

2020-2021

Annual Report



How We Supported Small Business in Alberta in 2020-21

We are proud to have served small business owners and entrepreneurs in new ways and in many communities across the province. We focused on small business recovery and resiliency, delivered new programs, developed digital resources and interactive business planning tools, hosted educational webinars and events, and continued to offer our specialized services to small business owners at all stages of business. We've helped thousands of entrepreneurs create clarity and confidence in their businesses as they worked through the impacts of COVID-19.

A Message from our CEO and Board Chair



Barbara McKenzie

Chief Executive Officer

"Another incredible year at Business Link! After starting with Business Link in 2019, never did I think we would experience what the last year has had in store for all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the world, our clients, and our team in ways we've never seen, and I am proud to have been witness to the resiliency that's been shown time and time again.

I am so proud of our entire Business Link team for the way they have shown up for our clients and have navigated through the uncertainty that this pandemic has brought forward. At times it has not been easy, but they have continued to show up every day for their peers and their clients and it has been incredible to witness. This year we're celebrating 25 years at Business Link, and it goes without saying that our success is not without the dedication of our amazing team. We've grown a lot in the last year, bringing in new team members to various business units across the organization, and it has allowed us to elevate the level of service we offer and ensure that our clients are getting what they need from us."

[Read Barbara's full statement...](#)



Chad Saunders

Board Chair

"This past year has proven to be one of the most challenging and disruptive years for many small business owners across Alberta. With the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, entrepreneurs have had to adapt and pivot their businesses in new ways to keep moving forward and stay open. Looking back on this past year and the unexpected challenges that came with it, we've been inspired by the resiliency and strength of Alberta small businesses. This coming year also marks the 25th anniversary of Business Link, an incredible milestone that we are thrilled to share with all of you.

Business Link has worked tirelessly to provide critical support for small business owners as they work through unprecedented times by developing new programs and resources with a strong focus on business recovery. Our board has supported the organization as it continues to adapt its offerings to the evolving needs of entrepreneurs, while maintaining its reputation for exceptional service delivery and strengthening its relationships with funders and key partners."

[Read Chad's full statement...](#)

Our Partners

Without the support from our funders, we would not be able to provide service to thousands of entrepreneurs across the province. We're primarily funded by the Federal and Provincial Governments. Federally, we are funded under Prairies Economic Development Canada, in the Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development. Provincially, we're funded by the Ministry of Jobs, Economy, and Innovation. We also work collaboratively with these other **small business support organizations** in Alberta on various events and programs.

Building a successful small business community in Alberta requires hard work and dedication from a variety of incredible organizations across the province. We are thankful to be able to partner with dedicated small business support organizations across Alberta and Canada.

Canada

Alberta



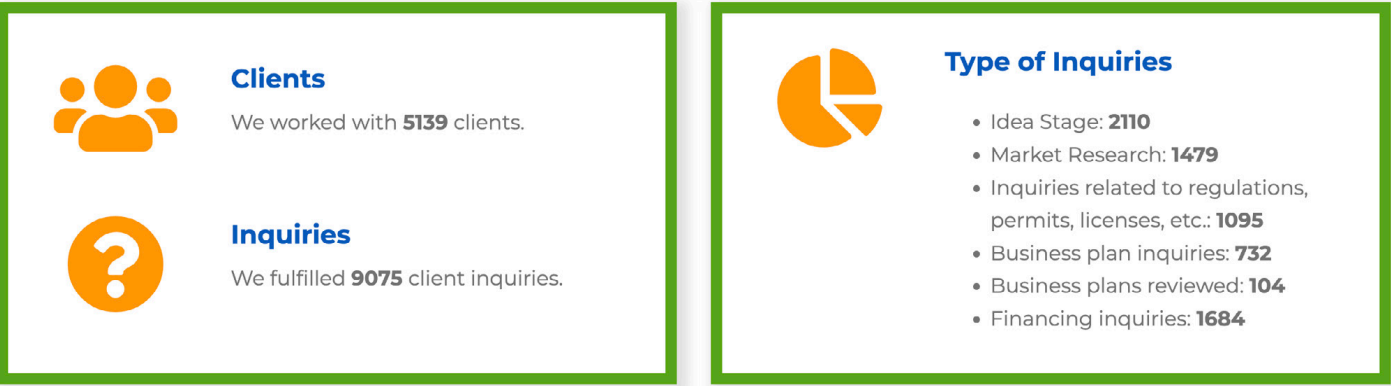
COVID-19

COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges to entrepreneurs and small business owners in Alberta. Business Link provided relevant and timely resources, programs and information to small business owners to help them through the challenges their business faced throughout the year.

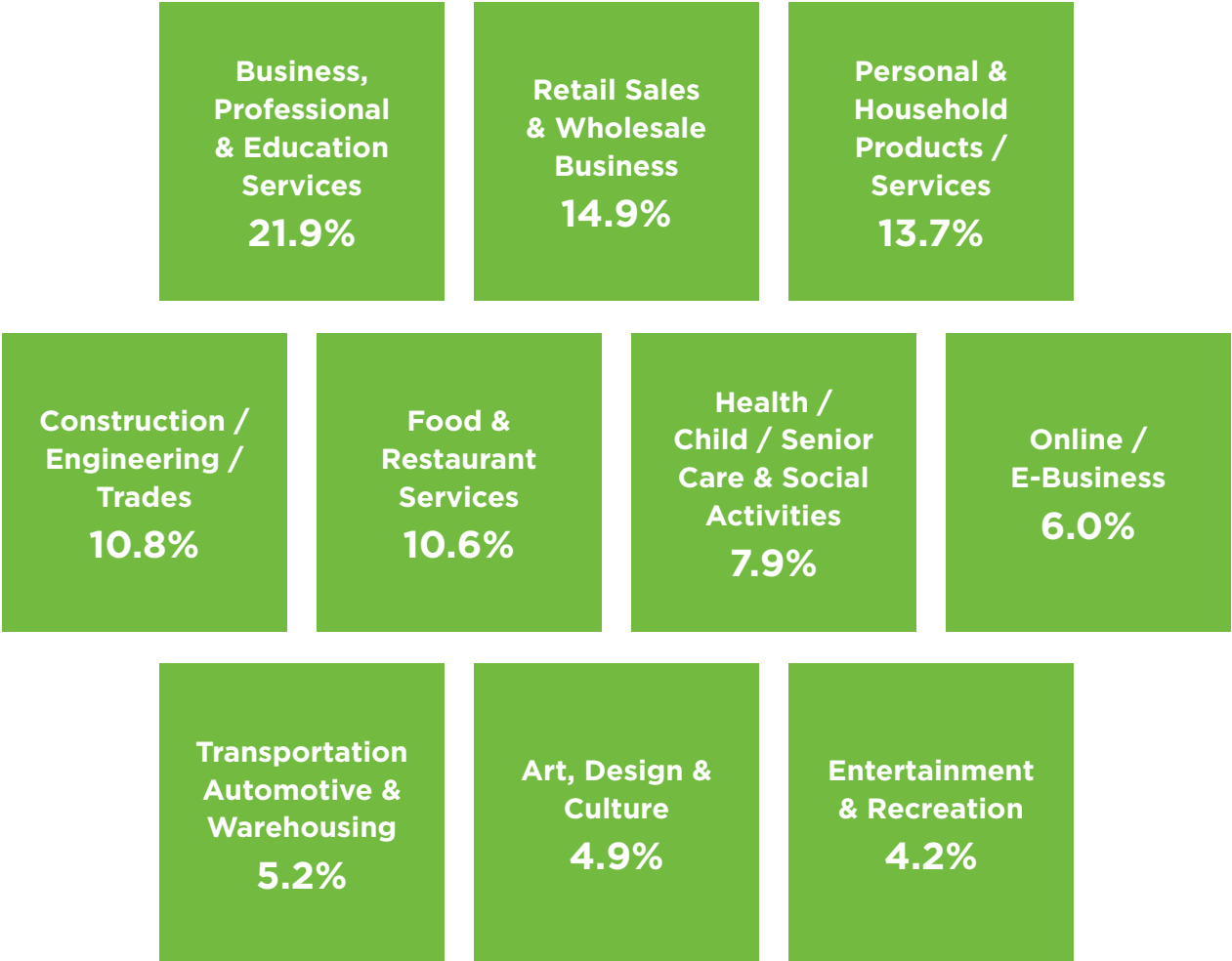
COVID Supports for Small Businesses:

- We had **1,726** COVID-related inquiries
- Our COVID resources web page was visited **32,044** times
- We partnered with **COVID Continuity** for the Alberta COVID information hub
- Several new programs were launched to support businesses: **Peerpreneur**, the **Resilient Recovery Program**, and the **YEG Business Recovery Program**

Supporting Small Business



Top Industries We Worked With



Events and Partnerships



Partnered with **102** organizations—click to view our **partners list**



Hosted **116** events and participated in an additional **235**



Reached **10,109** people through events



Trained **4756** participants

New Programs Launched in 2020-21



Peerpreneur Sessions

Launched in the Fall of 2020, Peerpreneur Sessions were designed to help strengthen connections between small business owners across Alberta throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These sessions give entrepreneurs the chance to participate in live, peer-to-peer virtual group discussions over a 4-week period where they can exchange best practices, network, and brainstorm solutions to business challenges.

We had **96** participants in this years sessions.

"The program connected me with great like-minded entrepreneurs. The group discussion helped solve specific business issues I was facing. Great business ideas were discussed that generated creative business thought. Great program and connections!"

Peerpreneur Participant

[Learn More](#)



Resilient Recovery Program

In August 2020, we launched the Resilient Recovery Program to help strengthen small businesses across Alberta who most significantly felt the impacts of COVID-19. Participants received one-on-one coaching with a business recovery coach to work through any pressure points that came up throughout the pandemic, and build a strong plan for their business to move forward and stay open.

We had **34** businesses participate in the Resilient Recovery Program.

[Learn More](#)



Export Readiness Program

Alberta businesses have plenty to offer other provinces and the rest of the world. Knowing this, we designed the Export Readiness Program to help small business owners reach new domestic and international markets. Through the program, participants work with a Business Link Strategist trained to provide advice and guidance as they start their export journey.

The Export Readiness Program had over **100** interactions in **59** hours with **53** clients in the year.

[Learn More](#)



YEG Business Recovery Program

Business Link and the Edmonton Business Improvement Area Council teamed up to provide support to small businesses in Edmonton. This program gives Edmonton businesses access to a dedicated business coach and exclusive access to webinars and workshops. This program covers practical strategies to boost sales revenue, adapt their business, manage cash flow, and HR.

Through this program, **22** businesses started coaching, receiving over **120** hours of coaching during our fiscal year!

"I would highly recommend the YEG Business Recovery Program/Business Coaching offered through Business Link to anyone who owns their own business. The program has increased my confidence as a business owner. To be honest, I always thought that business coaching was meant for larger businesses. I am proof that even if you own a small business, or even if you feel you have no time – this program can help you."

Andrea House, Acupuncture Works!

[Learn More](#)



Pitch Competition

In March 2021, we hosted our first-ever Pitch Competition for Indigenous and immigrant small businesses owners. Participants got to pitch their business, connect with other Indigenous and immigrant small businesses and entrepreneurs, and win amazing cash prizes. Indigenous and immigrant-owned small businesses need platforms tailored to their specific needs so that they can successfully showcase their businesses.

Our first Pitch Competition included **11** Immigrant and **8** Indigenous businesses.

[Read the Blog](#)

This inaugural event would not have been possible without support from our partners and sponsors:



Digital Resources for Entrepreneurs

In 2020-21, we developed and launched new digital resources for entrepreneurs. These digital resources are free and accessible to all Albertans through our website, which had **248,648** visitors and **501,217** pageviews this year.



Interactive Business Plan Builder

Our new Business Plan Builder makes writing a business plan easier than ever. The interactive tool is for anyone, from aspiring entrepreneurs with a new business idea to existing business owners looking to shift their current business model or secure new funding. The tool walks clients through the business planning process from start to finish and includes tips, examples, and offers 1:1 support along the way.

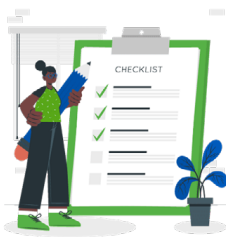
During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, we had 562 users start a business plan with our new tool!

[Learn More](#)

Support Local AB Directory

Our small business directory, Support Local AB, highlights and celebrates the diversity in small businesses and in entrepreneurship across Alberta. The directory connects business owners with new customers and clients across the province and helps them increase their online presence and drive traffic to their business.

We launched our directory March 8th and by March 30th we had 371 businesses listed and over 10,000 page views on the site!

[Visit the Directory](#)

Small Business Guides

We developed and designed downloadable guides to help small businesses navigate their entrepreneurial journey. Focusing on the fundamentals of starting a business, financials, and marketing, these helpful guides are packed full of resources. With links, definitions, and exercises, our guides help take any small business to new heights!

Our Small Business Guides were downloaded 2249 times this year!

[View Guides](#)

Small Business Basics Videos

When it comes to running a small business, there are a few basics that all small business owners need to master. We cover those basics in this great new video series! The Small Business Basics videos include business planning, business structures, market research, financial management, and marketing.

Our Small Business Basics videos were watched 1,062 times this year!

[Watch Videos](#)

Indigenous Services

We offer specialized support to Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs across Alberta, from 1:1 support to community presentations and business planning workshops. Our Indigenous Services team reached hundreds of clients across Alberta throughout the year and were able to help create, maintain or expand **66** Indigenous businesses. This year, we also hosted our first ever **Pitch Competition**, an exclusive platform for Indigenous business owners to pitch their business for a chance to win some incredible prizes.



Indigenous Services



455 Indigenous clients served



213 advisory services provided



213 advisory services provided



213 advisory services provided

Immigrant Services

While all entrepreneurs face challenges, we acknowledge that immigrants face additional barriers to starting and running a business. That's why we continue to offer specialized support to aspiring and established immigrant entrepreneurs across Alberta. Through our Immigrant Entrepreneur Program, we participated in many partnership activities and other events throughout the year. This year, we also hosted our first ever **Pitch Competition**, an exclusive platform for immigrant business owners to pitch their business for a chance to win exciting prizes.



Immigrant Services



389 immigrant clients served



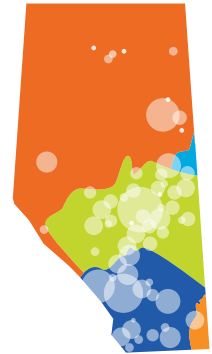
958 client interactions



697 participants trained

Our Clients

We work with some incredible clients all across Alberta. This year we served **5139** clients across **215** different Alberta communities. Learn more about how we supported small business owners and entrepreneurs across Alberta on our client features page.



[Visit Client Features Page](#)

Our Staff

In 2020-21, we grew our team of experts to increase our ability to support entrepreneurs through business recovery. New staff were added to increase capacity to support entrepreneurs, including additional Business Support Officers, Market Research, Web Design and Sponsorship support, and additional administrative support.



[View Our Staff](#)

Our Board

Business Link's Board of Directors serves to support our endeavour to be Alberta's small business hub. The board provides governance to Business Link, ensuring we are accountable to our funders and entrepreneurs across Alberta. Hailing from communities across Alberta, they bring expertise in small business, innovation, economic development, education, and Indigenous sectors. We're grateful to our Board of Directors for supporting and guiding our team through the ups and downs of our 2020-21 fiscal year.

[View Our Board](#)

[View our 2020-21 Financial Summary](#)

