BEYOND BARRIERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding Queer and Trans Entrepreneurship in Edmonton

Queer and trans founders in Edmonton are building viable, community-rooted businesses, while personally absorbing costs that the broader ecosystem creates. This report draws on published research, listening sessions and workshops with founders, and a review with ecosystem stakeholders. It sets out what these entrepreneurs need, where others can act, and where the work goes next.

WHAT QUEER AND TRANS ENTREPRENEURS NEED

- **Safety without forced disclosure.** A 2024 national report found that 75% of queer founders actively conceal their identity and ownership status. Visibility is both currency and risk, and support should never out someone by default.
- **Connection that fits.** Application-heavy mentorship and mainstream networking filter out the people they are meant to serve. What works is informal: peer circles, trusted introductions, and other queer-owned businesses.
- **Capital and the networks around it.** Many founders start with less family wealth, do not meet funding criteria, and self-fund. Access to knowledgeable lawyers, accountants, bankers and landlords is missing as often as money.
- **Recognition that care is the product.** These businesses exist to meet unmet community needs. Sliding scales and community rates are paid for out of founders' own pockets.
- **Room to stay sustainable.** Time and energy are finite inventory. Boundaries, and sometimes staying small on purpose, are business strategy and not a failure to grow.
- **An intersectional lens.** Indigenous, racialized and disabled founders carry layered barriers that a single-axis view misses.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

For funders, financial institutions and the City

- Subsidize the subsidy: community-rate top-up funds, relief on space costs, and institutional purchasing at full rate.
- Open procurement by breaking large contracts into smaller opportunities and creating pathways for diverse-owned businesses to bid.
- Rethink eligibility criteria that exclude community-oriented business models, and ask who current programs actually reach.

For business support organizations

- Fund and legitimize informal peer support instead of adding another program with an application form.
- Broker access to vetted, community-competent professionals alongside funding.
- Treat space, safety and sensory design as business infrastructure, and let people get support without publicly identifying themselves.

For the Chamber and its members

- Build resources that open with affirmation, are intersectional by default, and treat energy and boundaries as core business content.
- Present success stories as evidence of what is possible, not as exceptions.

PATHWAYS FORWARD

- **A digital toolkit.** The Chamber is building an interactive resource guide, intended as a living resource the community keeps adding to.
- **Sharing the findings** with members and the broader community.
- **Deeper research,** with further funding, through interviews, videos and topic-specific explorations.
- **Stronger connections** between the Chamber, the City of Edmonton, funders and business associations, including linking the guide to City resources.

Redesign the systems, not the founders, and move the costs these entrepreneurs are carrying back to where they belong.

