



Immigrant Women Entrepreneurship Network

ISANS' Immigrant Women Entrepreneurship Network (IWEN) aims to amplify the voices of immigrant and refugee women entrepreneurs in Nova Scotia, providing opportunities to develop and enhance their entrepreneurial skills as they strive to become independent business owners.

Program Objectives

- **Promote Diversity and Inclusion:** to foster an inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem and help immigrant women overcome barriers.
- **Facilitate access to markets:** to increase opportunities for women to test and validate their products and services
- **Provide business training and mentorship:** to help women develop skills and increase knowledge to start their business
- **Access to financial literacy and funding:** to support women in navigating financial resources and information to start or grow their business
- **Access to networks and resources:** to help women build relationships with other entrepreneurs and key players in the ecosystem

Program Structure (2 years)

4 Training Cohort with 60 immigrant women entrepreneurs
12 networking events with 120 women participants
2 pitch competitions with 20 women pitching
8 roundtables and meet and greets with experts
4 intercultural competencies sessions

Our Achievements - Year 1:

- 2 cohorts - 10-week focused training
 - 30 immigrant women entrepreneurs from 18 different countries
- 12 networking events
 - 175 immigrant women entrepreneurs in attendance
- Immigrant Women Entrepreneurship Pitch Competition on September 25th
 - 9 women entrepreneurs pitched their business ideas from sectors like construction, jewelry design, and digital marketing.
 - Luciana de Souza Moreira, founder of Science PORTAGE, won 1st prize for her work connecting research institutions and pharmaceutical companies.
- 2 intercultural competencies training sessions
 - 12 participants from financial institutions and key business ecosystem players.
- 3 roundtable discussions, offering our clients the opportunity to ask questions and gain insights from successful women entrepreneurs, financial institutions, and key stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- ISANS' vendor market
 - 16 women entrepreneurs showcased their businesses and gained valuable market information to apply in their business
- 17 partnerships with key stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem
 - Saint Mary's University, Emera IdeaHub, Arthur L. Irving Entrepreneurship Center, Onside, Tribe Network, RBC, BDC, CBDC, Public Services and Procurement Canada, Craft Nova Scotia, Efficiency Nova Scotia and Divert Nova Scotia.



175 Immigrant women entrepreneurs in 12 networking events

30 participants from 18 different countries in 2 training cohorts

17 traditional and non-traditional partnerships formed

9 women pitched in IWEN annual pitch competition

2 intercultural sessions with 12 participants from various financial institutions

16 women entrepreneurs participated in vendor markets

11 new businesses started by immigrant women entrepreneurs

Testimonials



"Networking is about building connections over time. The program provided helpful opportunities to connect with people who are embedded in the community and know how things work behind the scenes."
Carolyn - Founder of Story Circles

"I felt like I wasn't alone, surrounded by other women who also want to be successful. The sharing of ideas was very helpful for me."
Narimane - Founder of Beirut Way Convenience Store

"You are behind the success of this program, offering ongoing support even after the courses are done. It's been a win-win situation for both participants and organizers."
Desiree - founder of Insights Perception

"I am completely satisfied with the IWEN program. It opened my eyes to many new perspectives, and I learned a lot while still striving to learn more."
Shirin - founder of Coastwide Construction

"Participating in the IWEN program opened my eyes to new possibilities and provided the confidence I needed to pursue my business goals. The networking events were particularly impactful; they allowed me to connect with other entrepreneurs and gain insights into the market. Although I faced challenges, the supportive community helped me realize that I could overcome them. This program not only helped me refine my business idea but also equipped me with practical knowledge and connections to move forward confidently."
Miriam - Founder of M8 Retail

"Being part of this program has been transformative for me. After finishing the program, I felt an urgent need to stay engaged in a community where everyone supports each other. The cohort environment sparked new ideas and motivation, making me realize how crucial it is to have a network that fosters collaboration."
Xin - Founder of Snowy Day Treats

Advocacy in Action

Advocacy plays a crucial role in advancing women's entrepreneurship, particularly for immigrant women who often face unique challenges in the business landscape. The advocacy efforts associated with this project are designed to raise awareness and promote policies and programs that specifically support immigrant women entrepreneurs. Our goal is to shift cultural attitudes and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that empowers these women to thrive in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

To achieve this, we are forming non-traditional partnerships that aim to transform the perception of immigrant women entrepreneurs within Nova Scotia's entrepreneurial ecosystem. By collaborating with various stakeholders, we seek to enhance the visibility and prominence of these entrepreneurs, thereby highlighting the vital contributions they make to the local economy. These partnerships not only emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion but also encourage action among community groups and ecosystem enablers to provide essential resources and information tailored to the needs of immigrant women in business.

Another critical aspect of our advocacy efforts is to amplify the voices and successes of immigrant and refugee women entrepreneurs by creating platforms for them to connect with a wide network of peers and business experts. This interaction not only facilitates learning but also ensures that their experiences and achievements are recognized and celebrated. Additionally, we are committed to showcasing the substantial contributions of immigrant women within the province by sharing their impactful stories and successes. Our goal is to inspire a wider audience and cultivate a supportive environment for all women entrepreneurs, consequently fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial landscape that recognizes and values the contributions of immigrant women.

Partnerships

The primary focus of our initiatives was to generate new opportunities and enhance access to previously inaccessible resources. To accomplish this, we implemented a strategic approach that not only leveraged ISANS' established partnerships, such as with the Centre for Women in Business, but also sought to forge non-traditional collaborations with organizations and companies capable of delivering value in innovative ways.

In Year 1, we engaged with over 20 organizations across Nova Scotia, resulting in several key outcomes:

- Sightline Planning and Approvals, a consultancy firm specializing in municipal planning and urban development, sponsored our 2024 annual pitch by providing seed capital for the winning entry. They were impressed by the quality of the pitches and have decided to increase their support for our next competition with a larger contribution.
- RBC contributes to the program by delivering financial training and supporting events through their Communities Together Fund.
- Saint Mary's University-Arthur L. Irving Entrepreneurship Centre partnered with us by offering free event spaces, co-working facilities, business coaching, and training sessions.
- Tribe Network collaborated with us to organize events at their facilities. Additionally, they offered access to various grants and funding opportunities, including the Start Small grant, which ranges from \$500 to \$1,000. This grant was successfully awarded to four of our women entrepreneurs.
- Shanti Hot Yoga has endorsed our mission to promote the physical and mental well-being of women entrepreneurs by offering complimentary yoga sessions to participants of IWEN.
- Halifax Public Libraries partnered with us to offer accessible venues for IWEN networking events and entrepreneurial meetings.
- CBDC Blue Water introduced a microloan program aimed at supporting immigrant entrepreneurs, with a particular focus on women entrepreneurs in rural and smaller communities throughout Nova Scotia. This initiative seeks to address the challenges they face when accessing traditional financing.
- Divert Nova Scotia is committed to providing information and support in the waste management sector. To further this commitment, they have launched a micro grants program providing funding of up to \$1,500 for women entrepreneurs who are starting projects aimed at reducing waste and improving recycling practices.

These partnerships have significantly enhanced the resources and opportunities available to immigrant women entrepreneurs.

About Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

With over 40 years of experience, ISANS is the leading immigrant settlement service agency in Atlantic Canada, serving 17,000+ clients annually from over 200 countries in communities across the province. ISANS helps immigrants build a future in Nova Scotia.

We bring varied languages, diverse experiences, and unique perspectives that inform our client-centered programming. We seek to empower our clients and staff to collaborate and to learn and grow together—both personally and professionally—through partnership, professionalism, and accountability. As the front door to many of Nova Scotia's immigrants, our goal is to create a community where all can belong and grow, building a stronger Nova Scotia and Canada for all.



Success stories

IWEN is an impactful network that provides a safe space for immigrant and refugee women to share their unique challenges, from securing funding to balancing family responsibilities. These women frequently hold informal gatherings to uplift one another, celebrate achievements, and share valuable insights. These interactions enhance professional connections and foster lasting friendships, significantly boosting their confidence and empowering them to pursue their business aspirations. Additionally, IWEN cultivates a sense of belonging and resilience, demonstrating that collaboration enables them to overcome challenges and succeed. Their collective efforts not only improve their individual well-being but also enrich the broader community, highlighting the powerful impact of solidarity among immigrant women entrepreneurs.

IWEN participants are transforming challenges into opportunities through their dedication to learning and collaboration, leading to funding, contracts, and local recognition. For example, entrepreneur Desiree has successfully obtained contracts with local businesses by implementing innovative management and consulting strategies. Likewise, Shirin has increased her confidence and business skills, which led her to secure the "Small Start Grant" from a local organization, allowing her to continue developing her construction and renovation company. Their journey exemplifies the power of community and the impact of investing in personal and professional growth.



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