



Black Business and Professional Association
Entreprise noire et Association Professionnelle

Rise Up

A Study of 700 Black
Women Entrepreneurs

RISE UP
PITCH COMPETITION

CASA
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IJWL
de SEDULOUS WOMEN LEADERS
Immigrant Women Making Impact With Grit



Women
Entrepreneurship
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Founded in 1983, the BBPA is a non-profit, charitable organization that addresses equity and opportunity for the Black community in business, employment, education, and economic development. The BBPA represents Black entrepreneurs across a broad spectrum. The BBPA has developed specialized culturally appropriate support programs to meet its constituents' needs. The BBPA Harry Jerome Awards are the most prestigious fundraising and scholarship effort in the Canadian Black community. They recognize and honour achievement nationally within the Black Canadian community. The BBPA provides scholarships to Black youth to further access to higher education and drive the overall success of the entire business community. Financial literacy is a particularly important part of this effort, that is why the BBPA heavily invests within this programming sector. The Business Advisory, Implementation, and Development Series (BAIDS) is a new, customized program intended to train and expand the capabilities of Black entrepreneurs. The end goal of BAIDS is to prepare Black businesses for ongoing success both during and post-COVID, and the BBPA has taken a lead in creating and presenting the program.



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Casa Foundation for International Development is a Canadian not-for-profit founded in 2011 to advance women, youths, and emerging leaders through economic, entrepreneurship, and business development initiatives. Casa Foundation offers support to vertical sectors in the area of health, infrastructure, and education. Casa foundation's social impact programs and initiatives are executed through the trifold approach of Partnership, Sponsorship, and Mentorship.



SEDULOUSWOMENLEADERS.NET

Founded in 2018, de Sedulous Women Leaders (dSWL) is a national network (social enterprise for profit) whose mission is to get as many immigrant Black women to rise to the T.O.P. of their professional career, as well as their entrepreneurial and political journey, by facilitating the delivery of mastermind classes, private coaching, mentorship, free quarterly events, and an annual conference. With six City Chapters (Grande Prairie, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, and Surrey in United Kingdom) and a network of over 500 women members, de Sedulous Women Leaders' goal is to elevate the next generation of women leaders to support emerging innovators, creators, changemakers, and disruptors. The free quarterly events connect women leaders together to foster networking, collaboration, and partnerships.

Supporting Partner



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The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) is a national network and accessible digital platform for sharing research, resources, and leading strategies. With ten regional hubs and a network of more than 250 organizations, WEKH is designed to address the needs of diverse women entrepreneurs across regions and across sectors. In response to COVID-19, WEKH adopted an agitator role connecting women entrepreneurs and support organizations across the country and led network calls and training sessions. WEKH's advanced technology platform, powered by Magnet, will enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs and the organizations who serve them by linking them to resources and best practices from across the country.

With the support of the Government of Canada, WEKH will spread its expertise from coast to coast, enabling service providers, academics, government, and industry to enhance their support for women entrepreneurs. Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, in collaboration with Ryerson's Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship and the Ted Rogers School of Management, is leading a team of researchers, business support organizations, and key stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

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Executive Summary

There is limited research on Black women entrepreneurs in Canada. The research that does exist is often based on small sample sizes, is based on immigrant women, or is entirely qualitative in nature. This report adds to the literature by highlighting the unique experiences of Black women entrepreneurs in Canada. It is based on an analysis of data on 700 Black women entrepreneurs—the largest undertaken in Canada, using a purposive sample based on the 2020–2021 Rise Up Pitch Competition applicants. The report aims to highlight the demographic attributes of Black women entrepreneurs in Canada, their businesses, their inspirations and motivations to start businesses, the barriers that they face when starting or scaling their businesses, and their achievements as business owners. The report also examines the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the businesses of Black women entrepreneurs. The report concludes by listing actions at the macro, meso, and micro level that can support Black women entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial journey.

When looking at the demographic attributes of Black women entrepreneurs, this study found that 60 percent of this population are immigrants with the majority indicating they are of African or Caribbean descent. They also tend to be young in age and more educated than the general population of Black women in Canada. Moreover, almost half of applicants indicated they do not have dependent children.

Examining the business profiles of Black women entrepreneurs, it is evident that the majority of businesses are new, as 50 percent were established in 2020 or 2021. Businesses tend to operate from home, and almost 80 percent are online. The businesses also are small in size, with the majority having no employees.

Quantitative findings state that Black women entrepreneurs' primary motivations include finding an opportunity to provide products or services (87.9%), the desire for increased work flexibility (73.1%), and finding an unexpected opportunity (61.3%). Qualitative findings highlight family and community influences, both positive and negative personal experiences and passion, and flexibility and freedom as motivating factors.

Black women entrepreneurs also shared their greatest achievements as business owners. Many indicated their key achievements as entrepreneurial success (including developing the courage to start a businesses, particularly amid the pandemic, and the positive feedback they receive on products and services), the ability to innovate and develop products, and feelings of overall self-fulfillment.

The report further explores the barriers to business development and growth experienced by Black women entrepreneurs across Canada. Findings indicate that funding is a key barrier to Black women entrepreneurs' ability to develop and grow their businesses. More than 80 percent of Black women entrepreneurs have used personal financing to fund their businesses. Entrepreneurial needs include general business guidance and mentorship, funding, and staff and team assistance.

The study also examined the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black women entrepreneurs and their businesses. The quantitative findings highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased online presence (45.3%), order and event cancellations (34%), restricted spending due to uncertainty (29%), and a decrease in sales (28.9%), among others. The qualitative findings highlight that the pandemic has caused business slowdown, disruptions, and a decrease in services.

Introduction

Black women entrepreneurs across Canada often experience barriers to entrepreneurship in the form of systemic inequalities and unequal access to supports¹. Existing disparities have been exacerbated amid the pandemic, and Black women entrepreneurs have experienced the compounded effects of unequal access to basic infrastructure, as well as the negative effects of school and daycare closures and the burden of unpaid work in the home.² Moreover, many Black women own and operate businesses in the service sector and are thus impacted by pandemic-related closures and disruptions.³

Despite barriers to entrepreneurship and business growth posed by the pandemic, Black women entrepreneurs continue to develop successful businesses and engage with consumers. This report provides an overview of literature focusing on the experiences of Black women entrepreneurs across Canada and their entrepreneurial successes, as well as the barriers they face to business development and growth. This report further provides a snapshot of Black women entrepreneurs' demographic and business characteristics, as well as the motivations, barriers, and successes they experience. This report presents a way forward and recommendations for supporting Black women entrepreneurs at societal, organizational, and individual levels.

The Black Community in Canada

The Black identity is fluid and has been “shaped by historical and ongoing processes of racialization”.⁴ The Black population represents 3.5 percent of the Canadian population and 15.6 percent of the racialized population in Canada and has doubled in size in the span of 20 years.⁵ It should be noted that the Black experience is not homogenous, and there are significant variations in history, culture, beliefs, places of origins, language and religion. According to the 2016 Census, approximately 56 percent of Black people were not born in Canada, and the most common ethnic origins reported by the Black community in Canada are African and Caribbean origins.⁶ Despite the stated heterogeneity of the Black experience, Black individuals share a common “prejudicial experience”⁷ in Canadian society, where anti-Black racism is pervasive.

Anti-Black racism has socio-economic consequences. The Black population in Canada has higher poverty rates, lower employment rates, lower median annual wages, and lower educational attainment compared to the total Canadian population.⁸ The 2017 Black Experience Project found that one-third of respondents reported challenges in the workplace including overt anti-Black racism or discrimination.⁹ Moreover, 80 percent of participants reported experiencing one or several forms of microaggressions in their day-to-day interactions at work.¹⁰ Despite the systemic and individual racism that the Black population in Canada endures, Black individuals also demonstrate high levels of resilience.¹¹ Black individuals were more likely to indicate that after difficult experiences, they are able to continue going about their life as they normally would, that they always learned something from the experiences, and that they always bounce back quickly after hard times.¹²

Black women face compounded difficulties in Canada as they have to navigate the experiences of being racialized as well as being a woman. Data from Statistics Canada (Table 1) shows that Black women are less likely to have a bachelor’s degree or higher when compared to other women in Canada. Working-age Black women are also less likely to be employed compared to other women, Black men, and other men in Canada (Figure 1). When comparing median annual income across major cities in Canada, Table 2 shows that Black women have lower median annual income when compared to other women, Black men, and other men in Canada. In terms of the corporate landscape, the 2020 DiversityLeads study examined the state of diversity on corporate boards and found that out of 1,600 corporate board of directors in Canada, only 13 members were Black, and only 2 were Black women.¹³

Despite the systemic and individual racism that the Black population in Canada endures, Black individuals also demonstrate high levels of resilience

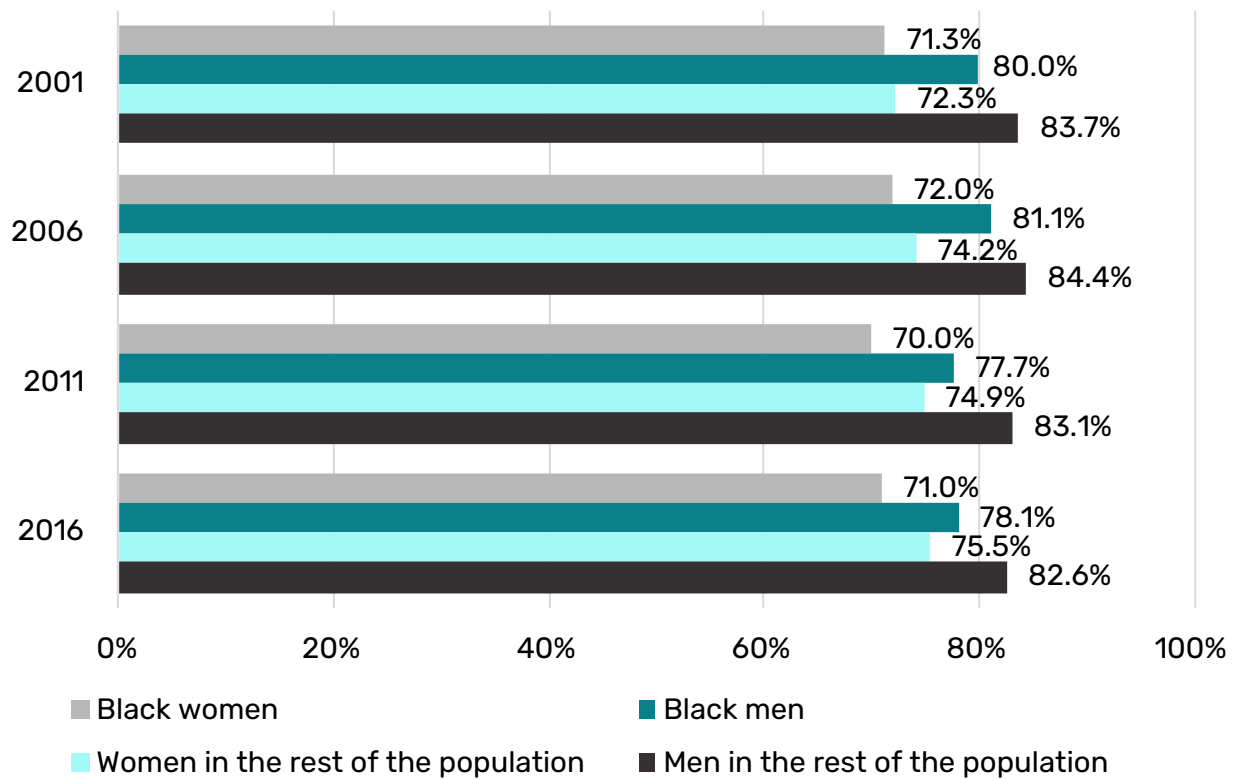
TABLE 1
Percentage with a Bachelor’s Level or Above, Individuals Aged 25 to 59 Years, Canada, 2016

Population	Percentage with bachelor’s level or above
Black women	27.5%
Women in the rest of the population	32.7%
Black men	27.7%
Men in the rest of the population	26.7%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2020¹⁴

FIGURE 1

Employment Rates for Individuals Aged 25 to 59 Years in Canada, 2001 to 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2020¹⁵

TABLE 2

Median Annual Wages in Major Canadian Cities, Individuals aged 25 to 59, 2016

City	Black women	Women in the rest of the population	Black men	Men in the rest of the population
Montreal	\$30,710	\$39,154	\$34,243	\$50,276
Calgary	\$35,131	\$48,044	\$48,553	\$69,882
Vancouver	\$38,228	\$39,466	\$42,961	\$55,188
Toronto	\$39,301	\$42,734	\$43,695	\$56,648

Source: Statistics Canada, 2020¹⁶

Black Entrepreneurs

There is limited research in Canada on Black entrepreneurship and even less on Black women entrepreneurs. Recent data from the Labour Force Survey shows that Black people in Canada are less likely to be self-employed than the non-racialized population in Canada.¹⁷ The low levels of entrepreneurship among the Black community have been attributed to lack of information on where to acquire funding,¹⁸ financing difficulties,¹⁹ and discrimination.²⁰ A study examining Black businesses in Canada found that Black entrepreneurs tend to be young, have fairly new businesses (with 75 percent of the businesses established less than four years ago), and tend to have small businesses (with the majority having only one employee).²¹ Moreover, this study also found that Black entrepreneurs were often not aware of funding opportunities. For example, only 22 percent of Black entrepreneurs knew about the Business Development Bank of Canada or Export Development Canada,²² despite those organizations offering the largest federally funded programs that support businesses in Canada.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been unevenly felt, with Black people in Canada facing high rates of unemployment during this time.²³ Data from the Labour Force Survey shows that the unemployment rate during the pandemic for Black individuals was 70 percent higher than that of their non-racialized counterparts.²⁴ When examining the financial impacts of the pandemic on Black families, data shows that Black individuals were twice as likely as non-racialized individuals to report living in a household where it has been difficult to meet basic financial commitments (33.2% versus 16.6%).²⁵ Moreover, recent data from January 2021 shows that working-age Black mothers with a child younger than six are less likely to be active in the labour market when compared to their non-racialized counterparts (75.9% versus 81.1%).²⁶

Data from a survey conducted by the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) on 120 members across Ontario shows alarming results regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black businesses (Table 3). When compared to members of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), BBPA members were much more likely to indicate that they do not think they would qualify for CEBA, that CERB will not help, they are worried about permanent closures, and that they lack capacity to take on debt. Additionally, the pandemic has had more negative effects on Black women entrepreneurs than other entrepreneurs, especially when it comes to access to financial and other supports.²⁷ While many Black business owners have struggled during the pandemic, some Black entrepreneurs have managed to respond to the pandemic in creative ways.²⁸ These include pivoting their businesses online quickly, starting up new businesses, and using the pandemic to transition their part-time business into a full-time venture.

TABLE 3

Survey Results from the Black Business and Professional Association

	Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)	Black Business & Professional Association
Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will not help	37%	80%
Do not think they will qualify for a Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)	20%	80%
Are fully open	20%	10%
Do not have cash flow to pay April bills	30%	80%
Worried about permanent closure	39%	85%
Unsure they will be able to reopen	32%	60%
Can survive less than a month	25%	85%
Believe government should make emergency money available to businesses	86%	98%
Lack capacity to take on debt	56%	96%

Source: Black Business and Professional Association, 2020²⁹

Black Women Entrepreneurs

Research on Black women entrepreneurs in Canada is limited. The research that does exist shows that Black men are twice as likely to be self-employed compared to Black women in Canada (12.0% versus 6.1%).³⁰ Businesses led by Black women tend to be newer and smaller in size (employing up to five people) compared those led by Black men.³¹ Moreover, Black entrepreneurs who are women tend to be younger than their counterparts who are men.³² Approximately half of businesses owned by Black women in Toronto are in the health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, finance and insurance, professional services, or retail sectors.³³

Black women entrepreneurs face compounded difficulties when entering and succeeding in entrepreneurship. Thus, employing an intersectional lens is crucial for understanding the challenges and opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs.³⁴ For example, research on Black Ghanaian female immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada found that their principal motivation for entering entrepreneurship was family considerations (i.e., the opportunity to spend more time with their families).³⁵ This is often a concern for women entrepreneurs. The study also found that Ghanaian women entrepreneurs in Canada faced hardships which they attributed to their gender, skin colour, and accent. Others have attributed language barriers as an important differentiating factor between Black Caribbean entrepreneurs and Black African entrepreneurs.³⁶ While discrimination based on accents affect individuals of both Caribbean and African descent, the majority of Caribbean individuals

indicate English as their first language.³⁷ Despite these hardships, Ghanaian entrepreneurs showed resiliency and developed coping strategies that included networking through immigrant associations and employing “faceless”^a business strategies to gain new clients and keep existing ones.³⁸

Examining barriers to entrepreneurship, Black women entrepreneurs face difficulties in accessing start-up capital and tend to use unconventional funding sources to finance their businesses.³⁹ Moreover, Black women entrepreneurs tend to have social networks with individuals who share characteristics with themselves and therefore do not have access to information in the same way that someone with a heterogeneous network does.⁴⁰ However, Black women entrepreneurs also experience upsides to entrepreneurship.⁴¹ Studies examining Black women’s motivations for entering entrepreneurship found that it was an appealing alternative career option and a way to overcome their socioeconomic disadvantages in the labour market.⁴² Black women also use entrepreneurship as a way to fill unmet needs in their communities, including gaps in product and service provisions in the market.⁴³ Moreover, entrepreneurship is an opportunity for Black women to gain increased work–life balance.⁴⁴

^a Facelessness is the strategy of intentionally avoiding sharing identifying characteristics of one’s identity due to fears of discrimination. In the case of Ghanaian immigrant women entrepreneurs, for example, many employed white individuals to be the face of the enterprise and took a backstage role in the operation to avoid discrimination and retain or gain customers (Nkrumah, 2016, refer to reference 38).

Methods

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the profile and experiences of Black women entrepreneurs in Canada. Specifically, the study focuses on understanding the demographic attributes of Black women entrepreneurs, their business profiles, their motivations and inspirations for starting their businesses, the successes they have had, and the barriers they have experienced while starting and growing their businesses. This study also examines the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their businesses.

This report is based on an analysis of English and French data from a sample of 700 Black women entrepreneurs—the largest undertaken in Canada. This is a purposive sample based on applicants to the Rise Up Pitch Competition. Quantitative and qualitative results are presented in the next section.

Leximancer software and manual coding were used to analyze the qualitative responses for the English-speaking sample (n=568). Leximancer employs concept-mapping software which selects concepts among frequently used words and the terms clustered around those words, excluding commonly used words such as “and”.⁴⁵ From these results, prominent concepts are grouped into “themes”.⁴⁶ Although some concepts re-appear in multiple themes,

the underlying term is directly correlated with the relevant theme under which it is situated.⁴⁷ In addition to the Leximancer process, the qualitative data was manually coded and a content analysis was performed to capture nuances within the applicants’ responses. This multi-approach analysis led to the discovery of major themes, which are discussed at length in the qualitative section of the report.

There is no comparable Statistics Canada data on Black women entrepreneurs in Canada, and there is limited information on the profile of Black women entrepreneurs. Therefore, Table 4 compares the Rise Up sample to the Black population in Canada and, where data is available, to Black women in Canada. The Rise Up sample is similar to the Black population in Canada in terms of age, immigrant population, and language (i.e., proportion of Francophones). In examining the regional breakdown, it is evident that the pattern in the study sample generally follows regional patterns of the Black population in Canada. For example, the majority of Black women entrepreneurs in the sample are from Ontario, followed by Quebec and Alberta, similar to the Black population in Canada. However, it should be noted that the Black women entrepreneurs in this study are a highly educated population, with 62.7 percent having a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 27.5 percent of Black women in Canada.

TABLE 4

Comparison of the Sample to the Black Population in Canada

	Black population in Canada	Study sample
Total	Black population in Canada ⁴⁸ : 1,198,540 Black women in Canada ⁴⁹ : 618,447 Self-employed Black women ⁵⁰ : 10,148	700
Age	Median age: 30 ⁵¹	40% of sample were 25–34 years old
Immigrants	60% ⁵²	60%
Francophone	19.6% ⁵³	18.9%
Location of business ⁵⁴		
Ontario	52.4%	61.0%
Quebec	26.6%	16.6%
Alberta	10.8%	10.5%
British Columbia	3.6%	5.2%
Manitoba	2.5%	1.7%
Nova Scotia	1.8%	3.5%
Saskatchewan	1.3%	0.6%
New Brunswick	0.6%	0.5%
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.2%	0.0%
PEI	0.1%	0.3%
Has a bachelor degree or higher	Black women in Canada: 27.5% ⁵⁵	62.7%

Note: Numbers represent total Black population in Canada unless otherwise specified. Numbers do not add up to 100% because data for the territories are not included, as there were no Rise Up applicants from the Canadian territories.

Quantitative Findings

Demographic Attributes of Applicants

Recognizing that Black women entrepreneurs are not a homogenous entity, applicants were asked to identify their ethnicity (Figure 2). The overwhelming majority of participants indicated they were either African (44.7%) or Afro-Caribbean (44.3%). This is consistent with data from Statistics Canada that shows that the most common ethnic origins reported by first- and second-generation Black individuals are African and Caribbean origins⁵⁶. Applicants also identified as North American Black (5.6%), European Black (1.1%), and “other” (4.3%). The “other” category allowed participants to specify, and responses included “Black” or mixed heritage

(i.e., Black and Indigenous, Black and white, etc.). Most of the Black women entrepreneurs studied had either been born in Canada (39.7%) or had been in Canada for more than ten years (37.1%) (Figure 3). Approximately 10 percent of applicants were newcomers to Canada (i.e., been in Canada for five years or less).

As Figure 4 demonstrates, the majority of applicants were in the age ranges of 25–34 and 35–44. Only a small number of applicants were 65 or older. Data from Statistics Canada shows that the Black population tends to be younger than the total Canadian population, with a median age of 29.6 years.⁵⁷

FIGURE 2
Ethnic Origins (n=700)

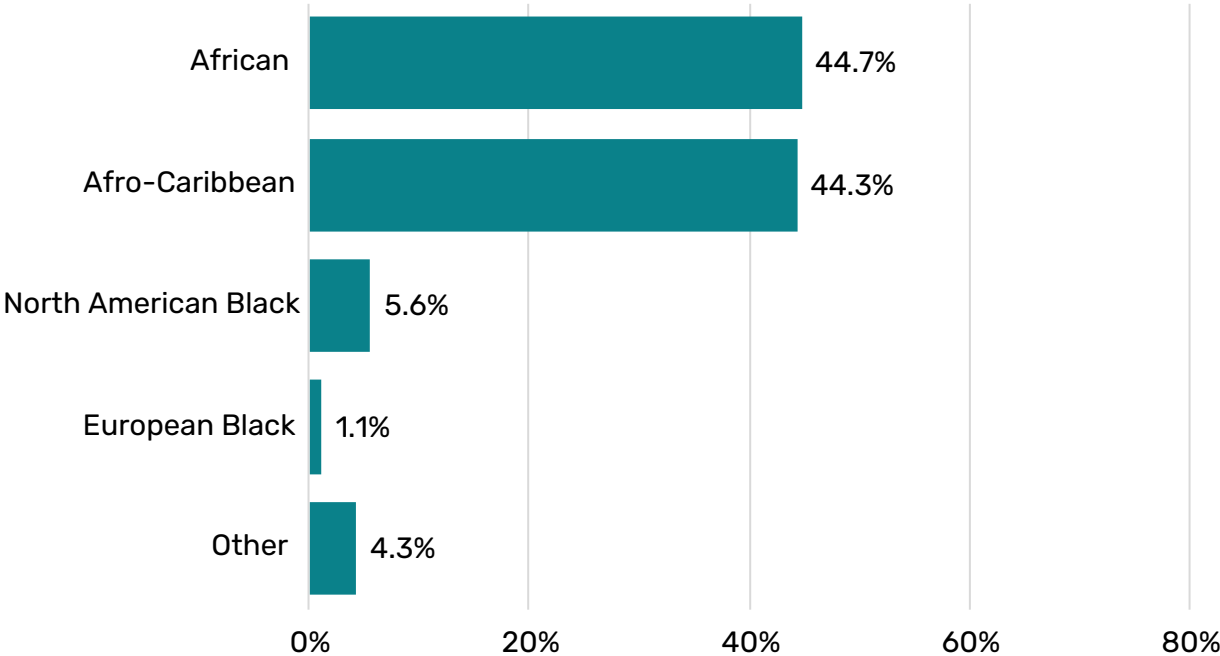
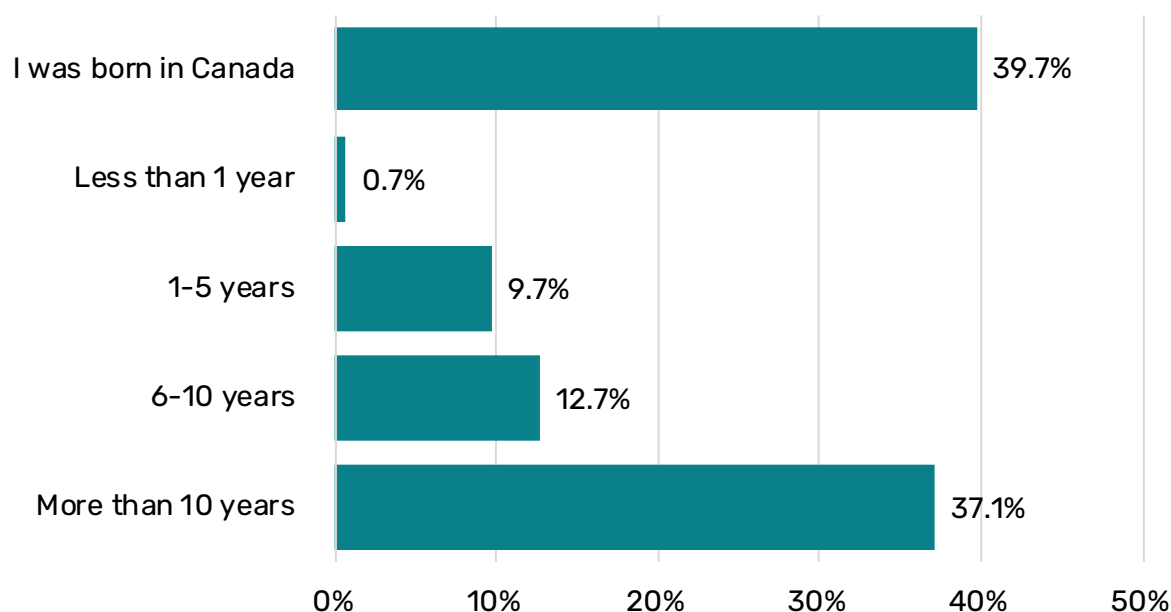


FIGURE 3

Length of Time in Canada (n=700)



The Black women entrepreneurs studied tended to be well-educated, with higher-than-average education levels for working-age Black women in Canada (Figure 5). The majority (62.7%) of the sample had a bachelor's degree or higher, including 37.4 percent who had obtained a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education and an additional 25.3 percent of the applicants had a master's degree (23.3%) or PhD (2.0%). This is in comparison to 27.5 percent of Black women in Canada who have a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁵⁸ Just over one quarter (25.9%) of the sample had a post-secondary certificate or diploma, compared to 29 percent of Black women in Canada.⁵⁹ Applicants were also asked about dependent children (Table 5). Almost half of the applicants (46.6%) indicated that they did not have any children, while two-fifths indicated that they had either one child (19.3%) or two children (19.6%).

Most of the Black women entrepreneurs studied had either been born in Canada (39.7%) or had been in Canada for more than ten years (37.1%). Approximately 10 percent of applicants were newcomers to Canada.

FIGURE 4

Age Group (n=698)

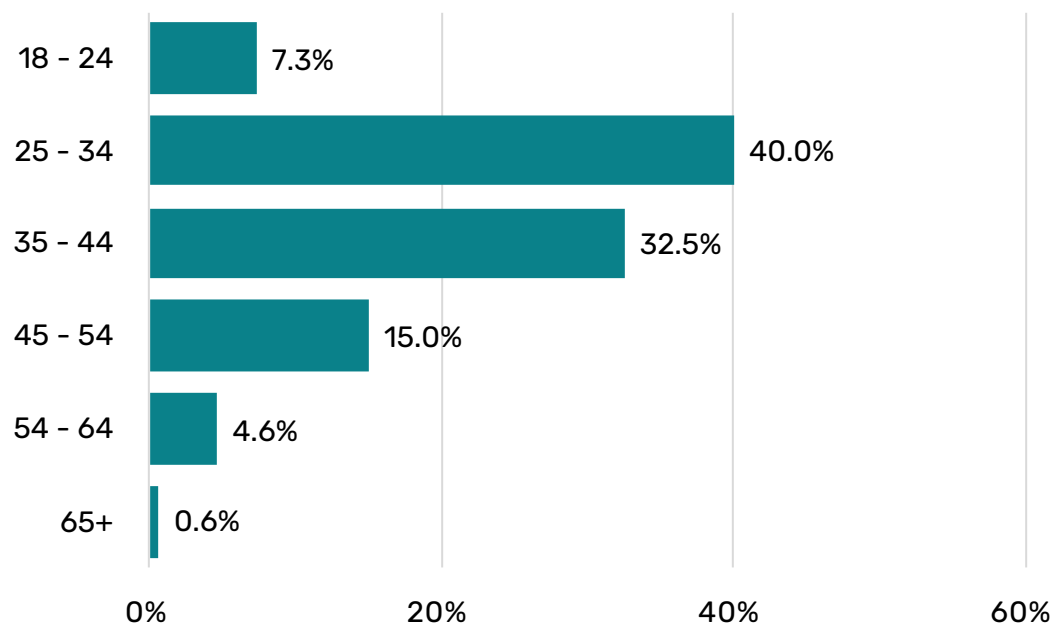


FIGURE 5

Highest Level of Education (n=700)

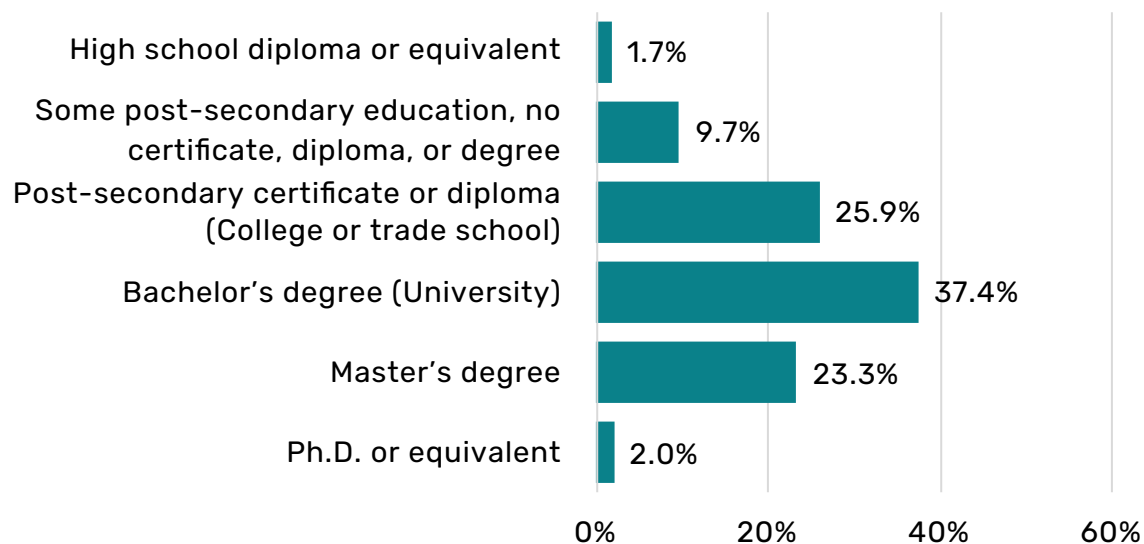


TABLE 5

Number of Dependent Children

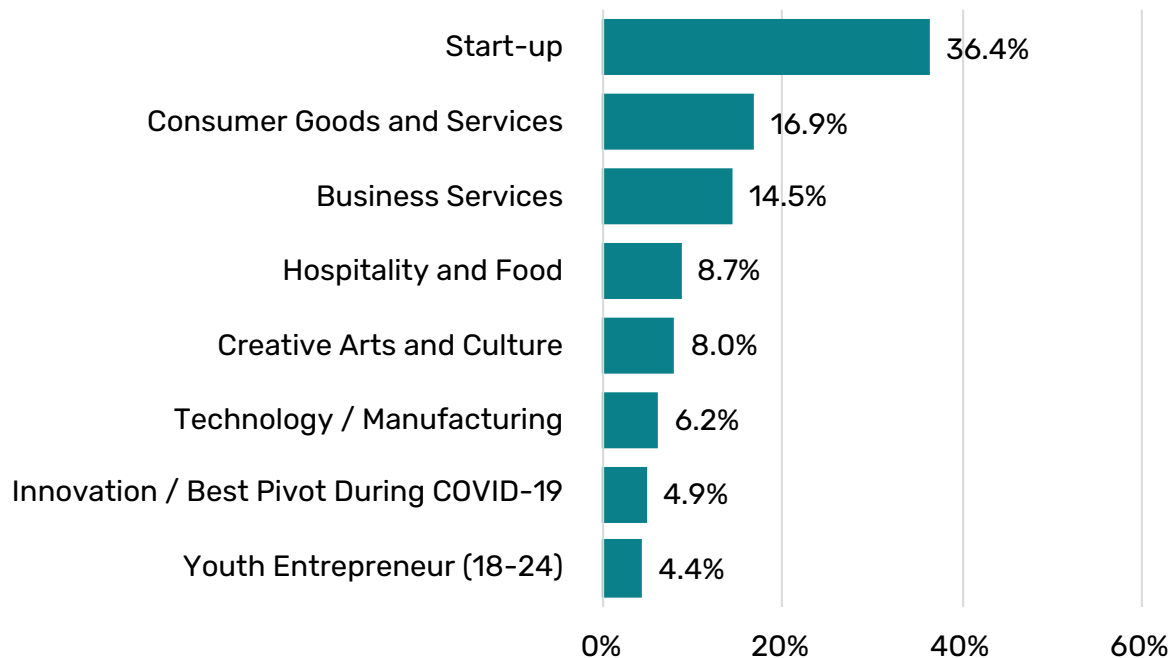
How many children do you have under your care?	n=685
0	46.6%
1	19.3%
2	19.6%
3	9.9%
4+	4.7%

Business Characteristics

In this section, the business profiles of the Black women entrepreneurs studied are examined. The majority of the Black women entrepreneurs applied for the start-up award (36.4%), followed by the consumer goods and services award (16.9%) and business services award (14.5%) (Figure 6). The large number of start-up applications signals that businesses owned by Black women entrepreneurs are fairly new. This finding is reinforced by looking at the year the businesses were established.

FIGURE 6

Award Type Sought (n=698)



The applicant data suggests that almost half of the applicants (47.6%) had an established business (Figure 7). The majority of businesses were new (Figure 8), with 50 percent established in 2020 or 2021 and

38 percent established between 2016 and 2019. Only a small number of business were established prior to 2010.

FIGURE 7

Stage of Business (n=697)

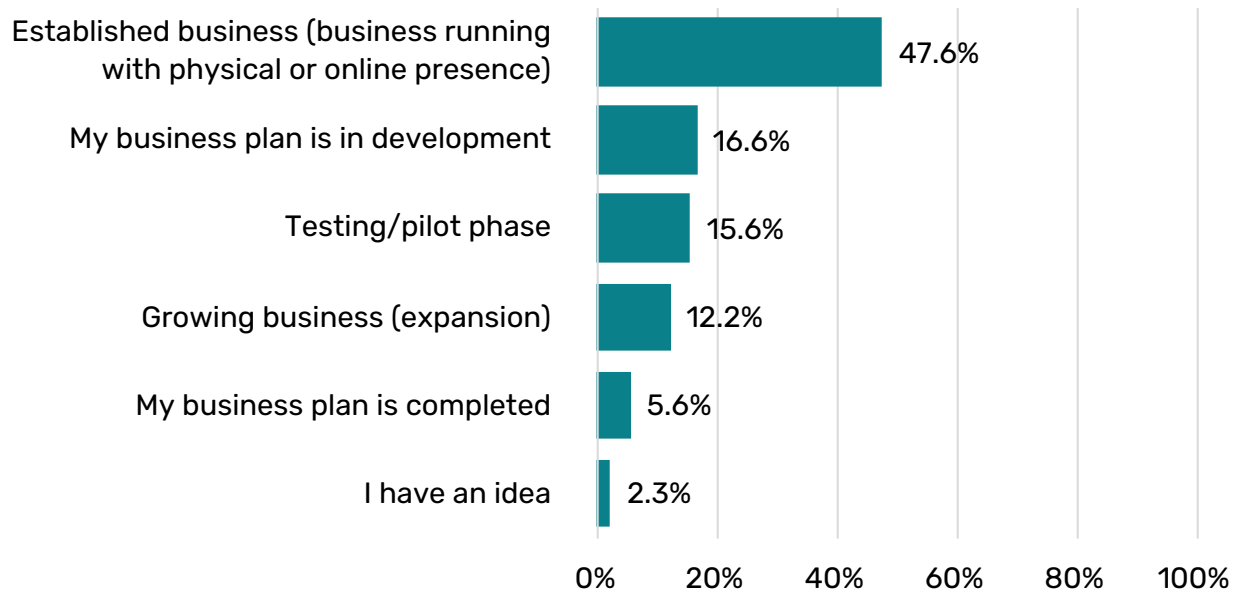


FIGURE 8

Year Business Was Established (n=692)

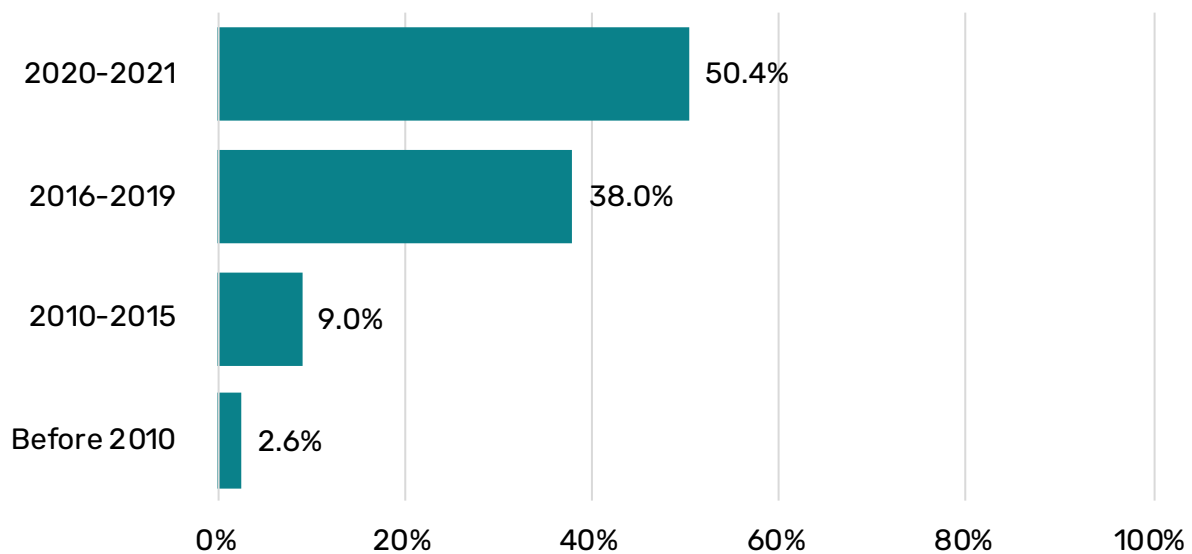
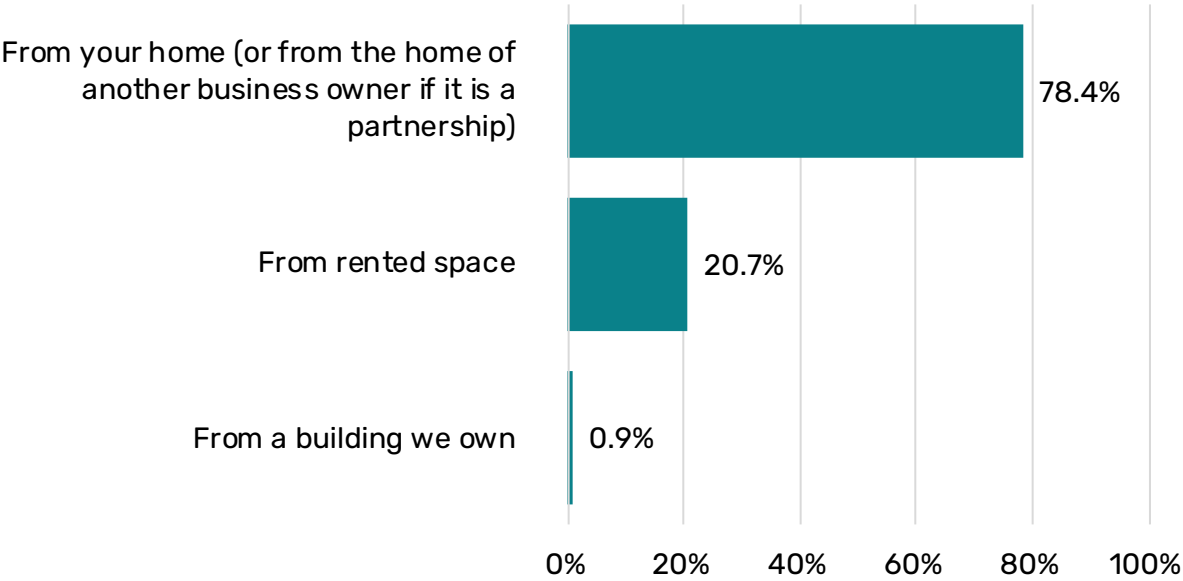


Figure 9 shows that most businesses were operating from the applicant’s home (78.4%). One-fifth of businesses were operating from a rented space, and less than 1 percent

operated from a space owned by the applicant or their business. The majority of businesses were also online (78.8%).

FIGURE 9
Location (Type of Space) of Business Operations (n=694)



The Black women entrepreneurs studied were also asked about the location of their business. The responses were categorized by province (Figure 10) and major Canadian city (Figure 11). It should be noted that none of the Black women entrepreneurs in this study indicated that their location was in Newfoundland and Labrador or any of the

three Canadian territories. When examining the provincial breakdown, it is evident that the majority of businesses were located in Ontario, followed by Quebec and Alberta. Examining location by major Canadian city shows that the majority of businesses were located in the Greater Toronto Area (64.1%).

FIGURE 10

Location (Province) of Business Operations (n=631)

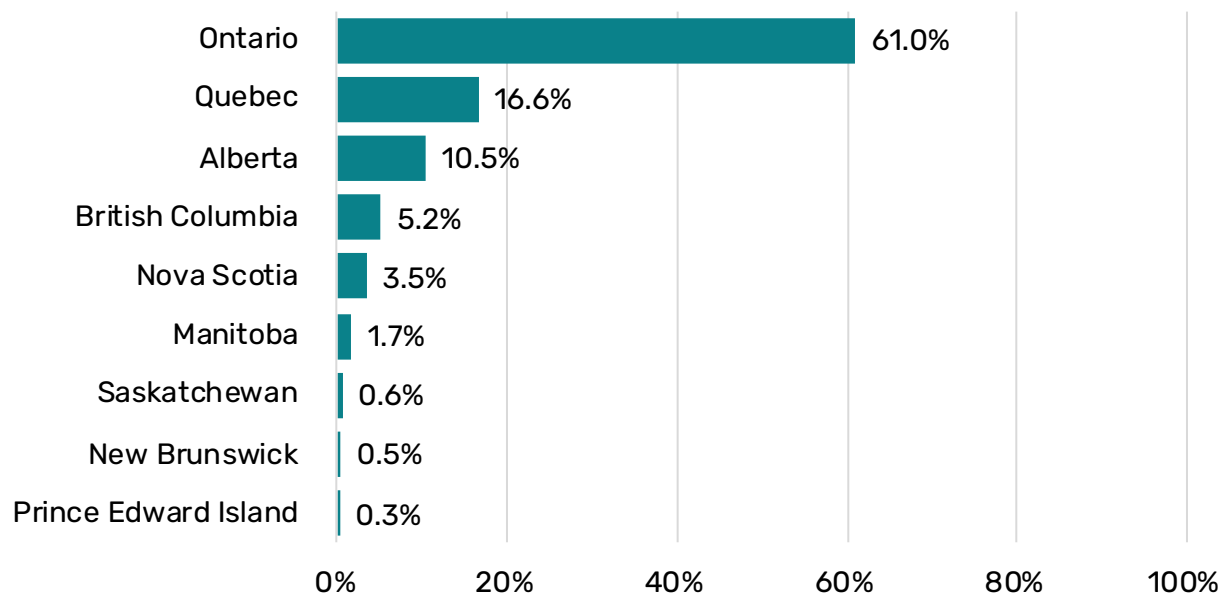
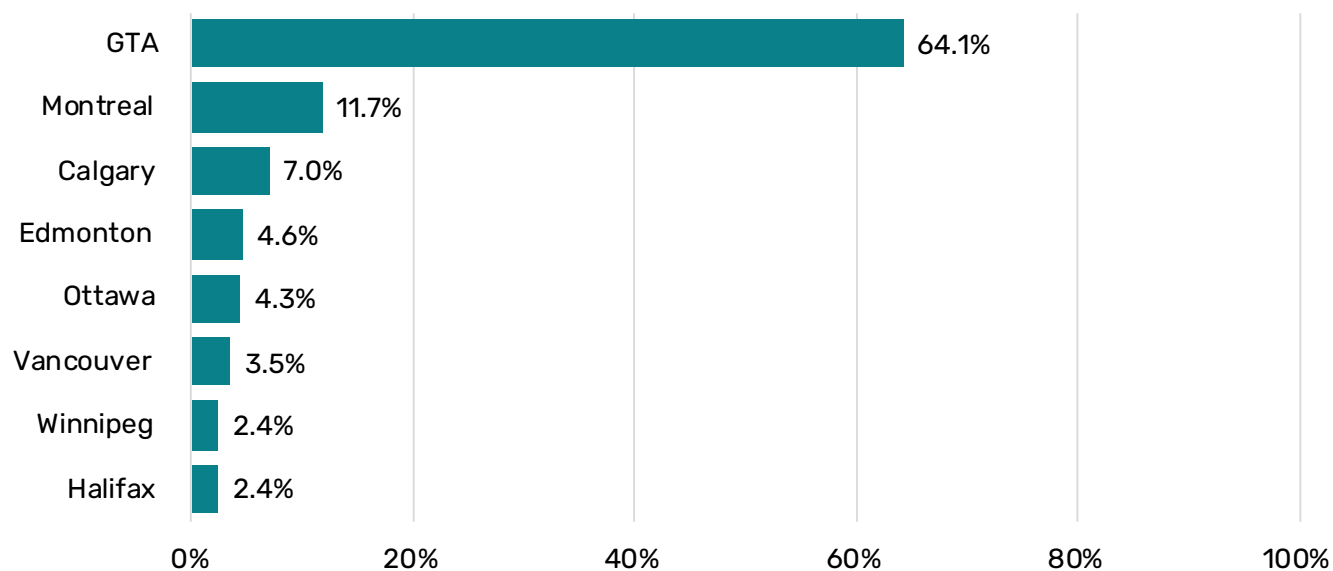


FIGURE 11

Location (Major City) of Business Operations (n=460)



The overwhelming majority of applicants' businesses had no employees working full time (74.8%), part-time (69.4%) or casually (63.1%) (Tables 6–8). As shown in Figure 12, 93 percent of businesses had current annual revenues of less than \$100,000.

TABLE 6
Number of Permanent Full-Time Employees

Other than yourself, on average, how many of your employees are permanent full-time (i.e., 30 hours per week or more)?	n=686
None	74.8%
1–4	23.5
5–10	1.3%
More than 10	0.4%

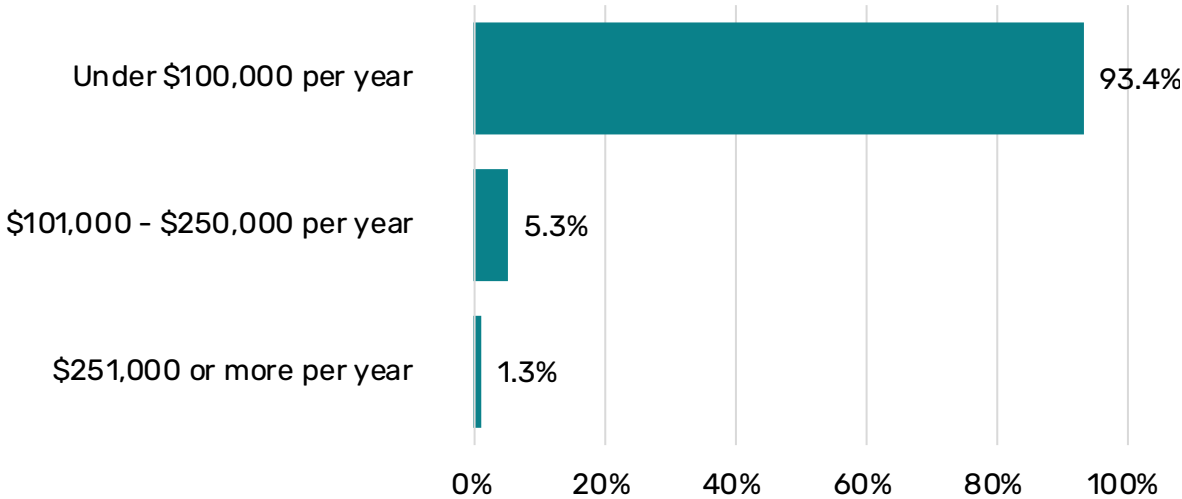
TABLE 7
Number of Permanent Part-Time Employees

Other than yourself, on average, how many of your employees are permanent part-time (i.e., less than 30 hours per week)?	n=676
None	69.4%
1–4	28.1%
5–10	2.2%
More than 10	0.3%

TABLE 8
Number of Temporary Employees

Other than yourself, on average, how many of your employees are casual, temporary?	n=685
None	63.1%
1–4	32.3%
5–10	3.6%
More than 10	1.0%

FIGURE 12
Current Annual Revenues (n=700)



Motivations

When looking at the motivations for starting a business expressed by the Black women entrepreneurs studied (Table 9), opportunities seem to be important, with 88 percent stating that they found an opportunity to provide products or services and 61 percent indicating that they found an unexpected opportunity. Increased flexibility in work was also a major motivator for starting a business, with 73 percent of applicants saying they agreed or strongly agreed that this was one of their motivations for starting a business.

Since the majority of applicants were either born in Canada or had been in Canada for many years, and because their businesses tended to be fairly recently established, it is not surprising that difficulty getting foreign credentials recognized was not a common motivation for starting a business (with 75% saying that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was a motivator). Finally, family responsibilities were not seen as a major motivation in applicants' decision to start a business, and this could be because the majority of applicants did not have dependent children.

TABLE 9

Motivations for Starting a Business

	Number of Responses	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I had difficulty in finding employment	674	40.9%	12.8%	20.5%	14.5%	11.3%
I found an opportunity to provide products or services	686	3.9%	2.2%	6.0%	16.0%	71.9%
I found an unexpected opportunity	677	9.3%	6.1%	23.3%	23.2%	38.1%
I had difficulty getting foreign credentials recognized	666	66.7%	8.0%	17.4%	4.1%	3.9%
I was dissatisfied with my job	669	21.5%	10.5%	22.1%	24.2%	21.7%
My family has a history of business ownership	671	30.3%	10.3%	16.8%	19.5%	23.1%
I needed to supplement income from employment	673	24.8%	9.5%	23.0%	20.2%	22.4%
I had to work from home due to family responsibilities	672	44.6%	10.6%	18.2%	11.3%	15.3%
I wanted increased flexibility in my work	674	11.1%	3.7%	12.0%	23.1%	50.0%

Note: Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Barriers

When examining the barriers applicants faced while operating or growing their business (Table 10), the overwhelming majority (78.5%) of applicants agreed or strongly agreed that access to financing was an issue. The cost of borrowing and access to equity or capital were also seen as major obstacles for applicants.

While the majority of participants said they agreed that they knew where to get help for their business, more than one-quarter disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement

TABLE 10

Obstacles Faced While Operating or Growing the Business

	Number of Responses	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Access to financing	691	3.9%	3.0%	14.5%	20.8%	57.7%
Cost of borrowing	675	6.1%	3.9%	25.3%	19.7%	45.0%
Access to equity or capital	681	5.6%	3.4%	21.1%	22.9%	47.0%
Trade regulations or exchange rate	675	22.4%	8.6%	44.0%	10.4%	14.7%
Competition	679	14.6%	13.3%	32.4%	24.6%	15.2%
Availability of skilled labour	672	21.3%	14.0%	37.6%	17.3%	9.8%
Overall economic conditions	676	9.0%	7.5%	25.6%	31.7%	26.2%
Government policies (rules and regulations)	669	17.8%	13.5%	33.0%	18.1%	17.6%
Infrastructure, such as telephone, electricity, water, roads, lands	675	39.3%	15.4%	31.9%	7.9%	5.6%
Taxes	669	25.9%	14.6%	40.5%	10.5%	8.5%

Applicants perspectives on their personal connections and networks are shown in Table 11. The majority of applicants agreed or strongly agreed that they had good family support, knew others who were doing similar work, or had good connections in their

community. While the majority of participants said they agreed that they knew where to get help for their business (58.5%), more than one-quarter (27.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

TABLE 11

Personal Connections

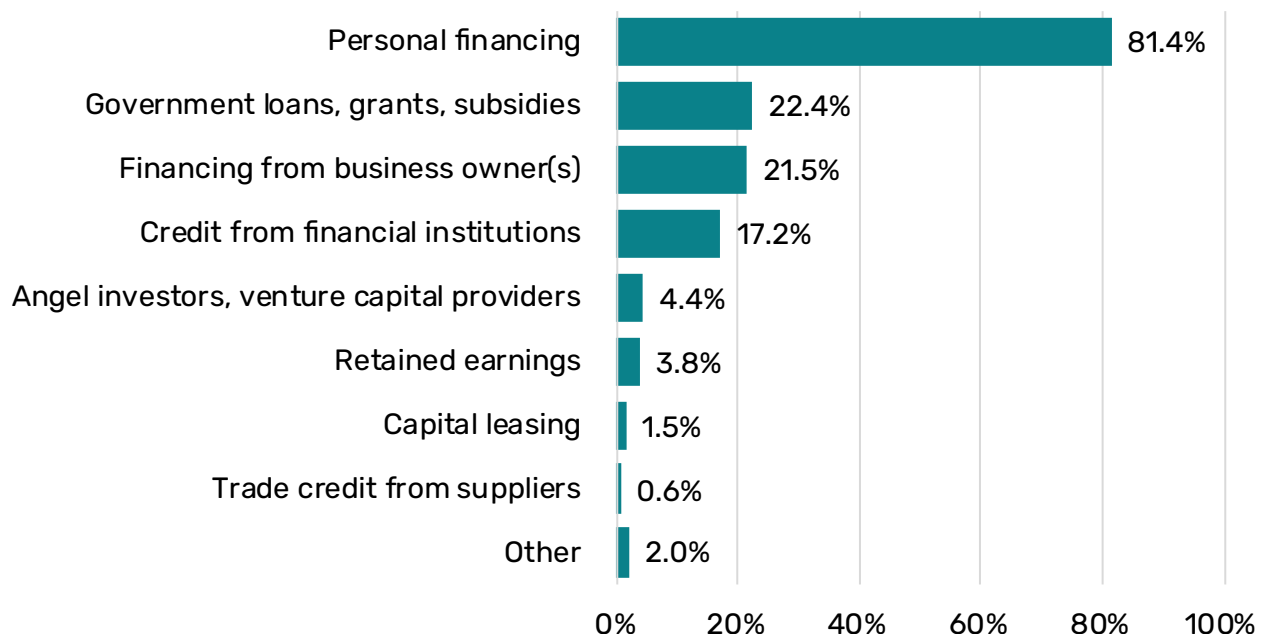
	Number of Responses	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I have good family support for my work	690	5.5%	7.7%	9.6%	25.4%	51.9%
I know where to get help for my business (training, mentorship, information, etc.)	689	7.8%	20.0%	13.6%	34.1%	24.4%
I know others who are doing similar work/business	690	12.8%	14.1%	15.4%	31.9%	25.9%
I have good connections to my community	692	5.1%	10.0%	18.4%	32.4%	34.2%

Applicants were also asked whether they received any assistance in funding their business from loans, government grants, or outside investments. Just under half (49.4%) said they did receive assistance. When asked about the different sources of funding they used to start their businesses,

the overwhelming majority of applicants used personal financing (81.4%); 22 percent used government loans, grants, or subsidies; 22 percent used financing from business owners; and 17 percent used credit from financial institutions (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13

Sources of Funding for Starting the Business (n=344)



Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Businesses

As noted above, previous research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and also on the Black community, so it comes as no surprise that Black women entrepreneurs have also been affected. Applicants were asked what level of impact they expect the COVID-19 pandemic will have on their business (Table 12). Surprisingly, applicants most frequently (45.3%) indicated that they expected the pandemic to impact their business financially, but that they were confident they could weather the storm. A large subset of applicants (31.9%) indicated that the pandemic was going to significantly impact their business's financials. Approximately 10 percent of applicants indicated that they expected the pandemic may put them out of business. It should be noted that the majority of applicants indicated that their business was established in 2020 or 2021. Moreover, these statistics should be considered in light of the fact that applicants were applying for a competition, which could have affected responses to this particular question.

TABLE 12

Level of Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Businesses

At this point in time, what level of impact do you expect COVID-19 to have on your business?	n=695
This may impact us financially, but we are confident we can weather the storm	45.3%
This is going to significantly impact our financials	31.9%
Other (e.g., no impact, started business during the pandemic, positive impact)	12.9%
This may put us out of business	9.8%

Applicants were also asked how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the operation of their business (Table 13). The majority of applicants indicated that they had increased their online presence as a result of the pandemic (45.3%). Many applicants also indicated that the pandemic had negatively impacted the operation of their business, with 34 percent reporting that their orders/events were being cancelled and 21 percent reporting that their supply chain was interrupted. While 17 percent of applicants indicated that they were experiencing significant increases in consumer demand for certain items, 29 percent of applicants indicated that they were experiencing decreases in sales. Applicants also reported that the pandemic was negatively impacting the financial situation of their business, with 29 percent of applicants indicating that they were starting to restrict spending because of the uncertainty, 19 percent indicating that they had no more capacity to take on debt during this emergency, and 11 percent indicating that the market was causing them to draw on their line of credit. As a result of the pandemic, many applicants indicated that they had shifted to remote work (24.6%), adjusted their hours of operation (14%), or completely closed their physical place of business (11.7%). Although 4 percent said they could survive less than a month under current conditions, 17 percent indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had no direct impact on the operations of their business, which some attributed to having started their business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 13**Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Business Operations**

How has COVID-19 impacted the operations of your business?	n=700
We have increased our online presence	45.3%
Orders/events are being cancelled	34.0%
We are starting to restrict spending because of the uncertainty	29.0%
We are experiencing decreases in sales	28.9%
We have shifted to remote work	24.6%
Our supply chain is interrupted	20.7%
We have no more capacity to take on debt during this emergency	18.7%
We are experiencing significant increases in consumer demand for certain items	17.4%
No direct impact	16.6%
We have adjusted our hours of operation	14.0%
We have completely closed our physical place of business	11.7%
The market is causing us to draw on our line of credit	10.7%
We can survive less than a month under current conditions.	4.3%
Other (e.g., business started during the pandemic, unable to offer certain services, lack of opportunities)	15.3%

Qualitative Findings

The sections below outline the main responses from the Black women entrepreneurs studied, based on the following questions:

1. What inspired you to be a business owner?
2. What is your greatest achievement to date as a business owner?
3. What do you need to achieve [your business] goals [for the next three years]?
4. How has the pandemic affected your business?

Qualitative Leximancer Results

Table 14 reflects the number of times each particular theme was stated in the sample.

TABLE 14

Frequency of Themes in the Sample

Motivations/inspirations (What inspired you to be a business owner?)		
Family and community	Personal experiences and passion	Flexibility and freedom
794	622	515
Greatest achievement (What is your greatest achievement to date as a business owner?)		
Entrepreneurial success	Innovation	Self-fulfillment
669	329	279
Entrepreneurial needs (What do you need to achieve [your business] goals [for the next three years]?)		
General business support/ business mentorship	Funding	Staff and team assistance
331	330	288
COVID-19 impacts (How has the pandemic impacted your business?)		
Business slowdown	Business disruptions	Decrease in services
804	482	345

Note: Hits reflect the number of times a specific word was used in responses and thus may show a number larger than the sample size.

What inspired you to be a business owner?

Black women entrepreneurs indicated many motivating factors behind their engagement in entrepreneurship, notably family and community influences, both positive and negative personal experiences, and the desire for flexibility and freedom to dictate their work schedules and find financial stability.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Many entrepreneurs expressed that they were exposed to entrepreneurship at a young age and that they found inspiration from family members who were also entrepreneurs. Additionally, many entrepreneurs indicated that motherhood and the ability to financially provide for their children while simultaneously making their children proud were motivating factors. As expressed by several entrepreneurs:

- > *"Motherhood inspired me to be a business owner. When I had my twin girls, it was a very busy time in my life, I always have to have affirmation words for the day ... so to say 'MOM THE DAY', after a while I had to write these words or phrases somewhere on the wall; after I started writing on T-shirts and blank wood just to feel better and go through the day in a good mood!"*
- > *"Inspiration has come from many different things in life, but if I had to choose one I would say my parents. [As] business owners themselves, although in a different industry, their drive and hustle and the awesome privilege to be able to start something and see the successful fruits of that labour has been a huge inspiration."*

Some entrepreneurs also indicated that their inspiration to start a business stemmed from their community's needs. As one entrepreneur pointed out:

I walked in to a salon a few weeks after I came to Canada to get my hair done and

I was told that they could not cater to my hair type. It didn't take long for me to find out that there were no salons that catered to my hair type. I had to figure out a way to get my hair done myself. Over time I realized that this was a struggle for most Black women and girls in my community. I identified a need and decided to provide a solution.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND PASSION

For many, entrepreneurial aspirations stem from a specific personal experience, whether positive or negative, and a subsequent desire to either replicate this positivity and create new opportunities for others or change negative experiences for the better.

One woman stated that, since immigrating to Canada, she has experienced difficulties finding work experiences that adequately match her skills. As such, her initiative was born from a desire to understand the needs of those in the Black opportunity who were seeking employment opportunities. Experiences of discrimination in the form of anti-Black racism and sexism in the workplace and in society as a whole also motivated some business owners to start their own businesses. These experiences also tended to influence the types of services applicants offered through their businesses. For example, one applicant's experience of anti-Black racism in the workplace influenced her to start a business centered around anti-racism and promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion:

I never thought I would be a business owner; however, once my business began to grow, I saw the opportunities to pursue my dream to work full time addressing systemic racism within our society, and to be self-employed. I have practiced law for over ten years, and in every position that I have occupied I have been the only Black lawyer or among two or three Black employees. I have dealt with various forms

of anti-Black racism within the workplace, which had an impact on my mental health and well-being. While these experiences have been difficult, they have also given me the ability to approach my consulting work with a deep understanding of how to address racism and other forms of discrimination within organizations.

On the other hand, entrepreneurs described positive experiences that led them to develop their business. As stated by one woman:

As a birth doula, I am inspired by the women and mothers I get to work with and support during their pregnancies and births. These women inspired me to create my new business. Watching these women transform into mothers is so inspiring and this led me to create a product that will support them into their new journey.

Entrepreneurial spirit and passion have also been positive factors influencing women's desire to undertake entrepreneurship, as articulated by one entrepreneur:

I have a passion for product, so when this idea came to my mind I realized it was an opportunity to take my efforts from banking and focus on building a company where I can create an environment with the values and morals I live by, including integrity, inclusiveness, [and] empowerment, to name a few.

Other entrepreneurs in the study indicated their passion for their culture as a driving force in becoming a business owner. One applicant stated: *"As an Ethiopian immigrant, finding authentic, quality teff flour is difficult in the market... We didn't only want to sell quality teff, but to bring the authentic Ethiopian experience and teach North Americans about teff and Ethiopian cultures/traditions."*

FLEXIBILITY AND FREEDOM

Entrepreneurship provides women with the flexibility to dictate their hours, thus ensuring that women are able to work from home and care for their children while simultaneously operating their businesses. As expressed by one entrepreneur in particular:

My inspiration is definitely my children, I have traded so much time in the past for money to make ends meet for them, and I had gotten to a point where it was no longer possible, especially with the pandemic. I am thankful to be able to stay at home and watch them grow and also work close [to] them and build my empire, not for myself, but for them and their future generations.

Similarly, entrepreneurship may provide economic independence and the ability for women to provide for themselves and their families. This may be born from an imminent need to provide for their family and their community, while in other cases it is born from the desire to break away from reliance on an employer. As one entrepreneur stated:

As an entrepreneur [I am offered] ... financial freedom. I was particularly drawn to entrepreneurship due to becoming a mother, not having the ability to determine how much quality time is spent with my children and family—I felt the need to create financial freedom for myself and my future generations.

Other entrepreneurs saw the flexibility and stability afforded to friends and family who undertook entrepreneurship, and this provided a source of inspiration and motivation for women to start their own businesses, as shared by one entrepreneur:

My inspiration came from my [grandmother]; she was a tailor. She was an entrepreneur that had a home-based successful business. She worked at her own time, [at her own] pace, with a flexible

schedule. Her being able to create her own work schedule, have time for family and make an income. That [inspired] me to seek within and find what I can do to be able to create something similar for myself.

The ability to obtain flexibility and financial freedom has inspired women to provide this for others. As one woman stated:

I developed this idea at the start of the pandemic when I faced the real possibility of having my pay reduced, but not by enough to qualify for any benefits. A lot has changed in the last few months that has made it clear that there are a lot more people like me looking to start their own businesses. However, as we all know, start-ups are hard to get off the ground and often fail. There is very little start-up funding to go around, and organic growth is slow. Therefore, not only does my platform offer teleworker freelancers a place to make some extra money, unlike the other freelancers platforms out there, it gives them an opportunity to potentially develop a clientele forgoing the huge start-up cost of building their own website from day one.

What is your greatest achievement to date as a business owner?

Black women entrepreneurs across the country own and operate successful businesses. Black women entrepreneurs articulated many of their key achievements since starting their businesses, namely entrepreneurial successes, innovation, and self-fulfillment.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

The Black women entrepreneurs studied quantified achievement through entrepreneurial success in many ways. In some cases, success was reflected in courage and personal perseverance, while for

others it was quantified through consumer satisfaction and engagement.

Entrepreneurs expressed feelings of accomplishment and success in developing the courage to start and grow their businesses, particularly amid the pandemic. Taking a leap of faith, continuously growing their business, and persevering through difficult times were also achievements articulated by many entrepreneurs:

- > *“Personally, it is the courage to grow, to build and move to a new location in 2020 despite all of the challenges with the pandemic.”*
- > *“I would have to say my greatest achievement to date would be starting [my business]. Anyone can have a plan, but I find it takes great strength and courage to actually go after your plan and build it up from the ground.”*

A further achievement for many entrepreneurs is the positive feedback and reviews from satisfied consumers. This reflects the energy and care an entrepreneur has put into developing their product or service and the ability to meet a consumer’s needs. As expressed by one entrepreneur: *“My greatest [achievement is] when I get positive results and see my clients recover from their illness, and some become very stable and are able to manage their degenerating diseases—this gives me great joy.”*

Similarly, entrepreneurs quantified their achievements and successes through positive consumer engagement, as stated by one entrepreneur: *“With my large Instagram followership of over 7,500 followers, I have enjoyed good engagement from both current and potential clients and keep gathering new followers daily. I have been able to build a brand and grow my reputation.”*

INNOVATION

For many entrepreneurs, achievement was expressed as the creation of a trusted and innovative product. In many cases, this serves as a proof of concept and may spur further product development, innovation, and business growth. As expressed by one entrepreneur: *"Our customers love our products, and we hope to develop more products and grow our business year after year."*

Other entrepreneurs highlighted their ability to re-tool, pivot their business, and use online strategies for growth as their greatest achievements, particularly amid the pandemic. As articulated by several entrepreneurs:

- > *"Being able to launch the first pilot of my online store during a pandemic year to help customers shop while physical stores [were] closed, and [generating] sales [in] the first month."*
- > *"We had to [re-tool] and [re-invent] our business 2020, [and] we were able to launch the company's website, giving us the ability to sell online. Negotiating good shipping rates: the new shipping rates are allowing us to acquire more customers as we are more competitive [for] shipping across Canada."*
- > *"Renovations where I rented and made a complete makeover/ launched my online platform talk show."*

SELF-FULFILLMENT

Entrepreneurs shared feeling proud with the work they put into building their product, business, and brand, and the positive feedback they have received. The ability to connect with communities through their businesses and have their efforts come full circle was the ultimate achievement for many. As noted by several entrepreneurs:

- > *"The ability to gain the interests of different people from different cultural backgrounds. They must have seen how artistic and beautiful my work is, and I am proud of this opportunity to connect and work with people from diverse backgrounds."*
- > *"I have grown my business slowly and steadily by referrals and reaching out to new potential clients. I am proud to say that I am still standing, albeit a small business, and despite COVID-19, with loyal clients who desire my impeccable customer service and professional work. I am proud of seeing my work being posted by my clients because they believe it is excellent work."*
- > *"Connecting [approximately] 30 women from the community and offering that a supportive network of women sharing the same or similar experiences."*
- > *"The opportunity to meet different fantastic people who want to appreciate their loved ones on their special days and also be a part of the joy and happiness created."*
- > *"My business is still fairly new, but having created a product that people love has also been a great achievement. I receive a series of little wins when I receive positive feedback or get an Instagram shoutout of people raving about the quality of my ice cream. I work really hard to make a beautiful product so this means so much to me."*

What do you need to achieve your business goals for the next three years?

Black women entrepreneurs were asked about their business goals for the next three years, and the majority of these entrepreneurs indicated that they wanted to scale their businesses. They were then asked

what supports they would need to reach their business goals. The supports identified include general business support, funding, and staffing needs.

GENERAL BUSINESS SUPPORT AND BUSINESS MENTORSHIP

General business guidance and mentorship are key components of supporting entrepreneurs as they start and grow their businesses. Mentorship provides entrepreneurs with the opportunity to share positive experiences and inspire others, while also sharing solutions for overcoming obstacles to business growth. As several entrepreneurs shared:

- > *"Resources and tools needed: 1. Business plan 2. Business mentorship and training 3. Dedicated finance advisor 4. New markets, investors and capital."*
- > *"I think my business can 100% benefit from better quality promotion and advertising. [I need] a stronger social media presence. [I] basically [need] someone who can look at my business and tell me what I'm lacking. Where I have room to grow. How I can maximize my income."*

FUNDING

Many entrepreneurs expressed the need for increased funding to both start and grow their businesses. Funding is needed as an initial investment to assist entrepreneurs in kickstarting their ventures, but is also needed as entrepreneurs scale their businesses. Many entrepreneurs described a need for funding to support marketing efforts and the ability to build a robust online presence. Other entrepreneurs articulated that financial support was needed to buy quality ingredients and parts for their products. Moreover, many entrepreneurs highlighted the need for financial support to hire staff and seek mentorship and guidance from external experts and consultants.

- > *"To achieve [my] goals, [my company requires] additional funding to obtain and explore advertisement, talent, physical locations, additional clientele, and employees."*
- > *"Funding [is needed] to order more samples of product and have some inventory on hand."*
- > *"Financial support to fulfill big orders and keep employees to help me achieve this. Funding for staff and advertising, a [third] eye view of my business to know what I need to improve on."*
- > *"Our first step is to get funding, in order to launch online with our fully developed online store. The funding will cover our sustainable packaging and sourcing of quality ingredients that will attract our target market."*
- > *"In order to achieve these goals, we would need funding and mentorship. We would love to be able to have the money needed to make these investments and also more guidance in how to approach the growing stage in a wise manner that would allow us to glean from others who have already paved the way."*

STAFF AND TEAM ASSISTANCE

The ability to hire casual, part-time, and full-time staff is critical for business sustainability. Many of the Black women entrepreneurs studied expressed that they had yet to hire casual/temporary (63.1%), permanent part-time (69.4%) and/or permanent full-time (74.8%) staff. Hiring general staff for support, as well as specialized skills was articulated as a need by several entrepreneurs who stated:

- > *"In order to execute all of these areas well, I would need to hire (or consult) with the right individuals who specialize in various [aspects of my business]."*
- > *"A bit of financing would help tremendously so that I could hire support staff to assist me to focus on building the brand and*

securing the clients. I also need for this pandemic to end as well as the human resources and technical support to develop tools (guides, manuals etc.) and improve systems."

- > *"I need tenacity, grace, patience, self-determination, love, wisdom and acceptance to make it happen ... to achieve these goals, we need support to hire more staff."*

The ability to seek the specialized expertise of individuals like consultants, lawyers, and others is a common need for many entrepreneurs. One entrepreneur shared her need for legal support to better understand how to adequately grow her business: *"[One] of the things we'd like to accomplish is to hire a lawyer to discuss permits etc. for selling alcohol on our own in this province."*

How has the pandemic impacted your business?

When asked about impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, many entrepreneurs reported experiencing difficulties making sales and satisfying financial projects for the year, as well as spill-over supply-chain effects. Entrepreneurs were forced to pivot their businesses online and increase their online presence through their website, social media, and other means. While Black women entrepreneurs experienced several negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, many were able to successfully pivot their businesses online to continue to meet consumer needs.

BUSINESS SLOWDOWN

Many entrepreneurs expressed that the pandemic impacted their business timelines and hindered their projected growth. In most cases, entrepreneurs indicated that they needed to re-strategize and in some cases, reinvent their businesses to respond to the challenges of the pandemic including limited opportunities for outreach and engagement.

- > *"The pandemic affected my business in three important areas: the financial growth, the position of my business, and the timeline."*
- > *"The pandemic has mainly affected my outreach strategies and business development. While I have not taken a detrimental hit financially, I did not meet projections for the 2020 year as a result of having to postpone and rethink strategies that were originally set in place to help reach these goals."*

BUSINESS DISRUPTIONS

The closure of businesses and services that Black women entrepreneurs relied on in their supply chains negatively impacted their businesses. In some cases, these ripple effects have led to difficulties producing goods and services, as well as challenges in obtaining customers. The below statements from several entrepreneurs highlight these challenges:

- > *"The lockdown led to [a] shut down of most restaurants, one of which I was to have a pop-up event at some time. The limiting of face-to-face meetings greatly reduced my chances of attending some planned pop-up events for sampling of products, physical sales, and marketing."*
- > *"When I first registered my business back in February, I had planned on doing Black-owned business trade shows and markets, as the best way to sell my product is when people actually see it in person and are able to feel the quality of the cards. I had not thought much about an online presence at the time, because I felt like when people [saw] the cards they [would] buy them on the spot."*
- > *"The pandemic greatly affected my business, as we were not able to attend farmers' markets and summer events to promote our spices. Every year from spring we showcase our products at different cultural event[s]. We couple it with some*

grilling, so people can taste our spices. That's how we increase awareness and increase sales. Unfortunately, with [the pandemic], none of those were possible, resulting in [a] huge decrease in sales."

DECREASE IN SERVICES

Pandemic-related closures have slowed the provision of services across the country. Closures have directly impacted entrepreneurs in the service industry and added a layer of uncertainty and risk for those able to continue to provide services. As stated by one woman:

With the city/province being in lockdown and personal services being prohibited, I have been unable to provide any services, and that definitely hurt my business. Furthermore, providing services amidst a global pandemic is also scary, because you have to be extremely careful to minimize risk to both myself [and] clients.

Closures in the service industry have, in many cases, caused a ripple effect for women entrepreneurs who rely on service provisions as part of their business supply chains. As described by one woman:

[The pandemic] has affected the recruitment process for our platform, as many service providers are not taking clients and thus are not in the mindset of growing their client list or needing to be discoverable by clients at this time. These implications are causing the slowing of our sign-up numbers, decreasing our daily active user count, and thus pushing out the paid feature launch of [our business].

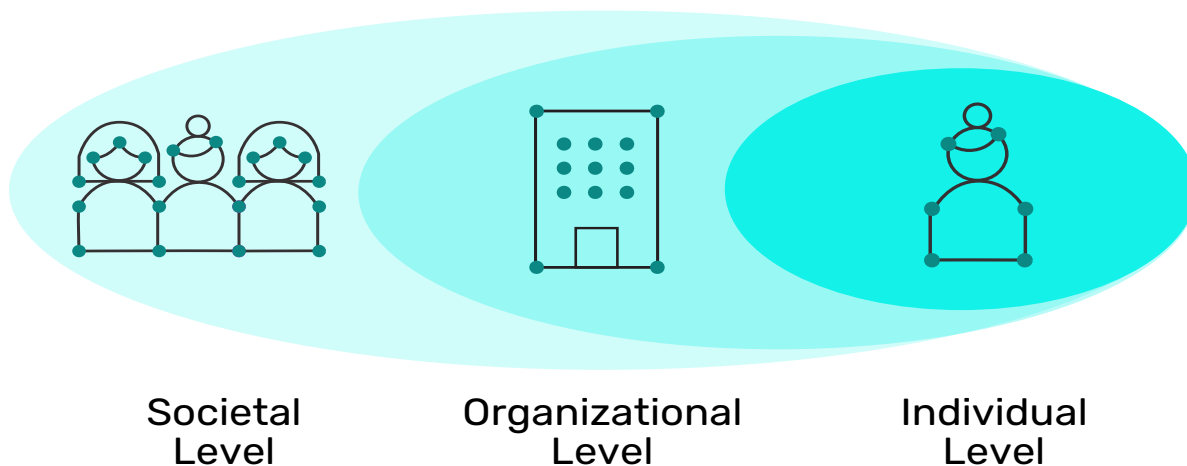
Ultimately, pandemic-related closures have had both direct and ripple effects on the businesses of Black women entrepreneurs, many of whom have been forced to pivot their businesses and rethink their service-related models in order to continue to reach consumers.

The Way Forward

The findings from this study reinforce the importance of a systems approach to understanding the issues Black women entrepreneurs face. A systems approach means having integrated and intentional strategies to support Black women entrepreneurs, which are critical at all levels of the ecosystem. In addition, this report provides recommendations that can help improve the status of Black women entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which are organized within a critical ecological approach. The critical ecological framework provides a lens to better monitor and examine the barriers facing Black women entrepreneurs and other problems within the entrepreneurial ecosystem at macro, meso, and micro levels.

FIGURE 14

The Ecosystem Model



Actions to Support Black Women Entrepreneurs

SOCIETAL LEVEL

- > Challenge anti-Black racism and break down stereotypes that associate entrepreneurship and innovation with masculinity, whiteness, and tech
- > Showcase and celebrate the successes of Black women entrepreneurs and highlight role models within the Black community
- > Challenge media bias and stereotypes of entrepreneurship and Black women
- > Meaningfully include more voices of Black women entrepreneurs
- > Collect disaggregated data on the experiences of Black women entrepreneurs
- > Promote policies that support Black women entrepreneurs, including targeted investments, procurement, and micro grants, as well as childcare
- > Provide access to technology and ensure affordability, skills development, and tools
- > Ensure that government programming and funding opportunities are allocated equitably using an intersectional approach

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

- > Focus on the tone at the top: explicit communication is needed regarding the business case for diversity (especially in incubators, venture capital firms, and financial institutions)
- > Collect disaggregated data on the barriers Black women entrepreneurs experience when accessing funding, programming, resources and other supports
- > Prioritize benchmarking and target setting
- > Challenge stereotypes of leadership
- > Develop programs related to networking, skill building, thematic workshops, and other topics specifically geared toward Black women entrepreneurs

- > Provide sustained financing opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs through a long-term fund managed by the Black community
- > Ensure that leadership positions in both the public sector and private sector are diversified and that Black women have a seat at the decision-making table
- > Provide childcare support for entrepreneurs
- > Provide inclusive procurement opportunities and strengthen the value chain to ensure that Black women entrepreneurs have opportunities to sell products to the public and private sector
- > Build the pipeline of Black women entrepreneurs by fostering partnership opportunities, government relations, and outreach support

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- > Promote entrepreneurship as a career option for Black women
- > Challenge microaggressions related to stereotypes and biases around traditional definitions of entrepreneurship and innovation
- > Share best practices with other prospective Black women entrepreneurs to promote knowledge sharing
- > Find a mentor, be a mentor
- > Build networks and use your sphere of influence
- > Provide gender- and race-specific SME training and development support services
- > Share stories of success as well failures, and provide Black women the opportunity to learn from mistakes and improve

Conclusion

This report provides a snapshot of the industries and sectors where the Black women entrepreneurs studied are concentrated, with the majority of entrepreneurs operating as start-ups or businesses one year old or less (36.4%) or operating in the consumer goods and services sector (16.9%). The snapshot further highlights business features, including annual revenue (where 93.4% of businesses make less than \$100,000 annually), and demographic features such as age (where entrepreneurs aged 25–34 make up 40% of applicants) and educational background (where the majority—62.7%—of applicants have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher).

Many Black women entrepreneurs studied highlighted their motivations for undertaking entrepreneurship. Quantitative findings state that Black women entrepreneurs' primary motivations include finding an opportunity to provide products or services (87.9%), the desire for increased work flexibility (73.1%), and finding an unexpected opportunity (61.3%). Qualitative findings highlight family and community influences, both positive and negative personal experiences and passion, and flexibility and freedom as motivating factors.

The research highlights the barriers that Black women entrepreneurs experience while operating and growing their businesses, namely: access to financing, cost of borrowing, and access to equity or capital. Such barriers to business development and growth have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of the Black women entrepreneurs studied experienced increases in their online presence, order and event cancellations, restricted spending due to uncertainty, and decreases in sales, as well as business slowdown, disruptions, and a decrease in services.

Despite barriers, Black women entrepreneurs continue to develop successful businesses and share a variety of entrepreneurial achievements. Key achievements include entrepreneurial success (including developing the courage to start a businesses, particularly amid the pandemic, the positive feedback they receive on products and services), the ability to innovate and develop products, and feelings of overall self-fulfillment.

Finally, this report highlights the need to continue to support Black women entrepreneurs across Canada, including the need for general business guidance and mentorship, funding, and staff and team assistance. This report highlights the unique experiences of Black women entrepreneurs across Canada and the exceptional businesses they have developed. As Black women entrepreneurs contribute to the Canadian economy and pandemic recovery, engaging in integrated and intentional strategies to support Black women entrepreneurs as they develop and grow their business is vital to inclusive sustainable growth in Canada.

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