

INDIGENOUS FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

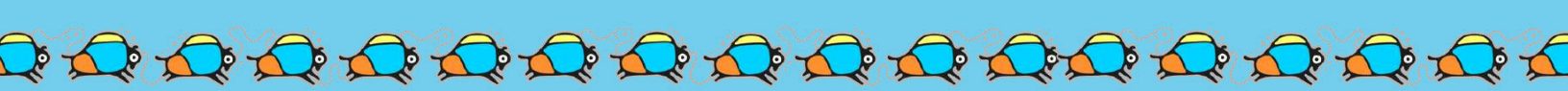
ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



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Land Acknowledgement

The team at Indigenous Friends Association (IFA) is deeply grateful to live, work, and collaborate on the traditional lands of Indigenous Peoples across Canada. While IFA is a remote organization, our staff and collaborators are located in many regions throughout Canada and beyond. As such, we recognize that the work we do is carried out on the ancestral and unceded territories of many Indigenous Nations.

We honour and respect the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who have lived on and cared for these lands. We acknowledge our responsibilities as individuals living and working on these territories, and we recognize the continued presence and contributions of Indigenous Peoples across the country.

At IFA, we are committed to meaningful reconciliation through relationship-building, listening, and action. We remain dedicated to amplifying Indigenous voices, supporting Indigenous-led innovation, and walking alongside communities with humility and accountability as we work to create inclusive digital spaces and opportunities for all.

Message From Our Leadership

It is my honour to address you as the new Executive Director of the Indigenous Friends Association (IFA). This year, we advanced our mission to cultivate digital pathways and increase Indigenous representation in the Tech sector, remaining rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and centring self-determination.

Our IndigiTECH Mentorship Program has reached over 660 individuals, with 74% completing Phase 2 training. Through partnerships with York University, BMO, Accenture, and others, 55% of mentees secured internships. Meanwhile, our IndigiTAL programme registered 300 participants across Turtle Island, with 94 graduates exploring the intersections of art and technology. These initiatives directly address Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action 7 and 66.

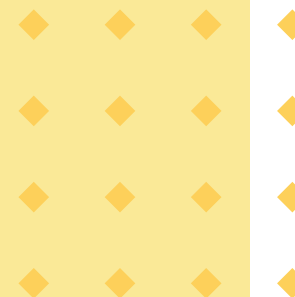
We have evolved our Mentorship Department into a dedicated team, launching IFA's first in-house curriculum, which is grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems. This supported over 150 one-on-one check-ins and more than 20 professional development hours. The integration of the Mentor City platform further enabled connection and growth.

We facilitated 87 community sessions featuring nearly 80 Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and professionals, centring on critical themes such as data sovereignty and entrepreneurship. Partnerships with seven organisations – including Deloitte Canada and Toronto Metropolitan University – enabled 38 internships, with 22 mentees undertaking advanced web development roles at IFA. Our Youth Advisory Council fostered monthly intergenerational mentorship.

We will deepen land-based learning across programmes, scale IndigiTECH through industry collaborations, and expand our Cultural Advisory Council. Our research contributions to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Action Plan will continue championing Indigenous data sovereignty.

Together, we build inclusive digital spaces where communities flourish.

Keshav Kant
Executive Director
Indigenous Friends Association



Who We Are

The Indigenous Friends Association (IFA) is an Indigenous-led tech not-for-profit organization that is reshaping the digital landscape by centering Indigenous knowledge, values, and leadership. IFA exists at the intersection of Indigenous heritage and digital innovation, working to ensure Indigenous communities exercise full authority over their participation in the digital world. Through community-guided education, ethical tech development, and collaborative research, we strive to build inclusive digital spaces where Indigenous Peoples can assert their sovereignty and flourish on their own terms.

IFA has established a strong foundation in delivering hands-on digital literacy programs and training grounded in Indigenous pedagogies. Our initiatives create holistic, culturally relevant learning environments that employ technology, design, coding, and digital arts as instruments of self-determination and cultural expression. We are proud to support the next generation of Indigenous tech leaders while actively responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action particularly Nos. 7 and 66 by confronting the systemic education and employment barriers so Indigenous youth can lead their own pathways to success.

Our Mission

To cultivate opportunities that advance digital pathways rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, fostering community connection and driving positive change for generations to come.

Our Vision

Indigenous Peoples leveraging technology to amplify their worldviews, promote tech equity, and advance digital sovereignty.

PROGRAMS

IndigiTECH

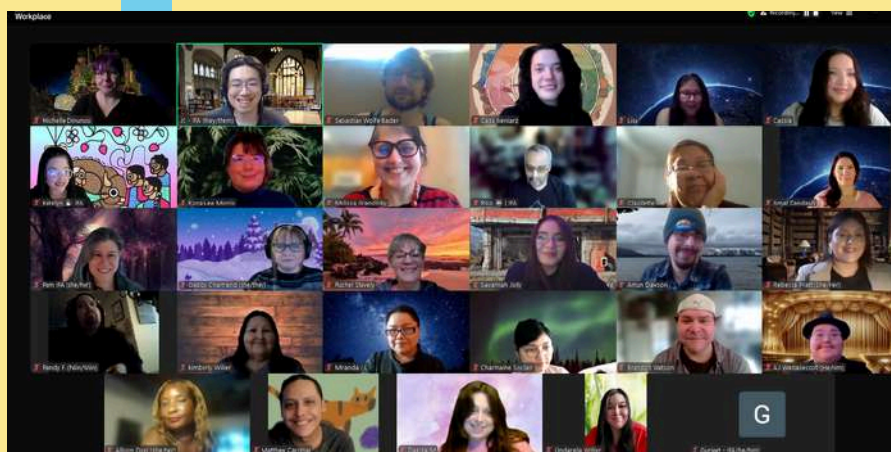
In 2024, the IndigiTECH Mentorship Program at IFA continued to grow and evolve, delivering meaningful impact for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners through expanded mentorship, enriched curriculum, and stronger pathways into the tech industry. Now in its third year, the program provided structured, phase-based training in web development and digital skills, complemented by mentorship, coaching, and industry exposure. Program delivery was supported by a dedicated team who focused on building both technical and soft skills, offering learners a well-rounded foundation for career growth.

Across all groups, over 150 one-on-one check-ins and 20+ hours of professional development sessions were delivered, alongside structured mentorship circles and weekly support coaching, reinforcing academic success and wellness.

The program also focused on strengthening connections with the broader tech ecosystem. Internship partnerships expanded to include York University, Critical Mass, BMO, Accenture, and others, creating valuable opportunities for mentees to gain paid, real-world experience. The speaker series continued to be a cornerstone of community engagement, featuring inspiring Indigenous professionals who offered mentorship and career guidance.

The IndigiTECH curriculum was refined based on mentee feedback and shifting industry needs, particularly in Phase 2, where updates aimed to better prepare learners for employment. A restructuring of the Partnerships Team helped streamline collaboration with external stakeholders and began exploring alternative success pathways beyond traditional internships. However, challenges such as internship participation, communication, decline in DEI initiatives, and overall retention remained key focus areas. To address these, new onboarding processes, improved tracking, and enhanced support systems were introduced mid-year.

Looking ahead to 2025, IndigiTECH is focused on scaling its impact. Plans are in place to expand mentorship and internship programming, deepen alumni engagement, and grow the number of industry partners. The IndigiTECH team is also working toward embedding land-based learning and Indigenous knowledge more fully into the curriculum, while continuing to invest in wellness resources and career readiness initiatives. By leveraging program data and feedback, the team is committed to driving continuous improvement and creating stronger, more equitable pathways for Indigenous learners in tech. We remain committed to deepening this work and helping our communities thrive in the digital space.



Picture from IndigiTECH Cohort Session

Testimonials



Exciting Next Steps

"Today, I received my certification from my time with IFA! The past few months have been an exciting and rewarding experience. While I'm still figuring out my next steps, I'm thrilled about what's ahead. A huge thank you to all the faculty and staff for being so supportive, encouraging, and always pushing us to be our best selves. It's been truly wonderful!"

— **IndigiTECH Graduate**

Blending Tradition with Innovation

"Thank you, IndigiTECH community—students and staff—for your dedication to merging Indigenous knowledge with technology. Your work uplifts Indigenous cultural pride while opening doors to fields like Web Development, UX Design, Digital Art, and Entrepreneurship. I am incredibly grateful for the tools and support provided—my laptop, art pad, and financial assistance—which allowed me to fully commit to this 12-week program. Coming from a background where I once feared I might 'break the internet' to now coding and developing my own website has been truly empowering. Through career coaching, business training, and professional development, I've gained the confidence to explore online employment opportunities and seek an Artist-in-Residence role or paid internship. To the IndigiTECH team—thank you for everything, including the graduation gift from Indigenous Box. I'm deeply appreciative of this journey and all of your support!"

— **IndigiTECH Graduate**

Building Confidence and a Future in Business

"The IFA program gave me the tools and guidance to turn an idea into something real. As a first-time entrepreneur, I never imagined I could build my own brand or start a business. Before this, I had always worked for someone else. Now, I have the confidence and knowledge to take on something bigger than myself. Even when I faced personal hardships, the program was incredibly understanding and supportive. They never let me give up, and that made all the difference. I especially want to thank Pam Nicholas—she was my biggest supporter and someone I could truly trust. I don't know if I could have done this without her. Programs like IFA are rare. They genuinely want to see us succeed, and for that, I will always be grateful."

— **IndigiTECH Graduate**



IndigiTAL

IFA continued to grow and evolve the IndigiTAL Program, providing Indigenous participants across Turtle Island with a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of art, technology, and community. This year, IFA delivered four virtual sessions—three editions of *Connecting Through Art* and one edition of *Connecting Through Technology*. To date, 127 participants have completed the program, with one final session concluded at the end of March. Through engaging and culturally rooted content, participants explored themes such as Indigenous history, cultural traditions, community building, entrepreneurship, and the ongoing processes of decolonizing and Indigenousizing technology.

The IndigiTAL Program remains grounded in its two core streams: one focused on digital tools and foundational tech skills, and the other centered on artistic exploration and expression. This dual approach has helped participants build both creative confidence and technical proficiency. Key skill-building areas this year included web development, digital security, privacy, Google Suite, Zoom, and basic programming logic. Participants also had the opportunity to connect with Indigenous and non-Indigenous industry professionals, gaining valuable insight into potential career paths and business models.

Feedback from this year's cohorts reflected significant growth in digital literacy and artistic confidence. Participants reported feeling more capable, supported, and inspired, with many acknowledging that the program helped them realize their untapped potential. Several graduates have since joined IFA's IndigiTECH Mentorship Program, taken steps toward tech careers, launched online art businesses, or returned to school to pursue further education in digital arts or technology.

IFA also strengthened its network of industry collaborators, welcoming guest speakers who brought a wide range of perspectives and expertise to the program. Notable contributors included Maria Montejó, representatives from Royal Bank of Canada and Teqare, Dr. Kathy Absolon, Adam Thomson of Shopify, Dallas Pootlass, Maria Livingston, Nodin Cutfeet, and Shermayn Menicoche. These partnerships continue to enhance the learning experience, fostering meaningful connections between participants and professionals working in the field.

Overall, the INDIGiTAL Program continues to be a transformative space where Indigenous culture, digital innovation, and community capacity-building intersect, furthering IFA's mission to support Indigenous futures through education, creativity, and collaboration

“

“I have learned independence and I have a voice to use my tech skills to help indigenous communities”

“

“I really enjoyed the cultural teachings - where I am based I have limited resources. It encouraged me to step more forward to learning more and look up more programming and information available to me”

“

“Having that encouragement and being open to talk about anything that is going to help us, break us out of our shyness and our shells”

“

“Guest speakers were amazing! All of them, each of their perspectives was so amazing to hear”

Impact & Reach



74%

Successfully completed IndigiTECH Phase 2

660+

individuals reached for IndigiTECH Cohorts

55%

IndigiTECH Internship Placement Rate

Over **300**

registrations in the IndigiTAL iterations in 2024 - 2025

94

participants graduated the IndigiTAL iterations in 2024

161

registrants for 2025 IndigiTAL Cohort



Mentorship

The IFA Mentorship Department has evolved from a single-coordinator model into a fully-fledged team, underpinned by a robust network of external mentors. This expansion from Mentorship Coordinator to a dedicated Mentorship Manager and Coordinator has enabled us to deliver a more responsive, inclusive, and culturally grounded ecosystem. Over the past year, our growing team has enhanced one-on-one mentorship, seamless onboarding of external mentors, and the coordination of peer-led Mentorship Circles, all tailored to support Indigenous youth in their personal, professional, and technological journeys.

In 2024, we launched IFA's first in-house mentorship curriculum, developed through insights gained from two successful cohorts of the Digital Wellness external mentorship program. The Mentorship Manager and Coordinator co-designed a soft-skills curriculum rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, relational mentorship, and strength-based approaches.

This year, we also made strides in strengthening the foundation of the mentorship program. A PhD practicum student has contributed significantly by reviewing all mentorship documentation through an inclusive lens, with a focus on Two-Spirit inclusion. They have helped expand the mentorship framework and created a resource guide connecting mentees to third-party supports that encourage holistic self-determination and community-based growth. To further this work, community focus groups are scheduled for February to ensure all materials reflect the needs and voices of our community.

In addition, we have been working toward a centralized mentorship database and are in the process of developing a comprehensive Mentorship Handbook to accompany our curriculum in the new year. Feedback from both mentors and mentees has informed major updates to all mentorship-related materials, including presentation and training content.

IFA has also welcomed the valuable support of a prior mentee who volunteered to review mentorship materials and presentation aesthetics. Her insights have not only improved our content but also encouraged her to grow into a mentor role herself. Her involvement demonstrates how mentee-centred programming creates pathways for leadership and employment readiness.

All participants now have access to the Mentor City platform, a mentorship-based learning management system supported by Mentor Canada. This digital space allows mentors and mentees to connect professionally, share reflections, and engage in additional learning outside of scheduled programming.

Looking ahead, we are preparing to launch Cohort 5 in April 2025 with a full complement of external mentors. As we move forward, we remain grounded in Indigenous values of relationship, reciprocity, and collective growth, while continuing to evolve our programming based on community feedback and lived experience.



Staff Development at IFA

IFA continues to recognize that its staff are at the heart of its mission and success. Staff development remains a priority, with a continued focus on fostering an environment of growth, inclusivity, and shared learning. This year, a range of professional development activities were undertaken to build both individual and collective capacity within the organization, ensuring IFA staff are equipped to contribute meaningfully to its strategic goals.

A key focus for the year was deepening cultural competency. The Community Engagement (CE) team led this work, delivering seven impactful cultural awareness sessions in collaboration with three Indigenous consultant organizations: Your Syilx Sisters (Kelsie and Lauren Marchand), Marni Hope (Independent Consultant), and Decolonize and Rise (Ariana Fotinakis and Vanessa Lesperance). These sessions provided critical tools and teachings rooted in Syilx knowledge, Blackfoot Winter Counts, and trauma-informed practices. Through this work, staff were guided to understand cultural sovereignty, relational accountability, and the importance of Indigenous self-determination. These learnings serve as a foundation for respectful engagement and support IFA's continued commitment to cultural continuity and community-led action.

Beyond formal training, IFA fostered continuous learning through regular team and staff engagement meetings. Monthly IFA Team Meetings continued to serve as a valuable platform for knowledge-sharing, cross-departmental collaboration, and building a cohesive organizational culture. These gatherings not only allowed staff to share project updates and reflect on IFA's strategic direction, but also encouraged dialogue on the cultural values that guide our work. Staff explored Indigenous worldviews, shared personal reflections, and collectively considered how to work in more equitable and respectful ways.

In addition, monthly staff engagement meetings were introduced as a space to connect more personally. These informal gatherings focused on staff wellness, relationship building, and fun. With creative themes such as "Spooky IFA Team Meeting" and "Holiday Sweater Day," these sessions encouraged staff to share stories, play games, and learn more about each other beyond their roles. This intentional space to foster connection and celebrate the diverse personalities within the team has helped nurture a stronger sense of belonging and camaraderie.

IFA remains committed to investing in the holistic development of its staff, providing both structured and organic opportunities for growth, reflection, and community-building. This multi-faceted approach ensures that all team members are supported to thrive, both professionally and personally, in alignment with the values and vision of the organization.

Community Engagement

Deepening Connections, Strengthening Community Leadership

At IFA, our Community Engagement team continues to nurture relationships that honour Indigenous knowledge, elevate youth voices, and foster long-term leadership. The 2024–2025 year marked an inspiring period of growth and reflection, rooted in our shared values of self-determination, cultural integrity, and community-led innovation.

Over the past year, our team facilitated 87 impactful sessions featuring nearly 80 Indigenous guest speakers (Elders, Knowledge Keepers, entrepreneurs, and tech professionals) who came together to share knowledge and stories. These sessions explored critical themes such as data sovereignty, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, and digital storytelling. By creating spaces for meaningful exchange, we support pathways for Indigenous innovation that remain grounded in culture and community.

These engagements weren't just moments, they were milestones. Alumni returned to mentor and share their journeys with the next generation, creating full-circle moments of reciprocity. One guest speaker transitioned into a leadership role on IFA's Board of Directors, and others have taken active roles in shaping key initiatives such as our Youth Advisory Council (YAC) and data sovereignty roundtables. These leadership pathways ensure our work remains community-informed and community-driven.



The Youth Advisory Council

The Youth Advisory Council continues to be a vibrant space where Indigenous youth gather monthly for mentorship, skill-building, and connection with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. These experiences help young leaders shape their futures while contributing to IFA's mission in powerful ways. Looking ahead, we're excited to form a Cultural Advisory Council that will bring together Elders, youth, and community leaders to guide our work and ensure it reflects the values and teachings of our people.

We remain committed to expanding alumni engagement, nurturing Indigenous leadership, and building a resilient network rooted in trust and shared vision. Whether by participating in programs, sharing knowledge, or introducing new collaborators, everyone has a role in strengthening our circle. Together, we continue to build a future where digital innovation and Indigenous knowledge thrive side by side.

Fundraising

This past year marked a period of meaningful growth and progress for fundraising at IFA, as we continued to broaden and diversify our funding sources in support of our mission to advance digital pathways rooted in Indigenous knowledge. Through strengthened partnerships and strategic campaigns, we have been able to expand our programs, deepen community engagement, and ensure long-term sustainability.

Our fundraising efforts were supported by a mix of funding streams:

- **Government Grants**
 - Federal and provincial funding dedicated to Indigenous initiatives enhanced the reach and impact of our educational offerings.
- **Corporate Partnerships**
 - Collaborations with socially responsible businesses provided both financial support and valuable in-kind contributions.
- **Foundation Support**
 - Grants from philanthropic foundations enabled us to scale existing programs and pilot new initiatives.
- **Individual Donors**
 - A growing base of individual donors reflects increasing community trust and commitment to our mission.

Throughout the year, we launched several targeted campaigns to drive donor engagement and increase awareness:

- **Tech Education Campaign (September):** Focused on raising funds to support digital skills training for Indigenous learners entering tech careers.
- **Giving Tuesday (November):** Participated in this global movement to amplify our mission and invite broader community involvement.

- **Year-End Appeal (December):**

Highlighted the tangible impact of donor contributions during the holiday season.

- **Monthly Donor Drive (March):**

Promoted the value of sustained, long-term giving for program continuity and organizational stability.

Engagement remains a cornerstone of our fundraising strategy. We continued to share impact stories and program updates through quarterly newsletters and digital platforms, providing our supporters with transparent insights into the real-world difference their contributions are making. This focus on storytelling and ongoing communication helps to foster lasting relationships and reinforces the value of every donation, large or small.

Through these collective efforts, IFA has significantly strengthened its fundraising capacity, expanded its reach, and built a more resilient foundation for future growth. As we continue to evolve, the support of our donors and partners will remain vital to achieving long-term impact and creating pathways to opportunity for Indigenous communities across Canada.

We are deeply grateful to our diverse network of supporters, including:

Canada

La fondation
McConnell
Foundation



Ontario
Trillium
Foundation



Fondation
Trillium
de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Foundation

Scotiabank



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

TEKsystems



mastercard
foundation

N Northeastern University
Toronto



Unifor
Social
Justice
Fund

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sociale

407 ETR
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FONDATION FAMILIALE
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TORONTO
FOUNDATION

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Groupe financier
Financial Group



CIBC
Foundation

recollective

ATLAS
CORPORATION

Partnerships

Building Pathways Together

At IFA, partnerships are more than collaborations, they are bridges to opportunity, growth, and transformation. Over the past year, we worked alongside organizations across sectors to co-create spaces where Indigenous talent can thrive, innovate, and lead. These relationships have expanded access to hands-on learning, critical skill-building, and career development opportunities rooted in cultural values and professional excellence.

IFA partnered with seven diverse organizations: York University, Turtle Island Technology Solutions Inc., Toronto Metropolitan University, Thomson Reuters Corporation, Global Indigenous Development Trust, Deloitte Canada, and the Aquatic Biosphere Society of Canada. Through these partnerships, we provided 109 mentees with access to meaningful learning experiences, with 68 actively participating in programming and 38 securing internships across industries. Among them, 22 mentees were selected for an advanced web development internship at IFA, equipping them with in-demand technical skills and real-world project experience.

We also celebrated a new milestone with the launch of a partnership with Cornerstone International Community College (CICCC), which awarded a full Digital Marketing scholarship to one of our mentees, beginning in April 2025. This collaboration represents more than an academic opportunity—it offers a platform for personal growth, industry readiness, and self-determined career development in the digital space. IFA were also selected as 2024 Semi-Finalists for the CharityVillage Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award, reinforcing our dedication to a more inclusive and equitable future.

Our commitment to sustainable success also includes supporting both mentees and employers. This year, we introduced Phase 2 Info Sessions, designed to strengthen pathways to career fulfillment. With 17 sessions and 7 employer networking events, we offered programming that ranged from interview prep to entrepreneurship and career coaching. These sessions supported mentees to clarify their goals while giving employers meaningful opportunities to build cultural competency and connect with emerging Indigenous talent.

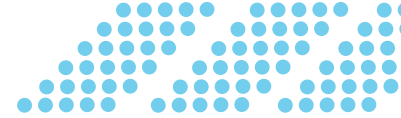
As our community grows, so does the cycle of giving back. Alumni continue to play a powerful role in mentoring new cohorts, sharing their journeys and providing encouragement. Christopher, an IndigiTECH alumnus, reflected on his return as a mentor:

“Thanks for the invite today! Glad to share my path with the new cohort and thank you for championing me. The past three months have been a dream.”

These moments remind us of the power of connection and the strength of our community-led approach. Through mentorship and partnership, we are cultivating an environment of mutual support and shared success.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to nurturing these relationships and inviting new collaborators into this journey. Whether you're a corporate leader, educator, nonprofit partner, or advocate, your support helps shape a more inclusive future for Indigenous communities. Together, we are building pathways rooted in respect, possibility, and lasting impact.

Research



The IFA's Research Department continued to grow its presence in the digital and data sovereignty space, deepening partnerships and supporting systemic change through research grounded in Indigenous self-determination.

IFA remained an active contributor to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Action Plan, strengthening its role as a sitting member of the UN Declaration Act (UNDA) Technical Working Group. This group includes:

- Indigenous partners
- Federal departments
- Subject-matter experts

Together, they collaborate closely with the UNDA Implementation Secretariat and associated advisory and data groups to support Indigenous-led evaluation, performance measurement, and meaningful policy alignment.

The department also advanced several collaborative initiatives focused on ethical data governance, cultural knowledge-sharing, and intersectional justice. Highlights include:

- A partnership with Northeastern University (NEU) and IFA's Volunteer Program for Newcomers and Immigrants
- Experiential learning opportunities rooted in Indigenous histories and contemporary realities
- Cultural exchanges, collective learning, and digital inclusion aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action

Throughout the year, IFA prioritized community-led research and dialogue on Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Key initiatives included:

- Roundtable series:
 - Indigenous Community Stories: The UN Declaration Action Plan Perspective on (Racism and Discrimination) Data Sovereignty
 - Elevated diverse community voices
 - Emphasized co-developing evaluation frameworks grounded in lived experience and Indigenous rights
- Focus group with IndigiTECH mentees:
 - Reinforced the need for collaborative approaches to data collection, analysis, and advocacy

Additional key achievements:

- Finalized IFA's contribution to the chapter "The New Digital Buffalo" in the second edition of Internet Decolonized (2024), exploring Indigenous digital sovereignty
- Concluded international recommendations for:
 - Regional indicators for the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization's Amazon Regional Observatory (ARO)
 - Funded by the EUROCLIMA+ Programme
 - Designed to strengthen data frameworks on climate vulnerability, biodiversity, and Indigenous rights across eight Amazonian countries

To support internal capacity, the department also led the development of:

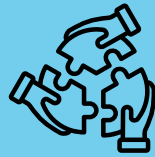
- IFA's centralized data management plan, which:
 - Establishes a comprehensive internal system for governance and accessibility
 - Enhances transparency and protects community-held knowledge
 - Supports data-driven decision-making across all programs

By centering Indigenous Data Sovereignty across research practices and operations, IFA continues to foster trust, accountability, and long-term impact for Indigenous communities navigating the digital world.



Social Media At IFA

IFA significantly expanded its online reach, growing both it's social media following and deepening engagement with key audiences. Our digital platforms continue to serve as powerful tools for storytelling, and community connection.



101,917



Individuals reached on Facebook this year

16.1%



Follower growth on Instagram

13,600+



Total Followers Across Platforms

1,800+



New Followers this year

482,800+

Individuals reached on
LinkedIn this year



