

Elders Program Strategy 2010-2014



Department of Culture, Language,
Elders and Youth

PREAMBLE:

Elders are at the heart of Inuit identity. The knowledge they possess embodies the accumulated wisdom of generations. Their traditions represent a connection to our past and their values influence our decisions about the future.

Most of our elders today were raised according to Inuit traditions. Born in small camps or villages, they were closely connected to the cycles of the land and the customary practices of Inuit society. In this way, they absorbed the collective knowledge of our ancestors. And yet, they have adapted to tremendous changes. Families were moved into larger communities and nomadic lifestyles were largely abandoned. Increasing exposure to southern influences, values and ideals are now visible in Inuit communities. As a result, the passing of traditions, customs and Inuit Societal Values from our elders to a new generation of Inuit is vital in maintaining our unique cultural identity.

In this document, the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth presents a strategy for supporting elders and using their intelligence to benefit our communities. Importantly, it also outlines the ways in which elders can feel more empowered through this process.

OUR MANDATE:

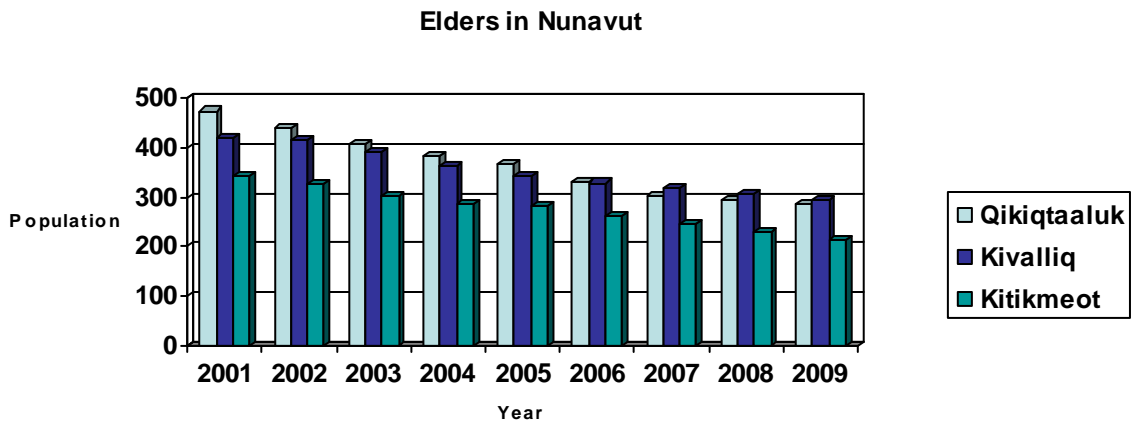
The Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth has a mandate to support elders in Nunavut. To achieve this goal, the department's Elders and Youth division organizes and funds cultural programs and services for elders. This work includes the provision of grants and contributions for cultural training workshops, elder committees and facilities, programs that connect elders and youth and projects that record the rich oral history and song legacy of Nunavut.

Communities define "Elders"
as those over 50 year of age.

BACKGROUND:

The ancient wisdom, the traditions, rituals, languages and cultural values were passed on and carried forward. In this process, a primary role was played by the Elders, the Old Ones, the Grandmothers and Grandfathers. As individuals especially knowledgeable and experienced in the culture, they were seen as those most closely in touch with the philosophical teachings of life lived in harmony with the Creator and creation. (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, Volume 4, pp.101)

For nearly a decade, the Elders and Youth division (formerly Community Programs) of CLEY has maintained a list of elders in each community it can call on to support cultural initiatives. The list is based on suggestions by community members. This record shows the number of elders who possess knowledge associated with traditional Inuit society as steadily declining.



The prominent role elders have in passing traditional knowledge is being undermined by language loss, the increasing prominence of southern influences in the north, and the erosion of traditional learning environments. Opportunities for elders to pass on skills associated with living on the land for instance, once an everyday feature of life, now occur much less frequently. Consequently, it is critical that efforts now be made to document this traditional knowledge and support new ways for elders to pass it on to youth.

Elders have gone through many changes in their lifetime and have been introduced very quickly to a world not their own. (Elder participant in the consultation process, 2005)

The traditional role of elders within Inuit society shifted in the mid-twentieth century into a new way of life with the introduction of permanent settlements and formalized schooling. Despite this and other changes, Inuit language and culture remain strong in many communities and virtually all elders are still familiar with the traditional Inuit knowledge, skills and values. Elders across Nunavut are also actively involved in programs designed to pass on these aspects of Inuit culture to the next generation.

CONSULTATION PROCESS:

The Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth believes elders are best able to identify their challenges and determine associated solutions themselves.



Elders need support to achieve the goals they have outlined for themselves. They need to know that their ideas are heard by government and will prompt action. Although the elders consulted had different backgrounds and were from different communities the recommendations they made were quite similar. The need to maintain the Inuit language and culture was a principal concern as was instilling a sense of respect for elders in youth. At the same time, a significant number of recommendations concerned health and social well

being. Ultimately, the consultation process resulted in the release of *Promoting Elders Needs* in 2005. The adoption of this strategy helped the department focus its programs, grants and contributions in ways that directly addressed the needs identified by elders.

CLEY is committed to on-going evaluation and improvement of its programming. Consequently, staff of the department took advantage of the *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit Katimajiit* workshops held in Iqaluit during June and September 2008 to speak with elders about ways the department's programming could be improved. Later that year, a more thorough consultation process took place. An elder representative from each community was invited to attend. Workshops were organized in the following communities:

- Qikiqtaaluk, Cape Dorset, November 2008
- Kivalliq, Repulse Bay, July 2009
- Kitikmeot, Kugaaruk, September 2009.

Twenty-two elders committees are currently active in Nunavut. Although they face challenges typical of many volunteer organizations, including the difficulty of retaining a skilled secretary and the need to continually reapply for funding, CLEY provides elders committees with a funding each year. Additional funding is available through grants and contributions within the department and from other organizations and government departments.



A STRATEGY: ACTION ITEMS

The results from the second consultation process with elders were implemented to form a strategy; it attempts to address specific suggestions made by elders during the second round of consultations.

The strategy also remains firmly rooted in Tamapta (Government of Nunavut, 2009):

Connect our community; Elders provide cultural continuity, help develop leadership, and pass on our traditional skills and knowledge. All generations, from youth to elders, will be encouraged and supported in expanding their individual roles in governance and leadership. We will increase opportunities and programs to support social, sports, recreational and traditional activities in communities and on the land.

In reading the following action items, it is important to remember the objectives, next steps and outcomes which are not listed in any particular order. In fact, they must be achieved collectively in order to fulfill the vision of the strategy as a whole.



A: EMPOWER ELDERS – BUILDING CAPACITY

By developing more effective, powerful elder committees, elders will be better positioned to address issues of importance to them directly. A well-organized, professional and cohesive network of elder committees, enjoying good working relationships with hamlet councils and government, will represent an important tool and basic knowledge for elders wishing to initiate changes at the local and territorial levels.

Elders expressed:

- Financial and administrative capacity of elders committees is a constant struggle that needs to be taken into consideration.
- A need for more knowledge on fund-raising capacity of elders committees.
- A need for drug and alcohol awareness workshops to help them understand what people with addiction go through.
- A need for better understanding of how the Government of Nunavut works.

Objectives:

- ❖ Facilitate training sessions for elders committees; project proposal development; fundraising strategies; board governance and recruitment plans.
- ❖ Support the creation of a Seniors Secretariat in Nunavut.
- ❖ Partner with RCMP and HSS to create drug and alcohol awareness workshops.
- ❖ Partner with other GN Departments to increase knowledge on government processes.

Next Steps:

- Community funding workshops to raise awareness of funding sources for elders committees and develop stronger funding proposals.
- Facilitate RCMP and HS&S drug and alcohol presentations for elders.
- Provide liaison between the department and elders by distributing information on government processes;

Outcomes:

- Elders develop a better understanding of funding proposal development, board governance and funding agencies.
- A more effective, organized and cohesive group of elders committees working together across Nunavut.
- Ties are strengthened between elders and RCMP and HS&S.
- Elders develop a clearer understanding of the legislative process and the ways their needs can be addressed by government.

B: PROMOTE RESPECT FOR ELDERS – *CELEBRATING CONTRIBUTIONS OF ELDERS*

The status of elders will be raised through programs that connect them with youth, celebrate their accomplishments, and provide opportunities for young people to learn from their cultural and linguistic experience. An important way of formally recognizing the importance of elders in Nunavut is at gatherings that celebrate their accomplishments.

Communities that respect elders will not tolerate their abuse or exploitation. Consequently, elder abuse awareness campaigns will continue to strengthen government departments and community organizations in working together to eliminate elder abuse.

Elders expressed:

- The need for support at the local, regional and territorial level for elder gatherings and celebrations.
- An interest in support on community lectures done by elders.

Objectives:

- ❖ Support gatherings and celebrations for elders at the community, regional, and territorial level.
- ❖ Build ties with the Department of Justice and other groups to help promote respect for elders and eliminate the exploitation and abuse.
- ❖ Support awareness campaigns focused on the exploitation and abuse of elders.
- ❖ Facilitate community presentations and lectures by elders showcasing their linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Next Steps:

- Assist elders committees in planning and setting goals for their camp programs.
- Assist in the coordination and promotion of lecture presentations by elders.
- Build ties with the Department of Justice and the Department of Education to promote respect for elders and eliminate elder abuse.

Outcomes:

- The profile and status of elders in Nunavut is raised.
- Ties are strengthened between elders and youth in Nunavut.
- Effective elder abuse awareness campaigns.



C: TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE – PASSING ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Over centuries, Inuit have developed a vibrant language, culture and heritage. Inuit knowledge of the land, animals and climate of the north is unparalleled and unique. Efforts need to be made to maintain these aspects of Inuit identity in modern communities. This work is essential to imparting a fully formed sense of Inuit identity to our youth while maintaining a legacy of social, cultural and intellectual history and development centuries old.

Elders expressed:

- Their interest in genealogical research should be increased.
- Documenting community histories would help youth to understand better how the community came to be.
- An interest in documenting place names in communities for the younger generation.
- That there should be more support on traditional skills workshops.
- The need for an increase of the number of on-the-land activities for elders and youth.

Objectives:

- ❖ Develop resources for those interested in genealogical research.
- ❖ Continue oral history collection and work to make the results more accessible.
- ❖ Explore the possibility of producing additional printed resources and other media based on oral history recordings.
- ❖ Support programs that connect elders and youth.
- ❖ Support on-the-land workshops that teach traditional skills and associated terminology.

Next Steps:

- Initiate genealogy projects.
- Initiate workshops and projects.
- Develop a strategy for increasing public accessibility to oral history collections produced by CLEY.

Outcomes:

- Ties are strengthened between elders and youth and based on shared interests in culture, language and heritage.
- The revival of traditional place names throughout Nunavut.
- The traditional knowledge, skills, values and language of elders is preserved and passed on to the next generation.

D: HEALTHY LIVES AND FAMILIES – SUPPORTING HEALTHY MINDS AND BODIES

Healthy minds, bodies and families allow elders to maintain active, fulfilling lifestyles and avoid social and cultural isolation. Independence and mobility also help elders maintain their dignity and remain active contributors within their communities. It is equally important to recognize that suicide and drug addiction among young people have a direct impact on the security, well-being and happiness of elders. As a result, a holistic approach to supporting elders' health and social well-being is required. This includes culturally relevant healthy living programs, appropriate housing options and an emphasis on creating healthy families and communities.

Elders expressed:

- The need to socialize with each other to ease the mind and body.
- An interest in being more active physically and mentally.

Objectives:

- ❖ Build ties with other government departments to promote healthy living programs.
- ❖ Support social activities that exercise the minds and bodies of elders.

Next Steps:

- Build ties with other government departments that share similar objectives.
- Create flyers on healthy living and different simple exercises for distribution to elders.

Outcomes:

- Strengthened ties with other government departments to promote healthy lifestyles.
- An increased awareness of the impact suicide, drug addiction and poor housing has on elders and the development of a holistic strategy to combat it.



E: SUMMATION

The Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth provides funding for various programs that support Elders in Nunavut. Indeed, there are a variety of other GN departments and other agencies that do the same. The action items in this strategy steps beyond most of the regular program activities that currently exist for Elders.

The objectives, next steps and outcomes listed on the previous pages will not be accomplished by CLEY alone. Our elders require a collaborative effort on their behalf to meet their needs. In taking a holistic approach, and by listening to what elders have told us, our intention is to improve the quality of life of this respected portion of our population.

