A Collective Entrepreneurial Ecosystem:
Insights from the 2023 Startup Canada Tour

Presented by UPS
CEO Message

Over the last few years, Canadian entrepreneurs have faced an array of challenges in isolation, shining a light on the need for community and connection across the country. With this need for connection top of mind, this year, Startup Canada launched our inaugural program Startup Canada Tour. A five stop national in-person event series connecting early stage entrepreneurs with the support needed to build and grow their businesses. Tour also sparked a move away from our annual entrepreneurship census report, instead using the opportunity of being in-person to connect directly with entrepreneurs from across the country and hear first-hand their stories, challenges, and needs. Throughout the year, the team mobilized the startup support ecosystem across selected territories and provinces - Yukon, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. Throughout this report, we were able to highlight what we heard from entrepreneurs in each province, including their unique and collective experiences as an entrepreneur in Canada.

For this new program, the Startup Canada team focused on developing an event series that was informed of the realities of entrepreneurship in 2023. Our goal was to connect entrepreneurs directly to support organizations at the local, provincial, and national levels, as well as provide early stage entrepreneurs with the tools they need to start and grow their businesses. Tour was developed with the purpose of telling the stories of diverse entrepreneurs and providing a space for the ecosystem to come together, share ideas, and identify gaps and opportunities for change.

Through Startup Canada Tour, attendees had access to keynotes, panels, and practical workshops featuring fellow entrepreneurs, private and public sector support organizations, community builders, and key industry experts. Beyond mainstage programming, each leg of Tour also featured small group mentorship sessions via the Ask the Expert Lounge, the Startup Global Pop-up Pitch Competition, and direct access to engaged partners via the Ecosystem Support Zone. Startup Canada Tour’s inaugural year connected over 1,600 in-person attendees, over 5,800 virtual attendees for our final hybrid Tour stop, 169 partners, 107 exhibitors, 126 speakers (of which 60% are women), and 98 mentors.

Our team saw first-hand the strength of Canada’s entrepreneurs from coast to coast to coast, and the need for more in-person opportunities to share our stories and build new systems of support. Together, we will make Canada the best place in the world to start and operate a business.

- KAYLA ISABELLE
CEO, STARTUP CANADA
Reflections from the Road

Whitehorse, Yukon

Tour first touched down on April 25th at the beautiful Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre in downtown Whitehorse. The day featured sessions on How to Become a Business Champion of the North, Shipping Fundamentals with UPS, Local Supports to Grow Your Business, Future Branding, Funding Fundamentals, and Successes and Lessons from Entrepreneurs. Uniquely featured at the Whitehorse stop, was a South x North Roundtable Discussion, where attendees gathered to openly share the particular barriers facing northern entrepreneurs, and ways of bringing the north and south together through shared experiences and support.

In attendance was Premier of the Yukon, the Honourable Ranj Pillai, who took part in a fireside chat to discuss economic resilience and the challenges early stage Yukon entrepreneurs face. Premiere Pillai also announced a Canadian first - the Yukon’s government-funded paid sick leave program for workers and self-employed individuals. The Whitehorse keynote was presented by Bob Baxter, Founder of Yukon Brewing. The Yukon Brewing team also stuck around to help attendees celebrate with their sponsored Yukon Entrepreneurs Networking Hour at the end of the day!

Whitehorse was the first location of the Startup Global Pop-up Pitch Competition, where founders competed live on the mainstage for a cash prize of $3,000 and a spot in the Brampton-based 2023 Startup Global Pitch Competition Grand Finale. First place was awarded
to Sheryl Nimigon of Hinterland Flour Mill - the first Yukon-based flour mill, contributing to sustainable food systems in Northern Canada.

What We Heard in Whitehorse

At our kick-off in Whitehorse, we heard from local small business owners that ecosystem support and geographical location are significant challenges to growing their businesses. With a lack of product and business diversity, local entrepreneurs need more access to industry-specific mentors and support organizations. As shared in a roundtable discussion by local entrepreneur Joline Beauregard, Owner of Sunrise Nutrition, “We have an amazing community in the Yukon and the appetite for collaboration and community. But, sometimes, we live in a bubble, so there is a challenge there.” The geographical location of Whitehorse also means that travel and shipping are often required for any business growth and networking, adding additional business costs. Weather also impacts sales of physical products, especially in the winter months when tourism is low.

Despite these challenges, we saw first-hand the power of community that unites Whitehorse’s entrepreneurship ecosystem, with business leaders working collaboratively and championing one another.
Halifax, Nova Scotia

The second Startup Canada Tour stop, on May 2nd, was at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax. The agenda for the day delivered insights on local supports, funding, shipping, and lessons learned, as well as a special panel discussion highlighting newcomer entrepreneurs and their unique experiences starting and growing a business in Nova Scotia. The day also included a workshop on how early stage entrepreneurs can launch their side hustles with Jeff Mitchell of the Maker's Collective Inc.

In addition to a series of incredible panels and presentations, an unforgettable keynote was given in the morning by Peace By Chocolate’s CEO and Founder, Tareq Hadhad. The Halifax winner of the Startup Global Pop-up Pitch Competition was also announced in front of a packed house. Rashmi Prakash of Aruna Revolution, a Canadian-made, affordable, and environmentally responsible alternative period product, was named the region's winner, taking home the cash prize and a chance to compete in the October Grand Finale.

What We Heard in Halifax

In Halifax, we heard about the power of immigration and unique support for new Canadians exploring entrepreneurship on the East Coast. In our panel on newcomer entrepreneurship, Shawn Montique, CEO of Gloria’s International Grocery Store, shared that while Nova Scotia has many unique supports for newcomers, “You have to come to events like these to stay connected to the people who can point you in the right direction to help you to grow and be a part of the support system for Nova Scotia.”
The power of networking was echoed across other panels and presentations, coupled with the need for increased diversity in entrepreneurial spaces and events. Tiffany Young, CEO of Natural Butter Bar, had found it challenging to find a Black woman mentor in Nova Scotia. Additionally, in a panel on funding fundamentals, Tia Upshaw, CEO of Canadian Blk Women in Excellence Society, noted that Atlantic Canada lacks funding support for Black entrepreneurs, especially compared to Ontario and British Columbia. With recent growth in local support organizations, such as Volta and Tribe Network, there was a positive feeling of change across the local ecosystem.
For the third stop, on May 11th, the Startup Canada Tour touched down at The Nest at UBC, in Vancouver. The Vancouver stage featured stories of B.C. business champions and workshops on how to find product market fit and build a business plan. The day also included a fireside chat with Blume co-founder and CEO, Karen Danudjaja and Startup Canada CEO Kayla Isabelle.

Vancouver marked the first Tour stop with two keynote sessions - starting in the morning Tara Bosch, Founder of SmartSweets - the candy brand worth $125M in revenue and $360M after acquisition. The afternoon keynote was presented by Ian MacKinnon, CTO and Co-Founder of Later.com - the number one visual social media marketing platform globally.

The Vancouver Tour stop’s Startup Global Pop-up Pitch Competition winner was Vivian Liu of Mae: Making Auto Easy - the first-ever unbiased car shopping experience built for women, by women.

What We Heard in Vancouver

Our panellists and keynotes showcased the thriving ecosystem of tech and consumer products in Vancouver, a city filled with emerging businesses that have successfully grown nationally and globally. With those success stories, many founders shared how the smallness of the Canadian startup community can present both opportunities and challenges for Vancouver-based startups. Taking part in our iconic founders panel, Bonfire and FLIK Co-founder Michelle Kwok shared that as a Canadian startup, “once you’re plugged into the network, you know everyone, or you’re one or two connections away from someone.”
On the other hand, the smaller Canadian ecosystem has made funding challenging for many entrepreneurs in Vancouver, forcing some to look to the United States first for investment opportunities. Adam Bent, CEO of Scout Canning, shared that many entrepreneurs will seek funding through venture capital, but warned that this route is often very expensive for early entrepreneurs and can lead to unsustainable growth. Overall, the strength of the entrepreneurship community shined in Vancouver, with transparent success and failure stories shared by industry experts and an openness to help early entrepreneurs succeed.
Calgary's September 28th event, hosted at the BMO Centre at Stampede Park, marked the second last Startup Canada Tour stop of 2023. Alberta’s startup support players showed up in droves, enjoying sessions on Unleashing the Albertan Advantage, Social Impact Investment for Women-Led Businesses, Albertan Allies You Can Lean On, and a special workshop on Embracing Experimentation & Customer-Centricity for Revenue Growth. Premier of Alberta, the Honourable Danielle Smith, also helped kick off the day with a special welcome during opening remarks.

Calgary’s keynote was presented by Bryan de Lottinville, Founder and Executive Chairperson of Benevity - one of Western Canada’s most successful tech unicorns. Announced by Calgary's Deputy Mayor and Ward 1 City Councillor Sonya Sharp, the regional Startup Global Pitch Competition winner was Mohamad Abdel Rida of Rinvio Technologies Inc. - a disruptive software startup reimagining safety and efficiency within the Canadian trucking industry.

What We Heard in Calgary

The power of the Alberta ecosystem was showcased across our Calgary stop. Guest speakers highlighted the strength and pioneering mentality of Alberta entrepreneurs and the unique challenges that come from operating a business in a smaller city. In our panel on local champions, Emily Slaneff, CEO of Crush Camp, spoke about how the kindness and community-first mentality of Alberta helped her business thrive. “It’s the people who make up Alberta, and you can find someone to help. People are open to new ideas and concepts.”
Similar to What We Heard in Vancouver, other entrepreneurs shared how the smaller community in Alberta can cause barriers to entry when seeking funding and support, especially if you are from an underrepresented group. With a call for more support for 2SLGBTQIA+ and women entrepreneurs, panellists also looped back to the power of networking, and the need to eliminate silos. Industry experts and leaders also stressed the importance of asking for help and staying connected through community events.
Brampton, Ontario

The fifth and final 2023 Startup Canada Tour stop was held in Brampton on October 26th at the Rose Brampton. As the one and only hybrid stop of the series, the Brampton event was designed to empower access to all entrepreneurs across the country who wanted to learn, gather, and celebrate the collective achievements of Canada’s startup ecosystem.

Over 6,300 virtual and in-person attendees had the opportunity to engage with the day’s mainstage sessions. Featured topics included Building a Solid Foundation for Startup Growth, Unlocking Financing Strategies for Early Stage Startups, and panels featuring local women trailblazers and the 2023 CANIE Awards Winners. Avery Swartz of Camp Tech also took the stage to deliver a workshop on digital marketing strategies for entrepreneurs. The Brampton Tour stop also featured two keynote speakers - Co-founder and CEO of Marlow, Nadia Ladak and Daniel Lewis, motivational speaker and founder of Daniel’s Chai Bar.

Throughout the day, nearly 100 Brampton-based founders pitched behind closed doors for the chance to be named the region’s Pop-up Pitch winner. Taking home first place, announced on the mainstage prior to the Grand Finale top 10 showdown, was Liza Akvhledziani of Chexy Co. - a tenant-focused rental platform allowing users to use a credit card to earn rewards on their largest monthly expense.

Joined by the Mayor of Brampton, his Worship Patrick Brown, the top three Startup Global Pitch Competition Grand Finale winners were announced. Hamilton-based startup ImaginAble Solutions - a company revolutionizing assistive technologies for people with disabilities - was
named the first-place winner, taking home $30,000. Liza Akvhledziani of Chexy Co. took home the second-place prize, winning $15,000. Rashmi Prakash of Aruna Revolution, the third-place winner, collected $7,500. Last but not least, Jessica McNaughton of memoryKPR Technologies was selected as the 2023 People’s Choice winner, securing a $2,500 cash prize. You can watch the recording of our final stop in Brampton on YouTube.

**Key learnings from Startup Canada Tour 2023**

Our fifth and final stop in Brampton echoed the strength of the Canadian startup ecosystem, the commitment to community and lifting each other up, as well as the need for increased support for equity-deserving founders, and accessible funding across the country. The gap in funding knowledge and access across Canada was highlighted in our panel on funding strategies for early stage founders. Scott Tabachnick, VP of Communications and Government Relations at Moneris shared that “45% of founders aren’t sure what funding is available to them.”

In our panel on inspiring stories from Canadian Founders, Natasha Ferguson, Founder of Ethelfox Construct Group, shared that while she has faced countless moments of discrimination and gender bias in growing her business, her approach to change is “if they're not going to invite me to the table, I’ll build my own.” The call to build new support systems for entrepreneurs was a sentiment shared not only by entrepreneurs in Brampton but at every Tour stop.
Based on what we heard from the community, moving into Startup Canada Tour 2024, our goal is to continue to collaborate across the ecosystem with local, regional, and national players. As echoed across each 2023 stop, we will continue to champion increased availability and access to funding for early stage entrepreneurs, especially for underrepresented and equity-deserving groups. Including the collection and sharing of data around funding disparities between demographics, and hosting discussions with private and public sector organizations to discuss ways of moving forward, each Startup Canada Tour stop will continue to champion and platform stories of entrepreneurs from diverse communities, industries, regions, and experiences.

We have also put together a list of ecosystem resources and support organizations, which can be found at the end of this report. The resources are categorized by each territory and province we visited during Startup Canada Tour 2023, as well as a list of tools available across Canada.
The 2023 Startup Canada Tour was presented in partnership with UPS, with Air Canada as the exclusive airline partner, Media Planet as the Media Partner, and with program support from BDC, YukonStruct, TD, Magnet, Competition Bureau Canada, and the Hunter Hub for Entrepreneurial Thinking - University of Calgary. Each Tour stop was also presented with the help of over 100 ecosystem partners from across Canada! Tour was also made possible through the support of 26 volunteers, across all five stops, showcasing the passion and eagerness to support Canadian entrepreneurs and become involved in the ecosystem.

We are excited to be continuing Startup Canada Tour in 2024! You can join us in:

- Winnipeg, Manitoba
- Langley, British Columbia
- Moncton, New Brunswick
- Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario

Tickets for each stop will be available for sale in early 2024. To stay updated on 2024 Startup Canada Tour dates and locations, including registration, visit startupcanadatour.ca and subscribe to the Tour mailing list.

We can’t wait to see you next year!
Ecosystem Resources & Support Organizations

Throughout Startup Canada Tour, we connected with national and local support organizations, offering tools and resources to help support Canadian entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses. Below, you will find a list of resources and organizations categorized by the territories and provinces we visited, as well as a list of Canada-wide resources. It is important to note that these are only some of the many organizations helping support Canadian entrepreneurs.

Yukon Resources & Support Organizations

- Association franco-yukonnaise
- Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency
- däna Näye Ventures
- Government of Yukon
- Small Economy Works
- Tech Yukon
- Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce
- Yukonstruct
- Yukon Chamber of Commerce
- Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce
- Yukon University's Innovation & Entrepreneurship
- Yukon Venture Angels

Nova Scotia Resources & Support Organizations

- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
- Arthur L. Irving Entrepreneurship Centre at Saint Mary's University
- Black Business Initiative
- Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development
- Centre for Women in Business
- Common Good Solutions
- Digital Nova Scotia
- Emera
- Halifax Chamber of Commerce
- Ignite Atlantic
- Invest Nova Scotia
• Nova Scotian Association of CBDC’s
• Propel ICT
• Startup Zone
• Tribe Network
• Volta

British Columbia Resources & Support Organizations

• Black Business Association of BC
• Blk Women in Excellence Society
• entrepreneurship@UBC
• Innovate BC
• ISS of BC
• Launch Academy
• League of Innovators
• New Ventures BC
• Pacific Economic Development Canada
• Panache Ventures
• Province of British Columbia Business Support
• Small Business BC
• Spring Activator
• Volition
• WeBC

Alberta Resources & Support Organizations

• Alberta Innovates
• Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute (AMII)
• Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE)
• ATB Financial
• Business Link
• Community Futures Network of Alberta
• Conseil De Développement Économique de L'Alberta
• Edmonton Unlimited
• Government of Alberta
• Platform Calgary
• Prairies Economic Development Canada
• Upside Foundation
• Venturepark Labs
Ontario (Brampton/Region of Peel) Resources & Support Organizations

- BHive
- Black Business and Professional Association
- Brampton Entrepreneur Centre
- Brampton Innovation District
- Brampton Venture Zone
- Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council (CAMSC)
- Community Futures Ontario
- CMC Microsystems
- DMZ
- Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
- The Founder Institute
- Government of Ontario
- Innovators & Entrepreneurs Foundation (IEF)
- Invest Brampton
- MAGNET
- NCFDC
- Rogers Cybersecure Catalyst
- Small Business Centres Ontario
- Startup Peel
- University of Waterloo

National Support Organizations & Resources

- BlackNorth
- Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)
- Canada Small Business Financing Program
- Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC)
- Canadian Small Business Women
- Competition Bureau Canada
- Export Development Canada
- Futurpreneur
- GS1 Canada
- Inclusive Workplace and Supply Council of Canada (IWSCC)
- Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada
- Moneris
- Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada
• Ownr
• Pocketed
• Startup Canada
• The Forum
• Trade Commissioner Service (TCS)
• UPS Small Business Program
• Venture for Canada
• Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH)