

Project Insights Report

Black African and Caribbean Entrepreneurship Leadership (BACEL)



PARTNERS

Black Business and Professional Association
Diversity Institute



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

\$3,213,750



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Executive Summary

Black entrepreneurs in Canada face several challenges in their entrepreneurial journeys, such as limited networking opportunities (leading to a lack of mentors and role models), skills gaps and limited access to capital because of a lack of awareness of opportunities or not meeting requirements.

While these are challenges that all Black entrepreneurs face, there are specific, nuanced challenges that different segments of Black entrepreneurs also face. For example, Black women entrepreneurs face a dual challenge of racial and gender biases that may impact their access to digital tools, and balancing multiple roles. The entrepreneurial aspirations of Black youth are shaped by societal conditions, discrimination and unequal access to information. There are also different challenges faced by and skills required for each entrepreneur depending on their stage of business and the sector they are in.

The Black African and Caribbean Entrepreneurship Leadership (BACEL) program was built with a comprehensive understanding of these distinct challenges in mind. The overarching goal of the program is to empower Black entrepreneurs across Canada through comprehensive skills building, mentorship and networking opportunities designed to address the needs of these entrepreneurs at different stages of their journeys, including ideation, validation and scaling up. The program was a collaboration between the Black Business and Professional Association and the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University. It was funded by the Future Skills Centre.

The program evaluation, designed as a pre-post evaluation, revealed that participants were highly satisfied with the programming and that it was most impactful in improving financial literacy and business planning skills. Participants also noted growth in their networks. Program learnings include (1) the value in tailoring programs to address unique challenges for different groups and (2) that hybrid or virtual program delivery methods increase accessibility. The importance of considering mental health was also highlighted. By fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurship, the BACEL program is a catalyst for economic progress within the Black community.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1** From November 2021 to June 2023, the program served 563 Black entrepreneurs in Canada, including men, women and youth.
- 2** Comparisons between pre- and post-program skills assessments showed improvement, particularly in financial literacy and networking skills. There was also a notable difference in technological skills, although progress varied among demographic groups, including youth, women and men's cohorts.
- 3** After programming, 54 participants indicated that they had received new funding for their businesses.

► The Issue

Black entrepreneurs in Canada face several barriers on their paths to entrepreneurship. First, they face challenges with networking, which limits their access to mentors and role models. Research shows that many Black entrepreneurs in Canada don't know where to seek support, and few have a trusted advisor or family member with entrepreneurial experience that they can reach out to for support.

The most significant challenge for Black entrepreneurs is access to funding. Many Black business owners do not apply for funding due to being unaware of opportunities or due to industry-specific biases. The barriers are compounded for Black women entrepreneurs, who encounter racial and gender biases when seeking funding for their businesses. These challenges extend to professional development, with financial constraints and time limitations hindering skills development in key areas such as business planning and financial literacy.

The entrepreneurial journey for Black entrepreneurs is multi-faceted and influenced by age and gender. Black women entrepreneurs, who face a double bind of racial and gender biases, encounter limitations in accessing digital tools and financial supports while juggling multiple roles. Societal conditions profoundly shape the entrepreneurial aspirations and challenges of Black youth, who are influenced by barriers like socioeconomic conditions, unequal access, and systemic discrimination. From 2001 to 2016, the employment rate for Black men declined, with discrimination based on stereotypes having contributed significantly.



What We Investigated

The BACEL program tested the implementation of a tailored program delivery method; recognizing that a one-size-fits-all model is insufficient for Black entrepreneurs, the program was designed to address intersectionality and support the unique needs of participants at different stages in their entrepreneurial journeys. To do this, the program followed a three-tiered curriculum to guide Black entrepreneurs from ideation to scale-up. A systematic review of the literature as well as experience with other entrepreneurship training informed the development of a competency framework used to guide the program development. Each level was tailored to provide BACEL participants with the tools, knowledge and support they needed to transform their entrepreneurial aspirations into sustainable business ventures. The program addressed specific competencies at each stage to ensure participants built a solid foundation for business and personal development.

Level 1—Ideation

Participants in this level focused on entrepreneurial basics, such as the ability to identify viable business opportunities and articulate these prospects effectively. Participants engaged in activities such as the following:

- opportunity identification
- business information gathering
- resource compilation
- networking

- self-care strategies

Level 2—Validation

In this intermediate stage, the business concept was validated through activities like exploring the business model canvas, enhancing digital skills and understanding legal essentials for business operations.

Level 3—Scale-up

The final level equipped program participants with advanced skills for scaling their businesses, including:

- financial acumen
- human resource planning
- leadership development
- marketing execution
- negotiation
- procurement
- intellectual property regulation
- funding acquisition
- comprehensive self-care plans

The program also utilized a mix of delivery methods, including in-person, virtual and hybrid, to accommodate diverse participant preferences.

What We're Learning

Learnings and recommendations based on programming include the following:

Tailor program content

Recognizing the diversity within the overarching group of Black entrepreneurs, the program outcomes highlight the importance of tailoring content to address unique challenges.

Enhance technological proficiency training

The results of the program evaluation revealed varying levels of digital literacy after programming. This prompts the recommendation to enhance technological proficiency further in future training. This may include covering basic digital literacy and advanced topics like e-commerce and social media marketing.

Strengthen mentorship and networking opportunities

Pre-program surveys indicate the importance of networking and mentorship for Black entrepreneurs. This has led to the recommendation for structured mentorship programming, industry-specific events, and peer mentorship groups.

Improve accessibility through diverse delivery methods

Participants' favourable responses to hybrid and virtual program delivery options highlight the importance of investing in technology for virtual learning, and flexible scheduling options for entrepreneurial training programs.

Address mental health and well-being

The focus on mental health in programming leads to recommendations to integrate more mental health resources, establish partnerships with mental health professionals and offer counselling services. Previous research indicates that entrepreneurship can be psychologically challenging, making this recommendation a vital component of holistic support.

Implement wraparound services

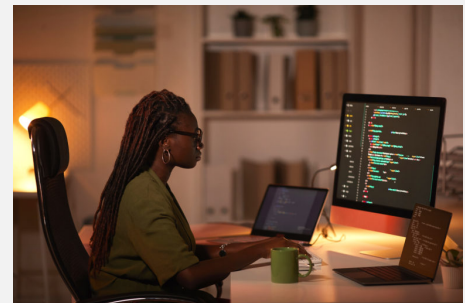
Programming results suggest that implementing comprehensive wraparound services is key, including financial stipends and childcare services.

Continuously improve through evaluation

The evaluation findings emphasize the importance of continuous improvement and responsiveness to participant needs. Recommendations include enhancing evaluation processes and employing alternative evaluation methods.

★ Why It Matters

The BACEL program, grounded in an understanding of the unique challenges faced by Black entrepreneurs, sets a new standard for empowerment. The program's success lies in its commitment to addressing the diverse needs of the Black entrepreneurial community in Canada, tailoring support to different demographic groups and to various business stages. The impact of the BACEL program is significant and enduring, as it contributes to the reshaping of the entrepreneurial landscape in Canada for the Black community and society at large.



State of Skills: Digital Tools in the Skills Ecosystem

There is considerable promise in the role digital tools and virtual career services can play in improving access to training and career development, particularly for those with geographic barriers or constraints such as family care or other work responsibilities.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

► What's Next

In the next phase of the project, additional data will be collected to understand how to define competencies for different segments within the Black community.

Insights will help inform the development of the Diversity Institute and Future Skills Centre's Entrepreneurial Skills Competency Framework.

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

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