



## Evaluation of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's *Business Growth and Trade and Investment Programming*

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) *Business Growth and Trade and Investment* programming provides funding, advice and other supports to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow. It focuses on the development of SME capacity and planning as well as productivity improvements and market diversification.

The programming is delivered through ACOA offices located in each of the four Atlantic Provinces. It uses two funding programs: the Business Development Program and the new Regional Economic Growth through Innovation program.

### WHAT THE EVALUATION FOUND

- The programming continues to address specific growth needs of SMEs in Atlantic Canada. It is well aligned with ACOA's mandate and government priorities and complements other programming and initiatives offered in the region.
- There is evidence that the programming helps Atlantic Canadian SMEs to grow their business. Most important, it leads to improved planning and capacity for growth, productivity and market development.
- The design and delivery of the programming supports efficiency, awareness of changing needs, and the achievement of results. A strong regional presence allows ACOA to understand SME needs and capacities. The Agency plays an important role in developing and maintaining collaborations, pathfinding and convening partners across the ecosystem.
- Areas for continued programming improvement relate to ensuring a comprehensive approach to business growth, internal coordination and communication, inclusive growth and performance measurement.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the evaluation makes three recommendations:

1. Modernize the programming for a comprehensive and client-focused approach to business growth across the Agency.
2. Identify and implement best practices for inclusive growth through clearer direction, information, tools and targets.
3. Review, clearly define and communicate programming expected outcomes, performance indicators and data collection tools to facilitate common understanding of Agency-wide vision and maximize results for business growth.

ACOA's senior management agrees with each of these recommendations and an action plan is included in the full report.

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### ABOUT THE EVALUATION

*This study supports ACOA's accountability and information requirements. It examined the relevance and performance of ACOA's Business Growth and Trade and Investment programming from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019, representing a combined investment of \$495 million in approved Grants and Contributions.*

*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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