



Indigenous
Prosperity
Foundation

**BRIDGING THE
DIGITAL DIVIDE:
ENHANCING ACCESS FOR
INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEURS
IN CANADA**

Interview
Summary Report



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Prosperity
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INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

Bridging the Digital Divide: Enhancing Access for Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Canada

Prepared By
The Indigenous Prosperity Foundation

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Executive Summary

Indigenous entrepreneurs continue to face systemic barriers that limit their participation in Canada's digital economy. These challenges extend beyond connectivity—affordability, digital skills gaps, funding inequities, and systemic exclusion from mainstream support programs create significant roadblocks. Addressing these issues is critical to advancing economic reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination.

To gain deeper insight into these barriers and identify solutions, the Indigenous Prosperity Foundation (IPF) conducted interviews with 18 Indigenous entrepreneurs, non-profit leaders, and industry experts across Canada. Their lived experiences provide a comprehensive, real-world perspective on the digital divide and the urgent need for systemic change.

Key Findings

1. Persistent Connectivity Gaps Undermine Business Viability

Indigenous entrepreneurs, particularly in rural and remote areas, face unreliable and expensive Internet access.

- Many communities still lack the infrastructure to support high-speed Internet, leaving entrepreneurs unable to fully participate in the digital economy.
- Satellite-based services, like Starlink, offer promise but remain financially out of reach for most businesses.

The digital divide is not just a rural issue.

- While urban Indigenous entrepreneurs often have better Internet access, cost and service reliability remain concerns for those running businesses from home.
- One interviewee described how entrepreneurs must drive to specific locations just to access a stable connection.

Mobile Internet is the only option for many, but it's not enough.

- Several entrepreneurs reported relying solely on mobile phones for business operations, limiting their ability to manage online sales, digital marketing, and client relationships effectively.

2. The High Cost of Technology Limits Business Success

Many Indigenous entrepreneurs cannot afford essential business technology.

- Laptops, software, and digital tools remain out of reach for many due to financial constraints.

- One interviewee highlighted that even when funding is available, access to appropriate hardware and software remains a challenge.

Outdated or second-hand technology limits business operations.

- Entrepreneurs often rely on older, slower computers that hinder their ability to manage e-commerce platforms, financial systems, and marketing tools.
- A digital business consultant noted that many Indigenous entrepreneurs use “makeshift” solutions due to the high cost of software and hardware upgrades.

3. Indigenous Entrepreneurs Face Significant Digital Skills Gaps

Many business owners lack foundational digital skills, creating major barriers to success.

- Several interviewees emphasized that even basic tasks—such as managing spreadsheets, using financial software, or navigating digital payment systems—can be a challenge.
- Existing training programs often fail to meet Indigenous entrepreneurs where they are.

Training programs are often disconnected from Indigenous ways of learning.

- Many digital training initiatives lack cultural relevance, making them less effective for Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- One leader emphasized the need for training that incorporates Indigenous knowledge, storytelling, and hands-on mentorship.

Youth and older entrepreneurs face different but equally significant challenges.

- Indigenous youth are often more digitally fluent but lack early exposure to business tools like e-commerce and CRM software.
- Older entrepreneurs struggle with rapid technological change, requiring more accessible, tailored digital training.

4. Systemic Barriers in Funding & Financing Exclude Indigenous Entrepreneurs

Access to capital remains a major challenge.

- Traditional financing models do not work for many Indigenous businesses, which often lack the collateral or credit history required for loans.
- One expert noted that grant programs frequently require upfront payments, making them inaccessible to entrepreneurs with limited financial resources.

Short-term, reimbursement-based grants create additional barriers.

- Most grants require recipients to cover costs upfront and then submit receipts for reimbursement.
- Many Indigenous entrepreneurs do not have the cash flow to cover these costs, preventing them from accessing critical funding.

Indigenous women and youth face additional financial constraints.

- Women entrepreneurs, in particular, struggle to balance caregiving responsibilities with securing funding for their businesses.
- Youth often lack financial literacy training, making it difficult to navigate funding applications and business financing options.

5. Existing Support Programs Are Fragmented and Difficult to Navigate

Entrepreneurs often experience ‘referral loops’ between disconnected support systems.

- Several interviewees described being passed between multiple organizations without receiving tangible support.
- One entrepreneur said they spent two weeks being referred from one organization to another, only to end up back at square one.

Mistrust of financial institutions and government programs is a significant issue.

- Historical and systemic barriers continue to discourage Indigenous entrepreneurs from engaging with mainstream funding and business development programs.

Recommendations for Action

Invest in Indigenous-Led Broadband and Digital Infrastructure

- Expand Indigenous-owned broadband initiatives to ensure long-term digital sovereignty.
- Fund low-cost, high-speed Internet solutions tailored to Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Make Digital Tools and Training Affordable and Accessible

- Develop hardware and software subsidy programs for Indigenous businesses.
- Provide culturally relevant, hands-on digital training that incorporates Indigenous knowledge and mentorship.

Reform Funding Models to Remove Systemic Barriers

- Shift from reimbursement-based grants to upfront capital support.
- Create low-interest loan programs and micro-grants specifically designed for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Strengthen Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Cybersecurity

- Invest in Indigenous-led digital governance frameworks to protect data and business assets.
- Expand cybersecurity training and support programs for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Improve Coordination Between Support Programs

- Establish a centralized Indigenous entrepreneurship support network to prevent entrepreneurs from getting lost in referral loops.
- Ensure government and non-profit programs are streamlined and accessible.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

The findings from these interviews reinforce that Indigenous entrepreneurs are being systematically excluded from Canada's digital economy due to connectivity challenges, financial barriers, and systemic inequities. Bridging the digital divide is not just about technology—it is about economic reconciliation, self-determination, and long-term sustainability.

Governments, funding organizations, and tech companies must take immediate action to:

- Invest in Indigenous-led digital solutions that empower entrepreneurs.
- Create financial systems that work for Indigenous businesses.
- Ensure training programs are relevant, accessible, and culturally aligned.

Indigenous entrepreneurs are ready to lead in the digital economy—but they need the right tools, funding, and infrastructure to succeed. Now is the time to act.

1. Introduction

Following the literature review, which highlighted the existing research on digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs, this chapter delves into the perspectives of expert stakeholders gathered through a series of interviews. The purpose of this qualitative research was to deepen the understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and systemic needs related to digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs and to build upon the findings of previous research.

The insights presented in this chapter are grounded in conversations with a carefully selected group of participants, including Indigenous entrepreneurs, non-profit leaders, and industry experts. These voices represent a range of geographies, expertise, and lived experiences, offering a well-rounded perspective on the state of digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs in Canada's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Methodology

The interviews were conducted between September and November 2024, using a semi-structured format designed to explore key themes in digital access. Fourteen interviews were held via Zoom, enabling dynamic dialogue, while four were completed through written questionnaires to accommodate participant availability and preference. Questions were categorized into four thematic areas:

1. **Existing Resources:** Identifying the resources and programs currently available, their effectiveness, and the challenges entrepreneurs face at various stages of their journeys.
2. **Gaps and Opportunities:** Uncovering unmet needs, systemic barriers, and areas where additional support is most required.
3. **Recommendations:** Eliciting actionable strategies for improving digital access and enhancing support systems for Indigenous entrepreneurs.
4. **Vision for the Future:** Exploring aspirations for a more equitable digital ecosystem.

The inclusion of open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed, context-rich responses, enhancing the depth of insights collected.

Participants

The participant pool included 18 leaders across diverse sectors, categorized as follows:

- **Entrepreneurs (6):** Indigenous and non-Indigenous business owners actively navigating digital challenges and opportunities.
- **Non-Profit Leaders (10):** Representatives of organizations supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs through training, funding, and ecosystem development.
- **Industry Leaders (2):** Experts shaping policy and driving innovation in technology and economic development.

Geographically, participants hailed from across Canada, representing regions such as Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. This diversity ensured a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities specific to both rural and urban contexts. Notably, 10 participants self-identified as Indigenous, centring Indigenous perspectives and priorities throughout this chapter.

Chapter Purpose and Scope

This chapter synthesizes the interview findings and offers a detailed account of the current landscape of digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs. It builds upon the literature review by grounding findings in real-world experiences and expertise. The insights presented here illuminate structural barriers, highlight successful interventions and offer clear, actionable pathways forward.

This chapter aims to inform policy, programming, and ecosystem development through these perspectives to advance equitable digital access and economic empowerment for Indigenous entrepreneurs. These voices underscore the urgency of addressing systemic inequities while offering a roadmap for change rooted in Indigenous leadership and innovation.

2. Challenges and Barriers to Digital Access

This section summarizes insights from interviews with Indigenous entrepreneurs, experts, and leaders, highlighting their experiences with digital access barriers throughout the entrepreneurial journey. Key challenges include connectivity gaps, affordability, rapid technological change, and systemic inequities, compounded by a digital skills gap and mistrust of institutions. Indigenous women and youth face added barriers such as financial constraints, time limitations, and late engagement with digital tools. Organized into themes—connectivity, skills, systemic and financial barriers, and the unique experiences of women and youth—this chapter integrates interviewees' voices to ensure their perspectives guide culturally relevant solutions for bridging the digital divide.

2.1 Connectivity

Access to reliable, high-speed internet is one of the most critical enablers for entrepreneurial success in the digital age. However, Indigenous entrepreneurs across Canada face persistent and systemic challenges related to connectivity, as consistently described during interviews with experts and leaders. These challenges not only hinder daily business operations but also limit broader economic opportunities for Indigenous communities.

Lack of Infrastructure and Geographic Disparities

Connectivity challenges are deeply rooted in the lack of infrastructure in Indigenous communities, particularly in rural and remote areas, where geographic disparities exacerbate the problem. Interviewees frequently noted that these regions are often deemed low-priority by internet service providers, leading to limited investment. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** explained, “Many Indigenous communities lack access to high-speed internet because providers don’t see them as profitable enough to invest in.” Similarly, **Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)** highlighted, “Only 34.8% of First Nations reserves meet the CRTC’s universal service objective, compared to 87.4% of Canadian households.”

The reliance on costly and unreliable satellite internet in northern communities further compounds these issues. **Lee Morris (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** noted, “Northern communities often rely on satellite internet, which is expensive and unreliable.” Additionally, urban Indigenous entrepreneurs often experience better connectivity, creating a stark contrast to their rural counterparts. Vivid examples, like the one shared by **an expert interviewee**—“One entrepreneur called me from the top of a hill just to discuss her business plan”—illustrate the extent to which limited infrastructure disrupts business activities and economic development.

Affordability Challenges

Affordability remains a major hurdle for many Indigenous entrepreneurs, even in areas where connectivity is available. Interviewees consistently emphasized that the cost of services like Starlink, while improving access, is prohibitively high for most. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** remarked, “Starlink offers potential, but its high costs make it unattainable for most entrepreneurs in remote areas.” Similarly, **an expert interviewee** observed, “Even when broadband is available, it’s often too expensive for small businesses operating on tight budgets.” These affordability challenges create inequities in accessing the tools necessary for competing in the digital economy.

Reliance on Mobile Connectivity

For many Indigenous entrepreneurs, mobile phones serve as their primary means of accessing the internet. While this offers a degree of accessibility, it presents significant limitations for more advanced business operations. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** noted, “Mobile phones are great for consumption but fall short when it comes to business-critical tasks like managing e-commerce platforms or creating content.” The dependence on mobile devices highlights the urgent need for more robust broadband solutions that can accommodate the complex demands of modern entrepreneurship.

Impact on Business Viability

The lack of reliable connectivity has a direct and far-reaching impact on the viability and scalability of Indigenous businesses. **Denis Carignan (PLATO Testing)** explained, “Without reliable connectivity, Indigenous tech businesses can’t scale or compete effectively in broader markets.” Poor internet access hinders essential business operations such as communication, marketing, and financial management. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** observed, “Inadequate internet access hinders daily operations, from using basic tools like email to leveraging advanced platforms for marketing and sales.” These barriers reinforce systemic inequities and limit opportunities for long-term economic growth.

Connectivity challenges present significant barriers for Indigenous entrepreneurs, affecting daily operations and long-term growth opportunities. The interviewees’ insights underscore how these barriers perpetuate broader inequities, making it difficult for Indigenous businesses to compete and thrive in the digital economy. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can empower Indigenous entrepreneurs to unlock their full potential and contribute meaningfully to community and economic resilience.

2.2 Digital Literacy & Skills

The ability to effectively leverage digital tools is critical for modern entrepreneurship, yet many Indigenous entrepreneurs face persistent barriers in acquiring and utilizing digital skills. These challenges span foundational gaps, limited access to relevant training, and systemic inequities that hinder effective technology adoption. This section explores the key themes raised during interviews, highlighting the experiences and insights of Indigenous entrepreneurs and experts.

Foundational Skills Gaps

A significant portion of Indigenous entrepreneurs lack the foundational digital skills required to operate effectively in today's economy. Interviewees frequently highlighted gaps in basic competencies such as managing spreadsheets, using email effectively, and navigating cloud-based platforms. **Aine McGlynn (McGlynn Consulting)** remarked, "Many people start with a great idea but lack the digital skills to deliver it effectively in 2024." This gap is particularly pronounced among older entrepreneurs who have had limited exposure to technology. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** observed, "For some older entrepreneurs, even email and Google Sheets can be daunting." These challenges hinder not only daily operations but also long-term scalability.

Advanced Digital Tools and Overwhelm

As Indigenous entrepreneurs progress in their business journeys, the challenges become more complex. Interviewees pointed to significant barriers in adopting advanced digital tools like customer relationship management (CRM) systems, e-commerce platforms, and digital marketing tools. **Aaron Fay (Cloudcraft Software Inc.)** explained, "The amount of options and complexity in technology can feel overwhelming, even for someone like me who's been in the industry for decades." This sense of overwhelm prevents many entrepreneurs from fully utilizing available tools, leaving gaps in efficiency and growth potential. **Darian Kovacs (Jelly Academy)** added, "There's so much funding available for advanced courses but none for basic digital literacy. Without the foundation, the advanced tools remain out of reach."

Youth Engagement and Late-Stage Exposure

While younger Indigenous entrepreneurs are often more familiar with technology, interviewees highlighted that exposure to advanced digital tools often comes too late. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** emphasized that ICT and STEAM resources are frequently introduced only in the later stages of education, limiting early skill development. In contrast, **an expert interviewee** noted, "Indigenous youth are born into the digital world—it's almost like another language for them." However, even digitally savvy youth face barriers in accessing the advanced tools and training needed to scale their businesses, particularly in remote areas.

Cultural Disconnect in Training Programs

A recurring theme in the interviews was the lack of culturally relevant training programs. Many existing digital skills initiatives fail to incorporate Indigenous knowledge, methodologies, or values. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** stated, “Traditional digital skills training lacks integration with Indigenous knowledge, making it less relevant or engaging for Indigenous learners.” **Aine McGlynn (McGlynn Consulting)** further commented, “We’re still educating people to think of digital skills as an IT domain problem rather than as a core competency for every entrepreneur.” This disconnect reduces the effectiveness of training programs and their appeal to Indigenous participants.

Resistance to Habit and Culture Change

Adopting new digital tools requires a shift in habits and workplace culture, which many entrepreneurs and organizations struggle to implement. **Aine McGlynn (McGlynn Consulting)** likened the process to learning a musical instrument, stating, “Technology adoption is like learning to play the piano—you’ll be bad at it at first, but with daily practice and habit formation, you can make beautiful music.” Overcoming the initial discomfort of using new tools is often a significant hurdle, particularly when there is limited support to guide entrepreneurs through the process.

Systemic Barriers to Training Access

Access to high-quality, relevant digital training remains uneven, particularly for Indigenous entrepreneurs in rural and remote areas. Interviewees consistently emphasized that systemic inequities leave many entrepreneurs without the resources to build foundational or advanced skills. **Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)** pointed out, “Current initiatives often fail to account for the specific challenges faced by Indigenous communities, leaving many without the support they need.” This lack of accessibility is compounded by funding gaps. As **Darian Kovacs (Jelly Academy)** noted, “There’s plenty of support for advanced courses but little for the foundational skills that entrepreneurs need to get started.”

Intersections with Connectivity Challenges

Many of the digital skills challenges described by interviewees are exacerbated by connectivity issues, particularly in rural and remote communities. Poor internet access not only limits access to online training but also hampers the ability to practice and integrate digital tools into business operations. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** emphasized, “You can’t build digital skills without reliable internet access—they’re fundamentally intertwined.”

The digital skills gap among Indigenous entrepreneurs presents significant barriers to business success and broader economic participation. Foundational gaps, challenges with advanced tools, late-stage engagement, cultural disconnects, and systemic inequities all contribute to the issue. By addressing these barriers through tailored, culturally relevant training programs and increased accessibility, stakeholders can empower Indigenous entrepreneurs to leverage digital tools effectively, unlocking new opportunities for growth, innovation, and community resilience.

2.3 Access to Technology

Access to technology is a cornerstone of modern entrepreneurship, yet Indigenous entrepreneurs face numerous barriers in acquiring the tools they need to succeed. These challenges, including affordability, outdated infrastructure, and systemic inequities, were recurring themes in interviews with experts and entrepreneurs. This section explores the insights shared by interviewees, highlighting the obstacles Indigenous entrepreneurs encounter when accessing essential technologies and their implications for business success.

Affordability of Technology

The high cost of technology was consistently cited as a significant barrier for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Many struggle to afford laptops, tablets, and software licenses, which are essential for running a modern business. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** highlighted that “access to devices remains a major issue, with many unable to purchase laptops or other necessary tools.” Similarly, **an expert interviewee** pointed out, “Small businesses often lack the financial resources to invest in technology upgrades, leaving them at a disadvantage in a rapidly digitizing economy.” This affordability gap disproportionately affects entrepreneurs in remote and underserved communities, where costs are often higher due to shipping fees and limited availability.

Geographic Disparities in Technology Access

Entrepreneurs in rural and remote areas face unique challenges in accessing technology. Limited availability of hardware and higher costs for shipping exacerbate the barriers already posed by affordability. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** observed, “Not everyone has access to stores where they can purchase hardware, and shipping costs to remote areas are often prohibitive.” Additionally, these geographic disparities often intersect with connectivity issues, making it even harder for entrepreneurs to utilize available tools. **An expert interviewee** shared, “Even when technology is available, the lack of reliable connectivity in remote areas compounds the challenge, making it difficult to fully utilize these tools.”

Rapid Technological Advancements

The fast-paced nature of technological change presents another challenge, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to stay current. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** explained, “Many entrepreneurs struggle to keep up with the rapid evolution of tools and platforms, which often require frequent upgrades or replacements.” This constant need for updates creates financial and logistical hurdles, particularly for businesses operating with limited budgets. **Aaron Fay (Cloudcraft Software Inc.)** added, “Technology is overwhelming for most people, and the cost of staying current makes it even harder to adapt.”

Reliance on Outdated Tools

Due to financial constraints, many Indigenous entrepreneurs are forced to rely on outdated or second-hand technology. **Lee Morris (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** noted, “Entrepreneurs often use older hardware that cannot support modern software, which limits their ability to engage with advanced digital tools.” This reliance on obsolete technology creates inefficiencies, reduces productivity, and limits competitiveness in an increasingly digital market.

Ethical Concerns with Vendors

Interviewees raised concerns about unethical practices by technology vendors that exploit Indigenous businesses. **Lee Morris (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** explained, “Some vendors exploit Indigenous businesses, assuming they have access to substantial funding, and inflate prices or push unnecessary services.” These exploitative practices not only increase costs but also erode trust between entrepreneurs and service providers, further complicating efforts to adopt new technologies.

Interconnection with Digital Skills and Connectivity

Access to technology is closely linked to digital skills and connectivity, creating a layered set of challenges for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Poor internet access limits the ability to use even the most advanced tools effectively, while a lack of training in how to operate these tools further diminishes their value. **Darian Kovacs (Jelly Academy)** remarked, “Providing hardware is only part of the solution. Without training and connectivity, the technology itself can’t deliver results.” This interdependence underscores the need for holistic approaches that address these interconnected barriers simultaneously.

Barriers to accessing technology present significant challenges for Indigenous entrepreneurs, limiting their ability to compete and thrive in the digital economy. Affordability, geographic disparities, rapid advancements, reliance on outdated tools, and unethical vendor practices all contribute to these obstacles, while systemic links to digital skills and connectivity compound their effects. Addressing these barriers through culturally relevant support, fair pricing practices and systemic change will ensure Indigenous entrepreneurs have equitable access to the tools they need to succeed and drive long-term economic resilience.

2.4 Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers significantly hinder the success of Indigenous entrepreneurs, shaping their experiences across every stage of the entrepreneurial journey. These barriers include institutional biases, fragmented programs, and inadequate support systems, which collectively create a challenging environment for Indigenous businesses to thrive. This section synthesizes the insights shared by interviewees, highlighting the pervasive systemic challenges faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs and their impacts.

Institutional Bias and Mistrust

Historical and ongoing systemic inequities have fostered deep mistrust of mainstream institutions among many Indigenous entrepreneurs. This mistrust often stems from a history of exclusion, discrimination, and harmful policies that have marginalized Indigenous communities.

Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business) noted, “Indigenous entrepreneurs are often navigating systems that were not built for them, making access to resources and support unnecessarily difficult.” This distrust affects engagement with financial institutions, government programs, and other service providers, limiting access to funding, mentorship, and growth opportunities. Many interviewees stressed that rebuilding trust requires institutions to address historical injustices and adopt more inclusive practices.

Fragmentation of Support Programs

A lack of coordination among digital access and entrepreneurial support programs was a recurring theme in the interviews. Entrepreneurs often struggle to navigate fragmented systems offering overlapping but disconnected resources. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** observed, “Programs often operate in silos, creating confusion and inefficiency for entrepreneurs trying to piece together the support they need.” This fragmentation leads to referral loops, where entrepreneurs are passed between organizations without receiving tangible assistance. **An expert interviewee** shared, “One entrepreneur told me he spent two weeks being referred from one organization to another, only to end up back at square one.” These inefficiencies not only waste time but also discourage entrepreneurs from seeking support in the future.

Inadequate Funding Structures

The design of funding programs frequently poses significant challenges for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Many programs rely on short-term, project-based funding models that fail to support long-term growth or sustainability. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** explained, “Most grants require prepayment and receipts for reimbursement, which creates barriers for entrepreneurs without access to upfront capital.” This issue is compounded for Indigenous women and youth, who often face additional challenges in securing funding due to systemic biases and limited access to networks. **Lawrence Lewis (OneFeather)** highlighted, “Traditional investors often impose extractive conditions that don’t align with Indigenous values, creating further obstacles.”

Complex Bureaucratic Processes

Interviewees repeatedly highlighted the complexity of bureaucratic processes as a significant barrier. Grant applications, procurement policies, and reporting requirements are often overly complicated and misaligned with the realities of Indigenous entrepreneurs. **Darryl Julott (Digital Main Street)** remarked, “You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Sometimes, simplifying the process is enough to make a huge difference.” For example, many funding applications

require extensive documentation, which can be particularly challenging for entrepreneurs in remote areas with limited resources or internet access.

Limited Representation and Advocacy

The lack of Indigenous representation in decision-making processes and policy development exacerbates systemic barriers. **Aaron Fay (Cloudcraft Software Inc.)** emphasized, “Policies and programs are often designed without Indigenous voices at the table, leading to solutions that don’t align with Indigenous needs or realities.” This disconnect perpetuates a cycle where systemic issues remain unaddressed, and Indigenous entrepreneurs continue to face challenges that could have been mitigated through inclusive policy design. Interviewees called for greater Indigenous leadership in crafting policies and programs to ensure they reflect the lived experiences and priorities of Indigenous communities.

Cultural Disconnect in Program Design

Existing programs often fail to incorporate Indigenous values, knowledge, and methodologies, creating a cultural disconnect that diminishes their effectiveness. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** stated, “Programs must reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to truly resonate and deliver value.” The lack of trauma-informed approaches further limits the ability of programs to address the historical and systemic challenges faced by Indigenous communities. Interviewees stressed the importance of designing programs that are culturally relevant and grounded in Indigenous traditions to ensure meaningful engagement.

Interconnectedness of Barriers

Systemic barriers do not exist in isolation but are deeply interconnected, compounding their impact on Indigenous entrepreneurs. For instance, fragmented support systems and complex bureaucratic processes exacerbate funding challenges, while mistrust of institutions limits engagement with existing programs. **Faun Rice (Information and Communications Technology Council)** observed, “True progress lies in addressing these barriers holistically and meeting Indigenous entrepreneurs where they are.” Additionally, cultural disconnects in program design often amplify the challenges posed by institutional bias and fragmented systems, making it even harder for entrepreneurs to navigate the landscape.

Broader Implications and Need for Change

The systemic barriers faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs have far-reaching implications, not only limiting individual success but also hindering broader community economic resilience. Addressing these challenges requires systemic change that includes fostering trust, simplifying processes, ensuring Indigenous representation, and designing culturally relevant solutions. As **An expert interviewee** remarked, “Empowering Indigenous entrepreneurs isn’t just about economic growth; it’s about equity, resilience, and creating pathways for future generations.”

Systemic barriers create significant challenges for Indigenous entrepreneurs, affecting their ability to access resources, navigate support systems, and build sustainable businesses.

Institutional biases, fragmented programs, funding limitations, and cultural disconnects all contribute to these challenges, which are further compounded by their interconnections. Addressing these barriers requires systemic change, inclusive policy design, and culturally relevant solutions to create an equitable environment where Indigenous entrepreneurs can thrive.

2.5 Financial Constraints

Financial constraints represent a significant challenge for Indigenous entrepreneurs, affecting every stage of their business development. Issues such as limited access to funding, systemic inequities in financial systems, and the structure of available programs create substantial barriers to growth and sustainability. This section synthesizes insights from interviewees, highlighting the pervasive financial challenges Indigenous entrepreneurs face and their implications for long-term success.

Limited Access to Capital

Access to capital remains a fundamental challenge for many Indigenous entrepreneurs. Systemic inequities in the financial system, such as a lack of collateral and credit history, disproportionately impact Indigenous communities. **Lawrence Lewis (OneFeather)** emphasized, “Access to capital is a big one. Traditional investors often impose conditions that don’t align with Indigenous values, making it difficult to secure funding.” This lack of access is particularly acute in the early stages of business development, where small loans or grants could make a significant difference. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** explained, “Start-ups often struggle to find the funding they need in their first few years, which limits their ability to grow and stabilize.” For instance, entrepreneurs frequently cite challenges in accessing seed funding to purchase initial inventory or establish essential business operations.

Barriers in Funding Programs

The structure of funding programs often creates barriers rather than opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Many programs rely on reimbursement-based models, requiring entrepreneurs to front costs and provide receipts for repayment. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** noted, “Most grants require prepayment, which is a major hurdle for entrepreneurs who lack upfront capital.” Additionally, short-term funding cycles limit the long-term impact of these programs, leaving entrepreneurs without sustained support. **Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)** emphasized, “Funding programs need to evolve to focus on long-term growth rather than short-term projects.” Entrepreneurs shared stories of being unable to complete projects due to the gap between funding approval and reimbursement, which often derails momentum.

Lack of Equity-Based Financing Options

Many interviewees highlighted the scarcity of equity-based financing tailored to Indigenous businesses. Traditional financing models often do not account for the unique challenges Indigenous entrepreneurs face, such as limited land ownership on reserves, which can restrict collateral options. **An expert interviewee** observed, “Indigenous entrepreneurs need financing options that align with their realities, including more accessible equity-based solutions.” Without these tailored options, many entrepreneurs are forced to rely on personal savings or predatory lending, further perpetuating financial inequities. These gaps create significant disparities in opportunities to scale businesses or invest in long-term infrastructure.

Systemic Discrimination in Financial Institutions

Systemic discrimination within financial institutions further exacerbates financial challenges for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Historical biases and a lack of cultural competency among lenders create significant barriers. **An expert interviewee** remarked, “Many Indigenous entrepreneurs are discouraged from even applying for loans because they anticipate rejection or don’t feel understood by financial institutions.” Interviewees shared that the legacy of mistrust often leads entrepreneurs to avoid mainstream financial institutions altogether, further narrowing their funding options. This systemic issue underscores the need for culturally informed training for financial professionals.

Interconnectedness with Other Barriers

Financial constraints are deeply intertwined with other systemic challenges, such as limited access to technology, inadequate digital skills, and poor connectivity. For example, the inability to afford essential technology directly impacts an entrepreneur’s ability to scale their business or adopt digital tools. **Faun Rice (Information and Communications Technology Council)** observed, “Financial barriers often cascade into other areas, creating a web of challenges that are difficult to untangle.” Entrepreneurs in remote areas often face compounded challenges, such as higher shipping costs for supplies and limited local markets, which further strain already tight budgets.

Role of Financial Literacy

The lack of financial literacy was highlighted as a significant barrier that compounds existing constraints. Many entrepreneurs struggle to navigate complex funding processes or understand how to manage cash flow effectively. **Darian Kovacs (Jelly Academy)** noted, “Youth need targeted programs that not only provide funding but also help them develop the financial literacy required to navigate the system.” Building financial literacy at early stages can help entrepreneurs better manage resources and access available funding opportunities.

Broader Implications for Community Resilience

The financial constraints faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs have far-reaching implications beyond individual businesses. Limited access to capital and funding not only stifles

entrepreneurial growth but also impacts the economic resilience of entire communities. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** remarked, “Investing in Indigenous entrepreneurs is investing in the future of Indigenous communities.” Addressing these barriers can create a ripple effect, fostering job creation, community-led initiatives, and broader economic empowerment.

Financial constraints represent a critical barrier to the success of Indigenous entrepreneurs. Limited access to capital, inequitable funding structures, systemic discrimination, and insufficient financial literacy all contribute to the financial inequities faced by these entrepreneurs. Addressing these barriers requires systemic change, including the development of culturally relevant financing models, long-term funding solutions, and initiatives that build trust between Indigenous entrepreneurs and financial institutions. By tackling these issues, stakeholders can foster an environment where Indigenous businesses and communities can thrive.

2.6 Challenges Specific to Women and Youth

Indigenous women and youth face unique and compounded challenges in entrepreneurship, shaped by systemic inequities, cultural expectations, and limited access to tailored resources. These obstacles often require distinct solutions to ensure equitable opportunities for success. This section synthesizes the perspectives shared by interviewees, highlighting the barriers that disproportionately impact these groups and the interconnections between them.

Indigenous Women: Balancing Multiple Roles

Indigenous women entrepreneurs often juggle multiple roles, balancing caregiving responsibilities with community leadership and business operations. This dynamic creates significant time constraints, limiting their ability to access funding, participate in training, or scale their businesses. **An expert interviewee** emphasized, “Indigenous women are the catalysts and foundation of our communities and families, but their multiple roles make it harder to secure funding and sustain their businesses.” These overlapping responsibilities often lead to burnout and hinder long-term growth.

Systemic barriers in accessing capital further exacerbate the challenges faced by Indigenous women. Biases within traditional financing systems and a lack of targeted funding programs magnify these issues. **An expert interviewee** observed, “Indigenous women face compounded challenges in funding, magnifying the barriers they experience in accessing digital tools and business resources.” For example, women entrepreneurs often describe the difficulty of navigating complex funding applications while managing family and community obligations.

Indigenous Youth: Limited Early Exposure and Access

Indigenous youth bring immense potential and digital savvy to the entrepreneurial landscape, but they often face barriers stemming from late-stage engagement with resources and opportunities. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** noted, “ICT and STEAM resources are frequently introduced late in educational settings, limiting their ability to

develop advanced competencies early on.” This delayed exposure reduces the likelihood of youth pursuing entrepreneurial pathways equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Financial constraints also disproportionately impact youth entrepreneurs. Without established credit histories or collateral, they struggle to access the funding needed to start or grow their businesses. **Darian Kovacs (Jelly Academy)** highlighted, “Youth need targeted programs that not only provide funding but also help them develop the financial literacy required to navigate the system.” For instance, a young entrepreneur might lack the resources to purchase essential equipment, limiting their ability to launch their business.

Cultural Disconnect in Training and Resources

Both Indigenous women and youth often encounter a lack of culturally relevant training and resources. Programs designed without Indigenous methodologies or trauma-informed approaches fail to address the specific needs of these groups. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** stated, “Programs must reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to truly resonate and deliver value.” For youth, this disconnect can discourage engagement, while for women, it often perpetuates feelings of exclusion from mainstream entrepreneurial ecosystems.

The lack of culturally relevant support extends to financial literacy programs as well. Many youth and women struggle to navigate traditional financial systems due to a lack of targeted guidance. This gap reinforces systemic inequities and limits their ability to access and utilize available resources effectively.

Geographic and Logistical Barriers

For Indigenous women and youth in rural and remote areas, geographic isolation compounds existing challenges. Limited access to high-speed internet, technology, and training opportunities makes it difficult to participate in digital and entrepreneurial initiatives. **An expert interviewee** shared, “Some entrepreneurs still call me from the top of a hill or drive into town just to get cell reception to discuss their business plans.” These logistical barriers disproportionately affect women managing family responsibilities and youth without the resources to travel for opportunities.

In addition, high transportation costs and limited access to centralized hubs for training or mentorship further hinder their entrepreneurial efforts. These barriers highlight the need for decentralized and accessible programs tailored to remote communities.

Interconnected Challenges and Broader Implications

The challenges faced by Indigenous women and youth are deeply interconnected, with financial constraints, cultural disconnects, and geographic isolation reinforcing one another. For example, limited access to funding often prevents women and youth from investing in the technology and training needed to overcome other barriers. **Faun Rice (Information and Communications**

Technology Council) noted, “True progress lies in addressing these barriers holistically and meeting Indigenous entrepreneurs where they are.”

Addressing these challenges has broader implications for the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Empowering Indigenous women and youth not only fosters individual success but also strengthens entire communities through job creation, cultural preservation, and economic resilience. **An expert interviewee** emphasized, “Empowering Indigenous women and youth isn’t just about business; it’s about strengthening entire communities and creating pathways for future generations.”

Indigenous women and youth encounter unique challenges that demand tailored solutions. Time constraints, financial barriers, late-stage resource engagement, cultural disconnects, and geographic isolation all contribute to the inequities they face. By addressing these challenges through systemic change, inclusive program design, and targeted support, stakeholders can create an environment where Indigenous women and youth thrive as leaders and innovators, driving long-term economic and social progress within their communities.

2.7 Additional Challenges and Barriers

Indigenous entrepreneurs face several challenges related to digital access that extend beyond previously discussed barriers. This section highlights additional gaps and systemic issues that hinder equitable digital access and entrepreneurial success.

Fragmented Support Systems

The digital access support landscape is often characterized by fragmentation, where programs operate in silos with little coordination or integration. This creates confusion and inefficiency for entrepreneurs seeking resources. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** observed, “Programs often operate in isolation, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to navigate the system and access the help they need.” Entrepreneurs frequently report being referred between multiple organizations without receiving tangible support, exacerbating frustration and discouraging engagement.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs lack platforms to exchange experiences and best practices, which hinders knowledge sharing. **Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)** highlighted, “Entrepreneurs often need accessible spaces to share lessons learned and practical solutions, which are currently missing from the ecosystem.”

Cultural Disconnect in Program Design

Many existing digital access programs lack cultural relevance, failing to incorporate Indigenous methodologies, values, and knowledge systems. **Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** stated, “Programs must reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to truly resonate and deliver value.” This disconnect often leads to low engagement and reduced

effectiveness, as the programs do not align with the lived experiences and priorities of Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Community-led solutions integrating Indigenous knowledge and values, such as **OneFeather's digital services**, have begun to emerge but remain limited. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of culturally relevant approaches but also underscore the gaps in scalable, systemic adoption of such practices.

Knowledge Sharing Gaps

Entrepreneurs lack platforms to exchange experiences and best practices, which limits the dissemination of valuable knowledge across communities. This absence hinders the ability of Indigenous entrepreneurs to learn from one another and build on shared experiences. **Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)** highlighted, "Knowledge-sharing platforms would significantly enhance the ecosystem by creating spaces for entrepreneurs to connect, share insights, and collaborate on solutions."

The challenges and gaps in the digital access landscape for Indigenous entrepreneurs encompass fragmented support systems, cultural disconnects, and limited knowledge sharing. Addressing these gaps requires systemic change, including culturally relevant program design, expanded training opportunities, and long-term policy solutions. By bridging these gaps, stakeholders can create an inclusive digital ecosystem that empowers Indigenous entrepreneurs to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader economy.

2.8 Final Words

This section has outlined the pervasive barriers Indigenous entrepreneurs face in accessing the digital tools and infrastructure necessary for modern business operations. Through insights shared by experts and entrepreneurs, the discussion has revealed systemic inequities in connectivity, digital skills, technology access, and funding structures. Challenges specific to Indigenous women and youth highlight the compounded difficulties stemming from financial limitations, late engagement with resources, and cultural disconnects in training and support systems. These issues are further exacerbated by fragmented programs and limited opportunities for knowledge sharing, creating a digital divide that hampers economic growth and entrepreneurial success.

3. Best Practices and Transformative Initiatives

This chapter provides a summary and analysis of the programs, organizations, and projects shared by interviewees as exemplary efforts to enhance digital access and opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs. These best practices are organized into key thematic areas to ensure clarity and ease of reference.

3.1 Summary of Best Practices

The number of stars beside each program represents the number of interviewees that referenced each best practice.

A. Training and Education Programs

Name	Description
Adapt Program*	Provides basic digital literacy training tailored to underrepresented groups, including Indigenous entrepreneurs.
Digital Matriarchs*	Digital literacy workshops created by and for Northern Indigenous women to further their economic independence.
Digital Mi'kmaq/Ellinowaq*	STEM-focused educational programming for Indigenous communities, promoting economic empowerment through digital tools.
Diversity Institute's ICT Programs*	Provides Indigenous-specific training in fields like cybersecurity and programming.
Cando*	Providing training, networking, and resources to foster community-driven economic growth and self-sufficiency.
Centre for Indigenous Innovation and Technology*	Fosters digital skills, entrepreneurship and access to resources that bridge the digital divide while promoting Indigenous leadership in the tech sector.
Connected North*	Virtual education and mental health support to Indigenous students in remote communities, fostering engagement and opportunities through digital connectivity.

Name	Description
First Nations Technology Council (FNTC)***	Offers digital skills training, including GIS and drone operations, to support economic development.
InDigital Program*	Combines traditional teachings with technical skills like HTML and JavaScript, fostering cultural integration in learning.
Jelly Academy**	Indigenous-led digital marketing training program equipping participants with critical digital skills.
NPower Canada*	Provides foundational digital skills and career pathways for Indigenous learners.
PLATO Testing***	Offers IT training for Indigenous communities, focusing on software testing and career-building opportunities.
Virtual Reality School ORIGIN*	Founded by Melissa Hardy-Giles, integrates professional development training with traditional skills.

B. Programs Supporting Digital Entrepreneurship

Name	Description
ADAWE Indigenous Business Hub*	Physical hub offering resources, mentorship, and community support for Indigenous entrepreneurs.
Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP)**	Includes Indigenous-specific components enabling digital transformation for entrepreneurs.
CIRA's Net Good Grants Program*	Funds internet and digital literacy projects for Indigenous communities, including Digital Matriarchs and Indige-preneurs.
Futurpreneur*	Indigenous-tailored program providing mentorship, funding, and resources to support business success and growth.

Name	Description
Indigenous Friends App*	Digital environment following traditional teepee protocols, offering mentorship and support.
Indigenous Shop*	E-commerce platform by JEDI enabling entrepreneurs without websites to enter online markets.
EntrepreNorth*	Culturally tailored program offering mentorship and resources to help build sustainable business models.
Pow Wow Pitch***	Provides culturally intentional capital, mentorship, and resources through in-person and online opportunities tailored for Indigenous businesses.
SOAR Digital Gathering of Indigenous Entrepreneurs**	United Indigenous entrepreneurs across Canada through Digital Conference and in-person Accelerator programs.

C. Infrastructure and Connectivity Initiatives

Name	Description
CIRA Infrastructure Projects*	Includes funding for reliable internet in Takla Lake Nation, Malahat Nation, and Leq'á:mel First Nation.
Cisco's Connectivity work in the North*	Cisco enhances Northern connectivity with reliable networks, enabling access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
Data Sovereignty Projects*	Collaborations with bands to protect sensitive information and reclaim control over cloud-stored data.
First Mile Connectivity Consortium (FMCC)**	Supports Indigenous-owned broadband corporations, focusing on "first-mile" solutions to connectivity challenges.

Name	Description
Indigenous Connectivity Institute*	A community of Indigenous broadband advocates and network builders driving a digital future on our terms.
Katlotech Communications**	Dene-owned broadband and data center project addressing connectivity challenges in NWT.
KuhKenah Network (K-Net)*	Focuses on Indigenous-led connectivity solutions and local control over infrastructure.
PLC Info's Partnership with Listuguj*	Enhance digital connectivity and infrastructure, supporting community development through improved access to technology, education, and essential online services.
Rogers Communications Programs*	Focuses on improving Internet access and affordability in Indigenous Communities
Starlink*	Starlink provides high-speed internet to remote Northern communities, improving access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

D. Funding, Mentorship and Networking Programs

Name	Description
CIRA Net Good Grants*	Support projects that leverage the internet to benefit communities across Canada. These grants focus on areas like digital literacy, cybersecurity, community connectivity, and innovation, aiming to enhance internet access and use for social good.
Digital Enhancement Grant (JEDI)**	Provides up to \$5,000 for digital access needs such as hardware, software, and websites. JEDI also provides Chromebook distribution to ensure incubator participants receive laptops, bridging the hardware gap.
Fab Lab Innovation (JEDI)*	Encourages youth to explore entrepreneurship through hands-on technology training and real-world applications.

Name	Description
First Peoples Cultural Council*	Focuses on language revitalization and digital infrastructure that supports cultural preservation and technological adoption.
Indigenous Friends App*	A mobile app and social network offering Indigenous resources, event details, maps, peer support counselling, and access to Indigenous knowledge and communities.
Native Women Lead (USA)*	Redefines lending criteria to focus on Indigenous cultural values, promoting equitable access to capital.
Raven Indigenous Capital Partners*	Impact investment organization offering culturally aligned funding models to foster Indigenous entrepreneurship.

3.2 Analysis of Best Practices

Efforts to enhance digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs have combined training, mentorship, and connectivity infrastructure with culturally aligned and community-led approaches. These initiatives demonstrate how addressing systemic barriers while respecting Indigenous values can create transformative impacts, fostering entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

Training and Education Programs: Building Capacity Through Culture

Programs designed to build digital and entrepreneurial skills among Indigenous communities stand out for their cultural relevance and innovative delivery. **Digital Matriarchs**, created by and for Northern Indigenous women, equips participants with digital literacy skills to promote economic independence. Spencer Callaghan emphasized its impact: “Fostering confidence and independence among participants has been a cornerstone of this program.”

The **InDigital Program** takes this further, blending traditional teachings with technical skills such as HTML and JavaScript. Alejandro Mayoral Baños reflected, “Combining protocols like honesty and wisdom with technology brings ethics and creativity into learning.” Similarly, **Digital Mi’kmaq/Ellinowaq** integrates STEM-focused programming to connect Indigenous youth with economic opportunities through modern tools.

Other notable examples include **Jelly Academy**, which provides Indigenous-led digital marketing training to entrepreneurs at all stages, and **Virtual Reality School ORIGIN**, which

merges professional development with traditional skills. These programs exemplify how education can bridge digital divides while preserving cultural identity.

Programs Supporting Digital Entrepreneurship

Culturally aligned entrepreneurship programs have created sustainable pathways for Indigenous business owners. **EntrepreNorth** supports entrepreneurs in the North by providing mentorship and resources for building culturally grounded business models. Shannon Pestun highlighted its transformative approach: “Integrating Indigenous values and mentorship builds confidence and empowers success.”

Similarly, **Pow Wow Pitch** combines access to capital with mentorship and resources, creating opportunities for in-person and virtual participation. **An expert interviewee** noted, “Pow Wow Pitch showcases how culturally specific programs can drive meaningful change.”

Practical tools like JEDI’s **Indigenous Shop** e-commerce platform provide accessible entry points for entrepreneurs lacking websites, while government-backed initiatives like the **Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP)** include Indigenous-specific components to support digital transformation. The **SOAR Digital Gathering of Indigenous Entrepreneurs** stands out for its dual-format model, which united entrepreneurs across Canada through virtual conferences and accelerators, demonstrating adaptability and reach.

U.S.-based programs like **Native Women Lead** offer valuable insights, redefining lending criteria to focus on cultural values and equitable access to capital—principles that can be applied globally.

Infrastructure and Connectivity: Building the Foundation

Reliable connectivity is foundational for digital entrepreneurship, and various initiatives have made significant progress in addressing gaps. **CIRA’s Net Good Grants** have funded projects in communities like Takla Lake Nation and Malahat Nation, improving internet access and unlocking economic opportunities. Spencer Callaghan remarked, “CIRA’s grants have transformed connectivity challenges into pathways for success.”

Starlink and **KatloTech Communications** bring high-speed internet to remote areas, enabling access to education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. **KuhKenah Network (K-Net)** exemplifies Indigenous-led infrastructure solutions, empowering communities to maintain control over their digital assets. The **First Mile Connectivity Consortium** emphasizes the importance of Indigenous-led broadband corporations, demonstrating that community-driven solutions are both scalable and sustainable.

Corporate initiatives, such as **Rogers Communications Programs**, address affordability and access, while partnerships like **PLC Info’s work with Listuguj** show how collaboration can enhance infrastructure and support community development.

Mentorship and Networking: Holistic Support for Entrepreneurs

Holistic mentorship programs that address both professional and personal barriers have proven transformative. JEDI's **Digital Enhancement Grant** not only provides funding for hardware and software but also integrates mentorship, helping entrepreneurs navigate their journeys. Laura Englehart noted, "Participants gained skills, confidence, and a sense of community support."

The **Indigenous Friends App**, a culturally aligned digital environment based on teepee protocols, fosters mentorship in a safe space. Alejandro Mayoral Baños explained, "Bringing ethics into the digital space through traditional protocols sparks creativity and strengthens cultural identity."

Raven Indigenous Capital Partners emphasizes culturally aligned impact investing, offering funding models that reflect Indigenous values. Similarly, **Fab Lab Innovation by JEDI** encourages youth to explore entrepreneurship through hands-on technology training, preparing them for the digital economy.

Key Lessons and Best Practices

1. **Cultural Integration:** Programs like InDigital and EntrepreNorth demonstrate that connecting traditional teachings with modern tools enhances both skills and cultural pride.
2. **Holistic and Inclusive Models:** Initiatives such as Pow Wow Pitch and Digital Matriarchs accommodate diverse needs, from flexible schedules to childcare support, ensuring accessibility for underserved groups.
3. **Community Ownership:** Indigenous-led infrastructure solutions like K-Net and FMCC highlight the importance of local control in achieving sustainable outcomes.
4. **Scalable Impact:** Infrastructure projects like those by Starlink, CIRA, and KatloTech illustrate how connectivity can unlock opportunities for education, healthcare, and economic development.
5. **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Partnerships among corporations, community organizations, and governments, such as CDAP and Rogers Communications Programs, emphasize the power of collective action in addressing systemic barriers.

Conclusion

Efforts to improve digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs reveal that integrating cultural relevance, mentorship, and community-driven solutions leads to transformative outcomes. Programs that respect Indigenous values while addressing systemic barriers empower entrepreneurs to thrive in the digital economy. As Alejandro Mayoral Baños aptly stated, "Bringing ethics into the digital space sparks creativity and strengthens cultural identity." By building on these best practices, organizations can foster a future where Indigenous entrepreneurs lead vibrant, connected, and sustainable businesses.

4. Recommendations for Bridging the Digital Divide

Indigenous entrepreneurs are poised to drive economic growth and innovation, yet systemic barriers in digital access continue to hold them back. Limited connectivity, financial constraints, and gaps in digital literacy create a stark divide, preventing many from fully participating in the digital economy.

This chapter presents bold, actionable recommendations drawn from Indigenous leaders, entrepreneurs, and experts. It calls for urgent investment in broadband infrastructure, sustainable funding models, culturally relevant training, and Indigenous-led solutions. By closing the digital gap, we unlock potential, foster economic self-determination, and empower Indigenous businesses to thrive in a connected world.

4.1 Strengthening Digital Infrastructure

Access to reliable, high-speed internet is a foundational requirement for Indigenous entrepreneurs to fully participate in the digital economy. However, systemic gaps in broadband connectivity continue to disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, particularly those in rural, remote, and northern regions. Without robust digital infrastructure, Indigenous businesses struggle to access e-commerce, digital marketing, financial tools, and global opportunities, deepening economic disparities. Addressing these challenges requires targeted investment, Indigenous-led solutions, and sustainable infrastructure development to ensure long-term digital inclusion.

Expand Broadband Access

Action: Prioritize investment in high-speed internet infrastructure for rural, remote, and northern Indigenous communities.

Expert Insight:

- *Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)* emphasized, “Less than 35% of First Nations reserves have adequate internet, compared to 87% of Canadian households. This digital gap restricts business development, job creation, and education in Indigenous communities.”
- *An expert interviewee* added, “Connectivity is not just about internet access—it’s about creating equity of opportunity. Without it, Indigenous businesses are locked out of the modern economy.”

Implementation:

- Establish multi-year, **Indigenous-led broadband expansion projects** to provide stable, high-speed internet to underserved regions.

- **Streamline regulatory approvals** to reduce delays and fast-track broadband rollout in Indigenous communities.
- Support **emerging technologies**, including low-orbit satellites (e.g., Starlink), community mesh networks, and fiber-optic solutions tailored for remote regions.
- Ensure community consultation and **Indigenous governance over broadband infrastructure** to align projects with local needs.

Support Indigenous-Owned Broadband Providers

Action: Provide direct funding to Indigenous-owned broadband companies to develop community-led solutions.

Expert Insight:

- *Faun Rice (ICTC)* stated, “Direct investment in Indigenous-owned broadband companies creates long-term solutions to digital access issues, shifting control and economic benefits to the communities themselves.”
- *Darryl Julott (Digital Main Street)* emphasized, “It’s not just about laying down fiber-optic cables. It’s about ensuring Indigenous businesses have the ability to leverage that infrastructure through tailored support and digital literacy.”

Implementation:

- Invest in **First Mile Initiatives**, where Indigenous communities build, own, and operate their broadband networks, reducing dependency on large telecom providers.
- Establish **funding programs** for Indigenous-led broadband cooperatives, enabling them to expand infrastructure and service coverage in remote areas.
- Develop **public-private partnerships** to facilitate knowledge sharing, technical support, and sustainable long-term broadband operations.
- Improve Indigenous businesses’ access to government broadband funding by simplifying application processes and offering dedicated technical assistance.

Build Digital Infrastructure with Sustainability and Self-Sufficiency in Mind

Action: Develop long-term, sustainable broadband solutions that align with Indigenous values and environmental considerations.

Expert Insight:

- *Lee Morris (JEDI)* stressed, “Data sovereignty is as important as land sovereignty. We need to build broadband infrastructure that empowers Indigenous communities to own and control their digital futures.”
- *Lawrence Lewis (OneFeather)* noted, “We’ve had to create our own infrastructure because mainstream providers have overlooked us. Investing in Indigenous-owned digital infrastructure ensures communities thrive on their own terms.”

Implementation:

- **Prioritize green technology solutions**, such as solar-powered internet hubs and energy-efficient broadband systems that minimize environmental impact.
- Establish local **maintenance and capacity-building programs** to train Indigenous technicians in broadband installation, ensuring long-term community employment.
- Encourage **hybrid grant models**, where funding covers both broadband infrastructure and wraparound supports such as digital literacy training and mentorship.
- Expand **Indigenous-led cybersecurity and data governance programs** to ensure communities have full ownership and protection of their digital assets.

Conclusion

Strengthening digital infrastructure is a critical step in ensuring Indigenous entrepreneurs can fully engage in the digital economy. Expanding broadband access and supporting Indigenous-led broadband initiatives will help bridge the digital divide, enabling Indigenous businesses to thrive in an increasingly connected world. By investing in sustainable, community-driven solutions, stakeholders can foster digital equity, economic self-determination, and innovation within Indigenous communities. As *Spencer Callaghan (CIRA)* puts it, “It’s not just about access. It’s about ensuring Indigenous entrepreneurs have the tools, training, and confidence to fully participate in the digital economy.”

4.2 Improving Access to Digital Tools and Resources

Access to reliable, high-speed internet is a foundational requirement for Indigenous entrepreneurs to fully participate in the digital economy. However, systemic gaps in broadband connectivity continue to disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, particularly those in rural, remote, and northern regions. Without robust digital infrastructure, Indigenous businesses struggle to access e-commerce, digital marketing, financial tools, and global opportunities, deepening economic disparities. Addressing these challenges requires targeted investment, Indigenous-led solutions, and sustainable infrastructure development to ensure long-term digital inclusion.

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- Establish multi-year, **Indigenous-led broadband expansion projects** to provide stable, high-speed internet to underserved regions.
- **Streamline regulatory approvals** to reduce delays and fast-track broadband rollout in Indigenous communities.
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- *Lawrence Lewis (OneFeather)* noted, “We’ve had to create our own infrastructure because mainstream providers have overlooked us. Investing in Indigenous-owned digital infrastructure ensures communities thrive on their own terms.”

Implementation:

- **Prioritize green technology solutions**, such as solar-powered internet hubs and energy-efficient broadband systems that minimize environmental impact.
- Establish local **maintenance and capacity-building programs** to train Indigenous technicians in broadband installation, ensuring long-term community employment.
- Encourage **hybrid grant models**, where funding covers both broadband infrastructure and wraparound supports such as digital literacy training and mentorship.
- Expand **Indigenous-led cybersecurity and data governance programs** to ensure communities have full ownership and protection of their digital assets.

4.3 Expanding Access to Tools, Training, and Resources

Ensuring equitable access to digital tools and resources is essential for Indigenous entrepreneurs to compete and thrive in the modern economy. However, significant barriers remain, including high costs of technology, limited funding opportunities, and gaps in digital literacy. Addressing these challenges requires strategic investment in affordability programs, targeted training initiatives, and Indigenous-led digital solutions that align with community values and business needs. This section outlines key strategies to enhance access to digital tools and ensure long-term success for Indigenous businesses.

Affordable and Updated Technology

Action: Implement hardware subsidy programs to provide affordable laptops, software, and tools for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Expert Insight:

- *Stanley Barnaby (JEDI)* noted, “Many Indigenous entrepreneurs struggle without access to updated laptops and accounting software. This gap limits their ability to compete in today’s digital economy.”

- *Darian Kovacs (Jelly Academy)* emphasized, “It’s not just about providing tools—it’s about making sure entrepreneurs can afford them and know how to use them effectively.”

Implementation:

- Establish **micro-grant programs** that help cover the costs of laptops, essential software, and digital tools.
- Form **partnerships with major technology companies** like Microsoft, Dell, and Shopify to provide discounted or donated hardware, software, and business support to Indigenous businesses. Successful initiatives, such as Microsoft’s AI for Good program and Dell’s Entrepreneur Support Program, serve as models for collaboration.
- Develop **leasing and financing options**, modeled after successful community-driven financing initiatives such as the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA) micro-lending programs, as well as models like Canada’s Business Development Bank’s flexible financing, to allow entrepreneurs to access cutting-edge technology with lower upfront costs and flexible repayment plans tailored to Indigenous business cycles.
- Ensure funding programs include **hardware maintenance support**, ensuring entrepreneurs can sustain long-term use of their digital tools.

Digital Literacy and Accessibility

Action: Develop community-based digital literacy training that meets Indigenous entrepreneurs where they are.

Expert Insight:

- *Aine McGlynn (McGlynn Consulting)* observed, “Canada lacks practical digital skills programs beyond social media use, but short of coding expertise. Indigenous entrepreneurs need access to training that helps them operate and grow their businesses effectively.”
- *Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)* stressed, “Digital training must be culturally relevant and reflect Indigenous ways of learning and doing business.”

Implementation:

- Offer **foundational courses** on e-commerce, financial tools, cybersecurity, and digital marketing, delivered in Indigenous languages where possible.
- Create **mobile training units**, modeled after successful Indigenous-led programs such as the Kuh-Ke-Nah Network’s digital initiatives, to bring digital literacy programs directly to remote communities. These units should be staffed by Indigenous digital educators and funded through government-industry partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability. These units should incorporate Indigenous language and knowledge frameworks and be supported through partnerships with local economic development organizations. These

units should be staffed by trained Indigenous digital educators and supported through partnerships with local economic development organizations.

- Establish **peer mentorship networks**, where experienced Indigenous entrepreneurs provide hands-on guidance in adopting digital tools.
- Develop **Indigenous-led digital literacy programs** that integrate traditional knowledge with modern technology, ensuring relevance and accessibility. This could include incorporating Indigenous storytelling, oral traditions, and visual learning techniques to make digital education more engaging and culturally resonant.
- Provide **accessibility accommodations** such as video-based training, oral instruction options, and flexible course structures that support different learning needs and languages.

Sustainable Funding and Capital Access

Long-Term Grant and Loan Structures

Action: Move away from short-term project-based grants and toward long-term grant and loan structures.

Expert Insight:

- *Shannon Pestun (Finance Cafe)* recommended, “Ensure funding reaches grassroots organizations that support Indigenous entrepreneurs.”

Implementation:

- Create **Indigenous-specific low-interest loan programs** and **equity-based financing options** to provide sustainable capital access.
- Establish **multi-year funding programs** that provide long-term stability for Indigenous businesses, reducing dependency on short-term grants.

Tailored Financial Support Programs

Action: Provide micro-grants and non-repayable startup capital for Indigenous businesses.

Expert Insight:

- *Laura Englehart (JEDI)* noted, “Even \$5,000 can make a huge difference for our entrepreneurs.”

Implementation:

- Streamline **grant application processes**, allowing video or oral submissions to increase accessibility.
- Expand financial literacy initiatives that help Indigenous entrepreneurs effectively apply for and manage grants and funding. Examples of successful Indigenous-led financial

literacy programs include AFOA Canada's Indigenous Financial Wellness Program and NACCA's business development training. These should include culturally relevant financial workshops, one-on-one advisory services, and resources in Indigenous languages to ensure broader accessibility.

Enhancing Mentorship and Training

Culturally Relevant Mentorship

Action: Establish mentorship programs led by Indigenous entrepreneurs and experts in digital transformation.

Expert Insight:

- *Aaron Fay (Cloudcraft Software)* stated, "Imagine how much further entrepreneurs could go with a mentor for a year instead of ten weeks."

Implementation:

- Develop **long-term mentorship initiatives** that incorporate both technical and entrepreneurial guidance.
- Facilitate **one-on-one coaching and group mentorship programs** tailored to different business stages and industries.

Apprenticeships and Peer Learning

Action: Encourage industry partnerships to create Indigenous-focused internships and training programs.

Expert Insight:

- *Matthew Foss (CCAB)* emphasized, "Apprenticeships shouldn't just be for trades but also for digital skills."

Implementation:

- Partner with **leading tech companies** such as Google, Shopify, and Telus to provide real-world experience for Indigenous youth and entrepreneurs through structured internship and training programs.
- Develop **peer-to-peer learning platforms**, such as the Indigenous Innovation Hub and Pow Wow Pitch network, where Indigenous business owners can exchange insights, share best practices, and collaborate on digital strategies.

Conclusion

Bridging the digital divide is critical for Indigenous entrepreneurs to fully participate in the modern economy, fostering innovation, sustainability, and long-term success. By addressing barriers related to affordability, accessibility, and digital literacy, Indigenous businesses can scale, compete, and create lasting community impact. By addressing affordability challenges, expanding culturally relevant digital literacy initiatives, ensuring long-term funding access, and strengthening mentorship opportunities, stakeholders can create an inclusive and equitable digital ecosystem. As *Faun Rice (ICTC)* put it, “Access to digital tools is not a luxury—it’s a necessity for business growth and economic resilience.”

4.4 Policy and Systemic Change

As digital transformation reshapes global economies, Indigenous entrepreneurs and communities face systemic barriers to accessing equitable opportunities in the digital space. Addressing these barriers requires structural changes in policy, procurement, funding, and digital governance. By advocating for Indigenous-led digital economy policies, simplifying access to funding and procurement, strengthening data sovereignty, and expanding public-private partnerships, Indigenous communities can take a leadership role in shaping a sustainable and inclusive digital future. This section outlines key recommendations to drive systemic change and advance economic reconciliation through digital access.

Indigenous-Led Digital Economy Policies

Action: Advocate for digital access as a pillar of economic reconciliation.

Expert Insight:

- *An expert interviewee* stated, “Economic reconciliation must include digital access as a foundational pillar.”

Implementation:

- Ensure **Indigenous representation** in digital policy development and funding decisions.
- Establish **Indigenous-led advisory councils** to guide national digital inclusion strategies.
- Advocate for **equitable funding models** that prioritize Indigenous digital entrepreneurship and infrastructure development.
- Integrate **digital access policies** into federal and provincial economic reconciliation frameworks.

Simplified Procurement and Funding Processes

Action: Improve Indigenous entrepreneurs’ access to government contracts and funding programs.

Expert Insight:

- *Nathan Snider (ICTC)* noted, “Even with preferential procurement policies, the lack of support to navigate RFPs creates significant barriers.”

Implementation:

- Provide **dedicated procurement advisors** to help Indigenous businesses apply for government opportunities.
- Streamline **funding applications**, allowing for video and oral submissions to improve accessibility.
- Expand **preferential procurement policies** to create more opportunities for Indigenous businesses in government contracts.
- Develop **online training programs** on navigating procurement processes and government funding structures.

Strengthening Digital Sovereignty and Data Governance

Action: Support Indigenous data sovereignty and ensure control over digital assets.

Expert Insight:

- *Faun Rice (ICTC)* emphasized, “True digital equity means Indigenous communities must own and control their own data.”

Implementation:

- Implement **Indigenous-led data governance frameworks** to protect digital assets and intellectual property.
- Advocate for **data sovereignty policies** based on OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) principles.
- Encourage **self-hosted digital infrastructure** to reduce reliance on external platforms.
- Provide **legal and technical support** for Indigenous entrepreneurs to secure their digital content and business data.

Expanding Public-Private Partnerships for Digital Equity

Action: Foster collaboration between Indigenous organizations, government agencies, and the private sector to drive digital inclusion.

Expert Insight:

- *Matthew Foss (CCAB)* stated, “The digital economy requires Indigenous leadership at every level, from infrastructure to enterprise development.”

Implementation:

- Establish **joint funding initiatives** that support Indigenous digital entrepreneurship and broadband expansion.
- Encourage **corporate investment** in Indigenous-led digital enterprises and community broadband networks.
- Facilitate **knowledge-sharing partnerships** between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to improve digital skills and innovation.
- Ensure **long-term commitments** from public and private stakeholders to support Indigenous digital transformation efforts.

Conclusion

Ensuring Indigenous leadership in digital policy and economic development is critical for long-term prosperity and innovation. By embedding digital access as a fundamental pillar of economic reconciliation, Indigenous communities can shape policies and initiatives that support sustainable growth. Simplifying procurement and funding processes, strengthening data sovereignty, and fostering public-private partnerships are essential steps toward achieving true digital equity. As *an expert interviewee* emphasized, “Economic reconciliation must include digital access as a foundational pillar.” By taking a proactive approach to policy advocacy and systemic change, Indigenous entrepreneurs can drive their own digital futures and create lasting economic impact for generations to come.

5. Conclusion: A Path Forward

This chapter has provided a firsthand account of the challenges and opportunities Indigenous entrepreneurs face in accessing and leveraging digital tools. Through interviews with 18 stakeholders, including Indigenous entrepreneurs, non-profit leaders, and industry experts, several key themes emerged. Interviewees consistently emphasized that meaningful digital inclusion is about more than connectivity—it requires long-term investment, culturally relevant training, and Indigenous-led solutions.

By grounding this discussion in real-world experiences, these interviews offer a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers Indigenous entrepreneurs face, the gaps in existing programs, and the steps needed to create an inclusive and sustainable digital economy.

Key Takeaways from Stakeholder Interviews

The interviews illuminated several urgent priorities that must shape policy and programming for Indigenous digital inclusion:

1. Connectivity Remains a Foundational Barrier, but Affordability is Equally Pressing.

Interviewees reinforced that connectivity gaps in rural and remote Indigenous communities remain a major obstacle, particularly due to inadequate broadband infrastructure. Entrepreneurs frequently described relying on mobile devices with poor service or costly, unreliable satellite connections. However, even where broadband is available, high costs often prevent small businesses from accessing or maintaining reliable internet service.

2. Access to Digital Tools and Training is Uneven and Often Inaccessible.

While some programs exist to support Indigenous entrepreneurs in adopting digital tools, training is often not aligned with the realities of Indigenous business ownership. Many interviewees described cumbersome application processes, lack of hands-on support, and programs that were not designed with Indigenous knowledge or ways of learning in mind.

3. Indigenous Entrepreneurs Face Structural Barriers to Business Financing.

Even when digital tools and training are available, financial barriers prevent many Indigenous entrepreneurs from taking full advantage of these resources. Interviewees pointed to short-term, reimbursement-based funding models, a lack of flexible financing, and systemic discrimination in financial institutions.

4. Existing Support Programs are Fragmented and Hard to Navigate.

Many interviewees described the lack of coordination between government, non-profit, and corporate programs designed to support Indigenous digital inclusion. Entrepreneurs often experience referral loops—where one organization directs them to another, and then another—without receiving tangible support.

5. Indigenous Entrepreneurs Want Solutions that Respect Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing.

A consistent theme across interviews was the need for programs and funding models that reflect Indigenous values, traditions, and knowledge-sharing approaches. Several interviewees pointed out that mainstream digital training is not designed for Indigenous learners and fails to incorporate oral traditions, community-based mentorship, or Indigenous governance models.

Implications for the Indigenous Prosperity Foundation

The interviews reinforce that IPF has an opportunity to fill critical gaps in digital access, funding, and culturally aligned training for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Specifically, interviewees identified key areas where IPF can lead meaningful change:

- **Advocate for Systemic Policy & Funding Reform** – Push for long-term, flexible funding models (moving away from short-term, reimbursement-based grants) and Indigenous-led digital policy development to ensure sustainable access to capital, broadband, and technology.
- **Expand Affordable Access to Digital Tools & Connectivity** – Launch a Digital Access Fund to provide Indigenous entrepreneurs with subsidized laptops, software, and internet access, while supporting Indigenous-owned broadband cooperatives to drive community-led infrastructure solutions.
- **Develop a National Indigenous Digital Training & Mentorship Network** – Establish culturally relevant digital skills programs, blending storytelling, oral traditions, and hands-on learning with peer mentorship opportunities to build confidence and capacity among Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- **Address Financial Barriers & Unlock Capital Access** – Advocate for equity-based financing models, upfront capital for grants, and Indigenous procurement opportunities, while partnering with financial institutions to improve access to business loans and financial literacy training.
- **Strengthen Indigenous Data Sovereignty & Digital Governance** – Develop an Indigenous Digital Sovereignty Toolkit to protect entrepreneurs' data, cybersecurity, and intellectual property, and support Indigenous-controlled digital infrastructure to reduce reliance on external service providers.

Preparing for the Next Phase: Surveying Indigenous Entrepreneurs

While these interviews provided rich qualitative insights, a broader survey of Indigenous entrepreneurs is now essential to validate and quantify these findings. The next phase of research will expand this work to include direct input from a larger and more diverse group of Indigenous business owners.

Final Reflections

These interviews have provided an essential foundation for understanding the systemic challenges and opportunities in digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs. They highlight the

resilience, innovation, and leadership of Indigenous business owners, while also exposing the barriers that continue to hold many back.

As we move into the next phase of research—surveying Indigenous entrepreneurs directly—we aim to build on these qualitative insights with quantitative data that will inform future policies, funding models, and digital support programs. The findings from this next phase will help shape actionable, Indigenous-led solutions that drive digital inclusion, economic empowerment, and long-term success for Indigenous entrepreneurs across Canada.

Addendum A: Interviewees

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the incredible individuals who shared their insights, expertise, and lived experiences to inform this research on digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Their perspectives have been invaluable in shaping a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in this space. Listed alphabetically below, these interviewees represent a diverse range of leadership, innovation, and dedication to advancing Indigenous economic empowerment.

Name	Role	Organization
Holly Atjecoutay	Head of Diversity Equity and Inclusion and Director Indigenous and Northern Entrepreneurs	Futurpreneur
Darian Kovacs	Founder & CEO	Jelly Academy
Denis Carignan	President, Co-Founder, and Chief Impact Officer	PLATO
Aaron Fay	Founder & CEO	Cloudcraft Software Inc.
Alejandro Mayoral Baños	Executive Director & Founder	Indigenous Friends Association
Aine McGlynn	Consultant	Canada Helps
Darryl Julott	Managing Lead	Digital Mainstreet
Faun Rice	Manager, Research and Evaluation	Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC)
Nathan Snider	Program Manager, Indigenous Outreach & Programming	Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC)
Kate Karn	Director, Public Policy and Acting Coordinator	Mastercard Changeworks

Name	Role	Organization
Laura Englehart	Economic Development Manager	Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI)
Lee Morris	IT Projects Manager	Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI)
Lawrence Lewis	Founder & CEO	OneFeather Mobile Technologies
Shannon Pestun	Founder, Co-Founder of Finance Cafe	Pestun Consulting
Spencer Callaghan	Director, Brand and Communications	CIRA
Shehnika Sayeed	Senior Communications Specialist, Brand and Communications	CIRA
Stanley Barnaby	CEO	Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI)
Wendy Cukier	Professor, Entrepreneurship and Innovation	Toronto Metropolitan University

We deeply appreciate the time and thoughtfulness these leaders brought to this project. Their contributions ensure that Indigenous voices remain at the forefront of digital access and entrepreneurship discussions. Thank you for your commitment to making a difference.

Addendum B: Interview Guide & Questions

The Indigenous Prosperity Foundation (IPF) aims to enhance the digital access of Indigenous entrepreneurs as a key component of economic empowerment. Digital access includes Internet connectivity, hardware, essential software (e.g. OS, Cloud, AI, etc.), telecommunications, training, mentorship, and digital tools to support key business systems such as operating, financial, sales and marketing, e-commerce, creative tools, point of sale (POS), payment, cybersecurity, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Supply Chain Management (SCM), and Human Resource (HR) systems.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the second phase of our project, focusing on gathering qualitative data through in-depth interviews. This phase is crucial for understanding the digital access needs, challenges, and opportunities faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs. Our goal is to identify specific digital access needs, assess existing resources, highlight gaps, and provide actionable recommendations to enhance digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Interview Questions: Questions are framed for relevancy to different types of experts.

Interviewee Information:

1. Name
2. Title
3. Organization
4. Telephone
5. Consents to be acknowledged in the report? Y/N
6. Consents to be quoted in the report, provided that the quote is approved in advance?
Y/N

Research Scope for Digital Access: Interviewee Profile:

7. Could you please share your background and your role, as well as the work you have done in the field of digital access?
8. How, if at all, does your work intersect with or support Indigenous entrepreneurs, especially women and youth?

Assess Existing Resources

9. What digital access challenges do Indigenous entrepreneurs face at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey? What digital access challenges do Indigenous women and youth face in particular?

10. How would you evaluate the current landscape of digital access resources and support systems available to Indigenous entrepreneurs?
11. Are there any best practice projects, organizations, programs, or case studies you are aware of that have made a transformative impact in improving digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs? If so, could you share some examples?

Gaps and Opportunities:

12. What gaps do you see in the current digital access ecosystem for Indigenous entrepreneurs?
13. Are there specific areas where you feel additional support or resources are needed?
14. What opportunities do you see for improving digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs?

Recommendations:

15. Could you provide actionable recommendations to enhance digital access among Indigenous entrepreneurs?
16. Are there any experts, researchers, entrepreneurs, or leaders you know who might have a unique perspective on digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs that you would recommend we speak with?
17. Are there any resources, organizations, or reports you recommend we explore to better understand and enhance digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs?

Additional Insights and Vision for the Future:

18. In an ideal world, what vision do you have for the future of digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or perspectives on digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs?

Thank you for your participation. Your insights are invaluable to advancing digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs.