

# What We Heard Immigration Strategy

Public Engagement June 2021



This document is available in French.  
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## Background

The Yukon Nominee Program was launched in 2007, to assist employers experiencing labour shortages in the territory, by nominating applicants through its critical impact, skilled worker and express entry streams. Over 2,000 nominees and their families have been nominated through the program - providing workforce stability and valuable economic and social contributions to Yukon. Employers and communities have played an important role in the attraction and retention of foreign workers in Yukon by making the territory an attractive place to work, live and raise families.

The first Yukon Immigration Strategy was released in 2010 to address Yukon's immigration requirements and to complement and support the four other labour market framework strategies: comprehensive skills and trades training, recruitment, retention and labour market information.

The Department of Economic Development is developing a new Immigration Strategy to guide policy and programs over the 2020-2030 timeframe. The new strategy will update Yukon's vision for immigration and lay out an action plan to ensure that our programs and policies are responsive to our economy and our communities' needs. The strategy will cover existing programs like the Yukon Nominee Program and Yukon Business Nominee Program, along with proposed new actions to assist Yukon employers and newcomers as we work together to grow the territory's economy.

A critical component of developing the new strategy was to listen to and learn from Yukoners about their short and long-term needs and priorities that should be addressed through the new strategy. In fall 2020, the department undertook an engagement process to solicit input and ideas into the new Immigration Strategy. The following report captures "What We Heard" during the engagement.

## Engagement Process

The 2020-2030 Immigration Strategy engagement process was comprised of two main streams: an online survey and stakeholder interviews.

The online survey was developed by staff from the Department of Economic Development, hosted on EngageYukon.ca, and promoted via social media and notices in the local newspapers. The survey was available from October 23, 2020, to December 4, 2020.

In October 2020, letters were also sent from the department to a targeted group of stakeholders, informing them of the process and inviting them to participate either through the survey or an interview. The stakeholders included business associations, chambers of commerce, municipalities, non-government organizations, community and cultural associations and First Nations governments.

## Participation

### Survey

There were 203 valid responses<sup>1</sup> to the online survey. Approximately 80 percent of respondents were individuals, with the remainder participating on behalf of an organization. The majority of the individual respondents resided in Whitehorse; the minority originated from the three most populous communities (Dawson, Watson Lake, Haines Junction) or elsewhere in the territory.

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<sup>1</sup> Of 213 responses received – surveys that were completed multiple times by individuals were removed from the data set.

## Interviews

A total of five interviews were conducted during November and December 2020.

Sessions involved the following organizations:

- City of Dawson Council (5 participants)
- Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon (2 participants)
- L' Association franco-yukonnaise (2 participants)
- Multicultural Association of Yukon (1 participant)
- Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce (8 participants)

Follow-up surveys were conducted with the Canadian Filipino Association of Yukon and the Chinese Canadian Association of Yukon as well.

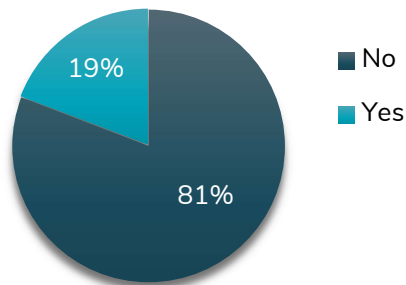
## General Respondent Information

As an indication of the number of participants providing a similar or certain type of input, we use the following terminology:

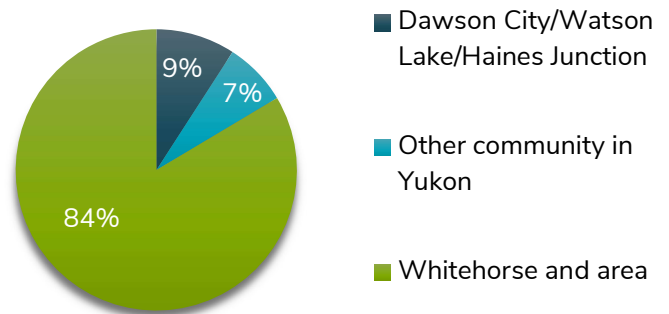
Term	Participants
Several	2 to 3
Numerous	5 or more

## Demographic Response

Are you responding on behalf of an organization?

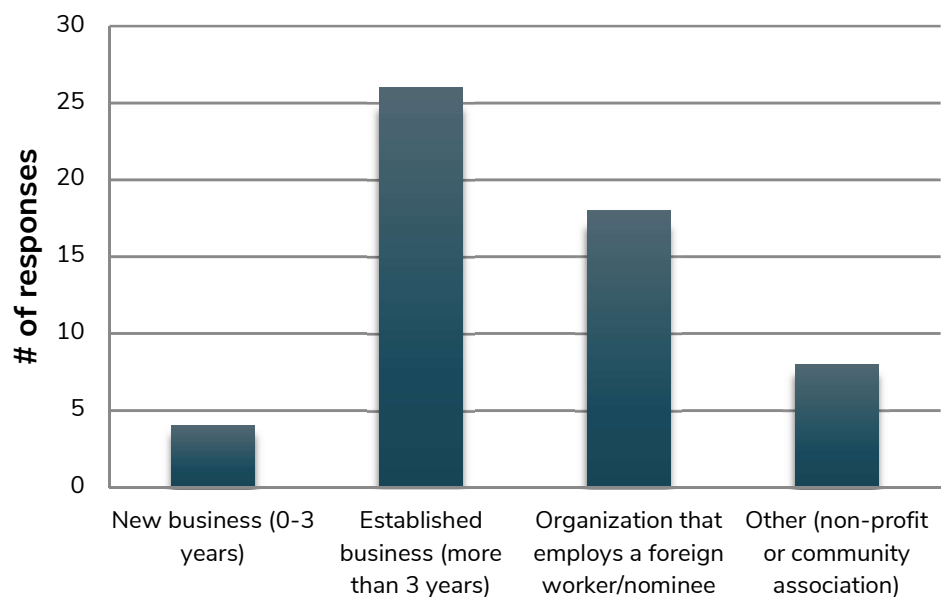


In which community do you live?



Two thirds of the 39 organizations that provided a survey response were established businesses. Almost half employed a foreign worker and/or Yukon immigration nominee. Eight non-profit or community organizations responded, but none indicated working as a settlement agency or multi-cultural organization.

Which of the following describes your organization?



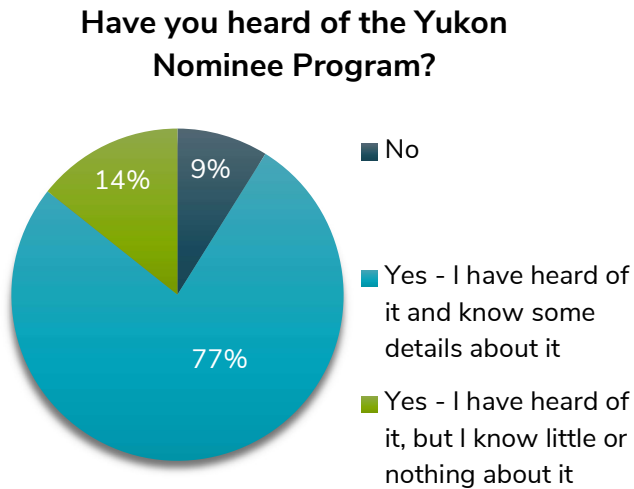
Twenty per cent of responding organizations indicated being based in Yukon's communities, in particular the more populous ones.



## What We Heard: Key Topics

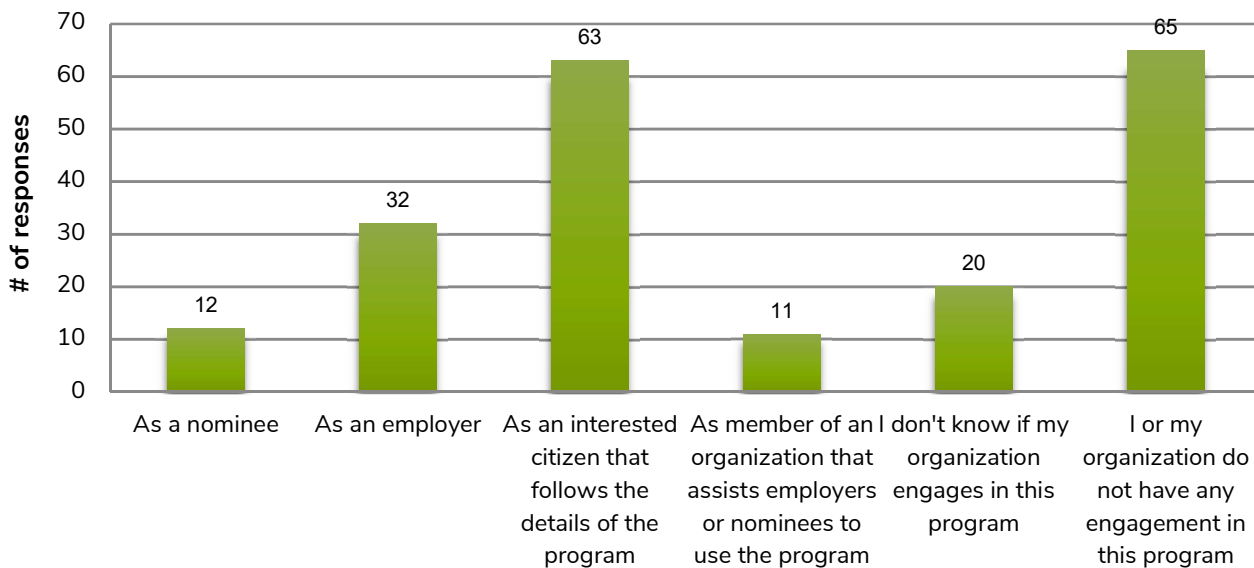
### Immigration Programming

#### Yukon Nominee Program



The Yukon Nominee Program (YNP) was a key topic of both the online survey and interviews. In both cases, familiarity with YNP was quite high; less than 10% of survey respondents had no familiarity with the program.

#### How are you or your organization engaged with the Yukon Nominee Program?





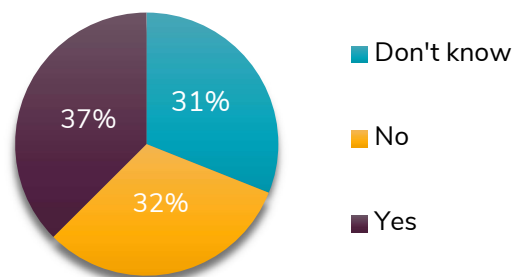
Participants had a range of experience with YNP. Almost one-sixth of respondents were employers, while a dozen were nominees. Interviewees included a municipal council with a keen interest in immigration, businesses participating in YNP, and organizations that directly and/or indirectly assist nominees. Almost one-third of survey respondents indicated having no direct involvement with the program, while another one-third indicated involvement as an “interested citizen.”

*Effectiveness of YNP*

YNP received mixed reviews with respect to its effectiveness in meeting Yukon’s labour market demands. Survey respondents were evenly divided on YNP’s effectiveness (with over one-third being unsure).

One interviewee who works closely with nominees and employers commented that YNP is generally meeting demands and that businesses feel that it is “way less bureaucratic” than the federal process. A similarly favourable view of YNP was echoed by the business community interview group; participants generally felt that YNP has been very successful in Yukon and should continue. One participant who works with

**Are existing Yukon Nominee streams meeting Yukon labour market demands?**



international students at Yukon University credited YNP with attracting 90% of the current international student population from India, Sudan and Philippines and indicated that post-graduation employment in the communities is an established trend.

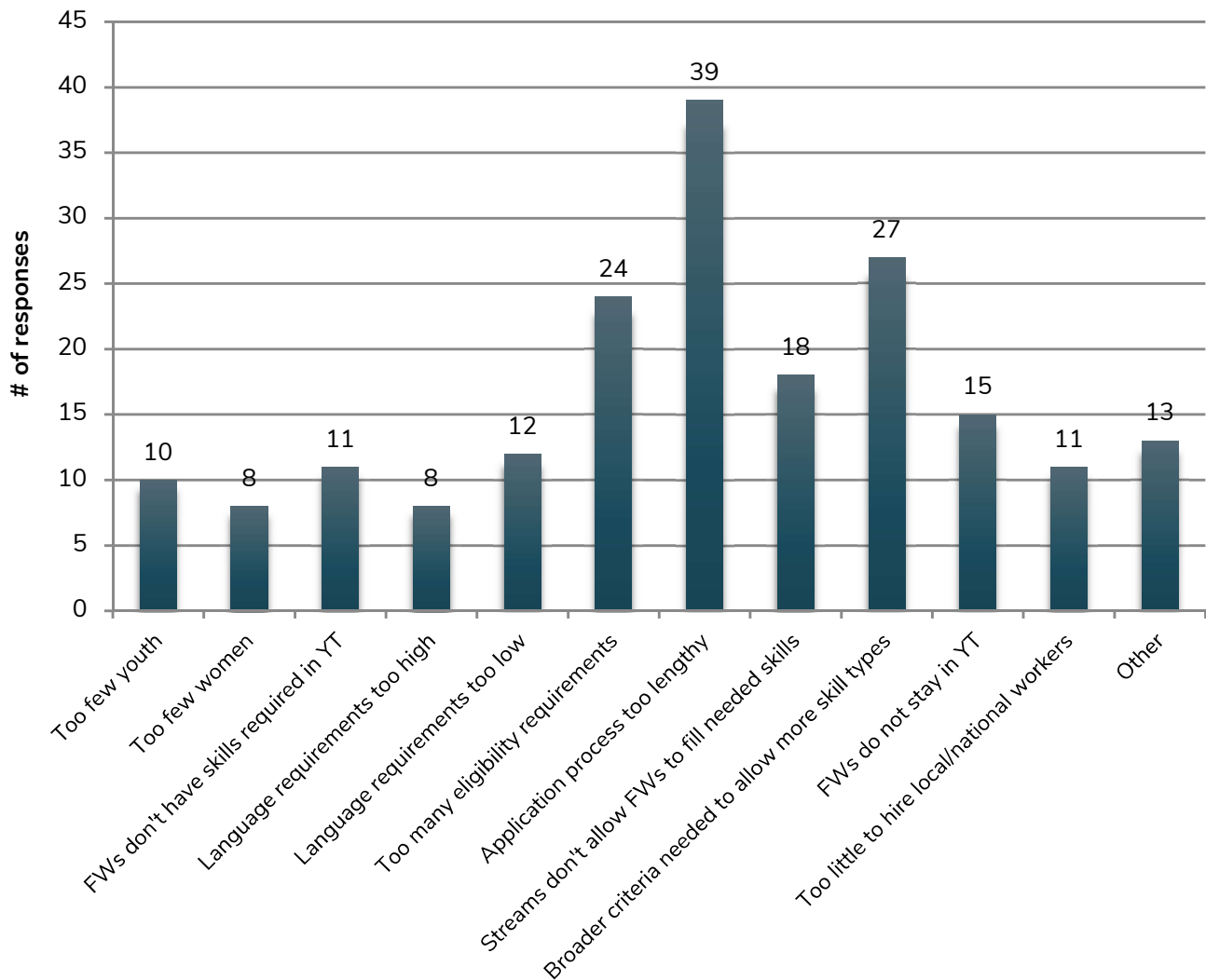
Several interviewees expressed support for the Community Pilot stream, however most expressed

that online information about the program was sparse and not easily understood. A theme that emerged in a discussion on the program was the lack of clarity on how



multiple employers could coordinate among themselves to access the program and provide a nominee with full-time equivalent hours.

### What do you believe are the gaps in the Yukon Nominee Program?



#### *Overall Application Process*

The primary program issue identified by survey respondents was the length of the employer application process. One respondent commented that the program's employee cap is too low to meet retail sector needs, while another felt that the



program is not responsive to the labour demands of the territory's seasonal tourism industry by not including temporary workers.

Twenty per cent of respondents identified several key issues with the program including: narrow criteria; onerous eligibility requirements; a mismatch between program streams and needed skills; and nominee retention in the territory upon receipt of permanent residency.

Interviewees identified access to accurate information as a barrier for both nominees and prospective employers. One commented that the federal immigration website is very difficult to navigate and finding simple answers can be difficult, particularly if there are language barriers. Participants in the business interview group felt that key information was not immediately clear to prospective YNP employers navigating both federal and Yukon websites. The Canada Job Bank website was mentioned as difficult to navigate and use in order to verify information. Participants remarked that these difficulties indirectly encourage employers to use their existing networks of nominees to find new ones. Clearer online program information and more outreach was suggested.

*“Application process is difficult and poorly laid out - it is very difficult to get to the end of the process.”*

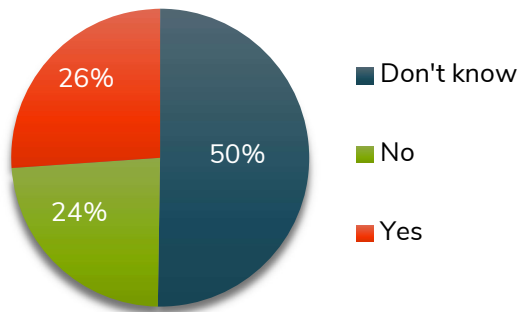
*“Business immigration excludes specific types of businesses. Why is that?”*

*“Federal processes... are not responsive to shortage[s] of health professionals (such as dentists) in the territory.”*

- Survey respondents

*Access to Labour*

**Are there restrictions in the Yukon Nominee Program that hinder employers' access to labour?**



Survey respondents were evenly divided on the issue of whether there are YNP restrictions that hinder access to labour (and, half of respondents were unsure).

Noted in the chart above – eligibility requirements and the need to broaden the criteria to allow for more skill types was raised.

The duration of the employer application process was most frequently identified as an issue. Over half of respondents also pointed

to user- “unfriendly” online information, high transportation costs (for relocating foreign workers), and a confusing and/or complex process as barriers. Excessive criteria and eligibility requirements, additional federal requirements, and a mismatch between skill sets and Yukon labour needs were identified by at least one-quarter of survey respondents.

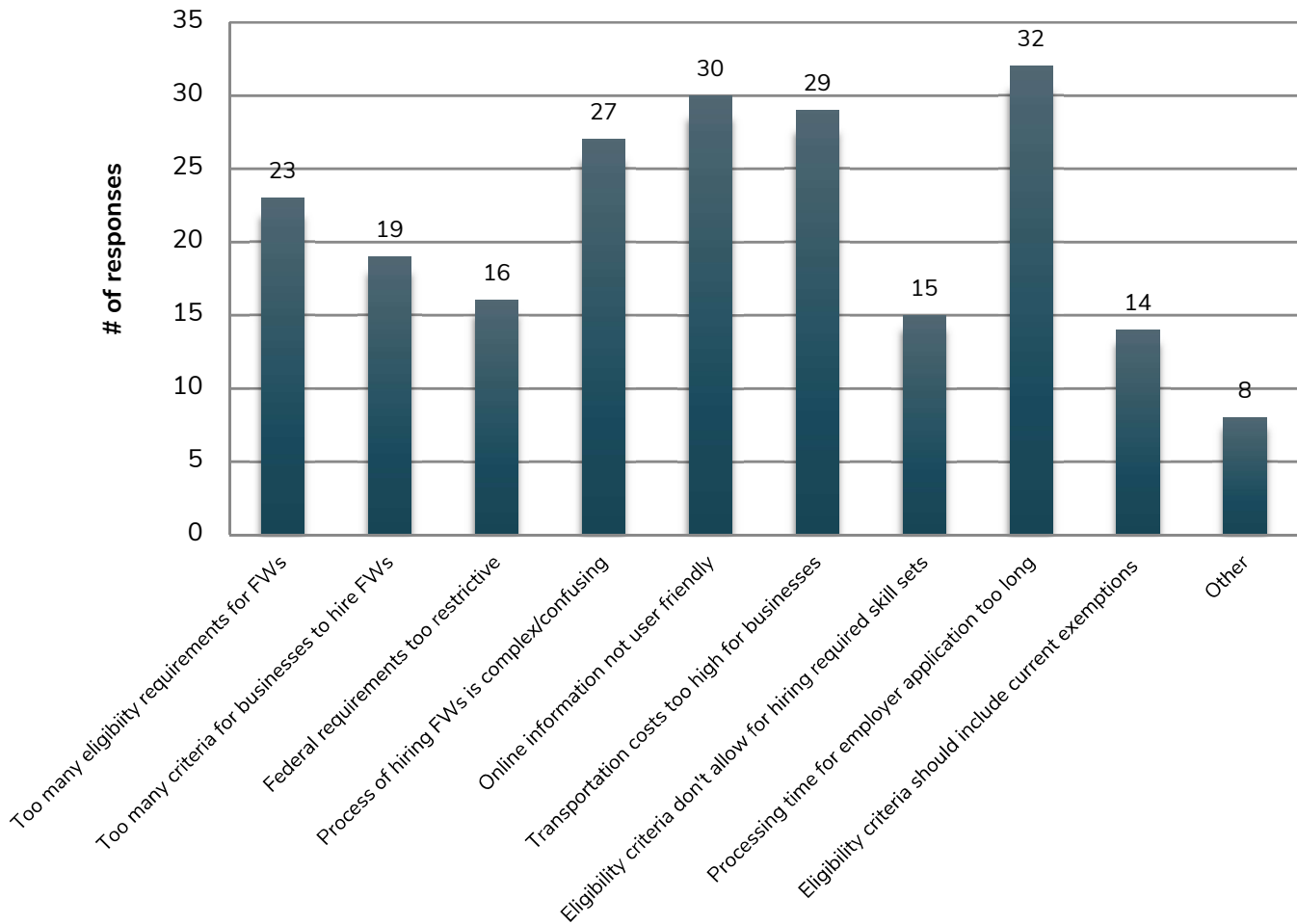
“Our hiring market is too difficult in the Yukon, and so the cap is too low. We could easily use 6-7 more nominees, Canadians just aren’t available for retail positions.”

“Our main need in the North is the 4-5 month tourist season and there is no allowance for temporary workers...”

“Federal website is absolutely inadequate and problematic.”

- Survey respondents

**What do you believe are the restrictions in the Yukon Nominee Program that hinder the employer's access to labour?**



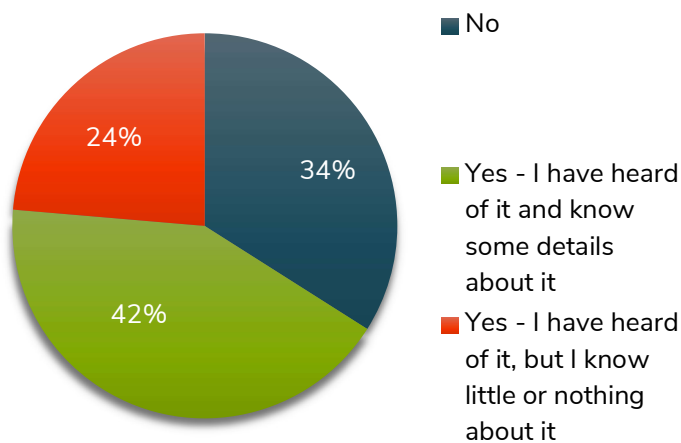
## Yukon Business Nominee Program

Overall, awareness of the Yukon Business Nominee Program (YBNP) was lower than for YNP. Over one-third of survey respondents had not heard of YBNP; another quarter had heard of it but knew little. This pattern repeated itself with the interviewees, several of whom were not at all familiar with the program. Over half of survey participants indicated having no involvement with YBNP whatsoever. About one-quarter indicated involvement as an “interested citizen”.

### Yukon Business Nominee Program

Since 2004, 24 businesses have been established through the Yukon Business Nominee Program (YBNP), and 41 candidates have been nominated for Permanent Residence. The YBNP is designed to attract and retain skilled international entrepreneurs who start a new business or purchase/partner with an existing business. Participants are required to contribute a minimum of \$300,000 to their Yukon business and have a minimum verifiable net worth of \$500,000.

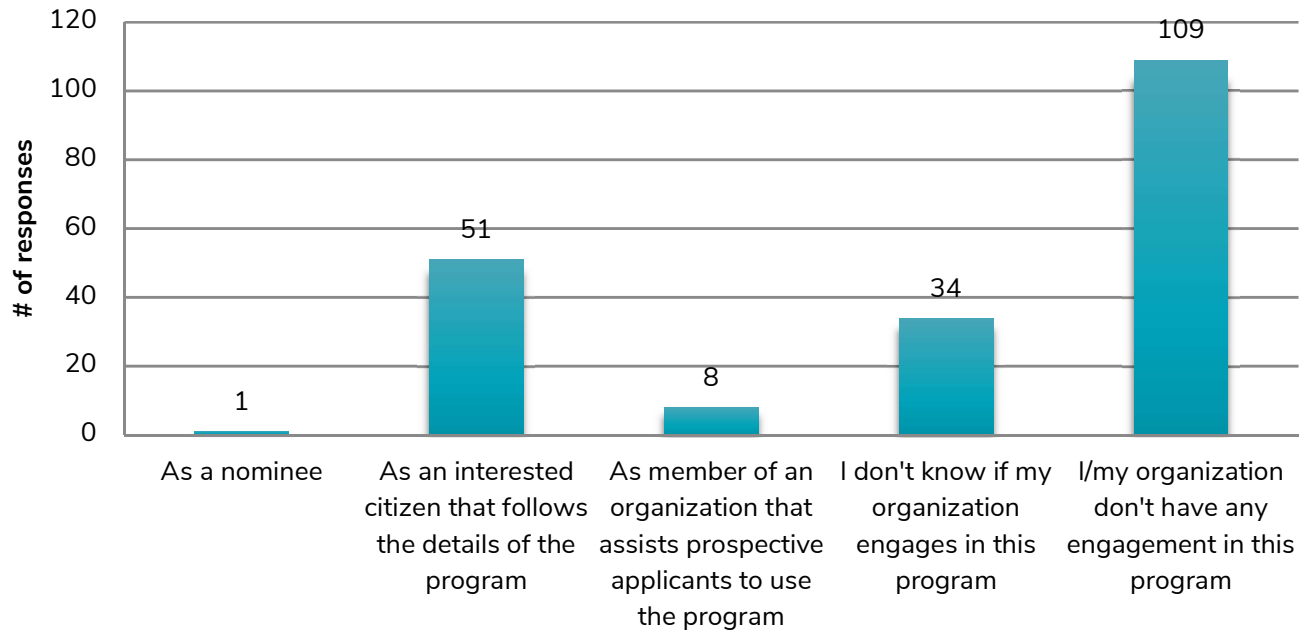
### Have you heard of the Yukon Business Nominee Program?



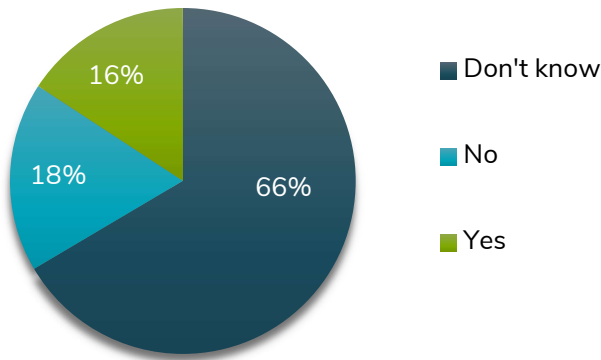
Only eight survey respondents indicated working with prospective applicants in the program. Only a few interviewees had any involvement with YBNP, and it was highly limited. One organization that works frequently with YNP nominees says that participants in YBNP tend to have more business acumen and need far fewer supports.



### How are you or your organization engaged with the Yukon Business Nominee Program?



### Is the Yukon Business Nominee Program addressing the needs of businesses?



When asked about the program's effectiveness in addressing Yukon business needs, 2/3 of survey participants were unsure. The remaining 1/3 were evenly divided between positive and negative responses.

The business community interview group generally gave favourable reviews to the program and felt that it has been successful for Yukon business. They commented that competition is good for Yukon businesses.

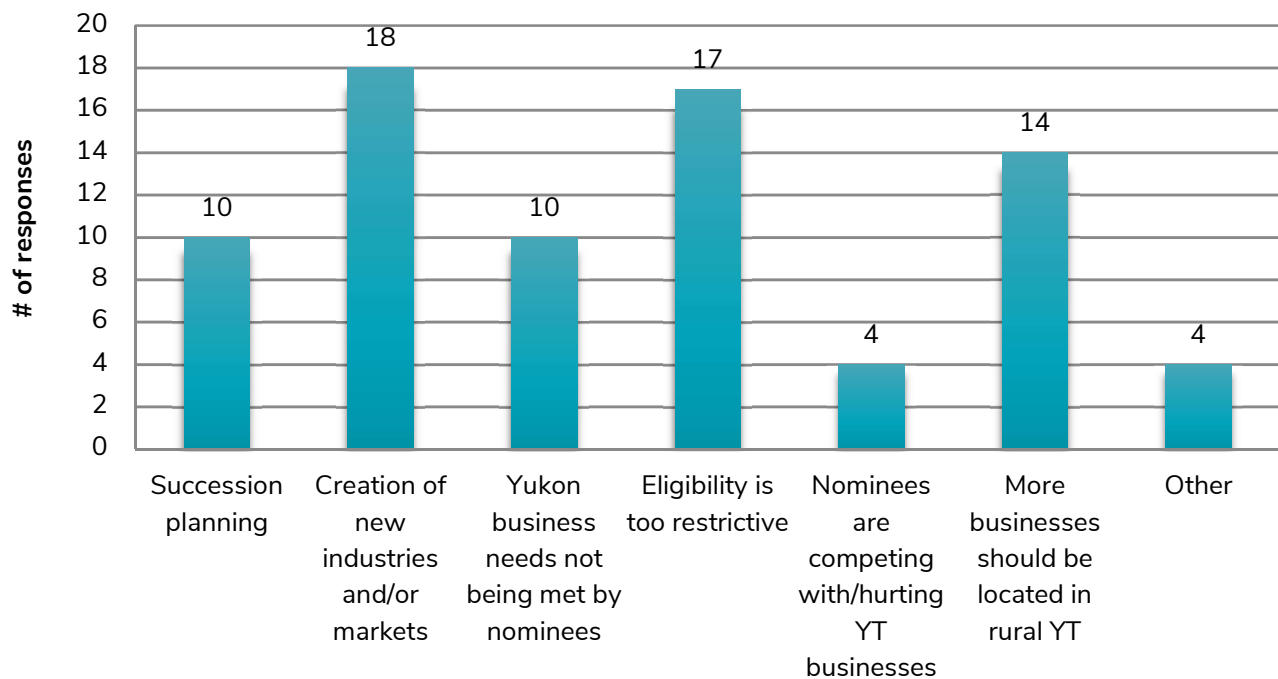
“The creation of new industries and/or markets” was most often cited by survey participants as a gap with YBNP, followed closely by eligibility restrictions and the need for more business established outside of Whitehorse. One respondent suggested the expansion of the program to streams in media/design/translation, online commerce, and export-oriented businesses. Several other participants suggested that the investment requirements are too high for smaller, sole proprietor businesses, while another requested that investors in existing Yukon companies be granted increased eligibility for immigration.

Participants in the business interview group felt that YBNP should be approached with caution. Business owners should have experience, and not “buy their way in.” It was suggested that government exercise caution to not saturate the market in a given area and create unnecessary or excessive competition to existing Yukon businesses. Additionally, according to two of those participants : “Environmentally positive” entrepreneurs who can provide solutions, particularly in rural Yukon, should be targeted as desirable applicants.



Survey respondents' "Top 3" suggestions for improvements to YBNP included: better coordination with communities to meet specific needs; broader eligibility criteria; and better promotion of the program.

**What is not being addressed by the Yukon Business Nominee Program?**



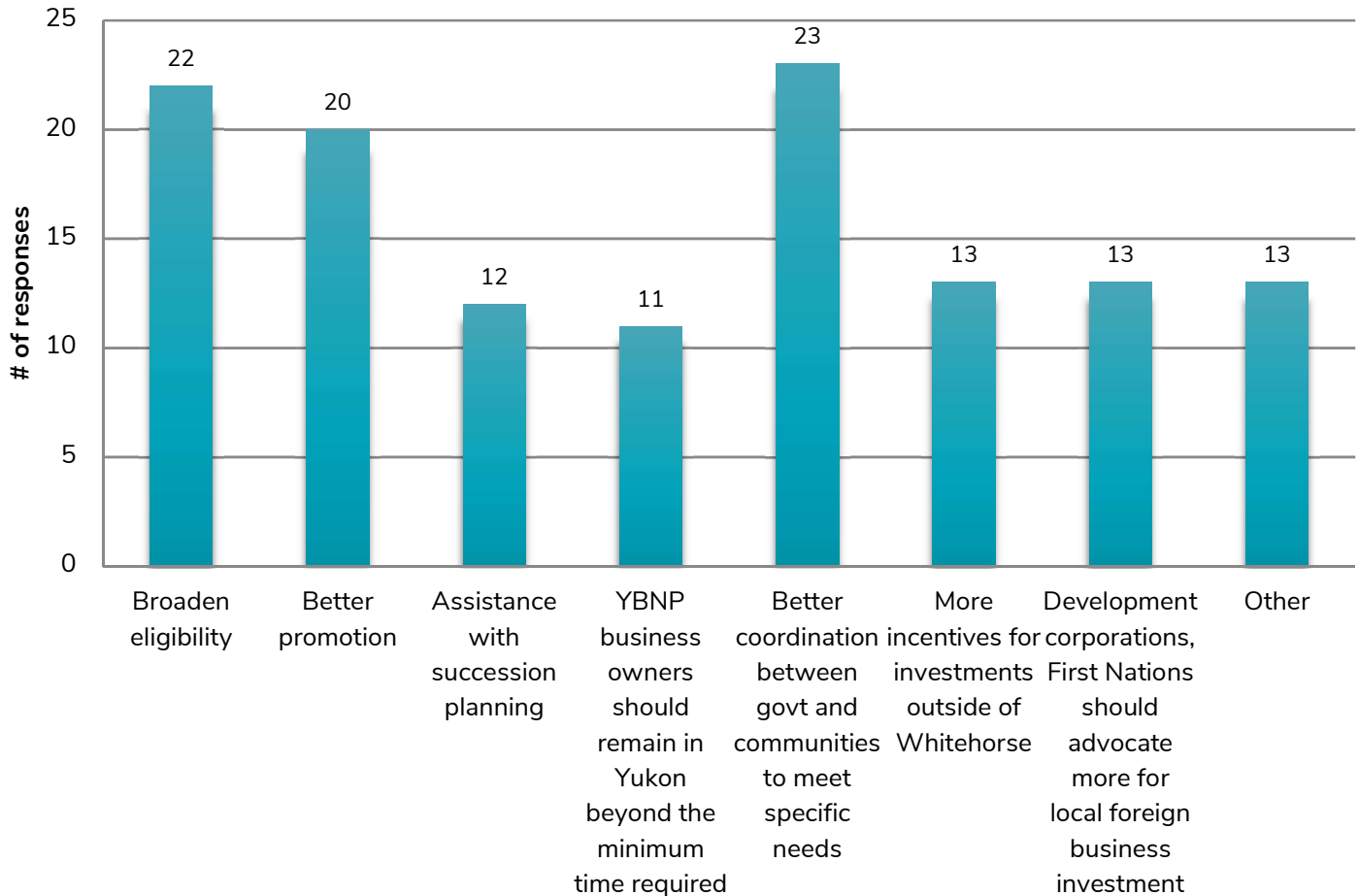
“It should be easier to be an investor to an existing Yukon company and be eligible for business immigration.”

“Investment requirements are too high for sole proprietors.”

- Survey respondents



### What would improve the Yukon Business Nominee Program?



“Unclear of how people can apply for the program. It would be nice if people interested in immigrating to the Yukon could apply and then interested businesses could contact them.”



“There should be a stream for creative industries including media, design, translation, etc.; there should be a stream for online businesses; there should be a stream for export-oriented businesses; these streams should allow for smaller, sole proprietor businesses.”

“limit program.”

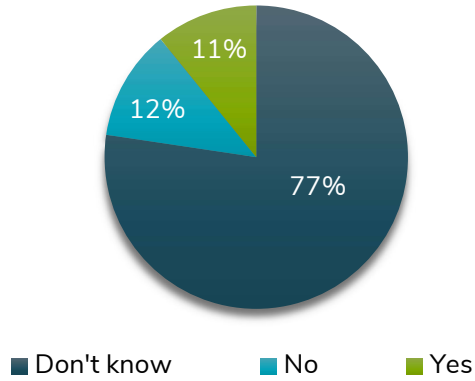
“employees in the program need better treatment, secure pay, overtime pay, deal with the issues of racism, Employees need to be ensured of safe work conditions especially during Covid.”

- Survey respondents

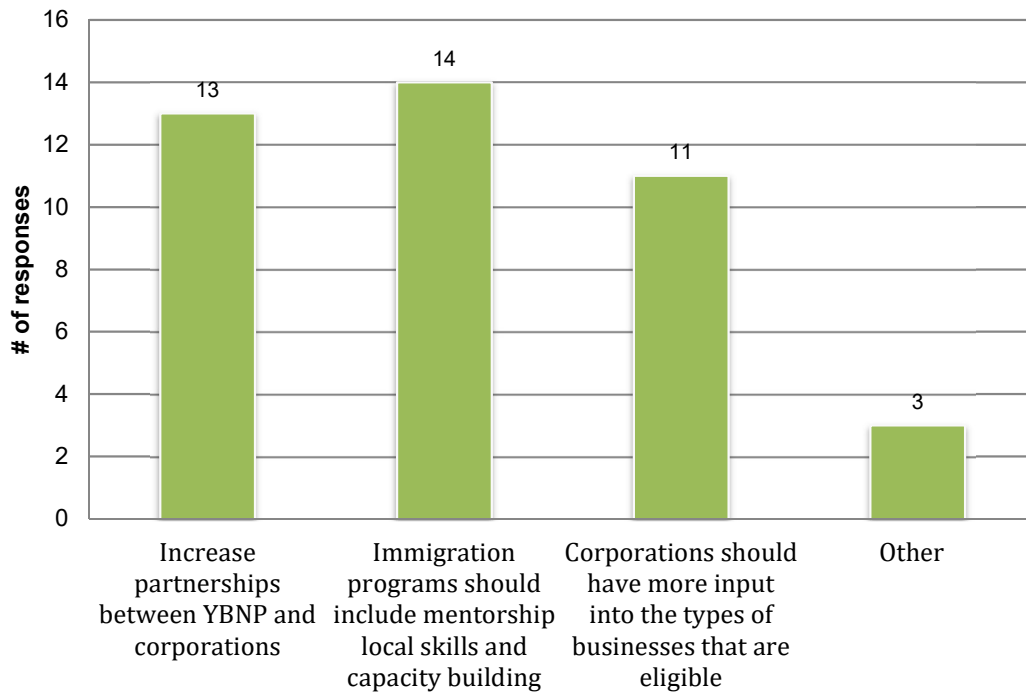
## First Nations

In regards to the question of whether immigration programs are meeting the needs of Yukon First Nation development corporations, over three-quarters of survey participants indicated uncertainty. Of those who responded “no”, there was even support for increased partnerships, mentorship and skills/capacity building, and increased corporation input into YBNP eligibility as potential improvements.

**Do immigration programs meet the needs of Yukon First Nation development corporations?**



**What opportunities are there for programs to better support development corporations?**

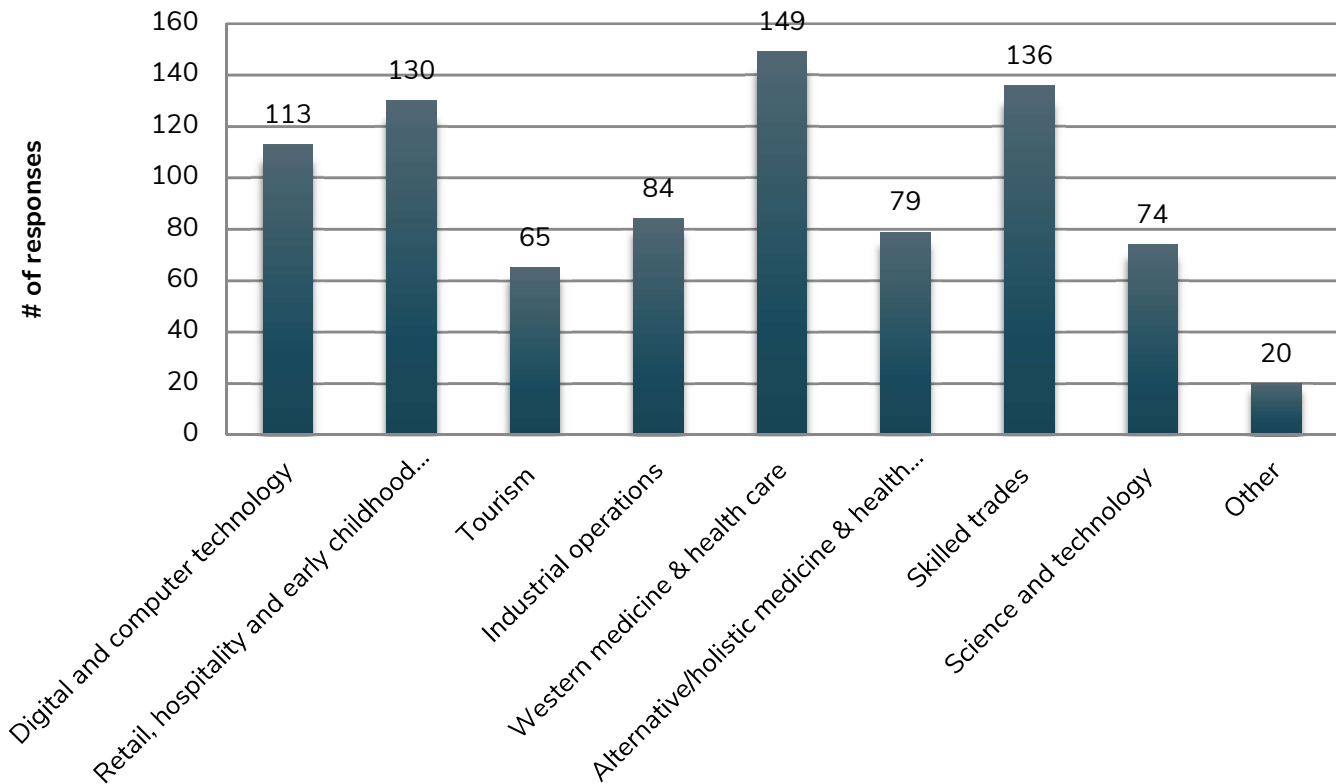


While most interviewees did not speak on the topic of First Nations and immigration, one commented that there has generally been a lack of First Nation representation in conversations around issues of immigration and hoped for a change in the future. Another interviewee pointed out that immigration management decisions should be shared among Yukon First Nations governments and the public governments of Canada and Yukon. First Nations governments or development corporations were contacted during the engagement process. Ongoing collaborative efforts will continue during the strategy development.

## **Future Labour Market Needs**

The “Top 3” skill sets identified by survey respondents needed in Yukon over the next decade were: Western medicine/health care practitioners and workers; skilled trades; and retail, hospitality and early childhood care. Digital and computer technology followed, while the remainder of the skill categories listed received fewer responses. Several respondents highlighted spatial design (architecture, engineering, planning, etc.) as a needed skill set in the “other” category. Another suggested that entrepreneurs and innovators, regardless of field, be a strategic focus.

### What skill sets will be required in Yukon over the next decade?



One interviewee noted the challenge of predicting needed skill sets over that timeframe, particularly as demographic shifts take place. However, they predicted that historical hospitality and food service sector labour shortages would persist and suggested that these sectors should continue to be a focus. Skilled trades were identified as a key strategic focus for immigration efforts by several other interviewees.

Participants in the business community interview group felt that climate change and migration should be factored into the determination of strategic skill sets. Skilled workers, without employment, but with training and experience in areas such as climate adaptation and infrastructure development, could be a key niche for Yukon to pursue.



## Foreign Credential Recognition

The issue of foreign professional credential recognition (FCR) was raised by interviewees during the engagement, with a few acknowledging that the issue is complex.

One interviewee talked about the obstacles faced by immigrants with respect to FCR. They cited substantial costs (for security, processing, documentation, etc.) and time delays as major impediments to pursuing FCR. As a result, they observed that most nominees delay pursuing FCR at least five years after they have arrived in Yukon. For this reason, it was noted that it is important to assist immigrants in pursuing careers that utilize their skill sets but do not require FCR.

Several other interviewees spoke of the difficulty of recruiting Europeans who would be forced to change their stream of work. They cited the example of people with daycare training, not recognized in Canada, having to start at the bottom wage level and choosing to return to school or start businesses instead. Participants in the business community interview group also confirmed the challenge of losing nominees when they must complete courses outside Yukon in order to obtain credentials. Another particular challenge noted was that foreign workers with work permits cannot study without a study permit.

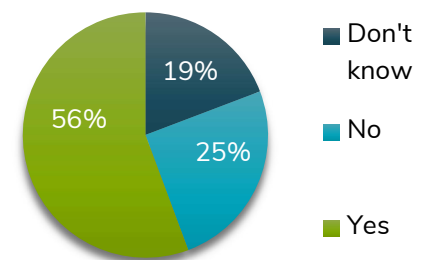
Over half of survey respondents supported the idea of Yukon addressing these challenges by establishing its own foreign credentials office (compared to one-quarter opposing). One interviewee was highly skeptical of this idea. They described a hypothetical office as a “massive moving target” due to the vast array of occupations

**Foreign Credential Recognition**

Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) is the process of verifying that the education obtained by a person in another country is equal to the standards established for Canadian workers.

In Yukon, there are few regulators who verify credentials. The Government of Yukon works with provincial registrars across Canada to issue licenses for certain regulated occupations. A person holding foreign credentials often needs to become licensed in another jurisdiction before being able to practice in Yukon.

**Should Yukon establish its own foreign credentials office?**



and constant changes within each of them. They suggested taking the budget that would be required to set up a Yukon-specific “bricks and mortar” solution and creating a fund that nominees could access (as a short-term loan, etc.) to bridge requirements to fill the most economically strategic positions. They used the metaphor of “giving them the vehicle to get where they need to go,” with the government’s role being to accelerate the process and nominated individuals for needed positions.

Similar suggestions were made by other interviewees. One interviewee in rural Yukon suggested that a version of the Yukon Grant be developed for individuals in high-demand professional roles living in the communities (they further commented that immigration must move beyond filling positions in grocery stores and needs to bring professionals to rural Yukon if the programs are to truly succeed). Another Whitehorse-based interviewee suggested a targeted approach in which nominees are trained locally (in person or online), but through partnerships with outside institutions. They further recommended that Yukon look to other jurisdictions that have piloted FCR programs (Prince Edward Island was specifically mentioned).

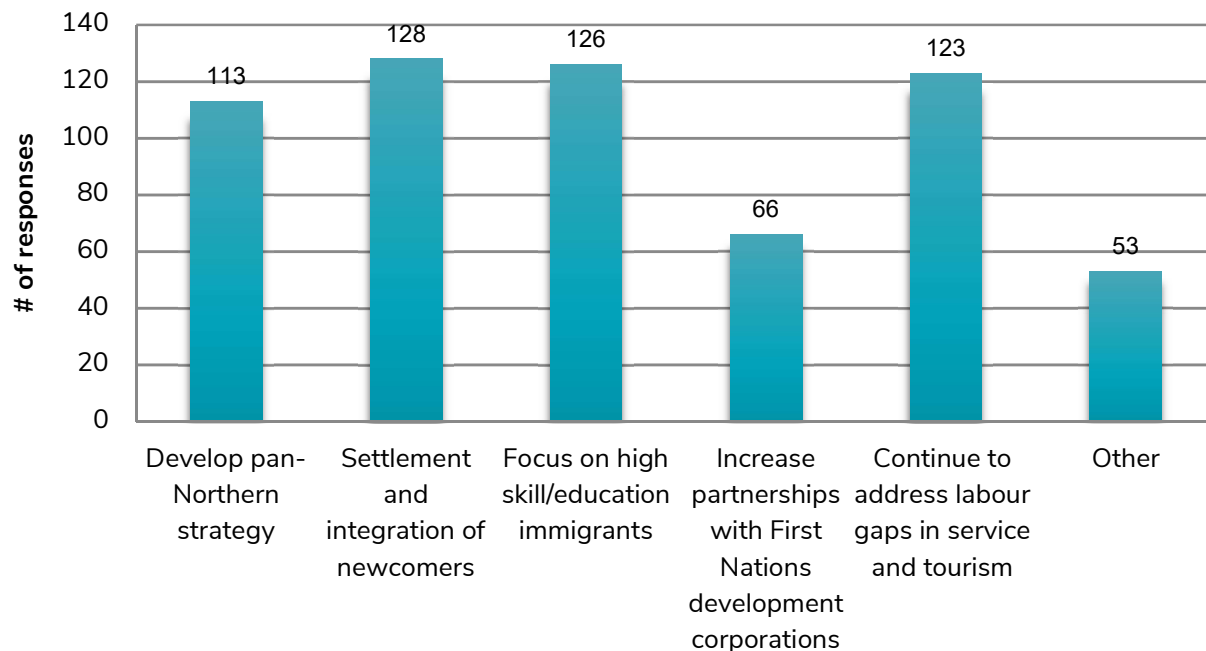


## Priorities for 2020-2030

### Survey Responses – Top 3 Priorities

The survey asked participants to choose the three most important priorities for economic immigration over the next decade from a pre-determined list. The “Top 3” priorities selected were: settlement and integration of newcomers; increased focus on highly skilled and educated immigrants; and continued use of immigration to address labour gaps in the service and tourism sectors. The development of a pan-Northern immigration strategy was the fourth most selected priority, followed by increased partnerships with First Nation development corporations. A wide range of “other” priorities were brought forward by respondents, including program improvements, housing access, and education. A third of comments provided in the “other” category expressed either opposition to continued and/or increased immigration or requested that training and employment of current residents be prioritized (refer to page 24).

**What should the Government of Yukon's three priorities for economic immigration be over the next decade?**



“Ensure access to jobs to already established Yukon youth.”

“Offer enticement to young Yukoners to return to Yukon (or stay) after education is completed.”

“Identify issues concerning racism, low pay, dangerous working environments.”

“Work with national bodies (like the National Dentistry Examining Board) to ensure a faster process for the territory as compared to the rest of Canada. We are losing foreign trained health workers (like dentists) because the process takes around 3 years.”

“Making sure the skilled labour we attract can obtain Canadian credentials in a fast/easy/affordable way.”

“Allow them to have more than 1 job.”

- Survey respondents

## Stakeholder Suggestions

Stakeholders brought forward a number of suggestions for the department to consider in developing strategic priorities for the 2020-2030 Immigration Strategy, including:

*Climate Migration* – One submission encouraged the department to consider the impact of climate-induced migration. It was suggested that Yukon should be looking at where climate migration may be most prevalent and be working to tailor those banks of human capital matched with Yukon’s skill and labour force needs through actions such as accreditation and planning for housing.

*Immigration Rights and Advocacy* - Several interviewees who help nominees navigate the system felt that there is a power imbalance between nominees and their employers. They shared that nominees may not report workplace problems (i.e., abuse, etc.) for fear of repercussions and potential inability to secure Canadian permanent residence status. They felt that YNP is focused on employers and may be difficult for employees/nominees to access information or understand what kind of protection is afforded to them. Several survey comments echoed the same concerns, highlighting the vulnerability of immigrants. There was a request for the reinstatement of the community advisory group that previously advised on immigration issues when the program was overseen by the Department of Education to ensure these types of issues have a forum for ongoing discussion.

*Francophone Immigration* – Several interviewees stressed the importance of acknowledging Canada’s context as a bilingual country in Yukon’s immigration approach. They felt that setting specific targets around and increasing francophone immigration will dovetail with the Government of Yukon’s desire to increase the number of bilingual positions. Participants referred to a community roundtable discussion in recent years on increasing francophone immigration; they expressed a desire to not reinvent the wheel, but instead revisit priorities and take action on them. They also noted that additional funding is required to expand recruitment activities from France/Belgium to other French-speaking regions such as North Africa. They

encouraged the department to ensure that francophone immigration considerations are woven through all strategic focus areas, which was echoed in the survey comments as well.

*Local/Cultural Acclimation and Integration* – Participants in the business interview group spoke to the challenges of living in Yukon, and the need for honesty and transparency in promotions about the territory. In their estimation, Yukon is not just a series of “grand landscapes”, but also cold and dark. They felt that more education should be provided to help nominees prepare for and love their new home territory, as well as understand the importance of protecting it. Another interviewee who works with nominees noted that their organization receives many questions about Canadian society, culture, and customs. They have heard damaging comments towards Indigenous people from immigrants that they believe demonstrate a lack of understanding about the legacy of colonialism and residential schools. It was suggested that more cultural orientation programming could help immigrants integrate within the community.

Another interviewee stressed that the biggest barrier to integration is language and suggested that increased literacy was the best way to help immigrants overcome other challenges. A rural Yukon interviewee shared the challenge of trying to recruit immigrant youth into local sports and recreation and suggested that the government’s Sport and Recreation Branch staff may be able to assist.

*Housing Supply* – Housing was a recurring topic of conversation during interviews (it was mentioned numerous times in survey responses as well). The business interview group predicted that there will continue to be significant housing pressures across Canada, including Yukon. Other interviewees shared specific examples of failed recruitment and retention due to the inability to secure affordable, quality housing. This problem was particularly “front of mind” for those in rural Yukon, who stressed that the housing issue must be a central part of immigration planning for communities in particular. The business interview group noted housing availability and affordability is a barrier to the recruitment of whole families and ultimately, retention of nominees. Many

interviewees urged the department to make housing a strategic priority for the upcoming decade.

*Multi-Faceted and Coordinated Approach* – Several interviewees noted the multi-faceted nature of immigration and suggested that the strategy must address its multiple dimensions – primarily recruitment, supply and demand, settlement and integration, and retention. One interviewee felt that newcomers can be confused around which organizations perform different functions and where to go for specific needs; they urged the Department of Economic Development to facilitate coordination among all the organizations providing services.

*Focus on Families* – Two interviewees noted significant progress on the retention of nominees and immigrants in recent years; for example, francophones are attracted to the Yukon lifestyle (including rural Yukon living), not just the chance to obtain permanent residence - and are much more likely to remain in Yukon today than in the past. Despite these gains, there were calls for continued efforts to retain nominees in the territory. Participants in the business interview group urged the department to additionally focus on the recruitment of entire families as a measure to encourage retention.

*Community Support* – Several interviewees urged more support for immigration in rural Yukon communities; one respondent felt that the Yukon government currently pays only “lip service” to this issue. One provided a model from the Northwest Territories, where a part-time staff member provides support to immigrants in smaller communities. Ensuring that Yukoners work together on issues of mutual understanding and sharing could provide a way forward.

*Local training and development* - ensuring the government prioritizes Yukoners being well-trained and educated to maximize their opportunities, engagement, and productivity in the workforce.

## Opposition to Immigration

Anti-immigration sentiments were a recurring theme in comments section of the online survey. Comments connected immigration with unemployment and diminished opportunities for Yukoners, as were concerns about preserving culture and race and identity. These comments directly contradict the what was shared by many of the other survey respondents and interviewees.

For example, members of the business community credited YNP with raising wage levels for all Yukon workers and shared the difficulty of hiring local workers for some positions. Interviewees in rural Yukon felt that immigration had enhanced quality of life and a global view for all residents. Throughout this document, you can see how Yukoners feel that the program is helping moving the territory into the future and made a concerted effort to comment on improving these programs we have now for newcomers to the territory.

However, they also indirectly reinforce other input, where several interviewees mentioned that more local education and awareness around the benefits of immigration should be a priority focus for the new strategy, that has been reinforced through this exercise.

## Next Steps

The insights gathered through this engagement shall be incorporated into a new immigration strategy to be released by the Government of Yukon.

In developing a new Immigration Strategy, the government will seek to balance the interests of immigration stakeholders while ensuring economic growth and employment. This means working with businesses and other employers to have their employment demands met, through both local hiring and through immigration. It also means prioritizing the development of the local labour force, including training and education, to keep unemployment rates low and maximizing employment opportunities

for Yukoners. In this vein, Yukon government will continue its work supporting under-represented groups in the workforce, including First Nations, youth, persons with disabilities, older workers, and women in trades and technology, to maximize their employment participation.

In the near term, Yukon government will also focus on addressing unemployment issues in sectors most affected by the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

At the same time, it is important to ensure the protection of immigrants from violations of their human rights, in employment standards, their safety, and also from racism. To accomplish this, Yukon government will continue to work with the federal government on enforcement, including issues with fraud. Yukon government will also continue to collaborate with its partners in immigration, like the federal government, the Multicultural Association of Yukon, and other non-government organizations and community associations to provide effective settlement services.

Developing a new immigration strategy will enable Yukon government to engage with its partners in immigration to consider new ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of immigration services to everyone's benefit – recognizing this is a challenging task.

We thank all of the Yukoners, organizations and businesses who shared their thoughts, ideas and expertise to contribute to Yukon's future strategy on immigration.