

Building Canada's innovation capacity through inclusion

Mitacs' Inclusive Innovation Action Plan, progress report

mitacs
return on innovation

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Message from the CEO

At Mitacs, we believe Canada builds its strongest innovation capacity when everyone with the talent to contribute has a real opportunity to do so. Our work depends on people, and that means keeping the door open to diverse talent from every background across the country.

The Inclusive Innovation Action Plan (IIAP) has now completed its three years, and I am pleased with what it has delivered. We expanded accessibility supports and strengthened inclusive learning opportunities across the organization. Programs such as the Women in STEM Peer-to-Peer Mentorship Program have helped participants build confidence, develop leadership skills, and strengthen professional networks.

Researchers working with Mitacs have clear guidance on inclusion and Indigenous research to draw on when they design their projects. Indigenous Governments can access programming that was not open to them before. Interns who came to us through Indigenous Pathways are moving into professional roles and bringing that experience back to their own communities. And our partnerships have opened more research and industry opportunities to Indigenous and Black scholars.

Our work is far from over. Building a truly inclusive innovation economy requires sustained effort and a willingness to keep learning. As CEO, I am committed to that work, and it continues under our **Strategic Plan 2026–2030**, which commits Mitacs to advance the goals of this plan, to build a diverse and inclusive team, and to work with Indigenous students, entrepreneurs, and communities to support economic reconciliation and the well-being of all individuals in Canada.

Dr. Stephen Lucas, CM
Chief Executive Officer, Mitacs

Executive summary: Three years of inclusive innovation in action

Launched in 2023, Mitacs' Inclusive Innovation Action Plan (IIAP) set a three-year roadmap to embed *equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation* across programs, partnerships, workforce systems, and culture. Over three years, the plan helped move this work from intention to sustained practice.

This section highlights the work of the IIAP, with emphasis on key activities and impacts identified for each year.

YEAR 1

Building the foundation focused on establishing the baselines, structures, and relationships needed to guide action and make future progress measurable.

Key areas of focus and progress included:

Improved accessibility and Indigenous participation and identifying external partners aligned with our mission and vision.

Completed a website accessibility audit and made 100% of the public-facing programmatic documents accessible.

Increased Indigenous Pathways delivery units by 61%, supported by additional funding.

Mitacs also launched the inaugural Inclusive Innovation Award and advanced targeted initiatives and partnerships to recognize and support equity-deserving students and researchers.

YEAR 2

Moving into implementation expanded supports for equity-deserving participants, formalized accessibility and inclusion processes, advanced internal leadership development, and deepened partnerships that broadened access to research and innovation opportunities.

Mitacs launched the Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) Peer-to-Peer Mentorship Program, delivering four cohorts and supporting 32 matched participants with structured peer support.

Indigenous Pathways internships delivery increased by 56% reaching 747 units across nine provinces.

Mitacs implemented an accessibility request process and improved website accessibility, including 5,000 alternative image descriptions.

Mitacs strengthened institutional alignment through four all-staff Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) learning sessions, a 92% Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) training completion rate, inclusive leadership coaching for 11 senior leaders, and targeted accessibility and inclusive communications training for high impact teams. Internal policy updates, including the Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy and Corporate Financial Policy, helped embed this work into organizational systems.

Mitacs expanded collaboration with the Canadian Black Scientists Network (CBSN), engaged more than 12 Indigenous economic and educational partners through the Arctic Indigenous Investment Conference, and standardized its criteria for social innovation project intake.

YEAR 3

Strengthened the policies, partnerships, accessibility practices, learning pathways, and accountability mechanisms needed to sustain inclusive innovation over time. This work continues through Mitacs' Strategic Plan 2026–2030, which commits the organization to advance the IIAP, to build a diverse and inclusive workforce, and to work with Indigenous students, entrepreneurs, and communities to deliver economic benefit and reconciliation.

Mitacs launched the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Research and Innovation Policy and updated the Indigenous Research and Innovation Policy to strengthen inclusive research design across the project lifecycle.

Mitacs audited Mitacs Plus against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA, launched a Digital Accessibility Plan, continued targeted accessibility training, and maintained strong AODA training completion.

Since April 2023, Reconciliation & EDI training has reached 2,536 enrolled learners across instructor-led and online English and French offerings, while the Globalink Research Internship Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility pilot supported international interns through practical, discussion-based EDI and accessibility learning.

Mitacs advanced the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Strategy and secured continued provincial support for Indigenous Pathways in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Mitacs extended Indigenous Pathways eligibility to include Indigenous Governments and delivering on 536 Indigenous Pathways Units.

The renewed Mitacs-Indigenous and Black Engineering and Technology memorandum of understanding (IBET MOU) sustained tailored access to research mobility and internship opportunities for Indigenous and Black scholars in engineering and technology.



Enhancing access and support for equity-deserving students and researchers

This section summarizes how Mitacs strengthened access and wraparound support for equity-deserving students and researchers through clearer policies, targeted learning, recognition, accessibility improvements, Indigenous participation pathways, and peer mentorship.

Policy tools for inclusive research design. Mitacs advanced two distinct policy tools to strengthen inclusive research design. The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Research and Innovation Policy was developed and launched to provide clearer guidance across the application and project lifecycle, while the Indigenous Research and Innovation Policy was updated to better reflect Indigenous priorities, relationship-based engagement, and community-responsive research practices. Together, these separate but complementary policies help applicants and partners design projects that are more inclusive, accessible, accountable, and grounded in respectful engagement.

EDI and Reconciliation learning on EDGE. Mitacs expanded participant-facing learning through the *Fostering a Culture of Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI)* course and the Globalink Research Internship Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, & Accessibility (GRI IDEA) pilot, supporting stronger inclusive participation and intercultural understanding.

297 learners

48% completion rate

Course satisfaction

★★★★½

The Reconciliation & EDI course reached a 48% completion rate with 143 completions out of 297 enrolled learners across English and French offerings between April 2025 and March 2026. The overall satisfaction with the course was rated 4.5/5, and the gain of applicable knowledge, skills and resources was rated 4.5/5.

65 participants

3 virtual session

Course satisfaction

★★★★★

The GRI IDEA pilot reached 65 enrolled participants across three virtual sessions, with completion rates of 52%, 55%, and 31%. Completion rates for the third virtual session were lower, which can be attributed to scheduling conflicts, reduced engagement, or other external barriers. Participants who completed the training rated it between 4.6 and 4.9 out of 5 (n=29), and all respondents confirmed the course met expectations and would recommend it to future GRI interns and mentors.



2023 Mitacs Award winners (from left to right):
Bern Klein, Matthew Mitchell, Gary Bogdani, Kirsty Choquette, Georges Kaddoum, Glenda Watson Hyatt, Hannah Fronenberg, Reza Eslami, and Ketul Patel.



Inclusive Innovator Awards. The Inclusive Innovator of the Year Award made inclusive innovation more visible by recognizing researchers whose work advances accessibility, community benefit, and equity-informed design.

2023 Inclusive Innovator of the Year Award Winner

Kirsty Choquette, a PhD student in the School and Clinical Child Psychology program at the University of Alberta, was recognized for her groundbreaking solutions in ensuring the voices of Indigenous youth are meaningfully captured in mentoring programs. Kirsty's work led to improved and more inclusive support to help Indigenous youth transferring out of child welfare services as adults.

2025 Inclusive Innovator of the Year Award Winner

Dr. Anne Laurie, a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Education at Concordia University, was recognized for developing a pioneering Developmental Language Disorder assessment tool. The tool provides a culturally sensitive way to distinguish between second-language learning and Developmental Language Disorder, addressing a critical gap in speech-language assessment and educational technology. The tool helps reduce the risk of mislabeling children who are learning an additional language and strengthens access to appropriate intervention and support.

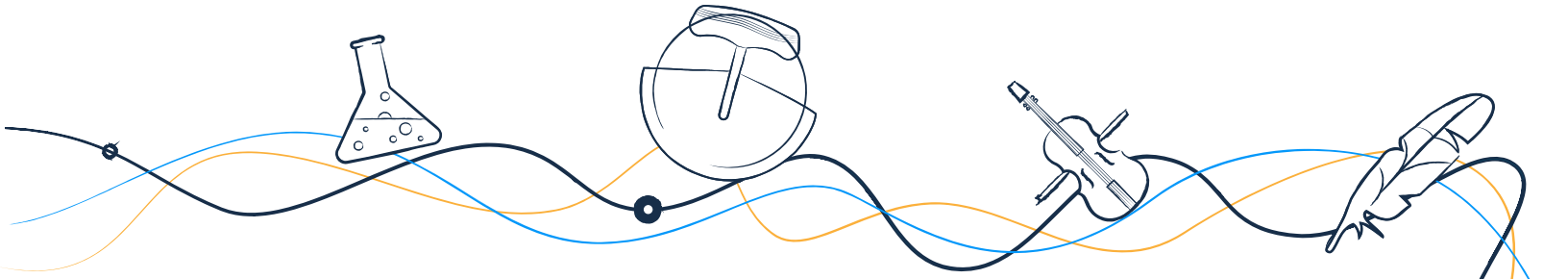
Innovation rooted in local knowledge

Dr. Paul Onkundi Nyangaresi grew up in Kilgoris and Kisii, Kenya, and came to the University of British Columbia as a postdoctoral researcher in 2021. Working with supervisor Dr. Sara Beck in Civil Engineering and industry partners Clear Inc. and MW Technologies, he designed a rainwater disinfection system costing roughly $5,000, pairing UV LED technology with a Kenyan-designed sand filtration unit. It delivers 500 litres of clean drinking and cooking water daily to 365 students and teachers at the Rianyabayo Memorial Academy in Kisii County. He consulted local residents on the design, sourced materials regionally, and employed local talent to install it. He is now working to apply the research with Indigenous communities in Canada.



> "I lived there for many years, so I was able to understand and work out the unique issues they face. Sometimes projects with good intentions fail because the people implementing them don't really know what the community wants."
>
> — Dr. Paul Onkundi Nyangaresi, 2024 Mitacs Innovation Award Winner and Mitacs Accelerate participant, University of British Columbia

Accessibility as a barrier-reduction approach. Mitacs strengthened accessibility as an ongoing commitment to barrier reduction, remediation, and participant support. This work included accessible programmatic documents, a centralized accommodation request process, 5,000 alternative image descriptions, targeted accessibility training for 25 team members across eight teams, a Mitacs Plus audit against WCAG 2.2 AA standards, the Mitacs Digital Accessibility Plan, and training for six Service Delivery team members. The Digital Accessibility Plan positions accessibility as a continuous improvement priority, supporting both identification of barriers and timely action to remediate them across digital experiences.



Indigenous Pathways

Indigenous Pathways remained a central access mechanism for Indigenous students and organizations. Across the IIAP, delivery units increased by 61% in Year 1 and Indigenous Pathways internships increased by 56% to 747 units across nine provinces in Year 2, while Year 3 focused on sustaining participation, strengthening provincial support, and using technical reporting to understand future opportunities.

The Impact of Mitacs' Indigenous Pathways:

Engaged **2,240+ partners** and interns since inception

Provides up to **75% of project funding** through a highly successful enhanced leverage funding model

Top reasons organizations participate:

- cost-sharing **78%**
- access to knowledge **69%**
- networking **63%**

Top reasons interns participate:

- skill development **70%**
- funding **64%**

Only 4%

of projects would have proceeded without Mitacs support, showing **Indigenous Pathways provides essential rather than incremental funding**.

Organizational outcomes

70%
Improved knowledge and skills

42%
Enhanced Research & Development capacity

45%
Stronger networks

Indigenous Pathways projects were more likely to:

Address societal challenges
54% vs **31%**
in other programs

Contribute to policy
41% vs **20%**
in other programs

Intern outcomes

83%
Improved career prospects

62%
Improved professional skills

51%
Improved technical skills

Provincial support for Indigenous engagement.

Continued provincial support helped sustain dedicated Indigenous Pathways internship opportunities, including Research Manitoba support for 50 Indigenous Pathways internship units over 2026–2029, representing up to $500,000, and Saskatchewan support for 15 Indigenous Pathways internships, with funding of up to $150,000.

From psychology student to Indigenous energy expert

Mesa Kennedy came to energy research from an unlikely starting point: a psychology degree with a minor in Indigenous Health Studies from the University of Regina. Her Indigenous Pathways internship with the First Nations Power Authority and the Petroleum Technology Research Centre led to a place at the University of Saskatchewan's Nuclear Energy Management School, one of 50 students selected from more than 200 applicants nationwide, and then home to Carry the Kettle Nakoda Nation, where she now serves as Assistant Land Manager.



"Although I was initially unfamiliar with the energy sector, the internship quickly immersed me in the challenges that isolated communities face in securing reliable heat and energy. That experience became a defining one, ultimately leading me back to my nation, Carry the Kettle Nakoda Nation, where I serve as the new Assistant Land Manager."

— Mesa Kennedy, Mitacs Intern, University of Regina, and First Nations Power Authority

Peer-to-peer mentoring.

The Women in STEM Peer-to-Peer Mentorship Program, also referred to as the Accelerate Peer Mentoring pilot, launched in November 2024 and continued to demonstrate the value of structured peer support for women in STEM and first-time Mitacs Accelerate participants. Mitacs will continue to expand structured peer support as part of its ongoing commitment under the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan.

The pilot engaged 56 participants across 28 mentor–mentee pairs. Mentors reported growth in leadership, communication, and self-confidence, with 95% reporting growth in these areas and 95% indicating they would recommend the program. Among mentees, 100% said they would consider becoming mentors in the future, and 87% intended to stay in touch with their mentor.



"Being a mentor in the Accelerate Peer Mentoring program has been incredibly rewarding! Supporting my mentee as they navigate research challenges, industry collaborations, and career growth has reinforced the importance of guidance and shared experiences in STEM. Building a genuine mentor-mentee relationship has strengthened my leadership skills, and it's deeply fulfilling to witness my mentee grow and succeed with newly gained confidence in their journey."

— Nina-Francesca Farac, Mitacs Accelerate Peer Mentor



Expanding the inclusive innovation ecosystem through partnerships

Over the three years of the IIAP, partnerships became a practical mechanism for expanding access, strengthening representation, and connecting equity-deserving communities to research and innovation opportunities. This work evolved from early relationship-building into more intentional ecosystem-building across four areas:

- Inclusive partnership and supplier development
- Expanded access for equity-deserving researchers and communities
- Tailored pathways for Indigenous and Black scholars in engineering and technology
- Culturally grounded undergraduate research pathways through the Indigenous Research Award (INDRA)

YEAR 1

Inclusive partnership and supplier development. Mitacs began building a more inclusive partnership ecosystem by engaging organizations that support equity-deserving researchers and entrepreneurs, consulting with postsecondary institutions on EDI, and identifying opportunities to diversify participation in innovation.

- Partnered with five organizations supporting equity-deserving researchers and entrepreneurs.
- Developed an initial list of 52 diverse suppliers.
- Embedded EDI expectations into the Request for Proposal process through the Mitacs Corporate Financial Policy.

YEAR 2

Expanded reach for equity-deserving researchers and communities.

Mitacs' partnerships became more structured and targeted, creating stronger entry points for Black researchers, Indigenous partners, and social innovation projects.

Deepened collaboration with the Canadian Black Scientists Network (CBSN) to support access and representation for Black researchers in STEM.

Engaged more than 12 Indigenous economic and educational partners through the Arctic Indigenous Investment Conference.

Adopted a standard definition of social innovation to better align partnership intake with inclusive innovation goals.

Together, these efforts helped move partnership development from informal engagement toward more deliberate ecosystem-building, supplier inclusion, and community-connected innovation.

YEAR 2

Tailored access pathways through IBET.

The Indigenous Black Engineering Technology (IBET) PHD partnership project helped reduce barriers to research mobility, industry-linked opportunities, and cross-institutional collaboration for Indigenous and Black scholars in engineering and technology.

Since 2023, Mitacs-supported IBET activity has included seven IBET Connect awards, two outbound Globalink Research Award projects, two BSI projects totaling four internship units, and four Accelerate or Accelerate Entrepreneur projects totaling 12 internship units.

Mitacs' sustained presence at IBET annual conferences helped maintain visibility, relationship continuity, and engagement with IBET leadership, Fellows, and partner institutions.



YEAR 2

Culturally grounded undergraduate research pathways through INDRA. The Indigenous Research Award (INDRA) pilot created more accessible and culturally grounded pathways for Indigenous students to enter research, build confidence, and progress into graduate and professional opportunities.

Implemented since 2021 with institutions including the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Northern British Columbia.

Supported paid, flexible research roles alongside promotion, supervisor matching, application support, cohort programming, land-based learning, research celebrations, and mini-symposiums.

Helped reduce access barriers for students balancing time in home communities, ceremonial commitments, family responsibilities, or other scheduling needs.

At the University of Saskatchewan, INDRA has supported strong progression outcomes: since 2021, University of Saskatchewan has had 20 INDRA recipients; of the 12 recipients who had completed their undergraduate degrees by the time of reporting, 83% had gone on to pursue graduate studies or professional colleges, and most continued to work with their original INDRA supervisors.

INDRA also demonstrated the breadth of Indigenous-led and Indigenous student research across disciplines, with University of Saskatchewan recipients contributing to Indigenous Studies, Political Studies, Geological Sciences, Biomedical Neuroscience, Geography, Psychology, Health Sciences, Public Health, Veterinary Medicine, Biology, Sociology, Biomedical Sciences, Linguistics, and History.

YEAR 3

Sustained access to pathways and accountability. Mitacs placed greater emphasis on using partnerships to support participation outcomes, economic opportunity, and ecosystem connectivity.

Renewed the Mitacs–IBET memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreement, effective in 2026, to continue tailored access to Accelerate, BSI, and Globalink Research Award opportunities for IBET Fellows.

Maintained IBET Connect for 2026–27, with an evaluation and extension decision planned by March 2027.

Confirmed 2025–26 activity included one IBET Connect award and two BSI projects totaling four internship units.

Early 2026–27 activity included two additional Accelerate or Accelerate Entrepreneur projects involving IBET Fellows, representing seven internship units.

These results show how the partnership has moved beyond relationship-building toward a sustained access pathway for Indigenous and Black scholars in engineering and technology.

YEAR 3

Overall impact.

Across the IIAP, partnerships helped expand access, connect equity-deserving communities to research and innovation opportunities, support Indigenous and Black scholars, strengthen supplier diversity, and build a more diverse and collaborative innovation landscape.

Partnership Spotlight: Mitacs and the IBET PhD Project

Mitacs renewed its partnership with the Indigenous and Black Engineering and Technology (IBET) PhD Project in 2026 through a three-year agreement running to 2029, extending IBET Fellows' access to Accelerate, Business Strategy Internship, and Globalink Research Award opportunities and continuing the IBET Connect Award. Mitacs industry partners benefit from a reduced financial contribution when they host IBET Fellows, lowering barriers to research placements. Launched in 2021 by six Ontario engineering and technology faculties, IBET now spans 18 universities across Canada.



"The IBET PhD Project was created to address systemic barriers and create meaningful pathways for Indigenous and Black scholars in engineering and technology. Our continued collaboration with Mitacs expands opportunities for our Fellows to gain research experience, build networks, and pursue careers across academia, industry, and beyond."

— Dr. Tiz Mekonnen, Director, IBET PhD Project

Strengthening Mitacs' internal foundations for inclusive innovation

Mitacs' external progress under the IIAP was supported by internal work to embed equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation across workforce systems, learning, policies, and culture. These foundations helped build the organizational capacity needed to deliver inclusive innovation more consistently.

50–30 Challenge

Representation, data, and accountability. A Government of Canada initiative promoting gender parity (50%) and increased representation (30%) of equity deserving groups in leading roles.

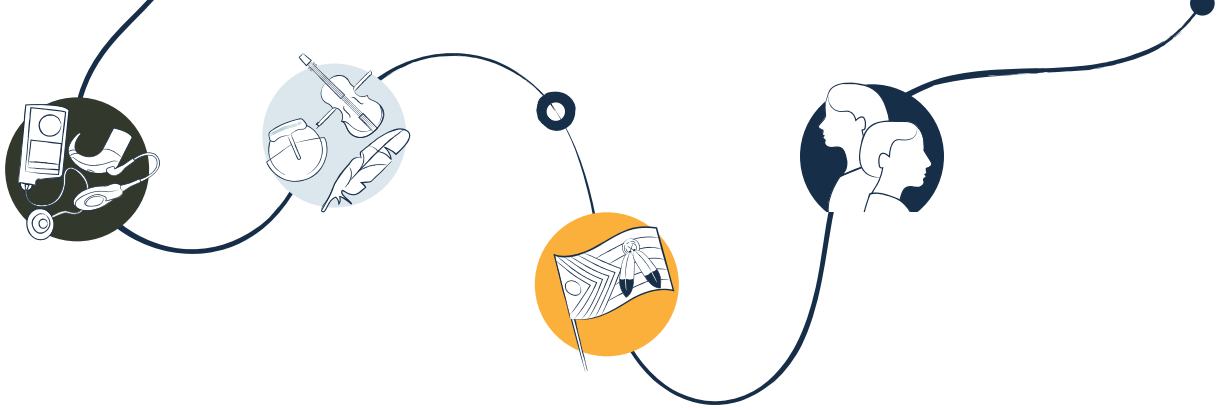
Mitacs used the 50–30 Challenge to strengthen workforce representation tracking and inform action on recruitment, pay transparency, inclusive policies, and leadership accountability. This work helped move EDI from a values-based commitment into a more measurable internal practice.

YEAR 1	Established Mitacs' first comprehensive workforce demographic and inclusion baseline with Diversio, achieving a **74.7% response rate** and an overall inclusion score of **72.3%**, **11.8 points above industry benchmarks**.
YEAR 2	Continued to meet or exceed national benchmarks for several equity-deserving groups and embedded 50–30 Challenge commitments through internal policy updates.
YEAR 3	Continued tracking representation across the organization, including senior management and the Board of Directors, to strengthen workforce planning and accountability. Our data showed gender parity among the 20 individuals who self-identified in the Board of Directors and Mitacs Executive Committee, alongside representation across equity-deserving groups.



External recognition

Mitacs received Diversio's 2024 Workplace Impact Award for advancing equity and inclusion.



EDI learning and internal knowledge-sharing.

Mitacs delivered EDI learning through all-staff sessions, targeted training, leadership coaching, and internal tools that helped build shared language and support more consistent inclusive practices across teams.

13 learning sessions across the IIAP focused on EDI, allyship, reconciliation, representation, and accessibility.	Average attendance was **51%** of Mitacs staff per session over the past three years.
Inclusive leadership coaching supported **11 senior leaders**.	The EDI Hub and articles supported ongoing communication, resources, and knowledge-sharing.

Organization-wide learning and engagement through dates of significance.

Dates of significance created recurring opportunities for employees to learn, reflect, and connect EDI topics to Mitacs' work. Sessions and communications tied to **Asian Heritage Month**, **Pride Month**, the **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**, **Latin American Heritage Month**, **Black History Month**, **International Women's Day**, **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**, and the **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** helped establish a more sustained rhythm of awareness-building and dialogue.

Truth and Reconciliation-informed communications and training.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation became a recurring learning anchor within Mitacs' internal communications and training. Across the IIAP, Mitacs moved from introductory awareness-building to a more coordinated campaign-style approach, culminating in a Year 3 session on economic reconciliation that drew 176 attendees in September 2025.

Employee recognition and inclusive culture–building.

Mitacs launched its inaugural Employee Recognition Awards at the 2025–2026 All Staff Retreat in January 2026 to recognize contributions across Diversity & Healthy Workplace, Early Excellence, Impact, Innovation, Mentorship, and One Mitacs.

The Diversity & Healthy Workplace award reinforces behaviours that advance inclusive practices, respectful collaboration, and a supportive workplace culture.





Indigenous recruitment and retention.

Internal efforts to support Indigenous recruitment and retention progressed alongside external Indigenous engagement. By Year 3, Mitacs had advanced an organization-wide Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Strategy aligned with broader reconciliation commitments and Indigenous Pathways programming.

The strategy supports more relationship-based, culturally responsive, and barrier-conscious approaches to attracting, supporting, and retaining Indigenous employees.

It also positions Mitacs to strengthen Indigenous representation over time and support a workplace where Indigenous employees, and all employees, can belong, contribute, and thrive.

Priorities for the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Strategy:

Applicant tracking system: Implement tracking of Indigenous applicants with secure data governance and reporting.

Job descriptions: Update templates to be more inclusive, flexible, and relevant to Indigenous applicants.

Interview process: Strengthen evaluation criteria to reduce bias and support diverse, inclusive hiring panels.

Partnerships: Identify and begin engagement with Indigenous organizations to support recruitment pipelines.

Training: Develop a plan to build staff capacity in cultural safety and inclusive hiring practices.

Indigenous Leadership Circle

In the final year of the IIAP implementation, Mitacs began laying the groundwork for an Indigenous Leadership Circle, a commitment embedded in the organizations 2026–2030 Strategic Plan. The circle is currently in development and is intended to support Mitacs in strengthening relationships with Indigenous students, entrepreneurs, organizations, and governments, while deepening the organizations understanding of their priorities and needs. This work is foundational to Mitacs' continued progress toward meaningful reconciliation and partnership with Indigenous peoples.



Conclusion

The Inclusive Innovation Action Plan was a three-year roadmap for building the foundations, relationships, tools, and practices needed to make inclusive innovation more consistent across the organization. As this first plan period concludes, these commitments move into their next phase through Mitacs' 2026–2030 Strategic Plan and the ongoing commitments, initiatives, and partnerships that will carry this work forward.

Over the past three years, the IIAP helped Mitacs strengthen access and support for equity-deserving students and researchers, deepen Indigenous engagement, expand inclusive partnerships, improve accessibility practices, and build internal capacity through learning, policy, data, and accountability. These efforts created important momentum, but they also made clear that inclusive innovation is ongoing work.

The conclusion of the Inclusive Innovation Action Plan demonstrates Mitacs' strategic commitment to embedding *equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and reconciliation* across programs, partnerships, workforce systems, and culture. Mitacs' continued task is to ensure that inclusive innovation is not treated as a separate initiative, but as a sustained way of designing programs, building partnerships, supporting participants, and shaping organizational culture.

Thank you to our funding partners

Canada

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British Columbia

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New Nouveau Brunswick

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Nova Scotia

Ontario

innovationpei

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Yukon

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