

## Centering equity in the activities of the Queer Atlantic Business Hub

The observations outlined in the four Atlantic provincial briefs are informed by data collected on the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs, including the challenges that they face, and their engagement with and preferences for support. While participants described strong motivations to pursue entrepreneurship and highlighted the importance of informal networks and community support, the data also suggested that there is uneven access to formal support and resources across the region.

There appears to be inequities shaped by geography and available infrastructure, with rural entrepreneurs and those outside established networks reporting fewer opportunities and connections. Expanding connections to rural and remote regions, through partnerships, hybrid programming, and network building, may help reduce geographic inequities and increase access to support.

At the same time, gaps remain in understanding equity-related challenges in access to resources, representation, and participation within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In particular, knowledge is incomplete about how intersecting identities, including Indigenous, racialized, trans, non-binary, neurodivergent, and disabled identities, shape the experiences of queer entrepreneurs. Achieving equitable participation in the Hub will therefore require greater attention to how intersectionality influences access to programs, mentorship, and funding, as well as deeper research on variations in needs and preferences across the community.

Addressing inequities will require intentional and inclusive approaches to research, governance, and program design. Future work might prioritize targeted research that expands knowledge of the diverse experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs across the region, including differences by identity, geography, sector, and business characteristics, in order to better inform programming and strategic priorities. Participants emphasized the importance of culturally safe and inclusive spaces, including the need for decolonial approaches and meaningful engagement with Francophone entrepreneurs to achieve genuine bilingual participation.

Elaboration of these approaches and strengthening equitable participation will involve ensuring diverse representation in governance and decision-making structures, as well as sustained collaboration with community organizations working with equity-deserving groups who may not currently be connected to formal entrepreneurial networks. This will require commitment given the small population sizes in Atlantic provinces compared with the rest of the country, and the relative invisibility of underrepresented groups within the broader community.

Intersectional research elaborating on the experiences of the diverse groups within the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities has historically been very limited in Canada, with some

expansion over the last 5 to 10 years. Furthermore, research on 2SLGBTQIA+ business owners in general is relatively recent and research that focuses on the entire Atlantic region is also new. While a lens revealing the layered effects of multiple sources of marginalization in accessing opportunity for entrepreneurs is needed, it is also important to recognize that this kind of research and knowledge mobilization to capture experiences and implement meaningful changes to achieve equity requires commitment, including time and resources, in order to avoid tokenism and perpetuating further harm.

At the same time, there are existing data sources about equity-deserving entrepreneurial groups across Canada that might augment existing information and reveal opportunities for generating future knowledge at the Queer Atlantic Business Hub. A select sample, identified by a rapid scan of research sources, is described here. These are limited in their potential to shed light on the Atlantic provinces due to their Canada-wide lens, however, they do raise some key themes that are likely to be relevant to all regions across the country. Most or all reports recognize the significant contribution that various equity-deserving entrepreneurial communities make to the economy already and aim to increase the potential for success in this area for these groups.

## **Black entrepreneurs**

### *Black Entrepreneurship in Canada: Results and Insights from the 2024 BEKH National Survey*

Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, 2024

<https://www.bekh.org/news/bekh-launches-national-data-repository-on-black-entrepreneurship>

One of the largest surveys of its kind, the Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub collected 2,688 survey responses from Black entrepreneurs across Canada, shedding light on a business ecosystem shaped by resource gaps, regulatory hurdles, and limited access to finances. It highlights the realities faced by Black entrepreneurs and identifies the shortcomings of policy and investment. The research includes: Features of Black entrepreneurship in Canada; the context and dynamics of Black entrepreneurship, including challenges and opportunities; and recommendations to improve the experiences and success of Black business owners.

Some key points from the research include:

- Black Canadians represent a dynamic and diverse group with distinct patterns across age, religion, languages, and nationalities. Over the last decade, Black communities are growing in number and geographic representation across Canada and will likely soon become the second largest racialized group.
- In 2020, the Labour Force Survey estimated 144,980 Black businesses in Canada, which represents 2.4% of roughly 6 million businesses recorded by this survey

- 3.2% of Black business owners across the country are located in Atlantic Canada
- A total of 6.8% of respondents identified as individuals with disabilities. In terms of gender identity, the majority (71.2%) identified as male, while 28.8% identified as female. A smaller percentage (4.2%) identified as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Regarding linguistic identity, 28.1% of respondents identified as Francophones, with the majority (71.9%) identifying as Anglophone
- 52% are first generation immigrants
- 88% are young to middle aged (26-55 years old)
- 29% are women entrepreneurs
- Black businesses are mostly self-financed, often underfunded, typically generate small revenues, and experience slow growth
- Access to funding remains a critical issue for Black entrepreneurs and more needs to be done to increase awareness of funding opportunities available for support and access to financing
  - The survey showed that 75% of Black Entrepreneurs in New Brunswick were unaware of funding opportunities designed to support them
- Black businesses are concentrated in a few sectors – most of the businesses are in the professional, scientific, and technical services; and arts, entertainment, and recreation industries. Fewer businesses are in agriculture, utilities, and wholesale trade sectors
- Black business owners are increasingly digitally connected, leveraging technology and expanding their reach to international markets.
- In terms of motivations for entrepreneurship, the top negative experiences driving business ownership are unemployment, lack of job security, and discrimination. On the other hand, top positive motivators are the desire for independence, passion, and addressing unmet market needs.
- Black business owners are significantly impacted by caregiving responsibilities, with 54.8% reporting moderate to significant effects.

### *What can the data tell us about Black Entrepreneurs in Canada*

Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), January 2024

<https://lmic-cimt.ca/part-2-what-can-the-data-tell-us-about-black-entrepreneurs-in-canada/>

The LMIC analyzed Statistics Canada data from 2018 and 2021 to investigate what the data reveals about Black entrepreneurship in Canada. The LMIC also conducted interviews with a sample of Black business owners to explore motivations for entrepreneurship. The online report reveals the gender breakdown of business ownership, the top countries of origin, information about age and the main sectors attracting Black business owners.

Some key points from the research are:

- In 2018, among Black-owned businesses, far more men than women are owners (70.4% versus 29.6%).
- In 2018, Black-owned businesses, whether incorporated or unincorporated, were well represented, relative to other sectors, in transportation and warehousing

(34.3% for unincorporated and 14.2% for incorporated businesses), along with significant representation in professional, scientific, and technical services (10.4% for unincorporated and 17.7% for incorporated businesses).

- Interviews with Black entrepreneurs reveal that labour market inequalities (e.g., high rates of anti-Black racism in workplaces) push entrepreneurs into business ownership.
- Interviews also revealed that some Black entrepreneurs experienced being motivated by a strong desire and capacity to provide ethnic or cultural goods or services where there was consumer demand.

## Racialized Entrepreneurs

### *Social Indicators of Disparity for Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (IBPOC): Representation in Business*

Prepared for the Canadian Network of Equity and Racial Justice. 2025

[https://canwcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/CNERJ-Report\\_Representation-in-Business\\_O.Adewusi\\_CanWCC\\_Apr2025.pdf](https://canwcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/CNERJ-Report_Representation-in-Business_O.Adewusi_CanWCC_Apr2025.pdf)

The report was generated as part of the Canadian Network for Equity and Racial Justice's (CNERJ) broader commitment to dismantling systemic racial inequities. It uses a disaggregated and intersectional lens to explore the landscape of IBPOC business ownership in Canada. Data sources are primarily from Statistics Canada. It examines key indicators such as business ownership rates, revenue performance, business formation trends, regional and sectoral representation, and barriers to success.

Some key findings include:

- There are disparities in business ownership across ethnic and racial groups. Disaggregated data shows that there is significant underrepresentation for some groups, particularly for Black, Filipino, Indigenous, Latin American, and Japanese entrepreneurs. They own fewer businesses than their population shares, highlighting the need for targeted interventions rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.
- IBPOC business ownership increased by 12.1% between 2019 and 2021, which was greater than non-IBPOC growth. Despite this, most IBPOC-owned businesses remain small and concentrated in lower-revenue sectors such as transportation, warehousing, and accommodation, with the majority generating under \$30,000 in annual revenue.
- Women and disabled IBPOC business owners face greater, compounded challenges than others and are less likely to own businesses.
- A primary challenge facing IBPOC entrepreneurs is access to financing, with more than 80% using personal monies to fund initiatives. There are also related gaps in business networks and skill development opportunities.

- Recommendations for support of IBPOC entrepreneurs through public policy include expanding equitable access to financial capital, investing in community based business networks and strengthening access to skills development.

## **Indigenous entrepreneurs**

*Bridging the Digital Divide: Enhancing Access for Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Canada*  
Indigenous Prosperity Foundation. 2025  
<https://www.indigenousfoundation.ca/digital>

Indigenous entrepreneurs continue to face systemic barriers that limit their participation in Canada's digital economy. These challenges extend beyond connectivity to involve affordability, digital skills gaps, funding inequities, and systemic exclusion from mainstream support programs that create significant roadblocks to inclusion within the business ownership landscape. Addressing these issues is critical to advancing economic reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination. The Indigenous Prosperity Foundation engaged in a number of research activities to inform understandings and action related to these issues for Indigenous entrepreneurs, including a literature review, qualitative interview and a survey.

Some key findings include:

- Indigenous businesses are in a position for considerable growth, however, digital barriers and exclusion, including high costs, unreliable broadband, and limited access to training, are holding many Indigenous entrepreneurs back.
- 65% of Indigenous entrepreneurs struggle with high internet costs and unreliable broadband, limiting their ability to work within the economy.
- 57% lack access to digital training.
- 39% cite a lack of mentorship and digital business support as obstacles to navigating financing, technology adoption, and market expansion.
- 91% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs face financial constraints, and many experience online harassment, discouraging participation in the digital marketplace.

## **Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs in Canada**

National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association. 2020  
<https://nacca.ca/iwe-research-reports/>

The National Aboriginal Capital Corporations (NACCA) is a network of 59 Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFI) across Canada that is dedicated to stimulating economic growth for all Indigenous people in Canada. The research was initiated due to inequities observed between Indigenous men and women in entrepreneurship. Indigenous women do not pursue entrepreneurship at the same rate that Indigenous men do, and they overcome greater challenges in pursuing their entrepreneurship pursuits. NACCA's

research includes a literature review and a national survey of 114 Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Canada. The research looked at information about the entrepreneurs and businesses, the support that they have received and also what is needed moving forward for support. Of note, gender was defined as male/female. Although the reports acknowledge the role of Two Spirit people in creative and entrepreneurial endeavours, the survey did not make provisions for non-binary identities.

Some key findings include:

- A majority of Indigenous women entrepreneurs from the survey had businesses located off territory in an urban setting, were structured as a sole proprietorship, operated full time, owned 100% of their business, and had been in operation for 1–5 years. They used their own savings to start their businesses, just over half had employees and they used various resources. Many respondents also indicated that they had accessed numerous supports, including workshops and training, mentorship programs, and a much smaller number identified receiving financial support.
- The primary motivations for pursuing entrepreneurship were greater freedom and flexibility and a passion to create a product or service (64% identified this as a top driver), economic independence (43%), the need for income (41%) and the need for work life balance (30%).
- The top three challenges around entrepreneurship identified by Indigenous women were access to financing (48% identified this as a top challenge), balancing family and business (40%), and a lack of business training (33%).
- Numerous recommendations are outlined in the report and these include ensuring equitable access to capital to support Indigenous women in their business pursuits and increasing their representation in leadership, strategic development, decision making, and service delivery.

## **Entrepreneurs with disabilities**

### *Environmental Scan on Entrepreneurs with Disabilities*

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2023

<https://www.srdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Environmental-Scan-of-Entrepreneurs-with-Disabilities-Project-Report-Final-26-Oct-23.pdf>

This purpose of this project aimed to fill a knowledge gap on the experiences of people with disabilities pursuing self-employment income or entrepreneurship. It conducts a scan of both Canadian and international studies and an intersectional lens to capture the intersections between disabilities, gender, and race. Areas covered by the research include: the impacts of COVID-19 on entrepreneurs with a disability in Canada; diverse experiences of entrepreneurs with a disability in an inaccessible society; motivations for pursuing entrepreneurship; barriers to entrepreneurship, including access to education and information, economic and material resources, social networks and support; existing supports and services for entrepreneurs with disabilities in Canada; barriers

and gaps in support services; examples of programs that support entrepreneurs with disabilities internationally; and best practices for supporting entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Some key findings include:

- The motivations of entrepreneurs with disabilities are complex and multifaceted, involving individual, social and economic factors, and broader systemic inequities and discrimination. For some pursuing business ownership is less a choice and more of a necessity due to persistent barriers to inclusion in traditional forms of employment.
- Entrepreneurs with disabilities represent a greater proportion of newly established businesses compared to the overall small and medium business landscape
- People with disabilities operated a higher proportion of small and medium enterprises in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector (26.2% compared to 14.4%), and the information and communication technologies sector (11.4% compared to 4.0%) when compared to all small and medium enterprises.
- The main barriers and corresponding enablers faced by entrepreneurs with disabilities in Canada are access to education and information, economic and material resources, and social networks and support.
- Best practices include offering programs and services specifically aimed at people with disabilities who have intersecting identities, such as women, and BIPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ people who face amplified barriers to entrepreneurship. Disability service providers are often ill-equipped to provide culturally-sensitive support to marginalized groups.
- Other important approaches to improving outcomes for entrepreneurs with disabilities involve providing accessible business-related training and support services, offering adequate financial support and wrap-around services, supporting the development of formal and informal networks, and increasing the visibility of entrepreneurs with disabilities to counter stereotypes.

## **Two Spirit, trans and non-binary entrepreneurs**

*Working for Change: Understanding the employment experiences of Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people in Canada*

Egale, 2024

[https://indd.adobe.com/view/publication/58481269-3b10-4fa1-be9f-3a9e0848e5d3/1/publication-web-resources/pdf/EN-Working\\_For\\_Change\\_Report.pdf](https://indd.adobe.com/view/publication/58481269-3b10-4fa1-be9f-3a9e0848e5d3/1/publication-web-resources/pdf/EN-Working_For_Change_Report.pdf)

Egale's purpose was to create a better understanding of the employment landscape Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people navigate. The study was initiated, informed and conducted by, for, and with trans and nonbinary researchers with support from the broader research team at Egale, a Two Spirit project advisor, peer reviewers, and community members, including the Youth Project (NS) and Quadrangle (NL). From

September 2022 to February 2023, the team conducted 79 interviews and collected 555 survey responses from 2STNB people across Canada. Of the survey respondents, 31 were in French, and 524 were in English. Twenty of the interviews were conducted in Atlantic provinces. The findings describe: 2STNB participants' experiences with navigating the workplace, quitting or leaving their jobs; barriers to employment, experiences of unemployment and underemployment, job seeking, experiences with employment services organizations, and supportive work environments; the experiences of those with intersecting trans and disabled identities; living conditions outside the workplace that impact ability to access work; inequitable access to education as a barrier to employment opportunities; impact of experiences on mental health; and recommendations for employers, allies, and government and systems change. The research also resulted in a Newfoundland and Labrador-specific fact sheet (<https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Working-For-Change-Fact-Sheets-NL.pdf>).

The research includes the following observations:

- Of the interview participants, 14 (18%) and 37 (6.7%) of the survey participants were self-employed.
- Data revealed significant barriers in workplaces and the majority of respondents reported experiences of microaggressions, discrimination and harassment in workplaces for 2STNB participants.
- Some interview participants spoke of choosing to leave or quitting their jobs for reasons including workplace safety concerns and psychologically harmful work environments, or to pursue employment elsewhere or be self-employed, as well as to pursue educational opportunities. Other participants shared their experiences being forced out of the workplace through being laid off or terminated. Mental health was an overarching theme in participants' descriptions of leaving their jobs, with people describing a range of stressors.
- The intersection between trans identity and disability created significant challenges for many interview participants. This included difficulty finding employment and for some the inability to work full-time hours.
- The research generated many recommendations for workplaces, allies, governments and systems. One example points to the need for more flexible workplace conditions, including flexible working hours and where possible to allow for greater accessibility and flexibility for 2STNB employees with mental health issues, caregiving duties, disabilities and healthcare challenges, and those who are in training or in educational programs.

## **Immigrant entrepreneurs**

*Economic and Social Reports. Immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada: Highlights from recent studies*

Statistics Canada, 2021

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021009/article/00001-eng.htm>

This report highlights the main findings of the Immigrant Entrepreneurs Research Program initiated by the Research and Evaluation Branch of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Statistics Canada. The findings include information on: who are immigrant entrepreneurs, including demographic information and immigration pathways; a description of what business ownership looks like for immigrants to Canada; outcomes for business owners who are immigrants in Canada; and approaches to financing.

Some key observations from the research:

- Historically higher self-employment rates among immigrants (first generation in Canada) has in part been driven by the difficulty of finding suitable paid employment.
- Immigrant entrepreneurs come from all immigration admission pathways (e.g., economic class, refugee class, family class)
- Approximately 80% of immigrant owners of private companies were still in business two years after becoming owners and 58% after seven years. These rates were similar to those of Canadian-born owners.
- Recent immigrants (those in Canada for less than 10 years) had higher exit rates from ownership and shorter durations than the Canadian-born population or longer-term immigrants.

*Economic Analysis: Immigrant entrepreneurship is taking centre stage in Canada*

The Business Development Bank of Canada. 2024

<https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/blog/immigrant-entrepreneurship-taking-centre-stage-canada>

This online analysis offers data on immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada. The information includes: some demographic breakdown of immigrant entrepreneur population, projection of future breakdown of immigrant entrepreneurs in the country, and challenges and opportunities for immigrant owned businesses.

Some key observations from the research:

- Women identifying immigrants are underrepresented in entrepreneurship in Canada.
- The Atlantic region has the smallest proportion of immigrant entrepreneurs compared to other regions across the country – comprising 16% of entrepreneurs in this region.
- Immigrant-led firms are characterized as more financially fragile based on a number of indicators.

## **Women entrepreneurs**

*The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada*

Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, 2025

[https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/WEKH\\_The-State-of-Womens-Entrepreneurship-in-Canada-2025.pdf](https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/WEKH_The-State-of-Womens-Entrepreneurship-in-Canada-2025.pdf)

This report draws from national data, from Statistics Canada and other sources, to describe the impact of female entrepreneurs, challenges and opportunities, impactful programs and policies, as well as recommendations for change to better support and promote women entrepreneurs in Canada.

Some key findings are as follows:

- Research has shown that women entrepreneurs with intersecting identities, including Indigenous women, racialized and Black women, immigrant women, women with disabilities, and those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, often face additional barriers. These include access to capital and financial services, bias and discrimination, difficulties building and leveraging networks, language and cultural barriers, and inequitable financial structures. Despite these challenges, women with intersecting identities exhibit higher entrepreneurial rates than women overall in Canada.
- The breakdown of equity-deserving groups by small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) ownership are - 17.8% of all SMEs in Canada were majority women-owned in 2023. Women-owned SMEs represented 30.4% of SMEs owned by Indigenous Peoples, 21.3% of SMEs majority owned by racialized people, 38.8% of SMEs majority owned by Black people, 23.1% of SMEs majority owned by persons with disabilities and 35.7% of SMEs majority owned by 2SLGBTQ+ individuals women entrepreneurs by equity-deserving group. Majority men-owned SMEs dominate with the greater share across all of these intersecting groups.
- In terms of sector, women majority SMEs have the highest representation in retail and service sectors (professional, scientific and technical services, accommodation and food)
- There are resources available, including the Inclusive Entrepreneurship Competency Framework (IECF), which outline core competencies that are crucial for entrepreneurs at every stage of business development and specialized competencies tailored to the specific needs of entrepreneurs from different equity-deserving groups and industry sectors.

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