

## News

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Lee Swanson, associate professor in USask's Edwards School of Business. (Photo: University of Saskatchewan)

# USask research videos in Cree, Dene highlight ideas to build capacity in North

University of Saskatchewan (USask) researchers have produced four videos—two each in Cree and Dene—to present the results of a project that partnered with seven Indigenous communities to study ways to build social and economic capacity for living well in the province's North.

Mar 7, 2022

The communities were full research partners in the project aimed at defining, describing, and assessing the role of entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan's North. Local people see building the region's social and economic capacity as key to securing "the good life," well-being, and prosperity they want.

"We wanted the communities to feel they were full partners and had control—that the research was being done with and for them, not on them," said principal investigator Lee Swanson, associate professor in USask's Edwards School of Business.

The complex project, *Building Northern Capacity Through Aboriginal Entrepreneurship*, began in 2014 with a five-year grant of \$291,000 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) as well as support from Edwards, the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, and USask's former International Centre for Northern Governance and Development.

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed by two years the production and release of the four English-subtitled videos available **here**. (<https://research-groups.usask.ca/bnce/research.results/index.php>)

### USask Research Minute: Dr. Lee Swanson



Swanson said the project changed dramatically after initial discussions with community leaders pointed to the value of engaging youth, who are integral to the future of the communities.

The youth, as well as adults, participated separately in focus groups, used markers to indicate on a

large, detailed map of Northern Saskatchewan what they considered to be their community, and responded to 88 flash cards to provide feedback on the goods and services needed or available in their community.

As well, researchers provided students in Grades 11 and 12 with a video camera, provided interview questions and had pairs of students interview each other on their own. Swanson believes this peer-to-peer interview technique, which his team calls OurVoice, is a first in this type of research.

Adults participated in data collection workshops, many were interviewed separately from the workshops, and others given cameras to capture images of entrepreneurship in their communities to use in follow-up interviews in a well-known data collection method called Photovoice.

Among the most interesting findings to emerge from the project is the region's "righteous undocumented economy," based on centuries-old cultural and survival practices of hunting, fishing, gathering, sharing, giving, and exchanging goods and services. While a bureaucrat or accountant in the south might consider this as tax avoidance or an underground economy, these traditional cultural practices continue to provide the means for people to meet their needs in remote places with limited employment possibilities.

Lee and his research team filtered down the hundreds of pages of data to two brief scripts for the videos that use photographs from the region and stills from the PhotoVoice portion of the project to highlight what's important for the North. The youth peer-to-peer videos are presented separately.

A recurring theme on the videos is the pride northerners take in their communities. Rather than ship youth south for training and see them not return, people want some university, technical school training, and business education provided in the North, and more meaningful employment opportunities created to retain their youth. Community members also felt it should be easier for northerners to get loans and other supports to start and run businesses.

"The videos are a novel way to present the very practical things that pose a challenge to these communities," said Swanson. "By using the language of the communities and different research methods, we tried to ensure that the information essentially is owned by the communities and available to them."

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