

RETAIL INCUBATOR PROGRAM 2025 FINAL REPORT

*Turning immigrant-led ideas into
revenue-generating businesses*

**Presented by RBC and
supported by Meridian**



Immigrant
Entrepreneur
Canada



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, Immigrant Entrepreneur Canada (IEC) delivered the Retail Incubator Program — Presented by RBC, Supported by Meridian, supporting immigrant entrepreneurs in moving from idea-stage or informal business activity to registered, revenue-generating, growth-ready ventures.



The program combined a structured business incubator with real-world retail testing through a one-week pop-up residency. This integrated model accelerated business readiness, confidence, and market validation.

KEY OUTCOMES

- 22 immigrant entrepreneurs supported across 19 ventures
- Participants representing 18 countries
- 18 businesses formally registered
- All registered businesses opened a business bank account and incorporated a formal POS system using Square terminals
- **\$36,228 in combined revenue** generated during the program period
- **52% of ventures generated revenue for the first time**
- Five earned media features across major regional outlets
- Strong post-program momentum, including **full-time transitions**, sustained revenue growth, continued retail access, and **early export activity to the U.S.**

Survey data confirms measurable gains in confidence, clarity and readiness for growth.





CONTEXT & RATIONALE

Immigrant entrepreneurs face persistent barriers when starting businesses in Canada, including limited access to professional networks, unfamiliar regulatory and tax systems and few opportunities to test products in real retail environments.

As a result, many remain at the idea or informal selling stage—not due to lack of ability, but due to lack of structured, practical, market-facing support.

The Retail Incubator was designed to close this gap by combining:

- ✓ **Canada-specific business education**
- ✓ **Applied learning through real customer interaction**
- ✓ **Market validation and expansion through live retail sales**

PROGRAM MODEL & DELIVERY

Phase 1: Business Incubator

Participants completed a two-month incubator covering:

- Business registration and compliance
- Taxes, HST & Financial Systems
- Pricing Strategies & POS systems
- Marketing, content creation, and product photography
- Banking, accounting and funding readiness
- Merchandising, wholesaling, and distribution
- Commercial leasing fundamentals

Clear participation and attendance expectations were enforced to ensure accountability and readiness for retail.





Phase 2: Retail Pop-Up Residency

Each participant completed a one-week pop-up residency at the ByWard Market, proving:

- Direct customer engagement
- Real-time pricing and merchandising feedback
- Revenue generation and sales validation
- Exposure in a professional retail setting
- Exposure to potential wholesale retail partners at the ByWard Market

PARTICIPANT PROFILE



53

Applicants



Selected

22

(19 Ventures)



18

Countries
Represented

Participants entered the program at varying stages, from idea-stage concepts to early-stage informal businesses



Sectors Represented

Fashion/Textile

Visual Arts

Food & Beverage (CPG)

Plant Retail

Natural Skincare & Wellness

Service-based business (pilot)

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

- 22 immigrant entrepreneurs supported
- 18 businesses formally registered
- 100% of registered businesses implemented formal banking and POS systems
- **\$36,228** in combined revenue generated during the program period
- **52% first-time revenue generation**
- Five earned media features
- Post-program outcomes included **full-time employment replacement**, continued retail access, sustained revenue growth and **early U.S. market entry**

Business Readiness & Formalization



By program completion:

- 18 businesses were formally registered
- Participants reported increased confidence navigating Canadian business, tax and financial systems



This marked a critical transition from informal activity to legitimate business operations.



Revenue & Market Validation



During the Program Period:

\$36,228 Total revenue generated

\$2,750 Highest single residency week

For many participants, this represented their first meaningful market validation and confirmed product-market fit.

Confidence & Capacity Building



Pre- and post-program showed clear increases in:

- Pricing confidence and value communication
- Professional business identity
- Strategic decision-making
- Readiness to pursue growth opportunities

These shifts are strong predictors of long-term viability.

Ecosystem Collaboration & Spillover Impact

Beyond individual business growth, the program fostered collaboration among participants, leading to shared resources, peer referrals, cross-promotion, and informal mentorship. These relationships extended impact beyond the formal program period and contributed to a more connected and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem.



POST-PROGRAM MOMENTUM



Post-program tracking confirms the program served as a launchpad for sustained growth, not a one-time experience

Karen Mendoza Designs transitioned to **full-time entrepreneurship** during maternity leave after her business reached income replacement levels.

85%

AtlasHaus secured a **Stackt Market residency**, extending retail exposure and validation

Pretty Eats by Hanan reported **\$34,000 in sales (May–December 2025)** following program participation

Several participants reported early U.S. market traction, reflecting export readiness.

Additional outcomes included new contracts, accelerator acceptance, funding, paid speaking engagements and new product launches



VISIBILITY, CREDIBILITY & MARKET EXPOSURE

Earned media coverage increased legitimacy and visibility for early-stage immigrant entrepreneurs.

CTV Morning Live (2 segments)
CBC Radio Ottawa Morning
CBC Radio - In Town and Out
Ottawa Citizen

Deachman: Immigrant entrepreneurs add flair to the ByWard Market

An innovative program, back for its second year, helps newcomers hone their business skills — and makes the Market a more interesting place.

By Bruce Deachman

Published May 15, 2025

Last updated May 16, 2025

5 minute read

17 Comments



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PROUDLY CANADIAN WEEK: LIVE LOCAL SHOPPING SPREE

PARTICIPANT IMPACT



Participant feedback reflected transformation rather than satisfaction alone. Entrepreneurs reported feeling more confident, clearer in their direction, and better prepared to operate professionally in the Canadian market.

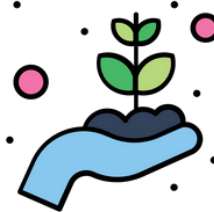
FUNDER VALUE



Business formalization



First-time and sustained revenue generation



Employment replacement and market expansion



Earned media visibility and ecosystem credibility

The impact extends well beyond the program period, contributing to durable businesses and inclusive economic growth.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Building on 2025 outcomes, IEC will:

Continue refining the model using participant data



Strengthen post-program supports



Support more entrepreneurs in scaling beyond local markets, including export readiness



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Immigrant Entrepreneur Canada gratefully acknowledges **RBC**, Presenting Partner of the Retail Incubator Program, and **Meridian**, Supporting Partner, for their leadership and commitment to advancing immigrant entrepreneurship in Canada.

We also thank our Seed Partner and Community Partners for their contributions through funding, expertise, space, and ecosystem connections that strengthened the program experience.

Presented by



Supported by



Seed Partner



Community Partners



Questions?
Get in Touch

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Appendix A: 2025 Cohort

The following entrepreneurs and businesses participated in the 2025 Retail Incubator Program — Presented by RBC, Supported by Meridian.

- Eyssa Ahmed — [Akira Group & Co.](#) (High-end modest wedding dresses & hijabs) — Tanzania
- Nima London — [All Vegan In](#) (Djiboutian vegan food products) — Djibouti
- Ami Nuwame — [Ami & Jiarra](#) (Natural skincare) — Senegal
- Cansu Koç & Daryl Casseus — [AtlasHaus](#) (Map-based wall art) — Türkiye & Haiti
- Chidima Nzakamulilo — [Chidima Dezigns](#) (African print designs) — Zambia
- Nihad Ali — [Fleuryshicious](#) (Natural body products) — Comoros Islands
- Bahaa Bashnak — [Hummus 'N' Things](#) (Gourmet hummus) — Lebanon
- Karen Mendoza — [Karen Mendoza Design](#) (Graphic design) — Mexico
- Mariama-Cire Keita — [Love Mariama Juices](#) (Natural juices) — Senegal
- Walaa Sarem — [Natural Blend](#) (Natural skincare) — Syria
- Hanan Alameh — [Pretty Eats by Hanan](#) (Charcuterie carts & boards) — Lebanon
- Ayse Rumeysa Mohammed — [Renewify](#) (Sustainable fashion) — Türkiye
- Fy Andrianarison — [Shootsia](#) (Tropical & exotic plants) — Madagascar
- Ikram Ahmed — [Siti Organic Skin](#) (Natural skincare) — Somalia / Ethiopia
- Amandeep Kaur — [The Motherly Love Studio](#) (Breastfeeding apparel) — India
- Erin Riley — [Umma Home Art](#) (Islamic art & home décor) — United States
- Kimya Keyan — [Kon Korazon Designs](#) (Quilted wearable art) — Iran
- Artem Maistrenko — [NEBO Drips](#) (Drip coffee) — Ukraine

