



Evaluation of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's Innovation Programming

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) Innovation programming provides funding as well as advice and pathfinding assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and other clients to facilitate research and development, commercialization, and the development and demonstration of new or improved technologies, products, processes or services.

The programming is delivered through ACOA offices located throughout Atlantic Canada. It uses three funding programs: the Business Development Program, the Atlantic Innovation Fund (AIF) and the new Regional Economic Growth through Innovation program.

WHAT THE EVALUATION FOUND

- There continues to be a need for the Innovation programming. It offers unique supports and efforts are aligned with ACOA's mandate and government priorities.
- The programming contributes to the growth of SMEs, especially through the commercialization of new or improved technologies, products, processes or services, productivity improvements and a strengthened start-up ecosystem.
- Its design and delivery supports the efficient delivery of programming, the awareness of changing needs, and the achievement of results.
- Recent changes in the funding platforms available to SMEs, the changing needs of

the start-up community and growing labour and skills pressures bring some risks to the future achievement of strong results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build upon current Agency efforts to address any gaps in funding that may impact the scale up and growth of Atlantic Canadian firms.
2. Examine AIF funding in relation to the current needs of SMEs and the priorities of the Government of Canada.
3. Continue to support a strong Atlantic start-up ecosystem by strengthening the impact of Business Accelerators and Incubators.
4. Continue to strengthen programming priorities and collaborations to better address labour and skills shortages in the region.

ACOA has developed a management action plan to respond to each of the recommendations.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

This study supports ACOA's accountability and information requirements. It examined the relevance and performance of ACOA's Innovation programming from 2013-2014 to 2018-2019.

The evaluation analyzed data from a number of lines of evidence: existing administrative and performance information, a document and literature review, key informant interviews, case studies, and an online client survey.

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