



Indigenous  
Prosperity  
Foundation

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

**Summary Report**

# Acknowledgement & Gratitude

Thank you to the Indigenous entrepreneurs, industry experts, and ecosystem leaders who shared their time, insights, and experiences for this study. Your contributions have been invaluable in shaping these findings and advancing digital access for Indigenous businesses.

This report reflects the collective effort of a thriving Indigenous business community. Your leadership and vision drive meaningful change, and we are grateful for your commitment to fostering Indigenous prosperity.

*With gratitude,  
Indigenous Prosperity Foundation*



# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	04
Introduction	08
Understanding Digital Adoption & Barriers	10
Breaking the Cost Barrier	14
Closing the Connectivity Gap	18
Bridging the Digital Skills Divide	22
Transforming Systems	26
Addressing Unique Barriers	31
Conclusion	35
Bibliography	37



# Executive Summary

Digital access is essential for Indigenous entrepreneurs to compete, grow, and connect in today's economy.

Yet, systemic barriers—unreliable Internet, high costs, and limited digital training—continue to limit opportunities, particularly for Indigenous women, youth, and those in rural communities. Without urgent action, these challenges will further restrict business growth, job creation, and long-term economic prosperity. Ensuring equitable access to digital tools, infrastructure, and culturally relevant training is not just an economic priority—it is a matter of fairness and inclusion.

This report, commissioned by the Indigenous Prosperity Foundation (IPF), presents a data-driven analysis of the digital divide and offers six key Indigenous-led solutions:

- Expand Indigenous-led broadband infrastructure
- Improve funding access and affordability
- Enhance culturally relevant digital training
- Strengthen policy, governance, and institutional support
- Advance digital security and sustainability
- Address unique barriers for Indigenous women and youth

## Key Findings

### 1. Digital Access is Essential but Unevenly Distributed

Digital tools are a necessity, not a luxury. Over 80 percent of Indigenous entrepreneurs say digital access is critical for their business success, with 85 percent using digital tools to increase efficiency, expand their market reach, and improve customer engagement.

Despite this, significant digital barriers persist:

- **88 percent cite affordability as the biggest obstacle**, with the high cost of hardware, software, and Internet access limiting adoption.
- **57 percent report a lack of digital training**, leaving them unable to fully utilize digital tools.



- **39 percent lack mentorship, making it difficult to navigate digital transformation and business growth.**
- **36 percent say existing digital tools and resources do not align with Indigenous cultural values,** reducing engagement and effectiveness.

## 2. Infrastructure and Digital Resource Gaps Persist

- **65 percent of Indigenous entrepreneurs struggle with high Internet costs,** making online operations difficult.
- **17 percent report unreliable broadband access,** particularly in remote communities with limited investment in infrastructure.
- **73 percent rely on creative and marketing tools,** yet many lack cybersecurity (14.4 percent), customer relationship management (CRM) systems (18.9 percent), and project management software (17.1 percent), highlighting critical gaps in adoption and support.
- **86 percent trust digital platforms,** but concerns about data security, privacy, and software reliability remain widespread.

## 3. Limited Digital Access Directly Affects Business Outcomes

Indigenous entrepreneurs with limited digital access experience slower business growth and fewer opportunities to expand into new markets.

- Many report missing funding and networking opportunities due to limited knowledge of online grant applications and digital marketing.
- Reliance on outdated technology results in inefficiencies and lost productivity, further widening the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses.
- Limited digital trust affects adoption rates, as concerns about data sovereignty, privacy, and customer service deter full engagement with digital tools.

## 4. Indigenous Women and Youth Face Additional Barriers

- **91 percent of Indigenous women entrepreneurs cite financial constraints** as a major obstacle to accessing digital tools.
- **65 percent of Indigenous youth say they were introduced to digital tools too late,** impacting their ability to develop essential skills early in their careers.
- Many Indigenous women entrepreneurs report experiencing **online harassment,** discouraging their participation in digital business spaces and reducing visibility in online markets.



# Pathways for Action: Closing the Digital Divide

This report highlights a clear need for targeted, Indigenous-led interventions to bridge the digital gap and empower Indigenous entrepreneurs. Addressing these systemic challenges requires collaborative efforts between Indigenous leaders, policymakers, funders, and industry stakeholders. The following key actions must be prioritized:

## 1. Expand Indigenous-Led Digital Infrastructure

- Invest in Indigenous-owned broadband projects with long-term infrastructure maintenance.
- Subsidize high-speed Internet access and develop affordable data plans for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

## 2. Improve Funding Accessibility and Affordability

- Expand Indigenous-led micro-loans, grants, and flexible financing for digital adoption.
- Increase the capacity of Indigenous-owned financial institutions to provide culturally relevant financing models.
- Simplify funding application and reporting processes to reduce bureaucratic barriers.

## 3. Enhance Culturally Relevant Digital Training and Mentorship

- Develop Indigenous-led training programs that integrate traditional knowledge and business realities.
- Provide sector-specific training in e-commerce, cybersecurity, AI, automation, and digital marketing.
- Offer flexible learning models, including in-person, virtual, and hybrid options.
- Expand digital literacy certification programs and training to increase Indigenous participation in the digital economy.

## 4. Strengthen Policy, Governance, and Institutional Support

- Ensure Indigenous representation in digital policy-making, program design, and funding allocation.
- Advocate for Indigenous-led governance models in broadband expansion, funding distribution, and technology regulation.



- Streamline funding and training program eligibility to reduce inefficiencies.
- Strengthen collaboration among digital support organizations to create a coordinated support ecosystem.
- Establish a centralized Indigenous-led Digital Hub to consolidate and communicate funding, training, mentorship, and resources.

## 5. Advance Digital Security and Sustainability

- Support Indigenous-led cybersecurity initiatives to protect business data and privacy.
- Develop long-term broadband sustainability models for infrastructure maintenance.
- Increase awareness and training on digital security to improve online safety for Indigenous businesses.

## 6. Address Unique Barriers for Indigenous Women and Youth

- Expand targeted funding, grants, and micro-loans for Indigenous women and youth entrepreneurs.
- Develop programs that address financial, technical, and social challenges unique to women and youth entrepreneurs in the digital economy.
- Create safer digital spaces through stronger protections against online harassment.
- Strengthen STEAM education pathways to increase Indigenous youth participation in digital industries.

## A Call to Action

Closing the digital divide requires immediate action. Governments, funders, and industry leaders must commit to Indigenous-led solutions that provide reliable broadband, affordable digital tools, and culturally relevant training. Without these investments, Indigenous entrepreneurs will continue to be excluded from Canada's digital economy. Without urgent action, this gap will continue to limit business growth, job creation, and economic self-determination for Indigenous communities across Canada.

This summary report serves as a roadmap for action, calling on governments, funders, corporate partners, and Indigenous organizations to invest in long-term, sustainable, and Indigenous-led digital solutions. By ensuring equitable digital access today, Indigenous entrepreneurs will have the tools, skills, and resources necessary to compete, innovate, and succeed on their own terms. **The time to act is now.**



# Introduction

Access to digital tools and technology is critical for entrepreneurship in today's economy, yet many Indigenous entrepreneurs face systemic barriers to digital adoption.

From unreliable internet infrastructure in rural and remote communities to the high costs of digital tools and limited access to culturally relevant training, these challenges create disparities that hinder business growth and economic self-determination.

This study explores the digital access landscape for Indigenous entrepreneurs, identifying key barriers, opportunities, and actionable solutions to ensure Indigenous-led businesses can thrive in an increasingly digital world. By centring Indigenous perspectives and experiences, this research aims to inform policies, programs, and partnerships that advance digital equity and economic empowerment for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

## Objectives of the Summary Report

This report, commissioned by the **Indigenous Prosperity Foundation (IPF)**, aims to:

- **Identify barriers to digital access** for Indigenous entrepreneurs, with a focus on women and youth.
- **Assess existing resources and supports** to determine their effectiveness and accessibility.
- **Highlight key gaps** in infrastructure, funding, and training.
- **Provide actionable recommendations** to improve digital access and empower Indigenous entrepreneurs.

## Methodology

This study employed a **multi-method approach** to ensure a **comprehensive and data-driven** understanding of digital access challenges. Research methods include:

- **Literature Review** – Analyzing research on digital access, entrepreneurship, and Indigenous economic development.
- **Stakeholder Interviews** – Gathering insights from 18 Indigenous entrepreneurs, digital access experts, and support organizations.



- **Survey Analysis** – Capturing data from **111 Indigenous entrepreneurs'** experiences with digital tools and barriers.
- **Ecosystem Mapping** – Evaluating the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of current digital programs.

This report combines **quantitative and qualitative data** to offer **a holistic view** of the digital landscape for Indigenous entrepreneurs and highlight areas for targeted intervention.

## Report Structure

This report is structured into six chapters, beginning with an overview of digital adoption among Indigenous entrepreneurs before diving into the biggest challenges they face:

1. **Understanding Digital Adoption and Barriers** – Sets the stage by examining how Indigenous entrepreneurs use digital tools, their adoption motivations, and key barriers, providing context for the challenges and solutions ahead.
2. **Breaking the Cost Barrier** – Explores affordability challenges, including high technology costs, funding gaps, and financial constraints.
3. **Closing the Connectivity Gap** – Analyzes broadband and infrastructure limitations in rural and remote communities and the impact of unreliable internet.
4. **Bridging the Digital Skills Gap** – Addresses gaps in digital literacy, business technology skills, and cybersecurity, emphasizing training and mentorship needs.
5. **Overcoming Systemic Barriers** – Investigates institutional mistrust, fragmented support systems, and the need for Indigenous-led digital strategies.
6. **Unique Barriers for Indigenous Women and Youth** – Examines the compounded challenges these groups face and proposes tailored solutions for digital inclusion.

Each chapter presents a summary of the key challenges, best practices, and opportunities for improvement, ensuring stakeholders have clear, actionable insights.

## Call to Action

Addressing the digital divide can unlock new opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs, strengthen economic resilience, and foster lasting reconciliation. This report provides a roadmap to support Indigenous entrepreneurs through inclusive, culturally responsive digital strategies.

By working together—Indigenous leaders, government, industry, and communities—we can create sustainable, Indigenous-led solutions that ensure every Indigenous entrepreneur has the digital tools they need to succeed.



# Understanding Digital Adoption & Barriers

Digital adoption is a critical factor in the success of Indigenous entrepreneurs, enabling them to enhance operations, expand market reach, and build sustainable businesses.

Digital tools provide opportunities for efficiency, customer engagement, and business growth, but many Indigenous entrepreneurs face systemic barriers that limit their ability to fully integrate and leverage these technologies. These barriers range from financial constraints and infrastructure gaps to digital literacy challenges and the need for culturally relevant digital tools and training.

This chapter explores the digital adoption activities, motivations, challenges, and impacts of these challenges, drawing on survey findings and stakeholder insights. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing targeted interventions that support Indigenous businesses in the digital economy.

## Digital Motivations and Adoption

Over 80% rate digital access as ‘extremely important’ for their business operations and long-term success.

Survey results indicate that Indigenous entrepreneurs recognize the strategic importance of digital tools. The motivations for adopting digital resources reflect a strong focus on **business efficiency, customer engagement, and market expansion.**

The most cited motivations for adopting digital tools include:

- **85.6%** – Increasing efficiency and productivity by streamlining processes and reducing administrative burdens.
- **81.1%** – Expanding market reach and accessing new customers beyond local communities.



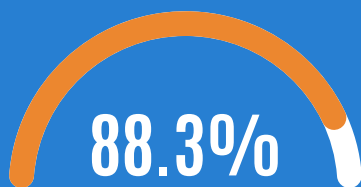
- **80.2%** – Enhancing customer engagement and improving service delivery.
- **76.6%** – Reducing operational costs through automation and online platforms.
- **75.7%** – Strengthening online presence and brand visibility through websites and social media.
- **70.3%** – Utilizing data and analytics to inform business decisions and strategies.
- **63.1%** – Remaining competitive by adopting digital tools used by industry peers.

Despite these motivations, entrepreneurs face **substantial obstacles to full digital adoption**.

## Challenges in Digital Access and Adoption

While digital adoption is widely recognized as a business necessity, **Indigenous entrepreneurs encounter multiple barriers** that limit their ability to implement and utilize these tools effectively. The most frequently cited challenges include **financial constraints, lack of training, mentorship gaps, infrastructure limitations, and cultural misalignment of existing digital tools and programs**. Survey respondents highlighted the following key barriers:

- **Cost (88.3%)** – The most frequently reported challenge, with many entrepreneurs struggling to afford essential hardware, software, and Internet access.
- **Lack of Training (57.7%)** – Many entrepreneurs report feeling unprepared to fully leverage digital tools due to a lack of structured and culturally relevant training programs.
- **Lack of Mentorship (39.6%)** – Limited access to experienced mentors who can guide Indigenous entrepreneurs through digital transformation creates an additional barrier to adoption.
- **Lack of Indigenous Cultural Ways of Knowing and Being (36%)** – Digital tools and resources are often not designed with Indigenous knowledge systems in mind, making them less effective or unappealing for many Indigenous businesses.
- **Limited Availability (27%)** – Some entrepreneurs face challenges in accessing the necessary digital tools and infrastructure, particularly in remote communities.
- **Connectivity Issues (17.1%)** – Reliable Internet remains a significant barrier in many regions, restricting access to cloud-based services, e-commerce, and virtual business operations.



**Cost is the most frequently reported challenge to digital adoption.**



## The Impact of Digital Access Channels

The consequences of these challenges extend beyond inconvenience, **directly affecting business growth, productivity, and sustainability**. Many Indigenous entrepreneurs report that financial constraints, lack of access, and inefficiencies in digital adoption slow their business development, limit their ability to compete and create operational hurdles. The challenges of limited digital access impact Indigenous entrepreneurs in several key ways:

**1. Slower Growth and Missed Opportunities:** Entrepreneurs frequently cite financial barriers and lack of training as key reasons for stalled business growth. Many struggle to scale their businesses due to the high costs of adopting new technology and the lack of training to use advanced digital tools effectively. Missed networking, funding, and client acquisition opportunities further exacerbate the challenge, limiting their reach and revenue potential.

**2. Operational Inefficiencies and Productivity Loss:** Many Indigenous entrepreneurs report that outdated technology and limited access to training result in time-consuming workflows, inefficient business operations, and reliance on manual processes. In remote areas, unreliable connectivity disrupts virtual meetings, cloud-based business management, and online service delivery, reducing efficiency and increasing frustration.

**3. Limited Competitiveness and Scaling Challenges:** Many Indigenous businesses struggle to remain competitive in their industries due to a lack of advanced digital tools. Entrepreneurs report difficulties affording essential software subscriptions, automation tools, and digital marketing services that could help them streamline operations and engage with a broader customer base. Limited access to artificial intelligence, project management tools, and e-commerce platforms restricts opportunities to scale and expand market presence.

**4. Cultural Misalignment and Lack of Relevant Support:** Some Indigenous entrepreneurs feel that mainstream digital training programs and tools do not reflect their realities or ways of doing business. Many existing programs fail to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and business practices, making them feel disconnected or irrelevant. As a result, some entrepreneurs avoid digital adoption entirely or struggle to integrate technology in ways that align with their values.

**5. Stress and Overwhelming Responsibilities:** Entrepreneurs balancing multiple business roles without adequate support often experience heightened stress and burnout. Many report that administrative tasks, financial management, and marketing consume valuable time that could otherwise be spent on core business growth. Without proper training and streamlined digital tools, business owners find themselves overburdened, limiting their long-term sustainability.



## Trust in Digital Programs and Tools

Despite a general willingness to adopt digital tools, **13.5% of respondents expressed distrust in digital software and programs**, citing concerns about:

- **Security and Data Privacy** – Fear of breaches, unauthorized access, and lack of data sovereignty.
- **Errors and Reliability** – Concerns over software bugs, system failures, and technical issues impacting business operations.
- **Poor Customer Support and Sales Practices** – Frustration with constant upselling and inadequate assistance from software providers.
- **General Distrust in Digital Tools** – Some entrepreneurs, particularly those with technical backgrounds, expressed skepticism about how digital platforms collect and use data.

These findings indicate that **building trust in digital tools requires transparency, culturally aligned cybersecurity solutions, and training programs that address privacy concerns and best practices.**

Understanding the **motivations, challenges, and impact of digital adoption barriers** provides a critical context for the rest of this summary report. The following chapters will explore **targeted solutions in affordability, connectivity, digital skills, systemic barriers, and support for women and youth** to foster an inclusive and thriving Indigenous digital economy.



# Breaking the Cost Barrier

Digital adoption is a critical factor in the success of Indigenous entrepreneurs, enabling them to enhance operations, expand market reach, and build sustainable businesses.

Survey responses highlight these challenges:

- **68% of respondents reported difficulty in securing grants or funding for digital investments.**
- **65% of respondents struggle with high Internet costs, impacting their ability to engage in e-commerce, virtual meetings, and online business management.**
- **42% of respondents expressed concerns about restrictive eligibility criteria in funding programs.**

This chapter explores affordability challenges, best practices, existing gaps, and recommendations to improve digital affordability for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

## 1. Affordability Barriers in Digital Entrepreneurship

### 1.1 High Cost of Digital Tools and Technology

Indigenous entrepreneurs face significant costs in acquiring the digital tools necessary for business success. The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB, 2021) found that over **40% of Indigenous businesses struggle to afford updated hardware and software**, aligning with survey findings where nearly **90% cited financial constraints as their biggest challenge**.

#### Key expenses include:

- Business software and productivity tools (e.g., accounting software, CRM systems, etc.).
- E-commerce platforms and website hosting fees.
- Cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive data.
- Hardware such as laptops, mobile devices, and POS systems.

**“I know I need to invest in digital tools to grow my business, but every time I calculate the costs—software, website hosting, Internet—it becomes overwhelming.”**  
— survey respondent



## 1.2 High Internet and Connectivity Costs

Access to reliable high-speed Internet is essential for digital business operations, yet it remains prohibitively expensive in many Indigenous communities. Internet costs in remote areas can be **two to three times higher** than in urban centers (CRTC, 2023; ISED, 2022).

Survey findings indicate:

- **65% of respondents struggle with high Internet costs.**
- **Many entrepreneurs in rural areas report unreliable service despite high costs.**

## 1.3 Limited Access to Funding for Digital Investments

Indigenous entrepreneurs face barriers to securing financial assistance to cover digital expenses. Many available funding programs require complex applications, matching funds, or reimbursement-based models, which create additional hurdles.

Survey findings reveal:

- **68% of respondents reported difficulty in securing grants or funding for digital investments.**
- **42% expressed concerns about restrictive eligibility criteria.**

**“Funding programs should support ongoing digital needs like website maintenance and software, not just one-time purchases.”**  
– survey respondent

## 1.4 Insufficient Micro-Lending and Flexible Financing Options

Most traditional business financing models do not accommodate small-scale digital investments, leaving entrepreneurs with few options beyond personal savings or high-interest loans.

**Key challenges include:**

- Lack of accessible micro-loans for small digital purchases.
- No-equity financing options that align with Indigenous business values.
- Limited Indigenous-led financial programs that support digital adoption.



## 2. Best Practices in Digital Affordability

Despite these barriers, several successful initiatives have demonstrated effective models for improving digital affordability:

- **ADAWE Indigenous Business Hub:** Provides free on-site Internet and a tech library with loanable hardware (e.g., cameras, laptops, iPads, mobile phones) for Indigenous businesses at no cost.
- **CIRA Net Good Grants:** Provides funding for projects that enhance digital literacy, cybersecurity, and community connectivity.
- **Digital Enhancement Grant (JEDI):** This grant provides up to \$5,000 for digital access needs, such as hardware and software.
- **Futurpreneur:** Indigenous-tailored program providing mentorship, funding, and resources to support business success and growth.
- **Pow Wow Pitch:** A platform that combines access to capital with mentorship, networking, business exposure, and technology for Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- **Raven Indigenous Capital Partners:** Offers culturally aligned impact investments that support Indigenous businesses.

## 3. Gaps and Opportunities for Digital Affordability

### 3.1 Gaps Identified

- **Lack of flexible funding models** that support ongoing digital investments (CCIB, 2023).
- **High costs of essential digital tools** such as software, Internet, and cybersecurity (ICTC, 2022).
- **Limited financial literacy programs** to help entrepreneurs optimize digital spending (CRTC, 2021).
- **Few accessible micro-loan programs** are tailored to digital needs (PPF, 2020).
- **Insufficient grant opportunities** designed specifically for digital entrepreneurship in Indigenous communities.



## 3.2 Recommendations for Expanding Digital Affordability

### 1. Expand Micro-Lending & Flexible Financing

- Develop Indigenous-led micro-loan programs tailored to digital business needs (PPF, 2020).
- Provide zero-interest or low-interest financing for software, hardware, and infrastructure investments.

### 2. Make Internet Access More Affordable

- Implement subsidized broadband programs for Indigenous entrepreneurs (CIRA, 2021).
- Develop Indigenous-specific data plans with lower costs and better connectivity.

### 3. Enhance Financial Literacy

- Introduce training programs that help entrepreneurs budget and plan for digital expenses (ICTC, 2022).
- Provide mentorship and financial coaching on managing digital infrastructure costs.

### 4. Support Indigenous-Led Funding Initiatives

- Increase funding for Indigenous-led financial institutions that provide digital investment support.
- Create specialized grants to cover long-term digital needs, such as website maintenance and security.

Indigenous entrepreneurs face significant affordability barriers to digital access, including **the high cost of technology and the Internet and limited funding options**. Survey findings indicate that many entrepreneurs find **current grant structures ineffective and difficult to navigate**, reinforcing the need for **better micro-lending, financial literacy training, and Indigenous-led funding models**.

By **expanding micro-loan programs, making Internet access more affordable, increasing financial literacy, and supporting Indigenous-led digital financing initiatives**, policymakers and organizations can create a more equitable digital ecosystem. These efforts will empower Indigenous entrepreneurs to fully participate in the digital economy, strengthening economic independence and long-term sustainability.



# Closing the Connectivity Gap

Reliable, high-speed Internet is a fundamental enabler of modern entrepreneurship.

However, Indigenous entrepreneurs, particularly in rural and remote areas, face systemic connectivity challenges that hinder their ability to compete in the digital economy. Only **34.8% of First Nations reserves meet the CRTC's universal service objective**, compared to **87.4% of Canadian households** (CCIB, 2023). The lack of infrastructure and high costs of services like Starlink create disparities in digital access (PPF, 2020).

Survey results reinforce these findings:

- **65% of respondents indicated that unreliable Internet access negatively impacts their business operations.**
- **38% reported that poor connectivity limits their ability to participate in virtual training and mentorship.**
- **42% struggle with high Internet costs that restrict their ability to expand digital operations.**

**“Living in Northern Canada, I can barely hold a Zoom meeting without losing the connection. Our business' most urgent need right now is an Internet connection. Without it, we can't operate efficiently.”**  
— survey respondent

## 1. Connectivity Challenges Faced by Indigenous Entrepreneurs

### 1.1 Limited Broadband Infrastructure

Many Indigenous communities still lack access to broadband infrastructure that meets the **50/10 Mbps standard** set by the CRTC. Even where service is available, **slow speeds, frequent outages, and overloaded networks** create barriers to running online businesses. Entrepreneurs report difficulty conducting virtual meetings, processing online sales, and using cloud-based business tools. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** explained,



Many Indigenous communities lack high-speed Internet because service providers don't see them as profitable investments.



## 1.2 Dependence on Mobile Connectivity

Even mobile data plans, which many entrepreneurs rely on in the absence of broadband, come with high costs and restrictive data caps, **limiting their ability to run digital businesses effectively**. While mobile access allows for basic tasks like email and social media, it is insufficient for **high-bandwidth activities** like virtual meetings, cloud-based accounting, or digital marketing.

Additional challenges with mobile reliance include:

- Weak signals and dropped connections in rural areas disrupt business activities.
- Limited access to secure networks increases cybersecurity risks.
- High mobile data costs, making consistent Internet use unsustainable.

**“I can check emails on my phone, but I can’t run my business from it.”**  
– survey respondent

## 2. Structural and Policy Barriers

### 2.1 Lack of Indigenous-Led Broadband Projects

Few Indigenous-owned broadband projects exist, leaving many communities dependent on external providers who **may not prioritize service improvements**. While government programs like the **Universal Broadband Fund and Connect to Innovate** provide funding, implementation is often slow due to **bureaucratic hurdles and complicated application processes** (PPF, 2020). This results in delayed infrastructure projects and a lack of local control over Internet services.

### 2.2 Weak Collaboration Between Indigenous Communities and Industry

Government and industry programs often fail to **meaningfully include Indigenous entrepreneurs** in decision-making processes. Many funding mechanisms prioritize large telecom providers over community-led initiatives. As a result, infrastructure deployment **does not align with Indigenous business needs**, and funding opportunities remain inaccessible to smaller, Indigenous-run projects.



## 3. Indigenous-Led Connectivity Solutions and Best Practices

Despite these challenges, some Indigenous-led initiatives have successfully improved connectivity and broadband access in their communities. These models emphasize **self-determination, community ownership, and investment in long-term infrastructure**.

### 3.1 Successful Indigenous Broadband Initiatives

- **Clear Sky Connections (Manitoba):** An Indigenous-owned fibre-optic project connecting First Nations communities to high-speed Internet.
- **First Mile Connectivity Consortium (FMCC):** Supports Indigenous-owned broadband corporations, focusing on community-driven Internet solutions.
- **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):** Empowers Indigenous communities to manage and control their broadband networks.
- **Matawa First Nations Broadband Project:** Provides fibre-optic infrastructure and digital literacy training to First Nations in Ontario.

### 3.2 Innovative Corporate and Policy Partnerships

- **Cisco's Connectivity Work in the North:** Enhances reliable broadband access in remote Indigenous communities, improving opportunities in education, healthcare, and business.
- **PLC Info's Partnership with Listuguj:** The Mi'gmaq Communities of Listuguj, Gesgapegiag, and Gespeg are now shareholders in PLC Info after purchasing 51% stake in the IT company.
- **Rogers Communications Programs:** Focuses on improving Internet access and affordability in Indigenous communities.
- **Starlink for Indigenous Communities:** Offers high-speed satellite Internet solutions tailored to remote areas.



## 4. Indigenous-Led Connectivity Solutions and Best Practices

### 4.1 Gaps Identified

- **Lack of broadband infrastructure** in rural and remote Indigenous communities (CIRA, 2021).
- **High costs of satellite Internet services and mobile data plans** (Indigenous Connectivity Summit, 2022).
- **Over-reliance on mobile networks** limits efficiency and security (ACOA, 2021).
- **Slow deployment of government-funded broadband projects** due to bureaucratic inefficiencies (PPF, 2020).
- **Limited Indigenous-led broadband initiatives**, restricting community ownership of infrastructure.
- **Weak collaboration between Indigenous communities and mainstream telecom providers**, resulting in misaligned priorities.

### 4.2 Recommendations for Expanding Digital Affordability

#### 1. Invest in Indigenous-Led Broadband

- Provide long-term funding for Indigenous-run infrastructure projects.
- Ensure broadband funding includes direct support for Indigenous-owned Internet Service providers.

#### 2. Provide Affordable & Accessible Internet

- Subsidize broadband and mobile data costs for Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- Develop affordable Indigenous business data plans with unlimited bandwidth options.

#### 3. Improve Collaboration & Streamline Funding

- Reduce bureaucratic delays and make government broadband grants easier to access.
- Prioritize Indigenous representation in funding allocation and infrastructure planning.

#### 4. Strengthen Digital Security

- Support Indigenous-led cybersecurity initiatives to protect business data.
- Establish sustainable business models for long-term broadband maintenance in Indigenous communities.

Connectivity remains a major barrier to Indigenous digital entrepreneurship due to limited broadband infrastructure, high costs, reliance on mobile networks, and lack of Indigenous-led broadband ownership. Closing this gap requires Indigenous leadership, infrastructure investment, and sustainable solutions. By supporting **Indigenous-led broadband, subsidizing Internet costs, and fostering community-industry collaboration**, policymakers can build a more equitable digital economy where Indigenous entrepreneurs thrive and compete nationally and globally.



# Bridging the Digital Skills Divide

Access to digital skills training is a fundamental requirement for Indigenous entrepreneurs to compete in an increasingly digital economy.

However, many Indigenous business owners lack the foundational digital skills necessary for success, and existing training programs are often fragmented, inaccessible, or not culturally relevant (CIRA, 2021). Additionally, the overwhelming number of digital tools available further complicates adoption.

Survey results reinforce these findings:

- **57% of Indigenous entrepreneurs lack sufficient digital training.**
- **32% of respondents rated tutorials and guides as ‘extremely effective’**, highlighting the importance of structured, step-by-step learning.
- **37% of respondents found in-person workshops and seminars highly effective**, emphasizing the value of hands-on instruction.

This chapter explores the digital skills deficit, existing best practices, gaps, and recommendations for improving access to digital education for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

## 1. Challenges in Digital Skills Development

### 1.1 Foundational Digital Skills Deficit

Many Indigenous entrepreneurs struggle with basic digital literacy, which limits their ability to integrate technology into their businesses. **Laura Englehart (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** observed, “*For some older entrepreneurs, even email and Google Sheets can be daunting.*”



For some older entrepreneurs even email and Google Sheets can be daunting.



Survey respondents reinforced the urgency of **structured training**. Many existing digital education programs are self-guided, making it difficult for entrepreneurs who learn best through interactive or peer-supported training. Further, short-term funding cycles also frequently cause mentorship and training programs to be discontinued, leaving entrepreneurs without long-term support.

“Programs offer initial mentorship, but when funding runs out or the program ends, I’m left figuring things out on my own.”  
– survey respondent

## 1.2 Limited Access to Culturally Relevant Training

Many digital training programs lack Indigenous knowledge and cultural integration, making them feel disconnected and ineffective. **Only 25% of training programs integrate Indigenous perspectives** (TMU, 2022), and **36% of survey respondents stated that existing programs fail to reflect Indigenous values, traditions, or business practices**. Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association) noted,

“Traditional digital training lacks integration with Indigenous knowledge, making it less relevant for Indigenous learners.”

The lack of culturally relevant mentorship further limits engagement and impact. **40% of survey respondents struggle to find mentors who understand their challenges**, and interviewees highlighted that mainstream mentorship programs often overlook Indigenous business values.

## 1.3 Rapid Technological Advancements

Many Indigenous entrepreneurs feel overwhelmed by the rapid evolution of digital tools.

“Every time I learn a tool, a new one replaces it, and I feel like I’m starting over.” – survey respondent

Most training programs focus on general digital literacy rather than business-specific skills like e-commerce, financial software, or customer management (PPF, 2020). **Only 22% of reviewed training programs included instruction on industry-specific digital tools**, leaving significant gaps in practical applications.

Without tailored training, many entrepreneurs struggle to adopt digital tools effectively. Additionally, a lack of clear guidance on transitioning to digital-first business models contributes to uncertainty and hesitation in using technology to its full potential.



## 2. Best Practices in Indigenous Digital Training

Despite challenges, several successful programs have been developed to support Indigenous entrepreneurs in digital literacy and skills development:

- **Digital Matriarchs:** Designed by and for Northern Indigenous women, equipping participants with digital literacy skills to promote economic independence.
- **First Nations Technology Council (FNTEC):** Offers training in GIS, drone operations, and other tech-based skills to support Indigenous economic development.
- **InDigital Program:** Integrates traditional teachings with technical skills like HTML and JavaScript to create culturally relevant learning experiences.
- **Jelly Academy:** Provides Indigenous-led digital marketing training and certification programming to entrepreneurs at all stages.
- **PLATO Testing:** Focuses on software testing and career-building opportunities in Indigenous communities.
- **Virtual Reality School ORIGIN:** Integrates professional development training with traditional skills.

## 3. Gaps and Opportunities Indigenous Digital Skills Training

### 3.1 Gaps Identified:

- **Insufficient foundational digital skills training** (ICTC, 2022).
- **Limited culturally relevant digital education programs** (ACOA, 2021).
- **Late-stage introduction of ICT and STEAM education for Indigenous youth** (PPF, 2020).
- **Lack of accessible training materials in Indigenous languages** (Indigenous Connectivity Summit, 2022).
- **Limited access to ongoing mentorship in digital entrepreneurship.**
- **Need for more training on advanced topics like AI, cybersecurity, and automation.**



## 3.2 Recommendations for Expanding Digital Affordability

### 1. Expand Culturally Responsive Digital Literacy Programs

- Develop Indigenous-led digital training models that integrate traditional knowledge and values (CCIB, 2023).
- Offer training in Indigenous languages to improve accessibility.

### 2. Improve Accessibility of Digital Training Programs

- Expand funding for basic digital skills training alongside advanced courses (ICTC, 2022).
- Provide flexible learning models, including in-person, virtual, and hybrid workshops.

### 3. Early Integration of Digital Training

- Introduce digital literacy in Indigenous-focused curricula at earlier stages (Indigenous Connectivity Summit, 2022).
- Strengthen STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education for Indigenous youth.

### 4. Enhance Mentorship and Support Networks

- Create Indigenous-led digital skills mentorship programs to provide long-term guidance (PPF, 2020).
- Strengthen partnerships between Indigenous organizations and post-secondary institutions to provide continuous learning opportunities.

### 5. Develop Industry-Specific Digital Training

- Expand digital training to include e-commerce, cybersecurity, AI, and automation tools.
- Offer sector-specific digital training programs tailored to Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Indigenous entrepreneurs face significant barriers in digital skills training, including limited access to foundational education, culturally relevant programs, and long-term mentorship. Survey findings highlight that structured learning tools and in-person workshops are among the most effective resources, yet gaps remain. Expanding Indigenous-led digital education initiatives, increasing mentorship opportunities, and integrating digital skills into early education can help bridge these gaps. By fostering a more inclusive and supportive digital training ecosystem, policymakers and organizations can equip Indigenous entrepreneurs with the skills needed to compete and thrive in a rapidly evolving digital economy.



# Transforming Systems

Despite growing efforts to improve digital access, systemic barriers continue to impede Indigenous entrepreneurs from fully leveraging digital tools and resources.

These challenges include fragmented support systems, mistrust of mainstream institutions, and a lack of Indigenous leadership in digital strategy development. Addressing these systemic barriers is crucial to ensuring equitable participation in the digital economy. Survey responses, interviews, and literature reviews reinforce that these barriers are deeply embedded within existing structures, making navigation difficult and often discouraging engagement.

“There are programs available, but they don’t talk to each other. I’ve spent months getting bounced around between agencies without getting real support.”  
– survey respondent

## 1. Fragmented Digital Support Systems

Indigenous entrepreneurs frequently struggle to navigate disjointed, siloed digital support networks, where programs operate independently without coordination or integration.

### Survey findings indicate:

- **58% of Indigenous entrepreneurs find digital support systems confusing or ineffective**, with many citing unclear eligibility criteria, inconsistent program availability, and bureaucratic hurdles.
- Entrepreneurs often face referral loops where they are directed from one organization to another without receiving tangible assistance.

Disjointed efforts waste time, resources, and momentum, limiting Indigenous entrepreneurs' digital opportunities. They also struggle with the absence of a centralized hub for information, funding, and training. **Stanley Barnaby (Joint Economic Development Initiative)** highlighted,

“Programs often operate in isolation, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to navigate the system and access the help they need.”



## 1.1 Best Practices Addressing Fragmentation

- **ADAAWE Indigenous Business Hub:** A physical and digital resource center that fosters community-led business support and knowledge-sharing.
- **CIRA Net Good Grants:** Support community-led digital initiatives that promote greater accessibility and integration of digital resources.
- **Indigenous Friends App:** A digital environment designed to create a centralized Indigenous-led support and mentorship network.

## 1.2 Opportunities for Improvement

- Develop a centralized Indigenous-led digital hub that consolidates funding, training, and mentorship resources.
- Strengthen collaboration among digital support organizations to ensure programs complement rather than compete with each other.
- Streamline program eligibility and application processes to reduce redundancy and inefficiencies.

## 2. Mistrust of Mainstream Institutions

Historical and ongoing systemic inequities have fostered deep mistrust of mainstream institutions among many Indigenous entrepreneurs, limiting engagement with government-administered digital programs.

### Survey findings indicate:

- **47% of Indigenous entrepreneurs avoid mainstream financial institutions** due to concerns over unfair lending practices and complex application processes.
- Many Indigenous entrepreneurs perceive government programs as bureaucratic, extractive, and disconnected from their realities (PPF, 2020).
- Lengthy funding applications and reporting requirements create additional obstacles, particularly for entrepreneurs in remote areas who have limited access to administrative support.

**Matthew Foss (Canadian Council for Indigenous Business)** emphasized,



Accessible and culturally relevant institutions & solutions are currently missing from the ecosystem.



## 2.1 Best Practices to Address Mistrust

- **Native Women Lead (USA):** Provides alternative lending models based on Indigenous cultural values rather than conventional credit metrics.
- **First Nations Technology Council (FNTEC):** Advocates for Indigenous-led policy development in digital funding and training.
- **Raven Indigenous Capital Partners:** Offers equity-based and culturally aligned investment models that prioritize Indigenous entrepreneurship.

## 2.2 Opportunities for Improvement

- Co-design digital programs with Indigenous entrepreneurs to ensure relevance, accessibility, and trust.
- Simplify funding application and reporting processes to encourage greater participation.
- Expand Indigenous-owned financial institutions that offer culturally relevant funding models.

## 3. Lack of Indigenous Leadership in Digital Strategy

The absence of Indigenous voices in the development of digital policy, funding structures, and business mentorship models reinforces systemic inequities and limits opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

### Survey results indicate:

- **52% of Indigenous entrepreneurs feel existing digital programs do not reflect Indigenous realities.**
- Many funding and mentorship initiatives are developed without Indigenous consultation, resulting in misaligned priorities and limited impact.
- Entrepreneurs have called for more Indigenous-led mentorship and training programs that integrate cultural values into digital adoption strategies.

**Alejandro Mayoral Baños (Indigenous Friends Association)** stated,



Programs must reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to truly resonate and deliver value.



### 3.1 Best Practices Supporting Indigenous Leadership

- **EntrepreNorth:** Provides Indigenous-led business mentorship and funding opportunities designed to reflect Inuit and Northern Indigenous cultural values.
- **Digital Matriarchs:** A community-led digital literacy initiative developed by and for Northern Indigenous women.
- **PLATO Testing:** A technology training and employment program designed specifically for Indigenous professionals.

### 3.2 Opportunities for Improvement

- Increase Indigenous representation in digital policy-making to ensure funding and training programs align with Indigenous realities.
- Fund Indigenous-led mentorship programs to empower entrepreneurs with culturally relevant guidance.
- Create Indigenous-led digital literacy certification programs to standardize culturally competent training initiatives.

## 4. Recommendations to Transform Systems

### 1. Establish an Indigenous-Led Digital Hub

- Develop a centralized platform that consolidates funding, training, mentorship, and digital resources to improve accessibility and coordination (CCIB, 2023).
- Ensure the hub is Indigenous-governed to foster trust and relevance.

### 2. Enhance Collaboration Among Support Organizations

- Strengthen partnerships between digital training and funding organizations to align efforts and reduce competition (ICTC, 2022).
- Develop an integrated referral system to prevent entrepreneurs from being redirected without receiving tangible support.

### 3. Streamline Application and Funding Processes

- Introduce digital literacy in Indigenous-focused curricula at earlier stages (Indigenous Connectivity Summit, 2022).
- Strengthen STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education for Indigenous youth.



## 1. Increase Indigenous Leadership in Digital Policy

- Ensure Indigenous representation in policy-making and program development to align funding and training with Indigenous business realities (Indigenous Connectivity Summit, 2022).
- Establish advisory councils led by Indigenous entrepreneurs to influence digital policy and funding strategies.

## 3. Develop Indigenous-Led Digital Training and Certifications

- Create standardized digital literacy certification programs that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and doing business (PLATO Testing, 2023).
- Fund Indigenous-led mentorship programs that offer long-term digital skills development and business guidance.

## 2. Expand Indigenous-Led Financial Institutions

- Support the growth of Indigenous-owned financial organizations that provide culturally relevant funding models (Raven Indigenous Capital Partners, 2023).
- Develop alternative lending programs that prioritize relationship-based financing and Indigenous economic principles.

## 4. Co-Design Digital Programs with Indigenous Entrepreneurs

- Engage Indigenous business owners in the design of digital tools and support programs to enhance relevance, accessibility, and trust (EntrepreNorth, 2023).
- Embed Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives into digital business training models.

Systemic barriers—including fragmented digital support systems, mistrust of mainstream institutions, and a lack of Indigenous leadership in digital policy—create significant obstacles for Indigenous entrepreneurs. By addressing these challenges through Indigenous-led solutions, strategic partnerships, and policy reforms, we can create a more inclusive and equitable digital ecosystem.



# Addressing Unique Barriers for Indigenous Women & 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 require distinct solutions to ensure equitable opportunities for success.

## 1. Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

Indigenous women entrepreneurs frequently 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. These overlapping responsibilities often lead to burnout and hinder long-term growth.

### Survey findings indicate:

- **91% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs cite financial constraints as a major barrier**, with many receiving more scrutiny in loan applications compared to male peers (CCAB, 2021). Biases within traditional financing systems and a lack of targeted funding programs magnify these issues.
- **42% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs lack a mentor who understands their digital needs**, compared to 36% of men.
- **38% of Indigenous women report challenges with digital marketing** due to a lack of funding and culturally relevant branding support.

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.



Additionally, **online harassment presents a major deterrent** for many Indigenous women entrepreneurs. Public Policy Forum (2020) found that Indigenous women experience higher rates of digital abuse, discouraging participation and impacting business visibility.

**“I rely on social media for sales, but constant harassment makes it exhausting.”**  
– survey respondent

## 1.1 Best Practices Supporting Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

- **Diversity Institute’s ICT Programs:** Provides Indigenous-specific training in fields like cybersecurity and programming.
- **Native Women Lead (USA):** Focuses on equity-based lending for Indigenous women.
- **Raven Indigenous Capital Partners:** Provides culturally aligned investment models for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

## 1.2 Opportunities for Improvement

- **Expand funding and grant programs** tailored specifically for Indigenous women entrepreneurs.
- **Develop mentorship initiatives** designed to address both digital and business challenges in culturally relevant ways.
- **Increase protections and support systems** to mitigate online harassment and create safer digital spaces.

## 2. Indigenous Youth Entrepreneurs

Indigenous youth bring immense potential and digital fluency to the entrepreneurial landscape, but they often face barriers stemming from late-stage engagement with resources and opportunities.

### Survey findings indicate:

- **65% of Indigenous youth entrepreneurs feel they were introduced to digital business tools too late**, limiting their ability to develop advanced competencies early on.
- **40% of Indigenous youth entrepreneurs cite financial constraints as a major barrier**, lacking the resources needed to purchase essential equipment or access necessary software.
- **Many youth-run businesses are seasonal or part-time**, making long-term investment in digital infrastructure challenging.



**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.

Additionally, **financial constraints 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.



## 2.1 Best Practices Supporting Indigenous Youth Entrepreneurs

- **Connected North:** Virtual education and mental health support to Indigenous students in remote communities, fostering engagement and opportunities through digital connectivity.
- **Digital Matriarchs:** A community-led initiative developed by and for Northern Indigenous women to equip youth with digital literacy skills.
- **Digital Mi'kmaq/Ellinowaq:** STEM-focused educational programming for Indigenous communities, promoting economic empowerment through digital tools.

## 2.2 Opportunities for Improvement

- **Integrate digital and entrepreneurial education early** in Indigenous-focused curricula to ensure youth have foundational exposure to key business tools.
- **Develop targeted microgrants** for young entrepreneurs to support early-stage digital adoption.
- **Increase youth-focused mentorship programs** to provide ongoing guidance and skill development.



## 3. Recommendations

### 1. Integrate Digital and Entrepreneurial Education Early

- Embed digital and business literacy into Indigenous-focused curricula to provide youth with foundational exposure to key business tools.
- Strengthen STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education pathways for Indigenous youth to increase digital fluency.

### 3. Strengthen Culturally Relevant Training and Mentorship

- Expand culturally responsive training programs that align digital skills development with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing business.
- Develop mentorship initiatives that address both digital and business challenges in a culturally relevant way.
- Increase youth-focused mentorship programs to provide ongoing guidance and skill development.

### 5. Create Safe Digital Spaces

- Implement stronger protections and support systems to mitigate online harassment and create safer digital environments for Indigenous women entrepreneurs.
- Develop digital literacy programs that include online safety, privacy, and cybersecurity awareness.

### 2. Expand Funding and Financial Support

- Develop targeted microgrants to help young entrepreneurs adopt digital tools in the early stages of their businesses.
- Increase funding models tailored specifically to the needs of Indigenous women and youth entrepreneurs.

### 4. Develop Targeted Policies for Indigenous Women and Youth Entrepreneurs

- Ensure digital economic policies reflect the unique needs and challenges faced by Indigenous women and youth.
- Increase Indigenous representation in digital policy discussions to advocate for gender- and youth-inclusive solutions.

Indigenous women and youth entrepreneurs face distinct and compounded challenges in accessing digital tools, financial resources, and business opportunities. Financial constraints, mentorship gaps, late-stage exposure, and online harassment create significant barriers to success.

Addressing these unique challenges through culturally relevant training, tailored funding initiatives, and expanded mentorship opportunities can better equip Indigenous women and youth entrepreneurs to succeed in an increasingly digital world.



# Conclusion

Digital access is no longer optional—it is an essential driver of economic success, business sustainability, and cultural resilience.

Indigenous entrepreneurs must have equitable access to the digital tools, infrastructure, and training necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital economy. However, systemic barriers—high costs, unreliable connectivity, lack of digital skills training, fragmented support systems, and underrepresentation in policy-making and program creation—continue to limit Indigenous participation in the digital landscape.

This report underscores the **urgent need for change** and provides a roadmap to bridge the digital divide. By implementing Indigenous-led solutions, fostering stronger collaborations, and addressing structural inequities, we can **create a more inclusive and sustainable digital ecosystem** that supports Indigenous business growth and economic self-determination.

## Key Findings and Challenges

Through extensive research, stakeholder interviews, and survey analysis, this report identifies five core barriers:

- **Affordability** – High costs of digital tools, software, and Internet access make digital adoption challenging.
- **Connectivity** – Infrastructure gaps, particularly in rural and remote communities, restrict reliable high-speed Internet access.
- **Digital Skills** – Indigenous entrepreneurs face limited access to culturally relevant and practical digital training.
- **Systemic Barriers** – Fragmented support systems and mistrust of mainstream institutions hinder access to digital resources and funding.
- **Unique Challenges for Indigenous Women and Youth** – These groups face compounded barriers, requiring tailored solutions and dedicated support systems.

## Pathways for Action: Moving Forward Together

To ensure equitable digital access and empower Indigenous entrepreneurs, the following key actions must be prioritized:



### 1. Expand Indigenous-Led Digital Infrastructure

Invest in Indigenous-owned broadband projects, support long-term maintenance, and subsidize high-speed Internet access.

### 3. Enhance Culturally Relevant Digital Training

Develop Indigenous-led training programs that integrate traditional knowledge and focus on sector-specific skills such as e-commerce, AI, automation, and cybersecurity, while ensuring flexible in-person, virtual, and hybrid learning models.

### 5. Advance Digital Security & Sustainability

Support Indigenous-led cybersecurity initiatives, establish long-term broadband sustainability strategies, and improve access to data protection tools.

### 2. Improve Funding Accessibility & Affordability

Increase access to Indigenous-led micro-loans, flexible financing, and grants for digital adoption while expanding Indigenous-owned financial institutions to provide culturally relevant funding models.

### 4. Strengthen Policy & Institutional Support

Ensure Indigenous representation in digital policy-making, program design and funding allocation, streamline funding processes, and improve collaboration among digital support organizations to reduce fragmentation.

### 6. Address Unique Barrier for Women and Youth

Expand targeted funding, mentorship, and training programs, create safer digital spaces, and increase the representation of Indigenous women and youth in digital leadership roles.

These actions will create a more **inclusive, sustainable, and Indigenous-led** digital economy, ensuring that Indigenous entrepreneurs can fully participate in and benefit from digital opportunities.

## A Call to Action: Collaborative and Indigenous-Led Change

Digital inclusion is a shared responsibility. **Indigenous leaders, policymakers, financial institutions, corporations, and community organizations must work together** to close the digital gap and foster economic reconciliation. Now is the time to act. **By investing in digital equity today, we are ensuring long-term economic prosperity, self-determination, and sustainable success for Indigenous entrepreneurs across Canada.**



# Bibliography

## Reports and Studies

Amato, D., Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB), Google Canada, & Bull, T. (2022). Digital Directions: Discussion on the findings of Google Canada's Indigenous-led Businesses Poll Fall 2022. [CCAB](#)

Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, & National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (n.d.). COVID-19 Indigenous Business Survey - Phase II: Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs. [CCAB](#)

Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, & National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (n.d.). COVID-19 Indigenous Business Survey - Phase III. [CCAB](#)

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). (2021). Annual Communications Monitoring Report. CRTC

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). (2023). Universal Service Objective: Broadband Access in Canada. CRTC

CIRA (Canadian Internet Registration Authority). (2021). Indigenous Digital Divide: Access and Connectivity. CIRA

CIRA (Canadian Internet Registration Authority). (2023). Net Good Grants for Indigenous Communities. CIRA

First Nations Technology Council (FNTC). (2023). Digital Futures for Indigenous Businesses. [FNTC](#)

Government of Canada. (2023). Universal Broadband Fund: Connecting Indigenous Entrepreneurs. ISED

Government of Canada. (2023). Canada's Connectivity Strategy: Supporting Indigenous Digital Access. Canada

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED). (2022). Indigenous Connectivity Initiatives: Progress and Challenges. ISED



Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC). (2022). The Digital Economy and Indigenous Entrepreneurs: Barriers and Opportunities. [ICTC](#)

National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). Indigenous Economic Progress Report Recommendations Revisited. [NIEDB](#)

Public Policy Forum (PPF). (2020). Building Digital Equity for Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Canada. PPF

Raven Indigenous Capital Partners. (2023). Indigenous Impact Investing and Financial Models for Economic Development. [Raven](#)

## Articles and Policy Papers

Champagne, F.-P., Government of Canada, Bailey, B., & Province of British Columbia. (2023). DIGITAL Annual Report 2022-23. [Digital Supercluster](#)

Hardwick, A. (2024, July 19). How Indigenous businesses can lead the way in an age of digital. [The Globe and Mail](#)

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN). (2024, June 3). The Digital Connectivity Gap - Assembly of First Nations. [AFN](#)

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN). (2023, March). Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030. [AFN](#)

Public Policy Forum. (2020, September 3). The Opportunity for Indigenous Infrastructure. [PPF](#)

## Interviewees

**Holly Atjecoutay** – Head of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; 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*

**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*

**Shehnila 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*





Indigenous  
Prosperity  
Foundation

Indigenous Prosperity Foundation  
338 Somerset St. W. Ottawa, ON

[www.indigenousfoundation.ca](http://www.indigenousfoundation.ca)  
[info@indigenousfoundation.ca](mailto:info@indigenousfoundation.ca)  
[@indigenousprosperity](https://www.instagram.com/indigenousprosperity)