

Reclaiming Our Narrative:

A Roadmap to Local Participation in N.W.T. Media

By Garrett Hinchey



Jane Glassco
Northern Fellowship

Fifth Cohort | Policy Recommendations



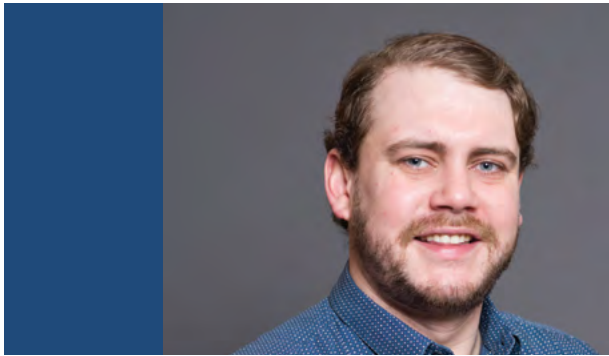


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Garrett Hinchey

Born and raised in Yellowknife, Garrett Hinchey is a Métis journalist, currently serving as CBC North's managing editor.

Garrett completed a Master's degree in journalism in 2014, and returned to his hometown, where he oversaw a variety of major projects for CBC North, including the 2017 North American Indigenous Games, the 2019 Canada Winter Games, and the 2019 N.W.T. election. As managing editor, he is responsible for CBC's journalism in all three territories, strategy, and hiring in the N.W.T.

Outside of the newsroom, Garrett has been heavily involved with the community, most notably through sport, which has shaped his life since he was a youth. Garrett has sat on the boards for N.W.T. Volleyball, Squash N.W.T., and

Yellowknife Minor Fastball, and currently serves as the president of the Yellowknife Fastball League, where he is overseeing a \$600,000 revitalization of the historic Tommy Forrest Ballpark. Garrett is also the founder of 100 Men Who Give a Damn Yellowknife, a charitable organization that has delivered over \$200,000 in funding to local causes.

A proud Yellowknifer, Garrett's pursuits center around making his home a better, more sustainable place to live. That mission has informed his work in the Fellowship, where he has explored ways to strengthen the N.W.T.'s media ecosystem, aiming to ultimately allow more Indigenous Northerners to tell their own stories to each other and the world.

Introduction

On February 13, 2021, in a small boardroom on the second floor of Yellowknife’s Northern United Place, a group of current and former Northern journalists met for the start of a two-day strategic planning session. The problem they had come to discuss: the territory’s lack of born-and-bred journalists and communicators.

As each member of the group took their chance to address each other in opening statements, outlining the problem and their own specific goals, Marie Wilson, a former managing editor of CBC North who headed up the territories’ first local TV offerings, spoke by telephone as a remote attendee:

“There is a solid and fundamental connection between information and democracy,” she said. “Information leads to understanding, and understanding is power, and power is a form of public service.”¹

There is no doubt that per capita, the Northwest Territories has an abundance of journalists. A fully staffed CBC bureau boasts dozens of employees; robust small business support and government advertising support a healthy private sector; and government and private funding both drive a number of Indigenous-language and Francophone outlets.

Information leads to understanding, and understanding is power, and power is a form of public service.”

— Marie Wilson, former CBC North managing editor

However, who holds those jobs – and who shapes that understanding – is more important than ever before. Global eyes are turning to the Arctic in a way that they have not in modern history. Both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls have recommendations focusing on the empowerment of Indigenous journalists. The current COVID-19 pandemic has also emphasized the importance of trust in media, which is falling, particularly in underrepresented communities.²

In many ways, it seems a no-brainer to hire journalists local to the Northwest Territories: their community connections allow for more robust coverage of the territory; they often carry a sense of respect and trust based on their names alone; and the jobs are abundant and well paid.

¹Marie Wilson, former CBC North managing editor N.W.T. journalism strategic planning session, Feb. 13, 2021.

²Felix Salmon, “Media trust hits new low,” Axios, Jan. 21, 2021, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/media-trust-crisis-2bf0ec1c-00c0-4901-9069-e26b21c283a9.html>

However, local journalists, and in particular local Indigenous journalists, are significantly underrepresented across N.W.T. newsrooms. A 2019 informal labour market survey identified the number of Indigenous editorial staff at under 25 per cent of the total number of journalism jobs in the territory (14 of 62).³ The majority of those represented are staff broadcasting in Indigenous languages, meaning that for English-language journalism, the lack of representation is even more dire.

It is not a stretch to say that lack of representation represents a threat to well-functioning governance in parts of the territory. A critical, connected media is essential to a well-functioning government; research shows that communities in the United States without local news media can end up with government inefficiency, higher costs for residents, and lower voter turnout.⁴

In the Northwest Territories, with fledgling Indigenous and community self-governments, and many remote communities without a journalist on the ground, these impacts can be felt dramatically. Often, communities only see themselves in the news when a major story catches the eye of a non-local, Yellowknife-based journalist – their day-to-day goings-on and municipal affairs are rarely covered, and successes of their residents go unnoticed.

“In terms of sheer numbers, you’ve probably got, in Yellowknife, the largest number of journalists per head anywhere in the Western world,” Ollie Williams, the news director for Yellowknife-based outlet Cabin Radio, told me in an interview. “But in terms of what coverage that actually ends up equating to, particularly of smaller communities, I think there is an ongoing struggle and one that you can probably never fully resolve ... that there are quite a lot of journalists in the Northwest Territories, but they have a lot of trouble getting to the communities, both physically and metaphorically, and actually unearthing stories that genuinely matter to all of those communities and all of those different groups of people.”⁵

This represents a disconnect with the stated intentions of N.W.T. newsrooms. The editorial leaders of Northern News Services Limited, Cabin Radio, and CBC North all said they would hire Indigenous northerners into editorial positions with limited experience – simply a keen interest in learning – but individually they face difficulties in identifying and recruiting locals.⁶

³Sara Minogue, “Informal Yellowknife journalism labour market survey,” August 2019 (unpublished manuscript presented to Aurora College November 2020), Microsoft Word file.

⁴Penelope Muse Abernethy, “The Expanding News Desert,” *Husman School of Journalism and Media*, accessed September 7, 2021, <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/reports/expanding-news-desert/>

⁵Ollie Williams (News Director, Cabin Radio), interview by the author, October 6, 2020.

⁶Mervin Brass (Senior Managing Director, CBC North), Ollie Williams (News Director, Cabin Radio), Bruce Valpy (Publisher, Northern News Services Ltd.), interviews by the author, October 2020.

“In terms of sheer numbers, you’ve probably got, in Yellowknife, the largest number of journalists per head anywhere in the Western world.”

—Ollie Williams, Cabin Radio

Locals, in tandem, say they have difficulty seeing themselves in journalistic roles, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation. In my own role running CBC North’s internship program, I have had multiple participants tell me that their hesitation into entering the industry was that they “never thought it was possible.”

These barriers to access not only cut off local access to an accessible profession, they also stunt leadership development, undermine Northerners’ ability to control their own global narrative, and impact the foundations of democracy at home.

This paper, then, aims to address the factors that have led to the lack of N.W.T. residents practicing journalism in their home territory; assess the impacts that this lack has had; and suggest policy pathways to improving the situation.

During the strategic planning session, former CBC Northbeat host and Sahtu Dene Elder Paul Andrew said that he asks himself all the time: “why do I do this?”

“I have a couple nieces, little ones,” he said. “I want them to have a better future. This is about reconciliation, this is about healing. People ... we have a chance to make it better for those coming after us.”⁷

⁷Paul Andrew (former broadcaster, CBC North), N.W.T. journalism strategic planning session, Feb. 13, 2021.

Background

Made-in-the-territory journalism has existed in the Northwest Territories since at least 1955, when the territory’s still-publishing weekly newspaper, *News/North*, began its life;⁸ however, it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the territory’s media landscape began to approximate its modern iteration.



Wally Firth working at a radio station turntable, 1967. Credit: N.W.T. Archives/YK Photo/N-2019-001: 0453.

During that time period, regional newspapers such as the *Inuvik Drum* (1964), *Yellowknifer* and *Hay River Hub* (1972), and *Northern Journal* (1977) were founded, and CBC expanded its Northern Service to include local radio and television programs in Indigenous languages. Local AM (now FM) radio station CJCD, Yellowknife’s first commercial radio station, hit the air in 1979.⁹

⁸NNSL Media “About us,” *NNSL.com*, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.nnsl.com/about-us/>

⁹Ollie Williams, “CJCD, Yellowknife’s first commercial radio station, turns 40,” *Cabin Radio*, Nov. 13, 2019, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://cabinradio.ca/25685/news/yellowknife/cjcd-yellowknifes-first-commercial-radio-station-turns-40/>



Albert Canadien sits in front of the microphone in a broadcast booth at the CBC radio station. Yellowknife, 1960. Credit: N.W.T. Archives/Henry Busse/N-1979-052: 5574.

The expansion of local options continued into the 1980s, with the founding of the Native Communications Society of the N.W.T. (1982), which began broadcasting on its own radio band, now CKLB Radio. Features magazine *Up Here* began publication in 1984. In 1995, CBC North began broadcasting *Northbeat*, the territories' first English-language daily television news program.¹⁰ In more recent years, web-based news outlets have been established, the most prominent being *Cabin Radio*, which began operations in 2016.

The outsized number of local media outlets may be partially explained by a long-standing fear that the penetration of southern media will negatively impact the preservation of local culture. CBC's own Northern Broadcasting Plan, produced in 1974 by local communities in the territory, outlines as much, as detailed in a paper by York University's Anne McLennan:

¹⁰Katherine Barton, "Igalaaq, *Northbeat* celebrate 20 years: a look at how TV evolved in the North," *CBC North*, Nov. 13, 2015, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/1.3317652>

Globally, broadcasting is closely associated with the preservation of national, regional and local languages and cultures. Within Canada, the northern settlements initially hoped to use broadcasting to deliver much needed information and programming in aboriginal languages, not merely to receive broadcasting services from the South.¹¹

Marie Wilson recalls similar fears when television came to small communities in the Northwest Territories during her time living in Fort Good Hope in 1974, when plans for satellite television service reached the community: “It was a very hot debate, because people were afraid that people would stop gathering for community events. The language used was cultural genocide at the time ... and in many ways the fears that people talked about were true. The attendance at band council meetings immediately reduced, and you couldn’t get people out for a pick-up ball game, and stuff like that. It really changed dramatically.”¹²

Those concerns led to a CRTC hearing in 1982, in which the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation’s Rosemary Kuptana likened the invasion of southern programming to an atomic bomb, a “bomb that kills the people, but leaves the buildings standing.”¹³

Kuptana’s remarks take a different tone in 2021: while there are a number of made-in-the-North media outlets thriving, the number of locals participating in the industry has waned. The reasons for this are numerous, with newsroom leaders citing high turnover, increasing pressure to file to multiple platforms, and a lack of connection to the industry.

“If we can get a local hire, we will,” said Bruce Valpy, the long-time, recently-retired publisher of Northern News Services Limited. “We have had Indigenous people on staff before. It doesn’t necessarily last long ... because I think one of the things that we have to keep in mind is that we’re very much a capitalist, colonialist, workplace, right? So that comes with certain expectations.”¹⁴

¹¹Anne F. MacLennan, “Cultural Imperialism of the North? The Expansion of the CBC Northern Service and community radio,” (Toronto: York University, 2011), accessed November 11, 2021, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/189494596.pdf>, 5.

¹²Marie Wilson (former Managing Editor, CBC North), interview by author, May 5, 2021.

¹³Ian S. David, Jennifer Crawford, “Seeing Ourselves, Being Ourselves: Broadcasting Aboriginal Television in Canada,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*, June 1998, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.cultural-survival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/seeing-ourselves-being-ourselves-broadcasting-aboriginal>

¹⁴Bruce Valpy (Publisher, Northern News Services Ltd.), interview by author, Oct. 8, 2020.

“They’re like, I don’t know if I can ever get on there. They can’t see themselves on there.”

—Mervin Brass, CBC North

Mervin Brass, the Senior Managing Director of CBC North, said that “people [in the territories], I think, are still overwhelmed when they see somebody, and they meet somebody who’s on TV, right? Or on the radio ... They’re like, I don’t know if I can ever get on there. They can’t see themselves on there.”¹⁵

Having a primarily Southern Canadian staffed and framed news media has major impacts on how news is reported in the territory. Newsrooms are based and staffed out of Yellowknife, making small community reporting expensive and difficult. Issues are framed through a colonial journalism model, with government sources largely serving as experts, and those who can’t speak English fluently do not see their knowledge reflected, pivotal for a territory that has a primarily Indigenous population.

As Candis Callison and Mary-Lynn Young put it in their book examining the changing role of local journalism, *Reckoning*:

Reporting from somewhere, as opposed to nowhere, means that Indigenous journalists are more likely to both unearth their own epistemology (how they know what they know) and epistemological commitments (what methods and evidence are admissible; what matters), and acknowledge the ways in which their stories reflect their own situated knowledges (their view comes from somewhere).¹⁶

¹⁵Mervin Brass (Senior Managing Director, CBC North), interview by author, Oct. 2, 2020.

¹⁶Candis Callison and Mary-Lynn Young, *Reckoning: Journalism’s Limits and Possibilities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 184.



Folk on the Rocks 2019. Credit: Sarah Pruys.

Put in layperson’s terms, by not participating in journalism and the news media in the territory, N.W.T. residents – in particular, and most urgently Indigenous people – are inadvertently ceding control of their own stories: which ones are told, who experts and knowledge keepers are, and how journalism itself functions.

“There is a huge advantage to having [local] people,” said Brass. “Because this is their home, you know? You know what’s really going on.”¹⁷

“My philosophy has always been having a voice [in the communities],” said Valpy. “Even if it’s somebody sticking their head out a window and saying: ‘looks like it’s raining.’”

“It’s been [the same] since the 1700s, you know, really. [Hudson’s Bay Company] guys. We [local media] come in and we establish a rapport with all kinds of commitments and relationships and then, bang, we’re done.”¹⁸

¹⁷Mervin Brass.

¹⁸Bruce Valpy.

The dearth of Indigenous and Northern journalists has been noted by local newsrooms, non-profits, and even the federal government. Both Cabin Radio and NNSL have had some success accessing funding under the federal government’s local journalism initiative, while CBC North has committed to hiring local residents into its internship program.

Recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls both expressly address the impact of having a lack of Indigenous voices in media, and call for more steps to fix them.

However, difficulties persist in identifying locals interested in taking journalism jobs. All newsroom leaders interviewed for this paper said they would hire anyone from the territory with a keen interest in learning the industry. However, there is also an acknowledgement that a step



CBC - group at desk around microphone, 1963. Credit: N.W.T. Archives/YK Photo/N-2019-001: 0023.

is missing – that people still do not see their participation in journalism as attainable.

Cabin Radio’s Ollie Williams elaborates, when discussing a bursary program for young Indigenous writers co-sponsored by Cabin Radio and Journalists for Human Rights:¹⁹

“We have bursaries available for five young Indigenous people to come and work on stories with us. And it’s hard to find people who want to take the money because it’s almost a step stage too far in the process for us to have come in to say: ‘alright, hey, if you’re interested in reporting and you’re young and Indigenous, why don’t you come and work with us on stories?’ Well, hang on. What have we actually done to make people interested yet?”²⁰

The lack of local journalists in the territory is also felt in less obvious ways. Over past decades, many prominent Indigenous leaders have progressed through journalism on their pathways to leadership, including former N.W.T. Premier Nellie Cournoyea, former Nunavut Premiers Paul Quassa and Eva Aariak, former N.W.T. Commissioner George Tuccaro, and former N.W.T. Languages Commissioner Snookie Catholique.²¹

The profession offers an opportunity to become well-versed in the issues facing the territory, develop contacts and understand systems of governance. It is not a stretch to say that a lack of N.W.T. residents participating in journalism slows the pipeline for homegrown Indigenous leaders.

¹⁹Cabin Radio, “Apply now: Bursaries for young, Indigenous N.W.T. journalists,” *Cabin Radio*, June 25, 2020, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://cabinradio.ca/40114/news/apply-now-bursaries-for-young-indigenous-nwt-journalists/>

²⁰Ollie Williams, interview.

²¹Kaila Jefford-Moore, “Journalism and communications program in the N.W.T.,” (unpublished manuscript presented to Aurora College November 2020), PDF file.

Put simply: the lack of local, Indigenous journalists in the territory has negative impacts that reverberate outside of the industry:

- A skewed coverage map on which stories are covered and who is represented in them;
- A geographic centralizing of journalism organizations in a decentralized territory;
- A ceding of local narratives to a southern framework; and
- The closing of a proven pathway to local leadership

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all is the discrepancy between acknowledgement of the issue, including by those in decision-making positions in N.W.T. newsrooms, and the lack of success in addressing it.

“I wish we had this larger pool of talent in the Northwest Territories where broadcasters like ourselves, newsrooms had spent time nurturing people across the territory,” said Williams. “So that there were more people to reach out to, and give freelance work to, who were from here and who grew up in smaller communities and who had connections and understandings of issues. But we haven’t. Or at least I feel as though we collectively haven’t laid that groundwork yet.”²²

²²Ollie Williams, interview.



Mike Ballantyne, Herb Norwegian (CBC), 1986. Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh. Credit: Archives/©Northwest Territories. PW&S/G-1995-001: 3537.

Policy Options

The reasons to encourage the number of Indigenous N.W.T. residents participating in journalism in the territory are manifold: locals are not taking advantage of a field that includes numerous stable, high-paying jobs, including building the “gig economy” through freelance work, opportunities suited to mixed economies in the territory’s small communities.

Increasing capacity in this field will also have downstream impacts. As noted above, increasing the autonomy of a region to tell its own stories can increase trust in media, promote healthier democracies, and ensure better representation among its own people. It has also proven to be a reliable incubator for leadership

in the territories, meaning the territory can reap these benefits while helping to develop leaders of the future.

It is tempting to leave the incubation of the next generation of Indigenous journalists to the private sector – after all, the territory’s media leaders have expressed interest in addressing the issue, and some programs, such as Cabin Radio’s partnerships with community radio stations,²³ have proven effective.

²³Cabin Radio, “Cabin Radio partners with CFLK Fort Simpson,” *Cabin Radio*, December 15, 2017, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://cabinradio.ca/509/on-air/community-radio/cabin-radio-partners-with-cflk-fort-simpson/>



Dene National Assembly, 1988. Credit: ©N.W.T. Archives/Rene Fumoleau/N-1998-051: 3772.

However, it should be noted that private media in the territories operates with limited funds for training and development, while the CBC, the largest outlet, with dedicated public funding, must compete for dedicated bureau funding with the other demands of a national corporation. It has also faced long-standing calls for more community-led programming since the 1970s, when it was seen as the sole steward of community radio in the North.²⁴

With that being said, there are numerous options on how the territorial government can support the development of a representative journalism and media sector:

1. Add a communications or journalism studies diploma to Aurora College

The Northwest Territories' largest post-secondary educational institution, Aurora College, is undergoing a reckoning: a transformation into a polytechnic university, set to be launched in 2025, is underway.²⁵

The planned university has already released four proposed areas of specialization: skilled trades and technology; mineral resource and environmental management; business and leadership; and health, education, and community services.

These areas have come under criticism for using a 2030 labour market projection as one of the factors in their selection; that survey would ostensibly only be relevant to the first graduating class from the new university.²⁶

²⁴Anne F. MacLennan, 8.

²⁵Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture, and Employment, "Aurora College Transformation: Timeline," *N.W.T. Department of Education, Culture, and Employment*, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/aurora-transformation/en/aurora-timeline>

²⁶Katie Toth, "N.W.T. government proposes polytechnic university specializes in 4 fields," *CBC North*, Sept., 3, 2020, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/aurora-college-polytechnic-university-specializations-proposal-1.5710714>

Those criticisms have extended into the realm of journalism. Mervin Brass, CBC North’s Senior Managing Director, says that any arts program could have a major impact on the industry in the territory:

“I’m really disappointed to hear that they don’t have any types of arts and fine arts classes, or any literature classes that are going to be offered,” he said. “It’s always technical trade stuff that’s really shortsighted. Really shortsighted. I think educational institutions should offer something for everybody, even if it’s just introductory classes, at least that gives them, you know, the basics. Then you can go somewhere and learn, or call upon an institution like the CBC, and we can take care of the rest.”²⁷

Per Brass’ and other newsroom leaders’ comments, any post-secondary journalism or communications program in the territory would serve as a valuable pipeline to get more locals involved in newsrooms. The idea itself is already being implemented, with success, at Sámi University College in Norway, where programs were created to address the lack of local journalists after it was established in a government report that having Sámi journalists participating in local media was crucial to restoring and preserving cultural rights.²⁸

The existence of such a program would also support reconciliation and help define what journalism could look like in the territories. On the Sámi program, Torkel Rasmussen writes that by prioritizing Indigenous languages, developing media “can be interpreted equally as part of a language revitalization process as it is democracy-building and empowering to Indigenous peoples.”²⁹

Implementing a journalism program would be relatively inexpensive in terms of specialized equipment, could draw on local expertise, and easily establish internship opportunities with local newsrooms. If required to fall under an already-proposed area of specialization, it could slot under business and leadership, given the already established parallels to governance and leadership-building.

Implementing a program like this into Aurora College would also have spin-off impacts in other industries in the territory, providing a pathway to well-paying jobs in municipal, territorial, and Indigenous government. Communications positions, in particular, have a vast underrepresentation of locals and Indigenous people; a 2019 informal survey by Eileen Marlowe indicated that at the time, there was one Indigenous person working in communications in the Government of the Northwest Territories, out of 58 positions.³⁰

²⁷Mervin Brass.

²⁸Torkel Rasmussen, “Journalism Studies for the Indigenous Sámi: From preparatory courses to worldwide Indigenous Master’s Studies,” *WINHEC Journal* (2017), 5.

²⁹Torkel Rasmussen, 14.

³⁰Eileen Marlowe, “Informal N.W.T. gov’t communications labour market survey,” 2019 (unpublished manuscript, presented to N.W.T. journalism society strategic planning session, February 2021).



Government of the Northwest Territories press conference, 2020. Credit: Sarah Pruys.

2. Integrate communications and media studies into the high school curriculum

Like Aurora College, the N.W.T.'s grade school curriculum is also in the midst of an overhaul. Engagement sessions took place throughout 2021, with the territory's education department dropping Alberta's curriculum in favour of British Columbia's in December.³¹

Though media studies courses are available at some of Yellowknife's high schools, expanding this offering to include modules directly related to communications or journalism programs could have a significant impact in removing the barriers to employment in the local industry. Notably, no high school in the Northwest Territories publishes a school newspaper, a program that has been shown not only to increase the likelihood of students entering the industry, but also to improve general reading and writing skills.³²

Implementing programs of this kind also opens the door for increased partnership with newsrooms in the Northwest Territories – and provides a noncompetitive space for those entities to collaborate. During interviews with newsroom leaders, many expressed an interest in implementing mentorship programs, but had difficulties determining where to do so.

³¹Michelle Bellefontaine, "Northwest Territories drops Alberta K-12 curriculum after at least 40 years of use," *CBC News*, Dec. 16, 2021, accessed Jan. 18, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/nwt-alberta-kindergarten-grade-12-school-curriculum-1.6289214>

³²Tara George, "The Journalism Pipeline: An investigation into the state of journalism in New Jersey Public High Schools," *Centre for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University*, Spring 2020, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/The-Journalism-Pipeline-Tara-George-16APR2020.pdf>, 6.

 **I feel as though the education sector has never really engaged with the idea of reporting in journalism as being something that should be taught or encouraged by the North.”**

—Ollie Williams, Cabin Radio

“I feel as though the education sector has never really engaged with the idea of reporting in journalism as being something that should be taught or encouraged by the North,” said Ollie Williams of Cabin Radio:

“And that’s not to say it’s their fault. I mean, we should be leading a lot of that. But it’s notable in its absence from any curriculum up here at the same time.”

“I increasingly get messages from teachers saying, ‘look, I want to get the students working more on the news, or learning how to hold a debate, or grill a political candidate,’ all these sorts of things that, you know, we as journalists would encourage. So there are steps being made, but it’s all really piecemeal. There’s no overarching plan, certainly not that different newsrooms share. And that would be a great place to get it if we had three, four or five newsrooms that shared a plan to develop the industry in the area.”³³

Taking advantage of the curriculum overhaul would provide a ripe timeline for new graduates: if it were implemented swiftly, a class of new graduates with interests in media studies could transition seamlessly to a new program at the newly-constituted polytechnic university when it opens in 2025.

³³Ollie Williams, interview.

3. Setting hiring targets through legislation

While journalism and media are hardly the only industry in the Northwest Territories to suffer from an overrepresentation of non-local, non-Indigenous staff, one could argue that they are one of the most impactful, due to the aforementioned impacts on representation, local discourse, and, by extension, governance.

In order to counteract such a disparity, governments could look to a model used in the territory's relationship with another industry that has proven to be extractive and overrepresented with Southern hires: the mineral resource industry.

The N.W.T. government currently mandates socio-economic agreements for any resource extraction project in the territory. These agreements, among other things, set non-binding employment targets for both Northern and Indigenous hires, and require regular reporting of each mine's progress towards meeting those targets.

This model may seem radical, but it is not unknown to Canadian broadcasting. It could even be seen as an extension of the country's federal Broadcasting Act, which mandates certain minimum amounts of Canadian content in broadcasters' programming schedules.³⁴

It could be argued that these agreements have been ineffective in significantly increasing Indigenous employment. Mines have historically fallen short of their employment targets, according to the territorial government's own reporting.³⁵

CBC North, in particular, has avenues to encourage hiring, with senior managers' annual incentive program tied to goals set by management. Managers in the Northwest Territories, including myself, could tie these incentives, in part, to the amount of local hires brought into their newsroom. Using the aforementioned baseline of 14 of 62 local hires – just under 25% – a 40% goal for new hires is likely an attainable goal right away, with escalating targets in future years.

Setting commitments and mandating annual reporting would not only likely be met with some acceptance from the sector, given the aforementioned stated interest by newsrooms in addressing the issue; it would also mandate valuable data collection and reporting.

Doing so would also put the territorial government and newsrooms in lockstep when it comes to their commitment to addressing the issue, which will create further possibilities for partnership.

³⁴Broadcasting Act, S.C. 1991, c.11, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/b-9.01/>

³⁵Northwest Territories Department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment, *Socio Economic Agreement Report for mines operating in the Northwest Territories, 2019*, Dec. 31, 2019, accessed July 13, 2021, https://www.iti.gov.nt.ca/sites/iti/files/001-sea_report_sj_final.pdf, 32.

In many ways, partnership is the most important element of this recommendation. It is essential for newsrooms and government to collectively acknowledge and address the issue, despite their often antagonistic editorial relationship with one another. Doing so is the simplest and strongest way to address an issue that has widespread impacts on the territory that expand well beyond the inside of Yellowknife news offices.

Taken together, these recommendations take advantage of a unique point in time: a relatively large industry with a proven track record of developing Northern leaders and impacting local governance crying out for more local participation; simultaneous reimagining of the high school and post-secondary school structure in the Northwest Territories; and a territory grappling with its role in reconciliation and empowering its Indigenous population and governments to take control of their own destinies.

Along with providing a sustainable local industry to a territorial government seeking innovative ways to boost the local economy as it flags during the COVID-19 pandemic, these three recommendations provide a relatively inexpensive, proven roadmap to revitalizing, and, ultimately, reshaping journalism in the Northwest Territories.



CBC Focus North. Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh, 1986. Credit: N.W.T. Archives/©Northwest Territories. PW&S/G-1995-001: 3576.

Conclusion

During those strategic planning sessions in February 2021, Paul Andrew returned to the question of the lack of Indigenous Northerners in media.

“How do we make it different?” he asked, referring to the industry, and the current situation. “How does that young person from Tulita feel like they want to be a journalist? In my whole time at CBC, I’ve never had an Indigenous person come up to me and say they wanted to be a journalist. Why is that?”

Andrew, realistic, knew that the entire industry couldn’t be torn down and restarted from scratch. However, he ruminated on the lack of attainable pathways to the industry as a key factor in bringing more people like him into the room – seeing his success in journalism as the norm, rather than an anomaly.

“I know the teaching and nursing programs here attracted a lot of students,” he said. “One of the reasons was because it was here, in the Northwest Territories.”

The impacts of having more local residents in journalism are myriad and well-supported: not only do they reduce southern reliance, they support reconciliation, build leadership potential, and change daily conversations.

Creating pathways to that representation is not a difficult proposition, but one that requires dedicated commitment amongst the private sector, the education system, and government. The problem is long-standing; seldom is the moment for a solution so clearly defined.

“Dene or Indigenous communication has never been a problem – for Dene,” said Andrew. “Dene people were already communicating very, very well. The ability has always been there. But our structures aren’t connected to that.”³⁶

Not yet. But with a little will and a collaborative effort, they could be.

³⁶Paul Andrew.

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Ulukhaktok in the winter. Credit: Derek Robbins.

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