

Summary of the Evaluation of the Northern Ontario Development Program (NODP)

Audit and Evaluation Branch
Senior Management Committee – January 2022

Background

The NODP was launched in 1996 by FedNor to address long-standing regional economic challenges. The NODP aims to promote economic diversification, job creation, and sustainable, self-reliant communities in Northern Ontario. The program also supports youth internships, providing project partners with labour while giving post-secondary graduates valuable work experience in Northern Ontario. The NODP is delivered under five streams:

- **Community Economic Development (CED)** focuses on building strong and sustainable communities by helping to create the conditions necessary for economic growth and development.
- **Business Growth and Competitiveness (BCG)** focused on fostering economic growth and increasing the competitiveness of Northern Ontario's businesses.
- **Innovation (INN)** focused on encouraging communities and businesses to become more innovative.
- **The Community Investment Initiative for Northern Ontario (CIINO)** is a FedNor initiative under the NODP that allows rural communities and First Nations to hire a qualified individual to help develop the local economy.
- **The Canadian Experiences Fund (CEF)** is a national initiative that supports communities across Canada as they create and enhance tourism products, facilities and experiences. In Northern Ontario, it is delivered by FedNor under the NODP.

Evaluation Approach, Scope, and Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation were to assess the relevance, performance and efficiency of the program, while addressing issues identified by FedNor and ISED management. For instance, the evaluation included the Community Investment Initiative for Northern Ontario as it had never been evaluated since it was introduced as a pilot project in 2014. Further, the evaluation only focused on the immediate outcomes of the Canadian Experiences Fund, as it was introduced in 2019.

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board *Policy on Results and Directive on Results* and covered the period of April 1, 2015, to March 31, 2020.

Lines of evidence included:

- Document and Literature Review
- Interviews
- Survey
- Case Studies
- Administrative and Financial Data Review

Results at a Glance



Relevance

Given the relatively slow growth in Northern Ontario, there is an ongoing need for the economic development support the NODP provides. There is also a need for the professional economic planning expertise and support to the tourism sector provided through the Community Investment Initiative for Northern Ontario and the Canadian Experiences Fund. However, the tourism sector may require a more strategic and targeted support. NODP initiatives have provided increased support to help address the needs of its target groups: Indigenous people, women, youth and Francophones. However, there is an opportunity to review and improve the services it provides to Indigenous groups and other underrepresented groups, such as visible minorities and people with disabilities. Funding through the NODP complements other federal and provincial government programs supporting economic development in Northern Ontario.



Performance

The evaluation showed that the NODP is largely achieving its expected outcomes. It contributed to improving the financial resources and capacity of Northern Ontario communities and businesses to respond to, implement, and benefit from economic development opportunities. It also contributed to increased growth and competitiveness of Northern Ontario communities and businesses. There is some evidence the NODP is contributing to its ultimate outcome of economic diversification, viability and sustainability of Northern Ontario communities and businesses.



Efficiency

The NODP fully dispersed its budget and its clients are highly satisfied with the support FedNor provides. Its program funding and program staff are broadly dispersed across Northern Ontario communities. Areas for improvement include further efforts to reduce project approval times and the length and complexity of application processes, especially for Indigenous communities and other underrepresented groups.

Recommendations

1. FedNor should examine how it can provide services that are more tailored to the cultures of Indigenous communities and the challenges they face, and whether its target groups should be expanded.
2. FedNor should continue to explore opportunities to streamline project approvals. It should also consult with groups, such as Indigenous communities and visible minorities, to see how it can better assist them with the application process.