Richard Frank: "It has taken 84 years for us to sit down across the table from each other and talk about land claims. In the old days, and even today, a lot of the old people cannot understand what it is about. We know that this is our father's land. We know that for our children to be part of the new America we have to live in villages or in the city for them to go to school. But that doesn't mean that we have forgotten about our land …. We have a right to our ancient land."

72. Lael Morgan, *And the Land Provides: Alaska Natives in a Year of Transition* (Doubleday, 1974).
73. It is important to note the role of Felix Cohen, a brilliant lawyer who served in the Interior Department during this period and went on to write the *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*. Of his many contributions was the distinction he drew between "wardship" and "trusteeship" as it relates to Native rights. Cohen argued the government relationship with Indigenous Peoples was more akin to trusteeship because of the "inherent rights of self government." This was an historically early and significant shift toward "self determination." Haycox, "Felix Cohen," 148.
74. This point was emphasized by David Case in his presentation at the Alaska Historical Society Critical Issues Lecture Series: "Alaska Native Sovereignty," October 16, 2023. https://alaskahistoricalsociety.org/lecture-and-discussion-series/.

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Research Article

Breaking New Trail? First Nations and Municipal Government Cooperation in Rural Yukon

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Abstract: Rural communities in the Yukon tend to be very small, most with fewer than 1,000 people, with mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Although small, these communities face economic, social, and environmental issues similar to larger centres. These problems are complex and require a collective response from multiple governments or organizations. This research project explored the factors of inter-organizational collaboration and examined the status of cooperation between Self-Governing First Nations (SGFNs) and municipalities in rural Yukon in order to understand the factors that strengthen collaborative processes and any barriers to these processes. The project involved interviews with six key informants who are, or were, directly involved with a municipality, territorial government, or an SGFN. The research found that while most SGFNs and municipalities engage with each other, the trend is towards minimal cooperation, although relationships are improving slowly. All respondents agreed that SGFNs and municipalities in rural Yukon should collaborate more, for reasons including the need to make the best use of resources and social justice such as reconciliation. Frequently cited barriers to collaboration include a lack of human resource capacity and staff turnover. Other barriers are community histories and Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. The enabling factor of common understanding has some unique features in the Yukon. The region is a complex myriad of jurisdictions—territorial, First Nations, and municipal governments—with conflicting, competing, and separate mandates. However, the informants felt that a common understanding for First Nations and municipalities should be working together to benefit their entire communities.

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Introduction

Yukon communities present an interesting opportunity for research that explores inter-organizational collaboration between different orders of governments in small, rural communities, specifically self-governing First Nations and municipalities. Rural communities in the Yukon tend to be very small, with most having populations fewer than 1,000 people, and mixed populations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Although small, these communities face similar economic, social, and environmental issues as do larger centres. These complex problems require a collective response with collaboration between more than one level of government or group. Therefore, a collaborative ecosystem is a critical component before beginning any community development process.

Creating a collaborative ecosystem in rural Yukon communities is complicated by Canada's colonial history with Indigenous Peoples and the socio-political development of the Yukon. Given the socio-political evolution of the Yukon, First Nations and municipal collaborations are still an emerging concept. Community members and government institutions, such as self-governing First Nations (SGFNs) and municipalities, struggle with the issues associated with the inequalities and trauma of colonialism. However, this tension creates both a barrier and an opportunity for reconciliation.

Since the dominant government actors in several rural Yukon communities are SGFNs and municipalities, the relationship between these two actors is key to community collaboration. Due to their shared geographical community space, rural Yukon communities have the potential to be at the forefront of intergovernmental collaboration between First Nations and municipal governments in Canada.

The purpose of this research study was to conduct an environmental scan of collaboration between SGFNs and municipalities in rural Yukon.[1] It explored the factors of inter-organizational collaboration and examined the status of cooperation between Self-Governing First Nations (SGFNs) and municipalities in rural Yukon in order to understand the factors that strengthen collaborative processes and any barriers to these processes. The study sought to understand whether the past poses too significant a barrier for collaboration between First Nations and municipal governments—or, alternatively, whether the desire to work together and co-create their futures for the betterment of their respective communities provides the impetus for grassroots reconciliation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six key informants who are, or had been, directly involved with a municipality, territorial government, or an SGFN. Several themes emerged from the interviews: the state of collaboration, motivations, barriers, Yukon's socio-political evolution, leadership, and trust and relationship building. The informants agreed that self-governing First Nations and municipal government collaboration is mostly moving in the right direction in the Yukon, albeit slowly. However, the speed, quality, and degree of collaborations range from minimal to very collaborative.

The research also explored the starting conditions for collaboration, six enabling factors, and the role of historical tensions and conflict between Indigenous Peoples and settlers to the territory.

Researcher Positionality

I am a non-Indigenous person educated by Western-centric institutions and raised outside the Yukon. Since arriving in the Yukon in the fall of 2008, I have lived in the rural community of Teslin. My first position in the community was working in the executive office at Teslin Tlingit Council (TTC), an SGFN. In 2011, I moved to the Teslin campus of Yukon College, now Yukon University. In 2012, I was elected to the Village of Teslin (VOT) municipal council, and in 2018 I was elected as mayor, and was acclaimed for a third term in 2024. VOT and TTC have a long-standing collaborative relationship aimed at the betterment of the community as a whole. This remarkable relationship is the inspiration for my interest in inter-organizational collaboration between municipalities and First Nations governments in the Yukon.[2]

Background: Rural Yukon Community Context

With a population of over 46,500, the Yukon has a low population density but a striking urban–rural divide. The capital city of Whitehorse, where over three-quarters of the population resides, dominates the territory (Coates & Graham, 2015; Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The remaining population is spread over fifteen small communities, with the second and third largest communities—Dawson City, with 2,391 people, and Watson Lake, with 1,513 people—dwarfed by the capital city. The rest, except Haines Junction, have populations under 1,000 people (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

Outside of Whitehorse, local governance is a mix of SGFNs and municipalities. Eleven of the fourteen First Nations in the Yukon are self-governing, with nine in rural Yukon. Of the eight municipalities in the Yukon, seven are in rural communities, with all but two sharing at least some geographical space with an SGFN.

Table 1 depicts the total population of rural Yukon communities with a percentage of the Indigenous population for each community.

Table 1. Rural Yukon Communities—Total Population and Percentage Indigenous Population

Rural Community	Total Population	Indigenous Population
Pelly Crossing	381	88%
Old Crow	222	89%
Ross River	403	80%
Burwash Landing	120	61%
Carmacks	602	64%
Teslin	510	63%
Mayo	466	56%
Carcross	495	63%
Watson Lake	1,513	42%
Beaver Creek	111	44%
Haines Junction	1,055	35%
Other	80	32%
Tagish	396	19%
Dawson City	2,391	19%
Destruction Bay	66	18%
Faro	454	23%
Highlighted: Communities with both an SGFN and municipality		

Source: Yukon Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Population report second quarter 2024.* Government of Yukon. https://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/ybs/fin-population-report-q2-2024.pdf

The municipalities of Faro and Watson Lake do not share space with an SGFN. Liard First Nation is located in Watson Lake but is not self-governing. Faro is adjacent to Ross River, home to the Ross River Dena Council, which is also not self-governing.

The Indigenous population of Whitehorse is 14% of the city's total population, and it is 21% of the territorial population. SGFNs receive substantially more funding than municipalities, but they also have much larger mandates and more programs and services than municipal governments.[3] They are also considered a government on level with the federal and territorial governments. SGFNs play a significant role in the politics of the Yukon, and this is particularly noticeable in most rural communities. As a result, they exert more influence and power than municipalities.

The Yukon's eight municipalities cover only 0.2% of the territory's landmass, but over 80% of the population resides within a municipality. Municipalities are established under the Yukon Municipal Act, and therefore are a subset of the territorial government, and focus on delivering critical core municipal infrastructure services such as water, wastewater, recreation, and solid waste.

While there is a strong government presence in rural Yukon, the governance structure is complex. Although rural communities have small populations, the territorial, First Nations, and municipal governments all have a presence with different jurisdictions, resources, and infrastructure (Crawford, 2021). However, the concept of working together is embedded in the 1993 Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA)—signed by the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Yukon—and in each SGFN's individual Final Agreement (FA). Clause 24.7 of the UFA contemplates the creation of regional or district structures that allow for common administrative or planning structures by Yukon First Nations, the federal government, the territorial government, and municipalities (Council for Yukon First Nations, Yukon Territory, and Canada, 1993, p. 264). Although this clause exists, no order of government has taken advantage of it yet.

There are also higher-level reasons for working together. Of the ninety-four recommendations in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action released in 2015, five refer directly to municipal government, recognizing its importance in successful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Wuttunee, 2018).

Given the small size of Yukon rural communities, their strong local governance presence, potential legal mechanisms, and the nature of complex problems, there appears to be a significant impetus for rural SGFNs and municipalities to collaborate. All signs point to the need and opportunities to work together.

However, Canada's colonization of Indigenous Peoples has left deep scars and severely damaged relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Furthermore, parallel, yet separate, self-government initiatives in the Yukon, one by the First Nations and one by the non-Indigenous settlers in the latter part of the twentieth century, may have also created additional tension, which continues to this day and presents a barrier to creating trust (Sabin, 2014).

First Nations and Municipal Government Collaboration in Canada

Research into First Nations and municipal government collaboration in Canada is an emerging field. Alcantara and Nelles (2016) claim that most studies focus on conflicts and adversarial relations between First Nations and federal, territorial, and provincial governments. In contrast, most of the information about

progressive local partnerships, which Alcantara and Nelles characterize as quiet and "highly productive and beneficial" (p. 4), is buried in grey literature sources such as government reports and intergovernmental agreements. A report for the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) (Apolonio, 2008) concurs, stating that while community non-Indigenous and Indigenous governments see the value of coming together to deal with common concerns for the benefit of the broader community, the research on these collaborations is sparse.

The UBCM report examined local and First Nations government partnerships in British Columbia. It concluded that the province has many notable local relationships in the areas of collaborative governance, land and resource co-management, and economic development (Apolonio, 2008). The report also cited seven enabling factors for successful Indigenous government–local government collaborations, including triggers, environment, purpose, principles, structures and process, capacity, and evaluation (Apolonio, 2008). Triggers include third-party processes, such as a treaty, and Wuttunnee (2018) also points to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as potential trigger.

Epp (2016) suggests that Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in rural communities in Canada need to work together to renew their ageing infrastructure. He draws attention to their similarities. They both have common characteristics of being in a place and a landscape, with an increasing feeling of distance from decision makers in far-off urban centres. However, Epp advises that to work together, they must also bridge the historical divides, including mutual isolation, racism, and rivalry for land and resources.

Principles and values play a vital role in guiding partners. While specific values vary depending on the community, the UBCM report points to trust, commitment, consensus, and recognition of Indigenous Traditional Territory and cultural sites, as principles that stood out across the board. Trust and commitment are also significant factors. In this context, trust takes two forms. Trust building is a crucial enabling factor that is usually the first step in a successful partnership. Trust is also an outcome of successful collaboration. A genuine and robust commitment to the partnership, particularly by leadership, is cited as an essential principle (Apolonio, 2008).

Informal and formal structures and processes are essential for collaboration. For example, Morris (2008) identifies board and committee meetings as important formal structures, while task groups, sub-groups, ad-hoc groups, and workshops provide more informal structures.

Alcantara and Nelles (2016) evaluated First Nations and municipal cooperation using case studies of four communities in Canada, including two from the Yukon. They used a relationship-type matrix with two dimensions—engagement and intensity, classified as either high or low to categorize their findings. The authors conclude that neither is better than the other. Instead, individual communities need to decide when and how to cooperate and whether their nature is high or low engagement and intensity. The authors recommend that collaboration should only be used as a strategic tool for specific issues and, for some communities, no cooperation is an acceptable strategy. This conclusion also connects to Huxham and Vangen's (2000a; 2005) warning that organizations should not engage in collaboration unless they must.

Wuttunee (2018) states that leadership is critical for First Nations and municipal collaboration, even when players change through election cycles. She adds that the relationship building and consensus building process needs time and attention, but building trust-based relationships through collaboration is a significant outcome and key to building a foundation for long-term sustainable success.

It is important to underscore the potential need for communities to address historical conflict between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. The 2018 National Indigenous–Local Government Partnership Forum found that the barriers to cooperation include historical issues that inhibit trust and reconciliation, including the lack of acknowledgement of past wrongs and colonial history. This work extends to understanding the history and cultures of the partner communities (Alderhill Planning Inc, 2018). Gray and Wood (2018) also warn that profound value differences pose complex challenges for Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaboration.

The process of addressing historical community conflict and Canada's colonial legacy with Indigenous Peoples may also take time. While conducting a participatory research project in community economic development in rural British Columbia, Markey et al. (2005) found that one of the communities realized that leaving unresolved historical conflict between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people jeopardized the community planning process and presented a critical barrier. As a result, the intervention included a series of well-managed community workshops to promote dialogue to address the conflict. In this case, conflict resolution was a critical step to starting collaboration. Given the socio-political evolution of the Yukon and Canada, it may also be a necessary step for some Yukon communities.

Methodology

This qualitative research study involved data collection through semi-structured interviews with six key informants with past or current experience in an SGFN, a rural municipality, or within the Government of Yukon's Department of Community Services. The selection criteria focused on current or former senior employees or political representatives with experience across different organizations.[4] All six informants had a broad range of experience in multiple positions across different organizations that gave them a "landscape" view of First Nations and municipal relations: two with First Nations elected official experience; three with municipal elected official experience; three with First Nations senior administration experience; two with municipal senior administration experience; one with territorial elected official experience; and one with territorial senior administration experience. Three of the informants identified as Indigenous.[5]

A conceptual framework based on factors relevant to the Yukon was designed to guide inquiries with informants (see Figure 1).

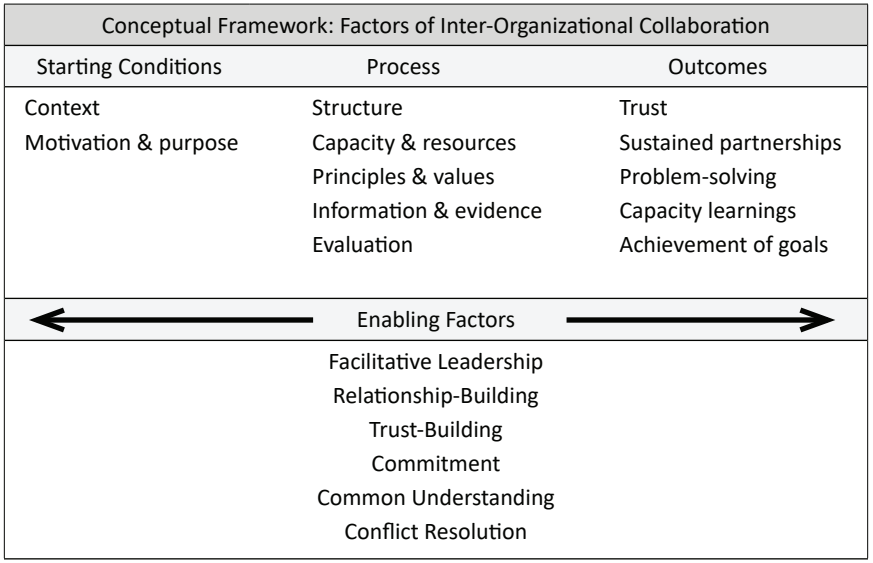

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Factors of Inter-Organizational Collaboration
Source: Author, based on the antecedent-process-outcome model from Thompson and Perry (2006). The factors draw heavily on the work of Morris (2008) and Apolonio (2008) and may be inspired by elements in other works.

Results

This study aimed to understand the factors that support inter-organizational collaboration or pose potential barriers, informed by lived experience and shaped by context. The specific research questions of the study were as follows: What are the critical enabling factors for inter-organizational collaboration, and what additional factors may need to be considered for relationships between First Nations and municipal governments? What enabling factors or restrictive barriers contribute to the current collaborative environment for First Nations and municipal governments in rural Yukon? Several themes emerged from the interviews: The state of collaboration, motivations, barriers, Yukon's socio-political evolution, leadership, and trust and relationship building.[6]

State of Collaboration

The informants agreed that self-governing First Nations and municipal government collaboration is mostly moving in the right direction in the Yukon, albeit slowly. However, the speed, quality, and degree of collaboration range from minimal to very collaborative. There may be some superficial interest in some communities but no action by the municipality or First Nation for various reasons. As one of the informants stated, "Practice may differ from intention." In some communities, the collaboration may be more transactional and does not extend beyond service agreements or perfunctory joint council meetings and administrative meetings on minor operational issues. In some cases, the political meetings are more about updating the First Nation on specific municipal initiatives and issues rather than a dialogue around shared concerns or community issues. Full collaborations on community planning and common issues of concern exist but are rare. The reasons for this spectrum of collaboration are varied, although individual personalities as both a catalyst and a barrier came up frequently.

Several informants observed that rural Yukon communities with both a First Nation government and a municipality have an advantage, regardless of the state of the relationship. Municipalities provide value to First Nations by alleviating some obligations in providing drinking water, fire protection, sewer, and solid waste services. Without a municipality, these responsibilities are left to the First Nation governments to deliver themselves or advocate for their delivery by the Yukon Government, which manages services from afar. One informant also pointed out that First Nation governments performing municipal services do not receive compensation for these services from either the territorial or federal governments. In other words, even if the working relationship between the governments is minimal, in communities with a municipality that focuses on providing essential

municipal services, First Nation governments can concentrate energy and capacity on other priorities, many of which are complex problems.

Several informants noted that strong working relationships between First Nation governments and municipalities have a tremendous positive impact on Yukon's small rural communities, even more so when it is a deep relationship involving common areas of concern or joint community planning.

The interviews made it clear that all communities are in unique places for different reasons. All the informants agreed that it is vital for municipalities and SGFNs in these small communities to work together, and although there are signs of improvement, it is not enough. However, wide variations in the history, composition, strengths, and degree of trust and interest in collaboration in each community mean that every community is in a different place and, therefore, requires a different starting point. All informants recognized that collaboration is complex and that there is no uniform approach for this work, especially for First Nations and municipal collaboration in the context of reconciliation. As one informant, who views First Nations and municipal collaboration as an essential part of reconciliation, stated, "I think every community is different. Everyone is different. Everyone is in a different place. And, yeah, there's no roadmap for this work."

Motivations

As expected, the motivations for collaborating are varied. While the informants provided some concrete examples of why municipalities and First Nation governments work together, many of the reasons were more aspirational. The motivations ranged from pragmatic reasons such as efficient use of resources and leveraging better funding opportunities to addressing significant external threats such as climate change, the pandemic, and social issues such as the opioid crisis. Some informants suggested a more principled approach by stating that collaboration is integral to reconciliation. Along the same lines, some informants pointed out that the intention of the land claims process was about all Yukoners working together for a better future. Almost all informants said that the primary motivation for collaboration is, or should be, to serve the community better and benefit all community members. The overall feeling is that small Yukon communities are always better off when First Nation and municipal governments work together, and the outcomes are even better when the central motivation is a shared sense of community.

There are some specific advantages for each organization. One of the advantages for small rural municipalities is that SGFNs have significantly more influence and power in territorial politics and policy development. SGFNs provide unique value by giving rural Yukon a more prominent voice on the territorial and national stage. As one informant stated, "In a lot of ways, there's de facto representation from First Nations for the rural perspective." Furthermore, First Nation governments are likely the most significant economic driver in rural communities and the largest taxpayer and consumer of municipal services. Therefore, partnering with First Nation governments is usually in the municipalities' best interests.

For First Nation governments, in addition to the benefits of municipalities taking on the responsibilities of essential municipal services, there is an advantage to building up the broader community, which creates prosperity for their citizens. More than one informant stated that collaboration creates opportunities for the entire community.

Several informants identified the efficient use of resources as a fundamental reason for collaboration. Community collaboration helps municipalities and First Nation governments avoid working at cross-purposes on programming and projects, which wastes time and energy. Without cooperation, communities may expend considerable effort and not achieve their goals. Communities that collaborate make better use of resources and can achieve their goals quicker. As one informant stated, "When everybody's working in that direction, you see movement a lot faster."

From another pragmatic perspective, several informants pointed to First Nations and rural municipalities' limited human resources and vast responsibilities.With small populations in rural Yukon, the labour pool is limited, especially in relation to the diversity and range of skills need for governments. One informant pointed out that over twenty municipal or First Nation governments—counting SGFNs and Indian Act First Nations—are in rural Yukon, plus Yukon Government offices in most communities. All orders of government frequently cite capacity issues related to recruiting and retaining staff, coupled with overwhelming responsibilities.

Several informants identified the role that external events such as the pandemic, the opioid crisis, or climate change have, or could potentially have, in creating the starting conditions for collaboration. In particular, the pandemic provided the spark for several municipalities and First Nation governments to work together. For example, several municipalities and First Nation governments released joint travel advisories or worked on local, joint interagency groups to support their respective communities. The Yukon Government also played a role by reaching out to chiefs and mayors to dialogue with community leaders about the territorial government's response and understand the rural community perspective.

The pandemic also exacerbated a growing opioid crisis that one informant pointed to as a potential and urgent catalyst for municipalities and First

Nation governments to work together for the well-being of their communities. Climate change is another opportunity for collaboration since it directly impacts infrastructure that the First Nations and municipalities own, not to mention community assets. These issues on their own, being dealt with by a single order of government, are overwhelming. However, by taking a more collaborative approach to these issues from a territorial and community perspective, there is more potential for solutions.

Finally, several informants cited higher-level reasons for collaboration, including land claims and reconciliation. Reconciliation provides an opportunity for both First Nation governments and municipalities to understand different world views and perspectives, address the past, strengthen the social fabric in their communities, and create social capital, which is commonly seen as a key ingredient to relationship building.

Barriers

The list of barriers that informants identified was significantly longer than the motivations for collaboration. Barriers included the different orders of governments, an unclear understanding of mandates and agreements, capacity and turnover issues, the inertia of systems, and racism. While all the participants felt that collaboration is a worthwhile initiative, they recognized that the barriers pose significant impediments.

There were some potential high-level barriers associated with the development of SGFNs. Several informants speculated that SGFNs may be reluctant to collaborate with municipalities since they are still trying to establish their sovereignty and gain recognition from other orders of government. After many years of fighting for self-determination and recognition as a nation, SGFNs may not want to risk being viewed on the same level as a municipality, which is considered a subordinate to the Yukon Government. Furthermore, since they are relatively newly established governments in the Western style of governing, SGFNs may also be preoccupied with organizational development while simultaneously dealing with complex nation-building issues.

The different mandates of each government may also pose another potential barrier. The primary goals of SGFNs are nation-building and establishing sovereignty, with responsibilities on par with those of the Yukon and Canadian governments, which are their primary partners. On the other hand, municipalities are subordinate to the territorial government and deliver typical municipal services—water, wastewater, solid waste, and recreation—under a much more defined mandate. While municipal services are an essential part of community building, the goals and aims of municipalities are very different from SGFNs, which are involved in issues specific to their members or more complex issues, many of which fall outside the scope of direct services that municipalities deliver. Therefore, municipalities may not be viewed as community partners on other community-wide problems, such as health and social issues and community well-being. Sometimes, neither organization can see where their goals intersect if they do not explore issues that may be perceived as being outside their respective mandates.

Part of the challenge may also be an unclear understanding of the mandates of the respective governments. The inability to see commonality is sometimes a result of a lack or minimal knowledge of each other's organizations, respective mandates, and the Final Agreements. Some informants stated that First Nation governments understand municipal mandates and that the municipality's role is appreciated but viewed with limitations. It is sometimes narrowly viewed in the context of what is visible to the community—recreation and public works—forgetting that the municipality can also advocate to other orders of government in areas where they do not offer services, such as those related to community well-being.

Municipal employees, especially those new to the territory, may also not fully understand self-governing First Nations and their mandates and responsibilities, not to mention the intent of the agreements. Several informants mentioned that they were less concerned about staff knowing the text of the agreements than understanding the larger context of the agreements' history and the narratives behind the road to self-government.

Since First Nation governments are larger, and with broader responsibilities, some First Nations and municipal meetings may feel like more of an update on municipal services to the First Nation government with minimal dialogue or seeking common ground on broader community concerns. Furthermore, one informant offered that the long, hard-fought land claims process may have created an adversarial mindset: "I think thirty years of negotiating agreements has created a 'one side of the table' and the 'other side of the table.'" This mindset does not lend itself to collaboration.

From a practical perspective, staff capacity was viewed as a barrier in almost all the interviews. As rural organizations, both First Nation and municipal governments carry huge responsibilities in relation to their scale, with significant staff workloads, a shallow workforce pool, and constant staff turnover creating challenges for sustained collaboration. In particular, Whitehorse and the Yukon Government serve as magnets for career-minded professionals. The turnover is so acute that one former Chief said the council decided to turn it into a benefit for intergovernmental relations, stating, "Let's make their experience a good experience. Let's train people because if we're going to be the grooming ground, we want people who are going into YG to be aware of First Nation issues and to actually have some cultural understanding."

However, the high turnover also means that many highly-skilled workers shoulder huge workloads, a situation that does not lend itself well to staff investing time into collaboration. As one informant from a municipality stated, "We just don't have the capacity to find ways to work collaboratively because we're just too busy doing what it is we need to do on a daily basis." Doing what has always been done is easier and more expedient, even if it is not necessarily more practical.

Several informants cited community division and racism as a barrier. Even though the Yukon appears very progressive with the modern land claims agreement and a long history of settler and Indigenous people interactions, there remains division in some communities. As one informant stated, "Because that relationship is not there in every community, and the challenges that I've seen are from long-standing animosities, division, between First Nation communities and the settler community." Related to these tensions is racism, which cropped up differently across several interviews. One informant described the subtleness of racism as:

> It's also this piece of an underlying tension of racism that is palpable in some communities. You can actually feel it, and there's others that have kind of seen the light that it's better to work together than not. And it's just little pockets throughout the territory.

There was also a recognition of institutional racism embedded in Western-style institutions across Canada, including municipalities and the territorial government, which has created deep-seated prejudices that most people within those institutions are unaware of. As one informant stated, "One of the problems of systemic systems like that, or biases—deep-seated prejudice—is that you don't even notice them when they're happening." In some cases, SGFNs are not recognized as legitimate governments by some non-Indigenous people, and there is a general lack of recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Racism can also result from fear or trauma from a history of marginalization and discrimination, and Canada's colonialism and residential schools' legacy has created a deep-seated distrust of non-Indigenous people, which needs healing and reconciliation in accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In whatever form racism takes on and to what degree in each community, it takes time and energy away from other activities that contribute to collaboration. As one informant stated, "So, combating that racism, and the legacy of it, takes a lot of energy away that you could have otherwise put towards building better infrastructure or better policies." However, each informant felt racism needed to be addressed in one way or another.

Yukon's Socio-Political Evolution

The question about the Yukon's socio-political evolution is rooted in the parallel, or two solitudes, land claims process for First Nations, which led to self-government, and the federal government devolution process, which led to responsible government for the Yukon Government. The critical question is whether the tensions from parallel processes created a barrier to cooperation between First Nation governments and municipalities. The answer is that there are tensions. However, the parallel processes, particularly the land claims, have created a unique governance model that gives the Yukon an advantage when appropriately leveraged.

The question about the impact of these parallel processes caused all the informants to reflect a little more deeply on the underlying tensions in the Yukon. Not all informants had contemplated this factor beforehand, although several concluded that these processes created tension. One Indigenous informant was succinct in his appraisal of the difference in the processes, noting, "The Yukon government got their land claim for free when we had to pay twenty-five years of sacrifice and suffering and hard negotiations, just to get to where we are."

Another informant with municipal and First Nations experience pointed out that at the time of the land claims process, there was significant and very vocal opposition in some quarters of the settler population who felt that the land claims were impinging on the rights of settlers. This opposition was paternalistic with racist undertones, with the attitude that the land claims were "a nice treat to mollify" the Indigenous population. As a result, some did not take the process seriously, and the expectation was that self-government would fail. This attitude may have contributed to SGFNs struggling to achieve recognition from some in the territory.

However, the same informant pointed out that this opposition underestimated the "political endurance" of the Indigenous people who exhibited "patient capital" by taking a long-term view of the future. Due to this long-term view, First Nations persevered, weathering the many setbacks along the way. The informant acknowledged that the opposition to land claims represented old, outdated attitudes that are mostly fading, although other informants pointed out that old settler attitudes persist in some communities. These concepts came up in varying degrees in most of the interviews. However, most informants acknowledged that people are generally less aware of the history of land claims and devolution processes than in the past. Therefore, today's opposition may be more attributable to institutional racism or a lack of understanding of the governance landscape. The attitudes and tension exist, but most informants felt they are slowly starting to shift, although more work remains.

While there was a frank acknowledgement of past tensions, complex negotiations, and lingering negative attitudes by settlers towards the road to Indigenous self-determination, and by Indigenous people towards the devolution, almost all of the informants preferred to talk about the potential of the Final Agreements and a vision of "one Yukon." The agreements were frequently referenced as being for all Yukoners. In a region like the Yukon, composed of a large urban area and small communities dispersed across a wide geographical area, rural communities are much stronger working together than independently.

Although the informants were generally optimistic about the future, several informants also acknowledged that the Yukon's complicated and government-heavy structure leads to jurisdictional opaqueness and control struggles between the different orders of government. However, the agreements also help counteract top-down governance by forcing First Nations, territorial, and municipal governments to discuss issues and find solutions that benefit all parties. This is a work in progress, but almost all informants agreed that the Yukon is much better off with the land claim agreements, especially rural communities, since the SGFNs give rural Yukon a stronger voice in the territory.

One informant also pointed out that the settler population is currently more stable than the transient population of the past, which cycled with the boom and bust periods. They are more likely to stay, and this more permanent settler population bodes well for relationship-building and community-building.

None of the informants saw the Final Agreements as a barrier. Despite past and current challenges, several informants felt that they put Yukon well ahead of many other jurisdictions in collaboration and co-governance. However, several informants pointed out that the agreements are poorly understood in the municipal, territorial, and First Nations governments. They emphasized that the agreements need to be seen as a guidebook, and the focus should be on understanding the intent and narratives behind the road to self-government rather than a strict interpretation.

While the struggle for land claims and devolution were different processes, they were steps in the same direction and have resulted in a better governance model than in the past. While there is residual tension from these dual processes and jurisdictional struggles between the Yukon Government and First Nations governments, there are more decision-making powers in the Yukon than when a far-off federal government managed the region. Due to this autonomy, the Yukon also has a stronger voice at the federal level. Plenty of challenges are still inhibiting progress, including Western-style approaches to legislation, governance, and administration designed for much larger populations. However, the region has more autonomy in its direction than in the past. It has also created a unique governance model that provides the potential for collaboration between municipal and First Nation governments.

Leadership

Not surprisingly, all informants agreed that a facilitative leadership style at different levels is more conducive to collaboration. The First Nation or municipality bringing an authoritative style or attempting to be directive puts up walls between the governments, and thwarts attempts to understand different perspectives and build trust. It creates resistance and kills any creativity that a collaboration might create.

Facilitative leadership is often about the vision and inspiring people, not assuming or dictating the outcome. As one former Chief said, "I love getting people excited about the projects and doing all the stuff, but I also love finding people who are excited about doing the projects … you need to have people who are those operational wizards." For several informants, political leaders must provide vision, understand their role, create a team to complement their strengths, build capacity, and give administrative leaders and staff space to develop solutions.

Equally important, facilitative leadership at the administrative level is also required to execute the vision and find solutions. More than one political informant acknowledged that the best solutions come from the administrative professionals. Listening and understanding are key attributes of administrative leadership as well.

Those with a collaborative mindset in a First Nations and municipal context tend to have the welfare of their community in mind and a forward-looking approach. As one informant stated, "You know, the ones who seem to make it work are ones that have people who are, you know, friendly, amiable, have concerns about the community."

In some communities, one or two people can make a difference. While the political people must be on board, the "key people that help or hinder" collaboration can be at the administrative or political levels. In the Yukon, because of its small size, the role of personality and attitude, both as a barrier and catalyst, came up in almost all the interviews. As one informant noted, "It comes down to personalities, who's at the table. Who wants to build that collaboration?" Another informant stated, "In most of the communities of the Yukon, we're talking small populations. So, at that level, one individual can make a difference—both ways—can make a positive difference, can make a negative difference." There are probably as many collaborations occurring in the Yukon due to strong personalities at different levels as there are not happening because of personalities who are not interested nor see the benefit.

Trust and Relationship Building

All informants stated that trust and relationship building are essential for collaboration. In the Yukon, trust and relationship-building are vital between First Nation governments and municipalities due to the colonial history of Canada and the treatment of Indigenous people, the socio-political development of the Yukon, and the specific histories of communities.

Several informants indicated the importance of formal and informal trust building. Within small communities, informal interpersonal relationships tend to be very important. Attending social or community events, engaging in recreational activities, or simply visiting people can provide opportunities to build relationships and social capital in the community, which are essential for building trust that sees results in formal meetings. In a small community, it is essential to invest time into the community to make these connections and build relationships since this is an indicator of interest in being part of the community.

One informant pointed out that there is also a different dynamic for elected officials and senior administrators. Elected officials generally come from the community, so many informal relationships already exist. However, senior administrators may come from elsewhere and may need to build informal relationships in addition to the formal relationships that are part of the job. Strong informal relationships will move initiatives along quicker, whether due to comfort level or the ability to have sidebar conversations.

Relationships benefit when non-Indigenous people show interest in Indigenous culture and ways of doing and knowing. One Indigenous informant explained that Indigenous people like sharing some of their culture, but the interest from non-Indigenous people has to be genuine and in the spirit of understanding different perspectives and ways of doing. It is also important to know when the invitation to share is open or not—some things are public, others are not. Building trust with Indigenous people and their governments also needs to be built with extra care. Colonial governments and settlers have mishandled trust in the past. Therefore, it may take a long time for non-Indigenous people to build trust with Indigenous people, and trust can be harder to earn and easier to lose than in other environments.

One Indigenous informant also acknowledged that in his community, many non-Indigenous people have contributed to community building by organizing events for the whole community. It may have been just a movie or game night, but it was a part of the overall process. Exchanging and understanding different world views and simply getting comfortable with each other is an integral part of the process of building cross-cultural trust, and it frequently starts on a personal level.

While informal relationships are important, and almost all informants agreed that this is where the best collaborations start in small communities, at some point, these relationships need to progress into more institutionalized and formalized arrangements. A land acknowledgement is a common practice now, and co-organized annual events such as community clean-ups, BBQs, or Canada Day events occur in many communities and are highly visual events that provide community-building and relationship-building opportunities.

Collaboration can be formalized in other ways, such as joint meetings with agendas where both organizations provide updates or memorandums of understanding to work together, followed by agreements for specific issues or projects. Collaboration capacity and trust can be built through more formal community planning processes that build on smaller planning processes. Several informants discussed the importance of an external event or small project as a starting condition for more formal collaboration. Even the smallest community project can be crucial to building trust that expands into larger projects. One informant suggested that municipalities work towards understanding their community from an Indigenous viewpoint by including Indigenous perspectives in their projects and bylaws. To do this, the informant suggested a walk around town to understand the community and heritage buildings from an Indigenous perspective: "A couple of years ago, we did a big sort of a community tour where we walked in and looked at all the colonial buildings from the past, and reinterpreted them from a First Nation perspective, and that was really super interesting."

A couple of informants pointed to the cross-pollination of organizations as a valuable relationship-building tool. Within the small populations of rural Yukon, people may work for both the First Nation and municipality during their careers, sit on respective councils at different times, or work in one administration of one and sit on the council of the other. It is a bit of a conflict-of-interest quagmire. However, this cross-pollination allows people to understand the value that the respective governments provide to their communities and the different perspectives of each organization. A lot of movement between the organizations is a benefit when it happens.

For several informants, the most important activity for building trust and relationships is dialogue. As one informant stated:

> To me, the only way to make that happen—the trust and/or respect—is to continue to have dialogue, have discussions. You know, be respectful of each other and as you have those discussions and come to an understanding of where each other is at. I mean, you may disagree on some things, but at least you can understand where each other's at and have the ability to negotiate at some level. I think that's where the trust comes in.

As another informant stated, "It's an effort, right? Maybe they don't want to put in the effort, you know." The same informant stressed the importance of champions to overcome inertia.

These champions can be at the political or administrative leadership level, and they are essential to starting the dialogue, building relationships, and committing to the long-term vision as the collaboration inevitably hits bumps and setbacks. Champions are also critical to ensuring that a collaboration withstands the inevitable changes to personnel and political leadership—the more champions and the more success, the more resilient the collaboration over the long term. Without champions or resiliency, it is simply too easy to do nothing.

Successful collaboration is also about having the right people in place and some intention. As one informant stated about a successful collaboration they participated in, "Where our journey has gone has been based on having the right people, in the right place, at the right time to make things happen." There has to be some will to collaborate and have the people at several levels willing to engage and actively participate.

Discussion

While all the informants acknowledged, in theory, the benefits of collaboration for the small communities in rural Yukon, they also identified a long list of reasons why SGFNs and municipalities do not do it more. There are many reasons why it is not happening as often as it should, many of which mirror what has been found in other research, but some specific to the Yukon. This analysis reviewed the starting conditions shown in the conceptual framework in Figure 1. It then compared the findings of this research study to the six enabling factors identified in the collaborative framework, which support collaboration engagement from beginning to end: Facilitative leadership, relationship building, trust building, commitment, common understanding, and conflict resolution.

Starting Conditions

The conceptual framework includes the following two starting conditions—context plus motivation and purpose. All informants identified sharing scarce resources, specifically human resource capacity, as an important reason for collaboration. Other pragmatic reasons also included combining efforts to avoid duplication and wasting time and energy or increasing chances to attract funding for joint public projects or infrastructure. Working together also allows communities to reach their goals together quicker.

Several informants identified wicked problems such as climate change, pandemic response, and the opioid crisis, problems identified by other researchers as ideal collaboration opportunities (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Huxham & Vangen, 1996). In the Yukon context, reconciliation arose several times, as did the pandemic as an impetus for better collaboration. Although these are worthy projects for cooperation, most informants trended towards pragmatic reasons such as efficient use of scarce resources such as staffing.

Through the interviews, the concept of community, as motivation and purpose for Yukon communities to work together, arose consistently (see also Apolonio, 2008). Several informants pointed out that when collaboration happens to its fullest, the SGFN and municipality have a common understanding of community and commitment to its well-being. There may be differences in the organizational authorities, values, and mandates. However, there is a recognition that their interests intersect on specific issues that are important to the community as a whole. Common understanding and commitment are important enabling factors found in other research (Apolonio 2008; Morris 2008), but the shared concept of community and commitment to it is vital to successful collaboration in rural Yukon.

The UFA and the subsequent Final Agreements and Self-Governing Agreements are unique to the Yukon as a context factor under starting conditions. The UBCM report identified treaties as external third-party triggers for collaboration (Apolonio 2008). To a degree, these agreements create a unique governance structure for the Yukon that enables collaboration by forcing different orders of government to resolve issues. However, this structure also creates a complex governance structure with overlapping mandates with uncertainty on how all levels of government should work together, creating a barrier at times.

The role of the UFA in the context of SGFN and municipal collaboration is interesting to discern. Many practitioners do not necessarily refer to the agreements in their everyday operations. However, it is a crucial tone-setting document for some political representatives since the agreement's vision is about all Yukoners working together. However, several informants acknowledged that the lengthy negotiation of the agreements also created an adversarial environment that needs to shift to a more collaborative mindset. Above all, very few people in all orders of government truly understand the intent of the agreements. Finally, municipalities are only mentioned in one clause.

So, what is the role of the agreements? It is unlikely the agreements trigger relationships between SGFNs and municipalities independent of other factors, but they are a context factor unique to the Yukon. They give elected officials something to use when articulating a vision for their community. At other times, they are used to force parties to the table to resolve a specific issue and potentially spark a partnership. All informants felt the agreements were an essential part of

intergovernmental cooperation, although the documents do not overtly address First Nations and municipal relationships.

The same could be said about reconciliation with Indigenous people, which some informants cited as an essential principle for collaboration. While it may not be enough motivation to start a relationship independently, and partnerships may be created for other, more pragmatic reasons, reconciliation is an enabling factor that falls under conflict resolution in the conceptual framework (Wuttunee, 2018; Apolonio, 2008).

Facilitative Leadership

All informants agreed that facilitative leadership is an enabling factor that sets a favourable environment for collaboration. In the context of the Yukon, several informants added the trait of community-oriented leadership—that First Nations and municipal leaders see community building as important. While not mentioned specifically, this has also been alluded to by Apolonio (2008) and Wuttunee (2018).

Informants also saw the need for leadership commitment at both the political and operational levels (see also Morris, 2008). They also agreed that the goal is different for each level—political leadership is about vision and inspiration, and administrative leadership is about finding solutions and execution. However, they are both essential. The one slight difference is that several informants saw the need for champions at both levels.

Political leadership is crucial in First Nations and non-First Nations relationships because it signals trust or a willingness to start building trust if it does not exist. In the Yukon, the administrative champions sometimes initiate a collaboration, which may be unique to Yukon communities due to the small populations that enable more informal relationships, allowing for more accessible communication between the political and administrative spheres. However, having political leadership on board is still critical.

The leadership approach is essential. However, the right approach is particularly vital in relationships with First Nations governments, where historically, other orders of government have dictated terms or ways of doing things. A collaborative mindset by being open to listening and understanding are critical attributes for First Nations and municipal leaders since the organizations have different values and come from very different contexts, powers, and perspectives.

One of the most interesting aspects of the interviews was the role of personalities in leadership and relationship building. In Yukon's small communities, personalities in leadership play an outsized role in helping or hindering collaboration between SGFNs and municipalities.

Due to this reliance on personalities, the sustainability of collaboration in some communities is questionable and susceptible to election cycles and staff turnover. However, one informant noted that continued success results from the development over time of a solid stable of council and administration champions in both organizations. These champions built resiliency into the collaboration that withstood the inevitable leadership changes. This informant's observation concurs with Wuttunnee's (2018) view about the importance of leadership, the process of relationship building, and building trust-based relationships as the key foundational pieces for withstanding leadership cycles. Without champions or resiliency, it is simply too easy to do nothing or let the relationship slip into collaborative inertia (see Huxham & Vangen, 2000a; Huxham & Vangen, 2005) and do things the same way as in the past.

Trust and Relationship Building

Trust in the Yukon context frequently begins with discussing Indigenous and non-Indigenous historical relationships at the national, territorial, and community levels. The situation is different for each community, but local leadership must address this history in their communities as part of trust and relationship building.

What was striking about the informant interviews was the importance of informal relationship-building in the Yukon. Most collaboration research focuses on the importance of formal and informal structures for relationship building. In the Yukon, developing casual relationships through community activities and at a personal level plays a prominent role. Much more gets done through informal channels than formal channels. Elected officials tend to be an advantage since they generally come from the community and have long-standing relationships. Senior administrators need to intentionally develop these relationships within the community, more so than in other larger centres.

The socio-political evolution of the territory provides additional barriers in the Yukon. These are inter-organizational barriers to trust and relationship building that need to be overcome by community leaders, who may not have directly been involved in these histories. Several informants identified community tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as a barrier to cooperation. Some of this relates to racism and residual tension from the Yukon's socio-political evolution. For example, some informants suggested that SGFNs still need to be acknowledged as legitimate governments in some communities.

If Yukon community leaders are interested in collaboration, addressing historical divides and racism in their communities is a part of trust and relationship building. Community leaders could adopt the high-level recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a starting point for working through

local issues. Or, they could begin the process of reconciliation with smaller steps. This means building enough trust to disagree but continuing to communicate to begin problem-solving. Building trust is a long journey, regardless of the strategy.

With the unique history of the Yukon and its small mixed populations, leaders must pay special attention to the national, territorial, and local historical relationships between First Nations and non-First Nations when building a collaboration. Each community's history is different and requires those interested in collaboration to be open to exchanging world views and perspectives and taking genuine steps toward reconciliation. Most importantly, those interested in collaborating need to come into it with the mindset of working together for mutual benefit. While this seems obvious, it carries unique connotations in the Yukon due to a long history of adversarial negotiations between First Nations and other orders of government and residual bitterness over the road to responsible government for the Yukon Government.

Commitment

Although there were no direct research questions on commitment, the theme of commitment came out when discussing barriers with informants. As stated previously, commitment from leadership is crucial and plays an integral role in the initial commitment to collaboration. However, commitment also means the degree to which one is willing to commit and the ability to devote time and resources.

At a minimum, most communities host joint council meetings and operational meetings on specific issues as they arise. So, the intent is to work together, but the desire and ability to commit significant operational time and resources may be limited. Time and commitment are significant costs for any collaboration due to the degree of trust and relationship building required to achieve a collaborative advantage (Huxham & Vangen, 2000a; 2005).

The reasons for the limited commitment of resources are varied. Several informants cited capacity as an issue, although informants recognized that collaboration helps address capacity issues. However, getting to that point is difficult when the daily tasks are overwhelming.

As stated above, a lack of time and staff turnover also create barriers to dialogue, an essential part of relationship building. All informants acknowledged that dialoguing takes time and commitment. However, for most communities, getting to that point means overcoming hurdles.

Common Understanding

Most informants felt that SGFNs and municipalities do not always understand their respective mandates, which is complicated by overlap with the Yukon Government. While the socio-political evolution of the Yukon created an advantage, it also created a labyrinth of jurisdictions and unclear mandates, creating a barrier for the different orders of government to work together. Trust issues due to the socio-political development of the Yukon may also hamper the desire to seek a common understanding.

Understanding each other's mandates is complicated by a lack of understanding of the land claims process and the resulting agreements by all parties. It is challenging to understand how each partner can help each other without a clear understanding of their respective mandates.

According to the informants, there is clearly an advantage when SGFNs and municipalities work together to benefit their communities. To an extent, SGFNs and municipalities are different enough to complement each other if they can establish where their interests intersect. To do so requires understanding each other's mandates and identifying common areas of concern where they can work together. There may be some sense that working together is good for the entire community but finding that balance is elusive in practice. One option is more training in the respective mandates, although that has limitations since training sessions are usually only about basic knowledge, not a fuller understanding. However, training can be designed to provide a much fuller understanding of the governments and how they intersect rather than just providing basic knowledge.

A lack of trust does not help find a common understanding, and likewise, a lack of understanding does not help with trust. Trust is not easy to achieve due to differences in aims, culture, working practice, language, and perceived power (see Huxham and Vangen, 1996). This is especially true in SGFNs and municipalities' contexts, as there could be a wide difference in values and practice in all these areas. A couple of the informants who were part of successful large-scale SGFN and municipal collaborations confirmed that the partnerships started with small projects that built trust and understanding that later snowballed into more significant initiatives. Again, it takes time to put into a joint project, but as the informants observed, the time investment had future payoffs.

Conflict Resolution

There is still lingering tension from Canada's history of colonization, the socio-political evolution of the Yukon, and specific histories of communities. As stated previously, the degree of tension is different in all communities and requires various measures to address. Gray and Wood (2018) emphasize recognizing profound

value differences in First Nations and non-First Nations collaboration. This aspect was touched on briefly by some informants who remarked that there are very different perspectives, but this study did not explore the differences in any depth. It is safe to say that value differences exist between First Nations and municipal organizations and the people employed in each organization. This aspect needs further exploration, and expanding on a common understanding of the past may be helpful.

The community's leadership needs to identify tension and address it. However, leaders need to understand that resolving some of these tensions may take a long time, depending on their history. Most informants suggested signs of improvement and a willingness in Yukon communities to start addressing conflicts, although much work remains in some communities. Informants in communities with less tension acknowledge reconciliation remains an ongoing effort. The job of addressing the past never ends, nor does the role of conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Given the few people residing in rural Yukon, one would think that collaboration should be easy. However, it is not easy due to a complex governance model that includes self-governing First Nations, First Nations under the Indian Act, municipalities, and the Yukon Government. The situation is further complicated by the overlay of the history of colonialism, which has impacted the relationships between settler and Indigenous Peoples, and the varied state of reconciliation at the national, territorial, and community levels.

This study discovered that while most SGFNs and municipalities engage with each other, the trend is toward minimal cooperation. A few collaborations are extensive, where the SGFN and municipality are engaged in joint community planning and discussing shared goals for the community. However, these examples are rare.

All the informants agreed that there are significant reasons for SGFNs and municipalities to start collaborating, starting with practical reasons such as the size of the communities and the need to make the best use of resources. Social justice reasons also rank high for some informants who cited the spirit of reconciliation and addressing historical community divides. According to the informants, the relationships are improving slowly and are optimistic about the future of collaboration in the Yukon.

There are barriers to collaboration in the Yukon related to a lack of commitment, with frequently cited reasons including a lack of human resource capacity and staff turnover.

Another inhibiting reason is the history of communities and Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. Although each community is different, this aspect and the subtext of racism require attention in some communities in the Yukon. As stated in the literature, relationship building and trust need not be in place to start a collaboration, but these factors must be part of the process. Conflict resolution as an enabling factor takes a whole new meaning in a First Nations and municipal context due to the impact of colonialism compared to the broader collaboration literature. It may also be a longer process than typical conflict resolution processes.

The role of leadership in addressing historical conflict within a community cannot be understated either. Hence, the importance of facilitative leadership as described in the literature and confirmed by the informants.

The enabling factor of common understanding has some unique features in the Yukon. The Final Agreements vision of "one Yukon" and the intention for all orders of government to work together should provide the impetus for different levels of government to work together. However, municipalities are barely mentioned in the agreements, and First Nations governments are a more senior level of government. Furthermore, the region is a complex myriad of jurisdictions between territorial, First Nations, and municipal governments with conflicting, competing, and separate mandates, and all levels frequently misunderstand the respective mandates. However, all agree that if First Nations and municipalities can reach a common understanding that they need to work together, their entire community benefits.

This small study helps close a gap in the collaboration literature documenting the collaboration and status of cooperation between First Nation governments and municipalities. Additional studies are required to fill more of the gaps. While all starting and enabling factors apply to varying degrees, the Yukon's unique history and governance structure highlight distinctive aspects of collaboration between SGFNs and municipalities. Having these factors confirmed as crucial in the Yukon and identifying additional considerations is a step forward for the broader field of collaboration and contributes significantly to understanding these types of partnerships in the Yukon.

While the current state of collaboration in the Yukon can viewed as nascent and slowly emerging, the territory also holds great promise as a pivotal region to inform theory and practice in the rest of Canada on how First Nation and municipal governments can collaborate for the benefit of all community members. Most informants were optimistic that the Yukon and its communities are forging new collaboration models since the Yukon has more SGFNs than any other Canadian territory or province.

As previous research and the informants in this study suggest, there is no blueprint or roadmap, making collaboration challenging and time-consuming. However, when an SGFN and municipality in rural Yukon take on this challenge and begin to build stronger and deeper partnerships, it is then that they are breaking a new trail.

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Notes

1. Through my municipal activity, I am also active as a board member of the Association of Yukon Communities (AYC), and was president from 2020 to 2022. Our membership consists of the eight Yukon municipalities. SGFNs can join as associate members, although currently none have done so. While I interviewed current or former mayors and chief administrative officers, the role of the president is to run meetings, facilitate collaboration, and be the voice of our membership. It is not a hierarchical reporting position.
2. Both the Yukon and Canadian governments play a significant role in annually funding rural governments, whether SGFNs or municipalities. The Government of Yukon's support to rural areas is characterized as more than other jurisdictions in Canada (Coates & Graham, 2015, p. 82). This support includes annual block funding to municipalities as Comprehensive Municipal Grants (CMG) and heavy subsidization of infrastructure projects (Government of Yukon, 2016). The Government of Canada also provides considerable support to rural communities through the annual funding of SGFNs. As part of their self-governing agreements, SGFNs receive annual financial transfers, through a Funding Transfer Agreement (FTA), to operate their governments and deliver services.
3. The researcher used a network of contacts and the snowball technique to identify possible candidates. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the researcher's location, the interviews were conducted in one-on-one meetings using Zoom and were recorded and transcribed, and then coded and organized into themes (Saldana, 2021). The analysis was conducted using a database of findings that catalogued the interviews, investigator notes, and document-analysis results. The data were coded and organized by themes and then compared and contrasted to allow for patterns to emerge fully (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Merriam, 2009).
4. The research received approval from the Research Ethics Board of Cape Breton University. The consent form acknowledged the historical colonialist approach to research, and when interviewing someone of Indigenous ancestry, the researcher brought this section to the informant's attention before starting. Historically, the research concerning Indigenous Peoples has not been respectful nor for the benefit of Indigenous communities, to the point that "the history of research from many Indigenous perspectives is so deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool only of colonization" (Smith, 2005, p. 87). This study was neither an ethnological nor in-depth research into Indigenous ways of knowing, Traditional Knowledge, values, or heritage. The research highlighted some differences in communication or values between SGFNs and municipalities, but it did not analyze the differences to any significant degree. The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) (Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018) guided the researcher's questioning when interviewing Indigenous participants. Given the small population of the Yukon and the researcher's positionality, the researcher potentially knew the participants previous to the study. Therefore, the study research parameters clearly articulated and defined which communications were part of the study, including requests for interviews, interviews, and post-interview follow-up by phone or email.
5. Informants were asked about the Yukon Government's role since it has a common relationship link to both First Nations and municipal governments. Since collaboration between First Nations governments and municipalities is primarily a local decision, most informants did not see much of a role for the Yukon Government other than supporting collaboration when it happens.

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