The year that VFC graduated from bootstraps to systems.

Canadian businesses’ ability to address emerging and social and economic challenges depends on the entrepreneurial skill of individuals. This year’s report features stories of how VFC training has impacted our community, where the rubber meets the road.
Welcome Letter

Impact Stories

Program Numbers

Thanks
Dear Stakeholders,

2019 was a year marked by organizational growth for Venture for Canada. Growth characterized by the number of youth served, the number of provinces we operate in, and the types of programs that we run.

According to a recent McKinsey study, while 83% of educators feel youth are ready for work, only 34% of employers and 44% of youth agree. There is an increasing disconnect between the skills that young people have and the skills that young people need. Increasingly, in a rapidly changing world, young people need entrepreneurial skills, such as creativity, adaptability, and nimbleness, to succeed.

Venture for Canada empowers youth to pursue entrepreneurial careers and create positive social, economic, and environmental impact. Through profiling the stories of VFC Fellows, interns, and Fellow alumni, this report illustrates the positive influence that Venture for Canada has on young people, small businesses, and communities across this country.

Since its humble beginnings six years ago, the Fellowship program’s impact has grown considerably. The annual cohort has tripled in size, and the program’s influence has expanded to six provinces, including most recently British Columbia. From the organization’s earliest days, there has been a significant emphasis on the importance of community. It’s wonderful to see the social bonds and friendships that exist amongst Fellow alumni even years after completing the program. We are also thrilled to see the recent launch of the Fellow Alumni Council, which will design, build, and execute programming by and for alumni.

The internship program also experienced significant growth last year. Nearly 300 students participated in 2019. In the upcoming year, we are excited to expand the impact of the internship program to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, as well as deliver new innovative training to support VFC’s interns from coast to coast.

Over the last six years, Venture for Canada has grown into a community of thousands of people, including Fellow alumni, Fellows, interns, staff, volunteers, employers, and supporters. We want to thank everyone whose contribution helped make 2019 such a year of growth and for making the #vfccommunity so dynamic.

The recent COVID-19 crisis demonstrates more than ever the need for VFC’s programs as recent graduates and students across Canada are struggling to find employment. We remain as committed as ever to enriching the entrepreneurial ecosystem during this challenging and unprecedented time.

SCOTT STIRRET
CEO & Founder
Venture For Canada

PARM GILL
Board Chair, VFC
Managing Partner, Gill Group
Three Hundred Interns and Counting!

A Program Team That’s Invested in Your Success.

“Other people should know about the energy that the organization provides. It delivers insightful content in an engaging way, and as a participant you really feel that the internship team is invested in your success.”

Alexandra Webb
2019 (NS)

My challenge before VFC? I always felt I had an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ but knew I was using it only within the safety of an existing enterprise.

Hearing entrepreneurs speak about their journeys and the challenges they overcame changed my perspective. It ignited the idea that entrepreneurship is something that I could take on.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development? The Internship Program gave me a chance to regain confidence in my ‘work’ skills. VFC delivers insightful content in an engaging way—participants really feel that VFC is invested in your success.

Through the virtual learning assignments I developed and applied skills before returning to the work world.

What changed? I’m now part of a network of engaged, visionary people. It motivates me to continue to develop my skills and approach issues with the entrepreneurial and creative mindset that the Venture for Canada program alumni share.
I Learned About the Importance of Networking & Collaboration.

“VFC plays a huge role in demonstrating youth engagement in businesses and the importance of voice in youth about their placement. We are the ones who will be guiding the way of businesses and organizations and what that should look like for the future. What we learn, who we learn it from and who we pass it onto is important to shaping the business industry.”

My challenge before VFC? I always worried that when I joined an organization people in higher positions wouldn’t have the time to guide or teach me. My VFC Internship proved to me this was not the case. I gained a better understanding of how a small business operates, and learned the value of networking and the importance of collaboration at a startup.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development? My Internship wasn’t just a work placement that is routinized. It was a constant process of learning new skills on-the-job, through VFC training, and through interns in different placements across Canada.

What changed? I now appreciate the value of connecting with others and growing my network.

I Stepped Out of My Comfort Zone.

“I learned how to be more comfortable working in teams and exposed me to different ideas.”

My challenge before VFC? My biggest hurdle before participating in VFC’s internship program was that I actively avoided challenging situations. Through the training and work experience I received through VFC, I was encouraged to push myself and step out of my comfort zone.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development? VFC’s internship program helped me grow by pushing me to continuously learn, making me more comfortable with working in teams, and exposing me to different ideas from those around me.

What changed? VFC gave me the opportunity to work with different team dynamics and those prepared me for the several teams I currently work with.
What Was Anyone Going to Teach Me After Grad School? Turns Out a Lot!

“It is not just a career opportunity. I really believe that being involved with the program has opened avenues that I never would have considered in many aspects of my life.”

My challenge before VFC? I found the job search required too much patience and trust in a process beyond my control. Waiting for employers to sift through candidates and select only some for interviews was hard. So was waiting on employer decisions and accepting rejection. It got frustrating at times, but because of VFC, I was able to dig a little deeper and discover a new level of discipline and creativity.

I find myself leaning into these skills every day in my current role.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development?

Immersion in the startup world gave me a chance to practice getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. I learned to navigate through fear, think through risks, and show up powerfully through my actions.

The relationships I’ve made through the program have also been transformational. My new network and I continue to support and push each other to be the best versions of ourselves. I’m proud to be among an incredible group of individuals at VFC.

What changed? Being a part of the Fellowship Program is so much more than a career opportunity. Not only do I have a role that I love, but I’ve also started a business, moved provinces, and created a new life for myself. The VFC experience was truly the catalyst that set my life in motion.

This program can alter the trajectory of your life if you’re open to the possibility of change and growth.
I Have Been Enlightened In Ways I
Never Expected.

“I wish other people knew the value of meeting some of Canada’s
brightest graduates. They have enlightened me in ways I never
expected, that alone is worth applying for. You get to meet life-
changing people.”

My challenge before VFC? Before
joining the Fellowship Program, I’d
struggled with my public speaking skills.
I’d always assume there was someone in
the room who knew more than I did, focus
on that and lose my confidence before
speaking.

My program instilled in me the
reassurance and skills I needed to
overcome these fears. I now have
confidence I did not possess before
joining VFC.

Aspects of the experience that were
essential to your development?
The most rewarding aspect of my
VFC experience is the number of
opportunities that it opened in my life.
Learning about industries, practices and
startup realities paralleled self-discovery.

What changed? VFC gave me a
chance to develop skills that traditional
post-secondary education can’t while
connecting me to a community of
ambitious, talented, creative new
graduates.

In hindsight, my growth in areas I never
expected alone made the program worth
applying for.

The VFC Community is a Great Support
Network.

“Embrace the diversity of opportunities and learn from others.
VFC does the networking groundwork for you so you can
actually take time to enjoy it.”

My challenge before VFC? I’ve always
struggled with anxiety. Through VFC I’ve
developed a great support network that I
can lean on when things get tough.

Aspects of the experience that were
essential to your development? VFC
pushes you to understand that learning
about yourself is a life skill, especially
beneficial early on in your career. The
program’s guidance led me to a better
understanding of who I am, what I want,
and what brings me joy.

What changed? Meeting people
from across Canada makes the overall
experience fun. The network I developed
through VFC includes friends I became
close with during the program.

I’m working at an early stage startup and
the VFC Community has been there for
me with go-to support and advice. We
lean on each other on the bad days and
share wins on the good days! The VFC
Community is a huge part of how I got to
this point and who I am today.
2019 Alumni Highlights

This Year Broke the 100 Fellowship Alumni Barrier

The VFC Fellowship Inspired Me to Have Courage and Take Career Risks.

“I likely wouldn’t have taken the same kinds of risks I did as part of VFC. I also likely wouldn’t have had the same amount of courage given to me by the support network.”

My challenge before VFC? VFC gave me the courage to take risks and develop my network. The Fellowship experience has helped me talk through my challenges with others who are experiencing similar situations.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development? VFC gave me the opportunity to pursue a career path that isn’t talked about in school—creating value for others.

My personal growth happened faster surrounded by creative entrepreneurs than it would have if I’d gone on this journey myself.

What changed? As an Alumni, VFC was an amazing jumping off point, and influential experience I’m proud of. VFC is a great way to make friends once you’re out of school and VFC fellows are some of the kindest and most welcoming people I know.
VFC Training as an Accelerant.

“VFC continues to be an active part of my professional journey.”

My challenge before VFC? I was driven to be an entrepreneur and founded a non-profit back in 2015. But scaling it was a challenge. VFC gave me the tools I needed to successfully grow my company. I launched a year or two earlier than I expected to. I’ll always be grateful to VFC for that acceleration.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development? As an Alumni, I know I can count on the community VFC has built for answers, networking with Fellows at potential partner startups, or just to hear a supportive voice. VFC continues to be an active part of my journey.

What changed? The future of learning is innovation and VFC is a leader in providing people with space, resources, networks, and tools to do so. I’m grateful to VFC for accelerating my journey and exposing me to both opportunities and personal growth moments.

I’m eager to give back to the community in any way I can, and will always be an advocate for the organization and its essential work.

LUCÍA GALLARDO
2017 (ON)

The Fellowship Provides a Community of Support

“At VFC I was encouraged to stretch myself out of my comfort zone.”

My challenge before VFC? My education taught me how to write, but prior to VFC I found talking and presenting to be challenging and uncomfortable. I was encouraged to stretch beyond my comfort zone.

Aspects of the experience that were essential to your development? There are so many aspects of VFC beyond getting a job. The VFC community is game to offer advice and keeps its finger on the pulse of Canada’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. VFC exposed me to opportunities at tech companies and helped me understand my options.

What changed? I went to school in the USA and didn’t know anyone in Canada before joining VFC. VFC’s strong support network has become a large part of my community in Canada. They’re a great sounding-board when I have challenges and I’m grateful for the skills I’ve been able to apply to my job. I’m also excited to be able to give back and share my experiences with current Fellows. I’m proud to be a part of this community.

LISA HUANG
2016 (ON)
Testimonials

Employer Stories

Newfoundland & Labrador

“VFC makes applying for funding easy. They reduce barriers with a short process and offer an attainable subsidy for startups. The program is flexible, the training is relevant and our interns leave with a strong sense of community.”

CAROLANN HARDING
Smartice
Executive Director, Intern Employer

Nova Scotia

“Startup employees need to be able to jump in and add value where they can, and VFC Fellows come to us with a can-do attitude. The skills Fellow’s develop through VFC give them a visible confidence boost.

VFC Fellows also stand out in that they are well-rounded. Someone who has been exposed to VFC training simply offers more value, sooner, than someone who hasn’t.”

SHAWN WILKIE
Talkatoo
CEO, Fellow & Intern Employer

British Columbia

“One of our best hires came out of the VFC Fellowship Program and we’ve already given them equity in the company. Fellows come with a startup mentality, are able to quickly adapt to a nimble environment, and have great sense of responsibility.

It’s a great program if you’re looking for entrepreneurial, values-aligned candidates to join your team.”

VALERIE SONG
Ava Technologies
CEO & Co-Founder, Fellow Employer
The VFC Models by the Numbers

300%

Program Growth 2018 to 2019

Students, recent grads, small business employers, oh my! Our participation growth boomed with the first full year of our Internship Program in Atlantic Canada, and our expansion of our Fellowship Employers to recent grads and startups in British Columbia.
In 2019, our numbers exploded. With the introduction of our internship program we virtually doubled our employer partners and the number of post-secondary institutions we work with. The increase in program participants shown here is a direct result of our enhanced ability to recruit bigger numbers of students and recent grads.
ROI

Building a Future

$135m

IN FELLOWSHIP REVENUE DOLLARS *

Through our Fellowship surveys, employers communicate the value directly contributed by well-trained, adaptable, and emotionally resilient Fellows. The numbers add up when you factor in less need for training, support, culture fit, and reduced churn costs.

* total reported increase in employer revenue attributable to VFC fellows.
Satisfaction

People want to talk about it

FELLOWS 2019

96%

The extent to which fellows are satisfied with their participation in the Venture for Canada Fellowship program and feel they are better prepared to have an entrepreneurial / impactful career

94%

The percentage of program participants who would recommend VFC

100%

The percentage of employers who indicate a Fellowship participant met or exceeded their expectations *

INTERNS 2019

98%

The percentage of program participants who would recommend VFC

80%

The percentage of employers who indicate that a VFC Intern met or exceeded their expectations

58%

of interns come from underrepresented populations **

EMPLOYERS 2019

100%

The percentage of employers who would recommend VFC

* from the 2019 fellow and employer survey

** Interns (chose to) identify as women in STEM; Newcomers to Canada, Persons with disabilities; Indigenous; or studying in their first year

We ask for net promoter type scores (e.g. would you recommend the program?) at least once a year for Fellows and three times per year for Interns. The high level of satisfaction tells us we’re doing something right but we also see this as a research opportunity. Our surveys include open-ended responses and leave space for comprehensive consideration. The insights gleaned from the feedback informs rapid iteration on our programs.
Investing in People

Education is at the core of all VFC programming. These numbers, pulled from VFC’s learning management system, provide a snapshot of how much we’ve grown since 2018 -- nearly 1000 hours of online learning and 25,000 videos watched, since we’ve made online learning assets available to our participants.

In 2019 VFC graduated from training activities to a training system, which maps all VFC training to the key entrepreneurial skills needed in today’s dynamic workforce. Anchored by our new Learning Management System, VFC can now track training engagement and outputs for every program participant.

| HOURS OF LIVE LEARNING DELIVERED IN 2019 | 256 |
| LEARNERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN VFC PROGRAMMING IN 2019 | 426 |
| HOURS OF ONLINE LEARNING DELIVERED IN 2019 | 989 |
| LEARNING VIDEOS UTILIZED BY INTERNS AND FELLOWS IN 2019 | 25,000 |
To all of our donors, sponsors and funders big and small; in five years we’ve gone from a team of two with a bootstrapped budget to 425+ program participants and almost 1200 hours of entrepreneurial skills-training provided. Your support enabled this growth, and the resulting exponential impact. Thank you.