

Northern Lights College Submission Funding Review

1. What are the most important contributions your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

Northern Lights College (NLC) benefits regional businesses by increasing consumer spending in the region and supplying a steady flow of qualified, trained workers to the workforce. For example, NLC added \$289.2 million in income to NLC's service region economy during the FY2019-2020¹. For context, the \$289.2 million impact was equal to approximately 5.0% of the total gross regional product (GRP) of the college's service region. This contribution by the college on its own is larger than the entire retail trade industry in the region. NLC's total impact can also be expressed in terms of jobs supported. The \$289.2 million impact supported 2,907 regional jobs, using the jobs-to-sales ratios specific to each industry in the region. This means that one out of every 15 jobs in the college's service region is supported by the activities of NLC and its students. Among non-education industry sectors, NLC's activity and alumni in the retail trade industry sector supported 553 jobs in FY2019-20. These are impacts that would not have been generated without the college's presence in the college's service region.

NLC enriches the lives of students by raising their lifetime earnings and helping them achieve their individual potential. For every dollar students invest in NLC, in the form of out-of-pocket expenses and forgone time and money, they receive a cumulative value of \$1.80 in higher future earnings. The college benefits provincial taxpayers through increased tax receipts and a reduced demand for government-supported social services. Altogether, the social benefits of NLC equal a present value of \$265.8 million. These benefits include \$262 million in added income through students' increased lifetime earnings and increased business output, as well as \$3.8 million in social savings related to health, crime, and income assistance in BC. Finally, NLC benefits society as a whole in BC by creating a prosperous economy and generating a variety of savings through the improved lifestyles of students. In other words, for every dollar invested in NLC, people in BC will receive a cumulative value of \$4.40 in benefits. The benefits of this investment will occur for as long as NLC's FY 2019-20 students remain employed in the provincial workforce.

2. What is your institution doing to promote Reconciliation with Indigenous People and First Nations?

NLC is currently developing the Centre for Innovation in Indigenous Education (CIIE). The CIIE will explore innovative educational delivery theories, create community identified curriculum and programming, and undertake policy amendments that will position Indigenous traditional knowledge, culture, and language within the academic credentialing standards at the College. The CIIE will involve key members of our Indigenous partner communities in active decision making, ensuring that NLC is following the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan.

Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) are in place with three Indigenous communities in our region, and several other agreements are in the draft stages. NLC is taking steps to ensure that Indigenous partner communities are actively involved in decision making. For example, NLC is working with FNFN¹ to assist with community led curriculum development which upholds Indigenous oral histories and centers

¹ Fort Nelson First Nations

Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Additionally, NLC engaged with Ridgeline, BCOGC², and other industry partners to deliver a work integrated learning (WIL) project designed to prepare Indigenous students for careers in the land reclamation and remediation field. The program provided a set of courses incorporating indigenous knowledge and concepts. The program also provided students with the option of further progression through the NLC Land and Water Resources Diploma.

The Indigenous Education Department offers holistic programming that has been directed by student desire and need. The Indigenous Gathering Spaces have hosted drum making, drum circles, lunch and learns, strong women's circle, soup and bannock sessions, sewing and beading, and has worked alongside community organizations to provide responsive student programming that is culturally relevant and involves local knowledge keepers. We are launching an Elders-In-Residence program in the Fall semester of 2022. We recognize that interaction with Elders as a significant factor to improve the retention and success of Indigenous post-secondary students (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

3. What is your institution doing to promote equitable access for people who come from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances?

NLC has a substantial proportion of students that are first in family to attend post-secondary. This is a long-standing phenomenon at NLC. Much of our infrastructure is built to support students that lack a social support system that is familiar with post-secondary education. NLC seeks out opportunities for students to enter their post-secondary studies through shorter, flexible programming that allows students to gain confidence and experience with pre-college programming before continuing into a full program of studies. We continue to identify systemic barriers to accessing education by providing ways to overcome or remove barriers. For example, the NLC Foundation provides great opportunities for students through receipt of scholarships and bursaries.

4. What are your major challenges in enhancing the contribution your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

The geographic area covered by NLC is the largest of any institution in the province. Many communities that NLC services are in remote areas, with low density population. However, every community needs access to post-secondary education. Many of our smaller remote campuses act as an access point for post-secondary education. Cost of delivery to meet the needs of communities is extremely high, due to the remote nature of the area and winter conditions. NLC is faced with duplicating programs with small number of students (typically less than 5). Moreover, NLC staff are required to travel to our five campuses to support students. The trip from Chetwynd to Atlin is a 17 hour drive without access to any airports to support travel in the region. Faculty are also required to deliver a wide range of classes, unable to hire specialists due to the lower number of classes that a specialist can teach.

As a northern institution, we are subject to higher rates of turnover. NLC is usually a steppingstone in new faculty careers. Executive and management positions also have the same recruitment issues. Due to our location hiring for NLC is a challenge, potential candidates are reluctant to live in a northern remote location. We also compete in a provincial salary system with trying to fill temporary instructor vacancies.

Complicating the success of our students are the various barriers they face in accessing NLC, such as the ongoing challenge of connectivity in rural areas and in indigenous communities, with limited public transportation options.

5. What are the most significant contributions your institution makes in collaboration with

² British Columbia Oil and Gas Commission

other parts of BC's PSE system?

NLC continually builds upon its broad range of partnerships and collaborations with regional and community-based working groups. For example, the Northern Post-Secondary Council (NPSC) supports collaboration between post-secondary institutions in the north (i.e., UNBC, CNC, CMTN, NLC) and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training. This unique partnership demonstrates the strong commitment to provide access to high quality education in the North. An example of collaborative efforts of the NPSC is the partnership with the Mastercard Foundation in which the northern post-secondary institutions provided technical solutions to improve access for remote education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Doig River First Nation's Super Wi-Fi Project*, conceived and led by NLC provided high-speed internet to the Doig River First Nation community. This project removed barriers to post-secondary education for Indigenous students during the pandemic, particularly since program delivery was moved to online delivery across the province. The benefits continue today, as learners have access to programming (e.g., hybrid, hyflex) beyond traditional on campus, face-to-face learning. A second initiative of the NPSC is the Canada Learning Bond, "The Northern Promise" project. NLC is the lead institution for this project which aims to increase the number of students enrolled in the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) and Canada Learning Bond (CLB) programs throughout the north in all communities including Indigenous communities and to increase the number of students enrolled in post-secondary education in the north.

NLC also has well established transfer pathways with BC Universities and colleges. Examples include Aircraft Maintenance Technician (partner Okanagan College), Alaska Highway Consortium on Teacher Education (partner Simon Fraser University), Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program (partner University of Northern BC), and Bachelor of Engineering (BEng, BSEng) (partner University of Victoria).

6. What stands in the way of you collaborating more with the rest of BC's PSE system?

Several key factors impede collaborative efforts with other PSIs. For example, collaboration requires adequate staffing, however we are a very lean institution which requires staff to "fit in" extra projects into their workload. This becomes a workload strain particularly for those in leadership positions and faculty. A second factor is collective agreement misalignments between institutions. A specific example was when we were unable to participate in the Coast Mountain College's Contact North initiative owing to our language in our collective agreement.

Deciding how student FTE's should be handled is another barrier to collaboration. Since student FTE is a performance measure, institutions are mindful that each FTE is important to capture, especially for a small northern college such as NLC.

Our vast geographic college region (upper 1/3 of the province) makes it difficult for students, faculty, and administrative staff to travel for programming (students), networking and meetings (faculty and staff) with institutions south of our college region. Certainly, there are budgetary concerns when travelling given the distance as we are required to take additional days away since it is not possible to fly in and out in one day.

7. What are the key economic, demographic, social and technological trends that will unfold over the next 30 years that will impact British Columbia's PSE system?

Action to reduce the effects of climate change will have a large impact on the PSE system. NLC continues to include energy efficiencies in major renovations projects. Programming in the north as it pertains to climate change has not been a priority due to socioeconomic repercussions and requires funding to create more awareness and structure.

Canada, including northern BC, faces a shrinking and aging domestic population, and immigration is required for general population and economic growth over the foreseeable future. Furthermore, a tightening labour market, compounded by more workers reaching retirement age, leads to the conclusion

that immigration will need to address labour market shortages. The Government of BC projects a need for 1 million workers over the next decade, and much of that growth will be through immigrant attraction. In Northeast BC, the recent Labour Market Studies completed by NLC demonstrates the significant labour market shortages the region could face without new workers (many of whom will be immigrants).

Perpetual licensing and on-premises systems are a thing of the past. Modernization and futureproofing of our system and network infrastructure has resulted in significantly increased licensing/support costs. Consolidation of systems into Software as a Service platforms require reactive maintenance and configuration and will continue to put strain on IT resources as many of these systems have tightly knit interdependencies. Cybersecurity will continue to be the number one threat to PSIs, attack surface grows exponentially year over year as more services digitize and move into cloud/hybrid systems.

BC PSI's will see a shift in training models over the next 30 years with continuation of micro-credentials, an emphasis on just-in-time custom training, short term programming, and the shift to work integrated learning. Employers often cannot afford to have employees away from the workplace for long stretches and employ people that are sometimes under skilled. Work integrated learning requires supportive sponsors from industry and provincial funding to support the cost of training. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition and competency-based learning and assessment /assessment will also be important as mid-career workers seek upskilling to enter a different work sector. As PSI's develop programming with indigenous partners that is centered in ways of indigenous being and knowing we will see an increase in indigenous learners in the PSE system. This will require access to online delivery from remote communities, comprehensive wrap around student supports, and flexibility in faculty workload assignments which allow for teaching in off-campus sites that may be at a great distance from their home campus.

8. How do you think the PSE system needs to evolve in response to those trends?

Specialized staffing will need to be hired throughout the system to develop the foundation required for equity, diversity and inclusion with funding streams dedicated to this initiative. The labour market shortages forecasted for Canada/BC will require an increase in foreign workers and immigration to Canada. The diversity will demand key competencies in EDI. Our fastest growing domestic group are indigenous. We must gain an understanding of cultural differences in the emerging workforce, diversity and inclusion is key.

Major investment will be required to invest in infrastructure upgrades to reduce emissions. Cybersecurity threats evolve quickly, and dedicated resources are needed to provide a consistent, congruent defense to BCs PSIs. The PSE System also needs to continue to support the expansion of connectivity in all areas of the province.

Work integrated learning requires supportive sponsors from industry and community, provincial funding to support the cost of training and support smaller businesses. This is key to building longer term relationships with those unable to partake due to financial impacts to the businesses. Communities that have few workplace options or can only take a few workplace students contribute to the inability to build these resources.

9. How does your institution need to evolve in response to those trends?

To address equity, diversity and inclusion key priorities, there requires attention to, and resources placed in building a strong foundation to ensure success including key policies and procedures. Training and development of staff and faculty, and resourcing of key positions to address these priorities will take substantial investment by NLC and currently cannot be resourced in the current funding model.

Again, training and development of staff regarding climate change is required at NLC. Practices need to be reviewed to ensure NLC is achieving emission reductions. Energy management knowledge will be needed

to ensure buildings are operating as efficiently as possible. As an institution supporting the educational needs of the oil and gas sector as there is a balance between providing training for the oil and gas industry and incorporating programming that meets the needs of the larger energy sector.

International students are one of the fastest growing segments of newcomers to Canada and are increasingly an important source of new permanent residents. International students gain Canadian educational credentials and part-time work experience before entering the work force, and for local communities, they can be a great source of future workers. NLC will continue to attract international students. The link between international education and immigration continues to grow, and it is clear that international students in small communities offer an opportunity for those communities to address their labour market shortages and community needs.

To meet to labour market demands, NLC needs to work with industry to design programming that aligns with technological advances in the workplace (i.e., automation). Additionally, program delivery in terms of modality (e.g., online, hybrid, hyflex), duration (e.g., short courses that can be bundled into a credential), and responsiveness (e.g., just-in-time) will be critical to meet the needs of students of tomorrow as well as future business and industry needs.

10. Considering the above, what modifications to the funding formula would you recommend?

NLC would like to recommend the following modifications:

- Multiyear funding blocks with a northern remote multiplier. This would allow for strategic use of funding and long-term planning. This will also address the high operating cost in the north with smaller class sizes.
- Review of the ITA funding as it only funds direct instructional costs without consideration of student supports required. Base funding is currently being utilized to fill this gap in funding. Additionally, fund and expand the mandate of ITA to support programming for international students to meet skilled training needs.
- Review of one-time funding, this creates challenges as funding of this nature is often difficult to spend in a sustainable and impactful way. The projects themselves must be short term and often the balance is to ensure that the project is meaningful but able to be phased out if the funding goes away. There is little notice of incoming funding and no commitment of ongoing support.
- Review of the 2% tuition cap is also required. The ability to review program costing and receive approval for a tuition increase based on a set of criteria would allow one time adjustments for programs that have seen large increases in costs.
- Multi year funding to support the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan. The \$250,000 received is a very small amount of money to support all the indigenous communities in our region.

ⁱ Northern Lights College Economic Value. (April, 2021). *EMSI*, pp. 95.