



Readiness and Resilience

Mapping the Contours
of the Indigenous
Skills and Employment
Ecosystem in Canada



Partners



The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by under-represented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.



The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

Canadian Council for
**ABORIGINAL
BUSINESS**



Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) is committed to the full participation of Indigenous peoples in Canada's economy. As a national, non-partisan association, its mission is to promote, strengthen and enhance a prosperous Indigenous economy through the fostering of business relationships, opportunities, and awareness. CCAB offers knowledge, resources, and programs to its members to cultivate economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples and businesses across Canada. For more information, visit www.ccab.com.

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Foreword

Readiness and resilience: Mapping the contours of the Indigenous skills and employment ecosystem in Canada

Indigenous-led organizations and entrepreneurs are increasing and creating new employment opportunities in communities across the country. Elevating Indigenous leaders and professionals in the workforce will foster prosperous and longer-term sustainable futures.

Despite Canada experiencing a demand for workers in high-growth sectors, Indigenous peoples continue to be under-represented in the labour market. While there have been some gains by Indigenous-owned businesses in sectors that border Indigenous communities, such as mining, oil and gas, and sustainable energy, limitations still exist when it comes to Indigenous people entering broader corporate settings. Indigenous youth are one of the fastest growing populations in Canada and could help close the workers shortage as they enter the labour force. Expanding access to culturally informed skills training, mentorship, and upskilling offerings is one of many crucial steps needed to support economic reconciliation, resilience, and inclusiveness.

Readiness and resilience: Mapping the contours of the Indigenous skills and employment ecosystem in Canada provides a valuable map of the skills development, training, and funding landscape for Indigenous peoples.

This research helps uncover the current state of programs available to Indigenous job seekers, and enables the assessment of whether programming includes intersectional and Indigenous-specific approaches to skills development. We recognize the leadership and research led by the Diversity Institute and Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business in shaping this valuable mapping exercise. Together we can continue reflecting on the recommendations and future directions outlined in this report to support and empower Indigenous people throughout their careers.

Pedro Barata
Executive Director
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Executive Summary

Skills growth, training, and funding opportunities are critical for Indigenous peoples to advance their careers, improve Indigenous labour-market and entrepreneurship results, and further economic reconciliation in Canada. Opportunities such as these can allow Indigenous people to adapt to a constantly changing, technologically-driven labour market in a variety of industries that make up Canada's economy. Canada's economic strength depends on our ability to offer every member of the population the resources they require to engage and contribute their talents, skills, and capacities. To achieve a truly inclusive economy, deliberate effort must be made to ensure that historically marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, have equal opportunities to grow and succeed as valued employees, company owners, entrepreneurs, and leaders of industry and broader society. This achievement must be linked to initiatives that enable Indigenous people to acquire skills through training, networking, and mentorship opportunities.

In collaboration with our partners, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) created the *Readiness and Resilience: Mapping the Contours of the Indigenous Skills and Employment*

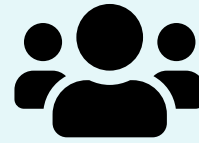
Ecosystem report as part of a project on Indigenous people's barriers to and facilitators of employment in Canada to learn about the scope of the Indigenous employment landscape. This study was divided into three phases: a mapping exercise, followed by two rounds of in-depth interviews. Phase 1 evaluated a large pool of organizations that comprise the Indigenous-specific skills development and financing landscape in Canada. The mapping exercise was undertaken to understand the existing career advancement and skills development opportunities available for Indigenous people. Phases 2 and 3 provided further context of the status of the Indigenous employment landscape, including the unique observations and contributions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous companies, respectively. The two phases of interviews included 15 interviews with Indigenous training providers and 15 with non-Indigenous businesses from CCAB directory, for a total of 30 interviews.

Among the 1,207 organizations mapped in Phase 1 that provide Indigenous people with training and funding, we found that:

- > The most prevalent industries among these organizations were health care and social assistance (26%) and retail

trade (18%). Other industries, such as manufacturing, were under-represented, accounting for none of the organizations despite employing 9% of Indigenous peoples.

- > Of the organizations for which Indigenous identity was explicitly specified, the majority were First Nations owned/led (80%), followed by Métis owned/led (11%), and Inuit owned/led (9%).
- > Tools or resources (81%) and networking (73%) were accessible to Indigenous Peoples at most organizations in the database. Training also appeared to be largely available, with 54% of the organizations offering some type of practical training. Mentorship opportunities (37%) were less widespread among the organizations, which indicates a potential growth area.
- > In terms of the skills targeted by the organizations, interpersonal and unspecified skills (which included skills that could not be otherwise categorized, such as creative abilities) were the most frequently targeted, at 54% and 54%, respectively. A similar proportion of organizations aimed to enhance foundational (38%), analytical (38%), and resource management (36%) skills. Based on the distribution of targeted skills throughout the mapping project, Indigenous people appear to have fewer opportunities to acquire technical skills (17%), such as the operation of machines and technological systems.



To achieve a truly inclusive economy, deliberate effort must be made to ensure that historically marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, have equal opportunities to grow and succeed as valued employees, company owners, entrepreneurs, and leaders of industry and broader society.

Among Indigenous-owned training providers that participated in interviews, we found that:

- > Participating Indigenous-owned training providers share the common goal of improving the employment landscape for Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- > These providers see themselves contributing in different ways to the landscape of workforce-related training or skills development for Indigenous people, including:
 - > Overcoming job-specific skills gaps (e.g., ensuring individuals have the necessary skills to fulfill job requirements)

- > Identifying strategic needs (e.g., training for management rather than entry-level jobs, training for self-governance negotiations or community environmental monitoring)
- > Addressing holistic needs (i.e., helping companies create culturally safe and welcoming environments for Indigenous people)

Among non-Indigenous organizations that participated in interviews, we found that:

- > Non-Indigenous organizations are employing multiple methods to recruit Indigenous talent (including through mainstream recruiting methods, outreach in Indigenous communities, and educational and training institutions) and training Indigenous people (including training to qualify for the kinds of jobs offered by the company, training upon being hired by the company, and broader support of community members that is not directly linked to a job).
- > Some companies offer very personalized support and training to help Indigenous candidates navigate the hiring process and qualify for positions. This individualized support is necessary to overcome two main types of barriers referenced throughout the interviews: unintended barriers created by the company itself (e.g., only accepting online applications) and systemic barriers faced by Indigenous peoples (e.g., unreliable access to internet or phone).

The results of the study can help Indigenous entrepreneurs, governments, and private sector companies better understand the shortcomings in present opportunities available to Indigenous peoples, highlight opportunities for future program development, and revise existing opportunities to close any gaps. The insights gleaned in the assessment of the Indigenous skills and employment landscape outline the greater possibilities for Indigenous people's career advancement. Governments, social service agencies, and business sector partners can support Indigenous-led groups to deliver skills and resources in the most effective manner for the communities they serve.



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Phase 1: Mapping the Indigenous Skills Training Ecosystem

Introduction

The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program was established by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) after consultations with Indigenous rights-holders in 2016 and 2017 on the skills and training strategy for Indigenous people to improve their skills and find employment. The program funds Indigenous service organizations that provide skills training to Indigenous peoples in their communities. While the impact of ISET is currently being evaluated, similar programs that were funded by ESDC have shown promising results. Compared to non-participants, participants of the programs had increased employment earnings, a higher employment rate, and decreased reliance on social assistance (Government of Canada, 2021a).

Despite continued investments into Indigenous skills training, Indigenous peoples continue to be under-represented in the workforce relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts, and these disparities have worsened since the onset of the pandemic (EnviroNics, 2021). According to Statistics Canada (2022), the unemployment rate for Indigenous peoples

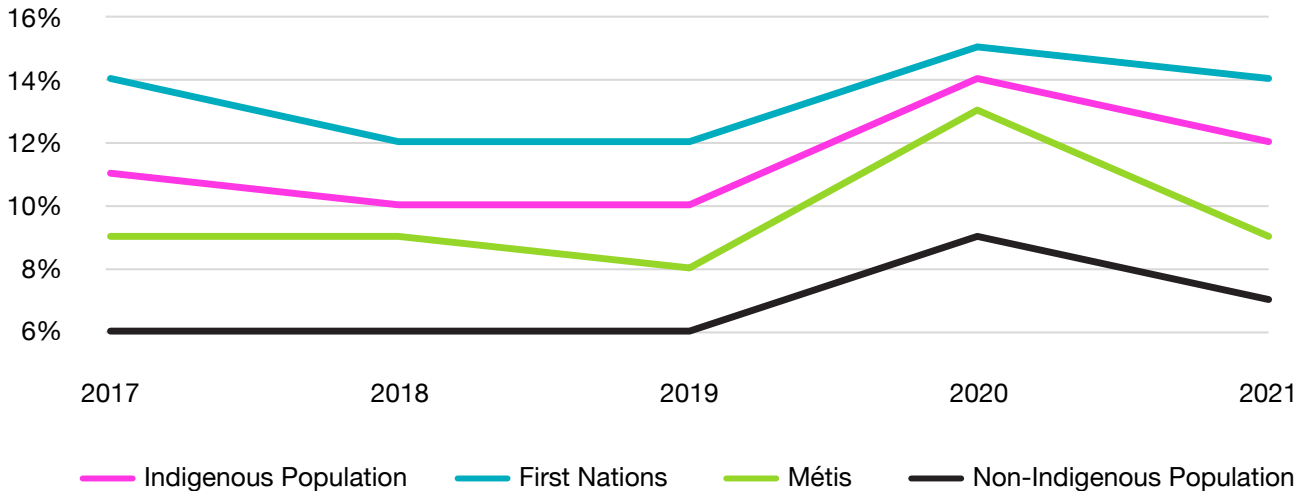
was 10.2% in 2019 and jumped to 14.2% in 2020, but is showing some signs of recovery, as the rate dropped to 11.6% in 2021. However, these rates were all higher than the respective unemployment rate for non-Indigenous people. The information provided by Statistics Canada did not include separate data for Inuit identity.

Like many other countries, Canada is experiencing a shortage of skilled labour in high-demand sectors of the economy. This is partly attributed to the digitization of organizations, which has created a strong demand for digital skills, and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as employees seek better opportunities elsewhere (Cukier et al., 2021). Businesses in certain sectors, such as accommodation and food services, and certain regions, such as Atlantic Canada (Brigley & Chapman, 2022), have been struggling with worker shortages and increased wages.

However, when assessing the worker shortage alongside the higher unemployment rate among Indigenous peoples, part of the problem seems to lie in the underutilization of the Indigenous workforce. According to a 2017 survey by Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018b), the most common challenge in finding work reported

FIGURE 1

Unemployment rate by Indigenous identity and year (2017–2021)



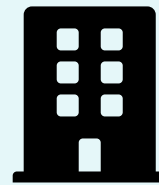
Source: Statistics Canada. (2022, January 7). *Labour force characteristics by region and detailed Indigenous group* [Table 14-10-0365-01]. Retrieved June 8, 2022, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410036501>

by Indigenous peoples was lack of available jobs (60.3%), followed by not having enough work experience (44.6%) and lack of education and training (44.5%). However, as the labour market is shifting toward one that is candidate-driven with an uptick in available jobs (Bundale, 2022), lack of work experience, education, and training are now likely the biggest hurdles for Indigenous job seekers. This increase in job availability may also not be as significant on First Nations reserves.

The Government of Canada has laid out an initiative to increase the representation of Indigenous peoples in the federal public service (Interdepartmental Circles on Indigenous Representation [ICIR], 2017), and this initiative has been echoed by private corporations as well (e.g., Shopify) (Shopify, 2020), many of whom are actively recruiting Indigenous workers. Indigenous youth are also the fastest-growing demographic in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018a), and by

2026, 350,000 Indigenous youth may close some of those talent gaps as they join the labour force (Skudra et al., 2020).

The focus on Indigenous recruitment and reskilling is necessary as people increasingly expect organizations to address social



The most common challenge in finding work reported by Indigenous peoples was lack of available jobs (60.3%), followed by not having enough work experience (44.6%) and lack of education and training (44.5%).

injustices of the past (Indigenous Works, 2019). Greater investment in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) can improve employee retention and make organizations more attractive places to work for prospective job seekers, particularly for those who are younger (Miller, 2021). Along with broadening the talent pool, employing Indigenous workers also leads to a better relationship with the local community, helps employers acquire the social license to operate in Indigenous communities, and improves their reputation, thereby improving retention (MacLaine et al., 2019).

Why is skills training important?

Despite the clear benefits of Indigenous employment, organizations continue to struggle to increase Indigenous inclusion in their workforce. Part of this challenge stems from an overemphasis on credentials (Gooch et al., 2022), such as a university degree or college diploma, over skills. When an employer is looking to fill a particular position in their organization, they are essentially looking for a specific set of skills that help achieve the objectives of the business. Human resources professionals often use credentials as indicators of the specific skills that a job seeker may possess, even though they are generally poor indicators (Gyarmanti et al., 2020). While educators like to believe that they are building the necessary skills for their students to succeed, about a quarter of final-year students score below the level of literacy and numeracy they are projected to need to succeed in the labour market of tomorrow (Weingarten & Hicks, 2018).

This overemphasis on credentials has also disproportionately disadvantaged many equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous peoples, who are under-represented in higher education. While Indigenous people have made significant gains in the educational attainment of post-secondary education, they are still below the educational attainment of non-Indigenous people (National Indigenous Economic Development Board, 2019).

The benefits of post-secondary education for Indigenous people are clear. Once Indigenous people obtain a bachelor's degree, over 90% are employed, which is similar to the rate for non-Indigenous people. However, Indigenous people continue to face many barriers to accessing and completing their degrees, such as lack of academic preparation and guidance, inadequate funding, and lack of community and family support due to the need to relocate (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2020; National Indigenous Economic Development Board, 2019). These challenges highlight the need for alternative pathways to obtain the skills necessary for Indigenous people to participate in the labour market (Statistics Canada, 2021b).

There are also critical foundational skills gaps and disproportionate barriers when comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Many Indigenous youth do not graduate high school, or they graduate without having acquired sufficient literacy and numeracy skills (Skudra et al., 2020). They are also less confident in their digital literacy, despite frequently using digital devices (Schrumm et al., 2021). A great contributor to this gap is likely to be the

unequal distribution of digital infrastructure, where broadband internet access in Indigenous communities is limited (Collier, 2021). Indigenous populations are over-represented in remote and rural locations without broadband internet access and thus face the steepest barriers to skills training and employment opportunities (Middleton, 2021).

There are concerns that the Indigenous talent pool does not possess the necessary skills to remain resilient to future disruptions. It is estimated that 50% of the workforce will need to reskill in the next five years due to the double disruption of the pandemic and increasing technological automation (Cukier et al., 2021). Indigenous workers are over-represented in low-wage work that is vulnerable to automation and where upskilling needs to be a priority (Young et al., 2021). There is an opportunity then to transition Indigenous workers from these high-risk industries to the information and communications technology (ICT)



There is an opportunity then to transition Indigenous workers from these high-risk industries to the information and communications technology (ICT) sector

sector, which generally offers better pay and benefits. This would likely improve Indigenous employment and job stability and help close the digital skills gap.

In response to the emerging need for upskilling and reskilling, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations have established themselves to offer skills training specifically for Indigenous people, to help them gain the necessary skills to achieve employment. Well-informed Indigenous-delivered and Indigenous-led employment training is important to improve Indigenous labour-market outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Skills training can help fill the gap between post-secondary education and labour market needs by providing Indigenous people an opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to participate in the labour market without a formal degree. It can even benefit those with a formal degree by supplementing their credentials with skills that are more relevant to the current labour market. The Career Pathways Framework established in the United States is one creative approach to continuously upgrading skills for in-demand jobs. This approach outlines a series of connected training opportunities aligned with industry-relevant credentials. The result is shorter-term training that moves people more quickly into the workforce (Palamar & Pasolli, 2018). Skills training can come in many forms, including direct training for skills, mentorship, providing tools and resources for self-directed learning, and networking with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals.

The importance of these skills development and training opportunities for Indigenous people cannot be overstated. Indigenous people can not only help to fill the talent gap, but they can accelerate the productivity of our new digital reality that requires diversity in thought and idea exchange (Patsey et al., 2019). The expansion of training, education, mentorship, and networking opportunities specifically for Indigenous people would have long-lasting impacts on the welfare of Indigenous communities and the Canadian economy.

Phase 1: Importance of mapping exercise

Skills training for Indigenous people is critical to closing some of the gaps in skills and employment. Yet there is very little information about the current landscape of the skills training ecosystem for Indigenous people. What programs are currently available for Indigenous job seekers? Where are they located? What skills do they target? Are there programs specifically tailored for Indigenous people who are at the intersection of multiple equity-seeking groups (e.g., Indigenous women or Two-Spirit people)? While numerous skills training and funding programs for Indigenous peoples exist, it is difficult to access consolidated information about Indigenous-specific programming across Canada (Skudra et al., 2020). Such information is useful not only for potential Indigenous job seekers looking to upskill or reskill, but also for policy-makers and program delivery organizations to identify gaps in the current Indigenous skills development ecosystem.

In the first phase of this project, we gathered information on 1,207 organizations across Canada that offer skills training or funding for Indigenous peoples. This list is far larger and more up to date than other consolidated lists that have been gathered in the past (e.g., the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project [FIMESIP, 2014]), thus allowing for a more comprehensive and relevant overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the current Indigenous training landscape. While Indigenous peoples participate in skills training programs that are geared toward a more general audience, our focus was primarily on programs specifically tailored to Indigenous people, as studies have shown that the likelihood of participant success from these programs increases when the training is culturally appropriate, land-based, and includes wraparound supports (Skudra et al., 2020). Wraparound services, especially child care, skills assessment, case management, transportation support, and mentoring and coaching, may be especially important in helping Indigenous job seekers complete job training and use their newfound skills to find and retain work (Zhong & Shetty, 2021). In April 2022, the federal budget announced \$2.5 billion over five years to build on Indigenous early learning and child care, including before- and after-school care on reserves (Government of Canada, 2022a).

Mapping exercise design and method

The mapping exercise provided an understanding of the scope and nature of skills development, training, and career advancement opportunities for Indigenous

peoples. A pan-Canadian list of 1,207 Indigenous organizations was coded between August 25, 2021 and February 23, 2022. The organizations in this exercise were drawn from a multitude of sources, such as the Native Women's Association of Canada's #BeTheDrum Indigenous Women's Business Directory, the Skills Development Ecosystem Mapping (SDEM) database at the Diversity Institute (DI), and the Government of Canada's Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program list of service delivery organizations. DI supplied these organization and business lists, and CCAB discovered additional organizations via desk research.

The types of organizations entered in the mapping exercise include, among others:

- > Indigenous companies and institutions assisting Indigenous Peoples with skills, training, financing, or employment
- > Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic institutions offering Indigenous studies courses or scholarships for Indigenous students
- > First Nations communities offering skills and training opportunities for community members
- > Not-for-profits providing training, mentorship, or networking opportunities to Indigenous peoples
- > Privately-owned businesses providing skills development or training opportunities for Indigenous peoples

For the mapping exercise, we collected detailed information on each organization, such as their location, industry, skills targeted, method of skills training, and business size.

Analysis: Mapping exercise

The final mapping sample included 1,207 Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses and organizations. We describe the results of each field in more detail below.

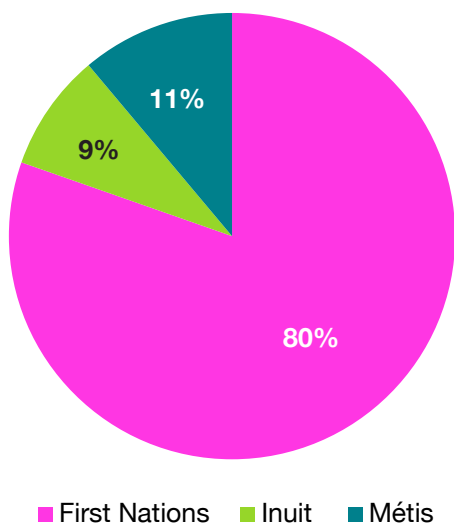
Identity of the organizations' owners/decision-makers

We followed the Government of Canada's (Department of Justice, 2018) distinctions-based approach to recognize the three Indigenous groupings in Canada (i.e., First Nations, Inuit, and Métis), as the "one size fits all" approach to Indigenous policy and decision-making is insufficient in dealing with the unique challenges faced by each of these Indigenous groups (NAFC, 2021). The Indigenous identity category examined whether the organizations in the database might be classified as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or non-Indigenous based on how they represented themselves online. We were able to identify Indigenous ownership or operation by searching for keywords on the organizations' websites, such as "Indigenous," "Aboriginal," "Métis," "Inuit," or the name of a specific First Nations community. Some establishments were unable to be classified, resulting in the creation of an "unidentified" category.

Using CCAB’s definition of Indigenous ownership as 51 % or more owned and controlled by an Indigenous person(s), Indigenous Peoples owned/led 77% of the organizations in the dataset. However, we could not determine the identities of the organizations’ key decision-makers in 43% of the organizations in the sample, and 24% of organizations were owned/led by non-Indigenous individuals.

Figure 2 displays the percentage of organizations that identified with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis groups in a subsample of 387. First Nations owned/led organizations represented 80% of those that could be identified, followed by Métis (11%) and Inuit (9%).

FIGURE 2
Subsample of organizations mapping by Indigenous identity group (n=387)



Industry

Industry classification is based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) framework. NAICS is used in Canadian economic statistics to provide common definitions of the industrial structure (Statistics Canada, 2021a). The mapping criteria involved 20 NAICS codes, and each organization was mapped for its industry.

The most prevalent industries among these organizations were health care and social assistance (26%), retail trade (18%), other services (except public administration, accounting) (16%), public administration (14%), and educational services (9%). Organizations involved in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, as well as manufacturing and wholesale trade, were all absent from the database. Collectively, industries such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; utilities; construction; transportation and warehousing; real estate and rental and leasing; management of companies and enterprises; and accommodation and food services accounted for about 2% of the organizations mapped.

In the future, more research attention must be paid to the availability of skills development initiatives in industries such as accommodation and food services (7% of the Indigenous working-age population compared to 0.3% of our sample), construction (7% compared to 0.3%), manufacturing (9% compared to 0%), mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (2% compared to 0%), transportation and warehousing (5% compared to 0.2%), and wholesale trade (4% compared to 0%).

TABLE 1

Organizations mapping by industry (NAICS) and the percentage of Indigenous workers employed by industry in Canada (2016 Census)

NAICS Industry	Percentage of Organizations Mapping	Percentage of Indigenous Workers Employed
Health care and social assistance	26%	12%
Retail trade	18%	12%
Other services (except public administration)	16%	4%
Public administration	14%	6%
Educational services	9%	8%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	6%	7%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	5%	2%
Finance and insurance	4%	4%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	1%	2%
Information and cultural industries	1%	2%
Accommodation and food services	0%*	7%
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	0%*	4%
Construction	0%*	7%
Management of companies and enterprises	0%*	0%
Real estate and rental and leasing	0%*	2%
Transportation and warehousing	0%*	5%
Utilities	0%*	1%
Manufacturing	0%	9%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	0%	2%
Wholesale trade	0%	4%

*These numbers were all rounded down to 0% if less than 0.5%. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding to the nearest whole number

Source: Data on the distribution of Indigenous peoples across industries in Canada is from Statistics Canada. (2016). *2016 Census of Population* [Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016359].

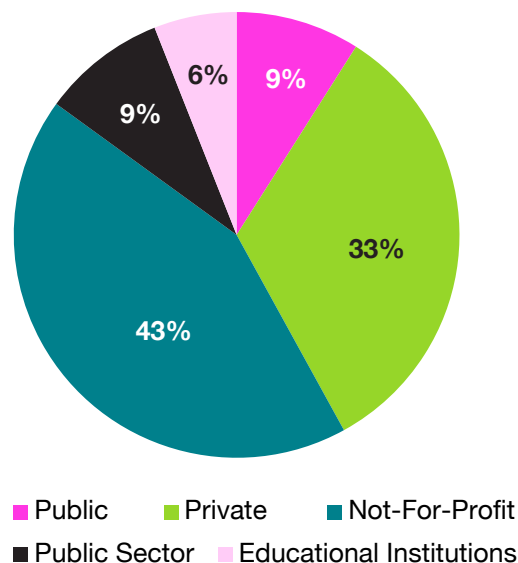
These low participation rates may lead to the identification of training and development opportunities for Indigenous people in these industries.

These findings highlight a need for additional investment into these industries to offer more opportunities for skills development, training, and career advancement for Indigenous people interested in or living near these industries. For instance, the development of institutions like the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies has helped to produce a large talent pool of skilled workers, which has pushed progress forward and enabled links between businesses and First Nations communities. As a result, companies like KDM Constructors, a joint venture between three First Nations and SECON Group, are creating change in the right direction (Warick, 2021).

Organization type

Organizations were classified into one of five types: public (open/owned by a group but not a business); private (privately-owned business or organization requiring membership); not-for-profit; public sector (government, including Indigenous Territories); and educational institutions (private and public, all age levels). The most common organization type was not-for-profit (43%), followed by privately-owned organizations (33%). Public sector, educational institutions, and public organizations combined accounted for 24% of the total.

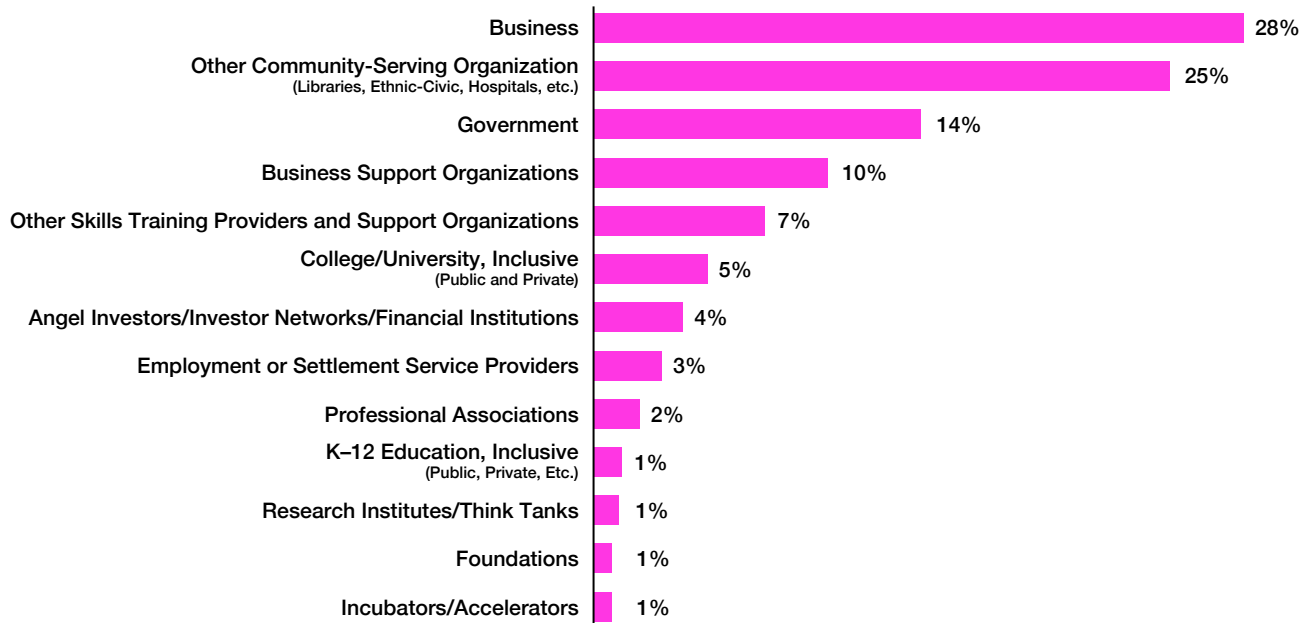
FIGURE 3
Organizations mapping by type



Ecosystem category

The 13 ecosystem categories grouped organizations based on their involvement in the delivery of a specific product or service. Businesses (28%), other community-serving organizations (such as libraries, ethnic-civic organizations, and hospitals) (25%), and government bodies (14%) comprised the bulk of our sample. Of the businesses we identified through our mapping, 30%, or 362 firms, were small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which have fewer than 500 employees. Further research is needed to assess the role of incubators/accelerators, foundations, professional associations, and employment/settlement service providers in offering Indigenous people skills development, training, resources for capital and training costs, and career advancement opportunities. These organizations collectively represented one-third (33%) of the dataset, while each only contributed a minor percentage of the database.

FIGURE 4
Organizations mapping by ecosystem category



*K-12 education refers to only off-reserve schools.

Organizational funding and grants

Skills and training organizations rely on a range of funding sources, and identifying these sources is essential to determining how available funding can best be channelled to assist with creating skills programs and providing financial assistance to participants. Areas in which funding and grants are not available will provide information on where gaps exist, resulting in skills training not being available and/or accessible. The funding sources were divided into four broad groups: federal, provincial, municipal, and private. This category allowed for multi-select responses, as many organizations received funding from multiple sources.

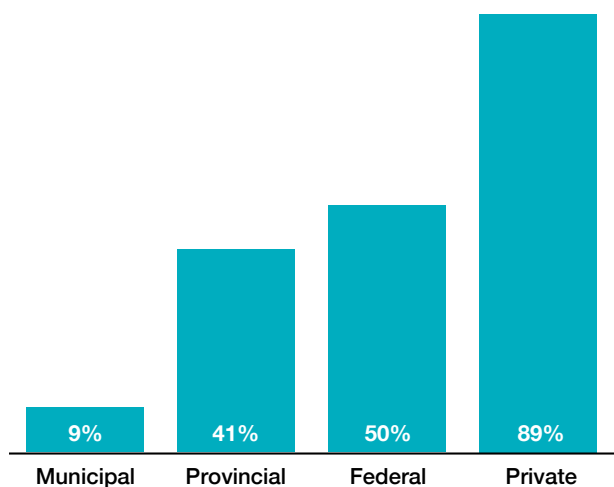


A substantial majority of organizations were privately funded (89%). Many also received funding from federal (50%) and provincial (41%) governments, with fewer obtaining support from municipal sources (9%).

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One-third (33%) of organizations offered grants through their programs and services (broadly defined in this exercise as non-repayable funding accessible to Indigenous peoples), whereas only 4% provided financing options (repayable loans from angel investors/investor networks/financial institutions). The database did not include information on government student loans and/or grants administered through a post-secondary institution.

FIGURE 5
Organizations mapping
by funding sources



Skills targeted

We based the categories in the mapping exercise on the skills and competencies taxonomy outlined by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to help streamline the terminology and establish a blueprint for skills development (Government of Canada, 2021c). This taxonomy also complements ESDC's Skills for Success model, which lists the nine essential skills Canadians need to participate in work, education, training, and society (Palameta et al., 2021). The five skill categories are defined as follows:

- > **Foundational skills** constitute skills including reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication, and digital skills. All the skills that comprise the foundational skills are listed as essential skills in ESDC's Skills for Success model.
- > **Analytical skills** allow individuals to develop capacities needed to process information and data logically to produce useable results. This includes critical thinking, decision making, evaluation, learning strategies, operations analysis, problem solving, quality control analysis, researching and investigating, and systems analysis. Critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving are regrouped under problem solving in ESDC's Skills for Success model.
- > **Technical skills** allow individuals to design, develop, integrate, set up, and operate machines and technological systems and correct malfunctions

involving their application, such as skills relating to equipment maintenance, set up, repair, operation, and selection.

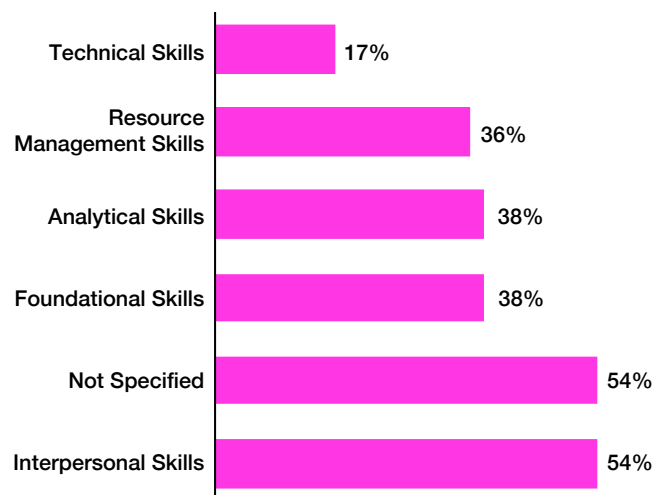
- > **Resource management skills** allow the development of capacities to plan, organize, monitor, and control resources to achieve goals, such as management of change; crises; risk; and financial, material and personnel resources, as well as strategic planning skills.
- > **Interpersonal skills** develop the capacity to plan, organize, monitor, and control resources to achieve goals, which include coordinating, instructing, intercultural skills, managing conversation, negotiating, persuading, service orientation, social perceptiveness, and working with others. Intercultural skills and working with others fall under collaboration in ESDC’s Skills for Success model.

Some organizations were mapped into multiple categories, as many organizations focused on a spectrum of relevant abilities. Other offerings that did not fit into these categories, including training for creative abilities, entrepreneurship, or cultural awareness training, were labelled as “not specified.” It is important to note that the Skills for Success model (Palameta et al., 2021) was updated in May 2021 to include “creativity and innovation” and “adaptability” as key components of the framework to more accurately account for continuous

learning and to reflect the traditional values and knowledge of Indigenous learners. However, the research study had already started prior to the release of the updated framework, so these new categories are not included in this mapping exercise. Nevertheless, we emphasize that a particular skill not being categorized in one of the five categories does not necessarily mean that it is any less important or valuable for success.

Overall, the percentage of program offerings for Indigenous peoples was almost equally distributed across the key targeted skills of resource management (36%), foundational (38%), and analytical (38%) skills. Interpersonal skills (54%) and unspecified skills (54%) were the most commonly targeted. Indigenous people do not appear to have as many opportunities to gain technical skills (17%), which develop the capacity to set up or operate machinery or technological systems.

FIGURE 6
Percentage of organizations mapping offering training in various skills





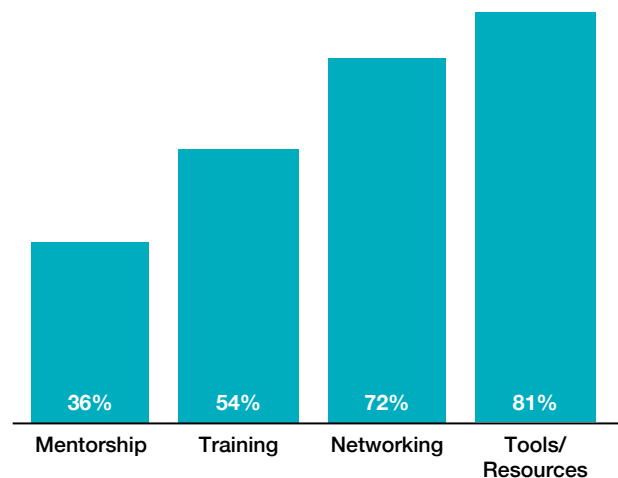
Skills development

Skills development refers to the kinds of services or programs that an organization offers to promote development of the skills targeted (as outlined above). Since organizations frequently provide multiple services to improve skills, this category allows for organizations to be categorized into multiple types.

Tools or resources (81%) and networking (72%) were accessible to Indigenous peoples at most organizations in the database. Training also appeared to be commonly available, with 54% of the organizations offering some type of practical training. However, given that only about a third (36%) provided mentorship opportunities, further research is needed to determine whether this absence is due to a genuine lack of opportunities or resources.

FIGURE 7

Percentage of organizations mapping offering training, mentorship, tools or resources, and networking opportunities for Indigenous peoples



Incorporation of Indigenous cultural and traditional practices

To gain an understanding of how many organizations incorporate Indigenous cultural and traditional practices into their services, we determined which organizations include Indigenous worldviews, ways of knowing, teachings, ceremonies, languages, and traditions within daily business operations. Most organizations (70%) integrated Indigenous cultural and traditional practices into their organizational models. While this significant majority shows great promise for Indigenous people’s inclusion, nearly one-third (30%) of our sample did

not include any Indigenous cultural and/or traditional practices when providing their training services to Indigenous people.

Geographic location

The organization’s location identified where the organization was headquartered as well as its range of action, which could be used to determine the regions with the most abundant access to workforce-related training and resources and those with less training infrastructure. This data may be used to further identify communities that are underserved and under-resourced compared to the rest of the country.

TABLE 2

Organizations mapping and total Indigenous population 15 years or older by province and territory (2016 Census)

Province/Territory	Percentage of Organizations Mapping	Percentage of Indigenous Population (15+)
Atlantic provinces	9%	8%
New Brunswick	3%	2%
Nova Scotia	2%	3%
Newfoundland and Labrador	2%	3%
Prince Edward Island	1%	0.16%
Ontario	32%	23%
British Columbia	17%	16%
Manitoba	14%	13%
Quebec	8%	12%
Alberta	7%	15%
Saskatchewan	6%	10%
Territories	9%	3%
Northwest Territories	3%	1%
Yukon	3%	1%
Nunavut	3%	2%

Source: Statistics Canada. (2020b). *Special tabulation, based on 2016 Census*. Prepared for Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. [Unpublished internal company document.]

The majority of the organizations were located in Ontario (32%), British Columbia (17%), and Manitoba (14%), with a considerable number also in Quebec (8%), Alberta (7%), and Saskatchewan (6%). However, in each of these provinces, less than half of the organizations offered services to the entire province. Moreover, many provinces and territories, from New Brunswick (3%), Newfoundland and Labrador (2%), Nova Scotia (2%), and Prince Edward Island (1%), to Yukon (3%), Northwest Territories (3%), and Nunavut (3%) have fewer dedicated organizations. A more in-depth examination of the population base, population clusters, and urban versus rural areas could shed light on geographic gaps, infrastructure barriers, and supply and demand requirements. In all, 36% of organizations provided services across the country, including those that delivered their services online.

Target audience

The criteria of the target audience of the programming were introduced to ascertain how many organizations target services for intersectionality of Indigenous people who belong to multiple under-represented and equity-deserving groups. These groups were selected based on the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) document for the 50 – 30 Challenge, which is a federal challenge aimed at achieving gender parity (50% women and/or non-binary people) and significant representation (30%) of equity-deserving groups on boards and in senior management (Diversity Institute, 2021). The Diversity Institute leveraged Canada's standardization system, along with experts on diversity and inclusion, to define key

terms and definitions laid out in the 50 – 30 Challenge. Members of equity-deserving groups include, but are not limited to, those identifying as 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous peoples, and members of racialized groups.

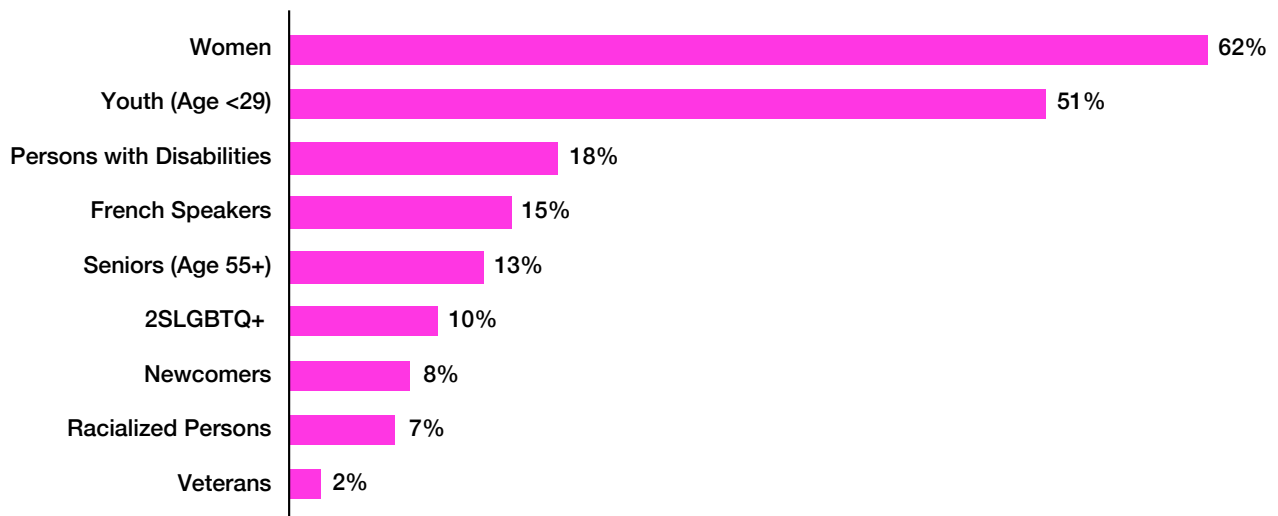
To address inequality and its impact, an understanding of the system in which Black and Indigenous individuals and people of colour navigate their careers is required (Tingling, 2020). As an example, research indicates that Indigenous women are the most overqualified workers earning the lowest personal income, with overqualified Indigenous women with a university education earning half the median income of non-overqualified women and almost \$7,000 less than overqualified Indigenous men (Park, 2021). All of the organizations mapped offered services specifically for Indigenous peoples. In addition to Indigenous peoples, the organizations and programs included in the mapping were most available to women (62%), youth (under 29 years old) (51%), and persons with disabilities (18%). According to population tables, youth (under 29) comprise approximately 50% of the Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2020).



Research indicates that Indigenous women are the most overqualified workers earning the lowest personal income.

FIGURE 8

Percentage of organizations mapping offering services to particular groups



Limitations of the mapping exercise

Due to the limitations of internet research and the public availability of information, this analysis, although extensive, may not include every organization in Canada providing opportunities to increase employability and success at work for Indigenous people. As a result, this analysis is limited in its scope of the Indigenous skills training and employment landscape in Canada. However, the breadth of the database is large enough that clear patterns and gaps can be identified in the overall Canadian Indigenous skills training ecosystem.

Similarly, our coding was based on the information that is publicly available on each organization’s website. Information about program offerings may not be available online and, therefore, may not be fully represented in this exercise (e.g., if an organization does not say they offer networking on their website but internally hosts a series of networking events).

For future mapping exercises, it would be beneficial to send a survey out to the organizations included in the sample to confirm our mapping, as that would ensure that the most current and accurate information is captured.

In addition to the landscape outlined in this report, there were other non-traditional pathways to skills development that this exercise could not capture as it largely focused on established organizations. These include the success of Indigenous learning and development captured by informal, at-home learning or knowledge sharing within a community (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). Not only must training opportunities be available to Indigenous peoples, but crucial to reconciliation is a recognition of Indigenous initiatives and an understanding of how to identify skills Indigenous people already possess without having to participate in formal education. Transferable skills are becoming hiring standards, and by exploring these avenues, employment opportunities can be increased (Yate, 2018).

Overall insights

The mapping exercise captures a snapshot of the skills development, training, and funding environment for Indigenous peoples in Canada. Information was collected across multiple industries, organization types, regions, and Indigenous identities to provide a more comprehensive sense of the current opportunities. The sample gathered in this exercise demonstrates that there is a need to create more opportunities for Indigenous peoples in Canada to develop and hone their skills in a range of professions and industries.

The data indicates that the majority (89%) of organizations are unable to sustain operations only through government

support and have established alternative funding sources and bootstrap models. Governments, social service agencies, and business sector partners should support Indigenous-led groups to deliver these skills and resources in the most effective manner for their communities through capacity building, staffing, and training. The database findings reveal an intriguing opportunity for municipalities, which provide only 9% of funding, to improve outreach and engagement with Indigenous communities, given their proximity. Municipal and Indigenous governments may stand to gain from collaborating on employment and training programs to supporting each other with local business and projects.

Phase 2: In-Depth Interviews with Indigenous-Owned Training Providers

The mapping exercise offered a quantitative view of the training and skills ecosystem for Indigenous peoples and helped identify strengths in the ecosystem, as well as the gaps. However, the descriptive details gathered from the organizations' websites only offer superficial information about their skills and training offerings. The mapping exercise does not provide enough information about how these organizations provide Indigenous skills development. What are some of the challenges in delivering these training programs? How do the organizations tailor their training to Indigenous people?

To answer these more detailed questions, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with Indigenous-owned training providers to glean deeper insights into how the training is delivered to Indigenous people. The insights from the interviews can potentially offer some ideas for other Indigenous training service providers to better deliver their services. The interview findings may also be useful for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations that are interested in offering more skills development opportunities for their Indigenous employees. Additionally,

the obstacles and gaps in training identified by the Indigenous training providers can help policy-makers and advocacy groups better design interventions to facilitate the training of Indigenous people and recognize the value in entrusting those services to Indigenous institutions themselves.

Phases 2 and 3 were undertaken in collaboration between CCAB and Environics Research, one of Canada's leading public opinion research firms. CCAB led the questionnaire design, supported by Environics Research and with input from Diversity Institute. CCAB Research identified and recruited the research participants and conducted interviews with Indigenous-owned training providers. Environics Research conducted interviews with non-Indigenous organizations in Phase 3 of the research.

One group of providers who took part in this research provides training directly to Indigenous people using coaching that is aligned with Indigenous worldviews. While equipping participants with tactical skills for the job market, they take into consideration the cultures and languages that distinguish Indigenous identities.

“Our focus is on that cultural piece; what [do] they see, hear, and feel when they walk into that building. Is this some place that they want to be, are they supported, are they seen as human beings and not just part of a product line?”

Another group of companies provides training to both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, aiming to better prepare them for a specific trade (such as forestry jobs or software testing) or job searching in general. Job search skills tend to reflect soft skills such as communication skills or time management, which participants can use during interviews or once they secure a job.

A third group of training providers considers their clients to be professionals working within non-Indigenous organizations who hire Indigenous-owned training providers to expand their cultural awareness and help address gaps in knowledge. For example, one training provider focuses on executives and higher-level positions, with the belief that cultural sensitivity and understanding will trickle from the top down.

Indigenous recruitment and retention practices

While skills development is vital in closing some of the Indigenous employment gaps, it is not the only barrier Indigenous people face. For instance, even among those with higher literacy skills, Indigenous people are less likely to be employed than non-Indigenous people, particularly off-reserve First Nations adults (Arriagada & Hango, 2016). Negative stereotypes and



While it is important to create a work environment in which Indigenous people feel valued, accepted, and understood, companies vary widely in their awareness and adoption of inclusion practices.

racism continue to persist, prompting some Indigenous candidates to mask their Indigenous identity during the hiring process (Government of Canada, 2017). While it is important to create a work environment in which Indigenous people feel valued, accepted, and understood, companies vary widely in their awareness and adoption of inclusion practices (MacLaine et al., 2019). Indigenous employees and job seekers are also dealing with the damaging consequences of Canada’s mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, including the harmful impact of the residential school system, which forced Indigenous children to be separated from their families to indoctrinate them with a new culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). While skills training can help Indigenous people to gain sustainable and meaningful employment, it is not enough.

Therefore, we also took the interview study one step further and asked Indigenous training providers to identify the challenges in the recruitment and retention of Indigenous people, in order to examine other



factors beyond skills that pose a barrier to their employment. By examining these additional hurdles, we were able to gain a more holistic picture of the challenges that Indigenous people face in their efforts to attain employment.

Contributions of Phase 2

By combining the topics of skills training, recruitment, and retention, the interviews provided us with an opportunity to learn about each organization's expertise in the following areas:

- > How Indigenous-owned training providers are contributing to the Indigenous skills training and employment landscape
- > What kind of training and skills development opportunities are available and specifically tailored to Indigenous people
- > How recent disruptions in digital transformation and the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the organization's efforts
- > What gaps and opportunities exist in the recruitment, retention, and training of Indigenous people

Interview design and method

Step 1: Selection and recruitment of participants

For Phase 2 of the interviews with Indigenous-owned businesses (those having at least 51% Indigenous ownership), participants were identified through CCAB's membership directory and the mapping exercise. The primary inclusion criterion was whether the organization would be well-positioned to speak about the employment, training, and skills development landscape for Indigenous-owned organizations, as stated by their mission or their services. Additionally, we aimed to include participants from each Indigenous identity group (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) and from multiple regions and industries.

Step 2: Conducting the interviews

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, were conducted over Microsoft Teams, and were recorded with consent from the participants. All interviews were transcribed.

The interview questions for Indigenous-owned organizations included the following topics, which we expand on in the next section of this report:

- > Types of training services offered
- > Mentorship, networking, and funding opportunities
- > Metrics for evaluating success
- > Incorporation of Indigenous cultures and communities
- > Future of work and the COVID-19 pandemic
- > Gaps and barriers in recruitment, retention, and training

Interviewers also followed up by asking probing questions, where appropriate, to encourage richer responses.

A qualitative method (in-depth individual interview) was chosen so that the in-depth perspectives provided could inform future employment, training, and skills development landscape.

Step 3: Analysis

The interview data was transcribed by CCAB, and thematic analysis was conducted by Environics Research and CCAB to look for patterns and themes across the perspectives of the training providers. Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. While the results of the interviews cannot be projected to the full population of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, they can be used as directional information in developing policy and communications.

Interview analysis

Sample characteristics

The 15 Indigenous organizations interviewed for Phase 2 covered a range of three industries, nine provinces, and mostly First Nations-owned businesses. Our sample did not sufficiently represent Yukon, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut, where Indigenous populations make up a significant proportion of the territorial populations: Nunavut (86%), Northwest Territories (51%), and Yukon (23%) (Government of Canada,

2020). Future research should examine the perspectives of Indigenous training providers in the Northern Territories of Canada, where Indigenous people face additional challenges in skills development, education, and employment due to the lack of physical and digital infrastructure, including reliable internet services. Canada has identified 190 Indigenous communities that do not have these services, and of those that do, only 24% have high-speed internet access (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada [ISED], 2019).

TABLE 3

Characteristics of Indigenous businesses interviewed

Sample Characteristic	Number (total n = 15)
Industry	
Administrative and support services	7
Professional, scientific, and technical services	6
Health care and social assistance	2
Province	
Ontario	4
Quebec	3
Alberta	2
British Columbia	1
Manitoba	1
New Brunswick	1
Nova Scotia	1
Saskatchewan	1
Indigenous Identity	
First Nations-owned	12
Métis-owned	2
Inuit-owned	1

Types of training services offered

Indigenous-owned training providers interviewed for this research seek to empower other Indigenous people through employment, teaching, and understanding. While some approach this by providing tactical training for future jobs, others are driving awareness within non-Indigenous organizations about Indigenous culture, tradition, and language.

Training providers believe that increased understanding of Indigenous peoples and their cultures will result in more success for Indigenous people in the workplace. Those with this holistic perspective place importance on the retention of Indigenous employees who feel prepared, comfortable, and seen within their workplaces.

Several Indigenous-owned training providers have identified mid- to senior-level jobs as a major gap within Indigenous employment. While other providers train Indigenous people with the technical skills for trades,



Several Indigenous-owned training providers have identified mid- to senior-level jobs as a major gap within Indigenous employment.

the Indigenous-owned training providers develop and teach Indigenous people to see themselves beyond entry-level jobs. They teach skills such as self-discipline, negotiation, money management, and interview preparation that facilitate the advancement of Indigenous people to higher-level positions.

Indigenous-owned organizations included in this sample reflect three different types of training providers:

CAREER AND LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

This includes those who provide culturally relevant training in generalized skills to Indigenous people, in varying scopes and approaches. Indigenous-owned training providers are preparing Indigenous people for employment and helping to develop the skills they believe will get them there. Much of the training found in this group was also applicable to non-Indigenous employees, who received the same training.

Discussions with the 15 Indigenous-owned training providers revealed a multitude of skills that companies work to develop in Indigenous people and/or non-Indigenous people. Helping individuals develop soft skills such as time management, active listening, dependability, and work ethic is meant to help inform their life, college, career, and leadership readiness. Those in the recruitment and staffing industries put great emphasis on interview practice, resume writing, and job search skills.

JOB-SPECIFIC TRAINING

This includes those who provide training in specific trades or job search skills to both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, as it relates to job-specific skills (skills that individuals need to demonstrate to qualify for specific types of work). Providers may collect information about various workplaces and train prospective employees specifically for them. In other instances, skills training providers are positioning Indigenous employees in the job market to find employment that not only incorporates their worldviews but also matches their skill sets.

CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

This includes those who provide cultural awareness training to non-Indigenous organizations. The purpose of this type of training is to address gaps in awareness and knowledge about Indigenous peoples. By doing so, providers of this type of training can strengthen the connection between a non-Indigenous company and an Indigenous employee and help employers understand how Indigenous communities do business and participate in projects. Providers in this space have noticed a growing demand from businesses for help to overcome these gaps, which is a promising development and may lead to Indigenous employees feeling more recognized and understood by their employers.

“Businesses that are looking for cultural training should look at it as a relationship and not just as a ‘one and done,’ that it’s something that’s going to continue.”

“Our company’s guiding philosophy refers to the way problems are analyzed, with one lens comprising Western-centric scientific knowledge and one lens made up of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding.”

OTHER TRAINING

Relatively few training providers mentioned internal training within the organization. In most cases, this was due to the organization’s small size. Providers with more employees indicated that any training they provide externally, they also deliver internally. This was most likely to be the case for Indigenous cultural awareness training.

“Companies either need to assign someone to focus on recruiting diverse peoples and building relationships with communities or invest; so that’s where it falls short, because then companies view that as too much work, [they say,] we just want to be quick and want help now, [but] this is the kind of thing that takes time, and you need to invest in it if you want to see the fruits of that work.”

Mentorship, networking, and funding opportunities

Several organizations identified a need for further opportunities in mentorship, funding, and networking beyond what is currently available. For networking opportunities, providers connect employees with prospective employers and have also established an open-door policy between themselves and Indigenous youth and hosted events that foster connection through Indigenous knowledge.

Many organizations provide mentorship opportunities internally in the form of employment training counsellors or retention representatives. These counsellors facilitate an Indigenous employee's training when hired and ensure they have the tools they need or can access them through an Indigenous internship program.

For funding, examples provided by organizations include developing an Indigenous entrepreneurship program, introducing a scholarship program, and funding a forklift license or a human resources certificate.

Metrics for evaluating success

When it comes to metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of the training or skills development opportunities currently provided, most describe their measures as informal and hard to quantify. Some methods of measurement mentioned include solicitation of feedback from employees and supervisors, regular (quarterly or annual) performance assessments between supervisor and employees, and internal surveys to monitor areas of success and improvement. Other examples of methods for providing feedback are storytelling and informal internal check-ins in which trainees can share their feedback and reflections.

Incorporation of Indigenous cultures and communities

Indigenous cultures and worldviews are inextricably linked to the work of these training providers. They highlight the importance of community relationships and the need for non-Indigenous companies to invest time and effort into building those relationships. Some Indigenous-owned organizations considered it inherent to their work to consider language, culture, and traditions.

“[For me] part of reconciliation is creating that space that Indigenous peoples can participate in, and if you have a structure I understand it's corporate, I understand that it's government and there's policies, but if they are so rigid that you cannot be accommodating then you are really not on a path of reconciliation.”

The range of how Indigenous cultures and worldviews are incorporated into work includes:

- > **Traditional or ceremonial activities, such as:**
 - > Inclusion of a sacred fire burning on a separate screen during virtual meetings
 - > Smudging ceremonies
 - > Celebration and recognition of dates of specific importance (e.g., Inuit cultural days)
- > **Use of traditional Indigenous teachings or wisdoms** woven into concepts such as entrepreneurship, professional skills, and preferences for employment setting, through the lens of Indigenous values and decolonization. Examples include:
 - > Encouraging entrepreneurs to examine the personal and cultural value of entrepreneurship through a decolonial lens and the vibrancy of Indigenous worldviews
 - > Focusing on the Seven Grandfather Teachings (wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, truth) and intertwining them with professional and personal skills
 - > Adjusting to different learning or communication styles, including pace and rhythm in conversation, and considering less formal meeting styles
 - > Incorporating traditional Indigenous teachings or wisdoms such as the medicine wheel, circular systems, and the blanket system

“[Inuk adapting to life outside their communities] is also a concern we have in our work, even if [our work is] employment or school focused, at the same time we have to work with the values, the understandings of Inuit culture, [and] Inuit lifestyle, and attempt to preserve their identity. It’s important to help them to preserve their culture and their identity while looking for a job.”

Several of the providers interviewed maintain an ongoing relationship with Indigenous communities to fulfill employment needs. They described two themes in these relationships. First, both parties reach out to each other to find individuals to fulfill employment needs. For example, an Indigenous community may reach out to the training organization when it needs to fill vacant positions (e.g., nurses, early childhood educators, language speakers). Other times, the organization relies on its established relationship with communities to recruit people interested in specific training (such as training to becoming a software tester or a human resources advisor). Second, both parties benefit from knowledge sharing between the training provider and the community. An example is when an Indigenous community reaches out to training providers to suggest training they deem necessary—such as that surrounding mental health, intergenerational trauma, and lateral violence. On the other side, for example, a provider may ask impacted Nations for insights about traditional land-use studies. Meanwhile, those providers who have not yet fostered community relationships mention it as a longer-term goal.

Future of work and the COVID-19 pandemic

Due to the digitization of work that has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous-owned organizations and training providers are adapting to shifting work landscapes. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a widespread need for online training and working from home, and thus training providers have had to accelerate digital capacities. Large organizations with a technology focus were best suited to make these shifts, whereas companies that focused on in-person training found it more difficult to pivot. Indigenous organizations have found both challenges and advantages in online training and employment.

Many Indigenous organizations revolve around building the connections and trust that come from in-person working environments, leading to various disadvantages as work grows increasingly digital. A lack of human connection, authenticity, and presence hinders the ability to connect and develop relationships. This is particularly important in Indigenous cultures that are strongly family-oriented and community-based. The pandemic has also created limitations for Indigenous people living on reserves or in rural communities. It is a challenge for Indigenous people living in these remote areas to access services and adapt to new workplaces due to lack of cell service, high-speed internet, or a computer. Service providers are rerouting their services online; however, without in-person services, Indigenous people are unable to access the training to advance their careers and skills.



Many Indigenous organizations revolve around building the connections and trust that come from in-person working environments, leading to various disadvantages as work grows increasingly digital.

“The fact that some [Indigenous recruits] do not have easy access to technology, not everyone has a computer, not everyone has a cell phone. How can they call us to make an appointment if they don’t have a computer or a cell phone all the time, or if they don’t have some money to make a call?”

There have also been advantages to the digital shift for Indigenous organizations. For Indigenous people in certain areas, the COVID-19 pandemic has helped reduce geographic limitations. Digital shifts have opened doors to work opportunities that were previously limited due to where they live. For example, an office in Toronto was inherently limiting to Indigenous staff who cannot afford to live in or commute to the city. Moving into a digital space has proven to be an effective way to recruit individuals from Indigenous communities residing in rural areas, as long as they have access to high-speed internet, and members of these

communities now have the option of staying home rather than leaving their communities to find work. Additionally, those who engage with non-Indigenous organizations noticed that the pandemic helped these organizations to better understand the hurdles that Indigenous communities face in terms of geographic location and digital access. In terms of driving compassion and understanding, this serves as an advantage for Indigenous people by emphasizing the tools they need to succeed in the workplace.

Gaps and barriers in recruitment, retention, and training

Indigenous-owned training providers identified gaps in current approaches to recruitment, retention, and training for Indigenous peoples that fell into common themes.

There is a lack of representation of Indigenous people in middle and upper-level management positions. There is an immense need to increase Indigenous representation in senior leadership roles.

“The government should actually have Indigenous people in positions that can actually make decisions that affect Indigenous people at a very high level. Because we know our people best.”

Many systemic limitations exist within the corporate world for Indigenous people, stunting them from reaching their full potential. It is possible that colonial organizations prefer to hire other colonial-structured corporations to undertake projects, rather than Indigenous-owned enterprises.

- > The same colonial system places value on formal education while skills trades are undervalued, even though trades provide many transferable skills. Due to historical relationships with the education system, education is not always an option for Indigenous people in Canada, and many Indigenous people opt for the trades. Skills must be valued over education to boost career development.
- > There is a lack of information and a lack of understanding among the general Canadian public when it comes to Indigenous rights, culture, and history, including persistent misconceptions and stereotypes about their work ethic and quality of work. The history of Indigenous peoples should be known by all Canadians to dismantle colonial systems.
- > The last identified gap is limited access for Indigenous community members living in rural areas of the country. These areas often do not have access to stable internet connections or proper devices to



There is a lack of representation of Indigenous people in middle and upper-level management positions. There is an immense need to increase Indigenous representation in senior leadership roles.

enable internet connection. The inability to access the digital world as it grows continues to put Indigenous people at a disadvantage and prevents them from entering the corporate world to expand skills development and career advancement.

“One of the things that we noticed is that when Indigenous talent is hired, they are harder to retain than they are to attract. So we came up with this idea from one of my mentors around having an Indigenous retention representative available for that person to help them get through the probationary period where they can call on us as needed and we can help them with any of the corporate culture shock or sensitivities that may be going on in the workplace.”

Overall insights

Broadly speaking, participating Indigenous-owned organizations share the common goal of improving the employment landscape for Indigenous peoples in Canada. These organizations see themselves contributing in different ways to the landscape of workforce-related training or skills development for Indigenous peoples: overcoming job-specific skills gaps (e.g., ensuring individuals have the necessary skills to fulfill job requirements); identifying strategic needs (e.g., training for management rather than entry-level jobs, training for self-governance negotiations or community environmental monitoring); and addressing holistic needs (i.e., helping companies create environments that are culturally safe and welcoming for Indigenous people).

Phase 3: In-Depth Interviews with Non-Indigenous Businesses

The interviews in Phase 2 were focused on Indigenous-owned training providers whose primary focus is on delivering some type of training to Indigenous people or non-Indigenous businesses. While these Indigenous-owned training providers play a vital role in the Indigenous skills training ecosystem, most organizations in the dataset are owned by people who are non-Indigenous, and most do not focus on skills training as their primary product or service offering. However, there are many organizations in both the public and private sectors that have introduced Indigenous training initiatives to broaden their talent pool and practice corporate social responsibility. For instance, Shopify has partnered with Indigenous-led organizations across Canada to reduce barriers to entrepreneurship (Shopify, 2020), and the Government of Canada began the Information Technology Apprenticeship Program (ITAP) to place Indigenous students in information technology (IT) roles (Government of Canada, 2021b).

We interviewed non-Indigenous businesses in Phase 3 to highlight some of these training initiatives as examples for other non-Indigenous businesses that want to support Indigenous communities through hiring and training practices. Sharing these

stories is important because organizations can use learnings from other institutions to avoid making similar mistakes and to invest in strategies that have been shown to produce positive outcomes. Additionally, the information could also highlight common gaps and areas of difficulty for those non-Indigenous businesses that are striving to increase the representation of Indigenous people and improve their relationships with their Indigenous employees. Any organization aiming to create or improve hiring and training methods should look for recommendations and best practices from Indigenous organizations first, in addition to those from non-Indigenous organizations.



Sharing these stories is important because organizations can use learnings from other institutions to avoid making similar mistakes and to invest in strategies that have been shown to produce positive outcomes.

Contributions of Phase 3

While Phase 2 focused on generating insights from Indigenous-owned training service providers, Phase 3 focused on large, non-Indigenous businesses that have made efforts to improve Indigenous employment outcomes in their organization. The interviews in Phase 3 follow a similar interview structure as those in Phase 2, with the following additional topics:

- > How partnerships are formed with Indigenous communities
- > Their strategy and targets for the recruitment, retention, and training of Indigenous people
- > The kinds of training opportunities that are available for their own Indigenous employees
- > How their company culture creates a warm and inclusive environment for Indigenous employees

Interview design and method

Step 1: Selection and recruitment of participants

As in Phase 2, non-Indigenous business participants in Phase 3 were identified through CCAB's membership directory and the mapping exercise. The inclusion criteria were whether the organization offered skills development, training, and/or career advancement opportunities for Indigenous people and whether it employed Indigenous people as part of its workforce. We aimed

to include large industrial employers of Indigenous people, as they have a greater capacity to create and launch an Indigenous relations strategy.

The large non-Indigenous organizations interviewed for this project were nearly all certified with CCAB's Progressive Aboriginal Relations ("PAR") program, which is a certification program that confirms corporate performance in Indigenous relations. These organizations were chosen because they set examples for non-Indigenous businesses to help them create more inclusive programming and career pathways for Indigenous people. Participating companies are working to develop an Indigenous workforce through the efforts of individuals and departments that have built strong relationships with the Indigenous communities in which they operate. A driving factor behind this focus is proximity: many of these companies are in resource or energy industries and operate in or adjacent to Indigenous communities with whom they have built long-term relationships.

Step 2: Conducting the interviews

Upon selecting the participants, we reached out to human resource managers, training directors, and other relevant staff in these organizations to speak about their training opportunities and strategies for the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees. The interviews in Phase 3 were conducted in the same manner as those in Phase 2, using videoconferencing technology and lasting approximately 45 minutes each.

Interviews covered the following topics, which we will expand on in more detail in the next section of this report:

- > Strategy and targets
- > Recruitment
- > Training and skills development
- > Networking and mentorship abilities
- > Metrics for evaluating success
- > Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- > Company culture

This research is focused on a unique group of non-Indigenous companies that are at the forefront of Indigenous workforce development and are unlikely to be representative of (all) non-Indigenous

businesses in Canada. Additionally, given that we exclusively interviewed large companies, future research should also incorporate the perspectives of small non-Indigenous organizations that may not have the staffing or the resources of large businesses.

“We are advancing reconciliation in the province, so we want our workforce to be representative of the communities that we work and live in.”

Interview analysis

Sample characteristics

The 15 organizations interviewed in Phase 3 represented seven industries and three provinces.

TABLE 4

Characteristics of non-Indigenous businesses interviewed

Sample Characteristic	Number (total n = 15)
Industry	
Utilities	6
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	3
Accommodation and food services	2
Finance and insurance	1
Information and cultural industries	1
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	1
Public administration	1
Province	
Alberta	9
Ontario	4
British Columbia	2

Strategy and targets

Half of participating companies say they have a formal strategy in place to guide the initiatives they are using to attract, train, and retain Indigenous employees. Those without a strategy are typically in the process of developing one and are first gathering data to better understand the issues and barriers to Indigenous employment within their company.

“We initiated a study to give us a snapshot of where we are at, what are the barriers, not just to career advancement, but also company barriers that stop [Indigenous] people from considering a career with us. Once the study is complete and we know the gaps, we aim to put forward a plan to address them.”

Similarly, roughly half of these companies report using targets to guide Indigenous recruitment and hiring. In this project, targets are broadly defined as any quantitative measure of Indigenous people throughout the employment process, such as the



The departure of key employees who hold institutional knowledge and/or the relationship with Indigenous communities can set back an organization’s efforts.

number of Indigenous people hired that year. Targets are often initially perceived as having drawbacks, such as concerns that efforts to improve workforce representation will stop once the target is reached. However, companies that have implemented targets have found them beneficial in ensuring that hiring and training objectives are understood and met across the company.

“Our goal is to be representative of the populations in which we operate across Canada, and to be respectful and create strong relationships with those communities. We don’t have formal targets.”

“At first we didn’t have targets...but targets did help with getting momentum and helping the rest of the organization get involved. For my area, we didn’t have targets, but that didn’t matter because [Indigenous hiring is] our job. But for areas like the recruitment team or different leaders or hiring managers, it wasn’t a focus for them. Once the company set targets, it helped them to be motivated to work together to meet that target.”

A key observation from the interviews is that, while organizations can set the goal of developing an Indigenous workforce, strategies and policies are executed at an individual or departmental level. Often, these individual efforts have served as the springboard for strategies and targets. Thus, the departure of key employees who hold institutional knowledge and/or the relationship with Indigenous communities can set back an organization’s efforts.

One area for future research is to identify what personnel capacity is needed in Canadian companies to build expertise in Indigenous workforce inclusion so that organizations' efforts toward Indigenous inclusion will remain resilient to future disruptions.

Recruitment

Participating non-Indigenous employers are intentionally using multiple methods to find, attract, and retain Indigenous employees. A key element seems to be the personalized support and training provided by some companies to help Indigenous candidates navigate the hiring process, overcome barriers, and qualify for positions. These companies deliberately use a variety of methods to recruit Indigenous talent:

- > **Tailored job postings:** Organizations post job openings on the company website, social media (e.g., LinkedIn), or job boards (e.g., Indeed). There have been efforts to tailor this process to Indigenous applicants, such as by providing an Indigenous-specific application space on a company website that is not tied to any specific job.
- > **Community outreach:** For companies operating in or near Indigenous communities, the primary method of recruiting is to communicate frequently with employment representatives in the community.

- > **Partnerships with education and training organizations:** Companies look to find and attract Indigenous candidates through post-secondary institutions, high schools, and training programs such as the Indigenous Skills and Training Program (ISET).
- > **Specialized support through the recruiting and hiring process:** This appears to be a distinguishing factor between companies, with some offering self-identified Indigenous candidates additional support in navigating the process (e.g., application support, interview preparation, providing a contact who explains the process or answers questions) and/or identifying where a candidate may fall short of the job requirements and helping the candidate to fill those gaps.

It is typically, but not exclusively, the organizations that see recruiting and hiring as two different processes that are more successful: recruiting is finding and attracting Indigenous candidates to apply, and hiring is the process of bringing them into the company.

“If [Indigenous] applicants meet the job requirements, we monitor their progress through the usual process. If they don’t meet the requirements, the Indigenous employment team looks at the candidate and identifies gaps to understand and match them with programs so they can meet the requirements and be able to compete.”

Training, skills development, and non-repayable funding

Non-Indigenous companies provide a variety of skills training opportunities to current and potential future Indigenous employees, which fall into three main categories:

- > **Training to qualify for the kinds of jobs offered by companies:** This includes sponsoring their education (i.e., paying the tuition for a certain program or degree), specific training to fulfill certain qualifications or meet necessary requirements, and apprenticeship programs.
- > **Training upon being hired by the company:** This includes on-the-job training that is equally available to all employees, Indigenous or not.

“Retention comes from onboarding at the onset but also from maintenance of a relationship with the individual. When they get to the site, they are paired with senior individuals...The ask [of partner Nations] is that they head out there as well, have their leaders at site, set the tone on what the expectation is and if they need someone to talk to. There are roundtable discussions to find out how they are faring. There is a whole team of us there and dedicated.”

- > **Broader support of community members:** These are training opportunities that are offered to Indigenous communities without a direct benefit to the company itself in terms of producing employees (e.g., a

resource company providing scholarships for Indigenous community members to train as health professionals).

“We offer scholarship programs that are open to any discipline—doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses—we’ll pay tuition for up to five years. We are trying to see them be successful...as individuals, they go back and help the community.”

Most participants described initiatives designed to recruit and train for entry-level, on-site jobs. When discussing initiatives that aim to find Indigenous people for mid- or senior-level jobs, instead of training, participants emphasized efforts to (a) bring in the right person regardless of whether their expertise is directly relevant, and (b) create ties within the organization through mentorship opportunities and building cultural awareness among non-Indigenous employees.

“Our Indigenous internship program provides on-the-job training; candidates get exposure to us and they get mentoring. If the individual has the education for a position but doesn’t have enough experience, if we can make it happen, we’ll have the candidate participate in a program to get that experience.”

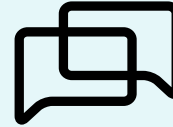
When asked about non-repayable funding opportunities, participants almost exclusively referred to scholarships their company provides to Indigenous students to pursue their education.

Networking and mentorship opportunities

Networking opportunities are widely available as a part of efforts to create a sense of community for Indigenous employees within a company. These typically involve a group of individuals who meet regularly. In some cases, the network includes Indigenous employees only; in others, it also includes non-Indigenous employees or is part of a broader Black, Indigenous, and people of colour committee. A less common approach is a newsletter for Indigenous employees. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, networking may have included in-person meetings and social activities (e.g., golf tournaments, paint nights).

“[The Indigenous network] is the longest standing network at [company]. It has a structure, a leadership circle, and contributes 100% to attraction, inclusion, and retention. They partner with students to make sure they are engaged. The network is also engaged company-wide for input into our journey into reconciliation.”

Mentoring is generally recognized as important to the retention and advancement of Indigenous employees. Informal or unstructured mentoring is often discussed as



More formal mentoring initiatives are less common relative to other initiatives because they are perceived to work best when they are very individualized, which is challenging to manage and thus difficult to scale up in these large companies.

an offshoot of networking, where anyone can play a mentoring role. More formal mentoring initiatives are less common relative to other initiatives because they are perceived to work best when they are very individualized, which is challenging to manage and thus difficult to scale up in these large companies.

“We don’t have a mentorship program, but we have very specific cases of someone hired in a developmental role who was not well versed in the area, and a senior Indigenous employee [took] on a mentorship role; we have lots of stories like that.”

Metrics for evaluating success

There is no common approach among non-Indigenous companies to evaluating the success of their Indigenous training initiatives. Where evaluation efforts do exist, they focus on getting feedback on how to improve specific programs from Indigenous employees who have participated in those programs. There is also some high-level tracking of key performance indicators or gathering of quantitative data through feedback surveys.

“We have a basic tracking system based on our programming. How many team members have taken our Indigenous relations training, which is mandatory for every team member so that people in the workplace have a bit of understanding. We track our employment numbers, we track apprenticeships and scholarships, but we haven’t expanded to other things. We are looking at it in our strategy.”

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, companies’ recruiting and training initiatives tended to be in-person due to the value placed on personal connections by Indigenous people. Both non-Indigenous companies and the Indigenous communities they partner with have adapted to the pandemic by adopting online/digital communications, but have not found it an adequate substitute in overcoming the loss of the in-person connection. This is at least partly due to their focus on on-site, entry-level jobs that cannot be done remotely. Instead, recruiting

and training initiatives have typically been postponed until pandemic restrictions have been lifted and they can be held in person.

“The biggest thing was youth hires and trades, we essentially had to pause, we deferred them because they are job shadows, they require an in-person presence with mentorship and supervision. It’s not possible to do remotely... That has affected our ability to meet [employment] targets.”

“[The COVID-19 pandemic] had a huge impact, with adjustments everywhere... We were adjusting with communities to online virtual platforms, which is against everything we know! Training for employment has been put on pause because it’s not safe. We’ve planned great stuff, once it’s safe, we can flip the switch on—but the timing of implementation has definitely been affected.”

Company culture

Participating non-Indigenous employers are investing in cultural awareness training for their non-Indigenous employees. The various initiatives described throughout this report suggest a growing recognition that attracting and retaining Indigenous employees requires companies to provide a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment for Indigenous people.

Companies reported widespread efforts to build cultural awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous employees. A wide range of Indigenous cultural awareness training initiatives was described, including:

- > Mandatory and voluntary training
- > Full-day classroom sessions and online programs
- > Programs on introducing Indigenous relations as well as more advanced learning
- > Programs developed and delivered by external consultants and by internal staff
- > Initiatives to recognize important Indigenous dates (e.g., National Indigenous Peoples Day, Orange Shirt Day/National Day for Truth and Reconciliation)

When asked about efforts to incorporate Indigenous culture or traditions into their company's recruitment and training practices, participating companies typically described how meetings and other gatherings include land acknowledgements, smudging, or prayers, or that they invited



Interviews seemed to reflect the perspective that attracting Indigenous talent is not simply about using the right recruiting and hiring techniques, but also requires an investment in culture to ensure Indigenous employees will choose to join and remain with the company.

Elders to open meetings. This seems to reflect the perspective that attracting Indigenous talent is not simply about using the right recruiting and hiring techniques but also requires an investment in culture to ensure Indigenous employees will choose to join and remain with the company.

"In today's day and age, this is part of what we are missing. We are talking about recruitment and advancement, but not talking about culture. Do we have a culture that is friendly to Indigenous employees? How are we doing at being open to diverse perspectives and Indigenous worldviews?"

"We are building out [our cultural awareness training]. We have engaged [an external consultant] to provide in-depth training at the manager/executive level... About 400 people in the organization so far have completed it. We are developing a phased approach...most people will go through some kind of training. The goal is to have another 1,000 people trained this year. The self-directed piece is mandatory, then there will be other pathways to do a deep-dive into specific topics."

There are two main types of barriers that non-Indigenous companies are trying to address by personalizing the recruitment process for Indigenous candidates: organizational barriers created by the company itself and systemic barriers faced by Indigenous people. In both cases, flexibility and personalization of recruitment techniques are necessary to overcome the barriers.



Organizational barriers include anything about the recruitment and hiring process that might create an unintended barrier for Indigenous people, such as only accepting online applications or having an interview experience that is not culturally accommodating. Systemic barriers include a lack of access to reliable internet or phone, a lack of postsecondary education in relevant fields, and unresolved intergenerational trauma.

Indigenous languages, cultures, and traditions are inherent to the work of Indigenous training providers. They incorporate this into their work through traditional and ceremonial activities, as well as by weaving Indigenous teachings or wisdoms into concepts such as entrepreneurship, professional skills, and preference for employment settings/ employer.

“We have come to the realization that at the end of the day, you are hiring one human being. We are not ever going to have 40 people come in the door to us; it’s a slow process, inclusion takes time. We want to see the numbers go up, but it’s not all about the numbers, it’s about individual people.”

Indigenous training service providers

Companies report widespread use of Indigenous training providers to develop and deliver their corporate cultural awareness training. By comparison, relatively few non-Indigenous employers have used an external Indigenous staffing agency, either currently or in the past. Some feel they do not need this service or use a non-Indigenous staffing agency. A few companies described working with Indigenous organizations to reach Indigenous candidates by posting job opportunities where Indigenous people will see them (e.g., through Indigenous Link or the ISET program).

Companies did not identify gaps in the Indigenous training service landscape per se, but raised two potential barriers to the use of Indigenous service providers: (1) the need to invest time and effort into learning what companies exist and what services are available, and (2) the limited capacity at external Indigenous-owned firms to meet the (increasing) demand for their services. It is likely the two are related, as Indigenous-owned firms may not be marketing themselves widely because they are already at full capacity.

“There are very few Indigenous firms with real expertise in recruiting and training... We need more Indigenous-owned firms in training and recruiting. We have great partners, but they are so busy.”

“I don’t know if [an external Indigenous staffing agency] is something we’ve explored. We haven’t perceived the need to. But with our metrics/targets, it’s something we should consider...If we are going to be doing that, it needs to be Indigenous-owned and focused, if we are truly going to provide equal opportunities and show we are serious about Indigenous representation.”

Overall insights

Our findings indicate that non-Indigenous organizations are employing multiple methods to recruit Indigenous talent (including through mainstream recruiting methods, outreach in Indigenous communities, and educational and training institutions) and train Indigenous people (including training to qualify for the kinds of jobs offered by the company, training upon being hired by the company, and broader support of community members that is not directly linked to a job). We found a key distinguishing factor to be that

some companies offer very personalized support and training to help Indigenous candidates navigate the hiring process and qualify for positions. This individualized support is necessary to overcome two main types of barriers referenced throughout the interviews: unintended barriers created by the organization itself (e.g., only accepting online applications) and systemic barriers faced by Indigenous peoples (e.g., unreliable access to internet or phone).

Among non-Indigenous organizations, institutional knowledge and community relationships are often held by key individuals, whose departure from the organization can considerably set back efforts. Non-Indigenous companies report using Indigenous providers for cultural awareness training, but less so as staffing agencies; there is a perception of limited numbers of and capacity at external Indigenous-owned firms to meet demand for their services. For their part, Indigenous-owned training providers indicate that there can be unreasonable expectations and that non-Indigenous companies need to invest the necessary time and effort to build ongoing community relationships to be successful in their workforce development goals.

Comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous training organizations

There are a few key similarities between Indigenous-owned training organizations and non-Indigenous companies looking to expand their Indigenous workforce. First, there is a shared passion for the work they do that comes from understanding the importance of improving the employment landscape for Indigenous people. Second, both types of organizations identify similar constraints, including the need to develop evaluation metrics to identify what is working or not working in hiring, retention, and recruitment efforts; their own internal capacity challenges (e.g., not enough knowledgeable staff in key positions to meet demand for their services); and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been both negative (e.g., losing face-to-face connection that is so important in Indigenous relationships) and positive (e.g., opening up employment opportunities for Indigenous people living in remote areas).

The main difference found through this research is that Indigenous training organizations are more likely to use an Indigenous lens in their hiring and training efforts. Among non-Indigenous companies, there have been efforts to incorporate Indigenous culture to create a more inclusive environment, but this has not necessarily filtered down to hiring, training, and retention efforts.

While Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations expressed support for Indigenous communities, we urge businesses to prioritize drawing on the expertise of Indigenous-led organizations and establishing partnerships with them for several reasons. First, training tends to be more successful when both participant and instructor share similar lived experiences (Redding, 2019; Skudra et al., 2021). Second, engaging the services of Indigenous-led organizations will help further advance the participation of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian economy. Third, promoting representation of Indigenous people in leadership roles provides powerful role models to encourage other Indigenous people to pursue similar paths (Bastian, 2020). Finally, Indigenous peoples place a strong emphasis on trust, and a number of historical events have contributed to the distrust of non-Indigenous people by many Indigenous peoples (Berthiaume et al.). While non-Indigenous people need to recognize the root of this distrust and actively work to rebuild trust, building an effective partnership with Indigenous peoples takes significant time and should not be rushed (Green et al., 2014).

Recommendations and Future Directions

Governments, social service agencies, and business sector partners should support Indigenous-led organizations through capacity building, staffing, and funding to deliver these skills and resources in the most effective manner for the communities they serve. The analysis developed in this report confirms that many Indigenous employees in Canada require more specialized and accessible programs and training opportunities to develop their skill sets. Based upon this principle, it is evident that the overview of the skills training and development landscape in Canada needs to be expanded to fill the gaps and challenges addressed in this report.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations:

Establish an Indigenous skills framework

Over half of the skills targeted by the organizations were not grouped under any of the categories in ESDC's skills and competency taxonomy (i.e., uncategorized). There are two explanations for this high proportion: 1) many of the training programs for Indigenous people target

skills that are not necessarily useful for gaining employment; or 2) the skills framework that was chosen for this study is insufficient. Based on our review of the organizations during coding, we believe that many vital skills, such as creativity and cultural competence, are not adequately captured by ESDC's taxonomy. While ESDC has an updated Skills for Success framework that expands the essential skills to include "creativity and innovation" and "adaptability," which could reduce the number of uncategorized skills, another possibility is that the skills framework that is applied to the general public may not be well-suited to Indigenous peoples. This is an important avenue for future research, as a successful talent strategy needs to be based on the foundation of a skills framework to ensure that job seekers, employers, and training providers are all using the same language and understanding of skills (Cukier, 2020).

More integration of Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge

It is promising to see that 70% of organizations integrate Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge into their training programs, as this has been shown to improve training outcomes (Skudra et. al,

2020). However, 30% of organizations still lack this component of Indigenous skills training. We encourage all organizations that offer skills training to Indigenous people to create frameworks where employees can gain knowledge of Indigenous cultural or traditional practices in the workplace (Vander Weir, 2018). These frameworks can include incorporating ceremonial traditions such as smudging or Indigenous teachings such as the Seven Grandfathers and the medicine wheel. By incorporating ways of learning about Indigenous cultures into daily operations, organizations would create an inclusive and respectful workplace where Indigenous worldviews and perspectives are valued.

Increase focus on intersectionality

Disaggregated data on Indigenous peoples is difficult to find, but based on the limited data we could locate, there is some indication that the current Indigenous training landscape does not sufficiently meet the needs of Indigenous peoples who are at the intersection of multiple equity-deserving groups. For instance, 23% of Indigenous people in Toronto identified as Two-Spirit (Our Health Counts: Toronto, 2018), yet only 10% of the Indigenous training programs are targeted to people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. As training outcomes are more successful when they are closely tailored to the needs of learners (J-PAL, 2019), we encourage more Indigenous organizations to apply an intersectional lens in their training delivery.

Expand mentorship opportunities

A deficiency in mentorship opportunities for Indigenous people was highlighted throughout the mapping exercise and the interview analysis. Culturally relevant mentorship and mentoring activities should be tailored to Indigenous peoples, specifically youth, to support growth and development. Within Indigenous communities, knowledge is passed down generationally through storytelling and oral tradition. Therefore, mentorship is a concept that is deeply embedded, allowing for Indigenous employees to feel culturally supported while also gaining necessary skills development and thereby supporting the cohort as a whole. Given that 51% of the organizations in the mapping exercise also offer services to youth and that Indigenous youth represent the fastest-growing demographic in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018), it is integral that mentorship opportunities are created specifically for Indigenous youth and young professionals. There is a lack of Indigenous representation in fields such as medicine, law, and politics, among others; thus, a program centered on building connections through mentorship would encourage more aspiring Indigenous professionals to strive for careers in these fields.

- > The Big Brothers, Big Sisters mentorship program run by Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Canada is one example of an organization that delivers an effective mentorship program for Indigenous youth (Briggs, 2022). Mentors in this program encourage youth to develop their skill sets and pursue their education. One mentee

stated that their mentor “has encouraged [them] to connect more, to embrace [their] culture and [their] roots” (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Canada, 2019).

Increase digital skills development

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations highlighted a need for further research into adaptive strategies that can be employed to deliver training, skills development, and career advancement opportunities virtually during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic accelerated digital transformation for all businesses, lack of access to reliable internet, varying degrees of digital literacy, and lack of opportunities for digital skills development continue to be challenges faced disproportionately by Indigenous peoples. Digital skills are particularly pivotal in supporting the much-needed digital infrastructure Indigenous peoples lack in remote areas. There is a need to expand digital literacy among Indigenous peoples to empower Indigenous workers to meaningfully participate online.

- > Google Canada has committed \$600,000 to support the advancement of digital skills development that will provide free digital skills training to Indigenous job seekers. By facilitating connectivity and digital skills development for Indigenous peoples, measures such as this will bridge existing gaps and increase access to free skills education (Newswire, 2021).

Improve hiring and retention strategies

For non-Indigenous organizations, there is a need to ensure that strategies are developed for recruiting, retaining, and training Indigenous people. Even though the organizations interviewed were distinguished by having demonstrated a commitment to growing and retaining their Indigenous workforce, only about half of them currently have a strategy for this recruitment and retention. Additionally, participating non-Indigenous companies that are committed to developing an Indigenous workforce must broaden workforce development efforts beyond human resources or the Indigenous relations department and embed them throughout the company. Corporate Canada should focus on the development and implementation of specialized strategies and best practices to ensure Indigenous employees feel comfortable, resulting in the retention of Indigenous workers. These hiring and retention strategies can be developed by working with Indigenous consultants who specialize in EDI. Hiring practices should be developed in partnership with Indigenous communities or Indigenous hiring and staffing agencies, which can determine culturally appropriate and comfortable ways to hire and retain Indigenous people. Targets should be set to ensure that organizations have measurable goals and are held accountable when their efforts fall short.

Training for senior roles

Indigenous-owned training providers identified mid- to senior-level jobs as a major gap within Indigenous employment. There is a lack of Indigenous representation in senior-level positions in corporate Canada. If Canadian companies are to rise to the 50 – 30 Challenge’s call to have gender parity and 30% members from under-represented groups on boards, then members of those groups must be given the opportunities and the skills necessary to fill those positions (Government of Canada, 2022b). Specific training must be developed for Indigenous people to be able to advance within the workplace. Indigenous people must be seen as integral to organizations and must have a say in strategies and decisions in order to further economic reconciliation in Canada.

Increase funding for the Indigenous employment landscape

All of the Indigenous-owned organizations cited a need for increased funding for Indigenous peoples and businesses for skills development, training, and educational opportunities. In addition, participants indicated that the funding must be accessible and easy to understand for the general public, and eligibility criteria should be straightforward. This includes funding for services focused on the hiring and retention of Indigenous workers. Additionally, infrastructure funding in areas such as business centres located in a variety of remote and urban areas across Canada, as

well as reliable energy sources, would allow Indigenous people to easily access skills development and training opportunities irrespective of their location. The current lack of funding available to Indigenous peoples and entrepreneurs results from several hurdles identified in the research, including lack of awareness, difficulty in locating financing opportunities, risk aversion, lack of financial literacy, and discomfort with conventional financial institutions.

“Finding funding is difficult, so make it easy for me. It’s really difficult, so I think there’s a better job to be done at connecting the dots and whether it’s a group that you can call and say, ‘Hey what grants are available to me?’; why don’t they offer that service?”

“It’s very difficult as a small Indigenous business to compete with the large companies. We’re applying to these [requests for proposals], and big companies that have zero Indigenous interest are winning them to talk about Indigenous issues. It’s very strange [to me] and colonized organizations like hiring colonizer organizations, like municipal governments hiring [multinational professional services] because they are of the same structure. Whereas to hire an Indigenous business, that’s scary; I can’t do that, they are going to be hard to work with, the quality is going to be bad, and [more]. So, I just think that they need to stop doing that.”

Promote Indigenous peoples' self-determination in decision-making processes

The Indigenous-owned training providers spoke to the necessity of engaging with Indigenous peoples regularly. The advice repeatedly given was to partner with Indigenous communities to understand what is needed, rather than making assumptions. The Government of Canada and non-Indigenous organizations must ensure there are Indigenous people in positions where they can influence decision making. Training and other programs must be developed from Indigenous perspectives. Engagement with Indigenous communities, with an understanding of capacity building and development, and that, individually, they are unique in their own aspirations and goals for economic prosperity, is integral for all future research with and involving Indigenous peoples.

Improve public education about Indigenous peoples and culture

Some Indigenous-owned training providers emphasized that Canadians should be learning about Indigenous cultures, traditions, and history more prominently within school and work systems. This will aid in understanding the perpetual impacts of this history when it comes to Indigenous involvement in the employment landscape and provide an understanding of Indigenous culture as it may influence the workplace.

We acknowledge the significant limitation of our recommendations as they are applied to “Indigenous peoples” as a single entity,

where in reality, they represent multiple groups with their own unique identities and cultures. While this was due to the small sample sizes, we encourage future researchers and policy-makers to adopt a distinctions-based approach and more closely examine each of the three federally recognized Indigenous groupings (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) to develop policies and recommendations that are better tailored to each People.

Other important considerations

We also highlight two additional considerations that are worthy of deeper discussion as we work to improve skills training for Indigenous people:

Internet access and connectivity

As the development of digital skills was often mentioned as critical to the advancement of Indigenous peoples, we cannot neglect the importance of universal internet access. Due to remote conditions of many Indigenous reserves, Indigenous peoples lack proper internet connectivity to access online training and job opportunities (Collier, 2021). The Government of Canada must focus on bringing reliable internet to all communities, a goal that they hope to reach by 2030 (ISED, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of reliable internet as many businesses began to shift digitally.

The digital divide between Indigenous people residing on reserves and individuals living in more densely populated areas

perpetuates disadvantages related to economic development, education, and employment for Indigenous people (Buell, 2021). The majority of on-reserve homes—more than two-thirds—do not have high-speed internet (Buell, 2021). Throughout the interview process, this was the most notable issue, as nearly all Indigenous-owned organizations suggested that among the current gaps for Indigenous peoples, a lack of internet access was the most daunting. Without proper access to the internet, the current gaps faced by Indigenous peoples will continue to widen. The expansion of digital infrastructure will ensure that Indigenous people are connected to online services that enable upskilling and career advancement. The meaningful inclusion of Indigenous voices as equal and knowledgeable partners, capable of managing their own community infrastructure, is important, as upskilling programs can provide Indigenous people with the right tools to advocate for advanced community infrastructure networks and to keep using these state-of-the-art technologies even after the pandemic (Abdelaal & Andrey, 2021).

While governments must work to bring connectivity to these communities, it is especially pertinent that Indigenous peoples own and develop their own internet access. Indigenous internet networks are currently being established, such as K-Net, which is a provider of cellular service and broadband connectivity for rural and remote First Nations in Ontario (K-Net, 2022). Indigenous communities and individuals are working toward digital self-determination; thus, it is possible that with expansion of

skills development for utilities, an industry that suffers from under-representation of Indigenous Peoples, more Indigenous Peoples will be able to implement their own means of internet connectivity. However, even with digitalization, mainstream technology training programs are not Indigenous-designed or Indigenous-led, and therefore lack the appropriate cultural context, reference, and support to train and retain Indigenous workers in this sector (Pierre, 2022).

Indigenous rights and sovereignty

Indigenous culture and worldviews were highlighted in the interviews as inextricably linked to the work of the Indigenous-owned training providers. They highlighted the importance of community relationships and the need for non-Indigenous companies to invest time and effort into building those relationships. Sovereignty refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to further their own languages, culture, traditions, and knowledge through management of their own educational systems and institutions (OECD, 2019). This right is outlined by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and is supported by Canadian governments (United Nations, 2008). Supporting the sovereignty and rights of Indigenous peoples will help fill the gaps in education and skills development. Recognition of the natural rights of Indigenous peoples will allow for full participation in the workforce and encourage the development of skills, allowing Indigenous people to be involved in the development of specialized educational programs.

To offer a practical example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action include the revitalization and reestablishment of over 70 Indigenous languages, as language is an essential component of culture (Rosen, 2021). Many institutions, including the Government of Canada, have a preference for job candidates who are bilingual, which they often strictly define as French and English, establishing a hierarchy of French and English above all other languages. However, this creates an undue burden on Indigenous people, many of whom are just now starting to relearn their own language after they or their parents were forced to attend residential and day schools where they were forbidden to speak any other language other than English or French (Lafond & Fraser, 2021). Supporting the sovereignty and rights of Indigenous peoples also means supporting their language and recognizing Indigenous languages as equally critical and valuable as English and French. Organizations can broaden opportunities for Indigenous people if they expand their definition of bilingualism and support the Indigenous Languages Act, which states that the “recognition and implementation of rights related to Indigenous languages are at the core of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and are fundamental to shaping the country” (Rosen, 2021).

As previously mentioned in this report, a participant in the study noted that the Government of Canada should have Indigenous people in high-level positions to advise on matters that affect Indigenous peoples, as participants indicated that Indigenous people know their needs better than any external entity or individual. There is a lack of Indigenous representation in policymaking within the country; thus, without these leaders, there are few people at high levels who are able to speak from an Indigenous perspective on key matters pertaining to the creation of policy. The Government of Nunavut is an example of the imbalance between Indigenous leadership and Indigenous serving policies. While there are many initiatives put forth in Nunavut, the government is only 52% Inuit, while the total population of Nunavut is 86% Inuit (OECD, 2020). Respecting and honoring Indigenous sovereignty through meaningful engagement with Indigenous leaders would allow for authority and control over jurisdictions such as education and employment. The recognition of the inherent rights and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples not only furthers reconciliation, but it would allow for Indigenous peoples to be fully self-sufficient and prosperous (Slowey, 2021).

Future areas of research

Several areas for future research emerged from the mapping process and interviews:

- > Apply a distinctions-based approach to better understand the unique challenges faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, so policies and recommendations can be better targeted for these specific Indigenous groups.
- > Examine what personnel capacity is needed in Canadian companies to build expertise for Indigenous workforce inclusion.
- > Continue to catalogue the Indigenous skills and employment landscape, resulting in an up-to-date database.
- > Gain deeper knowledge of the perspectives of Indigenous employees and organizations on skills development.
- > Understand the current availability of digital skills training for Indigenous people in light of rapid digitization catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which makes it vital for Indigenous people to hone and develop their digital literacy skills. Because the mapping exercise's category of foundational skills encapsulates digital skills, and foundational skills also include many other abilities, more research on the availability of digital skills is required.
- > Further investigate service offerings in relation to the population, population clusters for Indigenous peoples off-reserve, urban versus rural training and employment opportunities, and infrastructure barriers such as internet services and transportation.

Conclusion

The mapping exercise and interviews provide critical insights into the current state of the Indigenous skills and employment landscape from the perspectives of individuals who support hiring, recruiting, and training processes. The need for greater mentorship opportunities for Indigenous people was a recurring theme throughout the project. There is also a need for further skills development and training opportunities aimed at more senior roles for Indigenous people. These opportunities are critical for Indigenous people to influence organizational policies and decisions, thereby advancing economic reconciliation in Canada.

There have been increased efforts by the private and public sectors to improve the Indigenous skills training ecosystem to ensure that all Indigenous people possess the right skills to attain meaningful and stable employment. While more funding is needed, Indigenous entrepreneurs have seen an increase in funding in recent months. Google Canada recently announced a \$1.5 million commitment to CCAB to support Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs across the country (Newswire, 2022). This support will entail rebuilding the Tools and Financing for Aboriginal Business (TFAB)

platform at CCAB to provide new training and resources to Indigenous entrepreneurs over the next two years, enabling increased participation of Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs in the digital-skills-based economy. While many of these initiatives are currently taking place across Canada, they are often independent of one another, which can create redundancies and inefficiencies in our collective efforts to improve Indigenous employment outcomes. The aim of this project is to bring some of these efforts together and highlight the utility in consolidating this information to identify gaps and opportunities for Indigenous skills training in Canada.

The results of the mapping exercise and interviews emphasize that there are still many holes in the present availability of skills development, training, and career advancement opportunities for Indigenous people. There are also areas for improvement in hiring and recruitment process for Indigenous people seeking employment with non-Indigenous organizations. Furthermore, opportunities for Indigenous people in industries that were under-represented in our sample need to be explored further (e.g., manufacturing). An important part of promoting economic

reconciliation in Canada is ensuring that organizations provide skills, training, and financial resources that are widely accessible to Indigenous peoples and responsive to the shifts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, ensuring that these opportunities are culturally appropriate and accessible to Indigenous peoples, irrespective of their location, is of the utmost importance. The most critical requirement for accessibility is universal internet access, as many Indigenous communities still do not have access to high-speed internet. Understanding and acting on the gaps in skills development, hiring, and training strategies identified in this report will go a long way toward advancing an equitable labour force and the broader path to economic reconciliation.



An important part of promoting economic reconciliation in Canada is ensuring that organizations provide skills, training, and financial resources that are widely accessible to Indigenous peoples and responsive to the shifts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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