



# Indigenous Community Food Security in Yukon Territory, Canada

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Arctic Institute of  
Community-Based Research  
For Northern Health and Well-Being

## Research Question

How can Yukon people be more food secure in the face of a changing climate?

## Who We Are

- Independent, non-profit research organization established in 2007.
- Our **mission** is to facilitate, promote and conduct community-based, Northern-led research aimed at improving the lives of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Northerners and the health of Northern environments.
- Our **vision** is the meaningful engagement of Northerners in health, natural and social science research focused on Northern priorities, with results contributing to all Northerners living healthy lives.
- We work with Northern Indigenous communities, NGOs, governments (Indigenous, Territorial, Federal), academics, graduate students, research organizations and the private sector.
- Our **research approach** prioritizes:
  - Principles of Community-Based Research
  - Youth Engagement
  - Community Capacity-Building
  - Knowledge Sharing
  - Evaluation
  - Partnership Development
  - Inter-sectoral Collaboration
- Our **research priorities** include:
  - Food Security
  - Chronic Disease Prevention
  - Healthy Lifestyles
  - Injury Prevention
  - Climate Change Adaptation



## Objectives

### Short Term

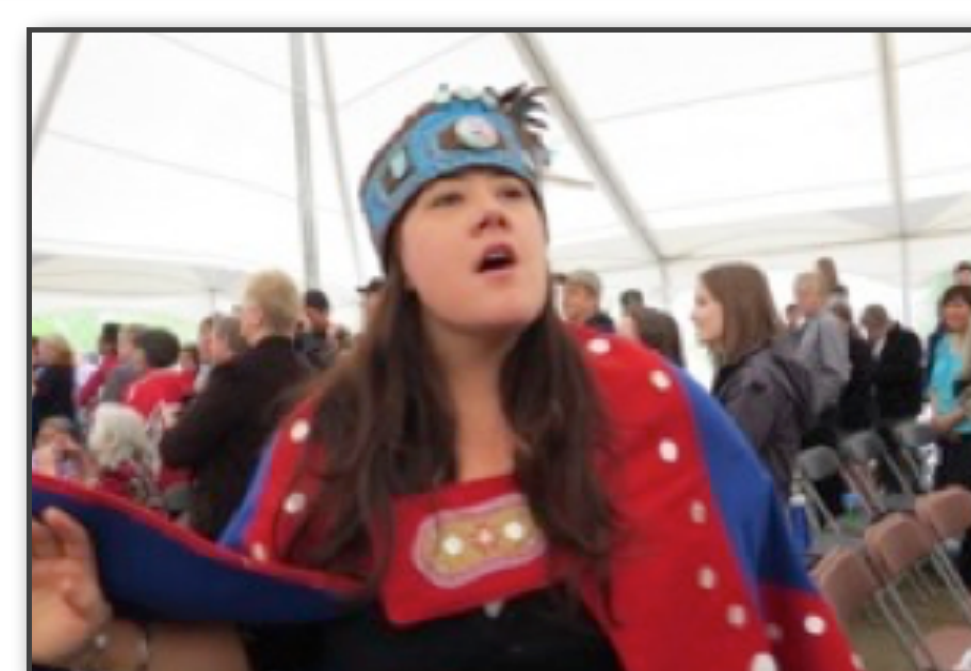
- Build on and gather in-depth information (including traditional knowledge, local knowledge, published literature) about locally based experiences of climate and lifestyle changes on community's food security.
- Define food security from a community perspective.
- Find ways First Nation citizens and other residents can collaboratively adapt to ensure there will be local, nutritious food available for the community now and in the future.
- Assess feasibility and potential of a community greenhouse and/or garden as a social enterprise so that it is a useful and self-sustaining resource in the community.
- Build capacity and empower youth to be culturally resilient First Nation citizens who are prepared to cope with and adapt to changing environment and lifestyles by giving them opportunity to learn from Elders, engage in culturally-based activities, and learn about climate change and food security from a global to local perspective.
- Build capacity and empower youth to be leaders in their community by giving them a voice through visual media (i.e. Photo voice project).
- Build youth capacity in research skills (i.e. interview, communication, cultural protocols, data analysis, photography).
- Develop a long-term food security community adaptation and action plan.

### Long Term

- Support local First Nation communities with long-term strategies to become more self-sufficient and food secure.
- Prepare future leaders to make decisions that involve planning for changing environmental conditions, including both adaptation related to reduced access to traditional food species and preserving the Tlingit culture in light of a rapidly changing environment.

## Background

- In the spring of 2012, flooding washed out several sections of the Alaska Highway, cutting off the only transport link to Yukon Territory. This was a wake-up call for the Yukon and now local communities are taking it upon themselves to ensure they are more self-sufficient when it comes to food security.
- In Yukon, over 6000 people are food insecure (17%)<sup>1</sup>, the majority of which are Yukon First Nations.
- Climate change is affecting the North, creating uncertainty and variability of temperature, growing season, precipitation and hydrology. These changing environmental conditions are directly linked to rural communities' food security, namely through affecting access to traditional foods.
- For Indigenous peoples, traditional foods are central to cultural health and well-being, and fishing, hunting and gathering continue to be a main part of their livelihood.
- Food security for Indigenous peoples in Canada involves understanding the cultural, nutritional, and spiritual significance of specific types of foods such as traditional foods like moose, caribou, and salmon<sup>2,3</sup>
- Clear evidence exists that food insecurity has negative implications for human health, including cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes and mental health<sup>4</sup>. Chronic diseases including diabetes and cancer are increasing in northern Indigenous communities. Indigenous people believe strongly that this is a result of not being able to practice traditional activities and eat traditional foods; which is causing reduced physical activity, greater reliance on market foods, and a major change in diet.
- It is the youth and future generations who will be facing the greatest impacts of climate change and food insecurity in the coming years, and they will be responsible for adapting to the changes. It is therefore essential to focus attention on building capacity and knowledge on climate change and food security with the youth;
- The end goal is to develop locally based, culturally-relevant, long-term, community food security and adaptation strategies and action plans for Yukon communities.



## Key Factors for Northern Community Engagement

Different kinds of communities require different kinds of engagement strategies at different stages, in different projects. For the local community food strategies, we have found the following approach to be the most effective.

- Engage with Chief and Council, Elders Council and/or Mayor with presentation for what is being proposed.
- Assess interest in community and interest in proceeding with the project.
- Develop proposal in collaboration with community.

Once funding is confirmed, the following takes place:

- Negotiate research agreement.
- Establish community steering committee.
- Develop research protocols, including informed consent, and pre-test.
- Hire local project coordinator to work directly in community.
- Where possible, hire and train local youth and others to assist with project in meaningful ways.
- Where possible, attend and participate in relevant cultural events and activities.
- Have youth capture project using different visual media including photos and film.
- Ensure frequent ongoing communications with steering committee and community during course of the project.
- Interpret results with involvement of steering committee and others.
- Present preliminary results to Chief and Council, Elders Council, Mayor and other key individuals in community; after-which, present and validate results at community meeting.
- Present final plain language summary of project and results soon after results have been verified.

## Our Partners

There are 14 First Nations in Yukon, to date, AICBR has worked collaboratively with the following communities on food security strategies.

- Selkirk First Nation, Pelly Crossing Yukon (2015-2016)
- Carcross-Tagish First Nation, Carcross and Tagish Yukon (2012-2014/ completion pending funding)
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Dawson Yukon (2013-2014/ completion pending funding)
- Kluane First Nation, Burwash Landing Yukon (2013-2014)
- Vuntut Gwitchin, Old Crow Yukon (2008-2011)
- Teslin Tlingit Council, Teslin Yukon (2010)



## Conclusions

- For long-term sustainability and security, communities want clear plans that they can build from, which include being more self-sufficient by:
  - Increasing local food production
  - Building community gardens
  - Increasing animal husbandry
  - Building micro enterprises
  - Returning to ancient methods of sharing
  - Returning to ancient methods of wildlife management and conservation
- Following a community-based approach has resulted in tangible food security strategies tailored to meet the needs of each community's circumstances and cultural heritage.
- While northern communities are unique, we also have many underlying commonalities and issues. We believe that our work will help contribute to and support other's work on these matters across the North.



## References

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