



Canadian Northern Economic
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de développement
économique du Nord

Evaluation of the Inclusive Diversification and Economic Advancement of the North Program, Northern Business Relief Fund, and Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund 2019-2020 to 2022-2023

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Canada 

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List of Acronyms

ANPF	Arctic and Northern Policy Framework
CanNor	Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency
GBA Plus	Gender Based Analysis Plus
IDEANorth	Inclusive Diversification and Economic Advancement of the North Program
NBRF	Northern Business Relief Fund
NICI Fund	Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund
NWT	Northwest Territories
RRRF	Regional Relief and Recovery Fund
SINED	Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development Program
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TBS	Treasury Board Secretariat

Executive Summary

This is the final report for the evaluation of the Inclusive Diversification and Economic Advancement in the North (IDEANorth) Program, Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF), and Northern Isolated Community Initiatives (NICI) Fund delivered by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor). CanNor is a micro-agency of the federal government, headquartered in the North, with an exclusive mandate for the territories – Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon. It is shaped by northern realities, is positioned to respond to northern interests, and seeks to help build diversified and dynamic economies that foster long-term sustainability and economic prosperity across the territories.

Together, the programs evaluated have provided foundational investments in economic infrastructure, sector development and capacity building; support for small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic; and, investments to enhance Indigenous and northern food security by supporting local, community-led projects. The evaluation focused on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of activities occurring from 2019-2020 to 2022-2023. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach which consisted of program document, file and administrative data review, a survey of funding recipients, key informant interviews with funding recipients, CanNor representatives and territorial government representatives, and case studies focused on each of the programs included in the evaluation.

Key Findings

Relevance

The IDEANorth program promotes economic development in the North to strengthen economies and increase economic participation by Northerners. It has provided funding for projects that enhance business expansion, revenue growth, and job creation; has delivered workshops to support capacity building; and has funded projects that are intended to address gaps in economic infrastructure. By providing funding to economic development needs identified through the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF), IDEANorth supports the economic objectives of the ANPF around building strong, sustainable, diversified and inclusive local and regional economies. Additionally, IDEANorth supports gender and diversity objectives by funding projects led by Indigenous, women, and youth proponents. The NICI Fund aims to improve food security in northern and Indigenous communities by supporting the economic growth and diversification of the northern food sector. The funding is crucial for implementing innovative food solutions and has been highlighted as essential due to high rates of food insecurity in these regions. The NBRF was created to support SMEs in the North affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund was instrumental in helping

businesses overcome operational challenges, preventing closures, and maintaining essential services in remote communities. The relevance of the program was evident in its rapid response to the urgent needs of territorial economies during the crisis.

Effectiveness

IDEANorth funded 235 projects across the territories during the evaluation period. The program's effectiveness is demonstrated in part by its ability to leverage other funding sources at a rate of \$2.59 for every \$1.00 of CanNor funding. Recipients reported expanding their businesses, increasing profits, creating and maintaining jobs, and developing local partnerships. Most recipients met or exceeded their expected results and attributed these outcomes primarily to IDEANorth funding. Despite these successes, limitations in performance data make it difficult to fully assess the program's long-term outcomes.

The Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF) supported 565 SMEs, helping to maintain over 1,685 jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The NBRF was instrumental in keeping businesses operational, with recipients reporting that the funding allowed them to remain viable and maintain or hire staff. Most NBRF recipients met or exceeded their expected results, and many attributed these outcomes to the program's funding. However, some recipients reported unintended negative impacts, such as higher-than-expected administrative costs and financial strains associated with repaying the funds.

The NICI Fund supported at least 50 projects in the NWT, Nunavut, and Yukon, impacting local food production and supply. The fund enabled innovative projects and created new jobs, but challenges such as short timelines and insufficient funding were noted. Most NICI recipients reported that their projects met or exceeded expectations, with outcomes attributed to a combination of CanNor funding and other factors. Positive unintended impacts included community interest and extended project benefits, while some recipients highlighted the need for long-term funding to sustain their initiatives.

Efficiency

The evaluation of the IDEANorth, NICI Fund, and NBRF programs indicates that they generally function efficiently, with recipients expressing satisfaction with program operations and support from officials. However, timeliness of project approval, particularly for larger projects and NICI Fund initiatives, remains a concern, with recipients suggesting that longer timelines are needed for testing and implementing solutions, especially in the realm of food security. The flexibility of IDEANorth funding is noted as a

strength, allowing for efficient project design that addresses unique challenges. The NBRF program, created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on SMEs, was deemed efficient, though some recipients found the application and reporting processes challenging. Enhancing communication about eligibility, reporting, and repayment requirements could improve future emergency response programs.

Performance measurement data is collected and integrated into contribution agreements, and despite issues with indicators and data management, it is used by senior management in program design and implementation. However, there is room for improvement in performance measurement, with a need for better collection and management of performance data. Addressing these issues could increase the efficiency of CanNor programs and provide a clearer picture of their impacts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, and recognizing that CanNor is a micro-agency, recommendations have been developed to support ongoing program management. The evaluation recommends that the CanNor Senior Management Committee:

Recommendation 1

Establish a process, including timelines, for the selection and implementation of a data management system and procedures that will improve collection, storage, management, and use of data related to proponents, projects, and outcomes.

Recommendation 2

Improve the usefulness of performance measurement data by identifying and implementing indicators that more accurately demonstrate project outcomes and tell a performance story that is responsive and reflective of the territorial context.

Recommendation 3

Identify opportunities to shorten project approval periods and to improve communication with project proponents about application status, anticipated timelines, and contract obligations.

1.0 Introduction

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation of the Inclusive Diversification and Economic Advancement in the North (IDEANorth) Program, Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF), and Northern Isolated Community Initiatives (NICI) Fund delivered by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor).

The evaluation focused on the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of these programs and was conducted to address requirements outlined in the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) Policy on Results (2016). [Footnote 1](#) IDEANorth Program and NICI Fund activities over the 4-year period between 2019-2020 to 2022-2023 were included in the scope of the evaluation. The NBRF was in place for less than one year during 2020-2021, so activities carried out during that period were included in the scope of evaluation.

2.0 Program Profiles

The following section describes each of the 3 programs included in the evaluation.

2.1 Inclusive Diversification and Economic Advancement in the North (IDEANorth) Program

The IDEANorth Program was established in 2019-20 and subsumed the Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development (SINED) program, which had an annual budget of approximately \$21M. It is referred to as the "flagship program" of CanNor. Budget 2019 allocated an additional \$75M over five years to the creation of the IDEANorth program, which was designed to make foundational investments in economic infrastructure, sector development and capacity building to help position Northerners in the territories to take advantage of Canada's innovation economy. The funding allocated to IDEANorth expanded CanNor's ability to make foundational investments in territorial economies through funding for capacity-building projects, including access to grants to support select low-risk single activity projects. The introduction of repayable contributions expanded CanNor's capacity to support larger businesses with multi-year projects.

The intended short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes of the IDEANorth program are shown in the following table:

Table 1: Intended Outcomes of IDEANorth

Timing	Description
Short-term Outcomes	<p>Territorial economic growth and capacity is supported</p> <p>Gaps in territorial small-scale economic infrastructure are addressed</p> <p>Increased readiness to address territorial foundational infrastructure gaps</p> <p>Partnerships established with Northern governments and organizations</p> <p>Businesses are supported to grow</p> <p>Investments to advance territorial economic growth and sector development contribute to increasing local or regional economic development activity</p>
Medium-term Outcomes	<p>Investments to small scale economic infrastructure contribute to increasing local or regional economic development activity</p> <p>Pre-construction readiness activities are used to advance foundational infrastructure projects</p> <p>Foundational investments in key sectors of the territorial economies contributes to enhanced sectoral growth</p>
Long-term Outcomes	<p>Strong, dynamic, diverse, innovative, and inclusive territorial economies for the benefit of Northerners and all Canadians</p>

The cost and sources of funds for IDEANorth for each of the 4 years included in the evaluation scope are shown in the following table. The values in the table include new funding received through Budget 2019 as well as existing funding and total between \$31M and \$41M per year for the four years covered by the evaluation.

Table 2: IDEANorth Cost and Source of Funds

Cost category	Fiscal Year			
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Vote 1				

Table 2: IDEANorth Cost and Source of Funds

Cost category	Fiscal Year			
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Personnel costs ^{Footnote 2}	\$3,429,720	\$3,429,720	\$4,191,720	\$4,959,720
Other operating costs	\$1,201,779	\$1,201,779	\$1,358,279	\$1,515,529
Sub total (Vote 1)	\$4,631,499	\$4,631,499	\$5,549,999	\$6,469,249
	Vote 5			
Grants	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$5,000,000
Contributions	\$23,657,000	\$23,657,000	\$26,657,000	\$29,157,000
Sub total (Vote 5)	\$26,157,000	\$26,157,000	\$30,157,000	\$34,157,000
Other ^{Footnote 3}	\$368,491	\$368,491	\$449,991	\$530,791
Grand total	\$31,156,990	\$31,156,990	\$36,156,990	\$41,157,040

2.2 Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF)

Although launched in 2019-2020, the first cohort of IDEANorth recipients were awarded funding in April 2020, which coincided with the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic created stress on territorial businesses and the economy overall. To mitigate the adverse economic impacts on Northern economies resulting from the pandemic, CanNor introduced the Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF) on April 20, 2020. Delivered through the IDEANorth program, NBRF had the ability to provide up to \$12.5M from the IDEANorth grant allocation to provide non-repayable grants to small- and medium enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 100 employees located in the territories. NBRF awarded recipients up to \$100,000 to help pay for eligible fixed operating costs incurred to help them remain operational throughout the pandemic. Funds provided direct support for ongoing operating costs incurred (i.e., rent/mortgage; utilities; subscriptions (e.g., booking systems)) for up to 16 weeks.

Shortly after developing the NBRF, the Government of Canada launched the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) to be implemented by the Regional Development Agencies. CanNor's \$34.3M portion of the RRRF complemented the supports already being provided by the Agency's NBRF to fill further needs for immediate relief for businesses in the territories. The programs sunsetted in March 2021.

The stated purpose of the Fund was to provide direct support for ongoing operating costs incurred by small businesses, to help them continue to play their vital role in Northern communities.^{Footnote 4} Therefore, the performance

indicators used for the fund were the number of jobs maintained across the territories and the number of businesses supported.

2.3 Northern Isolated Community Initiatives (NICI) Fund

The NICI Fund supports community-led projects for local and Indigenous food production systems with an emphasis on innovative and practical solutions to increase food security across the territories. NICI was announced in Budget 2019 as a \$15 million investment, over five years starting in the 2019-20 fiscal, as part of the broader Canada Food Policy led by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. CanNor implemented this fund in collaboration with other federal and territorial partners to develop solutions to food security issues.

NICI aims to enhance Indigenous and northern food security by supporting local, community-led projects that reduce dependence on the southern food industry and the associated costs (e.g., transportation and storage) for northern communities. This initiative program supports a variety of projects through the following streams:

- Stream 1: Support for Northern Food Businesses: This stream provides funding to Northern businesses and communities to build a strong territorial food industry and help reduce food insecurity using practical approaches.
- Stream 2: Support for Northern Territorial Food Systems: This stream provides funding to territorial initiatives identified by the Northern Food Working Group (NFWG), a federal–territorial working group created to increase economic opportunities in the territories related to growing, harvesting, and processing healthy food.
- Stream 3: Support for the Northern Food Innovation Challenge: This stream supports innovative community-led projects for local and Indigenous food production systems to help improve food security in Canada's territories.

The intended immediate, intermediate, and ultimate outcomes of the NICI Fund are show in the following table. In addition, NICI is anticipated to contribute, in part, to the Sustainable Development Goal aspirational target 2.1, "to end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round".

Table 3: Intended Outcomes of the NICI Fund

Timing	Description
Immediate Outcome	Communities are testing and implementing innovative solutions related to food

Table 3: Intended Outcomes of the NICI Fund

Timing	Description
Intermediate Outcome	Successful business and community solutions related to food are shared broadly across the territories
Ultimate Outcome	Improved food security in northern and Indigenous communities

The cost and sources of funds for the NICI Fund for each of the 4 years included in the evaluation scope are shown in the following table.

Table 4: NICI Cost and Source of Funds

Cost category	Fiscal Year			
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
	Vote 1			
Personnel costs Footnote 5	\$289,019	\$289,019	\$289,019	\$289,019
Other operating costs	\$180,003	\$180,003	\$180,003	\$180,003
Sub total (Vote 1)	\$469,016	\$469,016	\$469,016	\$469,016
	Vote 5			
Grants	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
Contributions	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Sub total (Vote 5)	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000
Other Footnote 6	\$30,984	\$30,984	\$30,984	\$30,984
Grand total	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000

3.0 Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken by CanNor's Policy and Planning Branch with support from an evaluation consulting firm. This section outlines the evaluation approach including scope, evaluation questions, data collection methods, limitations, and mitigation strategies.

3.1 Scope and planning

The overall scope of the evaluation is the four-year period consisting of fiscal year 2019-2020 through 2022-2023. The NBRF was in place during 2020-2021 only. In addition to considering overall themes of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, other areas of interest included the relevance of the programs to federal government priorities such as the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANFP) and to CanNor's mandate including the Pan-territorial Growth Strategy; the delivery and impact of funding received

in the form of repayable contributions; and, the rapid implementation and delivery of programming under pandemic conditions and the impact of the NBRF on SMEs.

3.2 Evaluation questions

The questions used to guide the evaluation are presented in the following table. The evaluation framework included as [Appendix 1](#) provides additional detail on the data sources and indicators linked to each of the questions.

Table 5: Evaluation questions

Core issue	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there an ongoing need for the IDEANorth Program and the NICI Fund? 2. To what extent did the NBRF respond to a demonstrable need? 3. Are the programs consistent with departmental and federal government roles, responsibilities, and priorities?
Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. To what extent have expected results and objectives been achieved? 5. What, if any, other or unintended impacts have resulted from the programs?
Efficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. To what extent have the programs functioned efficiently? 7. To what extent are performance measurement data collected and utilized by the programs?

3.3 Data collection methods

The evaluation relied on a mixed-methods approach, including a program document and data review, key informant interviews with funding recipients, internal CanNor representatives and other governmental representatives, a survey of funding recipients, and case studies of each program. The following table provides a brief description of the data collection methods.

Table 6: Summary of methodology

Core issue	Evaluation Questions
Program document, file and	Documents and data held by CanNor were reviewed for data pertaining to the evaluation questions. These included background information, policy and

Table 6: Summary of methodology

Core issue	Evaluation Questions
administrative data review	strategy documents, financial and administrative data, and other pertinent information on program and project objectives, delivery and performance indicators.
Survey of Funding Recipients	A total of 128 individuals, including 85 NBRF recipients, 36 IDEANorth recipients and 7 NICI recipients, completed a survey administered online and by telephone during January and February 2024. This represents an overall completion rate of 24% of the eligible population of funding recipients. The survey gathered information related to impact and attribution to funding, perceptions related to program efficiency, and other evaluation topics.
Key Informant Interviews	Relevant key informants were identified by the Program areas in each region. In total, interviews were completed with 13 CanNor employees and managers and 3 external government representatives.
Case Studies	A total of 3 case studies were conducted to inform the evaluation findings, one each for IDEANorth, NBRF and NICI. Each case study includes 2-3 project proponents with representation from all 3 regions. Case studies involved additional key informant interviews with 8 project recipients and a review of available project files such background material about proponents, funding applications and contribution agreements.

3.4 Evaluation limitations and mitigation strategies

The following table describes key limitations and the mitigation strategies used to minimize their impacts.

Table 7: Evaluation limitations and mitigation strategies

Limitations	Mitigation Strategy
Limited time available to conduct the evaluation	The evaluation was calibrated to ensure that key questions about the programs could be addressed through a targeted evaluation. Interviews were conducted remotely as opposed to in person.

Table 7: Evaluation limitations and mitigation strategies

Limitations	Mitigation Strategy
<p>Data for some performance indicators are insufficient for fully measuring progress made towards intended outcomes</p>	<p>Available data was used where possible, and existing limitations were articulated in the evaluation findings.</p>
<p>Some recipients of the NBRF are no longer in business and so are not reflected in the survey results</p>	<p>Efforts were made to ensure that the survey was completed by as many existing contacts as possible. Telephone follow up calls were placed to recipients who did not complete the survey online to encourage participation.</p>

4.0 Findings

The evaluation findings are presented according to the 3 evaluation themes: relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency.

4.1 Relevance

4.1.1 Relevance - Ongoing need for the programs:

Evaluation Question: Is there an ongoing need for the IDEANorth Program and the NICI Fund?

Key findings:

- IDEANorth exists to address an ongoing need to diversify the Northern economy.
- Food security challenges in the North highlight the ongoing need for the NICI Fund.
- Without the funding provided through the IDEANorth and NICI Fund Programs, participants would not have been able to undertake their projects.

IDEANorth exists to address an ongoing need to diversify the Northern economy

The economic landscape of Canada's territories is largely shaped by natural resource extraction and development projects, which, while contributing significantly to Canada's and the local economies' growth, also expose them to boom-and-bust cycles due to their resource dependency. As stated in the *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*, while sustainable resource development is the cornerstone of the territorial economies, there is also a need to grow other areas to help insulate these resource-based economies

and to provide more diversity of opportunity for Arctic and northern peoples.^{[Footnote 7](#)} Challenges such as sparse and widely distributed population, a significant infrastructure deficit, high energy costs, difficulty accessing capital, fluctuations within the natural resource extraction sector due to cyclical commodity pricing, and a shortage of skilled labour pose major hurdles to economic growth and diversification.^{[Footnote 8](#)} These conditions underscore the importance of sustaining economic development programs, such as IDEANorth, to foster the growth and diversification of Northern economies.

Key informant interviews with internal CanNor and other government representatives indicated that IDEANorth remains very relevant. Participants shared that IDEANorth is well-designed to address:

- Economic development in the territories through economic diversification and innovation (n=11).
- Creating a more robust economy that has higher quality, better paying jobs, and an improved skilled workforce (n=4).
- Major sector development for SMEs (n=3); and,
- Infrastructure gaps that are barriers to economic development (e.g., housing) (n=3).

Funding participants also agreed that there is an ongoing need for the IDEANorth Program. Without the CanNor funding provided through the IDEANorth Program, participants shared that their project would not have been realized. As a result, business expansion, growth in revenue streams, and increased profits would not have occurred. Additionally, CanNor funding streamlined participants' ability to complete their project all at once, decreasing the time before they were operational. Recipients of IDEANorth funding who completed the evaluation survey indicated that the funding allowed for increased industry capacity (e.g., investments in training, development of new projects, increased technology, economic development) (n=21) and that the funding allowed for the purchase of needed equipment (n=4).

Food security challenges in the North show that there is an ongoing need for the NICI Fund

Northern and remote communities in Canada, particularly in Indigenous communities, face drastically higher food prices and challenges in satisfying their nutritional needs through traditional methods. Harsh environments, a lack of land suitable for agriculture, the cost of energy and transportation, and the expense of food production solutions are all significant barriers. Statistic Canada reports that while 16% of Canadian households experienced food insecurity in 2021,^{[Footnote 9](#)} the rate across the territories was 26.4%, including 46.1% in Nunavut, 22.2% in the Northwest Territories and 12.8% in Yukon.^{[Footnote 10](#)}

Initiatives, like the Northern Isolated Food Initiative (NICI) Fund, support improving food security in northern and Indigenous communities. Further, the NICI Fund promotes economic growth and diversification of the northern food sector, which is needed to improve the health and sustainability of communities to enhance growth in other sectors.

NICI recipients agreed that without the funding provided by CanNor through the NICI Fund and the Northern Innovation Food Challenge, their projects would not have been implemented. In addition, recipients shared that the funding provided by CanNor was instrumental in securing additional funding needed to complete their projects. For example, one recipient shared that without the CanNor funding, they would have continued to make small improvements to their business however, they would not have been able to improve the availability of food in the north to the degree that they have since receiving the funding. In addition to addressing a funding gap for implementing innovative food solutions in the north, recipients felt that the nature of the Northern Innovative Food Challenge provided them the space to think differently about food security in the north. This allowed recipients to develop innovative approaches that they would not have considered otherwise.

All internal CanNor representative key informants indicated that there is an ongoing need for the NICI Fund. Specifically, because the NICI Fund is designed to address:

- Economic growth and developments of the northern food sector to improve food security in the north (n=8) and,
- Developing sustainable food security systems (n=3).

4.1.2 Relevance - Demonstrable need for the NBRF:

Evaluation Question: To what extent did the NBRF respond to a demonstrable need?

Key findings:

- The unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic required government support for SMEs to reduce the overall impact on the northern economy. Evaluation findings affirm that the NBRF helped business stay afloat that otherwise would not have survived COVID-19.
- NBRF funding was complimentary to other supports.

The unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic required government support for SMEs to reduce the overall impact on the northern economy.

The territories are home to more than 4,000 SMEs, 80% of which have fewer than 20 employees. [Footnote 11](#) The economic and social context is unique in the North as all communities identify as rural and/or remote and contend with issues specific to the territories (e.g., significant physical and social infrastructure deficit, overcrowded housing). Lack of economic diversification means that the territories are particularly impacted by external drivers, as well as, a general higher cost of living and doing business. Economic development in the territories faces several inherent challenges including small, dispersed populations (i.e. 124,000 across three territories; 38 communities are fly-in, including all of Nunavut).

Businesses in the North were significantly impacted by the limits placed on physical distancing and gatherings because of COVID-19. These businesses are often the lifeblood of many small and isolated communities as they frequently represent the only one of their kind in the community and play a critical role in ensuring the safety and well-being of Northerners. Preliminary analysis from the Yukon Chamber of Commerce shows that only half of SMEs expect to be able to weather the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. If businesses close, many owners are indicating they will not have the financial resources to restart them. Should they close permanently, they would leave a significant gap in locally available services and have a long-term negative effect in communities.

Therefore, on April 20, 2020, CanNor launched the Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF), which made available existing funds of \$15 million in non-repayable support to assist with operating costs not already covered by other federal measures. This Fund, which was unique among RDAs, prioritized businesses with less than 20 employees, and provided up to \$100,000 per recipient to cover eligible fixed expenses between April and July 2020. In the first week of its launch, CanNor received over 120 applications for funding, representing approximately \$5 million in funding requests.

All CanNor representatives who participated in a key informant interview agreed that the NBRF was extremely relevant in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as this program responded to an urgent need to protect the northern economy. The funding was said to be complimentary to other government supports and saved SMEs from bankruptcy.

NBRF funding recipients who completed a survey provided a range of business expense-related reasons for why the funding program was necessary:

- Funding allowed for the maintenance of business costs so they could continue successfully through and/or after the pandemic (n=28)

- Funding supported businesses who noted they lost revenue while closed, but still had high overhead costs (n=27). A subset of these respondents were in the tourism industry and lost all revenue (n=8).
- Funding was crucial due to forced government shutdowns (n=14)

NBRF funding was complimentary to other supports.

In addition to the NBRF funding, participants received funding from other sources including the bank, the Canadian Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loans, and the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to further support their business. The NBRF was seen as particularly effective because the funding received was unique in that it allowed businesses to cover operational expenses and was non-repayable if the business did not turn a profit. A funding recipient included in the case studies carried out to inform this evaluation shared that their revenue dropped by more than 75% the following year and that it would have been very hard to cover those operational costs without the funding. Furthermore, the non-repayable nature of the program allowed them to work on rebuilding their business after the pandemic, rather than being stressed about paying back their loans.

4.1.3 Relevance - Alignment with government roles, responsibilities, and priorities:

Evaluation Question: Are the programs consistent with departmental and federal government roles, responsibilities, and priorities?

Key findings:

- IDEANorth appears to be well-aligned with the core mandate of CanNor, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, and the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy and the high degree of alignment between project purpose and program design, confirm the relevance of program funding.
- The programs support GBA Plus objectives by funding projects led by Indigenous, women, and youth proponents.

IDEANorth appears to be well-aligned with the core mandate of CanNor, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, and the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy and the high degree of alignment between project purpose and program design, confirm the relevance of program funding.

IDEANorth supports CanNor's core responsibility of economic development in the territories and is directly linked to the following departmental result of:

- Businesses are developing in the territories. Specifically, CanNor tracks the number of businesses by business locations in the territories, which enables the Agency to identify whether interventions are

supporting small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Under IDEANorth, CanNor also tracks support to SMEs, in addition to SMEs owned by underrepresented groups, including women, youth and Indigenous peoples. IDEANorth also measures the level to which recipients can leverage funds to demonstrate the commitment of other organizations to their project.

- People and communities participate in the economy of the territories. Specifically, the Agency tracks the labour participation rates in the territories, as well as the number of women, Indigenous peoples and youth engaged in IDEANorth projects. This enables the CanNor to identify whether interventions are helping to increase participation of targeted groups in the economy.
- Innovation and Skills Plan, pursuing results that align with all three of the Plan's Action Areas (People & Skills; Research, Technology & Commercialization; and Companies). Specifically, IDEANorth provides the foundational investments necessary for economic development in the territories with the goal to help communities diversify and transition to new forms of economic activity and promote a clean growth economy. It also targets the inclusion of under-represented groups to optimize their energy and contributions to ensure innovation has a broader reach throughout Canada's diverse communities.

The Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) is a comprehensive co-developed strategy by the Government of Canada to address the unique challenges and opportunities in the Arctic and northern regions. Its goals include nurturing healthy communities, investing in infrastructure, creating jobs, supporting research, addressing climate change, ensuring safety and security, restoring international leadership, and advancing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.[Footnote 12](#) The IDEANorth program is well aligned with the ANPF by focusing on fostering economic growth and diversification in the territories and through an emphasis on involving Indigenous people in the development and implementation of projects.

Internal CanNor representatives agreed that the IDEANorth program aligns well with the federal government roles, responsibilities, and priorities (n=12). Specifically, for CanNor, whose mandate is to grow territorial economies, these programs help to address many of the gaps that will help to fulfill this mandate. CanNor representatives discussed how CanNor, and all programs, are linked back to the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF), which is linked to the Pan-Territorial Growth Strategy (PTGS); CanNor's response to providing a funding tool that is linked to the ANPF. IDEANorth is embedded into all aspects of the PTGS. IDEANorth creates jobs, improved job quality, and works to develop sectors from the group up.

The programs support GBA Plus outcomes by supporting Indigenous and women-owned businesses.

Program data tracking the number of projects supported by IDEANorth with Indigenous, women and youth (under 30 years of age) proponents. Based on this data, over the evaluation period, IDEANorth supported at least 96 projects with an Indigenous proponent, 27 with women, and 8 where the proponent was a young person under 30 years of age.

Table 8: IDEANorth Projects led by Indigenous, women or youth proponents

Fiscal Year	Projects with GBA Plus Recipient		
	Indigenous	Women	Youth (<30 years)
2019-2020	22	0	0
2020-2021	14	3	0
2021-2022	24	6	1
2022-2023	36	18	7
Total	96	27	8

4.2 Effectiveness

4.2.1 Effectiveness – Achievement of results by IDEANorth:

Evaluation Questions: To what extent has the IDEANorth Program achieved expected short- medium, and long-term results. What, if any, other or unintended impacts have resulted from the program?

Key findings:

- IDEANorth funded at least 235 projects over the evaluation period, with distribution across the territories and project types.
- IDEANorth recipients were able to expand their business, increase profit, create, maintain and expand jobs, and develop local partnerships in the 3-year period from 2019-20 to 2021-22.
- IDEANorth proponents leveraged other funding sources at a rate of \$2.59 for every \$1.00 of CanNor funding.
- IDEANorth recipients report meeting or exceeding their expected results and attribute those impacts to the funding received from CanNor. Participants attribute all or mostly all their project achievements to IDEANorth funding.
- Limitations in the available performance data make it difficult to state if the program has met its intended outcomes.

IDEANorth funded at least 235 projects over the evaluation period, with distribution across the 3 regions and project types

The following table shows the descriptive information for all IDEANorth projects listed in a project database provided by the Project Authority. As shown, over the evaluation period 235 projects were funded by IDEANorth including 96 based in Yukon, 90 in NWT, and 49 in Nunavut. Projects were distributed by type of activity, with the most common being product and market development (65 projects), targeted investments (59), and research and planning (28).

Table 9: IDEANorth Projects 2019-20 to 2022-23, by Region and Activity

Fiscal Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
Total Number of Projects	62	38	55	80	235
By Region					
NWT	17	16	25	32	90
Nunavut	14	11	12	12	49
Yukon	31	11	18	36	96
By Activity					
Product and Market Development	23	8	16	18	65
Targeted Investments	16	11	17	15	59
Research and Planning	9	7	5	7	28
Organizational Capacity	2	4	4	15	25
SME Capacity	1	5	8	7	21
Knowledge Dissemination	5	1	1	10	17
Research and Development	3	1	4	7	15
Applied	3	1	0	1	5

IDEANorth proponents leveraged other funding sources at a rate of \$2.59 for every \$1.00 of CanNor funding

As shown in the following table, the leveraged amount ranged between \$1.64 and \$3.75 for every dollar of CanNor investment over the four years of the evaluation period.

Table 10: Amount of other funding leveraged by IDEANorth projects

Fiscal Year	Funding and leverage amounts		
	CanNor Funding	Other project funds	Other project funds per \$1 of CanNor funding
2019-2020	\$23,439,253	\$45,199,625	\$1.93

Table 10: Amount of other funding leveraged by IDEANorth projects

Fiscal Year	Funding and leverage amounts		
	CanNor Funding	Other project funds	Other project funds per \$1 of CanNor funding
2020-2021	\$21,694,572	\$35,540,484	\$1.64
2021-2022	\$34,123,474	\$128,005,452	\$3.75
2022-2023	\$25,356,588	\$62,406,052	\$2.46
Total	\$104,613,887	\$271,151,613	\$2.59

IDEANorth made progress towards its short-term results and objectives over the evaluation period

This includes making progress towards the outcome of "territorial economic growth and capacity is supported" through the 1,957 people who attended training sessions, capacity building activities or workshops between 2020-2021 and 2022-2023. The program also notes funding 50 projects over the evaluation period that support small scale infrastructure, which contributes to progress made towards the intended outcome of "gaps in territorial small-scale economic infrastructure are addressed".

Most IDEANorth recipients reported meeting or exceeding their expected results

The following table shows results from the survey of IDEANorth funding recipients to the question "please indicate how the actual results of the project/funding compared to what you had expected". As shown, most indicated that their results had met (42%) or exceeded (36%) their expectations. No respondents indicated that their results were less than expected, however some (22%) said they did not know, or the question was not applicable.

Table 11: IDEANorth survey responses to question "Please indicate how the actual results of the project/funding compared to what you had expected".

IDEANorth Recipients		
Actual results were...	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
Far better than expected	5	14%
Somewhat better than expected	8	22%
As expected	15	42%
Somewhat less than expected	0	0%
Far less than expected	0	0%
Do not know / Not applicable	8	22%
Total	36	100%

Source: Survey of IDEANorth funding recipients, 2024

IDEANorth funding recipients shared that their actual results surpassed their expectations for various reasons:

- Despite challenges such as staffing limitations and the need for more investment in areas like affordable charter air transportation, companies saw increased revenues and profits, and stronger balance sheets than in previous years.
- Funds helped ease significant purchases for businesses and allowed for infrastructure improvements that benefited both companies and local communities. Investments made were not just temporary but provided continuous benefits and capacity for innovation.
- The development of tools designed to assist Indigenous businesses has led to recognition and opportunities in the mining sector.
- The quality of construction and renovations funded by these grants resulted in superior facilities and innovative solutions, like improved heating systems.
- Training programs funded by grants have had a lasting impact, enabling individuals to acquire new skills and even surpass their instructors, leading to the creation of viable businesses.
- Educational programs were enriched by culturally relevant materials and the inclusion of Elders, enhancing the learning experience for students.

IDEANorth has an impact on employment and investment in the region, by generating, maintaining, and expanding jobs over the evaluation period

Funding recipients who completed a survey were asked to select from a list of impacts to indicate which occurred because of their project. A majority indicated that CanNor funding resulted in new jobs (76%), partnerships established with Northern governments (74%), investments to economic infrastructure (56%), and maintained jobs (56%). However, it is not clear if the 74% of respondents who indicated that partnerships were established with Northern governments were describing a partnership other than the one with the IDEANorth program.

Table 12: IDEANorth survey responses to question "Please indicate which of the following impacts/outcomes occurred as a result of the project".

Impacts	IDEANorth Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
Total responding	34	100%
New jobs	26	76%
Partnerships established with Northern governments	25	74%
Investments to economic infrastructure	19	56%
Maintained jobs	19	56%
New businesses	13	38%
Increased revenue	12	35%
New investments	9	26%
Increased visitors	9	26%

Source: Survey of IDEANorth funding recipients, 2024

Furthermore, IDEANorth projects examined through case study and interview with proponents found that the funding allowed proponents to expand businesses, purchase needed equipment, hire contractors that supported market expansion, hire new staff, and increase profitability.

Most IDEANorth project impacts can be attributed to the program funding

Funding recipients were also asked to indicate the extent to which project outcomes were attributed to CanNor funding, compared to all other factors that may have also contributed. The findings are shown in the following table, including that the majority (58%) of respondents credit the funding as being the primary source of project impacts and outcomes. No IDEANorth recipients who completed the survey said that their outcomes would have occurred in the absence of CanNor support.

Table 13: IDEANorth survey responses to question "When you think of the impacts and outcomes of the funding/project, to what extent do you attribute them to the funding received from CanNor, compared to all other factors that may have contributed?"

Level of attribution	IDEANorth Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
High attribution: the impact and outcomes occurred primarily because of the CanNor funding	21	58%
Medium attribution: the impacts and outcomes occurred because of a combination of CanNor funding and other factors	14	39%
Low attribution: most or all of the impacts and outcomes would have occurred even without the CanNor funding	0	0%
Do not know	1	3%
Total	36	100%

Source: Survey of IDEANorth funding recipients, 2024

IDEANorth recipients tend to report a range of intended and unintended project impacts

Among the n=13 IDEANorth recipients that said their project generated unintended impacts there were 8 mentions of positive unintended consequences and 5 mentions of negative unintended consequences, as shown in the following table. Positive impacts included increases to internal capacity and skills. Negative impacts related to higher-than-expected costs and administrative burden.

Table 14: Unintended project impacts identified by IDEANorth survey participants

Impacts	IDEANorth Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
Total responding	13	100%
Positive impacts		
Increased internal capacity for undertaking future projects, or	4	31%

Table 14: Unintended project impacts identified by IDEANorth survey participants

Impacts	IDEANorth Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
otherwise resulted in people developing skills		
Project benefits extended beyond the known set of stakeholders	2	15%
Project results exceeded expectations	1	8%
Project generated positive interest among the community/stakeholders	1	8%
Negative impacts		
Project costs were higher than expected	2	15%
Administrative and/or financial cost of adhering to contract with CanNor were higher than expected, or other related issues	2	15%
Payback was more difficult than anticipated	1	8%

Source: Survey of IDEANorth funding recipients, 2024

4.2.2 Effectiveness – Achievement of results by NBRF:

Evaluation Questions: What results or objectives were achieved by the NBRF? What, if any, other or unintended impacts have resulted from the program?

Key findings:

- The NBRF was instrumental in keeping businesses open in territorial communities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and together with the RRRF, supported 565 SMEs which helped maintain over 1,685 jobs. NBRF recipients reported mixed results compared to their expectations. Those who met or exceeded expectations were more likely to attribute those results to CanNor compared to those who said results were less than expected.

NBRF/RRRF projects were distributed across the 3 regions

As shown in the following table, NBRF/RRRF grants went primarily to for-profit companies based across the North.

Table 15: RRRF/NBRF Projects 2020-21, by Region and Transaction Activity

Fiscal Year	NBRF	RRRF	Total
Total Number of Projects	289	230	519
By Region			
NWT	143	85	228
Nunavut	21	26	47
Yukon	125	119	244
By Transaction Activity			
Organizational Capacity	280	4	284
For-profit Relief Support	8	223	231
Not-for-profit Relief Support	1	2	3
Targeted Measures	0	1	1

The NBRF, together with the RRRF, supported 565 SMEs to maintain over 1,685 jobs

The purpose of NBRF was to respond to a timely and unique need to provide support and funding to businesses in the North to keep their doors open during the pandemic. NBRF was unique in that it provided operational funding as an eligible expense.

Survey participants were asked to describe the impact receiving the NBRF had on their business. The results are shown in the following table. Most reported positive impacts, such as remaining viable (66%) or maintaining staff or hiring new staff (54%). A minority of respondent to the survey reported negative outcomes such as losing their business or having to repay amounts received though the NBRF.

Table 16: Project Impacts described by NBRF survey participants

Impacts	NBRF Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
Total responding	85	100%
Business remained viable and/or operational	56	66%
Maintained staff or hired new staff	46	54%
Was able to maintain payments for expenses	19	22%
Business was closed or sold, or other negative experiences such as	8	9%

Table 16: Project Impacts described by NBRF survey participants

Impacts	NBRF Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
having to pay be amounts received through the NBRF		

Source: Survey of NBRF funding recipients, 2024

Most NBRF recipients reported meeting or exceeding their expected results

The following table shows results from the survey of NBRF funding recipients to the question "please indicate how the actual results of the project/funding compared to what you had expected". As shown, most indicated that their results had met (52%) or exceeded (21%) their expectations. Some respondents (25%) indicated that their results were less than expected.

Table 17: NBRF survey responses to question "Please indicate how the actual results of the project/funding compared to what you had expected".

Actual results were...	NBRF Recipients	
	number of responses#	percentage of total responses%
Far better than expected	8	9%
Somewhat better than expected	10	12%
As expected	44	52%
Somewhat less than expected	5	6%
Far less than expected	16	19%
Do not know / Not applicable	2	2%
Total	85	100%

Source: Survey of NBRF funding recipients, 2024

Most NBRF project impacts can be attributed to the program funding. Recipients were more likely to credit CanNor with positive outcomes as opposed to blame the department for negative results.

Funding recipients were also asked to indicate the extent to which project outcomes were attributed to CanNor funding, compared to all other factors that may have also contributed. The findings are shown in the following table, including that many (39%) highly attribute their project results to

CanNor, and most others (47%) say impacts resulted because of a combination of CanNor and other factors.

The table also shows that while 50% of those with results that exceeded expectations say the outcomes were primarily because of CanNor funding, just 24% of those with unmet expectations say their outcomes were primarily from the funding. The external factors that impacted on businesses during the pandemic were substantial in scale and scope, and this finding demonstrates that NBRF recipients who experienced negative outcomes are aware that it is not CanNor, but a range of many other factors, that is likely to blame for the outcomes they have experienced.

Table 18: NBRF survey responses to question "When you think of the impacts and outcomes of the funding/project, to what extent do you attribute them to the funding received from CanNor, compared to all other factors that may have contributed?"

Level of attribution	All those surveyed	NBRF Recipients	
		With results that exceeded expectations	With <i>below expected</i> results
	85	18	21
High attribution: the impact and outcomes occurred primarily because of the CanNor funding	39%	50%	24%
Medium attribution: the impacts and outcomes occurred because of a combination of CanNor funding and other factors	47%	44%	38%
Low attribution: most or all of the impacts and outcomes would have occurred even without the CanNor funding	7%	0%	14%
Do not know	7%	6%	24%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Survey of NBRF funding recipients, 2024

NBRF case study participants highly attributed the CanNor funding provided through the NBRF program as the driving factor that kept their business opened during the pandemic. Participants shared that without the funding, they would have been forced to close their doors and shut down their business, permanently. Furthermore, the NBRF funding was seen as

instrumental because business owners were not required to pay back the loan if they did not turn a profit. Participants felt that not having to pay back their loan was helpful in re-opening their business, allowing them to focus on operations, rather than worrying about more expenses.

Unexpected results reported by NBRF recipients tended to relate to unexpected costs or negative financial outcomes

Of the NBRF participants that said their project generated unintended impacts, most provided negative examples. A small number provided positive examples of unintended consequences, including a reduction in emotional stress, but most others were focused on the experience of unexpected costs or negative financial outcomes, as summarized by the following three themes:

- Administrative and/or financial cost of adhering to the contract with CanNor was higher than expected (6 mentions).
- Experienced a negative financial impact because of receiving the NBRF (e.g., limited ability to receive other relief funds such as CEBA; having to pay tax on the amounts received) (5 mentions).
- Was unaware that funds may need to be paid back and experience financial strain while repaying (4 mentions).

4.2.3 Effectiveness – Achievement of results by the NICI Fund:

Evaluation Questions: To what extent has the NICI achieved expected immediate-intermediate, and ultimate results. What, if any, other or unintended impacts have resulted from the program?

Key findings:

- The NICI Fund supported at least 50 projects in NWT, Nunavut and Yukon during the evaluation period.
- NICI projects have had an impact on local food production and supply, and the fund has been able to support innovative projects being carried out by organizations that have not historically accessed CanNor funding. Furthermore, the success of the projects has resulted in the creation of new jobs. Long-term funding is needed to fully support innovative food solutions in the north that can be scaled to the degree necessary to address food insecurity. All attributed those results somewhat or largely to CanNor.

The NICI Fund supported at least 50 projects in NWT, Nunavut and Yukon during the evaluation period.

The following table shows descriptive information for all NICI projects listed in the program's tracking sheet.

Table 19: NICI Projects 2019-20 to 2022-23, by Region and Transaction Activity

Fiscal Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
Total Number of Projects	3	19	17	11	50
By Region					
NWT	0	2	4	4	10
Nunavut	2	6	5	1	14
Yukon	1	11	8	6	26
By Transaction Activity					
Northern Community Food System	3	19	9	10	41
Food Innovation Prize	0	0	8	1	9

Note: Project numbers are based on the fiscal year of approval.

NICI projects have had an impact on local food production and supply, and the fund has been able to support innovative projects being carried out by organizations that have not historically accessed CanNor funding. However, these impacts have yet to be scaled to the degree necessary to address food insecurity.

NICI funding recipients who completed a survey shared that it is too soon to quantify the success NICI in terms of improving overall food security in northern and Indigenous communities. However, 71% of recipients (n=5) noted that individual projects were able to improve security in their local communities. Others (n=3, or 43%) said that their project resulted in the sharing of solutions related to food across the region or territories. Those individuals were asked for more information about how results were shared:

- "We take a food ecosystem model in all our food sovereignty work, and so whenever we do a food related project, we are engaging with our relations outside of the Traditional Territory."
- "Through a report on our website and a presentation at our annual conference. A further discussion was had at our AGM."
- "Our focus was and continues to be providing foundation documents that communities and Inuit organizations can utilize in aligning of mutual objectives and bringing insight as to the technologies, we are also able to share at large with our sister organizations across the Territory."

In addition, internal CanNor representatives indicated that the Northern Food Innovation Challenge was successful in supporting communities to test and implement innovative projects. The fund provided the opportunity for new partnerships with community organizations who have not previously received CanNor funding. In addition, CanNor representatives detailed many

successes related to testing and implementing innovative solutions related to food, including:

- The challenge provided an avenue for community organizations to think outside of their normal scope to come up with innovative ideas. In phase I, these ideas were meant to be ideas that could be thought about and researched. Successful projects were then moved to phase II where these innovative ideas could be implemented.
- There were three streams of funding through the NICI Fund which was seen as a success because it allowed more diversification and flexibility in spending the funding.
- Increased food production was also measured as a success of the program. Although no long-term data is available to substantiate this, participants shared that projects were able to increase food production and supply within their local communities.

They also noted challenges, including the following:

- Timelines were shared as a challenge with the NICI fund as time is needed to test and implement solutions related to food and that short timelines impede progress.
- Funding is a challenge because food security in the north is such a large issue, more funding must be made available to support these types of programs.
- Although the program is relevant and needed, that this program alone won't be sufficient to address the need in the territories.

NICI recipients report their projects were successful and exceeded or met their expectations, and attribute those results somewhat or primarily to CanNor funding

Survey respondents were asked to compare the actual results of their projects with their expectations. Most (71%) NICI recipients indicated their project results were as expected and the rest (29%) said that results were far better than expected. Most (71%) indicated that the results were due to a combination of CanNor funding and other factors, and the rest (29%) said that results were highly attributable to the funding received from CanNor.

Funding recipients who participated in a key informant interview highly attributed the impacts generated by their project to the funding provided by CanNor. These participants felt that without the CanNor funding their projects would not have occurred. The other participant felt that the impacts that occurred were the result a combination of CanNor funding and other factors. This participant shared that although CanNor funded most of the project, there were contributions from other's as well.

NICI participants agreed that there were positive unintended impacts associated with the implementation of their projects

NICI funding recipients who completed a survey were then asked about any unintended impacts, whether positive or negative. The four NICI survey participants who indicated that there were unintended impacts resulting from their project described positive impacts including interest being generated among the community and project benefits that extended beyond the initial set of stakeholders. One recipient indicated that the administrative burden of the project application and approval was higher than expected. In addition to addressing food security, funding recipients shared that the success of their project created long-term jobs. One participant reported that to sustain their business post-project, they had to hire 6 full-time staff members. Similarly, the other participant reported that their business model was so successful that they created 3 full-time and 5 part-time positions, in addition to turning a profit that exceeded their expectations. Lastly, two recipients shared that a negative unintended impact of undertaking their project was related to funding. Recipients shared that the lack of long-term funding should be addressed to better support their projects.

4.3 Efficiency

4.3.1 Efficiency of programs:

Evaluation Question: To what extent have the programs functioned efficiently?

Key findings:

- IDEANorth and NICI fund recipients indicated that most aspects of the program are efficient, easy to understand and that they were well supported by program officials. Timeliness of project approval was the biggest concern; most NICI fund recipients disagreed that timelines were appropriate and IDEANorth recipients felt that smaller projects received approval quickly, but approval for larger projects was often longer. NICI fund recipients also indicated that more time is needed to test and implement solutions related to food security and that short timelines impede progress. The flexibility of IDEANorth funding provides the opportunity to design efficient projects that respond to unique challenges.
- Given the unprecedented impact on SMEs from COVID-19, the NBRF appears to have been an efficient process. Overall, NBRF recipients indicated that most aspects of the program were efficient, however some disagreed that it was easy to understand and felt the time and effort for applying and reporting back was not appropriate. When responding to emergencies in the future, enhanced communication about eligibility, reporting and repayment requirements may be needed.
- Performance measurement data is collected and integrated into contribution agreements. It appears that despite issues with

performance indicators and data management, performance data is used by senior management in the design and implementation of the program. Additional focus on strategic planning and performance measurement may increase efficiency of CanNor programs.

The flexibility of funding provides the opportunity to design efficient projects that respond to unique challenges. Additional focus on strategic planning and performance measurement may increase efficiency.

Programs at CanNor are tailored to the specific challenges of northern business and have been designed to be broad in scope and eligibility, specifically because the gaps are greater, expenses are higher, and challenges are more difficult to overcome. The program allows CanNor the flexibility needed to assist and respond to unique challenges. CanNor key informants indicated that this approach supports the efficient delivery of project funds. Re-gaining delegated authority was also highlighted by internal interviewees as a strong contributor to improving efficiency of the programs. Interviewees highlighted challenges that relate to efficiency, including:

- A lack of directional investment plans for IDEANorth. Some indicated that a 5 to 10-year investment plan for each territory would improve the efficient and effective distribution of project funds.
- Lack of an appropriate IT or data management system for tracking projects, clients, and performance measurement indicators.

IDEANorth recipients indicate that most aspects of the program are efficient, easy to understand and that they were well supported by program officials. Timeliness of project approval was the biggest concern.

Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to program operations and efficiency based on their interactions with CanNor. The statements are included in the following table, along with the proportion of respondents who agreed (strongly or somewhat), disagreed (strongly or somewhat), or provided another response (neither agree nor disagree, do not know, not applicable). The statements have been ordered according to the proportion of the recipients in agreement.

Table 20: IDEANorth survey responses to question "Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements..."

Statement related to program operations and efficiency	IDEANorth Recipients (n=36)		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither/Do not know
The eligibility and application process was easy to understand	75%	14%	11%

Table 20: IDEANorth survey responses to question "Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements..."

Statement related to program operations and efficiency	IDEANorth Recipients (n=36)		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither/Do not know
The timeliness of receiving project funds was appropriate	72%	8%	19%
The reporting requirements were appropriate in terms of the type of information asked for	75%	8%	17%
The application process was appropriate in terms of the amount of time and effort required	72%	14%	14%
The reporting requirements were appropriate in terms of the amount of time and effort required	69%	17%	14%
Program officials were available to provide information and respond to questions	69%	14%	17%
The timeliness of project approval was appropriate	56%	25%	19%

Source: Survey of IDEANorth Recipients, 2024. Note: row values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The high level of satisfaction with operational processes was also found among proponents interviewed for the case studies. Recipients shared that they felt the application process was easy to complete and reasonable in length and they appreciated the nature of the application whereby they were required to submit an expression of interest first, before moving to the next stage of project approval which required a more detailed and rigorous application. Recipients felt that this process values their time. Additionally, participants felt well supported by their CanNor official when completing their application. The timeliness of project approval and receiving funding were reported by recipients as quick and efficient. Recipients felt that their project received approval quite quickly and that the two-tiered application process facilitated this efficiency. One participant, who had a large project, felt that the approval process was also efficient although due to the size of their project their application required additional levels of approval which did delay the process somewhat. Furthermore, participants shared that there was a funding schedule laid out at the outset of their project that was accurate. Participants felt that the transparency of the funding scheduled allowed them to plan their project timelines accordingly. Furthermore, all funding recipients who participated in a case study shared that the reporting requirements were reasonable and relatively easy to complete. Participants

understood the importance of reporting on project progress throughout the project, as well as submitting a final report so that officials can verify that the money provided was spent as intended. One participant noted that the only issue with reporting was that sometimes it is difficult to get information from vendors that was needed to complete their reports.

Overall, NBRF recipients indicated that most aspects of the program were efficient, however some disagreed that it was easy to understand and felt the time and effort for applying and reporting back was not appropriate.

Most NBRF recipients appeared satisfied with the efficiency of operational processes and strongly agreed or agreed with most statements asked about in the survey. However, some disagreed that the process was easy to understand (25%), that the reporting requirements were appropriate in terms of time and effort required (22%), and that the application process was appropriate in time and effort required (21%).

Table 21: NBRF survey responses to question "Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements..."

Statement related to program operations and efficiency	NBRF Recipients (n=85)		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither/Do not know
The timeliness of receiving project funds was appropriate	73%	12%	16%
The timeliness of project approval was appropriate	71%	15%	15%
Program officials were available to provide information and respond to questions	70%	17%	11%
The eligibility and application process was easy to understand	68%	25%	7%
The application process was appropriate in terms of the amount of time and effort required	68%	21%	10%
The reporting requirements were appropriate in terms of the type of information asked for	67%	16%	16%
The reporting requirements were appropriate in terms of the amount of time and effort required	61%	22%	16%

Source: Survey of NBRF Recipients, 2024. Note: row values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Funding recipients who participated in a case study shared that they felt the overall process of the NBRF program functioned efficiently agreeing that the application process, timeliness of approval, and timeliness of receiving funds were sufficient and reasonable. The exception was that participants agreed that the reporting requirements were lengthy and produced a large amount of work. Being asked to report on every individual operational expense was out of the norm for the participants and they shared that this level of reporting was quite time consuming. Although both participants notes that the reporting was a less efficient component of the program, both also agreed that they understood why the reporting needed to be detailed and that they didn't believe that there would be any way CanNor could reduce the administrative load on the participants.

NICI Fund recipients agreed that the program operates in an efficient manner and that they understand it well. However, timeliness of project approvals was noted as a major concern.

Recipients who completed the evaluation survey indicated that most aspects of the program were efficient, however nearly all (6 of 7) said that they project approval was lengthy and not appropriate. NICI recipients indicated that more time is needed to test and implement solutions related to food security and that short timelines impede progress.

However, NICI funding recipients who participated in a case study shared that overall, the steps to apply for, be approved, receive funding and reporting requirements were efficient and reasonable. With respect to the application process, participants felt that the initial expression of interest that screens the project is efficient. It is possible that issues affecting the responses of survey participants have been addressed and were not experienced by case study participants.

CanNor representatives shared thoughts about overall challenges to program efficiency.

- The Agency is lacking an efficient IT system for data collection. Currently excel spreadsheets are being used to collect and report data. Participants shared how this can create a lot of room for error.
- Client capacity. Participants shared that a lot of their clients in the territories do not have the knowledge and know-how to plan, implement or report on their budgeting process.
- COVID pandemic and the cost of doing businesses. The high cost of doing business was further enhanced by the COVID pandemic, which meant that clients inaccurately assessed how much money they would need for their projects.

4.3.2 Efficiency: Performance measurement

Evaluation Question: To what extent are performance measurement data collected and utilized by the programs?

Key findings:

- Performance measurement data is collected and integrated into contribution agreements. It appears that despite issues with performance indicators and data management, performance data is used by senior management in the design and implementation of the program. Additional focus on strategic planning and performance measurement may increase efficiency of CanNor programs.
- The way in which some performance data is captured and recorded limits its usefulness in assessing program effectiveness and progress made towards intended outcomes.

Performance measurement data is collected and integrated into contribution agreements. It appears that despite issues with performance indicators and data management, performance data is used by senior management in the design and implementation of the programs.

CanNor representatives indicated that while PMIs are established and used by management, they need to be reviewed and updated because the current state does not show the true impact of the programs (n=7). Representatives shared concerns that the current PMIs do not tell the full story of the territorial economic landscape and feel that they were developed with the southern, urban landscape in mind. Furthermore, CanNor representatives shared that the current PMIs are also challenging for clients and that clients are given little guidance on how to navigate data collection (n=4). This creates problems and increases workload for both the clients and the internal staff.

In addition, internal representatives were split on whether PMIs are collected in a reliable and consistent manner. While two participants shared that they are collected well, the rest of the participants felt that there is a lot of room for improvement (n=11). Some suggestions included:

- Giving more information to clients when they are signing their contribution agreements about what is expected with data collection and reporting so that they are aware at the outset (n=4).
- Develop an IT system that is used for PMI collection and monitoring (n=3). The current system of using excel spreadsheets presents too high of a risk of errors and has limited functionality.

These concerns appear to be a continuation of those identified in the 2017 Evaluation of the Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development, including that performance indicators may not fully capture the program's long-term impact, highlighting a need for revised project evaluation criteria

and improved reporting coordination with territorial governments to better track and understand the impact of these initiatives. Related recommendations of the 2017 Evaluation included:

- Review and define the Performance Measurement Indicators so that they are more relevant to the Northern context and provide the required insights on the program's impacts/results.
- Develop a reporting template to support consistent reporting and easier tracking of SINED outputs (i.e. program results).
- Develop a database to track project outputs and outcomes (i.e. project results), by region.

The way in which some performance data is captured and recorded limits its usefulness in assessing program effectiveness and progress made towards intended outcomes.

Of note, this includes the number of jobs created, maintained or expanded as a result of IDEANorth fundings. While program data shows the expected and actual results for this category of impact, the data as reported by proponents and maintained by the program area. For example, the following table presents data collected by the program for three of the four years covered by the evaluation. However, the data does not reliably present the actual jobs created, maintained, or expanded despite appearing to do so. "Expected" values may include jobs to be created, maintained, or expanded over a multi-year project but that are reflected only in the first year of the project. "Actual" values are self reported by proponents annually. The actual values reported by project proponents reflect the number of project jobs at that moment, but do not necessarily reflect the net new amount each year. The result is an overcounting of these outcomes.

Table 22: Employment outcome data for IDEANorth

Outcomes	Fiscal Year			Total	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22		
Jobs created	Expected	68	106	182	355
	Actual	327	107	91	525
Jobs maintained	Expected	119	34	103	256
	Actual	27	27	58	112
Jobs expanded	Expected	14	19	54	87
	Actual	2	10	16	28

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The evaluation shows that the IDEANorth program is well aligned with key mandates and frameworks aimed at diversifying and growing the northern economy of Canada. The program has effectively supported projects across various territories, with a notable emphasis on Indigenous, women, and youth-owned businesses. With a total of 235 projects funded, IDEANorth has leveraged additional funding at an impressive rate, contributing to territorial economic growth and addressing gaps in small-scale economic infrastructure. Recipients have largely reported meeting or exceeding their expected results, with the program having a positive impact on employment and investment in the region. While most aspects of the program are viewed as efficient and well-supported by officials, there is room for improvement in strategic planning, performance measurement, and the timeliness of project approval. Overall, IDEANorth has demonstrated its value in fostering economic development and diversification in Canada's territories. Some efficiency issues persist, including inadequate design and collection of performance data and lack of an appropriate data management system.

The Northern Business Relief Fund (NBRF), launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, played a crucial role in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Canada's territories. The fund provided up to \$12.5 million in non-repayable grants to help businesses cover fixed operating costs, thereby enabling them to remain operational during the pandemic. With the territories facing unique economic and social challenges, the NBRF was particularly vital in assisting businesses that are often the lifeblood of remote and rural communities. The fund's impact was significant, with 565 SMEs supported, over 1,685 jobs maintained, and most recipients reporting that they met or exceeded their expected results. While the program was generally viewed as efficient, some recipients suggested improvements in the clarity of the process and the administrative burden of reporting requirements. Overall, the NBRF was an essential tool in mitigating the economic fallout of the pandemic for territorial businesses, allowing them to weather the crisis and focus on rebuilding in its aftermath.

The Northern Isolated Communities Initiatives (NICI) Fund has played a crucial role in addressing food security challenges in northern and Indigenous communities by supporting community-led projects for local and Indigenous food production systems. With a \$15 million investment over five years, NICI has funded at least 50 projects across the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon, focusing on innovative and practical solutions to increase food security. Recipients have reported that the funding was instrumental in implementing their projects and securing additional funding. While it is too early to quantify the overall success of NICI in improving food security, individual projects have shown positive impacts on local food production and supply. However, challenges such as short timelines and the need for more funding highlight that the program alone may not be sufficient to address the extensive food security needs in the territories. Despite these

challenges, NICI recipients have generally found the program to be efficient and well-understood, although timeliness of project approvals remains a concern.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, and recognizing that CanNor is a micro-agency, recommendations have been developed to support ongoing program management. The evaluation recommends that the CanNor Senior Management Committee:

Recommendation 1

Establish a process, including timelines, for the selection and implementation of a data management system and procedures that will improve collection, storage, management, and use of data related to proponents, projects, and outcomes.

Recommendation 2

Improve the usefulness of performance measurement data by identifying and implementing indicators that more accurately demonstrate project outcomes and tell a performance story that is responsive and reflective of the territorial context.

Recommendation 3

Identify opportunities to shorten project approval periods and to improve communication with project proponents about application status, anticipated timelines, and contract obligations.

Appendix 1: Evaluation Framework

Questions on the Relevance of the Program

1. Evaluation Question: Is there an ongoing need for the IDEANorth Program and the NICI Fund?
 - 1.1. Indicator: Evidence showing the ongoing need for the IDEANorth Program was found from document, program files, administrative data review, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
 - 1.2. Indicator: Evidence on the ongoing need for the NICI Fund was found from: document, program files, administrative data review, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.

- 1.3. Indicator: Evidence found from Statistics Canada or other economic data that establishes a specific ongoing need for this type of programming in the North was found in document, program files, administrative data review.
2. Evaluation Question: To what extent did the NBRF respond to a demonstrable need?
 - 2.1. Indicator: Evidence showing the need for the NBRF found through review of document, program files, administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
 - 2.2. Indicator: Evidence or statistics relating to the extent of economic impact to SMEs in NWT, Nunavut, Yukon or Canada as a result of COVID-19, prior to the establishment of the program found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 2.3. Indicator: Evidence or statistics that compares the NBRF and other COVID-19 government support for SMEs in terms of the level of funding and/or funding eligible expense criteria found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 2.4. Indicator: Evidence of, or views on, the extent to which the NBRF was complimentary or duplicative of other COVID-19 government interventions for SMEs: found through document, program files, administrative data review, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
 3. Evaluation Question: Are the programs consistent with departmental and federal government roles, responsibilities, and priorities?
 - 3.1. Indicator: Evidence of or views on the extent to which the programs are consistent with Canadian legislation, treaty obligations and government priorities found through document, program files, administrative data review, and from key informant interviews with CanNor internal respondents.
 - 3.2. Indicator: Evidence of or views on the extent to which the programs are aligned with CanNor strategic objectives: found through document, program files, administrative data review, and from key informant interviews with CanNor internal respondents.
 - 3.3. Indicator: Evidence of or views on the extent to which there is a legitimate, appropriate and necessary role for the federal government in the programs found through review of document, program files, administrative data, and from key informant interviews with CanNor internal respondents.

Questions on the Effectiveness of the Program

4. **a)** Evaluation Question: To what extent have the IDEANorth program and the NICI Fund achieved expected **short-term** results and objectives?
 - 4.1. Indicator: Progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Territorial economic growth and capacity is supported" in terms of the: amount of foundational investments (e.g. capacity building, economic

- planning, scientific/technical/commercial studies, marketing, economic development event) made to advance territorial economic growth. Evidence for this indicator found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
- 4.2. Indicator: Progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Territorial economic growth and capacity is supported" in terms of the: Number of Northerners participating in capacity building activities and training supported through IDEANorth funding. Evidence for this indicator found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 4.3. Indicator: Progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Territorial economic growth and capacity is supported" in terms of the: Percentage of businesses directly supported through IDEANorth funding that are majority-owned by women, youth (<30 years), and Indigenous peoples. Evidence for this indicator found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 4.4. Indicator: Progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Gaps (e.g. lacking tourism infrastructure, lacking commercial space available for businesses) in territorial small-scale economic infrastructure are addressed" in terms of the: Number of small-scale infrastructure projects funded to support local level economic opportunities across the territories. Evidence for this indicator found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 4.5. Indicator: Progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Increased readiness to address territorial foundational infrastructure gaps" in terms of the: Number of large-scale economic infrastructure initiatives supported by pre-construction readiness activities (e.g. feasibility studies, drawings, plans). Evidence for this indicator found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 4.6. Indicator: Progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Partnerships established with Northern governments and organizations" in terms of the: Funding leveraged from other organizations and sources. Evidence for this indicator found through review of document, program files, administrative data.
 - 4.7. Indicator: Extent to which NICI has made progress towards its immediate intended outcome of "communities are testing and implementing innovative solutions related to food". Evidence for this indicator was found in document, program files, administrative data review, from key informant interviews with CanNor external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
4. **b)** Evaluation Question: to what extent have the IDEANorth program and the NICI Fund achieved expected **medium-term** results and objectives?
- 4.8. Indicator: Extent to which progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome "Investments to advance territorial economic growth and sector development (Stream 1) and small-scale economic infrastructure (Stream 3) contribute to increasing local or regional economic development activity" in terms of the: Number of direct jobs

- (full-time year of employment) created or maintained as a result of IDEANorth funding. Evidence to answer this question was sourced from a review of documents, program files, and administrative data.
- 4.9. Indicator: Extent to which NICI has made progress towards its intermediate intended outcome of “successful business and community solutions related to food are shared broadly across the territories”. Evidence to answer this question was sourced from a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives and project recipients, and a survey of project recipients.
4. **c) Evaluation Question:** to what extent have the IDEANorth program and the NICI Fund achieved expected **long-term** results and objectives?
- 4.10. Indicator: Extent to which progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome “Foundational investments in key sectors of the territorial economies (e.g. mining, arts and culture, tourism, commercial fisheries) contributes to enhanced sectoral growth” in terms of the GDP annual growth rates (%) of key sectors of the territorial economies, in comparison to the annual growth rate of these sectors at the national level. Evidence to answer this question was found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data.
- 4.11. Indicator: Extent to which progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome “Strong, dynamic, diverse innovative and inclusive territorial economies for the benefit of Northerners and all Canadians” in terms of the labour market participation rate by Northerners. Evidence to answer this question was found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data.
- 4.12. Indicator: Extent to which progress has been made by IDEANorth towards the outcome “Strong, dynamic, diverse innovative and inclusive territorial economies for the benefit of Northerners and all Canadians” in terms of 5-year survival rates of SMEs in the territories. Evidence to answer this question was found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data.
- 4.13. Indicator: Extent to which NICI has made progress towards its ultimate intended outcome of “improved food security in northern and Indigenous communities”. Evidence to answer this question was sourced from a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives and project recipients.
5. Evaluation Question: what results or objectives were achieved by the NBRF?
- 5.1. Indicator: Nature of objectives, goals or targets established for NBRF. Evidence to answer this question was sourced from a review of

- documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives and project recipients.
- 5.2. Indicator: Evidence of, or Views on the extent and nature of outcomes achieved by the NBRF. Evidence to answer this question was sourced from a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives and project recipients, survey of project recipients and case studies.
6. Evaluation Question: what, if any, other or unintended impacts have resulted from the programs?
- 6.1. Indicator: Evidence of, or Views on the nature and extent of any other or unintended impacts or outcomes of the IDEANorth program found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
 - 6.2. Indicator: Evidence of or Views on the nature and extent of any other or unintended impacts or outcomes of the NBRF found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
 - 6.3. Indicator: Evidence of or Views on the nature and extent of any other or unintended impacts or outcomes of the NICI Fund found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients and case studies.
 - 6.4. Indicator: Evidence of or Views on the nature and extent to which the programs have contributed to CanNor Departmental Results found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives.

Questions on the Efficiency of the Program

7. Evaluation Question: To what extent have the programs functioned efficiently?
 - 7.1. Indicator: Analysis of planned vs. actual program expenditures by consulting documents, program files, and administrative data.
 - 7.2. Indicator: Rationale for discrepancies between planned and actual expenditures found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives.
 - 7.3. Indicator: Extent to which service standards are achieved and/or considered to be appropriate; found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, from key informant interviews

- with CanNor external representatives and project recipients, a survey of project recipients.
- 7.4. Indicator: Views on alternative approaches that would be more efficient at achieving expected outcomes; found through key informant interviews with CanNor internal and external representatives and project recipients.

 8. Evaluation Question: to what extent are performance measurement collected and utilized by the programs?
 - 8.1. Indicator: Evidence of, or views on the extent to which performance measurement indicators, baselines and targets have been established and data is collected in a consistent and reliable manner; found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, and key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives.
 - 8.2. Indicator: Assessment of the degree of alignment between program logic model(s), theories of change, and performance measurement indicators; found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data.
 - 8.3. Indicator: Evidence of, and views on the extent to which performance measurement data is used by senior management in the design or implementation of the program; found through a review of documents, program files, and administrative data, and key informant interviews with CanNor internal representatives.

Footnotes

Footnote 1

Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada. (2016). Policy on Results. Retrieved from: <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=31300>

[Return to footnote 1 referrer](#)

Footnote 2

Personnel costs include salaries and Employee Benefit Plans.

[Return to footnote 2 referrer](#)

Footnote 3

'Other' includes SSC core information technology services and PWGSC accommodation premium.

[Return to footnote 3 referrer](#)

Footnote 4

CanNor. (December 2020). News release. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/northern-economic-development/news/2020/12/2020-highlights-cannor-support-helps-northern-business-community-be-resilient-during-covid-19-pandemic-and-beyond.html>

[Return to footnote 4 referrer](#)

Footnote 5

Personnel costs include salaries and Employee Benefit Plans.

[Return to footnote 5 referrer](#)

Footnote 6

'Other' includes SSC core information technology services and PWGSC accommodation premium.

[Return to footnote 6 referrer](#)

Footnote 7

Government of Canada. (2022). Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. Retrieved from: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587#s1>

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[Return to footnote 12 referrer](#)