



RISE UP
PITCH COMPETITION

FINAL REPORT 2024



2024 Rise Up Semi-Finalists

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition (Rise Up), co-founded by the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA), CASA Foundation, and Women's Entrepreneurial Knowledge Hub (WEKH), is a transformative initiative designed to empower Black women entrepreneurs across Canada. This report provides key insights into demographic trends, business dynamics, and program effectiveness, highlighting the competition's pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurial success and offering strategic recommendations for future enhancements.

Key Achievements:

- **Participation and Engagement:** The 2024 competition attracted nearly 1,000 applicants, demonstrating a vibrant and growing community of Black women entrepreneurs. A team of 27 expert reviewers evaluated the business plans, ensuring a rigorous and fair assessment process.
- **Workshops and Coaching:** Six industry-leading speakers delivered a total of 10 hours of workshops, attended by 222 entrepreneurs. Additionally, 24 semi-finalists received personalized pitch coaching from seven expert coaches, preparing them for the final competition.
- **Awards and Recognition:** Eight finalists and 16 runners-up were awarded a total of \$96,000 in cash prizes to support their business growth. This financial boost enables the entrepreneurs to implement their business plans and accelerate market entry or expansion.

Demographic Insights:

- The age distribution of participants shows a strong engagement among women in their 30s and 40s, indicating the program's appeal to individuals at critical transformative stages in their professional lives.
- Geographic analysis reveals a predominant concentration of participants from Ontario, reflecting the demographic distribution of the Black population in Canada. However, there is significant potential for growth in other provinces like Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia.
- Cultural diversity is a hallmark of the competition, with substantial representation from African and Afro-Caribbean communities. This diversity enriches the learning and networking experiences and underscores the program's commitment to inclusivity.
- The competition attracted a diverse group of applicants in terms of identity, with 12% identifying as persons living with a disability, 8% as Francophone, 6% as LGBTQ2S+, and 1% as Indigenous. Additionally, 6% chose not to disclose their identity, emphasizing the importance of respecting privacy.
- The educational backgrounds of the applicants are varied, with 44% having completed college, 33% holding a bachelor's degree, 13% a master's degree, 2% a PhD, and 8% having completed high school. This demonstrates a strong foundation of knowledge and skills that participants bring to the competition.

Business Dynamics:

- The majority of participants are in the early stages of their entrepreneurial journey, with annual revenues ranging from \$0 to \$50,000. This highlights the urgent need for targeted financial and business growth support.
- The competition features a wide range of industries, from consumer goods and creative industries to health and wellness, education, and technology. This diversity reflects the varied entrepreneurial interests and broad appeal of the program.

Impact and Future Directions:

- The competition has significantly empowered Black women entrepreneurs by providing critical resources, including funding, mentorship, and strategic business workshops. This support has led to measurable improvements in business operations, scalability, and revenue generation.
- The program fosters community ties and networking opportunities, creating a robust ecosystem of support that extends beyond the competition.
- Looking ahead, the program aims to enhance its geographic reach and introduce more industry-specific support. Continuous adaptation and improvement are key to meeting the evolving needs of entrepreneurs and ensuring the program's long-term success.

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition is more than just an event; it is a catalyst for change, empowerment, and growth. Its impacts are seen in the enhanced economic status of participants, vibrant networks, increased visibility, and innovative business practices. The continued support and collaboration from our sponsors and partners are crucial to the program's ongoing success and its mission to elevate Black women entrepreneurs in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, co-founded by the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA), CASA Foundation, and Women's Entrepreneurial Knowledge Hub (WEKH), is dedicated to empowering Black women entrepreneurs by providing them with the necessary tools, mentorship, and visibility to excel in a competitive business landscape. This program is specifically designed to address the unique challenges that Black women face in entrepreneurship.

In a market where Black women entrepreneurs historically encounter systemic barriers to funding, networking, and growth opportunities, the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition stands as a beacon of support and advancement. By focusing on empowerment, education, and community building, the program not only aids participants in overcoming these hurdles but also works to dismantle them, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The competition leverages a comprehensive approach, incorporating tailored workshops, one-on-one mentorship sessions, and high-visibility pitching opportunities. These components are strategically designed to enhance participants' business skills, expand their networks, and increase their market presence. The program's emphasis on community building fosters a supportive network among Black women entrepreneurs, facilitating shared experiences and collaborations that extend beyond the competition itself.

Moreover, the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition also plays a crucial role in highlighting the innovative businesses led by Black women, showcasing their contributions to various industries and the broader economy. Through this platform, participants gain not only business acumen and networking opportunities but also a valuable affirmation of their roles as leaders and innovators.

By setting a strong foundation of support, the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition aims to inspire confidence and ambition among its participants, encouraging them to scale new heights in their business ventures. This introduction underscores the program's commitment to creating lasting impacts, driving change, and nurturing the next generation of Black women leaders in business.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition continues to make substantial strides in empowering Black women entrepreneurs across Canada. This year's program saw remarkable participation and engagement across various components, reflecting the deep impact and widespread interest in the initiative. Here, we detail the key statistics and achievements of this year's competition, underscoring the breadth and depth of the program's reach and influence.

PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Nearly 1000 Applicants:** This year, the competition attracted nearly 1000 applicants, showcasing a vibrant community of Black women entrepreneurs eager to take their businesses to the next level.
- **27 Business Plan Reviewers:** A dedicated team of 27 expert reviewers was tasked with the critical role of evaluating the business plans submitted, ensuring a rigorous and fair assessment process.
- **6 Workshop Speakers / 10 Hours of Workshops:** The program featured six industry-leading speakers who delivered a total of 10 hours of workshops. These sessions were designed to equip participants with essential business skills, ranging from financial literacy to marketing strategies.
- **222 Workshop Participants:** A total of 222 entrepreneurs actively participated in the workshops, gaining valuable insights and skills to enhance their business operations.

PITCH COACHING AND COMPETITION

- **24 Semi-Finalists:** Out of the numerous applications, 24 exceptional entrepreneurs were selected as semi-finalists, each demonstrating unique business propositions and potential for significant impact.
- **7 Pitch Coaches / 12 Hours of Pitch Coaching:** Each semi-finalist benefited from a 30 minute personalized pitch coaching session provided by one of seven expert coaches. This coaching was instrumental in refining their pitches and enhancing their presentation skills.
- **12 Pitch Day Judges:** The critical task of evaluating the pitches and determining the winners was entrusted to a panel of 12 esteemed judges, each bringing a wealth of experience and insight to the decision-making process.

WINNERS AND AWARDS

- **8 Finalists:** From the semi-finalists, eight outstanding women were selected as winners, each showcasing innovation and excellence in their respective fields.
- **\$96,000 in Cash Awarded:** The competition culminated in awarding \$80,000 in cash prizes to the eight finalists and an additional \$16,000 to the 16 runners-up. These financial awards serve as a significant boost, enabling the entrepreneurs to implement their business plans and accelerate their market entry or expansion.

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition's comprehensive program structure—from workshops and pitch coaching to the rigorous judging process and substantial awards—highlights its commitment to fostering entrepreneurship among Black women in Canada. Each element of the program is carefully crafted to provide maximum support and opportunities for participants, contributing to their professional growth and the broader goal of enhancing diversity and innovation in the Canadian business landscape.

WINNERS, BUSINESS NAMES AND CATEGORIES



Rae Massop
Aworie Health
Start-Up



Denise Edwards
Tropix
Hospitality and Food



Marika Siewert
Marika Siewert
Creative Business



Karen Clarke
ASpectrum Inc.
Business Services



Eshe Simba
Sugar Plum Scrubs
Consumer Goods



Candina Elendu
The New Women's Safety
Apparel (TNWSA)
Innovation



Chantelle Campbell
Rent Law Legal Advocacy
Services
Technology



Rochelle Smith
Beauty, Braids & Beyond
Youth Entrepreneur

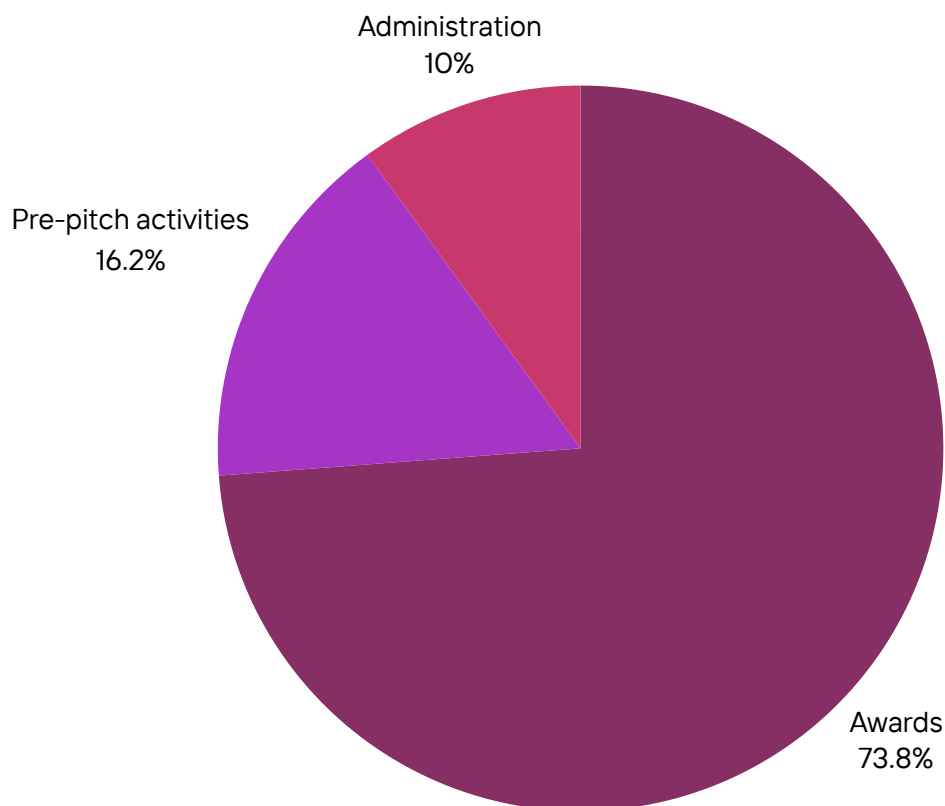
YOUR DONOR FUNDS AT WORK

The generous contributions from our donors have enabled significant advancements in our mission to empower Black women entrepreneurs. This year, we allocated our funds across various initiatives to ensure the highest impact for our community.

A large portion was awarded to the Finalists and Runners Up in the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, providing them with crucial support to grow their businesses and enter new markets. Additionally, a significant amount was directed towards pre-pitch activities, including workshops, coaching sessions, and personalized pitch coaching for the semi-finalists. The remaining funds covered essential administrative costs, ensuring the smooth operation and management of the competition.

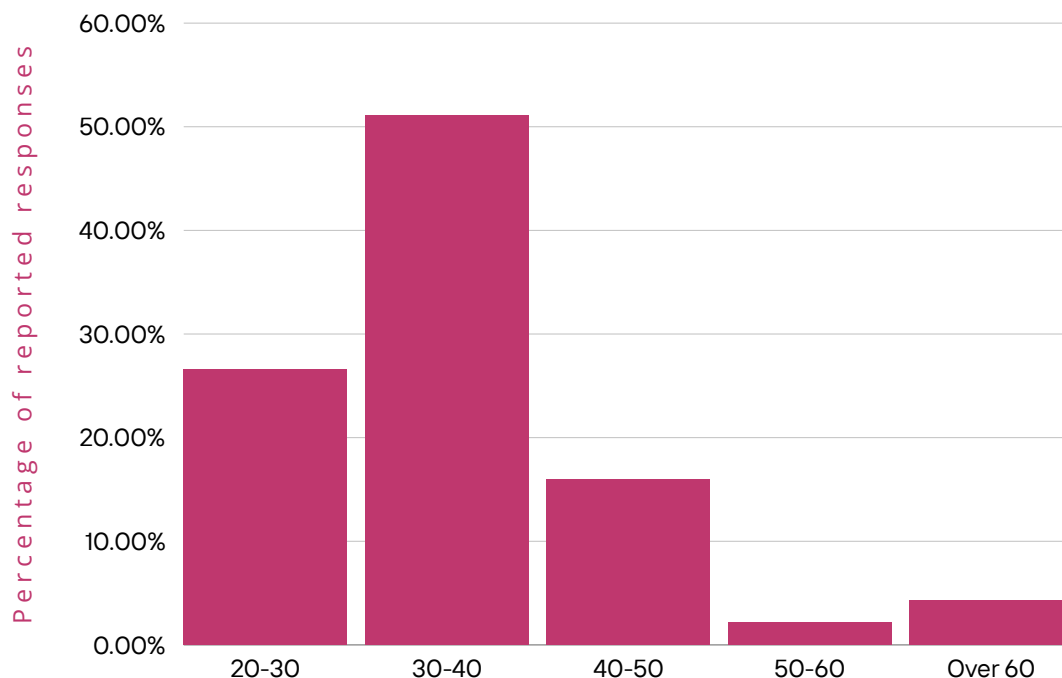
The pie chart below visually represents how these funds were utilized, demonstrating our commitment to transparency and effective resource management. By strategically allocating donor contributions, we have maximized our impact and supported the growth and success of Black women entrepreneurs.

Fund Allocation



DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Age Distribution



This bar graph details the age distribution of participants in the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, revealing a pronounced engagement among women ages 30 to 40. This trend is particularly notable as it underscores the program's strong appeal to individuals who are often at a critical, transformative stage in their professional lives.

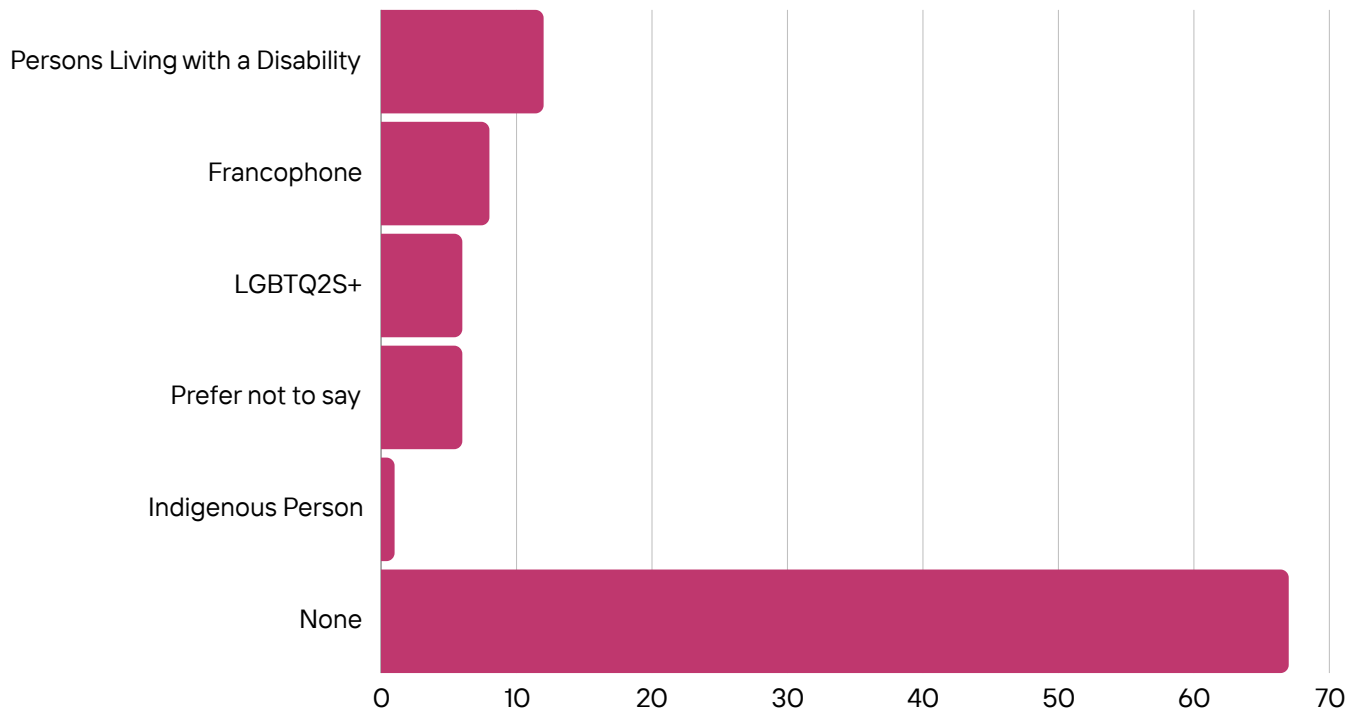
Women within this age bracket typically possess substantial industry experience and are poised to leverage their skills and knowledge to either scale existing businesses or launch new ventures. The significant representation from this demographic suggests that the program effectively addresses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by established professionals seeking growth or entrepreneurial shifts. These participants are likely looking for advanced strategies to expand their market reach, refine their business models, or possibly pivot their businesses in response to evolving personal and market conditions.

Furthermore, the involvement of younger entrepreneurs in their 20s also indicates the program's capacity to attract and nurture emerging talent. This group represents the up-and-coming innovators and disruptors who bring fresh ideas and energy to the entrepreneurial landscape. Their participation ensures a vibrant community that benefits from the exchange of cutting-edge ideas and the latest business practices.

Together, these demographics create a dynamic environment where experienced professionals can find the resources to push their businesses to new heights, while younger participants can access mentorship and foundational business knowledge. This diverse age mix not only enhances the learning experience for all involved but also fosters a rich network of collaboration and support that can lead to long-term business relationships and ventures.

The graph not only highlights the broad appeal of the Rise Up program across different age groups but also reflects its effectiveness in catering to the specific needs of these varied life stages, contributing significantly to the shaping of a robust entrepreneurial community.

Identification



The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition attracted a diverse group of applicants, reflecting a wide range of identities. This diversity is crucial for fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem where different perspectives and experiences can lead to innovative solutions and business success.

The data shows that the majority of applicants (67%) do not identify with any specific categories such as disability, Francophone, LGBTQ2S+, or Indigenous. However, a significant portion of the applicants do identify with one or more of these categories. Notably, 12% of the applicants identify as persons living with a disability, highlighting the importance of ensuring accessibility and inclusivity within the competition. Francophone applicants make up 8% of the total, reflecting the linguistic diversity within the Black community in Canada. Additionally, 6% of the applicants identify as LGBTQ2S+, underscoring the need for inclusive support systems. Another 6% chose not to disclose their identity, which is an important reminder to respect privacy and confidentiality. There is also a small representation of Indigenous persons, at 1%, indicating the potential for targeted outreach to increase participation from this group. The total number of respondents for this question was N=100

The chart illustrates the diverse identities of the participants, showcasing the program's effectiveness in reaching various segments within the Black community. This diversity is vital for creating an inclusive environment where different perspectives can drive innovation and entrepreneurial success.

Education

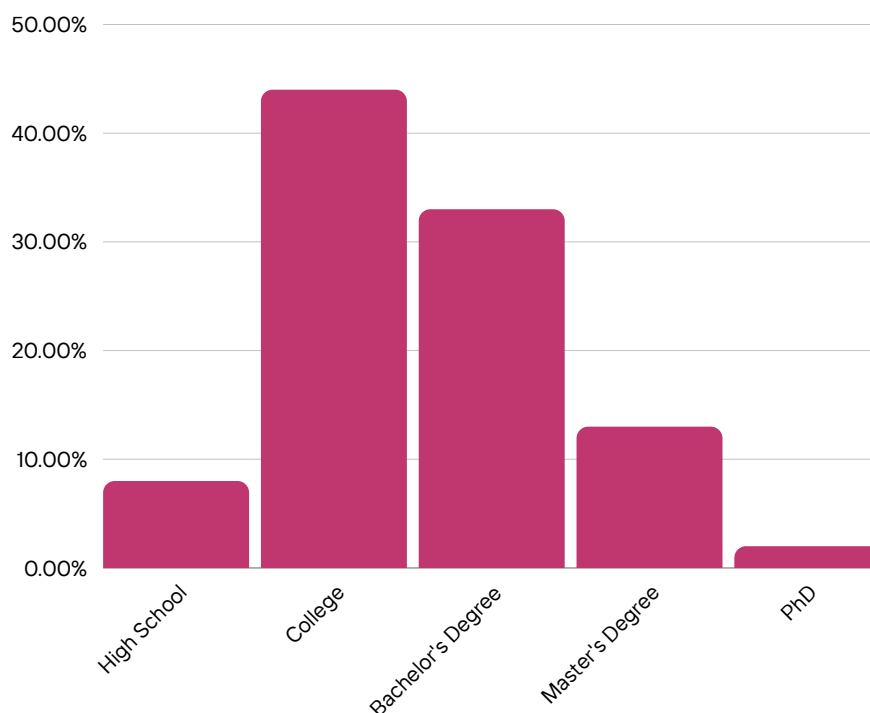
The educational backgrounds of the applicants are varied, demonstrating a strong foundation of knowledge and skills that participants bring to the competition. A small segment of the applicants, 8%, have completed high school, indicating early-stage entrepreneurs who may benefit from foundational business training.

The largest group, 44%, have completed college, showing a solid base of post-secondary education and readiness to advance their entrepreneurial ventures. These individuals possess a mix of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, making them well-prepared to tackle the challenges of starting and growing a business.

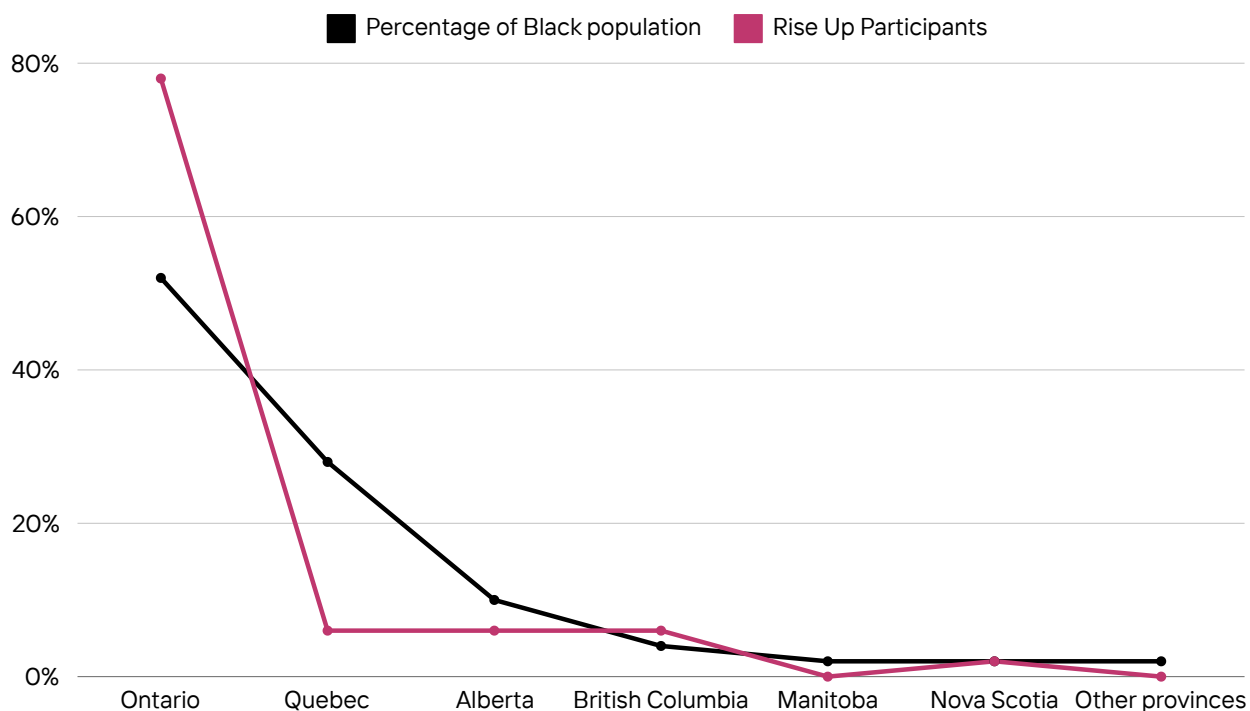
Additionally, 33% of the applicants hold a bachelor's degree, suggesting a well-educated cohort with diverse professional and academic experiences. This group is likely to have a deeper understanding of business principles, enabling them to develop more sophisticated business models and strategies. Those with a master's degree account for 13% of the applicants, bringing advanced knowledge and specialized skills to the competition. Their advanced education equips them with the expertise to tackle complex business challenges and innovate within their industries.

Finally, 2% of the applicants have attained the highest level of education with a PhD, reflecting a commitment to academic excellence and potential for high-impact entrepreneurship. PhD holders bring innovative solutions and advanced technologies to the market, contributing to groundbreaking advancements in their industries.

The chart highlights the varied educational backgrounds of the participants, emphasizing the program's appeal to a broad range of educational levels. This diversity in education ensures a rich exchange of knowledge and experiences, contributing to the overall success and innovation within the competition.



Percentage of Black Population and Rise Up Participants

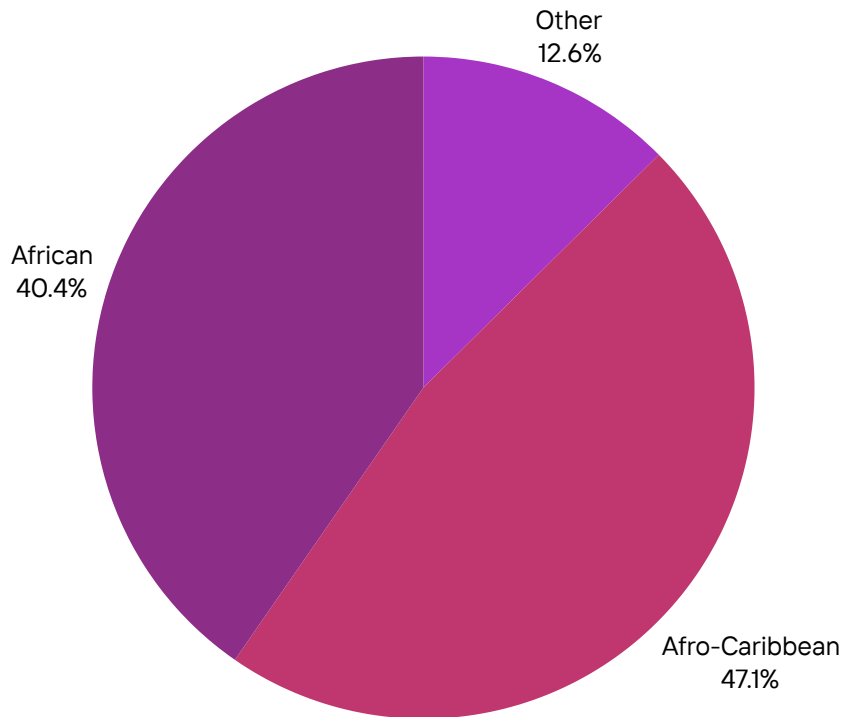


The geographic distribution of participants in the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, predominantly in Ontario, mirrors the demographic concentration of the Black population in Canada, where Ontario houses the largest Black community, primarily centered around the Greater Toronto Area. This alignment suggests that the program is effectively tapping into the heart of Canada's Black entrepreneurial potential, leveraging the dense population centers where support networks and business ecosystems are most developed.

However, while Ontario's dominant participation rate aligns with its demographic significance, the representation from other provinces like Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia, although notable, still presents room for growth. For instance, Montreal is home to a significant Black community that could potentially increase its representation in programs like Rise Up. Similarly, Alberta and British Columbia, with their growing Black populations in urban centers like Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver, indicate untapped potential for expanding the program's reach and impact.

The comparative underrepresentation from these regions, despite their significant Black populations, points to opportunities for targeted outreach and program expansion. By enhancing awareness of the program and establishing more localized support networks or partnerships, the Rise Up competition could foster a more evenly

Cultural Background Reported



This pie chart offers a vivid illustration of the cultural diversity within the participant pool of the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition. With a substantial proportion of participants identifying as African (40.35%) and Afro-Caribbean (47.10%), the chart highlights the rich cultural backgrounds that these entrepreneurs bring to the program. This diverse representation not only enriches the learning and networking experiences within the competition but also reflects the program's strong commitment to inclusivity and cultural representation.

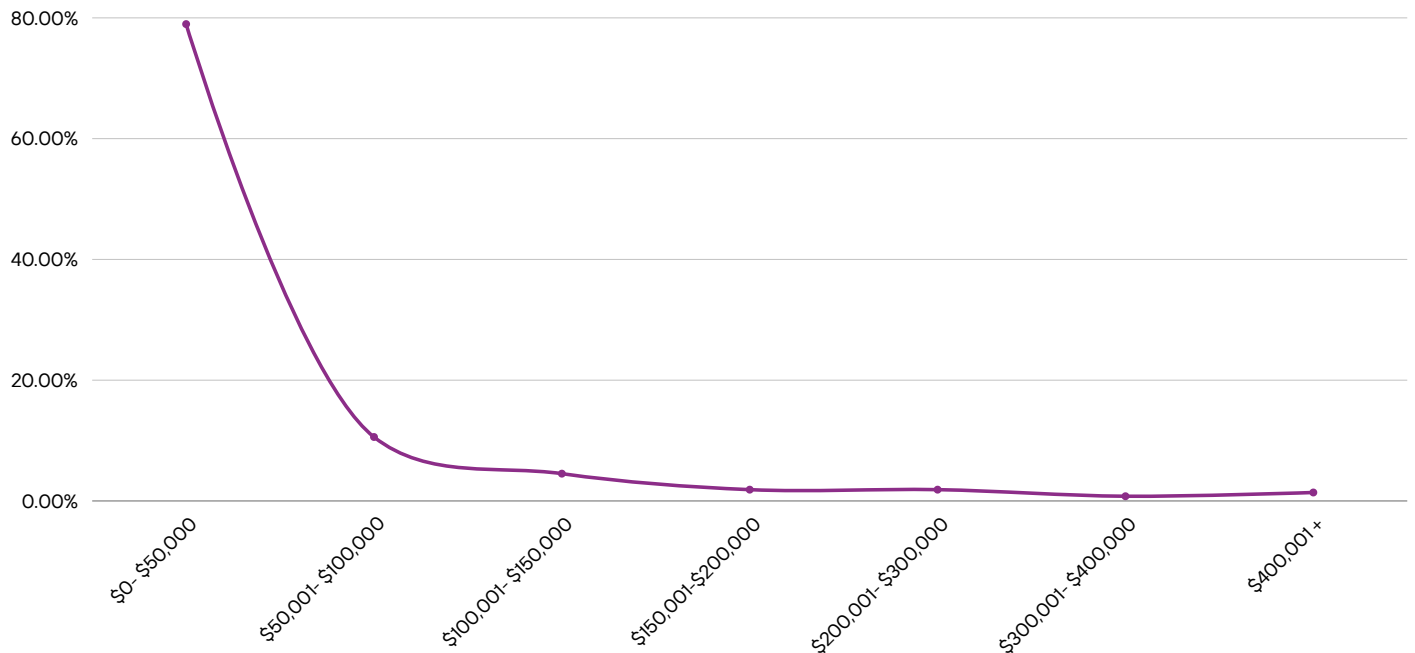
The significant presence of these communities within the competition underscores the program's effectiveness in engaging Black entrepreneurs from varied cultural backgrounds, showcasing its appeal and accessibility. The diversity of the participant pool is a testament to the program's outreach efforts and its success in creating a platform that is truly representative of the broader Black community in Canada.

Moreover, this cultural diversity is crucial for fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas, perspectives, and business practices, enhancing the vibrancy and creativity of the entrepreneurial ventures presented. It also plays a critical role in building a supportive community where participants can find common ground, share unique challenges and experiences related to their cultural contexts, and collaborate on solutions that cater to diverse markets.

By highlighting this representation, the program not only celebrates the cultural richness of its participants but also strengthens its mission to support and empower Black women entrepreneurs, enabling them to thrive and impact their communities positively.

This chart not only serves to showcase the current state of participation but also acts as a reminder of the ongoing need to maintain and enhance outreach efforts to ensure all segments of the Black community are equally represented and supported in future editions of the competition.

Reported Revenue Range

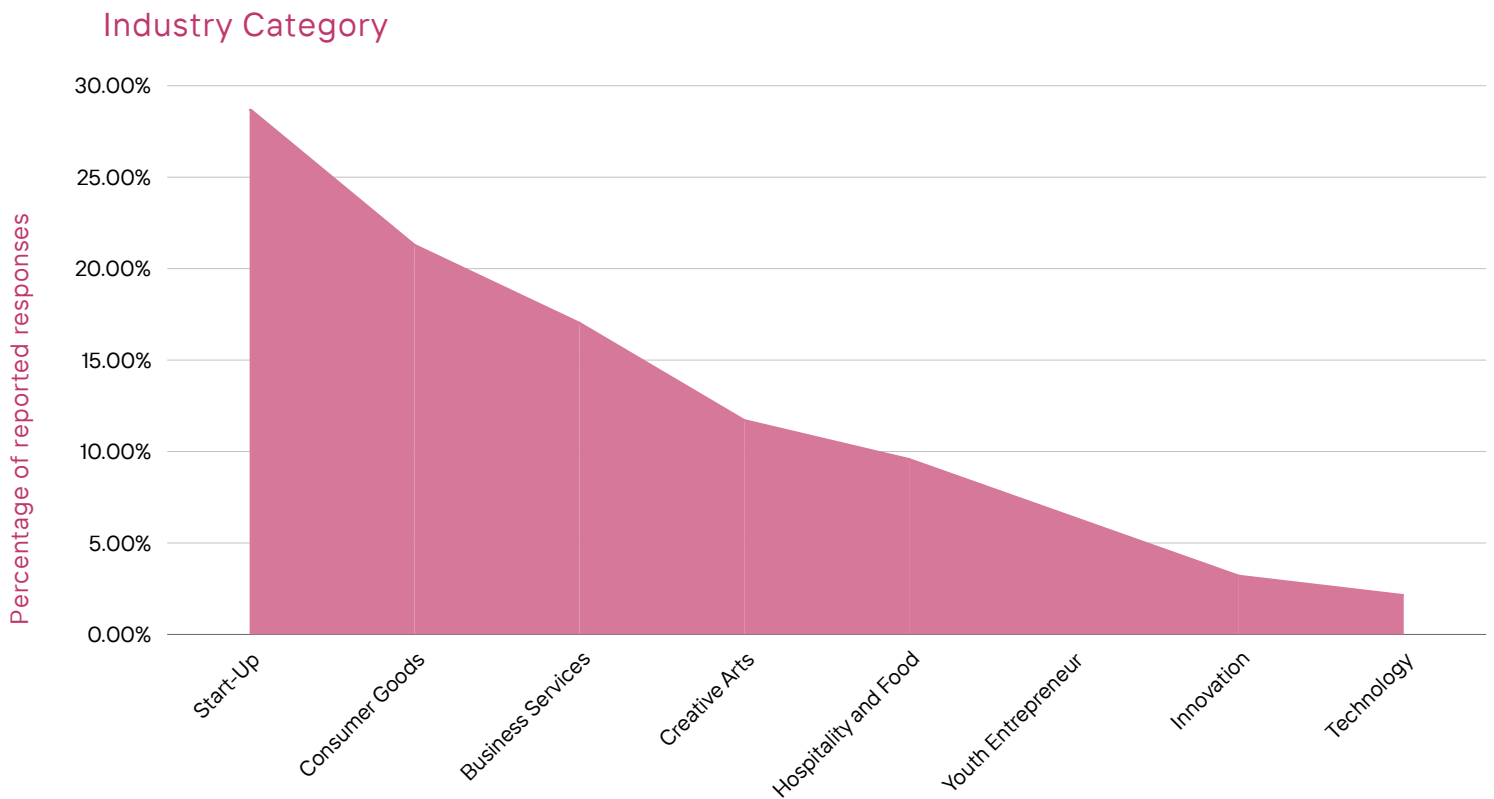


This graph provides a clear visualization of the various revenue stages of businesses within the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition. It reveals a significant concentration of participants at the early stages of their entrepreneurial journey, with a large majority reporting annual revenues ranging from \$0 to \$50,000. This data is critical as it highlights the nascent nature of most enterprises involved in the program and underscores the urgent need for targeted financial and business growth support tailored to these early-stage entrepreneurs.

The prevalence of lower revenue figures among participants indicates that many are in the initial phases of setting up their businesses, likely dealing with challenges such as securing initial funding, streamlining operations, and carving out a niche in the market. This stage is crucial for laying a strong foundation and requires substantial support in areas such as capital infusion, financial planning, and market strategy development.

In response to this need, the program is ideally positioned to offer such support through comprehensive workshops, funding opportunities, and one-on-one mentorship. These interventions are designed to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary tools to navigate the complex pathways of business growth, manage finances wisely, and scale their operations effectively.

Understanding the distribution of revenue stages not only helps in customizing the support provided within the competition but also in advocating for broader policy changes and initiatives aimed at supporting Black women entrepreneurs. This approach ensures that the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition remains a transformative platform, empowering participants to elevate their businesses from fledgling startups to thriving enterprises.



This chart provides a comprehensive overview of the wide range of industries represented by participants in the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition. From diverse startups to consumer goods, the diversity of sectors covered showcases the varied entrepreneurial interests and the broad appeal of the program across different market niches.

Startups: The startup category includes a variety of early-stage businesses across multiple sectors. These range from innovative service providers to product developers, each bringing fresh ideas and new solutions to their respective fields. Startups in this context could be engaged in anything from sustainable fashion and eco-friendly products to groundbreaking educational platforms and health tech innovations. This diversity highlights the entrepreneurial spirit of participants who are eager to introduce novel concepts and transform industries.

Consumer Goods: Another well-represented sector is consumer goods, which includes businesses focused on products ranging from bespoke crafts to mass-market items. Entrepreneurs in this category often bring unique cultural products to the market, capitalizing on traditional knowledge and contemporary trends to cater to diverse consumer bases.

Creative Industries: Participants from creative industries such as media, arts, and entertainment highlight the program's reach among those who blend artistic expression with business acumen. These entrepreneurs contribute significantly to the cultural and creative economy, often pushing the boundaries of conventional business models.

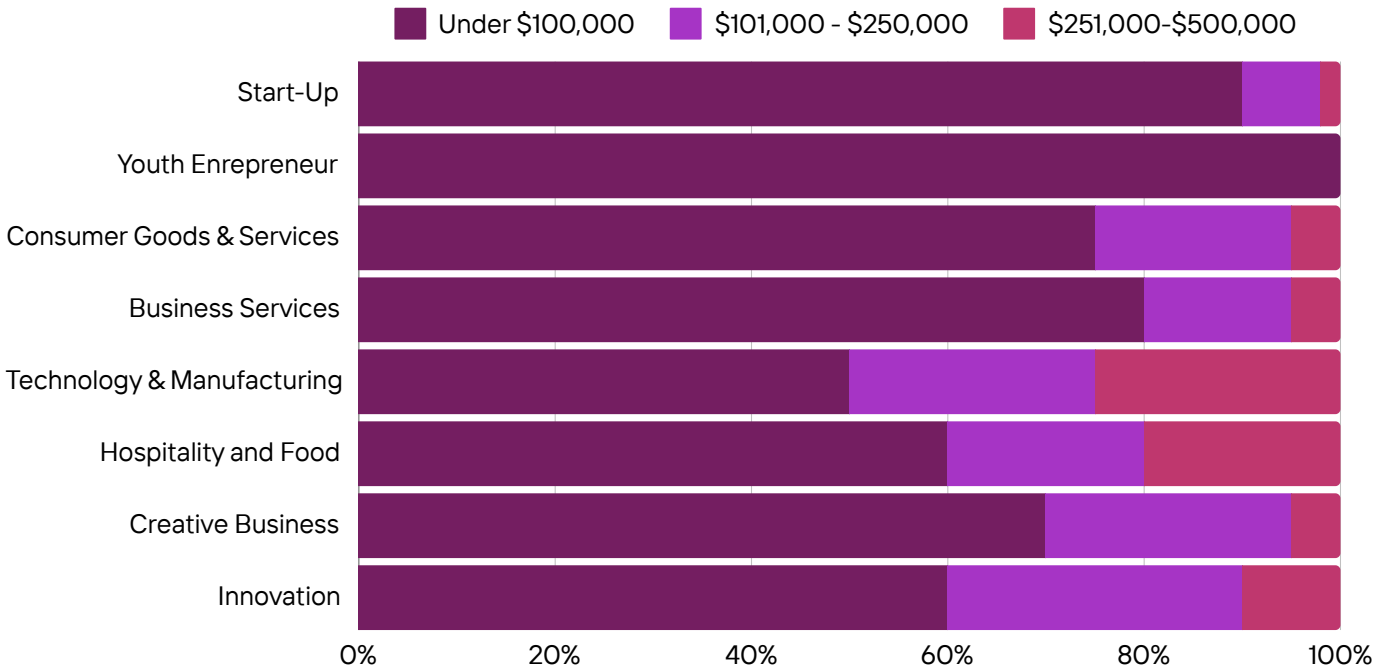
Health and Wellness: Participants from the health and wellness sector demonstrate the program's involvement in promoting businesses that prioritize physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These businesses range from fitness centers and yoga studios to wellness apps and holistic health products.

Education and Training: The presence of entrepreneurs in the education and training sector underscores a commitment to lifelong learning and skill development. These businesses provide critical resources for personal and professional growth, offering everything from vocational training to personal development workshops.

The diversity illustrated by this chart not only highlights the rich tapestry of industries engaged by the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition but also underscores the adaptability of the program to support a wide array of business types and models. This industry variety enriches the networking potential within the program, allowing for cross-sectoral learning and collaboration that can lead to innovative partnerships and business growth opportunities.

This deep engagement across various industries reinforces the program's role in nurturing a vibrant community of entrepreneurs who bring different perspectives, products, and services to the economy. By supporting such a wide range of industries, the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition plays a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem

Correlation between Industry Categories and Revenue Ranges



This detailed chart displays the diverse financial landscapes across various industry categories represented in the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, highlighting the significant variance in revenue stages among participants. By presenting the data in percentages, the chart offers a clear, quantified view of where each industry stands in terms of business maturity and economic success.

Analysis of Industry Categories:

- **Start-Ups:** Dominating the "Under \$100,000" revenue range with 90% of its entrants, this category represents the burgeoning phase of new businesses, most of which are still in the process of establishing their market presence. The small percentage transitioning into the "\$101,000 - \$250,000" and "\$251,000 - \$500,000" ranges indicates initial success stories emerging from this foundational stage.
- **Youth Entrepreneur (18-29):** Exclusively situated in the "Under \$100,000" category, youth entrepreneurs showcase the early entrepreneurial engagement of younger demographics, reflecting both the potential and the initial challenges faced by this age group in scaling their business ventures.
- **Consumer Goods & Services:** Exhibiting a broader distribution across all revenue categories, with a majority still in the lower revenue bracket, this sector shows both a high entry rate and a promising transition into higher earnings. The progression into mid-range and higher revenue categories signifies a maturing business model that benefits from consumer demand and market adaptability.
- **Business Services:** Similar to consumer goods, this category shows a significant concentration in the "Under \$100,000" range but with encouraging movement towards higher revenue brackets. This suggests that businesses are gradually scaling up, likely driven by expanding client bases and enhanced service offerings.
- **Technology & Manufacturing:** This category shows a more balanced distribution across all revenue ranges, reflecting the high capital and scaling potential inherent in tech and manufacturing ventures. The representation in higher revenue brackets underscores the success of businesses that manage to overcome initial barriers to entry.
- **Hospitality & Food:** Demonstrating considerable growth potential, this sector reveals a solid transition into higher revenue brackets. The spread suggests robust market engagement and the scalability of businesses within this industry, which are essential for long-term sustainability.
- **Creative Business and Innovation:** Both sectors show a healthy spread across the revenue spectrum, illustrating the creative and innovative drive that can lead to financial growth. Particularly for innovation, the movement towards higher revenue brackets highlights the impactful nature of novel solutions in attracting investment and market interest.

Strategic Implications

The chart not only serves as a diagnostic tool to understand the current economic standings of diverse industries but also acts as a strategic guide for directing support programs. Industries with higher concentrations in the lower revenue ranges may benefit from targeted financial aid, business mentorship, and growth accelerators to enhance their market viability and revenue potential. Conversely, industries demonstrating a broader spread across mid to high revenue ranges may be ideal candidates for advanced scaling programs, partnership development, and expansion support.

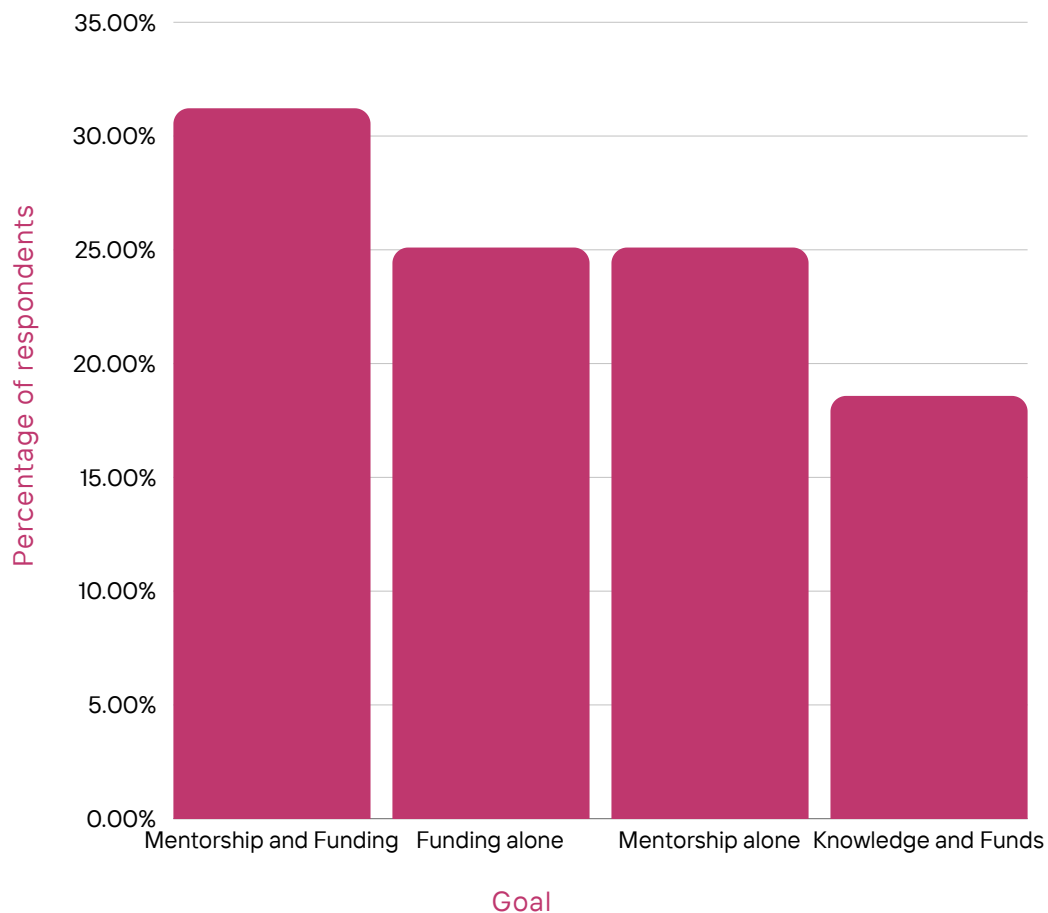
This visual representation of revenue across industry categories provides critical insights into the economic dynamics within the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition. It highlights the diverse economic achievements and challenges faced by Black women entrepreneurs across sectors, offering a foundational perspective for tailoring support mechanisms that align with specific industry needs and growth stages. By focusing on these insights, the BBPA can more effectively allocate resources, design interventions, and foster an environment that nurtures sustainable business growth and development.

PROGRAM GOALS (AREAS OF GROWTH)

In assessing the goals of participants in the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, a clear pattern emerges that underscores the diverse needs and aspirations of the entrepreneurs involved. The majority of participants have indicated a significant interest in both mentorship and funding, with approximately 31.22% of respondents identifying this dual focus as their primary goal. This highlights the crucial need for comprehensive support that spans both advisory services and financial assistance, emphasizing the importance of holistic program offerings that address multiple facets of entrepreneurial success.

Close behind, both funding alone and mentorship alone are equally prioritized, each by about 25.10% of the participants. This reflects a segmented demand within the community, where certain entrepreneurs may require more specific support either in the form of capital to scale their businesses or guidance and expertise to navigate the business landscape effectively.

A smaller yet significant proportion of the participants, 18.58%, are interested in both knowledge acquisition and funds, indicating a desire for educational development coupled with financial support. This group likely represents emerging entrepreneurs who are still in the foundational stages of their business journey, seeking to solidify their knowledge base while securing the capital necessary for initial growth and development.



This chart displays the primary goals of participants, with a significant number seeking mentorship and funding, directing future program enhancements to better meet these needs.

OVERALL IMPACT

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition has become an instrumental force in fostering the growth and development of Black women entrepreneurs across Canada. This initiative, structured to address unique challenges faced by this demographic, not only promotes business acumen but also empowers participants to become leaders within their communities and industries. Below, we explore the multifaceted impacts of this transformative program, emphasizing its role in driving significant change and fostering sustainable development.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND BUSINESS SUCCESS

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition has catalyzed economic empowerment by providing Black women entrepreneurs with critical resources, including funding, mentorship, and strategic business workshops. This direct support has led to measurable improvements in business operations, scalability, and revenue generation. For many participants, access to capital through the competition has been pivotal in transitioning from early-stage to more mature business operations. Over the past 4 years, several businesses have moved from under \$100,000 in annual revenue to higher revenue brackets up to \$500,000. This shift not only signifies individual business growth but also contributes to the broader economic fabric by promoting diverse and resilient business enterprises.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY TIES AND BUILDING NETWORKS

Beyond individual achievements, the competition strengthens community ties and fosters extensive networking opportunities. By connecting participants with a network of peers, seasoned industry leaders, and potential investors, the program creates a robust ecosystem of support. These connections often lead to collaborative opportunities, joint ventures, and shared growth initiatives that extend well beyond the competition itself. The community-building aspect of the program has proven essential, as it cultivates a culture of mutual support and collaboration that is vital for sustained entrepreneurial success.

ENHANCING VISIBILITY AND MARKET PRESENCE

Participation in the competition provides significant visibility, helping participants attract new investment and expand their customer bases. This enhanced market presence is critical for small businesses striving to establish a foothold in competitive markets. The exposure and publicity garnered through the competition amplify participant achievements, showcasing their businesses to a national audience and opening doors to new market opportunities and financial backing.

FOSTERING INNOVATION AND ADAPTABILITY

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition encourages innovation by pushing participants to think creatively about their business models and market approaches. This environment of innovation is particularly poignant in sectors like technology, manufacturing, and creative businesses, where adaptability and forward-thinking are crucial. The competition has seen participants pivot their business strategies to meet evolving market demands and leverage technology to enhance their operational efficiencies.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

The program's focus on sustainable business practices and long-term planning ensures that the benefits of participation extend beyond the immediate competition. Participants are encouraged to consider the environmental, social, and economic impacts of their businesses, leading to more sustainable practices and contributions to their communities. The emphasis on sustainability helps build businesses that are not only financially viable but also socially responsible and aligned with broader societal goals.

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition is more than an event; it is a catalyst for change, empowerment, and growth. Its impacts are seen in the enhanced economic status of participants, the vibrant networks it fosters, the increased visibility it provides, and the innovative and sustainable business practices it promotes. These achievements highlight the critical role of the competition in supporting and elevating Black women entrepreneurs in Canada, making it a vital initiative for continued investment and support.

TESTIMONIALS

These testimonials provide a snapshot of the profound impacts the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition has had on its participants, underscoring the significance of the support and opportunities it provides.



ALETHEA ROBINSON, FOUNDER OF SEE GIRL WORK

"This program helped me step out of my comfort zone and embrace my potential not just as a business owner but as a community leader. The Rise Up Competition instilled in me a greater sense of responsibility and the courage to lead initiatives that drive real change."



CANDINA ERENDU, CEO OF TRUE NORTH WOMEN'S SAFETY APPAREL

"The mentorship I received was transformative, providing me with the tools to refine my business model and significantly enhance my operational strategies. It has reshaped the way I approach business challenges and market opportunities."



MARIKA SIEWERT, MARIKA SIEWERT ENTREPRISES

"The connections I've made have been invaluable, leading to several collaborations that have propelled my business forward. These networks have not only supported my venture but also inspired innovative approaches to business that I continue to implement."



TAIJAH COX-ARMSTRONG, FOUNDER OF CHANGE4THOUGHT

"Through Rise Up, I've been able to launch community initiatives that were once just ideas. It's empowering to bring positive change to my local area, and the support from the program has been instrumental in making these projects a reality."



TESTIMONIALS

Each story is a testament to the program's role in empowering participants and enhancing their capabilities to succeed and impact their communities positively.



LATOYA BELFON, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF LABWORKS PUBLISHING INC.

"Being featured in the competition's final round increased my business's visibility tremendously, attracting key investors interested in what we're creating. This recognition has opened many doors and has been a game-changer for our growth."



SOPHIA JACKSON, FOUNDER OF SOULFUL COLOUR

"This opportunity means increased visibility for the Soulful Colour books and brand, allowing us to reach individuals who can benefit from our products nationally and eventually worldwide. The feedback and exposure from the competition have been pivotal in expanding our reach."



KAREN CLARKE, FOUNDER A SPECTRUM

"Rise Up has been a transformative experience. It's given me the confidence to take bold steps in my business and connect with a network of supportive, like-minded entrepreneurs. It's more than just a competition; it's a community where growth and empowerment are at the forefront. Participating in Rise Up has significantly impacted my approach to business and personal development."



MIRANDA P., FOUNDER OF OSHUN'S APOTHECARY

"This Rise Up experience has really been such a blessing. This is my third time entering, second time as a semi-finalist. I'm truly so grateful for all that the BBPA has done for women in business".



TESTIMONIALS

Through their voices, the value of the Rise Up initiative is vividly illustrated, showcasing the transformative power of dedicated support for Black women entrepreneurs in Canada.



ESHE SIMBA, FOUNDER OF SUGAR PLUM SCRUBS

"The Rise Up experience has been amazing. My highlight has to have been definitely putting together the business model canvas as well as the application itself. Applying for grants has a way of really sharpening your vision".



MARIAM OYINLOYE, FOUNDER OF ABIMBOLA

"The Rise Up Pitch Competition has really been amazing. We have gained followers on Instagram and blue connections on LinkedIn, which I'm really thankful for. The pitch training session has really helped me to sharpen my pitch".



KATRICE BENT, FOUNDER OF KATRICE JUSTICE

"Participating in Rise Up has definitely impacted my business by helping with exposure. After the initial post was made on Instagram, I started receiving more followers and connected with people who were in the audience today online".



FRANCES MURRAY, FOUNDER OF CHEZ FRAN ENTREPRISE INC.

My participation has highlighted how much I have grown as a person and business owner since applying last year. I was able to see on paper how much clearer my mission is and how much more impact I can have on the Canadian Corporate and small business landscape. It is not a highlight I expected but a welcomed one nonetheless.



MODIFICATIONS AND STRATEGIC FOCUS

In response to evolving needs and feedback, the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition implemented strategic modifications to its operational and engagement strategies. These changes were aimed at enhancing the quality and impact of the program, aligning more closely with our core mission of empowering Black women entrepreneurs across Canada.

ENHANCED QUALITY OF ENGAGEMENT

This year, we made a conscious decision to shift from external marketing efforts to an internally managed, focused approach. This strategic pivot was designed to deepen the quality of engagement and interaction within the program. Although this resulted in a decrease in the total number of applicants—from 1700 last year to about 1000 this year—the quality of applications and engagements has significantly improved. This targeted approach allowed us to offer more personalized support and resources, ensuring that every participant could benefit maximally from the program. The concentrated focus has fostered a richer, more productive experience for all involved, emphasizing depth and impact over sheer numbers.

TRANSITION TO VIRTUAL FORMAT

Understanding the diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds of our participants, we transitioned the program to a virtual format. This pivot was crucial in democratizing access to the competition, ensuring that women from remote, rural, or underserved regions could participate as fully as those from urban centres. By removing geographical barriers, we expanded the program's reach and inclusivity, allowing us to tap into a wider pool of talent and potential. The virtual format has not only leveled the playing field but also increased the program's accessibility, making it possible for more entrepreneurs to benefit from the valuable training, mentorship, and networking opportunities provided by the Women's+ Pitch Competition.

These strategic modifications have been pivotal in refining the program's focus and expanding its impact. By concentrating on quality engagement and ensuring equitable access through a virtual format, the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition continues to evolve as a leading initiative for fostering growth, innovation, and success among Black women entrepreneurs in Canada. These changes underscore our commitment to adapting and responding to the needs of our participants, ensuring that the program not only meets but exceeds its objectives of empowerment and community building.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition has established itself as a critical platform for nurturing and supporting the entrepreneurial ambitions of Black women across Canada. As we look to the future, the competition is well-positioned to build upon its successes and continue its essential role in the business ecosystem.

PROJECTED GROWTH AND EXPANSION PLANS

Our vision for the future involves broadening the program's influence both geographically and across various industries. We recognize the importance of adapting to the dynamic needs of our community and are committed to continuously refining our approach to better serve our participants.

Extending Geographic Reach: We plan to enhance our outreach efforts, particularly targeting underserved and remote regions across Canada. This expansion is not just about increasing numbers but ensuring that Black women entrepreneurs nationwide have the opportunity to access our resources, connect with mentors, and participate in our network, regardless of their location. Our aim is to foster a truly national community of vibrant, innovative entrepreneurs who can drive change and economic growth in their localities.

Introducing More Industry-Specific Supports: Recognizing the diverse interests and needs of our participants, we are set to introduce more industry-specific supports. This will involve tailoring our workshops, mentorship programs, and resources to cater to the unique challenges and opportunities within various sectors such as technology, healthcare, creative industries, and manufacturing. By providing targeted support, we can help participants not only start their businesses but also scale and sustain them.

ADAPTATION TO EVOLVING NEEDS

The business landscape is continually evolving, and so are the needs of our entrepreneurs. We are committed to staying adaptive and responsive, ensuring that our programs and initiatives remain relevant and effective. This will involve regular reviews and updates of our curriculum, bringing in experts from emergent fields, and leveraging technology to improve program delivery and participant engagement.

COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition, ensuring it remains a gold standard for entrepreneurial support programs in Canada. We will keep fostering a culture of innovation, inclusivity, and empowerment, ensuring that every Black woman entrepreneur who participates in our program feels supported, valued, and equipped to succeed.

Our strategic plans are designed to foster a thriving community of innovative entrepreneurs. The success of these plans is intertwined with the continued support and collaboration from our sponsors and donors. Through these partnerships, we not only aim to enhance the scale and scope of our program but also to empower our sponsors to meet their corporate social responsibility objectives effectively.

As the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition moves forward, our commitment to enhancing and expanding our support for Black women entrepreneurs remains steadfast. The envisioned improvements to our program are set to create a more inclusive and empowering environment, with each step forward made possible through the continued support of our partners. While we are dedicated to pushing the boundaries of what we can achieve, it is the collaboration with our sponsors and donors that truly enables us to turn these ambitious plans into reality. This collaborative spirit is what will continue to drive the program's success and the profound impact it has on the entrepreneurial landscape in Canada.

The success of the Rise Up Women's+ Pitch Competition is deeply intertwined with the invaluable support from our distinguished sponsors. Each sponsor brings unique industry expertise and resources that can greatly benefit our entrepreneurs.

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2024

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