



Ready to Export?

Research findings and a conversation with Indigenous exporters and ecosystem leaders

Moderated by Alicia Hussain, Senior Research Associate, Indigenous & Northern Communities

October 8, 2026

About us

Over the next 50 years, the noise in our systems will grow—amplified by reactive decisions, environmental disruption, and shifting political and economic realities. These pressures will come from within and beyond our borders. Making decisions based on hard evidence has become the imperative of our times.

With approximately 100 economists and researchers, Signal49 Research provides Canadians with the accurate data and rigorous unbiased research they need to navigate complex issues across eight critical arenas—Economics, Education and Skills, Health, Human Resources, Indigenous and Northern Communities, Innovation and Technology, Immigration, and Sustainability. As Canada's leading applied research organization, we publish over 500 research outputs a year, helping to advance education on the critical issues facing our communities, our organizations, and our country. Our Executive Councils bring leaders together to share real-world insights and support evidence-based decision-making. All in service of a stronger, more prosperous Canada.

For more than 70 years, Signal49 Research is where Canada has turned for applied, independent research and meaningful connections. Leaders trust us because we stand apart: objective, credible, and connected.



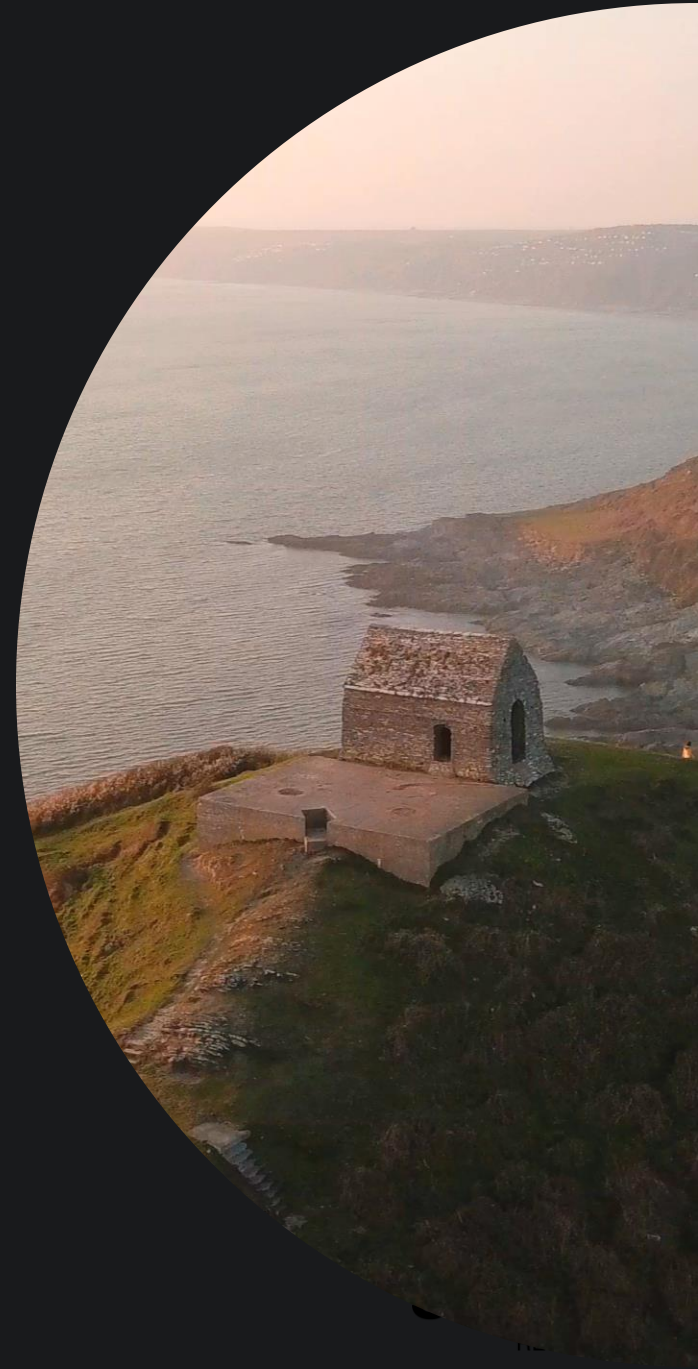
Land Acknowledgement

Signal49 Research honours the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who have lived on, cared for, and governed the lands and waters across Turtle Island since time immemorial. We recognize that our work takes place on lands where Indigenous Peoples hold inherent rights and, in many places, legal rights affirmed through treaties, case law, and ongoing stewardship.

We engage with Indigenous partners because their knowledge, stories, and leadership guide our understanding of Northern and remote development, reconciliation, and future skills. We commit to building research that supports Indigenous ownership of major projects and strengthens decision-making across communities, governments, and industries.

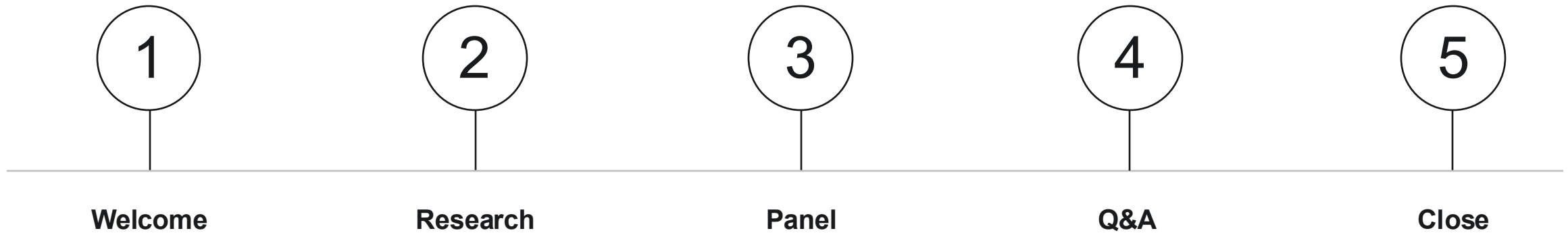
Our name, Signal49, reflects our connection to place. The 49th parallel and Signal Hill remind us that Indigenous Peoples shaped these lands long before Canada's borders took form. As an independent, non-profit organization, we use evidence to support a prosperous and healthy future that includes Indigenous priorities, rights, and economic aspirations.

We encourage everyone who reads this acknowledgment to learn about the Nations whose lands they live and work on, and to listen to the voices of the Indigenous communities who continue to shape Canada's present and future.



Today's webinar

A 90-minute conversation designed to move quickly from the research to practical experience.



Ready to export?

The 3Ds of Indigenous Export Readiness

Research overview



Why this research — and how we did it



Quantitative Analysis

2001 and 2021 Census

Statistics Canada Census data
Indigenous SMEs by industry, region
and export intensity



63

Research and policy review

Indigenous entrepreneurship, trade,
skills and export supports



15 + 6

Export readiness in practice

Ecosystem interviews + exporter case
studies
Real-world pathways and support
systems

Guided by TRC Call to Action 92(ii) • Supported through the Future Skills Centre / Government of Canada's Future Skills Program

Six exporters - Six different pathways

The case studies focus on businesses that have entered export markets — selected to show different ways readiness develops in practice.



Nuez Acres

Beauty & personal care

Privately owned SME • ~10% export revenue

Majority Métis-owned • female-led • Langley, BC



McGraw Seafood Inc.

Fisheries

Community-owned enterprise • ~90–95% export revenue

100% Elsipogtog First Nation-owned • Tracadie, NB



Bastien Industries

Cultural products

Privately owned SME • ~30% export revenue

100% Huron-Wendat-owned • Wendake, Quebec



NorSask Forest Products LP

Forestry & lumber

Community-owned industrial enterprise • ~30–40% export revenue

Meadow Lake Tribal Council-owned • 9 First Nations • Saskatchewan

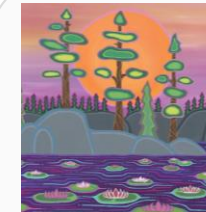


Canadian Arctic Producers

Arts & culture

Cooperative intermediary • ~5% export revenue

Inuit-owned cooperative system • 33 communities • Arctic production / Mississauga logistics



Patrick Hunter Inc.

Art, design & cultural education

Single-operator incorporated business • ~15% export revenue

100% First Nations-owned • Ojibwe Keeseekoowenin First Nation • Ontario

Not a representative sample — six real-world export pathways selected to show how readiness works under different conditions.

Research Advisory Board

Six leaders helped guide the research from design through knowledge mobilization

Expertise across Indigenous business development • exporting • finance • export education and training • public policy

Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard

President & Chief Executive Officer

Destination Original Indigenous Tourism (DO-IT)

Matthew Foss

Vice-President, Research & Public Policy

Canadian Council for Indigenous Business
(CCIB)

Kingson Lim

Manager, Strategic Indigenous Engagement

Global Affairs Canada (GAC)

RJ Ramrattan

General Manager

Canadian Arctic Producers (CAP)

Kevin Rose

Chief Strategy Officer

National Aboriginal Capital Corporations
Association (NACCA)

Caroline Tompkins, CITP, CAE

President & Chief Executive Officer

Forum for International Trade Training (FITT)

The board advised on research design, recruitment, interpretation of findings and knowledge mobilization.

The opportunity is growing but the export gap remains

Export rate

7.2%

Indigenous SMEs



12.1%

Canadian average



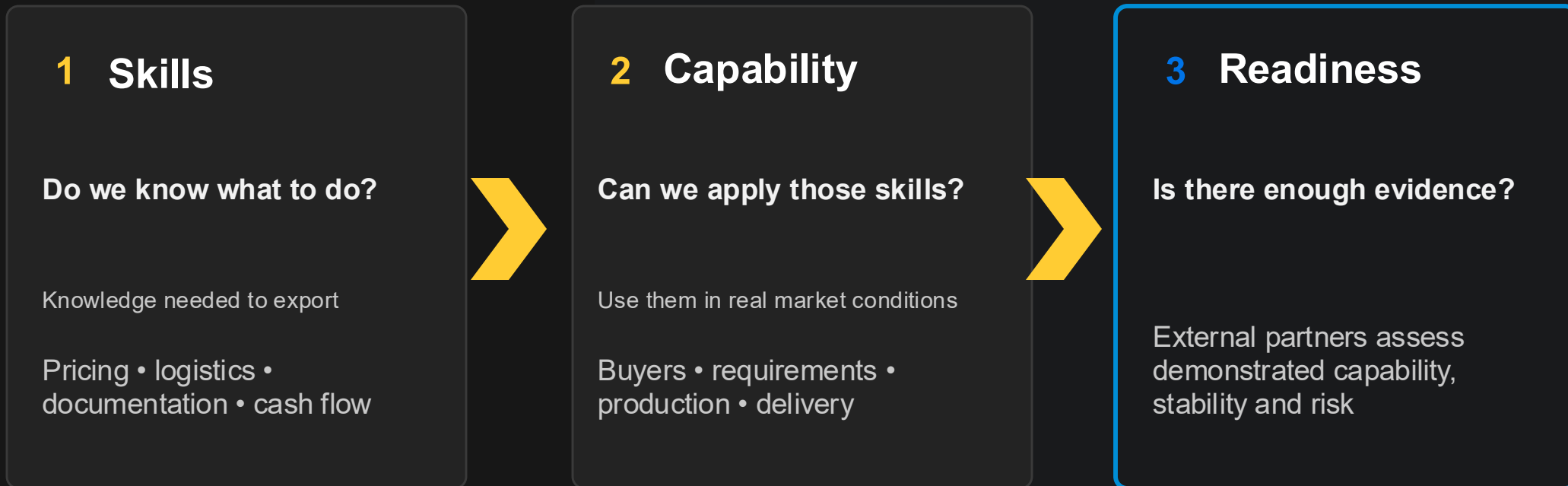
At the same time, the number of Indigenous business owners more than tripled between 2001 and 2021.

Artist: Patrick Hunter



The question is not whether Indigenous businesses can export. It is what helps more businesses enter — and stay in — global markets.

Export readiness is more than training



Training builds skills. Experience builds capability. Evidence helps establish readiness.

Context changes the path — not the core questions

There is no single export-readiness pathway.

Governance & ownership

Who makes decisions?
Where does accountability sit?

Business model & sector

What does delivery and stability look like in this industry?

Geography & infrastructure

What affects shipping, connectivity, cost and reliability?

Relationships & support

Who helps interpret requirements, finance growth and open markets?



The same export goal can require very different routes.

One-size-fits-all assessments can miss how stability and risk actually work.

What the findings suggest: six actions to strengthen readiness

These are mainly system adjustments — not a checklist businesses must complete on their own.

Make capability visible

1 Separate training from readiness assessment

2 Create structured pilot transactions

Support staying power

3 Use sector- and governance-specific criteria

4 Invest in relationship continuity

Reduce avoidable uncertainty

5 Build clear referral + coordination pathways

6 Use trade missions to clarify risk before scaling

Make evidence visible • match support to context • coordinate around real transactions

The 3Ds Placemat: a shared way to talk about readiness

The findings point to three recurring questions — with different evidence for different businesses.

Demonstration

Can the business deliver?

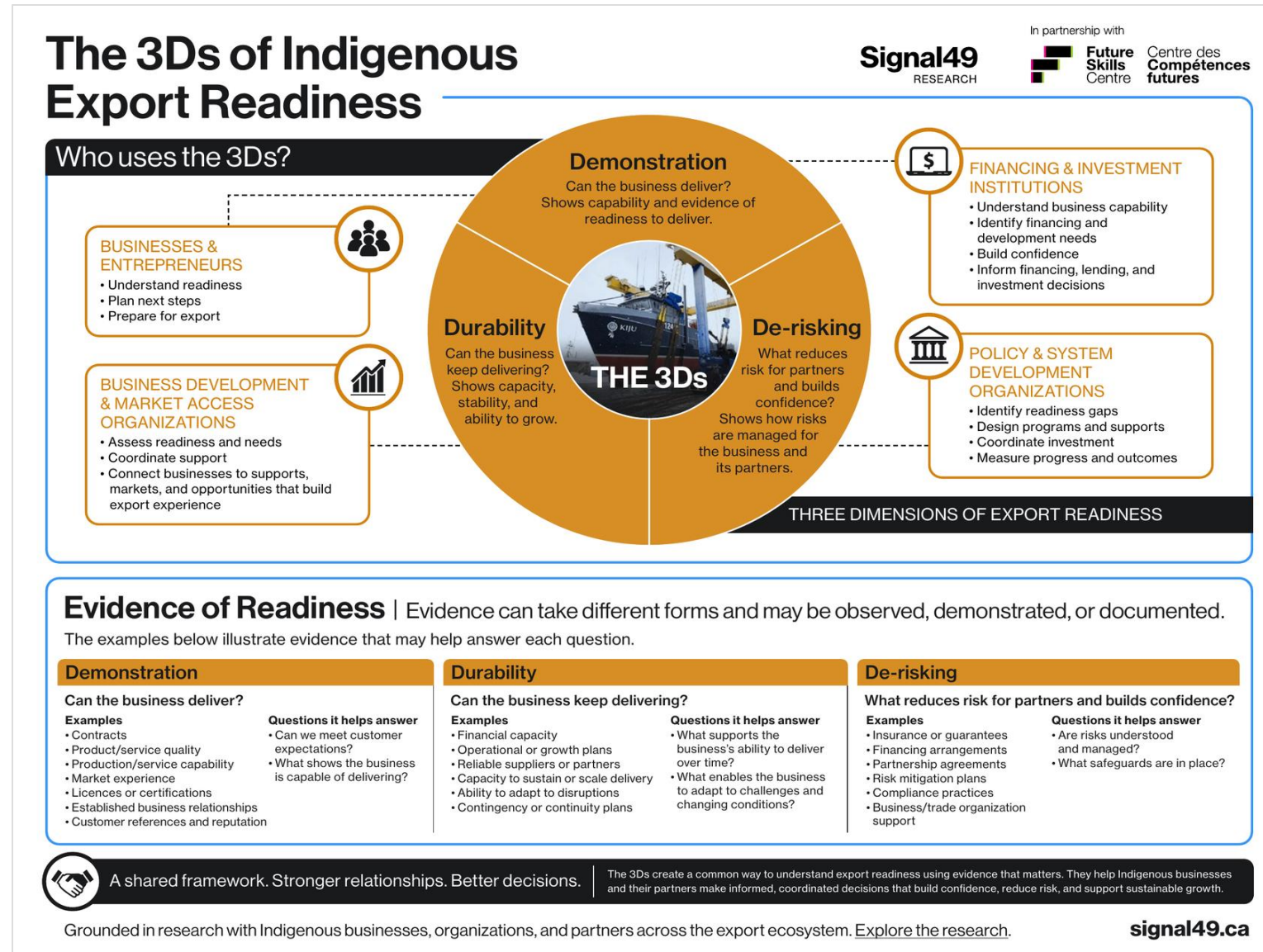
Durability

Can the business keep delivering?

De-Risking

What reduces risk and builds confidence?

Not a scorecard — a shared conversation tool.



Three questions to carry into the panel

The research gives us a framework. The panel lets us test it from different sides of the table.

1 What signals readiness?

When an opportunity appears, what evidence tells businesses and their partners that the business is ready to act?

2 What helps businesses sustain momentum?

Once a real opportunity exists, what helps a business keep moving — and where can the support system slow it down?

3 What reduces risk — and what needs to change?

What reduces uncertainty and builds confidence — and what needs to change so more Indigenous businesses can succeed internationally?

Panel Discussion: Speakers today



Anthony Wingham
Co-founder/COO
Nuez Acres



Patrick Hunter
Artist/Entrepreneur
Patrick Hunter Art &
Design



Dawn Madahbee Leach
General Manager
Waubetek Business
Corporation



Matthew Foss
Vice-President of
Research and
Public Policy
Canadian Council
for Indigenous
Business



Magnolia Perron
Director of Strategy and
Partnerships
National Aboriginal
Capital Corporations
Association



Anthony Wingham

Anthony Wingham is President of Métis Nation British Columbia and a Métis entrepreneur, educator and economic development professional focused on strengthening Indigenous communities, entrepreneurship and economic opportunity.

He is the co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Nuez Acres, an Indigenous-owned, women-led beauty company that grew from a family business into a nationally distributed brand. Anthony has also served as an Indigenous Export Advisor with Export Navigator, supporting Indigenous-owned businesses across British Columbia with export readiness, market development and growth.

Through Jelly Academy, he has delivered digital literacy, technology and export-focused training to Indigenous learners and entrepreneurs, while also supporting Indigenous youth through organizations including Connected North and the Indigenous Youth Prosperity Foundation.

Anthony's leadership experience includes serving with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association's Indigenous Youth Business Advisory Council, Vancity's Indigenous Advisory Committee, the BC Indigenous Housing Society and the MNBC Métis Business Advisory Council.

He brings a practical perspective shaped by governance, entrepreneurship, education, mentorship and working directly with Indigenous communities across British Columbia and Canada.



Patrick Hunter

Patrick is an award winning 2Spirit, Ojibwe (O-JIB-WAY) artist, graphic designer and entrepreneur from Red Lake, ON. He is most known for his Woodland style paintings, and Orange Shirt Day designs, but has also been making a name for himself in the world of sports through collaborations with the Chicago Blackhawks, the Premier Lacrosse League, and the 2022 Winter Olympics. He is the most recent artist to have a collectible coin with the Royal Canadian Mint.

When not collaborating with exciting international brands, Patrick is creating awareness about his Ojibwe roots and inspiring creative confidence through in-person and virtual paint classes across North America. Dividing his time between Toronto, and his studio in Batchawana Bay, he also makes regular journeys home to Red Lake to stay inspired, be with family, and reconnect with the land.



Dawn Madahbee Leach

Dawn Madahbee Leach, an Anishinabe-Kwe and member of Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation, is currently the General Manager of Waubetek Business Corporation, a leading Indigenous financial institution that provides financial services to Indigenous entrepreneurs across Northeastern Ontario, Canada. She is also the Founder and President of Indigenous Business International, which assists Indigenous people and companies internationally with economic sector strategies and project reviews. Ms. Madahbee Leach is the Chair of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, providing advice and guidance to the federal government on issues related to Indigenous economic policy and programming. In collaboration with more than 20 national Indigenous organizations, she chaired the development of the first-ever National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada, published in June 2022. Ms. Madahbee Leach also serves on the boards of Peace Hills Trust (since 2012), Des Nedhe Group (since 2024), TC Energy (since 2024), and Fiera Capital (since 2026). She also serves on the First Nations Procurement Authority Board of Directors and is a member of the Asian Business Leaders Advisory Council and the Indigenous Centre of Excellence for Mineral Development. She serves as a Patron of Indigenous Women in Industry, an international organization that promotes export opportunities for Indigenous women entrepreneurs and is on Indigenous advisory committees for Global Affairs Canada and companies in the manufacturing, mining, and energy sectors. She has also served on her First Nation's elected council and as Chair of the Northern Ontario Policy Institute.

Ms. Madahbee Leach has an extensive network across Canada and has spoken internationally to promote Indigenous businesses in Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines, Ecuador, Australia, Chile, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Ms. Madahbee Leach is the recipient of the 2023 Business Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, as well as the 2020 Indspire Award for Business and Commerce, one of the highest honours among Indigenous Peoples in Canada. She was also recognized as one of Canada's Most Powerful Women in 2018. Ms. Madahbee Leach graduated from the University of Waterloo's Economic Development Program and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Law from Laurentian University.



Matthew Foss

Matthew Foss is a member of the Metis Nation of Alberta. He brings over 25 years of public policy experience, specializing in energy economics along with research and public policy development. Mr. Foss currently serves as the Vice President of Research & Public Policy for the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, is a Member of the Board for the Canada Energy Regulator, serves on the Indigenous Advisory Circle for Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and is an Executive Fellow at the University of Calgary School of Public Policy.

Matthew's focus at the CCIB is on advancing Indigenous business through research and advocacy related to procurement, international trade, celebrating Indigenous entrepreneurs and natural resource development. Matthew has frequently provided seminars and presentations to domestic and international audiences and has taught university-level economics courses. Prior to joining CCIB, he ran his own energy economics and public policy consulting business for several years and served as the Chief Energy Economist for the Alberta Government.



Magnolia Perron

Magnolia Perron is the Director of Strategy & Partnerships at the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA), where she is dedicated to advancing Indigenous economic development.

She holds a Master's in Indigenous Nationhood from the University of Victoria and a Graduate Diploma in Indigenous Policy and Administration from Carleton University. Magnolia is a champion for Indigenous entrepreneurship and economic growth, with extensive experience in advocacy, research, policy, program development, and strategic partnerships.

Magnolia is from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and is a proud member of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. She was recognized as a 2024 Ottawa Business Journal and Ottawa Board of Trade Forty Under 40 recipient for her leadership and contributions to both the business and Indigenous communities. She serves on several Indigenous advisory committees and is committed to creating opportunities that strengthen Indigenous economies and communities.

Opening Round – Your vantage point

Where do you sit in the ecosystem — and what perspective do you bring to the conversation?



Anthony



Patrick



Dawn



Matthew



Magnolia

EXPORTERS

ECOSYSTEM SUPPORTS

~5 minutes total • about 1 minute each

Round 1: What signals export readiness?

Anthony: Thinking back to when your U.S. opportunity emerged, what gave you confidence that Nuez Acres could act on it?

Patrick: For a creative and digital business, what evidence tells you that the business can reliably take on international opportunities?

Dawn: When you are working with an entrepreneur, what do you look for beyond the fact that they have completed training or developed an export plan?

Magnolia: What evidence gives a lender confidence that a business can deliver — and that financing will help move a viable opportunity forward?

Matthew: Do different parts of the ecosystem sometimes mean different things when they use the term “export ready”?



Photo: Nuez Acres



Round 2: What helps businesses sustain momentum?

Once an Indigenous business has a real market opportunity, what helps it keep moving, and where might financing, programs, or the broader support system make it harder to sustain that momentum?

Dawn: Where do businesses most often get stuck between having an opportunity and getting the support they need to move forward?

Magnolia: When a commercially viable business does not fit standard financing or program criteria, what happens next?

Matthew: When supports exist but businesses still have difficulty accessing or using them, where is the disconnect?

Patrick & Anthony: What support arrived at the right time or was tricky to find?

Round 3: What reduces risk?

1. When an Indigenous business has a strong opportunity but there are still financial, operational, or market risks to manage, what can the business and its partners put in place to reduce those risks and build confidence?
2. How might the 3Ds Placemat help surface and navigate the risks that can affect readiness decisions?

The 3Ds of Indigenous Export Readiness

Signal49
RESEARCH

In partnership with
Future Skills Centre
Centre des Compétences futures

Who uses the 3Ds?

BUSINESSES & ENTREPRENEURS

- Understand readiness
- Plan next steps
- Prepare for export

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & MARKET ACCESS ORGANIZATIONS

- Assess readiness and needs
- Coordinate support
- Connect businesses to supports, markets, and opportunities that build export experience

Demonstration

Can the business deliver?
Shows capability and evidence of readiness to deliver.

Durability

Can the business keep delivering?
Shows capacity, stability, and ability to grow.

De-risking

What reduces risk for partners and builds confidence?
Shows how risks are managed for the business and its partners.

THE 3Ds

FINANCING & INVESTMENT INSTITUTIONS

- Understand business capability
- Identify financing and development needs
- Build confidence
- Inform financing, lending, and investment decisions

POLICY & SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

- Identify readiness gaps
- Design programs and supports
- Coordinate investment
- Measure progress and outcomes

THREE DIMENSIONS OF EXPORT READINESS

Evidence of Readiness | Evidence can take different forms and may be observed, demonstrated, or documented.

The examples below illustrate evidence that may help answer each question.

Demonstration

Can the business deliver?

Examples

- Contracts
- Product/service quality
- Production/service capability
- Market experience
- Licences or certifications
- Established business relationships
- Customer references and reputation

Questions it helps answer

- Can we meet customer expectations?
- What shows the business is capable of delivering?

Durability

Can the business keep delivering?

Examples

- Financial capacity
- Operational or growth plans
- Reliable suppliers or partners
- Capacity to sustain or scale delivery
- Ability to adapt to disruptions
- Contingency or continuity plans

Questions it helps answer

- What supports the business's ability to deliver over time?
- What enables the business to adapt to challenges and changing conditions?

De-risking

What reduces risk for partners and builds confidence?

Examples

- Insurance or guarantees
- Financing arrangements
- Partnership agreements
- Risk mitigation plans
- Compliance practices
- Business/trade organization support

Questions it helps answer

- Are risks understood and managed?
- What safeguards are in place?



A shared framework. Stronger relationships. Better decisions.

The 3Ds create a common way to understand export readiness using evidence that matters. They help Indigenous businesses and their partners make informed, coordinated decisions that build confidence, reduce risk, and support sustainable growth.

Grounded in research with Indigenous businesses, organizations, and partners across the export ecosystem. [Explore the research.](#)

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Where do we go from here?

Looking ahead, what is one practical change in the next 5 years that would make the biggest difference in helping more Indigenous businesses move from having export potential to entering and succeeding in international markets?

What should change and who needs to move it forward?

Key takeaways from:

Patrick, Anthony, Magnolia, Matthew, Dawn



Questions & Comments

Closing

Thank you, everyone!
Miigwech!
Wela'lin!
Kinanâskomitin!
Nakurmiik!
Marsi!

Final Report: https://www.signal49.ca/product/a-framework-for-indigenous-export-readiness_june2026/

3Ds Placemat: https://www.signal49.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/infographic_indigenous-exporters_sept2026-1.pdf

Quantitative Report: https://www.signal49.ca/in-fact/self-employment-and-indigenous-export-potential_mar2026/

Reach out to Alicia: Hussain@signal49.ca



Where knowledge
inspires action