Program Guidelines
Export Accelerator for Diverse-Owned Businesses

1. Program Objectives

The Export Accelerator for Diverse-Owned Businesses (the "Program") supports diverse-owned businesses to expand into new Canadian markets. It focuses on practical strategy and execution, providing expert guidance, the right tools, and direct support to help businesses build sustainable export operations and achieve tangible results in new markets.

The Program's core objectives are:

- **Get Export-Ready:** Businesses receive a practical gap analysis and expert support to strengthen their market strategy, refine product-market fit, and build an actionable plan to expand across Canada.
- **Make High-Value Connections:** Each business is matched with a minimum of five qualified buyers, distributors, or partners – not just leads, but curated introductions that can fast-track market entry and create real commercial opportunities.

Businesses are chosen through a competitive selection process. Selected businesses will then work one-on-one with a matchmaking expert to achieve these goals. Each cohort serves up to ten (10) businesses, and a cohort runs for eight (8) weeks.

2. Eligible Applicants

All applicants must meet the following criteria:

A. Ownership & Diversity

The business must be at least 51% owned, operated, and controlled by one or more individuals from the following equity-deserving groups:

a. 2SLGBTQIA+ Community
a. Indigenous Peoples
b. Women
c. Veterans
d. People living with Disabilities
e. Black Nova Scotians and African Nova Scotians
f. Other Racialized People

B. Geographic & Operational Capacity

a. Be registered in Nova Scotia (Registry of Joint Stock Companies) and in good standing.
b. Have a permanent establishment in Nova Scotia.
c. Have most of its workforce residing in Nova Scotia (some exceptions may apply where it can be demonstrated that the economic benefit can be accrued to Nova Scotia).

C. Financials

a. Have a minimum of $300,000 in annual gross revenue (exemptions may apply).
b. Be able to provide two (2) years of audited financial statements or reviewed financial records upon request.
c. Must have no outstanding or pending claims/litigation, injunctions, judgements, orders, legal or administrative actions or similar proceedings against the Invest Nova Scotia business, its principals and/or any related business(es).
d. The business, principals and/or any related business(es) shall not be in default of any obligations under any form of financial assistance and/or incentive program from Invest Nova Scotia, the Province of Nova Scotia, or by any agency of the Province of Nova Scotia. For the purpose of these criteria, the Credit Union Small Business Loan Guarantee Program is considered a form of financial assistance provided by the Province of Nova Scotia.

D. Export Readiness

The business must demonstrate a clear potential by having a product or service that possess a:

a. commercially successful product/service.
b. draft export strategy/plan. The fillable Export Strategy Canvas can be found here. The Export Strategy Canvas is a template that helps businesses map out the target markets & customers, distribution channel types, international value preposition etc.

Businesses not eligible under the Program:

a. Franchisees
b. Games of chance operations and bingo halls
c. Personal service providers, except where the project represents a unique and/or strategic opportunity with potential economic benefit, incremental sales outside of Nova Scotia, and/or job creation, and the product/service is scalable (Contact the Regional Business Development Advisor in your area to discuss.)
d. Real estate developers, agents or brokers
e. Licensed liquor establishments whose primary business is alcohol sales (except for production breweries, brew pubs, wineries and distilleries)
f. Distributors, agents or traders including retailers, except where value-added products or services are part of the deliverables or for the purpose of selling Nova Scotia products/services abroad
g. Associations
h. Professional service providers, unless certified, represent a unique and/or strategic opportunity with potential economic benefit, incremental sales outside of Nova Scotia and/or job creation
i. Businesses eligible to receive funding under the Creative Industries Fund
j. Tourism operators
k. Publicly funded organizations
l. Non-revenue-generating not-for-profit organizations

3. Program Criteria & Expected Commitment

a. Guarantee the active participation of at least one primary decision-maker (e.g., Founder, CEO, Export Director) in the entire eight-week program. This includes attending all scheduled one-on-one strategy sessions, being prepared for meetings, and responding promptly to requests from the consultant and the designated Invest Nova Scotia Export Development Executive.

b. Selected businesses must agree to utilize the consultant procured by Invest Nova Scotia for the matchmaking services. Program resources and funding cannot be applied to support the work of any other third-party matchmaker or business development consultant the company is currently engaged with for this project.

c. Understand that a business may only participate in the Program once to ensure the opportunity is extended to a wide range of diverse-owned companies.

Priority in the competitive selection process will be given to businesses that possess a valid Supplier Diversity Certification. For more information on how to obtain certification, reach out to Tamasha Fernando at Tamasha.Fernando@investnovascotia.ca.

4. Application Process

To apply for Export Accelerator for Diverse-Owned Businesses, please complete the application form via the submission form page.

If this is your first time applying to a program with Invest Nova Scotia, please contact Tamasha Fernando to request your Customer Number. You will need this number to submit your application online.

The application portal will be open from **June 09, 2026, to July 14, 2026**.

Complete applications must be submitted by **3:00 PM (ADT) on or before July 14, 2026**. Applications received after this deadline will not be accepted or reviewed.

Applications should be submitted via (Link) along with the following attachments:

- Export Strategy: Completed export strategy canvas. The export strategy canvas can be found here.
- Optional: Supplier Diversity Certification – A copy of a valid supplier diversity certificate from WBE Canada, CQCC, IWSCC, WE Connect International or CAMSC. Businesses willing to obtain certification must state their interest in their application. However, priority will be given to businesses that possess valid certification.

Application Review & Selection

The Invest Nova Scotia selection committee will review all complete applications received by the deadline.

Incomplete applications, or those missing requested follow-up information within 3 business days of a notification from Invest Nova Scotia, will be automatically declined.

Promising applicants may be invited to a short discussion upon initial review. The selection committee will coordinate the timing of these discussions directly with finalists.

Participation Fee
The Program requires a participation fee of **CAD $200.00**.

Successful applicants will receive an Export Accelerator for Diverse-Owned Businesses Letter of Offer ("Agreement") outlining the program's terms and conditions. To confirm their spot, selected companies must return the signed Agreement and pay the $200 participation fee before it is executed by Invest Nova Scotia.

5. Additional Information

a. Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Information collected in connection with the Program is subject to, and will be treated in accordance with, the Nova Scotia Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

a. Public Announcements and Disclosure of Information

Approved applicants must consent to participate in any public announcement relating to the Program and related accomplishments, as well as the release of the Program information (e.g., company name, sector, region) and the total Program funding amount being approved to the media and public.

b. Program Survey

Businesses must complete the feedback survey for the Program and participate in Invest Nova Scotia's annual corporate data collection process for two (2) years following the project's completion.

c. Application / Document Submission

All documentation must be submitted via the website. For questions, please contact:

Tamasha Fernando, Export Development Executive
Invest Nova Scotia
Tamasha.Fernando@investnovascotia.ca