TechYukon Strategic Direction 2018-2019

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Background and methodology

In May of 2018, TechYukon decided to gather feedback from its board and membership to gain clarity and direction on who the organization is, where it wants to go, its priority areas and the activities and projects it wants to undertake. The information gathered from board members and the membership was used to gain alignment on priority areas, develop organizational and strategic goals for TechYukon, and suggest projects to undertake.

E-mails and phone calls went out to board members and members during the month of June 2018. Interviews were conducted one-on-one, in person with seven out of eight board members. Interviews were conducted one-on-one by phone and in person with 12 out of 18 member companies. Their answers were used to inform the recommendations in this plan.

Brief history

TechYukon was founded in 2000 as the Yukon Information Technology Industry Society (YITIS), as a response to budget cutbacks by the government of the day. The industry self-organized to reverse these cutbacks and increase the IT envelope.

Over the years, YITIS undertook a variety of initiatives, such as student scholarships, trade shows, the First Nations IT Summit, Startup Checkpoint, networking, training and helping facilitate conversations around capital investment. YITIS also led the development of two ICT industry strategic plans in 2013 and 2014. YITIS re-branded as TechYukon in 2016.

The organization currently faces internal and external challenges and with its current funding expiring March 31, 2019, initiatives need to be put in place to improve the organizational structure and processes of the organization, to build its value proposition and chart the course of where it wants to go.

Tech industry challenges in Yukon

Board members and member companies identified the following as the challenges facing the industry:

- Access to and recruitment of skilled workers
- Lack of funding for training of new employees
- Issues around procurement
- Challenges of having YG as primary client
- The need for an anchor client
- Limited market size
- Accessing external markets
- Access to capital
- Lack of mentorship opportunities
- Lack of professional development opportunities, both on the technical side and the business side
- Access to programming
- Access to affordable, fast and reliable internet
- Difficulty scaling

As TechYukon is there to represent and support its members, the organization should strive to address these challenges, either through its own initiatives and advocacy efforts, by pointing members in the right direction to other resources in the community, or by partnering with other community players to build a community of support.

Key findings and considerations

Organizational improvements

During interviews, it became apparent that the issues around internal processes are hindering progress and need to be resolved in order for the organization to be in a position to follow its strategic direction and implement initiatives and projects effectively. The board and executive have received an organizational plan to tackle this.

Startup Checkpoint

A great deal of conversations revolved around the future of Startup Checkpoint. Views were quite divided on this. Those against the continuation of the program either argued that their business or segment of the industry could not benefit from it or that the organization did not have the capacity to continue taking on a project such as this. On the other side, eight member companies went through the program – and for some of them, it was the impetus to joining TechYukon as a member and they said they greatly benefited from it and wanted others to have the same opportunity. The ongoing mentorship they said, was invaluable in their business growth. Others who did not go through it also supported the program, but some felt like the organization was not in a position to take this on effectively at this time. Those against argued that the program should be taken on by another community organization, as it may be more in their mandate than Tech Yukon's. Others wanted TechYukon to continue being involved, in partnership with another organization to ensure the acceleration of the tech vertical. As such, it is recommended that the organization enter into talks with other community organizations to discuss the future of the program and to see if another organization could take it on, potentially in partnership with TechYukon, or if TechYukon could play a supporting role rather than lead this program.

Other items

Those who brought it up spoke glowingly of the First Nations IT Summit and were eager to see more initiatives like this.

Most respondents said that they still wanted to see networking events occur but wanted to see either a theme or speaker or workshop or partner organization attached to them to keep it interesting. They also wanted to see smaller training opportunities like lunch and learns around topics that help develop tech skills, but also develops business acumen, such as hiring plans and best practices, marketing 101, digital advertising etc.

In terms of procurement, most respondents said it wasn't necessarily about increasing the government's IT spend, but more a question of how it's spent. The feeling is that much of the money still flows outside of the territory. It was also suggested that government should work closely with local companies to develop solutions for their needs or become an early adopter of new technologies and programs.

On accessing capital, markets, and acceleration, although some said that TechYukon should play a leading role in this, most argued that it should play more of an advocacy or conduit role in this by building connections in the investment community and in external markets to connect members to them. This could be done in tandem with other community players to amplify the call to action. The role of the organization as a conduit to information, resources and support was often discussed. As an industry association, it was felt like it couldn't provide every single service necessary to every single sub-sector to effect change, the organization does not have that capacity, but it should absolutely play a role in ensuring there's a proper support system in place and that where it cannot offer the programming or support itself, the organization should connect member companies to the support it needs in the community.

TechYukon's identity

YITIS became TechYukon in 2016 and a rebranding exercise occurred. However, in talking to the membership and board members, it is evident there is still a great deal of work to be done to build and develop the TechYukon brand. As such, based on conversations, the following changes are recommended.

Mission statement

2016 mission statement:

Our mission is to enhance the sustainability and economic impact of the technology industry sector in Yukon. We support member businesses with programs, information, networking, and professional representation.

Recommended mission statement:

Our mission is to represent, advocate for, and support our member companies and enhance the sustainability, awareness, economic impact and growth of the technology sector in Yukon.

What we do section
The what you do section of the website seems to be out of date and now clearly reflective of the services you currently offer and the services you want to be offering. As such, when talking about what TechYukon does, the following is recommended:

What is TechYukon:
We are an organization of technology-driven companies, with a mission to grow the technology industry in Yukon.

We support the tech industry through:

Advocacy and information: We represent and advocate for member companies to governments, agencies and the wider community to ensure policies, processes, procurement and spending best support the development and growth of the Yukon tech sector. Further to our advocacy efforts, we host regular, members-only discussions with all levels of government, academic institutions and other industries on the topics of research, education, innovation and investment.

Connections: We connect our member companies to the resources, information, programming, support, markets, and funding they need grow their business. We connect businesses in the industry to one another through networking events to build a vibrant and connected tech industry.

Promotion and awareness: We champion our member companies and the contribution of the tech sector to the Yukon economy and community. We create awareness of the companies and services in the sector, as well as the tech careers available in the territory and the benefits of working in tech in Yukon.

Developing and growing the tech sector: We help the growth of the sector by helping companies fill jobs, attracting talent to the territory, introducing new tech trends, developing new skills and business acumen through workshops and conferences and connecting companies to the support they need to thrive.

Strategic goals for TechYukon

1. Continue to represent the tech industry to key players to ensure policies, programs, procurement, and spending best supports the growth of the industry.

2. Develop, support and grow the tech labour market to respond to the needs of the industry.

3. Raise the local and national profile and awareness of the Yukon tech sector, the services the members can provide in and from the territory, the services/support available in the community, average salaries and benefits and perks of living and working in tech in Yukon.

4. Support the growth of the sector and rise in GDP contribution.

5. Expand community outreach and partnership development with other organization to deliver quality programming, initiatives and advocacy that best supports all aspects and sub-sectors of the industry.

6. Enhance the sustainability and efficiency of the organization by building better internal processes to support the board and membership, working towards full-time Executive Director and ensuring core funding is renewed.

7. Diversify and grow memberships and revenue streams.

Strategic goals' implementation

Continue to represent the tech industry to key players to ensure government policies, programs, procurement, and spending best supports the industry

This can be done by:
- Making a list of the top proactive advocacy issues (leaving room to be reactive to issues when necessary). The following are advocacy issues that came up often during conversations:
  - Procurement
    - Looking at best practices from other jurisdictions
    - Developing a list of procurement recommendations to YG on behalf of TechYukon to help support the growth of the local industry
  - Advocating for the development of a tech/seed fund
  - Supporting calls for an incubator/acceleration program in Yukon
  - Supporting calls for tax incentives to attract investors to Yukon
  - Supporting calls for incentives and initiatives to attract tech talent to Yukon
  - Advocating for affordable and reliable internet
  - Advocating on behalf of the tech sector to other industries such as health and mining

Success metrics:
- Better procurement rates by local companies
- Percentage of IT spending that stays in territory (out of the IT envelope)
- There is a seed/angel fund in Yukon
- Increase in the number of tech workers
- There is an incubator/acceleration in Yukon
- Increase in investment in local companies
- More local companies are hired by different industries in Yukon

Develop, support and grow the tech labour market to respond to the needs of the industry

This can be done by:
- Undertaking an audit of training needs in the industry
- Advocating for/researching/developing a training funding to support local workers akin to the Yukon Tourism Training Fund which is funded by the Yukon Government's Department of Education, Advanced Education branch, and is administered by the Tourism Association of the Yukon. Another option would be looking at the expansion of the parameters of the trades funding available to include tech if possible

- Raising the profile of the local tech sector, opportunities that exist within this sector and its benefits to attract talent from the local community, especially with local students of all ages
- Raising the profile of the tech sector to attract talent from elsewhere to the territory
- Advocating for incentives to attract talent to Yukon
- Ensuring local companies are aware of, and connected to funding for summer students (ie. STEP)
- Hosting workshops to get people introduced to, and excited about tech and its career opportunities (ie. coding bootcamps, pop-up computer repair classes etc)

Success metrics:
- The number of people employed in tech
- The number of tech workers moving to Yukon
- The number of qualified applicants on local tech jobs
- The number of new tech companies
- Tech training fund/wage subsidies program in place
- The number of people attending workshops (both members and non-members)
- Increase in the number STEP private sector jobs in tech

Raise the profile and awareness of the Yukon tech sector, the services the members can provide in and from the territory, the services/support available in the community, average salaries and benefits and perks of living and working in Yukon.

This can be done by:
- Developing an advertising campaign showcasing the abilities, services, benefits and contributions of the local industry
- Sharing success stories of local companies
- Developing workshops and events to get the local population introduced to and excited about tech
- Developing a social media presence
- Writing op-eds and pieces for local publications as well as national publications such as Betakit
- Developing a "Why tech in Yukon" tab on the TechYukon website where the advantages of working in tech in Yukon are highlighted (salaries, types of jobs, services available, lifestyle perks)
- Developing a showcase event such as a trade show showcasing companies, the innovative products and services available/being developed in Yukon, recruitment opportunities, matching those looking for IT services with local companies.
- Being proactive rather than reactive in communications efforts

Success metrics:
- Successful advertising campaign
- Showcase event has occurred

- Number of news stories mentioning tech
- The number of unique visitors to the TechYukon website

Support the growth of the sector and rise in GDP contribution of the tech sector

The growth of the sector requires many aspects including filling/supporting staffing needs, attracting talent, getting more people interested in tech as a career programs to accelerate high-growth/export companies, access to mentorship, professional development, access to private capital, access to external markets. This is a lot to take on for the organization, as such, it should look to leverage other resources and enhance its community outreach to develop a strong network of support and partnerships to deliver programming, resources and advocacy.

Success metrics:
- Percentage of GDP contribution from tech rising (closing the gap to, or surpassing tourism's GDP contribution)
- Companies highlight less challenges
- The number of tech companies and number of tech workers is growing.
- Number of companies raising funds
- There's a made in Yukon incubation/acceleration program (created between community partners)
- The development of a seed/angel fund

Expand community outreach and partnership development with other organization to deliver quality programming that supports tech companies and fosters opportunities for collaboration to best support all aspects and sub-sectors of the industry.

This can be done by:
- Partnering with organizations such as (co)space, YuKonstruct, Yukon Women in Trades and Technology to deliver programming, or coordinated advocacy and communications efforts to grow and support the tech sector
- Working collaboratively with organizations such as Meetings Yukon to bring up tech-related conferences and other events that showcase the local tech sector
- Working together helps expand capacity and also enhances TechYukon's visibility in the community. It also allows it to help more members in various ways

Success metrics:
- Number of programs and workshops held with community partners
- Regular meetings with other players in the tech, innovation and entrepreneurial space

Enhance the sustainability and efficiency of the organization by building better internal processes to support the board and membership, working towards a full-time Executive Director and ensuring core funding is renewed.

This is fundamental for sustainability of the organization and for it to be able to undertake the goals above.

This can be done by:
- A strong application to Yukon Government showcasing upcoming changes to the organization and its internal processes as well as the projects it wants to undertake to benefit and grow the tech sector
- Developing new internal processes that will enhance governance
- Improving internal communications and member engagement
- Looking at the feasibility of new communications channels such as Slack to drive engagement and ensure transparency
- Developing a board protocol and best practices to ensure good governance
- Develop a job description and profile for a full-time Executive Director

Success metrics:
- Better communications and engagement with board members and members
- Feedback mechanisms that are actively used
- Renewed core funding
- Full-time executive director in place
- Projects that respond to the membership's needs

Diversifying and growing memberships and revenue streams.

It's important that the organization reviews its membership offerings and does outreach in the community to get new members to join. As much as there should be a diversity of companies to ensure the sustainability and reach of the organization, some work and thought should be put around gender diversity as well.

As it gets its funds from only one funder, the organization needs to diversify its revenue streams for long-term stability and sustainability. It also puts it in a much better position to lobby. Diversifying revenue is also one of its responsibilities in its latest funding agreement with Yukon Government, an objective that has yet to be met.

This can be done by:
- Conducting community outreach to recruit existing tech companies and sole proprietors to join
- Raising the profile and offerings of the organization
- Getting more people of all backgrounds interested in tech as a career
- Reaching out to other departments or organization to develop new programs/funds

Success metrics:
- Increase in membership
- Increase in diversity of members (both in terms of sectors and backgrounds)
- Increase in revenue from outside of Economic Development

Suggested list of projects for 2018-2019

Given the list of challenges as well as conversations with board members and members, the following project list for review by the Department of Economic Development is suggested:

1. Research
Two research projects should be undertaken.

Developing the tech labour market

The first research project should focus on the training needs of members. Most members said that filling jobs with qualified workers was a major concern of theirs and one of their main challenges. This research project should be an audit of all the training jobs and needs and where the gaps exist. This research would be used in the future to develop local programming to respond to these or to seek out partners, either locally, nationally or internationally to help deliver programming to respond to this.

Further to this, the research should look at the feasibility of creating a training fund as this is something that was brought up by many members. One fund to look at is the Yukon Tourism Training Fund (YTTF) which is funded by the Yukon Government's Department of Education, Advanced Education branch, and administered by TIA Yukon. Another option would be to look at expanding the parameters of the trades funding available through the Department of Education to include tech.

Tech benefits in Yukon

A second research project should be undertaken and focus on the average salaries and benefits in the tech industry. This could be used two-fold. Firstly, as an awareness and recruiting tool for prospective employees (in the territory and elsewhere). It could also be used to highlight the contribution of the tech sector to the public sector.

2. Communications/PR strategy and implementation

Managing the website as well as create content for the site was a project for 2017-2018 that did not get done. It is suggested that this project be updated and revamped into the development and implementation of a communications and public relations strategy. This would help develop and build the TechYukon brand, develop key messages, a narrative for the organization and the development of communications materials such as news releases, one pagers and op-eds on tech matters in Yukon. An awareness campaign including ads should be undertaken to raise the profile and awareness of the tech sector, its members and contribution to the Yukon economy and community.

3. Social media presence development and web content development

Further to the communications and PR strategy, a social media strategy should be developed and implemented to reach new audiences and enhance the organization's profile. This was a goal for 2017-2018 but it will be much more effective now. This project should also looking at developing fresh and consistent content for the website. The website should also be updated to include a "Why tech in Yukon" type tab as well as updated mission and mandate (as noted above).

4. Tech showcase event

To help raise the profile of the industry, a tech showcase or conference event should be undertaken in the next year. It could be used to show what companies are working on, what kinds of services are available in the community and to raise awareness of the types of jobs and openings in the tech sector. The event could be used by companies outside of the sector that are looking to fill their IT needs, for recruitment purposes for member companies, to bring up tech suppliers such as Xerox or Cisco, to introduce investors to what's happening in Yukon, to attract new talent, and to raise awareness of the organization.

5. Skills and business acumen development

Last year's IT coding bootcamp was well-received and delivered by a member company. As such, an audit of skills development workshops the membership can provide should be undertaken to host a similar workshop. This audit should also look at which skills and areas of business members want to develop in order to offer workshops and training that best responds to this.

6. Student and school outreach

A small-scale project should be undertaken to build relationships with each school so each year, member companies can go and speak to various classrooms about the viability of tech as a career and the types of careers that are available as students start thinking about what they will study after school. Students between grade 10 and 12 should be targeted.

Further to this, the organization should look at partnership opportunities to introduce elementary school students to tech. One option would be to look at participating in the annual robotics conference, or by simply helping host easy coding workshops in classes or helping train the teachers so they can pass along the IT skills to their students.

There was great appetite in the membership and at the board level to be more involved in schools to get more people interested in tech and to showcase tech as a viable career to older students so they know it's an option for them. In the longer-term this can help ease some of the labour market shortages the industry currently faces.

Along with high schools, strong links should be forged with the Yukon College, particularly as it transitions to a university to figure out if formal or continuing education programs should be put in place to support the training of the tech labour market or simply to assess if there are opportunities to partner or if TechYukon can support Yukon College initiatives such as its coding camp and its summer computer camp.

7. Community outreach/partnership development

As the organization works towards expanding its capacity and initiatives, it needs to build better connections in the community. This means building connections with other industries such as mining companies to showcase the abilities of the local sector, as well as figuring out which group/organization offers which service that could solve some of the challenges that companies are facing. Doing this inventory of services and building these connections and partnerships is a very important project for the organization to undertake as it will help raise its profile, expand its capacity and help it better serve and promote its membership.

8. Internal reorganization/sustainability initiative

A key aspect of the work that needs to be undertaken in ensuring the sustainability of the organization is overseeing the improvement of the internal processes of the organization and working towards a full-time Executive Director. This will require many hours of work, as well as research into best practices for board members, developing protocols, communications and feedback channels, newsletters, engaging with members, developing a job description, all of which will take time and effort but it is fundamental to the future of the organization.

Other activities

Further to these projects, TechYukon should continue to find ways to deliver the following:
- Advocacy
- Networking events (with a theme, or purpose, or speaker)
- Opportunity-based training and workshops around technical skills, professional development and business acumen
- Attendance at local events (Chamber events, (co)space, mining, health, YWITT, Yukon College etc) and national events (Roundup, BC Tech Summit)

Vetting and organizing projects

The board needs to develop a vetting system for projects to facilitate decision-making. The following should be taken into consideration when making decisions:

Prioritize projects that can:
- Benefit member companies and the industry as a whole
- Support the organization's sustainability
- Build capacity
- Are proactive
- Promote and create awareness of the industry
- Solve challenges that member companies are facing
- Are member-led

Cautious of projects that can:
- Require too much internal capacity
- Are too last minute/reactive
- Consume large amounts of financial resources
- Consume large amounts of ED time

It is recommended TechYukon uses the following grid (filled out as an example only) to organize its initiatives to track and manage its projects and other activities/advocacy priorities that can best benefit the organization and industry.

Lead	Advocate for	Participate in
Awareness campaign and showcase event	Procurement	Incubation/acceleration programming with community partners
Student outreach at all levels of education	Infrastructure	Community events
Advocacy efforts	Tax incentives for investors	Working with Meetings Yukon
Training needs and funding research	Incubation/acceleration programming in the community	Ecosystem collaboration
Research on salaries, benefits, perks and services of the tech sector	Angel/seed funding	The annual Robotics Challenge in Yukon schools
Communications and social media strategy and implementation	Incentives to attract talent	Talent development and attraction

Appendix A

List of participants

Executive Director:
Ziad Sahid

Board members:
Dan Johnson, Total North
Paul Kischuk, Vector Research
Chris Lane, MakeIT
Martin Lehner, Tangerine
Sylvio Lin, Triniti
Tracy Makarewich, etrace
Krista Prochazka, Northwestel

Members:
Marcos Castillo, Bizont
Jim Coates, Kryotec
Andrew Kalek, Anlek
Simon Lapointe, 3Pikas
Martin Lawrence, Tangerine
Sylvie Leonard, Leonard IT Consulting
Bob Miller, Computerisms
Lee Randall, Icefield Tools
Camilo Rivera, Apprendo
Dave Rogers, Yukon Dude
Ben Sanders, Proof
Alastair Smith, Proskida
Rick Steele, Richard Steele IT Consulting