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**McMaster
University**

SCIENCE
School of Earth,
Environment & Society

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH LICENSING IN NUNAVUT:

PERSPECTIVES FROM RESEARCH LICENSE REVIEW ORGANIZATIONS



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Table of Contents

Project History	01
Goals and Objectives	02
Project Timeline	03
Interview Format	04
Interview Demographics	05
Coding the Interviews	06
Priorities of Research Licensing	9
Distribution of Priorities	10
Challenges of Research Licensing	11
Distribution of Challenges	12
Opportunities for Research Licensing	13
Distribution of Opportunities	14
Reporting of Research Projects	15
What We Learned from Interviews	16
Workshop Logistics and Flow	17
Workshop Demographics	18
Criteria when Reviewing	19
Supports Needed to More Effectively Review Applications	22
Reporting on Research	24
What We Learned from Workshops	25
Recommendations from Interviews and Workshops for Research License Review	26
Resources	27

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Results from Interviews and workshops with Research license review organizations in Nunavut. Iqaluit and Hamilton: Nunavut Research Institute and McMaster University.

Project History

This project was co-developed with **northern and southern collaborators** who have worked on various projects together for over 16 years.

In Nunavut, any research that involves the air, land, water, or people must be approved through a scientific research license. This license is managed by the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI), which is part of Nunavut Arctic College. With funding from a SSHRC Insight grant, our team studied how communities experience and take part in the research license review process in Nunavut.

Unlike ethics reviews at universities, Nunavut's research licensing process focuses on Inuit and community rights. The goal is to reduce harm, keep track of research, and make sure communities are consulted. Before granting a license, Inuit, community, and government organizations are sent the license application to review. This step facilitates a research license Review (RLR) process, and is meant to strengthen community involvement and ensure that local voices have influence over proposed research.

Our early survey of community experiences with research license review (RLR) organizations (Fig. 1) showed that most reviewers handle up to ten applications a year, and not all applications are always reviewed. Most reviewers are not paid for their time, and they usually do not have set criteria for judging applications. Concerns about the RLR process are often linked to how researchers engage with communities, consult with them, and report back their findings. These first findings gave us a starting point for understanding how RLR currently works in Nunavut. To build on this, we carried out interviews and a workshop to learn more.

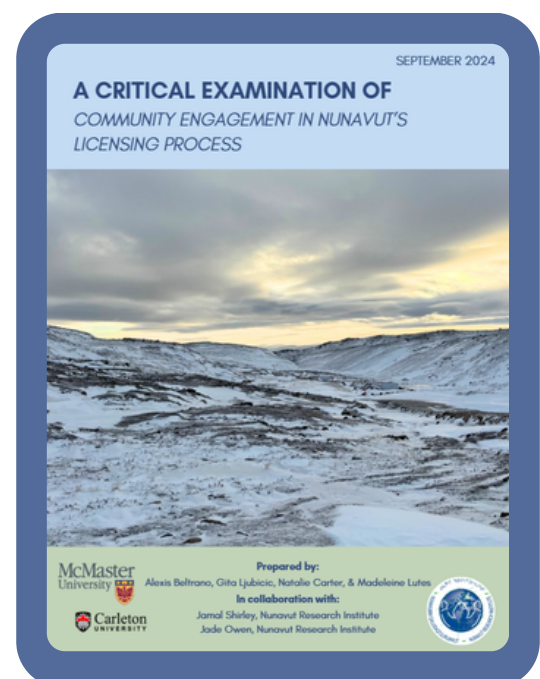


Figure 1: Survey results report

Goals and Objectives

As research in Nunavut increases over time and becomes more complex, so too have the expectations regarding community benefits, engagement, and reporting in research. This highlights a need to take a closer look at how well the RLR process is working, and, how it could be improved to better support Inuit self-determination in research.

To explore this, we conducted an initial online survey to gain a baseline understanding of organizational processes and experiences with RLR. To expand on our initial findings, we used interviews and workshops as our research methods. Interviews allowed us to gain in-depth experiences of RLR and to expand on our initial survey findings. Workshops, made it possible to collectively discuss perspectives and opportunities across the various organizations who participate in RLR. Interviews and workshops took place from September 2023 to February 2024, and involved representatives from hamlets, Hunters' and Trappers' Organizations/Associations, Inuit Organizations, Government of Nunavut, and community research organizations. Together, these approaches provided both individual and group insights on community experiences with RLR in Nunavut.

Objectives

1. **Understand** how the NRI receives and reviews research license applications
2. **Learn** how feedback is provided on research license applications;
3. **Identify** strategies to improve coordination with the NRI during RLR;
4. **Acknowledge** community perspectives on the opportunities and challenges associated with RLR; and
5. **Facilitate** an open-ended discussion about research, how research can better address community priorities and support community leadership in research.



Our approach was guided by the Piliriqatigiinniq Partnership Model for research (developed by the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre), with all project partners contributing at all stages of this study.

Project Timeline



Interview format



A total of 16 interviews were conducted with representatives who currently work for research license review organizations or who formerly held roles in reviewing research applications. These participants were invited to share their perspectives based on direct experience with research governance and licensing processes. Recruitment began in September 2023 and interviewing concluded in February 2024.



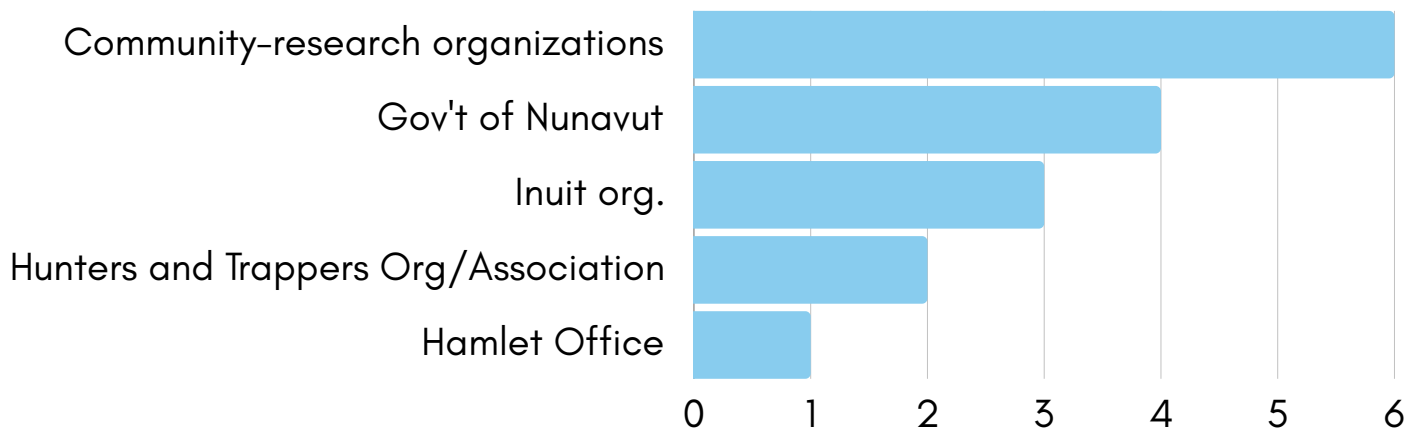
Of the 16 interviewees, the majority were from community research organizations (6 participants), followed by Government of Nunavut employees (4), Inuit organizations (3), hunters' and trappers' associations or organizations (2), and hamlet offices (1). This distribution reflects the diverse range of institutions and organizations engaged in research review and governance across Inuit Nunangat.



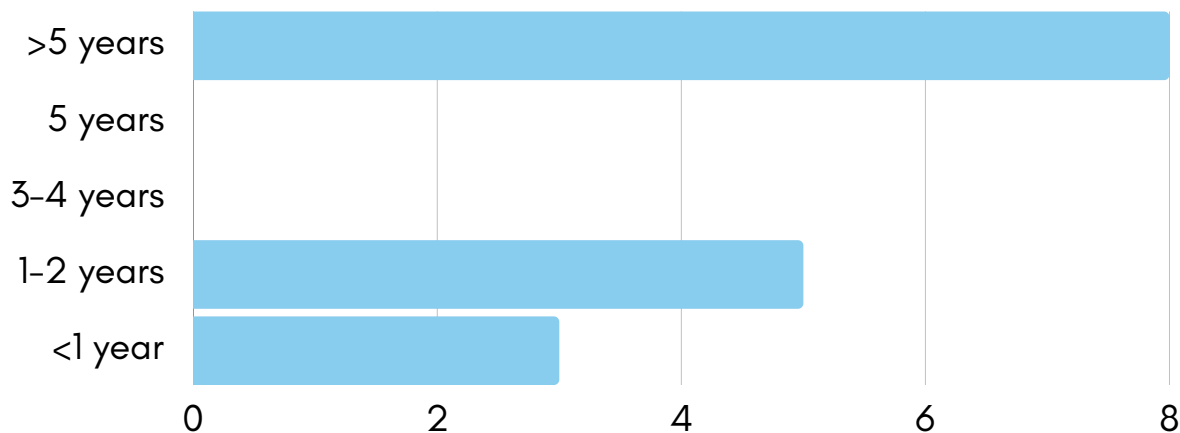
Interviews were scheduled across several formats to accommodate participant availability and preference: one was conducted by telephone, two were held in person, and thirteen took place online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. All interviews followed a semi-structured guide, were recorded and transcribed, and transcripts were shared with participants for validation and accuracy.

Interview Demographics

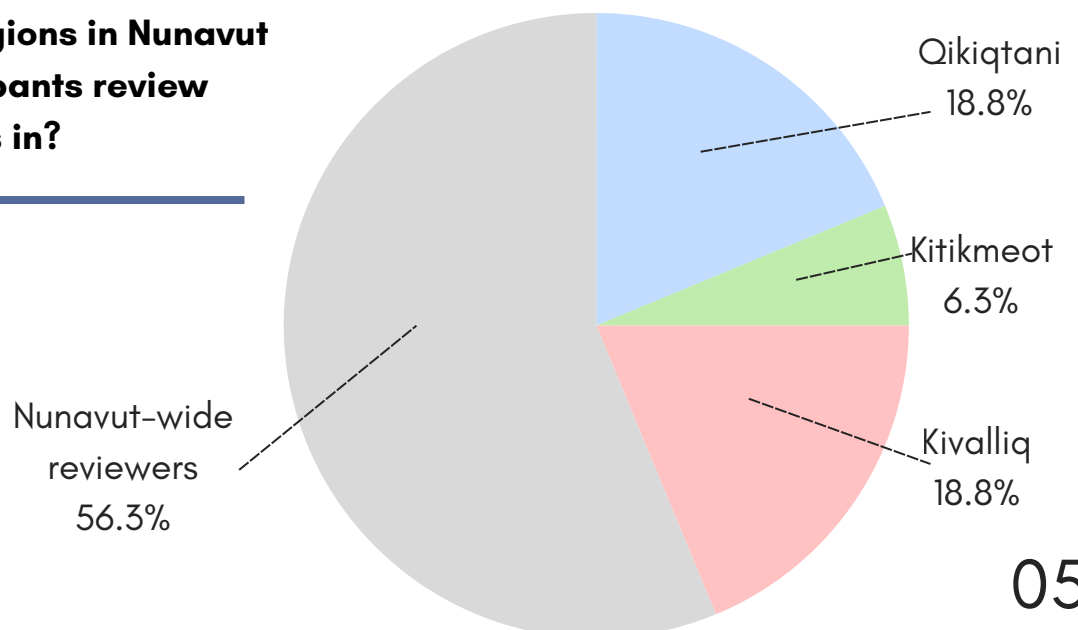
Which research license review organization types participated in the interviews?



For how long have interview participants been reviewing applications as part of their job?



What administrative regions in Nunavut do interview participants review applications in?



Coding the Interviews

We created a set of categories to organize the main ideas that came up in interviews about research license review. These categories included challenges with the review process, community priorities and concerns about research, opportunities for improvement, and issues with reporting. We then used these categories to look closely at the interview transcripts, adding more detailed sub-categories as new themes emerged.

Opportunities

★ To better support community engagement

- ◆ Consultation
- ◆ Face-to-face discussion
- ◆ Share results in community

★ To invest in technology and personnel

- ◆ Improve NRI admin process
- ◆ Hire a research liaison
- ◆ Incorporate technology (such as audio/video) in the review process

★ To facilitate capacity building

- ◆ Compensating communities
- ◆ Employment
- ◆ Training opportunities

★ To enhance RLR processes

- ◆ Real-time updates
- ◆ Territorial review
- ◆ Track and monitor research
- ◆ Local capacity
- ◆ Updating review processes/deadlines

Reporting

★ Access to reports

★ Community-based reporting

★ Report quality

Coding the Interviews

continued

Challenges regarding research license review

★ **Administrative challenges**

- ◆ Competing interests
- ◆ Conflicts of interest
- ◆ Inconsistencies
- ◆ Missing documents
- ◆ Plain language summary
- ◆ Research fatigue

★ **Expertise-related challenges**

- ◆ Lack/limited expertise
- ◆ Staffing
- ◆ Unfamiliar with researcher

★ **Scope & relevance**

- ◆ Unaware of NRI process
- ◆ Outside of scope
- ◆ Reviewing select projects

★ **Logistical challenges**

- ◆ Not checking email
- ◆ Time constraints
- ◆ Time of year
- ◆ Too technical
- ◆ Receiving documents before meeting

Coding the Interviews

continued

Priorities for research in Nunavut



Community relevance & engagement

- ◆ Building relationships
- ◆ Co-development
- ◆ Community benefits
- ◆ Community engagement
- ◆ Local relevance
- ◆ Understanding local knowledge/ IQ



Research quality and clarity

- ◆ Lack of clarity
- ◆ Lack of plain language
- ◆ Not enough detail



Research ethics & governance

- ◆ Box ticking
- ◆ Consent forms
- ◆ Identifying risk & harm
- ◆ Privacy



Logistical concerns

- ◆ Data security
- ◆ Economic incentives
- ◆ Funding
- ◆ Local capacity
- ◆ Meeting in-person
- ◆ Translations

Priorities of Research Licensing

Based on key themes that are coming from semi-structured interviews

Research ethics and governance

Interview participants raised concerns around the ethics of research, including potential risks, privacy issues, and the ethical considerations involved in working with specific communities (e.g., Inuit representation). They also questioned actionable outcomes of research, and the importance of doing research in a meaningful way (opposed to “box ticking.”)

Community relevance and engagement

Participants discussed the relationships and the level of community involvement in research, with an emphasis on ensuring the research benefits the community. Co-development, building relationships, and respecting/ understanding local knowledge and IQ are central to this theme.

Research quality and clarity

This theme focused on discussions related to the clarity and detail of the research itself. Lack of clarity, plain language, and redundancy in research applications are all challenges related to ensuring the research is understandable and useful.

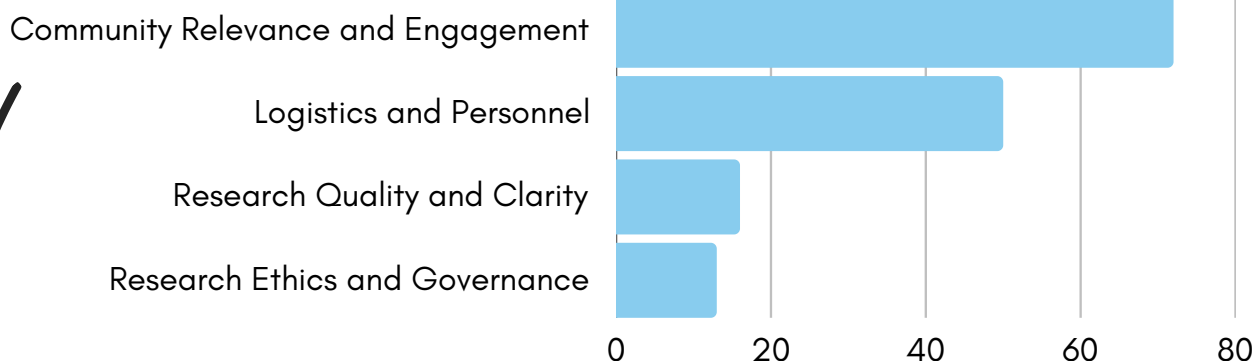
Logistical concerns

Interview participants flagged the more operational aspects of reviewing research, such as costs, funding, data security, translation needs, training, and the challenges of doing the research in-person. Local capacity to handle the research effectively also falls under this category.

Distribution of Priorities

“We want you to come sit down with us face to face”
– Shirley Tagalik, Aqqiumavvik Society

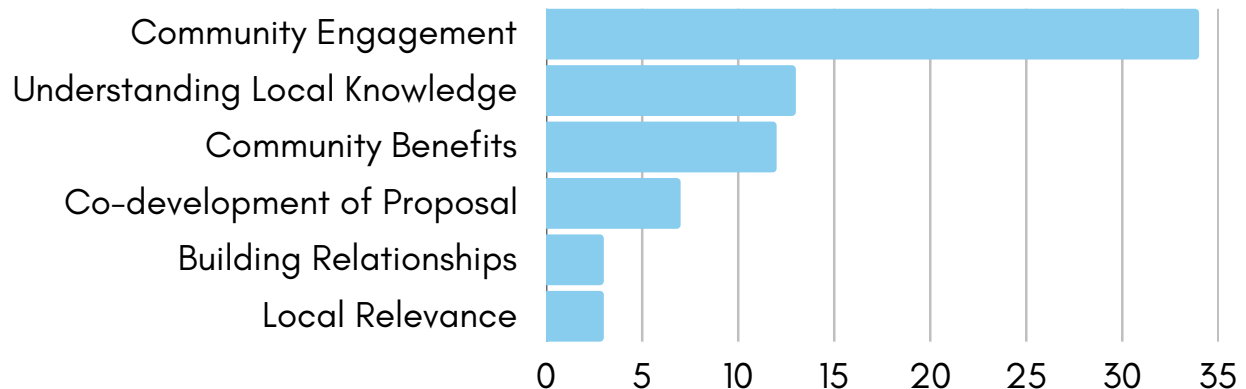
Number of References



Community Relevance and Engagement sub-themes:

References are the number of times a theme was mentioned in the interview transcripts

Number of References



Challenges of Research Licensing

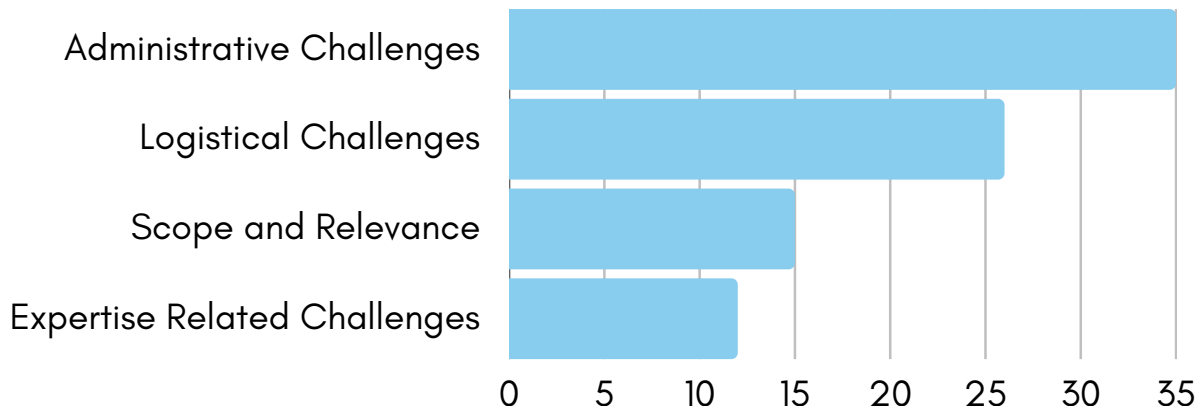
- ★ **Administrative challenges:** Interview participants discussed burdens such as competing and conflicting interests, and research fatigue. Additionally, participants flagged inconsistencies with research license applications received, such as missing documentation, or problems with plain language summaries..
- ★ **Logistical Challenges:** Participants reflected on their time available to complete RLR, including how it varies based time of year. Other logistical challenges to RLR that were discussed included time constraints, access to materials before review meetings, and not looking at emails.
- ★ **Expertise-related challenges:** Participants emphasized a lack of expertise in the subject area of certain applications, and limited staff expertise on hand to conduct a thorough review. Interview participants also notes that they are often unfamiliar with the researcher or team that submitted the application.
- ★ **Scope and relevance:** Participants noted challenges with scope and relevance, such as receiving projects outside the organization's scope, or selectively reviewing only those that seemed most interesting or relevant. Additionally, some reviewers were unaware of NRI's process and protocols for managing review.



Distribution of Challenges

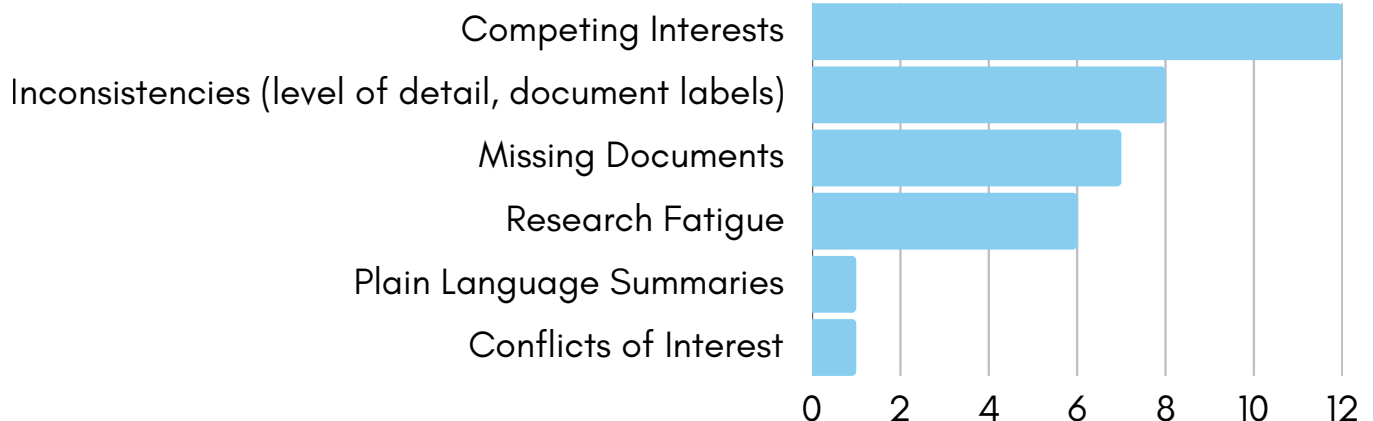
“ One reviewer from a community research organization revealed that research duplication and fatigue *“exhausts the really limited number of elders we have with this knowledge remaining”* ”

Number of References



Distribution of Administrative Challenges

Number of References



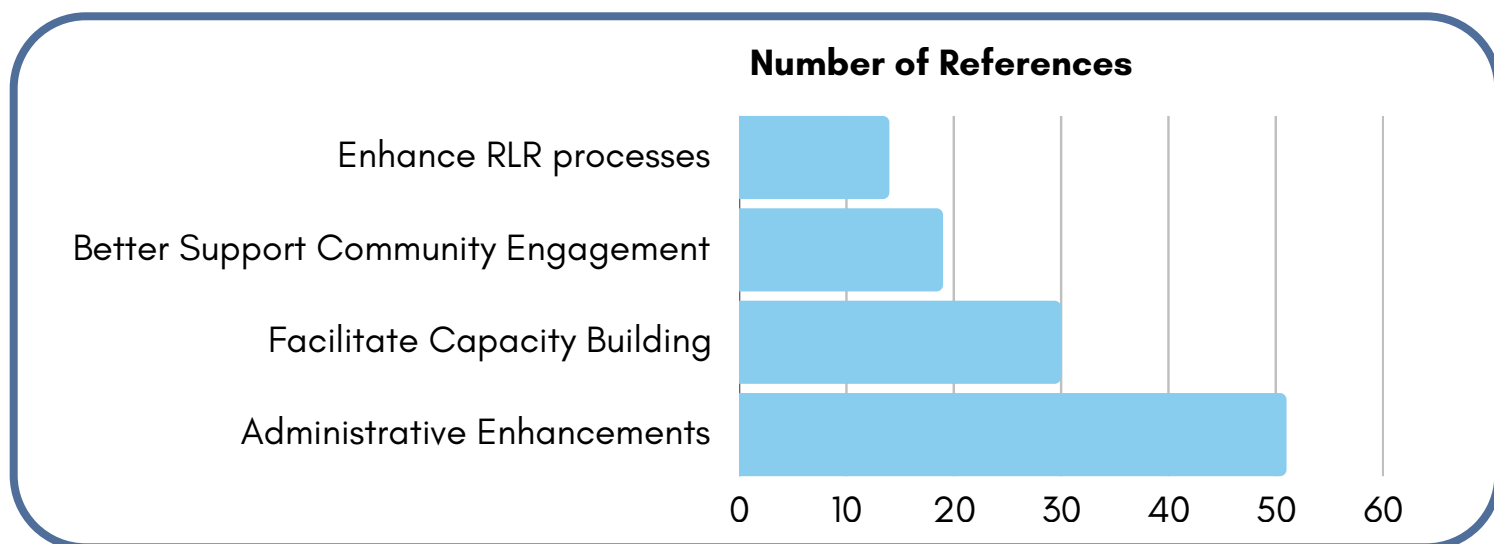
Opportunities for Research Licensing

- ★ **Enhance research license review processes:** Interview participants identified opportunities to streamline and enhance the research process itself, such as through an accelerated review process and tools to track progress, analytics, and updates to research licensing throughout the territory. They also identified real-time updates and clear submission deadlines as opportunities to enhancing RLR processes.
- ★ **Better support community engagement:** Participants suggested improving community connection and involvement in research. This included strategies for engagement, such as agreements with community researchers, consultation efforts, roundtable discussions, and sharing results with the community.
- ★ **Facilitate capacity building:** Interview participants highlighted opportunities for enhancing local capacity, including providing employment and training opportunities to support the development of a skilled workforce within the community.
- ★ **Administrative enhancements:** Participants would like to improve the administrative aspects of RLR, such as incorporating new technologies, or streamlining the administration of application packages. Participants identified administrative improvements for the NRI. Interview participants also suggested that a research liaison would be important in facilitating these interactions.

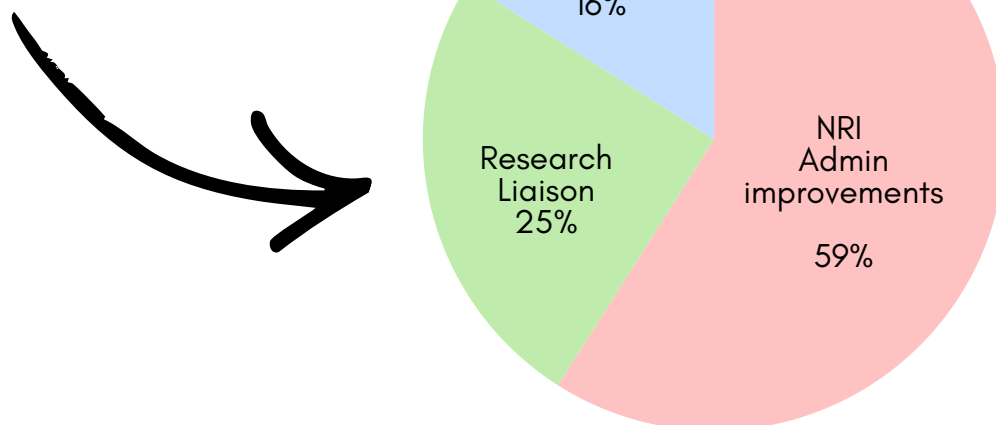


Distribution of Opportunities

“Examples of what's expected or more clearly outlined expectations [when reviewing] in terms of what each section requires I think that would go a long way in actually assisting and hopefully cutting down on the amount of back and forth” – Jodi Durdle-Awa, Nunavut SPOR



Distribution of Administrative Enhancements



Reporting of Research Projects

Problems With Accessing Research Results

- Some interview participants said they often can't access final reports from licensed research projects. They want to see more results shared with organizations and communities that supported the research.

More Face-to-Face Sharing is Needed

Interview participants also said they would like researchers to:

- Visit communities to talk about their findings.
- Make it a rule to send research results back to the people who helped with or were affected by the research.
- Keep sharing updates, not just a one-time report, so communities stay informed about ongoing work.

Using Isirvik to Share Results

There were suggestions identified by interview participants to improve the Isirvik research portal so it could:

- Host final research reports in one easy-to-find place.
- Let community researchers upload their own work, helping others find and learn from it.
- Help people access journal articles, which are often hard to find or read.

“We do want to ensure the research does benefit the communities, and that results are actionable and can inform decision making, policies, or programming initiatives – Inuit organization representative”

“Most of the time there's no way for me to get [results] in a systematic manner” – Government of Nunavut Representative

“Information is a continuous stream. We collect the data, we report back to the community, and so that is a much more effective way of doing the reporting” – Shirley Tagalik, Aqqiumavvik Society (on how their organization shares findings from their own research to their community)

What We Learned from Interviews



★ **Priorities**

The most common priority area for research licensing is community engagement in proposed research projects, with an emphasis on in-person project planning and consultation with community members.

★ **Challenges**

Majority of challenges revealed by interview participants include administrative barriers, time constraints, limited staffing, and inconsistent documentation received from NRI.

★ **Opportunities**

There were opportunities identified to improve NRI administrative procedures, research practice and accountability, and introducing the role of a research liaison to help connect researchers with community.

★ **Reporting**

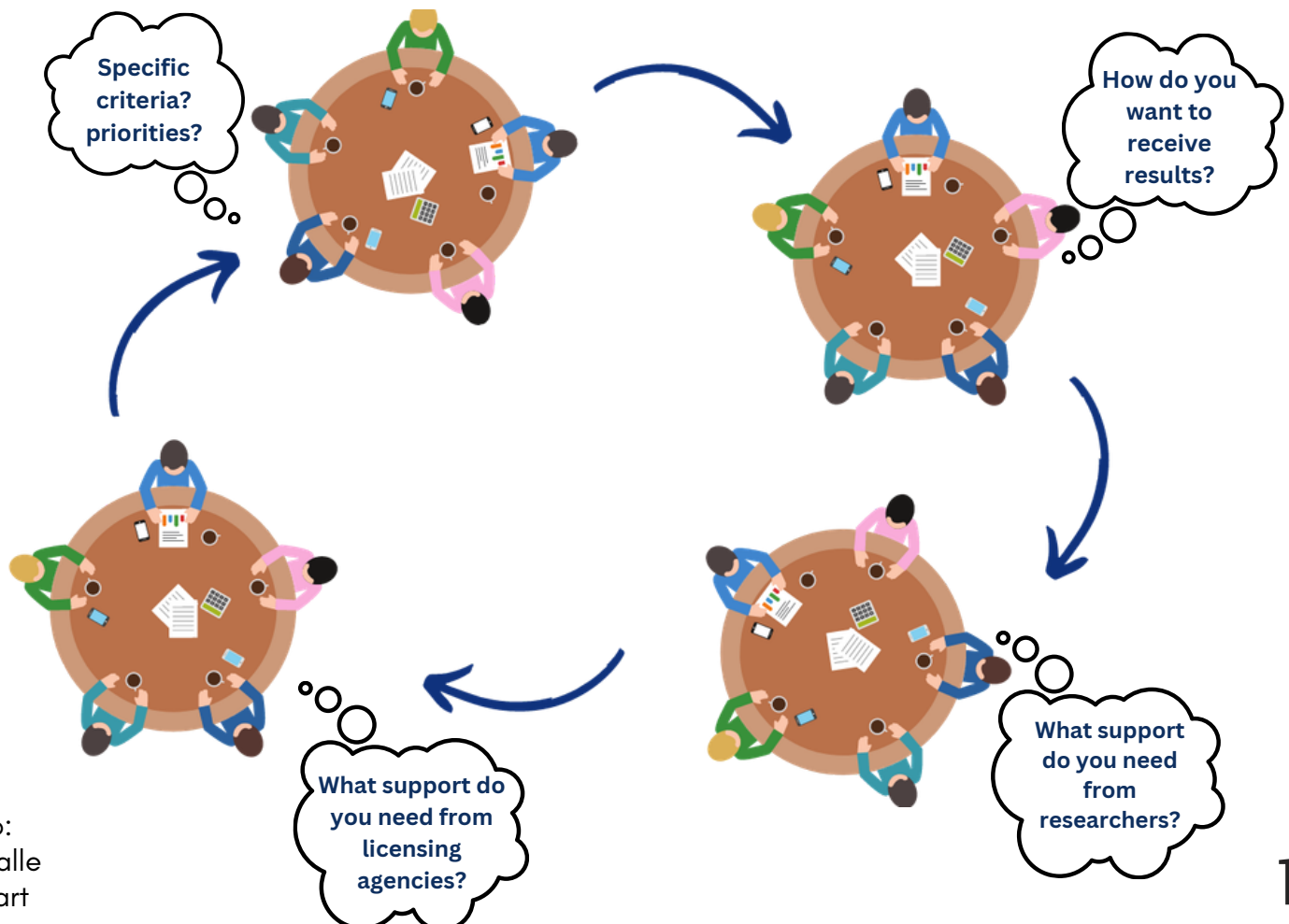
Reporting should be clear, accessible, shared back with communities in meaningful ways, and made available through tools like the Isirvik portal to support ongoing learning and community wellbeing.

Workshop Logistics and Flow

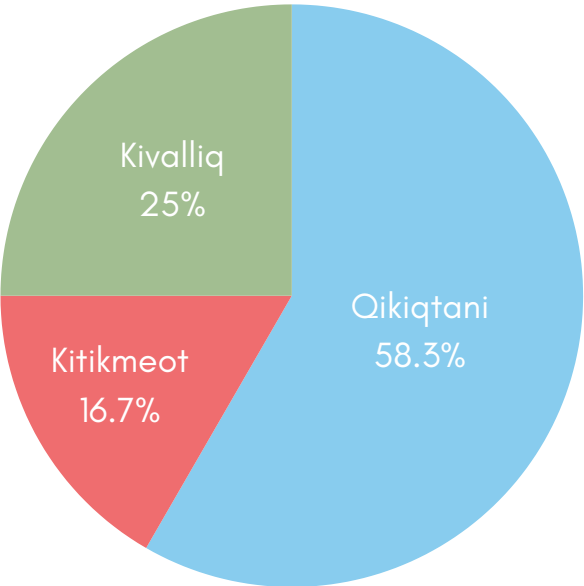
We held a **World Café-style workshop** with 12 participants during the ArcticNet Annual Scientific Meeting in December 2024. Participants were identified based on our previous recruitment list from the interview phase, ensuring continuity and relevance to the study. The workshop was organized into four rounds of discussion, each lasting 20 minutes.

At each table, participants focused on one guiding question, supported by a table host who facilitated dialogue and a notetaker who recorded key ideas. After each round, 4–5 participants moved to a different table, bringing insights from their earlier conversations. Participants were also encouraged to write or sketch ideas during discussions.

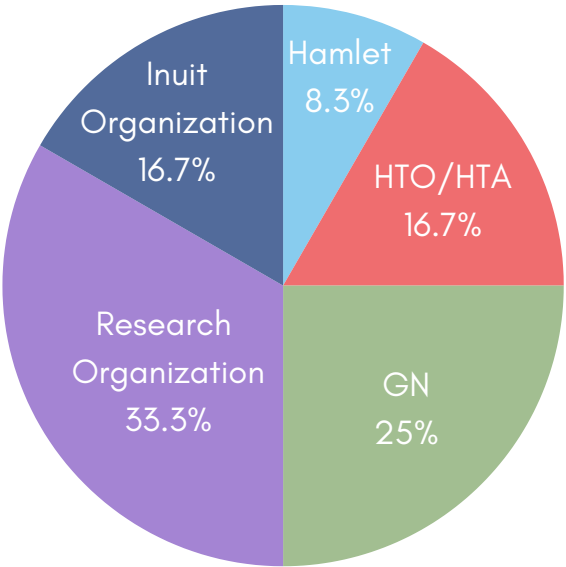
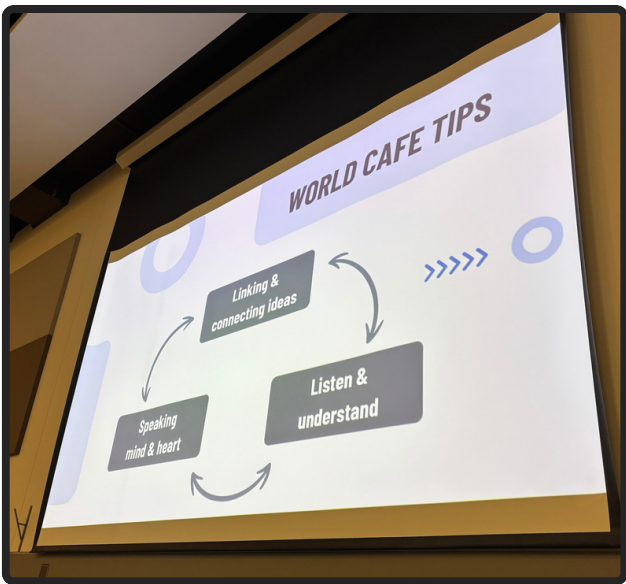
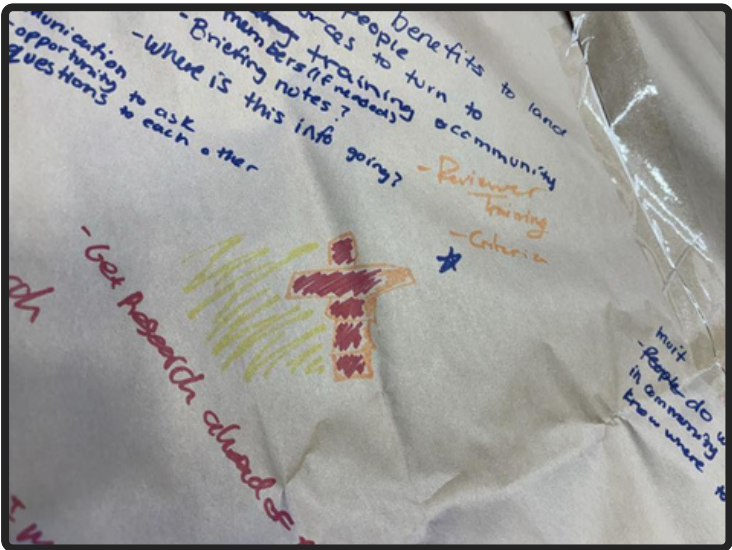
The **four guiding questions** explored: **(1)** specific criteria or priorities related to reviewing applications, **(2)** support needed from licensing agencies to strengthen review processes, **(3)** support needed from researchers to assist reviewers, and **(4)** how research license review organizations would like to receive results. At the end of the four rounds, all participants reconvened for a large group discussion to share and reflect on the main ideas that emerged.



Workshop Demographics



Where did participants come from?



What types of RLR organizations participated?

Criteria when Reviewing

After the workshop we created a set of categories to organize the main ideas that came up about **organizational criteria and priorities for research license review**. These included criteria when reviewing applications, including *community-centered values and ethics, building trust and relationships, research design and relevance, and long-term impacts and responsibility*. We then used these categories to look closely at the notes from the workshop, adding more detailed sub-categories as new themes emerged.

Community-centered values & ethics

- ◆ Community Benefits
- ◆ Asking for expectations from community
- ◆ Community engagement
- ◆ Reporting findings to community
- ◆ Providing consent forms
- ◆ Respecting Inuit ethics
- ◆ Elder involvement
- ◆ Avoid duplication of research

Building Trust & Relationships

- ◆ Co-development of research question
- ◆ Relationship building with community
- ◆ Partnership established with community
- ◆ Direct communication with researcher
- ◆ Researcher travelling to community

Criteria when Reviewing continued

Research Design & Relevance

- ◆ Addressing community priorities
- ◆ Clearly defined research question
- ◆ Local research methodologies
- ◆ Connections to school curriculum
- ◆ Oral and visual components
- ◆ Supporting documentation provided (recruitment materials, interview guides)



**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS ENGAGING IN
DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CRITERIA AND
PRIORITIES WHEN REVIEWING
APPLICATIONS**



Long-term Impact & Responsibility

- ◆ Leads to more research
- ◆ Training opportunities for community
- ◆ Risks and harm identified in application
- ◆ Focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation

Criteria continued...

During discussions on identifying criteria and priorities for reviewing research license applications, participants also noted **barriers to implementing these criteria**.



Organizational

- ◆ Competing views within organization
- ◆ No defined understanding of terms (ex: what is a partnership?)
- ◆ Not having time to read through review requests



Ethics

- ◆ Competing views between RLR organizations and institutional ethics boards (what is more important? How do we prioritize both?)
- ◆ Need to acknowledge oral consent instead of long forms



Policy

- ◆ Amendments to the Nunavut Scientists act to allow for more than 45 days to provide feedback before automatic approval of license
- ◆ Reviewer Recommendation form is too vague so having more prompts could help that review process target issues or concerns



Research

- ◆ There needs to be standardized cultural competency training
- ◆ Universities are eager to learn from Inuit knowledge, but if Elders spend too much time teaching researchers, they have less time to pass that knowledge on to the next generation.

Supports Needed to More Effectively Review Applications

During our workshop, participants first discussed the **types of supports needed** from researchers and licensing agencies to strengthen the capacity of research license review (RLR) organizations in assessing applications. Through these conversations, RLR organizations identified specific actions that could be taken, which are presented in the checklists below.

In addition, participants highlighted further supports that could be provided by policymakers, as well as actions RLR organizations themselves could take to support one another. These insights are also summarized in checklist form to reflect the **range of strategies identified across stakeholder groups**.

Supports needed from researchers

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☒ Accountability and humility from researcher | ☒ Improve communication |
| ☒ Add references to applications | ☒ Identify risks, benefits, and feasibility of project (i.e hunting impacts) |
| ☒ Community engagement (including LOI, progress updates, researcher open house) | ☒ Incorporate elders and youth |
| ☒ Cultural competency training | ☒ Technology (including oral and video as part of application and reporting processes) |
| ☒ Data storage (including sample tracking) | ☒ Relevant research and outcomes |
| ☒ Define terminology, local context | ☒ Reporting (Templates, appropriate language, non-technical) |
| ☒ Funding (for hiring community members, RLR org training, increase local capacity) | ☒ Training |

Supports needed from policymakers

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☒ Community engagement (including LOI, progress updates, researcher open house) | ☒ Funding (for hiring community members, RLR org training, increase local capacity) |
| ☒ Cultural competency training | ☒ Publicize current research priorities |

Supports Needed to More Effectively Review Applications (continued)

Supports needed from licensing agencies

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☒ Application portal | ☒ Letter to decline project |
| ☒ Bring review organizations together | ☒ Licensing fees |
| ☒ Monitor consistency and completion of forms | ☒ Technology (including oral and video as part of application and reporting processes) |
| ☒ Data storage (including sample tracking) | ☒ Provide compensation for review |
| ☒ Define terminology, local context | ☒ Publicize current research priorities |
| ☒ Evaluate and score researchers | ☒ Stagger timing of project approvals |
| ☒ Funding (for hiring community members, RLR org training, increase local capacity) | ☒ Reporting (templates, appropriate language, non-technical) |
| ☒ Improve communication | ☒ Training |

Supports needed from RLR organizations

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☒ Bring review organizations together | ☒ Letter to decline project |
| ☒ Data storage (including sample tracking) | ☒ Publicize current research priorities |
| ☒ Evaluate and score researchers | ☒ Stagger timing of project approvals |
| ☒ Improve communication | |

Reporting on Research

What RLR organizations recommend for reporting format

- ◆ Presentations (virtually or in person)
- ◆ Digital tools (ex: video formats)
- ◆ Executive summary
- ◆ Facebook
- ◆ One pagers
- ◆ Photo and video
- ◆ Plain language
- ◆ Upload to a research portal
- ◆ Radio
- ◆ Translations in all Inuktitut dialects

What RLR organizations recommend for reporting content

- ◆ How does the research align with community values?
- ◆ Was there a community representative or liaison?
- ◆ Is there follow through from proposal?
- ◆ Do the research methods involve community collaboration from the beginning?
- ◆ Will the research leave a legacy in the community?
- ◆ Was the output verified by the community before sharing?

What We Learned from Workshops

Review protocol and priorities

Strong community relationships are essential. Letters of support should reflect real engagement. Research should benefit the community, for example through jobs, training, or other opportunities, and Inuit knowledge and values must be prioritized within genuine partnerships.

Reporting strategies and requests

Sharing results in person or via video calls allows two-way discussion, reflection, and planning. Reports should be useful and actionable, showing why the research matters, how communities can use the results, and what next steps or training opportunities follow.

Support from licensing organizations

Licensing organizations need funding to support reviews, interpretation, and workshops. Continued investment in tools like the Isirvik portal helps communities stay informed about ongoing research in real time.

Support from researchers

Research should move beyond traditional scientific methodologies. Using video and other accessible formats can reduce local burdens and improve communication. Hiring locally and building community capacity is key. Researchers can provide progress updates, be accountable to communities, and include funding for local capacity building (employment, training) in their projects.

Recommendations from Interviews and Workshop for Research License Review

- ★ **Licensing agencies can update their reporting protocol**
 - ◆ To enforce video reporting or other reporting outputs accessible to RLR organizations
 - ◆ To enforce word limits and plain language
 - ◆ To ensure Inuktitut translations of reporting outputs
 - ◆ To allow for time to review reports, circulate with RLR organizations, and compile feedback
- ★ **Funding agencies can support**
 - ◆ RLR organizations by providing increased resources to hire RLR staff, and provide additional compensation for the review of applications
 - ◆ Researchers through in-person results sharing with RLR organizations
- ★ **Training from licensing agencies**
 - ◆ Of the RLR process, timeline to provide feedback, and instructions for completing the review
 - ◆ Including expectations for providing feedback on an application
- ★ **More reviewer organization support**
 - ◆ To hire more people to help facilitate RLR
 - ◆ To keep track of incoming applications
 - ◆ To invest in new technology (smart boards)
- ★ **Permitting organizations working closer together**
 - ◆ To address research fatigue, project overlap, exchange knowledge on researchers/projects, and track letters of support
- ★ **Hiring a research liaison can support RLR organizations through**
 - ◆ Providing more information on a project when asked
 - ◆ Sharing access/information about licensed projects in a community
 - ◆ Training on new technology options that come out to support the review process
 - ◆ Training on how to set boundaries for research (ex: writing terms and conditions)

Resources

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ISIRVIK: RESEARCH PORTAL

<https://isirvik.ca/>



ABOUT THIS PROJECT

<https://straightupnorth.ca/making-research-work-for-nunavummiut/>

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If you have feedback on the research licensing process or want to share your insights, we want to hear from you!



Photo: Alexis Beltrano

Results from interviews and a workshop on community experiences with the NRI research license review process

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