



CF NETWORK IMPACT

IN A CHALLENGING ENTREPRENEURIAL LANDSCAPE

Community Futures British Columbia

An examination and analysis of the impact of the Community Futures network in British Columbia in fortifying entrepreneurial ecosystems during the **2024-25** fiscal year.

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Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of the role played by the Community Futures Network (CFN) of 34 volunteer-led non-profit organizations in rural British Columbia (B.C.) and the programs delivered by the provincial association Community Futures British Columbia (CFBC) in fortifying rural entrepreneurial ecosystems amidst the economic landscape of the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

While B.C.'s economy shows overall growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in rural areas, face significant headwinds including persistent inflation, escalating input costs, and a cautious credit environment. These challenges are reflected in a deteriorating Small Business Health Index for BC and rising business delinquencies.

Against this backdrop, CFBC and its membership-based network of 34 Community Futures (CF) offices serve as indispensable pillars of support. Their impact is substantially enhanced by targeted initiatives such as Accessible Entrepreneurship Services (AES) [including the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program (EDP) and PRIDE in Entrepreneurship Program (PRIDE)], Export Navigator (EN), Rural Resiliency Initiative (RRI), myCommunityFutures (myCF), and the services from the independent yet closely related Venture Connect (VC). These offerings collectively address critical market gaps, foster inclusivity, build resilience against economic shocks, and facilitate crucial business transitions.

2,000,000 Residents in the CFN service area	\$41,447,228 Loans authorized	\$29,787,513 Dollars mobilized from loans and other projects	Every \$25,000 dollars invested by CF brings another \$18,000 from other sources and creates 1 FTE job
16,313 Advisory services provided	1,381 Full-time jobs created and/or supported	513 Part-time or seasonal jobs created and/or supported	



Introduction

Purpose & Scope

This report offers an expert-level analysis of how CF offices across rural B.C. amplify their impact through the strategic implementation of several key programs.

Programs, Projects & Initiatives Assessed

The programs under scrutiny include Accessible Entrepreneurship Services (AES) [including the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program (EDP) and PRIDE in Entrepreneurship Program (PRIDE)], Export Navigator (EN), Rural Resiliency Initiative (RRI), myCommunityFutures (myCF), and the services from the independent yet closely related Venture Connect (VC).

Timeframe

This analysis is confined to the 2024-2025 fiscal period ending March 31, 2025.

Objective

To deliver data-driven insights and actionable recommendations for key stakeholders involved in rural economic development within B.C.



About Community Futures

CF organizations play a pivotal role in rural community and economic development throughout B.C. Their primary focus lies in job creation outside major urban centers. The CF network in B.C. (CFN) comprises 34 CF offices, each part of a broader network of 267 CFs across Canada. CFs entities operate as non-profit corporations, governed by volunteer boards of directors and supported by salaried staff. Their mandate encompasses a range of services, including strategic economic planning, providing technical and advisory services to SMEs, offering direct loans, and implementing specialized programs tailored for diverse entrepreneurial segments.

CFBC, established in 1992, is the provincial association for this network. It coordinates and delivers essential business development services, provides leadership in economic development, and facilitates business financing within B.C.'s rural and remote communities. The structure, characterized by 34 independent CF offices working under the umbrella of a provincial association, signifies a model where local autonomy is carefully balanced with centralized coordination. Each office operates independently, allowing for a deep understanding and responsiveness to unique local needs. As the coordinating body, CFBC can leverage collective resources, advocate for the network at provincial and federal levels (such as with PacifiCan), and implement province-wide strategic initiatives. This hybrid operational model is instrumental in enabling CF offices to adapt effectively and respond to the varied and evolving challenges faced by rural communities across the province.



B.C.'s Economic Environment

GDP Projections

Indicator	2025 Forecast	2024 Actual
Population	5,719,961	5,719,594
Real GDP Growth (%)	1.5%	1.2%
Nominal GDP Growth (%)	4.1%	3.7%
Total Employment	2,953,000	2,845,000
Employment Growth (%)	1.3%	2.4%
Unemployment Rate (%)	6.4%	5.6%

The Economic Forecast Council (EFC) for the B.C. government estimates a 0.5% growth for 2024, anticipating a 2.1% growth in 2025, which generally aligns with the national average. These variations in projections from reputable sources underscore the inherent uncertainties in economic forecasting for the coming year, suggesting that businesses and support organizations must maintain flexibility in their strategic planning.

Employment

The employment landscape in B.C. for 2025 reflects an expanding workforce. Total employment is estimated at 2,193,383 people, with an average annual growth rate of 2.9% over the past five years, a rate that surpasses the national average. TD Economics projects a 1.3% employment growth for 2025. The unemployment rate in B.C. for 2025 stands at 5.4%, ranking 5th nationally, and has shown a downward trend, decreasing by 9.9% over the last five years. However, TD Economics forecasts a rise in the unemployment rate to 6.4% in 2025, with a peak at 6.6% by year-end before a gradual decline. This divergence in unemployment projections suggests that while the overall job market is growing, there may be temporary periods of increased labour market slack or frictional unemployment as the economy adjusts.

Population

As of April 1, 2025, B.C.'s estimated population was 5,719,961, marking a slight net decrease of 2,357 individuals (0.04%) compared to the previous quarter. Over the 12-month period ending March 31, 2025, the province's population grew by 53,073 individuals (0.94%), primarily driven by international migration. However, migration trends in the first quarter of 2025 reveal a more complex picture. International migration saw a net inflow of only 251 migrants, the lowest level recorded since the COVID-19 pandemic. While immigration by permanent residents added 14,976 individuals, there was a notable net outflow of 10,921 non-permanent residents (NPRs), representing the largest such outflow since the pandemic. B.C. received less than 1% of the total international migration to Canada during this quarter, ranking 10th nationally. Interprovincial migration patterns also indicate a net loss for B.C., marking the 7th consecutive quarter with a net outflow of 1,636 individuals, primarily to Alberta.

The combination of positive GDP and employment growth forecasts with a diminishing supply of new workers due to decreasing international migration and sustained interprovincial outflow indicates a tightening labour market. This dynamic could exacerbate existing labour shortages, which are already identified as a significant obstacle for businesses. For rural businesses, this means recruiting and retaining the necessary workforce for expansion or even stable operations may become increasingly challenging. In this context, CF programs that support local workforce development, retention, or entrepreneurship as a means of generating local employment become even more critical.



Conditions Affecting Rural SMEs

As of December 2023, B.C.'s business landscape was predominantly shaped by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with 170,127 small businesses (1-99 employees), 2,316 medium-sized businesses (100-499 employees), and 424 large businesses (500+ employees). Nationally, SMEs collectively account for a substantial 63.7% of the private sector workforce.

Challenges: Inflation, Input Costs & Labour Costs

In the first quarter of 2025, businesses in B.C., mirroring national trends, encountered significant obstacles. Cost-related issues were a primary concern, with nearly half (49.3%) of Canadian businesses anticipating inflation as an obstacle over the subsequent three months. The cost of inputs, including labour, raw materials, and energy, was the second most frequently cited obstacle, expected by 27.7% of businesses. This pervasive expectation of inflation and escalating input costs exerts considerable pressure on business profitability. For consumer-facing sectors such as accommodation and food services and retail trade, which are simultaneously experiencing reduced consumer spending, this creates a "double squeeze" on their financial viability, directly impacting their ability to sustain operations and potentially leading to increased financial distress.

Labour challenges also presented a significant hurdle, anticipated by over one-third (35.0%) of businesses. The consequence of these challenges often manifested in management working increased hours (46.4%), indicating that businesses are absorbing operational inefficiencies internally rather than being able to hire or expand their workforce. This internal absorption of workload can impede growth and contribute to burnout among business owners and managers, particularly in smaller enterprises where resources are more constrained. The Province of BC is actively addressing regulatory complexities, as evidenced by its ongoing "ease-of-doing-business review" aimed at streamlining processes and reducing red tape.

Canadian Small Business Health Index (SBHI)

The Canadian SBHI for B.C. stood at 95.0 in Q1 2025, making it the lowest among all regional indices and representing a 5% decline from 2024 levels. This decline was primarily driven by a 7.6% drop in growth projections, reflecting lower investment intentions and reduced sales outlooks among small and medium-sized businesses. Concurrently, credit performance decreased by approximately 2.5% in the last quarter, largely due to a sharp increase in overdue loan amounts and insolvencies. Nationally, over 309,000 credit-active businesses (11.3% of the total) missed at least one credit payment in Q1 2025, marking a significant 14.6% year-over-year increase in business delinquencies. B.C.'s financial trade arrears increased by 19.9% year-over-year, leading the country alongside Ontario.

The confluence of high inflation, rising input costs, weakening consumer demand, and persistent labour shortages has created a precarious operating environment for rural SMEs. This financial strain is directly reflected in the province's lowest Small Business Health Index and a significant year-over-year increase in business delinquencies. Such compounding pressures elevate the risk of business failure and constrain investment capacity.

In this challenging climate, organizations like Community Futures become even more indispensable. They provide vital financial and advisory services, often filling gaps left by traditional lenders, and tailor support to the unique needs of rural enterprises. Their role is crucial in mitigating these systemic pressures, potentially preventing widespread business failures and preserving local jobs and economic stability in rural communities. The disproportionately lower SBHI for B.C. underscores the critical need for targeted support within the province.



CFBC Operations & Impact

As of March 31, 2025, CFN operations extended its services to a substantial population of 1,997,331 citizens of rural B.C. The network's governance structure is robust, comprising 236 Board Directors and 110 non-director volunteers. These dedicated individuals collectively contributed 8,062 total volunteer hours during the 2024/25 fiscal year. This significant volunteer engagement, particularly when juxtaposed with the 191 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees within the network, highlights a substantial leveraging of community capital and non-financial resources. This reliance on volunteers is a critical factor in extending the reach and amplifying the impact of CF, especially within the rural areas where these organizations are specifically designed to operate.

The core operating budget for the CFN Operations during the 2024/25 fiscal year was predominantly supported by PacifiCan funding, which accounted for 63.4% of expenses. This high proportion of federal support indicates a considerable financial dependence on PacifiCan. Consequently, any shifts in PacifiCan's funding priorities or allocations could directly influence CFs' operational capacity and its ability to deliver essential services to entrepreneurs and communities. Other significant funding sources included Interest Transfers from Investment Funds, covering 13.3% of the budget, and various other income streams, such as loan fees and non-project fee-for-service contracts, which contributed 25.2%.

In terms of delivering advice and small-business coaching services directly to rural entrepreneurs, the CFN Operations provided a total of 16,313 distinct business advisory services, demonstrating a broad and active engagement with the entrepreneurial community. Furthermore, the network recorded 7,083 training session participants, indicating a strong focus on enhancing the skills and capabilities of entrepreneurs across the province.

PacifiCan continues to demonstrate its strategic commitment to the CF program in B.C. for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The agency's Departmental Plan for this period indicates a focus on core programs and service offerings, while winding down time-limited initiatives. PacifiCan's financial reports show that total grants and contributions authorities have seen a net decrease of \$53.7 million for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, primarily due to the conclusion of temporary programs announced in Budget 2021. This broader fiscal shift reflects a government-wide move away from short-term, crisis-response measures.

Despite this overall reduction in funding, PacifiCan's support for the CFN is operational and ongoing. While payments experienced a \$0.8 million decrease as of the quarter ended June 30, 2024, this program remains a foundational pillar for economic development. The Community Futures Program, which was established in 1985, is designed to provide long-term support for local business development and community economic growth in rural and remote areas of B.C. The program's resilience and continued operation, even amidst the reduction of other grant programs, highlight its strategic importance to PacifiCan's objectives, particularly for achieving inclusive growth and rural reach.

Population of Service Area: 1,997,331				Core Operating Budget
Personnel				
236 Volunteer Directors	110 Non-Volunteer Directors	8,062 Volunteer Hours	191 Full-time Equivalent Employees	63.3% PacifiCan Funding
Service Impact				13.3% Interest Revenues Transferred to Operations
16,313 Business Advisory Services Provided	7,083 Training Session Participants	1,381 Full-time Jobs Supported	513 Part-time/Seasonal Jobs Supported	25.2% Other Income



Lending Activities & Outcomes

The CFN maintained a robust and impactful lending portfolio as of March 31, 2025. The total value of its entire loan portfolio, encompassing outstanding loan balances plus cash and cash equivalents, was valued at more than \$196 Million. A substantial portion of this, nearly \$150 Million, is governed by Contribution Agreements between PacifiCan and the individual CF offices in B.C. The significant size of the PacifiCan component within the total loan portfolio reinforces the observation of financial reliance on federal support, indicating that PacifiCan's funding policies and levels directly influence the scale and accessibility of CF lending activities.

The network actively served 1,879 borrowers (loan clients) with 2,006 distinct loans outstanding on March 31, 2025. During the last fiscal year, 597 loans were authorized, signaling ongoing financial support to both new and existing businesses.

The total committed dollar value of loans authorized in the last fiscal year, including syndicated loans, exceeded \$44 Million. A particularly noteworthy aspect of this lending activity is the substantial leverage achieved: the dollar value of owner investment, other sources of financing, and grants for these authorized loans amounted to more than \$30 Million. This nearly 69% leverage ratio (leverage on committed loans) highlights the catalytic role of CF loans in attracting additional private and other non-CF funding, thereby mobilizing broader investment into local economies.

The financing provided by CF offices in B.C had a direct and measurable impact on job creation and maintenance across the province. In the last fiscal year, 1,381 full-time jobs and 513 part-time or seasonal jobs were created or otherwise supported as a direct result of lending activities across the CFN.

The availability of CF loans, particularly in rural areas where traditional financing might be more risk-averse or less accessible, acts as a powerful catalyst. By providing initial capital, CF loans de-risk projects for entrepreneurs and other potential funders (such as banks or private investors), encouraging them to invest alongside CF. This demonstrates that CF loans are not merely direct financial injections but rather catalytic capital that mobilizes broader investment into local economies. This multiplier effect amplifies the overall economic impact, fostering greater entrepreneurial activity and job growth than CF's direct lending alone could achieve, which is especially vital in rural B.C. where access to conventional financing can be a significant barrier.



Syndicated Lending

CF offices in B.C. actively participate in syndicated lending, demonstrating a collaborative approach to financing larger projects and sharing risk within the broader CF network. In the last fiscal year, 19 CF offices led syndicated loan projects, effectively moving capital within the province to support businesses' financing needs while maintaining strong risk management protocols. This indicates a capacity to initiate and manage significant multi-office financing endeavors.

This collaboration enables the financing of larger or more complex projects that might exceed the capacity or risk tolerance of a single CF office, thereby enhancing the collective impact and risk-sharing capabilities of the Community Futures network. This model demonstrates the network's maturity and strategic foresight in tackling larger-scale economic development challenges.





Loan Portfolio Health & Risk Management

An analysis of the loan portfolio health reveals areas of financial stress within the small business sector. In the last fiscal year, the CFN wrote off 128 loans, totaling a dollar value of \$3,790,639. As of March 31, 2025, 102 outstanding loans were categorized as seriously delinquent (e.g., subject to demand letters or legal action), with a total dollar value of \$3,133,408. The estimated dollar value of losses on these seriously delinquent loans was \$1,281,620. Despite the higher risk tolerance resulting from CFs' mission to support rural businesses from at or before startup through their entire life cycle (startup – growth/expansion, maturity/transition), its supportive and relationship-based lending model resulted in loan losses of only 1.93% (as a percentage of the total portfolio).

Although considered low, even by broader industry standards, the significant dollar value associated with both loan write-offs and seriously delinquent loans within the CFN's portfolio directly mirrors the broader economic obstacles and credit health deterioration observed in B.C. This financial distress aligns with broader economic challenges identified, such as persistent inflation, rising input costs, and a slowdown in consumer spending. External credit data further supports this, indicating that B.C.'s SBHI is the lowest among regional indices, and financial trade arrears in B.C. increased by nearly 20% year-over-year. This validates that CF is operating in a challenging provincial economic environment and that the financial distress observed in its portfolio is systemic, rather than solely attributable to its lending practices. It underscores the high-risk nature of the market segment that CF serves (often businesses unable to secure traditional financing) and reinforces the critical need for continued support as a counter-cyclical lender.

Loan Portfolio Health & Risk Management

 As of March 31, 2025

 Fiscal Year 2025

Metric	Island	Coastal	Kootenays	Central	Northern	B.C.
Population Served	437,199	446,174	177,064	606,128	330,766	1,997,331
Total Loan Portfolio (,000)	\$46,570	\$25,894	\$41,785	\$35,271	\$47,341	\$196,860
Loan Funds per Capita	\$106.52	\$58.04	\$235.99	\$58.19	\$143.12	\$98.56
PaciCan Portfolio (,000)	\$39,930	\$21,949	\$29,206	\$28,549	\$30,032	\$149,666
PaciCan % of Total Funds	85.7%	84.8%	69.9%	80.9%	63.4%	76.0%
# Borrowers (Total)	475	283	336	396	389	1,879
# Distinct Loans (Total)	454	305	402	405	440	2,006
# Loans Authorized	219	70	82	88	138	597
\$ Loans Authorized (,000)	\$12,515	\$5,412	\$9,092	\$6,989	\$9,998	\$44,006
\$ Leverage (,000)	\$11,449	\$1,739	\$10,109	\$5,090	\$1,716	\$30,153
Average Loan Size	\$57,144	\$77,315	\$110,884	\$79,417	\$72,450	\$73,712
Est. FTE Created/Maintained	362	313	221	401	341	1,638
# Lons Written Off	30	12	19	42	25	128
\$ Written Off (,000)	\$378	\$265	\$1,082	\$1,142	\$924	\$3,791
Losses % of Total Funds	0.81%	1.02%	2.59%	3.24%	1.95%	2.01%



Community Economic Development (CED)

CF offices in BC actively engage in CED initiatives, playing a pivotal role in fostering local economic growth beyond direct lending activities. In the last fiscal year, the CFN successfully completed 57 CED projects that were carried over from previous years, demonstrating a sustained commitment to long-term community development efforts. Additionally, the network initiated and completed 138 new CED projects as the project lead during the same period, showcasing its robust capacity for new development. A further 83 projects started last year are continuing into the current year, indicating sustained engagement in ongoing community building.

These CED projects are characterized by strong collaborative partnerships. A total of 554 organizations were actively engaged as partners in CED projects where CF offices assumed the role of project lead. The financial investment in these projects also highlights significant leveraging of resources. While the total dollar amount invested directly by CF offices in BC in CED projects last year was \$1,014,263, project partners contributed a substantial \$5,140,771. This indicates that partner investment was over five times CFs' own contribution, underscoring the network's effectiveness in mobilizing community resources and fostering collaborative economic development. The combined total dollar value of CED projects where a CF office was the lead (CF Investment + Partner Leverage) amounted to \$6,117,374.

The significant partner engagement and high financial leverage ratio in CF-led CED initiatives suggest that CFs' role as project lead and initial investor attracts substantial external financial and organizational commitment. This implies that CFs' involvement lends credibility and organizational capacity to projects, encouraging other stakeholders to invest. This highlights a powerful multiplier effect in community economic development. The ability to mobilize diverse community resources and foster collaborative partnerships means that CFs' impact extends far beyond its direct financial contributions. This shared ownership model not only amplifies the scale of development projects but also builds stronger, more resilient community networks, ensuring that local growth initiatives are deeply rooted and sustainably supported by various stakeholders.





Accessible Entrepreneurship for Persons with Disabilities

The Accessible Entrepreneurship Services (AES) umbrella program is strategically designed to provide comprehensive support for individuals who traditionally face barriers to self-employment. This encompasses two key initiatives: the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program (EDP) and the PRIDE in Entrepreneurship Program (PEP).

CFs' support for entrepreneurs with disabilities in B.C. is facilitated through two dedicated programs, the EDP stream of CFBC's provincially coordinated Accessible Entrepreneurship Services and an EDP stream delivered at the local level by individual CF offices.

CF offices in B.C. manage significant EDP Investment Funds. As of March 31, 2025, the total value of these dedicated loan funds for the CFN was \$7,210,145. The network was serving 82 EDP loan clients, with a total of 86 EDP loans outstanding. The total value of EDP loans receivable amounted to \$3,779,391. In the last fiscal year, 20 EDP loans were authorized, with a committed dollar value of \$1,579,942.

The existence of this specific EDP loan fund with dedicated capital demonstrates a targeted approach to addressing the unique barriers faced by entrepreneurs with disabilities. This specialized funding stream is crucial for enabling economic participation for this group, who might otherwise struggle to access conventional financing due to systemic challenges.

These targeted interventions significantly enhance CF's impact by fostering inclusive economic growth. They empower individuals from marginalized groups to participate in entrepreneurship, which not only improves their economic well-being but also diversifies the rural economy and taps into a broader pool of talent and innovation. This proactive approach to equity-driven development is crucial for building a truly resilient and representative entrepreneurial landscape in rural B.C.

Entrepreneurs With Disabilities program (EDP)



The EDP offers tailored assistance to entrepreneurs with a disability or ongoing health issue. This support includes crucial services such as business plan development, specialized training, dedicated business coaching, and facilitated access to funding opportunities. PacifiCan's 2024-2025 Departmental Plan explicitly highlights "persons with disabilities" as an under-represented group for whom the agency tracks directly assisted recipients, thereby demonstrating a strong policy commitment to fostering inclusive economic participation. Community Futures BC manages a dedicated EDP Investment Fund, which, as of March 31, 2025, held a total value of \$7,003,292.59 for the CFN. The network was actively serving 36 EDP loan clients with a total of 81 EDP loans outstanding. In the last fiscal year, 19 EDP loans were authorized, committing a total of \$1,446,802 in financial support. The existence of this specific EDP loan fund with dedicated capital signifies a targeted approach to addressing the unique barriers faced by entrepreneurs with disabilities, providing a specialized funding stream crucial for enabling economic participation for this group who might otherwise struggle to access conventional financing due to systemic challenges.



Accessible Entrepreneurship for 2SLBGTQIA+



PRIDE in Entrepreneurship Program (PEP)

The PEP is an inclusive and accessible initiative focused on supporting 2SLGBTQQIA+ entrepreneurs across B.C. who are looking to either start or grow their businesses. The program provides essential training, resources, assistance with business plan development or updates, coaching, and access to funding opportunities. Its 2024-2025 Annual Report highlights significant progress in outreach, training, and community engagement specifically for 2SLGBTQI+ entrepreneurs. The program successfully expanded from 2 planned cohorts to 5, enrolling 35 participants in PEP training programs and engaging 128 2SLGBTQI+ individuals in PEP Business Advisory Sessions. A key achievement was the introduction of PEP to 33 rural CF offices and the certification of 86 CF staff, board members, and consultants in Gender Diversity through TransFocus, thereby enhancing diversity and accessibility practices across the network. Furthermore, the IDEA Ecosystem Hub was launched on the Mighty Network platform in September 2024, creating a vibrant online community for 2SLGBTQI+ entrepreneurs to collaborate and share resources. To ensure broad accessibility, all client-facing systems and the CFBC website meet WCAG 2 accessibility standards, and all contracts and client correspondence now consistently use gender-neutral language. Program outcomes indicate that 75% of participants successfully developed business plans with financial projections, and many reported a significant increase in confidence regarding business strategy, financial planning, and market research.





Export Navigator (EN)

Export
Navigator

Expanding Market Access for Rural Businesses

Since 2016, EN has played a crucial role in preparing B.C. businesses for exporting beyond B.C. by connecting them with community-based Export Advisors for free support and ongoing guidance. With a full complement of 23, including 13 Export Advisors across the province, the program has demonstrated substantial impact, assisting over 1,200 businesses in their exporting journey. Jointly funded by the Government of B.C. through the Ministry of Jobs and Economic Growth, and the Government of Canada through PacifiCan, EN aligns closely with both provincial and federal priorities to strengthen the international competitiveness of B.C. businesses.

In addition to one-on-one advising, EN delivers a range of educational opportunities, resources and support designed to equip B.C. businesses with the knowledge and tools necessary for successful market expansion. These include access to technical specialists, webinars, a library of export resources, e-courses and a centralized database of exporting events in B.C.

Through the Technical Specialist Pilot (TSP) program, EN clients get free access to specialized expertise to address complex export challenges that go beyond the scope of general advising. Launched in September 2024, this pilot connects eligible businesses with technical specialists in areas such as international legal services, international accounting, and market research. By removing technical barriers and providing direct access to niche expertise, the TSP enables businesses to meet market-specific requirements more efficiently, accelerate their export plans, and improve their competitiveness in global markets.

In addition to general export readiness, in June of 2025, PacifiCan further invested \$900,000 for CFBC to launch the CUSMA Compliance Advisory Services Initiative (CCASI), which is delivered through EN. This initiative, which runs until March 2026, supports B.C.-based small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) impacted by U.S. tariffs by facilitating access to the technical experts and advisory services they need to become compliant with the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). Eligible service providers include customs brokers, trade consultants, trade lawyers, and compliance specialists based in Canada or the United States. Approved businesses are reimbursed for 50% of the total eligible costs incurred up to a maximum reimbursement of \$5,000.

In an increasingly interconnected and competitive global economy, B.C. businesses face both opportunities and risks when expanding beyond provincial and national markets. EN addresses these realities by providing comprehensive, personalized guidance that strengthens the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises to compete internationally. Through a combination of education, specialized advisory services, and targeted technical expertise, the program equips businesses to meet regulatory demands, adapt to changing trade conditions, and pursue new market opportunities with confidence.



Rural Resiliency Initiative (RRI)



RURAL RESILIENCY
INITIATIVE

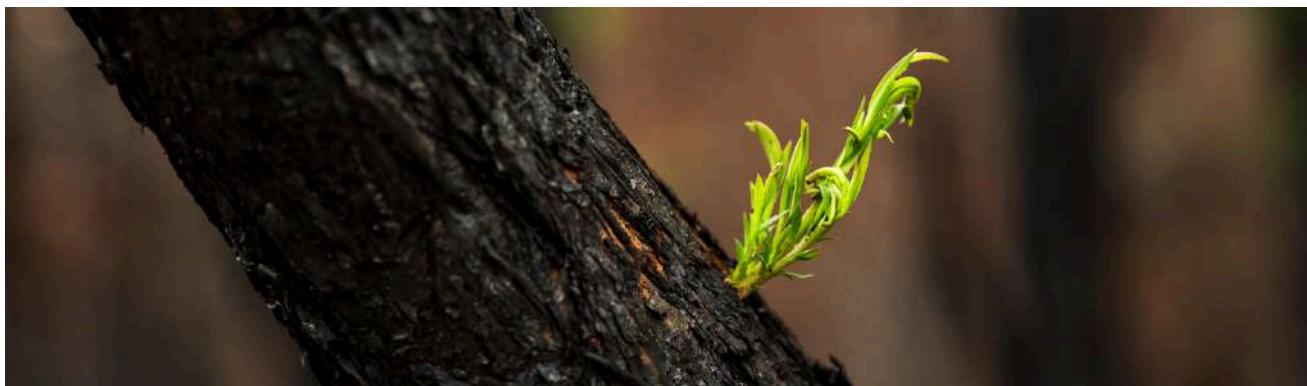
Building Capacity for Disaster Preparedness & Recovery

The RRI is a critical program that provides specialized support to businesses, local governments, and CF staff, covering phases both before, during, and after an economic disruption or disaster. The activities of the RRI are spearheaded by the Economic Quick Response & Recovery Team (EQRRT), a dedicated CFBC leadership team. This team comprises experienced contractors and CF staff with expertise in finance, project management, communications, and disaster response and recovery.

The RRI offers a comprehensive suite of resources designed to enhance understanding of emergency management in B.C., prepare CF offices to maintain operational continuity during crises, and proactively support local businesses. These resources include a "Starter Guide to Emergency Management in BC," a collection of emergency preparedness materials for businesses, and a "Catalogue of 'Tip Sheets'" that detail actionable steps to take before, during, and after an economic disruption. A practical demonstration of this initiative's impact can be seen in the response of CF Central Kootenay, which, in the face of wildfires, delivered emergency loans, counselling, and recovery initiatives through the CFBC Disaster Recovery program. A significant development under the Vision 2030 framework for 2024-2025 was a collaborative project with CFBC to develop a comprehensive "How-To Playbook for Emergency Operation Centers." This playbook is specifically tailored for the CFN, focusing on best practices for preparedness, response, and recovery during emergencies.

While the immediate need for disaster recovery is evident, as demonstrated by responses to wildfires requiring emergency loans and counselling, the RRI's core mandate explicitly emphasizes support "before, during and after" disruptions, and the provision of "proactive" resources like guides and action sheets. The development of a "How-To Playbook for Emergency Operation Centers" further solidifies this proactive stance. The recurring nature of economic disruptions and natural disasters in rural areas necessitates more than just post-event recovery. Proactive measures, such as comprehensive preparedness guides and pre-emptive capacity building, reduce the severity of impact when a disaster strikes, leading to faster and more effective recovery. This indicates a strategic evolution within CFBC from merely responding to crises to building systemic, long-term resilience within rural communities and their businesses.

By equipping CF offices and local businesses with the tools, knowledge, and frameworks for preparedness, the RRI significantly enhances CF's capacity to minimize the economic and operational impact of future disruptions, thereby safeguarding the stability and sustainability of rural economies.





myCommunityFutures (myCF)

Digitalizing Support & Expanding reach



myCF is an innovative online platform developed by CFBC to provide accessible workshops, webinars, and consulting services to rural businesses. The platform originated in 2022 under the brand "Taking Care of Business," initially securing federal funding to support rural BC businesses and non-profits impacted by disasters and economic downturns. It began by serving 17 regions and expanded its reach to 22 regions by October 2023. In December 2023, the initiative was rebranded as myCF, accompanied by the relaunch of the myCF website.

The demonstrable success and increasing client base of the platform prompted CFBC to make a strategic decision to continue providing support to startups, businesses, and non-profits through myCF, even after the initial government funding concluded in 2025. myCF has expanded its offerings to include webinars alongside its existing workshops and consulting services, with content available both on-demand and live. Workshops and webinars are provided free of charge to clients in 32 CF service areas (specifically non-metropolitan regions), while business consulting services are free across all 34 CF service areas. Through this initiative, CF has provided substantial support, assisting over 3,000 businesses, delivering more than 2,900 hours of expert one-on-one guidance, facilitating over 9,000 online workshops, and disbursing over \$2 million in business training reimbursement subsidies.

myCF's evolution from a federally funded, time-limited initiative to a permanently sustained service highlights a successful digital transformation. The platform's continued operation post-funding indicates its proven value and necessity. The demonstrated success and client uptake (over 3,000 businesses, 9,000 workshops, 2,900 hours of one-on-one guidance) underscore the platform's effectiveness, prompting CFBC to continue its operation independently. The digital format inherently overcomes geographical barriers prevalent in rural B.C., ensuring that essential advisory and training resources remain available to a wider rural audience, thereby fostering entrepreneurial growth and resilience across the province. This represents a successful and sustained digital transformation that significantly expands the accessibility and reach of CFBC's business support services to rural entrepreneurs.

By leveraging technology, myCF can deliver timely, flexible, and scalable support, overcoming the challenges of distance and limited physical presence in remote areas.





Venture Connect (VC)

venture  connect
Est. 2011

Facilitating Business Transitions & Retention

VC operates as a social enterprise, uniquely owned CF Alberni-Clayoquot, and functions as a working partner with the remaining CF offices throughout B.C. and beyond.³² Since its inception in 2011, the program has strategically focused on business retention as a means to strengthen communities amidst significant nationwide demographic shifts. It specifically addresses "entrepreneur shortages" rather than solely concentrating on labour shortages, recognizing that the continuity of existing businesses is as vital as the creation of new ones. Its foundational principle is economic development, occupying a distinctive position within the business buy and sell marketplace by emphasizing local knowledge and fostering collaborative relationships with a diverse range of partners, including CF offices, Economic Development Agencies, and Real Estate Agents.

VC provides a comprehensive suite of services tailored for both buyers and sellers of businesses. For buyers, services include free initial consultations, no-cost access to view business listings (which encompass private and hidden listings not widely advertised), free workbooks and resources. For a fee, professional business valuation and mediation services with sellers, expert guidance throughout negotiations, and support in navigating the legal aspects of the acquisition process are available. For sellers, VC offers free initial consultations, free online business listings, free workbooks and resources. For a fee, professional handling of buyer inquiries, business valuation and precise price determination, preparation of non-disclosure agreements, creation of a detailed Business Fact Sheet for prospective buyers, mediation with interested buyers, development of a comprehensive Business Transition Plan for the new owner, and expert guidance on the legal aspects of the sale are available.³²

A pivotal collaboration for VC is its role as the official service provider for the BC Business Match Program, under contract with CFBC. Through this program, fee for service offerings through VC services are provided free of charge to qualified B.C.-based businesses with funding generously supplied by the Province of B.C. and PacifiCan through the CFBC Sustainability Fund. VC's explicit focus on "business retention" and addressing "entrepreneur shortages" in rural B.C. amidst "unprecedented demographic shifting" indicates a deep understanding of a critical, often overlooked, threat to rural economies. Demographic shifts, such as an aging population of business owners or the out-migration of younger generations, can lead to a shortage of individuals willing or able to take over existing, viable businesses. Without a mechanism like Venture Connect, these businesses might simply close, resulting in job losses, a reduction in local services, and economic leakage from the community. By actively facilitating these transitions, VC directly counteracts this attrition. This program significantly enhances CF's impact by proactively addressing a crucial aspect of rural economic stability: business succession and continuity.

By ensuring that established businesses remain operational and continue to contribute to the local economy, VC helps preserve jobs, maintain essential services, and prevent the erosion of the rural economic fabric. Its collaboration with CF offices through the BC Business Match Program further integrates this vital service into the broader rural development strategy.



Key Performance Metrics

Targeted CFBC Programs 2024-25

	Accessible Entrepreneurship Services (EDP)	
 Community Futures Entrepreneurs With Disabilities Program	# Loan Clients (at March 31, 2025)	36
	\$ Loans Outstanding (at March 31, 2025)	\$3,645,698.45
	# Loans Authorized	19
	\$ Loans Disbursed	\$1,446,802.00
 PRIDE in Entrepreneurship	Accessible Entrepreneurship Services (PEP)	
	PEP Training Program Participants	35
	2SLGBTQIA+ PEP Business Advisory Session Participants	128
 Export Navigator	Export Navigator	
	Businesses Served	1,200+
	PacifiCan Funding Committed (2025)	\$1,200,000
 <i>my</i> Community Futures	myCommunityFutures	
	Businesses Served	2,900+
	Hours of 1on-1 Guidance	2,900+
	# Online Workshops	9,000+
	Business Training Grants Disbursed	\$2,000,000+
	Venture Connect	
 Est. 2011	Business Clients	373
	Business Listings	123
	Offers	61
	Closed Sales	47
	\$ Value of Closed Sales	\$16,013,861
	Average Sale Price	\$340,720
	Annual Business Revenues Preserved	\$29,009,665
	# Jobs Preserved	210
	# Jobs Created	25
	Annual Wages Preserved	\$14,361,567



Synergies & Amplified Impact: A Holistic View

Program Integration: Strengthening our Impact in Rural Communities

The various programs discussed in this report—Accessible Entrepreneurship Services, Export Navigator, Rural Resiliency Initiative, myCommunityFutures, and Venture Connect—are not isolated initiatives but rather form a cohesive and mutually reinforcing ecosystem. This integrated approach significantly amplifies the overall effectiveness of Community Futures offices in rural British Columbia. For example, a new entrepreneur who receives foundational support and inclusive financing through Accessible Entrepreneurship Services might subsequently leverage myCommunityFutures for ongoing digital training and advisory services. As their business grows, they could then utilize Export Navigator to explore and expand into new markets. Eventually, when considering retirement or a change in ownership, they might turn to Venture Connect for seamless succession planning.

This integrated suite of programs enables CF offices to provide holistic, lifecycle support to rural businesses, fostering long-term growth and sustainability rather than merely addressing isolated issues. This comprehensive approach strengthens the entire rural entrepreneurial ecosystem, making it more robust, adaptable, and resilient to both internal business challenges and external economic shocks. This comprehensive, lifecycle support ensures that rural businesses receive continuous, tailored assistance at every stage of their development.

Leveraging Partnerships for Broader Reach & Targeted Support

The success and extensive reach of CF throughout B.C. and its diverse programs are deeply intertwined with strategic partnerships at both federal and provincial levels. PacifiCan stands as a primary federal funder, significantly contributing to the CFN's operational capacity by covering 63.4% of its core operating budget and providing substantial loan capital for its portfolio. Beyond general operational support, PacifiCan directly funds specific programs, notably committing \$1.2 million to CFBC to continue delivering the Export Navigator program and investing \$900,000 for the CUSMA Compliance Advisory Services Initiative. PacifiCan explicitly leverages the CF network as an integral part of its Pacific Business Service Network (PBSN) to deliver business services and support under-represented groups across B.C. This indicates a deliberate strategic decision by the federal agency to utilize existing, established, and locally embedded organizations.

The Province of British Columbia also plays a crucial role in this collaborative funding model. It funds the BC Business Match Program through Venture Connect, which provides free services for BC-based businesses, thereby facilitating critical business transitions. By channeling funds and program mandates through CFBC and its local offices, federal and provincial governments can achieve broader reach and more tailored support than direct, centralized delivery might allow. This approach effectively leverages CF's deep local knowledge, established community relationships, and existing infrastructure. This networked governance model optimizes resource allocation by minimizing administrative overhead for funders and maximizing on-the-ground impact. It ensures that economic development initiatives are responsive to specific regional needs and can effectively reach diverse entrepreneurial segments in rural areas, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of public investment in rural B.C.



Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

The landscape for women entrepreneurs in Canada, including B.C., shows both progress and persistent challenges. In the first quarter of 2025, majority women-owned businesses constituted 19.5% of all private sector businesses in Canada, an increase from 17.6% in Q1 2024. Despite this growth, only 17% of small and medium-sized businesses across Canada are majority-owned by women. This disparity suggests that while more women are entering entrepreneurship, there remain structural barriers preventing them from achieving proportional representation in business ownership.

Significant obstacles persist, including gender stereotypes, systemic biases, and difficulties in accessing credit and funding. Data indicates that men-owned businesses receive, on average, about 150% higher financing amounts than women-owned businesses. Globally, women entrepreneurs are also 22% less likely to utilize external equity or venture capital. These financing gaps suggest that the growth in women-owned businesses may be constrained by limited access to capital, impacting their ability to scale and compete.

Revenue trends further illustrate the challenges. The proportion of majority women-owned businesses reporting a decrease in revenue between 2023 and 2024 was similar to all private sector businesses (31.5% vs. 32.2%). However, among those businesses that experienced a revenue decline, a higher percentage of women-owned businesses (10.0%) reported a severe decrease of 50-59%, compared to 7.0% for all businesses. This higher vulnerability to significant revenue drops underscores the critical role of accessible, gender-lens financing from specialized organizations.

CF offices across B.C. provide significant support. As of March 31, 2025, the CFN served 530 loan clients primarily owned by women entrepreneurs, with a total outstanding loan balance of \$31,710,674. In the last fiscal year, 195 loans were authorized to women-owned businesses, with a committed dollar value of \$12,281,283. These figures demonstrate a substantial commitment to supporting women entrepreneurs, helping to bridge the financing gap and foster their growth.





Supporting Young Entrepreneurs

Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, the economic landscape for young entrepreneurs in B.C. was marked by both significant challenges and emerging opportunities. While the overall economic climate presented headwinds, there was a notable drive among young people to pursue entrepreneurship, often motivated by a desire for purpose and flexibility.

Economic Landscape for Young Entrepreneurs in B.C.

Economic Slowdown & Uncertainty

The broader BC economy experienced a slowdown, with real GDP growth at 1.2% in 2024, one of the lowest in the country. This was coupled with ongoing economic uncertainty, including the threat of U.S. tariffs and a softening housing market. These factors likely made it more difficult for new businesses to secure funding and establish a stable customer base.

High Inflation & Interest Rates

Inflation remained a concern, and while the Bank of Canada began to cut its policy interest rate in June 2024, rates remained at elevated levels for much of the year. This made borrowing more expensive for aspiring entrepreneurs, and rising input costs posed a significant challenge for small businesses.

Shifting Motivations

Despite these challenges, a significant number of Canadians, particularly those under 35, were considering starting a business. A key driver was a shift away from solely focusing on profit to a desire for meaningful work and better work-life balance. Many were starting with "side hustles" or "passion projects" before scaling up, a cautious approach to mitigate risk.



CFBC plays a key role in supporting young entrepreneurs. As of March 31, 2025, the CFN served 136 loan clients primarily owned by young entrepreneurs (under 30), with a total outstanding balance of loans amounting to \$6,073,742.

In the last fiscal year, 68 loans were authorized to businesses owned by young entrepreneurs, with a committed dollar value of \$1,838,640.



Supporting Indigenous Entrepreneurs

The business environment for Indigenous-owned businesses in B.C. is dynamic, with several emerging trends for 2025. Digital transformation is rapidly changing operations, with a projection that at least 60% of Indigenous-owned enterprises will have a significant online presence by 2025. While 58% of Indigenous enterprises describe themselves as early adopters of new technology, challenges persist regarding the digital divide in distant places. This indicates an uneven landscape of digital transformation within the Indigenous entrepreneurial community, highlighting the continued need for investment in internet infrastructure and digital literacy to ensure equitable participation in the digital economy.

There is a growing demand for eco-conscious enterprises and green initiatives, a space where Indigenous companies are uniquely positioned to excel by integrating traditional knowledge into sustainable business concepts. Strategic alliances and cooperative ventures are also becoming more common, including collaborations with non-Indigenous businesses and intercommunity partnerships to share resources and knowledge. A significant development is the increasing prevalence of Indigenous equity partnerships in major projects, moving beyond traditional impact-benefit agreements to genuine equity participation. This shift signifies a deeper commitment to economic reconciliation, empowering Indigenous communities with greater control and direct benefits from large-scale ventures.



High-growth industry sectors offer considerable opportunities for Indigenous businesses, including clean energy and environmental technology, travel and cultural experiences (as evidenced by the thriving First Nations tourism industry), natural resource management, and professional services such as consultancy, information technology, and finance. Innovative financing models are emerging to address persistent capital access barriers, including Indigenous-led investment funds, crowdfunding platforms tailored for Indigenous companies, and alternative lending models that account for Indigenous-specific variables. The Indigenous Business Navigator service, supported by RBC, facilitates access to financial resources by connecting Indigenous enterprises directly with Government of Canada programs and services.

CFBC provides direct support to Indigenous entrepreneurs. As of March 31, 2025, the CFN served 163 loan clients primarily owned by Indigenous entrepreneurs, with a total outstanding balance of loans amounting to \$5,342,477. In the last fiscal year, 87 loans were authorized to Indigenous-owned businesses totaling \$3,429,005 authorized to Indigenous entrepreneurs in the last fiscal year.

Within the CFN, there are 4 Indigenous-specific CF offices, each receives core funding from PacifiCan and specifically serves individuals of Canadian Indigenous ancestry (First Nation, Métis, or Inuit) and their communities and economic development corporations. The Canadian government has also demonstrated a commitment to strengthening its economic relationship with Indigenous entrepreneurs, including through mandatory minimum 5% Indigenous procurement targets.



Challenges & Opportunities for Sustained Impact I

Navigating Economic Headwinds & Evolving Business Needs

The current economic climate presents significant and multifaceted challenges for B.C.'s entrepreneurs. Persistent inflation, coupled with high costs of inputs such as labour, raw materials, and energy, continues to escalate operating costs and debt burdens for businesses. This cost pressure is further exacerbated by a weakening in household consumption, which directly impacts revenue generation for consumer-facing sectors like Accommodation & Food Services and Retail Trade. The resulting financial strain is evident in rising delinquency rates and a decline in the Small Business Health Index for B.C., which, at 95.0 in Q1 2025, is the lowest regionally, indicating a systemic issue of deteriorating business health. Labour shortages remain a significant hurdle, with businesses reporting continued difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled employees. This often translates into increased workloads for existing management, which can impede growth and lead to burnout, particularly in smaller enterprises. The net outflow of interprovincial and non-permanent residents from B.C. further contributes to a tightening labour market, making it more challenging for businesses to find the necessary workforce.

An analysis of CFBC members' own loan portfolio health reveals areas of financial stress within the small business sector, mirroring the broader economic challenges. In the last fiscal year, the BC Network wrote off 128 loans, totaling a dollar value of \$3,790,639 (1.93% of total loan funds). Furthermore, as of March 31, 2025, 102 outstanding loans were categorized as seriously delinquent (e.g., subject to demand letters or legal action), with a total dollar value of \$3,133,408. The estimated dollar value of losses on these seriously delinquent loans was \$1,281,620. The significant dollar value associated with both loan write-offs and seriously delinquent loans indicates ongoing financial pressure within the small business sector in B.C., aligning with broader economic obstacles identified.

The widespread financial strain and deteriorating credit health among small businesses directly increase their need for alternative financing and advisory support, services that CF specializes in. The rising delinquencies within the network's loan portfolios underscore that even with CF support, clients are operating in a highly challenging environment, indicating the severity of the economic headwinds. CF offices are thus operating in an environment of intensified need, acting as a crucial safety net and growth facilitator for rural businesses facing significant external pressures. This heightened demand, coupled with the observed financial stress in their own portfolio, necessitates continued robust funding, adaptive program delivery, and potentially more intensive advisory support to help businesses navigate these complex conditions and prevent widespread failures in rural communities.





Challenges & Opportunities for Sustained Impact II

Opportunities for Program Evolution & Strategic Investment

Despite the prevailing challenges, B.C.'s entrepreneurial ecosystem, particularly through the CFN, presents several opportunities for sustained impact and growth. The established network of 34 CF offices and their proven ability to leverage substantial volunteer hours (8,062 hours in 2024/25) and significant partner funding (e.g., over five times CFs' contribution in CED projects) provides a strong and resilient foundation for future initiatives. The strategic prioritization of the CF Program by PacifiCan, evidenced by stable funding amidst broader reallocations, creates a steady funding outlook for core activities and collaborative initiatives.

Significant opportunities exist in further digital integration, building on the success of myCommunityFutures, to enhance the accessibility and efficiency of services across vast rural geographies. Continued focus on high-growth sectors, such as clean energy and environmental technology, and professional services for Indigenous businesses, can yield significant returns and foster inclusive growth. Addressing specific demographic needs, such as bridging the digital divide in distant Indigenous communities, remains crucial for equitable participation. The emphasis on strategic alliances and cooperative ventures, particularly with Indigenous businesses, also presents avenues for market expansion and resource sharing.

The wealth of granular data available on CF operations, lending performance, and the outcomes of various programs, broken down by region and entrepreneurial segment, coupled with insights into ongoing challenges like the digital divide and financial strain, provides a robust foundation for strategic planning. This comprehensive dataset allows for more than just reporting; it enables a deeper analytical process. By cross-referencing program outcomes with regional economic indicators and specific demographic challenges, CFBC can identify precise areas of strength, weakness, and unmet needs. For example, if a particular region shows high delinquency rates despite significant CF lending, it might indicate a need for more intensive advisory support or a different loan product. Further developing this rich data infrastructure could empower CFBC to move beyond reactive responses to proactive, data-driven strategic planning. It can inform targeted program evolution, optimized resource allocation, and precise investments (e.g., developing new digital tools for specific rural industries, enhancing financial literacy programs for sectors with high delinquency) to ensure Community Futures continued relevance and maximum impact in a dynamic and challenging economic landscape. This capability for adaptive strategy is a significant opportunity for sustained success.





Conclusion

Opportunities for Program Evolution & Strategic Investment

This report has demonstrated that CF offices, substantially bolstered by specialized programs such as Accessible Entrepreneurship Services, Export Navigator, Rural Resiliency Initiative, myCommunityFutures, and the independent Venture Connect, are indispensable pillars of rural economic resilience in B.C. Their impact transcends mere financial aid, encompassing comprehensive advisory services, robust capacity building, and strategic interventions that address systemic barriers and foster inclusive growth. The strong partnerships cultivated with federal and provincial entities, combined with a dedicated and extensive volunteer base, enable a highly leveraged and locally responsive approach to economic development.

Despite operating within a challenging economic climate characterized by persistent inflationary pressures, rising input costs, labour shortages, and notable credit strain, these programs collectively enhance the vitality and sustainability of rural entrepreneurial ecosystems. They achieve this by providing tailored support to diverse segments, expanding market access for rural businesses, building crucial disaster preparedness, digitalizing essential services for broader reach, and facilitating vital business transitions. The consistent prioritization of the CF Program by PacifiCan, evidenced by sustained and even increased funding amidst broader federal reallocations, underscores its recognized effectiveness and critical role in achieving inclusive economic development goals across B.C.





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