government issues, preservation of indigenous languages, use of traditional knowledge, scale and decentralization questions, circumpolar affairs, adaptation to climate change, boom-bust cycles, and urban-rural disparity, to name just a sampling;
- There are a great many northerners who are interested in thinking and writing about policy, have unique and vital contributions to make to policy discussions, *and* – importantly - wish to remain living and working in the north;
- Almost all northern non-governmental policy research is done by southern researchers under the auspices of southern universities and other institutions. Such institutional frameworks are not well-positioned to accommodate unique northern interests and sensibilities, including the central role of traditional Indigenous knowledge;
- The vast majority of northern research is natural science- and anthropology-focused, yet there is a clear need for *policy* research and education. Also, northern research in general in Canada is under-resourced;
- Policy research about the north often does not reach a northern audience and there are serious gaps in information-sharing *across* the north, and even within specific regions; and

- The structure of ‘civil society’ or the ‘third sector’ (as distinct from government and the commercial sector) is quite unique in the north, resulting – in many cases - in a more limited space for *independent* public discourse.

In recognition of the enthusiasm of responses from northerners who were interviewed for this project, the Foundation’s Trustees decided to make this report public. They hope that it will be read as an intervention in the discussion already underway in every region of the north about how to build upon existing strengths and institutions to create a stronger capacity for policy research and dissemination.

Over several months, the authors¹ of this report had many discussions with northerners and southern-based supporters of the north. People were asked to comment upon the state of northern policy research and what should be done to enhance it. The researchers spoke at length with nearly forty individuals in Iqaluit, Yellowknife, Whitehorse, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Montreal and Ottawa. A workshop in Yellowknife provided an opportunity for searching reflection and inspiration. Opinions, of course, varied. But most were keenly interested in the idea of policy research, and many had given the topic significant prior thought. This report is the digested result of those many conversations, considered in the light of research into technical matters, other models, and some existing proposals.

The report concludes that there is indeed a need for institutional development to create the conditions in the north that would foster a home-grown policy research community. There is very strong interest in meeting this need in every northern region, and in some cases northerners have made specific plans to move forward. But there are practical considerations also: what is feasible with respect to (1) personnel and level of interest, (2) costs, and (3) institutional and technical potential. Models from other jurisdictions, and from elsewhere in the circumpolar world have been reviewed, and the most promising are briefly described. The report also considers the possibility of a step-wise, or gradual movement towards the goal of expanded northern policy capacity and full institutional realization. Possible steps include the establishment of policy research institutes; promotion of research networks; and the direct encouragement of policy research for dissemination in conferences and publications. In the concluding section, six concrete possibilities are described.

By most accounts, ‘the North’ includes the three territories, as well as Nunavik, Labrador and the northern regions of provinces from Ontario west. For the purposes of this study, and as a matter of financial feasibility, arbitrary geographical limits were drawn. Most attention was paid the three territories, with some investigation in Nunavik and the Inuit territories of Labrador. No research was conducted in the northern provinces west of Quebec.

This report is offered to the public as a series of suggestions and reflections. Both the authors and the Gordon Foundation welcome your comments.

¹ See p. 33.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *There is a need to enhance northern-based policy research capacity. Building up northern capacity is a feasible goal.*

Enhanced policy research capacity in the North would make a lasting contribution to democratic social and political change in northern Canada. Many aspects of northern democracy are impressive, especially in contrast to the recent, colonial past, but decolonization is dangerously incomplete. The danger lies primarily in a lack of balance. The development of knowledge about fundamental northern development questions is currently primarily in the hands of government and industry, and tightly bound to their immediate purposes. There is scant opportunity for locally defined and executed independent policy research. Northerners identify a need for more citizen mobilization and engagement in knowledge development, and better means of knowledge dissemination, as a way of supporting more democratic government and public discussion.

2. *The different regions in the north will respond to this need differently.*

Political culture and institutional development in each northern region are distinctive. New policy institutions in the North are most likely to be developed by northerners with regional purposes and capacities in mind. It is unlikely that a single model will suit all regions of the North.

On the other hand, given the relatively small population base of the North (likely to remain under 150,000 people in Labrador, Nunavik, Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon for some time), it seems necessary that northerners maximize their use of collaborative and mutually supportive arrangements.

3. *The building of a research communication network would be advantageous, but such a network cannot be the “driving wheel” of the process to enhance northern policy research capacity.*

Despite their cultural, institutional, political and jurisdictional differences, Labrador, northern Quebec, Nunavut, Northwest Territories and the Yukon do share similar challenges and needs, and many of these are not being met by current research and communication institutions. There is a need for improved communication about research results among all of the regions, and also among particular groups of regions (for example, among all of the Inuit territories).

A research communication network would enhance policy research capacity in all regions, but the creation of such a network cannot be the beginning of the process. Rather, measures should be directed towards improving northern policy research capacity—and the volume and variety of research generated—by each region and

in the areas that reflect regional research priorities. While the existing northern research units and any new ones would benefit from being part of a network, a northern policy research network will require enhanced northern policy research capacity to thrive. The research generating “nodes” of any network require development and support. Measures that merit support include policy research programs, policy conferences and publications, policy institutions, and a public policy network. These are mutually supportive activities, suitable to step-wise development and support.

4. *A staged or incremental approach to enhancing northern policy research capacity is the most feasible and such an approach is likely to have the most positive overall impact in the long run.*

Northerners might consider a series of measures:

- A founding meeting of interested parties, to plan future activities
- A series of policy research conferences, incorporating community participation and leading to publication
- Formation of a policy research institution or organization
- Gradual development of a network of policy-focused bodies
- Publication of an annual “northern policy review” focused on northern policy issues, and meant to assess and inform northern governments

This list of steps is meant to illustrate how a sequence of initiatives, beginning with relative simplicity, could build a strong policy community over a number of years. Certainly not every step would be followed in the order given in every northern region. Other integral aspects could be

- Working relationships and alliances with post-secondary institutions in the north
- Working relationships with researchers, universities and other institutions in southern Canada
- Alliances with northern and southern-based non-governmental organizations

5. *Any new policy research institution, network or program must be built upon a common foundation of Indigenous knowledge and the diverse traditions of “mainstream” social and natural science.*

Politically and demographically, each northern region blends in varying degrees the traditions of Indigenous societies and those of the settler society, or mainstream Canada. The political institutions of each territory reflect this reality, and it is likely that public policy decisions will do so for the foreseeable future.

In order to make a contribution to democratic northern development, public policy research must build upon and respond to Indigenous knowledge, community purposes, and the public purposes of the whole society. Achieving expertise in this area will require experimentation over time, but considerable advances have already been made, and northern Canadians are poised to make a world class contribution.

6. *It will be important for any new policy institution to establish an appropriate level of fiscal stability, sufficient to protect independence and to enable it to develop a meaningful role in public discussion.*

A key feature lacking from the current universe of public policy practice in northern Canada is independence from the various political interests. Any new institutions or processes will require financial independence to ensure political independence and the possibility of a balanced response to the needs of the entire, diverse northern society.

The relatively high cost of operations in most parts of the North, coupled with the need for financial independence, lend further support to the idea of staged or incremental development of policy institutions and capacity. It also suggests that any new institutions should be supported by financial trusts or endowments, insulated from the political purposes of the original donors. Government funding may have a role to play, but it will be also important for the charitable sector and especially for the resource and other industries whose profitability is built on the development of northern resources, to contribute to the endowment(s).

To offer a specific example: how can the need for collaboration and mutual support among northern regions be balanced with the equally important need for regionally relevant and specific policy initiatives? One possibility among several would be the formation of a pan-northern policy research endowment fund, created with contributions from the private and public sectors, and available to a network of cooperating, but independent organizations.

THE NEED FOR NORTHERN POLICY RESEARCH INITIATIVES

A number of similar conditions apply to the northern regions that are the focus of this report (Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon):

- There are no resident universities or independent policy research institutions;
- Existing research institutes (such as those established by the territorial governments and by Indigenous authorities) do not specialize in policy research. Given their severe funding constraints and competing priorities, they are unlikely to do so in the near future;
- The relevant provincial and territorial governments have variable “in-house” northern policy capacity. They are handicapped by a lack of what is normally readily available in southern Canada -- local non-governmental resources upon which to draw for a variety of perspectives rooted in area-specific expertise. In most parts of the north, these resources are slender indeed, since there are no institutions at which such expertise could be nurtured;
- For excellent historical reasons and appropriately, most northern governments and Indigenous organizations are committed to innovative institutional development and organizational change, yet they often lack the resources to reflect on this process or analyze with the goal of course correction;
- Northern democracy is hampered by the absence of locally-rooted, independent policy research capacity. In particular, there is a need for programmatic research that informs public discussion and debate in the full range of policy areas;
- Generally, policy-relevant research conducted in the North now is either proprietary, and so relatively inaccessible to citizens and their governments; or, it is conducted on a project-specific basis in response to (rather than anticipation of) major policy issues;
- While some small advocacy groups engage in ad hoc policy-related research, such research is usually in response to major projects being proposed by government or industry, and usually a requirement of a public or Aboriginal consultation process (for example, the Mackenzie Gas pipeline project undergoing regulatory and land claim based environmental assessment);
- Some university-based research is now undertaken in the North, of course, and increasingly this is research planned and executed in partnership with northerners. These research results, however, are not often disseminated outside of academic journals or, at best, the northern region in which the work was done. There is no northern network for dissemination and accumulation of policy-relevant research about the North.

In short, the policy research environment in the north is unhealthy. It is dominated by government and industry and shaped almost entirely by the short-term needs of the regulatory process, or by the academic interests of university-based researchers. Both the regulatory process and universities have a legitimate role to play in northern policy research, but alone they cannot meet the fundamental need for a base of northern-focused knowledge.

The current situation for northern knowledge generation is similar to that of a household that secures its drinking water by melting snow or by buying water in small bottles, energy-intensive and inefficient alternatives to drilling a well or building a cistern to catch rainwater. It is important now to begin to dig the wells and build the cisterns.

While there is certainly a place for purpose-built, short-term research, and for imported, bottled expertise, such work has limited usefulness beyond the immediate purposes for which it was undertaken. It cannot adequately inform the public or political leaders in a way that promotes democratic dialogue and decision-making about the larger decisions of social and economic policy, because it has not been shaped to that end. It therefore cannot contribute to the overall project of democratic political development that has been underway in northern Canada, nor can it support necessary social and economic development in the smaller, predominantly Indigenous communities.

Finally, of course, northern policy research must be pluralistic. It should be independent of vested interests, and also diverse in topics, approaches and design. It should include research that is longer term and deeper (analogous to the language or traditional knowledge projects undertaken by northern cultural research institutes) and research that is independent, but more limited in time and scope.

The question of what institutions and initiatives might best meet these goals is discussed following, after regional differences and northern particularities have been described.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The northern regions are markedly different in terms of existing institutions and immediate needs –and also in terms of what first steps towards enhanced policy capacity would be considered feasible and appropriate. The following, painfully brief, overview is provided for the use of readers who may not be familiar with all five northern jurisdictions.

Yukon:

Today the Yukon is home to about 30,000 people, nearly one-quarter of whom are members of 16 First Nations. It is a highly centralized territory: 22,000 people live in the capital city of Whitehorse. With one exception (Old Crow) all Yukon communities are accessible by road and air. Old Crow has air service only.

Yukon First Nations negotiated an Umbrella Final Agreement with the Crown in 1993. The Umbrella Agreement provided for consequent individual negotiations with fourteen Yukon First Nations, and as these have proceeded they have begun to alter the structure of the public government. Without question, however, among the territories and other northern jurisdictions, the Yukon's governing architecture is the most similar to provincial institutions. This is perhaps not surprising, given the demographic balance and the fact that there has been a fully elected territorial legislature since 1909, and since 1979, most of the features of Cabinet government. The Yukon is the only one of the three territories to have formal political parties represented in the territorial legislature.

Recently, responsibility over resources such as oil and gas was transferred to the Yukon territorial government, making Yukon in terms of jurisdiction, the most “province-like” of all the territories. Despite a recent upswing in exploration, the mining sector of the Yukon economy has generally been in decline, with tourism and small business currently making up the backbone of the wage economy.

A number of Yukon-based institutions have an interest in policy research. Staff at Yukon College and its affiliate organization, the Northern Research Institute, are engaged in a variety of research production and dissemination activities and are interested in developing more. The leadership of the College is supportive of the concept of a new policy institution of some kind. The Arctic Athabaskan Council (housed at the Council of Yukon First Nations) is playing a pivotal role in research and dissemination concerning oil and gas development and adaptation to climate change. And there are groups of individuals in Whitehorse and elsewhere in the territory, including the Yukon Volunteer Bureau, who have expressed interest in working in a voluntary capacity on the development of a northern policy institution.

Northwest Territories:

The Northwest Territories' current incarnation results from the division of the former Northwest Territories in 1999, when the new territory of Nunavut was created. The Northwest Territories is the home of Inuvialuit (Inuit living in the Mackenzie Delta/Beaufort Sea area), Dene and Metis, who together make up just over half of the population. The Inuvialuit signed the first modern treaty in the NWT in 1984, since then building a strong business presence in their region. The Dene have five different linguistic traditions, roughly consistent with the groups that have formed to negotiate "regional" comprehensive land claim agreements, or modern treaties. Metis, variously descendents of both Red River Metis and Metis indigenous to the NWT, live throughout the territory, and have independently or as participants in Dene negotiations completed or are in the process of pursuing land and governance agreements.

The Northwest Territories government evolved out of a fully colonial administration, governed by an appointed Commissioner advised by a fully appointed council of legislators, few of whom lived in the north. The seat of government of the Northwest Territories was moved from Ottawa to Yellowknife in 1967, and in stages a government on the Westminster model was developed, with a fully elected legislature created in 1979. The dominating feature of Territorial politics has been the resolution of Indigenous land rights and public debate over the form of future government, a broadly participatory and research-based process that began in 1981, with the first (Territorial) Constitutional Conference. As regional claims and self-government agreements are being negotiated one-by-one, new governing institutions are being created.

About 20,000 of the NWT's total population of just over 40,000 people live in the capital of Yellowknife, with the balance living in smaller wage economy centres (Inuvik, Norman Wells, Hay River, Fort Smith, Fort Simpson) and in very small, predominantly Indigenous communities.

The Northwest Territories economy is booming, with government services, oil and natural gas exploration and production, and diamond mining the dominant economic sectors.

There are research institutions currently operating in the Northwest Territories, mainly in the area of culture, language and history. These include First Nations cultural institutes such as the Dene Cultural Institute and the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, and a publicly supported museum with strong research programs. Aurora College is primarily a post-secondary educational institution, supportive of the development of northern research capacity. The Aurora Research Institute, under the College's umbrella, is active in the area of research licensing, support and a limited number of (mainly natural science) research projects.

Nunavut:

The territory of Nunavut was created in 1999 pursuant to the negotiation of a modern treaty between the Inuit of Nunavut and the Government of Canada. The population of the territory is approximately 30,000, about 85% of whom are Inuit. Like the other Inuit territories, Nunavut is highly decentralized, with only about 1/5 of the population living in the capital of Iqaluit and the rest of the population living in 25 other communities, all accessible only by air or, in the short summer, by sea.

The Government of Nunavut is a public government under the significant stress of rapid development. Political leaders have committed themselves to a number of distinctive measures, including modifying standard bureaucratic practices to incorporate traditional Inuit practices and ideals about human relationships, together with an ambitious decentralization plan which has seen government offices expanded in ten communities outside of Iqaluit. The Nunavut treaty itself commits the Government of Nunavut (as well as the Government of Canada and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, the body created to administer comprehensive claims funding on behalf of Beneficiaries) to creating representative bureaucracies, by employing Beneficiaries in their labour forces in the same proportion as they are found in the general population.

Currently, approximately 90% of the expenditure budget of the Government of Nunavut is transferred directly from federal coffers, via the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Most analysts believe that the prospects for developing significantly greater own-source revenues in Nunavut are very high, mainly for geological reasons. At present, the Government of Nunavut, like the Government of the Northwest Territories, lacks jurisdiction over natural resources found on Crown lands.

Nunavut Arctic College and the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI) are respectively, the only post-secondary educational institution in Nunavut, and the only publicly supported research institution. The NRI issues research license, supports research activities, and is engaged in a limited number of research collaborations. As is the case for the other publicly funded northern research institutions, it accomplishes a great deal with a small budget and a very small staff.

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc (NTI), the body established to administer the Nunavut land claim on behalf of beneficiaries, has begun to play a role in convening policy discussions, for example in the area of modern treaty implementation. There is also significant research capacity in a number of Nunavut communities, though this research tends to be in the areas of history, culture and language.

Nunavik:

The Nunavik region of Quebec, north of the 55th parallel, has a population of 12,000, of whom 85% are of Inuit descent. The region does not have its own government but is administered by different institutions created by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) signed in 1978. The Kativik Regional Government (KRG) is the most comprehensive. Its jurisdiction covers transportation, economic development and public infrastructure. Education is under the responsibility of the Nunavik School Board (NSB) and health and social services are under the supervision of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS). All of these institutions are run locally but work as separate entities, each being responsible to a different Quebec Department.

Beside these public institutions of governance, Makivik Corporation is the organization in charge of the protection of Inuit rights and management of Inuit trust funds. It was created in 1978, following the signing of the JBNQA. It plays a very important role in the economy of the region; it owns two airlines, First Air and Air Inuit. It also runs Nunavik Creation, a clothing company and Halutik Enterprises Inc., a fuel and heavy equipment rental company, and participates in joint ventures. It supports the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Associations in each community, as well as the Landholding Corporations, which administer lands owned exclusively by Inuit (Category I Lands).

Work is underway to establish a Nunavik government that would be similar in many respects to the Nunavut government, creating an autonomous territory within the province of Quebec. The Nunavik Government would have delegated power from the Quebec National Assembly and the Canadian Parliament. This new territory would encompass 500,000 square kilometers, located above the 55 parallel.

The Nunavik region has significant experience in developing northern public policy, since most of these regional institutions have been operating since 1978. In fact, of all Inuit, the Nunavik Inuit probably have the longest experience in public administration. Makivik maintains the Nunavik Research Centre, a site of scientific research primarily. The Kativik Research and Economic Development is a small organization focused on economic development issues. Avataq Cultural Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the language and culture of the Nunavik Inuit. Both McGill and Laval Universities have a sustained northern presence (and of course researchers from other universities in Quebec and elsewhere are active in Nunavik, but none focus primarily upon public policy).

Labrador (Nunatsiavut):

With a population of about 28,000, Labrador comprises the continental part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Sometimes described as “a colony of a colony of a colony,” it is a diverse and resource rich area that has known very little prosperity. This has begun to change with modern mining projects and other developments. The territory still bears some marks of its history of administration arrangements within the provincial governance architecture somewhat similar to early practices for the federal administration of the northern territories. Labrador has a well-established non-Aboriginal population, and two initial Aboriginal groups: the Innu Nation, in the south and the centre of Labrador and the Inuit in the North of Labrador. More recently, people of mixed descent in Labrador have formed a Metis Association.

The Innu Nation is still in the early phase of negotiation but the Inuit have a land claim settlement known as the Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement. It was ratified by the Canadian Parliament in June 2005. This agreement creates the Nunatsiavut Government, which has jurisdiction over the Labrador Inuit Lands. In contrast to the other northern governments, this is not a public government and only the 5,300 Labrador Inuit and Kablunangâjuit (individuals of partial Inuit ancestry) can participate in this government.

Labrador Inuit share much with their neighbours in Nunavik and Nunavut, including language (though dialects differ), land- and sea-based productive activities, and a common experience of colonial administration.

Memorial University maintains the Labrador Institute in Happy Valley – Goose Bay, where a variety of natural and social science projects, as well as a strong tradition of work in community research, are housed. Both the Labrador Inuit Association and the Innu Nation have a long history of conducting their own research and of collaborating with selected researchers from outside the region. There is no research organization focused on public policy research.

INSTITUTIONAL FEASIBILITY: THE NORTHERN DIFFERENCE

Political development in northern Canada has followed a distinctive path, and any new northern policy organizations will reflect this. The most striking northern difference is the range of ways in which northern state structures have been shaped by Indigenous self-determination.

In the Yukon, where the basic conceptual framework for a new form of government was set with the negotiation of the Umbrella Final Agreement between Yukon First Nations and the federal government in 1994, it is clear that public governing institutions will be a work in progress for many years to come, as the small individual First Nations exercise jurisdiction and invest their capital to social purposes. There is no longer any issue of whether Indigenous self-determination will be reflected in territorial institutions, but many questions of “how” remain. In the Northwest Territories, somewhat similar processes created a system of “regional treaties,” each somewhat different and each altering public governing institutions. In Nunavut, of course, there is a new territorial government whose jurisdiction is protected by the Canadian Constitution and whose powers and responsibilities are shaped by a modern treaty. In Nunatsiavut (Labrador) and Nunavik (Quebec), pursuant to the negotiation of modern treaties new governing institutions are being designed that are likely to have the effect of creating “territories” within provinces in which Indigenous peoples are the great majority. These various arrangements are unique in Canadian history and, so far, largely specific to the North.

Naturally, research priorities are also specific to the north, and indeed to each northern region. So are the stakeholders who must be considered. Also, the substance and focus of policy research are distinctive. Consider, for example, policy implementation. In the north, policy implementation will never be a matter of federal, provincial and territorial action, entirely: rather, virtually all policies inevitably engage constitutionally protected treaties and Aboriginal governments which will have varying jurisdictional arrangements with the traditional federal and provincial orders.

Further, some of the people who are being served by the policies approach the world from distinctive and valuable epistemological and moral frameworks, not those that crystallized in the institutions of mainstream Canada. Means must be found to incorporate these in institutional practices and research agendas.

Finally, all northerners face a dizzying array of institutional opportunities for action, and enormous international forces felt through the activities of the international resource development industry. Policy research must grow out of this situation, but maintain a reasonable degree of independence.

Because policy research conducted by and for the North must take this political and institutional landscape into account, and because the institutional framework in northern Canada is different from that of the rest of the country, it is very likely that establishing northern capacity for advanced public policy research will require distinctively northern innovations, different in kind and effect from characteristic southern models (though the

different types and experiences embodied in southern models all have much to teach as well).

The distinctive political institutions and consequent political culture of the north also affect, directly, the nature of any northern policy research organization. In all jurisdictions, northerners' political expectations and habits have been shaped by two large factors: the unhappy memory and colonial legacy of heavy administration by distant powers, unrelieved for many years by much local control; and a recent political practice that has featured a large number of highly participatory public decision-making opportunities (such as resource project regulatory hearings, modern treaty ratification processes, and public consultations explicitly focused on macroeconomic development and constitutional development decisions). Northerners expect to be involved, and they are quick to react to externally imposed plans or limitations.

The most important implications of this reality as it affects policy research are as follows:

- Any new initiatives, whether they entail new organizations, conferences, research or publications (policy research activities) must build upon what is sometimes called Indigenous Knowledge, traditions and practices, from the beginning. This is likely to be one of the most significant challenges facing any new institution, and also the way in which the greatest contribution could be made. It is the subject of a following section.
- The policy research activities must engage the people for whom the research is being done, where they live. This creates a need for an excellent communications strategy and innovative ways to engage young people, especially, in the research activities.
- Any new institution that might be created will require a carefully structured board, council or steering committee that reflects its objectives and somehow, balances regional differences and interests; while maintaining scholarly independence.
- In all three territories (though not elsewhere in the north) legislation mandates a requirement that all research projects be licensed by a government body. This provision has its roots in the colonial past, in attempts to mitigate the impact of the power differential between people living in small northern communities and outsiders, but it does raise questions of potential interference with the independence of a policy research institution.
- The usefulness and relevance of an independent policy research entity might not be self-evident to some northern residents. There is scant experience with it. Any new institution or other initiative should build public relations (and communication) into its initial work plan, to build an audience for its work, and to build sustaining support.

With these considerations in mind, many ventures are feasible. In all three territories there are individuals who might be expected to respond to an opportunity for financial support to develop a northern policy institution or network, or to organize the conduct of more independent policy research.

In all cases, careful thought must go into how any new institution or network would “fit” into the existing configuration of institutions. To some extent in each territory, the existing institutions (particularly the territorial government research institutes, but also other bodies) might offer some resistance to the establishment of a new institution. Gaining their cooperation and support, without being subsumed by them, would be an early task.

THE QUESTION OF INSTITUTIONAL FORM: A PROJECT, A NETWORK, AN INSTITUTION OR A PROGRAM?

For the reasons explained in the preceding section, it is important to consider implementation carefully. Given the competing demands on northerners' time and the many other developmental projects underway, how could progress in enhancing northern policy research capacity be made?

One way to think about this problem of implementation is to visualize a developmental sequence, as follows:

- A founding meeting of interested parties, to plan future activities
- A series of policy research conferences, incorporating community participation and leading to publication
- Formation of a policy research institution or organization
- Gradual development of a network of policy-focused bodies
- Publication of an annual "northern policy review" focused on northern policy issues, and meant to assess and inform northern governments.

These activities are of course all complementary, and with some coordination and forward planning they could work together to develop considerable momentum and impact. None of these ideas originated with the Gordon Foundation or the author of this report; they were envisioned by people living in various parts of the North.

Founding Meeting

The founding meeting would bring together people interested in policy research (creating it, disseminating it, and/or using it) from a suitable regional grouping to plan a program of activity. This might entail fund-raising and research into the legal requirements towards the establishment of a policy organization, exploration of the question of institutional form, discussion of alliances and partnerships, or even perhaps the development of a program of research focused on public participation and discussion. Especially since it is essential that Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members from outside the capital cities or regional centres have a central role in the early stages of the initiative, structured financial support at this stage will be very important.

Policy Research Conferences

The pressing need in the North is for the generation of more "content" –more independent policy research from variety of perspectives—and better communication of research opportunities and results.

A simple and relatively low-cost, high-impact initiative would be a series of biennial policy research conferences. These would have to be planned sufficiently long in advance that research to be presented at the conference could be arranged, and ideally, there should be some funding associated with the conference for both research (in advance of the conference) and publications (after it).

Public policy research conferences, planned well in advance and focused on key policy issues (education, health, community development, economic development management and wealth distribution, etc.), would serve a number of important needs. First, advertised and developed appropriately, they would likely generate new applied research. Second, again organized appropriately, they would disseminate research results and advance public awareness of the uses of policy research. Third, if they incorporated a meaningful youth program, they would encourage young people in the region to become involved in the study and debate of public issues.

Probably the best format would be for a series of conferences to be planned at once –to be held annually or biennially, and possibly in different locations. An agenda of themes could be disseminated well in advance, so that researchers would have time to plan for research to be discussed at a health policy conference (for example) three years hence.

Policy Research Programs

There is some granting council support for scholarly research in the North, but not nearly enough is available to support full research programs in even the minimum list in priorities areas. This is partly to do with the high cost faced by southern researchers who wish to conduct research in the North (a factor that discourages students in the social sciences particularly). A policy research endowment program, administered by an independent committee or organization, could do much to fill the policy research gap. Appropriate requirements and conditions could be attached to the grants to ensure that northern researchers were involved to the fullest possible extent and –especially—that the grants made a contribution to the gathering and training of a new generation of northern-based researchers.

Funding for new policy research could also be built into the planning for policy research conferences, permitting organizers to encourage independent research in suitable topic areas.

The policy conference organizers might choose to incorporate research project funding in the conference budget. This could put resources in the hands of northerners who are seeking research partners, and ensure that new research would be available to the conference.

It is also worth exploring the possibility of research and conference-related partnerships to be formed with such institutions as the Pembina Institute, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, language and cultural institutes in the North, Frontier College, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (say, the Ideas program), among others. The goal would be to enhance the availability of research to public discussion.

In regions where there is not yet a cohort of people poised to establish an all-purpose policy research organization, the establishment of a series of conferences could be a welcome interim step. Besides stimulating and disseminating relevant research projects, the conferences would develop connections among researchers and the people who have an interest in relying upon their research. For these benefits to be maximized, it will be

important that the Conferences be organized in a series – so that momentum, public awareness and relationships may be built - and that they have sufficient infrastructure support to learn from experience and become more effective over time. It is not important that the conferences unfold in precisely the same way in every region of the north. Scope, process, focus and format should vary with local conditions.

A Policy Institute

There are currently groups in several parts of the north who are considering how to establish free-standing research institutes. A set of such institutes, based in several northern regions and linked by good communications technology (and perhaps, a funded network administrator) would make the strongest imaginable contribution to enhancing northern policy research capacity, short of the establishment of a northern university system.

One or more northern research institutes would not only sustain a research network, but they would provide appropriate institutional support for policy conferences, research programs and publication programs of all kinds –provided, of course, that funding were available. Financial feasibility is likely to be a large factor.

A Policy Network?

Many northerners readily agree that they have much to learn from initiatives in other northern regions, but for few people is the formation of a new policy research *network* the first priority. Among the people interviewed, there was a marked preference for meeting regional or local needs for policy research, analysis and debate, first.

There are good reasons for seeing the development of a network or networks(s) *as an aspect* of developing regional research capacity.

The vitality of a network depends upon at least two factors:

(1) dedicated resources (perhaps only a person with good software and high speed internet access) to perform such functions as maintaining a website, soliciting and posting information, stimulating or moderating discussions, securing and posting research results and research resources such as bibliographies and data sources;

(2) The engagement of network members who find the network useful and interesting, over time.

The first condition requires an unusually dedicated volunteer, or, more likely, someone who is paid to do this work. There are northern networks of various sorts now operating on the Internet that survive in these ways.

Some examples of durable Internet-based networks (loosely defined) that play a role in keeping researchers and others in touch now include:

- Websites, which are, of course, ubiquitous. Virtually every institution involved in northern research in any way maintains one, and some are very rich resources indeed.
- Several electronic newsletters, such as the University of the Arctic newsletter (*Shared Voices*) and the bulletin of the Canadian Circumpolar Institute (*Polar Access*). These subscription-based newsletters have wide distributions and ever-growing readership; they are produced by paid staff.
- Networks formed by groups of researchers for specific purposes, such as (1) communication among members of research consortia (e.g. the NSERC-funded, Canadian Arctic Shelf Exchange Study (CASES) or (2) interest associations such as the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies. These tend to have closed memberships, though often they are accompanied by information posted on an open-to-all website, which in some cases invites discussion and communication among visitors. The research consortia communication systems are maintained by volunteers or research assistants; those of the interest associations, by paid staff.
- The Canadian Polar Commission, an agency of the federal government, operates a multifaceted web-site and communication tool known as C-PIN (Canadian Polar Information Network). Among its services is a sophisticated communications program, through which a number of private internet “meetings” (in real time or not) can be hosted.
- On a volunteer basis, some individuals share information about news reports, information sources, curriculum materials and the like to an informal network of associates. While small in scale, these can be among the most effective, because they are tailored to individual interests.

None of these networks are focused on policy research, and no northern policy research institute now exists as an Internet network. Nor, apparently, is there an Internet resource explicitly devoted to the sharing and discussion of policy research results. Nevertheless, for almost every northerner, the Internet provides access to what is literally a world of information about research, and access to the research itself.

The gap lies elsewhere. What is needed is the capacity to identify, assemble, assess, compare and develop research that might be applied to particular questions that are of priority in the North, and, where it is necessary, in light of all of this, to design research programs that advance understanding or develop feasible applications –and then to communicate the results in appropriate ways. This would require the resources to engage the people already available in northern regions in publicly available, policy-relevant northern research.

For this reason I have concluded that the 'network' cannot be developed in the absence of attention to the elements that will be linked. It is likely that this means some funding for salaries and facilities, to create the conditions under which the work of analysis and interpretation to occur. This may not necessarily entail funding the staff of an entirely new institution, but rather finding a mechanism for funding positions in existing bodies, linked by some minimal coordinating capacity.

The issue of how far a network linking various centres of "capacity" could reach is less a question of geography than of convergence of policy interests. Communications technologies have reached the stage where a global reach (at least to institutions on this side of the digital divide) is relatively easy and certainly relatively low cost. The University of the Arctic, for example, is accessible to students who wish to take courses in English anywhere in the world.

BUILDING SOMETHING DIFFERENT: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN NORTHERN POLICY RESEARCH

Some institutions of Canadian public policy have begun to include ‘traditional knowledge’ or ‘traditional Indigenous knowledge’ in the process of policy development and decision-making, in a limited fashion. Traditional knowledge is invoked mainly where social and physical environmental disturbances affect Indigenous populations, or where a policy directly involves Indigenous people as a group. Most of the innovation in this area has taken place in the territorial North, where there is now a broad public consensus not only that Indigenous knowledge has a central role to play in public decision-making, but also that new institutions must be built upon all the founding traditions –Indigenous and non-Indigenous—now represented in the modern North. This is a much more ambitious, and very promising, vision.

In visualizing what this would mean, it is helpful to review the conclusions from a Yellowknife workshop on the possibility of a northern policy research institute, held in October 2005:

Northern Specificity

There was a strong sense throughout the discussion that establishing a public policy research organization within the north would have to contend with, and incorporate, issues and factors specific to the north. These ranged from the specific expectations arising out of unique northern political and democratic culture, to concrete realities presented by a small population dispersed throughout a number of small communities over a wide geographic area, to the reality that often impacts of public policy are felt keenly in small communities while visible benefits often accrue within larger centers.

Reliance on Indigenous and Western Knowledge

There was a strong sense among participants that responsiveness to northern realities means that recognition of indigenous knowledge and values must be a key feature of the organization. This is reflected in the principles that would inform its development and functioning, organization, and governance. The facility will innovate to develop research protocols, means for validating research, and the form of research activity and communication, rooted in both traditions.

Mechanism for Indigenous Knowledge Standards, Including Monitoring

A panel of experts responsible for identifying knowledge holders will be an essential part of the research facility.

Indigenous Values

Indigenous values, not simply knowledge alone, must inform the creation and actions of the organization.

Anti-Colonial/Post-Colonial Standards of Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge must be afforded primacy in public policy analysis.

Independent

There should be no formal affiliations with governments (Territorial, Federal, or First Nation).

Responsive

The facility should be responsive to community research needs and to the public policy issues in the North.

Secure Independent Funding

An ongoing stable source of funds is essential to secure independence and stability, and to make it possible to plan.

Communications

Research results must be shared across a variety of media (including some kind of Indigenous knowledge/research forum).

Affiliation, Not Duplication

Any new initiative must build on existing strengths and capacities of research organizations.

Capacity Building and Recognition

The research facility must involve youth, and recognize existing strengths and knowledge holders within communities.

Made in the North

There are some useful models elsewhere, but northern challenges and strengths are distinctive. The new facility must be “made in the North.”

Very few models exist, anywhere in the world, of policy research institutions that meet these high standards. In particular, it is difficult to find institutions in which Indigenous values, cosmological ideas and knowledge are fully incorporated. Any such new policy research institution in Canada’s north would be breaking new ground.

Practical Steps

Although there are apparently no policy research institutions that fully realize the vision of building on the knowledge traditions of northern Indigenous societies and those of the rest of society, there are researchers and research facilities in many parts of the world that have come some distance towards doing this. From their experiences, and from accepted practices in academic disciplines such as anthropology, the deliberations of researchers drawn together by Canadian granting councils, the work of such organizations as the Dene Cultural Institute, the National Centre for First Nations Governance, and the organization of research by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, we may draw some helpful ideas. The following list of ideas may help in visualizing how what might seem like a utopian idea could in fact be made real.

1. Personnel matters.

Projects and institutions should hire people who are rooted in the different traditions. Research teams should be mixed. Steering and planning committees, boards, etc. should all have people who are drawn from the communities who are the main audience for the policy research.

2. It takes time.

It is not an accident that the Yellowknife workshop discussion, as well as many other discussions that the author had in the north, focused on the formation of a permanent institution. It takes time for effective communication across cultures to be established, and more time after that for it to bear synthetic fruit. Traditionally, academic researchers who wish to work across cultures make a long-time, frequently lifetime, commitment to a specific group of people from whom they expect to learn. Not infrequently, academic researchers build close partnerships with key individuals from the community with which they wish to work, for mutual benefit and the exchange of ideas. It is upon these research partnerships, mainly, that the policy research conferences would have to depend for research and practice that bridges traditions. Conference organizers should minimize reliance upon people who have relevant academic expertise, but little northern knowledge or experience.

3. Procedures for knowledge validation must be explicit, and explicitly bi-cultural.

Academic peer review is the means by which the research community ensures that research results are reliable –based upon sound logic and adequate evidence. Scholars and Aboriginal communities have developed other means of validating the reliability of information drawn from the traditions of Indigenous societies. Quality control for northern policy research should rely upon both traditions.

An example of how bi- (or multi-) cultural quality control might be realized in practice is provided in the experience of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Research conducted for the Commission was peer reviewed by two sorts of experts: people who had expertise in the relevant academic field(s), and people who had the expertise to validate relevant knowledge claims about specific Indigenous communities. In practice, the “community reviewers” tended to be members of the Indigenous community in question who had some experience with research, acquired at university or in collaboration with researchers over the years.

The RCAP system worked reasonably well, but could no doubt be significantly improved upon. The work of the Dene Cultural Institute and other similar organizations would be important and helpful.

EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND CONTRIBUTION TO YOUTH

A new policy institution or network should play an important part in addressing two large needs in the northern political economy: the need to support more young people to complete high school and undertake post-secondary education, and the need to support the development of leadership skills in youth.

Programs addressed to these goals are important all over Canada, but they are particularly important in the territorial north –where the voluntary sector is relatively undeveloped compared to many other parts of Canada, and where the population of young people is burgeoning: it seems likely that the people under 25 will form the large majority of the permanent population in most northern regions for the foreseeable future. At the same time, these young people are most likely to be alienated from traditional sources of well-being and social cohesion, particularly land-based activities. Their limited educational opportunities, and the enormous tasks facing the education system, add urgency.

The existence of a policy research network or institution provides important opportunities for knowledge dissemination, mentoring and role modeling, work experience and exposure to research, writing and analysis as forms of employment. Links with the school system, with the northern colleges and with the University of the Arctic for these purposes should form part of the design of the new policy institution.

Most of the people who are engaged in thinking about the possibility of a northern policy research institution have plans to build in programming directed specifically at youth. Among their ideas are:

- Internships for postsecondary students, to provide them with direct work experience in their areas of study
- Schools programs to bring researchers and policy research results into the classroom
- Formal leadership development programs associated with other functions of the policy research institute, including those engaging Indigenous knowledge.

THE NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES: TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY

The prospects and the promise of a northern policy research institution are transformed by the availability of Internet resources, available for knowledge development, communication, teaching, research and exchange. Without this resource, it is likely that no network would be feasible and basic research dissemination would be a great deal more limited. The new information technologies make the ideas in this report feasible.

Considering the rate at which Internet technology is developing, the number of corporate and government partnerships that are sponsoring the development of infrastructure for Northern and remote communities, and increasing residential and corporate demand, it is likely that within a decade or less, all of the larger northern communities, and most of the smaller ones, will have some form of broadband capability, likely satellite based or, where the infrastructure exists, wireless.

As this unfolds, an expanded menu of affordable means of communication will become available to members of a research network. In rough order of technological complexity, these include

- email / mail lists /chat lines
- teleconferencing
- new portals and generally websites
- webconferencing and webcam transmissions
- videoconferencing

Individuals within the network would need to negotiate which method would work best given the available infrastructure (in the community or to the individual). Already available public or publicly available infrastructure might include college or university videoconference rooms or computer labs, computers in schools, adult education centres and Band offices, local businesses including communication technology companies.

MODES OF STEP-WISE IMPLEMENTATION: FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY

Many of the individuals I spoke with during my work on this project readily envisioned a full-blown final product: a network of policy research institutions across the north, each adapted to its locale but all enjoying the benefits of adequate office space, good technology, and sufficient numbers of colleagues working together to create synergy and innovative productivity. They pictured institutions with good communications programs and vital links to the purposes of the many small communities in each northern region. And they could imagine conferences and publications programs making a regular contribution to northern and indeed circumpolar political and social life.

No one, however, expects that this dream will be realized in a single step. Indeed, there are good reasons to take a step-wise or incremental approach. First, of course, the cost of realizing the grand vision would be very high, and likely beyond the means of any northern group to raise, even if they did have the vital support of this Foundation. Secondly, though, it is important to consider that creation of a new policy institution is necessarily an aspect of the broad process of political and institutional innovation that has been underway in most of Canada's north for some time. For the new institution to contribute positively, it will have to find its own place –in dialogue with the people it is meant to serve, and without disrupting other important purposes. This will take time and it will require institutional experimentation and learning.

It is also clear that each northern region finds itself in a different position. The state of readiness in Yukon is impressive, a consequence of the length of time Yukoners have been living with a relatively settled set of political institutions and their commitment to adapt these gradually to the unfolding of Aboriginal self-government. Different first steps might be possible in this setting than can be envisioned in the new territory of Nunavut, for example, where the structure of government itself is still taking shape.

An earlier section of this report (pp 15-17) considers the question of institutional form, reviewing the promise associated with a network, an institute, a virtual organization, a club, a conference series or a research program –or some combination of these. The next matter is to consider what is practical, considering the specific conditions in various northern regions. Despite the differences among regions, a few points about practical matters can be made.

Rather than conceiving of a series of steps through which each northern region will progress, then, it makes sense to consider a menu of possible initiatives, any one of which might advance the general cause of improving northern-based policy capacity and public awareness of its value. All of the initiatives listed below are potentially complementary. I would note also, that all have the status of “logical possibilities.” Not all are of equal interest to the people in the North who would have to make them work. It is best to imagine the different initiative listed below as sketching the range of options available to

each region in the North, with northern proponents and planners choosing among them.² The practical and financial implications of each choice are indicated.

1. Founding Meeting

Seed funding to enable interested parties from a suitable regional grouping to come together to plan a program of activity.

Activities arising from the meeting might include further fund-raising, legal analysis, meetings, and consultations.

Resource requirements:

Personnel: Minimal; could be done by volunteers

Financial: Cheapest option; requires one-shot fund-raising

2. Policy Research Conferences

Full or partial funding for a series of conferences, planned sufficiently far in advance to permit them to galvanize actual research activity.

The conferences could be organized by committees in each northern region. An enhancement would be for the organizers to promote a series of conferences in different regions of the north, building in some central staff support. This might improve the chances of continuity, support work in the areas where volunteer resources are relatively thin, and assist with publication and dissemination of research results.

Resource requirements:

Personnel: Substantial; could be a partnership between paid coordinator(s) in the north and volunteers in the north and at southern universities

Financial: Multi-year funding required; some institutional base for financial management and stability of communications

3. Policy Research Programs

Full or partial funding for new policy research programs in targeted areas of policy need.

Funding for new policy research could be built into the planning for policy research conferences, permitting organizers to encourage independent research in suitable topic areas.

Resource requirements:

Personnel: Direct involvement of researchers essential

Financial: Extremely variable depending upon scope of projects

² For fuller descriptions of all of these initiatives, see pp. 15-17 above.

4. Policy Research Publication Program

There is a need for better dissemination of research results throughout the north, and among northern regions. The policy research conferences and policy research programs will generate knowledge that should be made available to members of the northern public, in appropriate languages and explained in non-technical language.

Resource requirements:

Personnel: Editors, desktop publishers and webmasters

Financial: Extremely variable, with web publication being the cheapest means of dissemination. For print publications, costs could be reduced by partnerships.

5. A Policy Research Network

A way of adding value to the content-generating measures listed above, and of supporting broad dissemination and as well as collaboration across regions, would be the maintenance of a web-based policy research network.

Resource requirements:

Personnel: At least one webmaster, perhaps a full time coordinator as well

Financial: Salary of webmaster and some limited expenses.

Organizational and Financial Feasibility Are Linked

The relatively small population base of the North, the challenging array of policy analysis needs, the widespread and active interest among northerners in improving the policy capacity available to them all argue for innovation. It seems clear that any new initiative or initiatives should be supported by financial trusts or endowments, insulated from the political purposes of the original donors. Government funding may have a role to play, but it will be also important for the charitable sector and especially for the resource and other industries whose profitability is built on the development of northern resources, to contribute to the endowment(s).

It seems clear also that organizational innovation will be needed to meet the specific challenges associated with developing an active and effective policy community in northern social and geographical conditions. Specifically, how can the need for collaboration and mutual support among policy communities in northern regions be balanced with the equally important need for regionally relevant and specific policy initiatives? One possibility among several would be the formation of a pan-northern policy research endowment fund, created with contributions from the private and public sectors, and available to a network of cooperating, but independent organizations.

COMMENTS INVITED

The Gordon Foundation and Frances Abele are interested in your reactions to this report. Please write to us.

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