

From 'science from above' to 'science in the community'

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Most research initiatives aim to discover more knowledge. The International Polar Year (IPY) went even further; it created more discoverers.

That is what [Canadian Arctic](#) researcher David Hik will tell this week's meeting of the [American Association for the Advancement of Science](#) (AAAS) in [Vancouver](#).

"For the first time in the 130-year history of international polar years, people living in [polar regions](#) were not just objects of study — they led studies," said Hik.

"This was the case in Old Crow Flats, located in northern Yukon Territory, home to the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. They'd become concerned that changes to the local freshwater landscape threatened wildlife and, therefore, their way of life. So, they decided to take charge of the research effort."

"The IPY helped them tap into researcher talent — including university research Chairs funded by Canada's Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. But it was the local community that defined the research questions and used traditional knowledge to bolster inquiries. And now it's community members, both elders and youth, who've taken up the mantle to sustain the research effort."

Though Old Crow Flats was among the first communities to take the

lead, many others began taking up the challenge as the IPY progressed, creating a new model for northern research.

One IPY coordinator called it a shift from "science from above" (where researchers use satellites and automated systems to study the North from a distance) to "science at the community scale" (where northerners and researchers act as partners).

"The emphasis Canada put on local engagement has changed the way northern research will be conducted for years to come," said Hik.

Provided by Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council

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