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Inuit Women's Business Council

BACKGROUND
2021

Gender-Based Analysis of Inuit Women-Owned Businesses



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Summary

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (Pauktuutit) conducted a study interviewing 30 Inuit Women Business Owners (IWBO), as well as 15 Economic Development Officers (EDO) and other Service Providers, in Inuit Nunangat and southern urban centres during March and April of 2021.

The purpose of this consultation was to better understand the needs, priorities, challenges and gaps for Inuit women's economic development so that Pauktuutit can better support Inuit women and advocate on their behalf.

The interviews established business profiles and explored themes including how success is defined, how best practices are incorporated into business decisions, the influence of gender and culture on business, challenges and opportunities, and access to support and resources.

Profile of businesses: Owners of a variety of types of businesses participated in the study, including artisans, musicians, bookkeepers, innkeepers, caterers, charter service providers, and retailers. Most have been in business for four years or longer, and most of the women interviewed are the sole owners of their business.

Many of the businesses serve a large geographical area, ranging from the local community to across Canada and around the world. The majority provide service in English and/or Inuktitut, and some in French as well. While most businesses interviewed for this study are small, they are important contributors to their household income.

Business practices: The owners were asked to what extent they employ a number of standard business best practices, as well as challenges or capacity gaps. Most of the business owners work from home, with a small number of them not having access to reliable internet, which they require for their business. While most businesses have CRA accounts and business bank accounts in place, results were mixed when it came to other features such as a business plan, online presence, liability insurance, worker's compensation registration, and operational policies or procedures.

Business strategy: The IWBOs were asked to indicate which common business strategies they had employed in the last two years, including making purchases, advertising, taking or offering training, and visiting a competitor.





Although the majority have used a combination of these strategies, they indicated that lack of time, access to training, location, and cost of supplies are all barriers to practicing these strategies. Better access to information and mentorship in business strategy could benefit these business owners, especially considering many have plans for growth.

Inuit Women in Business: Intersectional relationships of gender and cultural identity are complex and difficult to measure. When asked, over half of the women surveyed felt they have the same opportunities as others to have a successful business, and slightly more felt that as a woman they have the same opportunities as others. Almost all reported that Inuit culture and traditions influence how they run their business, making this a very significant factor in how Inuit women business owners approach business. As well, most said that being a woman influences how their business is run. Many of the women did not consider gender roles to impact them negatively, and the presence of successful Inuit women in business is evidence that the traditional female role definition may be evolving.

The EDOs and Service Providers interviewed felt that Inuit have access to the same support and resources as non-Inuit; they were nearly unanimous in agreeing that businesses owned by Inuit women can be as successful as any other business.

Challenges and opportunities: IWBOs and Service Providers agreed that Inuit women in business face unique opportunities and challenges, including childcare and family obligations, the high cost of doing business in the North, and the need for networks and support. The study also showed there are differences in the challenges experienced in the North and South.

Support and resources: As for desired supports, financial support was most requested, along with business and financial planning, marketing, specific training, creating an online presence, and record keeping. Uptake was low on support programs and organizations currently available for Inuit businesses.

In fact, over half of the women interviewed had never accessed any of the programs or services available. As well, only half had contacted an EDO or someone in an equivalent position. The EDOs reported that IWBOs make up a small percentage of their clientele. Improving awareness of resources available to IWBOs is a key recommendation of this study, as well as reducing the barriers Inuit women face when accessing support and resources.

Networking: The importance of relationships and mentorship in fostering a strong business community was highlighted in the study. Many of the women interviewed indicated they have relationships with other women in business, while others mentioned feeling isolated. Half of the IWBOs were unaware of the Inuit Women in Business Network, and many of the women interviewed were interested in learning more and possibly becoming members.

Measuring success: Inuit culture and values are at the core of success for these businesses. When it comes to measuring business success, profit was indicated to be less important than factors associated with community like giving back, aligning with Inuit culture and values, feeling pride, and setting a positive example.

Plans for the future: The majority of the business owners interviewed had plans to expand their businesses, including through introducing new products or services, generating more revenue, reaching new customers, and hiring more staff. The impacts of COVID-19 varied among the businesses, with a combination of positive and negative effects that will extend for the foreseeable future.



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