CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR INDIGENOUS BUSINESS

INDUSTRY AND INCLUSION: THE INDIGENOUS PROCUREMENT CAPACITY SURVEY





About the Report

Industry and Inclusion: The Indigenous Procurement Capacity Survey is funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). This is the seventh report in a multi-report collaboration with ISC, focusing on Indigenous procurement.

About the Design

The cover and additional report graphics were designed by Jolene Arcand, CCIB Associate, Marketing and Communications. The artwork in this report was designed using a modern take on the traditional Indigenous woodland art style.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the results of a national survey of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis businesses across Canada on Indigenous participation in procurement, particularly Certified Indigenous Businesses (CIBs) within the CCIB membership.

The survey findings aim to establish a baseline of Indigenous business capacity to meet procurement needs, explore the types and values of contracts they bid on and are awarded, identify barriers, and indicate the support necessary for continued success.

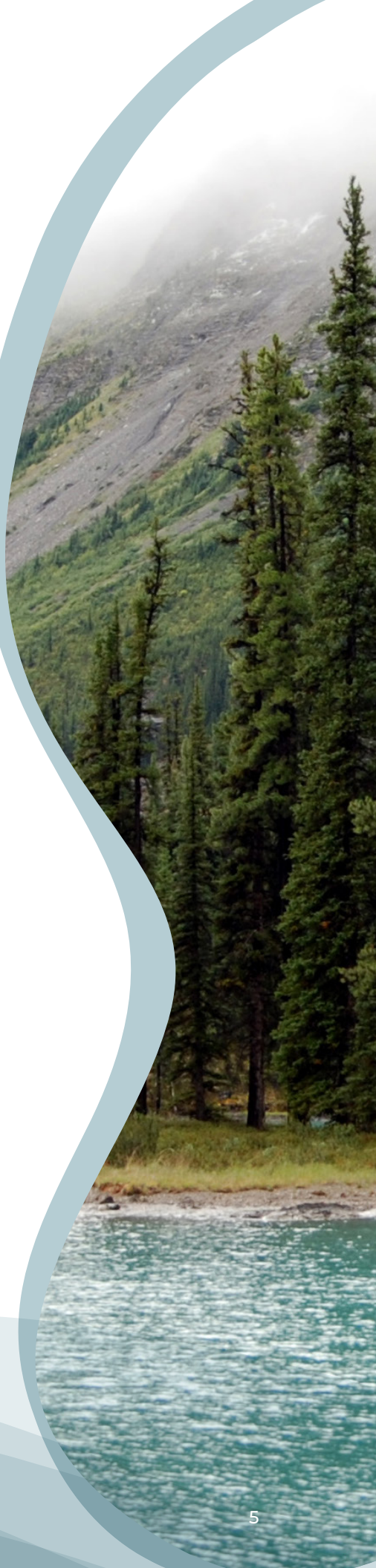
Procurement was defined as the sale of goods, services, or construction to public and private organizational buyers, often through competitive bidding.

The main buyers we are targeting are corporate Canada and the Government of Canada, especially to support the mandatory minimum 5 per cent Indigenous procurement target across all federal departments, which started in 2021.

However, CCIB research has found that procurement rules, limited flexibility, and administrative burdens are major obstacles for Indigenous suppliers trying to engage with the federal system. Meanwhile, corporate Canada remains largely untapped, faces fewer systemic barriers, has greater flexibility, and offers larger, more diverse supply chains with ample room for rapid growth, so even modest changes to procurement processes can create significant new opportunities.

This report begins with the understanding that Indigenous businesses often face persistent challenges in accessing procurement opportunities. Recognizing these hurdles helps us better understand the support they need to succeed.[1]

Not only do these findings help CCIB better understand our membership needs, but they also provide the Government of Canada and corporate Canada with practical data for targeted procurement policies, aligned opportunities, and stronger supplier support, ultimately leading to a more effective and equitable Indigenous procurement ecosystem.



[1] Government of Canada. (2025). Transformative Indigenous Procurement Strategy: Dialogue with Indigenous partners. Last modified on December 19, 2025. https://sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1760990558055/1760990583301

Research Highlights

- The analysis focused on a subgroup of survey respondents—awarded and unsuccessful bidders—defined as businesses with direct experience participating in the procurement process.
- Characteristics were largely consistent between all respondents and the subset of awarded or unsuccessful bidders, including Indigenous identity, community ownership, and business structure. This suggests these attributes are not strongly associated with procurement participation or outcomes within the sample.
- Industry distribution differed meaningfully between groups. Awarded and unsuccessful bidders were more likely to be in contract-based, institutionally oriented industries aligned with mid-value procurement (construction, manufacturing, transportation, warehousing, and professional services). In contrast, the broader respondent pool was more concentrated in consumer-facing, lower-margin, experience-driven sectors (retail, wholesale, arts, entertainment, and cultural industries).
- Geographic concentration varied. Awarded and unsuccessful bidders were overrepresented in Ontario compared with all respondents (50 per cent vs. 41 per cent), potentially reflecting greater access to procurement opportunities in and around the National Capital Region. The three most represented regions in the sample also have the highest number of Indigenous business entrepreneurs (Ontario with 19,905, BC with 17,725, and Alberta with 15,170).[2]
- MERX and CanadaBuys were the leading sources of bidding opportunities (25 per cent) and are expected to continue in this role as long as they remain the main federal platforms for Indigenous procurement. Indigenous-led marketplaces are also emerging as a meaningful channel (15 per cent).
- Formal registration in the Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Business (PSIB) lags set-aside participation. Only 23 per cent of respondents are registered in Canada's Indigenous Business Directory, yet 38 per cent of both awarded and unsuccessful bidders reported bidding on federal Indigenous set-asides, indicating that engagement in set-asides exceeds formal registration.
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[2] Statistics Canada. (2021). Class of worker (self-employed including unpaid family workers) by Indigenous identity for the population aged 15 years and over in private households, Canada, Atlantic provinces, provinces and territories (2021 Census, 25% sample data) [Custom tabulation]

- Corporate procurement is preferred. Despite the federal 5 per cent procurement target, 73 per cent of respondents preferred engaging with corporate buyers over federal (54 per cent) or regional governments (52 per cent), most often through subcontracting (23 per cent) or high-value competitive bids (22 per cent).
- Analysis of the total contract value bid on, awarded, and accumulated revealed three patterns:
    - → Mid-sized contracts form the core market. The median contract value is $300,000 for both sought and awarded contracts, indicating a consistent alignment between Indigenous business capacity and procurement opportunities.
    - → Lower-value contracts attract more interest than outcomes. Many respondents pursued contracts under $40,000 (including under $25,000), yet fewer are awarded at these levels, suggesting that smaller contracts still face barriers and are not necessarily easier to secure.
    - → Higher-value contracts reflect uneven scaling. While fewer firms bid on contracts over $1 million, those that do account for a disproportionate share of total awarded value.
- Capacity constraints persist. Staffing was the most frequently identified area requiring additional capacity to take on more procurement work (29 per cent), followed closely by working capital to manage cash flow requirements (21 per cent).
- Barriers exist across the procurement life cycle. Forty per cent of both awarded and unsuccessful bidders reported challenges across all procurement stages—pre-bid, active bidding, and post-award—with the most notable difficulties during the pre-bid phase, largely due to staffing and human capital limitations (79 per cent).
- Support usage is limited and uneven. Respondents most often relied on relational supports, such as events and networking (15 per cent), while a smaller share relied on information-based supports like guides or toolkits (11 per cent). All other types of support were used by 10 per cent or fewer respondents.

Next Steps

This survey is an exciting first step towards understanding the procurement capabilities and challenges faced by Indigenous businesses, particularly those in CCIB's Certified Indigenous Business (CIB) program. We look forward to learning more and supporting these vibrant businesses in future surveys. The data gathered serves as a helpful starting point for building a time-series dataset. This will allow us to see whether there are any quantifiable signs of progress in Indigenous procurement efforts across sectors.

Methodology

We conducted the survey online and anonymously with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis business owners from February 19 to March 24, 2025. Participation was voluntary, and all questions were optional. The average survey took about nine minutes to complete. We emailed the survey link to all 1,759 current Certified Indigenous Business (CIB) members and promoted it on social media to reach CCIB's networks nationwide. The survey targeted Indigenous-owned businesses and included a screening question to confirm majority Indigenous ownership (51 per cent or more).

While we made every effort to minimize bias, the sampling method warrants some caution. Respondents self-selected into the survey and could skip any question; therefore, the results cannot be treated with the same confidence as random, unbiased sampling. Nevertheless, these results provide information that is not available from other sources.



PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

We received 139 responses, for an estimated response rate of 7 per cent. Twenty-one responses were excluded for not meeting the screening criteria (Indigenous ownership or consent), leaving 118 valid responses. Sample size varies by question because some items were skipped.

Participation in Procurement Contracts. Respondents were divided into four groups based on whether they had ever bid on or been awarded a procurement contract: Awarded bidders, unsuccessful bidders, interested non-bidders, and uninterested non-bidders.

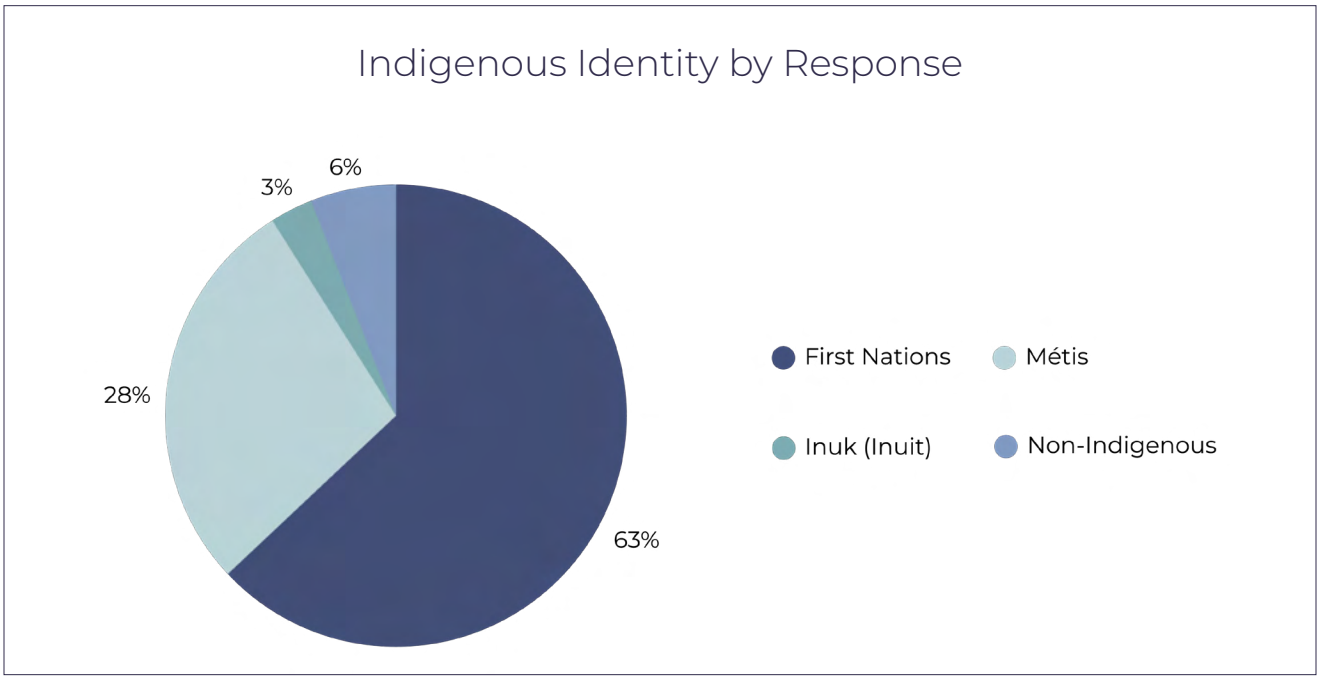
- **Awarded bidders:** This subgroup provided a thorough overview of the procurement process, from bid submission to contract award.
- **Unsuccessful bidders:** This subgroup participated in preparing and submitting bids and shared those bidding experiences, but as of the survey, had not obtained a procurement contract.
- **Interested non-bidders:** These respondents may have come across the survey because they wanted to participate in organizational procurement but were unsure where to start. They provided insights into whether large buyers have approached them about procurement opportunities.
- **Uninterested non-bidders:** These respondents may have completed the survey due to their active involvement in CCIB's networks and interest in survey research, despite lacking bidding experience. Many do not engage in business-to-business sales, so procurement is not particularly relevant to them. They were asked why procurement does not interest them.

Category	Number	Per cent
Awarded bidders	40	36%
Unsuccessful bidders	24	19%
Interested non-bidders	48	41%
Uninterested non-bidders	6	4%
Total	**118**	**100%**

* Base: n = 118 respondents
* Q4. Have you ever bid on or been awarded a procurement contract? [Single-select multiple choice]

Respondent identity. Nearly two-thirds of respondents identified as First Nations (63 per cent), with over a quarter also identifying as Métis (28 per cent), a smaller percentage as Inuit (3 per cent), and a handful of non-Indigenous respondents (6 per cent) representing Indigenous-owned firms. Compared with the 2021 Census distribution of Indigenous self-employed individuals, First Nations respondents appear overrepresented in the survey sample (63 per cent vs. 47 per cent).[3,4] Métis respondents were underrepresented relative to 2021 self-employment data (28 per cent vs. 51 per cent), while Inuit respondents more closely matched census figures (3 per cent vs. 2 per cent). This likely reflects self-selection rather than a true population difference.

The group of awarded and unsuccessful bidders, as a subset of all respondents, did not significantly differ in identity, consisting of 59 per cent First Nations, 29 per cent Métis, 3 per cent Inuit, and 9 per cent non-Indigenous.

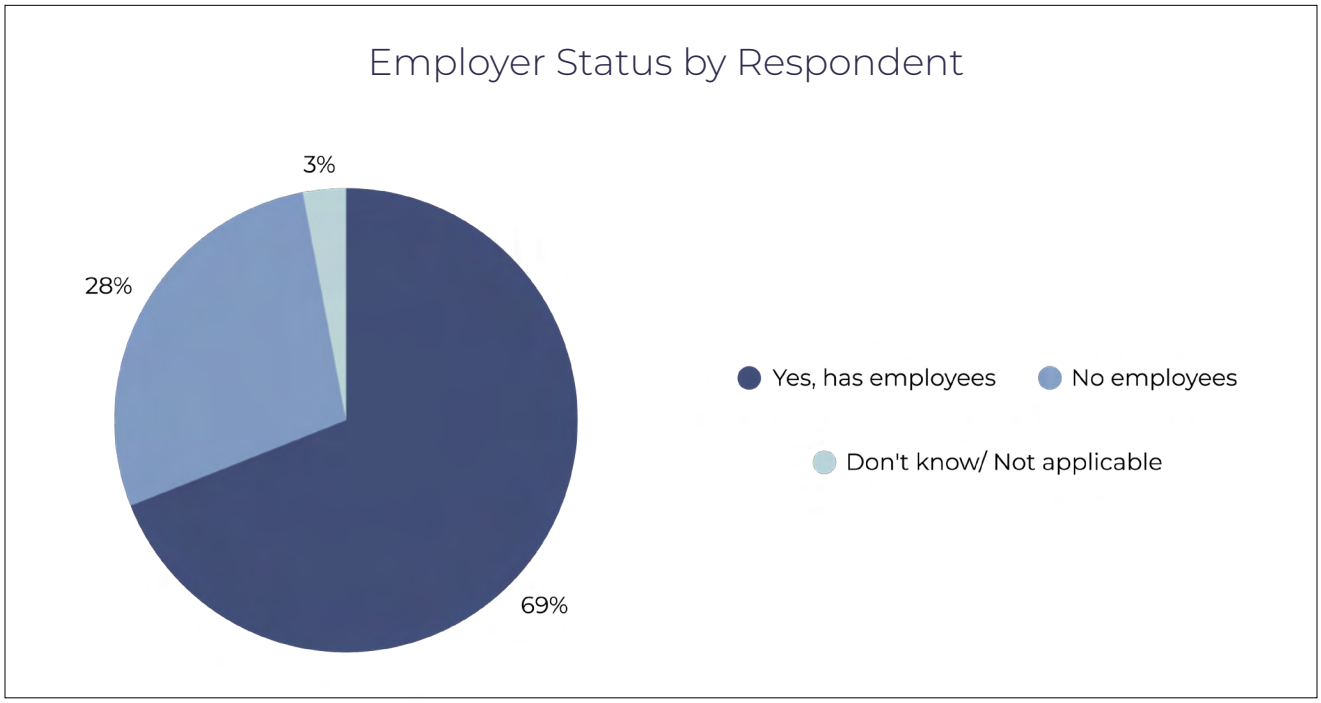


* Base: n = 123 responses
* Q3. Which of the following best describes you? Are you...? [Multi-select multiple choice]

Employers. The surveyed businesses were more likely to have employees, with 69 per cent reporting they did, regardless of whether they had bid on or received a procurement contract. Both awarded and unsuccessful bidders were similarly likely to have employees (73 per cent). This may indicate that staffing is not the only capacity constraint affecting procurement participation.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Note: Because the survey did not explicitly collect information on business ownership status, respondents cannot be assumed to be directly comparable to Census measures of self-employment or business entrepreneurship.



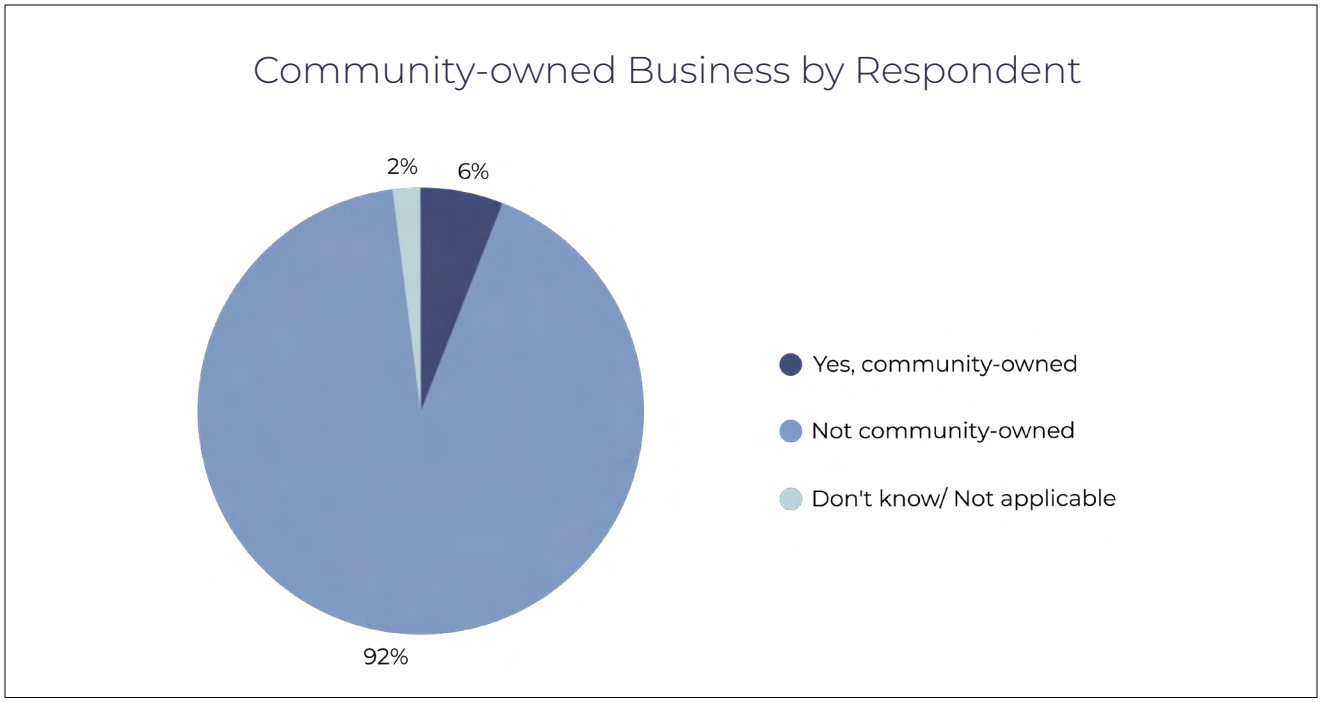
* Base: n = 101 respondents
* Q41. Do you have employees other than yourself? [Single-select multiple choice]

Community Ownership. Respondents rarely represented community-owned businesses, with only 6 per cent indicating they have a community ownership or governance relationship, such as an Indigenous economic development corporation. As a result, the vast majority of respondents appeared to be privately owned Indigenous firms (92 per cent). The proportion of community ownership among awarded and unsuccessful bidders fell within a similar range, with 8 per cent identifying as community-owned.

Previous CCIB research shows that many Indigenous community-owned businesses are eager to participate in corporate supply chains.[5] They also emphasize the importance of ensuring that communities have equitable access to the federal government's mandatory 5 per cent Indigenous procurement target. In addition, some community-owned businesses report growing financial capacity, supported by trusts and own-source revenue across major projects, which may position them to compete for larger procurement contracts.[6]

[5] CCIB. (2020). National perspectives on indigenous prosperity: Aboriginal economic development corporation capacity. February 20, 2020. https://www.ccib.ca/main/archive_publication/national-perspectives-on-indigenous-prosperity/

[6] CCIB. (2024). Untapped potential: A case study of indigenous economic development corporation capacity in federal procurement. November 6, 2024. https://www.ccib.ca/main/archive_publication/untapped-potential/



* Base: n = 98 respondents
* Q42. Is this business owned by an Indigenous community? [Single-select multiple choice]

Business structure. Only awarded and unsuccessful bidders were asked whether their businesses are structured as joint ventures or partnerships, and with whom they are partnered. A large majority (90 per cent) reported they have not entered into a joint venture, and nearly a quarter (23 per cent) have not considered this option.

All five respondents involved in joint ventures reported working with non-Indigenous partners, and two also collaborate with Indigenous partners.

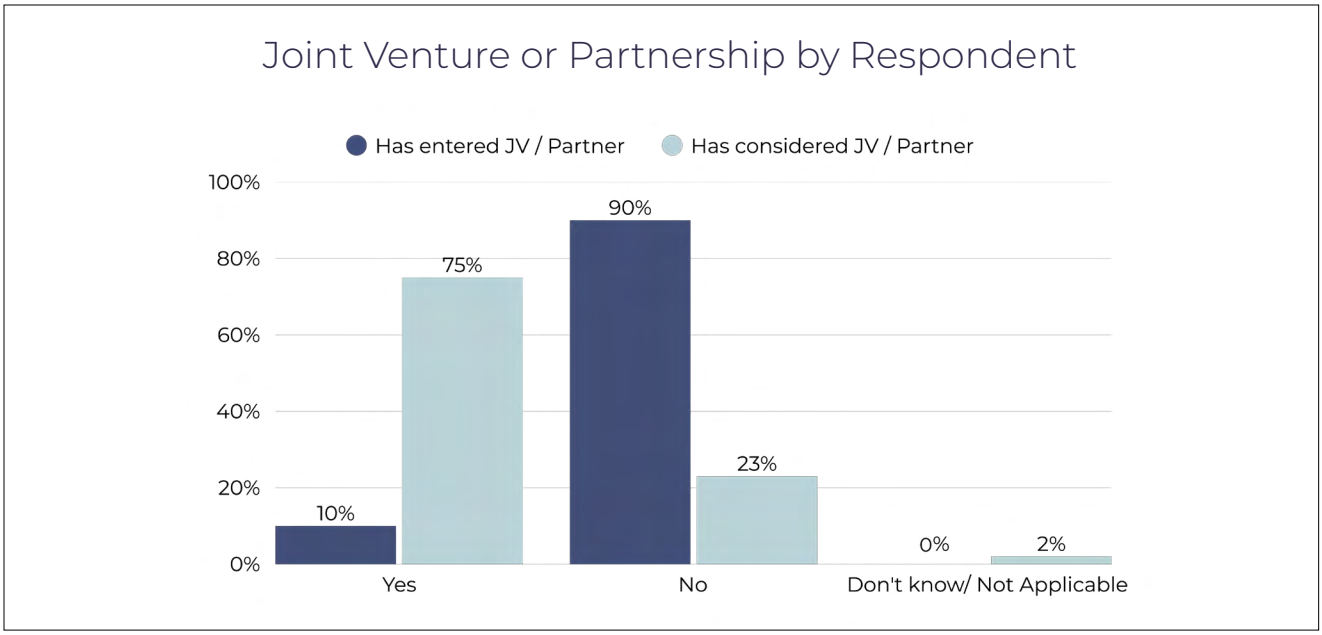
The length of joint ventures varied among the five respondents: three of the partnerships are quite new, having been in operation for less than a year or just about a year since they formed, while the other two have been active for over 20 years.

The few respondents who entered (10 per cent), along with many considering joint ventures (75 per cent), suggest an opportunity to expand corporate and federal procurement through partnerships, a move that Indigenous leaders have reported as a way to increase Indigenous participation in procurement for both community-owned businesses and entrepreneurs.[7]

A recent review by the Office of the Procurement Ombud highlights the need for oversight and genuine involvement of Indigenous partners in contracts.[8] While reaching the 5 per cent federal Indigenous procurement target is important, the quality and authenticity of these contracts are equally crucial. Empowering authentic Indigenous enterprises should remain the primary goal.

[7] Government of Canada. (2025). Transformative Indigenous Procurement Strategy (TIPS): What we learned report. Last modified on December 19, 2025. https://isc.gc.ca/eng/1760990558055/1760990583301

[8] Government of Canada. (2026). Procurement Practice Review of Contracts Awarded to Indigenous Businesses. March 2026. https://opo-boa.gc.ca/praapp-prorev/2026/epa-ppr-03-2026-eng.html



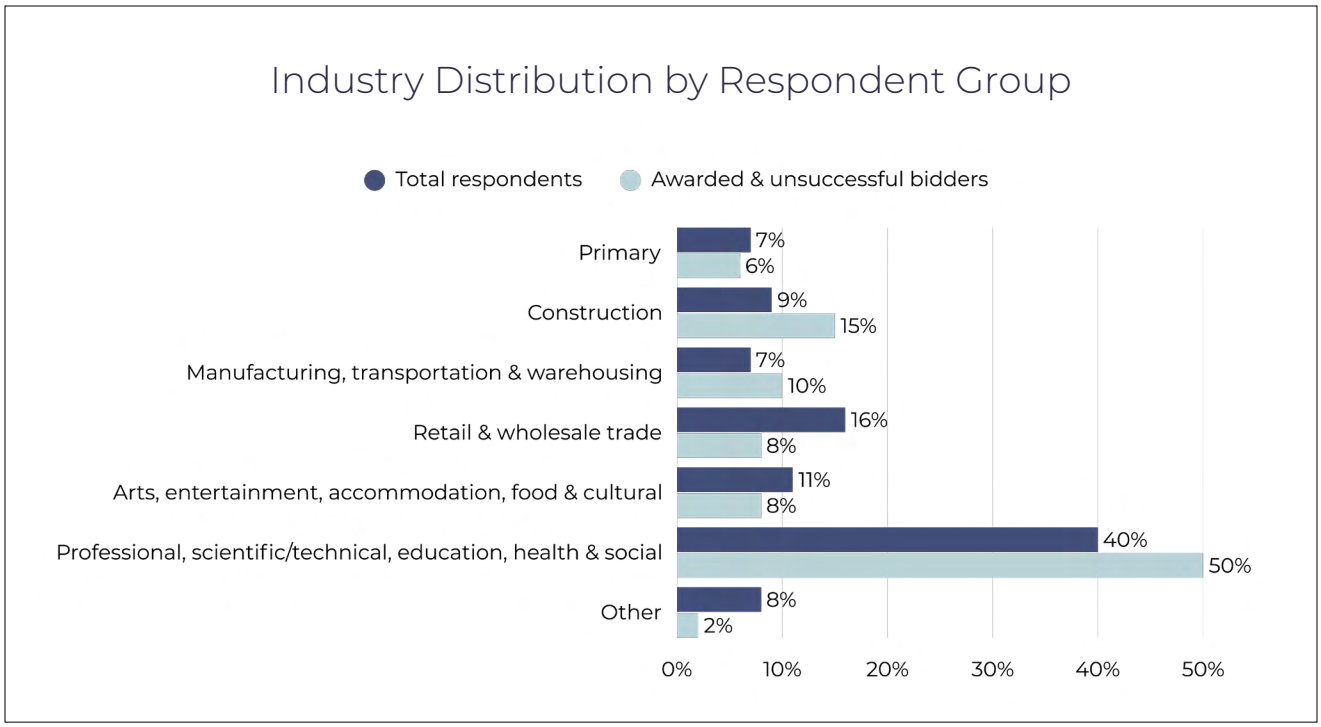
* Bases: Q34. Is this business a joint venture or partnership? (n = 49 respondents); Q37. Have you ever considered forming a joint venture or partnership? (n = 44 respondents) [Both single-select multiple choice]

Industry sector. Many businesses that participated in the survey come from a wide range of industries, with a particular focus on professional services. This diversity highlights the varied landscape of the Indigenous business community. The strong response from professional services firms also suggests opportunities for growth and collaboration in procurement across fields like information technology, human resources, marketing, accounting, legal, engineering, and environmental services.

Industry distribution varies notably between the subset of awarded and unsuccessful bidders compared to respondents overall, with higher concentrations among bidders in construction (+6 percentage points); manufacturing, transportation, and warehousing (+3 percentage points); as well as in professional, education, health, and social services (+10 percentage points).

Awarded and unsuccessful bidders tended to be less represented in sectors like retail and wholesale trade (-8 percentage points); arts, entertainment, accommodation, food, and cultural industries (-3 percentage points); and other services, including administrative support, waste management, remediation, real estate, and various other services (-6 percentage points).

However, in the primary industries, both awarded and unsuccessful bidders showed participation rates comparable to those of all respondents (6 per cent vs. 7 per cent).



* Bases: n = 107 respondents (total); n = 48 respondents (subgroup)
* Q43. In what industry or sector does your business operate? [Single-select multiple choice]

Main Products or Services. Indigenous businesses offer many products and services that can attract organizational buyers and support their procurement needs across multiple sectors, especially as awareness and visibility continue to grow.

The following breakdown, organized by goods, services, and major project sectors, provides a snapshot of offerings from both awarded and unsuccessful bidders. These categories show the breadth of activity across traditional sectors and emerging service areas.

Goods provided include:

- IT technologies (hardware and software)
- Reusable plastic products
- Flame-resistant clothing
- Personal protective equipment, such as face masks
- Commercial furniture and office supplies
- Apparel and headwear
- Food products
- Ethically sourced personal care products
- Promotional products

Services provided include:

- Creative services
- Engineering services
- Consulting and advisory services
- Security services
- Cyber and data protection

Alongside a number of niche and specialized offerings such as:

- IT services, ranging from professional staffing and consulting to website design, surveys, and utility locates
- Environmental services, such as environmental inspections and life-cycle assessments of greenhouse gas emissions
- Design services, including Indigenous-led graphic design
- Health services, such as mobile holistic health offerings

Respondents also work across major project sectors that demonstrate significant operational capacity:

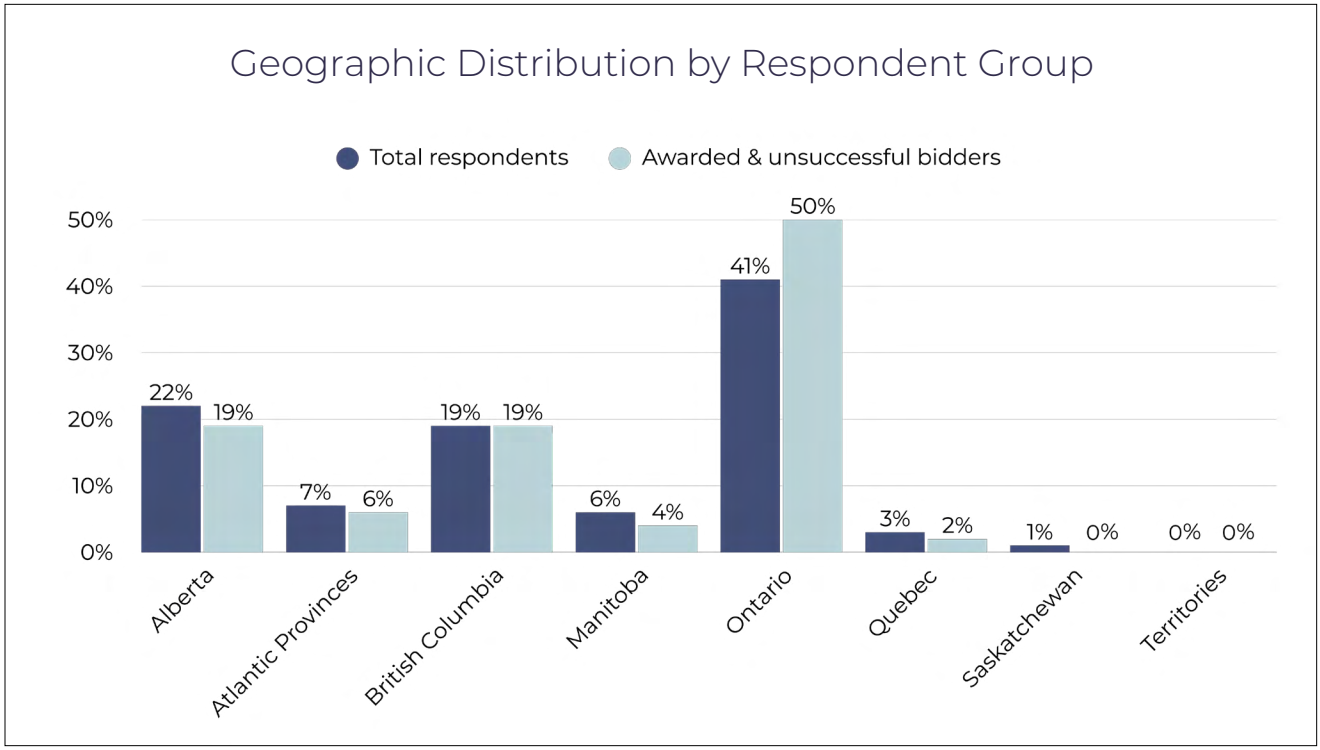
- Forestry, including forest management and related services
- Construction, spanning general contracting, specialized trades, transportation, and building supply
- Logistics and shipping, including freight and delivery services



Geography. The main office location for the subset of awarded and unsuccessful bidders generally followed the same pattern as all respondents. However, Ontario differed notably, with bidders more likely to report operations (+9 percentage points).

Apart from Ontario, awarded and unsuccessful bidders were somewhat underrepresented in the Atlantic provinces (-1 percentage point); the Prairie provinces, including Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan (-6 percentage points); and Quebec (-1 percentage point).

Proximity to the National Capital Region may influence the federal procurement opportunities available in Ontario. A similar pattern may exist in Alberta, though it is less evident in the data, where the oil sands and related support services have established deeply rooted supply chains.



* Bases: n = 98 respondents (total); n = 48 (subgroup)
* Q43. In which province or territory is your main office located? [Single-select multiple choice]



PROCUREMENT PREFERENCES AND ATTRIBUTES

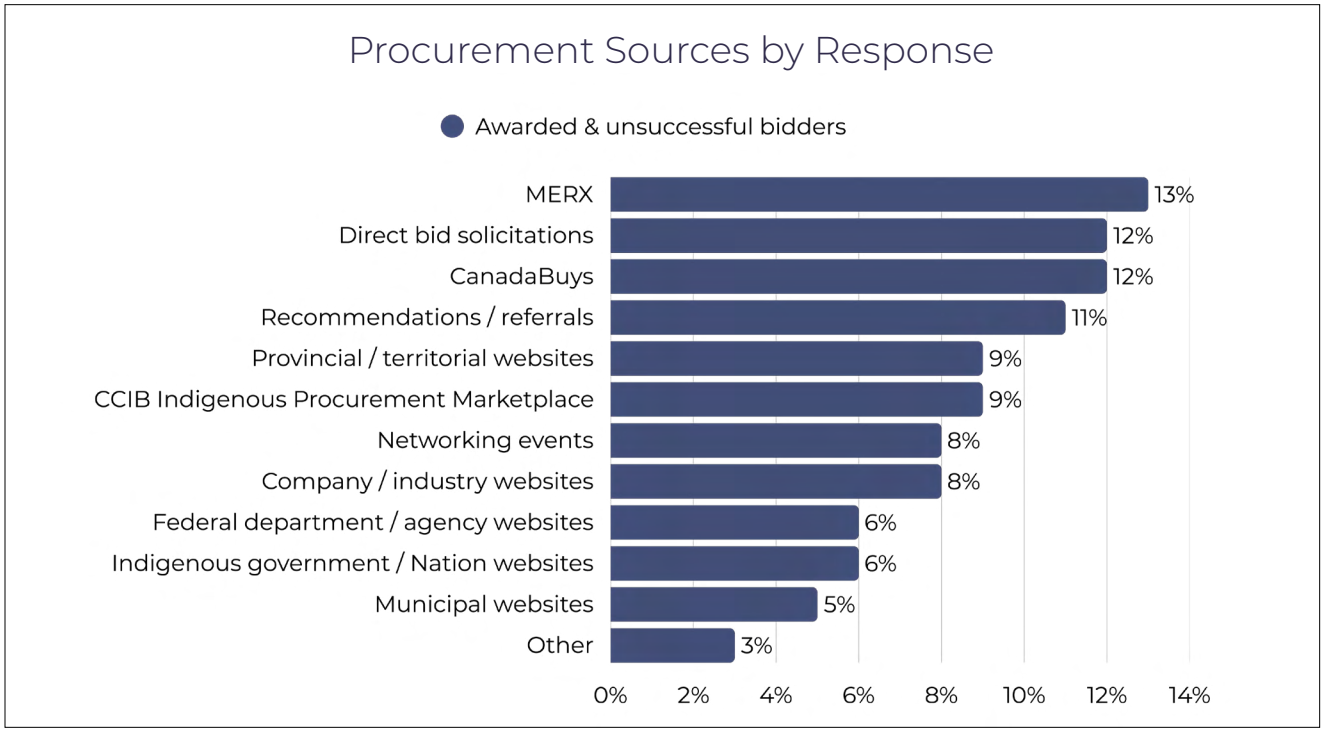
Main Sources of Procurement Opportunities. The prominence of MERX and CanadaBuys among respondents (25 per cent) was consistent with their role as the primary, centralized platforms for public-sector procurement in Canada, including Indigenous-specific set-aside and benefit-based opportunities. CanadaBuys and tenders posted on platforms like MERX implement the Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Business (PSIB) and the mandatory 5 per cent Indigenous procurement target. Both are widely promoted and included in training for Indigenous suppliers.

Other sources, such as Indigenous-led marketplaces (15 per cent), typically complement rather than replace these resources.

However, CCIB's Indigenous Procurement Program is steadily gaining a critical mass, supported by 1,700 Certified Indigenous Businesses (CIBs) and 140 corporate buyers, helping expand access beyond federal procurement. This makes members easier to find, strengthens the procurement ecosystem, and demonstrates what an Indigenous-led approach can look like. Certified Indigenous Business (CIB) verification continues to reassure buyers that they are working with authentic Indigenous businesses.

Other ways people learned about bid opportunities include Google searches, social media platforms like LinkedIn, email, word-of-mouth recommendations, and digital e-procurement sites such as bidsandtenders.ca. We also saw interest through Indigenous-led solutions like talkingcircle.ca.

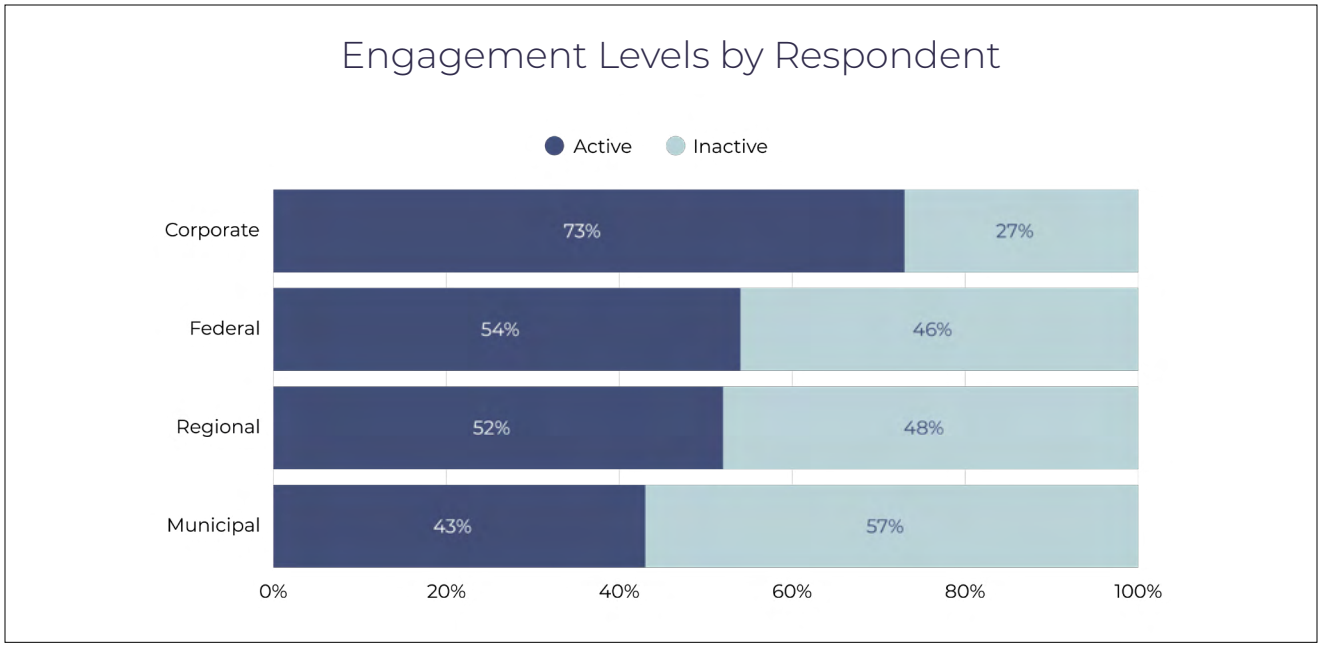




* Base: n = 216 responses (subgroup)
* Q6. How do you find procurement opportunities? [Multi-select multiple choice]

Sectors for Procurement Contracts. Both awarded and unsuccessful bidders showed interest in contracts across municipal, regional, and federal sectors. However, they were especially inclined to engage with the corporate sector, with 73 per cent indicating they bid either frequently or occasionally. More than half of the surveyed businesses actively bid for contracts from the federal government (54 per cent) or provincial and territorial governments (52 per cent). In contrast, fewer businesses take part in municipal government procurement (43 per cent), reflecting varying levels of engagement across government sectors.

This presents a great opportunity for local governments to build stronger connections with Indigenous businesses and collaborate closely with nearby Indigenous communities, given their proximity and common interests. These partnerships can deepen local supply networks and support mutual growth, benefiting everyone.



* Base: n = 64 respondents (subgroup)

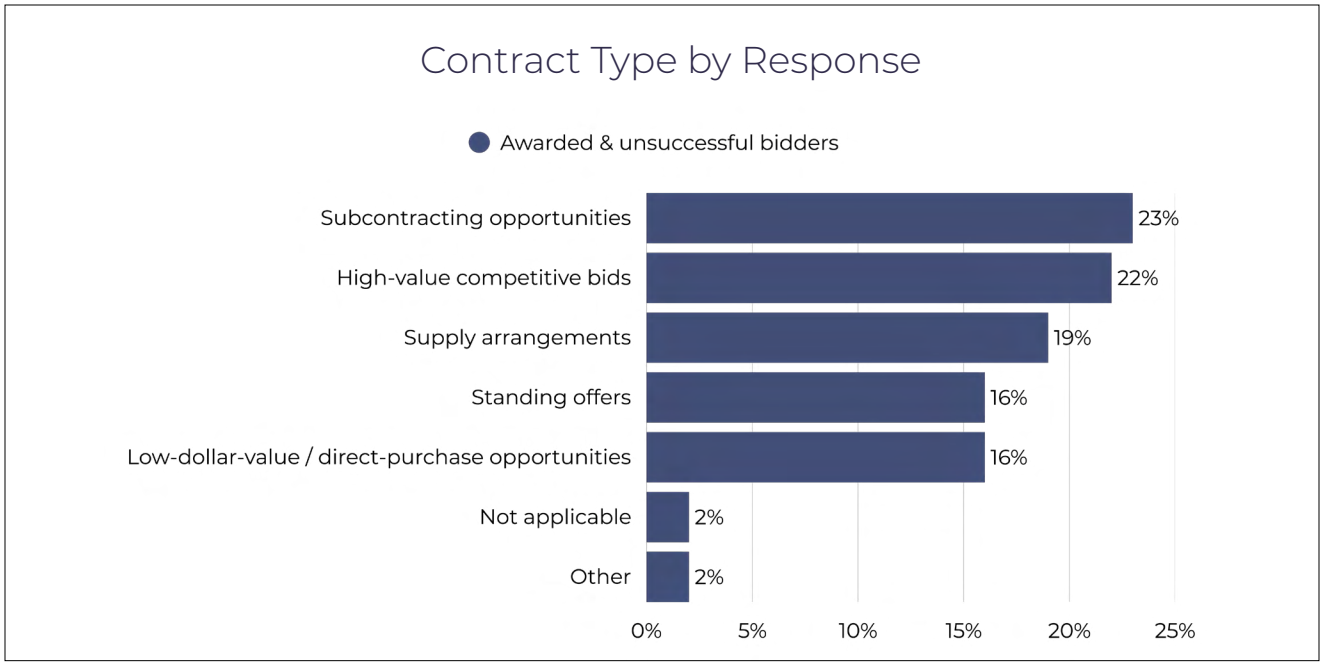
* Q7. In which sector do you bid for procurement contracts? Please rate how frequently you bid in each sector as "frequently," "occasionally," "rarely," or "never." [Likert matrix table]

Types of Procurement Contracts Sought. Subcontracting was the preferred contract option for 23 per cent of both awarded and unsuccessful bidders. Similar levels (22 per cent) targeted high-value, competitive bids such as RFPs, which may require more initial effort and operational skills but can lead to larger, more profitable contracts.

Over a third of surveyed businesses (35 per cent) choose different ways to set work terms in advance. For example, 19 per cent prefer supply arrangements as pre-qualified suppliers, and 16 per cent favour standing offers that come with pre-approved pricing and terms.

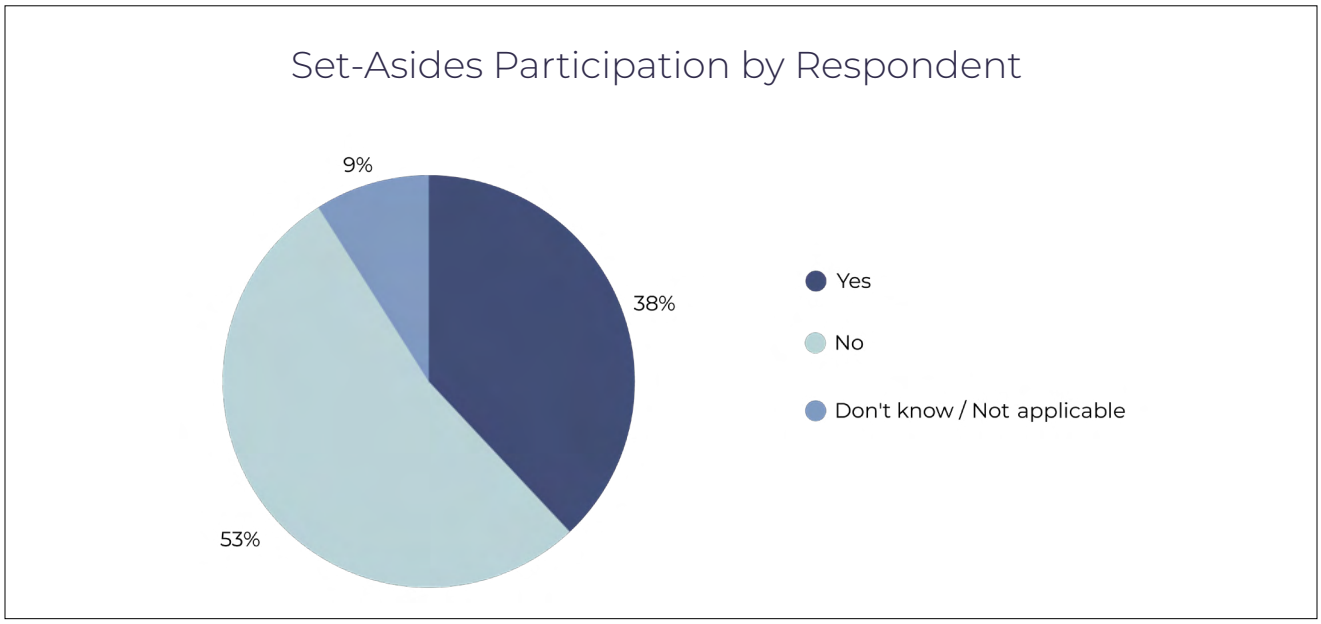
Another 16 per cent are taking advantage of the low-dollar-value and direct-purchase opportunities. These options are often highlighted as easier entry points into more complex procurement systems, such as those used by the federal government.

Other options (2 per cent) also included service agreements, which are agreements to deliver services over a specific period.



* Base: n = 125 responses (subgroup)
* Q8. What types of procurement contracts do you primarily seek? [Single-select multiple choice]

Indigenous Set-Asides Participation. Over a third (38 per cent) of both awarded and unsuccessful bidders had accessed a federal set-aside, while just over half (53 per cent) had not. Among those who had not, most were unaware of set-asides (46 per cent), a quarter could not find any that matched their offerings (25 per cent), and a few were new businesses or unprepared to respond (21 per cent). A much smaller percentage cited the process as too cumbersome (4 per cent) or lacked time (4 per cent).

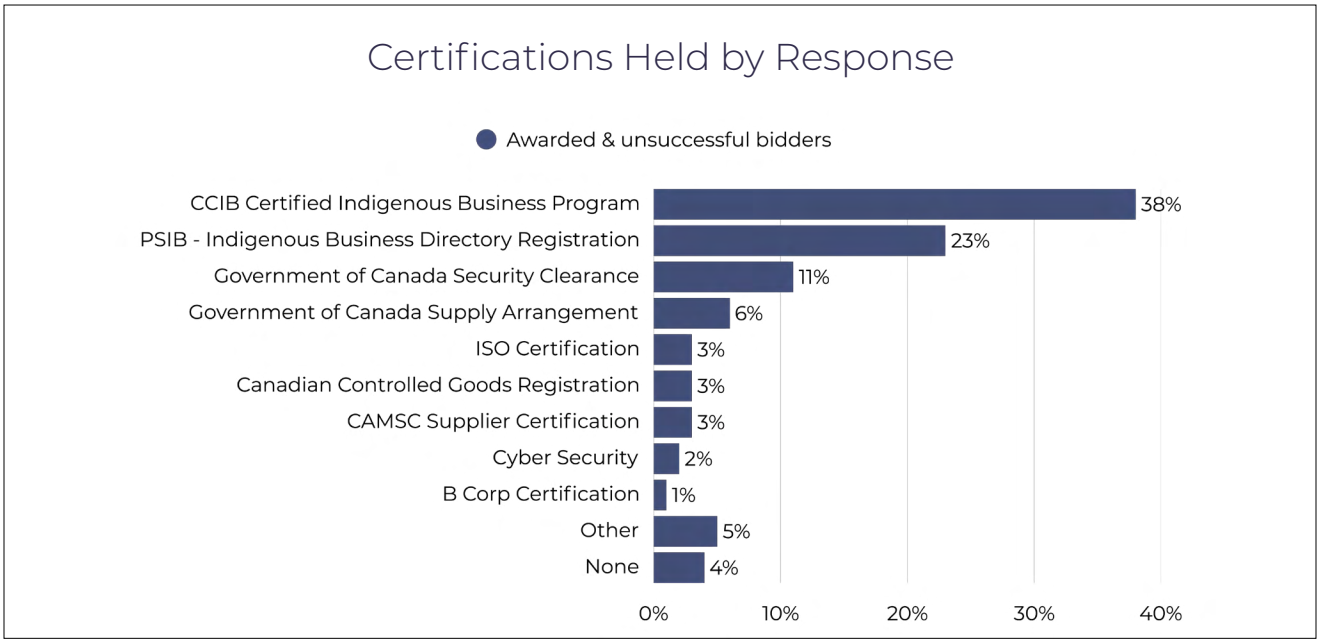


* Base: n = 55 respondents (subgroup)
* Q9. Have you ever bid on an Indigenous set-aside issued by the federal government? [Single-select multiple choice]

Certifications and Qualifications. Since the survey was intentionally shared with CCIB members, it is understandable that most (38 per cent) of the certifications cited by awarded and unsuccessful bidders were from CCIB's Certified Indigenous Business (CIB) program.

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of responses were registrations in Canada's Indigenous Business Directory via the Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Businesses (PSIB), which lists nearly 3,000 businesses.[9] This step unlocks opportunities for set-asides and support specifically designed for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Notably, 13 per cent of responses cited federal security clearances and the implementation of cybersecurity measures, indicating the capacity to support procurement opportunities involving sensitive or security-restricted work, including national defence-related contracts. This also positions early entrepreneurs to help peers understand, apply for, and maintain their security clearance requirements, and to contribute to a broader Indigenous procurement ecosystem in security-sensitive sectors.



* Base: n = 115 responses (subgroup)
* Q11. Which certifications do you hold, if any, that qualify you for procurement opportunities? [Multi-select multiple choice]

Other responses mentioned the Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC), which recognizes Registered Professional Planners, and the COR (Certificate of Recognition), a Canadian occupational health and safety certification required for many public contracts. Also noted were PEGNL (Professional Engineers and Geoscientists Newfoundland and Labrador), which is legally required to practice engineering or geoscience in the province, and Alberta Métis Works, an online directory and economic development initiative of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government (Métis Nation of Alberta).

[9] Government of Canada. (2026). Facts about federal Indigenous procurement policies and practices. Last modified on April 10, 2026. https://isc.gc.ca/eng/1746637262900/1746637283564

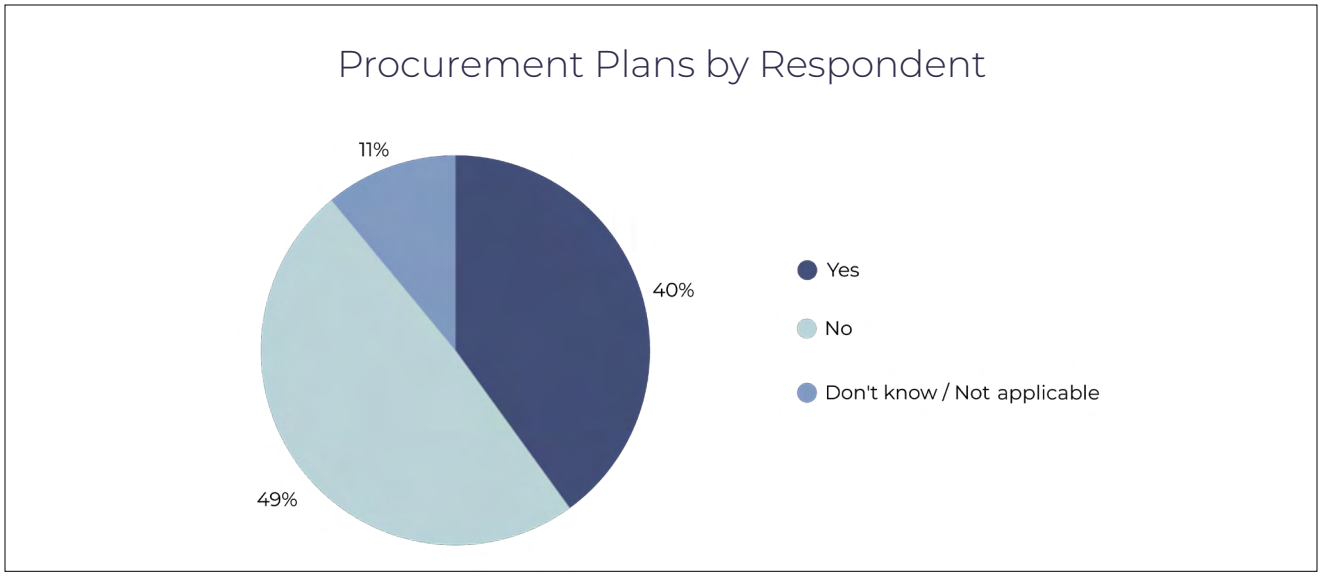


PERCEPTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Views on Procurement Process. Both awarded and unsuccessful bidders reported mixed outcomes, with a little over half (59 per cent) expressing mixed opinions about the procurement process. This reflects the substantial differences from one procurement to another and the absence of a standard experience across government agencies or corporate buyers.

About a quarter (26 per cent) of respondents reported a wholly negative experience, while only 4 per cent enjoyed a wholly positive one. Meanwhile, a small segment (11 per cent) felt indifferent and had no strong views either way. Reasons provided for these perceptions were predominantly negative. They highlighted issues such as lack of fairness (35 per cent), complexity (21 per cent), challenges faced by new or small businesses (21 per cent), being time-consuming (12 per cent), or a mixed bag of different and conflicting experiences (12 per cent).

Formal Plans to Increase Procurement Revenue. Awarded and unsuccessful bidders were roughly split between those who had created a formal procurement plan (40 per cent) and those who had not (49 per cent), with a minority unsure of their procurement planning efforts (11 per cent).

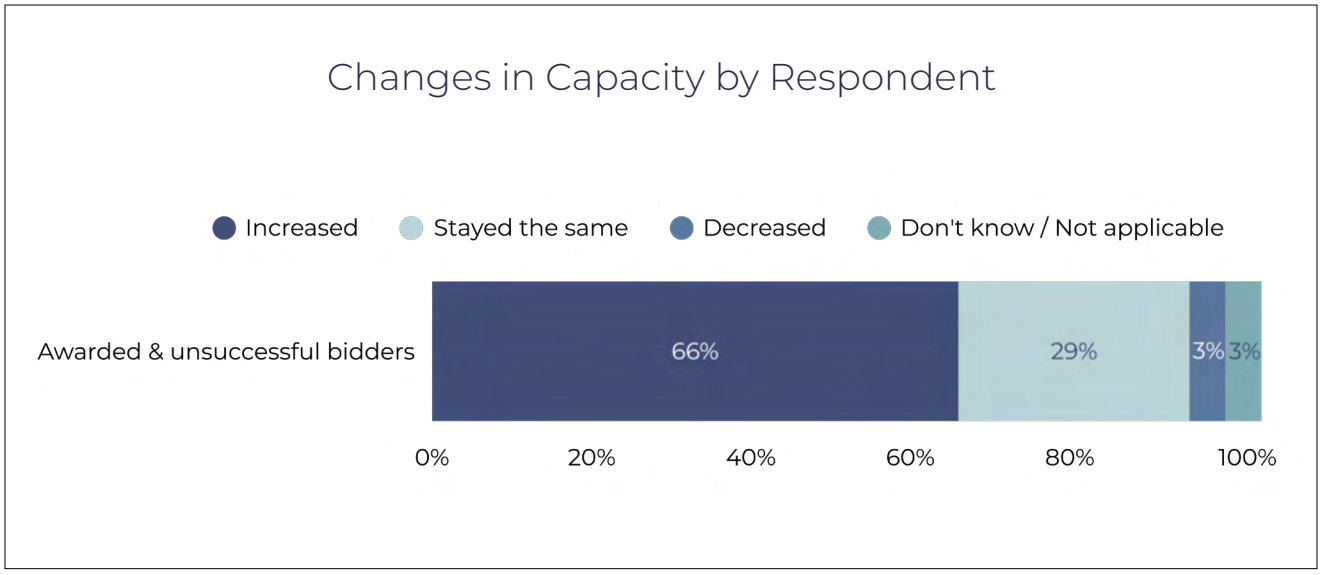


* Base: n = 53 respondents (subgroup)
* Q14. Does this business have a formal plan or strategy to increase its procurement revenue? [Single-select multiple choice]

Capacity and Growth. An impressive majority (66 per cent) had increased their capacity to take on additional procurement contracts by a little or a lot over the past six years, despite a global pandemic that slowed the movement of people and goods across borders. Buyer engagement with Indigenous targets is likely increasing demand and repeat business, thereby strengthening Indigenous businesses' capacity to scale and grow. This suggests the targets are helping translate procurement intent into tangible opportunities for Indigenous businesses.

About a third (34 per cent) of respondents reported significant improvements in their ability to perform contract work, indicating a substantial increase in capacity. Another third (32 per cent) of respondents reported staying the same or decreasing slightly or significantly over the same period.

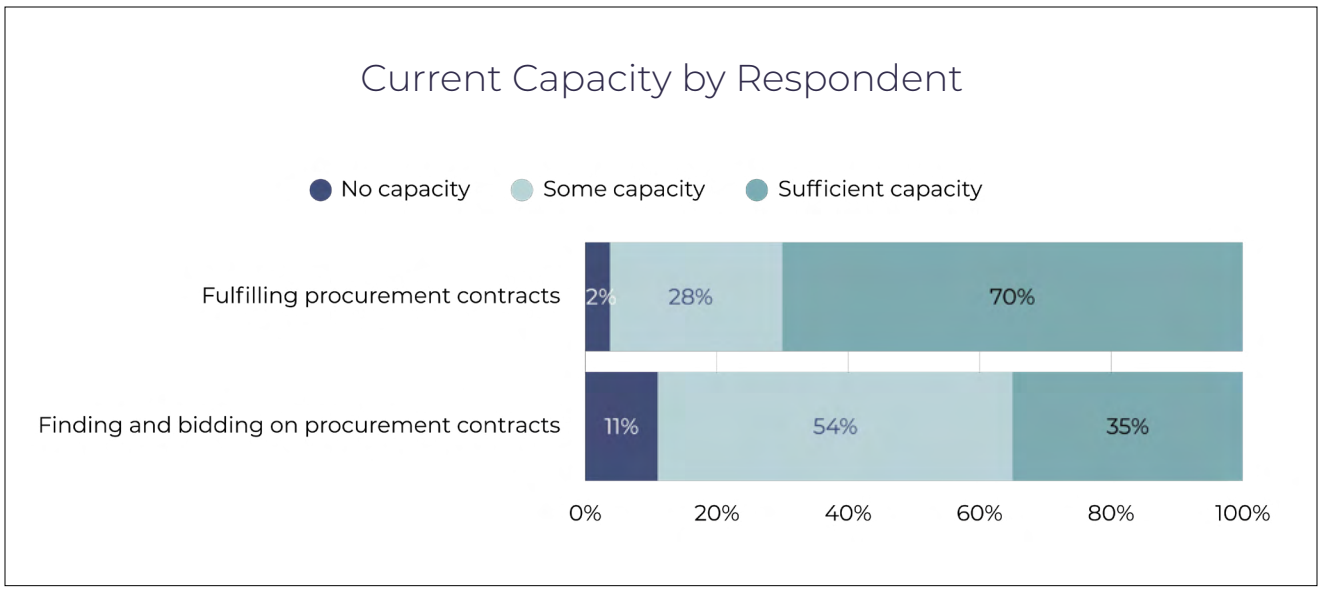
The period from 2018 to 2024 was symbolically chosen as a meaningful reference point because it marks the start of CCIB's Supply Change™ and Indigenous Procurement Program. This timeframe helps us understand the growth and development of these important initiatives.



* Base: n = 35 respondents (subgroup)
* Q15. Since 2018, has your ability to take on additional procurement contracts...? [Single-select multiple choice]

Current Capacity for Procurement Activities. Twice as many respondents in the subgroup of awarded and unsuccessful bidders had the capacity to fulfill procurement contracts (70 per cent) as those who could find and bid on them (35 per cent). This pattern indicates that Indigenous businesses have greater ability to do the work than they have the chance to use it.

Only a small percentage (2 per cent) of respondents lacked the capacity to deliver new contracted services, while the majority (54 per cent) had at least some capacity to identify procurement opportunities to bid on. This raises significant opportunities to enhance support for finding and managing tenders by providing tailored support for Indigenous entrepreneurs, such as using AI to streamline and automate the entire tender process.



* Base: n = 35 respondents (subgroup)
* Q15. Since 2018, has your ability to take on additional procurement contracts...? [Single-select multiple choice]

Areas Needing More Capacity. Over a quarter (29 per cent) of both awarded and unsuccessful bidders needed more staff to fulfill additional procurement contracts, considerably more than any other capacity needs reported by respondents. This reflects the well-known challenge Indigenous businesses often face in finding and retaining qualified employees.[10] As most bidders who have been awarded contracts are treated as already established, we assume that their primary constraint is likely skilled labour rather than financing.

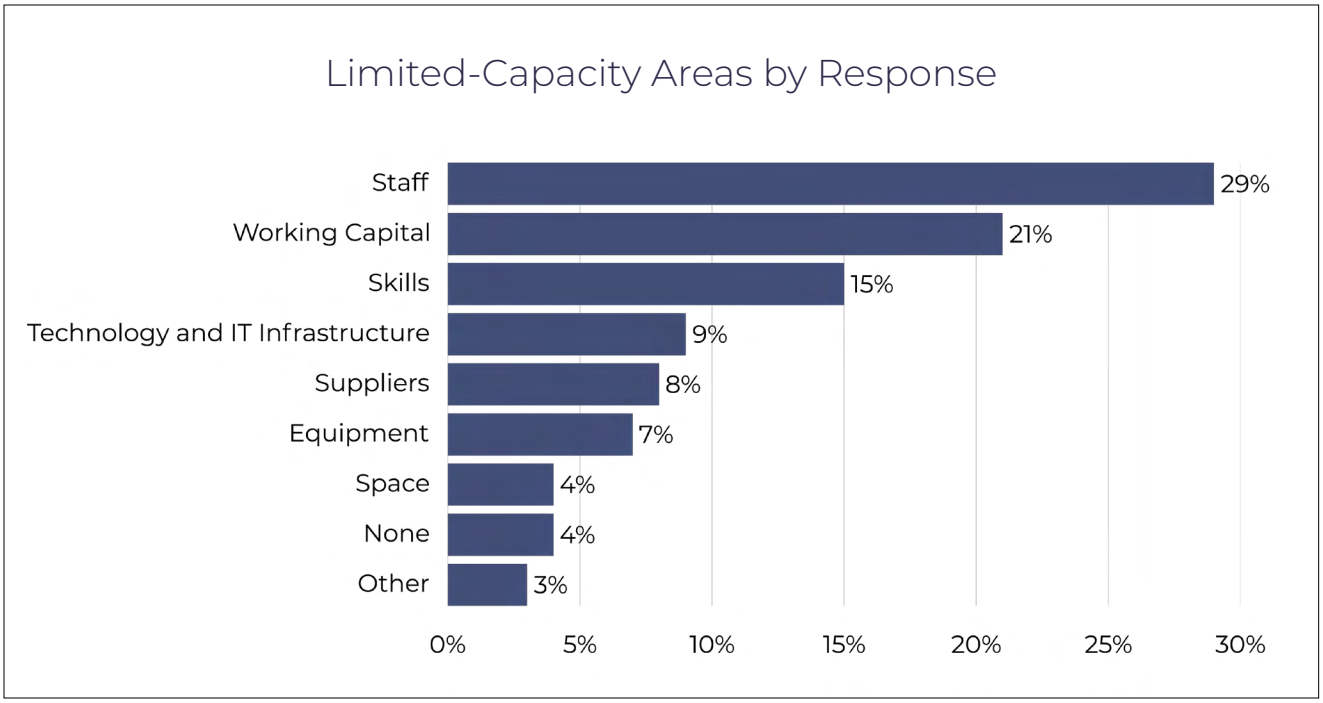
[10] CCIB. (2024). Atāmitowin: Export experiences of indigenous entrepreneurs. September 18, 2024. https://www.ccib.ca/main/archive_publication/atamitowin/

Expanding working capital was the second most important area (21 per cent) needed to manage the contracted work more effectively, including cash flow for payroll, materials, travel, and subcontractor payments. Once again, this highlights the ongoing challenges Indigenous businesses face in accessing financing when growing or exporting, especially for those operating within Indigenous communities.[11] We often find this is the main obstacle for newer or less established businesses.

In addition, 15 per cent of respondents reported needing to develop the right skills to better meet contract requirements. This may include technical, operational, or compliance skills that enhance their ability to win and execute procurement contracts, such as understanding request for proposals (RFPs) and their eligibility and evaluation criteria.

Other responses (3 per cent) emphasized not only developing new skills but also matching existing skills with suitable opportunities and increasing awareness of the best fits.

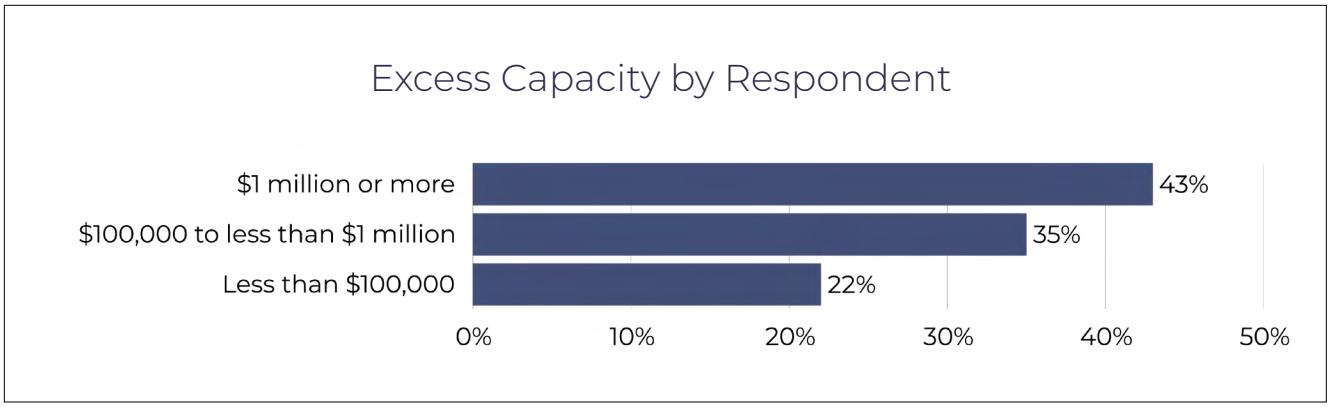
They also suggested the need for investment capital to prepare for new procurement work, such as hiring skilled staff, buying equipment, or expanding facilities, as well as working capital to cover daily operations on contracts once they start.



* Base: n = 121 responses (subgroup)
* Q17. In which areas, if any, do you need more capacity to fulfill additional procurement contracts? [Multi-select multiple choice]

[11] Ibid.

Estimated Value of Additional Contracts. Both awarded and unsuccessful bidders were encouraged to consider their current workload and how much extra contract work they could comfortably take on if such an opportunity arose. Most respondents (43 per cent) reported they could perform at least $1 million worth of additional work, around a third (35 per cent) indicated they could handle between $100,000 and less than $1 million, and close to a quarter (22 per cent) said they only have excess capacity for less than $100,000. The total excess capacity among 54 respondents amounts to roughly $156,212,500.[12]



* Base: n = 54 respondents (subgroup)
* Q18. Thinking about your current workload, what do you estimate is the value of the additional contracts you could take on? [Single-select multiple choice]

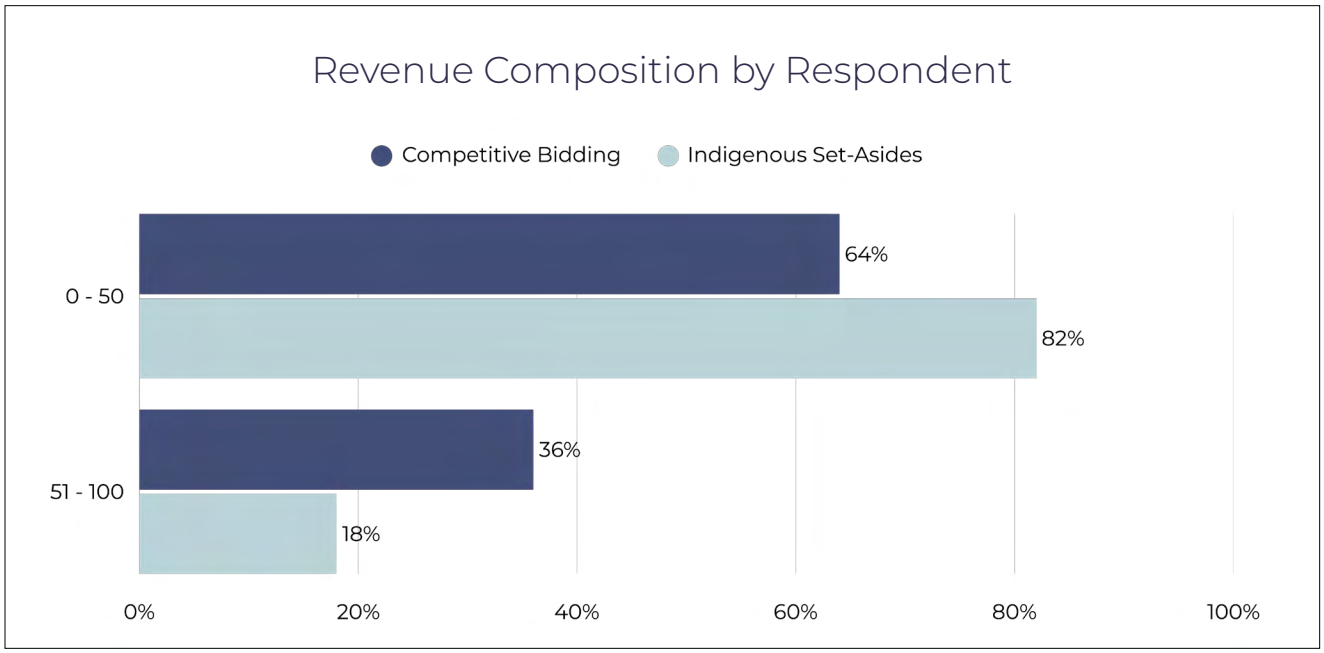
[12] Note: Midpoints were estimated by taking the midpoint of each range. For open-ended ranges, $0 was used as the lower bound for "less than $25,000," and $15 million was assumed as the upper bound for "$10 million or more," based on the adjacent range size. Midpoints were then multiplied by the number of respondents in each range and summed to estimate total excess capacity. These values are approximate and used for descriptive purposes only.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Gross Revenue in 2024. Approximately a quarter (26 per cent) of awarded and unsuccessful bidders had gross revenues of less than $100,000 in the previous year; about a third (35 per cent) had between $100,000 and $1 million; and 39 per cent had sales over $1 million.

Revenue from Competitive Bidding and Set-Asides. Among awarded bidders, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) reported earning between 0 and 50 per cent of their revenue from competitive bidding, while the remaining third (36 per cent) reported earning between 51 and 100 per cent of their revenue from competitive bidding. Eighteen per cent of this subgroup reported earning between 51 and 100 per cent of their revenue from federal government Indigenous set-asides.



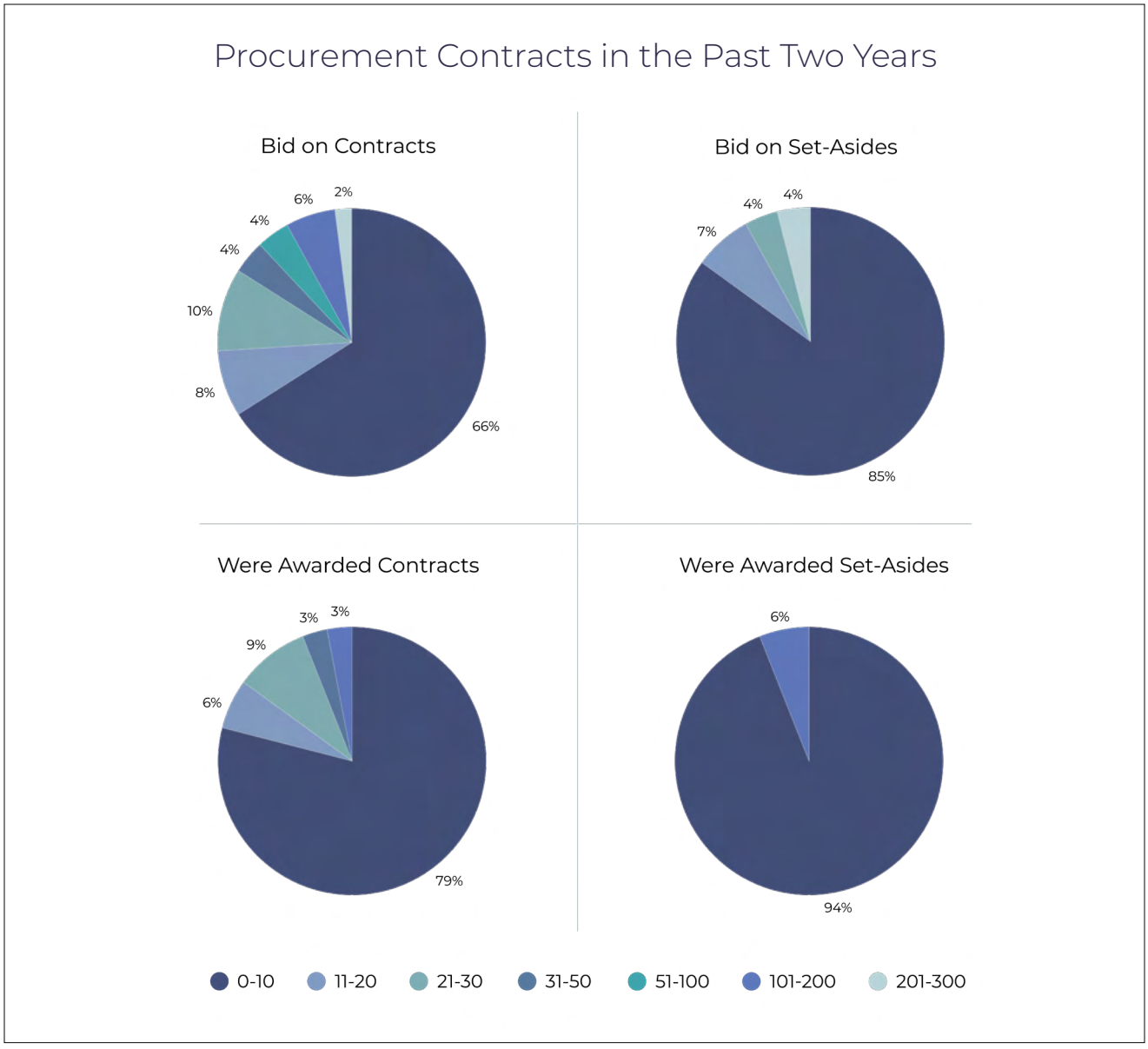
* Bases: Q20. In 2024, what percentage of this business's gross revenue came from contracts awarded through competitive bidding? (n = 33 respondents); Q21. In 2024, what percentage of this business's gross revenue came from Indigenous set-asides issued by the federal government? (n = 17 respondents) [Open-ended numeric entry]

Volume of Procurement Bids and Awards. Most respondents had bid on up to 10 procurement contracts (66 per cent) and on Indigenous set-asides (85 per cent) within the past two years. A few outliers also reported bidding on more than 50 procurement contracts (12 per cent) and on set-asides (4 per cent). However, the median number of procurement contracts bid on is six, while the median for set-asides is one.

The median success rate for both procurement contracts and Indigenous set-asides is 33 per cent, meaning respondents secure awards about one-third of the time through either open competitive bidding or designated carve-outs for Indigenous businesses.

Five respondents (10 per cent) reported a perfect win rate, meaning they have been awarded every procurement contract they bid on. Additionally, two respondents (6 per cent) reported 100 per cent success specifically with Indigenous set-aides.

These findings suggest Indigenous businesses may face greater challenges in achieving the 2026 request-for-proposal (RFP) win rate of 45 per cent, indicating they may be underperforming relative to the global average, even after accounting for Indigenous set-asides. This highlights the importance of improved benchmarking studies, especially through collaboration with industry leaders such as the Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP) and by identifying Indigenous-owned entities to collect valuable time-series data.



* Bases: Q22. In the past two years, how many procurement contracts have you...? a. bid on (n = 50 respondents); b. been awarded (n = 33 respondents); Q23. In the past two years, how many Indigenous set-asides have you...? a. bid on (n = 35 respondents); b. been awarded (n = 17 respondents) [Open-ended numeric entry]

Average and Cumulative Value of Procurement Contracts. Surveyed businesses typically pursued procurement contracts with an average value of $896,550, although the median was substantially lower at $300,000. The average total value of contracts awarded was slightly higher, at $1,128,583, while the median again remained $300,000. These figures suggest that while most activity is concentrated in mid-sized contracts, a limited number of respondents focus on larger awards that account for a disproportionate share of value.

Most respondents reported bidding in the $40,000 to less than $100,000 (19 per cent) and $100,000 to less than $500,000 (33 per cent) ranges. A notable share also pursued smaller opportunities, with 21 per cent bidding on contracts under $40,000, including 8 per cent under $25,000.

The lower bounds of $25,000 and $40,000 are significant because they correspond to federal thresholds below which departments may award contracts non-competitively for goods and services and construction, respectively.[13] This suggests that lower-value contracts may be attractive entry points or lower-barrier opportunities for some businesses.

At higher values, ten per cent of respondents bid on both the $500,000 to less than $1 million and the $1 million to less than $5 million ranges. Only a small proportion (4 per cent) pursued contracts exceeding $5 million.

Award outcomes show a different distribution. Only 16 per cent of respondents reported being awarded contracts under $40,000, and just 6 per cent received contracts under $25,000, despite higher bidding activity at these levels. This pattern may indicate barriers even for smaller contracts, such as administrative burdens, paperwork requirements, setup costs, or limited access to procurement relationships.

Roughly half of all respondents were awarded contracts clustered in the $40,000 to less than $100,000 (25 per cent) and $100,000 to $500,000 (28 per cent) ranges.

Larger contracts were less common but still present: 19 per cent of awarded contracts fell in the $500,000 to less than $1 million range, while 6 per cent were valued at $1 million to less than $5 million, and another 6 per cent exceeded $5 million.



[13] Fasken. (2025). New Federal Regulations May Significantly Impact Competitive Procurement Processes. February 3, 2025. https://www.fasken.com/en/knowledge/2025/02/new-federal-regulations-may-significantly-impact-competitive-procurement-processes

Average Value Range	Bid On		Awarded (2-Year Period)	
-	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Less than $100,000	21	40%	13	41%
$100,000 to less than $1 million	22	42%	15	47%
$1 million or more	7	13%	4	13%
Don't know / Not applicable	2	4%	0	0%
Total	**52**	**100%**	**32**	**100%**

* Base: n = 32 respondents (subgroup)
* Q24. What do you estimate is the average value of the contracts you have bid on? (n = 52 respondents); Q25. What do you estimate is the average value of the contracts you have been awarded in the past two years? [Single-select multiple choice]

The average cumulative value of procurement contracts awarded over the past two years was $11,445,313, while the median was $750,000, reinforcing the pattern observed in the average contract value. Nearly half (45 per cent) of respondents reported a combined contract value of less than $500,000.

Once again, a smaller proportion of respondents with cumulative revenue over $5 million appeared to have an outsized influence on total value, suggesting uneven scaling across the Indigenous procurement ecosystem and differences in capacity, credentials, or access to procurement relationships.

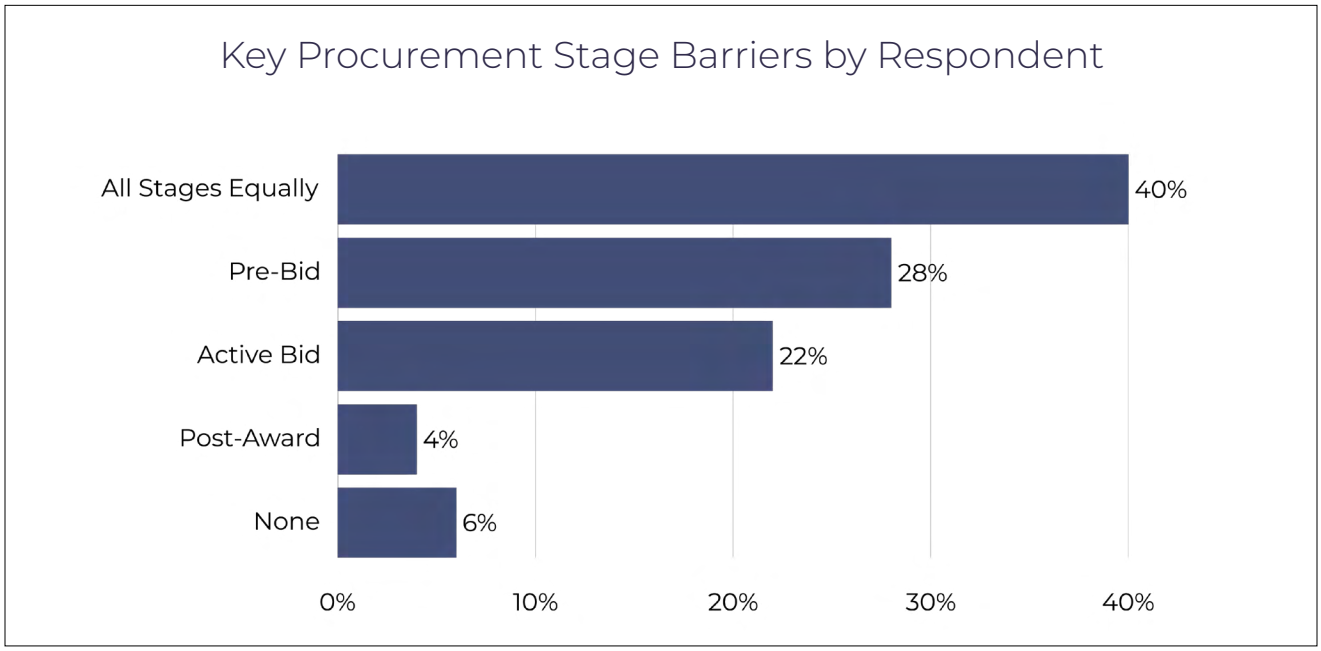
Cumulative Value Range	Awarded (2-Year Period)	
-	Number	Per cent
Less than $500,000	15	45%
$500,000 to less than $5 million	9	27%
$5 million or more	8	24%
Don't know / Not applicable	1	3%
Total	**33**	**100%**

* Base: n = 52 respondents (subgroup)
* Q26. What do you estimate is the total cumulative value of contracts you have been awarded in the past two years? [Single-select multiple choice]

BARRIERS AND SUPPORT NEEDS

Barriers Faced in Procurement. Both awarded and unsuccessful bidders were asked which stage of the procurement process presented the most obstacles. The choices were the pre-bid, active bid, and post-award stages, covering preparations before bidding, bid submission and evaluation, and post-award activities like onboarding and oversight.

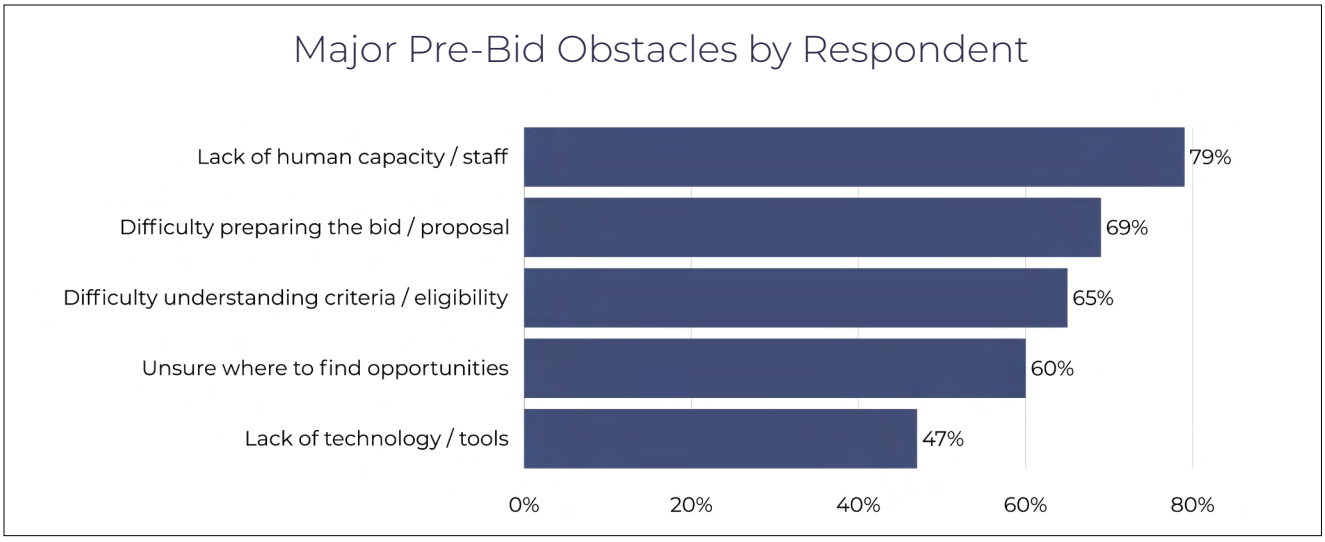
A wide majority (40 per cent) reported encountering obstacles at every stage of the procurement process. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents found the pre-bid stage the most challenging. The active bid stage was next, at 22 per cent, while only 4 per cent of respondents experienced friction during the post-award stage. This suggests that respondents generally feel more comfortable with contract setup and ongoing oversight after winning the award. Just 6 per cent reported no major pain points throughout the procurement process.



* Base: n = 50 respondents (subgroup)
* Q27. At which stage of the procurement process do you encounter the most obstacles? [Single-select multiple choice]

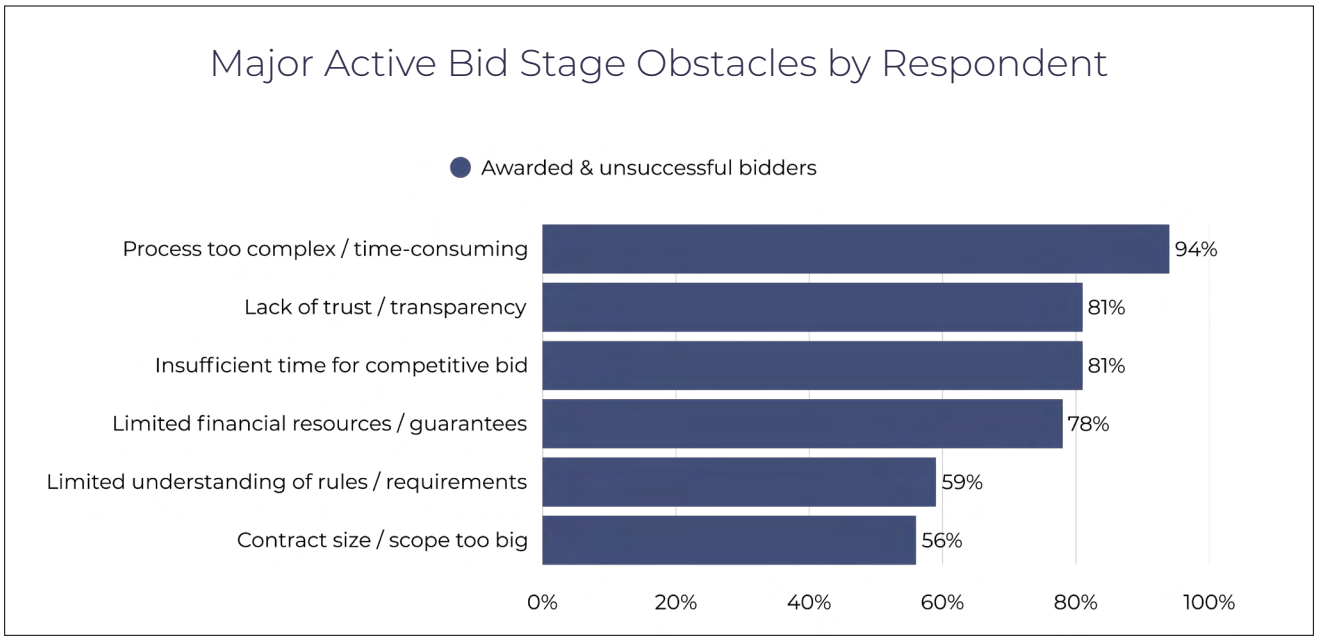
Summary of Moderate and Significant Obstacles. Companies at different stages of the procurement process encounter different challenges. The survey examined how various obstacles, identified in prior CCIB research and institutional experience, affected each stage of the process and categorized their impact as moderate, significant, or none. The following tables summarize the combined moderate and significant impact of each obstacle and point out where obstacles were rated as highly significant.

Pre-Bid Stage. Lack of human capacity or staff was the most widespread challenge affecting both awarded and unsuccessful bidders during the pre-bid stage, with 79 per cent of respondents reporting it as a moderate or significant obstacle. However, many respondents found that not knowing where to place their bids made the process particularly challenging. In fact, a full quarter (25 per cent) said that uncertainty about where opportunities are posted was the most significant obstacle.



* Base: n = 48 respondents (subgroup)
* Q28. Please rate the following obstacles encountered during the pre-bid stage as “significant,” “moderate,” or “not an obstacle at all.” [Single-select multiple choice]

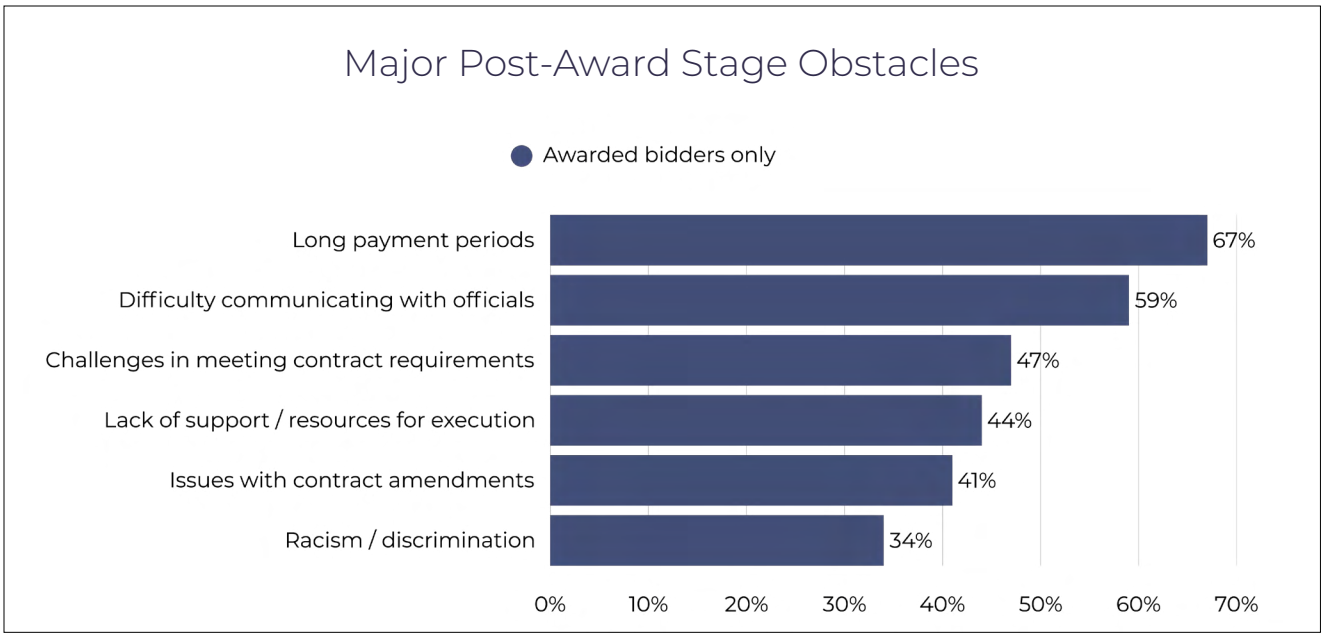
Active Bid Stage. Most respondents found the procurement process too complex or time-consuming to prepare and submit a bid, and 94 per cent cited it as a moderate or significant obstacle. A lack of trust and transparency in the process deterred a smaller but more severely affected proportion (31 per cent).



* Base: n = 32 respondents (subgroup)
* Q28. Please rate the following obstacles encountered during the active bid stage as “significant,” “moderate,” or “not an obstacle at all.” [Single-select multiple choice]

Post-Award Stage. Long payment terms for contract work are the most common challenge for awarded bidders, with about two-thirds (67 per cent) of respondents reporting it as a moderate or significant obstacle. Among the most significant obstacles, however, is difficulty communicating with procurement officials, affecting 13 per cent of respondents.

Although not reported as the most pressing challenge, about a third (34 per cent) of respondents still experienced perceived racism or discrimination during the process. This underscores the need for buyers to prioritize reconciliation to effectively leverage Indigenous procurement at scale.



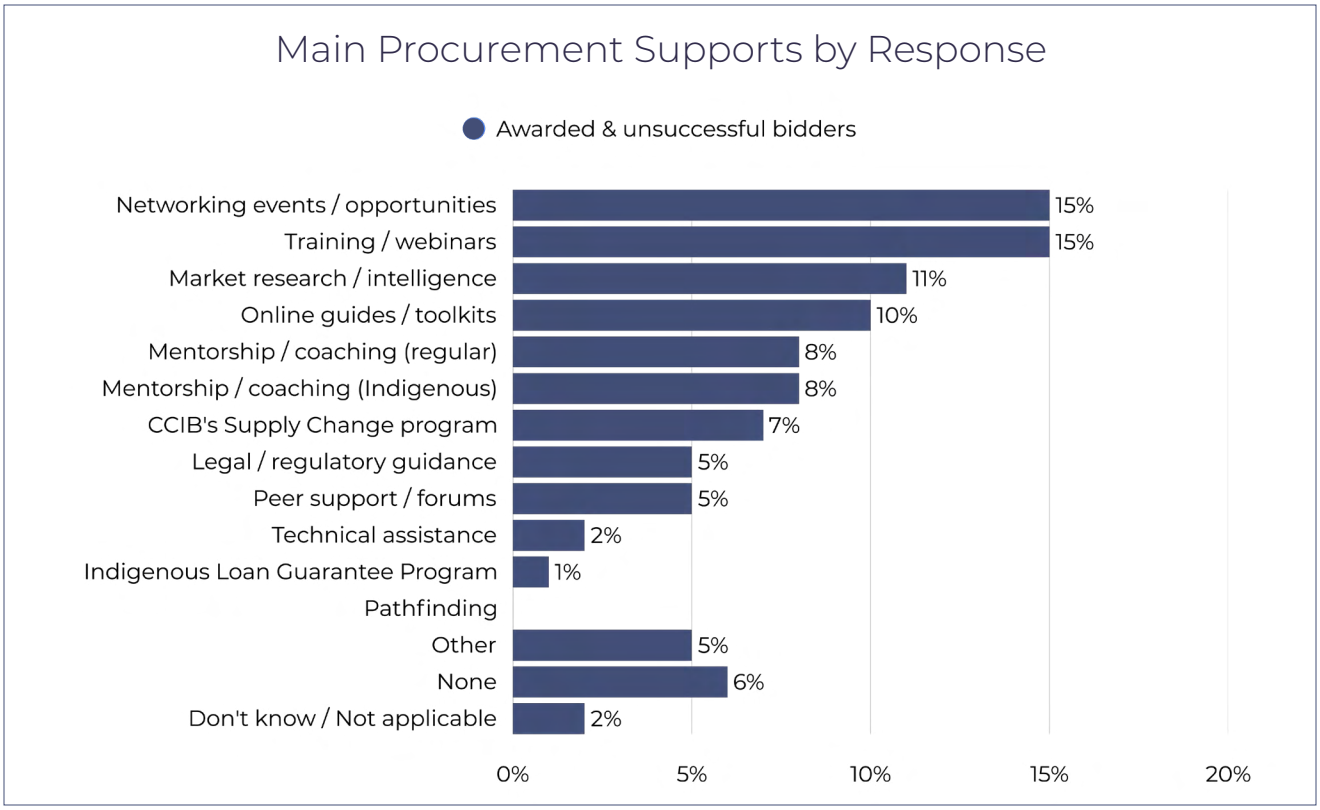
* Base: n = 33 respondents (subgroup)
* Q28. Please rate the following obstacles encountered during the post-award stage as "significant," "moderate," or "not an obstacle at all." [Single-select multiple choice]

Support Needed for Success. Indigenous businesses, whether awarded or unsuccessful in prior bids, selected a range of supports that helped them participate in procurement. The question did not specify who provided these supports, so they could come from both Indigenous-led organizations like CCIB and federal agencies such as Procurement Assistance Canada.

The two main types of support respondents found most helpful in the past—networking, events and opportunities, and training and webinars—are relational, each accounting for 15 per cent. These are followed by market research and intelligence (11 per cent) and online guides or toolkits (10 per cent), which represent information-based supports that expand awareness of new or growing procurement opportunities and help businesses navigate the process of selling into them.

Notably, pathfinding support, such as help identifying tailored opportunities, was not selected by any respondent, suggesting a potential gap in demand or availability for a concierge-style service that matches businesses with relevant buyers.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources delivered mentorship and coaching similarly (each accounting for 8 per cent), and both are likely valued for their procurement insights.



* Base: n = 123 responses (subgroup)

* Q31. What are the main types of support that you have used to help you engage in procurement? [Multi-select multiple choice]

Other responses (6 per cent) cited Pacific Economic Development Canada as a source of funding and regional expertise. Respondents also mentioned access to people with industry experience and word-of-mouth as helpful sources. One respondent used the Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP), which provided SMEs with $2,400 to adopt e-commerce. Another accessed other writing support beyond proposals. Buy Social Canada was also recognized for providing social procurement training, certification, and related supports.

Engagement of Interested Non-Bidders with Organizational Buyers. So far, the analysis has focused exclusively on awarded and unsuccessful bidders. Still, we also asked interested non-bidders whether large buyers had ever approached them to purchase their goods or services, and why they had not responded.

The sample included 48 interested non-bidders, or 41 per cent. All but one provided reasons for not currently engaging in procurement, and nearly a quarter (23 per cent) reported being contacted by organizational buyers about procurement opportunities. We standardized open-ended reasons for not bidding to identify keywords, then tabulated their frequency, excluding common words such as "the," "and," and "is."

The most common reasons people cited for not participating in procurement are a lack of knowledge and awareness (30 per cent), business constraints such as insufficient capital or time demands (27 per cent), limited opportunities in their field (25 per cent), being a small business—whether new to procurement or just starting out as entrepreneurs (14 per cent), and other reasons, such as "We have previously engaged in procurement," and "Not sure" (5 per cent).

Additional Insights from Uninterested Non-Bidders. Some respondents reported having no procurement experience and expressed no interest in engaging in procurement. Unsurprisingly, few people gave reasons for this position; however, those who did generally fell into three categories:

- Lack of Knowledge and Awareness: "Don't know enough about it" and "I don't know what that is" show a lack of understanding about the bidding process.
- Capacity Constraints: "We are currently at capacity" indicates the business is too busy with existing commitments.
- Negative Perception of Procurement: "Too much competition, and the payout isn't worth the effort. I prioritize other work with better gains. Procurement seems individual-focused, making collaboration hard for Indigenous businesses." This highlights concerns about competitiveness, effort-to-reward ratio, and lack of community focus.

CONCLUSION

Expanding Indigenous participation in procurement will require more than incentives and targets alone.

Progress will depend on rethinking how procurement processes are structured, communicated, and supported to enable sustained participation and growth across a broader range of businesses.

Participation is shaped less by the characteristics of Indigenous businesses and more by how procurement systems are designed and accessed.

This includes contract size, administrative requirements, industry fit, and access to information and relationships.

There is a longstanding pattern in which Indigenous entrepreneurs are expected to conform to mainstream procurement models, rather than institutions adapting to meet them where they are.

This is a key structural issue the findings highlight.

Indigenous firms are actively engaging with procurement markets where it makes sense given their scale, capacity, and operations, particularly in mid-sized, contract-based work.

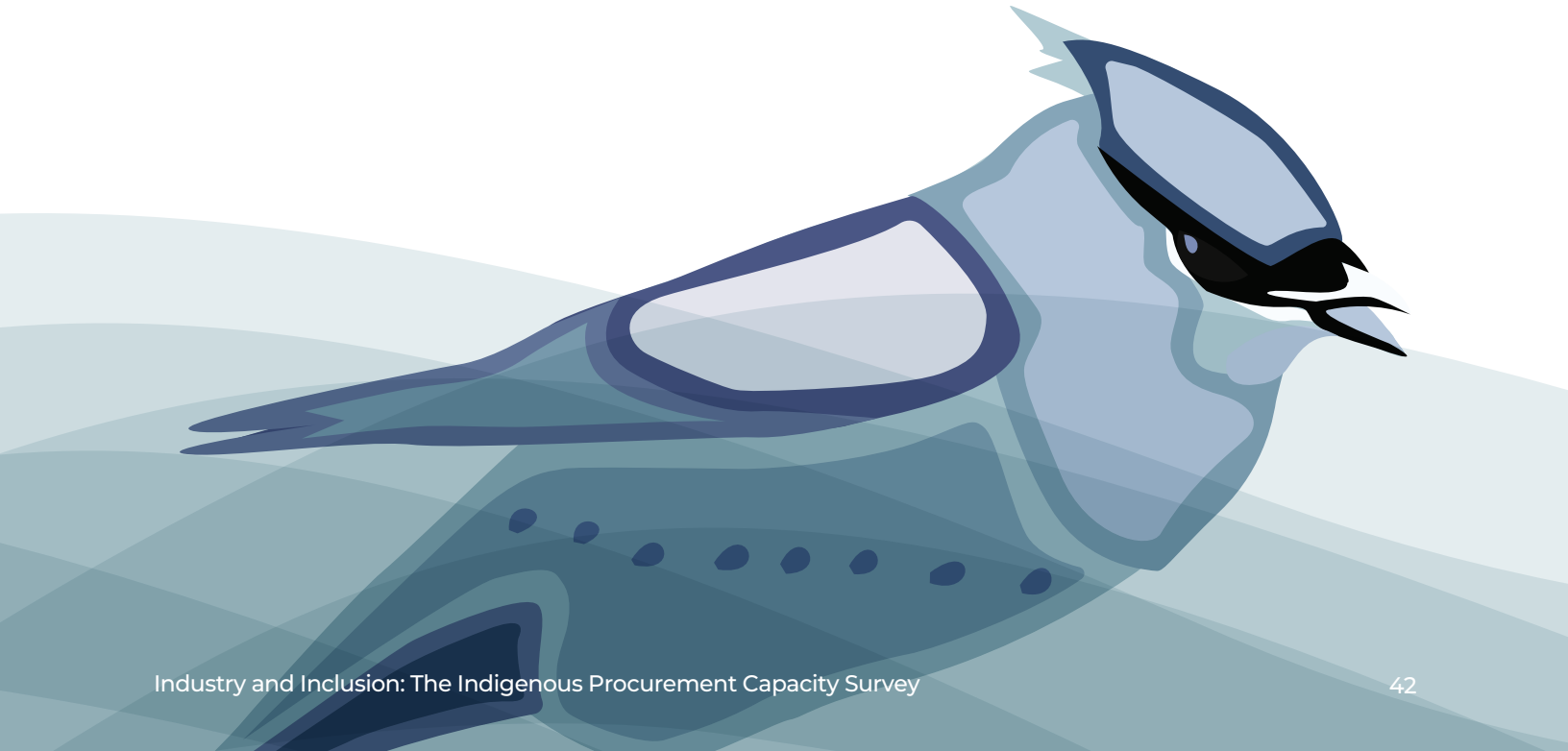
Smaller contracts appear less accessible than anticipated, likely because they entail the same fixed costs and setup requirements as larger contracts yet offer lower returns.

A relatively small number of firms account for a disproportionate share of awarded value, highlighting uneven capacity and scaling across the ecosystem.

This suggests participation and benefits are not evenly distributed.

Reducing friction across procurement processes is, therefore, important at both the lower and higher ends of the contract spectrum.

Coordinated efforts to address these challenges can help make procurement more accessible, efficient, and sustainable for all participants.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting Government Buyers

- Reduce friction for low-value contracts by simplifying setup, reporting, and approval requirements so they scale with contract value.
- Strengthen upstream support, such as clearer communication of opportunities, advance notice, and process guidance, to help businesses identify and pursue well-matched opportunities earlier.
- Improve visibility of registration platforms, including the Indigenous Business Directory, by clarifying how registration connects to real procurement outcomes and set-aside opportunities.
- Design procurement mechanisms that support progression, enabling businesses to move from smaller to mid-sized contracts without facing disproportionate administrative hurdles.

Supporting Corporate Buyers

- Leverage subcontracting and dedicated Indigenous procurement pathways as entry points for Indigenous businesses, particularly for larger or complex projects.
- Invest in relationship-building activities (e.g., networking, supplier engagement sessions), which respond to identified needs and are the most used and accessible form of support.
- Align procurement practices with Indigenous business operating realities, including flexible delivery models and clearer expectations around capacity and scaling.
- Support the adoption of Indigenous procurement tools, such as CCIB's Supply Change™ and the Indigenous Procurement Marketplace, to improve visibility, awareness, trust, and verification of Indigenous ownership.

Supporting Indigenous Businesses and The Ecosystem

- Provide navigation, interpretation, and advisory support to help businesses identify where opportunities exist and how to strategically engage with them.
- Facilitate peer learning and shared knowledge, especially on progressing from smaller to mid-sized and larger contracts. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors are equally valued for their industry expertise.
- Act as a bridge between buyers and businesses, translating procurement requirements while elevating Indigenous perspectives, thereby fostering empathy and understanding of the roles of both suppliers and buyers.



FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- **Examine onboarding and oversight costs in more detail, particularly for low-value contracts, to better understand where administrative burdens arise.**

- **Explore awareness and availability of pathfinding or concierge-style supports, given the lack of reported use and apparent navigational challenges.**

- **Separate outcomes by firm size and experience to clarify how some businesses can access higher-value procurement opportunities.**

- **Assess buyer practices, including how procurement rules are applied in practice and how informal relationships shape access below formal thresholds.**

- **Continue regular surveys of Indigenous business experiences in organizational procurement to facilitate tracking performance over time.**



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CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR
INDIGENOUS
BUSINESS

Canadian Council for Indigenous Business
2 Berkeley Street, Suite 202 Toronto (Ontario) M5A 4J5
Telephone : 416 961-8663 | Fax : 416 961-3995

www.ccib.ca