

Understanding the realities and addressing the needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island

A research brief and high-level gap analysis

Introduction

The following research brief highlights the experiences of entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island. 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 Prince Edward Island. 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.

A community engagement survey was administered online in French and English and collected a total of 111 responses (104 in English, 7 in French). In total, respondents included 12 participants in Prince Edward Island. Survey data provides a quantitative overview of entrepreneurial experiences, barriers, and support needs, and identifies patterns across provinces. The survey reflects 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.

There was some diversity in the demographic details (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, ethno-racial 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.

In addition to the survey, twenty nine semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually across Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. These regional findings are integrated into the broader analysis of queer entrepreneurship in Atlantic Canada.

The brief presents themes generated from a focused secondary analysis of the original environmental scan to identify content that was specifically relevant to 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island. 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.

Geography and demographic context

While Prince Edward Island has the smallest population in Atlantic Canada, its tight-knit communities, small business culture, and rural and urban settings produce a unique set of experiences for queer entrepreneurs.

Prince Edward Island has a population of approximately 175,000, with most residents living in rural areas and small communities connected through dense social networks. Charlottetown serves as the provincial hub for services, arts, and economic activity, but the majority of queer entrepreneurs navigate environments where “everyone knows each other,” which shapes decisions about visibility, identity expression, and business branding. The size of the province means that local markets are limited and small business success often relies on maintaining strong relationships and networks.

Prince Edward Island has a small but vibrant queer community, though formal queer spaces and structured supports remain limited. Visibility can carry both opportunity and risk, and many queer entrepreneurs adopt strategies of partial or contextual disclosure depending on audience, sector, and safety considerations. Economic conditions in the province are strongly influenced by tourism, seasonal labour, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Many queer entrepreneurs operate micro enterprises or service-based businesses with fluctuating demand.

There is a small but significant Francophone population in the province. Of the roughly 5,620 Francophones, many are distributed around the island, but most live in the Western part of the province, including the Évangéline and Summerside regions, as well as in Charlottetown. In addition to the Francophone population, there are other significant social, ethnic, racial and cultural groups within the province. Overall the province has an Indigenous population of 3,385, mostly from the Mi'kmaq community, and the land is unceded by this nation. Prince Edward Island is also home to several other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples with unique cultures and histories.

The province represents a number of racialized communities (approximately 9.5% of the total population) with around 3,735 people identifying as South Asian, 3,340 people

identifying as Chinese, 1,815 people identifying as Black, and 1,765 identifying as Filipino. The population has grown relatively rapidly in the last decade due to international and inter-provincial migration. Thus, 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. Almost one third (31.8%) of the population aged 15 years and older identify as having a disability.

There are 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.

Experiences of entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island:

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 across the region reflects a strong desire for an authentic expression of identity in work, such as through running an explicitly queer business, integrating queer aesthetics and politics into creative work, or simply not having to hide gender or relationship status in professional settings. At the same time, acknowledgment of diverse visibility needs were reflected in the desire to be able to showcase queer work while also maintaining safety for those not able to be publicly out in all contexts.

In every province across Atlantic Canada, participants conveyed 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. Entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island often start businesses to pursue autonomy, align work with personal values, or create safe and welcoming spaces they cannot find elsewhere. Because the local economy is deeply relational, Prince Edward Island entrepreneurs emphasized trust, authenticity, and reputation in their narratives

Authenticity is another major driver that appears consistently, though it plays out differently across provinces. For some respondents, entrepreneurship provides a path

to stay on the Island while living authentically. Others noted that starting their own business allowed them to avoid heteronormative or exclusionary workplace cultures. Some queer entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island described a careful balance between being out enough to feel honest and connected, and managing visibility so that business survival is not put at risk in very small markets. Some participants described creating “quietly queer” spaces that feel welcoming and safe without being branded in ways that could invite backlash. Identity-based visibility must be navigated especially carefully for trans, gender-diverse, or racialized entrepreneurs.

Representation plays a particularly important role for queer entrepreneurs in cultural, creative, and community-based sectors across the Atlantic region. Some participants spoke about wanting to be a queer reference point for younger queer and trans people or being visible in their community. For others, especially in rural and small town contexts, starting a business is one of the only viable ways to stay in their home community while building a livelihood that feels somewhat sustainable. In Francophone and Acadian settings, this often includes the added layer of linguistic representation: A desire for spaces where French and queerness can coexist without one being sidelined. In Indigenous and Two Spirit contexts, entrepreneurship is also described 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 suggests that entrepreneurship is not just an economic choice for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. It is also a strategy for survival, a vehicle for control over work and authenticity, and an avenue for representing communities that remain underseen in mainstream business landscapes.

Existing supports

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 identified areas of support that they currently access, including formal and informal mentoring, online business communities and queer-specific networks, government programs and loans or grant programs. Notably, many entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island also indicated that they did not access any support for their entrepreneurial pursuits, indicating that these were either unavailable or that there were barriers to accessing relevant supports.

Across all four provinces, human relationships are the most decisive form of support for queer and trans entrepreneurs. Formal programs play a role, but the survey and interview data show that mentoring relationships, peer networks, and community

connections are the most significant in people's experiences. On Prince Edward Island, the small scale of the province shapes support patterns. Many entrepreneurs rely on a few key relationships, such as a supportive accountant, a trusted advisor in government or the non-profit sector, or a community elder who has extensive experience. Peer support is often informal and happens in everyday spaces rather than organized programs.

Across all provinces, community support in the form of loyal clients, word of mouth promotion, and local media coverage plays a key role in keeping businesses afloat. 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, is 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. However, access to these supports is uneven, with urban centres and those already connected to institutional networks more likely to benefit.

Experiential learning was a recurring thread in every province. Many entrepreneurs bring experience from family businesses, previous roles, or earlier attempts at self employment. These histories provide practical skills and a sense of what is possible, even when formal support is limited. Several participants describe learning by watching others, trying things out, and "figuring it out together" with a small circle of peers.

Taken together, the data suggest 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 experiences gathered across the Atlantic provinces reveal an ecosystem marked by multiple, interconnected obstacles. While some are shared widely across the region, others take on specific forms in each province. 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island identified numerous challenges and barriers for accessing the support that they need, including gaps in the entrepreneurial environment, lack of access to technical and professional support, geographical barriers, discrimination, and mental health challenges.

Across Atlantic Canada, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is fragmented, with queer entrepreneurs often navigating a patchwork of support that varies in accessibility, cultural competence, and relevance. Structural gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem

are evident across the Atlantic region, with very few queer-specific business networks, especially outside major cities. Many existing programs are perceived as not fully inclusive because they lack cultural competence, are only in English, or assume a particular business model. Creative and cultural sectors, including drag, music, and visual arts, are especially underserved, with limited access to agents, booking structures, or distribution platforms that understand queer and regional realities.

Legal and financial barriers appear more prominently in Prince Edward Island compared to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, likely reflecting the Island's small business culture, limited local professional services, and the high cost of contracting specialists. 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. In rural and remote areas, limited access to banks or in person financial advice compounds the challenge. Despite the reliance on informal relationships for support, a pronounced lack of mentorship options also distinguishes Prince Edward Island from larger provinces.

Across the region, many participants report that institutional actors, including large corporations and mainstream business networks, are not leaders in advancing queer entrepreneurship. Diversity initiatives are often experienced as tokenistic, rather than structurally transformative. This contributes to a sense of isolation or of being only partially welcome in spaces that were not designed for queer and trans entrepreneurs.

Queer and trans entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island report encountering gender bias, heteronormativity, and subtle (or overt) skepticism in interactions with funders, landlords, suppliers, and institutional partners. Discrimination and bias was described across the region as a frequent occurrence that negatively impacts mental health and wellbeing. In Prince Edward Island, participants described a diffuse sense of risk, linked to worry about gossip, social consequences, or backlash in small communities.

Across the Atlantic region, 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. For trans and nonbinary entrepreneurs, administrative systems can be particularly challenging to navigate, and safety concerns frame networking and visibility decisions. Entrepreneurs in rural Prince Edward Island describe isolation, limited local markets, and high travel costs as major constraints. Access to mental health care, social benefits, and stable housing also affect entrepreneurial capacity, especially for self-employed and gig workers. Respondents noted that because queer entrepreneurs on Prince Edward Island are few in number, support gaps, including mental health strain and identity-based exclusion, can feel magnified.

Within this context, needs converge around a more accessible, interconnected, and adequately resourced ecosystem that includes 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 Francophone pockets of Prince Edward Island, language and queerness intersect to produce layered invisibility and distance from mainstream business and queer environments.

Access to resources in French is a recurring challenge. Francophone participants 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.

For some, French and queer visibility can both feel risky, depending on context. Experiences of marginalization from mainstream business (due to queer identity) and queer spaces (due to Francophone identity) affects how comfortable people feel seeking support, how easily they can navigate forms and processes, and whether they feel that their communities and cultural references are understood.

Across the Atlantic region, Francophone participants express a strong desire for a Hub that is truly bilingual in culture, not only in translation. This involves building governance, engagement, and programming practices that reflect Francophone and Acadian realities, acknowledge the specific pressures of linguistic minority status, and treat language as an equity issue rather than a logistical afterthought.

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 Prince Edward Island, participants described the desire for increased access to navigational support and practical resources, including information on funding, access workshops 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.

The relatively small size of Prince Edward Island means that entrepreneurs want programming that is relational, safe, and context specific. Peer support emerged as a more prominent desire in Prince Edward Island than in other provinces, reflecting the emotional and social dimensions of working in tight-knit communities. Queer

entrepreneurs in this province emphasize the need for low-barrier, relationship-centred spaces rather than highly formal or corporate style programming. There is interest in the Hub as a way to connect to opportunities away from the island, while also validating the existence of queer businesses.

Across all provinces, visibility and representation are 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. Practical resources to reduce administrative burden and decision fatigue are also high on the list.

Accessibility and equity considerations surfaced frequently in relation to the Hub. Participants stressed the importance of bilingualism, 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 Prince Edward Island. 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.

Across the Atlantic region, the research from the environmental scan could be strengthened by additional, focused research on variations in experiences, needs and preferences of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs across the province. The interviews and survey participants represented some diversity beyond 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, however, there are gaps in understanding how intersecting identities and contexts – including Indigenous, Francophone and ethno-racial identities, rural or remote dwellers, and those who identify as dis/abled, trans or non-binary – play 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.

As well, the data suggests that there is a need to further consider what cultural safety and inclusion looks 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 Prince Edward Island and the region.

Processes are needed to 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.

Prince Edward Island participants stressed the importance of informal support and community networks in part due to the small size of the province, rural residents and relative lack of resources. Collaboration with other community groups and organizations serving equity-deserving groups with and without established roots in entrepreneurship may help to create greater connections for those in need of networks across the province. Planning and program operation at the Hub should include prioritizing methods that maximize connections to more remote locations that may have access to fewer resources due to population size and other factors.

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. The desire to choose how, and the extent to which, queer identity shows up in one's business, was a clear need for entrepreneurs in Prince

Edward Island particularly in small knit communities with close ties and limited local markets. Addressing differences in visibility needs could involve thinking about how programs can be a combination of inward- or outward-facing initiatives, to ensure that people have autonomy within the hub network and balance the desire for visibility with concerns around safety.

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.

Furthermore, the survey data revealed a significant number of queer participants in Prince Edward Island reported having no support relevant to their entrepreneurial pursuits. This highlights likely inequities in availability of resources and support across geographies and provinces, and raises questions around how to mediate or address these in the programming, planning and governance of the Hub.

Numerous challenges and preferences have been identified across Prince Edward Island. Future research could focus on increasing understanding of the different experiences, needs and preferences of diverse groups within 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneur community across the Atlantic region, including key details like phase of business development, sector-specific information, as well as identifying strategies that align with regional resource gaps and availability. Such work could feed into planning around logistics, like the location of events and different modes of access (e.g., virtual, accessibility options) to Hub programs. This information could inform hub activities, decision-making and future planning, such as specific events, programming and directions for growth, and should be guided by an equity lens to identify priorities, gaps, and progress.

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