

A Strategy for Renewal of the **Northwest Territories Housing Corporation**

Purpose

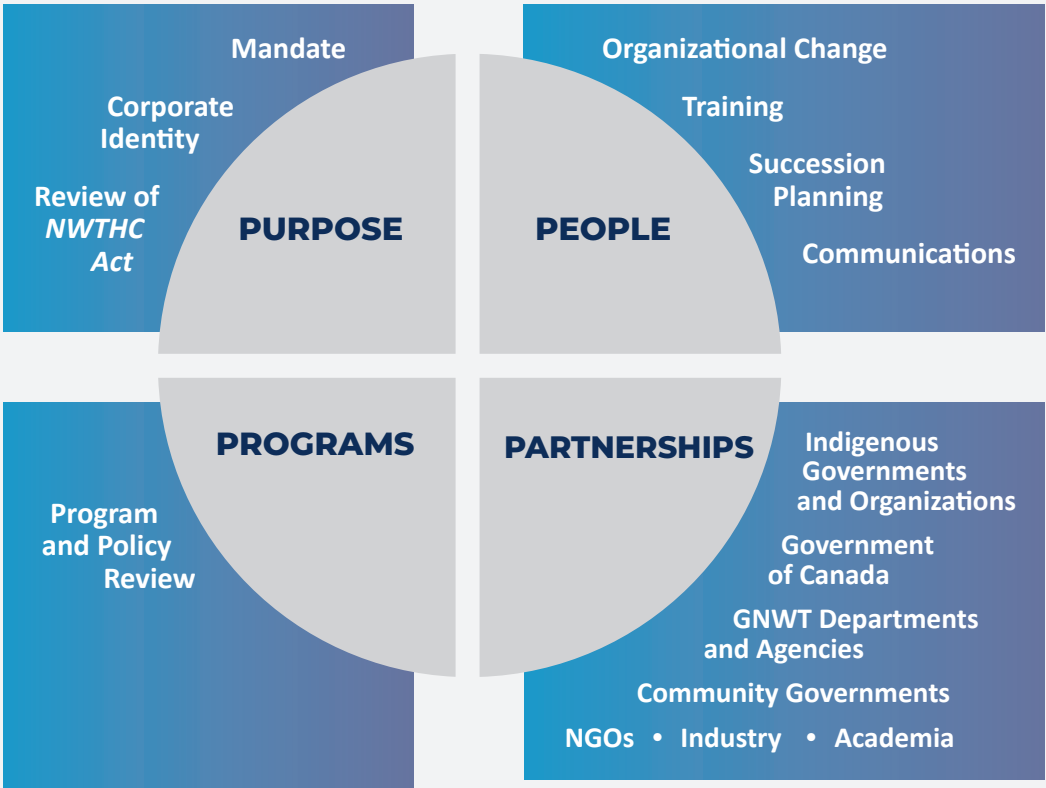
People

Programs

Partnerships

November 2021

A Strategy for Renewal of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation





Introduction

The past several years have seen an unprecedented focus on the Northwest Territories (NWT) housing crisis.

The 19th Legislative Assembly made increasing the number of affordable homes and reducing NWT core housing need one of its priorities, and the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) Mandate for 2019-2023 includes several actions related to housing.

On March 4, 2021, the Legislative Assembly passed a motion calling for a change in the mission of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWTHC). A large number of reports, recommendations and consultations have occurred within the last five years, including one of the most extensive surveys of the NWT public ever conducted by the GNWT¹.

Further recommendations from the Standing Committee on Social Development are anticipated in the form of a report on the NWTHC's social housing programming, and the high level of interest and scrutiny will continue through new multilateral forums such as the NWT Council of Leaders.

To address the need and demands for change, this strategy acknowledges these existing sources of direction and presents practical actions to build on the recent successes of the NWTHC within the remaining term of the 19th Assembly, setting the stage for success in the future.

The proposed approach is action-oriented: it is clear that the time for further studies is over, and that it is time to implement solutions.²

This strategy groups proposed actions into four categories:



1 The Housing Engagement Survey (November 2016 – March 2017) included about 10% of the households in the Northwest Territories: *Voices on Housing: A Summary of the Results of the Northwest Territories Housing Engagement Survey* (May 2017).

2 Salt River First Nation Chief David Poitras, NWT Council of Leaders Meeting, June 11, 2021.

Purpose

The roles of the NWTHC are set out in the *Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Act*. Under the Act, there is flexibility in how the NWTHC's roles are carried out.

The fiftieth anniversary of the NWTHC in 2022 provides a useful focal point for changes.

Actions

Mandate: With participation of staff and stakeholders, update Mission Statement and policies of the NWTHC consistent with NWT Legislative Assembly Motion 30-19(2) *Actions for Improved Housing Outcomes* (March 4, 2021), to reflect its role in social wellness.

- Existing mission statement: <https://www.nwthc.gov.nt.ca/en/nwthc-mission-statement>
- Refocus the NWTHC on its role in the delivery of social housing
- The NWTHC is not primarily a landlord or a business operation, although delivery of market housing remains part of its role
- Clarify the role of the NWTHC with respect to homelessness
- Renewed focus on delivery of programs to those who need them most
- Clarify the role of the NWTHC vis-a-vis Indigenous Governments, the NGO sector, and communities – to confirm how the NWTHC fits within the broader landscape of housing in the NWT (NWTHC is not the mechanism for all housing solutions – but it needs to more clearly define its role to allow it to focus on achieving success within that mandate)

Corporate Identity: Review and refresh NWTHC corporate identity consistent with the revised mission

- Primarily for financial reasons, the NWTHC is a corporation, but being “corporate” is not its goal
- This action will signal a clear break with the past, an improved reputation and new way of doing things
- Several provincial jurisdictions have moved away from “Corporation” in their name (B.C., Nova Scotia, Manitoba)
- For example: Housing NWT instead of Northwest Territories Housing Corporation
- Update visual identity to align with the revised mission statement



Review of the *Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Act* (future action):

- Due to the time requirements, would likely carry over to the 20th Assembly
- Ensure that the Act is not a barrier to achieving revised mandate
- Modernize, in collaboration with Indigenous Governments, acknowledging and facilitating Indigenous self-government
- For example, Act currently does not refer to Indigenous self-government

People

The people of the NWTHC and the Local Housing Authorities (LHOs) delivering housing programs to the NWT public are its most important resource.

Without a trained, effective workforce that has the support of the Minister, the President and CEO, and senior management, the NWTHC will not be able to successfully fulfill its purpose.

This is particularly true at the regional level, where front line staff deliver NWTHC programs.

Actions

Organizational Change: There is anecdotal evidence that regional offices may not be adequately resourced to deliver programming³, and questions have been raised about the structure of the NWTHC and LHOs more generally

- Examine opportunities for organizational changes and efficiencies
- Improve working relationship and review balance of staffing levels between HQ and the Regional Offices
- Consider whether broader organizational changes might be needed
- Clarify the role of the LHO Board and examine whether local/regional boards or other structures would be most effective in supporting future program delivery
- Ensure that LHO boards and staff are supported in their delivery of NWTHC programs, and that the duties of LHOs are understood and clearly set out in Community Housing Service Agreements
- Prioritize the recognition of employee achievements

³ See for example, Ombud recommendation 3 in Northwest Territories Ombud Special Report 01-2021, File #2014 – A Shortfall in C.A.R.E. : Fairness in Homeowner Assistance Programs. <https://nwtombud.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Fairness-in-Homeowner-Assistance-Programs-Special-Report-1-21-1.pdf>



Training: Help NWT HC staff excel in their jobs and careers

- Staff, particularly at the regional level, have voiced that they don't always have the training necessary to perform their jobs or achieve success in their work with the NWT HC or in their chosen career paths. Some specific areas of note include:
 - Employee on-boarding
 - Training with computer applications and on-line tools
 - Keeping employees and local contractors up-to-date with changing code requirements
- Refocusing on social-housing delivery as an integrated service may require developing employee skillsets in areas such as dealing with hostile behaviour, trauma-informed service delivery, and other areas

Succession Planning: Attracting and retaining dedicated staff

- The NWT HC is fortunate to have a considerable number of long-serving employees who are dedicated to their work and who carry important "corporate knowledge"
- Sustainability of the corporation requires that a new generation see work with the NWT HC as a fulfilling career where ideas and innovation are valued
- Promote opportunities for mentoring and knowledge transfer

Communications: Strengthen communications between Headquarters, Regions and LHOs, across regions, and with the public through tools including regular opportunities to meet, website improvements, newsletters and advertising

- Better outward communication of the successes and the challenges of our work
- Create an overarching communications strategy for the mandate and renewal exercise
- Create and implement communications plans and ensure communications are designed and delivered in a client-appropriate manner for Indigenous Government, NGO, and Legislative Assembly relationships and for the public

Programs

The programs and policies of the NWTCH will require review to ensure that they are aligned with the revised mission statement.

The programs and policies of the NWTCH should be client-centered, transparent and delivered in a way that meets standards of administrative fairness. There may be a perception that NWTCH programming is not as innovative as it could be, and may simply repackage old ideas.

Actions

Program and Policy Review

- Review NWTCH programs and policies in light of any changes to the mission and any strategic goals, with an objective of any policy and programming changes coming into effect on April 1, 2023
 - Working with Council of Leaders Housing Working Group consistent with the commitment of Premier Cochrane and Minister Chinna of June 11, 2021
- Set and communicate realistic expectations – limited resources mean the NWTCH will not be able to address all needs
- NWTCH programs and policies need to be fair, transparent, and internally coherent and the criteria for deciding on applications should be published. Exceptions to policies should be rare and accountability should be a feature of all NWTCH decision-making.
- Re-establish annual intake periods for programs instead of year-round intakes, to ensure that applications are compared on a fair basis and decisions align with procurement for the ensuing work season
- Review service standards with a view to proactively communicating with program applicants



- Focus on using limited resources efficiently – less administration = more money into housing to address those with highest needs
- Innovating in construction programs taking into account
 - Cultural appropriateness
 - Energy efficiency, climate change and greenhouse gas reduction
 - Changing technology and demographics
- Improve metrics to better evaluate and report on the effectiveness of programming
- Maximize economic and training opportunities for money spent on housing
 - Trades training and contracting practices
- Encourage innovation in program design

Partnerships

The NWT HC has been criticized for a perceived failure to collaborate with other partners to maximize housing-related opportunities in the NWT. There is a perception that the NWT HC is competing instead of collaborating with Indigenous Governments, and the NWT HC's relationship with federal government departments requires revitalization. Improving communication at all stages will be critical to building these partnerships and in some cases, correcting erroneous perceptions. These actions focus on collaboration with partners, instead of competition and "silos."

Actions

Indigenous Governments and Organizations

- Move from a competitive to a collaborative approach to getting funding to the NWT to serve NWT citizens
- Promote reconciliation, recognizing that choices about housing location and type have been a tool of colonization in the NWT in the past
 - Engage with Indigenous Governments on the type and location of housing within their communities, including resolving land tenure issues
 - Advance self-government, even where Indigenous governments have not yet chosen to exercise their law-making powers under a self-government agreement (Tłıchq̓ Government, Délı̄ne Government)
 - Communicate messages in Indigenous languages, where appropriate
 - Where the Indigenous Government is not the lead proponent of a community housing plan, ensure that the Indigenous Government is engaged and supportive of the Community Housing Plan initiative and that it continues to be part of future implementation of community housing plans
- Engage effectively through the Council of Leaders, bilateral MOUs and other opportunities

- Recognize the unique needs and aspirations of Indigenous Government partners and communities, and take concrete steps to address them
 - promoting linkages with Community Housing Plans already underway
 - use the Community Housing Support Program as an opportunity to partner with Indigenous Governments to achieve priority projects

Government of Canada

- Continually improve working relationship and communication with federal departments and agencies, with focus on CMHC, CIRNAC and ISC
- Consistent with desire expressed by the NWT Council of Leaders, facilitate and advocate for NWT Indigenous Government access to distinctions-based funding⁴
- Recognize that Canada is a necessary partner in ensuring the sustainability of housing programming in the NWT
 - Promote solution to declining operations and maintenance funding
- Clearly communicate the unique needs and challenges of housing in the NWT
- Clearly acknowledge and celebrate federal government successes where a GNWT need has been met
- Where there are mutual interests, work tri-territorially with Canada on Northern issues

GNWT Departments and Agencies

Improve collaboration and information sharing with GNWT departments and agencies including Aurora College, on matters including:

- homelessness
- integrated service delivery
- land tenure issues
- home insurance
- trades apprenticeships
- training for NWTHC and LHO staff
- staff market rental needs

⁴ Several Indigenous leaders suggested this at the NWT Council of Leaders Meeting, June 11, 2021

Community Governments

Engage with community governments and the Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC) on how to improve communications and working relationships related to housing development in NWT communities.

These conversations may include multiple partners and stakeholders around such issues as:

- community planning and development
- access to adequately serviced and zoned land for housing development
- homelessness
- development/implementation of community housing plans

Non-Governmental Organizations

Work to strengthen collaboration with the limited NGO sector of the NWT, particularly those organizations that are already proven partners of the NWTCH (YWCA, Habitat for Humanity)

Industry

Work to facilitate private industry, and in particular northern businesses, to play a greater role in addressing the housing shortage

Academia

- Foster relationships aimed at innovation and new research in the areas of housing, energy efficiency, homelessness and related policy
- Build the reputation of the NWTCH for openness to change and innovation

