

I.OI EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Priority Action Item #12 of “Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity & Justice: Yukon’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit+ People Strategy” is to engage men and boys in ending violence against women. **The pathway for doing so is the same pathway to engage men and boys to end violence against themselves.**

Men are struggling. The statistics are clear: incarceration, homelessness, physical illness and injury, mental illness, addictions, and life expectancy rates show that many men in Canada and the Yukon are faring poorly. The health and wellness of men affects the health and wellness of women, children, families, and society.

The dominant conclusion within the academic literature and among men’s groups is that these negative outcomes arise from the interaction between what society expects a man “*should be*” and the ways that men perpetually endeavor to demonstrate their manhood within those societal expectations, and that this behaviour leads to **social isolation** and, ultimately, illness and trauma.

Because “*manhood*” is core to the identity of most men – and because manhood is felt to be a precarious status – men engage in behaviours that affirm their status as men within what society suggests a man “*should be*”. **Expressions of manhood can be healthy or unhealthy, depending on how and when they are expressed.** Unhealthy expressions of manhood lead to illness, injury, and trauma for men themselves and those around them. Systems intended to support men and others often, unintentionally, perpetuate trauma – in part because they fail to recognize the importance of male identity and self-perception, but mostly because **they see men, themselves, as the problem**, rather than men as a product of their socio-ecological environment.

A common societal expectation for men is that they be “*stoic*” – keeping their feelings to themselves, always demonstrating strength, and “*not being a burden*” or accepting help. **Demonstrating manhood in this way leads to social isolation.** Social isolation is strongly correlated to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, lower socio-economic status, increased rates of addiction, and intergenerational trauma.

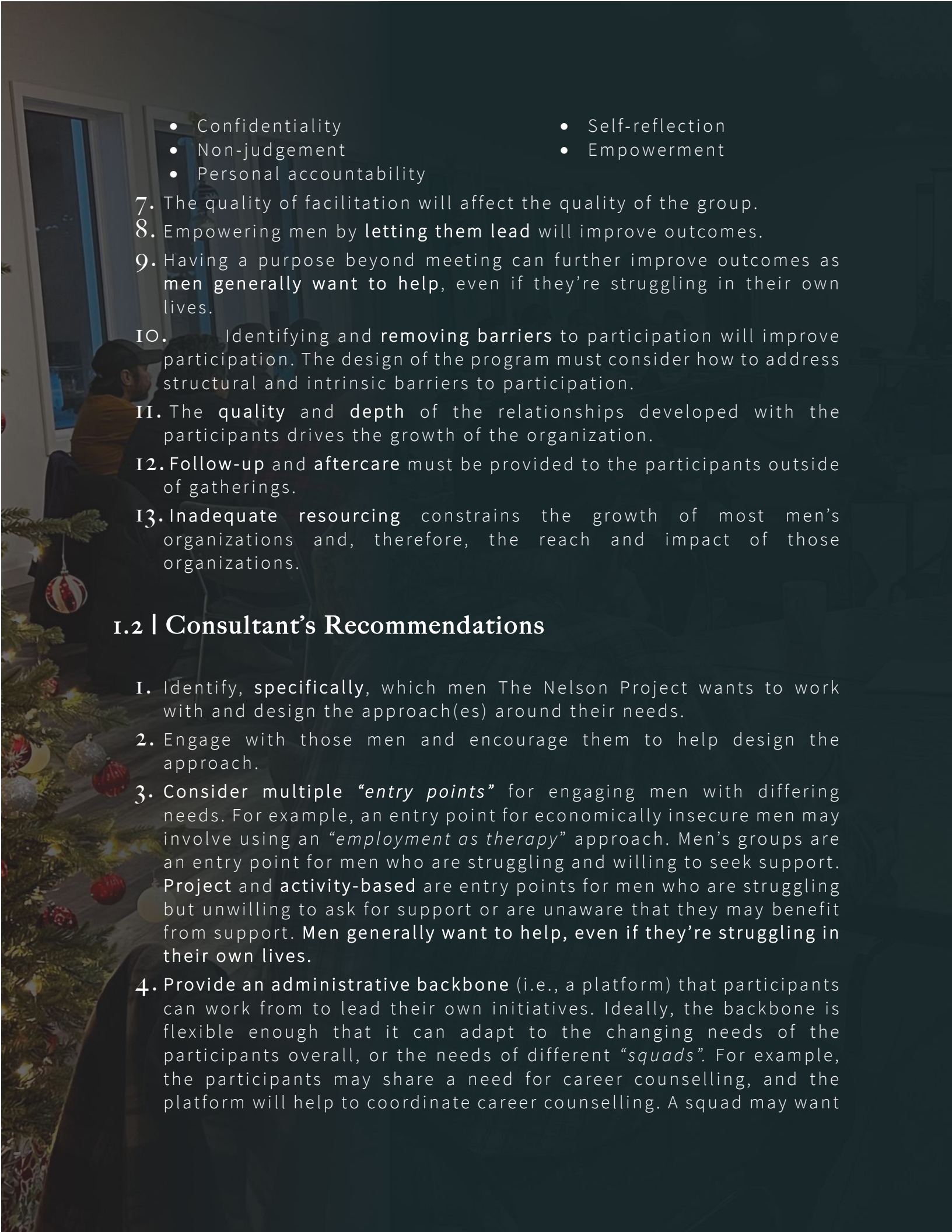
There is a growing recognition and evidence that male-specific, strengths-based interventions – *rooted in relationship development* – are both needed and effective. The Nelson Project has reached a similar conclusion.

The challenge becomes how to design a **strengths-based approach, rooted in relationship development**, that will work for men in the Yukon who are struggling.

Informed by over 75 relevant academic papers, articles, and books and interviews with 13 people involved in organizations working with men, *What Kind of Man? Environmental Scan & Design Considerations for The Nelson Project*, explores the factors leading to social isolation and how men's groups are improving men's health and wellness through relationship and the exploration of identity. This document also identifies a number of thematic areas and 65 specific questions for The Nelson Project's consideration when designing their approach to working with men in the Yukon. Finally, this document includes a number of recommendations, based on the consultant's research and his knowledge of the Yukon context.

1.1 | Summary of Key Findings

1. Healthy relationships contribute strongly to overall health and well-being.
2. Aspiring to achieve hegemonic masculinity leads to social isolation.
3. **Curating a space** where men can re-evaluate their manhood practices while developing relationships with other men is an effective way to improve men's health and wellbeing. **Men's groups are highly effective at helping men improve their own health and wellbeing.**
4. Primarily, men's groups are focused on men who want **happier, healthier lives** and are ready to seek help, although this is not always the case. Some work with men who are directed to participate in programs (through their employment or court orders). Both can be effective when the focus is on understanding **men's relationships with themselves, others, and society.**
5. Men tend to be more attracted to groups comprised of men who are **similar to themselves**. While this can serve as an entryway into a men's group, it can become limiting to the participants. As men progress, it is important to have other groups for them to progress into, further assisting with their transformation.
6. **The following principles** must be followed when working with men:

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- A person is sitting at a table in a room with large windows. In the foreground, there is a Christmas tree decorated with lights and ornaments. The background shows a person sitting at a table, possibly in a meeting or workshop setting.
- Confidentiality
 - Non-judgement
 - Personal accountability
 - Self-reflection
 - Empowerment
7. The quality of facilitation will affect the quality of the group.
 8. Empowering men by **letting them lead** will improve outcomes.
 9. Having a purpose beyond meeting can further improve outcomes as **men generally want to help**, even if they're struggling in their own lives.
 10. Identifying and **removing barriers** to participation will improve participation. The design of the program must consider how to address structural and intrinsic barriers to participation.
 11. The **quality** and **depth** of the relationships developed with the participants drives the growth of the organization.
 12. **Follow-up** and **aftercare** must be provided to the participants outside of gatherings.
 13. **Inadequate resourcing** constrains the growth of most men's organizations and, therefore, the reach and impact of those organizations.

1.2 | Consultant's Recommendations

1. Identify, **specifically**, which men The Nelson Project wants to work with and design the approach(es) around their needs.
2. Engage with those men and encourage them to help design the approach.
3. Consider multiple "**entry points**" for engaging men with differing needs. For example, an entry point for economically insecure men may involve using an "*employment as therapy*" approach. Men's groups are an entry point for men who are struggling and willing to seek support. **Project** and **activity-based** are entry points for men who are struggling but unwilling to ask for support or are unaware that they may benefit from support. **Men generally want to help, even if they're struggling in their own lives.**
4. Provide an **administrative backbone** (i.e., a platform) that participants can work from to lead their own initiatives. Ideally, the backbone is flexible enough that it can adapt to the changing needs of the participants overall, or the needs of different "*squads*". For example, the participants may share a need for career counselling, and the platform will help to coordinate career counselling. A squad may want

to undertake a project to benefit their community but might need assistance **accessing** and **managing funding**. The platform can help coordinate facilitation training. It can also help coordinate communications among the participants. **Rather than having the platform dictate the activities of the participants, let the participants dictate the activities of the platform.**

5. **Host regular events** that bring men from around the territory together. Continue with the practice of supporting travel costs to participate, where possible.
6. **Host initiation weekends** to help form relationships between new and existing participants, and to help develop norms and expectations in line with the principles that must be followed when working with men.
7. **The following principles must be followed when working with men:**
 - Confidentiality
 - Non-judgement
 - Personal accountability
 - Self-reflection
 - Empowerment