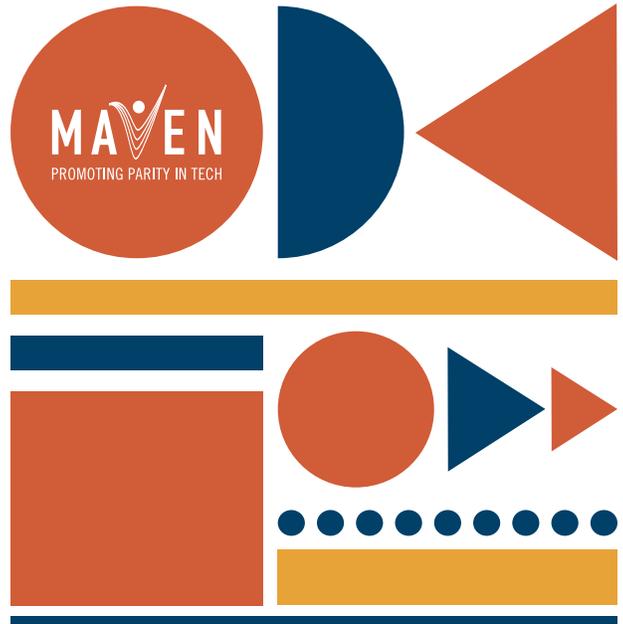


# THOMPSON AND UCN ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY



## PARTNERSHIPS

ICTAM and UCN are partners that share similar tech and education visions for Manitoba and the North. Maven is ICTAM's latest initiative to champion gender parity in Manitoba's tech sector. Over the next three years, Maven is supported through a grant with Status of Women Canada.

## ROUNDTABLE OVERVIEW

On January 15, 2019 Maven and University College of the North partnered for a roundtable at UCN's Thompson Campus. Industry educators, students and people working in tech were invited to discuss the attraction, retention and advancement of women in the tech sector. The roundtable was facilitated by Maven Program Coordinator, Amanda Emms.

## AREAS REPRESENTED – 22 ATTENDEES

ACADEMICS  
ENGINEERING  
MINING  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
NOT-FOR-PROFIT  
RECRUITERS  
SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
ASSESSMENT CENTRES  
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES  
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA  
ADULT LEARNING

## GROUP DISCUSSION RECAP

The roundtable opened with general discussion questions and welcomed feedback from all attendees. Below are key points from the conversation.

## THOMPSON'S TECH COMMUNITY

- Many participants didn't think Thompson had a strong and clearly defined tech community.
- Participants agreed there is a lack of awareness about tech and the industries using it. This contributes to the belief that Thompson is lagging in the tech industry.
- Many people don't see the use of personal technology like cell phones and video games as a link to technology.
- Attendees identified that there is a lack of promotion for local IT jobs as many are being contracted to people outside the community.
- There was a missed opportunity by not having local tech companies like MDS AeroTest at the discussion. It was noted that communication could be stronger between industry and the community.

## GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Remote access and extreme weather make it difficult for people in northern communities to access institutions that provide computers. This is problematic for people that don't own one.

- Access to proper Wi-Fi is a major issue. Many people in northern communities don't have adequate Internet access.
- Without proper access to the Internet, workers are not able to develop skills or work on-line. As remote work is becoming more common, this is a missed opportunity for individuals in Northern communities.

## BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

In the break-out sessions, the main group split-up and chose one of three smaller discussions. Below are key findings and take-aways from these focus groups.

## K-12 AND POST-SECONDARY

- There are gaps in the trades and technology academic programming. Companies are not hiring local people to do technical work.
- Systemic barriers, institutionalized racism, and the legacy of residential schools impact many Indigenous people and their experience within the education system.
- Many programs are not accessible to people in northern communities, so they are forced to relocate to bigger towns and cities. This transition can be a huge culture shock and the lack of emotional and financial support systems can impact their success.

- UCN has 12 regional centers that offer adult education, upgrading and post-secondary programs. These programs are very community driven. Currently, seven out of 10 people don't have their high school diplomas. This is one way to help raise these numbers.
- At UCN, many adult learners face immense barriers including family demands, affordable student housing and a lack of available spaces for childcare.
- Trade jobs are still predominantly occupied by men and gender bias was noted as a factor.

## PROPOSED OPPORTUNITIES

- Many adult learners don't have the luxury of time. Outcomes of programs need to promote the "what's in it for me" and portray a direct link to careers post-graduation.
- Promotion and awareness about tech and career opportunities are needed in northern communities. These messages should be diverse and help students see themselves in tech roles.
- Tech programs and clubs (for example – coding clubs geared to high school students) need to be consistent and available. Pop-up programs from traveling organizations isn't enough to sustain development. Children need accessible opportunities they can attend on their own discretion.
- The local high-school has an excellent apprenticeship program where students can earn up to eight of the 30 required credits required for graduating. We need to look at incorporating the tech sector into this program.



## PARENTAL LEAVE AND CHILDCARE

- Some women felt when they returned to work that they didn't exist and seen as abandoning their career.
- An organization can have good work policies, but the work culture might not match.
- Many felt the amount of time given for leave was reasonable.
- Women are still the primary people taking parental leave, and E.I. benefits are capped at 55 per cent of your average earning for a maximum yearly amount of \$51,300. Participants questioned the perception of what this cap means and its limitations for people who make more money.
- It's still primarily up to the mother to research and find a solution to raise and support a family.

## PROPOSED OPPORTUNITIES

- People should have the choice to remain involved with work while on leave. Currently, there is no option for this.
- If Employment Insurance covered training during parental leave, there could be less of a skills gap when people returned to work.
- There is a need for more on-site daycares and child-care options. Currently, there are a lack of options.
- The paperwork to apply for Employment Insurance can be complicated. More resources to out-line the process would be helpful.

## EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

- UCN has a Representative Workforce Policy (RWF) which includes a focus on men and women in non-traditional roles.
- It's important for people to make the connection to transferable skills (i.e. Computer games to control operator).
- Not having the pool of applicants in technology positions is a barrier.
- Infrastructure and over-crowding were experienced by some participants and seen as a barrier.

## PROPOSED OPPORTUNITIES

- Policy won't change early age perceptions or cultural influences. Influencers like parents and educators are big factors and need to be viewed as allies for change.
- Perception that women are treated differently when they make a mistake. Work-places need to address double standards and work towards inclusivity.
- There are currently five generations in the workforce, and they all have different levels of knowledge and skills. We need to implement practices that help people work together cohesively.