



Indigenous
Prosperity
Foundation

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

Survey
Summary Report



Indigenous
Prosperity
Foundation

SURVEY RESULTS

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

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Executive Summary

Digital access is an essential enabler of entrepreneurship, providing businesses with the tools they need to operate, grow, and innovate. For Indigenous entrepreneurs, digital technology presents both opportunities and challenges—offering pathways to economic empowerment while also highlighting persistent barriers such as affordability, connectivity, training, and cultural relevance.

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive survey conducted in **Fall 2024** with **111 Indigenous entrepreneurs** across Canada. The survey was designed to deepen our understanding of digital access by capturing the lived experiences of Indigenous business owners at various stages of development, from ideation to scaling. The insights generated contribute to a holistic understanding of the digital landscape, showcasing both systemic challenges and emerging opportunities.

Key Findings

1. Digital Access is Critical, Yet Barriers Persist

- **81.1%** of respondents rated digital access as **extremely important** to their business operations, while another **14.4%** rated it as **important**.
- Despite this, **88.3%** of respondents identified **cost** as the most significant barrier to digital adoption.
- **57.7%** cited **lack of training**, and **39.6%** reported **lack of mentorship** as additional challenges.
- **36%** of respondents indicated that existing digital tools do not reflect **Indigenous ways of knowing and doing business**.
- **17.1%** faced **connectivity challenges**, particularly in rural and remote communities.

2. Most Effective Digital Resources

Survey respondents identified the resources that provided the most value in their digital adoption journey:

- **Templates and Online Resources** (96 respondents rated them as at least moderately effective)
- **In-Person Workshops and Seminars** (Highly valued for engagement and networking)
- **Virtual Mentorship and Coaching** (Providing personalized support and skill-building)
- **Learning Tools (Tutorials and Guides)** (Helping entrepreneurs enhance digital capabilities)
- **Inspirational Stories and Case Studies** (Providing motivation and real-world success insights)

3. Least Effective Digital Resources

Some resources were found to be less effective, mainly due to accessibility challenges:

- **Access to Tools via Schools, Community Centres, or Libraries** (Limited availability in some regions)
- **Self-Directed On-Demand Training** (Difficult for entrepreneurs without prior digital knowledge)
- **Funding and Grants for Digital Tools** (Complex application processes and limited eligibility)
- **Scheduled Training (Live or Pre-Planned)** (Limited flexibility for busy entrepreneurs)

4. Demographic & Business-Related Insights

A statistical analysis of survey responses using **ANOVA and Chi-Square tests** found that:

- **Age** was the only factor that showed a statistically significant impact on digital access challenges.
- **Younger entrepreneurs (under 45)** were more likely to report challenges related to **cost, mentorship, and training needs**.
- **Older entrepreneurs (45+)** were more likely to struggle with **technological complexity and digital literacy gaps**.
- **Gender, location, industry, and business stage** did not significantly impact digital access challenges, indicating that these barriers are **systemic across the Indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystem**.

Key Recommendations

1. Addressing Financial Barriers with More Accessible Funding

- Provide **micro-grants and no-interest loans** for purchasing digital tools and training.
- Simplify **grant application processes** to reduce administrative burden.
- Expand funding coverage to include **e-commerce platforms, AI tools, and digital marketing resources**.

2. Expanding Training and Mentorship Opportunities

- Implement **Indigenous-led digital training programs** that reflect cultural and business realities.
- Offer **long-term mentorship programs** rather than one-time workshops.
- Provide **hands-on training in AI, social media marketing, and cybersecurity**.

3. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

- Invest in **high-speed Internet and mobile networks** for remote Indigenous communities.
- Subsidize **cloud storage, cybersecurity tools, and business software** for entrepreneurs.
- Develop **centralized digital hubs** that provide training, networking, and business resources.

4. Enhancing Cultural Alignment in Digital Tools

- Support Indigenous-led initiatives to develop **culturally relevant business software**.
- Establish **certification programs for Indigenous-friendly digital tools**.
- Strengthen **data protection measures** to uphold **Indigenous data sovereignty**.

5. Establishing a Centralized Digital Resource Hub

- Develop a **one-stop digital platform** offering funding opportunities, tutorials, and business support.
- Create a **peer-to-peer Indigenous entrepreneur network** to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Conclusion

This report underscores the **systemic nature of digital access challenges** faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs. While age impacts specific challenges, barriers related to **cost, training, mentorship, and accessibility** are widespread across the Indigenous business landscape.

By implementing **targeted funding solutions, expanding mentorship and training, improving connectivity, and developing Indigenous-led digital tools**, policymakers and stakeholders can foster **greater digital equity and economic empowerment** within Indigenous business communities.

The insights from this survey serve as a foundation for **policy development, advocacy efforts, and program design** aimed at ensuring that Indigenous entrepreneurs have the digital resources they need to succeed in an increasingly technology-driven economy. **Addressing these challenges will not only support individual businesses but also contribute to the long-term sustainability and growth of the Indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystem.**

1. Introduction

Digital access is a critical enabler of entrepreneurship in today's economy, providing businesses with the tools needed to operate, grow, and innovate. For Indigenous entrepreneurs, digital technology represents both an opportunity and a challenge—offering new pathways to economic empowerment while also highlighting persistent barriers to access, affordability, and relevant training. Understanding these dynamics is essential to ensuring that Indigenous business owners can fully participate in and benefit from the digital economy.

Building on insights gathered from a literature review and stakeholder interviews, this chapter presents the findings of a comprehensive survey conducted with **111 Indigenous entrepreneurs across Canada** in Fall 2024. Designed to deepen our understanding of digital access, the survey captures the lived experiences of Indigenous business owners at various stages of development, from ideation to scaling. By focusing on the realities of digital adoption, challenges, and available support systems, this chapter provides a data-driven complement to the qualitative perspectives shared in previous sections.

Survey Objectives and Approach

The survey was structured to explore key aspects of digital access and its role in Indigenous entrepreneurship. It was divided into six key sections:

- **Digital Tools in Action** – Examining the types of digital tools entrepreneurs use and their importance in daily operations.
- **Digital Access Challenges** – Identifying barriers to accessing and utilizing digital technology.
- **Existing Resources and Support Systems** – Assessing the effectiveness of available digital training, mentorship, funding, and technical support.
- **Gaps and Opportunities** – Exploring unmet needs, potential solutions, and recommendations for improving digital access.
- **Respondent Information** – Gathering demographic and business-related data to contextualize findings.

The survey was distributed through multiple channels, including direct outreach, partner organizations, and online platforms, ensuring broad participation. Respondents represented a diverse range of industries, business stages, and geographic locations, spanning urban centers, remote communities, and rural areas. To encourage engagement, participants had the opportunity to enter a draw for a \$250 MINI TIPI gift card. In alignment with ethical research practices, participation was voluntary, and responses were anonymized where necessary to protect privacy.

Scope and Impact

This chapter presents the survey results, offering quantitative insights into how Indigenous entrepreneurs engage with digital tools, the challenges they face, and the support they require. By analyzing the responses, we identify common trends, systemic gaps, and areas for targeted intervention. The findings serve as a foundation for informing **policy, program development, and advocacy efforts** aimed at strengthening digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

By centring the voices of Indigenous business owners, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of the digital landscape. It showcases both the systemic challenges and the emerging opportunities that exist for Indigenous entrepreneurs in the digital economy. Through this work, we aim to shape a future where digital inclusion is **equitable, community-driven, and responsive to the needs of Indigenous businesses**.

2. Respondent Profile

To effectively assess the state of digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs, it is crucial to first understand the individuals who participated in this survey. This section provides a detailed overview of the respondents, offering insights into their demographic and business characteristics. By examining factors such as business stage, industry, geographic location, and identity, we establish a strong contextual foundation for interpreting the survey's findings.

The 111 Indigenous entrepreneurs who took part in this survey represent a broad spectrum of Canada's entrepreneurial landscape. Their businesses span multiple industries, including retail, technology, arts, and culture, and they are at various stages of development, from ideation to scaling. Participants also come from diverse geographic settings, including urban and rural areas, as well as on-reserve and off-reserve locations. This diversity ensures a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by Indigenous business owners across the country.

This section presents the following key characteristics of the survey respondents:

- **Demographics** – Self-identified Indigenous identity, age, gender, and location.
- **Business Profile** – Business stage, industry, and province/territory of operation.
- **Digital Engagement** – Levels of digital adoption and access to digital tools.

By capturing these details, we can more effectively analyze respondents' experiences with digital tools, identify barriers to access, and highlight opportunities for improvement. This respondent profile serves as a critical reference point, ensuring that the insights presented in subsequent sections are firmly rooted in the realities of Indigenous entrepreneurs.

2.1 Self-Identified Indigenous Group Representation

Survey participants reflected the rich diversity of Indigenous communities across Canada. Among the 111 respondents:

- **72.1%** identified as First Nations.
- **21.6%** identified as Métis.
- **1.8%** identified as Inuit.
- **4.5%** selected *None of the above*.
- **3.6%** chose *Prefer not to answer*.

These figures underscore strong representation from First Nations and Métis entrepreneurs, with smaller participation from Inuit communities. This distribution provides essential context for understanding the survey results and highlights the importance of ensuring digital access solutions address the unique needs of different Indigenous groups.

2.2 Age Distribution

The survey captured responses from Indigenous entrepreneurs of various age groups, emphasizing the generational diversity of the community:

- **33.3%** were aged **35-44**, representing a significant share of mid-career entrepreneurs.
- **26.1%** were aged **45-54**, showcasing experienced business owners.
- **18%** were aged **25-34**, indicating a growing presence of young professionals entering entrepreneurship.
- **15.3%** were aged **55-64**, highlighting continued engagement from older generations.
- A smaller proportion of respondents were aged **65+**.
- No respondents were under the age of 18, aligning with the survey's focus on adult entrepreneurs.

This generational spread underscores the need for tailored digital strategies that cater to entrepreneurs at different life and business stages. Younger entrepreneurs may seek tools to scale their ventures, while older entrepreneurs may prioritize mentorship and user-friendly technology solutions.

2.3 Gender and Identity Representation

Survey respondents reflected a broad range of gender and identity expressions:

- **70.3%** identified as **women**, highlighting their prominent role in Indigenous entrepreneurship.
- **13.5%** identified as **Two-Spirit**, reflecting strong participation from Two-Spirit entrepreneurs.
- **19.8%** selected *None of the above*, indicating other gender identities not listed.
- **3.6%** chose *Prefer not to answer*.

These findings reinforce the leadership role of women and Two-Spirit individuals in Indigenous entrepreneurship. They also emphasize the need for inclusive, culturally responsive digital access programs that support the diverse identities within the community.

2.4 Geographic and Community Representation

Survey participants came from a variety of locations, illustrating the diverse experiences of Indigenous entrepreneurs:

- **46.8%** were located **off-reserve**.
- **45%** operated in **urban** settings.
- **24.3%** were located **on-reserve**.
- **25.2%** operated in **rural** areas.

This distribution highlights the importance of digital infrastructure investments across different geographic contexts. Entrepreneurs in rural and on-reserve locations may face unique barriers to digital access compared to their urban counterparts.

2.5 Provincial and Territorial Distribution

Indigenous entrepreneurs from across Canada participated in the survey. The highest representation came from:

- **32.4%** in **Ontario**.
- **24.3%** in **British Columbia**.
- **15.3%** in **Alberta**.
- **6.3%** in **Manitoba**.
- **5.4%** in **New Brunswick**.
- **4.5%** in **Nova Scotia**.
- **3.6%** in **Northwest Territories**.
- **3.6%** in **Newfoundland**.
- Smaller proportions of respondents came from Québec and Yukon, and no respondents from Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador or Nunavut.

This national representation underscores the diverse challenges and opportunities Indigenous entrepreneurs face in different provinces and territories. Factors such as Internet infrastructure, support networks, and funding access vary across regions, influencing digital adoption.

2.6 Business Stages

Survey respondents represented a broad range of business development stages:

- **36.9%** operated fully **established businesses**.
- **33.3%** were in the **startup phase**.
- **14.4%** were in the **establishment phase**, focusing on strengthening operations.
- **9.9%** were **scaling their businesses**, actively expanding their reach.
- The remaining respondents were in the **ideation phase**, developing their business concepts.

This variation underscores the need for flexible digital support that caters to entrepreneurs at different stages, from idea generation to scaling operations.

2.7 Industry Representation

The Indigenous entrepreneurs surveyed operate across a diverse range of industries, with notable concentrations in:

- **23.4%** in **Arts and Culture**, reflecting the deep connection between entrepreneurship and cultural expression.

- **13.5%** in **Health and Wellness**.
- **10.8%** in **Retail**, illustrating the importance of product-based businesses.
- **9%** in Technology.
- **8.1%** in Education and Training.
- **4.5%** in both Hospitality and Tourism and Manufacturing.
- A smaller proportion of respondents are involved in other industries.

Other industries represented include agriculture, construction, energy and natural resources, and finance. This breadth of industry engagement highlights the need for sector-specific digital tools and training programs to effectively support Indigenous entrepreneurs.

2.8 Conclusion

Understanding the respondent profile is essential for interpreting the survey findings and crafting meaningful solutions. Key insights include:

- **Geographic factors** influence digital connectivity challenges.
- **Industry representation** guides how digital tools can be adapted for specific sectors.
- **Demographic diversity** informs the development of inclusive, culturally responsive digital strategies.
- **Business stage variation** ensures tailored recommendations that support entrepreneurs from startup to scale-up.

This respondent profile provides a crucial lens for analyzing the survey's findings, ensuring that recommendations for improving digital access and equity for Indigenous entrepreneurs are rooted in real-world experiences. By centring the voices of Indigenous entrepreneurs, we can drive meaningful change in the digital landscape and strengthen economic empowerment across communities.

3. Digital Tools in Action

Digital tools and technologies are vital for entrepreneurs looking to operate, grow, and innovate in today's economy. For Indigenous entrepreneurs, access to these tools is not just about convenience—it is essential for overcoming barriers, enhancing efficiency, and seizing new opportunities in competitive markets. This section examines the digital tools currently utilized by Indigenous entrepreneurs, their significance in business operations, and the key motivations driving their adoption.

3.1 The Importance of Digital Access in Business Operations

The survey results underscore the critical role of digital access in Indigenous entrepreneurship. Respondents rated the importance of digital access on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important), and the findings were conclusive:

- **81.1%** of respondents rated digital access as **extremely important (5)**, underscoring its role in daily operations and long-term business success.
- **14.4%** rated digital access as **important (4)**, further reinforcing its high value.
- Only **3.6%** of respondents rated digital access as moderately important (3) or lower.
- Negligible percentages selected ratings of **1 or 2**, demonstrating near-universal recognition of its significance.

Key Insights:

- These findings confirm that digital access is not a luxury but a necessity for Indigenous entrepreneurs to remain competitive and sustainable.
- The overwhelming majority rating digital access as highly important emphasizes the urgent need to address barriers such as Internet connectivity, affordability, and digital training.
- Given the strong reliance on digital tools, tailored support programs can help bridge gaps in access and maximize digital adoption.

3.2 Motivations for Adopting Digital Resources

Indigenous entrepreneurs adopt digital tools for a variety of strategic reasons, from enhancing efficiency to expanding their market reach. Respondents could select multiple motivations, and the results indicate a strong alignment between digital adoption and business growth.

Top Motivations for Digital Adoption:

- **Increase efficiency and productivity (85.6%)** – Streamlining operations and maximizing output is the top driver.
- **Reach new customers or markets (81.1%)** – Digital tools help businesses expand their reach beyond their local communities.

- **Improve customer engagement and satisfaction (80.2%)** – Enhancing interactions with clients and improving service delivery is a key priority.
- **Streamline operations and reduce costs (76.6%)** – Cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency are major factors.
- **Enhance online presence and brand visibility (75.7%)** – Many entrepreneurs use digital tools to strengthen their brand identity and market position.
- **Access data and analytics for better decision-making (70.3%)** – Data-driven insights are becoming increasingly valuable for business strategies.
- **Stay competitive in the market (63.1%)** – Keeping pace with industry trends and competitor strategies is a priority.

Additional Motivations:

- Some respondents cited unique motivations such as *“personal development and freedom”* and *“accessing digital resources.”*

Key Insights:

- The high response rates across all categories suggest that Indigenous entrepreneurs view digital tools as crucial for both short-term success and long-term business growth.
- The emphasis on online presence and analytics highlights a growing awareness of the power of branding and data-driven decision-making.
- Personalized digital solutions tailored to Indigenous businesses can enhance adoption and ensure that technology aligns with community-driven business models.

3.3 Digital Tools in Use

The survey results reveal the breadth of digital tools Indigenous entrepreneurs rely on, demonstrating how these resources support various aspects of business operations.

Most Commonly Used Digital Tools:

- **Hardware (e.g., computers, laptops)** – 87.4% of respondents rely on essential computing devices.
- **Meeting Platform Software (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams, Google Hangouts)** – 83.8% use virtual communication tools for collaboration and networking.
- **Internet Connectivity** – 82.9% highlight the fundamental necessity of reliable Internet access.
- **Creative, Communications, and Production Tools (e.g., Canva, Grammarly, Sonix.ai)** – 73.9% leverage these tools for branding, content creation, and business communication.
- **Telecommunications (e.g., cellular phones)** – 65.8% depend on mobile connectivity for business management.
- **eCommerce Systems (e.g., Shopify, Squarespace)** – 50.5% utilize online sales platforms to reach broader markets.

- **AI Tools (e.g., ChatGPT, automation software)** – 54.1% show growing interest in artificial intelligence for productivity and innovation.
- **Financial Management Systems (e.g., QuickBooks, Wave)** – 47.7% use financial tools to streamline accounting and ensure operational efficiency.
- **Sales and Marketing Systems (e.g., Mailchimp, Hootsuite)** – 27.9% leverage digital marketing to engage customers and drive sales.

Less Commonly Used Digital Tools:

- **Operations and Project Management Systems** – 17.1% adoption, indicating potential gaps in structured business planning.
- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems** – 18.9% usage, suggesting an opportunity for better customer engagement strategies.
- **Cybersecurity Systems** – 14.4% adoption, highlighting a need for greater awareness around digital security.
- **Human Resource (HR) Systems** – 7.2% usage, reflecting limited adoption of workforce management tools.
- **Supply Chain Management Systems** – 3.6% usage, indicating minimal engagement with logistics and inventory tracking solutions.

Key Insights:

- **Widespread reliance on foundational tools** (hardware, Internet, and communication platforms) underscores their critical role in enabling business operations.
- **Strong adoption of creative and eCommerce tools** demonstrates a focus on branding and online sales, particularly in industries such as Arts and Culture and Retail.
- **Lower adoption of project management, CRM, and cybersecurity tools** suggests potential training and support gaps that could impact long-term business resilience.
- **AI adoption is on the rise**, indicating that Indigenous entrepreneurs are exploring new ways to enhance productivity and innovation.

3.4 Conclusion

The findings in this section highlight the pivotal role digital tools play in Indigenous entrepreneurship. Key takeaways include:

- **Digital access is a necessity, not an option.** Nearly all respondents emphasized the importance of digital access for business success.
- **Efficiency, market expansion, and customer engagement** are the primary drivers of digital adoption.
- **Foundational tools like hardware, Internet, and meeting platforms are essential**, but there is room for growth in areas such as cybersecurity, CRM, and project management.
- **Tailored support and training programs** could enhance the adoption of specialized tools, ensuring Indigenous entrepreneurs maximize the benefits of digital technology.

By understanding the tools Indigenous entrepreneurs use and the motivations behind their adoption, we can better advocate for policies, funding, and resources that ensure equitable access to digital technology. This, in turn, strengthens Indigenous businesses, drives economic empowerment, and fosters sustainable growth in Indigenous communities.

4. Digital Access Challenges

Access to digital tools and technologies is essential for Indigenous entrepreneurs to thrive in today's economy. However, significant barriers remain, preventing equitable access and effective adoption. This section explores the primary challenges reported by Indigenous entrepreneurs, their impact on business operations, and the level of trust in digital software and programs.

4.1 Reported Challenges in Digital Access

The survey highlights several key challenges Indigenous entrepreneurs face when accessing and utilizing digital tools. These barriers must be addressed to foster inclusive and sustainable digital adoption.

Top Challenges Identified

- **Cost (88.3%)** – The most commonly reported barrier, emphasizing that financial constraints limit the adoption of necessary digital tools.
- **Lack of Training (57.7%)** – Over half of respondents cited the need for training, indicating a knowledge gap in effectively using digital resources.
- **Lack of Mentorship (39.6%)** – Many entrepreneurs struggle to find guidance on navigating digital systems and leveraging technology for growth.
- **Lack of Indigenous Cultural Ways of Knowing and Being (36%)** – The absence of culturally relevant digital resources prevents meaningful engagement with digital tools.
- **Availability (27%)** – Limited access to digital tools, particularly in rural and remote areas, remains a concern.
- **Connectivity Issues (17.1%)** – Some respondents experience unreliable Internet access, hindering digital adoption and business efficiency.

Additional Challenges

A few respondents noted unique challenges, including:

- The overwhelming variety and complexity of available digital tools.
- Limited staff capacity to implement digital solutions effectively.
- Personal barriers, such as health challenges or client-related issues.

Key Insights:

- **Affordability remains the most significant barrier**, highlighting the need for accessible funding and subsidy programs.
- **Training and mentorship gaps indicate a need for structured learning opportunities** tailored to Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- **The call for culturally relevant digital tools underscores the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge** into digital education and solutions.

- **Connectivity disparities between urban and remote communities** continue to hinder equitable access to digital technology.

These findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions, including financial support, skill development programs, culturally aligned digital solutions, and improved infrastructure investments.

4.2 Impact of Digital Access Challenges

To gain deeper insights into the real-world consequences of digital barriers, respondents shared how these challenges have affected their businesses. Their experiences highlight the tangible effects on growth, operations, and competitiveness.

Key Themes and Business Impacts:

1. Slower Growth and Lost Opportunities

- High costs and lack of access to digital tools slow business expansion.
- Missed opportunities for networking, funding, and client acquisition limit growth potential.

2. Operational Inefficiencies

- Outdated or inefficient technologies, combined with a lack of training, result in time-consuming processes.
- Connectivity issues disrupt workflows, reducing productivity and service delivery.

3. Barriers to Scaling and Competitiveness

- Limited access to advanced tools prevents businesses from scaling effectively.
- Entrepreneurs struggle to afford subscriptions or software that could streamline operations.

4. Cultural Misalignment and Lack of Support

- Many mainstream digital tools and training programs fail to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, leading to feelings of exclusion.
- Entrepreneurs report a lack of support that recognizes Indigenous ways of knowing and doing business.

5. Personal Stress and Overload

- Entrepreneurs express feeling overwhelmed by administrative tasks and digital learning curves.
- Limited access to training and mentorship forces business owners to balance multiple roles without adequate support.

Specific Examples of Impact:

- Some entrepreneurs have delayed launching their businesses due to a lack of confidence in using digital tools.
- Business owners in remote regions struggle with connectivity issues, making virtual meetings and cloud-based tools unreliable.
- High setup and maintenance costs force some entrepreneurs to rely on outdated or shared technology, limiting their efficiency.

Key Insights:

- **Systemic digital barriers translate into reduced productivity, lost revenue, and limited market access.**
- **Indigenous entrepreneurs require tailored digital solutions, training, and mentorship programs** to build confidence and optimize business operations.
- **Addressing these challenges will not only support individual businesses but also strengthen the broader Indigenous economic landscape.**

4.3 Trust in Digital Software and Programs

The survey explored whether Indigenous entrepreneurs trust digital software and programs, revealing that trust levels are generally high but accompanied by significant concerns.

Trust Levels Among Respondents:

- **86.5%** of respondents indicated they **trust digital software and programs.**
- **13.5%** of respondents expressed **distrust** in these tools.

Reasons for Distrust:

For those who expressed distrust, concerns included:

1. Security and Privacy Concerns

- Worries about data breaches and the protection of Indigenous data sovereignty.
- One respondent shared, *“With so many data breaches over the years, we cannot be confident that mainstream data systems will respect Indigenous data sovereignty.”*

2. Data Privacy Issues

- Fears about personal and business information being tracked or shared.
- A respondent stated, *“I do NOT always trust software and programs as I wonder how my personal information is being tracked or shared. ZERO faith in cybersecurity in general AND... no choice but to cross my fingers and hope for the best.”*

3. Errors and Reliability Issues

- Concerns over software malfunctions negatively affecting business operations.
- One entrepreneur noted, *“Afraid of errors.”*

4. Poor Customer Support and Sales Practices

- Dissatisfaction with software companies due to lack of support and aggressive sales tactics.
- A respondent commented, *“Not so much about trust but the quality of support and the continuous harassment of purchasing more products to be more efficient.”*

5. Over-Permissioned Software

- Concerns over excessive permissions granted to software providers.
- One participant observed, *“Sometimes a 'grant privs' goes a bit far, and the team likely doesn't notice.”*

6. General Distrust in Software

- Some respondents expressed an overall skepticism about digital platforms.
- A software developer remarked, *“There is literally nothing you should trust about any software platform.”*

Key Insights:

- While most respondents trust digital software, **security, privacy, and ethical concerns remain significant barriers** to full adoption.
- **Concerns about Indigenous data sovereignty and personal privacy indicate a need for stronger safeguards** in digital platforms.
- **Improving customer support and transparency in digital tools could enhance trust and confidence** among Indigenous entrepreneurs.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings in this section reveal systemic challenges that Indigenous entrepreneurs face in adopting digital tools. The top barriers include cost, training gaps, mentorship shortages, lack of culturally relevant digital tools, and connectivity issues. These barriers have **tangible negative impacts** on business growth, efficiency, and competitiveness.

Building **affordable, inclusive, and culturally appropriate digital solutions** is essential to bridging these gaps. Key actions needed include:

- Expanding financial support and affordable digital access initiatives.
- Developing culturally relevant digital training and mentorship programs.
- Strengthening cybersecurity measures to build trust in digital tools.

- Investing in infrastructure to improve connectivity in remote communities.

By addressing these challenges, Indigenous entrepreneurs can unlock greater opportunities for success, innovation, and sustainable business growth in the digital economy.

5. Effectiveness of Digital Access Resource and Support Systems

The survey assessed the effectiveness of various digital access resources and support systems utilized by Indigenous entrepreneurs. This section examines key types of training resources, mentorship opportunities, and funding supports, providing insights into their impact and identifying areas for improvement.

5.1 Most Effective Resources

The survey results reveal that Indigenous entrepreneurs find hands-on, practical resources the most beneficial in navigating digital access challenges. The following resources were rated as the most effective:

1. Templates and Online Resources

- **42 Extremely Effective Responses**
- **96 respondents** rated this as at least moderately effective.
- **Key Takeaway:** Practical, ready-to-use templates help entrepreneurs streamline operations, making them a valuable and accessible resource.

2. In-Person Workshops and Seminars

- **40 Extremely Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** Hands-on training fosters engagement, networking, and real-time learning, making in-person interactions highly effective.

3. Virtual Mentorship and Coaching

- **34 Extremely Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** Personalized mentorship helps entrepreneurs overcome individual challenges, reinforcing the importance of tailored guidance.

4. Learning Tools (Tutorials and Guides)

- **35 Extremely Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** Practical, step-by-step guides help entrepreneurs develop digital skills efficiently.

5. Inspirational Stories and Case Studies

- **38 Extremely Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** Success stories provide motivation and practical insights, helping entrepreneurs visualize their own path forward.

5.2 Least Effective Resources

While some resources were highly beneficial, others were less effective for Indigenous entrepreneurs due to accessibility challenges or limited applicability:

1. Access to Tools Through Schools, Community Centres, or Libraries

- **15 Slightly Effective and 7 Not Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** These resources may be underutilized due to location constraints or inadequate infrastructure.

2. Self-Directed On-Demand Training

- **20 Slightly Effective and 3 Not Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** While useful for some, self-directed learning can be challenging without mentorship or peer collaboration.

3. Funding and Grants for Digital Tools

- **12 Slightly Effective and 3 Not Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** Entrepreneurs face difficulties in accessing and applying for grants due to complex processes and limited availability.

4. Scheduled Training (Live or Pre-Planned)

- **15 Slightly Effective and 3 Not Effective Responses**
- **Key Takeaway:** Rigid schedules and generic content may not fully meet the specific needs of Indigenous entrepreneurs.

5.3 Key Learnings from the Survey

1. Practical Resources Outperform: Hands-on tools such as **templates, guides, and mentorship** are the most effective. These resources offer direct, actionable solutions for business owners.

2. Engagement Matters: Entrepreneurs highly value **interactive and relationship-driven resources**, such as mentorship and workshops, which offer personalized and responsive learning opportunities.

3. Barriers Persist in Accessibility: Resources requiring **specific access points** (e.g., community centres) or self-directed engagement (e.g., online training) are **less effective** for many Indigenous entrepreneurs.

4. Cultural Relevance Is Critical: Indigenous entrepreneurs prefer resources that **reflect their cultural values and ways of knowing**. The effectiveness of digital tools increases when they align with Indigenous knowledge systems.

5. Funding Accessibility Needs Improvement: Although financial support is essential, **funding programs remain difficult to access** due to complex applications and eligibility criteria.

5.4 Urgent Digital Needs

Survey respondents identified the most pressing digital needs for their businesses. These priorities help pinpoint where additional resources and support are required:

- 1. Website Development and Optimization:** Many entrepreneurs struggle with outdated websites or lack online presence altogether.
- 2. Funding for Digital Tools and Services:** Respondents need financial assistance to purchase **software, hardware, and digital services**.
- 3. Marketing and Sales Tools:** Many entrepreneurs require better **digital marketing tools** to expand their reach and streamline their sales efforts.
- 4. Hardware and Infrastructure:** Access to **computers, POS systems, cloud storage, and reliable Internet** remains a key challenge, particularly in remote areas.
- 5. Bookkeeping and Financial Management Tools:** Many respondents require **accounting and financial management software** to efficiently track business finances.
- 6. Integration of Digital Tools:** Entrepreneurs using multiple platforms need **better integration** to improve efficiency.
- 7. Training and Education:** There is a strong demand for **training in AI, marketing, and bookkeeping** to enhance digital literacy.
- 8. Indigenous-Specific Digital Solutions:** Respondents emphasized the need for **tools that reflect Indigenous business values** and uphold **Indigenous data sovereignty**.

5.5 Identified Needs for Enhanced Digital Support

In addition to identifying gaps, respondents were asked what types of digital support and resources would be most beneficial. The most common responses included:

- 1. More Accessible and Flexible Funding Options**
 - Micro-grants and no-interest loans for digital tools and training.
 - Easier application processes with fewer barriers.
 - More grants that cover digital marketing, AI tools, and e-commerce platforms.
- 2. Expanded Digital Training and Mentorship**
 - Indigenous-led digital training reflecting cultural and business realities.
 - More hands-on workshops on social media marketing, AI, and cybersecurity.
 - Long-term mentorship programs rather than one-time training sessions.

3. **Stronger Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity Support**
 - Investments in high-speed Internet and mobile networks for remote communities.
 - Affordable access to cloud storage, cybersecurity tools, and business software.
4. **Digital Tools That Align with Indigenous Business Practices**
 - Indigenous-led initiatives to develop culturally relevant business software.
 - Certification or endorsement programs for Indigenous-friendly digital tools.
 - Data protection and Indigenous-owned data management solutions.
5. **Centralized Resource Hub for Indigenous Entrepreneurs**
 - A one-stop digital platform for funding, training, and business support.
 - A peer-to-peer network for Indigenous entrepreneurs to share resources and experiences.

These insights offer valuable direction for governments, funding bodies, and Indigenous business organizations to develop more effective digital access initiatives. The next chapter will explore recommendations from respondents on how to improve digital access and foster economic empowerment through technology.

6. Analysis

The findings of this survey provide deep insights into the digital access experiences of Indigenous entrepreneurs. The results highlight critical systemic barriers, key areas of opportunity, and the potential for policy and programmatic interventions to improve digital access and utilization. This analysis explores overarching trends, demographic and business-related influences, and actionable takeaways for supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs in their digital journeys.

6.1 Overarching Themes and Key Findings

The survey results confirm that digital access is widely regarded as essential among Indigenous entrepreneurs. However, significant challenges persist, particularly related to affordability, training gaps, and mentorship. While many entrepreneurs are leveraging digital tools effectively, systemic inequities continue to hinder equitable participation in the digital economy.

1. The Critical Role of Digital Access

The overwhelming majority of respondents (81.1%) rated digital access as extremely important to their business operations, with an additional 14.4% rating it as important. This near-unanimous agreement underscores the necessity of digital tools for competitiveness, growth, and efficiency. However, despite this recognition, many entrepreneurs still struggle to acquire and fully leverage these tools due to financial and structural barriers.

2. Financial Constraints as the Primary Barrier

The single most significant challenge reported was **cost**, with 88.3% of respondents citing financial barriers as a major impediment to digital adoption. This suggests that existing funding programs may not be sufficiently accessible or aligned with the financial realities of Indigenous entrepreneurs.

3. Gaps in Training and Mentorship

Over half of the respondents (57.7%) identified **lack of training** as a barrier, and 39.6% noted **lack of mentorship** as a significant challenge. These findings highlight the importance of **practical, culturally relevant training and long-term mentorship** in bridging the digital divide.

4. The Need for Culturally Aligned Digital Resources

A notable 36% of respondents reported that existing digital tools do not reflect **Indigenous ways of knowing and being**. This underscores a clear demand for Indigenous-designed and led digital solutions that integrate cultural values, traditions, and business approaches.

5. Accessibility and Connectivity Challenges

While not as frequently cited as cost or training, **connectivity issues (17.1%)** remain a significant concern, particularly for rural and remote entrepreneurs. These challenges impact access to e-commerce, cloud-based tools, and virtual networking opportunities, limiting business growth potential.

6.2 Statistical Analysis of Key Demographic and Business-Related Factors

To further analyze how demographic and business-related factors influence digital access experiences, we conducted statistical tests controlling for **age, gender, location, industry, and business stage**.

1. ANOVA Analysis: Impact of Key Factors on Perceived Importance of Digital Access

We applied **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** to assess whether perceptions of digital access importance varied significantly across different demographic and business-related groups. The results indicated **no statistically significant differences** based on gender, location, industry, or business stage. However, **age emerged as a statistically significant factor**.

2. Chi-Square Analysis: Impact of Demographics on Digital Access Challenges

To determine whether categorical variables—such as **trust in digital tools** and **challenges in digital access**—were significantly associated with demographic and business-related factors, we conducted **Chi-Square tests**. The results showed that **age was the only factor that exhibited statistically significant relationships with digital challenges**, while gender, location, industry, and business stage did not.

3. Age-Based Trends in Digital Challenges

Our findings indicate that **younger Indigenous entrepreneurs (under 45 years old)** are significantly more likely to report challenges related to:

- **Cost constraints** (due to limited capital and early-stage business development)
- **Lack of mentorship** (due to smaller business networks and fewer connections)
- **Training needs** (as they seek to develop digital skills for scalability)

Conversely, **older entrepreneurs (45+)** were more likely to report barriers related to:

- **Technological complexity** (difficulty adopting and integrating new technologies)
- **Digital literacy gaps** (limited confidence in navigating online business tools)

These findings suggest that **tailored digital support programs should be age-specific**, offering financial support and mentorship for younger entrepreneurs, while emphasizing **digital literacy and adoption strategies** for older business owners.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations

1. Addressing Financial Barriers with More Accessible Funding

Given that **cost is the most significant challenge**, funding programs should:

- Offer **micro-grants and no-interest loans** specifically for digital tools and training.
- Simplify application processes to reduce administrative burdens.
- Expand coverage to include **e-commerce platforms, AI tools, and digital marketing solutions**.

2. Expanding Training and Mentorship Opportunities

Since **57.7% of respondents cite lack of training** as a barrier, solutions should include:

- Indigenous-led digital training programs that reflect cultural and business realities.
- **Long-term mentorship programs** rather than one-time workshops.
- **Hands-on training in AI, social media marketing, and cybersecurity** to meet emerging business needs.

3. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

To support entrepreneurs in **rural and remote locations**, efforts should focus on:

- Expanding **high-speed Internet access and mobile networks**.
- Subsidizing cloud storage, cybersecurity tools, and business software.
- Developing **centralized Indigenous digital hubs** to offer online resources and networking opportunities.

4. Enhancing Cultural Alignment in Digital Tools

The **36% of respondents who noted a lack of Indigenous-centered tools** highlight the need for:

- Indigenous-led development of **business software and e-commerce platforms**.
- Certification programs for **Indigenous-friendly digital tools**.
- Stronger data protection frameworks supporting **Indigenous data sovereignty**.

5. Establishing a Centralized Digital Resource Hub

To facilitate better access to **training, funding, and peer networks**, stakeholders should develop:

- A **one-stop digital hub** featuring funding opportunities, tutorials, and business support.
- A **peer-to-peer Indigenous entrepreneur network** to encourage knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

6.4 Conclusion

The findings of this survey underscore the **systemic nature of digital access challenges** faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs. While **age significantly impacts specific challenges**, barriers related to cost, training, and accessibility are **shared across all demographics and business types**.

This analysis highlights the importance of **practical, culturally relevant, and financially accessible solutions** to ensure Indigenous entrepreneurs can fully participate in the digital economy. By addressing these challenges through targeted funding, expanded mentorship, improved connectivity, and Indigenous-led digital initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders can foster **greater digital equity and economic empowerment** within Indigenous business communities.

Addendum A: Survey

Empowering Indigenous Entrepreneurs: Digital Access and Needs Survey 2024

Welcome to the Indigenous Entrepreneurs Digital Access Survey

We invite you to participate in this important survey designed specifically for Indigenous entrepreneurs at all stages of business development. Our goal is to collect valuable data on your digital access needs and experiences, identify any gaps in current resources, and gather actionable insights to enhance digital access among Indigenous entrepreneurs. By completing this survey, you'll not only contribute to shaping the future of digital access for our community but also have a chance to win a \$250 gift certificate to MINI TIPI.

The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete and is open until August 30th. Your feedback is crucial in helping us understand and address the challenges faced by Indigenous entrepreneurs in the digital space. Together, we can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for all.

Thank you for your participation and for being a part of this collective effort.

Let's shape the future of digital access together.

1. Digital Access Needs

- How important is digital access for your business operations?
 - Not important
 - Slightly important
 - Moderately important
 - Very important
 - Extremely important
- Do you trust digital software and programs?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Why? Please explain.
- Which digital tools and technologies do you currently use? (Select all that apply)
 - Internet Connectivity
 - Hardware (e.g., computers, smartphones)
 - Essential Software (e.g., OS, Cloud, AI)
 - Meeting platform software (i.e., Zoom, MS Teams)
 - Telecommunications Cellular phone
 - Operating Systems
 - Financial Systems (software)
 - Sales and Marketing Systems (software)
 - E-commerce Platforms

- Creative Tools
- Point of Sale (POS) Systems
- Payment Systems
- Cybersecurity
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems (software)
- Supply Chain Management (SCM) Systems (software)
- Human Resource (HR) Systems (software)

2. Digital Access Challenges

- What are the main challenges you face in accessing digital tools and technologies? (Select all that apply)
 - Cost
 - Availability
 - Lack of training
 - Lack of mentorship
 - Connectivity issues
 - Lack of Indigenous Cultural ways of Knowing and Being (cultural safety)
 - Other (please specify)
- How have these challenges impacted your business?

3. Existing Resources and Support Systems

- Which digital access resources and support systems have you utilized? (Select all that apply)
 - On-Demand Training (self-directed)
 - Scheduled Training
 - Virtual Training
 - In-Person Training
 - Virtual Mentorship and Coaching
 - On-Demand Mentorship and Coaching (when required)
 - Inspiration, Stories, Case Studies
 - Templates, Online Resources
 - Funding (what does this mean in a digital context?)
 - Learning Tools
 - Access to Technology (what does this mean?)
 - Other (please specify)
- How effective were these resources in meeting your needs?
 - Not effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Very effective
 - Extremely effective

4. Gaps and Opportunities

- What gaps do you see in the current digital access resources and support systems for Indigenous entrepreneurs?
- What additional support or resources would you find most beneficial?
- What is the most immediate need for your business?

5. Recommendations

- What recommendations would you make to enhance digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs?
- How can support organizations better address your digital access needs?

6. Additional Insights

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or perspectives on digital access for Indigenous entrepreneurs?
- What would be your motivation to adopt digital resources for your business?

9. Basic Information

We would love to support you and work with you.

First Name

Last Name

Position (if applicable)

Organization (if applicable)

Email Address

Province/Indigenous Community

Do you belong to any of the following groups?

Tick all that apply.

- Inuit
- First Nations
- Métis
- None of the above
- Prefer not to answer

Do you identify as any of the following?

Tick all that apply.

- Woman
- Two-Spirit

- Youth (under 18)
- None of the above
- Prefer not to answer

Demographic Information

- What is your age group?
 - Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65+
- What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Prefer not to say
- What is your location?
 - On reserve
 - Off reserve
 - Urban
 - Rural

Business Information

- What stage is your business currently in?
 - Ideation
 - Startup
 - Establishment
 - Operating
 - Scaling

Privacy Policy

I understand the information I submit as part of this registration will be held by the Indigenous Prosperity Foundation according to their respective Privacy Notices.

Opt-In Options:

- *I would like to be notified when the report is released.*
- *I would like to join the Indigenous Prosperity Foundation Mailing List to stay up to date on the happenings at IPF.*