



BUSINESSLINK

2023-2024

Annual Report



A photograph of three people in a workshop or office setting. On the left, a woman with blonde hair and glasses is looking towards the center. In the middle, a man with a beard is looking down at something on the table. On the right, a woman with a headband is smiling. They are all gathered around a table with various items on it, including what looks like a laptop and some papers. The image has a blue overlay.

Business Link is a non-profit organization that **helps Alberta's small businesses start and succeed.**

We provide free one-on-one coaching and advice for entrepreneurs and small business owners, in-person and virtually. We help small business owners learn how to navigate the startup process, access market research, attend events and webinars, find online resources, and build a network. We provide support for Indigenous and immigrant entrepreneurs.

Business Link is proud to offer businesses free digital marketing support through the Digital Economy Program, and the Canada Digital Adoption Program where businesses can receive up to \$2,400 to boost their online presence.

Mission

Business Link helps Alberta small businesses start and succeed.

Vision

Alberta is the best place to start a small business.

Shared Message from the Board Chair, **Michael Oshry** & Executive Director, **Paul Cataford**



MICHAEL OSHRY
Board Chair

For the year ended March 31, 2024, Business Link supported over 9,000 small business owners and entrepreneurs through all services and programs by providing impactful support, programming, and guidance. Our team provided over 5,300 clients advisory services, an increase of 14% compared to the previous fiscal year. We also successfully launched a pilot project of our Mentor program, generating over 300 applicants.

In addition to our core services, we also deliver the Canada Digital Adoption Program or CDAP. CDAP client engagement doubled in fiscal 2024, and we delivered \$2,400 micro grants for digital support to over 2,000 entrepreneurs in the Province of Alberta. We also administer the Digital Economy Program or DEP and provided free digital marketing support to over 5,000 Alberta-based small businesses. In collaboration with 19 regional partners, the DEP helps businesses throughout Alberta upgrade their online presence. Both the DEP and CDAP will end this fiscal year. Not only have these programs brought capital and expertise to Albertans for digital adoption and upgrading, they have also raised the profile of Business Link through marketing and promotions.



PAUL CATAFORD
Executive Director

In the spring of 2024, in partnership with the African Canadian Civic Engagement Council, Business Link hosted our final group of ANZA entrepreneurs. Since its inception two and a half years ago, this program has involved 90 participants.

Business Link's success and high client satisfaction can be attributed to our team of committed, engaged and passionate people. Led by true professionals in all key positions, the culture at Business Link continues to improve; our employees are empowered, informed and supported. In a service business, it's all about the people, and we're proud of the team we've assembled.

Since the global pandemic, we have observed the challenges faced by small businesses as they deal with inflation, a tight labour market and higher interest rates. Business Link is here to help. Our entrepreneurs are our heroes. They create jobs by delivering products, services, food and beverages, entertainment and arts, and the diversity and local character that makes Alberta, well – Alberta. We are here to serve these entrepreneurs and always look at new and innovative ways to help.

Looking ahead to 2025, we plan to scale up our Mentor Program, promote our Business Launch Program, and refresh other programs and services. We are always looking to do more.

Business Link is governed by an independent, diverse, highly qualified volunteer board of directors. Our board provides oversight and good governance, as well as insight and strategic forethought. On behalf of our employees, government partners, and clients – we all thank you.

We thank our dedicated staff, valued clients, and supportive community. We would also like to thank our government partners which provide the funding to make this all possible. As we move forward, we will continue cultivating an environment where innovation thrives and collaboration flourishes. We remain committed to making a meaningful impact on Alberta's small business and entrepreneurial community.

Board of Directors



MICHAEL OSHRY
Board Chair and Chair,
Stakeholder Relations
Committee



MARK B. DICKIN
Board Vice Chair



JOSHUA DAY CHIEF
Board Member



RENEE FEHR
Board Member



ROLANDO INZUNZA
Chair, HR Committee



ROHIT JOSHI
Board Member



KIM ORLESKY
Board Member



**TSIKINAAKII KATIE
RABBIT-YOUNG PINE**
Board Member



DREW TETZ
Treasurer, Chair, Audit
and Finance Committee



HANSINE ULLBERG
Board Member



STEVE WHITTINGTON
Chair, Governance and
Nominating Committee



COLIN CHRISTENSEN
Board Member



MARIE SOPROVICH
Board Observer, Former
Chair, Governance and
Nominating Committee



***BEV THERRIEN**
Former Board Observer,
Government of Canada
Member Representative



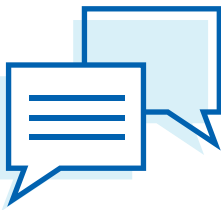
***SCOTT BEEBY**
Former Board Observer,
Government of Alberta
Member Representative

*Bev and Scott
retired from the
board in December
2023. We thank
them for their
years of service at
Business Link and
continued support.

How We Supported Alberta's Small Businesses

Client Services

- In 2023-24 we supported **9,609** aspiring and established Alberta entrepreneurs
- **5,372** small businesses served through advisory services (**up 14%** from last year)
- **504** Indigenous entrepreneurs served through advisory services
- **1,158** Newcomer & Immigrant entrepreneurs served through advisory services
- Communities reached: **197**
- Client Satisfaction: Net Promoter Score of **71**
- **417** market research clients (**up 9%** from last year)



Programs



PEERPRENEUR

- **10** cohorts with **103** total participants.
- Overall satisfaction score was **3.48/4**

MENTOR PROGRAM

- Launched in January 2024
- **268** Mentees
- **69** Mentors

DIGITAL ECONOMY PROGRAM

- **2239** businesses served through Digital Service Squads across Alberta
- **238** youth were employed as part of this program
- We had **20** program delivery partners operating Digital Service Squads throughout Alberta

CANADA DIGITAL ADOPTION PROGRAM

- **3,730** applications received (**up 38%** from last year)
- **1,998** applications approved (**up 95%** from last year)
- **\$2,197,145** funds disbursed to small businesses

ANZA

- **2** cohorts with **35** participants
- A total of **50** businesses have been registered by participants during the course of the program

How We Supported Alberta's Small Businesses

On-Demand Resources And Tools

- **1,279** interactive business plans
- **6,838** blog and client story views



Education And Events

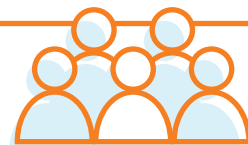
- **51** webinars and **3** in-person events
- **1,879** webinar attendees
- **263** in person attendees



Marketing

- **44,256** email subscribers (**up 76%** from last year)
- Over **380,000** people visited our website (**up 94%** from last year)
- **1.6 million** video views
- **36 million** ad impressions
- Over **1.8 million** people clicked on our digital ads
- **21,320** people follow us across on social media (up 17% from last year)
- Featured in **39** news articles

Organizations We Worked With



- Action For Healthy Communities
- Alberta Women Entrepreneurs
- Alberta Motor Association
- Africa Canadian Civic Engagement Council
- Africa Centre
- ATB Entrepreneur Centre
- City of Edmonton
- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Digital Main Street
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- Futurpreneur
- International Business Consulting
- Microbusiness Training Centre
- Quantum International Services
- RazLay
- The Immigrant Education Society

What Our **Clients Have to Say**



“One of the highlights of working with **Business Link** was that they were easy to talk to virtually over Teams and asked pertinent questions to learn more about my needs as a business owner.”

Rage Fitness

BUSINESS OWNER: VIBHU MAHAJAN

Vibhu Mahajan left a 15-year corporate career to redefine fitness with her purchase of Rage Fitness in 2022. Located in Calgary’s Beltline area, Vibhu’s vision extends beyond physical fitness; she aims to build a supportive community where everyone feels welcome. Rage Fitness stands as a testament to her commitment, offering a fresh perspective in a crowded market and impacting lives through sustainable, healthy practices.

[READ THE BLOG](#)

[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

What Our **Clients Have to Say**



“My Business Link advisor provided me with so much information, so much guidance, and really incredible resources that were specific to not only Edmonton, but also to my industry.”

White Rabbit Ice Cream

BUSINESS OWNER: YUKO TAKASAKI

Yuko Takasaki, with over 15 years of experience in the restaurant industry, launched White Rabbit Ice Cream in 2020 following her grandmother’s passing. Starting with an ice cream truck, Yuko brought her dream to life, capturing the hearts of the community. In 2023, she expanded her success by opening a storefront in downtown Edmonton. For Yuko, ice cream represents happiness, a sentiment she sees reflected in her customers’ faces daily.

[READ THE BLOG](#)[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

What Our **Clients Have to Say**



“Business Link was instrumental in shaping the foundation of my new business.”

Unshelf Design

BUSINESS OWNER: SARAH KIRKPATRICK

Influenced by the profound emotional connection we share with our living spaces, Sarah Kirkpatrick transitioned from running her own marketing agency to founding Unshelf Design during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her business offers comprehensive services in interior design, cosmetic renovation, home styling, and occupied staging, emphasizing sustainability by incorporating unique, secondhand items. Sarah's mission is to rejuvenate living spaces, helping clients rediscover love for their environments. Her approach blends practical design solutions with artistic creativity, ensuring each space not only meets functional needs but also carries a distinct, personal charm.

[READ THE BLOG](#)[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

What Our **Clients Have to Say**



“The tailored advice and direct mentorship have proven to be an invaluable asset. It’s not just about general guidance; it’s about custom advice that has addressed my specific challenges and aspirations.”

JSG Mixed Media & Art

BUSINESS OWNER: JOANNE GUTHRIE

Joanne Guthrie, a professional welder turned full-time artist, combined the strength of metal with the softness of mixed media in her eco-conscious art practice. Operating from a welding studio in her garage and a painting studio in her home, Joanne creates her art using organic materials, including homemade paper and ink made from wild berries. Her commitment to sustainability shines through in her work, minimizing waste and promoting eco-friendly living.

[READ THE BLOG](#)[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

Statement of Financial Position

AS OF MARCH 31, 2024

| | 2024 | 2023 |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| ASSETS | | |
| CURRENT | | |
| Cash and cash equivalents (Note 2) | \$ 1,446,026 | \$ 7,349,598 |
| Accounts receivable | 1,625,540 | 172,500 |
| Goods and Services Tax recoverable | 234,675 | 167,361 |
| Prepaid expenses and deposits | 44,810 | 11,741 |
| | 3,351,051 | 7,701,200 |
| TANGIBLE CAPITAL ASSETS (Note 3) | 3,068 | 6,492 |
| | \$ 3,354,119 | \$ 7,707,692 |
| LIABILITIES | | |
| CURRENT | | |
| Accounts payable and accrued liabilities (Note 4) | \$ 631,182 | \$ 794,163 |
| Deferred contributions (Note 5) | 1,816,462 | 6,376,064 |
| | 2,447,644 | 7,170,227 |
| NET ASSETS | | |
| Invested in tangible capital assets | 3,068 | 6,492 |
| Unrestricted | 903,407 | 530,973 |
| | 906,475 | 537,465 |
| | \$ 3,354,119 | \$ 7,707,692 |

Statement of Operations

FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024

| | 2024 | 2023 |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|
| REVENUE | | |
| Other grants (Note 6) (Schedule I - VQ) | \$ 9,835,047 | \$ 4,629,863 |
| Federal government core funding | 901,669 | 901,669 |
| Provincial government core funding | 850,000 | 850,000 |
| Fees for services and materials | 96,085 | 122,970 |
| Interest | 11,810 | 23,804 |
| Sponsorships | 6,500 | 25,500 |
| TOTAL REVENUE | \$ 11,701,111 | \$ 6,553,806 |
| EXPENSES | | |
| Grants paid out | 4,754,749 | 539,207 |
| Contracted services | 3,141,960 | 2,679,058 |
| Salaries and benefits | 2,524,660 | 2,280,893 |
| Advertising and promotion | 348,493 | 155,947 |
| Rent | 180,311 | 145,783 |
| Office | 91,702 | 75,617 |
| Professional Fees | 61,072 | 58,750 |
| Travel | 55,146 | 73,078 |
| Memberships | 51,814 | 63,496 |
| Client outreach | 33,574 | 11,755 |
| Equipment maintenance | 23,975 | 37,890 |
| Website and database support services | 21,014 | 31,178 |
| Training | 11,383 | 15,167 |
| Amortization | 8,398 | 13,893 |
| Insurance | 8,044 | 10,210 |
| Bank charges and interest | 7,380 | 3,140 |
| Telephone and internet | 6,851 | 25,358 |
| Bad debts | 1,575 | 5,486 |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$ 11,332,101 | \$ 6,225,906 |
| EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSES | \$ 369,010 | \$ 327,900 |

Statement of Changes in Net Assets

FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024

| | INVESTED IN TANGIBLE CAPITAL ASSETS | UNRESTRICTED | 2024 | 2023 |
|---|---|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| BALANCE, BEGINNING OF YEAR | \$ 6,492 | \$ 530,973 | \$ 537,465 | \$ 209,565 |
| Excess of revenue over expenses | - | 369,010 | 369,010 | 327,900 |
| Amortization of tangible capital assets | (8,398) | 8,398 | - | - |
| Purchase of tangible capital assets | 4,974 | (4,974) | - | - |
| BALANCE, END OF YEAR | \$ 3,068 | \$ 903,407 | \$ 906,475 | \$ 537,465 |

