



Indigenous
Prosperity
Foundation

Walking Together Tour

Kamloops Report

Building Pathways for Indigenous Prosperity in the Interior of British
Columbia

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Territory · July 6–9, 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2026, the Indigenous Prosperity Foundation (IPF) brought the Walking Together Tour to Kamloops, on the traditional and unceded territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, part of the Secwépemc Nation. Over four days, the IPF team took part in a cultural grounding experience, hosted a regional entrepreneurship roundtable, delivered Money Smarts facilitator training, and met with Indigenous Financial Institution and community partners.

The visit began on the land. A guided tour with George Casimir of Interior Indigenous Community Futures gave the team the historical context of the region, its key legal and economic development milestones, and a first look at some of the small businesses supported locally, before anyone sat down at a table.

What emerged from the roundtable was a region with real momentum. Participants agreed that Indigenous entrepreneurs in the Interior have more programs, training, mentorship and capital available to them than ever before, and that partners such as Venture Kamloops, the City of Kamloops, Thompson Rivers University (TRU), BCLC and local Nations are increasingly working together, particularly on procurement.

Yet the abundance of supports has created its own challenge. Entrepreneurs often don't know where to start, turn first to Google, and become overwhelmed. Many struggle to find customers and markets, to access trusted Indigenous professional advisors, and to sustain their businesses after the loan is approved and the first year begins.

This report organizes what we heard into five themes, sets out strategic opportunities for intervention under each, and identifies where IPF can add the most value as a convener and national connector.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE VISIT INCLUDE:

- Supports are plentiful, but there is no single, trusted front door. Entrepreneurs face information overload.
- Procurement is the region's clearest opportunity, but businesses need bid, RFP and RFQ training and feedback when they are unsuccessful.
- Finding customers and reaching markets beyond one's own community remains a core struggle.
- Post-care after financing (bookkeeping, taxes, marketing, early intervention) is the most consistently named gap.
- Access to trusted Indigenous advisors and cross-cultural mentorship is limited.
- Entrepreneurs want in-person, community-based support (a physical place) alongside digital tools.
- AI and digital tools can lighten administration, but cannot replace the entrepreneur's own thinking.

INTRODUCTION:

GROUNDING IN PLACE AND RELATIONSHIP

The Kamloops stop of the Walking Together Tour was intentionally grounded in both territory and relationship. The tour's first afternoon was spent not in a boardroom but in a pickup truck, with George Casimir guiding the IPF team through the community.



The IPF team on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory

George's stories spanned childhood, years on council, and his current work supporting entrepreneurs throughout the community. Along the way, he walked the team through the historical context of the region and its key legal and economic development milestones, and pointed out small businesses that he and his team support. The afternoon covered territorial grounding, cultural teachings and history, community priorities, and relationship building.

WHY KAMLOOPS

Kamloops serves as a regional hub for the Interior of British Columbia, bringing together Nations, Indigenous Financial Institutions (IFIs), post-secondary institutions, municipal economic development, and a growing base of Indigenous entrepreneurs. It is home to an active network of support organizations, including Interior Indigenous Community Futures, All Nations Trust Company, Venture Kamloops and TRU, which made it an ideal place to understand how a well-resourced ecosystem is experienced by the entrepreneurs it is meant to serve.

THE PURPOSE OF LISTENING

IPF did not come to Kamloops with answers. The purpose was to understand what is actually happening on the ground for Indigenous entrepreneurs in the region: what is working, where the gaps are, and what a strong, supported entrepreneurial ecosystem could look like in the Interior of BC.

What participants shared feeds directly into IPF's cross-tour reporting and into decisions about programming, partnerships, and where IPF invests its energy and resources.

METHODOLOGY

In advancing the Walking Together Tour, IPF uses a methodology centred on direct engagement, so that the insights captured reflect the lived realities of Indigenous entrepreneurs and ecosystem partners. In Kamloops, that engagement was guided by four objectives:

- Gain insights into the regional ecosystem supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen relationships with Indigenous Financial Institutions, Nations, and community partners.
- Gather recommendations to inform IPF's strategic priorities and program development.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen Indigenous entrepreneurship across the region.

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Day	Engagement
Mon, July 6	Cultural grounding experience hosted by George Casimir (territorial grounding, cultural teachings and history, community priorities).
Tue, July 7	Regional Entrepreneurship Roundtable at Centrepont, catered by Kekuli Café. In the afternoon, a meeting with the IICF and visiting local Indigenous-owned businesses .
Wed, July 8	Money Smarts Facilitator Training at the ANTCO boardroom, alongside a meeting with ANTCO's CEO . Followed by a visit to the Secwepemc Museum and Heritage Park .
Thu, July 9	Team reflection on key takeaways and travel home.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The roundtable brought together a cross-section of the Interior's Indigenous entrepreneurship ecosystem, including:

- Indigenous Financial Institutions (Interior Indigenous Community Futures and All Nations Trust Company)
- Nation-based economic development and employment and training staff
- Entrepreneurship instructors and grant writers
- Indigenous entrepreneurs
- Community development organizations

HOW INSIGHTS WERE CAPTURED

The roundtable followed a structured guide of six questions: the current reality for entrepreneurs, existing supports, barriers, opportunities, where IPF could add value, and a five-year vision. Three IPF team members took notes independently. Their notes were consolidated for this report, and themes were identified where they recurred across participants and note-takers. The result is a set of insights grounded in lived experience that inform IPF's programming, partnerships, and strategy in the region.

IN ONE WORD:

VOICES AROUND THE TABLE

The roundtable opened with introductions. Each participant was asked to share one word describing Indigenous entrepreneurship in the region. Together, the words set the tone for the conversation that followed: **hope, opportunity, growth, resilience, legacy, scalability, and partnership.**

INSPIRATION	HOPE	OPPORTUNITY
LEGACY	SCALABILITY	RESILIENCE
PARTNERSHIPS	GROWTH	OPPORTUNITY
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	DETERMINATION	ASPIRATIONAL
HONOUR		

WHAT'S WORKING WELL

Participants were clear that the Interior has real strengths to build on:

- More entrepreneurship programs, training, mentorship and capital are available than ever before.
- Collaboration is growing, including Venture Kamloops and the City of Kamloops, regional economic development partners, TRU, BCLC and local Nations.
- Partnerships between IFIs and support organizations help entrepreneurs succeed.
- Coaching, accounting, legal and advisory services are becoming more accessible.
- National organizations such as CANDO and AFOA offer support and endorsement opportunities.

The Interior's Indigenous entrepreneurship ecosystem is not short on programs. Participants named a long list of supports they find helpful: Venture Kamloops, TRU Launchpad, First Citizens Fund, Creative BC and arts councils, procurement initiatives through BCLC and local Nations, Money Smarts, local apprenticeship models such as 9th Lab, and IFIs including Interior Indigenous Community Futures and All Nations Trust Company.

The challenge is not availability. It is navigation. Entrepreneurs often don't know where to start, and the first stop for many is a Google search that produces more information than they can use. Many also look for grants before understanding broader business planning requirements.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Entrepreneurs become overwhelmed by the volume of programs and resources.
- There is no central system or trusted landing page for the region.
- Knowing where to start is a barrier in itself.
- Grant searches often come before business planning and market validation.
- Support organizations face their own capacity constraints.

Entrepreneurs need a pathway, and trusted advice when choosing which training and supports are right for them.

Roundtable participant

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION

1

A Regional Front Door

Create a one-stop, BC-focused hub or landing page that brings existing supports together, organized by stage of business and kept current by dedicated staff.

2

Guided Navigation

Offer entrepreneurship pathway and navigation services so entrepreneurs are referred to the right program at the right time, rather than searching alone.

3

Planning Before Funding

Help entrepreneurs strengthen business plans and understand the real work required to start and run a business before they pursue grants or loans.

CONCLUSION

Kamloops shows that a rich ecosystem can still feel inaccessible from the outside. A trusted front door with human navigation behind it would help entrepreneurs use the supports that already exist.

Procurement emerged as the region's clearest opportunity. Participants described the City of Kamloops, TSSN, economic development partners, BCLC and TRU working together on procurement, and noted that procurement events are helping connect Indigenous businesses with industry and municipalities.

But opportunity is not the same as readiness. Procurement and RFP processes are difficult to navigate, and smaller businesses struggle to compete when there is "always somebody bigger." Bonding, insurance and licensing requirements add further hurdles. Expectations about winning contracts are sometimes unrealistic, and businesses that are unsuccessful rarely receive feedback that would help them next time.

FINDING THE CUSTOMER

Beyond procurement, finding customers and markets was one of the most consistent struggles, even for entrepreneurs who have completed training. Participants stressed that an entrepreneur's market is often much larger than their own community, which makes cross-cultural understanding a business skill. Access to networks and decision-makers was also named as a barrier.

Entrepreneurs need to understand customers beyond their own cultural perspective, because their market is often much larger than their community.

Roundtable participant

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION

1

Bid-Readiness Training

Deliver practical training on how to find, prepare and submit bids, RFPs and RFQs, including bonding, insurance and licensing requirements.

2

Feedback and Partnering

Encourage buyers to give feedback to unsuccessful bidders and help small firms partner with larger ones where scale is required.

3

Directories and Market Connections

Support a reputable Indigenous business and procurement directory and connect entrepreneurs to broader markets and supplier diversity initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The building blocks of a strong Indigenous procurement ecosystem are already in place in Kamloops. Bid-readiness and market-access supports would let more Indigenous-owned businesses turn that collaboration into contracts.

IFIs in the region play a role well beyond lending. Participants described them as partners that provide financing, referrals, advice and capacity building, meet entrepreneurs where they are, and take on higher-risk lending based on relationships and an understanding of character.

The most consistently named gap, raised by IFI staff, instructors and entrepreneurs alike, was what happens after the loan. In the critical first year, entrepreneurs must manage financial statements, monthly accounting, taxes and marketing while still learning to understand their target audience. When they fall behind, there is often no one positioned to step in early.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Post-loan follow-up and ongoing business support are essential, and under-resourced.
- First-year needs centre on bookkeeping, taxes, marketing and understanding the customer.
- Early intervention when businesses fall behind could prevent failure.
- Entrepreneurs need help reconciling the reality of running a business with their original business plan.
- Capacity constraints limit both businesses and the organizations that support them.

"It takes TIME."

Roundtable participant

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION

1

Embedded Post-Care

Build post-care into entrepreneurship and lending programs from the start, with accounting, tax and coaching support through the first year.

2

Early-Warning Check-Ins

Support IFIs to run regular check-ins that catch businesses falling behind before problems become crises.

3

Funding for IFI Capacity

Direct investment to IFI and partner capacity for post-care, which is rarely covered by program funding.

CONCLUSION

Getting capital into entrepreneurs' hands is only the beginning. Sustained support after funding is where business survival is won or lost, and it is where IPF investment could have an outsized impact.

Trusted Advisors, Mentorship, and Cross-Cultural Connection

Participants highlighted a shortage of trusted Indigenous professionals (legal, accounting, marketing, coaching and advisory) to whom entrepreneurs can turn. Even where services exist, entrepreneurs don't always know whom to trust or how to find advisors who understand their context.

Mentorship was seen as part of the answer, especially cross-cultural mentorship that helps entrepreneurs connect with customers and markets beyond their own community. Peer-to-peer learning, validation and confidence-building were also valued, as was finding a niche and building a portfolio.

Practical, hands-on models are already showing promise. Participants pointed to local apprenticeship models such as 9th Lab and to co-op placements as ways to build experience while building a business.

"Experience is the currency, consistency over perfection."

Roundtable participant

WHAT WE HEARD

- Limited access to trusted Indigenous advisors and professionals.
- Relationships and networking remain essential to accessing opportunities.
- Entrepreneurs benefit from validation and confidence-building, not just information.
- Apprenticeships and co-op placements build real-world experience.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION

1

Curated Advisor Networks

Develop a vetted network of Indigenous and culturally competent professional service providers and connect entrepreneurs to them directly.

2

Cross-Cultural Mentorship

Pair emerging entrepreneurs with experienced mentors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who can open doors to new markets.

3

Peer Networks and Apprenticeships

Expand peer networks, co-operatives, apprenticeships and co-op placements that let entrepreneurs learn from those a few steps ahead.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurs aren't only looking for information. They are looking for people they trust. Building networks of advisors and mentors is a direct way to turn the region's resources into relationships.

Learning That Works: In Person, Hybrid, and Digital

Participants were clear that digital resources alone are not enough. Short attention spans and online overload mean entrepreneurs need in-person, community-based support, and several participants called for a physical "bricks and mortar" space where entrepreneurs can go for help.

At the same time, blended learning was seen as effective. One practical model raised was roughly 80% online and 20% in person, supported by both physical and virtual access points. Youth engagement and follow-through were named as ongoing challenges.

Participants saw AI literacy as an opportunity, with a clear boundary. AI can support administration and reporting, but it cannot do the entrepreneur's thinking for them. Innovation and strategy must remain human-led.

"AI is only as good as its prompts. It should be used for administration, not original thinking or idea generation."

IPF team reflection

MONEY SMARTS IN KAMLOOPS

The Money Smarts facilitator training with ANTCO showed the value of experiential learning. Team observations noted that Money Smarts works as both a financial literacy tool and a team-building resource: through gameplay, participants build practical financial decision-making, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, while the interactive format strengthens relationships and makes learning enjoyable.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION

1

Physical and Virtual Spaces

Support dedicated in-person spaces, paired with digital access points, so entrepreneurs have somewhere to go as well as something to search.

2

Hybrid, Youth-Friendly Learning

Design blended programs that are practical, interactive and engaging, building on experiential models like Money Smarts.

3

Practical AI Literacy

Teach entrepreneurs to use AI for administration, reporting and marketing, while keeping strategy and creativity in their own hands.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurs in the Interior want both a screen and a seat at the table. Programs that pair digital convenience with in-person connection and hands-on learning are most likely to keep them engaged.

WHERE IPF CAN ADD THE MOST VALUE

Participants saw a distinct role for IPF: not as another program in a crowded field, but as a **convener** that brings entrepreneurs, communities, industry and support organizations together, and as a **national connector** linking the region to networks such as NACCA, CANDO and AFOA.

Programs and services

- A centralized resource and information portal
- Entrepreneurship pathway and navigation services
- Youth entrepreneurship initiatives and practical learning

Funding and investment

- Post-care and first-year business assistance
- Procurement readiness and capacity building
- Support for regional entrepreneurship hubs

Training and mentorship

- Procurement training (RFPs, RFQs, bid development)
- Grant writing and funding applications
- Cross-cultural mentorship, confidence-building and validation

Partnerships

- Collaboration with Venture Kamloops, TRU, BCLC, municipalities and Nations
- Connecting entrepreneurs with professional service providers
- Bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous business communities

National connections and market access

- Leverage NACCA, CANDO and AFOA networks; expand procurement and supplier diversity opportunities; and connect entrepreneurs to Indigenous business networks across Canada.

A FIVE-YEAR VISION FOR THE REGION

Asked what success would look like if IPF returned in five years, participants described:

- A centralized, trusted ecosystem where Indigenous entrepreneurs can easily find support
- More Indigenous-owned businesses winning procurement contracts and joining supply chains
- Strong networks of Indigenous advisors and mentors connecting experienced and emerging entrepreneurs
- Higher business survival rates through effective post-care
- Youth engaged in entrepreneurship through practical, enjoyable learning
- Strong collaboration among Indigenous organizations, municipalities, educational institutions and industry

CONCLUSION:

FROM TRANSACTION TO TRANSFORMATION

The conversations in Kamloops describe a region with genuine strengths: committed IFIs, active municipal and post-secondary partners, Nation-led economic development, and entrepreneurs with clear ambition. The challenge is not a lack of opportunity but a gap between the supports that exist and the entrepreneur's ability to find, trust and sustain them.

Participants called for entrepreneurship support to move "from transaction to transformation", shifting from one-off loans and programs to long-term relationships that build intrinsic motivation and lasting growth.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Navigation matters more than new programs

A trusted front door and human guidance would unlock supports that already exist.

Procurement is the region's clearest opportunity

Collaboration among the City, Nations, TRU and BCLC is in place; bid-readiness is the missing piece.

Post-care is the critical gap

The first year after financing is where support is most needed and least available.

Relationships drive success

Trusted advisors, cross-cultural mentors and peer networks turn information into action.

Place still matters

Entrepreneurs want in-person, community-based spaces alongside digital tools.

IPF's role is to convene and connect

Partners see IPF as a bridge between regional actors and national networks.

The path forward does not require building an entirely new system. It requires connecting, guiding and sustaining what already exists, so that every Indigenous entrepreneur in the Interior has a clear place to start and someone to walk alongside them.

KAMLOOPS IN PICTURES



Regional Entrepreneurship Roundtable at Centrepoint



Sharing perspectives at the roundtable



Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park



Visiting a local Indigenous-owned business



Money Smarts facilitator training at ANTCO



Money Smarts facilitator training with ANTCO

WITH GRATITUDE: ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

The Indigenous Prosperity Foundation extends its heartfelt thanks to the entrepreneurs, Indigenous Financial Institution partners, and community leaders who joined the Kamloops roundtable. Your candour, experience, and generosity with your time shaped every page of this report.

Participant	Organization / Role
George Casimir	Interior Indigenous Community Futures (IICF)
Monica Manuel	Interior Indigenous Community Futures (IICF)
Natasha Seymour	Interior Indigenous Community Futures (IICF)
Juanita Jones	All Nations Trust Company (ANTCO)
Susan Thompson	All Nations Trust Company (ANTCO)
Stephanie Tate	Secwépemc Economic Development
Jordann Hazelwood	TSSN, Employment & Training
Shawn Bonnough	Entrepreneurship Instructor & Grant Writer
Jackson Roseh	Fighting Kiwi Productions

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Money Smarts facilitator training in Kamloops

Thank you for supporting the Walk Together initiative and helping us capture these important stories. Please feel free to reach out at any time if you have questions or need additional information.



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The Indigenous Prosperity **Foundation** is a Canadian charitable organization supporting early-stage Indigenous entrepreneurs.

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