



**Future
Skills
Centre**

Centre des
**Compétences
futures**

Project Insights Report

Northern Tourism Recovery Incubator



PARTNERS

Diversity Institute
Indigenous Tourism
Association of Canada



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

1,541,810



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Executive Summary

Indigenous tourism in Canada was rapidly expanding, making significant contributions to economic development and job creation. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted this sector. The sector's contribution to GDP plummeted by nearly 69% in 2020. This dramatic decline underscores the need for targeted recovery efforts to restore the sector's pre-pandemic momentum. Indigenous tourism is particularly crucial for Northern Canada, where it provides economic benefits and fosters community development, wellness, cultural learning and environmental stewardship. Addressing the significant setbacks is essential for the long-term well-being and development of Indigenous communities in the North.

The Northern Tourism Recovery Incubator (NTRI) program, funded by the Future Skills Centre and led by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) in collaboration with the Diversity Institute, aimed to revitalize Indigenous tourism in northern communities through a comprehensive support system. The program's objectives included supporting 100 northern Indigenous tourism business participants to achieve greater market readiness through needs assessments, attend an in-person networking event (the International Indigenous Tourism Conference), and receive tailored business and marketing support.

The needs of these businesses were assessed through a national accreditation program ([The Original Original Accreditation Program](#), formerly called the RISE accreditation program), which provides individual business assessments and aggregated data for ongoing support. The Original Original mark of excellence, accredited by ITAC, assures visitors of a quality and authentic tourism experience. This accreditation signifies that a business meets the rigorous standards set by Indigenous tourism operators, demonstrating their readiness to deliver exceptional visitor experiences and achieving formal recognition. Businesses were recruited through ITAC and its provincial/territorial Indigenous tourism organizations, which have a network of Indigenous-owned tourism businesses across Canada.

The NTRI program successfully engaged 103 Indigenous tourism businesses to conduct a needs assessment. The tailored business support phase was positively rated, helping 52 businesses meet market readiness standards. The findings highlight the importance of targeted support and personalized assistance for Indigenous tourism businesses. Adopting a holistic and comprehensive approach to support Indigenous entrepreneurs can guide future initiatives for Indigenous economic development, ensuring that recovery efforts are both effective and sustainable.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 The Northern Tourism Recovery Incubator program successfully engaged 103 Indigenous tourism businesses to conduct a needs assessment, and 57 businesses have received accreditation to date.
- 2 A cornerstone of the NTRI program's success was the emphasis on in-person networking, which provided valuable opportunities for Indigenous tourism businesses to connect with potential partners, share knowledge and build relationships.
- 3 Policymakers and practitioners must recognize the importance of a holistic approach that integrates financial support, capacity building and networking opportunities to foster resilience and sustainable growth within Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous tourism sector, which had been rapidly expanding and contributing significantly to economic development and job creation, saw its GDP footprint reduce by nearly 69% in 2020 compared to 2019. In addition, traditional support mechanisms have often failed to consider the unique challenges and cultural contexts of Indigenous communities. Many programs lack the necessary understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, Traditional Knowledge and the socioeconomic realities faced by these entrepreneurs. Moreover, the geographic isolation of northern communities exacerbates these challenges, making access to resources, training and markets more difficult.

The program was designed to assess the potential tailored and culturally appropriate training and business supports to help Indigenous tourism businesses achieve greater market readiness and sustainable growth. It offered 1) tailored business support to achieve greater market readiness and sustainable growth, 2) seed funding, and 3) an opportunity to participate in the International Indigenous Tourism Conference.

The focus on in-person networking and learning aimed to address the importance of community engagement and the transmission of knowledge in business practices. The NTTRI program also aimed to enhance the visibility and competitiveness of Indigenous tourism businesses in both national and international markets.



What We Investigated

Running from September 2022 to December 2023, the NTTRI program aimed to support 100 northern Indigenous tourism businesses across regions such as Nunavut, Yukon, Northwest Territories and the northern areas of several provinces.

The study component involved three stages of data collection: the first stage was a needs assessment, the second stage was a post-conference survey and the third stage was a post-programming survey. The guiding questions of the project were as follows:

- What are the needs of Indigenous tourism businesses in the North?
- How can the identified needs be addressed?
- How effective is the recovery incubator in meeting the business needs of Indigenous tourism businesses in the North?

The needs assessment provided a detailed understanding of each business's unique challenges and readiness levels. Indigenous business applicants chose from three designations (business ready, visitor ready and export ready) when applying and were evaluated in six key areas: community engagement and support; visitor experience; health, safety and comfort; sustainable Indigenous tourism; marketing and visitor services; and business acumen/practices.

The post-conference survey was conducted to evaluate participants' experiences at the International Indigenous Tourism Conference held in March 2023. The survey collected detailed feedback on various aspects of the conference, including overall satisfaction, event organization and the effectiveness of sessions. The post-programming survey was designed to evaluate the overall impact and effectiveness of the NTRI program on participating Indigenous tourism businesses. It aimed to understand how well the initial needs assessment identified gaps and progress in participants' businesses.

The program also assessed the value and impact of networking opportunities, examining how these connections helped businesses grow, market readiness, and build professional relationships. Furthermore, the survey evaluated the appropriateness and impact of the targeted business support offered through the program, such as financial help for improvements, access to digital marketing tools and resources, and the overall relevance of the support provided to meet Canada's market readiness standards. This helped make sure the recovery efforts were effective and sustainable.

What We're Learning

The NTRI program successfully engaged 103 businesses in the needs assessment phase, slightly exceeding recruitment targets. Out of these, 57 businesses received accreditation, demonstrating their improved market readiness. Additionally, 52 businesses received up to \$10,000 in funding to address gaps identified in the needs assessment. To build networking opportunities, 76 NTRI program participants took part in the International Indigenous Tourism Conference held in Winnipeg in March 2023.

The NTRI program has garnered strong positive feedback from participating businesses, with an average recommendation score of 8.86 out of 10, and 76% of participants rating it a perfect 10.

The self-assessment questionnaire effectively tracked progress across several business areas, with the following mean scores out of 5:

- community engagement and support: 4.52
- visitor experience: 4.6
- health, safety and comfort: 4.48
- sustainable Indigenous tourism: 4.48

- marketing and visitor services: 4.56
- business acumen/practices: 4.46
- other needs: 4.22

The conference proved to be a highly effective networking opportunity. Each participant connected with an average of 34 people. (The number of connections ranged from 10 to 100.) The quality of these connections was highly rated, with an average score of 4.5 out of 5.

Tailored support was another key component of the program. Participants rated the support a 4.6 for its alignment with their business needs. The appropriateness of the support received a 4.4 average score, while the effectiveness of the support in helping businesses meet Canada's market readiness standards received a mean score of 4.5.

Several lessons were learned during the program's implementation that could improve future initiatives.

- Enhance communication and outreach: Improve communication to boost program participation. Simplify messaging, increase transparency and prioritize personalized outreach, especially within Indigenous communities.
- Tailor support to diverse business needs: Customize support by providing dedicated consultants and individualized development plans to address the unique needs of Indigenous tourism businesses.
- Improve needs assessment: Revise the self-assessment to better capture diverse business activities. Simplify language, reduce redundancy and offer alternative formats for accessibility, especially for remote and Northern businesses.
- Streamline financial support: Simplify financial support processes by implementing direct deposit, clearer communication and easier applications. Consider additional funding for northern travel due to higher costs.
- Address broader business challenges: Provide targeted support in financial literacy, business forecasting and employee management to help businesses build resilience and adapt to market changes.

★ Why It Matters

The findings from the NTRI program have significant implications for policy and practice, particularly in the context of supporting Indigenous tourism and similar sectors. The program's success in engaging businesses, providing tailored support and enhancing market readiness underscores the effectiveness of targeted, holistic interventions. Policymakers and practitioners should recognize the value of combining financial assistance, capacity building and networking opportunities to foster resilience and sustainable growth for Indigenous communities.



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Green-related skills and knowledge are growing in significance and are becoming widespread across many sectors and occupations, requiring more workers to upskill by building upon their existing competencies.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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