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INSPIRED vi@Acadia

*The Institute for Nunavut Studies: Policy Innovation, Research
and Educational Development vi@ Acadia*

Conceptual foundation: Network technologies (NTs) such as the Internet support the move towards collaborative research initiatives and similarly, towards collaborative government and governance (Alexander, 2004; Box, 2002; Brown 2002). In academe, in governments, and in our federal system, new patterns of engagement and new relationships are being forged supported by NTs. Governments are using NTs to move beyond the traditional dichotomy between the state and civil society. Traditional perspectives of the public sphere are being replaced with complex network models of civil society. (Fountain 2001; Lenk 2003). The concept of policy networks within the public sector are being transformed with the growing emphasis on electronic or e-policy consultations to create new policy input opportunities. Network technologies present new opportunities to develop and sustain new collaborative research models that are built on sustainable, inter-sectoral, and cross-cultural policy research partnerships. INSPIRED vi@Acadia provides the necessary infrastructure to take-up the new collaborative research opportunities that have emerged with the organization of the Nunavut Policy Symposium.

Developing an Inclusive Policy Network: The Nunavut Policy Symposium (NPS), to be held May 5 – 7, 2004 at Acadia University reflects the diverse interest in and urgent need for policy-relevant research that is developed using a process involving a plurality of policy stakeholders including Inuit and northern policy officials, community leaders, and academics. The SSHRC Northern Research Grant initiative encourages research that involves northerners as full research partners. Eighteen Inuit participants will lead the discussion at the policy roundtable addressing health, education, culture, employment, economic development, environmental and other policy fields that they prioritize during the NPS. That additional senior level public officials expressed an interest in participating but could not be funded reflects the policy need and interest to engage in the kind of collaborative research processes that is being initiated at the NPS. What is needed is a vehicle to advance the Inuit-defined research agenda that will be articulated at the NPS: INSPIRED@Acadia.

Policy Innovation and Research: INSPIRED@Acadia will support the on-going development of policy-relevant, collaborative, and innovative research initiatives. Importantly, Acadia is uniquely positioned to conceive, create, assess, and refine the virtual policy fora that will support the INSPIRED policy research network. The interest in creating multi-stakeholder network is evident in the diversity of representation at the NPS. The INSPIRED policy network will include territorial, municipal public officials in Nunavut, research centres and programs at other universities in Canada (ie. Carleton University's Master of Public Administration program, with its new Certificate in Nunavut Public Service Studies) and abroad. Alexander's research, as a student of public policy and public administration, has focused on the evolution of e-government. As a teacher, she has contributed to multi-media pedagogical innovations, including the Digital Agora. Alexander represents one INSPIRED member's research and teaching experience in assessing, and development, with the Acadia team, using AITT resources and the new facilities of the Acadia Digital Culture Laboratory to develop innovative new multi-media resources that can support cross-cultural policy-

making processes, including “web-utaries, or web-based documentaries” which Alexander explored in Winter 2004. Too often e-government initiatives have replicated the paper-based world, merely uploading government documents that fail to consider how new media technologies can be applied to ‘re-present’ information more effectively and to ensure, in an ethnically diverse society, that new e-policy consultation processes sustain communicative diversity, supporting multiple ways of knowing, perceiving, and communicating. The creation of INSPIRED would necessitate research into how new media technologies can serve to meet policy-development needs in Nunavut, given the diversity of the citizenry (ie. age, gender, ethnicity, language and dialect), the geographic vastness across which the communities are located, the cultural predisposition and political commitment to consultative policy-making, and importantly, given the commitment to incorporate Inuit traditional knowledge in the Nunavut public sector.

Educational Development: INSPIRED will draw and build upon the critical mass of research and teaching expertise at Acadia University that continues to advance our understanding of innovative pedagogical development. From the work of Dianne Looker’s research team on ‘tech equity and youth in Canada’ to Lynn Aylward’s Nunavut-based research on inclusive education to the work of AITT on computer-based teacher training, INSPIRED vi@ Acadia will provide new opportunities to apply Acadia’s expertise to support the theoretical, program, and professional development objectives of policy makers and teachers. Drawing from the example of the SSHRC-funded e-Federalism Network which provides a virtual network for teachers and students pursuing Nunavut studies to share information and ideas, INSPIRED will also provide opportunities to create and sustain new peer-to-peer learning opportunities for youth; drawing from the example of the Digital Agora, the youth network will provide on-line self-publishing opportunities and virtual dialogues with policy practitioners and academics alike. Another immediate opportunity lies in the need to develop course material for students in Carleton University’s MPA Certificate for Nunavut Public Sector Studies. The funding opportunities in the Educational Development range from teacher training to the creation of multi-media course development material for the cadre of Inuit public sector employees that must be trained and employed in the Government of Nunavut (GN) to meet the requirements of the Bathurst Mandate, the GN’s statement of principles and priorities. With the new profile that the Prime Minister gave to Inuit affairs in his 19 April 2004 announcement, the creation of INSPIRED will provide Acadia with an avenue to contribute to national and international policy dialogue.

Action Plan:

In the first year of operation the actions of the proposed virtual research institute include:

- Create an Advisory Board that reflects the diversity of interests in the network.
- Develop a 5 year organizational, research and development plan for INSPIRED.
- Deepen and extend the network created at the NPS.
- Develop a comprehensive web-based presence for INSPIRED research work.
- Create an INSPIRED student network to share their research findings and communicate with each other, and with guest moderators.
- Collaborate to advance the research agenda articulated at the NPS.
- Co-edit a volume (with Frances Abele) based on the NPS and the follow-up collaborative work of the policy teams in the first year.
- Initiate research on multi-media, cross-cultural e-policy development processes.