Transport Canada / Transports Canada

Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency / Agence canadienne de développement économique du Nord

Joint Evaluation of CanNor's Northern Projects Management Office

Evaluation Summary, February 2026

About the Northern Projects Management Office (NPMO)

Established in 2010 as part of CanNor. Intended to improve the efficiency of environmental assessment and regulatory review processes for major projects in the North. Various federal departments and agencies, including TC, contribute to northern review processes with NPMO.

NPMO has **three** core functions:

1. **Federal coordination**
2. **Crown consultation support**
3. **Convening services**

About the Evaluation

CanNor and TC committed to a joint evaluation of NPMO to assess progress towards intended results.

The evaluation examined the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the NPMO and TC's NPMO-related activities from: **2019-20 to 2023-24**

Methods

- **Internal & External Interviews**
- **Document and Literature Review**
- **Quantitative Data Analysis**

FINDINGS

1. There is a clear need for the services provided by NPMO. The current focus on critical minerals and regulatory efficiency further emphasizes the need for and relevance of NPMO.
2. NPMO directly contributes to CanNor's mandate by supporting consistency and clarity in environmental review processes and supporting the Crown in its duty to consult.
3. Given the broad relevance of transportation in the North and in the context of resource extraction, TC's participation in NPMO and related processes is necessary.
4. There is general consensus that NPMO has improved over the last five years. This includes greater consistency in NPMO staff, increased internal clarity on responsibilities, and improved working relationships with partners.
5. NPMO's federal coordination role is effective, ensuring federal input is consistent, board timelines are met, and federal partners discuss key issues in advance. However, some federal partners shared challenges with tight timelines, as well as a desire for more guidance and look-ahead conversations.
6. NPMO's Crown consultation role is valued by federal partners. The Crown consultation record as documented and maintained by NPMO is particularly important.
7. Interviewees from Indigenous governments and organizations (IGOs) indicated a positive relationship with NPMO overall. Most highlighted the need for earlier engagement – before formal project-specific processes begin – and recognition of community-specific needs and rights. Other key challenges mentioned are broader than NPMO's specific function.
8. While convening is one of NPMO's central activities and has positive impacts, there is less clarity among external stakeholders and partners about this function in particular, relative to NPMO's two other key functions (federal coordination and Crown consultation). Services such as pathfinding or Resource Development Advisory Groups are not consistently understood or used.
9. NPMO's engagement activities under the umbrella of convening play a role in external awareness and relationship-building.
10. TC contributes to environmental review processes with NPMO efficiently and effectively.
11. NPMO's capacity has been a persistent concern, and with an expanding workload, the team will continue to be stretched. NPMO is currently exploring measures to better manage priorities with current resources (e.g., database improvements, staff cross-training).
12. The highest value NPMO activities identified by external interviewees are coordination of federal input, maintaining the Crown consultation record, and coordinating Crown consultation and engagement activities. Convening activities were not mentioned as highest value.

RECOMMENDATIONS → ACTIONS

It is recommended that NPMO:

1. Reassess how to get full value out of its convening activities to ensure optimal use of available capacity in the organization.

2. Ensure clarity on its services and roles through improved communications products and guidance materials for all partners. In addition, given NPMO's evolving role, NPMO should collaborate further with territorial governments, review boards, and regulatory boards to ensure a shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.

3. Explore options for sharing updates and project forecasts with IGOs and federal partners as early as practical, before formal project-specific processes get underway.

4. Identify and implement database improvements to support more efficient data entry and extraction, while maintaining high quality tracking and reporting.

NPMO will:

1. Review and redefine convening efforts and activities, and implement actions that highlight the strategic role of convening to partners and ensure that the organization is making the best possible use of available resources. *(2025-2027)*

2. Develop and implement a communications strategy to clarify NPMO's services and roles with partners. Then conduct targeted outreach with territorial governments, review boards, and regulatory boards. *(2025-2027)*

3. Explore the feasibility and practicality of sharing early updates and project forecasts with IGOs and federal partners. *(2025-2027)*

4. Assess current database systems to implement required improvements to support efficiencies. Monitor improvements to ensure standards for high quality tracking and reporting. *(2026-2028)*