



# PEER LEARNING GROUP

## Building Economic Resilience: Skills Development in Indigenous and Northern Communities

The [Future Skills Centre \(FSC\) Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#) is a pan-Canadian network for skills and workforce development stakeholders across sectors and industries to connect, share, and learn from each other. As part of the CoP, [Research Impact Canada \(RIC\)](#), in collaboration with FSC, hosts virtual themed Peer Learning Groups (PLGs) to facilitate open discussion among peers in an informal, shared space.

On November 18, 2025, RIC and FSC co-hosted a Peer Learning Group titled [Building Economic Resilience: Skills Development in Indigenous and Northern Communities](#). The session explored how Indigenous and Northern communities are strengthening economic resilience and self-determination through skills development, entrepreneurship, and culturally grounded approaches to capacity-building.

The session was led by guest speaker [Xina Cowan](#), Co-Director at [EntrepreNorth](#), an Indigenous-led organization based in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

### WHAT WE HEARD

Structural and infrastructure barriers continue to limit access to skills training and entrepreneurship opportunities. Participants emphasized that many Northern and remote communities continue to experience foundational barriers that influence skills development and economic participation. These include:

- Limited internet connectivity, which affects digital skills training, online learning, and virtual mentorship.
- Lack of specialized equipment and logistical challenges that make training delivery costly and difficult.
- Strained or limited community infrastructure that affects program delivery and local economic activity.

Some shared that equipment delivery to rural and remote communities is a major constraint and that cost per participant is significantly higher than in urban settings. Others added that while solutions like Starlink can improve connectivity, they do not reinvest in the community and may not support long-term sustainability.

EntrepreNorth empowers Indigenous entrepreneurs and innovators to build sustainable businesses and livelihoods across Northern Canada. Xina highlighted approaches for meaningfully engaging Northern communities, the importance of place-based supports, and how social entrepreneurship can serve as a pathway to community well-being.

Attendees shared initiatives at their own organizations where learning has also been connected to their work. Participants were invited to join small breakout groups for free-flowing moderated discussions, responding to the question:

“What is one enduring barrier Indigenous or Northern entrepreneurs in your region face, and what is your organization currently doing to help remove or reduce that barrier? In addition, what do you plan to do in the future to address this?”

These challenges reinforce the need for solutions tailored to the realities of Northern and Indigenous communities, rather than standardized programming.

Decolonizing approaches are needed to reduce barriers. Attendees noted that provincial and federal structures often do not reflect the governance context of Indigenous and Northern communities. This includes interactions with self-governing

First Nations, regional Indigenous organizations, and multiple levels of government.

Participants shared that:

- Policies and funding mechanisms should align with Indigenous governance structures.
- Administrative requirements need to be simplified to reduce burden on small Northern organizations.
- Decolonizing approaches must prioritize relationships, reciprocity, and sustained engagement.

A representative from a provincial government noted that we must better understand how to work across multiple jurisdictions and systems to determine which approaches best serve Indigenous communities.



## WHAT WE HEARD

Growing local mentorship networks is essential for long-term capacity-building. Participants identified mentorship as a critical, but limited resource for supporting Indigenous and Northern entrepreneurs, especially in tech and IT fields. Key points included:

- There is a shortage of mentors with relevant experience who can build long-term relationships in remote communities.
- Young entrepreneurs and job seekers benefit greatly from community-based role models and local champions.
- Culturally grounded mentorship helps build trust, confidence, and stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Similar to themes observed in past Peer Learning Groups, mentorship and wraparound supports are essential for meaningful and sustained participation in skills training and employment.

## RESOURCES

Participants shared the following tools and organizations related to digital inclusion, entrepreneurship, and Indigenous innovation:

**TechYukon:** A Yukon-based network that supports digital skills, technology sector development, and capacity-building across the territory.

**Indigenous Tech Circle :** A community and support network focused on Indigenous participation, leadership, and inclusion in the technology sector.

**EntrepreNorth:** An Indigenous-led organization empowering Northern entrepreneurs through culturally grounded business development and training.

**Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund:** Supports Indigenous entrepreneurs in Northern Ontario through financing, training, and advisory services.

**Pow Wow Pitch:** A national Indigenous entrepreneurship accelerator with mentorship, workshops, and microgrants.

Aspirations for stronger systems, more coordinated support, and community-led solutions. Despite the challenges, participants expressed optimism and shared aspirations for strengthening Northern economic resilience.

These included:

- Increasing investments in Northern infrastructure, including broadband access.
- Building stronger partnerships across governments, Indigenous organizations, training providers, and industry.
- Supporting Indigenous-led entrepreneurship and innovation as central to regional economic development.

Creating adaptable provincial and territorial strategies that recognize Northern diversity. Participants agreed that long-term, community-driven, and culturally relevant approaches will be key to supporting sustainable economic opportunities and self-determination.

**Futurpreneur Canada – Indigenous Entrepreneur Startup Program:** Provides financing, mentorship, and training tailored to Indigenous young entrepreneurs.

**Raven Indigenous Capital Partners:** Impact investment firm supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs and community-owned enterprises.

**Indigenous Business Development Services:** Provides business support, coaching, and access to funding for Indigenous entrepreneurs across Canada.

**Denendeh Development Corporation (NWT):** Economic development corporation supporting Indigenous-owned business development across the Northwest Territories.

**First Nations Technology Council (BC):** Creates pathways into the technology sector through digital skills training, capacity building, and tech sector partnerships.

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