



Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions

Evaluation Summary of the Fast Forward Challenge Pilot Project

Fast Forward Challenge overview

- The Fast forward Challenge pilot project (hereafter referred to as the Challenge) was an entrepreneurial competition aimed at increasing the number of youth and women entrepreneurs, specifically in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) innovation.
- The Challenge was launched on January 23, 2019. Participants had until April 1, 2019 to submit their applications. Ten recipients were [announced](#) on August 30, 2019. Each received a \$50,000 start-up grant.
- In addition to the \$500,000 in grants, the cost of the Challenge was estimated at \$330,000 (excluding an estimated 0.2 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) to Legal Services):
 - 0.4 FTEs for the design;
 - 2.3 FTEs for the implementation
 - Approximately \$50,000 in non-salary expenses

About this evaluation

- Four areas were evaluated :
 1. Best practices and constraints during ideation & design;
 2. Achievement of desired organizational outcomes;
 3. Results for the participating entrepreneurs;
 4. Results for the target populations (women and youth in entrepreneurship)
- The Challenge was aligned with the Government of Canada's commitment in its [Federal Strategy for Innovation and Growth for Quebec Regions](#).
- The data analyzed came from interviews, surveys, focus groups, an internal consultation at CED, and documentation on implementation

What the evaluation revealed

- **Best practices and constraints** for ideation and design were identified (area 1). They are summarized in these key findings:
 - **Extensive documentation** during the design of the pilot would have allowed for two things: 1- Learning lessons in the context of experimentation, and 2- Creating a pool of ideas for use in future projects;
 - The use of a **project charter** from the outset would have fostered a common understanding of the mandate. This charter should be adapted to the experimental context in terms of time, workload and resources;
 - The use of **generic terms and conditions**, including the selection of a competition-type project, was tailored to target audiences and objectives.

- Key findings about the desired organizational outcomes (area 2) are:
 - **Implementation deadlines** were considered too short by participants (posting period deadlines) and evaluators (application analysis deadlines);
 - According to the participants, the value of the grant (\$50,000) and its non-refundability were the most attractive elements of the competition;
 - **External communication** was innovative; the team that worked on the communication strategy won a national award;
 - The fields of study referred to in the **participation criteria** could have been expanded to include other STEM disciplines in addition to engineering
- Key findings about the **results for the participating entrepreneurs** (area 3) are:
 - The Challenge ensured the survival of two winning companies and **served as a lever** for some to obtain other sources of funding and hire more employees;
 - Businesses who applied to the Challenge said the **pandemic** only had a small impact on them;
 - **Lack of funding** is the most pressing need according to entrepreneurs, especially during pre-commercialization phases.
- Key findings about the **results for target populations** (area 4) are:
 - It is **too early to measure** the impact of the Challenge on the final objectives for the target groups (see Section 7.4 for the list of objectives), and it is difficult to isolate the contribution of this Challenge among the multiple initiatives contributing to similar objectives;
 - **93%** of grant applicants were young people, and **21%** of grant applicants were women;
 - **40%** (4/10) of the winning companies had a significant female shareholding.

Learning from this pilot project

- ✓ **When implementing similar projects, CED should allow for more time between the end of the design phase and the start of the implementation phase;**
- ✓ **CED should revisit the use of bonus points to encourage participation by target groups, while at the same time having a minimum pass mark to guarantee the viability of the projects;**
- ✓ **When implementing similar projects, CED should look at ways of increasing regional participation.**

