

AURORA COLLEGE MANDATE AGREEMENT

2025-2028



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INTRODUCTION

MANDATE AGREEMENT PREAMBLE

This Aurora College Mandate Agreement (ACMA) focuses on the priorities shared by the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) and the Aurora College Board of Governors until 2028 and contains the shared strategic priorities and the scope of activities undertaken by Aurora College to its mandate.

The requirement for an ACMA is established in the Post-Secondary Education Act and the process for Aurora College is further defined in the Aurora College Act. The structure and required components of the ACMA are outlined in the Aurora College Mandate Regulations.

That Aurora College should be transformed into a polytechnic university was central to the NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework 2019-2029. The urgent need for this transformation is highlighted by the extreme changes in the Northern environmental, political and economic landscapes that require innovative, informed and committed action by Northerners, now.

The ACMA may be renewed in the event of substantive policy or program changes that affect ACMA commitments. Any such amendment would be mutually endorsed by the Minister and Board of Governors.

TOWARDS A UNIQUE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY IN ARCTIC EDUCATION

Significant progress has been made in the transformation process as we move toward the formal launch of the polytechnic university in the Fall of 2027¹. To date, 69 of the 80 original milestones are complete. Since a polytechnic university will bring considerable benefits to NWT communities, there is a collective commitment to achieve this goal.

Building on the successes of Aurora College, the polytechnic university will prepare students for the modern workforce in key sectors such as natural resources, health and social services, education, technology, and applied research among others. Focusing on these high-demand areas will ensure graduates have the skills and knowledge needed to anticipate and thrive in a quickly changing labour market.

In addition to academic programs, enhanced research capabilities will play a critical role in addressing the North's unique challenges and opportunities. This will not only contribute to global knowledge but also provide practical solutions tailored to the specific needs of northern industry and local communities.

Indigenous knowledge and practices will be integrated into all aspects of the institution, ensuring that education and research reflect the North's unique cultural and environmental contexts. This approach will grow the institution into a global leader in Arctic education, fostering an inclusive and culturally relevant learning environment that respects and celebrates Indigenous knowledge and traditions.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PLANNING AND REPORTING

Aurora College is engaged in institutional planning on an annual and three-year cycle. This planning is reflected in the ACMA through the shared priorities. The planning and reporting are intended to ensure continuous quality improvement of the institution and satisfy the occasional review by the Campus Alberta Quality Council for continued academic recognition.

ECE and the GNWT also engage in an annual capital and operational planning cycle focusing on performance, business and capital planning, and budgeting. The planning and reporting documents of Aurora College and the GNWT include:

- Aurora College Corporate Plan;
- Aurora College Strategic Plan;
- Aurora College Academic Plan
- Aurora Research Institute Strategic Plan;
- Post-Secondary Education Accountability Framework; and
- Government Strategic and Business Planning.

¹ Launch in 2027 is dependent on the outcome of the Fall 2025 CAQC evaluation.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

The NWT Post-Secondary Education Strategic Framework 2019-2029 set an expectation for the ACMA vision and goals. These have been enhanced as shown in square brackets [].

VISION

Every resident of the NWT has an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential by obtaining a post-secondary education from institutions that are student-centred, accessible, high quality, relevant, and accountable [and that make a visible impact on the resilience of the NWT and its communities to prosper and evolve in a changing dynamic future. These have been further developed for the transformed polytechnic university in the “vision, mission and values”]

GOALS

1. Prioritize student success;
2. Increase access to post- secondary education opportunities;
3. Remain responsive to [actual and anticipate and support future] labour demands in the NWT;
4. Remain responsive to local and regional needs; and
5. Support growth of the knowledge economy.

AURORA COLLEGE’S VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

VISION

Through the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university, we will establish a university in the North and for the North that creates equitable learning, research, and career opportunities for residents across the Northwest Territories and beyond.

MISSION

Demonstrate leadership in the delivery of relevant and meaningful education, research, and reconciliation actions rooted in strong connections to Northern land, tradition, community, and people.

VALUES

HONOURING NORTHERN LAND, PEOPLE, AND CULTURE

We value the uniqueness of this land and the people who live here. We respect the land, water, air, and animals. We work with community leaders, organizations, and individuals to strengthen collaboration and build relationships with the communities we call home.

EXCELLENCE AND INTEGRITY

We are dedicated to supporting our students, faculty, and staff in their pursuit of academic excellence. We hold ourselves to the highest standards in our teaching, research, and ethical behaviour. We always strive to incorporate emerging practices and approaches to ensure continuous improvement.

INCLUSIVENESS AND DIVERSITY

We welcome the richness that comes from different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. We foster a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion that celebrates different ways of being, knowing, seeing, and doing. We recognize the unique needs of individuals and work to support their success in their journey at Aurora College.

INNOVATION

We foster a culture of innovation, curiosity, and constant exploration. We inspire and nurture these qualities, striving to find new and exciting ways to meet the unique needs of the North.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We believe that accountability is key to building trust and creating meaningful impact in our communities. We hold ourselves accountable to the people we serve – our students, staff, and community members – and ensure that our actions, processes, and programs reflect this commitment.

AREAS OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH SPECIALIZATION

Areas of specialization are central to a post-secondary institution's identity. They focus on how vibrant communities are fostered. Continuous improvement and innovation also help prepare students to adapt creatively to an ever-evolving future. As part of the transformation to a polytechnic university, areas of specialization will inform change and investment and help define success.

As part of the transformation to a polytechnic university, areas of specialization will inform change, attract investment and focus efforts and resources. They also highlight the institution's teaching and research focus to students, educators, researchers, and partners.

FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

Aurora College will strive to find a place for every resident who seeks an opportunity to further their skills, knowledge and abilities through post-secondary education and applied research. This means excelling in programs and support that provides students with the foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities to pursue their education and career goals, regardless of their starting point.

Addressing the needs of Indigenous students in foundational learning is crucial for ensuring equitable access to education and fostering student success. Foundational learning will remain a key area for enhancement and growth as the college transforms to a polytechnic university.

SKILLED TRADES AND TECHNOLOGY

Skilled trades make up an important segment of the labour market, and training will target areas with a high potential for employment.

Keeping pace with current and future labour demands requires close and ongoing collaboration with NWT employers, aiming for future preparedness and adaptability. Fostering Indigenous needs in skilled trades and technology is essential for building pathways to economic self-sufficiency and community prosperity.

There is also great potential for research programs that seek innovative solutions to constructing and maintaining appropriate Northern infrastructure.

EARTH RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Earth resources and environmental management are interconnected and can be addressed through common teaching and research programs.

The NWT has cutting-edge processes and governance structures for environmental impact assessments that create unique opportunities for employment and research.

The labour demands and research opportunities related to earth resources are significant from exploration to extraction, remediation and reclamation. NWT residents must be first in line for these employment opportunities.

Integrating Indigenous contributions and ways of knowing in earth resources and environmental management is vital for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation. By integrating Indigenous perspectives, Aurora College will empower students to become leaders in addressing environmental challenges, fostering culturally grounded and ecologically sound solutions.

NORTHERN HEALTH, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

This area of specialization focuses on empowering people to help and support others in Northern communities. This will include teaching and research that supports physical, mental, and emotional

health in a manner that fosters resilient and thriving people and communities. It will also include training for educators who will, in turn, provide care, mentorship, and support to generations of Northerners.

Embedding Indigenous needs in northern health, education, and community services is critical for fostering culturally responsive care and education. Tailoring programs with Indigenous perspectives will better prepare students to serve their communities, improve health outcomes, and strengthen social services.

BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

Promoting Indigenous needs in business and leadership is essential for empowering Indigenous entrepreneurs and leaders to drive economic prosperity and self-determination within their communities. By incorporating Indigenous knowledge, values and governance models, culturally informed leaders can be developed to navigate both traditional and modern business environments.

These efforts will support and be informed through close collaboration with the business community. The NWT has untapped economic potential and skills that will support opportunities for economic diversification, create jobs, and strengthen communities.

SHARED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

TRANSFORM TO A POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

This priority overarches all work to be undertaken for the duration of the ACMA. The success of Aurora College will be examined in the context of transformational change and progress toward becoming an effective, efficient, and sustainable polytechnic university equipped to meet the needs of current and future generations of Northerners.

Success in any area of the ACMA must not limit the transformation process. The ACMA is about building a foundation for the successful launch of the polytechnic university in 2027².

STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE

Aurora College will continue to implement a new system of tricameral governance, which includes the Board of Governors, Academic Council, and Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council along with the Research Advisory Council.

The relationship between the Aurora College Board of Governors and the Minister has evolved to reflect national standards and best practices in post-secondary education, reflecting a more arm's length relationship, which will support institutional success.

The Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council work alongside the Academic Council and Board of Governors is essential for ensuring the development of a leading northern polytechnic university that honours and integrates Indigenous knowledge systems with academic and governance structures.

IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Addressing infrastructure challenges across campuses and student housing is critical for supporting the unique educational needs of the territory. Aging facilities and inadequate

infrastructure limit the capacity to deliver high-quality programming, particularly the North Slave Campus in Yellowknife.

The lack of sufficient student housing also exacerbates barriers to education, especially for students from remote communities. By prioritizing new and creative uses of existing infrastructure, including student housing, we will foster an inclusive and accessible learning environment that supports economic prosperity and attracts future investment.

ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Aurora College is committed to excellence by fostering a dynamic learning, teaching, and research environment. This will benefit the members of the Aurora College community and contribute positively to the NWT. This priority will also be characterized by new programs.

The spirit and intent of Indigeneity will also be promoted, including embedding Indigenous languages, worldviews, traditions, and culture in all aspects of the institution.

LEARNING CENTRED

Aurora College will provide learners with programs and services that are adaptive and flexible to help meet their academic and personal goals. There is a focus on empowering learners to develop the confidence necessary to be successful during their studies and beyond.

Fostering a sense of success and community well-being, and education that is culturally relevant and addresses all students' needs and experiences will be promoted.

ENHANCE CONNECTIONS

Aurora College will establish and strengthen partnerships with Indigenous governments, communities, industry, the GNWT,

non-governmental organizations, and other academic institutions. These partnerships will be a key element in responding to local and regional needs, and to labour demand.

Building strong connections with education, industry, infrastructure, and funding partners will ensure students and staff have more opportunities to learn and grow. This includes identifying and promoting clear academic pathways for prospective students in communities to access post-secondary education and training.

The Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council will guide reconciliation efforts and build stronger relationships with Elders, families, schools, and communities to promote the revitalization of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, being, and believing into programs and operations.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Aurora College is committed to transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the need for integrated planning, operational excellence, and continuous quality improvement.

This will be supported by monitoring and reporting on institutional performance, a clear understanding of operational needs and costs, evolution of Aurora's Colleges arm's length relationship with the GNWT, and through practices that are culturally inclusive and aligned with the values and needs of Indigenous communities.

² Launch in 2027 is dependent on the outcome of the Fall 2025 CAQC evaluation.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Action	Timeline	Measure
Transform to a Polytechnic University		
Identify the first Made-in-the North Degree	Winter 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A degree program summary will be prepared outlining the decision for the first Made-in-the North degree
Submission of Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) application	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The institutional self-study is submitted, along with a program proposal for the Made-in-the-North degree, for CAQC's review
The Board of Governors, along with senior staff, will host the external review of college facilities, policies, procedures, and programs by assessors appointed by the CAQC virtually and/or on-site	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The external evaluation team appointed by CAQC completes its virtual and/or onsite review
Complete Institutional Quality Assurance External Review Evaluation	2025 - 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAQC completes an organizational review of Aurora College, culminating in a recommendation to the GNWT regarding whether Aurora College meets CAQC established organizational quality standards
Polytechnic University Legislation	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building from the Aurora College Act, polytechnic university legislation is enacted
Polytechnic university launch	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official transition from Aurora College to a polytechnic university
Strengthen Governance		
Continue to strengthen the arm's length relationship between the Board of Governors and the GNWT	2025 and Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through continued conversation and collaboration, the legislated roles of the Minister and Board of Governors is recognized and supported
Develop the mechanisms for receiving both Academic Council and Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council recommendations to the Board of Governors in addition to the Research Advisory Council recommendations	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through the receipt of recommendations from the Academic Council and the Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council, the Board of Governors will process and make decisions regarding recommendations, and share such with their tricameral entities
Complete implementation of Academic Council, with a lens on the academic governance of a polytechnic university	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Council advises and assists the Board of Governors as necessary through approved Terms of Reference for all Academic Council committees
Implementation of Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council informed by their legislative framework and mandate items	2025 - 2026	Strategic Directions document developed and approved by the Board of Governors

Improve Infrastructure		
Build partnerships with all levels of government as well as private investors to secure funding for the development of student housing and a North Slave Campus	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch an Expression of Interest to identify potential partners for housing developments
	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal engagement plan to lobby for federal funding to support College infrastructure
	2026 - 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOUs and partnerships solidified to start development
Decide on future direction for existing student housing options at Thebacha campus	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conclude assessment and develop next steps on future of Fort Smith housing units
Academic and Applied Research Excellence		
First year General Studies implemented	Fall 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum and development work will be completed ECE System Coordination and Quality Assurance Reviews completed Students interested in applying to the BEd and BSW programs starting in the Fall of 2027 can enroll along with undeclared General Studies students
First year Bachelor of Education Implemented	Fall 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum and development work will be completed ECE System Coordination and Quality Assurance Reviews completed
First year Bachelor of Social Work Implemented	Fall 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum and development work will be completed ECE System Coordination and Quality Assurance Reviews completed
Increase research capacity for applied research opportunities at Thebacha and North Slave campuses	2027 - 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish formalized partnerships with Indigenous Communities
Learning Centred		
Equitable pathways within College programming	Fall 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Studies available via distance New programs are developed to build in multiple pathways (ongoing) Existing programs are reviewed to expand pathway options (ongoing)
Consult with Indigenous Knowledge Holders Council (IKHC) with ways to support students at Aurora College	Fall 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IKHC Develop recommendations around student supports

Enhance Connections		
Partnerships linked to research services	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOUs between Aurora College and partners • Collaborative research projects
Build connections with Indigenous governments, industry, K-12 system, and other Northern collaborators to enhance programming	2025 - 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Advisory Committees and Program Review focus groups include representatives from Indigenous governments, industry, and/or K-12 as appropriate
Improved Organizational Effectiveness		
<p>Maximize performance of existing and new resources</p> <p>Secure sustainable funding to operate as a polytechnic university</p>	2027 - 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish polytechnic university funding formula with the GNWT • Identify funding from non-GNWT sources
Organizational Design	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, meeting labour market demands and metrics associated with PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environment, Legal)
Staffing model established between Aurora College, GNWT Finance, and UNW	<p>2025 - 2027</p> <p>2024 - 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the organizational design plan as funding and opportunities allow • Establishment of the Corporate Services Division
Staffing model established between Aurora College, GNWT Finance, and UNW	2027 - 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establish discussions as per UNW MOU that would support a university staffing model

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND METRICS

Performance indicators and metrics will be supported by the data from the implementation of the Post-Secondary Education Accountability Framework. Accountability Framework data, including surveys of students and employers, jointly administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and Aurora College, will demonstrate progress on shared strategic priorities within the ACMA. The Annual Report and the Corporate Plan will help to communicate Aurora College achievements and successes.

Indicators of Academic and Research Excellence:

1. Number of students who acquire employment closely related to their interests
2. Number of students who acquire employment in Northern Communities that are closely related to their interests
3. Increase in proportion of students who succeed in completing a degree
4. Feedback from communities indicating that students have made a positive difference in the community
5. Feedback from employers who report students were well prepared for their job
6. Awards acknowledging educational or research innovation

Indicators of Learning Centred:

7. Growth in students graduating
8. Growth in the number of communities represented in the student body
9. Growth in students attracted from other Northern jurisdictions

Indicators of Connections:

10. Increase in amount and proportion of non-GNWT funding
11. Increase in students financially supported by industry or non-government and civil society organizations
12. Increase in externally supported research by number of projects and dollar value

Indicators of Organizational Effectiveness:

13. Increased peer recognition of the quality of faculty
14. Increased student ratings of the learning experience
15. Decreasing graduation cost/student to the taxpayer

TERM

The term of the Mandate should conclude on July 1, 2028. However, the ACMA will remain valid until a renewed ACMA is approved by the Minister.



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