

Attention: The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance**Re: Closing the Indigenous Education Gap through support of Dechinta Bush University (NWT): Innovative Land-based Indigenous University Programming****SUMMARY**

Launched in 2009, the Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning has grown to become Canada's *only* university which offers all its courses for Indigenous students out on the land. Based in the Northwest Territories, Dechinta offers a unique interdisciplinary program of study. Core streams include governance, sustainable community, health, communications, law, arts, language and environmental science and land management. Dechinta is accredited by McGill, UBC and the University of Alberta.

Dechinta is Canada's bush university; designed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people. Dechinta has a 0% drop-out rate, which is unprecedented in northern Indigenous post-secondary programs. 100% of Dechinta's graduates have either pursued higher education or entered the labour force (49% pursued further post-secondary and 57% are employed, 97% of these in the NWT labour force).

Dechinta directly fulfills many of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's education recommendations, including closing the education gap, developing culturally appropriate and community developed curricula, enabling parenting and community responsibility and control and respecting and honouring Treaty relationships. By supporting Dechinta, the federal government would be contributing to the TRC call to action to close the education gap within a generation.

A registered charity, Dechinta is now poised to take its programs to the next level and become a fully accredited university under the Education Act of the Northwest Territories.

A core federal grant of **5M year/3 years** would allow Dechinta to complete the accreditation process, expand our programming and design our longer-term sustainability strategy. Given the NWT's unique situation in the early stages of implementing devolution, federal support would enable us to expand our programs while we continue to work with the GNWT to design an effective model for on-going territorial support.

Canadian universities generally receive on-going government funding through annual operating grants. To date, the majority of Dechinta's funding has come from other sources such as private foundations and innovation investors, including J.W McConnell Family Foundation, The Counselling Foundation of Canada, the Gordon Foundation and RSF Social Finance.

One of Dechinta's core programs is the Indigenous Boreal Guardians (IBG). Inspired by Australia's Working on Country Program, which created over 800 Indigenous Ranger jobs and has resulted in 10% of Australia being actively managed by Indigenous rangers. With a 3:1 investment return ratio, the WoC offers evidence that national Indigenous social infrastructure investments can transform community realities. The IBG ensures that Indigenous communities remain the eyes and ears on the ground, leading land use planning, environmental monitoring and research, such as climate change adaptation.

A UNIQUE NORTHERN APPROACH to UNIVERSITY

- Dechinta is flexible, innovative and responsive. Embedded evaluation and performance metrics have ensured responsive programming and are reflected in our success and **demonstrated return on investment to private and government funders.**
- Dechinta offers early childhood education through high school on-site in support all families in their quest to continue their education. Families are a core part of Dechinta. The culturally rich, language focused outdoor education program ensures whole family education support, as well as **wrap around services for mental health and wellness.**
- **Dechinta was purpose-built through research** and employs thorough student participation in governance and program evaluation, resulting in cost-effective, results-based program that is highly recommended by participants on an on-going basis.
- Dechinta designs unique curriculum on critical northern issues identified by communities and research using innovative land-based approaches to teaching and learning. Dechinta teaches an interdisciplinary program (Governance, Law, Health, Research, Policy, Sustainable, Economic Development, Writing and Communications) building real capacity and usable skills for a competitive NWT and Canada.
- In partnership with The Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Education, Culture and Employment and U of A, Dechinta offered an original On-the-Land Masters level course developed by Dechinta in summer of 2015. Dechinta will continue to expand its Masters level programming.
- Dechinta is accredited by the University of Alberta, McGill University and UBC. This ensures quality control and student mobility north/south.

ISSUE

The demand for a Northern University is not being met.

Dechinta is receiving 3x as many applications as funding for and can't meet the growing demand from students. This year, 104 potential students applied for 30 places.

Canada is the only circumpolar country without a circumpolar university. Dechinta is recognized as the leading evidence-based best practice in land-based Indigenous education. **Dechinta does not receive core or permanent funding.**

This underfunding hinders student potential . Students should not have to leave the north to pursue a degree relevant to their future unless it is their choice.

Education level attainment is the single biggest co-determinant in income earning, health outcomes and poverty alleviation.

Since its inception in 2009 Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning has successfully provided land-based post-secondary education in the NWT.

UBC recently co-appointed Yellowknives Dene First Nation UBC Professor Glen Coulthard to Dechinta, a significant permanent financial contribution from a leading university.

The Dechinta model offers a proven opportunity for sustainable regional economic development through the expansion of land-based programming, creating jobs in education, culture, language and governance.

Core Dechinta Funding (5M/yr) and recognition under the NWT Education Act would create 158 new jobs (153 outside of Yellowknife). In four years, the number of Indigenous degree holders would increase by 5%. This model is scalable.

Dechinta is building an active NWT Knowledge Economy while educating northerners using community expertise and preparing students to tackle the challenges and opportunities our territory, and country faces.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Dechinta has been operating in the NWT since 2009 (offering programming since 2010). There have been 306 (program) course completions and **0 drop outs** in that time. (including 12-week full university semesters and short programs).
- Dechinta offers a full minor in Indigenous Studies and Governance and is expanding to offer a full degree.
- Dechinta courses are designed in the North and accredited by the University of Alberta, McGill and UBC.
- In 2015-16 Dechinta's funding from Government of the Northwest Territories was ECE was 350k.
- Dechinta has become a viable and desired education option for Northerners. Dechinta received 104 applicants for 30 places in 2014-15.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS**University Degrees are directly tied to GDP growth, poverty alleviation and rise in real income:**

- Between May 2008-2014, more than twice as many new jobs were created for University graduates than for college and trades graduates combined¹.
- The NWT needs to fill Northern Jobs with Northerners. Over 50% of the currently un-occupied GNWT jobs require a degree, and only 4.9% of Aboriginal Northerners hold a degree².
- 2015-2030 80% of all NWT jobs will require post-secondary³. The NWT is not ready to fill these jobs. Funding Dechinta will ensure northerners are trained to maximize these opportunities.
- Aboriginal Unemployment for degree holders is 1.9% compared to 14% for those without a degree
- Over their careers, university graduates typically earn 50% more than other full-time workers without a university degree.

¹ AUCC, 2014

² Careers Website, GNWT

³ The Conference Board of Canada/ GNWT Skills for Success S4S, Current Labor Supply vs. Currently Available Labour Supply

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- When Indigenous women hold degrees, unemployment decreases to 5% from 20%
 - Northerners want the choice to earn a relevant, land –based degree without going south.

FACTS

- In total 104 people have applied for 30 spots offered in the last 3 semesters
- 97% of the students attending Dechinta are Indigenous, 72% are women.
- Dechinta offers integrated k-12 KidsU school to support families in education success on-site.
- Dechinta created 27 seasonal and diverse jobs in culture, education, language, history and governance in 2015, hiring people from 4 NWT regions covering many different demographics.
- With funding, In four years, Dechinta can graduate the largest cohort of Aboriginal Northern University Graduates (40) in history. This will increase the number of Aboriginal degree holders in the territory by 5% and provide a steady flow of Northern degree holders for the foreseeable future. **By 2030, Dechinta will graduate 440 new Indigenous university graduates. This is a legacy impact.**
- Dechinta is a dry program.
- Dechinta's original curriculum is designed in the north.
- Each Dechinta semester consists of 7 – 8 weeks of programming onsite at Blachford Lake Lodge followed by 5 weeks of programming in the student's home communities in job placements and community research projects.
- Dechinta expanded to the Sahtu in summer of 2015 with the Indigenous Boreal Guardian Program, and will continue to expand with funding offering multiple yearly regional programs, including a Deh Cho Water Semester, Summer 2016.
- Dechinta does not require new infrastructure. Dechinta uses existing land-based infrastructure (lodges, cabins, camps) maximizing efficiencies and re-purposing under-used facilities to minimize investment and maximize outcomes.
- Dechinta has four major funders:
 - ✓ GNWT ECE
 - ✓ J.W McConnell Family Foundation
 - ✓ Counselling Foundation of Canada
 - ✓ TIDES Foundation (an anonymous donor)

- Dechinta has received both national and international recognition:
 - ✓ **TIDES Top 10 Award** (one of the top 10 charitable projects in Canada)
 - ✓ **ASHORA Changemakers Award 2012** – award for best practices in First Nations, Inuit and Métis education
 - ✓ **Leading Together**: Indigenous Youth and Community Partnership
- Dechinta has been a national finalist in major research grants.
- Dechinta is currently a major partner in two multi-million dollar SSHRC research grants, *The Initiative for Indigenous Futures* and *Sustainable Water Governance and Indigenous Law*.
- Dechinta operates as a charity with a cost-effective social enterprise model maximizing public-private-government partnerships.
- Since 2008, Dechinta has brought over 5M in education funding to the NWT, demonstrating the viability of a sustainable Indigenous knowledge and innovation economy in northern Canada.
- Dechinta generates over 250K/yr in revenue from professional development programs and tuition.
- The on-the-land Masters course offers a teaching and learning experience that allows teachers to connect to the land in order to better understand Indigenous identity and life ways. This course gives educators the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will help them to deliver Northern Studies much more effectively.
- Dechinta's Indigenous Boreal Guardian Program, piloted this semester in the Sahtu Region, launched yet another valuable degree stream in environmental science, ecology and land management.
- Dechinta maximizes the benefits of on-the-land education, healing, wellness and capacity building while forwarding a sustainable rural economic development model. The result is cost-effective, results driven, high impact, high return evidence-based education programming.

Federal funding for Dechinta will result in measurable actions to close the education gap, increase employment for Indigenous citizens and establish a sustainable innovation knowledge economy in the Northwest Territories. An important investment in social infrastructure, Dechinta is backed by six years of evidence to inform a best-practice budget investment with measurable outcomes and scalable results.