

**EVALUATION OF THE
FAST FORWARD CHALLENGE PILOT PROJECT
Economic Development Canada
Fall 2021**



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Table of Contents

1. Executive summary.....	4
2. Background.....	7
3. Project profile.....	7
4. Evaluation strategy.....	9
5. Method.....	9
6. Limitations of the evaluation.....	10
7. Evaluation findings	
7.1 QUESTION 1: What were the best practices and constraints associated with the experimental project during the ideation and design phases?	
7.1.1 Ideation.....	10
7.1.2 Use of a project charter.....	11
7.1.3 New approaches during the design phase.....	12
7.1.3.1 Consultation and collaboration.....	13
7.1.3.2 Generic terms and conditions.....	14
7.1.3.3 GBA+ pilot project.....	14
7.1.4 Communication approaches.....	16
7.2 QUESTION 2: To what extent did the contest achieve the sought-after organizational results?	
7.2.1 Foster an innovation-based work.....	16
7.2.2 Test new generic terms and conditions.....	19
7.2.3 Enhance CED's visibility among a new clientele.....	21
7.2.4 Innovate in the field of external communications.....	23
7.2.5 Support target groups (youth, women)	24
7.3 QUESTION 3: What were the results for the entrepreneurs who took part in the <i>CED Fast Forward Challenge</i> ?	
7.3.1 Business impacts on participants.....	27
7.3.2 Current needs of the businesses.....	29
7.4 QUESTION 4: What were the results for the target groups, i.e., young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs?.....	29
8. Conclusion.....	31

1. Executive Summary

This report documents the evaluation of the Propulsion Challenge initiative, hereafter referred to as the “Challenge”.

The **objective** of this entrepreneurial competition was to increase the number of young and women entrepreneurs in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) innovation. This executive summary presents the key findings related to four evaluation questions, as well as the learning points that emerge from them.

Timeline: The Challenge was launched on January 23, 2019. Participants had until April 1, 2019 to submit their applications. The 10 recipients were [announced](#) on August 30, 2019. Each received a \$50,000 start-up grant.

Budget: In addition to the \$500,000 in grants, the total cost (salary and non-salary) for the design and implementation of the Challenge is estimated at \$330,000. It includes 0.4 FTEs¹ for design and 2.3 implementation FTEs plus approximately \$50,000 in non-salary expenditures. The total cost does not include Legal Services expenditures of approximately 0.2 FTEs.

Ideation and Design

Q1: What were the best practices and constraints related to the experimentation approach during project ideation and design?

Major findings:

- Comprehensive documentation during the brainstorming process leading up to the choice of the pilot project would have allowed for lessons to be learned within the context of the experimentation, and for a bank of ideas to be created during the ideation phase that could be used for future projects;
- The use of a project charter from the outset of the project would have helped convey a common understanding and would have served as a guide for grey areas, all the more so in the case of an experimental project. This charter needs to be tailored to the experimentation context in terms of timelines, workload and resources;
- The use of generic terms and condition instead of regular program delivery—specifically by means of a contest—was tailored to the objectives and the target clientele.

Implementation, and Reporting Results

Q2: To what extent did the contest achieve the sought-after organizational results?

Desired organizational outcomes:

- ❖ *Foster an innovation-based work culture*
- ❖ *Test new generic terms and conditions*

¹ FTE: full-time equivalent

- ❖ *Enhance CED's visibility among a new clientele*
- ❖ *Innovate in the field of external communication*
- ❖ *Support target groups (youth, women)*

Major findings:

- New approaches were used at CED, such as a “demo day,” during which the finalists presented their projects before a panel;
- Issues related to implementation time frames were raised, notably the posting period, which some considered to be too short, and the short period of time allotted to Operations for the analysis of the applicants’ files;
- The use of generic terms and conditions was a wise choice, given the high level of satisfaction among the businesses that had requested an application package, and the results achieved;
- According to the businesses that requested an application package, the amount of the prize (\$50,000) and the fact that it was non-repayable were the most appealing features, whereas the number of prizes to be won was the second least appealing feature;
- The contest format provided visibility among potential investors and clients, and the use of grants was also appreciated;
- External communications were innovative and the team that worked on the communication strategy won a national award;
- Of the businesses that requested an application package, 93% were young people and 21% were women;
- Of the 10 winning businesses, 4 had a significant proportion of women shareholders, which was a positive outcome;
- In the view of some applicants and Challenge officials, the requirement for significant involvement by engineering students or graduates could have been broadened to include other STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, in order to have a larger pool of projects;
- Regional representation of the applicants and winners’ points to a concentration in urban areas.

Learning:

- ✓ **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.**

Q3: What were the results for the entrepreneurs who took part in the CED Fast Forward Challenge?

Major findings:

- The Challenge acted as leverage for other sources of funding and the hiring of employees, and also ensured the survival of two winning businesses;
- The pandemic had little impact on businesses that had requested an application package;
- The Challenge allowed CED to expand its pool of entrepreneurs and to make itself known among potential new clients;
- The lack of funding was the most pressing need identified by the entrepreneurs, particularly at the pre-commercialization stage.

Q4: What were the results for the target groups, i.e., young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs?

Major findings:

- It is too soon to measure the impact of the Challenge in terms of the end goals;
- It is difficult to isolate the Challenge's contribution from that of the many stakeholders;
- The contest was able to reach youth and women, both among the businesses that requested an application package but did not win an award, and the actual winners.

2. Background

This document is the report of the Fast Forward Challenge pilot project, a specific initiative of the Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) program undertaken by Canada Economic Development, hereinafter referred to as “CED” or “the Agency”. This review focuses on four evaluation stages: *Ideation, Design, Implementation, and Reporting Results*. It is divided into 4 sections answering the following major questions:

1. What are the best practices and constraints related to the experimentation approach during project ideation and design? (Ideation/Design stages)
2. To what extent did the contest achieve the sought-after organizational results? (Implementation/Reporting Stages)
3. What were the results for the entrepreneurs who took part in the *CED Fast Forward Challenge*? (Implementation/Reporting Stages)
4. What were the results for the target groups, i.e., young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs? (Implementation/Reporting Stages)

It should be noted that the evaluation also focused on identifying learning paths in the experimental approach for possible application in future projects.

3. Project profile

In response to the [Experimentation direction for deputy heads](#),² CED decided to conduct an experimental project, both to make known the organization among a new clientele and to test new ways of doing business. In doing so, it adopted an innovative experimentation process during the design and implementation phases of the pilot project.

The Fast Forward Challenge, hereafter referred to as the “Challenge”, was an entrepreneurial competition aimed at increasing the number of young entrepreneurs, including women in innovative entrepreneurship, and related to the Government of Canada’s commitment³ to foster the development of new businesses by investing in innovation and talent as set out in *the Federal Innovation and Growth Strategy for Quebec Regions*. It was also aligned with CED’s commitment in its 2018-2019 Departmental Plan to “test new approaches” to program delivery by targeting

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-hub/services/reports-resources/experimentation-direction-deputy-heads.html>

³ [CED | Federal Strategy on Innovation and Growth for the Quebec Regions \(tgiiprojects.com\)](#)

“innovative entrepreneurship” with “special attention to different population groups”⁴. Through this project, CED sought to make itself known to a new clientele.

The Challenge was launched on January 23, 2019, and participants had until April 1, 2019, to apply. The [announcement](#) of the 10 selected winners was made on August 30, 2019. Each winner received a \$50,000 grant to start up their business.

At the start of the project, a working group made up of players from various sectors of CED was set up to develop and implement the project. The group was tasked with contributing to the collective thought process and overseeing the operationalization and monitoring of the experimental project. One person worked full-time on the project design; the other participants contributed on a part-time or ad hoc basis. For the implementation, the equivalent of 2.3 full-time employees developed selection tools, carried out communications activities, analyzed the applications received, organized the winner selection process, and awarded the grants to the winners and ensured follow-up.

Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the new approaches tested in the experimentation project



Figure 1 illustrates the different experimental approaches that were tested during the CED Fast Forward Challenge. Generic terms and conditions⁵ were used for the first time in this pilot project. Also, during implementation of the contest, a selection process for the candidates was developed, including a “Demo Day” during which the candidates had

⁴ [2018-19 Departmental Plan - About this publication - Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions](#)

⁵ These are specific terms and conditions that create authorities, provisions and exceptions in grants and contributions programs: [Enabling the innovative use of Transfer Payments - Canada.ca](#)

to present their project in front of a jury. In addition, various communication approaches were tested, including information transmitters, the use of social media, video clips and a distinct visual signature to increase CED's visibility with a new target audience. Furthermore, the CED Fast Forward Challenge was targeted as a GBA+ pilot project⁶ to demonstrate the practical application of gender and diversity integration throughout the pilot project. In fact, an entire section will be devoted to the evaluation of GBA+ as part of this project.

4. Evaluation Strategy

The objectives of the evaluation were: A) to learn from experimentation and contest organizing; and B) to measure the impact of the project on the intended clientele. The analysis was conducted in four sections, each responding to one of the previous research questions mentioned in the Background section:

- What were the best practices and constraints related to the experimentation approach during project ideation and design?
- To what extent did the contest achieve the sought-after organizational results?
- What were the results for the entrepreneurs who took part in the *CED Fast Forward Challenge*?
- What were the results for the target groups, i.e., young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs?

The scope of the evaluation covers the period from February 2019 to February 2021, when the last survey and interviews were conducted for this evaluation.

5. Method

The evaluation of the first two stages (Ideation and Design) was based on three methods: analysis of 8 internal interviews with key project stakeholders, documentation on project selection and design, and the preparation of a literature review. The evaluation of the remaining sections (Implementation and Reporting on Results) was based on six data collection methods:

- Ten interviews with CED representatives;
- Two focus groups with CED business office advisors;
- Consultation with the CED management team;
- Documentation collected regarding implementation;
- Survey data from potential participants and participants;
- Seven short interviews with laureates.

⁶ GBA+: Gender-Based Analysis Plus

6. Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation of the Challenge is the first in the context of a CED experimentation project. The potential limitations to this evaluation are:

- *Potential bias of interview respondents*: Most interviewees were CED employees involved in the implementation of the Challenge. In addition, some interviews were conducted at the same time as the contest was implemented, so some of the opinions gathered may have lacked perspective.
- *The COVID-19 context*: The pandemic may have had a negative impact on participation in the web survey conducted in February 2021; the response rate of the non-laureates for that survey was only 18 %. This low rate may have skewed certain results, as the survey respondents were disproportionately among those who successfully launched their business, while those with modest results might have preferred not to respond.
- *Lack of comparison with previous initiatives*: The evaluation of the CED Fast Forward Challenge contest is the first evaluation in the context of a CED experimental project. The approach for its implementation (contest type) and the generic terms and conditions were new, so there was no point of comparison with similar projects.
- *Lack of documentation, including for the project's ideation*: This gap limited the evaluation process to the extent that some evaluation topics initially identified remain unassessed. For example, the traceability of the selection process for the experimental project and the decision criteria leading to the competition could not be assessed due to lack of details.

To mitigate these limitations, the evaluation team ensured that it asked for examples illustrating respondents' opinions during the interviews and triangulated the findings of the interviews with the survey results. In addition, the Web-based survey of recipients received a high response rate, with 9 of the 10 recipients responding.

7. Evaluation findings

7.1 QUESTION 1: What were the best practices and constraints associated with the experimental project during the ideation and design phases?

7.1.1 Ideation

Highlights

Comprehensive documentation during the brainstorming process leading up to the choice of the pilot project would have allowed for lessons to be learned within the context of the experimentation, and for a bank of ideas to be created during the ideation phase that could be used for future projects.

Comprehensive documentation⁷ as part of an experimentation process allows for tracing and ensures a better understanding of the logic used to arrive at an outcome. Paul Capello noted that “*change management documentation preserves the integrity of the project definition*” and “*provides a means for retaining historical change/issue information to enhance future project management efforts.*”⁸ However, there is little documentation available to demonstrate the thought process used upstream during the selection of projects, resulting in the choice of the entrepreneurial contest. A bank of ideas, for example, could have been created during the experimentation process and used as a basis for future projects. The organization could have benefited from the (translation) “*wealth of ideas that arise during a project, even if they will not be used in the project itself.*”⁹ Furthermore, (translation) “*ideation processes are increasingly seen as strategic processes in their own right. Mastering them helps strengthen, improve and speed up innovation processes.*”¹⁰

7.1.2 Use of a project charter

Highlights

- There appeared to be a lack of consensus at the outset of the project regarding the interpretation of the *Experimentation Direction*.
- The use of a project charter from the outset of the project would have helped convey a common understanding and would have served as a guide for grey areas, all the more so in the case of an experimental project.
- The project charter needs to be tailored to the experimentation context in terms of timelines, workload and resources.

⁷ “Comprehensive documentation” refers to briefing notes, meeting minutes, project selection grids, etc. This documentation may, for example, have shed light on the brainstorming process that resulted in the pilot project (contest).

⁸ [PMO Workbook - Establishing Successful Methodology \(pmi.org\)](#)

⁹ « Gérer les idées pour mieux innover » (Fall, 2013) (File: « La gestion de la créativité »), *revuegestion.ca*, vol.38, n 3, p. 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 26.

In the case of experimentation, it is important to establish consensus from the get-go around the notion of experimentation, and to clearly communicate the chosen direction. However, as was revealed in the interviews, there was a divergence of opinion and different understandings of the interpretation and adaptation of the *Experimentation Direction*¹¹ in the CED context among the interviewees involved in the ideation phase.

It is said that: “As a comprehensive overview of the project, the project charter allows all parties involved (stakeholders) to reach agreement and document major aspects of the project such as the objectives, the scope, the deliverables, and the resources required. The charter supports the decision-making process and is also often used as a communication tool.¹²” Hence, the use of a project charter very early on in the process would have helped prevent most of the challenges that arose during the experimentation process.

Such a charter should also be widely communicated. During the interviews, a number of respondents specifically brought up the question of a project charter. For some, such a charter would have helped clarify the objectives and would have served as a reference in situations where understanding was ambiguous. For example, some respondents noted a lack of consensus around a clear vision, not only of the project objectives but also of organizational objectives; work planning by the directorates involved; and the allocated budget. For others, the charter would have allowed those joining the project mid-way or on an ad hoc basis to have a better idea of the direction and nature of the project. A project proposal document¹³ outlining the pilot project was used to brief management; however, it was not adapted to operational needs. Moreover, the interviews failed to confirm the extent to which this document was referred to and used by the stakeholders involved in the project.

Generally important for any type of project, a project charter is particularly so in the case of an experimental project, where there are many grey areas. As noted in a guide to experimentation evaluation methods, (translation) “*the problem is not just being able to clarify an objective, but also ensuring that it is effectively shared by all the stakeholders, by all the players who will be contributing to the project, including the beneficiaries themselves.*”¹⁴ Hence, the project charter needs to be tailored to the experimentation context in terms of timelines, workload and resources. Various options had to be tested, which took time and created additional work for the different teams involved in the project. A lack of time, and workload, were issues that came up a number of times in the interviews: the individuals responsible for carrying out the contest were working on other projects at the same time, and the time allotted for the entrepreneurial contest was similar to the time set aside for their usual projects.

¹¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-hub/services/reports-resources/experimentation-direction-deputy-heads.html>

¹² <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/emf-cag/projet-projet/documentation-documentation/guide-guide/guide-guide-eng.pdf>

¹³ Document entitled « *proposition de projet d'expérimentation pour jeunes entrepreneurs – grandes lignes* »

¹⁴ <http://www.experimentation.jeunes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/guide-pour-l-assessment-des-experimentations.pdf> , p. 6

7.1.3 New approaches during the design phase

Highlights

Several examples were given of the use of different approaches during the design of the pilot project:

- The use of generic terms and condition instead of regular program delivery—specifically by means of a contest—was tailored to the objectives and the target clientele.
- The experimental project was chosen as a pilot project to document GBA+ considerations during the design and implementation of an initiative.
- An informal consultation with external stakeholders was held prior to the project to confirm the needs of young entrepreneurs.
- Cross-sector collaboration among stakeholders, from the outset of the process, was hailed as a positive experience.

Since the new approaches and ways of doing things were key to the experimental process, the evaluation focused on new features at CED during the contest design phase. It should be noted that innovation during the implementation of the contest will be addressed in the second report.

7.1.3.1 Consultation and collaboration

In keeping with the government priority to support innovation, informal consultations were held prior to the project with a wide range of stakeholders from both entrepreneurial and university settings¹⁵ to confirm the need for assistance on the part of young entrepreneurs attending university. This approach benefits the organization by confirming needs and reinforcing collaboration with external stakeholders.

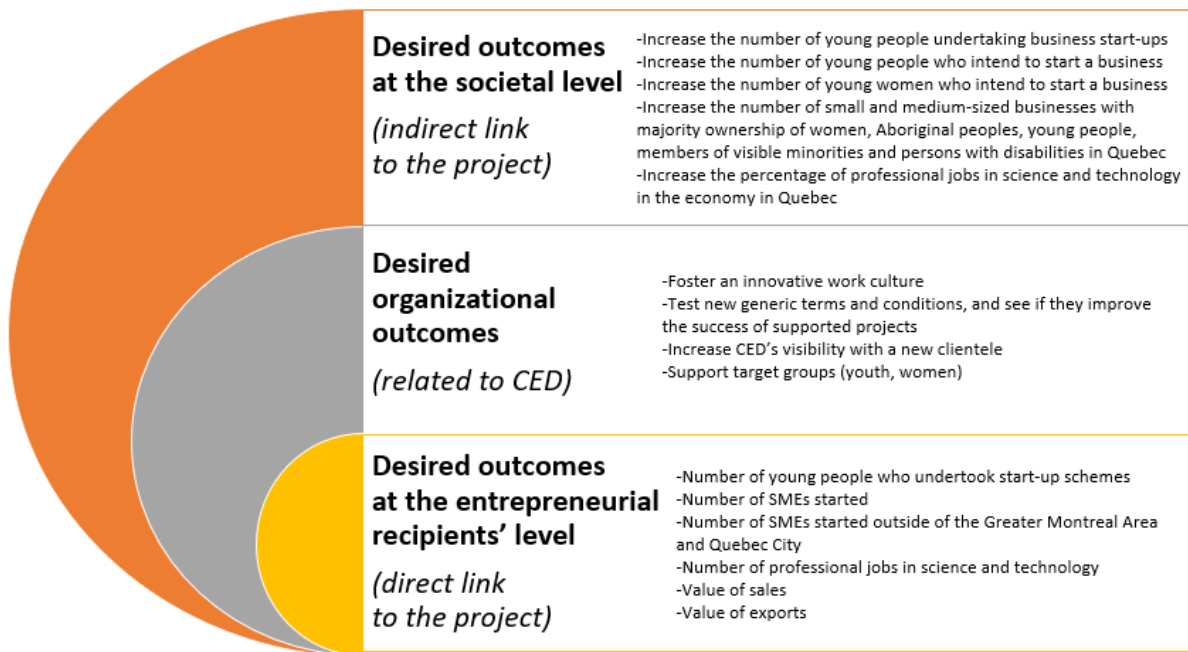
In addition, during the interviews, a number of internal stakeholders said they were pleased to have been able to work on the project right from the start, as they were usually only asked to contribute at the implementation stage of a project. Because they took part earlier on in the process, their exchanges went beyond their duties, drawing on their front-line experience and knowledge. These cross-sector exchanges allowed for a more comprehensive analysis at each phase of the project and helped save time during the validation stages. Establishing cross-sector collaboration very early on in the various projects is a practice that is worth adopting on a generalized level.

The desired outcomes identified further to internal and external consultations are presented in the results table below (Figure 2). Certain changes had to be made to the indicators during the project and will be addressed later in this report.

¹⁵ Stakeholders included universities, business incubators and accelerators, engineering firms and central agencies.

Finally, towards the end of the contest design phase, a presentation about the pilot project was organized for all CED employees. This approach was mentioned as being a best practice, since it allowed CED staff to discover the pilot project before it was implemented.

Figure 2 Table presenting the results originally expected for the experimental project at the design phase stage



7.1.3.2 Generic terms and conditions¹⁶

CED assistance for SME startups is usually in the form of repayable funding. In this traditional approach, potential clients submit an application for funding to a business office, and advisors review the applications based on pre-established evaluation criteria. In the case of this experimental project, however, CED targeted, prior to the start of the project, a client group that is not strongly represented in its regular programs: youth. In the literature review and the various consultations, it was noted that youth startups have a harder time getting the necessary funding to go ahead with their business projects. The Agency therefore used the generic terms and conditions to deliver an initiative by means of a contest, leading to the awarding of grants to the winning businesses. Furthermore, a communication strategy tailored to the objectives and the target clientele was used during the implementation of the *CED Fast Forward Challenge*.

¹⁶ Specific terms and conditions that create authorizations, provisions and exceptions for grant and contribution programs. <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/enabling-innovative-use-transfer-payments.html>

7.1.3.3 GBA+ pilot project

Further to the introduction of a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) policy and framework in 2018, the *CED Fast Forward Challenge* was selected to be a GBA+ pilot project, to document the application of GBA+. The goal of the GBA+ pilot project is to tangibly demonstrate how gender and diversity factors can be incorporated into all the development and implementation phases of an initiative, with a view to increasing the use of GBA+. The following aspects highlight some of the progress made by incorporating GBA+ considerations into the design of the contest.

a) Proposal development

The participation of the GBA+ team from the outset of the project made it easier to identify opportunities for tailoring the experimental project to the needs of youth and women. Nevertheless, for some people, the incorporation of GBA+ considerations was still seen as a new process and thus an additional burden for the project. Going forward, better communication and awareness about GBA+, specifically through training and employee communications, will help promote its usefulness.

During the design phase of the experimental project, CED conducted a literature review on the needs of young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs. Consultations with stakeholders served to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by these entrepreneurs, and helped identify possible solutions. Subsequent consultations with entrepreneurs served to validate the proposed solution.

One of the main outcomes of taking GBA+ considerations into account at the start of the design phase of the process was the highlighting of two population groups that, historically, have benefited less from CED's direct assistance: young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs. For example, by taking into account gender-based issues and existing gaps in the business world, the project aimed to create opportunities and incentives for youth and women so as to bridge the gap between entrepreneurial intention and action. Moreover, most of the desired outcomes of the experimental project are linked to GBA+ considerations.

Difficulties were encountered, however, during the needs' analysis, owing to the lack of available quantitative data documenting the reality of youth and women, both in science- and technology-related fields and in entrepreneurship.

b) Eligibility criteria

The foundations of GBA+ influenced the development of the contest's eligibility and evaluation criteria. Various possibilities were considered during the development of the criteria to encourage the participation of women. CED decided on an evaluation criterion whereby additional points would be awarded to teams that included women who held at

least 25% of the business's shares. The objective of this criterion was to create more equal opportunities for men and women in a field where women are generally under-represented. Furthermore, with a view to bolstering the inclusion of women in newly created businesses, the deadline for registering with Quebec's *Registraire des entreprises* was set at April 1, the last day of the application period.

7.1.3.4 Communication approaches

The foundations of GBA+ were also considered from a communications standpoint, specifically as part of the branding of the *CED Fast Forward Challenge*, i.e., choice of colours, personalities, music, the use of gender-neutral language during the drafting process, or even the choice of media and advertising. The intent of the communication approach was to create a sense of accessibility and openness that would encourage the participation of diverse groups and, specifically, attract the attention of women, a group that is under-represented in the engineering field. As was noted above, the targeted communication strategy will be addressed at greater length in the subsequent reports.

7.2 QUESTION 2: To what extent did the contest achieve the sought-after organizational results?

The targeted organizational results of the *CED Fast Forward Challenge* were to:

- 7.2.1 Foster an innovation-based work culture;
- 7.2.2 Test new generic terms and conditions to see whether any of them improve the success of projects receiving funding;
- 7.2.3 Enhance CED's visibility among a new clientele;
- 7.2.4 Innovate in the field of external communications; and
- 7.2.5 Support target groups.

7.2.1 Foster an innovation-based work culture

Highlights

- Collaboration between the Operations sector, the Communications Directorate and Legal Services right from the outset facilitated the implementation of the contest.
- New approaches were used at CED, such as a "demo day," during which the finalists presented their projects before a panel.
- Issues related to implementation time frames were raised, notably the posting period, which some considered to be too short, and the short period of time allotted to Operations for the analysis of the applicants' files.

The *CED Fast Forward Challenge* was announced on January 23, 2019, and the deadline for entrepreneurs to apply was April 1, 2019. A total of 115 businesses applied; 72 of the proposals submitted were complete. From these, 20 finalists were screened in by an internal committee made up of advisors from CED's business offices. The screening was done using a scoring grid to evaluate the following criteria:

- degree of innovation
- commercial and growth potential
- capacity to get the product to market quickly
- potential for job creation in Quebec
- need for funding
- relevance of the intellectual property strategy
- quality of the team

The 20 projects with the highest scores were selected as finalists. On May 17 and 18, 2019, the 20 finalists presented their projects before a panel made up of two private-sector representatives and one CED representative. On August 30, 2019, CED announced the 10 winning businesses that would each receive a \$50,000 grant to start up their business.

The implementation of the Challenge was a first for CED, and the design approach involved representatives from Operations who were subsequently tasked with implementing the contest; according to some interviewees, this helped ensure an understanding of the reality on the ground. The collaboration with the Communications Directorate team, Legal Services and the Policy, Economic Intelligence and Results Branch (PEIRB), right from the outset, facilitated understanding of the contest and helped maintain a focus on the objectives, with one respondent noting the importance of involving Legal Services as soon as possible in this type of project. The Challenge was also a pilot project for the implementation of Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+), and the PEIRB was involved in the integration of considerations such as the participation of youth and women during the design phase of the contest. The Communications Directorate was also very involved in the Challenge, and was responsible for the introduction of new, innovative tools, for which it won a national award, as noted in section 7.2.4.

Some new approaches were also introduced at CED: project screening by a group of advisors using a scoring grid in the context of a contest, and the introduction of a "Demo Day," during which a panel made of private-sector representatives recommended the winners from among those who came to make their sales pitches.

In terms of the implementation, certain issues relating to the implementation time frame were identified, both by CED respondents and potential Challenge participants. For the CED respondents, some Challenge officials thought there should have been more time

between the end of the design phase and the start of the implementation phase. Approval for the Challenge was received in late October 2018, and the launch was held on January 23, 2019, leaving about three months to implement the Challenge, which some interviewees felt was not enough time. One interviewee noted that, while a lot of work had gone into the terms and conditions of the Challenge, less time had been spent on the actual implementation because of the tight deadlines. For example, owing to a lack of time, it was impossible to post all the documentation online, and links to the forms had to be provided, rather than having everything online. The lack of time also meant that not all decisions made during the implementation could be documented; moreover, according to one interviewee, someone should have been tasked with documenting the project.

(Translation) *“We remained with the general idea of the contest. We thought about what the contest should be, rather than about what it takes to go ahead with the project afterwards.”* (from an interview with a Challenge official)

Some respondents also thought that the time between the application deadline (April 1, 2019), the preliminary screening (early May), and the final selection (July 2019) was short, as the advisors had to spend many hours analyzing the applications.

As for the participants, they had approximately a month and a half to prepare their applications between the start of the application period and the application deadline. This short time frame may have prevented some people from applying and, according to one interviewee, may have resulted in CED missing out on some of the best projects: [Translation] *“We took the best in the time we had.”* In all, 72 applications were submitted, out of the 273 requests for application packages (26%).¹⁷ Among the businesses requesting an application package that answered “No” to the survey question “Did you apply?” (11 respondents), the main reason(s) given (more than one possible response per respondent) were:

- They did not meet the eligibility criteria (three respondents because they did not have an engineer on their team; one respondent because of their age)
- The process was too much work (three respondents)
- The documentation requirements were too demanding (three respondents)
- Not enough time between the launch of the contest and the application deadline to prepare their file (two respondents)

This last point about the short period of time between the posting period and the application deadline corroborates the view expressed during an interview with a contest official, who believed that the short time frame may have limited participation. This statement was, however, partially contradicted by another interviewee who said that the

¹⁷ It should be noted that a business applicant (file) may have had several shareholders, and that several shareholders from the same business may have requested a package.

Challenge was meant to be a competitive process that prepares future businesses for dealing with time constraints.

Learning

When implementing similar projects, CED should allow for more time between the end of the design phase and the start of the implementation phase.

In addition to the \$500,000 paid out in grants, the total estimated cost (salary and non-salary expenses) for the design and implementation of the Challenge is approximately \$330,000. This sum includes 0.4 FTEs¹⁸ for the design phase and 2.3 FTEs for the implementation of the contest, plus approximately \$50,000 in non-salary expenses. Also, the total cost does not include the cost of the approximately 0.2 FTEs charged to Legal Services.

According to some interviewees, the call for proposals process is time consuming during a short period of time, but is faster because proponents have to provide all the information when they apply, which avoids having to contact clients that have failed to provide all the information. Others also noted that not having to analyze a participant's financial file in as much detail as in the case of regular programs had allowed for greater risk-taking.

During the consultation with the CED management team, some participants said that the Challenge had also involved a lot of work for the Communications Directorate and Legal Services, which had had to develop a participant's guide and rules, and prepare the grant agreements. Some participants in the consultation suggested that the cost of designing and developing tools for the Challenge could be amortized if the contest were to be repeated, since it would not be necessary to start the entire project from scratch.

7.2.2 Test new generic terms and conditions to determine whether any of them improve the success of projects receiving funding

Highlights

- The use of generic terms and conditions was a wise choice, given the high level of satisfaction among the businesses that had requested an application package, and the results achieved.
- According to the businesses that requested an application package, the amount of the prize (\$50,000) and the fact that it was non-repayable were the most appealing features, whereas the number of prizes to be won was the second least appealing feature.
- The contest format provided visibility among potential investors and clients, and the use of grants was also appreciated.

¹⁸ FTE: full-time equivalent

The Challenge was an experimental pilot project aimed at testing new approaches to project design and implementation. CED would be testing new ways of doing things that were different from its usual funding offer.

As concerns the use of generic terms and conditions for the prizes and challenges, CED wanted to test whether the grants awarded to start-up businesses were an effective way of supporting these businesses. According to Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) guidelines, *“Prizes/challenges are grants used to meet a significant challenge where a satisfactory solution has yet to be found. They are best used in situations where a clear objective exists, where there are many potential problem solvers, and where problem solvers are willing to bear the up-front costs and risks associated with meeting or taking on the challenge.”*¹⁹

In this context, CED decided to organize the *Fast Forward Challenge* and offer \$50,000 grants, thus providing meaningful, attractive, simple and non-repayable funding, instead of the repayable contributions it typically awards to businesses.

Business that had requested an application package were surveyed to find out which features of the contest they found the most, and least, appealing, with a view to assessing the overall attractiveness of the Challenge in their eyes. Reading the findings below, the amount of the prize (\$50,000) and the fact that it was non-repayable were the most appealing features, whereas the number of awards to be won was the second least appealing feature. The question of whether the number of awards could have been higher or lower remains to be considered.

Table 1. Results of the Web-based survey of businesses that requested an application package

What do you think are the <u>most</u> appealing features of the CED Fast Forward Challenge? n=107 (more than one possible answer per respondent)			What do you think are the <u>least</u> appealing features of the CED Fast Forward Challenge? n=107 (more than one possible answer per respondent)		
The fact that the funding is non-repayable	89	83%	The format of the registration forms	24	22%
The amount of the assistance	64	60%	The number of prizes to be won	22	21%
The visibility of the Challenge among potential investors and clients	41	38%	Application processing times	20	19%
The number of prizes to be won	30	28%	Eligibility criteria	18	17%
Eligibility criteria	29	27%	Selection criteria	15	14%
Selection criteria	11	10%	The format of the sales pitch	15	14%
The format of the sales pitch	6	6%	The visibility of the Challenge among potential investors and clients	8	7%
Application processing times	5	5%	The amount of the assistance	6	6%

¹⁹ [Enabling the innovative use of Transfer Payments – Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/transfer-payments/canada-ca)

The format of the registration forms	2	2%	The fact that the funding is non-repayable	0	0%
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Web-based survey, February–March 2019

In short, the most appealing features identified above seem to show that the choice of generic terms and conditions, i.e., a contest format that provides visibility among potential investors and clients, as well as the use of grants, was well-liked. Along with the positive results obtained by the winners (Section 2 on results), and data on the clientele reached (Section 1.4 on target groups), everything seems to indicate that the use of generic terms and conditions for the Challenge was a wise choice.

7.2.3 Enhance CED’s visibility among a new clientele

Highlights

- The *CED Fast Forward Challenge* was a pilot project for the application of GBA+, and selection criteria were used to reach young (18 to 39 years old) and women entrepreneurs.
- Of the businesses that requested an application package, 93% were young people and 21% were women.
- Of the 10 winning businesses, 4 had a significant proportion of women shareholders, which was a positive outcome.

Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) is an analytical approach used to evaluate the potential impact of policies, programs, services and other types of initiatives on diverse groups of men and women, taking into account gender and other identity factors.²⁰ The “plus” in the name emphasizes the fact that GBA+ goes beyond gender to include the consideration of a range of other, intersecting identity factors, such as age, education, language, geographic origin, culture, income and disability.

The *Fast Forward Challenge* was a pilot project for the application of GBA+ at CED, and it was decided that selection criteria would be used to reach young (18 to 39) and women entrepreneurs. With this in mind, an analyst responsible for GBA+-related issues was consulted. Finally, eligibility criteria were drawn up. One of these criteria was that young people (aged 18 to 39) be majority shareholders in the business (50% control in the business, or higher). In addition, for the evaluation of applications, bonus points were awarded for businesses that had significant involvement by women, i.e., women accounted for 25% or more of the business’s shareholders.

In terms of communications, an inclusive logo was used in order to reach as many participants as possible from all walks of life. Women were also present on the screening

²⁰ [Action Plan on Gender-based Analysis \(2016-2020\) - Women and Gender Equality Canada](#)

and selection committees. In fact, two of the three panel members were women involved in entrepreneurship in Quebec.

Section 7.2.5, “Support target groups” shows the results in terms of target groups: 93% of the businesses that requested an application package were young people and 21% were women. And, of the 10 winning businesses, 4 had significant involvement by women shareholders. This ratio is high, considering that there are fewer women entrepreneurs in the science and technology field. According to the 2017 *Indice entrepreneurial québécois*, the percentage of business owners aged 18 to 34 in the applied science and technology sector is 32.8% among men and 7.7% among women.²¹

A review of similar contests²² aimed at young and women entrepreneurs in Quebec and Canada revealed that these other contests were targeted and did not use the bonus point formula to encourage participation by a particular group. In fact, the contests were exclusively for woman, rather than having bonus points awarded as in the case of the *Fast Forward Challenge*. Furthermore, some of these contests offered, in addition to financial support, coaching such as a support service for business model development.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the eligibility criteria of the *Fast Forward Challenge* compare with those of similar contests, as the model used by the *Fast Forward Challenge* was hybrid, i.e., partially for youth only, with bonus points for women. The results of the *Fast Forward Challenge* do, however, point to the success in reaching women entrepreneurs (4 out of 10), but as this is a small number, it is difficult to draw any conclusions. The analysis of the contest scores also shows that the bonus points awarded to business applicants with a significant proportion of women shareholders had little impact on the final scores of the 20 finalists (only benefiting one business) and no impact on the selection of the 10 winners. During the interviews, contest officials explained that the bonus points awarded were not enough to have had an impact on the selection of the 10 winners. In conclusion, although the results for the target groups were positive, consideration should be given to awarding more points to them or, possibly, having a dedicated contest or a number of dedicated prizes, should a similar contest be conducted.

Learning

²⁰ Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, 2019 Edition, p. 52 ([Indice 2019 - Indice entrepreneurial québécois \(indiceentrepreneurialqc.com\)](https://www.indiceentrepreneurialqc.com))

²² Similar contests: Défi entrepreneuriat diversité (<https://www.polymtl.ca/carrefour-actualite/nouvelles/defi-entrepreneuriat-diversite-releve>), La Bourse + (<https://www.montrealinc.ca/bourse-croissance/avantages>), FoundHers ([FoundHers | Montreal inc.](https://www.foundhers.com)), Grants for Women Entrepreneurs / Huguette Fontaine Grant for the technological innovation sector (<https://philanthropie.fondationbombardier.ca/en/submit-a-request/grants-for-women-entrepreneurs/>), Pitch for the purse (<https://fwe.ca/pitch-for-the-purse>).

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.

7.2.4 Innovate in the field of external communications

Highlights

- External communications were innovative and the team that worked on the communication strategy won a national award.
- The Challenge allowed CED to improve its visibility, and was given a high satisfaction rating by the target clientele for the various characteristics of the communications: visual quality, accuracy of the information, quality of the application package, etc.

The launch of an entrepreneurial contest was a promotional activity that had never been done before by the CED Communications team, and the proposed communication strategy had some innovative features. To start with, it included the development of a communications strategy targeting a specific group, i.e., youth in the engineering field, using new tools such as the Simple Survey platform to submit applications and conduct participant surveys; it also targeted a different audience, namely universities. According to a Challenge official, the use of the Simple Survey platform ensured a more efficient implementation that was more user-friendly and better aligned with the needs of the clientele. In addition, all the documentation was online, and proponents downloaded the documents directly from the platform. However, according to Challenge officials, with more time, the platform could have allowed for applications to be completed directly online, which would have been even more efficient.

As a result of their work on the Challenge, the Communications team received the [Regional Powerhouse Award of Communications Excellence](#) recognizing communications excellence in the federal public service, at the second edition of the Government of Canada's Communications Awards of Excellence held in 2020. The criteria that led to the nomination of the winning team pertained to the variety and innovative nature of the strategies used, and the Challenge's branding.

The impact of the project from a communications standpoint was significant. A 25% increase was reported in CED website traffic during the contest. Over 30% of the people who visited the Challenge website had found out about it through social media (notably the Facebook page created for the occasion), advertising or partner relations. The Facebook engagement rate was 11% (well above average). The *Fast Forward Challenge* promotional video sparked the interest of a very high proportion of those who had viewed it: 93%, or 43/46. It should be noted, however, that half of the respondents (53% or 51/97)

had not seen the video in question. During the consultation with the CED management team, one participant noted that conducting the project on an annual basis would provide visibility.

“We had more visibility with this project than with any other project.” (a participant in the consultation with the CED management team)

As concerns CED’s visibility, it is interesting to note that 52% (52/100) of the respondents to the survey included with the application package said they had known about CED before, and 67% (72/107) of them said they were considering CED for financial assistance. Finally, regarding satisfaction, feedback from businesses that had requested an application package was very positive (“satisfied” or “very satisfied”) regarding the following aspects of communications:

- 81% for the visual quality of the *Fast Forward Challenge* promotional campaign
- 86% for the accuracy of the information in the promotional campaign
- 88% for the amount of information requested during the application process
- 92% for the accuracy of the information in the application package
- 94% for the user-friendliness of the application package

Among the negative feedback received, 22% of businesses that had requested an application package (24/107) said that the format of the registration forms was the least appealing aspect of the Challenge (see above, Table 1.). In conclusion, external communications were innovative and allowed CED to enhance its visibility and obtained a high satisfaction rating from the target clientele.

7.2.5 Support target groups (youth, women)

Highlights

- In the view of some applicants and Challenge officials, the requirement for significant involvement by engineering students or graduates could have been broadened to include other STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, in order to have a larger pool of projects.
- Regional representation of the applicants and winners points to a concentration in urban areas.

The goal of the *CED Fast Forward Challenge* was to increase the number of young entrepreneurs, and women in particular, involved in innovative entrepreneurship. Specifically, the Challenge targeted Quebec businesses that, as on April 1, 2019, were owned by youth aged 18 to 39; included significant involvement by engineering students or graduates; and had achieved a technology readiness level (TRL) of 6 or higher, i.e., the business had a prototype that had been tested in a simulated operational environment or laboratory. One of the evaluation criteria was that a significant proportion of the business’s shareholders be women (at least 25%).

When the application packages became available, potential candidates entered their email address to obtain a package and, at the same time, answered some demographic questions, which helped establish a profile of the pool of applicants reached. A total of 273 people requested an application package. Among these potential applicants, the proportion of 18–39-year-olds reached was very significant: 92.7% of businesses that had requested an application package were “between 18 and 39 years old” (n=253), and of these, 85% intended to take part in the contest (n=232). The breakdown of applicants by gender is as follows:

- 20.5% were women (n=56)
- 77.7% were men (n=212)
- 1.5% preferred not to say (n=4)
- 0.4% answered “Other” (n=1)

In the end, 72 proposals were received, and, of these, 42 applications were eligible. The following are the main reasons why 30 proposals were rejected (more than one possible reason per application):

- 17 businesses had not achieved a TRL of 6 or higher;
- 7 applications did not include significant involvement by engineering students or graduates;
- 7 applications did not include a letter of consent.

It should be noted that a slightly lower proportion of the women planned to take part in the contest, compared to the men, i.e., 85.7% of the women (48/56) compared with 90.6% of the men (192/212). Among the 72 applications received, 6 businesses received bonus points because of the significant proportion of women shareholders²³ (25% or more) in the business²⁴.

According to three comments received as part of a survey of businesses that had requested an application package but had subsequently decided not to take part, the reasons for not participating were as follows: the requirement to have at least two shareholders; a required technology readiness level (TRL 6²⁵) that was too high; and, the requirement to have an engineer shareholder. During the interviews, one interviewee explained that the technology readiness level was the same as the level usually required by CED for projects funded through its regular programs. Furthermore, the requirement for significant involvement by engineering students or graduates could have been broadened to include other STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, in order to have a larger pool of projects. In this regard, one interviewee noted

²³ In other words, at least 25% of the business’s voting shares are held by one or more women.

²⁴ Detailed eligibility criteria: <https://dec.canada.ca/eng/programs/regi/fast-forward-challenge/eligibility.html>

²⁵ [Technology readiness levels – Innovation Canada \(ic.gc.ca\)](https://www.innovation.gc.ca/technology-readiness-levels)

that this comment came up frequently in interactions between participants and community stakeholders (entrepreneurship incubators and educational institutions) consulted during the design phase. For example, the fact that some universities in the regions do not have engineering faculties limited the participation of these regions in the Challenge.

The analysis of the geographic scope of the contest shows that the majority of businesses that had requested an application package were from the Greater Montréal (63.7%, n=174) and Québec–Chaudière-Appalaches (12.1 n=33) regions. The remaining businesses that had requested an application package were from 11 regions of Quebec, the three main ones being Estrie (5.9%, n=16), Outaouais (4.0%, n=11) and Trois-Rivières (3.7%, n=10).

The geographic breakdown of the 72 applications received was as follows:

- 49/72 (68%) from Greater Montréal
- 9/72 (13 %) from Québec–Chaudière-Appalaches
- 7/72 (10 %) from the Eastern Townships
- 4/72 (6%) from the Mauricie
- 1/72 (1%) from the following regions: Bas-Saint-Laurent, Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine and the Saguenay

The geographic breakdown of the 10 finalists was as follows:

- 5/10 (50%) from Greater Montréal
- 3/10 (30%) from the Eastern Townships
- 2/10 (20%) from Québec–Chaudière-Appalaches

This regional representation of the applicants and the winners reveals a concentration in urban areas. Some participants in the consultation with the CED management team believed that the criteria should be reviewed to increase participation by young entrepreneurs from all across Quebec.

Learning

When implementing similar projects, CED should look at ways of increasing regional participation.

7.3 QUESTION 3: What were the results for the entrepreneurs who took part in the CED Fast Forward Challenge?

Highlights

- The Challenge acted as leverage for other sources of funding and the hiring of employees, and also ensured the survival of two winning businesses.

- The pandemic had little impact on businesses that had requested an application package.
- The Challenge allowed CED to expand its pool of entrepreneurs and to make itself known among potential new clients.
- The lack of funding was the most pressing need identified by the entrepreneurs, particularly at the pre-commercialization stage.

The goal of the Challenge was to foster entrepreneurship, not just among the winners but among all the participants. For this reason, as well as for comparison purposes, this section reports on the business results, both for the winners and the non-winners.

Data on the results was gathered by means of a Web-based survey completed by 9 of the 10 Challenge winners approximately a year and a half after receiving the \$50,000 grant from CED. The survey was also completed by businesses that had requested an application package but did not win an award.

7.3.1 Business impacts on participants

The aim of the evaluation was to determine the extent to which the Challenge was instrumental in the start-up of the winning businesses. The survey results showed that the Challenge was necessary for the survival of 2 of the 9 winning businesses. Interviews with the winners' representatives confirm the importance of the Challenge: two award winners stated that the funding received provided powerful leverage in the search for additional funding, and another noted that the funding received allowed them to hire their first employee.

"The Fast Forward Challenge was an initiator, the spark plug for our business; it effectively put us on fast forward." (a Fast Forward Challenge winner)

Of the 7 other survey respondents who said that their business would have remained afloat even without the Challenge, 5 noted that, although they would have been able to stay in business, it would not have been on the same scale; only 1 business would have been able to stay in business on the same scale.

According to the survey respondents, the pandemic seems to have had a relatively minor impact on most of the businesses that had requested an application package but that did not go on to receive a Challenge award: 77% of them stated that the pandemic had not had an impact on their intention to stay in business (53%, n=9), or that it had had a positive impact on their intention to stay in business (24%, n=4), while 24% (n=4) said that the pandemic had negatively impacted their intention to stay in business.

Survey responses regarding sales and the number of employees for the two groups of respondents (winners and businesses that requested an application package but did not

obtain Challenge funding) during the pre- and post-pandemic periods reveal the following:

- None of the survey respondents reported a drop in sales and in the number of employees, either before or after the pandemic.
- The pandemic appears to have had little impact on sales and on the number of employees; the most marked impact was on the sales of non-winners (24% of non-winners stated that their sales had declined because of the pandemic).

Table 2. Change in sales of package applicants (web survey, February-March 2021)

Change in sales –Web-based survey of winning and non-winning businesses					
Year prior to the start of the pandemic	Non-Winners	Winners	Since the start of the pandemic	Non-Winners	Winners
<i>My sales increased</i>	41% (7)	50% (4)	<i>My sales declined because of the pandemic</i>	24% (4)	13% (1)
<i>My sales declined</i>	0% (0)	0% (0)	<i>My sales declined; nothing to do with the pandemic</i>	0% (0)	0% (0)
<i>My sales remained the same</i>	24% (4)	0% (0)	<i>My sales increased as a result of the pandemic</i>	0% (0)	0% (0)
<i>Don't know / Not applicable</i>	35% (6)	50% (4)	<i>My sales increased; nothing to do with the pandemic</i>	24% (4)	13% (1)
TOTAL	17	8	<i>My sales have remained the same</i>	41% (7)	25% (2)
			<i>Don't know / Not applicable</i>	12% (2)	50% (4)
			TOTAL	17	8

Table 3. Employee Change in Package Applicants (web survey, February-March 2021)

Change in the number of employees – Results of the Web-based survey of non-winning businesses that requested a package and Fast Forward Challenge winners (Web-based survey, January–February 2021)					
Year prior to the start of the pandemic	Non-winners	Winners	Since the start of the pandemic	Non-winners	Winners
<i>The number of employees increased</i>	41% (8)	50% (4)	<i>The number of employees decreased because of the pandemic</i>	0% (0)	13% (1)
<i>The number of employees decreased</i>	0% (0)	0% (0)	<i>The number of employees decreased; nothing to do with the pandemic</i>	0% (0)	0% (0)
<i>The number of employees remained unchanged</i>	29% (5)	0% (0)	<i>The number of employees increased because of the pandemic</i>	6% (1)	13% (1)
<i>Don't know / Not applicable</i>	24% (4)	50% (4)	<i>The number of employees increased; nothing to do with the pandemic</i>	47% (8)	25% (2)
TOTAL	17	8	<i>The number of employees has remained unchanged since the start of the pandemic</i>	41% (7)	50% (4)
			<i>Don't know / Not applicable</i>	6% (1)	0% (0)
			TOTAL	17	8

The results shown are quite positive, both for non-winners and winners. As seen in feedback received during the interviews, three of the winners were very enthusiastic

about the results obtained since participating in the Challenge. In terms of their sales, half of the winners had not yet made any sales. According to two winners, it was still too early to commercialize their product, which explained why they had yet to make any sales.

During the interviews, two of the contest officials mentioned that the Challenge had allowed CED to expand its pool of entrepreneurs and to gain exposure among new clients that could take advantage of CED’s other programs. This corroborates the findings of the survey included with the application package, which revealed that only 52% (52/100) of the survey respondents had already known about CED. Further to their participation in the Challenge, four of the winners received funding through two CED programs: Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI); and the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF). The objectives of REGI projects included increasing production, commercialization and innovation capacity, whereas RRRF projects aimed to ensure the operational continuity of viable businesses in the context of the pandemic.

7.3.2 Current needs of the businesses

The lack of funding was the most pressing need identified by the entrepreneurs targeted by the Challenge. Web-based survey respondents (both winners and businesses that requested an application package but did not win), noted the following needs and issues:

Table 4. Entrepreneurs’ current needs (web survey, January-February 2021)

Entrepreneurs’ needs – Findings of the Web-based survey of businesses that requested an application package, and the winners of the <i>Fast Forward Challenge</i> <small>(Web-based survey, January–February 2021; more than one possible response to these questions)</small>			
What is the main challenge facing your business?		Over the coming year, what will be your business’s two main requirements?	
Businesses that requested a package but did not win an award N=17	Winners N=8	Businesses that requested a package but did not win an award N=17	Winners N=8
1. Funding for growth (8) 2. Operational challenges(7) 3. Drop in demand (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liquidity issues (3) • Funding for growth (3) • Operational challenges(3) 	1. Research and development (11) 2. Working capital (8) 3. Marketing adaptation measures (7)	1. Working capital (7) 2. Labour recruitment (4) 3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment purchases (2) • Research and development (2) • Marketing adaptation measures (2)

In the interviews, some of the winners said they had trouble finding funding to bridge the gap between start-up and pre-commercialization. They felt there was a lack of financial support for recent start-ups in the pre-commercialization stage, especially in sectors where there is a long development cycle (e.g., five years) before the product can be marketed. In short, the needs of young entrepreneurs are varied and still very much present.

7.4 QUESTION 4: What were the results for the target groups, i.e., young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs?

Highlights

- It is too soon to measure the impact of the Challenge in terms of the end goals.
- It is difficult to isolate the Challenge's contribution from that of the many stakeholders.
- The contest was able to reach youth and women, both among the businesses that requested an application package but did not win an award, and the actual winners.

In addition to the above results, the Challenge established the following long-term end goals among the target clientele:

1. Increase the number of young people who take steps to start up a business
2. Increase the number of young people and women who intend to start up a business
3. Increase the percentage of SMEs in Quebec that are majority-owned by women, Indigenous peoples, youth, visible minorities or persons with disabilities
4. Increase the percentage of professional jobs in science and technology in Quebec's economy
5. Increase the percentage of businesses that collaborate with institutions of higher learning in Quebec

It is difficult and also too soon to measure the impact of the Challenge in relation to the above end goals. They are also broad objectives to which a number of stakeholders contribute and for which the Challenge cannot easily take all the credit. However, in the case of end goals 2 and 3, the evaluation did identify results linked to these goals, notably the clientele reached and the improved visibility and performance (increase in sales and the number of employees) of the winning businesses.

When examined in greater detail, the data on the Challenge participants reveals that the contest was able to reach young people and women, not only among businesses that requested an application package but did not win an award, but also among the contest applicants and winners. The Challenge also enhanced CED's visibility among a new clientele.

During interviews with some of the winners in February 2021, the evaluation team asked the respondents if they would be willing to have their business featured in a success story on the CED website. The majority of them were enthusiastic about the idea, and one or two success stories will be produced by the Communications team in 2021. These success stories will highlight the realization of these entrepreneurial projects, thus contributing to goals 1 and 2.

8. Conclusion

The evaluation of the Propulsion Challenge pilot project answered 4 questions and provided a positive evaluation for several short-term objectives. The evaluation of the Ideation and Design aspects confirmed the importance of communication tools such as the project charter and extensive documentation. The following major findings were identified:

- Document the different elements related to the start-up of the project from the perspective of organizational learning, knowledge transfer and feeding a pool of innovative ideas.
- Use a project charter from the outset to develop a common understanding of the mandate and facilitate subsequent decisions
- Consider when planning an experimental project that the time required to complete the different deliverables is longer than usual projects.
- Consult with external stakeholders to confirm the needs of the targeted clientele.
- Engage all internal stakeholders from the beginning.

In addition, the conclusions of the Implementation and Reporting of Results are as follows:

Internally, the project fostered an innovative work culture in several ways, including the use of new program terms and conditions, the implementation of new practices (including the inclusion of the GBA+ perspective throughout the project), increased cross-sectoral collaboration within CED and the use of innovative tools.

Externally, the winners increased their sales and the number of employees. The CED project also leveraged funding for their project. From the communications plan, the visibility of CED among youth and women in STEM was increased, and the communications team received a national award in communications

Finally, experimentation made it possible to identify the following learnings when implementing experimentation initiatives or targeting specific clienteles:

- Leverage cross-sectoral collaboration early in the design phase.
- Allow time between design completion and implementation.
- Provide beneficial incentives to engage target groups.
- Consider ways to increase regional participation in competitions that require closer links with universities.