



2035 CANADA WINTER GAMES

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

Prepared jointly by the Government of the Northwest Territories and
Crossing Point Advisory*

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**Crossing Point Advisory is an independent consulting firm specializing in public engagement, governance, and strategic advisory services. The firm supported the design, delivery, analysis, and reporting of the 2035 Canada Winter Games engagement process.*



Government of
Northwest Territories

K'áhshó got'íne xədə k'é hederı ɁedɁhtl'é yerınıwę ní dé dúle.
Dene Kədə

ʔerıhtl'ís Dēne Sų́líné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theɁą Ɂat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yóftı.
Dēne Sų́líné

Edı gondı dehgáh got'ıe zhatıé k'éé edat'éh enahddhę nıde naxets'é edahfı.
Dene Zhatıé

Jii gwandak izhii ginjık vat'atr'ijähch'uu zhit yinoththan jı', diıts'at ginohkhıi.
Dinjii Zhuh Ginjik

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqłuta.
Inuvialuktun

Ć'ɁɁ ɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁ ɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁ ɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁ, ɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁ ɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁɁ.
Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.
Inuinnaqtun

kīspin ki nitawihtīn ē nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.
nēhiyawēwin

Tłıchq yatı k'èè. Dı wegodı newq dè, gots'o gonede.
Tłıchq

Indigenous Languages

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Executive Summary

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) undertook a public and stakeholder engagement process to better understand perspectives on the potential opportunity to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. The engagement included a public Have Your Say survey, targeted discussions with Indigenous governments and community governments, engagement with the business community, and input from sport and recreation organizations.

Overall, the engagement demonstrated a high level of interest in the opportunity and a strong desire among participants to contribute to the discussion. Feedback reflected a wide range of perspectives, with both enthusiasm for the potential benefits of hosting and concerns regarding cost, risk, capacity, and competing territorial priorities.

Many participants viewed the Games as a potential catalyst for positive long-term outcomes. Frequently identified opportunities included infrastructure investment, sport and recreation development, tourism growth, youth engagement, community pride, cultural celebration, volunteer development, workforce capacity building, and broader economic activity. Stakeholder groups also highlighted the potential to strengthen partnerships among governments, Indigenous organizations, businesses, volunteer organizations, and communities while creating lasting legacies that extend beyond the event itself.

At the same time, participants consistently emphasized the importance of careful planning and responsible decision-making. Concerns related to affordability, housing pressures, healthcare needs, accommodation capacity, workforce and volunteer availability, regional equity, and overall financial risk were raised throughout the engagement process. Many participants stressed that any future decision should clearly demonstrate how Games-related investments align with existing territorial priorities and deliver long-term benefits to residents across the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The public survey received 354 submissions, of which 350 respondents identified as NWT residents. Results reflected a community with diverse views on the opportunity. While a slight majority expressed some level of support for hosting, support and opposition were closely divided. When asked about the preferred direction for GNWT, respondents were similarly split between moving forward, continuing to explore the opportunity, and not proceeding with a bid. The results suggest that many residents continue to seek further information regarding costs, benefits, risks, and legacy outcomes before forming a final opinion.

Across all engagement activities, several consistent messages emerged:

- Any decision should be supported by a transparent business case, realistic budget assumptions, and clear communication regarding public costs, risks, and funding sources.
- Infrastructure and accommodation investments are viewed as the most significant potential legacy opportunities, provided they address long-term territorial needs beyond the Games.

- Youth development, sport participation, cultural celebration, and community pride are viewed as important potential benefits of hosting.
- Housing, healthcare, affordability, and other pressing community priorities should not be negatively impacted by Games-related investments.
- Benefits should extend beyond Yellowknife and include opportunities for communities and regions throughout the NWT.
- Strong governance, partnerships, workforce planning, volunteer development, and Indigenous participation would be critical to any successful hosting model.

Overall, the engagement did not reveal a clear consensus either for or against hosting the 2035 Canada Winter Games. Instead, it identifies a community that is interested in understanding the opportunity, conscious of the associated challenges, and looking for evidence that hosting can be delivered in a way that aligns with territorial priorities, manages risk responsibly, and creates meaningful long-term value for communities across the NWT.

Introduction and Background

The GNWT is exploring whether the NWT should pursue a bid to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. To support this exploration, the GNWT commissioned a feasibility assessment to better understand what hosting the Games could involve, including potential opportunities, costs, infrastructure requirements, risks, and long-term impacts for the territory.

The feasibility assessment identified a number of potential opportunities associated with hosting the Games, including:

- Strengthening tourism and increasing the profile of the NWT nationally
- Generating economic activity and business opportunities
- Supporting infrastructure and housing development
- Creating opportunities for sport development and participation
- Showcasing northern and Indigenous cultures on a national stage

The assessment also highlighted important considerations, including that hosting an event of this scale would require significant planning, investment, partnerships, and long-term coordination. It emphasized that the scope, cost, and impacts of hosting could vary considerably depending on future decisions regarding priorities, funding, partnerships, and infrastructure investments.

It is important to note that the feasibility assessment was developed as a decision-support tool. It was not intended to recommend for or against hosting the Games, nor does it represent a decision by the GNWT. The assessment does not prescribe a single hosting model or approach. Rather, it

outlines a range of potential scenarios, opportunities, challenges, and considerations to inform discussion and support future decision-making.

Before making any decision on whether to pursue a bid, the GNWT undertook a public engagement process to gather feedback from residents, Indigenous governments and organizations, communities, stakeholders, and partners across the territory.

Participants were invited to share their perspectives on:

- Potential benefits and opportunities associated with hosting the Games
- Concerns, risks, and challenges
- Community priorities and readiness
- Conditions that would need to be in place for a successful bid and hosting effort

This What We Heard Report summarizes the feedback received through the Have Your Say Survey and other engagement activities. The findings will help the GNWT better understand public and stakeholder perspectives, identify key opportunities and concerns, and inform future decision-making regarding whether pursuing a bid to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games is in the best interests of the NWT.

Methodology

This report was prepared jointly by Crossing Point Advisory and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and summarizes feedback collected through the 2035 Canada Winter Games engagement process. Engagement activities, analysis, and reporting were conducted collaboratively by the GNWT and Crossing Point Advisory.

The primary source of input was the public *Have Your Say Survey*, open from June 8 to June 25, 2026, which collected both quantitative and qualitative feedback from residents and interested stakeholders. The survey data included demographics, awareness levels, support for hosting, bid preferences, perceived benefits, concerns, priorities, conditions for support, and additional comments provided by respondents.

In addition to the survey, the engagement process included targeted in-person and virtual discussions designed to share the feasibility report findings and gather more detailed perspectives from key stakeholder groups. These efforts included facilitated engagement with community governments, Indigenous governments, members of the business community, and representatives from the sport and recreation community. These discussions provided an opportunity to explore issues in greater depth and to understand perspectives that may not be fully captured through survey responses alone.

Quantitative survey results are presented first, followed by a synthesis of themes that emerged from open-ended comments and stakeholder discussions. Responses were reviewed and analyzed to identify common ideas, recurring themes, and areas of shared concern or interest.

Open-ended comments were not attributed to individuals. Because many participants raised multiple issues within a single response, comments may be reflected under more than one theme. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the key messages emerging from the engagement rather than to assess the frequency or validity of individual opinions. Together, the survey and stakeholder engagement activities provided an opportunity for participants to share their views and contribute to the findings presented in this report.

What We Heard Survey

Who We Heard From

Almost all respondents reported living in the NWT: 350 (98.9%) answered yes, and 4 (1.1%) answered no. Respondents could select more than one identity category; as a result, identity counts add up to more than 354.

Identity Selected	Responses	Share of respondents
Resident	343	96.9%
Sport/recreation participant or coach or administrator	102	28.8%
Business owner/operator	55	15.5%
Non-profit/organization representative	41	11.6%
Member of an Indigenous government/organization	23	6.5%

Community responses were heavily weighted toward Yellowknife. Free-text community entries were normalized only for obvious spelling variations.

Community	Responses	Share
Yellowknife	284	80.2%
Hay River	30	8.5%

Fort Smith	22	6.2%
Inuvik	8	2.3%
Fort Simpson	5	1.4%
Outside NWT or unclear	4	1.1%
Behchokq	1	0.3%

Awareness of the Potential for Hosting

Awareness was high: 268 (75.7%) had heard about potential hosting discussions before taking the survey, while 86 (24.3%) had not.

Awareness before survey	Responses	Share
Yes	268	75.7%
No	86	24.3%

Support for Hosting

Support was polarized. A slight majority expressed some degree of support, but strong support and strong opposition were nearly equal. This means the overall result should not be read as a broad consensus. It reflects a community conversation where many residents see potential, while many others see unacceptable risk or competing priorities.

Support level	Responses	Share
Strongly support	138	39.0%
Somewhat support	53	15%
Neutral	20	5.6%
Strongly oppose	143	40.4%

Preferred Direction for GNWT

The bid-direction question produced more cautious results than the support question. The largest single group said the GNWT should not move forward with a bid. However, when respondents who supported moving forward are combined with those who wanted further exploration, a majority favoured either bidding or continuing due diligence before a final decision.

Statement selected	Responses	Share
The GNWT should move forward with a bid	128	36.2%
The GNWT should explore further before deciding	78	22%
The GNWT should not move forward with a bid	146	41.2%
Unsure	2	0.6%

Benefits

Open-ended benefit comments were provided by 311 respondents, and 278 identified the benefit they considered most important. Economic development, tourism, and raising the NWT's profile emerged as the most frequently cited benefits. Respondents also highlighted infrastructure improvements, community pride and cultural benefits, and opportunities for youth and athlete development. Regional equity and inclusion were mentioned less often but remained an important consideration for some respondents.

Theme in benefits comments	Mentions in potential-benefits column	Mentions in most-important-benefit column
Economic development, tourism and profile	202	115
Infrastructure, facilities and accommodation	145	89
Youth, sport and athlete development	126	60
Community pride, culture and volunteerism	149	57

Regional equity and inclusion	49	19
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Economic development, tourism and national profile

Respondents who saw benefits often framed the Games as a way to bring visitors, spending, sponsorships, federal attention and national exposure to the NWT. Comments referred to tourism promotion, showcasing the territory, increasing business activity, and strengthening the NWT's reputation as a place capable of hosting major events. Some respondents emphasized that the benefit would be strongest if the event attracted outside investment rather than relying heavily on territorial funds.

Infrastructure and facilities legacy

The most tangible benefit identified was the possibility of lasting infrastructure. Respondents pointed to sport facilities, recreation assets, accommodations, housing, transportation and other upgrades that could serve residents after the Games. Many supportive and cautious respondents agreed that infrastructure should be a legacy priority, but they differed on whether the Games were the right vehicle to achieve it.

Youth, athlete and sport development

Many respondents described the Games as an opportunity to inspire youth, improve coaching and athlete development, build sport participation, and create pride among young people. Several comments connected hosting to the long-term development of competitive and recreational sport in the NWT, including better facilities, training camps, coach and official development, and role models for youth.

Community pride, culture and connection

Supportive comments often referenced pride, celebration, connection and the chance to showcase northern and Indigenous culture. Respondents wanted cultural representation to be meaningful rather than symbolic. Several comments suggested that a bid should reflect the NWT's regions, Indigenous governments, northern identity and community builders.

Concerns

Among respondents who shared concerns about hosting the Games, cost and affordability were the most common issues raised. Infrastructure and accommodation capacity, workforce and delivery challenges, competing community priorities, and regional equity were also frequently identified as concerns.

Theme in concern comments	Mentions in biggest-concern column	Mentions in concerns-about-hosting column
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Cost, taxes and affordability	182	139
Infrastructure, facilities and accommodation	136	99
Capacity, workforce and delivery risk	84	75
Basic needs and competing priorities	40	36
Regional equity and inclusion	43	32
Climate, weather and safety	27	31
Planning, transparency and feasibility	14	8

Cost and public affordability

The dominant concern was cost. Respondents questioned whether the GNWT could afford to bid, prepare for and host the Games without creating new debt, increasing taxes, or diverting money from essential services. Many comments used strong language about public spending and reflected limited confidence that major-event costs would remain controlled.

Housing, accommodation and infrastructure capacity

Accommodation and housing appeared in both benefit and concern comments. Respondents worried that the NWT lacks enough hotels, short-term accommodation, housing, athlete villages, venues and transportation capacity. Some saw investment in these areas as a potential legacy; others saw current shortages as evidence that hosting would be unrealistic or inappropriate.

Volunteer, workforce and organizational capacity

Many respondents questioned whether the territory has sufficient volunteers, workers, contractors, event organizers and leadership capacity to host a national-scale event. Comments noted that NWT communities already rely heavily on a small group of volunteers and that a Games bid could strain non-profits, sport organizations, local events, businesses and public agencies.

Competing priorities: housing, health and affordability

A recurring concern was that basic needs must come first. Respondents referred to the housing crisis, homelessness, health care, addictions, mental health, schools, food security, cost of living and community infrastructure as higher priorities than hosting. This theme was especially strong among respondents who opposed moving forward, but it also appeared among respondents who were open to further exploration if costs and legacy benefits were clearly defined.

Regional equity and Yellowknife concentration

Respondents repeatedly asked whether benefits would reach communities outside Yellowknife. Some worried that facilities and spending would be concentrated in the capital while regional communities would see little direct benefit. Others suggested that a bid could be acceptable only if it included regional training camps, shared governance, travel support, community programming, and legacy investments across the territory.

Climate, weather, safety and feasibility

A smaller but important set of comments raised climate and safety risks, including cold weather, changing winter conditions, wildfire and smoke seasons, travel disruptions, and the challenge of staging outdoor events safely. These comments reinforce the importance of a feasibility assessment and risk plan before any bid decision.

Priorities and Conditions

Among 285 respondents who identified top priorities and 268 who described conditions for support, infrastructure, facilities, and accommodation were the most frequently cited themes. Community pride, culture, and volunteerism, affordability, and economic benefits were also commonly identified. Respondents emphasized that successful hosting would require adequate infrastructure, affordability, strong community involvement, and effective planning.

Theme	Mentions in top-priorities column	Mentions in conditions-for-support column
Infrastructure, facilities and accommodation	140	78
Community pride, culture and volunteerism	120	81
Youth, sport and athlete development	71	35
Economic development, tourism and profile	89	64
Cost, taxes and affordability	85	81
Regional equity and inclusion	40	37

Planning, transparency and feasibility	30	33
Capacity, workforce and delivery risk	66	33

The most common priorities and conditions were:

- A full, transparent business case with capital, operating and long-term maintenance costs; clear sources of funding; and explicit limits on GNWT exposure.
- A legacy plan focused on infrastructure residents already need, including sport and recreation facilities, accommodations, housing-related assets and transportation improvements.
- A regional inclusion plan that shares benefits beyond Yellowknife and involves Indigenous governments, communities, sport leaders and volunteers in planning and governance.
- A right-sized event model that uses existing or multi-purpose assets wherever possible and avoids purpose-built facilities with limited post-Games use.
- A volunteer and workforce strategy, including recruitment, training, accommodations, support for officials and coaches, and protection against burnout.
- Strong cultural representation, meaningful Indigenous participation, and opportunities to showcase northern identity, languages, arts, traditional activities and community strengths.
- Assurance that hosting would not reduce funding or attention for housing, health care, education, social supports, wildfire recovery, or cost-of-living pressures.
- Clear communication with residents, ongoing engagement, and a decision-making process that explains trade-offs honestly.

Additional Comments

The final open comment field received 142 substantive responses and reflected the range of views expressed throughout the engagement process. Participants who supported hosting encouraged the GNWT to be ambitious, highlighted potential benefits for youth, communities, and infrastructure, and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide input.

Participants who opposed hosting often cited concerns about cost, competing territorial priorities, housing and healthcare needs, and confidence in the budgeting and delivery of major projects.

Many comments fell between these perspectives. Rather than expressing clear support or opposition, these participants emphasized the importance of further analysis and information before any decision is made. Common areas of interest included costs, benefits, infrastructure

requirements, regional impacts, volunteer and workforce capacity, risks, and the potential trade-offs associated with pursuing a bid.

Direct Engagement Sessions

In addition to the Have Your Say survey, engagement presentations and discussions were held with Indigenous governments, community governments, and community partners in June 2026.

These sessions provided context on the feasibility assessment, including its findings, assumptions, and limitations, and supported informed discussion about the decision facing the GNWT. Discussions explored what hosting the Canada Games could involve in the NWT, including potential economic, social, cultural, and infrastructure benefits, as well as the financial, operational, and capacity-related risks. Participants also considered the range of options and conditions that could shape a future hosting model.

The sessions examined practical hosting considerations, including accommodations and visitor capacity, venue and infrastructure needs, municipal and community roles, opportunities for satellite community involvement, governance and risk management, and the importance of clearly defining roles and expectations. A key message throughout the discussions was that hosting would not begin with a finalized plan, but rather with a commitment to a longer planning and development process during which partnerships, delivery models, conditions, and risk mitigation strategies would continue to be refined.

What We Heard from Indigenous & Community Governments

Discussions with Indigenous governments, community governments, and community partners reflected interest in the opportunities that hosting the 2035 Canada Winter Games could create for the NWT, while recognizing the scale and complexity of the undertaking. Participants were generally supportive of continuing to explore the opportunity and valued the feasibility work completed to date. Many emphasized the importance of strong leadership, clear governance, and early commitment from key partners should the project proceed.

Participants identified a range of potential benefits, including infrastructure development, expanded sport and recreation opportunities, cultural celebration, tourism growth, and lasting community benefits. Many noted the potential to strengthen youth engagement and sport participation, while also highlighting the importance of ensuring Indigenous cultures, traditions, and stories are meaningfully reflected throughout any future Games experience.

Participants also identified several considerations requiring further exploration. Key concerns included the overall cost of hosting, accommodation capacity, workforce and volunteer requirements, and ensuring Games-related investments do not come at the expense of existing community, recreation, or social priorities. Regional participation was another recurring theme, with many expressing interest in opportunities for communities across the territory to share in the benefits of hosting.

Across discussions, there was broad agreement that any future hosting model should maximize long-term territorial benefits, build community capacity, and align investments with priorities that will continue to serve residents beyond the Games.

At the time of this report, not all community partners had participated in the engagement sessions or provided formal letters of support. Engagement remains ongoing and continues to inform the broader decision-making process.

What We Heard From the Business Community

Discussions with representatives of the business community generally reflected a positive view of the opportunity to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. Participants viewed the Games as more than a sporting event, identifying potential benefits related to economic growth, investment attraction, tourism development, workforce development, and the opportunity to showcase Yellowknife and the NWT on a national stage.

A recurring theme was the potential for the Games to generate economic activity across a broad range of sectors, including construction, transportation, tourism, hospitality, retail, professional services, and event management. Participants noted that planning and delivery of the Games could create opportunities for northern businesses to expand their capacity, establish new partnerships, participate in procurement opportunities, and demonstrate northern expertise to audiences and organizations from across Canada.

Business community representatives also recognized the potential long-term legacy benefits associated with strategic investments in infrastructure, community facilities, workforce development, and tourism promotion. Many viewed the Games as a potential catalyst that could support broader economic and community development objectives while strengthening the NWT's reputation as a place to invest, live, work, and visit.

At the same time, discussions acknowledged the unique challenges of hosting a national event in the North. Participants emphasized the importance of developing a realistic funding model that recognizes the higher costs associated with transportation, logistics, accommodations, labour, and event delivery in the NWT. Concerns were also raised regarding the level of revenue expected to be generated by the Host Society and the financial risks associated with relying too heavily on sponsorship, fundraising, ticket sales, and other locally generated revenues. There was broad agreement that strong partnerships and meaningful participation from territorial and federal governments would be essential to supporting a financially responsible hosting model.

Overall, business community representatives expressed support for continuing to explore the opportunity, while emphasizing the importance of realistic financial planning, collaborative

partnerships, and a hosting model that balances economic opportunity with responsible risk management.

What We Heard from the Sport Community

Representatives from the sport and recreation sector, including Sport North Federation, Territorial Sport Organizations, and the Indigenous Sports Circle NWT (ISCNWT), expressed strong support for continuing to explore the opportunity to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. Discussions and written submissions emphasized the potential for the Games to create lasting benefits for athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and communities across the NWT.

A consistent theme was the opportunity to strengthen the territorial sport system through increased youth participation, athlete development, coaching and officiating capacity, volunteer development, and enhanced collaboration among sport organizations and community partners. Participants also highlighted the potential legacy value of investments in sport and recreation infrastructure, as well as the opportunity to showcase northern and Indigenous culture, strengthen community pride, and create lasting leadership and wellness benefits for residents across the territory. At the same time, sport-sector organizations acknowledged that hosting the Games would be a significant undertaking requiring strong partnerships, careful planning, long-term commitment, and alignment with broader community priorities. Overall, the sport community viewed the Games as a potential catalyst for long-term sport, recreation, and community development in the NWT.

Conclusions

The engagement process provided valuable input from residents, Indigenous governments, community governments, and community partners on the potential opportunity to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. Participants expressed a range of perspectives, reflecting both interest in the potential benefits of hosting and concern about the associated costs, risks, and competing priorities.

Participants who supported hosting frequently identified potential benefits such as infrastructure investment, youth and sport development, community pride, tourism, economic activity, and long-term legacy opportunities. Additional benefits discussed through stakeholder engagement included stronger partnerships, enhanced volunteer and workforce capacity, Indigenous participation and cultural celebration, and investments that could continue to benefit communities beyond the Games.

Participants who expressed concerns about hosting most often cited affordability, housing, healthcare, workforce capacity, accommodation availability, regional equity, and the need to balance Games-related investments with other territorial priorities. Many emphasized the importance of demonstrating clear and lasting benefits for communities across the NWT.

Responses from participants who indicated that further exploration is needed suggest that access to clear information, transparent decision-making, realistic funding and cost assumptions, regional participation, and well-defined legacy outcomes are important considerations in shaping future discussions.

Overall, the engagement reflects a diversity of views on the potential opportunity to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. While participants differed on whether the NWT should pursue hosting, many emphasized the importance of careful planning, clear evidence, meaningful community involvement, and consideration of long-term benefits and risks as the GNWT evaluates potential next steps.