

**NORTHERN
ENTREPRENEURS
ACCESSING TRAINING
PROJECT
EVALUATION**



This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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 ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

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Executive Overview

Northern Entrepreneurs Accessing Training, (NEAT) was a project developed by Contact North | Contact Nord. The project was funded by the Future Skills Center via funding from the Government of Canada. The project ran from Oct. 1, 2022, to Dec. 31, 2023.

Contact North | Contact Nord undertook the project to provide opportunities to northern Indigenous entrepreneurs and their staff in northern Ontario and northern BC. The primary goal of the project was to increase access to skills training that met the training needs of the small, medium Indigenous entrepreneurs to allow for continued innovation and growth.

Through its two delivery partners a wide variety of courses were made available. The project team also assisted entrepreneurs with finding and registering in industry-specific training courses, if not available through the two partner colleges.

Resources and supports accessed by the participating entrepreneurs and their employees, included tuition and training allowances. Training allowance assisted entrepreneurs by offsetting costs for the entrepreneurs and/or employees. If training was done during work hours, the employer received a training allowance for their employees (offsetting their operational costs). If the training was done on the employee's own time

(outside of work hours), the employees directly received a training allowance to compensate their personal time spent while engaged in skills training identified by their employer.

Project Objective

The objective of the project was to connect 300-500 small and medium Indigenous entrepreneurs (and their employees) with education and skills training. Training options related to the needs identified by the entrepreneurs provided an avenue for access and participation and thus fostering continued growth in skills training and the ability to continue to innovate. Participating entrepreneurs and their employees were recruited for participation from rural and remote communities across northern Ontario and northwest British Columbia.

A major goal for the project team was to make training as accessible as possible for participating entrepreneurs. It was important to acknowledge that participation in skills training could be hampered by several barriers that included tuition costs, entrepreneurs' operational needs/costs and flexible skills training programming. The design of the NEAT project ensured the known potential barriers were immediately incorporated in the project delivery design.

Target Outcome

The target outcome of the project was to support 300 to 500 small/medium entrepreneurs (and/or their employees) with participation in focused, flexible, and innovative skills training. Delivery of skills training could include colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes in northern British Columbia and northern Ontario, and other skills training providers where industry-specific training was required (and not available through the delivery partners).

Outcomes Achieved

The outcome of the NEAT project was well-exceeded. Evidence of the project's success is outlined within the following data.

The NEAT project

- supported 533 individual participants in topic-specific skills training across more than 20 sectors
- supported 139 individual Indigenous businesses (representing 533 participants) in identifying and supporting skills training for themselves and/or their staff
- developed a portal to build awareness of the project and a centralized intake/contact form - www.neatcn.ca
- developed a searchable centralized list of resources available to Indigenous entrepreneurs

- partnered with two delivery colleges (one in BC and one in Ontario) to provide a broad range of topic specific skills training

Course Delivery

The project secured 2 partner colleges to assist in the skills training delivery. Coast Mountain College, in British Columbia and Lambton College in Ontario.

Key Course Delivery Outcomes:

1061 skills training courses were taken during the project, with 814 courses completed, resulting in a 77% completion rate.

912 of the 1061 courses were delivered by the 2 partner colleges (86%). Of the 912 asynchronous courses delivered by the two partner colleges, 678 courses were completed by the end of the project, representing a 74.3% completion rate. The partner courses were delivered asynchronously.

147 courses (14% of all courses) were delivered by other industry specific training partners and were not readily available through the two partner colleges in an asynchronous format. Most of these courses were delivered synchronously (74%). Course completion was 93%.

The project initially expected a larger portion of the project budget would be required to offset tuition costs; however, asynchronous learning was the most subscribed programming. More than 90% of participants engaged in asynchronous programming. Contact North | Contact Nord's partnerships with Lambton College and Coast Mountain College allowed significant cost savings on topic-specific asynchronous training. This flexibility allowed the project to move the funding initially earmarked for tuition to participant supports. The supports included a training allowance that acknowledged the time (and thus cost) required for entrepreneurs and their employees to participate in training. This additional support helped offset financial burdens that entrepreneurs and employees could incur with loss of staff time focused on business operations, while engaged in training. Compensation also encouraged course completion.

Most Subscribed Courses

Courses taken by participants varied widely. Management, business skills and technology appear to be the most in-demand for the entrepreneurs that participated. Below are the top courses taken in Ontario and British Columbia.

Course Name - BC

Start Your Own Online Business (Self-Paced Tutorial)
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Marketing and Analytics - Activ8

ICBA - Mental Health and First Aid

Computer Skills for the Workplace (Self-Paced Tutorial)

Fundamentals of Supervision and Management (Self-Paced Tutorial)
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Accounting Fundamentals (Self-Paced Tutorial)

Administrative Assistant Applications (Self-Paced Tutorial)

Creating a Successful Business Plan (Self-Paced Tutorial)

Introduction to Microsoft Excel 2016 (Self-Paced Tutorial)
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Introduction to QuickBooks Online (Self-Paced Tutorial)

Course Name - Ontario

Fundamentals of Supervision and Management (Self-Paced Tutorial)
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Burrows Consulting - Lateral Violence

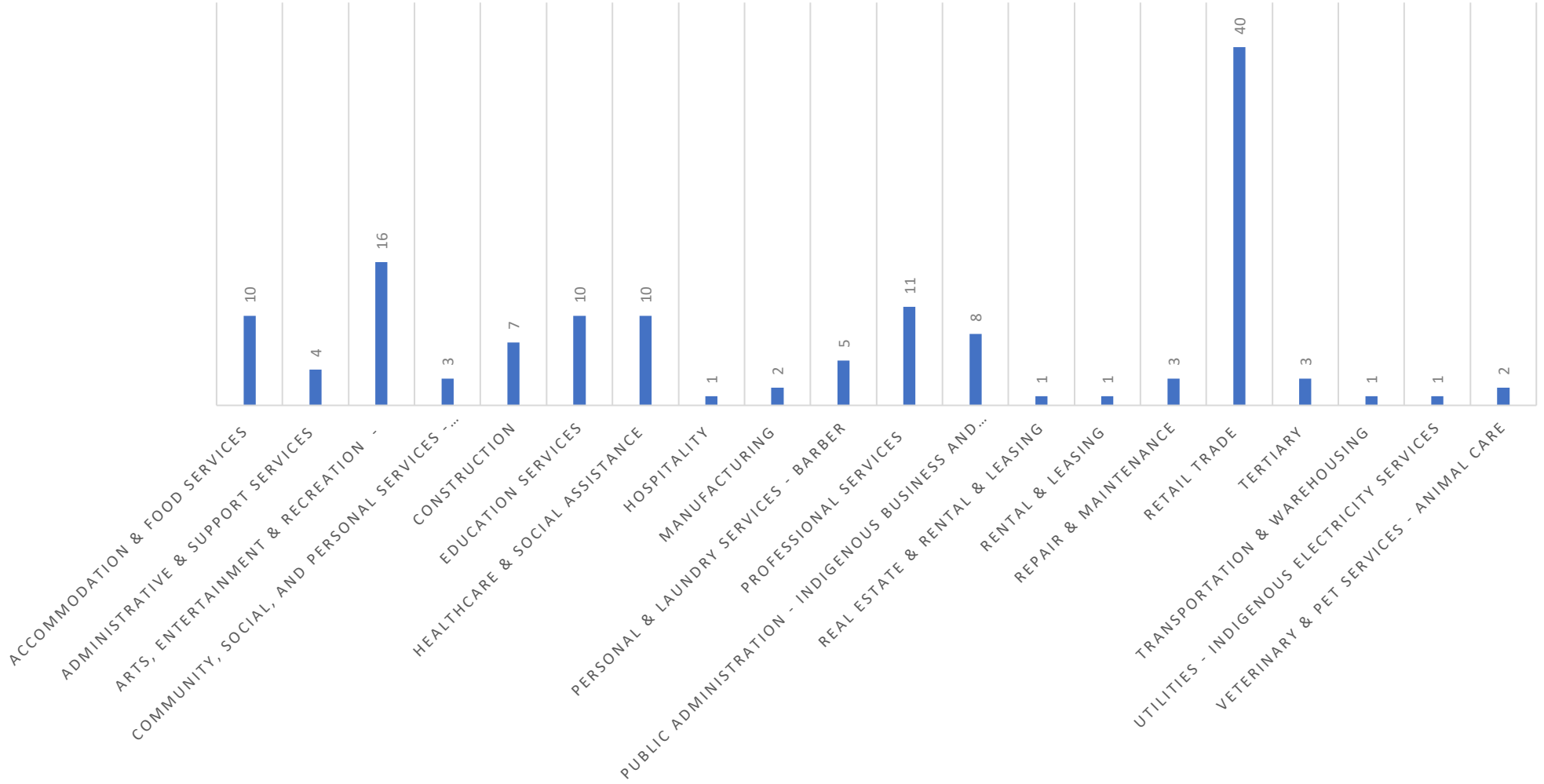
Advanced Grant Proposal Writing (Self-Paced Tutorial)

Certificate in Stress Management (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Building Teams That Work (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Introduction to Microsoft Access 2019 (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Using Social Media in Business (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Introduction to Natural Health and Healing (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Keys to Effective Communication (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Project Management Fundamentals (Self-Paced Tutorial)
Northern Academy of Transportation Training - Chainsaw, First Aid Training

Breakdown of Sectors

139 businesses participated in the project. 20 sectors were represented. Most businesses were in the retail trade (40), followed by arts, entertainment, and recreation (16) and professional services (11).

TOTAL BUSINESSES

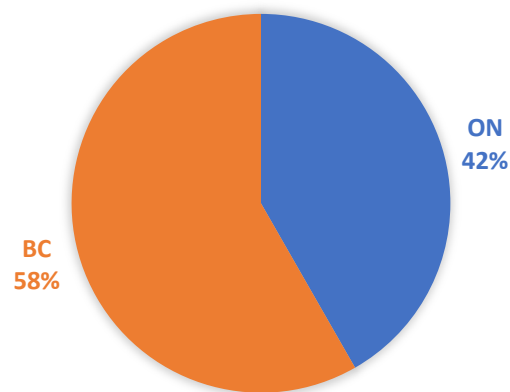


Delivery by Province

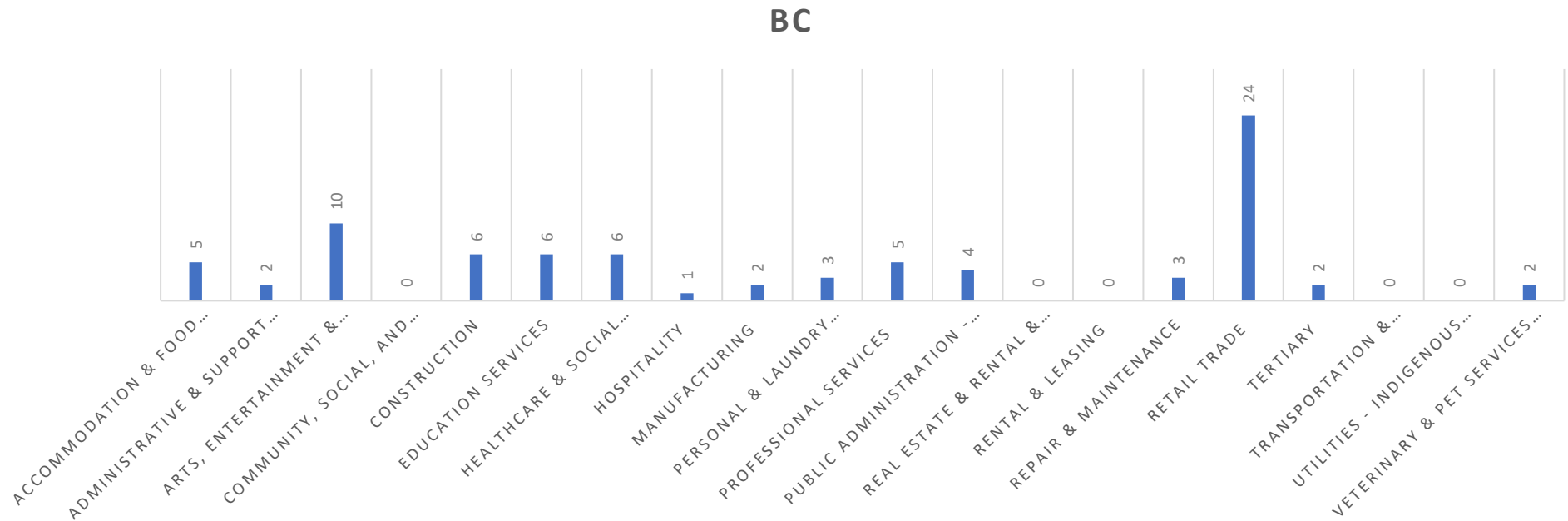
58% of entrepreneurs who participated were in Northwestern British Columbia (81). They completed 240 courses and utilized 102 persons.

42% of businesses who participated were in Northern Ontario (58). They completed 821 courses and utilized 356 persons.

LOCATIONS OF BUSINESSES

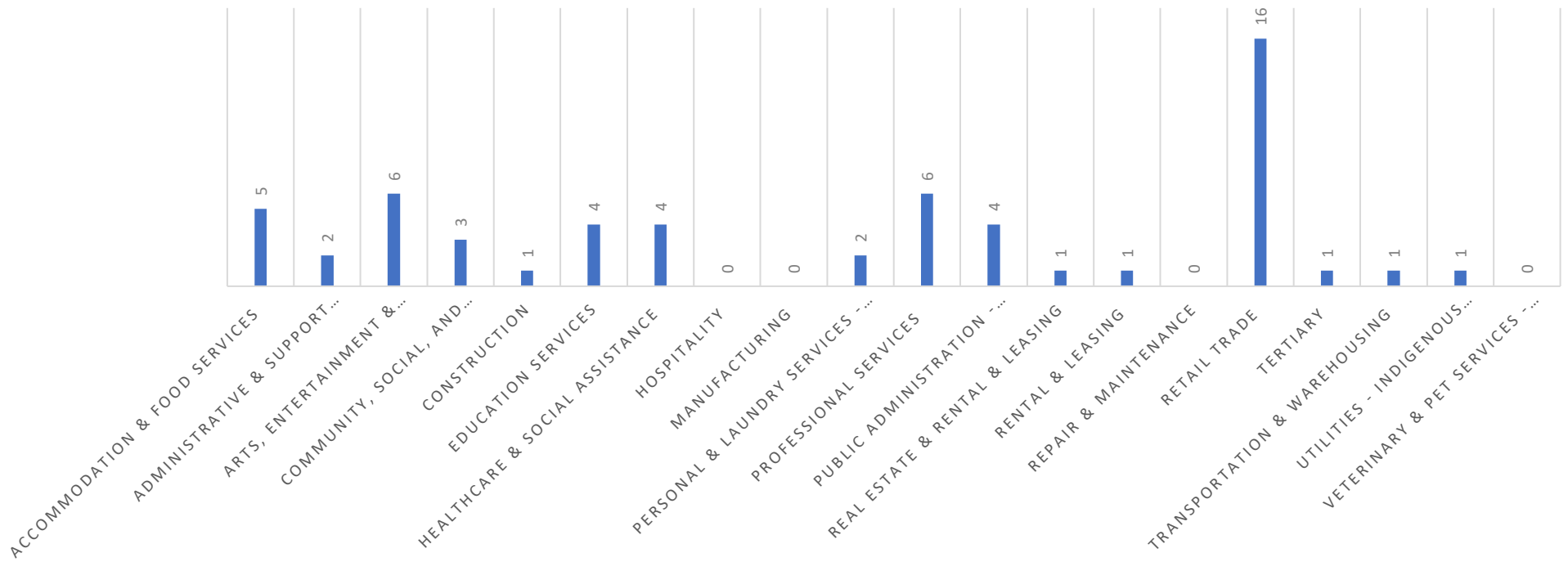


The most engaged sectors in British Columbia were like the overall numbers. The number one engaged sector was retail trade (24) followed by arts, entertainment, and recreation (10). The full results can be seen below.



Ontario was similar to British Columbia regarding overall numbers in the most engaged sectors. The number one engaged sector was retail trade (16) followed by arts, entertainment, and recreation (6) and professional services (6). The full results can be seen below.

ON



Key Insights

<p>Key Insight 1 Relationships with communities and a continuing presence is integral.</p>	<p>Existing networks, presence, and relationships (boots on the ground) in Ontario allowed the project team to identify and engage northern indigenous entrepreneurs more rapidly.</p>
<p>Key Insight 2 Flexibility is Key.</p>	<p>Small and medium entrepreneurs and their employees are busy. The subscription of asynchronous programming highlighted the need for flexible training options to gain needed skills.</p>
<p>Key Insight 3 Ongoing and regular communication, check ins, and support was essential to program completion.</p>	<p>A large amount of project delivery included connecting with participants at regular intervals. This helped to identify and address any challenges the participants may be experiencing and an opportunity to provide ongoing encouragement.</p>
<p>Key Insight 4 Training allowance and completion bonuses is imperative to offset costs and allow for participation.</p>	<p>Throughout the project the participating small and medium entrepreneurs and their employees required financial support to access training.</p>

	<p>Tuition free programming and compensation for time spent engaged in training was needed to offset the entrepreneurs and their employees time, in order to lessen the financial burden on the small and medium entrepreneurs' business operations.</p>
<p>Key Insight 5 Collaborative and responsive programming delivery partners is essential</p>	<p>Capacity can be an issue for program delivery providers, however early planning and responsiveness to change processes as required to address any challenges was integral to ensuring clear pathways to accessing programming. Finding delivery partners with broad range of topic specific training and the willingness to explore potential challenges and amend processes, accordingly, ensured participants were able to identify, access and complete training.</p>

Evaluator

Gay Douglas & Associates is a Niagara-based consulting firm helping non-profit organizations of all sizes.

<https://gdassociates.ca/about-us/>

<https://gdassociates.ca/associates/>

Evaluator Opinion

It is the opinion of the evaluator, Gay Douglas & Associates, that Contact North | Contact Nord's NEAT project well exceeded the expectations and outcomes for their Northern Entrepreneurs Accessing Training project.