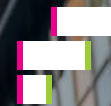


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Insights from Indigenous Executives

Recruitment and Retention in Business, Finance,
and Administration

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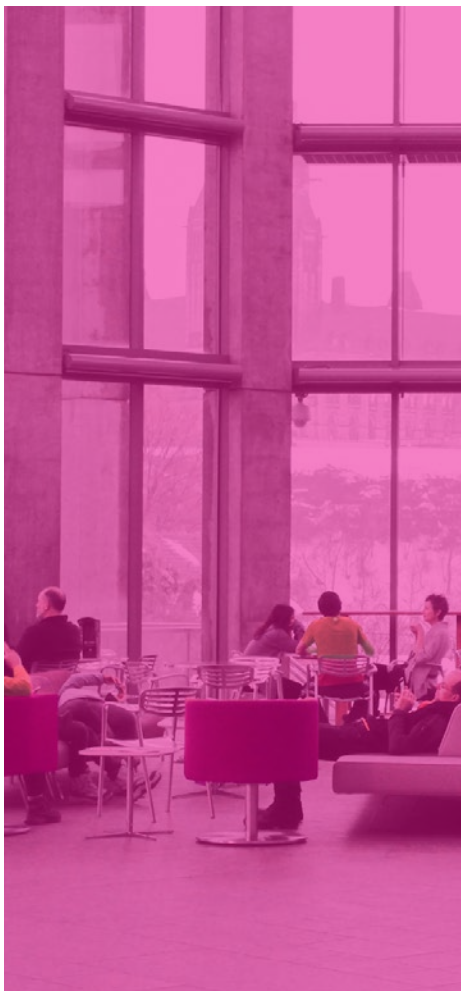
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The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they 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.

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Key findings

- Early-career Indigenous professionals benefit from structured mentorship programs that provide consistent, culturally grounded guidance, help build professional confidence, and reduce isolation.
- While credentials matter, hiring and retention practices should also value Indigenous candidates' cultural knowledge, community roles, and need for flexibility and support.
- To retain in-demand Indigenous talent, organizations must offer clear paths to grow—through internal promotion, leadership development, and transparent advancement opportunities.
- Indigenous professionals are in high demand; when employers offer meaningful training and skills upgrading, it affirms their value and strengthens long-term commitment to the organization.
- Indigenous professionals rely on strong ties to family, culture, and community. Employers who respect and accommodate these connections are more likely to retain Indigenous staff.
- Issues such as lateral violence and historical trauma within community-based organizations must be addressed through trust-building, training, and dialogue to create healthy environments for Indigenous leadership.





Hidden career paths

Indigenous professionals remain considerably under-represented in senior leadership roles in business, finance, and administration, particularly in technical and executive-level positions such as accounting, corporate finance, and organizational management. A previous Conference Board of Canada report, Indigenous Finance and Management Professionals: Critical for Reconciliation and Indigenous Self-Determination, sheds light on this issue while documenting the vital role Indigenous professionals play in advancing economic reconciliation and expanding community-driven opportunities.

This issue briefing builds on that foundation by examining how Indigenous executives are recruited, retained, and supported once they enter leadership roles. Between August 2019 and

September 2020, we interviewed 24 Indigenous leaders serving in C-suite and upper-management roles across public, private, and Indigenous-led organizations. Their insights offer a grounded view of the conditions that either support or hinder Indigenous advancement in senior roles.

Through these interviews, participants reflected on their career experiences and shared practical strategies for supporting the next generation of Indigenous leadership. The results highlight ongoing challenges and steps employers, educators, policymakers, and Indigenous communities can take to strengthen executive career pathways. (See Appendix A for our methodology.)

Representation in business, finance, and administration

The 24 Indigenous executives we interviewed are part of a small but highly influential group of leaders who have reached senior roles across a diverse range of organizations, including private companies in engineering, transportation, and manufacturing; banks and Indigenous financial institutions; public health agencies; Indigenous governments; and social services organizations.

Their presence in these roles is notable not only because of the under-representation of Indigenous professionals at the executive level but also because these executives have navigated—and often challenged—systemic barriers and succeeded in rising to leadership positions. Their unique combination of lived experience, professional insight, and strong community ties offers invaluable guidance for developing and supporting future generations of Indigenous leaders.

Under-representation in professional and middle-management roles

Of the Indigenous employees in business, finance, and administration, 22 per cent hold professional or middle-management roles, compared to 36 per cent of their non-Indigenous counterparts.¹ Several interviewees described being “the only Indigenous person in the room” during executive meetings, underscoring the isolation that often accompanies upward mobility.²

For Inuit professionals and middle managers, the gap is even wider (at 15 per cent versus 36 per cent).³ One participant described opportunities to reach CFO-level roles as “extremely rare,” reflecting broader structural barriers to advancement.⁴

Consequences of under-representation

Under-representation has consequences. Indigenous perspectives are often absent from strategic corporate decision-making, investment planning, and high-level policy development. Several interviewees noted that this absence contributes to persistent cultural blind spots, limiting organizational understanding of Indigenous markets, partnership opportunities, and community-driven economic goals.⁵ Under-representation in leadership roles also reduces the visibility of Indigenous role models, making it more difficult for junior professionals to see a clear path to advancement.

¹ Statistics Canada, “Employment Income Statistics.”

² This feeling of isolation was shared by nine of 24 participants. Participant interviews, 2019 and 2020.

³ Statistics Canada, “Employment Income Statistics.”

⁴ Participant interviews, 2020.

⁵ These views were shared by 18 of 24 participants. Participant interviews, 2019 and 2020.

Over-representation in lower-skilled administrative roles

Statistics Canada data tells us that 63 per cent of Indigenous employees occupy front-line support roles compared to 49 per cent for non-Indigenous employees.⁶ While interviewees pointed to disparities in early education as one contributing factor⁷—particularly for students from remote northern communities or on-reserve schools, where access to advanced coursework in math, business, and technology is often limited⁸—they also noted that this workplace imbalance cannot be explained by education alone. Structural factors such as discriminatory hiring practices, a lack of mentorship or sponsorship opportunities, and limited internal promotion pathways within organizations also restrict upward mobility for Indigenous professionals. Without targeted strategies to address these barriers, many remain concentrated in lower-skilled roles despite their capacity and ambition to advance.

Implications for career mobility

The limited mobility of those in lower-skilled administrative roles restricts their access to higher salaries, mentorship, and opportunities to move into executive leadership roles. Several interviewees observed that without targeted investment in professional development or access to employer-supported training, there is little room for advancement to higher-skilled positions. In cases of exceptions, employees who moved beyond administrative career tracks had to pursue additional education on their own, often at personal expense.⁹

6 Statistics Canada, "Employment Income Statistics."

7 This view was shared by 22 of 24 participants. Participant interviews, 2019 and 2020.

8 Indigenous Services, "Archived - Let's Talk on-Reserve Education."

9 This view was shared by five of 24 participants. Participant interviews, 2019 and 2020.



Recruiting Indigenous talent to senior roles

Sixteen of the 24 Indigenous executives interviewed reflected on a range of recruitment challenges affecting Indigenous professionals. The most frequently cited challenges were a lack of mentorship opportunities for junior employees, poor career awareness, difficulties addressing credential and experience requirements, and cultural biases in hiring processes. These executives noted that to effectively attract Indigenous talent, each of these challenges requires a targeted response.

The need for more mentorship opportunities

Eight participants highlighted the lack of mentorship for early-career Indigenous professionals as a key barrier to executive recruitment. They noted that too few Indigenous professionals enter the workforce with access to senior role models or structured support to help them navigate career advancement. For example, the vice president of Indigenous services at a national accounting and consulting firm pointed out that few Indigenous professionals—and students—have sufficient exposure to relevant role models in finance, accounting, or management due to gaps in both community networks and early mentorship.

The executive director of an Indigenous social enterprise highlighted the importance of mentorship. This executive emphasized that structured mentorship is essential for supporting young Indigenous professionals as they transition into the workforce. They noted that many face isolation and uncertainty when entering predominantly non-Indigenous office environments, especially in sectors like finance and management. By structured mentorship, they referred to formal programs that pair early-career professionals with experienced mentors who offer consistent,

goal-oriented support over time. These programs go beyond informal advice—they include regular check-ins, culturally grounded guidance, career planning, and skills development. The executive explained how this mentorship helps reduce the intimidation many Indigenous professionals feel when navigating unfamiliar workplace cultures and expectations and reinforces their confidence and sense of belonging.¹⁰

Executives also highlighted the importance of youth-focused mentorship and career development starting early in the education system. A director of economic development at an urban tribal council stressed that financial literacy and career awareness programs introduced in elementary school help Indigenous students envision professional futures that might otherwise feel out of reach.¹¹ When extended through middle school and into early-career stages, these programs can build confidence, strengthen networks, and create clearer pathways to executive-track roles—defined here as leadership positions in corporate, public sector, nonprofit, and Indigenous-led organizations. These include careers in accounting, finance, operations, governance, or administration that potentially lead to senior management or C-suite positions.

Several executives suggested that early-stage initiatives could include Indigenous youth leadership councils, school-based investment or entrepreneurship clubs, business case competitions, and community mentorship programs that connect students with Indigenous professionals. Programs that offer hands-on learning—such as budget simulations, cooperative education placements, or community-led economic development projects—were seen as

¹⁰ Participant interviews, 2019.

¹¹ Participant interviews, 2019.

particularly effective in building the requisite skills and real-world awareness to pursue leadership careers.¹² Executives also emphasized the importance of culturally grounded programming that affirms Indigenous identity while building financial and management literacy. Access to these kinds of opportunities, they noted, remains uneven across regions and communities, making intentional investments in early talent development all the more essential.¹³ For a deeper exploration of effective early-stage supports, our Future Skills Centre publication Indigenous Youth in Finance: Navigating a Complex Path provides additional insights and promising practices.¹⁴

Rethinking credentials: valuing Indigenous experience in executive hiring

Nine executives pointed to rigid credential and experience requirements as a major barrier to recruiting Indigenous professionals into executive roles. While they acknowledged that formal certifications are essential in certain professions—such as law, accounting, and financial analysis—many noted that credential requirements are often applied too narrowly in management and leadership hiring processes, where a broader set of competencies may be equally relevant. Standards such as mandatory graduate degrees or narrowly defined career pathways can overlook the practical knowledge and leadership experience that many Indigenous candidates bring.

For example, an executive from an Indigenous transportation company challenged the assumption that academic credentials are the sole indicator of readiness for senior roles, arguing that such expectations can unfairly exclude highly capable

candidates with deep operational and community experience. Similarly, a senior executive from an Indigenous economic development organization emphasized that hiring processes often undervalue community-based knowledge and lived experience. Skills such as cultural insight, practical problem-solving, and relationship-building—often acquired outside formal education—are critical to leadership but are not always reflected in resumés or academic records.¹⁵

To address this issue, executives urged organizations to adopt broader evaluation criteria that recognize both formal qualifications and experiential learning. Several executives also extended this critique to the education system, advocating for more-applied and practical training within post-secondary programs. A senior economic development advisor recommended expanding internship and co-op placements to better prepare Indigenous students for executive-track roles, noting that these hands-on experiences help build confidence, networks, soft skills, and job readiness in ways traditional coursework alone cannot.¹⁶

Overcoming cultural bias and misinterpretation in hiring

In addition to credential barriers, five executives we spoke to raised concerns about cultural bias in hiring processes. They noted that Indigenous candidates are often judged against norms that don't reflect their cultural values or communication styles. For instance, an Indigenous CPA and president of a training institute explained that behaviours such as humility or modesty—widely respected in Indigenous communities—are sometimes misread by recruiters as hesitation or lack of confidence.¹⁷

¹² This account reflects the views of six interview participants. Participant interviews, 2019 and 2020.

¹³ Participant interviews, 2020.

¹⁴ Conference Board of Canada, The, "Indigenous Youth in Finance."

¹⁵ Participant Interviews, 2019.

¹⁶ Participant interviews, 2019.

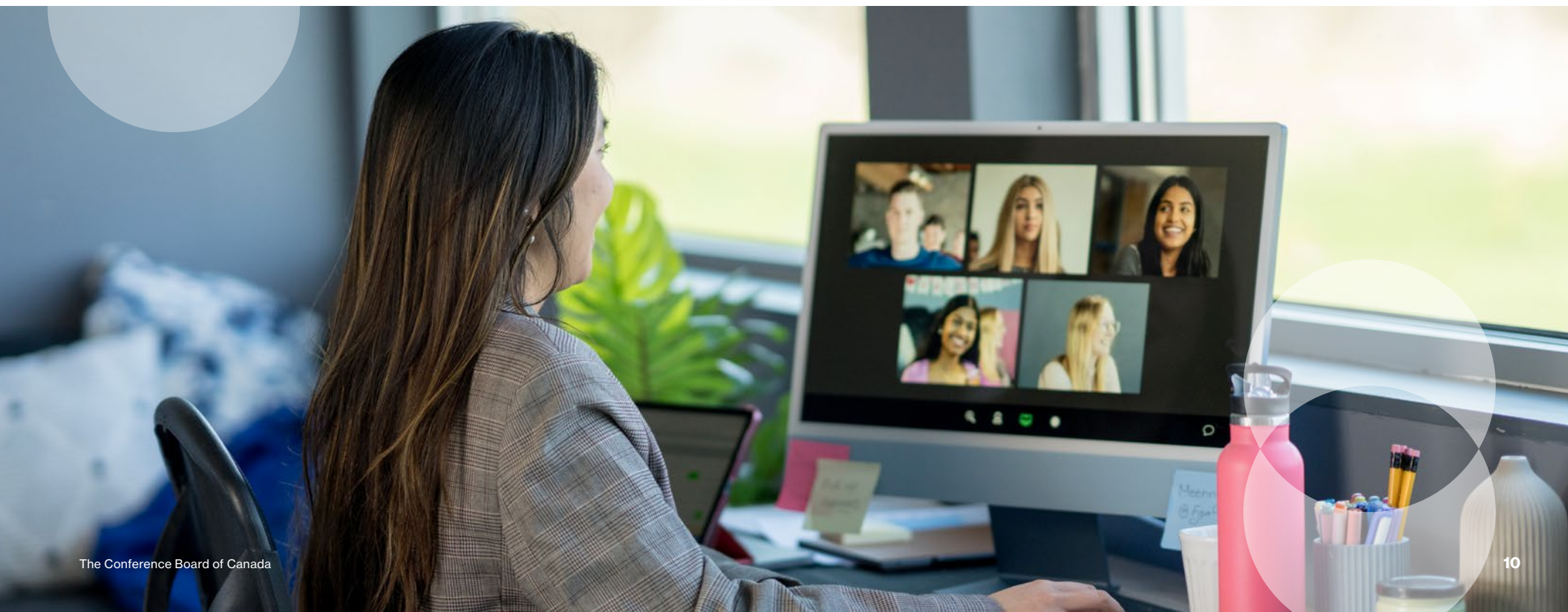
¹⁷ Participant interviews, 2020.

A Northern program specialist, in a national nonprofit, explained that Indigenous candidates are often expected to explain or justify their cultural identity during interviews as they encounter questions that place an unfair emotional and cognitive burden on them. They described how even in professional and social settings, Indigenous people are frequently put in positions of having to educate others about their history, culture, or the legacy of residential schools, despite the widespread availability of books, films, and public resources on these topics. This specialist emphasized that this expectation is both exhausting and inappropriate during a job interview and candidates should not have to comfort or educate their interviewers.¹⁸

¹⁸ Participant interviews, 2020.

To address these challenges, the five executives recommended implementing cultural competency training for recruiters and hiring teams. They emphasized that such training can reduce bias, help hiring professionals better understand Indigenous communication styles, and ensure that recruitment practices genuinely respect cultural differences and recognize the distinct strengths Indigenous candidates offer.

The executives also called for broader action by Canadian companies to confront racism and address persistent cultural misunderstandings in the workplace. They stressed that meaningful change requires more than training—it demands sustained commitment to equity and accountability across all levels of the organization.



Retention: ensuring long-term Indigenous leadership

Just as recruiting Indigenous professionals into leadership roles presents challenges, retaining them requires sustained and deliberate effort. Eighteen of the 24 Indigenous executives we interviewed focused on retention issues as a major challenge. They identified several recurring themes that influence whether Indigenous professionals remain in senior roles over the long term. The most frequently cited factor was the importance of strong employer-community connections. Executives emphasized that enabling personal commitments to family, culture, and community—such as attending ceremonies or fulfilling caregiving roles—is central to Indigenous professionals' long-term loyalty. When employers accommodate these responsibilities through flexible schedules or leave policies, retention improves. Participants also highlighted the need for competitive compensation, clear career pathways, and support for continuous learning.

Integrating community connections

Eighteen executives emphasized the critical role that strong employer-community connections play in both recruitment and retention. Ten of these executives specifically highlighted the importance of employers supporting Indigenous professionals in maintaining ties to their home community, culture, and spiritual practice. The COO of an Indigenous health authority noted that ongoing cultural and community engagement is not just a personal preference but a source of strength, resilience, and professional stability. This executive stressed that organizations that recognize and accommodate these connections are more

likely to retain Indigenous staff over the long term. They also noted that deep community engagement is essential for non-Indigenous organizations that want to serve Indigenous customers and clients.

At the same time, several executives noted that community connection must not be confused with the expectation that Indigenous professionals act as spokespersons for all Indigenous people within their organizations. When Indigenous employees are expected to explain their culture or educate colleagues—especially in workplaces that have not undertaken meaningful cultural learning—this places an unfair emotional burden on them and may contribute to burnout or disengagement. One interviewee recalled being approached by a non-Indigenous colleague who became emotional while discussing residential schools, asking deeply personal questions the interviewee was neither prepared for nor obligated to answer. This kind of interaction, they noted, creates unsafe and unbalanced dynamics.¹⁹

To address this issue, executives emphasized the need for employers—particularly in non-Indigenous organizations—to demonstrate a visible commitment to reconciliation, including the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #92.²⁰ This action includes providing cultural competency training, fostering respectful relationships, and ensuring that Indigenous professionals are supported, not isolated, in their roles.

¹⁹ Participant Interviews, 2020.

²⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action."

Deep community engagement and workplace inclusion go hand-in-hand, and both are essential for organizations that want to retain Indigenous staff and serve Indigenous clients with integrity.

Beyond organizational practices, several executives from Indigenous community-based organizations pointed to internal community dynamics that affect retention, particularly subtle but harmful behaviours such as gossip, exclusion, and undermining. These behaviours are often referred to as lateral violence, a term used to describe the displacement of frustration and trauma within oppressed communities, where individuals may direct their pain inward toward peers rather than outward toward systems of oppression. According to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, lateral violence is rooted in colonization, intergenerational trauma, and the breakdown of traditional governance and support systems.^{21,22}

The CEO of an Indigenous transportation company explained that these behaviours often stem from historical trauma and systemic pressures and must be addressed to create supportive environments for leadership development in community-based organizations. Along with two other executives, this participant recommended targeted community-based training and dialogue to build trust, address intergenerational trauma, and foster collaboration. They emphasized that strengthening community support not only improves individual well-being but also contributes to organizational stability and the long-term retention of executives.²³

Flexible workplace policies

Eight executives identified workplace flexibility as a key factor in retaining Indigenous professionals. These executives' perspectives reflect a broader trend in the Canadian workforce, where employees increasingly expect flexible work arrangements. As highlighted in research from The Conference Board of Canada's Human Capital knowledge area, flexibility and autonomy have become central to attracting and retaining talent in a competitive labour market.²⁴

For Indigenous professionals, these expectations are shaped not only by general workforce trends but also by cultural and community responsibilities that may not align with conventional workplace norms. The executive director of an Indigenous economic development organization explained that rigid nine-to-five schedules often conflict with caregiving duties and participation in cultural life. Reflecting on their experience as a single parent in a senior role, this executive advocated for flexible hours, remote work options, and generous cultural leave policies.²⁵

The executive director of an Indigenous social enterprise echoed this view when they described flexibility as essential to preventing burnout and turnover.²⁶ All eight executives stressed that culturally responsive policies—such as allowing time for ceremonies, community events, and extended family care—are vital to long-term engagement and retention. For Indigenous professionals, flexibility is not simply about convenience; it's about aligning work with the realities of life in and with the community.

21 Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman, *Origins of Lateral Violence in Aboriginal Communities*.

22 In his 2024 doctoral dissertation, scholar Mason Ducharme examines in depth the impact of lateral violence on executive turnover and retention in Indigenous organizations. Ducharme, "Turnover and the Retention of Indigenous Executives in Indigenous Organizations."

23 Participant Interviews, 2019.

24 Conference Board of Canada, *The, Spotlight on Redefining Work*.

25 Participant interviews, 2019.

26 Participant interviews, 2019.

Competitive compensation

While this report focuses on the experiences of Indigenous executives across both Indigenous-led and mainstream organizations, many interviewees reflected specifically on the distinct challenges Indigenous employers face. Eight executives emphasized that offering competitive pay is essential—particularly for Indigenous governments, enterprises, and community-based organizations that often operate with limited financial flexibility. The CEO of an Indigenous financial institution noted that many experienced professionals are drawn to higher-paying roles in the federal government or large non-Indigenous corporations. All eight executives recommended that to remain competitive, Indigenous employers need to adjust their salary scales and make better use of strategic advantages unique to Indigenous-led enterprises. For example, the director of economic development at an urban tribal council suggested leveraging urban reserve tax benefits to improve compensation packages and encourage retention within Indigenous organizations.

Compared to private sector businesses, Indigenous governments and community organizations often face greater difficulty offering competitive compensation, as they rely on annual funding allocations that tend to be lower in value and more restricted in use than the self-generated revenues available to private enterprises. Multi-year funding arrangements would enable Indigenous governments and organizations to plan more effectively and strengthen their ability to attract and retain skilled staff.

Clear career development pathways

Seven executives identified clear and structured opportunities for internal career advancement as a critical factor in retaining Indigenous professionals. While this need is common across many organizations, several participants noted that the stakes are often higher for Indigenous staff who may be one of the few—or the only—Indigenous professionals in their workplace. Without visible advancement pathways, the risk of isolation or stagnation increases, making it more likely they will leave for organizations that actively support Indigenous leadership growth.

The CEO of an Indigenous health management organization explained that in the absence of clear development supports, Indigenous professionals may struggle to see themselves reflected in leadership and are more likely to pursue opportunities elsewhere.²⁷ Similarly, an Indigenous vice president at a national accounting firm emphasized that transparent communication about career progression, combined with mentorship and targeted development, helps ensure Indigenous staff remain engaged and confident in their future with the organization. For Indigenous professionals, career advancement is not just a matter of mobility but also of representation, support, and long-term belonging.²⁸

²⁷ Participant interviews, 2019.

²⁸ Participant interviews, 2019.

Support for lifelong learning

Seven executives also emphasized the importance of ongoing learning and employer-supported training as key components of retention. While these are common workforce expectations, these executives noted their added importance in the context of Indigenous professionals, who remain under-represented in senior finance and management roles. As qualified Indigenous executives are relatively few in number, they are frequently targeted for recruitment by other organizations—including those offering better advancement or educational support.

A CEO from an Indigenous financial management organization explained that providing continuous skills development opportunities not only improves job satisfaction but also strengthens employee loyalty. When Indigenous professionals see that their growth is being actively supported, they are more likely to remain in their roles, invest in the organization's future, and contribute to the continuity of long-term leadership—particularly within Indigenous-led institutions that may struggle to replace departing talent.²⁹

Strategic recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the actionable insights of 24 Indigenous executives working in C-suite and senior management roles across finance, business, and administration. Based on these executives' lived experiences and leadership within mainstream and Indigenous organizations and enterprises, these recommended actions aim to address the most pressing challenges in recruitment and retention, while reinforcing the educational and community supports necessary for long-term success.

These are collective-action challenges that require coordinated efforts across sectors. No single organization can build inclusive workplaces or support Indigenous leadership in isolation. Strengthening recruitment and retention calls for shared commitment from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous employers—across the private sector, public institutions, and community-based organizations. The actions related to investing in the Indigenous talent pipeline extend even further, calling on companies, governments, philanthropic partners, and Indigenous communities themselves to support culturally grounded education, financial literacy, healing, and leadership development. Building a sustainable, inclusive Indigenous leadership pipeline will require long-term partnerships that address both structural barriers and internal community dynamics.

²⁹ Participant interviews, 2019.

Recruitment actions

- Establish youth-focused mentorship programs that begin early—starting in high school and extending through post-secondary education—to build career awareness, professional confidence, and pathways to careers in finance, business, and management.
- Recognize and value people's lived experience, community leadership, and practical knowledge alongside their formal education to ensure inclusive and effective recruitment, and revise hiring practices to include broader evaluation criteria.
- Equip recruiters with the tools to understand Indigenous communication styles and provide cultural competency training for hiring committees so they can avoid misinterpreting culturally appropriate behaviours as implying a lack of readiness or confidence.
- Increase internships, co-ops, and work placements by partnering with educational institutions to connect Indigenous learners with hands-on experience in finance, business, and administration.

Retention actions

- Community-based organizations can leverage tools such as urban reserve tax advantages and alternative funding mechanisms to offer compensation that is competitive with mainstream public- and private-sector benchmarks.
- Include remote work options, flexible schedules, and culturally appropriate leave policies that support community participation, caregiving, and ceremonial obligations.
- Ensure that all managers, executives, and human resources professionals understand Indigenous cultural values, histories, and interpersonal norms and support inclusive workplaces through cultural competency training, such as the Indigenous reconciliation training offered by the Canada School of Public Service, programs delivered by Indigenous Works, or customized workshops led by Indigenous cultural educators and organizations.
- Develop structured mentorship programs that focus on building consistent, culturally grounded support networks that help early-career Indigenous professionals navigate leadership pathways, such as those offered by AFOA Canada, or internal pairing initiatives within Indigenous organizations. Invest in leadership development, mentorship, and internal promotion strategies that show Indigenous professionals how to advance within the organization. Such efforts are vital for long-term succession planning.
- Provide access to employer-sponsored training, certification programs, and ongoing education to foster lifelong learning, long-term engagement, and career satisfaction.

Invest in the Indigenous talent pipeline

- Companies can take a long-term approach to workforce development by using philanthropic contributions and partnerships to strengthen the pipeline of talent.
- Support culturally relevant, community-based education and financial literacy programs that prepare Indigenous youth and junior professionals for careers in business, finance, and management.
- Provide funding for support networks and training initiatives that address internal community dynamics—such as lateral violence—and promote healing, collaboration, and collective leadership within Indigenous organizations.

Appendix A

Methodology

About the research

This study explored the following research question:

- What are the primary challenges to career advancement and retention for Indigenous executives in mainstream and Indigenous-led organizations?

The study employed a qualitative research methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by Indigenous executives in business, finance, and administration. Data was collected through 24 semi-structured interviews with Indigenous leaders and executives across various public and private sector organizations. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to identify key patterns, themes, and insights related to the guiding research question.

Detailed methods

The interview guide was designed to generate insights into both individual career experiences and systemic industry trends that shape the career pathways of Indigenous executives in business, finance, and administration. The guide was developed based on earlier Conference Board of Canada research, with support from members of our Research Advisory Board. The final guide is attached as Appendix B. To answer the research question, the guide focused on understanding the following:

- Interviewees' career journeys in finance and management
- Trends in business, finance, and administration
- Barriers to Indigenous participation in business, finance, and administration
- Retention challenges and solutions

We sought 30 interviews with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis executives in business, finance, and administration roles across a range of industry sectors including construction; educational services; finance and insurance; healthcare and social assistance; manufacturing; other services (except public administration); professional, scientific, and technical services; public administration; and transportation and warehousing. Based on our knowledge of Indigenous economies in Canada and the role of business, finance, and administration occupations, this sampling strategy provided sufficient coverage of Indigenous executive experiences in medium to large public and private sector organizations.

The 24 interview participants reflect a diverse cross-section of Indigenous identities and regions across Canada. Two-thirds (67%) identify as First Nations, with additional representation from Métis (25%) and Inuit (8%) communities. Participants are regionally diverse, with representation from British Columbia (25%), Saskatchewan (21%), the territories (21%), Ontario (17%), and single participants from Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, and the Atlantic region (4% each). This range brings forward perspectives shaped by distinct governance traditions, land relationships, and lived experiences in urban, rural, and remote contexts.

To build the recruitment list, we relied on our professional networks and ability to reach Indigenous executives through relationships with leading Indigenous organizations operating in or representing professionals in business, finance and administration, such as AFOA¹ Canada, the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, the First Nations Financial Management Board, and the First Nations Finance Authority. We also conducted recruitment through our connections with the financial services sector, the federal government, and national representative Indigenous organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council. The list included at least three possibilities per target industry sector and was sufficient to allow for an 80 per cent response rate. Invitations were sent to potential interviewees, in two waves of emails, starting on July 30, 2019. Within one week of an emailed invitation, we telephoned prospective interviewees. Of the 30 who were approached, 24 accepted our invitation to participate.

1 Aboriginal Financial Officers Association Canada.

Table 1

Interview participants represented Indigenous men and women from various industries and roles (n=24)

Industry sectors	Roles	Males	Females	Total	Proportion of industry sector coverage (per cent)
Construction	CEO	0	1	1	4
Educational services	Assoc. Dir., COO	1	1	2	8
Finance and Insurance	CEO, general mgr., reg. VP, trust mgr., vice chair	4	3	7	29
Healthcare and social assistance	CEO, COO	1	1	2	8
Manufacturing	CEO	1	0	1	4
Other services (except public administration)	Exec. dir., senior mgr.	0	2	2	8
Professional, scientific, and technical services	CEO, exec. dir., president, VP	4	2	6	25
Public administration	Dir., exec. eir.	1	1	2	8
Transportation and warehousing	CEO	0	1	1	4
Total	n.a.	12	12	24	n.a.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

The 24 interviews were conducted from August 1, 2019, to September 1, 2020. All of the interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours and were conducted by either telephone (18), videoconference (4), or in person (2). Thirty-six hours of interviews were transcribed, resulting in a total text corpus of 202,978 words.

The text generated from was coded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Coding themes were first developed based on the research questions and past Conference Board of Canada research, followed by an exploratory examination within the interviews. Themes were examined based on how frequently they were noted and the intensity of the observations. Similarities and differences between sub-populations were reported when at least five of the 24 interviewees noted a theme. Due to the small sample size, we could not generalize to the populations that were discussed.

Appendix B

Interview guide

The first series of questions asks about your career in business, finance, and administration.

When did you start out? How/where did you start out?

- What were the biggest obstacles you had to face when starting out?
 - How did you overcome those obstacles?
- What supports were available when you started out?
 - What kinds of support did you find most useful and why?
- Who were your professional mentors or role models?
 - What were the biggest lessons you learned from them?

If relevant, how would you describe the transition past the entry-level to a mid-career position in business, finance, and administration?

- What obstacles got in the way of promotions and your career advancement?
 - How did you overcome these mid-career obstacles?
- What supports were available to help you get ahead in your career?
 - What kinds of support did you find most useful and why?

Have you experienced any significant career transitions up to this point? (Job switching, leaving your community, unemployment, self-employment, etc.)

- What were the biggest obstacles you had to face during these career transitions?
- What supports were available during your career transitions?
 - What kinds of support did you find most useful during these transitions and why?

The next series of questions asks about relevant industry trends.

Where are the major opportunities for Indigenous executives and professionals in business, finance, and management?

- How do opportunities within Indigenous communities and Indigenous-owned corporations compare to those within non-Indigenous firms?
 - How have the opportunities changed over the past ten, 15, 20 years? What major future opportunities might lie ahead ten, 15, 20 years from now?

What skills do Indigenous executives and professionals need to succeed?

- Do you need different skills when working with Indigenous communities or for Indigenous-owned corporations compared to working in the city or for non-Indigenous companies? (Explain).
- How have the skills requirements of Indigenous executives and professionals changed over the past ten, 15, 20 years? What future skills will be needed 10, 15, 20 years from now?

The latest labour force data indicate that Indigenous people continue to be under-represented in executive and professional roles in business, finance, and administration. Why might that be?

What are the biggest barriers to recruiting more Indigenous executives and professionals?

- What can non-Indigenous firms do to improve their recruitment of Indigenous executives and professionals?
- What can Indigenous communities and Indigenous-owned corporations do to improve their recruitment of Indigenous executives and professionals?
- What might future recruitment barriers look like?
- What are the biggest barriers to retaining Indigenous executives and professionals?
 - What can non-Indigenous firms do to improve their retention of Indigenous executives and professionals?
 - What can Indigenous communities and Indigenous-owned corporations do to improve their retention of Indigenous executives and professionals?
 - What might future retention barriers look like?

Appendix C

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