



Definition of an NWT Indigenous Business

Plain-Language Backgrounder

Overview

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has adopted a definition of an NWT Indigenous business. The goal is to create a clear, shared understanding of what that term means when discussing government procurement.

This change focuses on clarity and understanding. It does not change procurement rules or how contracts are awarded.

Why a definition is needed

For several years, the GNWT has been asked to explain how Indigenous businesses participate in government procurement and whether existing approaches are working as intended. During engagement, it became clear that people often meant different things when they used the term “Indigenous business.”

Without a shared definition, discussions were difficult and sometimes confusing. Establishing a definition provides a common starting point, reduces uncertainty, and supports clearer conversations among Indigenous governments, businesses, and the public.

What the definition says

Under the new definition, an NWT Indigenous business is a business that:

- is registered under the GNWT Business Incentive Policy, and
- is either registered in the federal Indigenous Business Directory or listed on a publicly available business registry maintained by an NWT Modern Treaty Partner.

This approach relies on existing registration systems rather than creating a new one. It also recognizes the role Indigenous governments already play in identifying their own businesses.

What this does—and does not—change

The definition will be added to GNWT Procurement Guidelines for information and reporting purposes only. It does not introduce procurement preferences, change evaluation criteria, or alter competitive procurement processes.

All GNWT procurement will continue to follow legislation, trade agreements, and treaty obligations. The definition does not give businesses any new advantages or disadvantages when competing for contracts.

Respecting Indigenous governments and treaties

The definition recognizes business registries maintained by NWT Modern Treaty Partners. This respects government-to-government relationships and existing verification processes.

The approach aligns with treaty obligations and does not change treaty-based economic measures or procurement responsibilities.

What happens next

Beginning in the 2026–27 fiscal year, public procurement reporting will reflect procurement activity using the new definition. This supports transparency and clearer understanding over time.

The definition provides a foundation for informed discussions, but it does not commit the GNWT to future policy changes. Any future decisions would be based on evidence, engagement, and legal requirements, and would follow standard government decision-making processes.

For more information:

- [GNWT Business Incentive Policy](#)
- [Government of Canada's Indigenous Business Directory](#)
- [Have your say: Development of an Indigenous Procurement Policy](#)