

MindFrame Connect Final Program Evaluation



The Diversity Institute conducts and co-ordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse residents of Canada, 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 driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policy makers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills program.





MindFrame Connect is a not-for-profit created in partnership by Dalhousie University, Toronto Metropolitan University, I-INC, and Globalive. Funded through FSC, MindFrame Connect shares lessons from leading experts, entrepreneurs, and mentors in workshops, how-to videos, eCourses, academic research, frameworks and more. All content is designed to provide practical learnings on its various streams of programming — including improving the craft of inclusive mentorship and menteeship, and creating more resilient, high-performing entrepreneurs. MindFrame Connect works with accelerators, hubs, and academic institutions to provide training complementary to their current program offerings and catered to the needs of their entrepreneurs and mentors. All offerings are vetted by a team of entrepreneurs, mentors, and academics and is offered at no cost with the end goal of upskilling entrepreneurs and mentors in Canada.



Funder

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Future Skills Program



The Future Skills Centre—Centre des Compétences futures—is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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Publication Date

May 2025

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Executive Summary

Context

While mentorship is widely recognized as a vital support mechanism that offers guidance, knowledge sharing, and access to networks, mentorship programs for entrepreneurs often overlook the skills needed to build effective and trusting relationships. Structured training that addresses communication, power dynamics, and goal setting is often absent. This limits the potential impact of mentorship, especially for equity-deserving groups who may require different strategies to build trust and navigate systemic barriers. Entrepreneurs also face high levels of stress, uncertainty, and failure, making psychological skills like resilience an indispensable characteristic for entrepreneurs to cultivate.

MindFrame Connect, launched in 2021 by Dalhousie University and funded by the Future Skills Centre, was developed to address these gaps by offering training in mentorship and resilience through virtual and in-person workshops and eCourses. The program was designed to meet the needs of a broad spectrum of entrepreneurs, while also responding to long-standing gaps in mentorship practices. It draws on research across sectors and disciplines to emphasize core principles of effective mentorship and the psychological skills needed to sustain entrepreneurial well-being.

This evaluation builds on the earlier interim assessment of the MindFrame program, which reviewed data from learning sessions delivered in 2022–2023. It examines participation and outcomes from synchronous and asynchronous delivery formats held between January 2023 and December 2024, with an emphasis on reach, impact, and the experiences of diverse participants using disaggregated data where available. During this period, the program reached a total of 3,641 attendees through its synchronous workshops and 480 asynchronous eCourse learners.

Program overview

MindFrame Connect is a national initiative launched by Dalhousie University in partnership with Globalive Capital, Incubate Innovate Network of Canada (I-INC), and Toronto Metropolitan University's Diversity Institute, with support from the Future Skills Centre. The program was created to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Canada by providing targeted training in mentorship and resilience for entrepreneurs and mentors.

Drawing on consultations with over 150 stakeholders and an extensive scoping review of nearly 10,000 sources, the program launched its pilot at Dalhousie University in 2021. It has since expanded across Canada, offering synchronous workshops and free eCourses covering the Principles of Mentorship, Principles of Menteeship, and Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs. With

partnerships spanning more than 60 organizations, including accelerators, incubators, and academic institutions, MindFrame Connect has delivered over 180 sessions to a wide and diverse audience, encompassing aspiring entrepreneurs and more established business owners.

Evaluation methods

This report draws on qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the design, delivery, and outcomes of the MindFrame Connect program, with a focus on how it supports the development of competencies for success in entrepreneurship.

The learning agenda outlines the key questions guiding the evaluation of the program:

Program delivery

1. How effectively has MindFrame Connect recruited and engaged entrepreneurs from equity-deserving groups?
2. What challenges or barriers do entrepreneurs face in accessing, participating in, and applying the learnings from MindFrame Connect's eCourses and workshops?

Program outcomes

3. To what extent has MindFrame Connect's program content strengthened the competencies entrepreneurs need to build for effective mentorship relationships and developing resilience?
4. How has MindFrame Connect contributed to improving the mental health and overall well-being of entrepreneurs through its mentorship and resilience-building programming?
5. To what extent were participants satisfied with the MindFrame Connect program?

Data sources include the following:

- Post-workshop surveys: They were designed to capture participants' expectations, engagement, and overall perceptions of the synchronous learning workshop sessions.
- Pre- and post-eCourse surveys: Pre-eCourse surveys were designed to establish a baseline for participants' knowledge, expectations, and preparedness, while post-eCourse surveys revisit these areas to measure improvements and outcomes.
- Post-program survey: They were designed to capture comprehensive insights into the program's impact on entrepreneurial competencies, mentorship and menteeship capabilities, resilience development, and overall satisfaction, the survey also included demographic and business profile questions to explore variations in participant experiences.
- Partner interviews: Semi-structured interviews with delivery partners were conducted to gather insights into the implementation and outcomes of the MindFrame Connect program.
- Mentee focus group: A focus group was conducted to evaluate the Principles of Menteeship within the MindFrame Connect program, aiming to understand its impact on mentees' experiences and outcomes.

- Mentor focus group: A focus group was held to gather more in-depth insights into the Principles of Mentorship component of the program, and participants' perspectives on the design, delivery, and effectiveness of the training.

The evaluation faced several limitations, chief among them low response rates across surveys and focus groups, which reduced the generalizability of findings and likely reflected the perspectives of the most engaged participants.

Findings

Program delivery

Participation and engagement

Between January 2023 and December 2024, a total of 3,641 attendees engaged with the synchronous workshops and 480 participants enrolled in asynchronous eCourses. However, due to the lack of access to registration data for partner-delivered sessions and absence of demographic and business profile data at the point of eCourse registration, the number of unique participants and the full demographic reach of the program could not be accurately determined. A post-program survey was introduced to address these gaps, but a low response rate (n = 39) limits the generalizability of the findings. The following presents an overview of respondents' demographic and business characteristics, excluding those who selected "prefer not to answer" for each question:

- 37.5% (n = 15) identified as women, 25.0% (n = 10) as immigrants or newcomers, 15.0% (n = 6) as Black or racialized individuals, 15.0% (n = 6) as persons with disabilities, 5.0% (n = 2) as 2SLGBTQI+, and 2.5% (n = 1) as Indigenous Peoples.
- The majority were based in either Nova Scotia (42.4%, n = 14) or Ontario (36.4%, n = 12).
- One-half of the respondents (50.0%, n = 19) were in the 40–49year age bracket.
- 72.2% (n = 26) owned at least 51% of their business, 72.2% (n = 21) were working full time on their ventures, and 73.1% (n = 19) were self-employed.
- 80.0% (n = 20) reported annual revenues under \$50,000 and 57.1% (n = 16) had operated their business for less than two years.
- Respondents reported their business as being in services (32.1%, n = 9), followed by technology (25.0%, n = 7), retail (10.7%, n = 3), finance (7.1%, n = 2), and health care (3.6%, n = 1), with 21.4% (n = 6) selecting "other."

Challenges and barriers

Focus group discussions and partner interviews highlighted the following challenges and barriers:

- **Limited support for processing content:** While participants generally found the material valuable, they also expressed interest in having more tools to process and apply the learnings.
- **Varied learning styles and expectations:** eCourse learners expressed a desire for more real-world examples, including case studies and demonstration videos, to help bridge

the gap between theory and practice. Workshop partners similarly emphasized the importance of meeting participants where they work through tailored content, while acknowledging the difficulty of customizing delivery at scale within large cohorts.

- **Limited opportunities for connection and peer engagement:** The lack of in-person sessions as well as digital platforms to facilitate connections was seen as a barrier to deeper learning, networking, and relationship-building among eCourse learners.

Program outcomes

Competencies for entrepreneurial success

Business stage

Out of the 39 survey respondents, for those who identified as being an entrepreneur (n=22), the distribution by business stage is as follows: Ideation (13% of respondents, n=3), Validation (17.4%, n=4), Launch (47.8%, n=11), Growth (13%, n=3), and Sustainability (8.7%, n=2).

- **Ideation stage competencies (n=3)**
 - Personal development: High mean scores were observed for self-awareness, confidence, self-care, communication, and developing an entrepreneurial mindset (4.33 for all).
 - Identifying resources and support: Survey respondents reported improvements in their ability to locate information, identify incubators and accelerators, build relationships and social capital, and their awareness of financial resources (4.00 for all).
- **Validation stage competencies (n=4)**
 - Understanding and developing a business model: Moderate mean scores were observed for evaluating product market fit, business model development, and identifying customer segments (3.50 for all). Defining value propositions received a lower score of 2.50.
 - Strategic planning: A high mean score was observed for positioning (4.33). Pitching saw a slight improvement (3.67), while defining the business/startup and goal setting saw lower scores (3.00 for both).
 - Understanding financial landscape requirements: Survey results suggest the program did not improve the ability of participants to communicate their financial needs (2.50).
- **Launch stage competencies (n=11)**
 - Financial management: A low score of 3.50 was observed for knowledge of investor types and abilities to draw investors into the business.
 - Leadership and management: Survey respondents reported improvements in planning and organizing (4.09) and coping with challenges (4.00), with slight improvements in coaching and mentoring (3.82) and leadership (3.64).
 - Interaction with others: Moderate mean scores were reported for the ability to manage difficult or stressful interactions with others (3.91), influence others (3.73), and co-operate within a team to deliver results (3.73). A lower score was observed for valuing diversity (3.18).
- **Growth stage competencies (n=3)**

- Grow revenue: A moderate mean score was reported for marketing and brand development (4.00).
- Grow team: Survey respondents reported moderate improvements in their ability to develop team culture and norms, manage talent, and manage partnerships (4.00 for all).
- **Sustainability stage competencies (n=2)**
 - Strategic management: Moderate mean scores were reported for risk assessment and management, partnership building, and strategic vision (4.00 for all).
 - Corporate social responsibility: The ability to integrate EDI practices into business activities received a mean score of 4.00.

Industry and individual competencies

- Industry level competencies: Empowerment and autonomy received a mean score of 3.67.
- Individual level competencies: Moderate improvements were reported for knowledge of anti-discrimination and inclusion policies and work-life balance (4.00). Identifying resources designed for diverse entrepreneurs and language skills received slightly lower scores of 3.83. The lowest scores for individual level competencies were for cross-cultural competence (3.50) and self-care (3.00).

Pre-post program survey results for asynchronous learning (eCourses)

- Principles of Mentorship: The most notable increase (1.28 points) was in participants' understanding of mentor expectations, followed by understanding of power dynamics (1.16 point increase), being enabled with the frameworks or tools for managing their role as mentors (1.12 point increase), clear expectations on time management (1.05 point increase), being fully equipped to be a mentor (0.92), and confidence in creating psychologically safe environments (0.81).
- Principles of Menteeship: Understanding of what is expected to be a mentee and how to identify an effective mentor saw the greatest increase (0.65 points). This was followed by a 0.57 point increase in having a plan for how mentoring sessions would be used. Participants also reported a 0.40 point increase in setting goals and outcomes for their work with a mentor and a 0.38 point gain in confidence of their ability to logistically manage a mentoring relationship.
- Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs: The most notable improvement was a 0.81 point increase in the extent to which participants reported having frameworks or tools to support their resilience. This was followed by confidence in their understanding of skills that support resilience for entrepreneurship (0.50 point increase), knowing where to seek resources for entrepreneurial well-being (0.44 point increase), and recognizing the value of developing resilience-related skills (0.40 point increase).

Mental health and overall well-being

The following findings are drawn from the post-program survey and the focus group discussions. While the survey results suggest modest or limited impacts, focus group participants reported more positive experiences. This discrepancy may be, in part, due to focus group participants having had more favourable experiences with the program or being more engaged overall.

- Survey results: Participants rated their mental well-being as 7.37 on average out of 10. Most respondents reported feeling overwhelmed about their business either sometimes (31.8%, n=7), often (27.3%, n=6) or always (27.3%, n=6). While 76.6% (n=22) of respondents reported having access to mental health and well-being support, 23.4% (n=7) indicated limited or no access. The program's perceived impact on participants' mental well-being was modest, with only a small proportion (9.4%, n=3) reporting that the program had a very significant impact.
- Focus groups: Discussions suggest the program contributed to increased confidence, better stress management, and improved problem-solving.

Program satisfaction

Overall program satisfaction received a mean score of 4.42. Participants rated the online learning management system as accessible and user-friendly (4.38), and found the training relevant to their individual needs and goals (4.28) and their current stage of business development (4.30). The program content was considered easy to understand (4.45), and the digital format was seen as an effective method for delivering the material (4.43). The program's responsiveness to real-world challenges received a slightly lower rating (4.06). Participants rated their likelihood of recommending the program to others at 4.35.

Program satisfaction for synchronous learning workshops

The Principles of Mentorship workshop received the highest satisfaction rating with a mean score of 8.68 out of 10, followed closely by Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs (8.55) and Principles of Menteeship (8.54).

Participants found the content relevant across all three workshops, with Principles of Mentorship receiving the highest rating (4.48), followed by Principles of Menteeship and Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs (4.33 for both). Workshops on menteeship and resilience also scored well for the likelihood of applying the tools and strategies learned (4.40 and 4.31, respectively). Scores were slightly lower across all workshops for perceived skill development in the topic area (ranging from 4.02 to 4.13) and for the session format (ranging from 3.91 to 4.02).

Conclusions and recommendations

The following recommendations are gleaned from the quantitative and qualitative data:

Data collection and analysis:

- Standardize registration process and strengthen data ownership to support the ability to conduct follow-up evaluations to measure progress over time.
- Apply gender and equity lens to all evaluation instruments, including pre and post eCourse and post-workshop surveys, to assess the program’s relevance and effectiveness for equity-deserving groups.

Program content and delivery:

- Integrate strategies for approaching and communicating with mentors with specialized expertise (for e.g., finance).
- Introduce resources to support continuous learning and application (e.g., guided reflection exercises, practical assignments, and goal-setting templates, etc.) to encourage ongoing self-assessment, support progress tracking, and prompt deeper reflection on how course concepts are being used in real-world contexts.
- Enhance eCourses to accommodate different learning styles (e.g., audio versions, interactive case studies, demonstration videos, etc.) to help bridge the gap between theory and application.

Facilitate opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement (e.g., networking events, mentorship circles, digital platforms, etc.) to increase engagement and strengthen community ties within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Context

The entrepreneurial journey is inherently unpredictable, with challenges that test not only technical expertise but also interpersonal skills and the ability to adapt. Mentorship is well recognized as a critical part of developing the skills needed for success, as entrepreneurship training is deeply rooted in “learning by doing” approaches.¹ Despite its importance, a critical aspect of mentorship often goes overlooked: the skills and training required to be an effective mentor or mentee. Simply matching individuals based on expertise or seniority does not guarantee meaningful outcomes. Past research has also highlighted the importance of supporting entrepreneurs in developing psychological skills such as resilience for managing high-pressure environments and achieving personal and entrepreneurial outcomes.²

Launched in 2021, the MindFrame Connect program, developed by Dalhousie University and funded by the Future Skills Centre, was designed to provide mentees and mentors with the training needed to foster more effective mentoring relationships in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, while also equipping entrepreneurs with tools and resources to strengthen their resilience. Delivered virtually and in-person, the MindFrame Connect program offers asynchronous eCourses and synchronous workshops on topics such as Principles of Mentorship, Principles of Menteeship, and Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs. The program has delivered over 180 workshops, attracting about 6,000 attendees, alongside 498 enrollments in its eCourses.

This evaluation builds on the previous interim evaluation of the MindFrame program, which examined data from program learning sessions conducted in 2022–2023. The interim evaluation highlighted that there was a lack of formal design and assessment of mentorship within the entrepreneurial context, and even less examination of the needs and preferences of diverse entrepreneurs.³ The recommendations called for developing a more robust framework capable of assessing skill development before and after program participation, including developing a clear implementation strategy to ensure responses are effectively monitored.

Expanding on those insights, this report analyzes data from synchronous and asynchronous sessions held between January 2023 and December 2024. It offers an assessment of the program reach, outcomes, and lessons learned during this period, with additional focus on understanding the experience of diverse groups using disaggregated data. During this period, participation across all topics and modalities included 1,495 attendees for the Principles of Menteeship workshop, 767 for the Principles of Mentorship workshop, and 1,379 for the Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs workshop. Enrolment in the corresponding eCourses included 197 for Principles of Menteeship, 191 for Principles of Mentorship, and 92 for Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs. Due to limitations in registration data, as will be discussed in this report, it is not possible to determine the number of unique participants across these sessions. The findings draw on a variety of data sources, including post-workshop surveys, pre- and post-eCourse

surveys, a post-program survey, focus groups with mentees and mentors, and interviews with program partners.

Mentorship

Mentorship serves as a vital support system in entrepreneurship and plays a crucial role in transferring valuable knowledge, guiding entrepreneurs through unwritten rules, and fostering essential networks that pave the way for success.^{4, 5, 6, 7} Recognizing that many entrepreneurial skills are tacit and often best acquired by experience, mentorship is impactful as it emphasizes “learning by doing” as a core method of development.⁸ Typically, this involves pairing a mentor with seniority or specialized expertise with a mentee seeking to benefit from their insights and experience. These relationships can have a profound impact, fostering skill development, building self-efficacy, and increasing confidence.⁹

Mentorship differs from coaching, which is more performance-oriented, as well as sponsorship, which generally entails active advocacy. However, clear definitions and competencies for mentorship remain underdeveloped.^{10, 11, 12} While some studies have drawn emphasis to the importance of individual mentor characteristics (e.g., knowledge, attitudes and behaviour),¹³ and others have outlined structured processes for mentoring, including business coaching scorecards, there are significant gaps in understanding what forms of mentorship work best for different entrepreneurs.¹⁴ Existing research has been more focused on case studies,^{15, 16, 17} rather than broader theoretical frameworks or the needs of equity-deserving groups.^{18, 19}

While mentorship is widely recognized as valuable, the essential skills and preparation needed to be an effective mentor or mentee are often overlooked. Effective mentorship requires the capacity to build trust, provide constructive feedback, and adapt approaches to diverse needs and circumstances.²⁰ For mentees, success depends on active participation, clear goal-setting, and the skills to leverage mentorship for personal and professional growth.²¹ However, many programs lack structured frameworks to cultivate these competencies, leaving much of the potential in mentorship relationships untapped. Addressing this gap requires a shift in focus toward equipping mentors and mentees with the tools and training needed to maximize the value of their interactions. By doing so, mentorship programs can foster deeper, more impactful relationships that position entrepreneurs for success.²² Indeed, research shows that effective mentoring can contribute to the development of marketing, finance, and people management skills.²³

MindFrame Connect has carried out in-depth research to shape program design, delivery, and evaluation, with the goal of responding to gaps and needs in Canada’s entrepreneurial landscape. The research has centred on mentorship, mental health, and skills development. A broad scoping review of nearly 10,000 sources, 276 of which were tied to entrepreneurship, led to the following main findings:

- Ideal mentors are respectful, responsive, empathetic, and empowering. They bring expertise, experiential knowledge and strong communication skills. They should be prepared, organized, accountable, reflective, and learning-oriented.
- Ideal mentor-mentee relationships are built on trust, vulnerability, open communication, and support.
- Mentorship is mutually beneficial. Mentors often experience personal and professional growth, empowerment, and skills development. Mentees benefit from improved well-being, personal development, confidence, self-esteem, and work-related outcomes. When mentorship pairings are incompatible or poorly managed, it can lead to negative outcomes such as anxiety, distress, and emotional exhaustion.
- Equity-deserving groups require different mentoring strategies. Building trust and creating space for open dialogue about issues like race and discrimination are essential. Fostering high-quality relationships may call for strategies such as emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and understanding intercultural communication.

Resilience

Resilience is equally crucial in the context of entrepreneurship, as it enables entrepreneurs to adapt to adversity, recover from setbacks, and maintain focus under pressure. More than a capacity for enduring hardship, resilience equips entrepreneurs with the mindset to reframe adversity as an opportunity. This perspective shifts the focus from potential threats to manageable challenges, fostering proactive behaviours such as innovation, problem-solving, and strategic decision-making. Resilience not only acts as a safeguard against burnout, but also drives sustained business success. It equips entrepreneurs with the mindset and tools needed to navigate the volatility inherent in starting and running a business.²⁴ Research further shows that resilience is associated with improved mental well-being, as it helps to buffer the pressures and difficulties that entrepreneurs face on a daily basis.²⁵

Research consistently underscores the importance of resilience in entrepreneurship, especially since entrepreneurs must often contend with uncertain and rapidly changing environments. For example, a Vancouver-based study found resilience to be a key trait for driving venture success among startups. Entrepreneurs who demonstrated a greater willingness to take risks were better positioned to introduce innovative products and services, seize opportunities, disrupt existing industries, and adapt to changing markets.²⁶ Similarly, a study of immigrant entrepreneurs found that those who exhibited greater resilience were more successful in adapting to the changes ushered by the COVID-19 pandemic. These immigrant entrepreneurs showed a propensity for innovation by integrating technologies to enhance business processes, undertake unique marketing approaches, mobilizing diverse resources, and leveraging their social networks.²⁷

Drawing on these insights, MindFrame Connect aimed to strengthen areas often overlooked in entrepreneurship mentorship. First, many mentors are expected to provide guidance without receiving proper training or resources, which can make it difficult to support mentees effectively. Secondly, entrepreneurs often need help building skills like resilience to manage

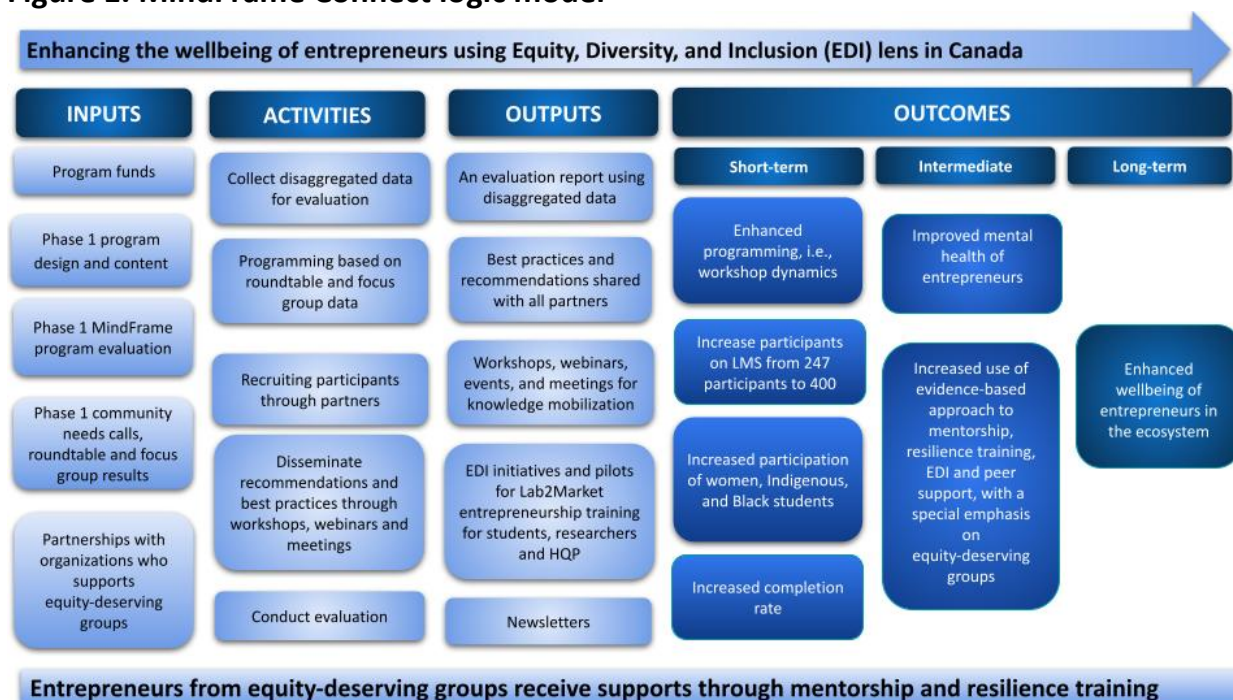
stress and challenges, which can have a direct impact on their personal growth and business success.

Program Overview

MindFrame Connect, an initiative launched by Dalhousie University in partnership with Globalive Capital, Incubate Innovate Network of Canada (I-INC), and Toronto Metropolitan University's Diversity Institute, with funding from the Future Skills Centre (FSC), was designed to enhance the skills and resilience of entrepreneurs and mentors in Canada, aiming to contribute to a stronger, more adaptive entrepreneurial ecosystem. With a focus on upskilling entrepreneurs, MindFrame Connect emphasizes building resilience as a core capability while supporting mentors and mentees to improve their ability to foster meaningful and impactful relationships. By addressing gaps in mentorship training and resilience-building, MindFrame Connect aims to foster a robust environment where entrepreneurs and their supporters can thrive.

Figure 1 illustrates the logic framework outlining how the program is designed to improve the well-being of entrepreneurs, with a particular focus on equity-deserving groups. It traces the program's progression from inputs, such as funding, partnerships with organizations supporting equity-deserving entrepreneurs, and insights from community consultations, to activities including the creation of tailored programming, hosting workshops and webinars, and sharing knowledge through events. Outputs such as evaluation reports, best practices, and increased engagement with program resources aim to achieve short-term outcomes like higher participation rates, enhanced completion rates, and improved workshop dynamics. In the long term, these efforts seek to build resilience, strengthen mentorship and training practices, and create a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Canada.

Figure 1. MindFrame Connect logic model



Scaling journey

MindFrame Connect undertook a discovery process involving 150 individuals from the entrepreneurial community in Canada. Insights from these interviews culminated in a draft manuscript titled *Mentoring Innovators*, which now serves as the cornerstone of MindFrame Connect's mentorship programming. The program also collaborated with academic experts, leveraging existing research, entrepreneurship literature, and established best practices. A scoping review was conducted to examine mentorship dynamics across various domains, following industry-leading guidelines. This process began with an initial search of 9,636 sources, which were rigorously screened. Ultimately, 276 articles were selected based on their relevance to the content, context, setting, and population.²⁸

In September 2021, MindFrame Connect launched its pilot program at Dalhousie University. The following month, it introduced synchronous workshops across Canada, focusing on the Principles of Mentorship, Principles of Menteeship, and Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs. These workshops were delivered in partnership with over 60 organizations, including accelerators, incubators, venture capital firms, and academic institutions. The training content was presented in regional roadshows in Alberta, Quebec, Ontario, and Nova Scotia to enhance engagement and accessibility.

By November 2021, the program expanded to include a video series featuring the journeys and experiences of entrepreneurs, with a focus on mentorship and resilience. These resources laid the foundation for the development of asynchronous learning. In January 2023, MindFrame Connect launched three eCourses: Principles of Menteeship, Principles of Mentorship, and

Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs. These courses, offered free of charge, were designed to support entrepreneurs and mentorship practitioners alike. To further expand its reach, MindFrame Connect partnered with organizations such as the Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development (CEED), Together@Dal, and Lab2Market, among others.

MindFrame Connect's partners

Box 1. Core Partners

Future Skills Centre (FSC). FSC is a forward-thinking hub for research and collaboration focused on equipping Canadian residents for employment success. Partnering with organizations across Canada, FSC identifies, tests, measures and shares innovative approaches to skill development. Established by a consortium comprising Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, FSC is funded through the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. FSC provided funding for the MindFrame Connect program as part of its commitment to fostering innovative solutions.

Globalive Capital. Globalive Capital, led by Anthony Lacavera, Brice Scheschuk, and Simon Lockie, is a strategic investment firm with over 70 years of combined experience. Known for its entrepreneur-friendly approach, Globalive has founded, operated, and invested in over 100 ventures, including WIND Mobile, sold to Shaw Communications for \$1.6 billion. Globalive played a key role in founding MindFrame Connect, with Brice Scheschuk co-leading the initiative, drawing on his insights into mentorship within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Dalhousie University. Dalhousie University is Atlantic Canada's leading research-intensive university. Located in the heart of Halifax, Nova Scotia, with an Agricultural Campus in Truro/Bible Hill, Dalhousie University is a truly national and international university, with more than one-half of the university's 20,000-plus students coming from outside the province. In addition to being one of the partners that created MindFrame Connect, Dalhousie's Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development, and the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation developed MindFrame Connect: Advanced Mentorship Skills. This course delivered a university-level micro-credential that allowed certification of advanced-level mentors.

Incubate Innovate Network of Canada (I-INC). I-INC is an internationally connected pan-Canadian network of high-performance university-linked accelerators and incubators. I-INC creates an ecosystem for the efficient commercialization of university-based and science and technology-enabled innovation. Founded in 2014, the network has expanded to include 13 universities across Canada. I-INC provided the original scope of work for MindFrame Connect by proposing a national program delivery platform that would improve local, regional and national delivery capacity for high-growth entrepreneurship and mentorship skill development.

Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). Formerly known as Ryerson University, TMU is Canada's leader in innovative, career-oriented education. Urban, culturally diverse and inclusive, TMU is home to more than 48,000 students, including 2,900 Master's and PhD students, 4,000 faculty and staff, and over 225,000 alumni worldwide. TMU is also home to the Diversity Institute, a research hub and the evaluation arm of the Future Skills Centre, where program evaluations for MindFrame Connect have been conducted.

To broaden its delivery, MindFrame Connect has partnered with 61 diverse organizations, more than one-half of which are incubators or accelerators, which have collectively provided over 180 synchronous and asynchronous workshops focused on mentorship, menteeship, and entrepreneurial resilience. On average, each partner facilitated four workshops, with York University delivering the highest number at 16 workshops. Box 2 highlights the top delivery partners.

Box 2. Top Delivery Partners

York University. York University is a top international teaching and research university and a driving force for positive change. Located in Toronto, Ontario, York University is empowered by a welcoming and diverse community with a uniquely global perspective, preparing students for their long-term career and personal success. Its innovation hub, YSpace, is dedicated to advancing entrepreneurship and innovation by offering resources, mentorship, and programming to support startups and entrepreneurs. MindFrame Connect was implemented at YSpace as part of its mission to enhance mentorship and entrepreneurial skills and served as the primary mentorship training program for Schulich Startups, an initiative of the Schulich School of Business.

Creative Destruction Lab (CDL). CDL is a global startup program for seed-stage, science-based companies. The program employs an objectives-based mentoring process by a selected group of accomplished entrepreneurs, angel investors, economists, and scientists. CDL inspires founders, students, and mentors, increases labour productivity by helping new innovations move from the lab into the economy. It enhances job opportunities for students at the schools that operate CDL sites. CDL works closely with Brice Scheschuk, co-founder of MindFrame Connect.

Dalhousie University. Combining innovative research, meaningful teaching and a deep sense of social responsibility, Dalhousie University is located in Nova Scotia, Canada (Mi'kma'ki) with four campuses in Halifax and Truro, and satellite locations in Yarmouth and Saint John, New Brunswick. Their broad range of academic programs attract and retain a diverse mix of incredible students, scholars, researchers and staff who work together with interdisciplinary perspectives and a focus on service.

Prince's Trust. Prince's Trust helps equity-deserving youth and Veterans secure meaningful employment through training and mentorship. They partner with employers and community

organizations to provide free skill-building programs and mentoring that prepare them for the transforming world of work. Their work is inspired by the vision of our President and Founder, His Majesty King Charles III, guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and powered by generous donors. Between 2021 and 2023, Prince's Trust hosted nine workshops with MindFrame Connect.

COVE. COVE connects people, ideas, resources and assets to propel solutions and sustainable growth for Canada's marine sector. A waterfront facility in Canada's deepest harbour provides the best space in the world to turn ideas into commercial solutions. Technology companies, post-secondary researchers, and marine-based service businesses come to the COVE facility for programming, and short- and long-term tenancies. COVE facilitated nine workshops with MindFrame Connect between 2021 and 2023. In its first year, MindFrame Connect worked with COVE, Dal Innovates, and the Emera ideaHUB to run its pilot program in Atlantic Canada.

Evaluation Methods

Inclusive Entrepreneurship Competency Framework (IECF)

Entrepreneurship training programs have proliferated in recent years. However, they are often developed without clearly identified goals and objectives or evaluation frameworks to assess their impact. Without a robust framework, it is challenging to determine whether a program has met its intended outcomes or supported participants in achieving meaningful progress. Although, there is extensive research on the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs (e.g., their personality traits, cognitive abilities, and knowledge)^{29, 30} as well as the processes they use to identify opportunities and secure resources,^{31, 32} this evidence is rarely applied to the design of entrepreneurial training programs, particularly in addressing the documented barriers they face and the systems required to support them.^{33, 34, 35}

Competencies encompass the integrated combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and personality traits required to perform tasks effectively and efficiently,^{36, 37, 38} but are seldom formally applied to entrepreneurship training programs. Moreover, the definition and assessment of individual competencies vary widely. Many programs reference broad topics, such as business planning, financial literacy, marketing, digital skills, and networking, without clearly identifying the competencies required for success.³⁹ While these areas receive considerable attention, they are often introduced without a clear articulation of the underlying skills and behaviours that should be developed. For example, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) may be included as a training topic, but the competency it requires, such as effectively managing and analyzing customer interactions to enhance satisfaction, foster loyalty, and drive business growth, may be overlooked or insufficiently addressed.

By defining and evaluating competencies, entrepreneurship programs can align their design with measurable outcomes, ensuring participants are equipped with the knowledge and capacities they need to succeed. Researchers and practitioners have developed a range of frameworks using different approaches. Some have adopted a progression approach, emphasizing competencies required at each stage of entrepreneurship^{40, 41, 42, 43} and others have focused on sectors (e.g., food industry,⁴⁴ sustainability entrepreneurship,⁴⁵ financial sector,⁴⁶ technology,⁴⁷ institutions,⁴⁸ etc.), or different demographics of entrepreneurs (e.g., women,^{49, 50} small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) managers,⁵¹ youth,⁵² etc.), each offering structured guidelines for developing the skills necessary for innovation, business creation, and adaptability across various industries. However, many of these models address entrepreneurial competencies from a singular perspective, often overlooking the intersecting challenges faced by diverse entrepreneurs in an increasingly globalized and complex environment. As such, there is a need for dynamic and multilayered competency frameworks that reflect the realities of diverse entrepreneurial experiences and support inclusive, context-specific approaches to training and development.

Additionally, previous research has shown that entrepreneurs are often directed to programs that do not align with their stage of business development, sector, or demographic-specific needs.⁵³ For example, entrepreneurs in the ideation phase require different forms of support than those who are pre-revenue, investment-ready, or scaling ventures.⁵⁴ Similarly, while many incubators focus on tech startups, women are more likely to operate businesses in sectors such as retail, services, or hospitality.^{55, 56} Demographic factors also matter as, for example, women may have different preferences and support needs than men, and immigrant women may require tailored resources to address the unique challenges they face.^{57, 58} Past projects have shown that misalignment between program design and participant needs can have detrimental effects. For instance, placing women in programs intended for investment-ready ventures when they are still in the ideation or pre-revenue stage can not only fail to deliver intended outcomes but may also undermine confidence and hinder future success.⁵⁹

To address the need for clearly defined competencies tailored to the realities of diverse entrepreneurs, and to support more targeted and effective program evaluation, the Diversity Institute has developed the Inclusive Entrepreneurship Competency Framework (IECF). This framework draws on extensive research in entrepreneurship, including studies on entrepreneurial intent, cognition, skills, and supports.^{60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65} It also reflects the practical experience designing and evaluating training programs for diverse audiences, such as the Black African and Caribbean Entrepreneurship Leadership (BACEL) program,⁶⁶ the Capital Skills program,⁶⁷ and Lab2Market.⁶⁸

The IECF serves as a guide for designing, implementing, and evaluating entrepreneurship programs in a systematic and meaningful way. It is designed to support better alignment between the needs of aspiring and developing entrepreneurs and the services and supports provided. The framework outlines core competencies essential at five key stages of the entrepreneurial journey: Ideation, Validation, Launch, Growth, and Sustainability. It also accounts for sector-specific competencies in industries such as manufacturing, technology, healthcare, finance, retail, services, and construction. Importantly, it incorporates specialized competencies that reflect the distinct experiences and needs of equity-deserving groups, including women, Black and racialized individuals, Indigenous Peoples, immigrants, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities. This evidence-based approach can be leveraged to enhance program design and delivery, contributing to more equitable, relevant, and targeted outcomes across the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Learning agenda

The learning agenda outlines the key questions guiding the evaluation of the MindFrame Connect program:

Program delivery

1. How effectively has MindFrame Connect recruited and engaged entrepreneurs from equity-deserving groups?

2. What challenges or barriers do entrepreneurs face in accessing, participating in, and applying the learnings from MindFrame Connect's eCourses and workshops?

Program outcomes

3. To what extent has MindFrame Connect's program content strengthened the competencies entrepreneurs need to build effective mentorship relationships and develop resilience?
4. How has MindFrame Connect contributed to improving the mental health and overall well-being of entrepreneurs through its mentorship and resilience-building programming?
5. To what extent were participants satisfied with the MindFrame Connect program?

Data sources and sample sizes

The data sources below provide detailed insights into the evaluation of the MindFrame Connect program from January 2023 to December 2024. These sources include surveys and focus groups targeting participants, as well as interviews with program partners. Each source was designed to capture aspects of program delivery, participant experiences, and outcomes.

Table 1. Quantitative data sources and sample sizes

Data sources	Description	Principles of Menteeship	Principles of Mentorship	Resilient Skills
Post-workshop survey	Surveys for workshop attendees were administered by MindFrame from January 2023 to November 2024.	25	63	91
Pre-eCourse survey	Pre-eCourse surveys for participants were distributed by MindFrame before course commencement, covering the period from January 2023 to November 2024.	79	79	26
Post-eCourse survey	Post-eCourse surveys were administered by MindFrame to participants after course completion, also spanning January 2023 to November 2024.	41	19	7
Post-program survey	Surveys for all program participants were conducted by the Diversity Institute from September to December 2024.	16	21	21

Note: As some respondents engaged with more than one workshop or eCourse, these figures do not reflect the number of unique individuals.

Post-workshop survey. The post-workshop survey was designed to collect detailed insights into participants’ experiences with the synchronous learning sessions conducted in 2023–2024. It aimed to assess participants’ expectations, levels of engagement with the content, and overall perceptions of the workshops. In addition to evaluating the workshops, the survey explored participants’ interest in supplementary resources, such as newsletters, learning tools, and additional materials to facilitate ongoing learning and application of workshop concepts.

Pre- and post-eCourse surveys. The pre-eCourse surveys establish a baseline for participants’ knowledge, expectations, and preparedness. For mentees, the focus is on readiness for mentorship, clarity of goals, and familiarity with mentorship principles. For mentors, the surveys examine confidence in mentoring skills, expectations for the process, and their ability to support mentees. Participants in the resilience eCourse are assessed on their understanding of resilience concepts, awareness of well-being resources, and familiarity with frameworks for building resilience. Post-eCourse surveys revisit these areas to measure improvements and outcomes.

Post-program survey. The survey is designed to evaluate the experiences, outcomes, and satisfaction of participants in the MindFrame Connect program. It aims to gather comprehensive insights into how the program impacts entrepreneurial skills, mentorship and menteeship capabilities, resilience development, and overall program satisfaction. Additionally, the survey explores the demographic and business profile of participants to explore variations in experiences for equity-deserving groups.

Table 2. Qualitative data sources and sample sizes

Data sources	Sample size	Collection Dates
Partner interviews	6 Lab2Market Saint Mary’s University COVE YSpace Accelerator King’s Trust Canada Next Canada	Sept. –Nov. 2024
Principles of Menteeship focus group	4	Nov. 2024
Principles of Mentorship focus group	3	Nov. 2024

Partner interviews. Semi-structured interviews with delivery partners were conducted to gather insights into the implementation and outcomes of the MindFrame Connect program.

The questions focused on whether program activities aligned with initial plans and explored reasons for any deviations. Respondents were asked about the program's success in engaging equity-deserving groups and the factors that contributed to or hindered this success. The interviews also sought suggestions for improving the program to better address participant needs, as well as reflections on challenges encountered during implementation and the strategies used to resolve them.

Mentee focus group. A focus group was conducted to evaluate the Principles of Menteeship within the MindFrame Connect program, aiming to understand its impact on mentees' experiences and outcomes. The discussion explored the relevance and accessibility of course content, the usability of the online learning platform, and participants' reflections on their role as mentees and the mentor-mentee relationship. Insights were gathered on how well the program addressed participants' entrepreneurial needs and barriers. By focusing on these areas, the session sought to identify key strengths, challenges, and opportunities to enhance future program iterations.

Mentor focus group. The focus group was held to gather more in-depth insights into the Principles of Mentorship component of the program, and participants' perspectives on the design, delivery, and effectiveness of the training. The discussion sought to assess the accessibility and functionality of the online learning platform, the coverage of the course topics, and the program's ability to address mentors' needs and barriers. Additionally, the focus group explored the program's approach to fostering effective mentorship practices and identifying areas for improvement.

Data limitations

- **Low response rates** across all surveys and focus groups posed significant challenges to the evaluation process and therefore caution must be exercised when interpreting the results. These low rates impacted the generalizability and representativeness of the data, as findings may primarily reflect the experiences and perspectives of the most engaged participants rather than the full participant population. Moreover, as the registration process was managed externally for synchronous learning workshops, which comprise the majority of participants in MindFrame Connect, the ability to target all participants for surveys and conduct follow-ups was severely limited.
- **Reliance on self-reported data** introduces potential biases such as social desirability bias, recall bias, and varied interpretations of survey or discussion questions. These biases can affect the accuracy and reliability of reported outcomes, further constraining the depth of the evaluation's conclusions.
- **The lack of a gender and equity lens in earlier survey tools**, including post-workshop surveys and eCourse pre- and post-surveys, represents a critical limitation. Without disaggregated demographic data or questions intended to capture the experience of equity-deserving groups, it is difficult to understand the diverse experiences of participants or gain insights into the type of interventions that effectively respond to the systemic barriers they encounter.

Findings

This section presents the key findings derived from the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the evaluation. The insights are organized according to the program's learning agenda, focusing on five critical areas:

Program delivery:

1. **Participation and engagement** examine the program's effectiveness in attracting and engaging participants.
2. **Challenges and barriers** identify the obstacles entrepreneurs faced in engaging fully with MindFrame Connect's synchronous and asynchronous learning formats.

Program outcomes:

3. **Competencies for entrepreneurial success** explores the development of key entrepreneurial competencies using data from the post-program survey distributed to all participants, pre- and post-program surveys from eCourse participants, and post-workshop feedback from those who engaged in synchronous learning.
4. **Mental health and overall well-being** assess how mentorship and resilience-focused programming helped entrepreneurs overcome business-related challenges and interpersonal dynamics.
5. **Program satisfaction** provides an overview of participants' overall experiences with the program, including relevance and clarity of the content and the program's alignment with individual goals and business needs.

Program delivery

Participation and engagement

Table 3 summarizes participation figures across the different types of sessions offered by MindFrame Connect from January 2023 to December 2024. However, a complete picture of overall participation cannot be provided due to two critical limitations:

(1) Asynchronous workshop courses were delivered through partner organizations and, as a result, program administrators did not have access to registration data.

(2) The design of registration for eCourses did not consider the demographic and business information (e.g., age, equity-deserving group, sector, business size, etc.). Although the post-program survey was designed to address this gap, a low response rate limits its generalizability.

Large completion numbers for the synchronous workshops are attributed to the range of delivery formats, which included large-scale sessions for hundreds of business students as well as a more narrowed focus for incubators and accelerators. Many participants attended multiple

sessions, making it difficult to distinguish unique participants due to the lack of registration data.

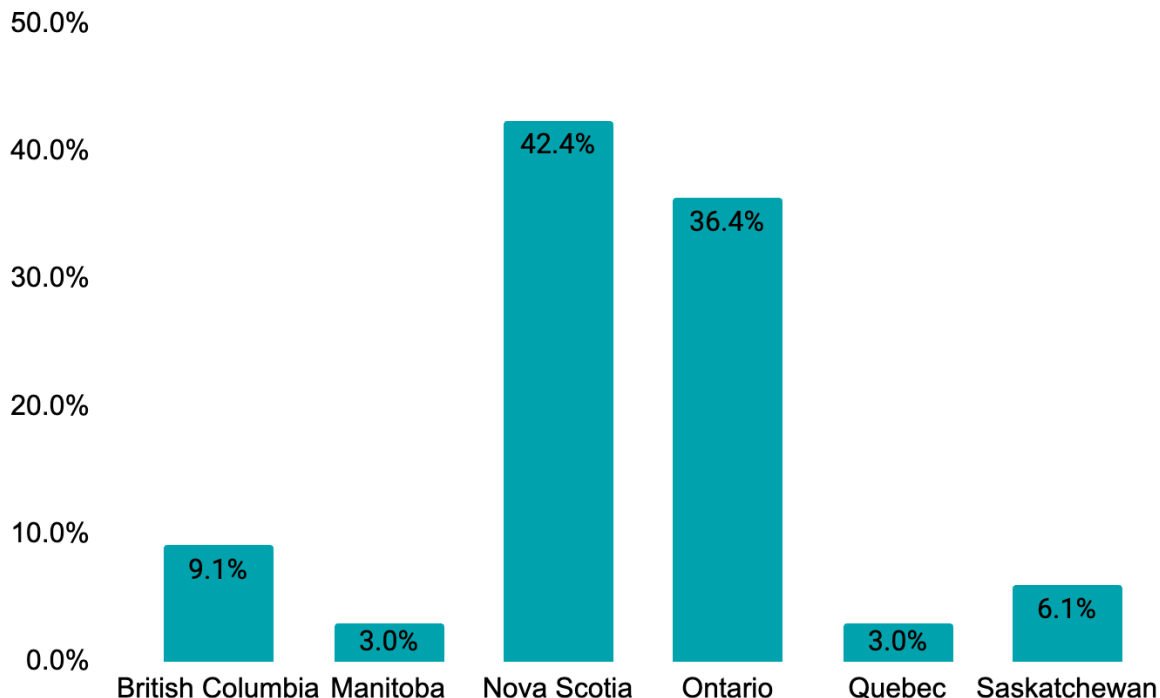
Table 3. Participation by program session and delivery format (January 2023 - December 2024)

Program Session	Number of Participants
Principles of Menteeship workshop	1,495
Principles of Mentorship workshop	767
Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs workshop	1,379
Principles of Menteeship eCourse	197
Principles of Mentorship eCourse	191
Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs eCourse	92

Note: As some participants engaged with more than one workshop or eCourse, these figures do not reflect the number of unique individuals.

While the post-program survey was designed to address the information gaps in registration, a low response rate (n=39) means that the findings should be interpreted with caution. Among those who completed the survey and responded to the question, 37.5% (n=15) identified as women, 25.0% (n=10) as immigrants or newcomers, 15.0% (n=6) as Black or racialized, 15.0% (n=6) as persons with disabilities, 5.0% (n=2) as 2SLGBTQI+, and 2.5% (n=1) as Indigenous Peoples. One-half of the respondents (n=19) were between the ages of 40 and 49, followed by those aged 30 to 39, (21.1%, n=8)), and under 30 (15.8%, n=6). Older age groups were less represented, with 10.5% (n=4) of respondents aged 50 to 64 and only 2.6% (n=1) aged 65 or older. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of representation across provinces, with the majority of respondents based in Nova Scotia (42.4%, n=14) and Ontario (36.4%, n=12).

Figure 2. Geographic breakdown of program participants



Excluding those who did not respond to the survey question, the majority of respondents (72.2%, n=26) identified as entrepreneurs owning at least 51% of their business, while a smaller proportion (5.6%, n=2) reported equal ownership. Most indicated they were working full time on their businesses (72.2%, n=21), were self-employed (73.1%, n=19), earned less than \$50,000 in revenue (80.0%, n=20), and operated businesses that had been running for less than two years (57.1%, n=16). Respondents represented a broad range of sectors, with the largest share operating in the service sector (32.1%, n=9), followed by technology (25.0%, n=7) and retail (10.7%, n=3). Smaller proportions were involved in finance (7.1%, n=2) and health care (3.6%, n=1), while 21.4% (n=6) selected “other” sectors.

Accessibility

Interviews with program partners suggested that MindFrame Connect was widely perceived as accessible to a broad audience. Partners emphasized that the program’s free, flexible delivery and broad availability enabled individuals from diverse backgrounds and financial circumstances to participate. As one partner noted, *“the fact that this was free and available to the ecosystem went such a long way”* (Partner Interview). Another highlighted that, *“with no barriers to entry,”* the program was accessible to international students, permanent residents, and individuals on temporary visas (Partner Interview). This perspective echoed in focus group discussions among participants who engaged in the eCourses. They emphasized that the program’s no-cost, self-paced format was especially valuable for startups, which often operate with limited time, funding, and capacity.

Inclusive programming for diverse groups

Feedback from partners and participants pertaining to inclusivity was largely positive, with the majority noting a welcoming environment and a sense that diverse perspectives were valued. But there were some concerns raised related to “cultural differences,” suggesting that some presentations may not have resonated equally with all participants. This feedback underscores the importance of recognizing that entrepreneurs have varied learning styles and communication preferences; for example, some may respond better to less direct approaches.

Challenges and barriers

This section examines key challenges and barriers that emerged during focus group discussions with Principles of Menteeship and Mentorship participants, as well as interviews with program implementers, which may have hindered their full engagement in the program or ability to apply learnings.

Limited support for processing program content

While qualitative data suggests that MindFrame Connect offered valuable and detailed material, interviews and focus groups also highlighted a lack of additional supports and accountability mechanisms to help participants effectively process and apply the content. eCourse Mentee learners expressed a desire for more engaging formats, including audio version of the course material, describing it as “*having notes being read back to you*,” as “*some things were really new topics*” and the course was “*very detailed*” (Mentee Focus Group). One mentee also noted that a check-in or other form of accountability would have helped them track and measure their progress (Mentee Focus Group).

Similar sentiments were shared by participants in the Principles for Mentorship eCourse. As one reflected:

This is not a program to have exams or tests after each module, but definitely a booklet to reflect with some questions, maybe assignments, something to reflect more on the content, something to trigger someone to sit down and write down their takeaways from the program would really help digest and process. (Mentor Focus Group)

Program partners also remarked that, while hour-long sessions were useful, offering additional time and more opportunities for Q&A would have allowed participants to absorb and engage with the material (Partner Interview) in a better way.

Varied learning styles and expectations

Some participants expressed interest in more practical guidance and real-world examples. Suggestions included incorporating stories, case studies, and demonstration videos, such as how an entrepreneur might approach different types of mentors, including examples of communication style and body language. Participants reported that this kind of applied guidance would help move beyond theoretical knowledge and offer more actionable insights.

While program partners recognized the value of meeting diverse learning needs, they also acknowledged the difficulty of doing so effectively, particularly in large group settings. One program partner explained:

What I've learned about working with entrepreneurs and founders lately is you have to meet them where they are. You can't expect them to hold these expectations that you're setting, because they have a million other things going on. So, you just need to be able to meet them like week by week, what they need right now, and just work from there, rather than having more of a general mentorship. (Staff 3, Partner Interview)

Another partner, however, highlighted the challenges of customizing content at scale. With a cohort of around 150 participants, experiences naturally varied: *“you're going to get some people who find the utility and the content stronger than others.”* In some cases, as one partner shared, participants who had previously encountered similar material may not have found the content as relevant the second time, even though it remained useful overall.

Limited opportunities for connection and peer engagement

eCourse learners highlighted a lack of in-person sessions and communication platforms as barriers to fostering deeper connections, stronger networking, and effective mentorship opportunities. While participants from the Principles of Menteeship eCourse acknowledged that scheduling constraints can make in-person sessions challenging, they emphasized the value of experiential learning, and the importance of face-to-face interactions for skills taught by the training. One participant suggested that even a few in-person sessions during the program would strengthen mentorship, encourage peer learning, and support relationship-building. Others shared that being physically present at an event creates a stronger sense of immersion and belonging, helping participants feel more connected to the entrepreneurial environment (Mentee Focus Group). Beyond in-person engagement, mentors also pointed to the absence of a dedicated communication platform, such as a forum or private group, as a missed opportunity for exchanging ideas and enhancing the overall learning experience (Mentor Focus Group).

Program Outcomes

Competencies for entrepreneurial success

This section presents findings from the post-program surveys, assessing the competencies developed through the program across business stages, industries, and at the individual level. It also includes results from the pre- and post-eCourse learning surveys, highlighting changes in knowledge, understanding, and skills among participants of the Principles of Menteeship, Principles of Mentorship, and Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs eCourses.

Business stages

Out of the 39 survey respondents, for those who identified as being an entrepreneur (n=22), the distribution by business stage is as follows: Ideation (13% of respondents, n=3), Validation (17.4%, n=4), Launch (47.8%, n=11), Growth (13%, n=3), and Sustainability (8.7%, n=2).

Ideation stage competencies

Only three respondents identified as being in the Ideation stage and completed the related competency questions in the post-program data. Nine competencies, grouped into personal development and identifying resources and support, were assessed. Table 4 provides the mean scores for each competency. However, the small sample size significantly limits the generalizability of these findings.

- **Personal development:** High mean scores were observed for self-awareness, confidence, self-care, communication, and developing an entrepreneurial mindset (4.33 for all).
 - Mentee focus group participants reported that the program shifted their perspective by encouraging a more reflective approach to receiving feedback, allowing them to *“listen to the points that [mentors] give before feeling the need to action on it right away”* (Mentee Focus Group). They also reported increased mental and emotional resilience, improved problem-solving skills, and greater confidence when engaging with individuals in positions of authority.
 - Mentor focus group participants emphasized how the program improved their mentorship approaches, with one noting that it helped them *“find the right balance between being available when needed and ensuring [their] mentees develop independence”* (Mentor Focus Group). They explained that the training not only encourages *“facilitation and self-discovery,”* but also *“build[s] trust, to make it easier for mentees to share openly and fully engage in the mentorship process”* (Mentor Focus Group).
- **Identifying resources and support:** Survey respondents reported improvements in their ability to locate information, identify incubators and accelerators, build relationships and social capital, and their awareness of financial resources (4.00 for all).
 - Mentee focus group discussions noted that the program introduced them to new business concepts, helping them expand their knowledge base. They further remarked that the training contributed to professional and personal growth by equipping them with the knowledge needed to broaden their networks and build relationships with different types of mentors, including potential investors.

Table 4. Ideation stage competencies and mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=3)
Personal development	Self-awareness	Understanding of strengths, weaknesses, preferences, goals and aspiration	4.33

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=3)
	Confidence	The self-assurance to pursue ideas in the face of uncertainty and potential setbacks.	4.33
	Self-care	Taking action to preserve or improve one's own health and well-being.	4.33
	Communication	The ability to drive interpersonal communication, and to translate complex ideas for different audiences.	4.33
	Develop an entrepreneurial mindset	The ability to develop a set of attitudes, beliefs, and characteristics that enable individuals to start and grow a successful business/ startup.	4.33
Identifying resources and support	Locating information	Knowledge of where to find information on how to develop a business idea or grow a business; environmental scanning.	4.00
	Incubators and accelerators	Knowledge of the role of incubators and accelerators to the business development process.	4.00
	Financial resources support	Knowledge of different forms of financial support.	4.00
	Networking and social capital	Ability to build relationships with potential partners, mentors, and key stakeholders.	4.00

Validation stage competencies

Four respondents identified as being in the Validation stage and responded to the relevant post-program competency questions. The assessment covered nine competencies across three key areas: business model development, strategic planning, and financial landscape awareness. While the mean scores in Table 5 suggest the program offered some support in helping entrepreneurs evaluate the viability and potential profitability of their ideas, the limited number of responses restricts the ability to draw broad conclusions.

- Understanding and developing a business model:** Respondents reported moderate confidence in evaluating product market fit, business model development, and being able to identify customer segments, each competency receiving an average score of 3.50. Defining value propositions received the lowest score (2.50), highlighting a potential gap in this foundational aspect of business development.

- **Strategic planning:** Survey results indicate that participants struggled most with defining their startup or business purpose and setting clear goals, with both areas receiving the lowest average score in this category (3.00). Pitching received a slightly higher score of 3.67. It is notable that the competency related to positioning (i.e. being able to explain the characteristics that differentiate the product or service from competitors) contrasts with the low score for defining value propositions. This gap may reflect challenges in shifting from an internal or product-focused perspective to a more customer-centric approach.
- **Understanding financial landscape requirements:** The mean score for communicating financial need (2.50) suggests the program did not adequately equip participants with the skills required to assess and articulate their financial position and funding requirements.

Table 5. Validation stage competencies and mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=2 unless stated otherwise)
Understanding and developing a business model	Evaluate product market fit	Being able to define the distinctness of an idea. Identifying several possible market segments in which this innovation could be used to address issues.	3.50
	Business model development	The ability to develop and improve a business model.	3.50
	Identify customer segments	The ability to identify and target specific consumer groups.	3.50
	Define value proposition	The ability to clearly communicate the unique benefits and outcomes that the product or service offers to the target consumers.	2.50
Strategic planning	Define your startup/business purpose	The ability to write a vision statement, and a mission statement that define the startup's purpose.	3.00 (n=3)
	Goal setting and	To be able to articulate high-level objectives	3.00

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=2 unless stated otherwise)
	objective key results		
	Pitching	The ability to create and present a concise and compelling narrative for the startup concept.	3.67 (n=3)
	Positioning	The ability to explain the characteristics that differentiate the product or service from their competitors.	4.33 (n=3)
Understanding financial landscape requirements	Communicating financial needs	The ability to objectively assess and communicate one's financial position and needs.	2.50

Launch stage competencies

A total of 11 participants identified as being in the Launch stage, with Table 6 providing the mean scores for the nine competencies assessed under financial management, leadership and management, and interaction with others. Although the Launch stage had the highest number of responses, the sample size remains too small to draw conclusions.

- **Financial management:** In line with other finance-related competencies across stages, participants reported limited knowledge of investor types and abilities in drawing investors into the business (3.50). The low scores related to participants' ability to communicate financial needs and engage with financial experts suggest a need to strengthen mentorship approaches in this area, as supporting mentors and mentees in navigating financial conversations could enhance overall entrepreneurial readiness.
- **Leadership and management:** Planning and organizing received the highest mean score (4.09), followed by coping with challenges (4.00), coaching and mentoring (3.82), and leadership (3.64).
- **Interaction with others:** The ability to manage difficult or stressful interactions between people (3.91) received a moderate mean score, followed by the ability to influence others (3.73), team building and teamwork (3.73), and valuing diversity (3.18).

Table 6. Launch stage competencies and mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=11 unless stated otherwise)
Financial management	Investors	Knowledge of the types of investors in the ecosystem and ability to draw investors to one's business.	3.50 (n=10)
Leadership and management	Coaching & mentoring	The ability to help the team advance and thrive by providing feedback, guidance, and support.	3.82
	Leadership	The ability to promote organizational mission and goals, and guiding others on how to accomplish them.	3.64
	Planning & organizing	The capacity to organize thoughts and resources to accomplish objectives.	4.09
	Coping with challenges	The ability to make choices in ambiguous circumstances, where results are unpredictable, data is inadequate or unclear, or there is a possibility of unforeseen outcomes.	4.00
Interaction with others	Influencing others	The ability to influence others to feel enthusiastic and dedicated to the accomplishment of the organization's goals.	3.73
	Team building & Teamwork	The ability to promote cooperation and commitment within a team to achieve goals and deliver results.	3.73

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=11 unless stated otherwise)
	Valuing diversity	The ability to create a work environment that welcomes and values diversity.	3.18
	Tact	The ability to manage difficult or stressful interactions between people.	3.91

Growth stage competencies

A total of three participants identified as being in the Growth stage, and therefore the following results are not generalizable.

Table 7. Growth stage competencies and mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=2)
Grow revenue	Marketing: Developing a brand	The ability to create a unique value proposition for your product/service in the marketplace.	4.00
Grow team	Develop team culture and norms	The ability to establish shared values and behaviours that guide interactions and decision making within the team.	4.00
	Manage talent	The ability to manage the hiring, growth, and maintenance of talented individuals within the company.	4.00
	Manage partnerships	The ability to foster and maintain cooperative relationships with external stakeholders.	4.00

Sustainability stage competencies

A total of two participants identified as being in the Sustainability stage, with the results summarized in the table below.

Table 8. Sustainability stage competencies and mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Area	Skill	Competency	Mean Score (n=2)
Strategic management	Risk assessment and management	The ability to identify and handle possible risks that could have an impact on the achievement of the business goals.	4.00
	Partnership building	The ability to build connections with potential collaborators and important stakeholders.	4.00
	Strategic vision	The ability to see and grasp the big picture.	4.00
Corporate social responsibility	EDI practices	The ability to integrate humane principles and values into business activities across diverse contexts and communities in a reflective and critical manner	4.00

Industry and individual competencies

Table 9. Industry and individual competencies mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Industry Competencies	Industry	Mean Score	Number of Respondents
Empowerment and autonomy (both personal and economic)	All	3.67	6
Individual Competencies	Equity-deserving Group	Mean Score	Number of Respondents
Knowledge of anti-discrimination and inclusion policies	All	4.00	3
Work-life balance	Women	4.00	3

Identifying resources designed for diverse entrepreneurs	All	3.83	6
Language skills	Immigrants and newcomers	3.83	6
Cross-cultural competence	Immigrants, Black, and racialized	3.50	2
Self-care (The knowledge of impact of trauma, current mental health challenges and resources for support)	Immigrants, persons living with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ	3.00	1

Pre-post program survey results for asynchronous learning (eCourses)

In addition to the post-program survey shared with all MindFrame participants, MindFrame also distributed pre- and post-program surveys to individuals who completed the eCourse learning modules. Although no demographic information was collected, the tables below present the average competency scores for each eCourse topic. The number of respondents per topic are as follows: Mentorship eCourse (31 respondents for pre-program survey and 19 for post), Menteeship eCourse (pre: 79 and post: 41), and Resilience eCourse (pre: 26 and post: 7).

Table 10 provides the weighted average of the pre- and post-program survey scores for Principles of Mentorship, where participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements related to preparedness, confidence, and understanding of mentorship. The most notable increase (1.28 points) was in participants' understanding of mentor expectations, followed by understanding of power dynamics (1.16-point increase), being enabled with the frameworks or tools for managing their role as mentors (1.12-point increase), clear expectations on time management (1.05-point increase), being fully equipped to be a mentor (0.92), and confidence in creating psychologically safe environments (0.81).

Table 10. Mentorship eCourse mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Statement	Pre (n=31)	Post (n=19)
I feel fully equipped to be a mentor.	3.29	4.21
I have clear expectations of how my mentee and I will use our time together.	3.16	4.21
I am confident in my ability to create a psychologically	3.87	4.68

Statement	Pre (n=31)	Post (n=19)
safe environment in mentorship (e.g., delivering hard feedback or sharing personal struggles)		
I know what is expected of me as a mentor.	3.29	4.57
I have taken active steps to understand the power dynamics of a mentorship.	3.26	4.42
I have frameworks or tools I use when managing my role as a mentor.	3.09	4.21

While the survey results for Principles of Menteeship eCourse were more moderate than those for Mentorship, respondents reported increases in all assessed competencies. Understanding what is expected to be a mentee and how to identify an effective mentor saw the greatest increase (0.65 points both). This was followed by a 0.57 point increase in having a plan for how mentoring sessions would be used. Participants also reported a 0.40 point increase in setting goals and outcomes for their work with a mentor and a 0.38 point gain in confidence of their ability to logistically manage a mentoring relationship.

Table 11. Menteeship eCourse mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Statement	Pre (n=79)	Post (n=41)
I know what is expected of a mentee.	3.91	4.56
I have a plan for how my mentor sessions will be used.	3.77	4.34
I have clear goals and outcomes in mind for my work with a mentor.	3.97	4.37
I understand how to identify an effective mentor.	3.84	4.49
I am confident in my ability to manage a mentoring relationship, logistically.	4.11	4.49

Table 12 presents average survey results collected before and after the Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs eCourse. With the average overall change across the four statements assessed was about 0.54, the most notable improvement was 0.81 point increase in the extent to which participants reported having frameworks or tools to support their resilience. This was followed by confidence in their understanding of skills that support resilience for entrepreneurship (0.50 point increase), knowing where to seek resources for entrepreneurial well-being (0.44 point increase), and recognizing the value of developing resilience-related skills (0.40-point increase).

Table 12. Resilience eCourse mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Statement	Pre (n=26)	Post (n=7)
I feel confident in my understanding of the skills that support resilience as an entrepreneur.	3.92	4.42
I know where to seek resources for my well-being as an entrepreneur.	3.85	4.29
I understand the value of developing my skills for resilience as an entrepreneur.	4.46	4.86
I have frameworks or tools that support my resilience skills as an entrepreneur.	3.62	4.43

Mental health and overall well-being

Respondents were asked to rate their current mental well-being on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), with the average rating being 7.37. The post-program survey also explored participants' experiences with stress and access to mental health support. When asked how often they felt overwhelmed or stressed about their business, most respondents reported feeling this way either sometimes (31.8%, n=7), often (27.3%, n=6) or always (27.3%, n=6). A smaller proportion of participants indicated that they rarely felt overwhelmed (13.6%, n=3). In terms of resources, majority of participants (76.6%, n=22) reported having access to mental health and well-being support, while a sizable portion (23.4%, n=7) indicated limited or no access.

Participants were also asked about the extent to which their current state of mental health was a result of participation in the program. A significant portion felt the program had limited impact on their mental well-being, with 28.1% (n=9) reporting no change and 31.3% (n=10) noting only a slight change. Another 31.3% (n=10) of respondents felt the program contributed moderately to changes in their mental health and well-being. A small proportion (9.4%, n=3)) reported the program had a very significant impact. Notably, no respondents reported that the program was extremely impactful on their mental health and well-being and that they now have full access to the support needed as a result of their participation.

While survey responses suggest that most participants experienced only slight or moderate changes in their mental health and well-being (62.6% combined, n=20), focus group discussions among mentors and mentees suggest more positive outcomes. The difference could be attributed to the fact that those who opted to participate in focus groups had a more positive experience of the program. Additionally, the open-ended format could have also allowed for more detailed reflection, leading to more nuanced insights that go beyond what scaled survey

questions could measure. The three major themes related to mental health that emerged from focus group discussions were increased confidence, better stress management, and improved problem-solving skills.

Confidence

Focus group participants shared that the program helped boost their confidence in navigating their entrepreneurial journeys. This included developing stronger mentorship relationships and feeling more comfortable engaging with people in positions of authority. One mentee noted that they felt *“way more confident being able to speak to anyone in a position of authority compared to before, because there is a level of power imbalance between mentees and mentors”* (Mentee Focus Group). Some mentors highlighted how the program made them feel *“stronger,”* describing the change in resilience as one of the most beneficial program outcomes. Program partners also highlighted the value of confidence-building within the program and its emphasis on embracing failure as part of the learning process:

So many people do not succeed for a million reasons, and if one did subscribe to this approach, I think that it's a recipe for success for someone to follow this. Have lots of mentors and take care of yourself and building that resilience where you expect to fail. If you're not failing, you're not learning, and it's just really encouraging. (Program Partner Interview)

Stress management

Stress management emerged as a key theme among mentor and mentee focus group discussions, who credited the program with helping them navigate the emotional challenges of entrepreneurship. One mentee found *“self-compassion and celebrating small wins”* to be a key takeaway from the program (Mentee Focus Group). Mentors expressed similar sentiments, noting that the program fostered a more constructive and forward-looking mindset:

So, the program[’s] focus on resilience went beyond just bouncing back from difficulties. It actually emphasized adapting and going stronger in the face of them. So, the resilience training actually offered particular tools for managing stress and uncertainty, both in my personal approach and in needing my team. So, I learned techniques to maintain morale and foster a positive outlook even during tough times. This has actually been invaluable, not only in handling immediate challenges, but also including a more resilient, adaptable mindsets for the future. (Mentor Focus Group)

Problem solving

The focus group discussions further suggest that the program helped participants in developing their problem-solving skills and responding to challenges more constructively. In the words of one participant:

Personally, I think this course really helped me in terms of problem solving. It really boosted my ability to solve problems. And actually, that has enabled me to navigate

challenges, setbacks, and failures more effectively. And I guess that has been the reason as to why I've been more successful, because I have really known how to deal with like stresses that come as a result of doing businesses. Because most of the people are so negative in when they face any challenge, any failure they tend to quit, they tend to just give in. But as per me. After taking this course, I guess the whole story changed.
(Mentee Focus Group)

Program satisfaction

The overall satisfaction with the MindFrame Connect program was reflected in a mean score of 4.42, with participants reporting generally positive experiences across several dimensions. The online learning management system was rated as accessible and user-friendly (4.38). Participants found the training relevant to their individual needs and goals (4.28), as well as to their current business stage (4.30). The program content was considered easy to understand (4.45), and the digital format was viewed as effective for delivering the material (4.43). The program's responsiveness to real-world challenges received a slightly lower score (4.06). The likelihood of recommending the program to others was rated at 4.35, indicating overall favourable perceptions of its value.

Program satisfaction for synchronous learning workshops

Post-program surveys were distributed to MindFrame Connect participants who attended the synchronous learning workshop sessions. Response numbers varied by session topic: Principles of Mentorship (25 respondents), Principles of Menteeship (63 respondents), and Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs (n=91). Participants rated their overall satisfaction with the sessions on a scale from 1 to 10, and additional dimensions of the synchronous learning workshop experience were evaluated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The Principles of Mentorship workshop received the highest satisfaction rating, with a mean score of 8.68 out of 10, followed closely by Resilient Skills for Entrepreneurs (8.55) and Principles of Menteeship (8.54).

Across all three workshops, participants reported consistently positive experiences, with mean scores ranging from 3.91 to 4.48 on a 5-point scale. Participants found the content relevant across all sessions, with the highest ratings given to content relevance in the Mentorship (4.48) workshop. The Menteeship and Resilience sessions also received strong scores for the likelihood of applying tools and strategies (4.40 and 4.31, respectively). While all workshops were positively received, the session format was rated slightly lower across the board, ranging from 3.91 to 4.02, indicating a potential area for refinement in workshop delivery.

Table 13. Principles of Mentorship workshop mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Statement	Mean Score (n=25)
This session developed my skills in the topic area	4.13

Statement	Mean Score (n=25)
The content presented was relevant for me	4.48
I am likely to implement the tools and strategies covered in this session	4.22
I am likely to seek further resources to develop my skills in the topic area	4.26
The session format was effective for my learning	3.91
I am likely to recommend this workshop to a peer	4.13

Table 14. Principles of Menteeship workshop mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Statement	Mean Score (n=63)
This session developed my skills in the topic area	4.08
The content presented was relevant for me	4.33
I am likely to implement the tools and strategies covered in this session	4.40
I am likely to seek further resources to develop my skills in the topic area	4.24
The session format was effective for my learning	3.94
I am likely to recommend this workshop to a peer	4.21

Table 15. Skills for Resilience workshop mean scores (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Statement	Mean Score (n=91)
This session developed my skills in the topic area	4.02
The content presented was relevant for me	4.33
I am likely to implement the tools and strategies covered in this session	4.31
I am likely to seek further resources to develop my skills in the topic area	4.15

Statement	Mean Score (n=91)
The session format was effective for my learning	4.02
I am likely to recommend this workshop to a peer	4.12

Conclusion

The evaluation of MindFrame Connect highlights the strengths and limitations of the program in addressing mentorship and resilience-building among entrepreneurs in Canada. The program's content was designed to reach a broad audience, accommodating aspiring entrepreneurs and more established business owners across different sectors and stages of business development. This flexible and inclusive approach enabled wide engagement, especially through free, self-paced eCourses and workshops delivered in partnership with intermediators across Canada.

However, the evaluation also revealed several constraints that limited the program's ability to assess reach and impact, especially among equity-deserving groups. Inconsistent access to registration data and the absence of standardized demographic collection prevented a full understanding of who participated in the program and how different groups experienced it. Without this foundational data, follow-up engagement and long-term impact assessment remain challenging.

Data collection and analysis

- **Standardize registration process and strengthen data ownership:** Establishing a standardized registration process that captures foundational information (e.g., demographics, contact information, etc.) is critical for tracking program reach and the ability to conduct follow-up evaluations to measure progress over time. Future delivery agreements should include provisions that allow program administrators to access or co-own this data while ensuring appropriate privacy and ethical safeguards are in place.
- **Apply gender and equity lens to all evaluation instruments:** Collecting data across gender, race, newcomer status, etc., as well as business stage is critical to understanding how different groups experience the program and where further adaptations may be needed. As currently designed, the post-workshop survey and pre-post eCourse surveys are limited in their ability to capture variations in experience or assess the program's relevance and effectiveness for equity-deserving groups.

Program content and delivery

- **Integrate strategies for approaching and communicating with mentors with specialized expertise:** Expand content to include practical guidance on how mentees can approach and communicate with mentors in specialized fields such as finance, helping participants feel more prepared and confident when seeking targeted support.
- **Introduce resources to support continuous learning and application:** Although focus group discussions indicated that participants found the content valuable, many emphasized the need for additional supports to reinforce and apply their learning over time. Incorporating tools such as guided reflection exercises, practical assignments, and goal-setting templates can help participants actively integrate new skills into their day-

to-day entrepreneurial practice. These resources would encourage ongoing self-assessment, support progress tracking, and prompt deeper reflection on how course concepts are being used in real-world contexts.

- **Enhance eCourses to accommodate different learning styles:** MindFrame Connect has already applied a range of delivery formats, including synchronous workshops and asynchronous eCourses. Building on this foundation, the eCourses could be further enriched by incorporating multimedia elements such as audio versions, interactive case studies, and demonstration videos. These additions would help accommodate different learning styles and make the content more engaging and accessible. Embedding practical, real-world examples can also bridge the gap between theory and application, enabling participants to better understand how to implement key concepts in everyday entrepreneurial contexts.
- **Facilitate opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement:** Incorporate networking events, mentorship circles, or digital platforms that facilitate peer interaction. Creating space for participants to share experiences, discuss challenges, and build relationships can increase engagement and strengthen community ties within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Next Steps

- Leverage the learnings from MindFrame Connect project and apply to Lab2Market (L2M) National Network evaluation design and process
- Support in the review and analysis of L2M National EDIA Committee survey collection
- Apply the entrepreneurial competency framework to expansion of Dalhousie University programs in Atlantic Canada
- Develop knowledge mobilization strategy for sharing results and lessons learned from project to share with other accelerator programs and universities

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