



CANIE

ROUND TABLES

INNOVATORS & ENTREPRENEURS FOUNDATION
FONDATION D'INNOVATEURS ET D'ENTREPRENEURS



Hosted by IEF | Sally J M Douglas

The CANIE Tables Report - Rise Together



Residential
Investments
Commercial



Sharing insights and knowledge from experts in contrasting industry sectors, focused on the challenges and opportunities for small business in 2022.

ROUND TABLE REPORT: RISE TOGETHER

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Introduction - Rise Together

To understand the needs, opportunities and challenges faced by entrepreneurs and innovators in Canada, The Foundation is committed to investment in research. As a first step to a much larger strategy planned in 2022, we brought together the 2021 CANIE Award winners, semi-finalists, our valued sponsors and other Foundation allies to form three Round Table discussions. Our objective was to create a space where the voices of entrepreneurs and innovators could be clearly heard, information could be gathered and a report formed to share in both the private and public sectors with a view to influencing change for the better.

We at the Foundation sincerely thank our partners UPS Canada without whom we would be unable to make these initiatives happen.

We are also deeply grateful to Canada Foundation for Innovation and all the participants listed below who joined us in discussion at the RoundTables. We look forward to collaborating again as we work together to support entrepreneurs and innovators in marginalized communities throughout the country.

As we move into 2022 we plan to build on this initial report with a full research strategy. This will include:

- Using reliable research and data, produce a quarterly report highlighting the trends, challenges & successes of the communities we serve
- Quarterly roundtables for entrepreneurs from marginalized communities to share their experience and views, and add to the quarterly report
- Reports to be shared with ecosystem partners, government and private sector leaders/influencers, as well as the press
- Reports will be used to shape the Foundations priorities,
- Programs and activities



About | IEF

Our Mission

As a national charity we are dedicated to support, educate & celebrate innovation & entrepreneurship among business owners in marginalized communities.

Our objectives include:

- Deliver reliable, indepth research to steer advocacy with both the private and public sector to influence change for the better
- Support entrepreneurs and innovators within marginalized communities nationwide
- Share education and mentorship opportunities designed specifically for entrepreneurs within marginalized communities
- Celebrate and promote excellence in Canadian innovation and entrepreneurship in marginalized communities

Who we serve:

Our commitment is to entrepreneurs and innovators nationwide who are marginalized and/or under-represented. These groups include (but are not exclusive to):

- Women
- Indigenous Peoples
- Youth
- People of Colour
- Seniorpreneurs
- New Immigrants
- Military Veterans

2021 RoundTable Participants

Our participants included the following experts. Our findings are presented collectively under common themes rather than as individual comments.



Jacquie Hutchings

Friendlier Company
- [CANIE Product Innovation Award Semi Finalist](#)
(Powered by [UPS Canada](#))



Roxanne Whiting

Sliao



Ashwin Kutty

WeThemUs



Claire Hoggetts

InFocus - [CANIE Women Entrepreneur of the Year Semi Finalist](#)



Kelly Bron Johnson

Completely Inclusive
- [CANIE Scotiabank Entrepreneur of the Year semi-finalist](#)



Olivia Carey

Canada Foundation for Innovation



Simeon Papailias

REC Canada



Anjali Dhaliwal

Youth Helping Youth (YHY) - [CANIE Youth Impact Icon Award Semi-Finalist](#)



Shannon Loutitt

International
Indigenous Speakers
Bureau



**Vanessa
Fajemisin**

Solid State
Community Industries
- [CANIE Black
Entrepreneur Award
Semi Finalist](#)



Danielle Fremes

Canada Foundation
for Innovation



**Dr. Janet
Aizenstros**

Ahava Holdings &
Ventures



Darren Perlem

Spot App SPOT App
- [CANIE Product
Innovation Award
Semi Finalist
\(Powered by UPS
Canada\)](#)



Marc Tasse

Veteran and SIRA
International Risk
Advisors



Paul Gasper

UPS Canada



Heidi Sveistrup

Bruyere Research
Institute

Note: While this includes all our guests it should be noted a couple of the individuals participated in more than one session.

Methodology

We set up three virtual Round Tables, with 8 people attending each session. The participants included CANIE Award winners, semi-finalists, sponsors and allies of the Foundation.

We shared the questions with participants prior to the sessions. These questions were kept as broad as possible to ensure our guests had the space to contribute the information they felt was most pertinent. Our aim was to encourage insights from whichever perspective they most wanted to shine a light upon - a specific market sector or particular marginalized group, Truth and Reconciliation, the climate crisis, the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and its variants, the economy etc.

Each roundtable was moderated by our Executive Director [Sally Douglas](#). The sessions were recorded (for internal use only) and we had note takers from our team in attendance. This final report with the findings from all sessions will be shared with leaders and influencers from business representation throughout the Canadian ecosystem in January of 2022.

Recommendations

- Collaboration is one of the key elements to being a successful entrepreneur. More must be done to provide networking and connection opportunities for entrepreneurs in marginalized communities.
- Investment in the access to quality internet services in both urban and rural regions of the country is critical.
- SME's should investigate and consider hybrid models combining virtual and in-person work (which will ensure human connectivity and team building) while maximizing productivity and support good mental health.
- Investment in mental health support at the local, provincial and national levels will be more important than ever in the coming year.
- Our workforce is changing and so is the need for our policies and legislation to continue evolving to ensure we harness all available talent within the country as well as attracting newcomers.
- We must work toward ways of retaining Baby Boomer knowledge and expertise.
- Mentorship and the sharing of knowledge is essential. Working to further connect entrepreneurs and innovators from marginalized sectors with training, programs and opportunities is essential to invest in their success.

- Supply chain disruption will continue to impact SME's and we need to work together to tackle it's many challenges.
- Research is a critical element to the success of a business and more needs to be done to make SME's aware of the options available to them.
- We should not underestimate the power of storytelling and commit to sharing more of our successes as well as the learning through our mistakes through as many channels as we can make available.
- Young entrepreneurs hold a critical role in the future of our economy. We need to offer more in the way of investment, support, mentorship and network opportunities to secure their success and the prosperity of our collective future.

Findings and Common Themes

(Note: SME's = Small & Medium-Sized Enterprises)

The main topics from these consultations ranged from economic recovery and the potential opportunities/challenges for small business in 2022. Below you will find a summary of these themes

Collaboration is one of the key elements to being a successful entrepreneur. Many business owners who typically draw energy and motivation from engaging with their customers, suppliers and networks are now isolated at home. This has added another significant layer to the many issues that are negatively impacting mental health.

Community and staying connected is vital for the business owner. Mentorship, advice, moral support and idea sharing are all crucial elements that contribute to success. Without in-person meetings we are having to find new ways to remain connected and to do so with authenticity. It is harder to read body language and make human connection conducting meetings virtually.

We need to think of new ways to reach and engage our customers. With so much being done virtually it would be valuable to provide entrepreneurs with access to more tech training options. How to use video and or audio, social media, virtual meeting spaces, marketing options etc.?

We should also not forget the power of a phone call. Not all meetings need to be virtual and screen fatigue is a real issue for many. The phone as a tool should not be underestimated.

The internet allows entrepreneurs who have always served one geographic area to reach out further for potential business but they need to have access to tools and learn how to use them effectively.

Internet services are more important than ever and government must invest particularly in rural areas to improve connectivity if SME's nationwide as well as our economy are to recover, succeed and thrive.



The pandemic has reminded us in so many ways about the value of fiscal sustainability. Entrepreneurs need to build funds for a rainy day - the rain fund needs to be a key part of every business owner's journey. Perhaps financial institutions could support us with access to learning, coaching and training specifically aimed at the entrepreneur's needs.

Entrepreneurs have been in survival mode. Covid-19 and subsequent closures/restrictions have provided an opportunity for some to evaluate their business, start side hustles, augment their service or build on their successes. It is a stark reminder that we must plan for the day, and the future, concurrently to create sustained success.

It may not be tomorrow but offices and businesses will open back up. What will the new office space look like? What will happen to the downtown core of our cities and how will commercial real estate be affected? New opportunities will unfold as well as challenges, so we must be willing to look at things with a fresh approach to come up with solutions that will work for 'the new normal'.

We know a critical loss, during the pandemic, has been that social connection. Entrepreneurs need to think about innovative ways to reconnect through new workshops, virtual demonstrations of products and/or services etc.

Hybrid event models are being explored by organizations of every size and we must learn and share what works most effectively with one another to accelerate the county's recovery.

Moving forward we need to continue looking for new ways to combine technology with in-person gathering and events. Covid-19 has accelerated this process and allowed us to look at many business/work modules in a different way. Organizations who are flexible and willing to test and practice hybrid options to keep their teams close and connected will undoubtedly be more successful. There are real advantages to working virtually and for people to come together - we need to work on the basis of a balance between the two.

There seems to be a growing understanding of the importance of people and 'team' in businesses across the country. It has always been there but the pandemic has forced fresh perspectives. People are what make an organization! Employees need more development and a more holistic approach to management, learning and career pathing.

Commercial real estate is going to continue changing. There are those who believe there will be more communal work spaces and co-lab spaces. While some businesses will return fully to their offices many will not need to. Working remotely has the potential to improve work/life balance and gives employees more flexibility in terms of where they live. We know teams need time together, but arguably not every day, so offices need to create spaces that are flexible and able to accommodate a more varied way of working.

Less commuting will impact environmental issues and give time back to people to spend more time with their family or do other things besides work. Having less geographic restrictions also widens the net for recruitment allowing us to build our teams with people from much further afield.

Remote work is something people with disabilities have been asking for but the option was not often available in the past. The pandemic has proven that remote work can be done efficiently and effectively. This opens up opportunities for both potential employees and the employers all over the country.

The pandemic has forced some businesses to focus on more local customers and suppliers in Canada. There have been production issues with international shipping and supply chain challenges. Using Canadian products and resources has many upsides, but is often more expensive and consumers will need to adjust to pricing increases.

Entrepreneurs have been incredibly creative, sometimes changing their practices weekly to abide by enforced regulations. They will continue to build new creative solutions to support customers, and there is a consensus that many will increase their local level client base due to distribution challenges. Business owners may have to work to improve their understanding of their local community if they are to better serve them.

We need to help people find culturally supportive community groups for skill sharing, motivation and coaching. We know that we all benefit from seeing successful people who look and sound like us. That said, it is also important not to create silos as it is through collaboration and diversity that we best succeed.

Amplifying voices and stories, and connecting entrepreneurs is critical. More funding is required for improved training and education resources. Canada needs to encourage more people into entrepreneurship and innovation by facilitating mentoring, coaching and training opportunities at the local level.

Business is built on collaboration. The intent in our hearts is projection. If we collectively and individually take care of what is inside of us first, we protect everything valuable outwards too. It creates sustainability and becomes much more about community, allowing us to rise together rather than alone.

So many established organizations (including banks, social media platforms, universities and colleges, government etc.) have mentorship, coaching and training programs, with many at no charge. The resources are there to support entrepreneurs and we can help by ensuring marginalized communities have these resources on their radar.

We are going to have to think about the supply chain differently moving forward. There is much disruption and more to come. There are so many factors including human resources, climate change issues, legislation, factory backlogs in Asia, international relations and much more.

Supply chains will force change for some; this is an evolution for many as alternative solutions are found and new markets are explored. Companies will always look for ways to remain competitive, prompt and sustain quality.

As a country we need to look at the way we treat our foreign workers. Baby Boomers are retiring in growing numbers and our average family size is shrinking. More must be done to enable access into the country for both temporary and permanent work opportunities. We need to

ensure the working conditions are improved to ensure equality and sustainability.

There is evidence that the job of a long haul truck driver does not have as much appeal as it has done in the past. Consideration needs to be given to salaries, benefits and conditions to entice newcomers into the sector and see it as a career opportunity.

Young people (those under 30) have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic. This is perhaps the most important stage in a career to collaborate, be mentored, network and continue learning. We need to work together to create new opportunities for young entrepreneurs to connect. We should create cohorts together, focused on capacity issues and draw potential entrepreneurs back into the circle of opportunity.

There have been many businesses lost, or put under severe financial pressure, but there have also been new opportunities born from the crisis; new businesses and many organizations who have adapted to the changing circumstances. In the coming year we will need to be willing to continue being versatile, listening to our customer base and adjusting our services to meet their needs.

Many of us don't want to go back to what work-life balance was pre-pandemic. There is opportunity in these times for transformation. We can do so many things differently and better and these changes can have a positive impact on climate challenges, on our wellbeing and our mental health. We need to remain connected to one another, as people need one another, but we are finding new ways to be together.

The pandemic has proven that the planet can collaborate to build solutions to problems together when we choose to. We have used science and research with greater efficiency than at any other time in recent history. We must draw lessons from this experience and continue to share and collaborate moving forward, both nationally and internationally.

Canada's reputation for investment in R & D could be better. And with the pandemic it's hard to ask people to invest during a time when they are trying to keep the lights on. The [Canada Foundation for Innovation](#) created a tool to support entrepreneurs called [Research Facilities Navigator](#) which conveniently helps connect entrepreneurs with the right research group to support their business.

We need to build entrepreneurship that includes resiliency and sustainability. Mentorship is a key component and we need to work together to build more resources.

There is a disconnect between small businesses and the government. Data collection is tricky for small businesses. It is hard to keep up and the social narratives can be complex and inconsistent.

Canada has been somewhat effective in providing immediate funding to small businesses during the pandemic, but now is the critical moment. To prevent businesses winding down and closing we need to support them further. This funding is an investment for our future understanding the ramifications of the long term impact of SME's closing on our communities and economy.

As a country Canada is young, but people have been here on this land for time immemorial. We must take the time to look at and learn from the first stewards of this land. We have been

in a very masculine cycle but now is the rise of the feminine - a time of nurture, reflection, compassion and caring. With these approaches comes great potential for improved prosperity.

For SME's, research and development continues to be an expensive investment. During Covid -19, trials halted as the research and science community worked tirelessly to find solutions for the crisis. While this was and is understandable it would be valuable if there could be subsidies for SME research. Alternatively, perhaps a tax credit could be an option. Current funding programs are time consuming and bureaucratic. Could we improve the process to ensure funding is provided when it is needed to give startups and small businesses a better chance of success?

While research is essential, so is the commercialization plan. Innovation will not happen in isolation. There are other critical, contributing factors.

70% of Canadian business is made up of SMEs, but most of the funding doesn't go towards them. Large corporations are rewarded by much of the funding because they are better resourced to tackle the complex and arduous application processes. Funding needs to be made more accessible.

Recommendations were made for more funds for specific causes, i.e. youth programs, indigenous peoples, environmental issues, science, mental health as just a few examples. It would also be valuable to combine more funding with mentorship or expert support to further ensure success.

We need to work together as a country to facilitate mentorship and capture the knowledge and expertise of our ageing population. Equally, we must invest in learning from the younger generation as we navigate our way into the future. We need to build bridges to connect different groups within the country to benefit all.

There are so many excellent programs being facilitated across the country but we need to do a better job of ensuring the people and businesses who need these opportunities most, have access to the information. The more marginalized a business owner is, the less likely they are to even have these programs on their radar.

Too many entrepreneurs fly solo when there are so many ways we could ensure they always have community, support and expertise around them. It is not just about money and funding - it is also about connecting and engaging different groups in our society to learn from one another to benefit everyone.

Collaboration needs to be at the heart of every conversation.

We have talent gaps in today's market sectors but we also have untapped talent! Covid-19 has disrupted the way we work and opened opportunities for all kinds of people who pre-Covid were too far from the office, unable to work in the office space and/or unable to relocate.

We subsidize youth employment but why don't we do the same for the aging population? Is there a way we can harness the wisdom of our elders and other parts of society that we currently find so difficult to contribute.

We should look to provinces like Nova Scotia within Canada as well as other countries who have strong immigration policies for people arriving in Canada and learn from these stronger models. We need to do a better job of not just welcoming immigrants to Canada but embracing them once they are here.

We must do more to embrace the talent arriving from other parts of the world and invest in their knowledge and expertise, while increasing support in housing, schools for kids, adult education, cultural support and more. We also need to work with Canadians to better welcome people into the country. These investments will help newcomers integrate into society faster and enable new business enterprises to get up and running more quickly.

Talent retention is also an issue with people moving around, greater rates of resignations in certain sectors and often happening with short notice. It is not easy to replace talent quickly particularly if we do not consider alternative methods to finding the right people.

Immigration and migration is founded on economic immobility. Collaboration is one of the ways to remedy this. It is hard to navigate resources, but continuing to facilitate and participate in sessions where we discuss and challenge the status quo is a small way to create new solutions.

We must look at new and innovative ways to connect the aging population with the younger generation. Facilitating this allows everyone to learn. We should consider reverse mentoring - allowing the younger generations to advise and support seniors as we can all learn from others.

There needs to be a shift in thinking around transferring talent and experience from one sector to another. There is often a resistance from employers to consider applicants without matching skill sets. But there are advantages to bringing people into your team with varied experience. New recruits who have come from your competition often arrive with opinions and methods that you might need to undo to help them work better in your culture. Learning and new challenges can be motivating, their experiences could help you uncover an opportunity through seeing the business from a different perspective. Skills and knowledge are more transferable between market sectors and job types than we often allow.

Universities across the country are important partners for research. There are a broad range of services and supports entrepreneurs can access. The CFI has a platform called Navigator that provides a search and connection tool for research based solutions, access to state of the art equipment and services through universities, colleges and hospitals across the country.

LinkedIn provides a valuable platform for social research and is easy to access.

[UPS](#) invests in a variety of white papers to support SME's that they share publicly. They are also willing to invest in additional research that would help small businesses and startups and are always considering new areas of focus.

Examples of UPS Whitepapers:

Pulse of the Online Shopper

https://solutions.ups.com/UPS-pulse-of-the-online-shopper-2019-LP.html?campaign_id=VAN701748

UPS and Nathan Associates present a new report on how small and medium businesses can leverage e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic

<https://www.nathaninc.com/insight/supporting-smb-growth/>

A lack of time and money can often hinder the commitment to research. It is a critical element of business strategy building to get the details right longer term and there is no industry or market sector this does not apply to.

[Mitacs](#) is another organization that can support and help small businesses invest in research.

As we learn to live with COVID-19 and determine what the new normal will look like, we must continue to work together, share ideas and collaborate. We have all learned how to do this remotely over the last couple of years and we can do more with both research and mentoring too, and the sharing of information.

There is some research however that lab closures have inevitably stalled and we need to think of safe ways to get these workplaces working effectively again.

[The Business Benefits Finder](#) is a federal program that helps evaluate the stage and challenges of a business and provides a detailed report with services available that can offer solutions and support.

There were over 150 million more online shoppers globally in 2020 than in 2019. Global ecommerce exceeds 5 trillion and we need to find solutions to our supply chain issues.

Examples of staff shortages were shared including in Niagara on the Lake where businesses were running at 50 percent capacity due to staff shortages, and in Northern Ontario where they have had to bus in kitchen staff from other parts of the province to keep businesses running. The labour shortage isn't going to go away. We need creative solutions, fairness and equality in the workplace, and better wages. The minimum wage needs to be increased to \$20 by 2023 for employers to compete.

In the healthcare space, COVID-19 has not hit people equally, migrant workers and long term care workers were and are impacted greatly. New challenges are being recognized including digital literacy in patients – people without access to the internet are starting to fall behind as the rest of the world storms forward. They cannot communicate with their doctor in the same way as virtual services are being introduced. While this is concerning it also opens up many new business opportunities. The sector is overloaded and it is hard to keep up but there are many SME's eager to create new solutions.

The better you understand how to get your product to market through research, the better prepared you are. By taking the time and making the investment to do the research you can venture into a new opportunity with greater confidence. The findings will influence your objectives and prepare you for potential challenges. There are tools that can help you determine what is the most important research to focus on, what testing is needed and what timelines look like.

Research is not easy and not quick. It requires longer term planning and patience, but a commitment to research is often key to success.

Advice for a young entrepreneur:

1. “Network, network, network”. Never turn a meeting down - opportunities turn up at the most unexpected time.
2. Find mentors - people who can share their experience with you and offer advice, encouragement and support. Have both formal and informal mentors too. Get involved in programs but also ask people in your network that you admire.
3. Always have your end user in mind when making decisions about your business. Make change based on their experience, not yours. And make time to listen and engage with feedback. This is an everyday commitment for the success of your business.
4. Whatever decision you are making, do it ethically. Be proud and upfront about your accomplishments, but humble and open to constructive criticism. Always ask lots of questions and speak up if you don’t understand the answer.
5. Research needs to be part of any business plan. While research is often seen as a huge endeavor, it can be as basic as a question on social media, considering different scopes of work, speaking with customers or experimenting with different communication strategies.
6. Partnerships and collaboration are vital.

Conclusion

The three roundtables reinforced feedback, research and messaging from and about entrepreneurs and innovators. While market and industry sectors have been impacted in different ways by the pandemic and other challenges in 2020/21, there is broad agreement and understanding on what ensures success for SME’s. Every session emphasised the importance of collaboration, networking and learning from one another. Unanimous opinion substantiates the need for research in its many different forms, as well as the need for additional government support and funding to ensure economic recovery and prosperity.

Appendix

Questions used in each session

Session 1.

- A. The challenges of the last couple of years have been unprecedented. What would you advise entrepreneurs to prioritize in this period of economic recovery?
- B. In some ways the pandemic has accelerated change for the better and created new opportunities. For example, we are all more familiar with virtual meetings, with remote work comes the ability to recruit from further afield and those living in remote areas now have more opportunities in the workforce than before. Can you share your perspective on how you think the pandemic, remote working, climate issues etc. will impact entrepreneurs in the coming year?
- C. How can we better support entrepreneurs in 2022 (and beyond) with the
- D. challenges around sales, marketing and financial literacy. What support have you found useful and why?
- E. Product and supply chains have been severely disrupted in recent months. How do you see this impacting entrepreneurs and what can be done to support them?

Session 2

- A. How have the events of the past couple of years impacted your ability to innovate? What challenges/opportunities do you anticipate in 2022/23?
- B. Innovation and research go hand in hand. What more can be done to ensure SME's don't lose momentum during this vital stage in their innovation process?
- C. We know Canada has an aging population and talent acquisition and planning is proving challenging for companies both large and small. How do you see this affecting innovation from the perspective of HR and talent acquisition?
- D. There is so much untapped talent in the country. What more can we do to connect those with potential from within Canada as well as new immigrants to opportunities within innovation? And how can we further connect the expertise of our elders with the younger generations who follow them?

Session 3

- A. Research plays a vital role in the entrepreneurial and innovation story. Have you engaged research experts, services or equipment to help develop or bring to market your product, service or technology? What organizations, services, or other resources would you consult if you did need to engage those research-based tools?
- B. What challenge and opportunity do you anticipate in the coming year given the impact of COVID?
- C. How does digital adoption impact research and what more can be done to support entrepreneurs?
- D. What advice can you share around access funding for research for entrepreneurs and innovators?
- E. We know opportunities are lost and businesses fail because of roadblocks related to research. What advice can you share to help a young business with a great idea ensure it has the chance to be realized?