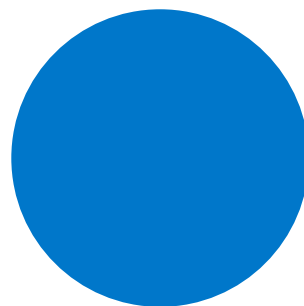
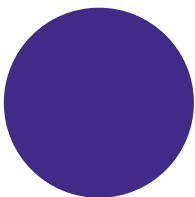


Submission to the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario on the Prosperity and Growth Strategy for Northern Ontario

October 2024



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On behalf of Algoma, Lakehead, Laurentian and Nipissing universities – Ontario’s Northern universities – we are pleased to provide feedback on the Prosperity and Growth Strategy for Northern Ontario (PGSNO), specifically relating to immigration, and talent attraction, retention and upskilling.

The Role of Universities in Northern Prosperity

Ontario’s universities play a critical role in attracting students to the region, supporting industry through innovation and talent development, enabling workforce upskilling, and making the connections necessary for economic development, such as between education, industry and not-for-profits.

In 2021, [the Conference Board of Canada](#) found that the Northern Ontario communities surrounding Algoma, Lakehead, Laurentian and Nipissing universities had the combined impact to Ontario’s GDP of:

- **\$1.4 billion** from spending from university activities; and
- **\$1.3 billion** from human capital development – that is, the income premium university graduates earn from their degrees relative to high school graduates.

In addition, these institutions supported 15,683 jobs annually in Ontario, and the cumulative investments in university R&D have increased the GDP in these communities by a total of \$778 million since 1971.

Our universities attracted approximately 30,000 students combined to our institutions in 2023-2024. These students play a critical role in the diversity and vitality of the community, as well as current and future skilled workers to increase the overall productivity of the region.

As a sector, Ontario’s universities will continue to focus on graduating job-ready students – the next generation of innovative employers, creative entrepreneurs and nimble employees who will help advance our local economies.

In fact, the Ontario government-appointed Blue-Ribbon Panel’s November report found that 90.4 per cent of university graduates find employment within six months, compared to 83.4 per cent of college graduates. The number for university graduates rises to over 94.3 per cent within two years of graduation.

Northern Ontario universities help students transition to postsecondary education, working with them as they establish their home in the North, build a community and find critical services to assist them during their studies, and as they join the workforce. These institutions take pride in their unique and vital role supporting students, striving to create future ambassadors of the North.

With the goal of optimizing job creation and economic growth to continue to build a strong Northern Ontario, please find recommendations on the PGSNO below.

Recommendations

- **Continue to invest in Northern universities through programming, partnership and funding supports that benefit the health and vitality of Northern universities and their local economies.**

Ontario's Northern universities play a critical role in attracting and developing talent, grow local economies and drive the innovation that helps create jobs and bring made-in-Ontario solutions to market. We are deeply invested and well-positioned to help address the unique economic challenges of the region.

However, as a sector, Ontario's universities continue to face mounting financial challenges, which, particularly for Northern institutions, are impacting the ability to deliver programming to remote communities.

Continued investments from the federal government, whether it is through programming, collaboration and/or funding support, will help ensure institutions are able to continue to play a vital role as economic drivers for the region.

In addition, ensuring federal policies are reviewed with a Northern Ontario lens will help mitigate unintended consequences that may negatively impact Northern universities, or undermine the region's economic prosperity due to its unique demographic and locational circumstances.

For example, the decision to cap international graduate and undergraduate allocations for institutions, despite the fact that Ontario's universities have been responsible players that have based international student enrolment on the unique needs and regional labour market demands of local communities, is placing further pressures on institutions, particularly those in Northern Ontario. As a sector, universities have maintained modest levels of growth in their international student population in order to ensure those who do enroll are well-supported throughout their postsecondary education.

- **Invest in talent retention programs that bring much-needed talent to Northern communities.**

As highlighted during the consultation, Northern Ontario is attracting international talent from around the world and experiencing a high uptake of the successful federally supported Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) program. The region will continue to work to attract and retain this talent, especially as Francophone communities in the North are projecting a need for 12,391 French-speaking immigrants annually for a decade in order to maintain its population.

Employment and talent retention programs, community or Northern-Ontario specific, that target both graduate and undergraduate students, will help fill critical job vacancies in communities, positively impacting the region's economic growth and drawing job seekers and students to the area, with the ultimate goal that they stay and build their life in the region.

This may include: building on existing Mitacs programs; a federal retention and transition fund to support relevant programming; a program similar to the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant that provides funds for students studying in postsecondary programs tied to labour market needs in underserved and growing communities; and/or creating a new platform to help bridge the connection between talent, innovation, technology adoption and job growth.

- **Build on provincial investments in critical regional services.**

In addition to education and employment, affordability and quality of life are big draws to the North. An efficient transportation system, high-quality, affordable childcare and high-quality, accessible and equitable health care, are some of the vital services that are crucial to ensure individuals are drawn to and stay in the North.

Recognizing that the province has a pivotal role, additional investment from the federal government will help ensure those who come to and stay in Northern Ontario have access to these vital services.

- **Support the vibrant and diverse cultural communities that are unique to Northern Ontario through targeted tools and programs.**

The North is home to vibrant cultural communities that are not found elsewhere, and are part of the region's strength. These include people from Indigenous, Francophone and diaspora communities.

Due to the limited resources available in the surrounding region, Northern universities have a unique role in supporting these diverse communities, both in terms of resources, as well as being responsive to community needs. During a time of increasing financial pressures faced by the sector, universities are stretching resources to ensure that their communities have the services they need to thrive.

Targeted supports and tools to help these communities succeed, such as targeted education, employment and retention, and language programming, will not only help them, but also ensure the greater economic prosperity of the region.

- **Work with other levels of government and key stakeholders to ensure opportunities to support talent are fully leveraged.**

As highlighted during both sessions, multiple levels of government and other stakeholders must work in partnership to build pathways around the elements that are critical for talent to integrate and prosper in Northern Ontario, such as employment, broadband, health care and housing.

Finding ways to leverage both federal and provincial funding to support these initiatives, and finding innovative ways to share resources and strategies, where possible, will be advantageous for the region.

In addition, an open dialogue with the federal and provincial governments around relevant policies that impact the talent pipeline, such as enrolment corridors funding and community infrastructure, would be beneficial when looking at longer term strategies.

The above recommendations are vital to the success of the Prosperity and Growth Strategy of Northern Ontario, and to ensuring the region thrives now and in the future.

Ontario's Northern universities remain committed to supporting and contributing to the PGSNO and welcome further discussions on this strategy in the future.

We will continue to work together to explore further opportunities to leverage synergies and collaboration between stakeholders, building relationships and pathways, while celebrating successes and championing Northern communities.

We thank the federal government's investments in Northern Ontario to date and look forward to continuing to work together, along with regional and community partners and other levels of government, to continue building a strong and prosperous Northern Ontario.

Stories from the North:

The economic and innovation impact of Northern Ontario universities

The following stories highlight some examples of Northern Ontario universities impacting and strengthening their communities, through regional economic development, driving research and innovation, and talent development.

Northern and Rural Innovation Cluster (NRIC)

- The Northern and Rural Innovation Cluster (NRIC) represents a collaborative effort to leverage postsecondary strengths and opportunities at four Ontario universities (Laurentian, Lakehead, Nipissing, and Trent) with industry in three key sectors: critical minerals, clean technology, and battery electric vehicles. The project supports dedicated resources and funding to Northern Ontario industries seeking intellectual property services, with the objective to nurture innovation and growth within the region.

Algoma University

- Algoma University, in collaboration with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University (NOSMU), and other community partners, is establishing a holistic, culturally appropriate Mental Health and Addictions Research and Training Institute which integrates multi-world views and cross-cultural approaches with Western knowledge and teachings to enhance current training, research and community leadership capacity within the province and the communities it serves. The Institute will respond to the crisis in Ontario's system of mental illness and addictions services and supports
- Researchers from the Department of Biology continue to explore the environmental impacts of oil spills, specifically focusing on freshwater ecosystems in the Great Lakes region. This research reflects a shared commitment between Algoma University and the International Joint Commission (IJC) to protect this critical water resource, and is conducted in close collaboration with Lake Superior State University. Understanding the long-term effects of oil spills on freshwater environments is essential to the design of appropriate clean up, remediation strategies, and action plans.

Lakehead University

- The frontier of research in the field of multinuclear magnetic resonance imaging at Lakehead University has developed lung imaging techniques, which are now being used to monitor symptoms of long COVID in patients, allowing health-care providers to develop individualized treatment plans. Furthermore, cutting-edge translational research programs utilizing novel hyperpolarized ¹²⁹Xe imaging techniques based at Lakehead University enhance and ensure the excellence of functional and molecular imaging to strengthen Canada's health systems.
- By partnering with community organizations, local businesses and individual workers, the EPID@Work (Enhancing the Prevention of Injury and Disability at Work) Research Institute

at Lakehead University is helping to deepen employers' understanding of mental and physical health in workplaces across Northwestern Ontario. In September 2023, EPID@Work launched the Northwestern Ontario Workplace and Worker Health Study (NOWWHS) to investigate the associations between workplace factors and mental and physical health challenges in the workplace. Ultimately, EPID@Work aims to work with employers to develop and test cost-effective interventions to improve the health of their employees.

Laurentian University

- Research partnerships between Ontario's universities and industry are contributing to advancements in our understanding of natural phenomena on Earth and beyond. Researchers at Laurentian University are collaborating with NASA to launch yeast samples, which are utilized as living radiation detectors in space, to identify the effects of radiation on astronauts and aid in the development of measures to improve the safety of manned space flights.
- As the mining industry continues to change and experience critical job shortages, the Goodman School of Mines at Laurentian University is collaborating to expand the scope of mining education and offering training in the fundamental skillsets that are needed in the industry. The Goodman School of Mines has partnered with multiple universities to build a mining masterclass that will leverage the best in all of the disciplines that they have to offer in mining and mining-related programming. These efforts expose students to all facets of the industry and serve as a bridge between educational opportunities and the pursuit of career advancement in the mining industry.

Nipissing University

- As EV technology becomes more sophisticated, more data scientists will be needed to analyze the data generated from new information systems and conduct insightful research to optimize EVs. Through work-integrated learning and research opportunities, Nipissing University is training the next generation of data scientists through its data science undergraduate program.
- To help develop employability and life-long skills in local communities, including personal and professional development, Nipissing University offers Extended Learning programs that contribute to the overall growth and well-being of the community. With opportunities in areas such as workforce development, continuing studies, community engagement, youth programs, leisure learning and micro-credentials, these offerings are open to all learners, including adult learners, working professionals and individuals in remote or underserved areas.