DIGITAL EMPOWERS

Bridging the Digital Gap in Indigenous Businesses and Communities

Fewer than 24% of Indigenous households have access to high-quality, high-speed internet[1] – just one example of what has come to be known as the "digital divide."

What we heard from cross-sector experts representing policy, technology, and small business, is that there are three main barriers to closing the digital divide.

Access

Challenge

A survey by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission indicated that only 37% of rural households and only 24% of households in Indigenous communities had access to high-speed internet – compared to 97% of urban homes[2].

Intervention

Universal Broadband Commitment is more important than ever in Canada. On November 9th 2020, the Prime Minster, Justin Trudeau, announced an investment of $1.75 billion to help connect Canadians to highspeed internet across the country, grow businesses, and therefore create jobs. This proposed investment will connect 98% of Canadians across the country to highspeed internet by 2026, with the goal of bridging all gaps by 2030.

Affordability

Challenge

According to a Canadian Press review of Consensus figures, a large majority of Indigenous Peoples living on reserve lands, over 80%, live below the low-income threshold[3]. This income gap is a result of the systemic inequalities that exist among Indigenous Peoples. There is a need for significant investment in broadband to increase affordability and digital equity among Indigenous communities.

Intervention

Addressing infrastructure capacity through Canada's Connectivity Strategy will help alleviate high-cost broadband, as inefficient infrastructure is associated with higher costs. The Government will go a step further by including affordability and open access in their assessment criteria of service provider partners[4], creating a business imperative for financial inclusion.

Skills Development and Employment

Challenge

Digital literacy and skills training is an important step in ensuring Indigenous Peoples have access to the knowledge economy. Currently, only 1.2% of Indigenous Peoples are employed in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) field[5].

Intervention

Leveraging best practices from the private sector in creating and delivering community-based programs is key. TCS' Ignite My Future in School (IMFIS) and goIT programs work with youth and educators from marginalized communities to teach important skills in computational thinking, to better prepare them for the future of work and create equitable pathways to the digital economy.

[1] https://www.socialconnectedness.org/digital-equity-for-indigenous-communities/

[2] https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/139.nsf/eng/h_00002.html

[3] https://globalnews.ca/news/3795083/reserves-poverty-line-census/

[4] https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/139.nsf/vwapj/ISEDC_19-170_Connectivity_Strategy_E_Web.pdf/$file/ISEDC_19-170_Connectivity_Strategy_E_Web.pdf

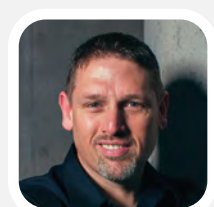[5] https://www.ictc-ctic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Indigenous_Supply_ICTC_FINAL_ENG.pdf

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Nathan Snider

Manager of Research and Stakeholder Relations at the Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC)

"We must look to reasonable pathways forward to bridge the digital divide by trying to solve those connectivity challenges in ways that are federally mandated, provincially integrated and supportive to communities. **Creative solutions are what communities across Canada need right now.**"

Sindhu John

HR Head, Canada, Tata Consultancy Services

"**Collective action is essential to support indigenous businesses and communities**. At TCS, part of that action is rooted in our strategic approach to indigenous inclusion exploring training and education; employment, procurement as well as business and community development."

Lawrence Lewis

Founder, OneFeather

"**When developing policy for indigenous groups, having those voices in the room is critical.** This will help break down barriers and systemic injustices that exist in current systems."

Philip Ducharme

Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, CCAB

"It is important to get everyone involved in this process. **Government, private sector and communities need to work together to create real impact.**"

Pam Damoff

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Government of Canada

"**So often the issue is the last mile**. Bringing the infrastructure into the community is one thing, but we must ensure people within the community can connect."

Soumen Roy

Executive Director and Country Head, Canada, Tata Consultancy Services

"**Leveraging the best practices from the private sector in creating and delivering programs is key**. Private sector collaborations can ensure best in class products, technology and processes are easily made available to bridge this digital divide"

About Digital Empowers

Digital Empowers is TCS' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) thought leadership initiative aimed at accelerating innovation for social impact. The purpose of Digital Empowers is to raise awareness on digital technologies and social issues, explore the art of the possible, and foster cross sector partnerships. TCS believes that companies across all sectors have the responsibility of developing future focused skills like computational thinking while creating access and equity for communities across the globe. Digital Empowers addresses the opportunity gap through research, insights and advocacy, seeks to mobilize the public, private and not for profit sectors and provides systemic support to create pioneering solutions that will unlock multiple opportunities, democratize access to learning and help the new generation harness the future abundance.

Contact

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