



Project Insights Report

Developing Canada's talent and building resilient and anti-fragile high growth entrepreneurs with the 21st century skills to thrive in the innovation economy



PARTNERS

Dalhousie University
Diversity Institute



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

\$3,213,750



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CONTRIBUTORS

Diversity Institute

Executive Summary

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, limiting 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 them 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 wellbeing.

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 both synchronous and asynchronous delivery formats held between January 2023 and December 2024. During this period, the program engaged 3641 attendees through live workshops and 480 learners through its self-paced eCourses.

The program identified key competencies for mentorship and filled a crucial gap by designing a microcredential for mentors. A key learning from the evaluation of the program was the importance of designing data collection processes that are aligned with evaluation goals. Limited access to participant information and the lack of key demographic and business data made it challenging to assess engagement, measure impact, and understand the experiences of equity-deserving groups.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 The program's focus on mentorship and resilience addressed participants' individual goals and was relevant to their current stage of business development.
- 2 The program was particularly effective in strengthening participants' confidence, supporting stress management, and improving problem-solving abilities, thereby boosting overall resilience.
- 3 Establishing a standardized registration process that gives program administrators access to key information is essential for tracking reach and supporting follow-up evaluations to measure progress over time.

▶ The Issue

The entrepreneurial journey is filled with challenges that test the resolve of entrepreneurs and demand the ability to adapt to new situations. Mentorship plays a vital role in helping entrepreneurs navigate these challenges. However, despite its importance, mentorship programs often overlook the core skills required to build effective mentoring relationships, such as communication, interpersonal awareness, navigating power dynamics, and setting clear goals. When mentorship programs do identify core skills, these skills are often ill-defined. This is especially relevant for entrepreneurs from equity-deserving groups, who may require different strategies to build trust and navigate systemic barriers. In parallel, entrepreneurs also need to cultivate psychological resilience to manage the stress and unpredictability inherent in entrepreneurship.

The MindFrame Connect program was designed to address these long-standing gaps in mentorship practices by equipping entrepreneurs with the skills to build mentorship relationships and resilience. To meet these needs, the program draws on research across sectors and disciplines to highlight the core principles of mentorship and the psychological skills needed to sustain entrepreneurial wellbeing. The long-term goal of the program is to build resilience, strengthen mentorship and training practices, and create a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Canada.



What We Investigated

To meet these goals, the program designed and delivered a synchronous workshop, and designed and launched 3 eCourses: Principles of Mentorship, Principles of Menteeship, and Resilience Skills for Entrepreneurs.

The project took place over two phases.

In Phase 1, between 2020 and 2023, the project staff:

- Reviewed literature, including 276 articles (academic journal and grey literature)
- Conducted 150 semi-structured open-ended interviews to strengthen the foundations of this project on the topic of mentorship and ecosystem needs.
- Conducted 8 semi-structured in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs on their resilience practices.
- Conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with 40 ecosystem partners who represent accelerators, incubators, and entrepreneurial programs in Canada.
- Hosted five roundtables with 23 members of the entrepreneurial ecosystem designed to explore EDI and mentorship more broadly.
- Hosted 186 beta training sessions and workshops for over 6000 mentors, mentees, entrepreneurs, and accelerator programs to provide real-time feedback on structure and effectiveness.

In Phase 2, the evaluation intended to examine participation and outcomes from both 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. To collect participant insights, surveys were conducted alongside partner interviews and focus groups with both mentors and mentees.

The evaluation during Phase 2 drew on the *Inclusive Entrepreneurship Competency Framework* (IECF), developed by the Diversity Institute to support program design and assessment. Grounded in extensive research, the IECF outlines key competencies needed for entrepreneurial success, tailored to different entrepreneurial stages (Ideation, Validation, Launch, Growth, and Sustainability), sectors, and equity-deserving groups.

The key questions guiding the evaluation in Phase 2 included:

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?

What We're Learning

From Phase 1, the project developed an online platform with

resources and training programs for mentors and mentees focused on building resilience and maximizing the mentor-mentee relationship. There were 186 participants across the workshops and events and 210 unique users of the developed eCourses. Over 2 years, more than 2000 completed surveys to assess program effectiveness and participant satisfaction.

Iterative program design

MindFrame Connect utilized diverse learning approaches and styles to meet the needs of various adult learners. This experimentation allowed the project to identify which styles were most effective with various audiences. By offering a broad library of synchronous and asynchronous programming, a much larger population was able to access the resources developed by the program.

Standardizing expectations of mentors and mentees

Given the diverse nature of mentorship, and often informal approach of the relationship, there was a need for established certification and credentials across Canada in an effort to establish best practices and industry benchmarks. Additionally, barriers to mentorship are present for equity-deserving entrepreneurs, and increasing education and standards for mentors on inclusive practices may assist in reducing these barriers.

Program design and delivery learnings

With the population of entrepreneurs, time considerations were particularly important in any interventions or programming. The most well-attended sessions were 60-90 minutes in length, while longer sessions were more difficult to confirm and register participants for. To this end, implementing programming for this population would likely be most effective with repeat sessions that are no more than 90 minutes, as many entrepreneurs are unable to commit more than that time in their workday. Additionally, asynchronous self-paced programming was a sought-after feature of this program, as entrepreneurs could access high-quality, evidence-based learning during the time available to them, rather than a program-set time. Knowledge translation was also important, as research and academic-heavy language was not effective with this population. Using skill-based, common language lessons from leaders in the field yielded the most engagement. Champion models within the ecosystem were effective at improving attendance and participation rates. Given the nature of entrepreneurship, the opportunity to learn with known leaders and network was often cited in our qualitative feedback as highly valuable.

During Phase 2, between January 2023 and December 2024, the MindFrame Connect program reached a total of 3,641 attendees through its synchronous workshops and 480 asynchronous eCourse learners. While the evaluation draws on multiple data sources (surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions), the findings are limited by the lack of demographic information in earlier survey tools. A post-program survey was developed to address these gaps, but because program administrators did not have access to registration data, their ability to conduct outreach and follow-up was restricted, resulting in a low response rate of only 39 participants. As such, the ability to assess impact for diverse equity-deserving entrepreneurs was limited.

The program evaluation found that mentorship is significant to mentors and mentees at various stages of their entrepreneurial journeys. Overall program satisfaction was high, with participants reporting positive experiences across different aspects of the program including program structure and course content. The workshops on *Principles of Mentorship* and *Principles of Menteeship* were well received, and all 3 eCourses saw very high satisfaction ratings, with participants sharing that the program gave them a better understanding of how to build effective mentorship relationships.

Regarding the program's benefits, participants found that the training content addressed their individual needs and goals, and was related to their current stage of business development. They generally felt that the program was accessible due to its cost-free nature and that the learning management system was accessible and user-friendly. In terms of mental wellbeing, the evaluation found that the program's focus on resilience and the mentorship relationship building boosted participants' confidence in building relationships with mentors, strengthened their ability to manage stress, and sharpened their problem-solving skills.

The evaluation also identified some challenges in program implementation including: limited support for helping participants apply the content to their real life, limited opportunities for connection and peer engagement, and the need for more tools to process the learnings. Some participants also noted that the content could have been better tailored for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

★ Why It Matters

The MindFrame Connect program was developed to address a critical gap in entrepreneurial training and support programs. Mentorship is widely recognized as a critical support for entrepreneurs, particularly because its experiential learning approach aligns closely with the nature of entrepreneurship itself: iterative, practical, and driven by continuous learning and adaptation. However, many programs rely primarily on matching individuals by experience or industry, without ensuring that mentors and mentees have the competencies needed to build trust-based relationships. As such, structured training based on extensive consultations and research, delivered through various modalities, targeting both mentees and mentors, represents a valuable intervention in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.



State of Skills: Resilient by Design: The Skills Canadians Need Now and for the Future

To build a resilient workforce that is able to respond to and adapt to changing labour markets, whether due to unpredictable disruptions or longer-term transitions, we need a range of training and upskilling pathways that equip people with the skills they need to enter, advance, transition and return to dynamic labour markets.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

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

How to Cite This Report

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