



FIVE-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

May 2019 – April 2024



CONESTOGA

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
COLLECTIVE



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DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

I am filled with immense joy and pride as we celebrate a significant milestone: the fifth anniversary of the Conestoga Entrepreneurship Collective. When we first began this journey in May 2019, our vision was clear: to foster a vibrant community of innovators, creators, and trailblazers in the Conestoga community who would help shape the future of entrepreneurship. A future that was diverse, inclusive and profoundly human.

Over the past five years, our organization has undergone remarkable growth and transformation. The CEC team expanded from one member to 14 dynamic individuals, offering groundbreaking programming. We have leveraged our successful programming models to support the development of various new initiatives like the LiftOff program tailored for Black entrepreneurs. We've established headquarters at the Downtown Kitchener campus and a satellite space at Communitech. We have fostered strong partnerships with key organizations in the entrepreneurial ecosystem including Communitech, The Accelerator Centre, Catalyst Commons, Waterloo Region Small Business Centre and the SDG Factory. This impact report vividly demonstrates the outcomes of our efforts, showcasing the evolution of aspiring entrepreneurs into successful leaders, skilled technicians into freelance experts, and sales professionals

into key players at top regional tech firms. We've navigated challenges, seized opportunities, and continued to push the boundaries of what's possible.

Looking ahead, the future is brimming with possibilities. As we stand on the cusp of a new chapter, I am confident that the CEC will continue to thrive and evolve, guided by the spirit of innovation, collaboration, and perseverance that defines us. Together, we will continue to champion entrepreneurship for humans: empowering aspiring founders, freelancers and sales professionals, and creating positive change in our communities and beyond.

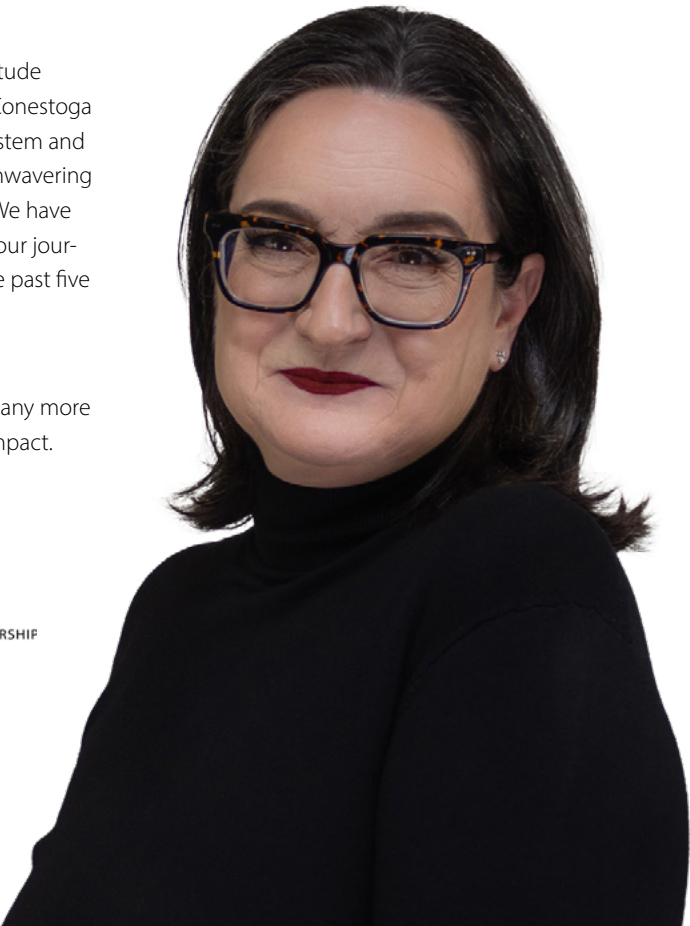
I want to express my deepest gratitude to the CEC team and allies across Conestoga College, the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the community at large for your unwavering support, dedication, and passion. We have achieved remarkable success, but our journey is far from over. So here's to the past five years and to the bright future that lies ahead.

Thank you, and I look forward to many more years of innovation, growth, and impact.

Rose Mastnak



“Together, we will continue to champion entrepreneurship for humans: empowering aspiring founders, freelancers and sales professionals, and creating positive change in our communities and beyond. “



OUR JOURNEY

2019–2024

- MAY 2019**
 - CEC founded within the School of Business
 - Pre-Pilot of Venture Lab
- SEPTEMBER 2019**
 - Official Pilot of Venture Lab
- JANUARY 2020**
 - Pilot of Sales Lab
- MAY 2020**
 - Pilot of Gig Lab
- OCTOBER 2020**
 - First Wilf Rieck Pitch Day @ Conestoga
- JANUARY 2021**
 - CEC joined new portfolio to create Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- MARCH 2021**
 - Equitable Life of Canada Community Venture Award exstablished
- SEPTEMBER 2021**
 - LiftOff Black Entrepreneurship Program launched in partnership with CCAWR
 - Gig Marketplace launched
- JUNE 2022**
 - Gig Marketplace partnership launched with Accelerator Centre in AC:Studio program
- OCTOBER 2022**
 - CEC Satellite space opened in Innovation Alley at Communitech
- SEPTEMBER 2023**
 - CEC Headquarters opened at the DTK campus
 - Venture Lab for Skilled Trades Pilot launched funded by the RBC Foundation as part of RBC's Future Launch initiative
 - Sales Lab for Founders Pilot launched with HalTech Regional Innovation Centre
- DECEMBER 2023**
 - First meeting of the CEC Advisory Committee
- JANUARY 2024**
 - Sales Lab for BDS Pilot launched as elective in Business Development & Sales Post Grad program
- MARCH 2024**
 - CSI x CEC Venture Award established
- MAY 2024**
 - Celebrating 5 years of impact from the CEC

VISION

—————● We champion entrepreneurship for **humans**.

MISSION

—————● Incubating founders, freelancers and talent for the innovation economy.

VALUES

- **Community**
- It takes a village to launch a person. We proactively curate connections and collaboration within the Collective, in the Conestoga community and in the broader ecosystem to support the success of our clients.
- Fast and lean**
- We move at the speed of the real world. Focus and urgency inform program development, iteration and delivery to enable our clients to learn fast and succeed swiftly. No wasted time, no wasted effort.
- Potential first**
- We see you. A dedication to empowering our clients to reach their full potential is at the core of all our interactions and communications. When you succeed, we succeed.
- World x Conestoga**
- We live at the intersection between what the world needs and what Conestoga offers. Opportunities can start with the students or the market, but they all converge in a space that serves both.

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

The CEC team is a vibrant mix of innovators, strategists, managers and industry experts committed to supporting the potential of our members. Their collaborative spirit and dedication to excellence empowers them to guide founders, freelancers and high-growth sales professionals through the challenges and opportunities of the modern marketplace. Together, we’re crafting the future of entrepreneurship.



BALYODH GILL
Sales Coach



CHRIS HENRY
Gig Marketplace Coordinator



CHRISTIAN SNYDER
Associate Director, Program Development and Delivery



GREG BARRATT
Sales Coach



JANE SNYDER
Gig Coach



JORDAN CODACK
Sales Coach



KEVIN FARRUGIE
Gig Coach & Gig Marketplace Concierge



KEMAR LAWRENCE
Venture Coach



LAUREN ROSS
Project Coordinator



LENORE JOHNSON
Venture Coach



MARIA PLAZAS
Program Manager



MARIOS MATSIAS
Gig Coach



MICHAEL DOWNING
Lead Sales Coach



TAYLOR FRANCIS
Skilled Trades Venture Coach



UCHE ONUORA
Venture Coach

CEC ECOSYSTEM

Every lab in the Conestoga Entrepreneurship Collective represents a pathway to participation in the innovation community. The CEC has three core labs: Venture Lab, Gig Lab and Sales Lab. Over the past five years, we have also had the opportunity to create customized experiences within those labs to support specific opportunities and gaps through donor funding, grant partnerships and academic integration.

venture lab

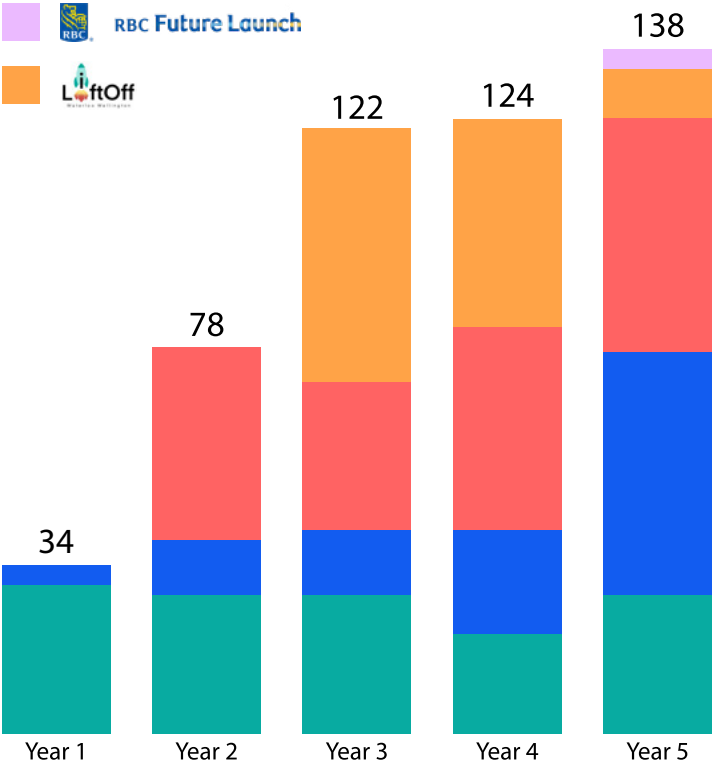
gig lab —  CONESTOGA
Connect Life and Learning | GIG MARKETPLACE

sales lab — sales lab BDS — sales lab FOUNDERS

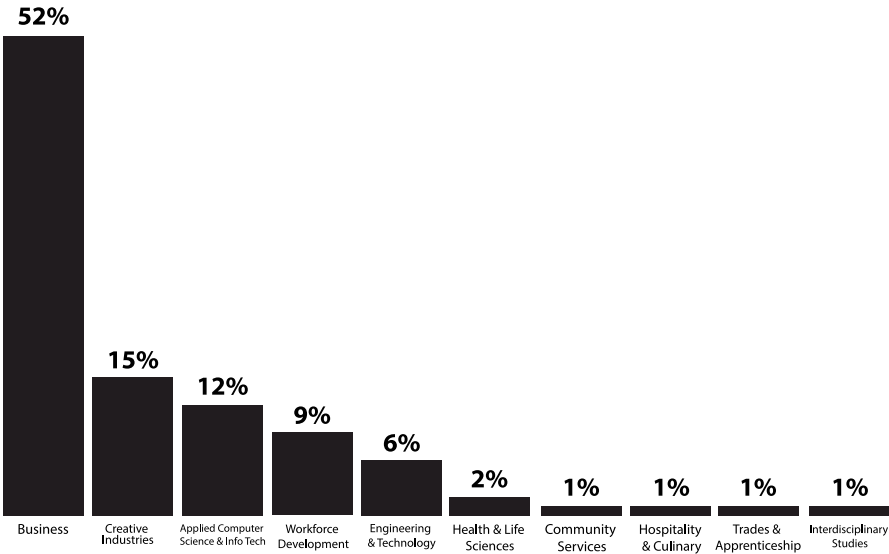
 RBC Future Launch — venture lab SKILLED TRADES



5 YEAR HIGHLIGHTS



Number of CEC participants each year since launch

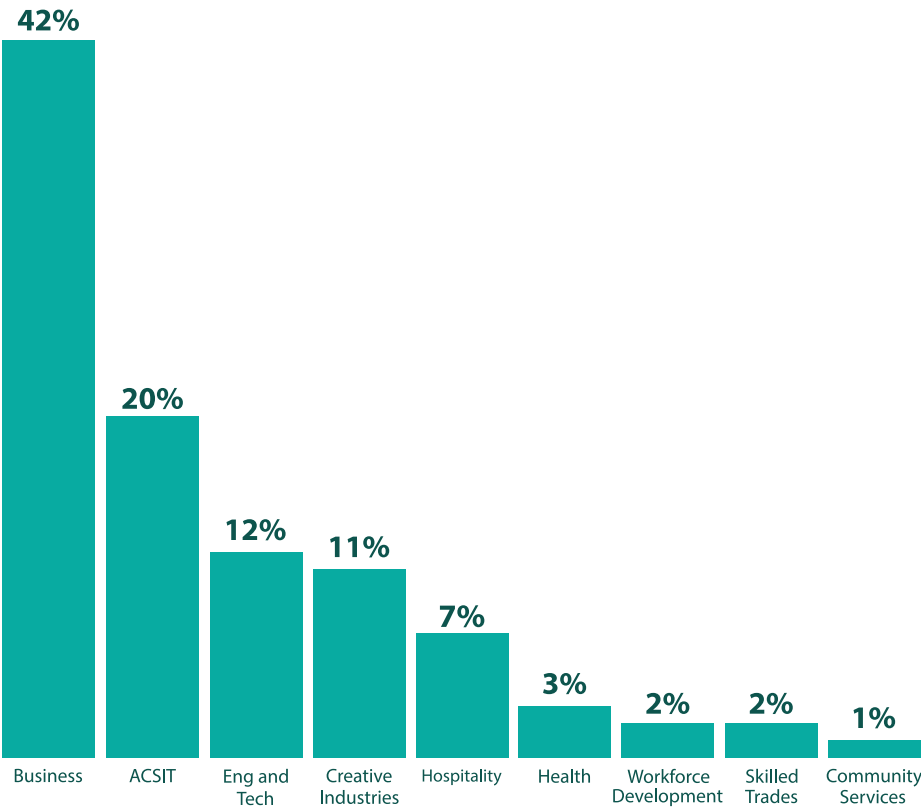


CEC members from all schools across conestoga college

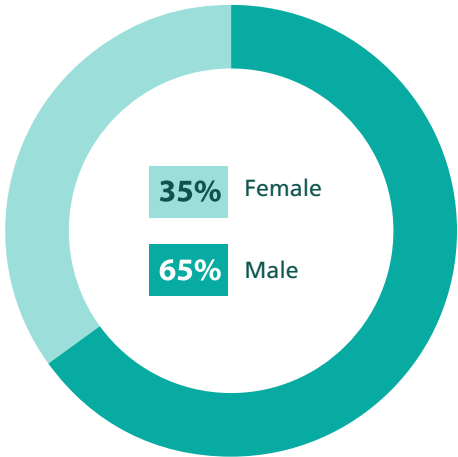
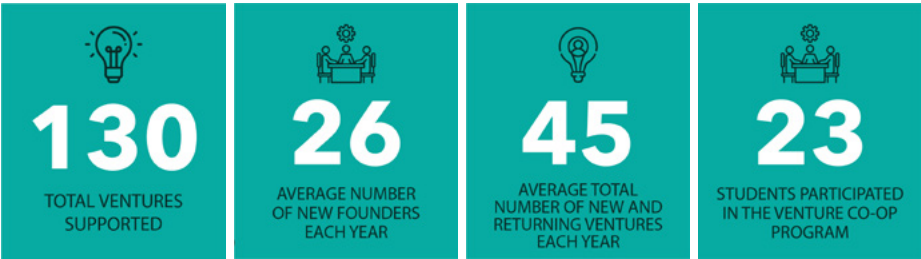
venture lab

UNIVERSAL BUSINESS INCUBATOR

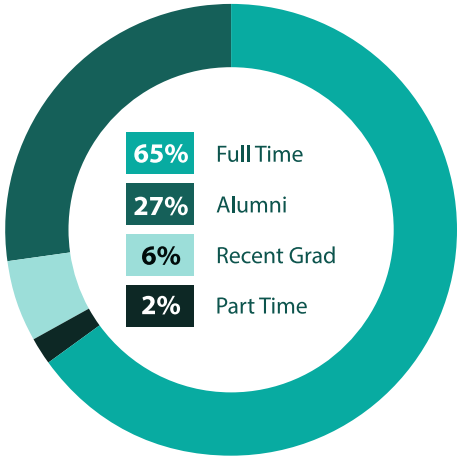
The Venture Lab supports founders of early-stage ventures across all sectors for up to one year. We have supported 15 cohorts of entrepreneurs in pursuing their startup dreams since the Pre-Pilot in Spring 2019.



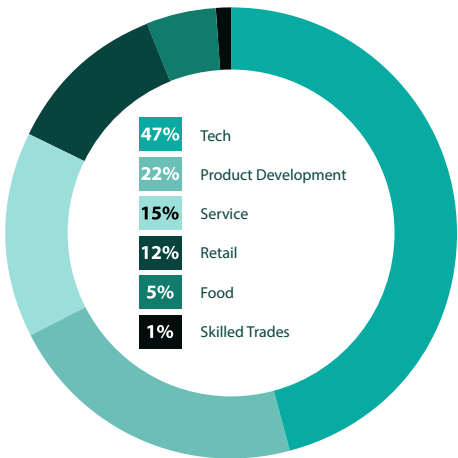
School affiliation



35% Female-owned businesses



Student status



Industry area

FEATURED FOUNDERS

Hear From Our Venture Lab Alumni [Here](#)



Stephen McCabe

Co-founder of QuickCasa

Alumni, Business Administration Management

Link to [QuickCasa](#) website

“Venture Lab helped solidify a collection of ideas and industry knowledge into a business model we could bring to market. The idea we took into Venture Lab grew into a complete, well-rounded concept and business ready to show customers.”



Nykole Crevits

Co-founder of Noki Farms

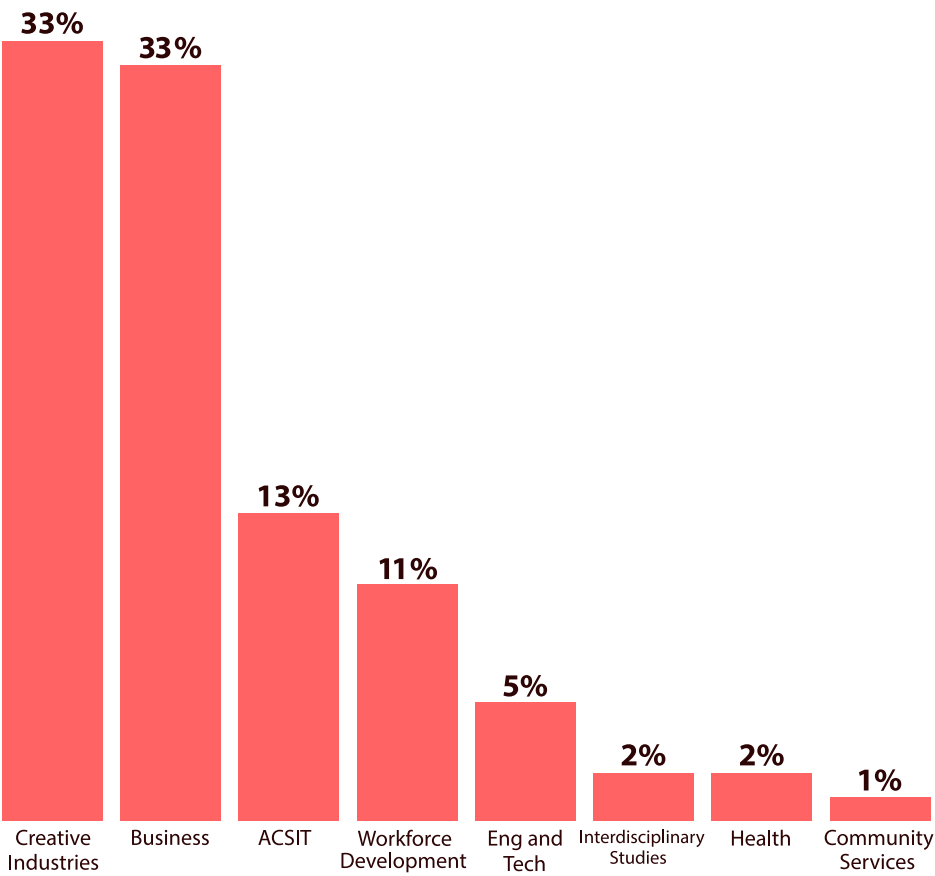
Alumni, Biotechnology Technician 2015

Link to [Noki Farms](#) website

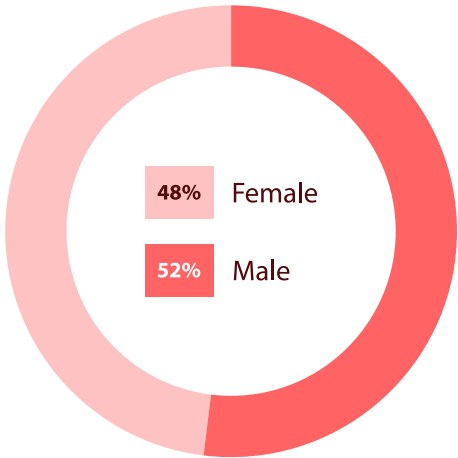
“We decided that Venture Lab was definitely for us when we compared a couple of different accelerators, incubators and similar programs. (My co-founder) Carl and I both came from Conestoga as alumni and just the community and the whole sense of belonging definitely resonated with us the most. We found that the Venture Lab program timing, the way that it was structured, and the freedom associated with it was definitely best-suited for the stage that we were at.”

CANADA’S FIRST BUSINESS INCUBATOR FOR FREELANCERS

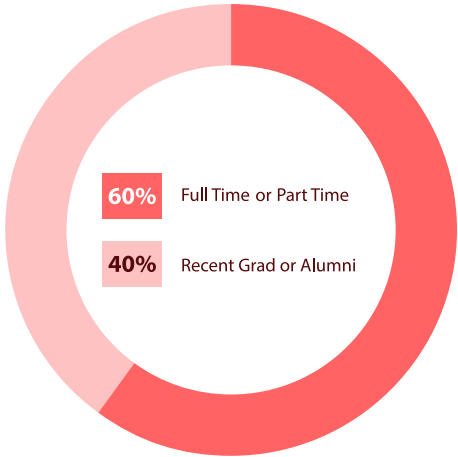
The Gig Lab empowers students and alumni to monetize their industry-level skills by launching a freelance business. Since the launch in Spring 2020, it remains the only business incubator in Canada specifically designed to address the nuances and specific needs of freelance entrepreneurs while developing the skills, mindset, and tools to succeed in the professional gig economy.



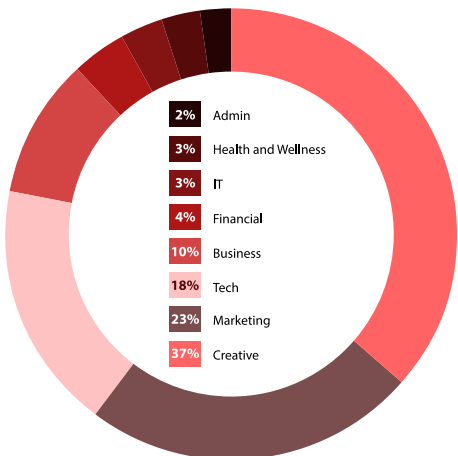
School affiliation



48% Female-owned businesses



Student status



Industry area

FEATURED FREELANCERS

Hear From Our Gig Lab Alumni [Here](#)



PRABHJOT SINGH
Digital Marketing

"You need a spark to ignite your business... that's what Gig Lab provides."



BREANNA LANGAN
Ever Bloom- Copywriting

"Gig Lab was a really enjoyable and transformative experience."



MERVE OZBEK
Moon Media-Videographer

"It is difficult to become a freelancer in Canada but after Gig Lab, I realized its not that hard and I can be one of them."



KATE BRADFIELD
Field & Co. Creative

"Gig Lab gave me a framework for my brand, website, marketing, building a client base, client communications and being able to deal with different situations in business."



BRE ELBOURNE
Commercial Photo & Video

"Working with the Gig Lab coaches, I had a huge boost in confidence, in not only my business but in myself as well."



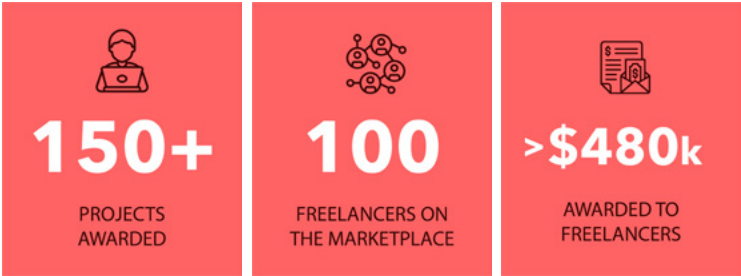
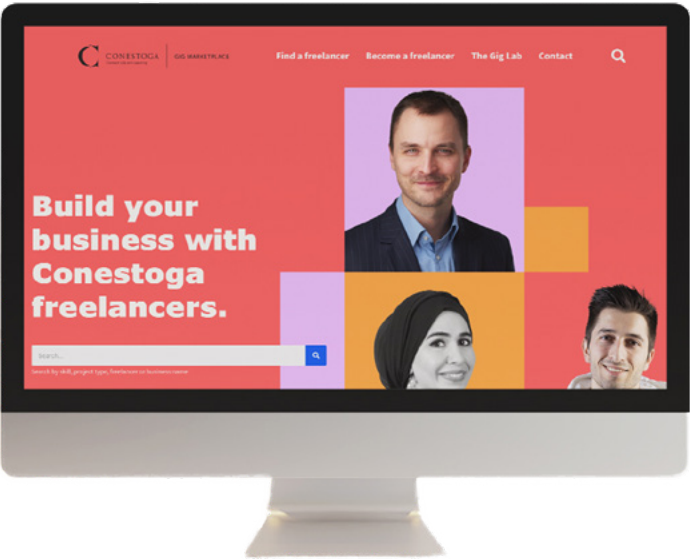
NOAH DONSIG
Noah John Design
Mechanical Designer

"I joined the lab seeking mentorship and that's what I got. That's something that even to this day, I still have."

FREELANCER LAUNCHPAD

The Conestoga Gig Marketplace is a groundbreaking online launchpad for freelancers that complete the Gig Lab business incubator. This unique platform acts as a store front and lead generator for paid freelance work in the broader community. Launched in September 2021 with only 12 freelancers, the platform has grown to include over 100 freelance entrepreneurs offering a wide range of services. The role of Gig Marketplace Concierge was added to the team to support potential clients in learning to work with freelance talent, developing scope of work and budgets and coaching the freelancers where needed as they established their business “in the wild”.

Link to [Conestogagigs.ca](https://conestogagigs.ca)



MARKETPLACE PARTNERS

The CEC has forged partnerships with organizations including the Accelerator Centre, Catalyst Commons, Communitech and the Chamber of Commerce to drive traffic to the site with more to come. To date, over \$480,000 in projects have been secured by Gig Marketplace freelancers.



The CEC is excited to partner with the Accelerator Centre on their flagship AC:Studio program. Launched in June 2022, founders in the AC:Studio program are allotted stipends to spend exclusively on services from Gig Marketplace freelancers. This initiative has been a wonderful example of entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs in their mutual success.

“The Conestoga Gig Lab is such an incredible opportunity for startups like us. Scrolling through the list of opportunities listed on the Gig Marketplace was initially overwhelming but expressed the depth and breadth of support that startups need when growing.”

- AC:Studio Founder

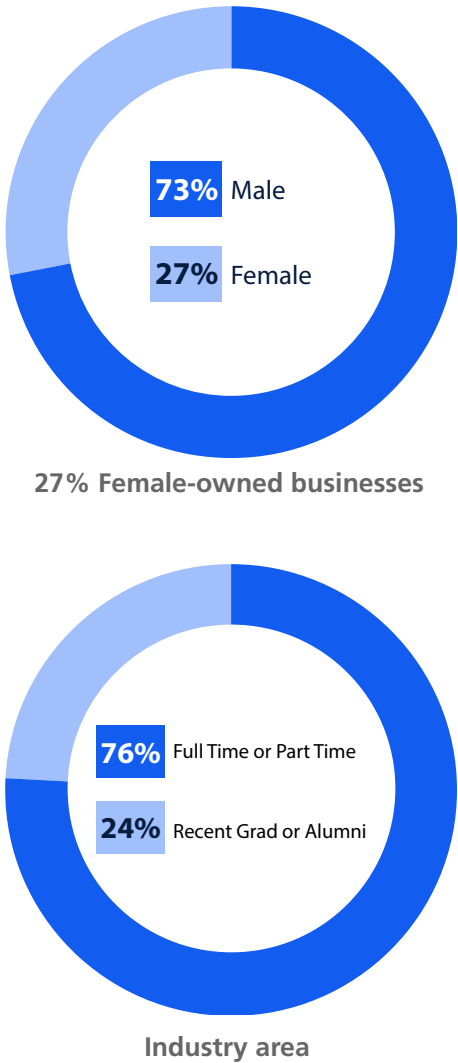
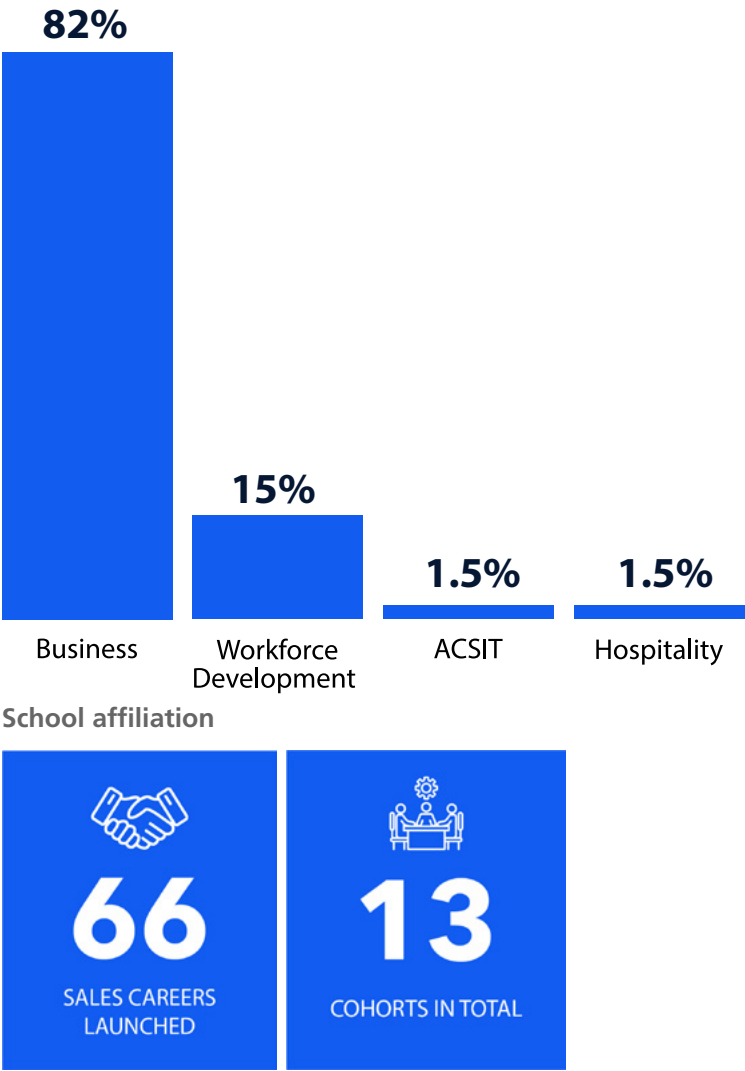
Catalyst Commons, Communitech and the Greater KW Chamber of Commerce all promote the Gig Marketplace to their members as a source of trusted local talent.



sales lab

CANADA'S ONLY INCUBATOR FOR SALES TALENT

The Sales Lab helps leverage an aptitude for sales to upskill and gain access to the lucrative tech sales industry. Launched in January 2020, this program was created to address industry demand for these positions and has been designed in consultation with tech companies to focus on the most critical skills, attitudes, and behaviours for success in this field. Over the past five years, members of the Sales Lab have come to represent talented, desirable candidates for the region's top tech companies. Many companies such as D2L and Vidyard have hired multiple Sales Lab graduates from various cohorts. We consider this ongoing confidence the highest compliment of all.



FEATURED SALES PROFESSIONALS

Hear From Our Sales Lab Alumni [Here](#)

PRACHI GUPTA
Territory Account Executive – SoftChoice

"This isn't just confined to sales. It's part of my everyday life too."

SERGIE FRANCO
Sales Engineer – evolutionQ

"Combining what I learned in Sales Lab with my technical background helped me tremendously to interview effectively and find my current job"

SNEHIT KURUP
BDR – Magnet Forensics

"Be authentic, understand, be curious."

DAN TOMAN
SMB Account Executive – 1Password

"The one-on-one coaching was the most valuable to me because that's where I got to ask questions and get real-time feedback."

Where Sales Lab Grads Are Working

ACADEMIC INTEGRATION PILOT

This unique program was created in collaboration with the School of Business and the Business Development and Sales Graduate Certificate program. The goal was to provide BDS students with the opportunity to apply to the Sales Lab as an elective that would replace the Professional Selling course in their final term. This approach provided students with a fast track to securing a job in tech sales upon graduation while supporting their goals through dedicated time in their academic schedules for Sales Lab work.

Featured Sales Professionals:




ERICSON PAUL CHARLES
Business Development Representative
TRUSTiIN



OSITADINMA UWAM
Senior Program Advisor
Co.Lab



DIANA CAROLINA SEVILLA BEDOYA
Director
FutureON Solutions


16
STUDENTS WERE
SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE
IN PILOT PROGRAM

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Recognizing the unique needs of startup founders, the CEC customized its highly successful Sales Lab program for entrepreneurs who must spearhead sales initiatives from inception. The new Sales Lab for Founders program is an 8-week module focused on equipping founders with the skills, attitudes, and behaviors essential for driving business development activities in Canada.

The program was piloted in Fall 2023 and Winter 2024 in partnership with the Haltech Regional Innovation Centre, Innovation Factory, and TechPlace aimed at empowering international startup founders enrolled in the Government of Canada-funded [Acceleration+](#) program to navigate and excel in the Canadian market.

Featured Sales Professionals:



JAMIE ROMERO
VP Corporate Marketing
Fortinet



"It was amazing! Highly recommended. I've been in sales for 16 years, and I still got a lot of value!"



RITU JHAVERI
Co-founder and CEO
Deschool Online Inc.



"The insights gained and skills honed during this program have truly been game-changers. The instructor's guidance and the structure of the lab were instrumental in boosting my confidence and effectiveness in sales. I've learned so much, and the hands-on approach made it all the more impactful."


16
FOUNDERS
PARTICIPATED

POWERING THE FUTURE OF BLACK ENTREPRENEURS

In September 2021, the CEC partnered with the Caribbean Canadian Association of Waterloo Region to develop and deliver programming for Black entrepreneurs and build capacity in our region’s Black entrepreneurship ecosystem. Support for this important initiative was provided through the National Ecosystem Fund, contributing to the economic prosperity and well-being of the community by providing Black entrepreneurs with the mentorship, training and tools to launch, grow and scale their businesses.

Leveraging the comprehensive, proven Conestoga Venture Lab roadmap and coaching techniques, our team worked closely with LiftOff staff to customize the resources to address specific pain points in the community and to remove potential barriers. Venture Coach, Uche Onuora, joined the LiftOff coaching team for the first two and a half years of the program to train and upskill coaches from the community as well as provide his experience and expertise to many cohorts of budding entrepreneurs.

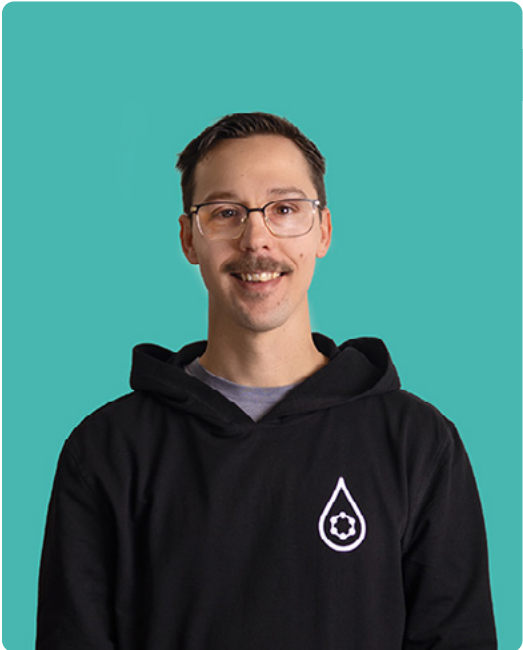


SCAFFOLDS FOR SUCCESS

The Venture Lab for Skilled Trades helps entrepreneurs in the trades build their own business. Launched in Fall 2023 with funding from the RBC Foundation as part of RBC’s Future Launch initiative, these founders are paired with a Venture Coach who has experience in the trades and has successfully launched a business of their own. Guided by their coach, founders navigate a customized roadmap and are introduced to a range of industry mentors that are curated to address their specific needs.



Featured Founder:



GAGE FUNKENHAUSER

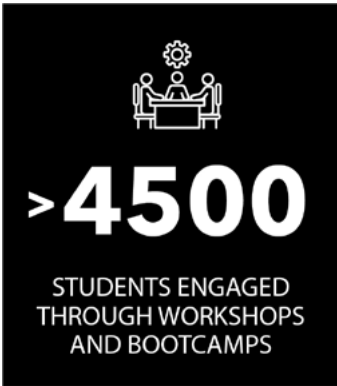
Co-founder, Twelve Gauge Coatings

Winner of the 2023 Wilf Rieck Pitch Day at Conestoga College
\$5000 First Place Prize

“The Conestoga Skilled Trades Venture Lab gave us a unique opportunity to grow our business from the very beginning and gave us an organized roadmap to put us directly on the path to success. When I was presented with the idea of joining the skilled trades Venture Lab, I expected it to get a basic roadmap of where we wanted to go with our business. What we ended up getting was actually a very unique opportunity to work on different aspects of our business and improve in ways that I never thought was possible before.”

Hear more of Gage’s story [here](#)

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Canadian Sales Educators Symposium

The Canadian Sales Educators Symposium is a one-of-a-kind experience that brings educators and industry together to exchange ideas on the trends, technology and techniques to enhance sales education.

Now in its 4th year, the goal is to help post-secondary educators of all experience levels improve their ability to teach sales and deliver strong, relevant, accredited sales curriculum, cultivating a knowledge and respect for the modern craft of professional selling.



Polytechnics Canada 2023

In May 2023, the Polytechnics Canada Conference was held in Calgary with the theme of partnership. CEC Director, Rose Mastnak, presented a talk called "Partnering for Success" that provided an overview of the ways in which preparing for and designing for partnership provided a solid foundation for engaging in partnership down the line.



Global Entrepreneurship Education Symposium

In June 2023, CEC Director, Rose Mastnak, presented at this conference in Porto, Portugal. The presentation was titled "The Rise of Freelance Entrepreneurs" and focused on a case study of the Gig Lab business incubator for freelancers in the CEC. Rose also participated in a panel discussion with other global leaders in entrepreneurship at post-secondary institutions.



California Entrepreneurship Education Conference

In March 2023, CEC Director, Rose Mastnak, presented at this conference in San Diego. The presentation was titled "Meet the Gig Lab" and focused on sharing the key components for setting up an incubator for freelancers, considerations for setting up your own Gig Marketplace and tips for filling freelancer and client pipelines through integration.

AWARDS

Wilf Rieck Pitch Day at Conestoga College

This annual competition was started in 2021 to provide a forum for aspiring entrepreneurs in the Conestoga Venture Lab to pitch their new business ideas to the community. Founders have an opportunity to win cash prizes of \$5000, \$3000 or \$2000 provided by a generous donation from the estate of Cambridge businessman, Wilf Rieck, and the Rotary Club of Cambridge – Preston Hespeler.

Winners:

- 2020:** Jolene MacDonald, Founder, Accessibrand
- 2021:** Orim Aliu and Stephen McCabe, Co-founders, KWKLY
- 2022:** Polly Gomides, Founder, Escala Solutions
- 2023:** Gage Funkenhauser, Co-founder, Twelve Gauge Solutions



Equitable Lift Community Venture Award

Equitable Life established the Community Venture Award in 2021 to recognize entrepreneurs for their passion, perseverance and dedication as they strive to successfully launch businesses that seek to strengthen our community and improve the quality of life for those living in Waterloo Region. Two awards are to be given out each year, valued at \$1,500 each.

Winners:

- 2021:** Angela Onuora, Founder, The Rise Class and Jolene MacDonald, Founder, Accessibrand
- 2022:** Ariyan Haq, Co-founder, PLNT.ai and Vishnu sagar YerraBoina, Founder, LTCJobs.com
- 2023:** Briana Burton, Co-founder, HOOD and Taylor Francis, Founder, ContractApp



CSI X CEC Venture Award

Conestoga Students Inc. is the official student union of Conestoga College that represents 23,000+ students across various municipalities in Ontario. As an organization, we recognize that our college is filled with young, energetic, creative and diligent individuals. Some of these individuals have the entrepreneurial spirit which allows them utilize learning experiences from both personal and academic life to solve problems. However, being a student entrepreneur comes with barriers, one of which is financial. That is why CSI has partnered with the Conestoga Entrepreneurial Collective (CEC) on this award.

CSI has pledged \$10,000 over two years to provide support in the form of grants to students starting new businesses in the Venture Lab.

2024 Recipients:

- Jayden Heidebrecht, Founder, Full Power Metal Works (Venture Lab for Skilled Trades)
- Shane Hall, Founder, HallMarkIt (Venture Lab)
- Haiyan Yuan, LocoTap (Venture Lab)



KW Oktoberfest Rogers Women of the Year Award Winners from the CEC

The KW Oktoberfest Rogers Women of the Year recognizes and pays tribute to outstanding women in the community. Three alumni of the Conestoga Entrepreneurship Collective have won this prestigious award.

Winners:

- Arts and Culture 2023:** Angela Onuora, Founder, The Rise Class
- Entrepreneur 40+ 2023:** Jolene MacDonald, Founder, Accessibrand
- Health and Wellness 2024:** Neha Juwale, Founder, bookmytherapy.ca



(Angela Onuora)



(Neha Juwale)



(Jolene MacDonald)

CEC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Conestoga Entrepreneurship Collective (CEC) Advisory Committee was established in December 2023. This assembly of leaders from the college, community and industry provides knowledge and direction on trends, best practices, developing issues and emerging opportunities relating to current and future programming and initiatives. Members also provide links to potential mentors, partners or collaborative projects, participate in major CEC events, and may offer SME-related advice on major projects. We are grateful for the support and contribution of the Advisory Committee members as the CEC looks forward to the next five years.

Committee Members:

- **Rose Mastnak:** Director, CEC
- **Christian Snyder:** Associate Director, CEC
- **Michelle Chretien:** VP, Research, Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Conestoga College
- **Troy Miller:** Conestoga Alumni, CEO and Co-founder, ASAP Data Solutions
- **Amber French:** New Venture Evangelist, CEO and Co-founder, Catalyst Commons and Catalyst Ventures
- **Sandra Reimer:** Freelancer Evangelist, Founder of CoLabourNation
- **Shane Gamble:** B2B Sales Evangelist, Head of Sales, Elevar
- **Cory Bluhm:** Community Evangelist, Executive Director, Economic Development at City of Kitchener
- **New CEC TBA:** Waterloo Region Innovation Ecosystem Champion, CEO, Accelerator Centre
- **Naudia Banton:** Non-tech Businesses Champion, Manager, Waterloo Region Small Business Centre
- **Meti Basiri:** Entrepreneur-in-residence, CEO, ApplyBoard



Committee Chair
Sandra Reimer
 Founder of CoLabourNation



Entrepreneur-in-Residence
Meti Basiri
 CEO of ApplyBoard



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CONESTOGA

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
COLLECTIVE