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The Artist

Shaya Sark

MEMBERTOU FIRST NATION

My name is Shaya Sark. I am an inspiring Artist, I am 25 years old, and I am from Membertou First Nation, located on Cape Breton Island. I'm currently employed at The Membertou Heritage Park. I'm also a full-time mom to my 6-year-old son, Elijah. My interest is mostly digital art, I love being able to create anywhere I go. I have been creating art for one year now, and in that time I have made, designed, and produced holiday cards which I sell, and I have designed logos for some local community businesses. My goal is to be able to return to school soon to pursue a career in graphic design.

The Artist's Statement About the Artwork

Shaya Sark

NATIVE ARTIST

The plants around the circle represent the medicines we use in our Mi'kmaq communities and appeal to a returning to traditional knowledge for healing.

The stages of the medicine show the transitional cycles of growth.

Orange background is the reflections of sunsets we have here in Unama'ki and are invoking the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action.

The buildings show differences in homes and offices, many worked from home during throughout the pandemic, and it changed our idea of working environments.

The bottom half of the circles represents a reflection on our history and that we have always had to adapt to changing times and circumstances. We are shaped by our environment and culture.

Greetings and Welcome!!

We are so excited to help you Learn to Fly. Together.

This is the first online issue for our journal. I want to share a bit of our journey with you and acknowledge all of the people who have contributed to this wonderful event. But first, I would like to encourage you to dig into the stories that are shared in this issue. JAED editorial board members and staff are dedicated to your success – in your family, your community and our place in Canada.

Are you looking to enter the procurement arena? We have some ideas and resources that might help. Of course, Cando is very active in supporting these endeavours. There are stories of political and business leaders, that are inspiring to say the least. It doesn't matter if your community is remote and northern, if your leadership has vision and an action plan they are working on every day to improve their community's situation. Challenges and strategies to overcome them as well as embracing new ideas and technologies are shared in the Lessons from Experience section. Are you curious about sustainable energy and its benefits or what the profile of northern businesses in the Yukon might be? You'll find that information in the Lessons from Research section. If you are curious about Indigenous economics, and how that differs from mainstream economics, you'll enjoy the book review.

We want to share the good news that is regularly published in this journal with as many people as possible. Moving to an online version will help us do that better. The journey started in December 2022 with support from both the JAED editorial board and Cando board members, who share this vision. I led this process and was thrust headlong into the world of Open Access. One of the many things I like about it, is the focus on accessibility of knowledge and information with everyone. My thanks and gratitude for all the help I have received is truly heartfelt. I think of the teams at Engaged Scholars Journal, Coalition Publica, Érudit and University of Alberta Library Publishing who came alongside me wholeheartedly. Svetlana is so awesome and Ray is a wonderful support. Our Journal Managing Editor, Penny Sanz is a blessing and Carleigh Brady, Copy Editor has done outstanding work. Many thanks to section editors John and David and to our new Podcasting Editor, Warren. Thanks Drew for the inspired logo. You can tell that it took a village to get to this happy day and these are my village people.

Wanda Wuttunee
Editor-in-Chief

Introduction

way' p snəqsyilxw | hello my relations!

John Chenoweth

Welcome to another issue of Lessons from Experience. This year's articles take us on a cross country tour where we explore the endless possibilities of economic development within and for Indigenous communities and people. To begin, on a national scale, Transforming Indigenous Procurement: Empowerment, Challenges, and the Road Ahead, provides us with an in-depth view of the world of procurement in Canada and the realities for Indigenous communities, corporations, and individuals to participate in this unique opportunity. Next, we are to celebrate the wonderful successes of Norway House Cree Nation, for their amazing work and dedication to build capacity and success within their community. Within their five-year economic development strategy, the reader learns about the construction of a new health centre, partnerships with mineral exploration companies, and construction of a fibre link from the community to the provincial network, to name a few successes.

Our whirlwind tour takes a turn into Saskatchewan where we are introduced to the perhaps unfamiliar economy of methamphetamine contamination. Meth Busters Incorporated (MBI) introduces the reader to the world of safety, trust, and family values within a business model situated on a very serious situation facing many communities across the country. Lastly, is a northern Ontario company sharing how innovative virtual reality technologies are used to share cultural teachings through virtual reality with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across our nation. The article, titled, Connecting Culture to the Modern-Day Workplace Through New Technology, showcases an example of innovative and fearless approaches to TRC through technology.

Enjoy!

Transforming Indigenous Procurement: Empowerment, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

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We cannot reverse hundreds of years of unequal relationships overnight. A history of broken treaties, territorial dispossession, reserves and residential schools will take time to overcome. This sad legacy is reflected in contemporary Indigenous culture, education, health and wellness – and in the economic marginalization of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada.... Without economic reconciliation, our unequal trade relationship will continue. We face a unique opportunity to remake the once-vibrant relationship between Aboriginal peoples and businesses in the rest of Canada.

—Jean Paul Gladu, CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business
“Economic Equality Must Be Part of Indigenous Reconciliation”

The potential of public procurement and partnerships between Indigenous communities and the private sector to address the socioeconomic disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada has been recognized by a host of organizations, including the Council for Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando), the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and internationally by the OECD (CCAB, 2019; Henriques, Colbourne, O’Farrell, Peredo, & Anderson, 2023; OECD, 2020). More specifically, the creation of national and regional initiatives to support Indigenous procurement in both the public and private sectors has the potential to create and sustain Indigenous supply chains as well as facilitate critical Indigenous community supports by building capacity, providing jobs, and offering critical re-investment into Indigenous communities (Barberstock, 2023). As such, Indigenous procurement can be viewed as a means for economic reconciliation with the potential to address economic and social injustices and what Gladu (2016) calls Canada’s unequal trade relationship with Indigenous peoples.

On August 6, 2021, the Government of Canada implemented a mandatory requirement for federal departments and agencies stating that by 2024 a minimum of 5% of the total contract value will be held by Indigenous businesses. To facilitate procurement readiness and scaling, past Indigenous procurement successes as well as Indigenous businesses/economic development agents who were not successful or chose not to apply need to be examined. Understanding the Indigenous procurement experience – both positive and negative – and recognizing Indigenous rights, interests, and aspirations in federal procurement are the first steps in transforming Indigenous procurement into a viable means for economic reconciliation and nation-to-nation relationship building between the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples.

In this article, we first provide a brief overview of public procurement, its purpose, and its operations, as well as a look at the role of Indigenous procurement. We then use federally available data on successful Indigenous procurement contracts to determine the trends, value, and overall landscape of Indigenous federal procurement during January 2009 to May 2023. Next, we summarize the results of an Indigenous procurement survey conducted in 2023, as an analysis of Indigenous procurement is incomplete without looking at the experiences of those who did not win contracts. Finally, we conclude with key takeaways and a look at the road ahead.

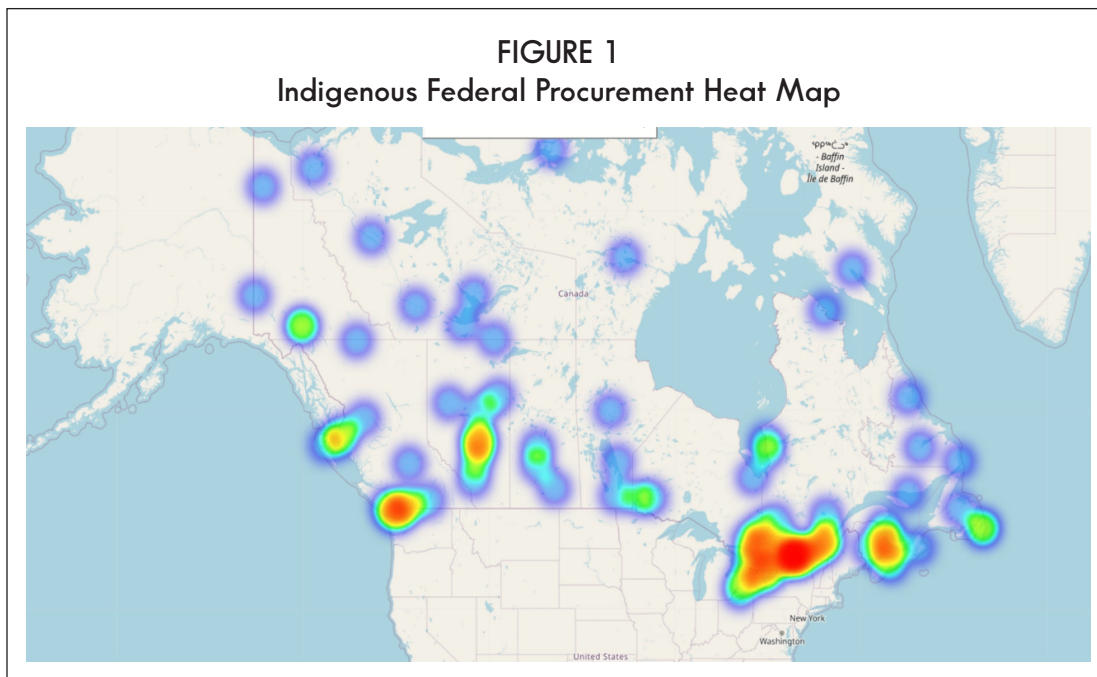
PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Public procurement is “the process by which a government department purchases either goods or services from businesses or individuals”(Panezi, 2020, p. 218). Procurement contracts vary in value and duration and occur at the federal, provincial, crown corporation, and municipal levels. Governments are one of the largest buyers of goods and services worldwide. The Government of Canada, for example, has spent an estimated \$15.1 billion in 2021-2022 excluding the Department of National Defense, commissions, review committees, and Offices of Parliament (Carleton SPPA Research Project, 2022).

Beyond being a tool to obtain goods and services, public procurement contracts can be used to fulfill economic and socio-political objectives. Procurement has been used to achieve national industrial policies (Sorte Junior, 2015), socio-economic goals (McCrudden, 2004), and political goals (Grandia & Meehan, 2017). One very interesting avenue is the use of procurement as a tool for economic growth while simultaneously helping historically disadvantaged groups – this is known as social procurement. Procurement can, therefore, be used to empower disadvantaged groups by helping to strengthen capacities while simultaneously redistributing income to said communities, thereby advancing economic equity and addressing historical injustices (Colbourne, Peredo, & Henriques, 2023).

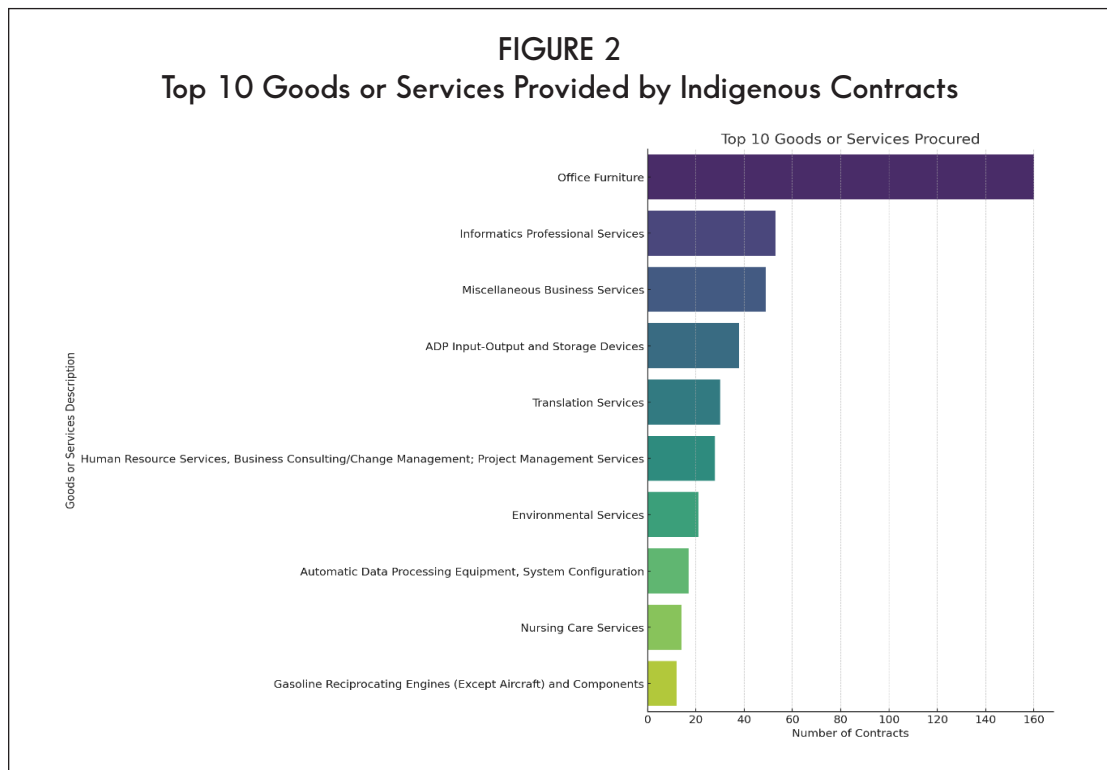
INDIGENOUS FEDERAL PROCUREMENT 2009 TO 2023

To assess Indigenous federal procurement, we used the Open Government archived contract history data from the Government of Canada’s open data platform (now called CanadaBuys) (Government of Canada, n.d.). The data include all federal government procurement contracts across all federal departments. Our analysis focuses on the Canadian procurement set aside, a policy that reserves certain contracts for Indigenous businesses (Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2023). From 2009 to May 2023, there were 793 set aside contracts averaging \$2,143,318.62 (ranging from \$338 to \$78,661,632), with an average duration of 1 year and 8 months (ranging from 0 to 11 years and 6 months). Figure 1 provides a heat map of the location of Indigenous contract winners. Blue reflects fewer contracts, while red signifies more contracts.



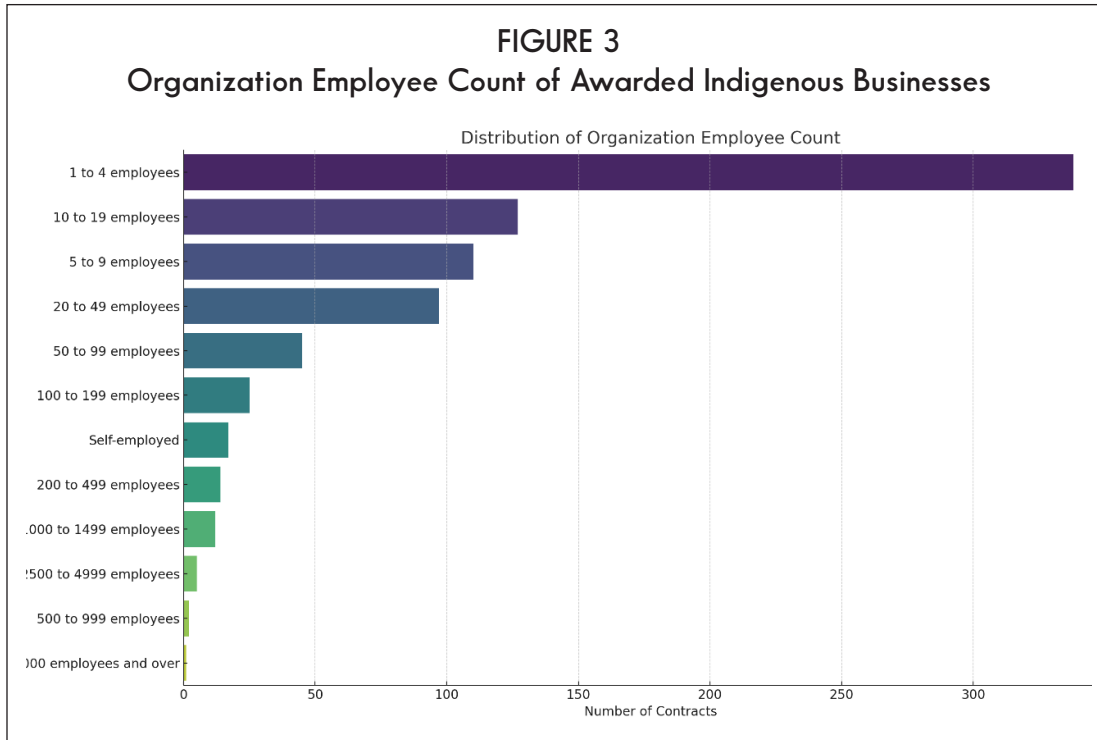
The greatest number of contracts were observed in Vancouver, British Columbia; Edmonton, Alberta; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Toronto, Ontario; Ottawa, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec; and various regions in New Brunswick: Ottawa had the highest number of contracts. However, the map suggests there is room for improvement. Rural and remote Indigenous businesses/communities appear to not have benefitted from such contracts, suggesting a need for greater outreach and communication if economic reconciliation is truly the goal.

Figure 2 showcases the top 10 most frequently procured goods or services based on the number of contracts.



Leading the list is Office Furniture, indicating a demand for workplace furnishings in the contracts. This is followed by categories such as Informatics Professional Services and Miscellaneous Business Services, emphasizing the value of specialized IT and other professional services in the procurement process. Clearly there is significant room for Indigenous businesses to expand their offerings into other goods and services such as IT where there is scope for new entrants, nursing care, and environmental services.

Figure 3 provides insights into contract distributions based on organization employee counts of awarded Indigenous businesses.



Smaller businesses, especially those with 1 to 4 employees, are heavily engaged in contracts, closely followed by organizations with 10 to 19 and 5 to 9 employees. Self-employed individuals also play a significant role in the contract landscape. Over time, these contracts should allow Indigenous businesses to grow.

Table 1 provides a synopsis of the number of procurement contracts by government department.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Contracts Across Government Departments

Government Department	Number of Contracts	Percentage of Total Contracts
Public Works and Government Services Canada	446	56.24%
Health Canada	50	6.31%
Department of National Defense	46	5.80%
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada	30	3.78%
Employment and Social Development Canada	26	3.28%
Correctional Service of Canada	25	3.15%
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	24	3.03%
Parks Canada	21	2.65%
Citizenship and Immigration Canada	20	2.52%
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	16	2.02%
Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada	11	1.39%
Transport Canada	10	1.26%
Statistics Canada	9	1.13%
Natural Resources Canada	6	0.76%
Industry Canada	6	0.76%
Canada Revenue Agency	5	0.63%
Treasury Board of Canada	5	0.63%
Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada	4	0.50%
Department of Justice Canada	4	0.50%
Indigenous Services Canada	3	0.38%
Canada Border Services Agency	3	0.38%
Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	2	0.25%
Canadian Heritage	2	0.25%
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada	2	0.25%
Public Prosecution Service of Canada	2	0.25%
Privy Council Office	2	0.25%
Canadian International Development Agency	1	0.13%
National Energy Board	1	0.13%
Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission	1	0.13%
Public Health Agency of Canada	1	0.13%
Department of Finance	1	0.13%
Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development	1	0.13%
Veterans Affairs Canada	1	0.13%
Canadian Food Inspection Agency	1	0.13%
Environment Canada	1	0.13%
Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission Secretariat	1	0.13%
Canadian Human Rights Commission	1	0.13%
Canada School of Public Service	1	0.13%
Library and Archives Canada	1	0.13%

Of the 793 contracts awarded between January 2009 and May 2023 to Indigenous businesses, over 56% are with Public Works and Government Services Canada followed by Health Canada, the Department of National Defense, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Correctional Service of Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The remaining departments had less than 22 contracts, with most having between 1 and 6 contracts.

Federal procurement opportunities present a significant avenue for collaboration between the government and Indigenous businesses and communities. Analysis of the federal Indigenous procurement data from January 2009 to May 2023 suggests there is considerable scope to enhance the geographical distribution of contracts, ensuring that even remote and underrepresented Indigenous regions benefit. The dominant categories of goods and services procured, such as office furniture and various professional services, highlight the need to diversify contract offerings. By aligning contracts more closely with the current strengths and capacities of Indigenous businesses (some of which draw on traditional ways of knowing and being and some of which demonstrate leadership in emerging sectors), the government can tap into a rich stream of expertise and resources.

The data, however, only look at awarded contracts and reveal little about the procurement experiences of Indigenous businesses across Canada. We now look at what Indigenous businesses and communities have shared with us regarding their procurement experiences.

INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCE OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

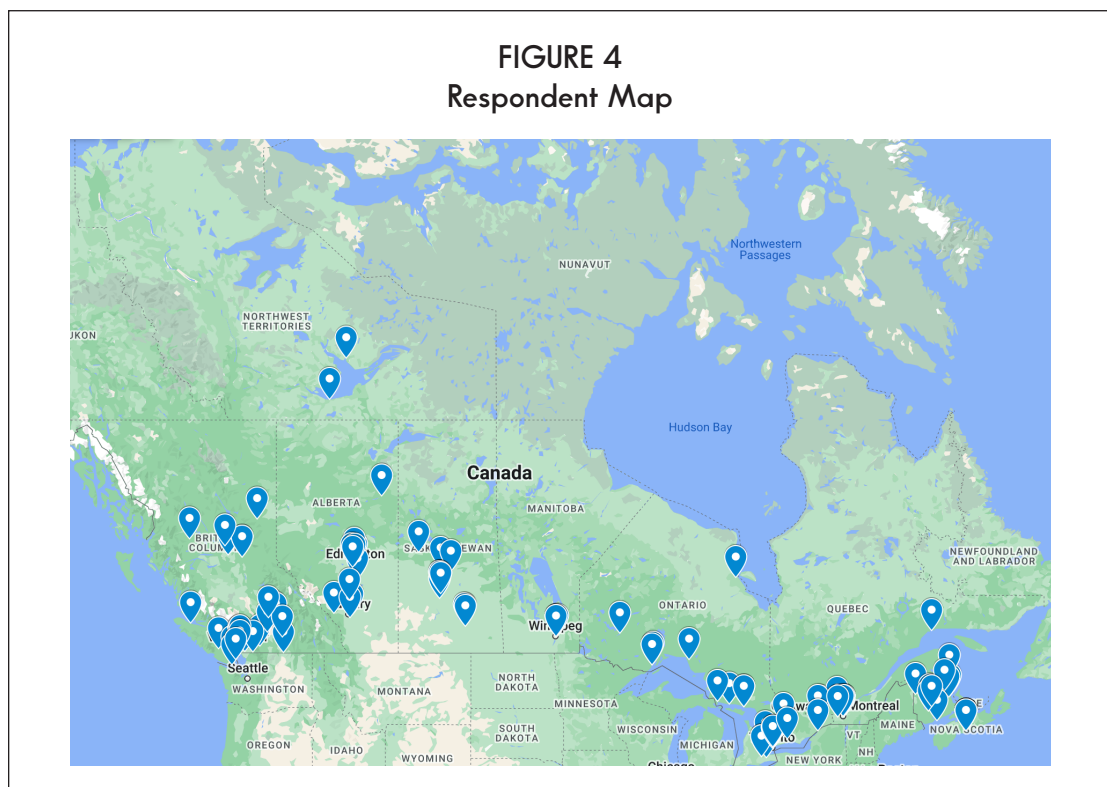
In the spring of 2023, a multidisciplinary team of Canadian researchers in collaboration with Cando undertook an online survey to study the state of Indigenous procurement activities and capacity needs in Canada. The survey was designed to determine the types of procurement contracts awarded across all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal, crown corporation, and foreign), the barriers and challenges Indigenous businesses face when participating in the procurement process, and the capacity needed for Indigenous businesses to participate effectively in procurement opportunities.

The survey, written in English and French, was sent to approximately 3,000 Cando members and alumni with 163 people responding – a 5.4% response rate. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the survey employed a self-selection method. This allowed respondents the flexibility to complete the entire survey or only specific sections based on their preference.

The survey's low response rate of 5.4% poses several limitations to the reliability and generalizability of our findings. Firstly, non-response bias may skew the results, as those who chose to participate might differ from non-respondents. This self-selection bias could distort the representation of opinions and characteristics in the broader population. Secondly, the limited sample size reduces our statistical power, making it challenging to detect meaningful relationships and draw precise conclusions. Despite these limitations, surveys remain the primary means to gather this type of information, and we strongly encourage Indigenous businesses, economic development officers,

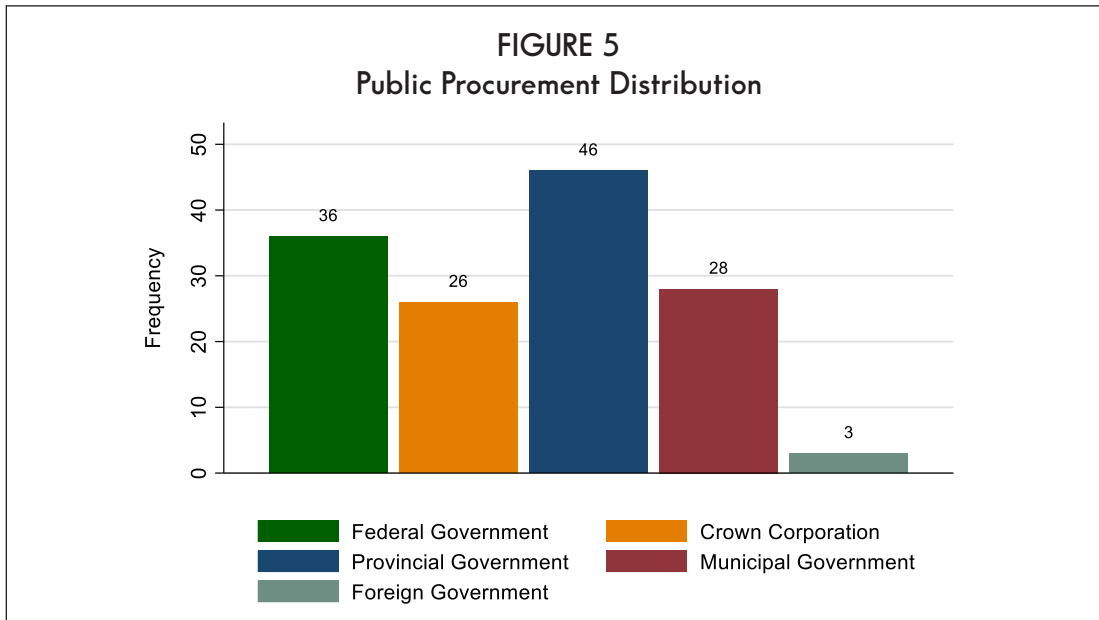
and community leaders to participate in future procurement surveys, as their input is invaluable for shaping policies and strategies that can boost Indigenous procurement. Participation in these surveys significantly enhances research comprehensiveness and accuracy, ultimately supporting efforts to boost Indigenous participation in procurement opportunities.

Seventy-five percent of respondents were First Nations and 14% were Metis: together, their main roles included business owners, economic development offices, CEOs, and land managers. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the geographical distribution of respondents. Seventy-six percent of respondents lived in communities with under 5,000 people.



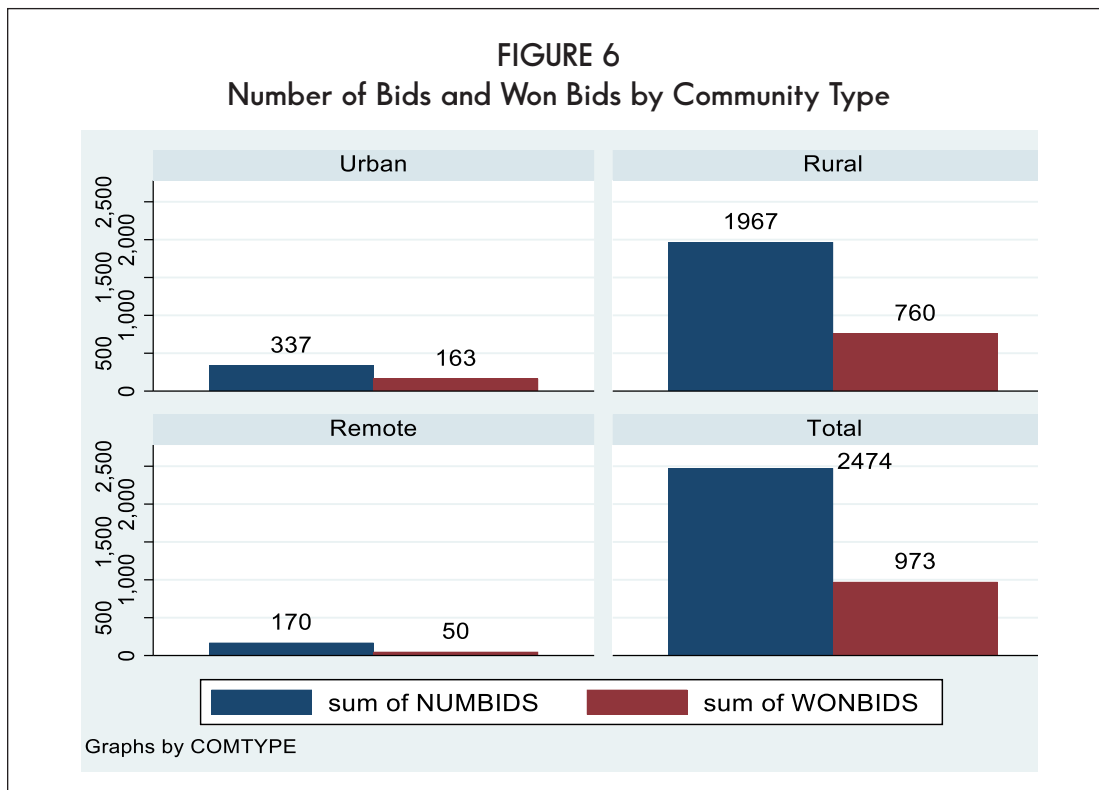
Approximately 58% of respondents lived in a rural community, 23% lived in an urban community, and 18% lived in a remote community.

Furthermore, as Figure 5 shows, when looking at public procurement experiences over the last five years, the top three types of public procurement that respondents bid on were provincial, federal, and municipal. The following analysis relates to all public procurement.



Ninety respondents provided information regarding submitted bids. Respondents collectively submitted 2,474 bids, of which 973 were successful, translating to a success rate of 39%.

To assess the difference in success rates across community type, we divided the total number of bids and winning bids by community type (see Figure 6).



The urban success rate was 48.4%, the rural success rate was 38.6%, and the remote success rate was 29.4%. An analysis of differences in business supports across community type suggests that access to financial advice and entrepreneurial/start-up advice appears to be a driver of these differences: these supports are the strongest in urban centres. The reported winning bid ranged from \$6,500 to \$250 million. The industries in which these winning bids belonged included construction, consulting, transportation, utilities/green energy, technology, forestry, and mining.

What did respondents view as the key factors in winning public procurement contracts? The number one reason given was being an Indigenous-owned business, followed by high-quality offering, low price, territorial knowledge, traditional knowledge, knowledge of risk, and cultural training. An Indigenous business must be visible to buyers in both the public and private sectors and it is imperative that government departments and agencies be able to identify an Indigenous business with the capacity to bid for and/or win a contract. One option is to register the business in the Government of Canada's Indigenous Business Directory (IBD). Note that IBD is not the only source of verified Indigenous businesses used by federal departments and agencies for contracts: other sources include Modern Treaty beneficiary lists. For more information on the Indigenous Business Director, including eligibility requirements or to register visit <https://services.sac-isc.gc.ca/rea-ibd>.

Despite the strengths of Indigenous businesses, procurement challenges still need to be addressed. This is reflected in the fact that 61% of procurement bids were unsuccessful. We inquired about the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with a set of statements regarding obstacles to accessing federal, provincial, and municipal procurement contracts. Most respondents stated that government procurement contracts were too difficult to win. The findings reveal two prominent challenges. First, respondents agree that a lack of resources poses a barrier to their participation in the Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Second, respondents identified issues with the specifications in RFPs as another major obstacle. These two factors indicate that resource constraints and procedural difficulties are hindering Indigenous businesses' access to government procurement contracts.

More specifically, many respondents strongly agreed that government procurement contracts are too difficult to win. The most common constraints to participation in public procurement were the lack of resources or capabilities, government assistance networks, and mentors to guide them in the government procurement process. Regarding procurement specification issues, the lack of insurance and experience, as well as large contract size, were viewed as daunting. A copy of the full report entitled "Transforming Indigenous Procurement: 2023 Cando Survey" can be accessed at <https://www.edo.ca/edo-tools/transforming-procurement-survey>.

When presenting our findings to Indigenous communities, local enterprises, economic development officers, and government officials, it is evident that clear communication is essential to encourage broad engagement in these opportunities. Utilizing community representatives and organizing informative events can help connect Indigenous enterprises with federal opportunities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The federal government's mandatory requirement that a minimum of 5% of the total value of contracts be held by Indigenous businesses is a unique opportunity for Indigenous businesses and communities. Our survey identified the types of procurement contracts Indigenous businesses have been awarded, their value, and the successes and obstacles to bidding and winning such contracts. Comparing our results to past Indigenous federal procurement awarded contracts shows there is a mismatch between current capacities and the requirements of Indigenous procurement.

There is a need to develop government policies and initiatives so that Indigenous procurement activities better align with the capacities of Indigenous businesses. There is a need to facilitate the exchange of experiences and expertise amongst Indigenous businesses involved in procurement. Clear, effective communication remains paramount to ensure widespread participation in these opportunities. Leveraging community liaisons and hosting informational sessions can bridge the gap between federal opportunities and Indigenous businesses. Additionally, fostering an environment of growth through training, mentorship, and transparent feedback mechanisms can empower Indigenous entrepreneurs to confidently navigate the federal procurement landscape. By prioritizing inclusivity, recognizing traditional knowledge, and adapting to the unique positioning of Indigenous communities, the government can foster a more collaborative, beneficial, and holistic procurement process.

The Federal government is not the only entity capable of developing an effective and comprehensive procurement process. Our next section focuses on the practical actions and contributions of Cando, Economic Development Organizations (EDOs), Indigenous businesses, and community leaders. This section showcases how these groups are essential in driving the success and evolution of Indigenous procurement, setting the stage for future growth.

ROAD AHEAD

a) Cando activities

The Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando) plays a crucial role in empowering Indigenous communities in the field of Federal procurement. Their comprehensive approach encompasses various initiatives, each designed to address specific challenges and opportunities within this field. Below are some illustrative examples of their work.

In the area of capacity building and training, Cando actively organizes workshops to demystify the federal procurement process. These workshops focus on navigating the System for Award Management (SAM) and understanding set-aside contracts for Indigenous businesses, providing invaluable insights for participants. Regarding networking and partnerships, Cando has been instrumental in bridging the gap between Indigenous business leaders and federal departments. Through a series of networking events, they have fostered direct partnerships and mentorship opportunities, which are crucial for securing federal contracts. In terms of advocacy and policy development, Cando's contributions have been transformative. Their advocacy for mandatory

Indigenous procurement targets in federal contracts has been a game changer, opening new avenues for Indigenous businesses in this competitive landscape. To facilitate resource and information sharing, Cando has developed a comprehensive online resource hub. This platform offers step-by-step guides and templates to assist Indigenous businesses in preparing effective bids for federal procurement opportunities, including case studies of successful bids. Lastly, in supporting Indigenous business growth, Cando's mentorship program stands out. By connecting established Indigenous businesses with emerging entrepreneurs, this program has significantly increased Indigenous participation in federal procurement.

Through these diverse initiatives, Cando has not only enhanced the capabilities of Indigenous communities in securing and managing federal procurement contracts but has also laid a strong foundation for continued growth and success in this important area.

b) EDO activities

In collaboration with Cando and other similar organizations, Indigenous economic development organizations (EDOs) can lobby and advocate for federal, provincial, and municipal procurement processes and practices that are responsive to the scale of Indigenous businesses and their service product offerings. Professional development is essential, given the evolving role of EDOs, who now act as advisors, researchers, communicators, and knowledge providers across different First Nations in Canada. Central to this is the development of custom training programs in collaboration with Cando and other Indigenous-led bodies to enhance procurement-related skills, competencies, and knowledge so individuals and organizations can better manage resources and negotiate with governmental and corporate entities. This ensures that training is relevant, accessible, and affordable and supports EDOs in identifying and capitalizing on procurement opportunities for their communities. In addition, through certification programs such as Cando's Technician Aboriginal Economic Developer (TAED) and Professional Aboriginal Economic Developer (PAED) certificates, senior Indigenous business leaders can develop new skills, build their professional networks, and share best practices in Indigenous economic development: EDOs can expand partnerships and joint ventures to facilitate successful procurement strategies. EDOs, through their collaboration with Cando and similar organizations, will not just enhance procurement capabilities but will also play a transformative role in the economic development of their communities and the wider Indigenous business ecosystem.

c) Indigenous business activities

Indigenous businesses are central to Indigenous procurement programs, and their success is essential for achieving the 5% target and beyond. To maximize their engagement, it is crucial that both individual Indigenous businesses and those within their ecosystem are well-informed about procurement programs' opportunities and benefits.

These businesses, regardless of size, location, or sector, have successfully participated in procurement projects, expanding their market presence. While challenges exist, such

programs present an appealing opportunity for business growth. Efforts should focus on local-level dissemination and collaboration with organizations like Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, and Industry Associations, emphasizing the potential for success.

Furthermore, it is essential to pay attention to businesses who applied but failed to secure a public procurement contract. These businesses have shown interest in Indigenous procurement programs and should be supported through collaboration with organizations like Cando, local EDOs, or business advisors to facilitate revisions and resubmissions. Expanding the regional scope of these contracts will require commitment by procurement programs and EDOs to supporting viable business propositions and convey the message that success is attainable. The goal is clear: “We want you as a supplier!”

d) Community leadership activities

Indigenous community leadership in Canada is exercised through several organizations at different levels including band councils, which are responsible for various aspects of community life including economic development and national advocacy groups such as The Assembly of First Nations (AFN), and regional councils. Both levels already play an important role in advancing economic development activities and continue to support the increase of procurement opportunities for First Nations.

At the local level, band council leaders can and do play an important role in bringing information about procurement opportunities and requirements to their members. Some band councils are already linking their websites to key procurement information and facilitating networking events where members can share their experiences. Further, band leaders can guide discussions on how to respond to procurement opportunities as a community. Bands can explore building alliances with their community corporations and/or small businesses.

Community leaders can also play a role by fostering collaborations between local businesses and educational institutions to create new products and services available for procurement. Community leaders can support small businesses, particularly women-owned, by providing resources and mentorships and facilitating connections with national Indigenous organization programs such as CANDO, regional AFN, government, and other sectors.

Indigenous businesses, economic development officers, and community leaders are active participants in the procurement process. Together, our collective participation in future procurement surveys is invaluable for shaping policies and strategies that can effectively enhance Indigenous procurement. We encourage and urge you to participate in future Cando Indigenous procurement surveys. By working together, we can not only track progress but also address concerns as they arise, ensuring that Indigenous procurement continues to thrive and grow.

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Norway House Cree Nation Reaping Successes Under Chief's Leadership

Sam Laskaris



Norway House

Larson Anderson had some unfinished business. “I have always believed, given the right circumstances, I could make an impact as a Chief,” Anderson said. “I was a councillor for two terms, from 1994 to 1998. And I had unfinished work that was needed to make Norway House the best First Nation in Canada.” Anderson was confident he could make positive things happen for his First Nation, and though others have also done their part, his successful work in recent years with the Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba is now receiving plenty of notice. For example, Cando (the national organization that promotes and supports economic development in Indigenous communities across Canada) chose Norway House as the Community of the Year at its 2023 conference. “The road out of poverty is to create partnerships with the Federal and Provincial governments and businesses,” Anderson said following the community’s

triumph. "By working with others, Norway House Cree Nation is opening the doors of opportunity and beginning to control its own destiny. Winning this prestigious national award is positive recognition for our focus and efforts over the past years." (Winnipeg Sun, 2024)

Anderson was involved with numerous other ventures between his time as a First Nations councillor and his return in 2018 as Norway House's elected Chief. He ran his own businesses for a decade. He also went back to school, enrolling at the University of Manitoba's prestigious Asper School of Business. Larson also worked for the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority. "And during that time, we did some financial reviews and we found lots of mismanagement and issues with the board," Anderson said. "So, I ended up getting into politics because all the board members were Chiefs. It wasn't that I wanted to get involved in that type of politics but as part of the job I tried to do what's right and what I feel is fair to the organization. Doing the reviews kind of got me back into politics."

Anderson said that he irked others by asking too many questions. He said that's why he was let go from his position with the Child and Family Services Authority. He returned to his First Nation where he was assigned various positions, including project manager, property manager, and general manager. His inquisitiveness, however, continued. "I ask questions," Anderson said. "That's my nature. If people don't like my questions, then they shouldn't do things that they shouldn't do. I ended up getting into hot water. I lost my job again because of the questions I had."

But this time, being the one to challenge authority proved beneficial for Anderson. "There was a big difference because now there is social media," he said. "Prior to that, there was really no way to question the leadership in any community or reserve. Now you can get your voice out there. So, as I was questioning some of the things that were going on, I started getting more and more people interested in wanting me to come home and get back into politics." And that's what he did shortly thereafter. "I wanted to finish my university degree with courses from Asper as part of general Bachelor of Arts Integrated [Studies] degree," he said. "So, I finished that and I went home and I got nominated [for Chief]. And I won. I beat the two-time [Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs] Grand Chief."

In the half dozen years, he has served as Norway House's Chief, Anderson has had his share of accomplishments. So, what makes him happiest about working for his First Nation? "I would say the increase in the number of jobs that have been created," he said. "In 2018, when I first became Chief, our payroll was \$500,000. That's grown to an average of about \$1 million a year for the past three years. So, if anything, my accomplishment has been getting more people to work. That's how I was raised. And I think that's the best way to get out of whatever rut we're in as First Nations." Through its various ventures, Norway House Cree Nation has about 900 employees. "I would probably say about 875 of them identity as Indigenous," Anderson said. He believes it's critical to have the majority of those employees be Indigenous: "We're Indigenous and we're trying to grow our Nation in Norway House."

In its efforts to diversify, Anderson said Norway House is keen to be involved with business ventures outside the boundaries of its own First Nation. An example of this is

Norway House Cree Nation's purchase late last year of the 200,000 square-foot building on Taylor Avenue in Winnipeg, which served as the headquarters for Manitoba Hydro. "This venture is set to unlock economic prosperity for our Nation, creating numerous employment opportunities and setting in motion a wave of economic benefits that were once beyond our reach," Anderson said. "We look forward to the prospect of collaborative efforts with business partners, government, and other First Nations to collectively enhance our capacities and foster a mutually beneficial future." (Brandon Sun, 2024) Anderson said Norway House Cree Nation is also looking at other projects in Manitoba's capital city: "We're close to finalizing a 100-suite hotel in Winnipeg as well. We're trying to grow our Nation. And the way you grow a Nation, I've learned, is you grow the people. Not the assets. Not the buildings. It's the people we have to grow. That's how you grow a Nation."

Speaking of people, Anderson has gained a reputation for being compassionate. He's always willing to give others the benefit of the doubt. It's something that he has done since owning his own businesses. "People began to know me as someone who gave the individual who was kind of frowned upon or castaway an opportunity to work," he said. "And many people were surprised at how well they could work. And I felt that we should be able to help everyone that wants to do something or work." To this end, Anderson said he is supportive of young individuals who are beginning their work careers. And he offered a message of hope for them: "If you want something in life, if you want to get ahead in life, get a job, go back to school, find something to do. My brother once told me that everyone can do something. There's always something that somebody can do. It's no excuse saying I don't know what to do or I don't know how to do anything. There's no such thing. If you look hard enough you will find something." Anderson said he's done his best to bring the attitude that everyone has something to contribute to Norway House. "As employers or as leaders we need to give them a little bit of slack and help them," he said. "People make mistakes, especially ones that haven't worked for any time during their life. We need to be a little more flexible and compassionate. I think we do that in my community."

Anderson feels there is still plenty of work to be done, especially regarding what he believes is the most important issue that is hindering successful Indigenous economic development: "access to funds, either through equity or financing." He also singled out "government processes that take a long time to get approvals. An example is the addition through reserve process. So far, it's taken five years to add a small parcel of 18 acres of land in the middle of nowhere on Highway 6. It's been five years and we still don't know when the end is going to be." Anderson also noted that funding options for Indigenous communities is a problem from coast to coast to coast. "There is very little funding or grants from Canada, and if approval is received, the limit is too low for a major business like a community's store," he said. "They have this core program where the maximum they will grant you is \$1 million. With a project that is \$20 million, \$1 million dollars does not get you very far."

Anderson realizes not everyone is as fortunate as Norway House Cree Nation. "They delayed this project that we're doing now in Norway House," he said of government officials. "We are building our store but no thanks to Canada. We have

funding elsewhere.” Thus, Anderson believes his First Nation does have the capacity to implement its goals and to have the desired economic impacts. “From where I started until now, yes, we do (have that capacity),” he said. “Especially in terms of the financing side of it. We now fall under First Nations Financial Management Board. So, we are able to get our funding through there at favourable rates. I guess the only thing that we need is more capacity building of our membership so we are able to run the store and things of that nature.”

Anderson also believes it is important to form partnerships with others to alleviate the challenge of finding sufficient employees to run new ventures. He said First Nations should attempt to align themselves with a group, other First Nations, or even individuals in order to work together and make projects go faster. “That way we can share responsibilities,” he said. “If I don’t have enough staff or people that are wanting to work in an area, then other communities might have some. If you take five or 10 from each community and you have 10 communities, that’s at least 50 workers. So, I think the issue lately is staffing. That’s been a challenge.”

One new venture was announced in the summer of 2022. The Manitoba government signed forestry revenue-sharing agreements with three First Nations in the northern parts of the province, including Norway House. “This agreement is a resolution regarding controversial forest harvesting that occurred previously within the area,” Anderson said. “The agreement to replant the forest, define financial contributions, establish a mutually acceptable long-term plan for the sustainable development of the area, and outline a package of employment opportunities will allow Norway House Cree Nation to benefit from the resources in its traditional territory. The Manitoba government has agreed to ensure appropriate consultation in future activities and share the financial benefits of future resource development. Environmental stewardship of our traditional territory is essential for appropriate environmental, social and governance economic activities in Northern Manitoba.” (Thompson Citizen, 2024)

Norway House Cree Nation also earned kudos in mid-2022 when it launched its new economic development department. That has been a goal for Anderson since he first became Chief. The department assists members seeking support to commence their own business. Department officials can also help members draft business plans, assist with filing funding applications, and supply seed money to see plans come to fruition. For example, Jimmy Thunder worked on the development of a comprehensive economic development plan for the Nation while he was director of the department. The mission statement addresses the goals of economic independence through a healthy local economy and a strong presence in the provincial economy. His great satisfaction is “seeing the incremental positive changes in the community already and the long-term benefits coming from the Nation’s investments.” Anderson said the department provides a sense of pride for the First Nation while helping members meet their goals. “People want to be part of the development (of the Cree Nation) and not only working, but also finding ways to contribute by creating jobs and finding some wealth for themselves,” Anderson said. (CTV News Winnipeg, 2024)

Though he was critical of others who were in leadership positions for his First Nation before, Anderson said he has carried over some aspects of their work into his thinking

today. “What I go by is what I learned when I was a councillor,” he said. “Back then that’s how all of our projects were done, by mentorship and apprenticeship programs and the like. We still do that. It’s a little bit different now. We’re doing more on-the-job training. We’ve also bought and run our own housing construction company. We build modular homes and we’re excited to build modular buildings now. So, we’re going to build our own store using our company.”

Indeed, Anderson believes self-ownership is the way to go. “Being able to have your own company, then you have more flexibility,” he said. “You can meet community needs. So, we are planning to put those trade apprentices in place as we go along.” A prime example is the trades building that was constructed at the local high school. “That is run by Frontier School Division,” Anderson said. “We built a facility that is big enough for students to learn how to build houses, two at a time. Through the school year they are learning carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and drywall inside the building. We have a good relationship with Frontier. And we have a good plan moving forward.” Norway House also has plans to expand educational pursuits. “In our Taylor building [in Winnipeg], there’s a 250-seat cafeteria,” Anderson said. “And we started discussions with Frontier School Division again to offer a college diploma for a culinary arts program. In Norway House students can go to Grade 12 and usually that’s where it ends. This way we can actually expand it to a college diploma with the Taylor building opening up by the fall.” Anderson was also instrumental in the construction of another jewel in his First Nation—the Norway House Cree Nation Health Centre of Excellence. “When I got elected in 2018, there was a project on the table that was a \$100 million health centre,” he said. “It took a while for government to approve it, about four months after I got elected. Before they started clapping I said ‘One more thing. I want to build it.’ They were reluctant at first but we signed an agreement with a partner that had deep pockets, so we got the project. We were the first [First Nation] in Canada to build our own health centre.”

However, Anderson doesn’t want to give away too many details on upcoming projects that his First Nation is planning. He’s hoping proposed partners prove to be beneficial: “So far we’ve had a couple of good ones. I can’t say that much about what we are doing today. But if the partners that we’re working with now come to the table and follow our lead, then the sky is the limit. There are enormous opportunities that we have been presented [with]. I alone can do a lot for my community. But I think we can expand that. We can do a lot for all communities if we put away our pride and are left to work together.” Considering its lengthy list of accomplishments in recent years, Norway House Cree Nation will continue to thrive under Anderson’s leadership.

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*Meth Busters Incorporated:
A Beacon of Hope
in Methamphetamine
Contamination Remediation*

Clarence J. Natomagan

OWNER – MBI



Clarence J. Natomagan

In recent years, the issue of drug contamination in residential properties, particularly the presence of methamphetamine residues, has become a pressing concern for many communities, especially Indigenous reserves and municipalities. This problem not only poses health risks to occupants, especially children, but also has far-reaching implications for property values, community safety, and environmental well-being. The increasing number of abandoned and contaminated properties, primarily due to drug use, has left many communities grappling with the complex challenge of remediation and revitalization.

Meth Busters Incorporated (MBI) is focused on offering a comprehensive and effective solution to the pressing issue of methamphetamine contamination. I founded MBI in 2020 in Pinehouse Lake, Saskatchewan, to address this critical issue head-on.

By combining environmental stewardship, technical expertise, and a commitment to fostering economic development, MBI is participating in the revitalization of neglected properties and the restoration of community homes—and the subsequent well-being of the tenants—in northern Saskatchewan.

I am excited to share the story of MBI—exploring its origins, unique approach, challenges, and positive impact on Indigenous communities. By recounting MBI's journey and strategies, I hope to shed light on innovative strategies for addressing the challenges posed by drug contamination, thereby contributing to the broader landscape of Indigenous economic development.

WHO I AM

I grew up in the small community of Pinehouse Lake in northern Saskatchewan, a beautiful community nestled on the shores of the Churchill River system. I grew up in an era and place where domestic violence was rampant and alcoholism abounded: because of this, the career options available to me were not very inviting, and my personal outlook was confused. However, my Mom taught me one important thing: “persevere, never back down!” To achieve this, I endeavored to be the best at whatever I tried. At 15, I suspended my colonial learning to fish commercially for my Uncle. This provided my first lesson in finance—don't work without a written contract or a fire extinguisher because you'll get burned!

At 17, I went back at school. There were only two of us in my program and we were placed in a mezzanine-style upper deck in the library: the ceiling was 6 feet high, and I was 6'2". There was no teacher, only mailed documents for me to read and learn from. I decided I wasn't going to let the principal determine what my education would be. I grabbed a pen and began writing about how the correspondence environment—and its lack of teachers—would affect my life and limit my career options. I had researched the school division and knew they had funding for students like me to attend classes elsewhere with real teachers. When the principal later came crashing up the stairwell, beet red with anger, I knew someone in Regina had heard me. He let me have it, mentioning my letter and screaming, “You have no right to do that!” I didn't know then that the Director of Education had just got off the phone with him. So, at 17, I learned an important life lesson: the power of the pen. Two years later, I graduated from Churchill Community High School in La Ronge, SK.

Through research and study, I became who I needed to be to excel. I have worked in senior government, private industry management, and construction and my three post-secondary certificates in Occupational Health and Safety, Environmental and Radiation Sampling and Monitoring, and Radiation Technology were all earned while working a full-time job. The project management skills I acquired have been an asset in addressing the multifaceted challenges of methamphetamine contamination and the regulatory regime of the province and its key players. Ultimately, my academic background and practical experience in health, safety, environmental protection, and quality management systems drive MBI's success today.

Looking back though, I now see how much my childhood affected my career. My traumas drove my life in work and in play. My biggest life setback was dealing with addiction. It took too many years to realize its hold. After poring over many books, I learned late in life that the emotional environment a child lives in shapes all aspects of their adult life. I had not realized that I had been living in victimhood for most of my life. This realization allowed me to begin healing: I face my addiction every day and by choosing not to have alcohol in my life for the last four years, I believe I am creating a legacy for my family and the Indigenous nations who are part of MBI's vision. Working on myself and beginning to understand the impact of my emotional state and responses not only allows me to continue working on my physical and mental health but also allows me to effectively establish and nurture the development of MBI.

MBI'S VISION OF EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EXPERTISE

At MBI, I envision a future where communities have their own methamphetamine remediation teams, operating independently and utilizing the effective systems that my son and I have established. I want to take MBI beyond Saskatchewan: I aim to establish MBI as the premier remediation company not just in Western Canada but across our nation. Why not?

At the core of this vision is my desire to lead the field of methamphetamine remediation by setting new standards and championing excellence. My vision is deeply connected to my belief that we can take care of ourselves. But everywhere I go, the message is the opposite—there is no trust in my abilities, thus no trust in MBI's capacity. It's the same message I hear about band-run businesses. It is an uphill battle everyday.

This is my commitment: to empower First Nations communities in making their homes a safe place to live. We aim to be the light that shows our nations a path toward cleaner homes, healthier lives, and stronger communities, with community teams taking charge of their homes' remediation and creating a healthier living environment, fostering self-sufficiency, and instilling pride.

GOALS TO ACHIEVE OUR VISION

MBI strives to create a lasting, positive impact on First Nations communities through promoting tailored training, expertise, exceptional services, and health and well-being. MBI promises to transform living environments and empower communities through education, excellence, and collaboration. Our goals include:

1. Developing a tailored training program for First Nations.
2. Collaborating with Indigenous leaders and communities to educate and provide resources.
3. Empowering Band members to take charge of home remediation for self-sufficiency.

To achieve this, MBI commits to:

1. Staying updated with the latest techniques and fostering continuous learning.
2. Prioritizing team training and development.
3. Utilizing advanced equipment and environmentally-friendly practices.
4. Striving for 100% customer satisfaction.
5. Collaborating with health and government agencies for prevention.
6. Contributing to community well-being and safety.

Imagine this: a methamphetamine remediation team exists in your community, funded through Jordan's Principle (Indigenous Services Canada's pilot project on home remediation, repairs, and community development initiatives). These funding streams flow into community health directorates that would procure the services of the community's methamphetamine remediation team, thus creating employment opportunities and immediate remediation capacity to deal with contaminated homes. Homes no longer sit boarded up for several years.

CLEANING PROCESS AND EXPERTISE

MBI's approach to methamphetamine contamination remediation revolves around a systematic three-phase process, ensuring properties are thoroughly cleaned of contaminants and restored to safe and habitable conditions. This process highlights MBI's commitment to safety, health, and environmental preservation and avoids adding to the current housing crisis. We continue to save homes for people who desperately need them.

Phase I: Assessment

This is handled by a qualified third-party assessment agency to avoid a conflict of interest. The expert agency visits the contaminated property and collects samples for laboratory testing, confirming the presence and extent of contamination. This preliminary phase is crucial to craft a tailored plan for the property's remediation.

Phase II: Clean-Up & Remediation

The core of our expertise lies with our learned skills and product combinations for cleaning and remediating contaminated properties. Contaminated materials are removed, including furniture and carpeting. Specialized equipment is employed to clean furnace systems, ductworks, walls, ceilings, and floors. Approved cleaning agents are used to methodically clean surfaces to ensure the removal of methamphetamine residue. This is the most critical phase—it makes or breaks us. Every team member adheres to stringent cleaning, health, and safety protocols to ensure a successful remediation.

Phase III: Retesting and Verification

Once the remediation is completed, MBI's third-party agency retests the property to confirm it is free of contamination. The analysis is performed by an accredited

laboratory. If contamination levels meet health standards, a final report is generated, detailing the property's condition and its rent readiness.

At every step of the remediation process, safety, health, and environmental protection remain paramount for all. MBI strictly adheres to industry standards and also develops new standards based on experience with the goal of quality improvement.

A FAMILY BUSINESS

The idea for this company came after talking with a local contractor and realizing that methamphetamine use is at crisis levels in communities. While there is no manual, and it is not easy (there were doubters and there still are), if you asked me today, "What's it like owning a business?" I would say, "It's the only way to go!"

At MBI, I don't want just a team—I want a family team that adds value to our company through dedication to their team and MBI standards. Our core team consists of myself, my awesome wife Sarah, and my son Aidon. I lead the company's growth, budgeting, marketing, and strategic development. Sarah manages our company's financial operations. She is the one that ensures financial records are maintained accurately and transparently and makes sure we go from one project to the next with as few hiccups as possible. Aidon is the frontline supervisor overseeing two teams within MBI. His role involves coordinating and managing daily operations, ensuring that the company's procedures and safe work practices are rigorously followed. Aidon's hands-on experience, coupled with his certification as a methamphetamine remediation technician, positions him as a proficient leader on the ground.

Beyond our business operations, I have an innate desire to help our communities. We help in events geared to community wellness. We participate in local events that serve those in need, providing food, clothing, and support to the homeless and underprivileged. We want to have a positive local impact when times are favorable for Meth Busters Incorporated.

As the owner and leader, I set the company's tone by practicing and advocating for respect in the workplace. I want MBI's workplace to have an inclusive culture, to be respectful, and to be harassment-free: *this is of utmost importance to me*. I also want MBI to leave a legacy that we can take care of ourselves and our own homes. Through education and imparting what we've learned to our Indigenous communities, this can be done.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

I struggle with this part of my story. What do I say? What can I say? Because there is no manual for setting up and running a business, I always believed that all it took to be successful was an education, hard-work, and consistent performance. However, the saying, "In order to be successful, it's who you know!" is true. You might say, "It doesn't work that way." Well, it does! As one businessman told me, "You'll suffer for at least three years!" Well—he was right! Building a new business requires commitment, dedication, and collaboration. It can be a challenging process: after three years of working with executive level Chiefs and Councils, I have still not received any requests from the Grand Councils—but I have been contacted by a few communities willing to fight the methamphetamine epidemic on their own. I have lived and worked through

our crab-in-the-bucket challenges and communities are beginning to solicit MBI for help. Our story is spreading, and I believe our communities are now seeing us as a legitimate option.

While my vision is to have Meth Buster teams remediating homes in every province, it is not the entire solution. In my pursuit of creating a sustainable team in each community, I knew that I had to create strategic partnerships, network, and cultivate relationships in the industry. As I write this, calls of opportunity are beginning to pour in. What do we do now? All the travelling, emails, letters, and conversations—both good and bad—have led to this. The hours of preparation to engage and confer with industry professionals, community leaders, and potential clients has allowed me to create opportunities for exposure, education, and collaboration. By collaborating with other corporations that provide complementary services, such as testing, MBI ensures a well-rounded approach to contamination remediation. These partnerships also help us mitigate potential conflicts of interest and foster a more comprehensive and unbiased assessment of contaminated homes.

However, building connections was not the only challenge. Naively, I only expected to suffer from a lack of work during the growing pains of my new business. In reality, the battle was three-fold: establishing business connections, yes, but also encountering authorities who I felt overextended their powers, and confronting the traumas associated with childhood experiences and their impact on every decision and interaction you have with people and businesses.

Regarding authorities who overextend their powers: if policies don't make sense, then don't hesitate to question and challenge them. In my experience, there were times when ghost policies were used by several persons in government agencies and MBI clients to support a decision that was not helpful to MBI. Did the policy really exist or was it just the individual's approach? When this has happened, I have used several tactics. I did my homework before I had a meeting with the decision-makers where I asked to see a copy of the policy they had mentioned. I am also persistent and gathered as much information as possible (for example, on the standards used by government inspectors when inspecting remediated homes) to ensure my case was built on facts. Because I was prepared, I could show that MBI met all policies that actually existed.

Being informed is crucial to a businesses' success. I am 6'2" and 275 lbs: because of this, I am sometimes perceived as intimidating and adversarial. To combat this, I ensure my approach is always well informed. I choose to be great at what I do and part of that is learning others' systems: I will speak with you on your terms because I chose to learn about you and your business. When I begin to highlight others' systems and rules, the relationship changes. Today, my relationship with the province is blossoming into what I wanted from the beginning: a mutually respectful relationship where the Province of Saskatchewan can believe in, and thus work with, MBI as a legitimate remediation company, allowing me to lead my company to be the Premier Remediation Company in Western Canada—if not all of Canada.

Positioning MBI as an example of excellence means meeting and sometimes exceeding standards. To do so, MBI will challenge authority and push boundaries when necessary: that is what I've always done and will continue to do. I teach this to

my kids and to my employees. As an experienced inspector and contractor, I grapple daily with balancing my knowledge and insight of governments and people in general against industry norms and expectations. The struggle to initiate change in a system totally resistant to alterations highlights the importance of MBI's perseverance and our strategic navigation of this culture. For example, I met resistance to improving current standards for remediation when I shared international standards with a government department—but I persisted, even though they probably felt harassed. A transformation is gradually beginning to shape the system to the advantage of us contractors.

My mantra is that it is necessary to present solutions to problems rather than simply identifying the problem and expecting solutions. Presenting solutions requires work. It requires research, preparation, and stakeholder engagement. The complexities of methamphetamine remediation necessitate constant vigilance and a multidimensional approach, combining rigorous adherence to protocols with adaptability to unforeseen circumstances. With a background in ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems (international guidance that is universally trusted by organizations and boosts the quality of business operations), MBI is committed to accurate procedures, periodic data review, action meetings, site visits, and ongoing and effective communication that demonstrates high standards of quality.

But while success stories are important, so too is dealing with failures. A very memorable instance was a failed paint job. I drove close to three hours to inspect a unit that I had painted. I entered the unit and was aghast at what I saw: entire sheets of paint falling off the wall—literally. Sheets of paint peeled off from the stippled ceiling: talk about anxiety! With my TapRoot training (a world-wide system for identifying and fixing all types of critical problems), I conducted an exhaustive investigation and uncovered causal factors. The subsequent corrective actions illustrated the value of investigating and addressing failures, turning them into opportunities for growth. This example showed us how to transform these setbacks into stepping stones and was a catalyst for growth—for progress! This was discussed amongst our team and boy, did we learn something that day.

In navigating through these challenges and learning from failures, we're able to continue to practice the essence of resilience, adaptability, and perseverance. These lessons have taught me the significance of sharing knowledge. We cannot and should not hoard knowledge. We must teach and share our knowledge. By sharing our learnings, we can make our communities and ourselves better.

By sharing my experiences, I believe that I am creating a blueprint for aspiring entrepreneurs and individuals striving for success. The principles of thorough research, continuous learning, mentorship, and strategic outreach are my guiding lights. MBI's journey—and where it is today--has been achieved through the power of determination, knowledge, and relationships. The story of MBI's challenges is being transformed into triumphs through sheer dedication and unwavering belief. But is that all it takes to be successful or even just to make it through every day? The answer is no. There needs to be someone (or in my case, two someones) who believes in you, someone on the inside. Find that someone!

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I write this, it is now 4:33 a.m. This day started like any other day. I get up at 3 a.m. and have a coffee. My deadline for this article is this morning and I have a presentation to a non-profit family support agency at 9 a.m. I struggle with my rewrites. And I struggle with the truth. “Tell it from the heart,” is the advice. That is easier said than done because there are societal and business rules and etiquette to follow. Those rules are not in any manual. You learn through osmosis. You simply learn quickly what matters and which matters are worth conflict. At 7 a.m. I will depart to Saskatoon to do my presentation. We will talk about the risks associated with methamphetamine residues in homes and how to protect oneself. My cousin Eric is going to drive me there. He is here to learn about methamphetamine remediation in hopes that, if he likes it, he will start his own company. Yay, MBI! We are at the cusp of unprecedented growth in 2024 and looking forward to the challenge.

Oh, did I forget to mention, I am also a certified mold remediator and inspector. After only two houses, our third mold job attained the lowest spore counts ever seen by provincial inspectors. But that’s another story!

ORIGIN: *Connecting Culture to the Modern-Day Workplace Through New Technology*

Sam Laskaris

CANDO WRITER



Melissa Hardy-Giles

Melissa Hardy-Giles is in a win-win situation: a member of the Red Rock Indian Band in northern Ontario, Hardy-Giles is the president and CEO of ORIGIN, a company she launched in 2009. ORIGIN provides innovative virtual reality technology to its clients, the majority of who are Indigenous peoples and communities. As Hardy-Giles shares, “Getting to work with communities and getting to see impacts on individuals and families as a whole and communities as a whole ... [gives her great satisfaction.] And it’s awesome to be able to promote our own Indigenous culture for a living. It’s awesome because I get to share cultural teachings through virtual reality with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across our nation.” Hardy-Giles realizes the work ORIGIN is doing is vital. “Of course, it’s an important role to be a facilitator in bringing resources to the community,” she said, “[a]nd it allows me to be a role model as well for those

who may not see themselves following a traditional career path. We're changing lives and that's the whole jive for me. And that's our whole why. It's like there's too many negative things that are out there for our youth right now. And to be able to motivate and get them excited and trying to guide them on their career path, is most rewarding."

After working for a decade at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay as a senior administrator and human resource practitioner, Hardy-Giles and her husband Paul founded Hardy Giles Consulting (HGC) in 2006 the precursor to ORIGIN. This company specialized in creating innovative approaches and solutions for training and planning. "The freedom got me excited," Hardy-Giles said of having her own company. "But at the same time the freedom to help people and kind of make my own boundaries and my own rules of how I wanted to do it, there was no holding back at that point." One of HGC's first projects was working on a life-skills training program in Hearst, Ontario. Hardy-Giles knew it was necessary to incorporate some form of technology into that program: "Just because our communities are remote, they shouldn't be left outside when it comes to technology. And a lot of times they are, just because getting bandwidth and everything up north is really, really hard." HGC brought in heavy equipment simulators and training to communities via a mobile classroom. The simulators were replicas of the machines utilized in the construction industry. As Hardy-Giles notes, "This was our way into helping our communities to be a part of different types of construction projects that are happening all the time in our northern communities."

Turning now to ORIGIN that has received its share of praise for the way it has conducted business since its inception. The company has also gotten much more recognition since it created ImmersiveLink, a virtual reality platform, in 2019. "That was basically to take a step further of being able to interact and be a part of the training rather than just seeing the Virtual Reality productions," Hardy-Giles said. She also knew her company could provide various educational aspects: "We realized the power of our reach and that's when we decided to launch a cultural library so at the same time, whoever has our headsets and who has subscribed to our ImmersiveLink library will also be educated and have the opportunity to be educated in how diverse our culture is" (Stranger, 2021). Using Virtual Reality, ImmersiveLink allows individuals to take part in life skills programs. They can quickly acquire skills in time management, budgeting, and self-care, allowing them to prosper in their lives. ImmersiveLink also allows clients to reconnect with their roots via Indigenous cultural knowledge workshops led by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. As Hardy-Giles explains, "I wanted to do something to support reconciliation. With the type of reach we have in regards to helping communities or organizations or even big corporations, I always like to add some cultural awareness on the side and be able to educate them at the same time. So, we have cultural teachings as well."

Hardy-Giles also realizes plenty of educational work still needs to happen. "The increase in discussions we see around reconciliation is still somewhat new," she said, and "[w]hile there may be a lot more messages on social media and more topics covered in the news, there is still a lot of progress to be made towards meaningful action. In 2009, before I started ORIGIN, reconciliation wasn't something that was talked about so openly" (Hardy-Giles, 2023). However, she is thrilled to be making valuable

contributions to society: “My personal motivations when running the company, is I just believe in helping people. It’s just amazing that we’re able to make a living helping people and breaking down barriers and being trailblazers. We get sucked up so quickly by big corporations that I knew we needed to be on these platforms and share our knowledge and also share Indigenous skills across Canada.” And it is only fitting that she incorporates Indigenous perspectives into the company’s work: “Indigenous perspectives are ingrained in me. They’re ingrained in my DNA. So, it’s only natural that it drives my intentions with staff and drives my intentions with the Nations we work with. Indigenous culture is so rich with traditions. And we go beyond what anyone sees at a powwow.”

ORIGIN’s work is now rather far reaching. “Obviously we service communities,” Hardy-Giles said. “We’re in over 1,000 schools in Ontario alone and for the past few years now, we have broken into big corporate. Just like the rest of the country, more and more people are giving us a spotlight and wanting to hear what we have to say. They’re opening their hearts to some of our teachings and how they can incorporate them.” Hardy-Giles is fully aware ORIGIN can provide teaching opportunities for people across the country: “Our outreach with our career experiences was so vast that we knew it was a perfect opportunity to educate Canadians on our Indigenous culture. Even myself, an Indigenous person from (Red Rock Indian Band), I’m learning a lot about our culture from our knowledge keepers because it is so diverse and there are so many knowledge keepers out there” (Garrick, 2021).

Hardy-Giles is proud of the projects that ORIGIN has undertaken over the years. These include Operation Innovation and Operation Playground. With Operation Innovation, the company worked alongside members of more than 40 communities, engaging more than 400 Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and training more than 80 people in heavy equipment operation. About 80 people were connected to careers via this program, while about 60 others were referred to other training programs. With Operation Playground, three playgrounds were constructed in northern Ontario communities. In the spirit of reconciliation, more than 100 youth (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) were consulted, and, along with some family members, helped rebuild playgrounds that had fallen in disrepair. “I think the difference is they were a part of it,” Hardy-Giles said of the interest in the projects. “Their families had their hands in there. And the children had their hands in there.”

Two more notable initiatives ORIGIN has been involved with are the Indigenous Perspectives Program and Operation Innovation 2.0. As Hardy-Giles explains, for the Indigenous Perspectives Program “[w]e engaged 400 youth from 32 First Nations communities. We connected these youth to Knowledge Keepers and Elders and this introduced storytelling. The way we incorporated technology was we taught the youth how to use 360-degree video equipment (captures a view from every direction) in order to story tell.” For Operation Innovation 2.0., Hardy-Giles and her team “trained and certified 50 employment and training partners to engage Indigenous individuals in a variety of career roles. We’re quite busy but we’re always trying to train people to train people rather than just delivering it on our own. I like to think we’re arming people with this information so they can use it.”

ORIGIN has grown over the years to the point where the company now has 14 employees, five of whom identify as Indigenous. “When we started the company, we wanted to create an environment that reflects our work, projects, and innovative approach to career exploration,” Hardy-Giles said. “We take great pride in our ability to attract and retain Indigenous talent who have the same vision in making meaningful change in Indigenous communities. We are fortunate that all employees share the same vision and enable us to lead this important work. It is important to the overall success of the company in reaching our goal that the team is passionate about working and supporting bringing opportunities to Indigenous communities.”

Hardy-Giles said her company is constantly assessing its own performance: “Similar to most organizations, we have implemented a series of systems and processes that enables the company to review goals and progress annually. This includes systems supporting products and services, operational processes, and human capital management. From these activities we set goals and objectives that align with overall company objectives for all staff members. Staff members are able to take ownership of these goals and use them as clear milestones when it comes to executing day-to-day activities.” And it’s not just staff input that is considered as customers and prospective customers are also approached for feedback to help drive the development of resources to support the company’s growth. As Hardy-Giles explains, “This growth will allow us to set higher goals and objectives to continually expand on the impact we are able to make as an organization.”

Hardy-Giles is aware that ORIGIN has become a huge success. “First and foremost, success is reflected in the meaningful outcomes that are the result of the work we lead,” she said. “We have worked with over 100 First Nations and have increased the number of Indigenous community members participating in projects operating in their respective territories. This confirms that our workshop offerings, the use of heavy equipment simulators, and Virtual Reality resources are the blueprint to meaningful engagement that leads to meaningful outcomes.”

Despite ORIGIN’s successes, Hardy-Giles believes there is a critical issue facing successful Indigenous economic development these days—access to and control over resources. “These resources include but aren’t limited to land rights, tools, investment funds, trained workforce to support these initiatives, proper education, and training, and so on,” she said. “These issues are especially prevalent in remote communities where they lack access to even basic necessities including clean drinking water.” Hardy-Giles added it can be challenging to make change, especially without some funding: “For example, when we look at accessing education and training, it comes with many barriers. Not only can it be challenging to physically get to communities, but it’s also costly and time consuming. Many cannot invest into this type of education or take time away from their current jobs to attend the training. This is why when it comes to building out training for Indigenous job seekers, it’s so important to understand their background and adapt the training to meet their needs. Some may also not have received the same types of career support that is offered in the public-school system. They may not even know of all the jobs that exist that may be of interest to them and meet their skillset.”

ORIGIN officials have also encountered other challenges. “Some challenges that employment and training teams may face in communities we’ve worked in include getting job seekers motivated and actively participating in opportunities available,” Hardy-Giles notes. “The element of virtual reality and the heavy equipment simulators are a great tool for bringing attention and interest to the workshops. Our workshops offer a lot of interactivity and the element of integration between Indigenous culture and career is something that sets them apart from traditional training methods. So, once people attend the workshop, our facilitators are able to get them out of their shell, having fun, and getting them excited about pursuing their next role.” Hardy-Giles acknowledges there has been new programming created to support Indigenous job seekers, but that it sometimes lacks an Indigenous perspective: “When new resources are being designed and implemented, the key is to look at it through the lens of who will actually be participating and making use of these programs.”

The bottom line is that Hardy-Giles had a plan and has managed to make it work—big time. “Melissa Hardy-Giles, the brains, and the muscles behind ORIGIN, founded the company with an aim to give the communities skills at a grassroots level and be self-sustained; the teachings of the seven grandfathers guiding the way. Her belief was that everyone has a unique and valuable set of skillsets, and it must be cultivated in the population to create more opportunities for the Indigenous population in Canada. The forefathers’ teachings, valuable as they are, could be left behind if it wasn’t adapted to the world today. The answer to that adaptation was already in Melissa’s mind: tech implementation” (Natesh, 2021).

Hardy-Giles also has some advice others seeking success might wish to consider. “One of the most important things someone can do for themselves is understand what their core values are,” she said. “Anything that you build or are working towards should be built around core values: whether they are company or individual driven, they are the foundation of who you are. These values will drive you where you want to be. This again ties into connecting back to your culture and understanding traditional core beliefs and what you feel resonates with you.”

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Introduction

David Newhouse

In this issue, we present two articles in Lessons from Research. The first article *Where exactly are all the First Nation Businesses? Interpreting the First Nation Business Environment in Yukon, 2008-2021* by Ken Coates and Greg Finnegan examines situation of First Nations Businesses in Yukon Territory. As one of the fastest growing economies in Canada and with one of the longest standing land claims agreement the Yukon First Nation Final Agreements, the expectation was that Indigenous business formation would be high. However, Indigenous businesses continue to be underrepresented in the Yukon economy. While there are data challenges in collecting data on Indigenous businesses, a complex picture of factors affecting Indigenous businesses emerges. Future business development will require co-ordinated efforts by First Nations, Territorial, and Canadian governments to address well.

The second article *Social value of renewable energy in remote, northern, Indigenous communities* by Anne Lim, Greg Poelzer and Bram Noble addresses an important and critical issue facing Indigenous communities across the country: developing a source of renewable energy to be able to move away from diesel-dependent generation. The article moves beyond the usual frameworks of evaluation that speak to contribution to sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and economic reconciliation to include social value. The authors outline a pathway that communities could follow to increase the social value of renewable energy projects: building relationships, capacity building, decreasing centralized bureaucracies of utility structures and safeguarding ecologies.

*Where Exactly Are All the
First Nation Businesses?
Interpreting the First Nation Business
Environment in the Yukon, 2008-2021*

Kenneth Coates

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ABSTRACT

The Yukon has one of the fastest growing, albeit smallest, economies in Canada, with an increasing population and a tight labour market. Modern treaties and self-government agreements have empowered First Nations governments, and Supreme Court decisions and treaty rights secured Indigenous governments a significant place in the resource sector. Yet Yukon First Nation businesspeople are not yet benefiting fully from this positive political and economic situation. This paper explores the underrepresentation of the Yukon First Nation businesspeople in the economy by examining the available data from the Yukon Business Survey (YBS), a census of Canada self-employment data, and a new national program at Statistics Canada that is working to better identify the presence of Indigenous businesses within the national economy. The research shows that work still needs to be done to better support the development of Indigenous businesspeople as they strive to break through the barriers that have left them on the margins of the northern economy.

Key Words: Indigenous economic development, Yukon First Nations business development

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, David Newhouse stated, “While the paths that Aboriginal economies are choosing are different, most are encouraging the development of a business community as one of the primary driving forces for economic development” (p. 69). However, some two decades later, it is still a struggle to define the Indigenous business community in Canada. While enthusiasts of Indigenous business talk of the \$100 billion Indigenous economy (Hilton, 2021), and while several mega-deals have changed public perceptions of Indigenous businesses, Indigenous peoples are still severely underrepresented in business. First Nations business owners face unique challenges in forging new business opportunities and new firms, including limited access to financial capital, small cohorts of skilled Indigenous workers and professionals, small home markets that are often economically disadvantaged, and remote regions with long supply lines (Jafri & Alasia, 2019).

The recent study *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada* (2020) found that according to the Community Well-Being Index, 98 of the 100 lowest ranked communities are First Nations communities (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]). In 2023, Statistics Canada reported that one-third (33.7%) of Indigenous majority-owned business did not have the cash or liquid assets to operate over the next quarter, compared to 23.9% of all private sector businesses. They also found a considerable drop in the number of Indigenous businesses in Canada between the first and second quarters of 2022, with Indigenous majority-owned businesses slumping from 23,530 in Q1 2022 to 17,417 in Q2 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2023a).¹ That’s a decline of over one-quarter of all Indigenous firms in a single quarter in 2022. Majority-owned Indigenous businesses in Q2 2022 represented only 1.7% of all Canadian businesses, similar in number to businesses owned by persons with a disability and far less than visible minorities (15.4%) and women (19.1%) (Statistics Canada, 2022a). While the small percentage of Indigenous-owned companies may be a consequence of owners struggling to restart their businesses after the pandemic, Chernoff and Cheung (2023) note that many Indigenous communities lack basic infrastructure such as full-time banking services, accounting firms, and business coaches—let alone investors. Additionally, labour shortage was cited by 30% of Indigenous firms as a major obstacle to success (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

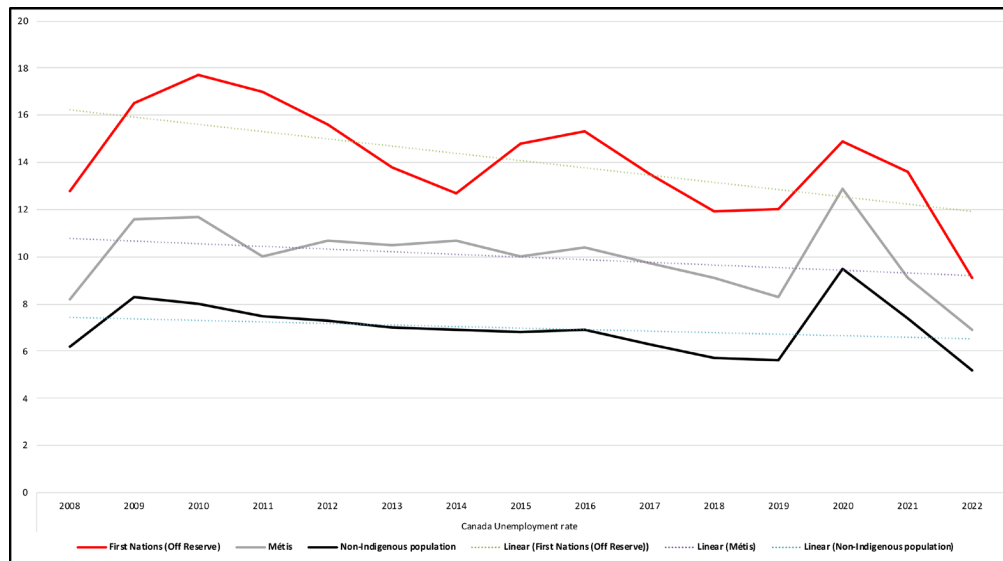
The remoteness and small population markets commonly associated with Indigenous communities make it difficult and costly to access emergency business services in a timely manner, whether that involves sourcing freon for a broken freezer at a grocery store or finding repair staff to restore internet access.² And these challenges are exacerbated by the devastating legacy of residential schools (Bleakney & Melvin, 2022). Unemployment in many Indigenous communities remains high, while high school and university graduation rates remain well below the national average (Anderson, 2021). And, while Warren Weir (2007) concluded his study of Indigenous small business and entrepreneurship by stating, “Small business development and entrepreneurship are in the end community and government tools that, if structured and managed properly, will undoubtedly assist in the promotion, development, and ongoing support of healthy,

self-governing, and self-sustaining communities” (p. 52), the Yukon statistical data from 2008 to 2021 does not support his optimism. Starting and maintaining a business in a small Indigenous community has challenges well beyond those of a start-up in larger urban centres. These challenges begin with access to capital and credit. de Soto (2000) estimates that 70% of businesspeople in the Western world started their firms based on capital available to them through the mortgaging of their own homes, a form of collateral not commonly available to First Nations people (Peredo et al., 2022).

Even with these limitations, First Nations entrepreneurs strive to open businesses, invest in their communities, and build the Canadian economy. However, First Nations businesses are severely underrepresented in the Canadian and Yukon economies, a problem that requires focused attention if First Nations communities are to prosper by attracting capital to their communities. Part of the problem is the effects of COVID-19 on First Nations communities, especially those on reserves. As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across Canada in 2020 and 2021, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs heard repeatedly that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and their communities were more vulnerable than other Canadians to the virus (Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 2021). The Parliamentary report points to a plethora of concerns—many present prior to the pandemic—raised by witnesses: inequalities in housing, health, broadband/telecommunications, basic connectivity (road, rail, air), and water and wastewater treatment. In 2020, the list grew to include concerns about increased food insecurity, amplified mental health problems, limited access to COVID-19 protective gear and medical treatment, and the growing need for vaccination education and communications (Polsky & Garriguet, 2022). Angele Alook, Shelia Block, and Grace-Edward Galabuzi show that “on average, over the period July 2020 to June 2021, 28 percent of Indigenous peoples lived with economic insecurity compared to 16 percent of white households” (2021, p. 4).

But there may be a silver lining: coming out of COVID-19, the increasing demand for labour in Canada is giving more First Nations workers entry into the work force, driving First Nations (off-reserve)³ unemployment rates to 9.1%, which is the lowest point in the labour force record (see Figure 1). One would expect that Indigenous businesses would be a significant driver of this increase in Indigenous labour force participation.

FIGURE 1
Canada First Nations (Off-Reserve), Métis, and
Non-Indigenous Unemployment Rate, 2008 - 2022



Note. Data is from *Table 14-10-0365-01 Labour Force Characteristics by Region and Detailed Indigenous Group* by Statistics Canada, 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.25318/1410036501-eng>).

This paper seeks to better understand the level of inequality blocking Indigenous businesspeople from equitable access to the marketplace. The Yukon has been collecting business survey data and reporting on First Nations business activity through the Yukon Business Survey (YBS) since 2008, providing a unique time series. More recently, Canada has begun to address the major gap in its Indigenous business registry after consultations with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB). This paper uses three sources to assess the level of First Nations business activity in the Yukon:

1. YBS from 2008-2021
2. Data from Statistics Canada, which for the first time in 2022 generated national statistical data on the number of Indigenous businesses in Canada, broken out by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit
3. Self-employment data from the Census of Canada, broken out by Indigenous and non-Indigenous categories using the Indigenous Census profile

Each of these three datasets presents challenges for the user. They are not seamless, and they cannot be readily woven together to form a precise profile of First Nations business activity in the Yukon. Collectively, though, they begin to build a baseline of what First Nations business activity looks like in the Yukon and suggest the need for

policies that better support First Nation business development in the Yukon. Policies such as the Government of Yukon's 2022 First Nations Procurement Policy may, in time, drive government contracts towards First Nations businesses, increasing revenue and improving access to capital.

FIRST NATIONS BUSINESS OWNERSHIP IN THE YUKON: ASSESSING THE YUKON BUSINESS SURVEY DATA

A preliminary analysis of data acquired from the YBS from 2008-2021 indicates that despite 22% of the Yukon population having Indigenous heritage, First Nations peoples are not developing businesses at an equivalent rate (Statistics Canada, 2021). Geographically, Indigenous people represent 36% of the rural Yukon's population and about 18% of Whitehorse's population (Statistics Canada, 2018). But in Whitehorse, Indigenous business owners from the two resident First Nations (the Kwanlin Dun and Ta'an Kwach'an Council) represent only seven locally owned firms out of 2,408—a minuscule 0.3%. (That said, many businesses in Whitehorse are owned by members of other Yukon and non-Yukon First Nations.) The results are somewhat better in rural Yukon where the majority of the population is of First Nations heritage, but underrepresentation persists.

In 2008, the Yukon Bureau of Statistics included new questions into the YBS that sought to capture information on First Nations business ownership as well as ownership by gender. The YBS provided annual results between 2008-2010 and biannual results from 2013-2021 (see Table 3). It is the only instrument of its kind in Canada that specifically seeks information on First Nations business ownership and offers a time series for such data.⁴ Nationally, the CCAB runs numerous surveys of Indigenous businesses in Canada, while Statistics Canada has developed more efficient Indigenous business reporting in the past few years. Indigenous business survey data is essential to better understand the Indigenous community's increasing role in the national economy. Benchmark surveys like the YBS measure First Nations business activity in the Territory and show how it has changed over time. In Canada, the Indigenous community (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) now represent 5% of the national population and Statistics Canada estimates the gross domestic product attributable to Indigenous peoples was \$48.9 billion for 2020, up from \$41.7 billion in 2012 (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Canada, and the CCAB all recognize the importance of standardized nomenclature for Indigenous-owned businesses. The commonly accepted level of ownership is recognized as being 51% Indigenous. In 2021, the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association published a comprehensive overview of the issue of defining Indigenous businesses in Canada and documented the different policies in place nationally. For the CCAB the benchmark is a 51% Indigenous stake in a firm, but in the Yukon the definition is more complex.

A Yukon First Nation Business meets one of the following criteria:

- (i) a corporation or not-for-profit corporation where one or more Yukon First Nations is the direct or beneficial owner of 100% of the shares of the corporation;
- (ii) a sole proprietorship owned by a Yukon First Nation Person;
- (iii) a partnership or limited partnership where at least 50% of the partnership is owned by a Yukon First Nation Person or an organization described in (i) or (ii);
- (iv) a corporation with at least 51% of the corporation's voting shares owned by a Yukon First Nation Person or an organization described in (i) or (ii); or
- (v) a not-for-profit organization in good standing under the Societies Act with at least 51% of its membership comprised of Yukon First Nations people.

A sole proprietorship owned by a non-Yukon First Nation Person, which supports a Yukon First Nation spouse or common law partner, and/or a Yukon First Nation family, may qualify as a Yukon First Nation Business. *The Government will engage the relevant Yukon First Nation government during its review* [emphasis added]. (Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce, n.d.)

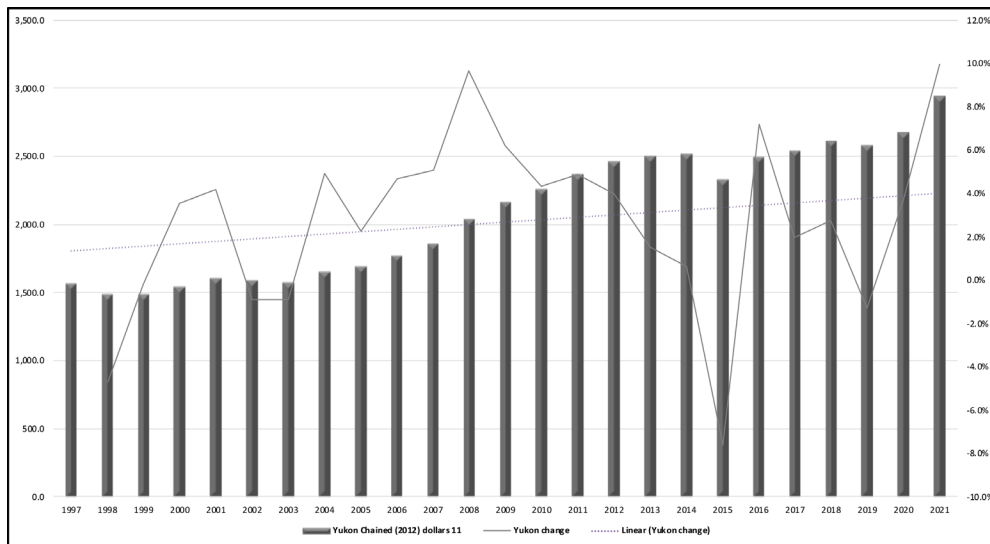
As the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association's 2021 report notes, "Fraudulent misrepresentation of Indigenous identity is endemic in Canada, which presents significant barriers for businesses that are authentically Indigenous" (p. 3). In the Yukon there was little advantage to claiming to be a First Nations business prior to 2022, when the First Nations procurement policy was enacted by the Yukon legislature. The YBS requests that Indigenous firms self-identify and requires 51% Indigenous ownership for a business to be considered First Nation owned. In Yukon Business Survey, Results by First Nation Ownership, 2019, the Yukon Bureau of Statistics provides the following definition of a First Nations business:

*The definition of a business for this survey includes industries within the business sector and does not include any level of government, crown corporations or non-profit organizations (NPOs). For the purpose of this report, businesses with any percentage of ownership held by a Yukon First Nation, a Yukon First Nation Development Corporation, or individuals belonging to a Yukon First Nation (self-identification basis) is categorized as **businesses with First Nation shares in ownership**. A **First Nation (FN) business** is defined as a business enterprise which has at least 51% of ownership held by a Yukon First Nation, a Yukon First Nation Development Corporation⁵, or individuals belonging to a Yukon First Nation (self-identification*

basis). FN businesses constitute a subset of businesses with FN shares in ownership. (2021, p. 1, emphasis in the original)

The YBS provides a unique opportunity to analyze the changes in First Nations entrepreneurship in a region where Indigenous self-government has greatly expanded. The Yukon has also witnessed substantial economic growth (based largely on government expenditures) and population increases that continued regardless of the economic downturn caused by the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 2). The Territory regularly has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and usually has the third-highest average weekly salary behind the Northwest Territories and Alberta. While mining and mineral exploration have not reached the heights predicted in 2007, hard rock mining is still active in the Yukon.

FIGURE 2
Yukon Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Basic Prices, by Industry, Provinces, and Territories (x 1,000,000) with Annual Change

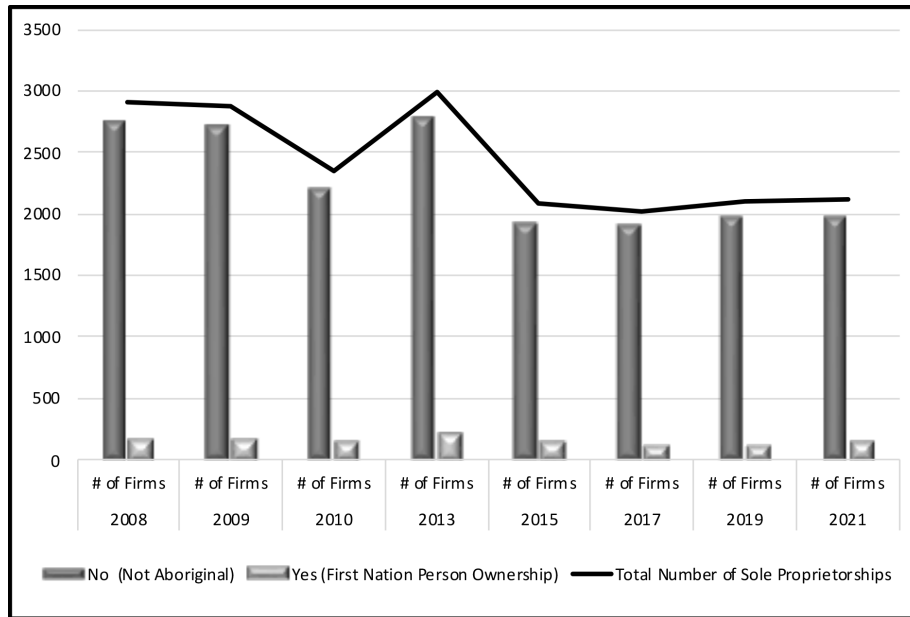


Note. Data is from *Table: 36-10-0402-01 (formerly CANSIM 379-0030) Gross domestic product at basic prices, by industry, provinces and territories* by Statistics Canada, 2021

Yet as shown in Figure 3, First Nations business ownership is minuscule compared to the non-Indigenous businesses that dominate the Yukon business environment. While First Nations people made up nearly one quarter of the Yukon’s population in 2021, they only owned 152 of 2120 companies, or 7.2% of all sole proprietor and partnership businesses. Figure 3 shows that the trendline for First Nations business ownership is negative. It peaked in 2013 and has generally been declining, though 2021 showed

improvement (although this improvement may be due to the inclusion of a non-Yukon First Nation category in the 2019 business survey reports that added 54 and then 35 businesses to the total).

FIGURE 3
Yukon First Nation Business Ownership Compared to Non-First Nation over Time, 2008-2021

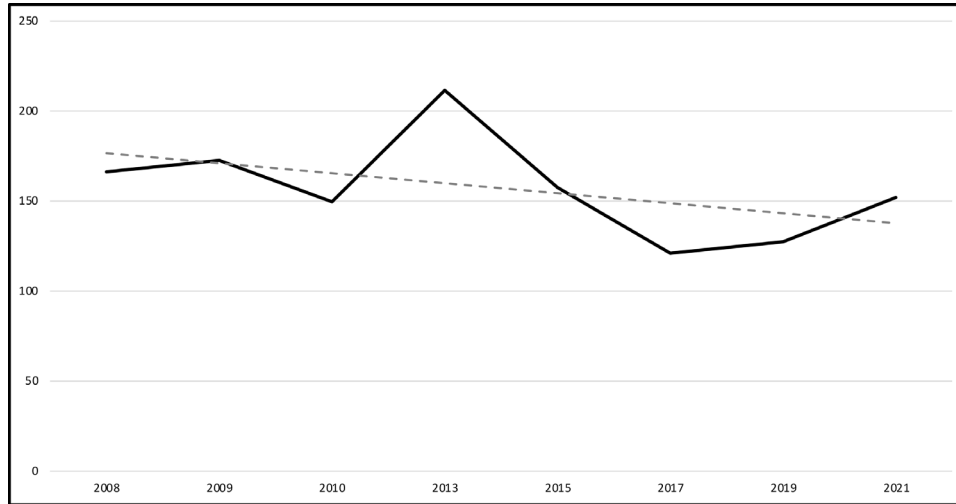


An overview of Gueye, et al.’s (2022) Identifying Indigenous Business Owners and Indigenous-Owned Businesses noted a similar trend:

From 2005 to 2015, the number of Indigenous-owned businesses trended upward (+3.5 percent on average), although at a generally decreasing rate from year to year. Non-Indigenous-owned businesses also grew at a comparable rate over the same period (+3.3 percent on average). The number of Indigenous-owned businesses contracted in each of the subsequent years, whereas the number of non-Indigenous-owned businesses decreased only in 2018. (Statistics Canada, 2022)

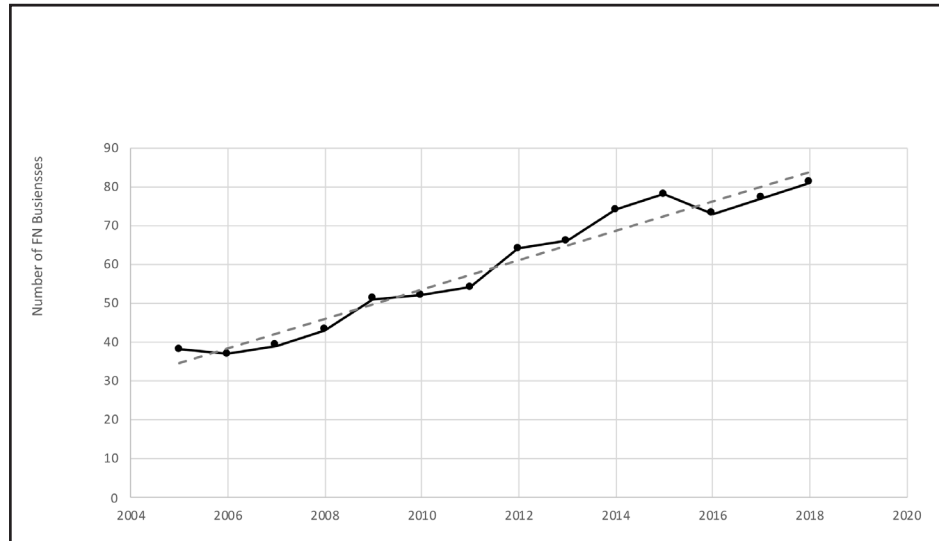
Given that the Indigenous population of the Yukon fluctuates at around 25% of the population, we should expect First Nations business ownership to be in that range. However, the First Nations business ownership rate falls well short of the 23% range that should be expected, ranging from 5.7% in 2008 to a high of 7.2% in 2021 with 152 businesses: for context, if First Nations business ownership reflected their population numbers, there should be 450-490 Indigenous firms (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Declining Trends in Yukon First Nation Person
Business Ownership: 2008-2021



However, a 2022 report released by Statistics Canada (Gueye et al., 2022) provides a different perspective on First Nations business ownership (see Figure 5). Unlike the Yukon’s 51% ownership threshold, Statistics Canada sets its threshold at 50% Indigenous owned. Additionally, Statistics Canada data includes private incorporated businesses and unincorporated employers, while the Yukon includes sole proprietors and partnerships. Ultimately, the difference between the two estimates hinges on the Yukon’s inclusion of self-employed individuals, which they label as “home-based workers.” So even though both datasets use First Nations as the business group identifier, they provide different results. For example, in 2008, Statistics Canada reported 43 First Nations businesses in the Yukon, while the Yukon reported 166. Likewise, the Yukon database suggests a decline in the number of First Nations businesses over time while Statistics Canada demonstrates a strong positive trend (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5
Yukon Businesses Owned by First Nations,
Statistics Canada Estimate 2005-2018



Yukon’s First Nations businesses can be further categorized by the business owner’s First Nation membership or association: Figures 6 and 7 show the distribution of these businesses in 2010 and 2021, respectively.⁶ Before proceeding, though, it is important to note one significant difference between the 2010 and 2021 surveys. The goal of the 2010 survey was to develop a baseline for better understanding how Yukon First Nations were transitioning into the market economy,⁷ and as a result, it did not ask if non-Yukon Indigenous people were business owners. In 2019 the First Nations question was expanded to accept replies from non-Yukon First Nations: consequently, thirty-five additional non-First Nations businesses were captured in the 2021 survey. Both surveys rely on the self-declaration of Indigenous ownership.

Comparing Figures 6 and 7 shows there has been considerable change in the representation of First Nations in the business survey record. In 2010, there were 149 First Nations businesses connected to Yukon First Nations, and all fourteen Yukon First Nations were represented. The most prominent were the Teslin Tlingit Council with 22 businesses, the Champagne and Aishihik (CAFN) with 17, the Selkirk with 15, the Carcross Tagish (CTFN) with 14, and the Liard First Nation with 14. These five First Nations accounted for 55% of the First Nations businesses surveyed in 2010. However, non-Yukon First Nations businesses are the single largest category in the 2021 survey, with ten more firms than the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation (THFN) in Dawson City. Removing the non-Yukon category from Figure 7 leaves only 121 firms spread among all fourteen Yukon First Nations: THFN with 25 businesses, CAFN and TTC with 15 each, the CTFN with 12, and the Kluane First Nation with 11. These five First Nations represent 64.4% of all Yukon First Nations businesses, suggesting a greater concentration

among the leading five First Nations. Ultimately, comparing the 2010 and 2021 survey results shows that there was a 18.9% decline in Yukon First Nations businesses over roughly a decade—despite Yukon’s economy growing by 23.1% between 2010-2021. Clearly, this economic growth did not spur the development of new Yukon First Nations businesses.

FIGURE 6
Yukon First Nations Businesses by First Nation Membership, 2010

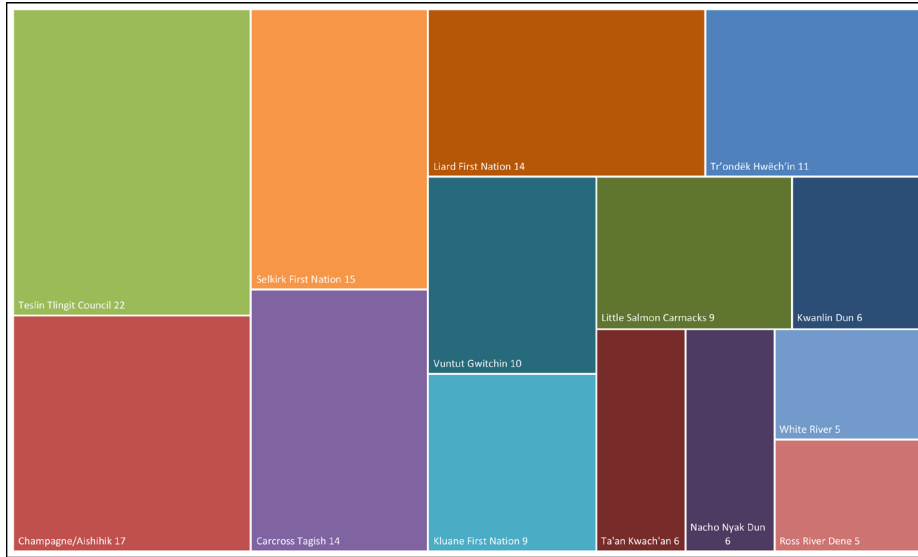
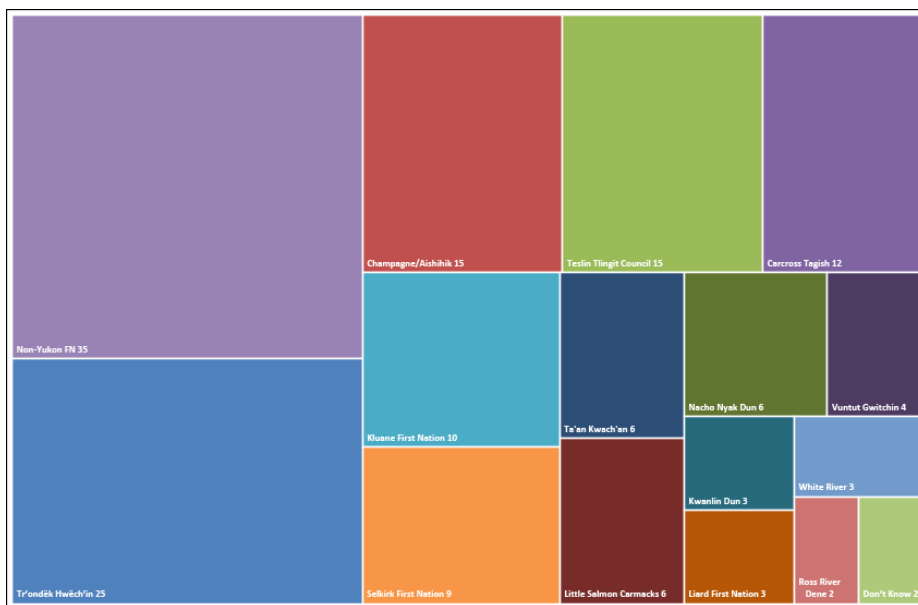


FIGURE 7
Yukon First Nations Businesses by First Nation Membership, 2021



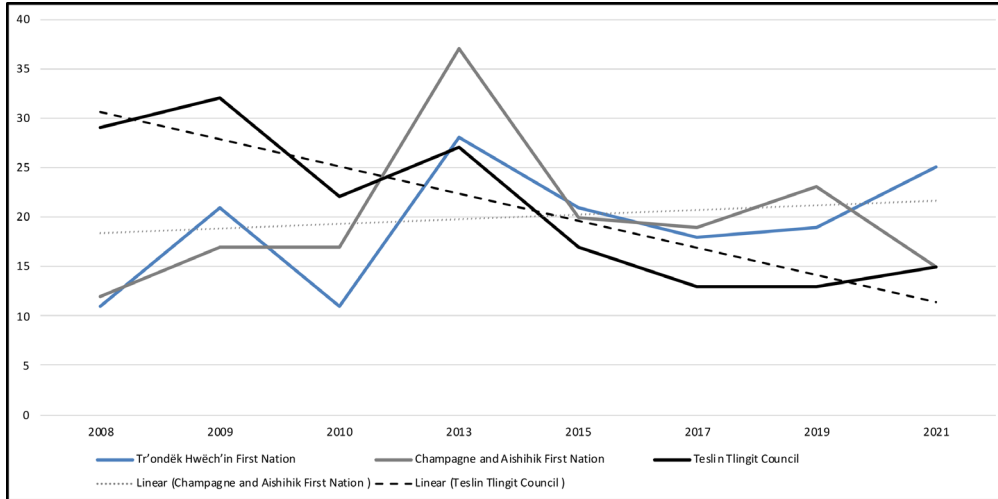
YUKON FIRST NATION OWNERSHIP BUSINESS TRENDS

Figures 8 through 11 illustrate the change in Yukon First Nations business participation, categorized by membership. Once again, these are self-declared members, and the companies may or may not be located in their traditional territory or home community, as First Nation members from any community can operate anywhere within the Yukon or further afield. Indeed, given Whitehorse's dominance with approximately 32,000 people in the greater census area out of a total population of 44,000, it is likely that members from all 14 First Nations are operating in the City. (For comparison, the next largest town is Dawson City at around 2,300 people.) Additionally, the number of non-Yukon First Nations proprietors grew from five non-Yukon First Nations proprietors in 2019 to thirty-five in 2021 (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2020; Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2022c). As the Yukon is one of the hottest economies in Canada with a nationally significant population increase, it is likely attracting new business owners and subsidiaries of out-of-territory Indigenous firms to the region.

The three First Nations shown in Figure 8 are self-governing political entities with strong development corporations. Members of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, whose main population centre is Dawson City and who capitalize on the Klondike highway's substantial 'rubber tire' tourism traffic, show a slightly positive trend in their business communities' development between 2008 and 2021, increasing from 11 to 25 businesses. Likewise, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation of Haines Junction also have a positive trendline, starting from a 2008 base of 12 businesses, with 15 businesses active in 2021. The Champagne and Aishihik First Nation also capitalizes on highway traffic between Whitehorse and the Alaska Border and benefits from the tourism trade associated with Kluane National Park. The trendlines for these two First Nations peaked in 2013 with 28 associated businesses for the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and 37 for the Champagne and Aishihik. From 2013 to 2021, the Champagne and Aishihik lost 22 associated businesses while the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in businesses declined by 13. While the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in decline continued through the 2019 survey year, it recovered in 2021, adding six new businesses to their community. However, the Champagne and Aishihik trend continued to decline through 2021, dropping from 23 businesses in 2019 to 15 in 2021 during the pandemic.

The third community shown in Figure 8 is the Teslin Tlingit Council. Teslin is a small community along the Alaska Highway south of Whitehorse, in cottage country. It has a progressive approach to community development as seen by its biomass district heating system, which provides renewable energy for government buildings and new housing units, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and lowering energy costs (Byers, 2019). While once leading all Yukon First Nations in generating businesses between 2008 and 2010, Teslin dropped to third place in 2013 and continued to decline in number with only 13 businesses in the 2019 survey before increasing to 15 in the 2021 survey.

FIGURE 8
Selected Trends in First Nation Business Activity, 2008 -2021



The three First Nations represented in Figure 9 all have negative trendlines, indicating that since 2008 their representation in the Yukon business community has declined. In 2013 Carcross Tagish businesspeople accounted for 21 businesses, but they dipped to only eight in 2019 before rebounding to twelve in 2021. The Selkirk First Nation followed a similar path, despite the potential economic benefits of the Minto Mine, which came into production in October 2007 (*Minto Copper-Gold, 2010*). Employment at the mine decreased from 307 in 2016 to 201 in 2017 and down to only 100 in 2019; the mine was closed in 2018 and sold to British mining firm Pembridge Resources PLC in June 2019 (*Minto Copper-Gold, 2010*). This drop in mine employment coincides with the decline in businesses owned by Selkirk residents from 12 in 2015 to only three in 2019. And while production ramped up in 2021, with employment at the mine increasing to 177 and Selkirk businesses likewise increasing to nine firms, the mine closed again in 2023. The final group, the Nacho N'äyk Dun, live in the relatively isolated Stewart Valley some 410 km northeast of Whitehorse. Despite silver, lead, zinc, and gold mining activity in the region, this First Nation failed to generate many businesses, dropping from its zenith of twelve in 2013 to only six in 2021. This occurred well after the Victoria Gold mine had opened and was generating hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue locally during construction and production.

FIGURE 9
Selected Trends in First Nations Business Activity, 2008 -2021

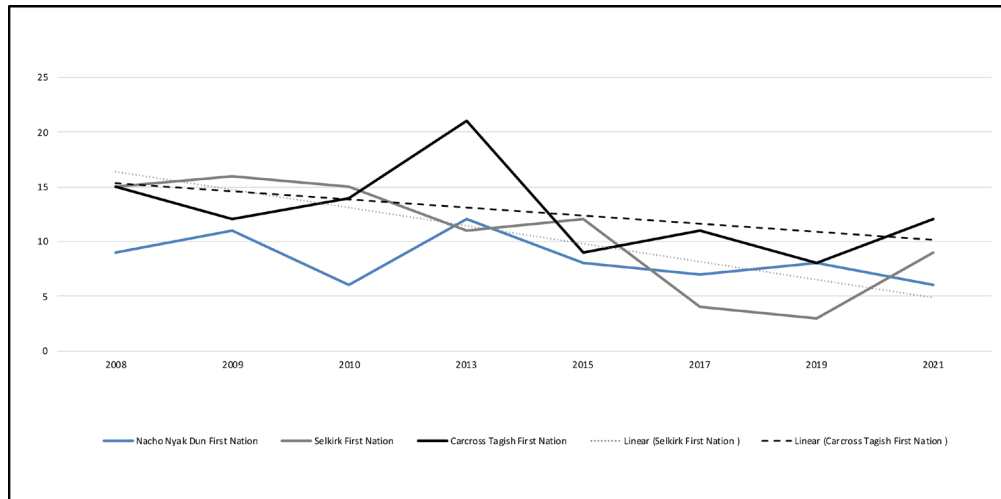
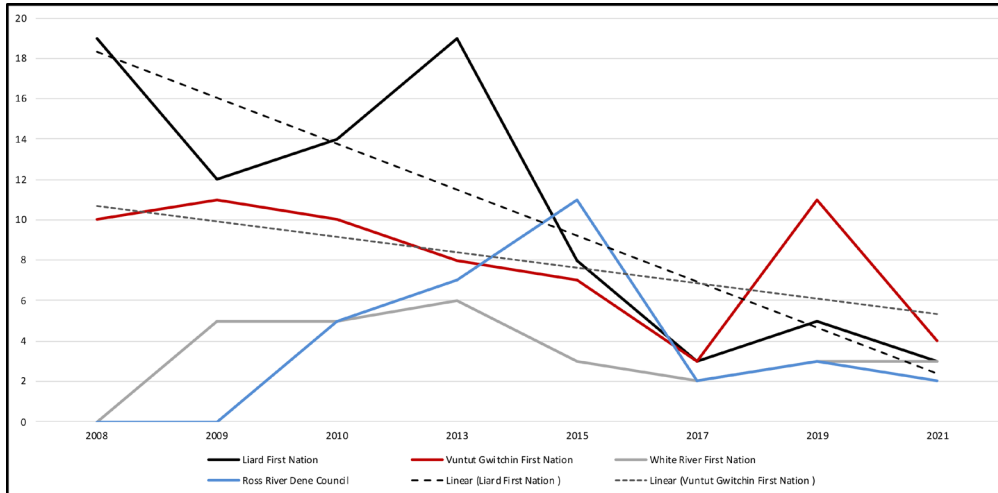


Figure 10 tracks the business activities of four smaller First Nations communities, all of whom had five or fewer businesses owned by their members in 2021. Of these four, only the Vuntut Gwitchin is a self-governing First Nation under the modern treaty; the other three First Nations continue to be governed under the Indian Act. The Liard First Nation in the Watson Lake region of southwestern Yukon has witnessed the sharpest business decline of any of the communities, dropping from highs of 19 in 2008 and 2013 down to only three firms in 2021. The Liard First Nation government itself went through a challenging time after coming under third-party management in August 2014, a period of economic hardship that ended in 2018 (Morin, 2014). The other three small First Nations shown in Figure 10 are all in remote locations, with the Vuntut Gwitchin of Old Crow being the only fly-in community in the Yukon. The Ross River Dene do not record any businesspeople in the 2008 and 2009 survey but peaked in 2015 with eleven firms before crashing down to two firms as of 2021.

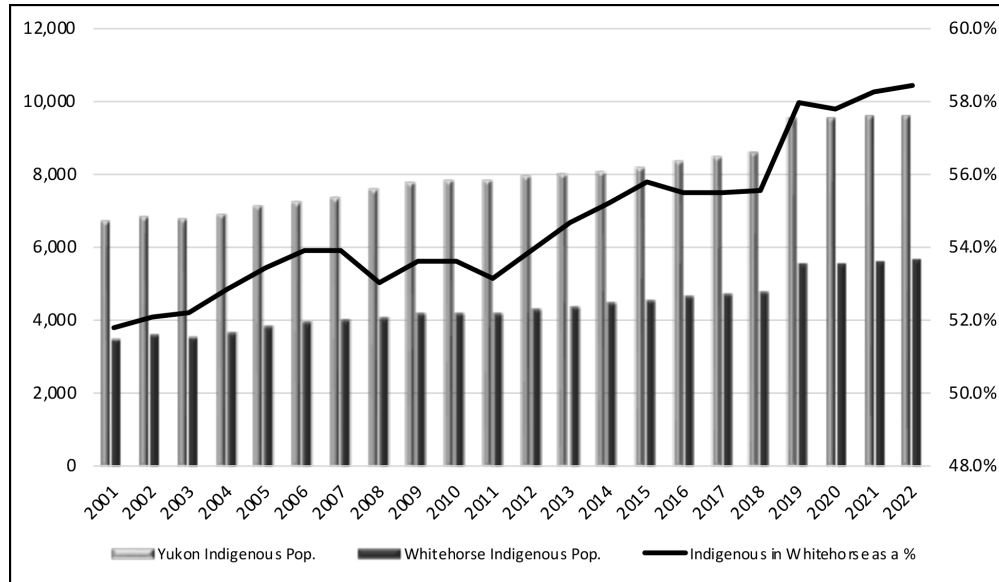
FIGURE 10
Selected Trends in First Nations Business Activity, 2008 -2021



While twelve of the Yukon's fourteen First Nations have their traditional territories in rural Yukon, which is dominated by small and remote communities of approximately 500 people or less, the Kwanlin Dun First Nation and the Ta'an Kwach'an Council are located within the Whitehorse census area, which has a government-dominated market of 32,000 people (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). However, these two First Nations have disproportionately small business communities. In 2017, they collectively had eighteen firms, ten for the KDFN and eight for the TKC, but their business numbers dropped quickly and in 2021 they accounted for only nine businesses: KDFN, the largest First Nation population in the Yukon, had three firms while the much smaller TKC had six.

However, while the number of First Nations-owned businesses has declined, there has been a steady increase in the number of Indigenous people living in Whitehorse (see Figure 11). This includes members of the KDFN and TKC, members of the Yukon's other twelve First Nations, and other non-Yukon First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Between 2001 and 2021 the Indigenous population of Whitehorse increased by 2,121 people, to a total population of 5,580. The City itself, however, grew by 12,172 residents, meaning that the percentage of the population that was Indigenous remained around the same (15.4% in 2001; 16.1% in 2021) (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2022b).

FIGURE 11
The Increasing Draw of Whitehorse for Indigenous Peoples



Note. From Population Report, Q2 2022, by Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2022 (<https://yukon.ca/en/population-report-q2-2022>).

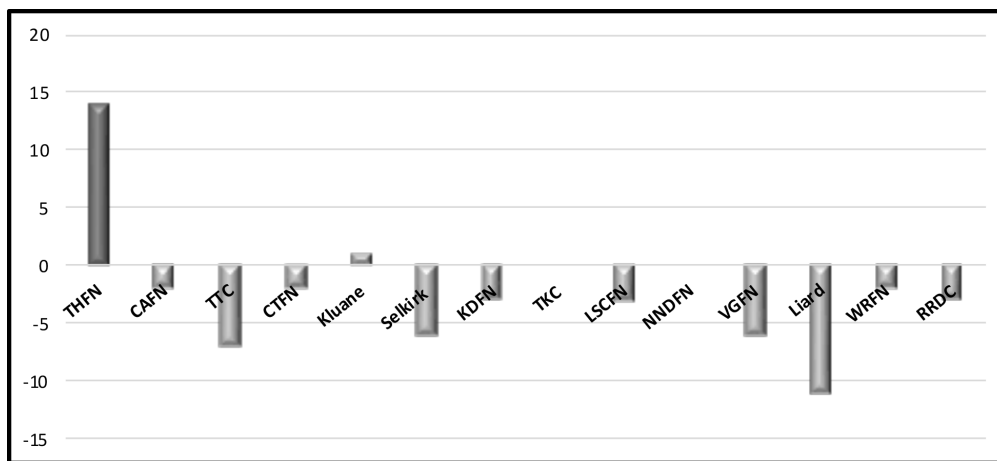
The small number of KDFN and TKC businesses may be due to the density of non-Indigenous businesses in Whitehorse, while the higher proportion of First Nations businesses among peripheral communities may be the result of the substantial economic presence of First Nations governments and their direct relationships with local resource activity. In Whitehorse, with its long-standing government-dominated and non-Indigenous economy, local First Nations communities appear to be crowded out. Recognizing this problem, the Yukon government passed legislation to support First Nations procurement on February 22, 2021. This legislation was enacted to increase the “the ability of local businesses and First Nations to secure Government Contracts through changes in how Government procures Goods and Services” (Government of Yukon, 2023, p. 1). While future YBS will hopefully provide evidence of this policy’s success, Whitehorse-based First Nations do not currently seem to be benefiting by proximity to the Yukon’s dominant marketplace.

Further analysis is required to develop an understanding of how THFN and, to a lesser extent, CAFN have managed to spur entrepreneurship while the Selkirk—even with the Minto Mine on their traditional territory—experienced a decline. More insight is needed into the limited business development of the two Whitehorse First Nations and why few of their First Nation members are moving into business ownership despite living in the largest market north of 600 in Canada.

Returning to the comparison of the 2010 composition of the Yukon’s First Nations business community to the community of 2021, Figure 12 demonstrates that only

two First Nations added businesses over the eleven-year time span. The other twelve First Nations lost representation. The Liard First Nation associated with Watson Lake dropped from fourteen businesses down to only three, while the Teslin Tlingit dropped from twenty-two firms down to fifteen. Changes of this nature could be explained by business failures but could equally be the result of mergers or even business lifecycle events. What is apparent though, is that there are fewer Yukon First Nations businesses in operation in 2021 than there were in 2010. Apart from the THFN, there is either stagnation or a real decline in the presence of Yukon First Nations businesses.

FIGURE 12
Change in First Nations Business Numbers by
First Nation Membership, 2010 to 2021



THE YUKON BUREAU OF STATISTICS' SPECIAL REPORT ON FIRST NATIONS BUSINESSES, 2019

The 2019 Yukon Bureau of Statistics' special report on First Nations business activity, the *Yukon Business Survey, Results by First Nation Ownership*, provides much more complex and detailed reporting on Yukon First Nations businesses, covering such topics as ownership models, industrial coding, employment, and revenue generation. Over three-quarters of all Yukon businesses employ four or fewer workers (including the owner of the firm); many are probably single-employee firms or owner-operator businesses. The comparable number for First Nations firms is not significantly different at 72.4%. First Nations firms are somewhat overrepresented in the 24-49 worker category, with 9 firms (4.6 %) in this range, compared to the total First Nations ownership of 2.2 % of all firms: this is possibly due to the presence of the First Nations development corporations in this sample. Yukon development corporations, of which there were 13 reporting in the 2019 special report, frequently have multiple business arms that may include grocery stores, construction firms, and catering companies, along with core office staff and seasonal workers in sectors such as wildfire fighting.

However, the total number for First Nations businesses in Table 1 is considerably greater than the number of First Nations firms listed in the 2019 business survey (196 businesses compared to 127). This is likely because the business survey data in Table 1 is based on Yukon sole proprietor and partnership businesses, while the special business report uses a different criterion:

A First Nation (FN) business is defined as a business enterprise which has at least 51 percent of ownership held by a Yukon First Nation, a Yukon First Nation Development Corporation, or individuals belonging to a Yukon First Nation (self-identification basis). (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2021, emphasis in original)

It appears that the difference lies in the inclusion of businesses owned by development corporations. For example, a development corporation might be run as a single entity owned by a specific First Nation, but it may have several separate operating arms, each incorporated through partnerships with non-First Nation or other First Nation firms. For example, NND-Summit Camps is a 51% First Nation-owned firm in partnership with Summit Camps, a non-First Nation firm that provides food catering and camp accommodations at the Eagle Gold mine in Dublin Gulch, Yukon. Tetra Tech Canada (an engineering firm) also has a partnership with NNDDC, as does the hotel and accommodations firm Northern Vision Development, which manages the Bedrock Hotel in Mayo (Coates, 2018).

Employment size	Total number of businesses	As a percentage	Number of FN businesses	As a percentage
1 to 4 workers	2443	75.4	142	72.4
5 to 9 workers	334	10.3	24	12.2
10 to 24 workers	233	7.2	14	7.1
25 to 49 workers	72	2.2	9	4.6
50 to 99 workers	26	0.8	2†	1.0
More than 100 workers	13	0.4	0†	0.0
Don't know/refuse to answer	121	3.7	5	2.6
Totals	3242	100.0	196	100.0
<p>Note. * Because some employees hold more than one job, multiple job holders will be counted more than once in 'Total Workers.' In addition, this total also includes any owners who actively work in their businesses. †Extrapolated by authors. From Yukon Business Survey, Results by First Nation Ownership, 2019, by Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2021 (https://yukon.ca/en/yukon-business-survey-results-first-nation-ownership-2019).</p>				

YBS also reported on the challenges firms were having attracting staff in the then-hot 2019 Yukon labour market. Of those businesses with vacancies in the 12-month period prior to the survey, 66.8% of total businesses reported difficulty finding staff. In comparison, 58% of First Nations businesses reported difficulty finding staff (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Again, given the small population number of First Nations firms against the greater backdrop of thousands of businesses surveyed in the Yukon, the difference is not significant.

First Nations businesses are not overrepresented in the smaller revenue categories of less than \$50,000, representing 27.1% of all First Nations businesses compared to 29.6% for the total population (Table 2). Indeed, there is little to differentiate the Yukon First Nations business community from the total population outside the million-dollar-plus firms, where First Nations firms represent 16.8% of the total compared to 13.4% for all firms. This is possibly explained by the Yukon's 13 First Nations development corporations as well as the strong showing of First Nations businesses in construction (44 firms) and mining and quarrying (11 firms), sectors that require considerable equipment and capital.

TABLE 2
Gross Revenues by Category and Ownership, Yukon, 2018

Revenue category	Total number of businesses	As a percentage	Number of FN businesses	As a percentage
Less than \$25,000	233	7.2	18	9.2
\$25,000 to \$50,000	729	22.4	35	17.9
\$50,000 to 100,000	620	19.1	37	18.9
\$100,000 to \$250,000	56	7.9	18	9.2
\$250,000 to \$500,000	504	15.5	26	13.3
\$500,000 to \$1,000,000	262	8.1	15	7.7
\$1,000,000 and more	436	13.4	33	16.8
Don't know, refuse, not operating	208	6.4	14	7.1
Total	3248	100.0	196	100.0

Note. From Yukon Business Survey, Results by First Nation Ownership, 2019, by Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2021 (<https://yukon.ca/en/yukon-business-survey-results-first-nation-ownership-2019>).

While First Nations businesses are not underrepresented in employment categories or in earning categories, a pattern emerges when examining their participation in specific industrial sectors based on GDP. First Nations business activity is highly concentrated in construction, mining and quarrying, and transportation and warehousing, which accounts for 64% of all GDP earned by First Nations businesses. In the Yukon, these sectors pay well. In contrast, the GDP for the total Yukon business community is more evenly distributed, with the top-earning categories of construction, retail trade, mining and quarrying, real estate, transportation and warehousing, and accommodation and food services accounting for 68% of the total GDP. However, the absence of First Nations businesses in the retail trade sector is apparent when reviewing the 2019 business data. First Nations retail trade firms generated only \$5.8 million in GDP (4% of their total GDP) compared to \$158 million for the total Yukon (10.5%).

There is a further break in the GDP earning potential of First Nations businesses compared to the total number of Yukon firms in the service economy sector, a sector which is usually associated with higher educational requirements in the health, sciences, and education (Table 3). Here we find that First Nations firms generated only \$7.2 million (5.2%) in GDP, compared to \$202 million (13.3%) in GDP for all Yukon businesses. Finally, First Nations GDP earnings in 2019 were either too small or not reported in the categories of utilities, information and cultural industries, agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and arts, entertainment, and recreation. However, various First Nations development corporations are creating commercial-scale power generation for sale into the Yukon grid, with new solar projects coming online in Old Crow through the VGFN and in Beaver Creek with the Copper Niisüü Limited Partnership (Elliot, 2021; MacIntyre, 2022).

TABLE 3
Yukon GDP by Industry Sector and Ownership, 2018

Industry sector	Sector total GDP (\$ millions)	As a percentage	GDP from FN businesses (\$ millions)	As a percentage
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	4.8	0.3	x	
Mining, quarrying, and oil & gas extraction	158.3	10.4	29.4	21.3
Utilities	49.6	3.3	..	
Construction	374	24.6	45.1	32.6
Manufacturing	20.4	1.3	4.2	3.0
Wholesale trade	52	3.4	5.4	3.9
Retail trade	158.6	10.5	5.6	4.0
Transportation & warehousing	109.4	7.2	13.7	9.9
Information & cultural industries	66.2	4.4	..	
Finance & insurance	74.3	4.9	6.9	5.0
Real estate, rental, & leasing	126.5	8.3	7.1	5.1
Professional, scientific, & technical services	79.2	5.2	2.7	2.0
Management of companies & enterprises	7.9	0.5	5.6	4.0
Administrative & support services	39.2	2.6	2.4	1.7
Educational services	2.9	0.2	x	
Health care & social assistance	55.2	3.6	1.1	0.8
Arts, entertainment, & recreation	10.4	0.7	x	
Accommodation & food services	102.8	6.8	7.8	5.6
Other services (except public admin)	25.5	1.7	1	0.7
All industries	1517.3	100.0	138.3	99.8
<p><i>Note.</i> .. = data not available, x = data suppression due to data quality or confidentiality. From <i>Yukon Business Survey, Results by First Nation Ownership, 2019, 2021</i> (https://yukon.ca/en/yukon-business-survey-results-first-nation-ownership-2019).</p>				

Alternatively, the lack of formally documented business in the First Nations sector may be the result of definitions, specialization, and legality. Formal business development, such as incorporating a firm or developing a storefront, is not readily accessible to Indigenous entrepreneurs who are active in a community and known locally as the person to go to for small engine repair or maintenance services. Many traditional and sustainable activities—such as hunting and gathering country foods, trapping and selling furs, and processing fur trim and other materials for specialized arts and crafts—fly under the business incorporation radar but are important seasonal or annual sources of revenue within the community. These activities bring money into the local economy but may not be readily measurable by Western economic measure such as GDP.

Finally, it is important to consider the issues raised by Hernandez de Soto in his ground-breaking *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (2000). Many of the issues he raised about Third World and former Communist countries also apply for First Nations businesses, where property ownership and investment produces similar barriers to entry into Western capitalism.⁸ Robert Bone offers similar insights into the economy of the North when he concluded that Indian Reserves, even those in agriculturally rich areas such as the Prairie North region, are not actually economic places in the Western sense of the term. He argues,

The lack of an economic foundation had proven to be the Achilles heel of the relocation “strategy.” Under normal circumstances, urban places that lose their economic function soon die, whether they are single-industry towns or rural communities. Native settlement does not follow this pattern of urban evolution because they generally have been located within cultural homelands and close to traditional hunting lands. (Bone, 2003, p. 187)

Following this line of inquiry, Tom Flanagan, Manny Jules, and their co-authors in *Beyond the Indian Act: Restoring Indigenous Property Rights* presented a Canadian case for improved access to land titles on Indian Reserves. In it, former chief Manny Jules (who promotes the First Nations Property Ownership Initiative) notes, “The Indian Act reserve system substantially reduces land value and promotes low value land use. It prevents us from accessing the equity in our lands, raises our costs of doing business and discourages investment” (Flanagan et al., 2010, p. x). It is not yet clear how these findings translate to the Yukon, where 11 of the 14 First Nations have signed modern land treaties and where First Nations should have greater access to investment capital due to their access to land and resources outside of the Indian Act. In all likelihood, it is too early to see the benefits from the land claims and self-government agreements.

Finally, it is not clear if measuring entrepreneurship by using the experience of individual firms is a culturally appropriate measure of Indigenous business acumen. Indigenous businesses have different priorities—job creation, local wealth creation, and cultural resilience—than standard Western businesses. There may be other metrics to measure Indigenous business activity than the existing Western capitalist-based survey tools.

STATISTICS CANADA AND THE INDIGENOUS BUSINESS COMMUNITY

In 2016, the Centre for Canadian Indigenous Business (CCAB) along with the authors approached Statistics Canada with a request to assess the level of Indigenous business activity in Canada: a baseline upon which to measure the impact of policies and investment designed to enhance Indigenous entrepreneurship has been a long-sought-after goal. At the time, Statistics Canada could not supply a comprehensive response. They recognized that their existing business survey instruments did not adequately ask business owners about their Indigenous heritage. The resulting research methodology program developed at Statistics Canada using existing Statistics Canada databases, census, and administrative records and employing their in-house BANFF imputation methodology resulted in the publication *Identifying Indigenous Business Owners and Indigenous-Owned Businesses* (Gueye et al., 2022).

In this report, Statistics Canada concluded that there were only 37,000 Indigenous owned businesses in Canada out of a total of 2,537,000 private businesses nationwide (both incorporated and unincorporated) as of 2018 (see Table 4). Gueye et al.'s paper considers two definitions of an Indigenous-owned business. The first, Gueye-Lafrance-Oyarzun 1 (GLO1), is based on the presence of at least one owner who identifies as an Indigenous person. The second and more common definition, Gueye-Lafrance-Oyarzun 2 (GLO2), is based on majority ownership (51%). The second model considers a business to be Indigenous owned if more than half of the shares are held by individuals who identify with that group and draws on the method used by Grekou et al. (2018) to measure business ownership by gender. The authors note that GLO1 identifies the extent to which Indigenous people are involved in business ownership. In contrast, their GLO2 methodology allows for comparison with other sources and is consistent with the definition of an Indigenous-owned business outlined in a report commissioned by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA) (National Indigenous Economic Development Board, 2015). NACCA found that the definition based on majority ownership is consistent with definitions of an Indigenous-owned business used elsewhere in Canada, as well as Australia and Hawaii (Gueye et al., 2022).

TABLE 4
**Distribution of Private Businesses by Indigenous Identity of
Owners and Presence of Employees (2018)**

Identity	Without employees	As a percentage	Employer business	As a percentage	Total
Non-Indigenous	1,664,200	66.6	835,800	33.4	2,499,900
Indigenous	25,100	67.8	11,900	32.2	37,001
First Nations	12,000	9.0	5,400	31.0	17,401
Metis	11,900	68.0	5,600	32.0	17,501
Inuk (Inuit)	400	66.7	200	33.3	601
Other Indigenous	900	56.3	700	43.8	1,601
Total	1,689,300	66.6	847,700	33.4	2,537,001

Note. “Other Indigenous ownership” refers to businesses belonging to individuals with multiple Indigenous identities or jointly owned by individuals who identify with one of the three Indigenous groups but where no one group controls more than 50 percent of the shares. Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. “Private businesses” refers to Canadian-controlled private corporations and unincorporated businesses for which gender, Indigenous identity and age of ownership, province and employment size can be defined. From *Identifying Indigenous Business Owners and Indigenous-Owned Businesses* by B. Gueye, A. Lafrance-Cooke, and J. Oyarzun, 2022, (Catalogue No. 11-633-X), Statistics Canada, (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-633-x/11-633-x2022008-eng.pdf?st=aVwK82mN>)

Gueye et al.’s (2022) study notes that businesses owned by individuals with multiple Indigenous identities or jointly owned by individuals who identify with one of the three Indigenous groups—but where no one group controls more than 50% of the shares—accounted for the remaining 4.3% or some 1600 firms (Table 4). Like non-Indigenous businesses, two-thirds of Indigenous-owned businesses did not have employees, suggesting they are more self-employed persons than employers. Gueye et al. suggest that the three communities that make up Indigenous Canada (Inuit, First Nations, and Métis) should not be considered as one homogenous group in terms of business ownership. Comparing the 2018 Indigenous business data to the Indigenous Census of Canada, 2016 population returns that show that Inuit and First Nations business owners are severely underrepresented while businesspeople of Métis heritage, while still underrepresented proportionately to their population size, dominate the Indigenous profile with more businesses in total than First Nations business-owners (17,500 compared to 17,400). The comparative strength of the Métis business community vis-à-vis the First Nations’ is apparent given that the Métis population in Canada totals some 390,000 fewer members than the First Nations as of 2016 (although this number is increasingly rapidly due to the registration efforts of the provincial Métis organizations).

Table 5 demonstrates the level of underrepresentation occurring within the Indigenous business community: the 2016 Indigenous population is used to determine the expected participation rate and is contrasted with the percentage of Indigenous businesses. The logic here is that, assuming all things are equal or equitable, the percentage of businesses in Canada that are Indigenous owned (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit) should be proportional to their percentage of the population. This is clearly not the case. For example, since Indigenous peoples comprise 4.73% of the Canadian population, there should be approximately 120,000 Indigenous businesses, not 37,000. The level of inequality is most apparent with the First Nations population, which should total 74,000 firms, not 17,400. Likewise, the Inuit totals should include 4,800 businesses, not 600.⁹ Explanations for this ongoing inequality abound: late entry into the Western economy, remote community locations, limited educational outcomes, limited access to capital, and, for First Nations, the complications of being on-reserve. The gaps, however, are greater than these factors would suggest.

TABLE 5
Proportional Distribution of Private Businesses in Canada by
Indigenous Identity of Owners and Presence of Employees (2018) *

Identity	Total businesses	As a percent of all businesses (observed)	Census population 2016 †	As a percent of population 2016 (expected)
Non-Indigenous	2,499,900	98.54	32,786,285	95.14
Indigenous	37,000	1.46	1,629,800	4.73
First Nations	17,400	0.69	977,235	2.84
Métis	17,500	0.69	587,545	1.71
Inuk (Inuit)	600	0.02	65,030	0.19
Other Indigenous	1,800	0.07	NA	NA
Total	2,537,000		34,460,060	

Note. *“Other Indigenous ownership” refers to businesses belonging to individuals with multiple Indigenous identities or jointly owned by individuals who identify with one of the three Indigenous groups but where no one group controls more than 50 percent of the shares. Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. “Private businesses” refers to Canadian-controlled private corporations and unincorporated businesses for which gender, Indigenous identity and age of ownership, province and employment size can be defined. Observed and Expected added by the authors. † From *Indigenous Population Profile*, by Statistics Canada, 2018, Catalogue No. 98-510-X2016001 (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/abpopprof/index.cfm?Lang=E>).

INDIGENOUS SELF-EMPLOYMENT, CENSUS OF CANADA

While the voluntary National Household Survey (NHS) that replaced the mandatory long-form census in 2011 had numerous shortcomings, it did finally include a question on self-employment under class of worker. By applying Statistics Canada’s Indigenous population profiles, it is possible to break out Indigenous self-employment levels for 2011, which fall between two of the YBS business survey populations (2010 and 2013). The results indicate considerable underrepresentation of Indigenous businesspeople in the ranks of the self-employed in 2011, with a non-Indigenous self-employment rate in the Yukon of 13% compared to an Indigenous rate of 5.8%. The 2016 Aboriginal Census of Canada demonstrates little change, with the corresponding self-employment levels being 13.2% and 6.4%. Overall, in 2016, self-employed workers of non-Aboriginal heritage represented 88.6% of the self-employed in the Yukon, with First Nations standing at 8.6% and with Métis and multiple Aboriginal origins comprising the remainder of this employment group (Statistics Canada, 2018).¹⁰ Finally, the recently released Indigenous population profile for 2021 shows that the national 40% growth in Indigenous self-employment between 2011 and 2016 appears to be a sustaining trend, with the 2021 census data showing another jump in Indigenous self-employment by, again, 40%. In contrast, non-Indigenous self-employment grew by 13.3% between 2011 and 2016, increasing to 23.5% in the pandemic year 2021 (see Table 6).

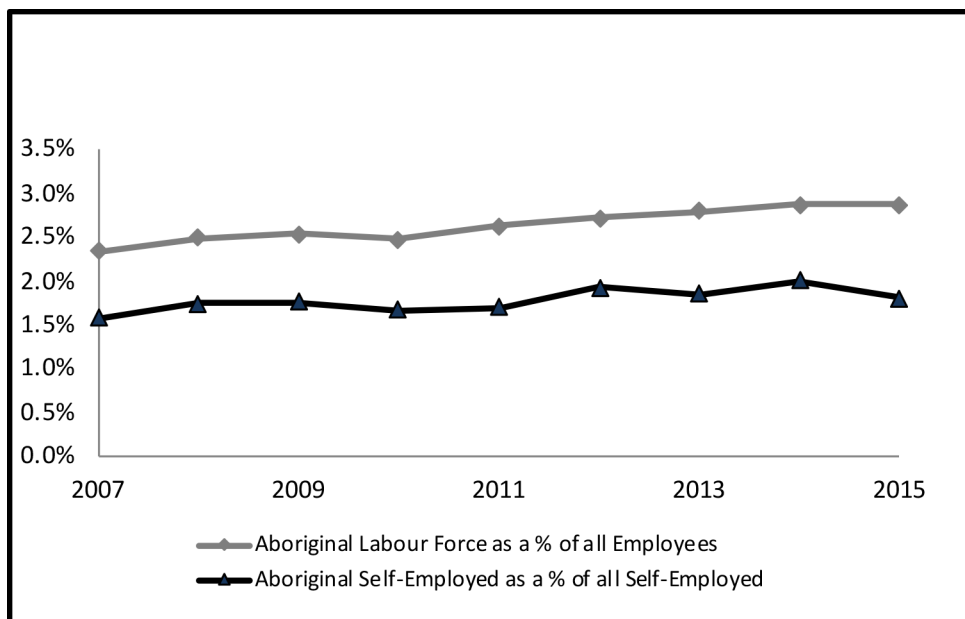
TABLE 6
Growth in Indigenous Self-Employment, Canada 2011-2021

Census year	Total self-employed	Change	Percentage change
2011	38,655		
2016	54,255	15,600	40.4
2021	75,845	21,590	39.8
Non-Indigenous			
2011	1,888,335		
2016	2,140,180	251,845	13.3
2021	2,644,185	504,005	23.5
<p>Note. From NHS Aboriginal Profile, 2011 by Statistics Canada, 2013, Catalogue No. 99-011-XWE2011007 (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/aprof/index.cfm?Lang=E); Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census by Statistics Canada, 2018, Catalogue No. 98-510-X2016001 (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/abpopprof/index.cfm?Lang=E); and Indigenous Population Profile, 2021 Census of Population by Statistics Canada, 20203, Catalogue No. 98-510-X2021001 (https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/ipp-ppa/index.cfm?Lang=E).</p>			

It has been suggested that the jump in Indigenous self-employment in Canada between 2016 and 2021 was the response to the pandemic. However, transitioning that quickly in response to pandemic layoffs seems unlikely, as starting a business takes time, planning, and financial—as well as familial—support. Given the stress and insecurity the COVID-19 pandemic created across society, this seems an unlikely response. The 2021 self-employment numbers mirror the increase in Indigenous self-employment demonstrated in the previous census, suggesting that this 40% growth rate is a viable measure of a renewed Indigenous entrepreneurial spirit.

Canada's flagship Labour Force Survey also breaks out self-employment for non-Indigenous and Indigenous (off-reserve) employees for Canada and the provinces. Figure 13 shows Indigenous employees as a percentage of all employees and as a percentage of those employees who were self-employed, 2007 to 2015 in an off-reserve setting.¹¹ Indigenous employment as a percentage of all employees grew steadily from 2007 to 2015, rising from 330,000 to 434,200 or from 2.3% of the employed labour force to 2.9%. In contrast, Indigenous self-employment never represented more than 2% of all self-employed workers, ranging from 1.6% in 2007 to 1.8% in 2015. In total, the number of Indigenous self-employed people was 40,600 in 2007, peaking at 54,200 in 2014 before falling off to 49,500 in 2015. During this period Indigenous employment

FIGURE 13
Aboriginal Self-Employment in Canada, LFS 2006-2015



Note. From Table 14-10-0369-01 Archived-Labour Force Survey Estimates (LFS), Employment by Aboriginal Group, National Occupational Classification for Statistics (NOC-S) and Age Group, Canada, Selected Provinces and Regions (x 1,000) by Statistics Canada, 2017 (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1410036901>)

in Canada grew by 34.6% while Indigenous self-employment grew by 33.5%, slightly off the pace of total employment growth, meaning that self-employment Indigenous workers continued to be underrepresented. In the Yukon, the 2015 Employment Annual Review, based on the territorial LFS, found that out of 3,400 workers, 300 Indigenous workers were self-employed, which supports the underrepresentation found in other sources.

The 2011 NHS reported that the Yukon had a self-employed working population representing 12.5% of all classes of workers in the labour force or 2,650 out of 21,250 total workers, slightly higher than the 11% registered nationally. However, the NHS Indigenous Profile for Yukon only shows 220 self-employed Indigenous workers out of a base of 2,650, or a rate of 8.3%. Custom tabulation shows that of the 220 self-employed workers, 190 were of First Nations heritage. The resulting self-employment rate for First Nations, then, was 7.2% in 2011. The Yukon rate for self-employment slightly exceeded the national rate for First Nations people, which sat at 7% in 2011.¹² In 2010, the YBS captured 149 First Nations businesses in the Yukon, one year before the National Household data was collected. Of course, not all self-employed workers register as a business with the corporate registry system, which partially explains the difference between the NHS data and the YBS, which draws its population from the Yukon Business Registry.

By 2016, the rate of self-employment in the Yukon stood at 11.9% based on 2,595 self-employed workers in a labour force of 21,795, which is slightly less than in 2011. The self-employment sector lost workers since 2011, while the Yukon labour force grew by 545 workers (Census of Canada, Yukon 2016). In 2016, self-employment among First Nations workers stood at 225 workers, demonstrating a 15.6% growth in self-employed First Nations workers over the five-year period. The 2016 census data sits directly between the 2015 and the 2017 YBS and shows 151 First Nations firms in the Yukon in 2015, dropping to 121 in 2017.

By 2021 self-employment for Indigenous people in the Yukon stood at only 10.1%, indicating a decline from 2011 to 2021. And, while the Yukon rate for Indigenous self-employment was slightly higher than the national rate, it was still below the rate of self-employment for non-Indigenous workers, which stood at 14.3%—the same as the national rate. In 2021, only 295 of the 445 self-employed Indigenous workers declared as First Nations, with 110 declaring as Métis. The YBS for 2021 found there were 156 First Nations businesses in the Territory, considerably less than the census self-employment count (and which did not include questions on the Métis status of business owners). The number of self-employed First Nations people in the Yukon has been growing in absolute numbers: from 2011-2016, the number of self-employed First Nations people in the Yukon grew from 220 to 225, topping out at 295 people in 2021. As a percentage of the labour force, First Nations self-employment grew from 6.8% in 2016 to 9.1% of all First Nations workers in 2021.

Ultimately, the Census and the YBS are two different surveys managed by two different organizations, asking different questions around the same topic of First Nations business activity. One is a census instrument for Canada, the other an administrative survey built from the Yukon business registry. The difference between the higher census

counts and the business survey counts includes unregistered firms in the Yukon, with employees probably working part-time and possibly having mixed incomes from wage economy work supplemented by self-employment. YBS is also a voluntary survey: regardless of how diligent survey staff may be in requesting participation, respondents may refuse to participate. In contrast, the Canadian Census is mandatory and carries penalties for non-participation (Statistics Canada, 2024a).

SELF-EMPLOYED FIRST NATIONS WORKERS IN THE TERRITORIES

The small population of self-employed workers in the Territories impacts the researchers' ability to clearly define the segmentation of the self-employed First Nations worker population without aggregation. As a result, this section aggregates the three territories, creating a larger population to better understand the sectors of the economy self-employed First Nations workers are active in. The section is dominated by the Yukon and Northwest Territories, as the Nunavut self-employed Inuit population is only 300, with only 10 of those listed as self-employed. In this case, a special census tabulation of the 2011 Census/NHS products provides the information on First Nations workers (Statistics Canada, 2011).¹³ In the Territories, self-employed First Nations workers are again underrepresented compared to non-Indigenous workers. Self-employed First Nations workers in the Territories represent 4.6% of the labour force, compared to 9.5% for non-Indigenous workers.

Across Canada, the three combined territories represent the only instance of relatively equal representation in management occupations, which are typically dominated by non-Indigenous workers: 26.9% of First Nations workers are in management occupations, compared to 24.7% of non-Indigenous workers. This may be attributed to the strong performance of First Nations Development Corporations in both the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, where mining, oil, and gas corporations have been signing Comprehensive Benefit Agreements with First Nations groups (Forrest, 2016).¹⁴ An additional factor in the increasing number of management opportunities in First Nations-owned businesses may be the self-governing status of 11 of the 14 First Nations in the Yukon.

That said, self-employed First Nations workers continue to be underrepresented in business, natural sciences, and health. They are also underrepresented in education, law, and government, as well as arts and culture, which runs counter to the national trend (Finnegan & Djokic, 2017). Self-employed First Nations workers, however, continue to be overrepresented in the lower-paying sales and services occupations and in resources and agriculture production (primarily forestry, fishing, and hunting, not farming). Self-employed First Nations workers are also underrepresented in the generally well-paying northern trades, transportation, and equipment operator sectors, which, given the strong mining sector in the Territories and the demand for trucking goods north, runs counter to the national rates: nationally, 19.2% of workers in these sectors are self-employed First Nations workers, compared to 17.4% of all self-employed workers in Canada (see Figure 14).

FIGURE 14
Comparison of First Nations Ancestry in Self-Employed Workers
to Non-Indigenous Self-Employed Workers, Territories, 2011

	Self-Employed First Nations (NAI) Ancestry	Self-Employed non-Indigenous Ancestry only
All occupations	4.6%	9.5%
0 Management	26.9%	24.7%
1 Business; finance & admin.	5.8%	10.2%
2 Natural & applied sciences	4.8%	6.7%
3 Health occupations	1.9%	5.3%
4 Education; law gov't.	5.8%	8.9%
5 Art; culture; recreation & sport	15.4%	8.0%
6 Sales and service	12.5%	10.5%
7 Trades; transport & equipment	19.2%	23.6%
8 Resources; agro & production	5.8%	1.4%
9 Manufacturing and utilities	1.9%	0.9%
<i>Note:</i> Detailed data is not publicly available through the Statistics Canada website, resulting in the use of 2011 data and not the more recent 2016 or 2021 census data.		

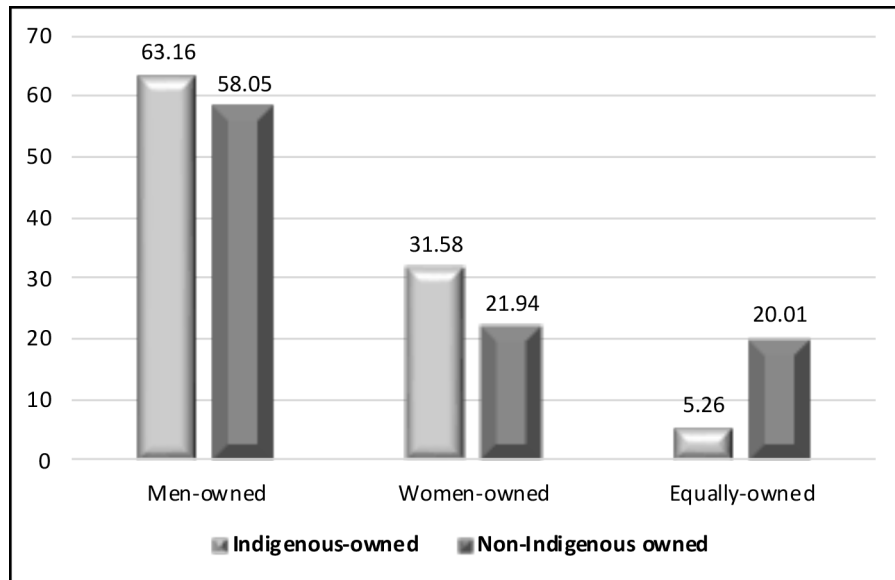
DATA LIMITATIONS

The YBS reports do not publish breakouts of female and male ownership, although the data does exist. The custom tabulation of the Aboriginal census profile for the Yukon in 2011, referenced in Figure 15, breaks out self-employment by sex and shows a split of 63% male and 37% female for the total population. More recently, in their 2022 assessment of the level of Indigenous business in Canada Statistics Canada found that

In Canada, about 71.8 percent and 24.7 percent of Indigenous-owned businesses are owned by men and women, respectively. In the territories, the distribution is, while still male dominated, is more balanced at 63.2 percent are men-owned and 31.6 percent women-owned. The remaining shares are equally owned by women and men. (S. Karmali, personal communication, March 13, 2023)

The data also indicates that Indigenous women are more likely to participate in business ownership in the Territories than in southern Canada (Figure 15). Furthermore, Indigenous women at a national scale represent just under 25% of all Indigenous business owners, while non-Indigenous women represent only 20.6% of all non-Indigenous owners (Gueye et al., 2022).

FIGURE 15
Private Enterprises by Sex and Indigenous Identity of Ownership, 2018



The YBS reports address neither the sex of First Nations business owners nor the continuity of ownership year-to-year. As collected, the data includes the year of business incorporation—and from that the years in business can be calculated—but they do not report on the ownership indicator. As such, when the change in business activity by First Nations membership is plotted, it is not possible to determine if the firms are surviving businesses from 2008: the data shows constant turnover from reference period to reference period.

Nor do the databases explored in this research explore the shadow economy, be it informal, grey, black, or underground. As noted in a publication prepared for Justice Canada,

Hidden beneath the **formal economy** (economic activity that is taxed and monitored by government and used for national calculations of gross national product [GNP]) are a mass of transactions both monetary and otherwise which go unaccounted for. As a whole, these untaxed and unregulated activities are large enough to be considered an economy of their own, albeit an illegal one. (Draeger, 2015, p.4, emphasis in original)

CONCLUSION

Statistics Canada's January 2023 report appears to offer a rosy view of the future: Indigenous majority-owned businesses are very optimistic (37.2%) or somewhat optimistic (33.1%) of the future outlook over the next 12 months, and private-sector businesses as a whole are also very optimistic (22%) and somewhat optimistic (47.9%)

(Statistics Canada, 2023a). However, while these Indigenous survey respondents are optimistic, Indigenous people are still seriously underrepresented in Canadian and Yukon businesses. Maggie Walter wants to set a new agenda for Indigenous statistics that allows research to move past the five Ds of “disparities, deprivation, disadvantage, dysfunction, and difference” (Taylor & Kukutai, 2016, p. 80). This is a meaningful discussion and a commendable approach. However, without statistical baselines that clearly demonstrate the inequalities that exist—the “d” of disparities/disadvantage—it is difficult to develop meaningful local and national policies such as First Nations procurement programs, innovative business management courses, and financing support systems that enable more Indigenous businesses to get started and for entrepreneurial individuals to make the jump from employee to employer.

This study has demonstrated how three different government sources provide slightly different yet equally revealing disparities between the First Nations and Indigenous business communities and the rest of Canada. Indigenous business communities are underrepresented in the national registry for Indigenous businesses released by Statistics Canada in 2022, the 2011 and 2016 census records, and the eight-cycle YBS record. One would expect that the Yukon, with its level of First Nations self-government, would be well advanced in the development of a strong and growing First Nations business culture. However, based on the number of businesses owned by Yukon First Nations businesspeople it appears this is not the case. If anything, the trend appears to be downward, with First Nations businesses peaking in 2013 at 211 and having declined since, dropping to 121 local Yukon First Nations businesses in 2021. This is, of course, only one measure of growth and stability and does not speak to such issues as size, profitability, and return on investment. Perhaps these 121 businesses in 2021 are employing more workers than those in 2013, perhaps they have greater revenues—but at this point, accessible data does not provide the answers. A research report by the Bank of Canada recommends that developing a register of Indigenous-owned businesses in Canada would support research in this area (Chernoff & Cheung, 2023). It is worrisome, however, that data from eight separate business survey cycles indicates that a considerable disparity exists between First Nations and non-Indigenous business communities in the Yukon, a disparity that it is probably worsening rather than improving.

This study stresses the importance of creating a baseline to understand the state of the First Nations business environment. If we accept that Indigenous businesses are severely underrepresented in Canada, then it follows that far more research on entrepreneurship among Yukon First Nations businesspeople is required. The momentum that should be driving new First Nations business development in the Yukon is being captured by First Nations businesspeople from outside the Territory. As such, it is necessary to clarify the barriers to First Nations businesses entering and prospering in the Yukon marketplace. This future research agenda needs to look at specific aspects of Yukon First Nations entrepreneurship including, but not be limited, to:

- The availability of capital and credit,
- The nature and extent of female First Nations entrepreneurship,

- The access to education, especially business training and related skill sets,
- The work and employment histories of entrepreneurs,
- The need for an expanded First Nations-oriented business skills program at Yukon University,
- The attitudes towards entrepreneurship within Yukon First Nations families and communities,
- The need for capacity building and acknowledgment of competition for talent between First Nations and public governments,
- The accessibility of northern markets and recognition of regional development challenges,
- The study of government procurement policies, which are only now taking hold,
- The nature of CBA/IBAs that may favour Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations over local entrepreneurs,
- The existence and nature of First Nations Development Corporations, and
- The role of First Nations Governments in supporting business enterprises.

The development of Yukon and national datasets outlining the state of Indigenous business in Canada clearly shows that, regardless of the importance that researchers and politicians attribute to the Indigenous economy in Canada, Indigenous businesspeople are significantly underrepresented.

END NOTES

- ¹ The number of Indigenous businesses in Canada ranges widely. Two recent estimates are 60,000 (Jackobsh & Boskov, 2020) and 50,000 (Moore & Robinson, 2022).
- ² The CEO of the Nacho Nyäk Dun Development Corporation (NNDDC) experienced these and many other delays operating in Mayo, Yukon, where the company's many assets were often compromised by limited emergency services that affected things as varied as building inspections, refrigerator repairs, internet service, plumbing, electricity, and fire extinguishers. Typically, these products and services had to come from Dawson City, Whitehorse, or Edmonton. The freon examples comes from Greg Finnegan's experience with NNDDC.
- ³ First Nations on-reserve populations are excluded from the monthly Labour Force Survey conducted by Statistics Canada. This exclusion has existed from the survey's start in 1945.
- ⁴ See p 201, Canada Council of Aboriginal Business, 2016, *Promise and Prosperity: The Aboriginal Business Survey*.
- ⁵ For example, in 2020 the NNDDC, under the umbrella of the Development Corporation, owned a 51% interest in numerous businesses in engineering, catering, mining equipment leasing, hotels, and airplane leasing (owned 50/50 with another First Nation) and had full ownership of a grocery store and mineral exploration firm, among other investments and business interests.
- ⁶ While 2008 and 2009 were the first years the survey was run with First Nations data requests, we selected 2010 for illustration because it included all fourteen First Nations, whereas 2008 and 2009 may have had gaps in representation, especially in Ross River and White River First Nation, which are rather isolated First Nations.
- ⁷ Greg Finnegan, co-author and Chief Statistician from 2007-2011, introduced the First Nations questions along with other changes to the YBS in 2008.
- ⁸ See also "Native Title: Dead Capital?" by R. Edwards, 2003, *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, pp. 80-105, who offers a perspective similar to de Soto's in regards to Indigenous lands in Australia.
- ⁹ As Gueye, Lafrance-Cooke and Oyarzun (2022) note in *Identifying Indigenous business owners and Indigenous-owned businesses*, "numbers may not add to total due to rounding" (p. 13). As such, these expected values are approximations.
- ¹⁰ The 2011 and 2016 Census of Canada and the Labour Force Survey data used in this section uses the term Aboriginal not Indigenous.
- ¹¹ This is a discontinued data series that has been archived by Statistics Canada. A request for an update on this data series was made but without success.
- ¹² We have considerable concerns over the aggregation of self-employment in small communities because of random rounding. If a community has 100 employed people and 5 are listed as self-employed this is a 5% self-employment rate, yet due to random rounding this could actually be zero or ten. Accumulated errors may be inflating or deflating the self-employment rate at this scale.
- ¹³ A custom tabulation using the following variables: Aboriginal identity (11), Area of residence (3), Highest certificate, diploma or degree (10), Class of worker (5), Selected characteristics (204) and Adjusted base for incompletely enumerated reserves 2006-2011 for the population aged 15 years and over in private households of Canada, provinces and territories, and of selected regions (2)
- ¹⁴ Comprehensive Benefit Agreements are also commonly referred to as Impact Benefit Agreements.
- ¹⁵ In the 2011 and 2016 census records, self-employment was used as a proxy for being in business.

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Social Value of Renewable Energy in Remote Northern Indigenous Communities

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ABSTRACT

Renewable energy (RE) is at the forefront of Canada's strategy to achieve a net-zero electricity grid by 2035. The development of RE projects is also promoted as a means to deliver energy services in rural and remote Indigenous communities across the North. Although RE projects have the potential to contribute to sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and economic reconciliation, the social value of RE to Indigenous communities is often overlooked and poorly understood. This article advances themes for understanding and approaching RE developments to better assess their social value. It does so based on the analysis of lessons from RE research in northern Canada and Alaska. We demonstrate that RE projects can create outcomes that are value generating or value eroding and that such outcomes are often couched in the context of supporting or detracting from self-determination. Techno-human variables, from community vision and capacity to policy environments and local RE ownership, serve to enable or inhibit the realization of value-generating outcomes from RE. Finally, we identify several pathways to creation from RE, including relationships and collaborative leadership, knowledge and skills-development, Indigenous-led policies that decrease energy bureaucracy and manage benefits distribution, and regulations and structures that safeguard ecologies.

Keywords: social value of energy, renewable energy, Indigenous communities, Canada, Alaska

INTRODUCTION

Energy systems are transitioning globally from fossil fuel-based systems toward renewables to mitigate climate change whilst ensuring energy security (IEA, 2023; Leonhardt et al., 2022). In Canada, the federal government has prioritized renewable energy (RE) as part of a national strategy to achieve a net-zero electricity grid by 2035 (Government of Canada, 2023a). For many of the off-grid, diesel-dependent communities across Canada's provincial and territorial North, RE is also promoted as a way to reduce the reliance on diesel fuel whilst supporting energy sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through equity ownership of RE projects (Government of Canada, 2023b; Hoicka et al., 2021; Rakshit et al., 2019)).

The potential to generate local economic and social benefits and empower historically marginalized communities are among the noted benefits of RE projects (Berka & Creamer, 2018; Hossain et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2022). However, McMaster et al. (2023) caution that such benefits are realized only when RE initiatives align with and enhance community social values. Similarly, Mercer et al. (2020) conclude that for off-grid Indigenous communities in Canada's eastern Arctic, RE projects that do not align with local traditional values are less likely to be accepted by the community and are instead seen as capital-driven energy investments that reflect external interests. Thus, notwithstanding the growing interest in RE to power rural and remote Indigenous communities, there is need for a more critical understanding of the potential benefits of RE and the burdens or risks that these projects may pose—a balance that is absent from many narratives promoting energy transition (e.g., Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2016; Walker et al., 2022).

Local RE projects have the potential to deliver energy services in rural and remote communities, but the social value of energy to these communities is often overlooked (del Rio & Burguillo, 2009; McMaster et al., 2024). The social value of energy is simply “the total value derived from energy services, including both economic and non-economic value and accounting for risks, burdens, and other negative externalities” (Miller et al., 2015, p. 67). Developing RE systems for, rather than with, Indigenous communities under the guise of environmentally responsible energy production imposes an agenda that may not align with a community's values and aspirations (Menghwani et al., 2022); such projects often fail to generate social value (Holdmann et al., 2022; McMaster et al., 2023). Another major challenge is that, despite the inherent importance of social value to RE projects, there is limited research to guide community, energy planner, and policy-maker understandings of the social value of RE in the context of northern, remote, and off-grid Indigenous communities (Holdmann et al., 2022; Stefanelli et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2021). Such understanding is crucial to ensuring that local energy investments improve community wellbeing and avoid propagating energy injustices (Biswas et al., 2022; MacKay et al., 2021).

This paper offers a thematic analysis and parameters for understanding the social value of RE projects in remote northern Indigenous community contexts, including potential value-generating and value-eroding outcomes. In doing so, the intent is to

support communities, energy planners, policy makers, and developers to better plan for, monitor, and evaluate RE projects based on an improved understanding of social value creation or burdens, rather than solely on techno-economic objectives. The themes and parameters offered provide a foundation for future studies aiming to develop more nuanced and community-specific frameworks for exploring the social value of energy for remote northern Indigenous communities.

TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL VALUE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

There is growing research on RE in remote northern Indigenous communities, yet this scholarship remains limited when compared to research focused on urban environments and grid-connected communities in the south (Holdmann et al., 2022). Our approach to understanding the social value of RE is based on a scoping review of scholarship on community and RE projects and experiences from northern Canada and Alaska—regions characterized by considerable growth in RE initiatives in the North (Holdmann & Asmus, 2019), yet where the majority of off-grid communities still rely on diesel fuel for power generation.

Methods

We used the Scopus database (www.scopus.com) to identify scholarly research on the social value of energy for Indigenous communities, using keyword searches that included (Canada OR Alaska) AND (renewable AND energy) OR (community AND energy) AND (Indigenous) OR (aboriginal) OR (first AND nation) OR (Metis). Multiple search strings that included the addition of specific named Nations or bands were first tested to ensure that our final search parameters did not exclude research addressing RE in Indigenous communities that did not adopt specific terminologies. Our focus of analysis was to reveal information that is contextual, explanatory, evaluative, and generative; therefore, we focused on publications that use qualitative research methods to capture local perspectives and produce insights that are often omitted from quantitative or technical studies (Ritchie, 2003). We thus limited our search to the social science disciplines and only included studies that were based on a qualitative design, informed by data collected through community engagement (e.g., interviews, focus groups, and participatory research), and focused in some capacity on the social value of energy. These were supplemented by a limited number of studies that provided cross-sectional analyses of Indigenous RE development, including the determinants of off-grid energy transition (Holdmann et al., 2022), government instruments supporting RE in northern communities (Leonhardt et al., 2023), and Indigenous business leaders in Canada's RE sector (Bullock et al., 2020; Zurba & Bullock, 2018, 2020) (see Table 1).

The sample of papers is small yet rich in that it is only comprised of research that tackles the social value of energy through community-engaged scholarship or that is based on cross-cutting analyses that engaged Indigenous community actors. All the literature selected for analysis used co-produced methods and/or data, which are essential to investigating the social value of energy because they include local community

viewpoints: desktop studies often fail to accurately capture this data (Biswas et al., 2021; Stefanelli et al., 2019). Importantly, the sample reflects the limited empirical research available to inform RE planning and decision making in remote community contexts. That said, the research sample included in our analysis addresses RE issues and contexts across more than 20 communities.

TABLE 1
Recent Research on Remote Northern Indigenous
Community Energy Included in Our Analysis

<i>Community or regionally focused</i>	<i>Communities or region</i>
Brewer et al. (2018)	Gwitchyaa Zhee Corporation, Fort Yukon, Alaska
Karanasios & Parker (2018)	Non-disclosed community, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Ontario
MacKay et al. (2021)	Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvialuit Settlement Region
Mang-Benza & Baxter (2021)	M'Chigeeng First Nation, Ontario
McMaster et al. (2023)	Inuvik, Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic—Northwest Territories
Mercer et al. (2020)	NunatuKavut, Labrador
Rakshit et al. (2019)	Poplar Hill First Nation, Ontario
Rakshit et al. (2018)	Keewaytinook Okimakanak First Nation, Ontario
Rezaei & Dowlatabadi (2016)	First Nation communities, British Columbia: Tsay Keh Dene, T'Sou-ke, Hartley Bay, Douglas First Nation, Tahltan Central Council, Atlin, Xeni Gwet'in, Kwadacha, Kanaka Bar
Rodon et al. (2021)	Kuujuaq and Inukjuak, Quebec
Schmidt et al. (2021)	Tanana, Alaska
Sikka et al. (2013)	Sealaska Corporation (Tlingit and Haida communities), Alaska
Tsuji et al. (2021)	Constance Lake First Nation, Ontario
<i>Cross-cutting research</i>	<i>Regions or actors</i>
Bullock et al. (2020); Zubra & Bullock (2020); Zubra & Bullock (2018)	Cross-Canada, Indigenous business leaders
Holdmann et al. (2022)	Cross-cutting, 24 Alaskan communities
Leonhardt et al. (2023)	Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Northwest Territories—Indigenous leaders, utilities, governments

We examined the content of this research through an iterative review and coding process following the methodological guidance of Braun & Clarke (2012). Initial coding was based on the semantic meaning of the text, identifying the range of values or outcomes of RE identified by the authors; this was followed by a second round of coding whereby codes were merged to create sub-themes based on the dimensions of social value of energy as proposed by Miller et al. (2018) and Biswas et al. (2022). NVIVO v.12 software was used to code, consolidate codes into sub-themes, and categorize

sub-themes into three emergent yet interconnected themes: i) RE outcomes, whether value creating or eroding; ii) techno-human variables; and iii) pathways to social value creation via RE (see Figure 1). The convergence of codes into sub-themes and themes was reviewed independently by the second and third authors and cross-checked against Biswas et al. (2022). The sections that follow discuss each of these components and their implications for realizing the social value of RE in remote northern Indigenous community contexts.

FIGURE 1
Social Value of Energy Core Themes



OUTCOMES: SOCIAL VALUE CREATION FROM RE

Across the selection of papers reviewed, we observed 179 references to RE outcomes, or 25% of our data codes. Of these 179 references, the majority (80%) referred to the social value created from RE projects, such as revenue generation and nurturing culture and well-being (which tend to contribute to self-determination objectives), whilst 20% of references to RE outcomes identified potential value-eroding outcomes, such as land displacement and increased local energy costs (which tend to detract from self-determination objectives).

Value Generating Outcomes—RE Aligns with Exercising Self-Determination

When envisioned, owned, and/or controlled by the community, RE projects can support self-determination as communities become more self-sufficient in meeting their energy needs, without reliance on external actors (Karanasios & Parker, 2018; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2016). Many remote communities across northern Canada and Alaska rely on expensive, imported diesel fuel for power generation, straining the community’s

financial resources whilst failing to meet even basic energy needs (Bullock et al., 2020; Rakshit et al., 2019; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2016; Sikka et al., 2013; Zurba & Bullock, 2020). Various studies identify RE as an endogenous energy option that reduces reliance on external energy supplies and actors, thus reducing community energy costs, enhancing local energy reliability, and increasing access to essential energy services such as heating (Brewer et al., 2018; Bullock et al., 2020; Karanasios & Parker, 2018; Krupa et al., 2015; MacKay et al., 2021; Mercer et al., 2020; Rakshit et al., 2018, 2019; Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2016; Schmidt et al., 2021; Sikka et al., 2013). In this context, we identify four primary value-generating outcomes for communities from RE, based on the sample of scholarship reviewed.

Fostering Self-Governance. Local production and use of RE can promote self-governance via improved energy self-reliance and self-sufficiency, thus decreasing dependencies on external producers, governments, and funding for energy security. Drawing on different community contexts and perspectives, recent studies identify RE as offering communities a means to break away from colonial power structures and catalyze decolonization (Rezaei & Dowlatabadi, 2016), coupled with economic and cultural reconciliation (Mang-Benza & Baxter, 2021). Such value opportunities are reported in McMaster et al.'s (2023) analysis of RE opportunities in Gwich'in communities in the Northwest Territories, referencing a Gwich'in community leader's explanation that local control over decisions about energy means breaking "the long history of colonial policies and approaches" (p. 150) that instruct communities on how to do things.

Generating Revenue and Savings to Finance Communities' Priorities. RE allows communities to generate new revenues or realize energy cost savings (Karanasios & Parker, 2018). Resources can then be redirected to essential community infrastructure (Krupa, 2012) or to a community trust fund to support local investments and development initiatives that are not supported via other government funding programs (Bullock et al., 2020; Rakshit et al., 2019). In the Northwest Territories, for example, Gwich'in leadership explain that when a community has energy control locally, they "can make better decisions about how [to] spend that energy, what [to] do with it" (McMaster et al., 2023, p. 150). In this regard, energy cost savings can free up resources to meet basic needs and provide greater financial autonomy.

Creating Local Economic Opportunities. Likewise, RE can create new local economic opportunities such as employment and income for local suppliers, operators, and maintenance personnel: this enables self-reliance and offers new opportunities to train and retain technical skillsets in the community (Brewer et al., 2018; MacKay et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2021; Zurba & Bullock, 2020). Coupled with more affordable energy and financial autonomy, this nurturing of new skillsets can enable entrepreneurial opportunities, which creates more local economic opportunities and gains. For instance, in Fort Yukon, Alaska, the Indigenous-owned Gwichyaa Zhee Corporation provides good paying local jobs by employing community members to harvest biomass, maintain boilers, and operate biomass power plants, while keeping revenues from biomass energy sales within the community, rather than spending on diesel fuel imported from outside the community (Brewer et al., 2018).

Nurturing Culture and Well-Being. RE can provide the means for communities to access energy services that are essential to live comfortably and affordably, while reducing local pollution from diesel fuels. Research from rural Alaska (Schmidt et al., 2021) and communities in Canada's boreal region, for example, show that harvesting local resources for bioenergy production helps sustain cultural practices, whilst other studies indicate that RE allows household resources normally spent on electricity for home heating to be invested instead in fuels and equipment to support hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering (Rodon et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2021; Tsuji et al., 2021). In the Mackenzie Delta, McMaster et al. (2023) report that the prospects of secure and affordable RE can translate to improved resourcing of social services, such as schools, recreational centers, and community buildings.

Value-Eroding Outcomes—RE Creates Barriers to Self-Determination

Notwithstanding the considerable value-generating outcomes, RE can also create value-eroding outcomes to self-determination. Based on our analysis, four cautionary value-eroding outcomes emerge from recent scholarship:

Land and Job Displacement. Whilst in Canada the concerns over displacement from traditional lands are most often documented in relation to hydropower development (Krupa, 2012; Tsuji et al., 2021), in other jurisdictions, including northern Sweden and Norway, such displacement is an increasing concern regarding wind power development and its disruption of traditional livelihoods (Szpak, 2019). Further, Indigenous communities in northern Ontario and Labrador have raised concerns that RE can also lead to job displacement, especially when RE projects replace locally operated diesel plants and lead to the loss of the diesel-related institutions that provide energy services to communities (e.g., fuel service and maintenance) (Karanasios & Parker, 2018; Mercer et al., 2020; Rodon et al., 2021).

Extractive and Adverse Impacts. Although considered clean energy, RE does have adverse impacts associated with it (Krupa, 2012), including impacts related to the demand for critical and rare earth mineral extraction in the North to support the manufacturing of RE technologies (Tortell et al., 2023). Such emerging concerns—coupled with more enduring concerns related to methyl mercury contamination and flooding from hydropower reservoirs (Tsuji et al., 2021), impacts of biomass harvesting on habitat and soil health (Bullock et al., 2020), or wind turbine disturbance to land and wildlife (MacKay et al., 2021)—can threaten subsistence activities and quality of life. Mercer et al. (2020), for example, report concerns from NunatuKavut communities regarding certain energy technologies, including small hydro and energy storage technologies, citing fears over disturbance to traditional food sources such as fish and soil contamination due to lithium battery disposal.

Adverse Effects on Physical and Social Health. Related to the above are concerns about the adverse impacts of RE projects to well-being, including those related to the noise and visual impacts of wind turbines (Mang-Benza and Baxter, 2021; Mercer et al., 2020) and emerging concerns from some communities about the health risks of

small modular nuclear reactor projects (Mercer et al., 2020)—a target technology for energy transitions in remote Canada (NRCan, 2022). Further, research in Canada’s North notes that low-cost RE can free up household income but cautions that it can also lead to further social disruption in communities where underlying social health challenges and coping mechanisms need to be addressed (Bullock et al., 2020; Zurba & Bullock, 2020).

Increased Energy Cost and Financial Losses. Replacement of existing energy services with RE can lead to increased energy costs or it may not generate sufficient profit for the local organizations providing RE services (Holdmann et al., 2022). Geographical remoteness, human resource capacity, and energy production ownership and distribution restrictions are all identified in the Canadian and Alaskan context as conditions that could lead to higher costs of producing and purchasing RE compared to current diesel-based generation (Bullock et al., 2020; Sikka et al., 2013). The capital cost of certain technologies, such as battery storage and replacement for solar, can also be prohibitive for many communities in absence of government subsidies (Mercer et al., 2020), increasing power rates and exacerbating energy poverty (MacKay et al., 2021).

TECHNO-HUMAN VARIABLES INHIBITING OR ENABLING SOCIAL VALUE FROM RE

The techno-human variables of energy systems either enable social value creation from RE projects or pose barriers to social value realization. Techno-human variables were widely discussed across the sample of papers reviewed, referred to more than 400 times by the collection of authors and representing 56% of our data codes. The techno-human variables identified include community awareness and vision (192 references; 47%), ownership and control (76 references; 19%), policy infrastructure and coordination (39 references; 9%), and capacity (100 references; 25%).

Community Awareness and Vision

The potential of RE projects to generate positive social value hinges on whether such projects are envisioned with or by community members and leaders, rather than based on the visions of outside interests (McMaster et al., 2023). Deep community involvement in RE planning, development, and even operations and maintenance are critical to establishing community support for RE initiatives (McMaster et al., 2024). Grassroots RE is more likely to align with community values that reinforce connections to land, water, and wildlife (Brewer et al., 2018), ensure the well-being of future generations (Mang-Benza & Baxter, 2021), and promote the sharing of benefits among community members (Schmidt et al., 2021). In Tsiigehtchic, Northwest Territories, for example, McMaster et al. (2023) show that the vision for RE must be embedded in the community’s way of life and not “imposed...from outside the community” (p. 7). Community visions for RE may be drastically different from those of energy developers, nonprofits, or external governments (Mercer et al., 2020). Limited attention is often paid to what northern and Indigenous communities want from RE, resulting in RE projects that are potentially threatening to local values such as subsistence activities,

traditions, and food security (MacKay et al., 2021; Tsuji et al., 2021). In Canada's eastern Arctic, Mercer et al. (2020) report that past experiences with external energy actors have left negative sentiments among community members—this is especially so when RE is politicized, its benefits overemphasized, or when the community has limited understanding about how a specific RE technology works (Brewer et al., 2018; MacKay et al., 2021; Mang-Benza & Baxter, 2021).

Ownership and Control

Local ownership and control of RE projects have been shown to support community acceptance and social value creation (Krupa et al., 2015; MacKay et al., 2021; Menghwani et al., 2022). For example, in the case of M'Chigeeng First Nation's wind power project, the community's sole ownership reduced members' negative sentiments about wind energy and even created a sense of pride and empowerment (Mang-Benza & Baxter, 2021). Similarly, Krupa et al. (2015) report that Pic River Nation, Ontario, managed to uplift the community through decades of RE development, which gained momentum because of local leadership's learning from outside partners during a pilot run-of-river project and that eventually led to the community's full ownership and control of RE projects. The importance of local control is further illustrated by Rondon et al. (2021), reporting on case studies from northern Quebec and the relative success of the Innavik hydro project (an essentially local initiative to explore alternative energy solutions) versus the externally driven and unsuccessful diesel-powered solutions introduced by the Crown energy utility, Hydro Quebec, for Kuujjuak. Local ownership and control of RE allows a community to reinvest the savings accrued from lower-cost energy (Brewer et al., 2018; MacKay et al., 2021). As summarized by Gwich'in leadership in the Northwest Territories, when communities control energy locally, they can “make better decisions about how you spend that energy, and what you do with it” (McMaster et al., 2023, p.8).

Policy Infrastructure and Coordination

Energy governance varies jurisdictionally, but it typically involves multiple layers of regulatory bodies with varying responsibilities and priorities. It is common for government-owned utilities to monopolize energy infrastructure and supply and to dominate energy governance (Leonhardt et al., 2023). Experiences across northern Canada show that monopoly control can reinforce colonial structures, disregard the cultural and social value of RE, and inhibit energy sovereignty (Rezaei and Dowlatabadi, 2016; Rodon et al., 2021; Tsuji et al., 2021). In the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, for example, MacKay et al. (2021) report that quota regulations for distributed energy projects limit an individual's ability to be energy secure. Similarly, in Aklavik, Northwest Territories, the community owns an integrated 55-kilowatt solar system, but to ensure energy cost balancing across the service region, the Crown energy corporation Northwest Territories Power Corporation allows for only a maximum 20% of electricity generation to come from local intermittent sources (Leonhardt et al., 2023; McMaster et al., 2023). And for RE sources such as biomass and hydro, land tenure restrictions

and water licenses limit community access to RE resources (Bullock et al., 2020; Krupa, 2012).

Central governments and utilities typically support renewables, but multi-level, multi-layered policy and regulatory processes pose barriers to local RE projects (Rakshit et al., 2019). The experiences of northern communities are echoed in Leonhardt et al.'s (2023) cross-jurisdictional analysis of Canada's energy systems, which are characterized by monopoly ownership, grid inaccessibility, and generation restrictions and which stifle RE in many remote and Indigenous communities. Examples such as Aklavik (McMaster et al., 2023) and Pic River First Nation (Krupa et al., 2015) demonstrate that it is possible for RE to emerge and benefit communities under centralized utility structures, but these examples simultaneously illustrate social value constraints and emphasize the importance of complementarity between government instruments for RE deployment: this ensures the development of community and place-based tools for value-added RE projects (Leonhardt et al., 2023; Rakshit et al., 2019).

Capacity to Plan, Build, Operate, and Maintain RE Projects

Communities must have the capacity to plan, build, operate, and maintain RE projects, including access to financial resources, expertise, technologies, and supporting energy infrastructure. Numerous studies on Indigenous community RE emphasize the importance of financial resources to the materialization of RE projects (MacKay et al., 2021; Mang-Benza and Baxter, 2021; Mercer et al., 2020). However, securing financing for local RE is complex, often stifling or delaying project development (Bullock et al., 2020; Rodon et al., 2021). Leonhardt et al. (2023) report that Indigenous communities must often pursue multiple financial programs to support a single RE project, often requiring matching funds from the private sector. Other reported barriers include debt ceilings (Rodon et al., 2021), as banks are not able to seize infrastructure built on First Nations' land in Canada in the event of a debt default. The borrower must instead secure a loan guarantee beforehand, which obstructs RE development (Bullock et al., 2020). Difficulty in capital financing of projects, coupled with the high start-up and maintenance costs of RE relative to the cost of energy from established fossil fuel companies, which are sometimes subsidized, remain inhibiting factors for RE in the North (Karanasios & Parker, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2021; Sikka et al., 2013).

Local human resource capacity plays an equally important role in enabling or constraining the social value of RE. Across Gwich'in communities in the Mackenzie Valley, for example, McMaster et al. (2023) identify two definitive capacity challenges: energy literacy and opportunities for RE skills development, including technical, financial, and managerial skillsets. Unfamiliarity with energy businesses and technologies and the installation, operations, and maintenance of RE can limit a community's ability to fully realize the benefits of RE (Bullock et al., 2020; Krupa, 2012) or even cause reluctance to pursue RE options (Mercer et al., 2020). For instance, McMaster et al. (2023) report that community members of Aklavik are aware that a portion of their electricity is generated by solar, but there is limited technical understanding of how the

solar energy system functions or awareness of generation policies set by the territorial utility that limit solar capacity.

Several scholars note that the historical exclusion of many Indigenous communities in the energy industry has contributed to the lack of energy-related skills and has fostered a dependency on external governments and corporations for energy services (Mang-Benz and Baxter, 2021; Rezaei and Dowlatabadi, 2016). That said, others report a rich embedded and transferable skillset; for example, across Gwich'in communities, McMaster et al. (2023) identify skills from the mining and oil and gas sector that are "easily transferable" (p. 152) to the RE sector. There is sometimes a perception that because RE is a new technology that remote Indigenous communities lack the skills to engage with it (Krupa, 2012; Rakshit et al., 2019); this perception is not always the reality.

PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL VALUE CREATION FROM RENEWABLE ENERGY

Based on the social value outcomes of RE and the enabling techno-human variables identified across communities' RE experiences, several potential pathways to social value creation were identified. Benefit pathways were referred to the least in the sample of scholarship, comprising 141 (19%) data codes: they included relationship building (29 references; 21%), knowledge and skills (50 references; 35%), decreasing bureaucracy (48 references; 34%), and safeguarding ecologies (14 references; 10%). These pathways are not meant to be prescriptive or comprehensive of all possible opportunities for realizing the social value of RE. Rather, the pathways draw on the common lessons and opportunities emerging from recent scholarship and experiences with RE deployment and interests across the North.

Building Relationships and Establishing Local Leadership

Several case studies in the literature emphasize the importance of local leadership or community energy champions to facilitate actor engagement, knowledge mobilization, and internalizing RE as a community-directed initiative (Krupa et al., 2015; Rakshit et al., 2018). Local leadership for RE is collaborative, not hierarchical, and focused on building the social capital to enable and sustain RE projects (Goedkoop et al., 2022). In other words, realizing the social value of RE opportunities requires leadership that engages community members, fosters a collaborative approach to shaping a community's energy vision, and ensures integration of community values into RE project planning, implementation, and benefits distribution (Krupa, 2012; MacKay et al., 2021; Rakshit et al., 2019). This requires gender-inclusive and multi-generational engagement to ensure social value distribution from both current and future RE projects (Rakshit et al., 2018; McMaster et al., 2023).

Due to the multi-sectoral and multi-layer governance structure of energy in remote northern Indigenous communities, working fluidly with multiple actors is necessary to develop RE initiatives (Krupa et al., 2015; Zurba and Bullock, 2020). This means that local energy leaders must be equipped with both the mandate and the resources to engage

both community members and external actors and to pursue new RE technologies and funding opportunities. Reporting on experiences from Tsiigehtchic, Aklavik, and Fort McPherson, for example, McMaster et al. (2023) note that not having locally designated or sufficiently resourced energy champions means missed opportunities to pursue RE projects; the challenges to local RE leadership are largely capacity related.

Building Knowledge, Skills, and Local Capacity

Three key opportunities to facilitate energy literacy and build the knowledge and skills to engage in RE initiatives emerge from community scholarship on RE across the North. First, there is empirical evidence that communities benefit and learn from partnering with industries or other actors to build local capacity for RE (Brewer et al., 2018; Krupa et al., 2015). Such partnerships can be in the form of demonstration projects, as in the case of Pic River Nation's learning from a run-of-river pilot initiative. The importance of local context-specific skills development and training for community engagement in RE is reinforced by McMaster et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of local, hands-on training and mentorship after looking at the challenges of formal training programs that require a prerequisite knowledge base and thus are largely inaccessible to community members. There are also examples of initiatives that ensure local capacity building is community appropriate, such the Northwest Territories Power Corporation initiatives to provide apprentice-type training and applied mentorship for community members out of high school (McMaster et al., 2023).

The next key opportunity is strengthening community energy literacy. Energy literacy has been a key catalyst to RE success in rural Alaska (Holdmann et al. 2019), with community understanding of energy technologies being foundational to their acceptance. Mercer et al. (2020), for example, report community resistance to certain energy technologies on the southern coast of Labrador, owing in large part to misunderstandings about the technology itself. As McMaster et al. (2023) note, a major challenge to current energy literacy programs in remote northern Indigenous communities is the focus on energy efficiency rather than on improving community knowledge about how energy systems work (production, distribution, and end use).

Finally, community-to-community energy networks provide an important opportunity for communities to learn from each other regarding the implementation of RE projects: for example, technological options, financing, governance, and operations and maintenance (Brewer et al., 2018; Krupa et al., 2015). While values may differ from one community to the next, community-to-community relationships can help build local capacity through knowledge sharing, technology transfer, or even resource sharing. At a minimum, sister community relationships provide an opportunity to learn about success stories and how mistakes can be avoided (McMaster et al., 2023). Socially networked communities have been instrumental to the emergence and success of regional grids across rural Alaska, providing support for energy project planning and maintenance across remote locations (Holdmann et al., 2019).

Decreasing Bureaucracy in Centralized Utility Structures

In many jurisdictions, legislation permits only Crown energy utilities to generate, transmit, and distribute electricity (Leonhardt et al., 2023), limiting the ability of Indigenous communities to be independent power producers. New opportunities are slowly emerging through power purchase agreements, but scholars argue that current policies and regulations, created by non-Indigenous governments mainly for centralized utility-based markets, create burdens and barriers for remote and Indigenous communities to engage in RE and could reinforce fossil fuel dependencies (Brewer et al., 2018; Leonhardt et al., 2023). Realizing the social value of RE requires not only engaging Indigenous governments and communities in energy sector governance (MacKay et al., 2021; Rakshit et al., 2019) but also supporting Indigenous-led policies that strengthen Indigenous communities' capacity for self-sufficiency (Bullock et al., 2020; Krupa et al., 2015). For instance, the success of Pic River Nation in becoming an RE developer involved advocating for policies that require Indigenous participation in provincial procurement processes and for RE siting allocation that would contribute to First Nation development (Krupa et al., 2015). There are also lessons to be learned from remote Alaska, namely the Alaskan Village Electric Cooperative (AVEC), for restructuring an energy sector to enable energy self-sufficiency. AVEC, although powered largely by diesel generation, emerged in the late 1960s as a non-profit electric cooperative and now provides power to 58 off-grid communities across Alaska (Holdmann et al., 2022). The cooperative is wholly owned by the communities it serves. No such organizational structure currently exists in Canada's North.

Beyond ownership and grid access, the success of community RE hinges on appropriate financial policies and regulations. Leonhardt et al. (2022) emphasize the inequities created by instruments such as power purchase agreements when smaller remote communities lack the capacity to negotiate rates. A substantial scholarship thus points toward the importance of context-specific policies for financing RE, such as government-backed loan guarantees or grants for start-ups and small enterprises (Bullock et al., 2020; Krupa et al., 2015). Evidence indicates that policies providing such financial incentives for Indigenous RE contribute significantly to the initial planning or deployment of RE projects. For instance, Ontario's Green Energy and Green Economy Act of 2009 provided a feed-in-tariff known as the Aboriginal Price Adder for RE developed by First Nations, which sparked the interest of Constance Lake First Nation and Northland Power Inc. to plan the development of hydropower projects on the Kabinakagami River, as well as the completion of a 2 MW wind project owned by the M'Chigeeng First Nation (Mang-Benza and Baxter, 2021; Tsuji et al., 2021).

Of course, such incentives for RE project development must be coupled with policies that support market expansion, including incentivizing power purchases from local RE vendors (Brewer et al., 2018) and creating an export market (Bullock et al., 2020). In addition, policy or regulations would need to support the local distribution of benefits accrued from RE projects. In the bioenergy sector, for example, Bullock et al. (2020) and Zubra and Bullock (2020) discuss how Indigenous business leaders recognize the need for mechanisms that uphold the Indigenous value of sharing and ensure the

distribution of benefits, with Rodon et al. (2021) reporting similar priorities emerging from Inukjuak regarding the distribution of project revenues to meet community needs.

Safeguarding Ecologies

Finally, the social value of RE projects encompass environmental impacts that need to be assessed and mitigated. Studies on bioenergy development, for example, show that Indigenous leaders see the overharvesting of wood and pollution from burning biomass as a potential threat to traditional lands and resources, thus requiring permitting and regulating processes to ensure sustainable biomass harvesting practices (Bullock et al., 2020; Sikka et al., 2013). Similarly, in the case of Nunavik, Rodon et al. (2021) report that Inukjuak community members supported local development plans for Innavik hydroelectric but requested specific ecological setbacks, thus minimizing the potential for adverse environmental impacts.

Assessment and permitting processes are needed for RE projects, but these processes may look different from those established under regulatory impact assessment for major mining or fossil fuel energy projects (Hanna et al., 2019). The challenge is to ensure sufficient regulatory controls for RE projects to mitigate potential adverse environmental impacts without introducing costly impact assessment processes that delay RE project approvals (McMaster et al., 2021). Macintosh et al. (2018), for example, note that complicated impact assessment and approval processes can delay RE projects, reduce the social and economic returns from investment, and, in the worst case, derail clean energy projects. Canada may require something similar to Europe's TEN-E Regulations for 'common interest projects,' introduced to ensure that priority energy infrastructure is developed that meets energy and climate needs (McMaster et al., 2021): Canada would benefit from similar expedited and novel procedures that prioritize Indigenous-led RE projects on Indigenous lands and ensure an efficient and Indigenous-led assessment and approval process whilst safeguarding local ecologies. Minimizing the transaction costs of RE project approvals and incorporating Indigenous-led review and approvals processes are important to realizing timely and appropriate benefits to communities.

CONCLUSION

The development of RE projects does not automatically lead to Indigenous communities' energy sovereignty, self-sufficiency, or economic reconciliation; hence, understanding the social value of RE for remote northern Indigenous communities is crucial to achieving these aspirations amidst the ongoing energy transition. This article presented a thematic analysis for the social value of RE in remote northern Indigenous communities, emphasizing the pathways that lead to social value creation and the techno-human variables that either enable or constrain social value from RE, while recognizing that outcomes of RE can be value generating or value eroding. To ensure alignment of RE with local values and economic reconciliation efforts, the actors involved in planning, developing, and implementing RE policies, programs, and initiatives need to recognize these pathways, variables, and value-generating or value-eroding outcomes. The themes

identified in this research are based on the Canadian and Alaskan Northern context: we acknowledge that further lessons and experiences with RE from research with northern and Indigenous communities across other Arctic regions such as Norway, Sweden, and Russia may challenge or reinforce the foundational principles presented in this paper. We thus recommend further research to explore these themes across different RE and community contexts and to translate the lessons learned into actionable guidance for community energy planning and evaluation of RE opportunities.

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Book Review: Indigenous Economics

Bettina Schneider

Trosper, R. L. (2022). *Indigenous Economics: Sustaining Peoples and Their Lands*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press. 218 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-3345.

Relationality is at the core of Ronald Trosper's *Indigenous Economics*, a book that investigates relationality and its effects on economics and economic analysis. There is a growing body of work on relationality, with scholars in multiple fields writing about it in connection with their respective disciplines (Chilisa, 2012; Gould et al., 2023; Kovach, 2009; Martinez et al., 2023; Tynan, 2021; Wilson, 2008). However, Trosper's work offers a unique perspective by looking at economics through the lens of relationality. The first chapter explores the meaning of development for Indigenous peoples, which Trosper argues is "living well through relationships" (2022, p. 4) with both humans and nonhumans. This perspective offers an alternative to the definition embraced by international organizations after World War II. Instead of focusing on the production of commodities as an indicator of development, Trosper examines relational goods such as trust, cooperation, peace, well-being, and thriving lands and species, positioning them as the key outcomes of enhanced relationships with the natural world and other human beings. Of course, this is not to say that an increase in one's material standard is not valued, only that it is not a primary measure of development. Drawing on the work of Indigenous scholars such as Dara Kelly (2017), Trosper goes on to define wealth as the strong relationships one has with all humans and nonhumans in a specific landscape, as opposed to the standard definition of wealth as one's net worth. In this first chapter, Trosper offers five examples of successful relationship building in Indigenous communities and the benefits their different approaches provide.

The remaining chapters expand on Trosper's understanding of Indigenous economic theory and relationality. Chapter 2 shows how a relational approach to economics, which focuses on the "subjective understanding and valuing of other persons" (Trosper, 2022, p. 28), contrasts with standard economics' use of contracts to outline the nature of a relationship. Trosper suggests a subjective approach is needed because every person is uniquely shaped by the relationships formed during their life. Chapter 3 examines

how each person becomes a relational subject by cooperating with others to produce relational goods and how identity is shaped at the micro, meso, and macro levels (e.g., families, villages, and nations). Chapter 4 illustrates the role of land in the formation of Indigenous identity, as well the relationships among humans and nonhumans within Indigenous land tenure systems. Indigenous “people are not separated from their land; they live in relationship to it” (Trosper, 2022, p. 85). Trosper goes on to describe Indigenous territoriality systems and identifies common characteristics between them such as the “creation of relational goods for families, clans, and villages” as well as “the inclusion of nonhumans in those relationships” (2022, p. 109). Chapter 5 examines common pool and public goods. Trosper shows how good commons governance comes from prioritizing good relationships, while poor governance of common pool goods such as fisheries can lead to overharvesting and limited productivity. Trosper also investigates the conflict between individualism and the management of common pool and public goods: what happens when individuals focus on maximizing resources for themselves without coordinating with others who are pursuing those same resources? Trosper explores how good relationships can solve these types of social dilemmas and discusses strategies for creating such relationships, as well as the importance of the relational goods such as trust, identity, and equity that emerge from these relationships. Chapter 6 examines relational leadership amongst Indigenous leaders. Trosper argues that Indigenous conceptions of sustainability support the principles of relationality and the consciousness of all beings and that relational leaders embody these principles and support sustainability by maintaining strong relationships among all humans and nonhumans. Trosper supports these claims with examples of relational leaders whose actions have contributed to sustainability.

The last chapter of the book is worth discussing at length. Chapter 7 focuses on relational entrepreneurship and compares relationality to more individualistic entrepreneurial approaches. Trosper acknowledges that many relational organizational entities defy the “public/private dichotomy” and provides examples of entities that represent “a mixture of both public and private activities of individuals” (2022, p. 170). Trosper looks to Wanda Wuttunee (2004) and her book *Living Rhythms: Lessons in Economic Resilience and Vision*, which shares lessons learned from relational entrepreneurs in Indigenous communities and organizations in Canada and which builds on Sherry Salway Black’s (1994) definition of Indigenous economics and her “Elements of a Development Model.” Trosper further illustrates relational entrepreneurship with helpful examples from additional communities and scholars. This chapter offers new perspectives on entrepreneurship that could significantly contribute to future research. In particular, one question that arises is how relationality and Trosper’s definition of relational entrepreneurship can contribute to future research on Indigenous entrepreneurship, financial institutions, and economic development organizations?

Lastly, the afterword summarizes the key points from each chapter and reiterates how relationality creates a very different approach to economic analysis. It also proposes guidelines for further work in the field of Indigenous economic theory. This book is a testament to Indigenous worldviews, the concept of relationality, and their influence on economic analysis, Indigenous peoples, and their lands. It offers a

new way of looking at ourselves, our relationships, our communities, our environments, and our economies. Its theory of relational economics should fundamentally change how we view standard economics and traditional economic theory. And finally, it is a testament to Ronald Trosper's scholarship, impressive knowledge, and wisdom he has amassed throughout his career.

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