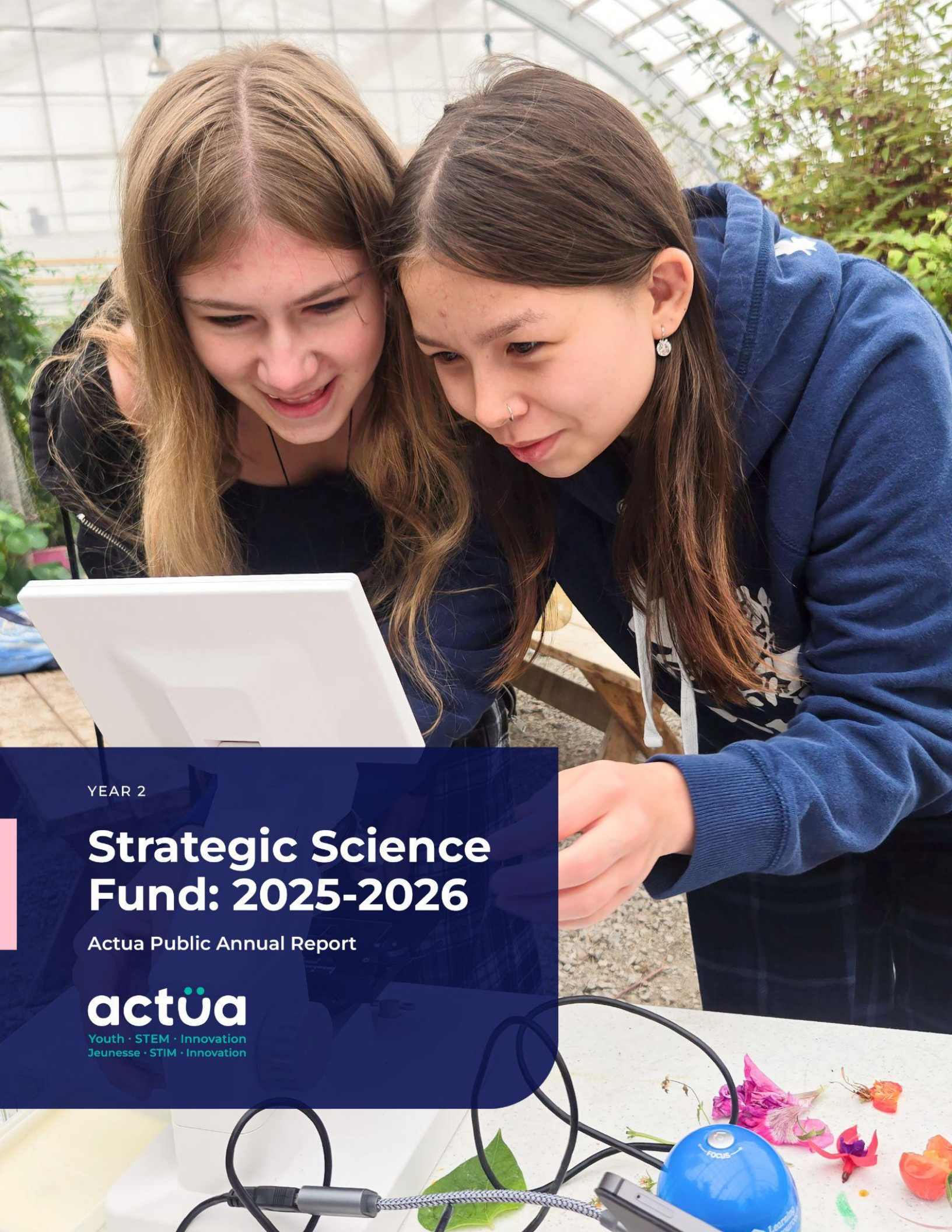


A photograph of two young women with long hair, one with blonde hair and one with dark hair, looking intently at a white tablet. They are in a greenhouse, with plants and a wooden bench visible in the background. The woman on the right is wearing a blue hoodie and a nose ring. The woman on the left is wearing a dark jacket. The image is partially covered by a dark blue overlay containing text and a logo.

YEAR 2

Strategic Science Fund: 2025-2026

Actua Public Annual Report

actua

Youth · STEM · Innovation
Jeunesse · STIM · Innovation

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Executive Summary

Actua has demonstrated exceptional performance in Year 2 of our SSF-funding project. We have met or exceeded all Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets and made significant strides in building Canada's future talent pipeline, facilitating thought leadership on equity-focused STEM, advancing science literacy and culture in Canada and leading critical research on the Canadian science and innovation landscape. This report summary highlights key achievements and robust financial stewardship.

Key Achievements and Progress Towards Objectives

Building Canada's Future Innovation Talent

In 2025-26, Actua delivered programming that significantly expanded Canada's future talent pipeline. Our SSF-supported programs played a vital role in developing future innovation talent in scientific fields aligned with Canada's priorities. This year, we engaged 405,436 youth in skill development programs across 606 communities in all 13 provinces and territories, significantly surpassing the target of 350,000. This included 28,540 youth in French-language programming outside of Québec. We made substantial progress in reaching equity-deserving youth, including Indigenous youth, girls in all-girls programming, Black youth, youth with disabilities, and youth facing socio-economic challenges. By engaging these youth, Actua is ensuring Canada's future talent pipeline is robust, diverse, and equipped to lead in the economy of the future.

Facilitating Knowledge Exchange and Thought Leadership

To amplify the impact of our youth reach, Actua delivered and participated in several knowledge exchange events, hosting eight thought leadership initiatives, and securing 22 media engagements, fostering critical national dialogue on equity-focused STEM talent development. Collaborations with fellow SSF recipients, including the Canadian Association of Science Centres and the Council of Canadian Academies, further amplified our reach and impact. Hosted by the Canadian Science Policy Centre, we also delivered a virtual session on the evolving state of science culture in Canada which explored the relationship between science and society, identified current gaps in skills and attitudes and analyzed institutional barriers. We also delivered three Indigenous Youth in STEM summits, sharing best practices in Indigenous youth engagement with a broad Canadian audience. We engaged 17 Indigenous youth in intensive leadership development and employment networking, directly putting our evidence-based approaches into practice.

Advancing Science Literacy and Science Culture in Canada

These knowledge-sharing efforts were matched by targeted investments in science literacy and culture, ensuring more youth have access to the skills and mindsets needed to succeed in a changing economy. Actua strengthened its role in fostering innovation skills by expanding its network of local organizations dedicated to science literacy. This year, we

developed partnerships with two new postsecondary members in regions with limited program access and built new or strengthened partnerships with 22 local youth-serving organizations, extending our reach to more underserved youth across the country.

Investing in Research to Better Understand the Canadian Science and Innovation Landscape

Actua initiated five critical research studies this year, including a discussion paper on measuring science culture in Canada (a follow on from our two papers on science culture and systemic change, which were produced last year), a research study on STEM identity development in post-secondary students, a national survey with Abacus Data on girls' attitudes in science, a program evaluation on the impacts of our Black Youth in STEM program, and a collaboration with the Munk School on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on youth learning and skill development. These studies provide a strong foundation for future initiatives and ensure our work remains closely aligned with federal priorities.

Outcomes and Impact

Actua's programs deliver measurable, lasting change for youth across Canada, backed by rigorous, ongoing evaluation. Each year, we assess our programs to ensure they not only meet but exceed the skills, confidence, and engagement levels needed for future success in STEM. The results from this year's impact evaluations highlight the transformative effect of our work:

- **76% of youth** reported improved STEM skill development.
- **62%** gained confidence in their STEM abilities.
- **59%** expressed increased interest in learning more about STEM.
- **48%** are more or much more interested in studying STEM in university or college, and **42%** in a STEM career.
- **86% of Indigenous youth** reported increased understanding of Indigenous land-based knowledge.
- **93%** of surveyed instructors feel they **have the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the workplace** following their instructor experience.
- **75% of Actua instructors** felt confident in being an advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion in STEM, and **79%** in fostering inclusion and accessibility in STEM, following the program.

Financial Performance

In Year 2, Actua received \$7,548,500 from the SSF. The SSF funding was spent across Research (\$301,000), Knowledge Mobilization (\$440,000), Networking (\$5,715,000, including \$3,500,000 to Network Members), and Operational Costs (\$1,092,500). Actua secured \$5,835,000 in matched funds and leveraged federal funds and underwent its annual audit in March 2026, receiving a clear audit opinion.

Year 2: Activities Undertaken and KPIs

In fiscal year 2025/26, Actua made significant and measurable advances in expanding, enriching and diversifying Canada's science and innovation talent pipeline; facilitating knowledge exchange and thought leadership on equity-driven youth STEM engagement; advancing science literacy and science culture; and investing in research to better understand the Canadian science and innovation landscape. We are pleased to report that we met or exceeded all KPI targets for Year 2.

Expanding, Enriching, and Diversifying Canada's Youth STEM Talent Pipeline

Overall, with support from SSF, Actua engaged 405,436 youth in STEM skill development programs in 606 communities in all 13 provinces and territories, surpassing our target of 350,000 youth in Year 2. Of those, 28,540 youth were engaged in French-language programming outside of Québec. The total reach is also inclusive of the following reach disaggregated by youth demographic, exceeding all of our targets:

- **31,841 Indigenous youth**, including 244 who received high school credit through land-based learning experiences;
- **19,744 girls** in all-girls programs;
- **7,617 Black youth**;
- **1,816 youth with disabilities**;
- **128,913 youth facing socio-economic challenges**.

Actua also successfully engaged **1,308 postsecondary students** in paid work experiences as STEM instructors, building their in-demand and career-readiness skills.

Facilitating Knowledge Exchange and Thought Leadership

Actua delivered three InSTEM summits that created transformative opportunities for 17 Indigenous high school and postsecondary youth. Through participation in the Forward Summits, major corporate and public sector gatherings that bring together hundreds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous business leaders to advance economic reconciliation, these youth served as panelists, leaders and learners. They inspired their adult peers while gaining valuable insights into the diversity of STEM career opportunities across Canada.

In addition, Actua hosted eight thought leadership events in Year 2, sparking national conversations on critical issues including resilience in the innovation economy, preparing youth for an AI-driven future and strategies for building an inclusive, future-ready science culture in Canada.

Investing in Research to Better Understand the Canadian Science and Innovation Landscape

To guide our work into the future, Actua advanced leading-edge research that will inform both program design and policy development. In Year 2, we advanced five major studies to deepen our understanding of the rapidly evolving science and innovation landscape and strengthen our impact on equity-focused STEM:

Our first study was centered on our Black Youth in STEM program. The primary purpose was to test data collection tools, gather early insights on youth and staff experiences and assess how well the program's guiding principles, such as providing relatable mentorship and culturally relevant pedagogy, supported desired outcomes.

The second study undertook the expansion of including measures on STEM Identity of Actua's instructors. In Year 2, we piloted the inclusion of one STEM identity question in our instructor survey, and will be expanding to include multiple STEM identity questions in Year 3. The intent of incorporating STEM identity questions was and is to measure instructors' sense of belonging, self-identification as a STEM professional and perceived external recognition. Because a strong STEM identity drives long-term persistence and success, especially among underrepresented groups, this data helps us evaluate how training and employment with Actua enhances instructors' professional identity.

Our third study focused on girls' attitudes and values towards STEM. This national research study collected insights about what Canadian youth value and their perceptions of what matters in science, as well as what their parents and caregivers think about their children's values and priorities. The survey was conducted in two parts to capture the views of 1,000 youth (aged 12 to 18, from all regions, with a balanced gender distribution) and their parents and caregivers.

The fourth study was a discussion paper on Reimagining Science Culture in Canada to strengthen the relationship between science and society in an age of public skepticism and uncertainty. The paper examines existing frameworks of science cultures, highlights their key gaps and advocates for a modernized approach that incorporates equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), systemic and institutional dimensions, and more democratic science communication.

Finally, our fifth study, a capstone project led by students at the University of Toronto, focused on understanding the impact of AI on youth learning and development. The paper examines the current state of research on how AI affects cognitive development, highlights what works and doesn't work in using AI in education, and explores strategies to minimize and manage the risks that youth, educators, and families face from AI.

Advancing Science Literacy and Science Culture in Canada

In Year 2, Actua made significant strides toward strengthening science culture across Canada. We began relationship development with 2 new network member prospects and expect to turn those into memberships in the coming year. As a national leader, Actua advances science culture through thought leadership, research, and media engagement, as outlined above. Equally important, our impact is felt locally in communities across all 13 provinces and territories, through the work of our network members and outreach team. This year, we established new or strengthened partnerships with 22 youth-serving organizations, furthering our goal of reaching more equity-deserving youth.

A strong science culture also depends on multi-sector investment. In Year 2, Actua secured more than \$5.7 million in matched and leveraged funding to support our SSF-funded project. This included \$3.65 million in in-kind contributions from network members, and \$1.4 million from corporate supporters. We also welcomed four new corporate partners, demonstrating strong financial support for our mission.

Summary of Evaluations and Audits Conducted

To measure and communicate the impact of our Year 2 programming, Actua conducted a series of robust evaluations assessing changes in youth's skills, confidence and future intentions to pursue STEM. These evaluations provide evidence of how our programs are equipping the next generation with the tools to thrive in a rapidly evolving innovation economy.

Impact Across All Programs

In support of Canada's goals to build STEM skills, increase the number of STEM graduates, and enhance national science, technology and innovation literacy, Actua and our network members deliver a diverse range of STEM experiences from intensive camps to ongoing clubs. Survey feedback from participants demonstrates strong progress toward these objectives, showing measurable gains in skills, confidence and long-term interest in STEM pathways.

Actua Program Impact on STEM Skills and Confidence

- 76 percent of surveyed participants said they learned or *did something new in STEM*.
- 62 percent said that, because of the program, they are *more confident in their STEM abilities*.
- 59 percent said they are *interested in learning more about STEM*.

Actua Program Impact on Education & Career Intentions

As a result of their participation in an Actua-supported program:

- 45 percent of participants are more or much more interested in taking optional STEM classes in high school.
- 53 percent are more or much more interested in going to university or college.
- 48 percent are more or much more interested in studying STEM in university or college.
- 42 percent are more or much more interested in a career in STEM.

Impact Across Actua's All-Girls Programs

We must continue to break down barriers to girls' and women's participation and achievement in STEM. Increasing their representation not only advances individual success but also ensures that science and innovation address issues and opportunities uniquely affecting women in areas that have historically been overlooked. Actua works to change this by delivering a range of evidence-based all-girls programs that create safe, engaging spaces where girls can strengthen their STEM skills, build confidence, and deepen their interest in STEM pathways.

Evaluations from Year 2 show that these programs are achieving their intended impact, with measurable gains in skills, confidence, and aspirations among participants—clear evidence that targeted interventions can help close the gender gap in STEM.

All-Girls Program Impact on STEM Skills and Confidence

- 86 percent of all-girls program participants surveyed said they *learned or did something new in STEM*.
- 63 percent said that, because of the program, they are *more confident in their STEM abilities*.
- 69 percent said they are *interested in learning more about STEM* – compared to 59 percent among participants in all Actua programs.

All-Girls Program Impact on STEM Education & Career Intentions

- 51 percent of all-girls program participants surveyed are more or much more *interested in taking optional STEM classes in high school* – compared to 45 percent among all Actua program participants.
- 60 percent are more or much more interested in *going to university or college* – compared to 53 percent among all Actua participants.
- 50 percent are more or much more interested in *studying STEM in university or college* – compared to 48 percent among all Actua participants.
- 39 percent are more or much more interested in a *career in STEM* – close to the same level as participants across all Actua youth participants.

InSTEM Youth Delegation

Actua's National InSTEM Youth Delegation is a program designed for Indigenous youth who have participated in Actua network member activities, completed a high school internship and/or attended an Actua-supported land camp. The program offers opportunities for participants to become more engaged with Actua's STEM and Indigenous Knowledge programs with a view to increasing their likelihood of working for the network in the future. Additionally, the program aims to increase interest in STEM more generally and strengthen participants' intentions to pursue STEM education and careers in the future. As evidenced below, the InSTEM delegation is an extremely effective way to create impact.

STEM and Indigenous Knowledge and Culture

- 11 of 21 respondents shared that the program improved their understanding of STEM.
- 20 of 21 respondents agreed the program improved their enjoyment of STEM.
- 18 of 21 agreed the delegation increased their understanding of Indigenous land-based knowledge and cultural practices.
- 17 of 21 respondents shared that their understanding that Indigenous knowledge is scientific (STEM) knowledge was enhanced.
- 19 of 21 respondents report an interest in learning more about the connections between Indigenous land-based knowledge and STEM.
- 17 of 21 respondents agreed that the program improved their connection to Indigenous knowledge..

Confidence, Leadership and Workforce Readiness

- 15 of 21 respondents said they gained leadership skills as a result of the program.
- 17 of 21 respondents agreed that they developed skills that will help prepare them for future employment.
- 16 of 21 respondents said they feel more confident pursuing leadership roles in the future (e.g., at school, work and in their communities).

Future Intentions

As a result of the program:

- 13 of 21 participants are more likely or much more likely to pursue other opportunities to participate in Indigenous land-based STEM education programs.
- 12 of 18 said they are more likely or much more likely to take a high school course in a STEM area (i.e., science, technology, engineering and/or math).
- 12 of 18 said that they are more likely to enroll in or seek a course where Indigenous knowledge is present.
- 10 of 18 said that, as a result of the program, they are more likely (10) to attend university or college.
- 10 of 21 said that they are more or much more likely to pursue a career in STEM where Indigenous knowledge is represented.

Comments from Indigenous Interns

- “I have enjoyed the opportunity to work in a field closely aligned with my academic studies, while also building meaningful relationships and engaging in community. As an Indigenous woman in STEM, I am especially grateful for the chance to participate in community outreach through these trips, where I aim to inspire other Indigenous youth to explore and pursue careers in STEM”
- “This summer, I went from working as a facilitator-in-training to working as a full facilitator at the Yukon University for the STEAM camps program. I had the opportunity to lead activities, support youth in learning, and create a positive, engaging environment. The role allowed me to build leadership skills, gain confidence in guiding groups and contribute to meaningful learning experiences. I’m very grateful to have had the opportunity to build these connections and skills through my work at the YukonU.”

Instructor Training for Inclusive STEM and Career Readiness

Actua's STEM program instructors are post-secondary students in STEM; not only do they serve as critical and effective role models for youth participants, but they also have the opportunity to strengthen their own STEM employability skills as they enter the workforce in the coming years. To support the skill development of instructors who will enter the STEM talent pool in the near term, Actua and its network members provided intensive, paid opportunities for instructors to develop their teaching, leadership and professional skills. A mix of online and in-person training, along with opportunities to deliver STEM programs and connect with other instructors and STEM leaders, are core features of Actua's instructor training.

Actua Instructor Training Impact

- 85 percent said they *expanded their professional network* through the training program.
- 84 percent feel *better prepared to secure a job*.
- 71 percent feel *better equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to work in the industry that interests them*.

Supporting Diversity in STEM

- 75 percent feel the training program *prepared them to be better advocates for diversity in STEM*.
- 79 percent feel *confident in their ability to foster inclusion and accessibility in STEM* following the program.

Financial Performance

SSF Expenditures

SSF funding was spent within the fiscal year in the following four categories:

Research: \$301,000

Actua's research expenses included research positions, executing research partnerships, research training and the commissioning surveys.

Knowledge Mobilization: \$440,000

Actua's knowledge mobilization spending included the costs of Indigenous youth leadership engagement, new community engagement resources for InSTEM programs and thought leadership activities.

Networking: \$5,715,000

Actua's Networking expenses includes \$3,500,000 of funds that were further distributed to ultimate recipients (Actua's Network Members). The remaining funds supported Actua's own delivery activities, including workshops and summer camp programs in Northern Canada, participation in three Forward Summits and hosting a national training summit which brought together over 40 network member organizations.

Operational Costs: \$1,092,500

Actua's operational cost spending supported portions of administrative salaries & benefits, rent and other office expenses and professional fees such as translations, legal, human resources and bookkeeping. This budget line also supported staff travel to attend and present at conferences related to Actua's Strategic Science Fund objectives.

Matched Fund Revenue

Total matched funds in Year 2 were **\$5,260,000** and were a combination of cash and in-kind support. This funding came from a wide range of sources including: provincial/territorial/municipal government, post-secondary institutions, not-for-profits, businesses and other partners. This funding amount also included new private sector investments.

Leveraged Fund Revenue

Total leveraged funds in Year 2 were **\$575,000**, which came from other federal government sources.