Understanding the realities and addressing the needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs in New Brunswick

A research brief and high-level gap analysis

Introduction

The following research brief highlights the experiences of entrepreneurs in New Brunswick. It draws from an environmental scan on the experiences, needs, and priorities of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs across Atlantic Canada. Specifically, the brief focuses on the motivations and existing sources of support as well as challenges and barriers to accessing support experienced by 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs from New Brunswick. In combination with data from the other Atlantic provinces, these findings serve as the foundation for the recommendations for the Queer Atlantic Business Hub outlined in the environmental scan.

In addition, some key considerations around data and information gaps are identified that could inform and improve decision making and the governance, operations, and program design work of the Queer Atlantic Business Hub.

Data sources and sample

The research brief brings together all data sources from the environmental scan, including surveys, interviews, provincial engagement, and regional context.

Survey data included 24 participants in New Brunswick and qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 entrepreneurs located around the province. The survey was conducted in both French and English, and close to half of the interviews were conducted in French. Both survey and interview samples reflect a wide range of business stages, including informal and unregistered businesses, early stage entrepreneurs, and established business owners, as well as a diversity of sectors and identities.

A narrative scan was also conducted in New Brunswick by O Strategies to better understand queer entrepreneurial experiences in the province, with particular attention to the realities of Francophone and Acadian communities, linguistic minority contexts, and regional specificities that shape entrepreneurship in the province. While rooted in New Brunswick, these findings contribute important insights to the broader Atlantic picture, particularly around bilingualism, rurality, community connection, and access to culturally and linguistically appropriate support.

Despite outreach in both official languages and the use of trusted networks, reaching queer entrepreneurs in New Brunswick was challenging. Direct engagement with

individuals reached some individuals who expressed that they did not feel "queer enough" to participate or did not strongly identify with the term "queer." Others confirmed interviews but did not attend.

Trust, rooted in personal relationships, emerged as a key factor in participation. Individuals with an existing relationship with members of the O Strategies team were significantly more likely to participate, reflecting broader patterns of trust and accessibility within marginalized communities.

Most participants from New Brunswick were based in urban areas, particularly Moncton, Dieppe, and Saint John, with a smaller number operating in rural settings, including Bathurst and Miramichi. Business representation spanned communications, health care, event production, construction, innovation, energy, arts, and community based work.

There was some diversity in the demographic details (e.g., ethno-racial identity, sexual orientation, gender identity) of participants across the sample. Due to the research design and size of the sample, the ability to analyze data across different identity categories to examine variations in responses across groups was limited.

The brief presents themes generated from a focused secondary analysis of the original environmental scan and the provincial report to identify content that was specifically relevant to 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs in New Brunswick. It provides a window into some of the distinctive circumstances of those in the province while also connecting to broader themes generated across the region. Sections of the environmental scan that aggregated data are not the focus of this brief, however, the findings discussed are closely aligned with the broader gaps and needs across all four Atlantic provinces.

Like the environmental scan, the themes that follow form the foundation for the Hub's strategic direction and highlight some conditions and pathways toward achieving a more equitable and connected entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Geography and demographic context

With a population of approximately 858,000 people, New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada. While French and English are recognized as equal official languages, the proportion of Francophones in the provincial population has been gradually declining. Contributing factors include rural outmigration, linguistic assimilation, and immigration patterns that skew predominantly Anglophone. According to Statistics Canada, in 2021 nearly 41 percent of the population identified as Francophone or reported being able to hold a conversation in French, and close to one quarter of the immigrant population indicated they could communicate in French.

Francophone communities are concentrated in rural regions, particularly the Northwest, the North, the Acadian Peninsula, and along the western coast. Urban centres such as Fredericton, Saint John, and, to a lesser extent, Moncton are predominantly Anglophone. Although there is limited formal data on queer-owned businesses in the province, it is reasonable to assume that many queer entrepreneurs live and work in

rural regions, given the demographic distribution of Francophone and Acadian populations.

In addition to the Francophone population, there are other significant social, ethnic, racial and cultural groups within the province. Members of several Indigenous nations, including the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Métis and Inuk (Inuit) live in New Brunswick, and the vast majority of the land is unceded by these nations. New Brunswick is also home to a significant Indigenous Black population, established over centuries of migration. While some of this group lives in rural settlements, well over half of New Brunswick's Black population live in urban areas. In addition to the original inhabitants of the land and multi-generational settlers, there are also many newcomers to the province, including recent immigrants from outside of Canada, most of whom are racialized. As well, the number of people in New Brunswick who identify as having a disability is higher than the national average (over one-third of the population 15 and older).

There are many additional equity-deserving groups in the province who face systemic exclusion. Economic circumstance plays a significant role in shaping access to choice and opportunity. Queer entrepreneurs who are also members of diverse communities may have unique experiences and needs for support around their businesses. Considering intersectional identities is important for meaningful representation. Focusing on a single dimension of identity can obscure how policies, programs, and cultures may advantage some groups while marginalizing others who sit at multiple intersections. An approach that recognizes these layered experiences is important for avoiding tokenism and designing more equitable decision making and other practices.

Despite yearly increases in the number of ally businesses certified under the Rainbow Registered designation, very few businesses publicly identify as queer owned. Safety concerns, market considerations, and social dynamics influence decisions about disclosure. Following a wave of 2SLGBTQIA+ venue closures, new queer bars opened in Moncton and Fredericton in 2024, signalling both need and community resilience.

Political and social tensions have shaped queer experiences in recent years. Threats targeting the drag community and a cultural event in Moncton in 2022 heightened fear among queer residents. In response, the Francophone queer community launched Alter Acadie in 2023, an organization dedicated to defending queer rights and producing resources for advocacy, events, and allied communities. The province's conservative political climate between 2018 and 2024, including controversial revisions to Policy 713 governing the rights of trans youth in schools, contributed to an environment of uncertainty and vigilance among queer individuals.

This broader context deeply influences entrepreneurial motivation, visibility, access to networks, and perceptions of risk for 2SLGBTQIA+ business owners.

Experiences of entrepreneurs in New Brunswick

Motivations

Across Atlantic Canada, motivations for becoming an entrepreneur are deeply connected to identity and a shared desire to build more representative spaces that enable entrepreneurs to exercise autonomy and act with authenticity.

The data from New Brunswick shows a shared desire to build freer, fairer, and more representative spaces, for oneself and for others. Entrepreneurship is rarely described as a neutral career choice. Instead, it emerges as a way to reclaim control over work, live more openly, and create the kinds of spaces and services that are missing elsewhere.

In every province across Atlantic Canada, participants describe a strong desire for autonomy as motivation for their entrepreneurial journey. Participants described their aspirations to build and maintain workspaces that are queer affirming and distinct from rigid institutional cultures typified in many work environments. Narratives revealed the importance of having the autonomy to choose projects, pace and collaborators and the acknowledgment that entrepreneurship can offer a pathway out of other work environments that are rigid, hierarchical, and hostile to queer and trans people.

In New Brunswick, safety concerns also shape visibility and growth choices for entrepreneurs. The political climate, heightened tensions around drag and trans rights, and recent community mobilizations directly influence how entrepreneurs present their businesses, engage with public networks, and assess risk.

Authenticity is an additional driver that was raised consistently and played out differently across the region. In New Brunswick, entrepreneurship was described as a way to build spaces where people can be fully themselves without tokenistic or performative diversity efforts. Representation plays a particularly important role in cultural, creative, and community-based sectors across the region. Data reflects the need to create queer representation through Francophone drag scenes, visible queer spaces, platforms for queer artists, or culturally safe environments for Indigenous and Two Spirit communities.

Other motivations stem from a desire to contribute to broader systemic change. Some participants aim to transform historically exclusionary sectors, such as construction, mental health, technology, or social innovation, by opening doors and creating opportunities for communities that are often marginalized. Others seek to build business models aligned with values of equity, inclusion, and diversity, through working with suppliers from equity-deserving groups, offering affirming services, or developing technologies grounded in sovereignty and cultural safety.

For some participants, especially in rural and small town contexts, starting a business was described as a way to stay in their home community while building a livelihood. In Francophone and Acadian settings, this often included the added layer of linguistic representation and a desire for spaces where French and queerness can coexist. Some

participants described entrepreneurship in Indigenous and Two Spirit contexts as an act of cultural reclamation and a way to assert sovereignty over stories, images, and practices that have often been misrepresented or controlled by others.

Taken together, the Atlantic wide data suggest that entrepreneurship is not just an economic choice for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. It is also a strategy for survival, a vehicle for authenticity, and an avenue for representing communities that remain underseen in mainstream business landscapes.

Existing support

Life events often serve as catalysts for entrepreneurship across Atlantic Canada. Coming out, relocating, the loss or closure of a job, a health crisis, or the receipt of a grant or severance package become turning points that make entrepreneurship feel possible or necessary. Mentors, peers, and family members sometimes play a supportive role, encouraging risk taking or offering practical help. For others, the absence of support is what pushes them toward entrepreneurship as a way to create their own conditions for safety, rest, and self-determination.

Entrepreneurs described drawing from both formal and informal support. Although formal programs play a role, they were often experienced as feeling detached, bureaucratic or inaccessible. Across all four provinces, human relationships are the most decisive form of support for queer and trans entrepreneurs. In New Brunswick, peer networks, mentors, family, and community connections remain the primary sources of support. Trusted individuals help entrepreneurs navigate credit systems, funding programs, or municipal processes that may not be designed for queer or small scale businesses. Francophone participants emphasize the value of mentors and peers who can support them in French and understand the specific dynamics of minority Francophone communities.

Across the Atlantic region, community support in the form of loyal clients, promotion of ventures through word of mouth, and local media coverage plays a key role in sustaining businesses. This is especially true for arts, cultural, and hospitality businesses, where repeat customers and community events can determine whether a project survives. For some, family and partner support, both emotional and financial, was described as a vital buffer during periods of transition or risk.

Technical and professional support, such as accounting help, legal advice, and sector specific mentorship, are also valued across the region. Participants in technology, innovation, and professional services mention targeted programs that helped them gain confidence and clarity in their work. However, access to these supports is uneven, with urban centres and those already connected to institutional networks more likely to benefit.

Taken together, the data suggests that the queer entrepreneurial ecosystem in Atlantic Canada is held together more by relationships and informal networks than by formal structures. Where formal supports exist, they are often navigated and made meaningful through those relationships.

Challenges for entrepreneurs and barriers preventing access to support

The challenges faced by queer entrepreneurs in New Brunswick take many, often intersecting forms, including structural gaps in financing, limited access to legal or financial expertise, significant emotional and cognitive burdens associated with navigating systems not designed for queer entrepreneurs, as wells as gaps in financial literacy, and other practical business skills and experience.

Disparities in resources for 2SLGBTQIA+ businesses are evident across the region. There are very few queer-specific business networks, especially outside major cities. Many existing programs are perceived as not fully inclusive, either because they lack cultural competence, are only in English, or assume a particular business model. Creative and cultural sectors are especially underserved, with limited access to agents, booking structures, or distribution platforms that understand queer and regional realities.

Across the region, many participants reported that institutional actors, including large corporations and mainstream business networks, are not seen as leaders in advancing queer entrepreneurship. Diversity initiatives are often experienced as superficial or tokenistic, rather than structurally transformative. This contributes to a sense of isolation from the mainstream, and marginalization in spaces that were not designed with queer and trans entrepreneurs in mind.

Access to financing and investment opportunities is a central barrier. Participants describe challenges with credit, collateral, guarantors, and eligibility criteria that do not fit small, values-driven, or creative businesses. Younger entrepreneurs, neurodivergent participants, and those with precarious employment histories feel these barriers most acutely. Many queer entrepreneurs in New Brunswick operate in rural and remote areas outside major cities, often in places where queer visibility is low and business networks are traditional or conservative. This increases isolation and transportation costs and limits access to markets and to inclusive practical and community supports, including banking or in-person financial advice.

Discrimination and bias were described across the region as negatively impacting mental health and well-being. Queer and trans entrepreneurs in New Brunswick reported encountering discrimination in both subtle and overt forms, including gender bias, heteronormativity, and skepticism in interactions with funders, landlords, suppliers, and institutional partners. Those who carry multiple marginalized identities, including being racialized, Indigenous, disabled, or from low-income backgrounds, described layered forms of exclusion and labelled these dynamics as particularly exhausting. At the same time, access to mental health care, social benefits, and stable housing can be challenging and affects entrepreneurial capacity, especially for self-employed and gig workers.

The New Brunswick narratives highlight how all of these barriers intersect with political climate and rising hostility toward queer and trans communities. Changes to policies protecting trans students, threats against drag performers, and public debates about queer rights were described as having substantial impacts on participants' experiences of safety and decisions about visibility in relation to their businesses.

Within this context, expressed needs converge around a more accessible, interconnected, and adequately resourced ecosystem: Adapted financing, support for creative industries, safer spaces, peer networks, meaningful inclusion training, and stronger representation of queer entrepreneurs in strategic sectors and decision-making spaces.

Francophone 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs

Language and linguistic dynamics add another level of complexity in Francophone contexts that shapes the motivations, opportunities, and constraints of queer entrepreneurs. In New Brunswick and across Atlantic Canada, Francophone and Acadian queer entrepreneurs described experiencing a form of double marginalization shaped by their layered identities.

In a province that is officially bilingual but where services are not always delivered as such, many Francophone participants report a lack of French-language training adapted to cultural or creative practices, limited truly bilingual administrative support, and an absence of Francophone equivalents to certain Anglophone resources, such as drag spaces, technology mentorship, and peer networks.

Access to resources in French was described as a recurring challenge. Francophone participants in New Brunswick described the scarcity of business resources in French, reported limited availability of training, mentorship, and administrative support tailored to their realities, and tensions around language and branding in public-facing businesses.

Even in officially bilingual or officially recognized minority language contexts, many programs are experienced as primarily Anglophone in structure, culture, and leadership. This has practical consequences for limiting how comfortable people feel seeking support, their ease in navigating forms and processes, and whether they feel that their cultural references are fully understood.

For some, French and queer visibility can both feel risky, depending on context. In New Brunswick, Francophone participants describe feeling "caught between worlds" in the sense that they were not fully seen within traditional Francophone institutions and not always visible or prioritized within predominantly Anglophone queer networks. In these cases, language and queerness intersect to produce a dual sense of invisibility and distance from mainstream business and queer ecosystems.

At the same time, Francophone queer entrepreneurs across the region are generating their own responses. The New Brunswick material points to the creation of Francophone queer cultural spaces, community-based businesses, and gathering places that function both as economic initiatives and as sites of representation and resistance. Similar efforts are emerging in other provinces, even if on a smaller scale, in the form of bilingual events, creative projects, and informal networks.

Preferences for support and hub activity

Across Atlantic Canada, there is strong interest in the Queer Atlantic Business Hub as a potential connector, amplifier, and advocate. In New Brunswick, participants described the desire for increased access to navigational support and practical resources, including information on funding, access to suppliers and customers, and training on topics such as marketing and legal skills. The data additionally reflects the need for increased visibility, and opportunities for relationship building. Both visibility and safety are central goals and queer entrepreneurs want platforms to showcase their work but also a Hub that supports diverse visibility needs, especially for those not able to be publicly out in all contexts.

Practical support was a priority of research participants, who voiced wanting structured mentorship tailored to business stage, peer circles, accessible workshops on marketing, admin, finance, and creative dissemination, and help navigating existing programs. Practical resources to reduce administrative burden and decision fatigue were also described as important. Across all provinces, visibility and representation are also central needs. Participants want platforms to showcase queer talent in arts, tech, services, and community based work. Many highlight the importance of safer, non-performative networking spaces where they do not have to code switch or downplay their identities.

In New Brunswick, the idea of a bilingual, regionally-anchored Hub that provides space for connection, mentorship, and visibility resonates strongly. Across Atlantic Canada, Francophone participants express a strong desire for a Hub that is truly bilingual in culture. This extends beyond translation and involves building governance, engagement, and programming practices that reflect Francophone and Acadian realities. Hub design and programming would thus acknowledge the specific pressures of linguistic minority status, and treat language as an equity issue rather than a logistical afterthought.

In this sense, the bilingual commitment of the Queer Atlantic Business Hub is not simply a technical feature, but a structural condition for accessibility, legitimacy, and trust. For many Francophone queer entrepreneurs, the degree to which the Hub feels genuinely bilingual will determine whether they see it as a space that is fully accessible to them.

Additional accessibility and equity considerations surfaced in relation to the Hub. In addition to bilingualism, participants stressed the importance of cultural safety for Indigenous and Two Spirit people and racialized entrepreneurs, and practices that are explicitly inclusive of trans, non-binary, neurodivergent, disabled, and rural entrepreneurs. There is a desire for an organization that uses culturally specific outreach strategies, understands that travel, time, and energy are limited, and that designs participation accordingly. The desire for practical tools corresponds with an additional need for psychological and cultural competence in the design of programs.

Other concerns focus on tone and structure. Some fear that the Hub could become overly institutional, centralize too much in one city, or replicate existing power imbalances. Others worry about expectations of unpaid labour, or about

communications that feel narrow, corporate, or overly tied to traditional pride imagery that does not reflect the full diversity of queer communities in Atlantic Canada.

At the same time, many participants see the Hub as a chance to build bridges between local organizations and national actors such as Pride at Work, CQCC, QueerTech, and Start Proud. A structure that can connect local, regional, and national levels, share information, and advocate for queer entrepreneurs with funders and governments is widely seen as valuable.

Overall, queer entrepreneurs in New Brunswick are seeking a Hub that is bilingual, inclusive, regionally grounded with attention to rural realities and political context, and oriented toward practical, relational support. They want a place where they can recognize themselves, learn together, and access opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach.

Knowledge gaps and pathways forward to support decision making and future work at the Hub

The observations and insights outlined in this brief are informed by data collected from across Atlantic Canada that specifically address 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs in New Brunswick. The brief describes the experiences of queer entrepreneurs, their motivations, the supports that they access, their challenges and barriers preventing access to entrepreneurial support, as well as preferences for support from the Queer Atlantic Business Hub. The following section outlines some high-level actions for how the Hub could contribute to decision making around designing and implementing programming.

Achieving true bilingualism for the Hub was identified as a priority for most participants in New Brunswick. This involves not just materials and translation in both French and English, but also attention to how queer Francophones are represented both culturally and in governance in future work. This requires deliberation and care in moving forward with models of participation that reflect genuine bilingualism, and should involve ongoing consultation with Hub members around preferences and experiences.

As well, the data suggests that there is a need to further consider what cultural safety and inclusion look like for other groups in order to better support Indigenous and Two Spirit people, racialized, trans, non-binary, neurodivergent, disabled, and rural entrepreneurs. Participants emphasize the need for decolonial approaches within the Hub's work and future work with Indigenous communities would provide greater detail about what this could look like in specific locations across New Brunswick and the region.

Across the Atlantic region, the research activities from the environmental scan could be further strengthened by additional, focused research on variations in experiences, needs and preferences of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs across the province. The interviews and survey participants represented a range of diversity beyond 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, however, there are gaps in understanding how intersectionality,

including Francophone and Acadian, ethno-racial identities, those who identify as dis/abled, in addition to trans and non-binary, plays out in some of the detailed descriptions. The data gathered points to differences across demographic groups and indicates that more work is needed to better understand inequities within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, to ultimately increase access for those with limited formal/institutional and informal resources.

Moving forward, gaps could be addressed using a number of broad approaches. Future research could focus on increasing knowledge of the different experiences, needs, and preferences of diverse groups within 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneur community across the province, including key details like the phase of business development and sector-specific information that may inform hub activities. This information could inform future planning, such as specific events, programming and directions for growth.

Processes are needed that ensure diverse representation and inclusion across all aspects of hub activities, including governance models, operations and program design. Collaboration with other community groups and organizations serving equity-deserving groups with and without established roots in entrepreneurship may also increase connection to those cut off from the organized 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneur community.

Possible tensions show up in diverse motivations and support needs. Ongoing deliberation about the needs of different groups within the community, and clear, transparent processes for developing priorities for programming and events could start to address differences. This could involve thinking about how programs can be a combination of inward- or outward-facing initiatives, to ensure that people have autonomy and choice within the hub network and balance the desire for visibility with concerns around safety.

The importance of political context was also raised by queer entrepreneurs in New Brunswick, particularly following the recent introduction and subsequent reversal of anti-trans policy in the education system. Future work at the hub could consider how best to advance the interests of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community through advocacy and other activities. Exploring collaboration with other community groups and organizations would likely be fruitful in this pursuit.

The support and hub activities prioritized by participants did not always align directly with the challenges they identified. As a result, it was not always clear how some preferred options would address specific issues they experience. Entrepreneurs expressed a mix of interest in relational aspects of entrepreneurship and in technical or professional resources, which may not equally directly address challenges such as discrimination or mental health, for example, though indirect benefits are possible. This underscores the importance of clearly defining objectives and expected outcomes so that both measurable and qualitative impacts and progress can be assessed.

Numerous challenges and preferences have been identified across New Brunswick. Conducting a structured needs assessment to map existing formal and informal supports and identify gaps would support more informed decision-making and planning. This could include clearly distinguishing mentorship and other supports by stage of

business development, as well as identifying strategies that align with regional resource gaps and availability. Queer entrepreneurs have also expressed interest in participating in hub activities in various roles; further exploration could help maximize participation and better meet member needs. This work could begin with a survey of hub members and other entrepreneurs and should be guided by an equity lens to identify priorities, gaps, and progress.