

Northwest Territories Council of Leaders Meet in Yellowknife

Yellowknife, NT (May 20-21, 2026) – Indigenous leaders and leaders from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) gathered for the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders (NWTCOL) meeting on May 20 and 21, 2026 in Yellowknife.

Leaders met with the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Industry and Economic Development Minister Joly to highlight what Indigenous and northern businesses have to offer, the need for indigenous-led projects, Indigenous procurement policies to keep spending in the North, and the importance of building workforce capacity through investing in training and development. They emphasized their interest in seeing the Indigenous procurement commitment of 5% around the Defence Industrial Strategy increased in the NWT to reflect the higher Indigenous population.

The Honourable Rebecca Chartrand, Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs and Minister Responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency met virtually with leaders to discuss major projects and infrastructure, the need for affordability, defense investments, and fulfilling treaty obligations.

The Honourable Rebecca Alty, Minister of Crown Indigenous Relations and MP for the Northwest Territories also met with leaders virtually and provided an update on actions taken in support of the territory including to advance Our Land for the Future, housing and infrastructure investments.

Leaders met with the Honourable Mona Fortier, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who provided an update on work to advance Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy and heard from leaders about their interest in being engaged in development, including at the community level. Leaders also met with met with Lieutenant-General MC Wright, Commander of the Canadian Army and with Chief Superintendent Northwest Territories Commanding Officer "G" Division Dyson Smith.

Federal Engagement

Leaders committed to working together to advance shared priorities with the Government of Canada that strengthen communities, support economic development, and improve quality of life across the Northwest Territories, recognizing that coordinated action and enduring partnerships are essential to long-term prosperity and community well-being.

Health

Leaders discussed the importance of working together to support improved health care for NWT residents and strengthening culturally grounded mental wellness supports across the continuum;

Leaders call on the Government of Canada to:

- recognize NWT Métis peoples as eligible NIHB recipients;
- include representatives appointed by the NWT Council of Leaders to the negotiation table for the federal NIHB policy development;

- transition the special allotment into a sustainable, long-term funding mechanism that reflects the realities of delivering NIHB in a Northern context; and
- make policy changes and investments from the Northern and Arctic Health Assessment that support sustainable health system improvements;

Housing and Infrastructure

The NWT Council of Leaders recognizes the need for increased and sustained housing investment in the Northwest Territories to address the growing shortage of safe, affordable, and accessible homes across communities. Additional funding is needed not only to build new housing units, but also to maintain, repair and modernize aging homes; ensuring that existing housing stock remains safe, energy-efficient, and suitable for northern conditions.

Leaders committed to working together to secure investments to support the development of essential infrastructure - including roads, water and wastewater systems, reliable power capacity, and community services – so that new housing developments and long-term community growth can be supported.

Strengthening housing infrastructure in the NWT will improve health outcomes, reduce homelessness and overcrowding, support economic development, and help residents remain in their home communities with dignity and stability. Leaders commit to continued collaboration to advance major infrastructure projects across the Territory that ensure all-season connectivity, improve accessibility, stabilize the cost of living, strengthen northern energy and transportation systems, and create long-term employment and economic opportunities for communities throughout the Northwest Territories.

Emerging Issues of National Interest

Leaders recognize the importance of the commitment made by Canada to invest in critical infrastructure in the Northwest Territories as a foundational element of reinforcing Arctic sovereignty and create new economic opportunities for the territory's long-term future. They affirmed that Canada's Arctic presence must be rooted in healthy, connected, and prepared Northern communities, and that a coordinated approach is required to ensure the North is equipped and prepared to respond to the complex challenges and opportunities emerging across the Arctic;

Leaders recognize that northern perspectives must be reflected in Canada's international engagement, particularly as global discussions and potential decisions related to trade, Arctic governance, and international partnerships increasingly affect the Northwest Territories and the people who call it home;

NWT's Economic Future

NWTCOL discussed the Northwest Territories' economic outlook and identified opportunities to collaborate and drive sustainable growth. They stressed the need to act now to build clear pathways to education and employment—so Northwest Territories residents

can prepare for major projects. Leaders committed to maintaining momentum, continuing focused discussions that will directly shape a long-term economic vision for the territory. Planning needs to be coordinated, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and priorities of Northern communities. This includes negotiating, implementing, and properly resourcing Modern Treaties and Self Government agreements and rights based negotiating processes and arrangements in the NWT.

Policing – RCMP

Leaders will continue working collaboratively to address the issue of illicit drugs and illegal firearms and their impacts in the communities and throughout the NWT.

Community and Regional Initiatives to Combat Toxic Drugs

Leaders want to move beyond discussing to combating the ongoing toxic drug crisis and reaffirmed the importance of community- and region-based collaboration, strengthened partnerships, and coordinated initiatives that emphasize harm reduction, culturally safe treatment options, and meaningful community engagement.

Leaders are committed to promoting community-based success stories and encouraging participation in educational and preventive campaigns, recognizing that local leadership, culturally grounded approaches, and shared learning are essential to reducing harms and supporting healthier, safer communities across the Northwest Territories.

Environment

NWT Council of Leaders will work together before, during, and after wildfire events to ensure communities are ready, response efforts are effective, and lessons learned are incorporated to continuously strengthen wildfire management leading into the 2026 wildfire season and year-round;

The GNWT is committed to continue sharing information with Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations in the NWT and to working with partners to strengthen transboundary water governance, recognizing the importance of shared stewardship, and transparency.

Leaders affirmed their commitment to work together on shared priorities related to climate change and energy, advancing coordinated actions that support community resilience, reduce emissions, and strengthen sustainable energy systems across the territory.

Education

Leaders are committed to working collaboratively to increase employment and skills acquisition in small communities; supporting training, capacity development, and locally driven opportunities that strengthen community resilience and long-term economic participation.

They are also committed to working together to support collaborative, community-driven approaches that center Indigenous knowledge, cultural relevance, and family engagement as core components of improving school attendance; recognizing that culturally grounded learning environments are essential to student success.

Leaders continue to advocate for a collaborative approach between federal, territorial and Indigenous partners on Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding to ensure that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in the NWT have sustained access to the education, social services, and health care supports necessary to address ongoing and systemic inequities;

Renewing the NWTCOL MOU

The NWT Council of Leaders renewed the *Memorandum of Understanding for the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders* at their meeting in Yellowknife, May 20-21, 2026, agreeing to continue collaboration on areas of mutual interest.

The NWTCOL continues to be a productive forum and an example of meaningful partnership between the Indigenous and GNWT leaders, consistent with the principles of reconciliation.

Leaders attending the meeting included:

- Chief Eugene Hope, Acho Dene Koe First Nation
- ʔekw'ahtı́dá Danny Gaudet, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Leonard Kenny, DKK Member, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Christopher Yukon, DKK Member, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Jonas Modeste, DKK Member, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Georgina (Gina) Dolphus, DKK Member, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Dora Blondin, DKK Member, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Marion Mackeinzo, DKK Member, Déłı́ne Got'ı́ne Government
- Grand Chief Frederick Blake Jr., Gwich'in Tribal Council
- Chief Elaine Auger, Kátł'odeeche First Nation
- Sub-Chief Shirley Lamalice, Kátł'odeeche First Nation
- Chief James Marlowe, Łutselk'e Dene First Nation
- Sub-Chief Juni Gahdele, Łutselk'e Dene First Nation
- Chief Steve Vital, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
- Councillor Eric Matou, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
- Councillor Marlene Matou, Nahanni Butte Dene Band
- President Marc Whitford, North Slave Métis Alliance
- President Garry Bailey, Northwest Territory Métis Nation
- Vice President Paul Harrington, Northwest Territory Métis Nation
- Chairperson Charles McNeely, Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated
- Chief Shawn Grandjambe, Fort Good Hope Dene Band, Sahtu Secretariat Inc.
- Chief Toni Heron, Salt River First Nation
- Councillor Levi MacDonald, Salt River First Nation
- Councillor Henry Beaver, Salt River First Nation

- Councillor Archie Beaulieu, Salt River First Nation
- Councillor Brittany Bourke, Salt River First Nation
- Councillor Carmen Wanderingspirit Marten, Salt River First Nation
- Grand Chief Jackson Lafferty, Tłıchǫ Government
- Chief Bertha Rabesca Zoe, Tłıchǫ Government
- Chief Charles Nitsiza, Tłıchǫ Government
- Chief Doreen Arrowmaker, Tłıchǫ Government
- Chief Adeline Football, Tłıchǫ Government
- Councillor Jeffrey Rosnawski, Yellowknives Dene First Nation
- Jennifer Drygeese, Yellowknives Dene First Nation
- Premier R.J. Simpson
- Deputy Premier Caroline Wawzonek
- Minister Jay Macdonald
- Minister Lesa Semmler
- Minister Caitlin Cleveland
- Minister Vince McKay
- Minister Lucy Kuptana

Quick Facts

- The *Northwest Territories Council of Leaders Memorandum of Understanding* was renewed in May 2026.
- NWTCOL strengthens intergovernmental relationships between Indigenous governments and Indigenous organization with the GNWT and enables the advancement of shared priorities.
- Signatories to the NWT Council of Leaders include: Acho Dene Koe First Nation, Akaitcho Dene First Nations, Délı̨nę Got'ı̨nę Government, Gwich'in Tribal Council, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Kát'odeeche First Nation, Nahanni Butte Dene Band, North Slave Métis Alliance, Northwest Territory Métis Nation, Salt River First Nation, Sahtu Secretariat Inc., Tłıchǫ Government, and the Government of the NWT.
- This is the NWT Council of Leaders fifth year of meetings since the inaugural meeting in June 2021.
- The MOU commits the NWT Council of Leaders to meeting annually.

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