



# INDIGENOUS BUSINESS WOMEN



This report documents the successes and the challenges of Indigenous Business Women who have received business financing and other supports from IBC.



INDIGENOUS  
BUSINESS  
WOMEN  
ARE

**RESILIENT**

**RESOURCEFUL**

**IMPACTFUL**

**INFLUENTIAL**

# LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

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As if running a business wasn't challenging enough, women frequently have to balance that with unpaid work like managing household finances and caring for children, family and community members.

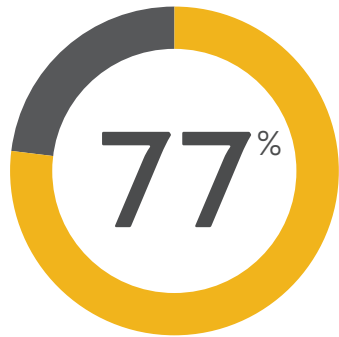
When it comes to financing, Indigenous borrowers face scrutiny most Canadians wouldn't experience. Mainstream banks and credit unions often frown on what they see as undue financial risk. For some Indigenous business women, especially those living on reserve, this discrimination is greatly magnified. Loan application denied!

Indian Business Corporation (IBC) is a First Nations-owned lending organization that provides financing and support to First Nations entrepreneurs in Western Canada. IBC nurtures talent with an approach to financial risk rooted in local knowledge and community experience. Since 1987, IBC has loaned over \$100 million to more than 2500 First Nations entrepreneurs, supporting the creation of 7,000 jobs—over half of which are rural or reserve-based. One-third of IBC's loan portfolio is invested with Indigenous Business Women.

The IBC Women's Loan Fund launched in 2016 to level the playing field by expanding access to capital and meaningful business support for Indigenous Business Women.

# IBC WOMEN'S LOAN FUND

Current fund value  
**\$5 Million**



live on reserve

1/3 of IBC customers are

**WOMEN**



70 small business  
loans averaging  
**\$110,000**

**Indigenous Business  
Women by Sector** (Top Five)

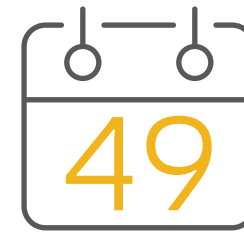
Agriculture

Energy

Equipment

Retail

Construction



the average age  
of IBC Women's  
Loan Fund customers

Since 2009, Indigenous  
Business Women  
have created **JOBS**

**68** full-time

and

**46** part-time

Maintained

**94**

existing **JOBS**



# FOUR QUESTIONS, FOUR QUALITIES

In the spring of 2019, IBC undertook a third-party evaluation of the IBC Women's Loan Fund with assistance from Sahmii Knowledge Solutions and Terrapin Social Finance. The process involved meetings with 33 business women from the three treaty areas of Alberta to explore four questions:

- What does owning a business mean to these entrepreneurs?
- What challenges have they faced?
- What's changed for their families because they started a business?
- How do these business women impact their communities?

Their responses provided qualitative information which helped tell the story of their entrepreneurial experiences.

Terrapin also undertook a 10-year review of IBC's loan records and customer surveys to better understand women's loan repayment behaviour and the various wrap-around services that helped keep them on track, out of bankruptcy and a going concern.

Women were asked for words they felt best described them as a woman in business. Here's what they told us:

## RESILIENT

- Meets the challenges of running a business
- Overcomes adversity, discrimination, sexism, racism, abuse, crab in the bucket mentality, band & inter-tribal politics
- Survives external factors like changing government policies, economic & financial conditions, the weather, competitors

## RESOURCEFUL

- Runs a business in complex environments with competing priorities
- Although most IBC loan customers are men, women are often behind the scenes in the success of many First Nation businesses
- Is deliberate in how to maintain work/life balance
- May require more services and miss more payments, but is more likely to successfully pay off a loan than men

## IMPACTFUL

- Sets a positive example for children, friends, community
- Creates opportunities for others
- Contributes to community cohesion & health

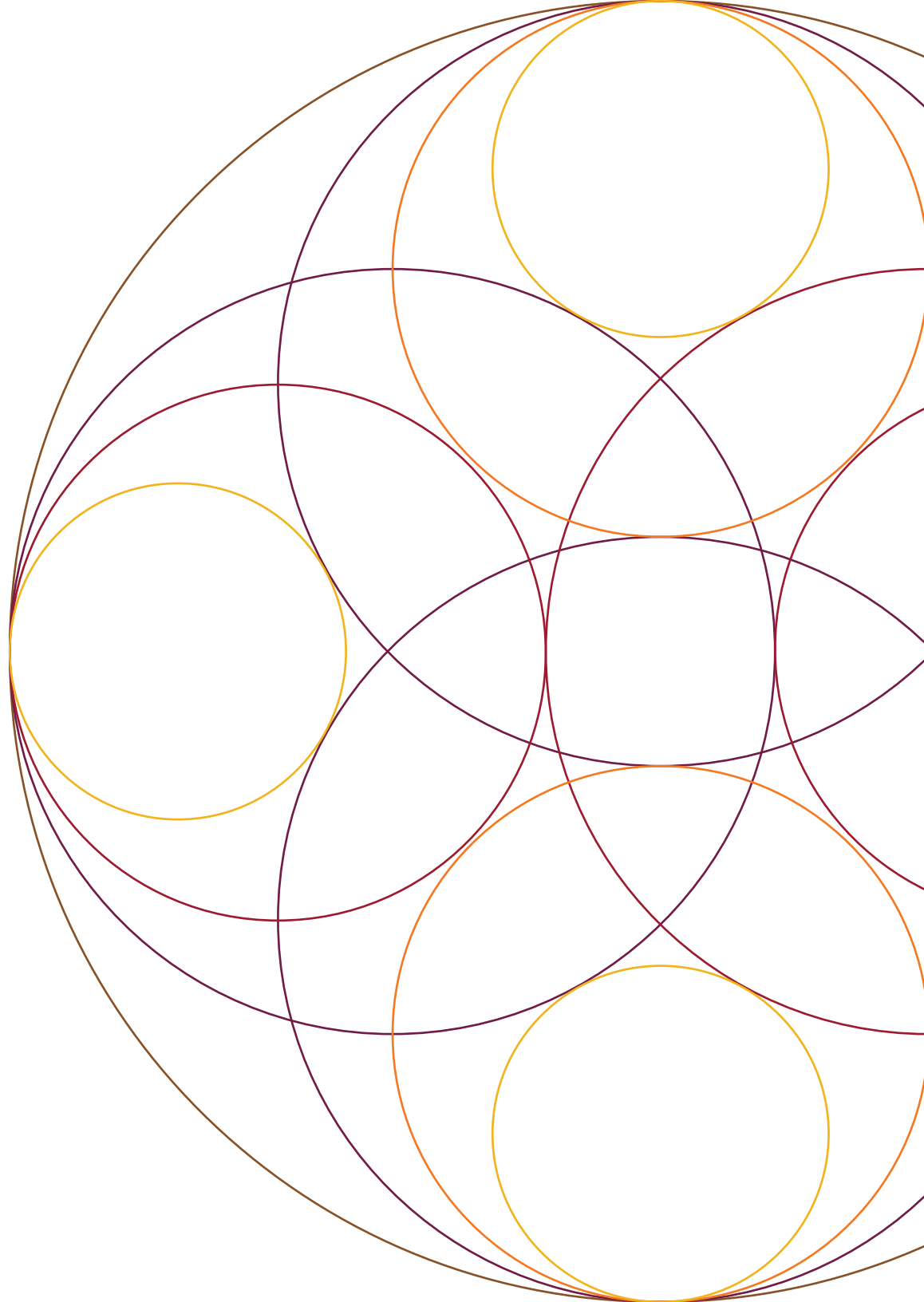
## INFLUENTIAL

- Brings feminine & traditional knowledge
- Addresses service gaps/opportunities/alternatives
- Adds calm, respect—has a civilizing effect on male-dominated workplaces/ bureaucracies



## **INDIGENOUS BUSINESS WOMEN**

Are independent  
Experience freedom  
Have control  
Enjoy personal achievement  
Are respected  
Have self confidence  
& self esteem



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OWN YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

**“ Every job before was for a man. Now I have autonomy. I’m my own boss.”**

A majority of the women interviewed for this report spoke of the sense of achievement that comes from entrepreneurship and running a business. Personal achievement was closely associated with feelings of independence and personal freedom.

*“Before I had nothing to do because I was on welfare.  
Now I have lots to do!”*

*“Every job before starting my business was for a man.  
Now I have autonomy. I’m my own boss.”*

One-third of respondents stated owning a small business meant overcoming adversity, discrimination and racism from employers, customers, the bank, the band office or inter-tribal racism.

*“I really wanted to work on my reserve but I couldn’t get work so I worked off-reserve. I had to deal with the stigma that native women don’t work hard.”*

Many referred to the effect that women in business have for more cohesive families and communities.

*“I wanted to start a business to bring my family together—my husband was in oil and gas and was away all the time. When we had our baby I wanted to do something our family could do together. Making our life together the focus of what’s important.”*

Others reported that owning a business means there’s a vital example being set for family and community members and creates opportunities for others to gain employment or start their own business.

# RESILIENT



# SEANNA PASCAL

## SALT SPRING NOODLE BAR Vancouver, BC

The Salt Spring Noodle Bar is not your average festival food truck.

“It’s a different food offering”, says Seanna Pascal, owner-operator of the mobile noodle bar. “Everything is fresh to order on the spot, gluten free, diet sensitive. We can feed everyone and we don’t cook with oil, we cook with steam.”

In the competitive world of food trucks, Salt Spring Noodle Bar provides a delicious, popular and healthy food option.

As a part-timer seven years ago, Seanna clicked with the original owners who have become life-long friends and mentors. “After five years I tried to give notice I was moving on and they proposed I buy the business. I researched financing options which brought me to IBC. They made it possible to buy the business last summer.”

Salt Spring Noodle Bar attended 10 festivals in 2019 including: Calgary Stampede, Edmonton K-Days, Sasquatch Music Festival, Dawson Country Music Festival, Greater Vancouver Food Truck Festival. Seanna employs 10-12 local people at each of the larger festivals to keep the business going for the long hours. Seanna’s right-hand woman is Darolyn Anderson who has been a constant force for the last three years

“I’m the only female First Nation food trailer owner that goes to these events. I’m a strong, independent Indigenous business woman who takes no shit from nobody. You need this attitude to survive in this world. Men aren’t used to a woman let alone an Aboriginal woman. I do my own heavy lifting. I’m proud of that.”



# BUSINESS CHALLENGES, PERSONAL CHALLENGES

**“ Just because I can work like a man doesn’t mean I have to smell or look like one.”**

Throughout this report business women speak about the challenge of achieving a balance between business responsibilities and all the other things they do within their families and community.

*“It was challenging to balance family and the business. In the winter it can be 24 hours. In the downtime, we have 2 grandchildren we’re raising. It was challenging but it makes your heart bigger to strive to do more. You’re tired, you get cranky, but it’s worth it.”*

While most respondents referred to sexist discrimination, one quarter spoke of overt sexism as a significant challenge in establishing their business.

*“What really opened my eyes as a woman was when my daughter needed to use a washroom in the field and there was nowhere to go. It was an embarrassment. They were going to ban my company because she made a puddle behind a truck. That’s not something you do to a woman, or any person. I got them to put port-a-potties on every lease.”*

Others spoke of a “crab in the bucket” mentality as a major distraction when starting a business. This is especially true in small communities where it’s impossible to fly under the radar.

*“When a person tries to get ahead there’s people trying to pull you back down (like a crab in a bucket). There’s jealousy.”*  
*“It’s Indigenous women that attack you first, your friends, cousins, family. We need to stop and band together like we used to.”*

*“...something on reserve has to change to help people with their small businesses to get ahead for themselves.”*

Still others referred to the challenge of being taken seriously and treated with respect.

*“My biggest challenge is to rebuild relationships and have them look at me as a professional person. I understand everything we’re doing. It’s a challenge to find my own voice and to be taken seriously.”*

A challenge facing all businesses are the external factors out of one’s control like the economy or the weather.

*“Our financial recovery is based on the rain. If it doesn’t rain I’m paying \$300 for one round bail. You have to have a plan to feed your cattle. There’s always the extra—we’re not just running cattle, we’re worried about this and that all the time.”*

RESURGEFUL

# STACY BANDURA

**CLARITY SALON**  
Edmonton, AB

Stacy Bandura wants community members to know Clarity Salon in Edmonton is a safe, comfortable space where everyone is treated like family and where you're not just getting a professional cut or colour—you'll also be offered an experience that's steeped in the hospitality she learned in her Grandma's house.

Stacy's experience financing her business was a little less family-like until she connected with IBC. Initially, one of the big banks in Edmonton led her to believe they would approve her business loan to launch Clarity Salon. After many weeks and months of meetings and paperwork, the financing never materialized. Eventually, she realized the big bank had no intention of approving her loan application. Stacy turned to the Internet, searching for financing options which ultimately put her in touch with an IBC loans officer. Her business loan was approved by IBC and Clarity was born.

Stacy enjoys connecting with people, building community and giving good service. Above all, she wants to bring happiness to her customers. "We want to create a nourishing experience, not just a haircut," says Stacy. "We'd like to be known as a place where women can gather on special evenings, for birthdays and bridal showers, with delicious catering."

Over time, Clarity would like to develop as a holistic spa that incorporates traditional knowledge, traditional teas and sweat lodge ceremony into their customer experience. While Clarity reflects Stacy's experience as a Cree woman from Athabasca First Nation, she and her team of 8 associates strive to be accessible to all cultures.

"Keeping the team working well together is a big part of my job," says Stacy. "I put a huge priority on creating a calm, positive, nurturing environment—where people are all equal."



# FAMILY IMPACT

**“ I got good help, my daughter, my granddaughter.”**

The single biggest change has to do with the amount of time available to spend with family, whether that's bringing family members into the business or working in a home-based business—making one more physically present—even if they are busy with business.

***“If I worked outside of the home I'd never see my kids. When we're not so busy that's when we do spend the time—but then they get used to it and it's hard when it gets busy again.”***  
***“It was hard working full time, I was taking care of other people's families more than my own. I was never home. I'm able to be a mom for them now. It's fun.”***

Respondents expressed the positive influence self-employment has on children.

***“My children have seen a good example, they all work hard. My only granddaughter is studying to be a medical doctor. I'm proud of them.”***

***“Just knowing in the end we're going to have really strong girls. What was instilled in us as kids we're instilling in them. They know how to work, even if they want to or not. That keeps us going.”***

Women expressed a growing sense of self-esteem and self worth which they suggest has helped reduce the level of discrimination they experience as individuals and intergenerationally.

***“My mom is a pioneer for feminism in the oil industry—I look up to her. I've learned from her. It's created that environment for me—they're not judging me like she probably had when she started.”***

IMPACTFUL

# CANDACE AWENOSE

HEAVY EQUIPMENT OPERATOR  
Slave Lake, AB

“It’s tough! The work is hard, managing people is hard. Hard to find good help that want to make money doing back-breaking work.”, says Candace Awenose, who owns an equipment and transport company serving Alberta’s energy sector. The company operates two picker trucks, a 5 tonne and a 3 tonne.

“It’s good when you can work as a family. I am a subcontractor to Monster Oil Service Company which is owned by my partner, Cody. He’s Metis and a third generation oil field worker. We employ a number of family members to work in both businesses. I am fortunate to be mentored by Cody who has been super supportive helping me get my company going. ‘You can do this’, he says.”

Before starting this business Candace worked in Slave Lake’s commercial fishery.

“I gained attention. ‘You can run a boat?’ the men would say. I decided as a woman it’s probably better to keep things on the down low. In the oil field, it’s different—I have great guys around me, family members who have my back.”

Candace feels fortunate now. She’s had to put up with “horse shit” in the past.

“Now I get respect.”



# COMMUNITY IMPACT

“ For community wellness, we stand up, we speak up, we challenge...”

Many of the businesses financed by IBC create employment and opportunities for others. Indigenous business women set examples that others follow.

*“It’s important that we can put our own people to work—we have to look out for our people because nobody else will.”*

*“We are the only First Nation-owned business in town—First Nation people are now coming to our store.”*

Another aspect of positive influence is when business women assist others to overcome their own barriers.

*“I’m a young mom, it’s not something new in any of our communities, it’s normal, not shocking. When I have young girls in my community and they are young moms, when they see I can finish school and have daughters, they’re not ashamed. They can do it too.”*

*“We do share information more freely than men—we’re more open to sharing, talking about our own journey.”*

Indigenous business women often referred to the importance of sharing feminine energy and traditional knowledge.

*“When I go out on a lease it’s a totally different atmosphere. People are more comfortable asking me if they’re unsure—being a woman out there just makes things calmer.”*

*“Women in business, we bring a different perspective—nurturing and caring.”*

*“We teach people how to do traditional art. We sell over 60 artists’ work—you have to be native for us to sell it. It’s helping our people get ahead. Especially native women who live on low income, they can work from home and make some extra income.”*

They spoke of a resourcefulness and an ability to recognize and address gaps in the community.

*“I look at that as how resilient we are as women. We know how to go way down and get back up. We live always above the water. Community wellness—we’re standing up, we’re speaking up and we challenge the males.”*

*“We give help to the community by helping their income. We sell sweetgrass—it’s not ours, it’s from the land, we give it away to the schools. We give away materials—we give beads so they don’t have to pay for them to get started.”*

WOMEN

# MARY BIG BULL

**BOY CHIEF TRADING COMPANY**  
Siksika First Nation, AB

Boy Chief Trading Company was named after Blackfoot warrior 'Boy Chief', a great leader and a revered medicine man. Boy Chief's memory inspired his great-great granddaughter, Mary Big Bull, to establish the company in 2017 with the goal of reasserting Blackfoot culture and promoting arts, crafts and culture of other Indigenous nations in Canada and the United States.

"Woven blankets and their designs have always been an important way of carrying our history to the next generation", says Mary Big Bull. "We went to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and studied the geometric designs of our Grandfather's regalia. Our company is reclaiming this form of communication and creative art which was lost to the big blanket companies that took our designs and made it unlawful for us to use them."

With financing from IBC, Boy Chief Trading Company purchased an initial 600 wool blankets from a mill capable of traditional weaving. Based on the success of their first order, they produced 1000 more blankets, this time with their own designs. They also ordered bulk material in vibrant colours to give people in their community and others the opportunity to make their own blankets. "The blankets carry our history and family story. It's an affordable, durable, historic craft," says Big Bull.

Boy Chief Trading Company is starting to see more women and girls reaching out, having noticed their success. "The more people see it's possible for a young person to open a company and be successful, the better it is for our community and for others," says Big Bull. "It's fun to own something, to do your own thing, to get outside the box and take a risk."

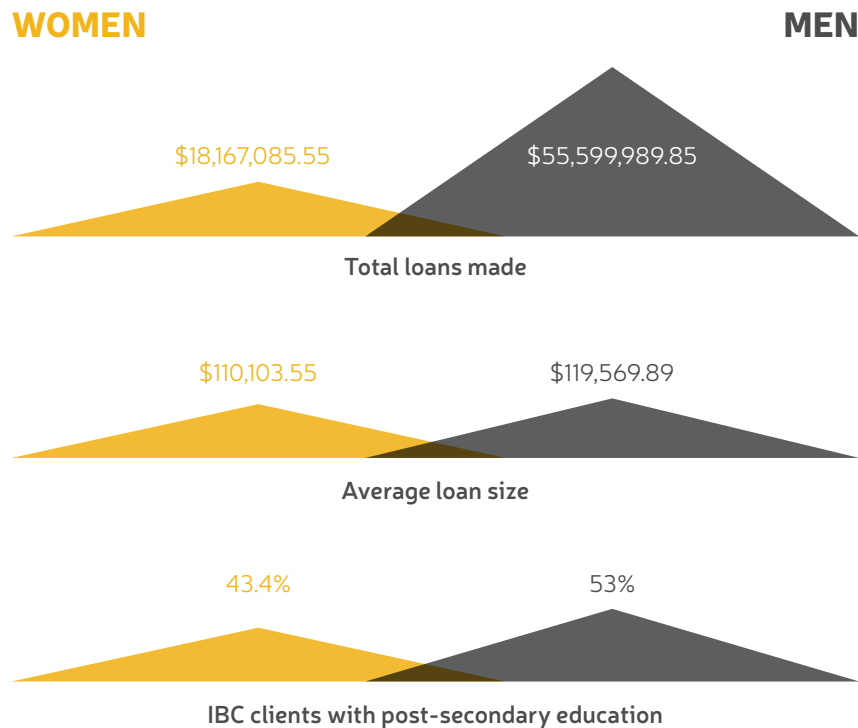
Boy Chief Trading Company sells their blankets and fabric at their store on Siksika First Nation South East of Calgary and through 50+ retail partners.



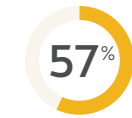
# A GENDER LENS ON INDIGENOUS BUSINESS LOANS

Female loan clients may need more “patient” lending due to the challenge of balancing business with household, family and community, yet they succeed at a higher rate than the general population.

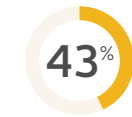
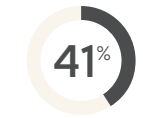
Indigenous business women often require more support from IBC to help their businesses get off the ground and grow, but statistically these women are less likely to default on their loans than their male counterparts.



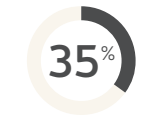
**IBC Customer Support Includes:**



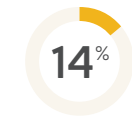
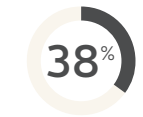
Business Plans



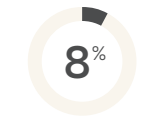
Grant Applications



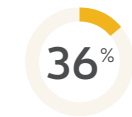
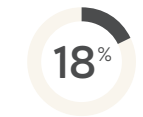
Financial Coaching



Tax Filing



Loan Write Offs



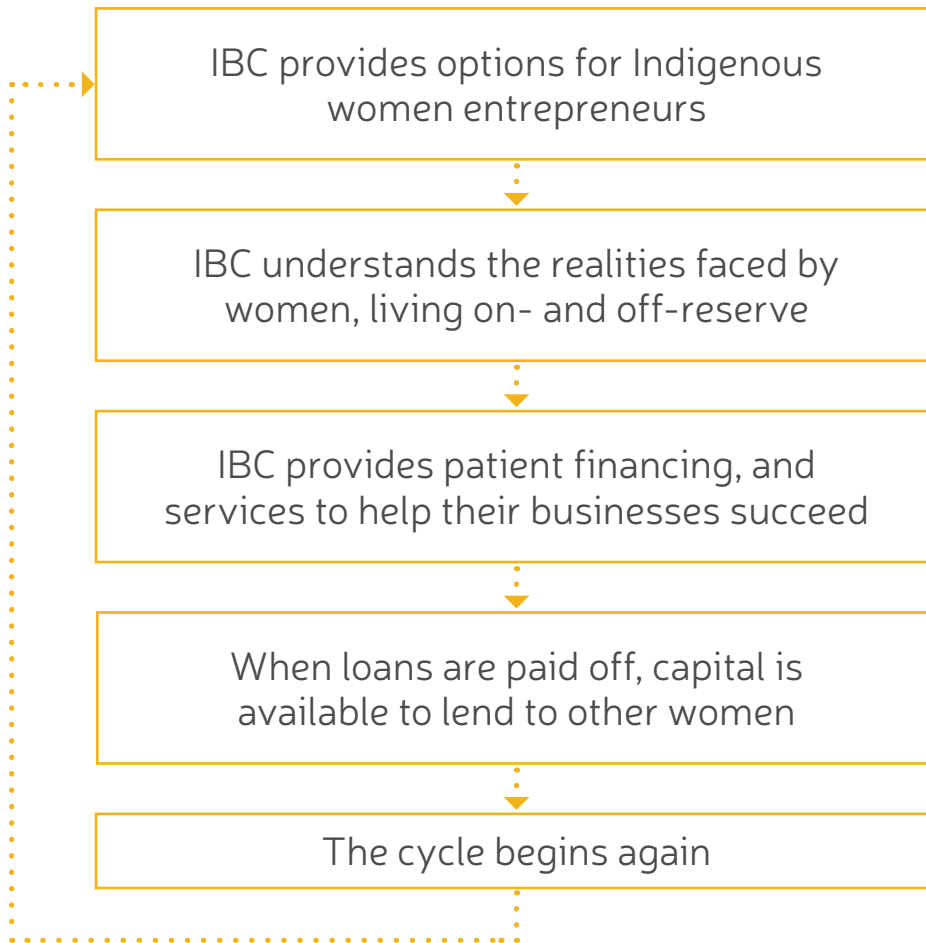
Miss Loan Payments (2 or more)





# INVESTING IN IBC WOMEN'S LOAN FUND

Investing in IBC is investing in positive social and economic change for Indigenous women, their families, their communities, their future.



## ALTA GAS

In 2014, AltaGas became the first private-sector company to invest in IBC with an interest-free loan of \$500,000 and knowledge that Indigenous business startups face extra challenges. This is especially true for Indigenous business women. "IBC understands the support necessary to address extra barriers that Indigenous entrepreneurs face. It's a level of support not offered anywhere else in the financial services industry," says David Markham, Director of Stakeholder Relations. "We take tremendous interest in how IBC supports and finances Indigenous-owned small businesses directly or indirectly involved in energy development."

AltaGas is a major Canadian midstream company and a diversified operator and developer of utilities and midstream infrastructure. "We receive many inquiries on how to participate in the industry and we're able to refer them to IBC for help with business plans and financing strategies," says Markham. "When colleagues ask about return on investment, I tell them 100 percent of the money AltaGas invests in IBC is loaned out and when it's repaid, it's loaned out again. It's a sustained return on investment, creating both social and economic value," says Markham.



# WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE FOR GOOD CHANGE TO HAPPEN

## Why more Indigenous business women are worth investing in

Research by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business shows that Indigenous entrepreneurship has grown at a rate of five to nine times the pace of the general population in Canada.

IBC understands the potential of Indigenous business start-ups in general and Indigenous business women in particular.

Indigenous business women are important contributors to Alberta's economy. They provide valuable services for their Nations, creating employment opportunities for friends and family. They are mentors, role-models and symbols of hope and perseverance for young people considering options for employment and lifestyle.

### FINANCE CHANGE

First and foremost, IBC requires investment from impact investors who share their vision of equal opportunity for Indigenous business women. More financial capital to lend leads to more Indigenous women-owned and operated businesses, and leads to positive social and economic outcomes.

### PEER-TO-PEER CHANGE

Opportunities for networking, learning and peer support – we heard it loud and clear. “We need more opportunities to come together, learn from one another, build each other up, support one another.”

### COMMUNITY CHANGE

It falls on communities to support local entrepreneurs, focus on procurement processes that are fair, and favour Indigenous-owned businesses. Successful Indigenous women-owned businesses create employment opportunities for the entire community – they deserve everyone's support.

### SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Addressing racism, sexism, colonialism, stereotypes—doing business would be easier for Indigenous women without these persistent, pervasive, systemic barriers.



**INDIGENOUS  
BUSINESS  
WOMEN**



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