

IP Roundtable - February 12, 2025

## **Turning the Tide on Canada's Declining IP Ownership**

# Key Takeaways Report

An Elevate IP Alberta Event



In partnership with  
Innovation Asset Collective



# IP Roundtable

## Turning the Tide on Canada's Declining IP Ownership

The IP Roundtable: Turning the Tide on Canada's Declining IP Ownership gathered leaders from business, tech, government, academia and law to address the role of intellectual property in driving Alberta's -- and Canada's -- productivity and economic prosperity.

With 60+ leaders from government, industry, and post-secondary institutions in attendance, the conversation highlighted the critical need for stronger IP strategies as Alberta negotiates its position in the global knowledge economy.

### Hosts

Kevin Dahl, Director, ElevateIP Alberta

Mike McLean, CEO, Innovation Asset Collective (IAC)

### Keynote Speakers

Jim Balsillie, co-Founder and Chair of Council of Canadian Innovators |  
Conseil canadien des innovateurs (CCI)

Neeraj Gupta, CEO and co-founder, Lawcubator

Peter Cowan, CEO, Innovate BC

# Keynote Speakers

## Jim Balsillie

Mr. Balsillie is the retired Chairman and co-CEO of Research In Motion (BlackBerry), a technology company he scaled from an idea to \$20 billion in sales globally.

His private investment office includes global and domestic technology investments. He is the co-founder of the Institute for New Economic Thinking in New York, and founder of the Council of Canadian Innovators based in Toronto, the Digital Governance Council in Ottawa, and the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo, as well as the Centre for Digital Rights, the Balsillie School of International Affairs, and the Arctic Research Foundation.

He currently chairs the boards of CCI, CIGI, Innovation Asset Collective and Digital Governance Council.



## Neeraj Gupta

**CEO Lawcubator Technologies**

Neeraj is an angel investor, serial entrepreneur, and board member to several tech startups and non-profit organisations. He is a cofounder at FormulatiP, ChapterAI & Lawcubator.

Neeraj is Chief Advisor for Technology & Innovation investments at Invest Alberta. He is a board member at Platform Calgary, Canadian Blockchain Consortium, Calgary Chamber of Commerce and TIDES, IIT Roorkee.

Neeraj is also the author of "Creating and Safeguarding a Strong Intellectual Property Portfolio," and is actively involved in several national and international AI ecosystems. He advises several provincial and federal governments on AI policies and initiatives.



## Peter Cowan

**CEO of Innovate BC**

Peter Cowan is a seasoned leader in Canada's innovation ecosystem, currently serving as the President and CEO of Innovate BC, a provincial Crown agency dedicated to fostering innovation across British Columbia's economy.

With over 25 years of experience, Peter has held various leadership roles, including interim CEO at Intellectual Property Ontario and founder of Northworks IP.

He is recognized for his expertise in intellectual property strategy and has advised numerous startups, scale-ups, and government agencies. Peter holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of Victoria.



## Executive Summary

The IP Roundtable: Turning the Tide on Canada's Declining IP Ownership pulled together a group of national, provincial and municipal leaders to discuss the role that intellectual property can play in driving Alberta's -- and Canada's -- productivity and economic prosperity.

Key goals for this inaugural Roundtable included:

- Facilitate open dialogue on IP policy and innovation
- Identify key IP challenges facing startups, scaleups and researchers within Albertan PSIs
- Foster collaboration between government, industry, and academia
- Create a roadmap for future IP and innovation in emerging technologies

Based on the conversation a list of actionable outcomes and next steps were generated:

- ElevateIP Alberta, IAC and other Funders across the province will endeavor to embed IP targets and metrics within their funding programs.
- As organizations mandated to provide IP support - IAC and ElevateIP Alberta pledge to work together to strengthen IP strategy education and support for companies in the province.
- Economic Development Lethbridge will convene rural RINs and PSIs to integrate and advance rural Alberta access to a provincial IP strategy and management framework.
- ElevateIP Alberta and IAC will keep the momentum going by committing to holding the next IP focused event during the Inventures Conference in May 2025.

This report captures what we heard from Roundtable speakers and participants, including an analysis of where IP issues stand today in Alberta, and a discussion of how to improve our situation in the immediate future.

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"During the 20 years I've spent living and working in Alberta, I've seen the innovation ecosystem evolve and grow dramatically. But that growth has not been equal across all dimensions of a healthy ecosystem. One of the dimensions that we've lagged behind on is Intellectual Property. **Through our conversation here today, we can help change that for future entrepreneurs.**" -- Kevin Dahl, Director, Elevate IP AB

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## Where we are

In 2025, Alberta (and Canada in general) faces a crisis around securing intangible assets -- data and intellectual property -- that will sustain our economic prosperity. IP exfiltration is a concern at publicly funded institutions across all strategic fields and technologies, including, cleantech, telecommunications, EV battery tech, life sciences and foundational AI, despite over ten billion annually in taxpayer funds directed to them.

### **Why this has happened and *what we can do about it* was the focus of this event.**

With new and emerging threats to our sovereignty and economy, we urgently need coordinated approaches across the federation by those who recognize the duty to support, devise, and implement the changes necessary to fuel recovery and our future prosperity.

**The good news:** Canada has extraordinary potential to prosper in the economy of startups, scale-ups and data, and Alberta could lead the way.

**The better news:** We have exceptional provincial institutions, businesses and agencies that are working to make the changes we need. Figuring out how they can work together to increase the efficiency of all is the work at hand.



## The current IP landscape:

### What we heard - audience perspectives

**We're falling behind:** We need to have freedom to operate, access to data, and access to solid compute capacity. Currently, we have none of these. Instead, we're building the walls higher around the castle that we don't own.

**Canada is immature in terms of patents:** Patents are more than a piece of paper. We file late, ineffectively, and primarily in the US - not in Europe and other important international jurisdictions.

**Canadians are not protecting their Freedom To Operate (FTO) when scaling their businesses.** In terms of international patent filing, Canada has gone down in the last 10 years by 17%. (1)

**We have to focus on sovereignty and on Canada-owned and controlled IP and patents:** We need strong provincial government commitment to investing in local control and in Canada-owned businesses that are rooted here.

**Canada is unique (but not in a good way): In terms of IP, we have "first world inputs and third world outputs." Companies don't protect their patents, they don't register their trademarks and copyrights. Then, when they finally do go public, they have already lost the ability to file protection on their IP.**

(1) [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2019/isde-ised/lu71-1-7-2018-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/isde-ised/lu71-1-7-2018-eng.pdf)

**We need to move fast and effectively:** And that might mean skipping some steps.

**Canadian data is vulnerable:** Leaders of other countries, such as the US, can leverage executive orders to access Canadian firms' data hosted outside of our country.

**We don't have a protection issue. We have a generation & commercialization issue.**

**We give away the freedom to operate.** It's by design. There are no receptors.

**The innovation flywheel is being driven by philanthropists, not by policy.** We've got to create the policies that will encourage and enable IP commercialization.

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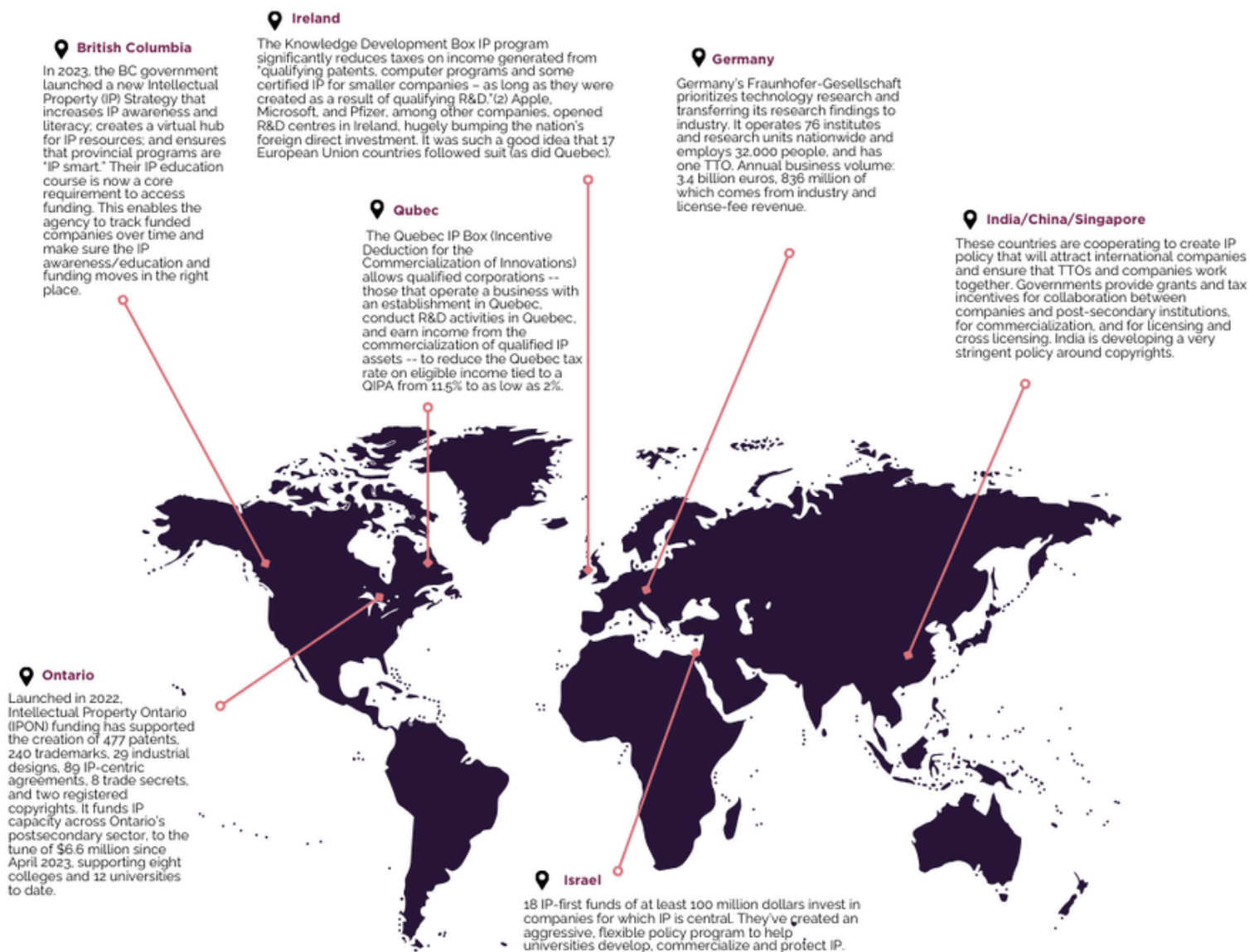
An IP strategy isn't just about funding and education—it's about leveraging interprovincial and pan-Canadian supports, integrating IP into innovation policy, and ensuring business-savvy IP leaders drive execution. -- Peter Cowan, CEO, InnovateBC

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**Grass-roots, pan-Canadian coordination on IP will be a key success factor.** The momentum is here—we just need to capitalize on it through collaboration and co-investment in IP initiatives.



# What can we learn from other jurisdictions?



(2) <https://leyton.com/ie/knowledge-development-box-kdb/>



## Discussion Point:

### How can Alberta become an IP leader?

Turning Alberta into a powerhouse of IP generation and protection will require close collaboration between post-secondary institutions, community-based organizations, governmental organizations, and industry partners. Together, we must focus on the following broad strategies:

- Champion the commercialization of research and the creation of IP that creates a value multiplier.
- Create provincial advantage through a common policy framework for post-secondary, industry and the organizations that support both.
- Work with PSIs to enable pathways to commercialization of research and make them available for rural and mainstream PSIs across Alberta.
- Explore how UCalgary and UofA can leverage their TTOs and Investment Funds to help other PSIs across the province.

Most crucially, we must realize Alberta's opportunity at the intersection of IP and data, seizing our unique position to increase Canada's data sovereignty. Our collective discussions and strategies to enhance the IP positions of Alberta-based businesses must also contemplate how data is created and stored

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**“As proud Albertans, we know that our province thrives when we work together.** No single organization or individual can drive our IP success alone—it takes collaboration, investment, and a shared commitment to strengthening our innovation ecosystem. By deploying capital and expertise where it's needed most, we can equip Alberta companies with the tools—like patent collectives and a core IP education curriculum for AB —that enhance their understanding and ability to achieve freedom to operate and compete on a global stage. Together, we can build a future where Alberta's ideas fuel prosperity at home and beyond.” -- Erin Pisko, VP, IP Strategy, IAC

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## Post-Secondary

Albertan PSIs are taking steps to celebrate researchers engaged in commercialization and giving them capacity so that they can focus on this critical activity. This new stance represents a dramatic shift. It will take time to become fully realized, but change is underway.

Over the past 5 years, the University of Calgary has created more startup companies than any other Canadian university, with growth areas including Quantum, Medical Devices and Engineering Solutions. The University of Alberta is ranked first in Canada and third globally in AI-related research, and is investing in promising companies. Such initiatives are not only transforming technology, they are transforming the way universities behave.

While many of the innovations coming out of post-secondaries are early and need significant advancement, funding arms are being developed, including UCalgary's UCeed fund, a group of early-stage investment funds backed by philanthropic support, and the University of Alberta's Innovation Fund, which invests risk capital in innovations coming out of the University. These seed funds address the gap between government funding and true venture capital investment, and attract follow-on funds. (3)

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“Oxford's seed fund has attracted a \$600 million GBP follow-on fund - the Oxford Science Enterprises (OSE) Fund. Funds like that in Canada would be welcome, and we should start that process.”

-- John Wilson, CEO Innovate Calgary

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## Community

Community will be the linchpin of Alberta's IP-strengthening efforts. If its core infrastructure is weak or incomplete, we won't reach our goals. We have to be the place where the most brilliant people want to start and grow IP-generating companies. It's where the flywheel begins to spin.

We need to build. We need to create materials and venues -- virtual and otherwise -- so we can educate and sensitize. We need the ability and the tools to develop proofs of concept, and to have safe and secure places to test. Only then will validation dollars flow smoothly into early-stage startups. We, the Alberta-based IP community and our federal partners, need to be closely aligned to make this a reality.

We need to provide access to the expertise -- legal, financial, technical -- that will smooth the process for new entrepreneurs. Creating networks in this way will help bolster our larger community in the long run.

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“Startups exist to commercialize IP. Giving them the right environment, knowledge and resources to grow quickly is key to success.”  
--Terry Rock, Platform Calgary

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We can begin by collaborating with our government partners to promote the attractiveness of Alberta's business environment. Beyond PR and marketing, this also involves things like favorable tax policies for firms creating and protecting IP here. Our business culture in Alberta is famous for being entrepreneurial, competitive and relatively friction-free, the ideal environment in which founders can thrive.

And finally, we can also nurture the development of IP here by sensitizing the angel investor ecosystem about IP. Our goal should be to motivate angel and family office investments in Alberta to insert IP-related concerns into the very beginning of the commercialization process.

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“We must elevate all Alberta entrepreneurs, not just those coming to Calgary or Edmonton. We also want to make sure that rural entrepreneurs and other under-represented entrepreneurs such as women, people of color and new Canadians are properly supported. And we must continue to deepen our special working relationship with Indigenous entrepreneurs, because they have special IP, and we as Canadians must help protect the traditional knowledge and creative expressions of the First Nations.”

-- Renae Barlow, VP Entrepreneurship & Innovation,  
Economic Development Lethbridge

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# Industry

The Canadian economy has suffered from lagging productivity for decades; this is due, in part, to the country's "inability to embrace the digital revolution and transform itself into a true knowledge economy." Bringing more IP-protected knowledge into the Alberta economy has national implications and also faces entrenched barriers, including, according to a recent PwC study, the fact that our "incentive system for the creation and commercialization of IP isn't encouraging scaling of companies, leading to much of our IP being commercialized in the United States." (4)

We urgently need to change that.

**Pursue R&D:** We need to enhance existing industry investing in R&D in Alberta. For example, when we're bringing in data centres, we should also have them establish an R&D office here along with it.

**Invest in IP:** Companies should invest aggressively in IP. It was suggested that 5-10% of an organization's research budget should go to IP, just like 5-10% of a house building budget goes to installing the roof. As one speaker put it, "Canada has been getting soaked because we have no roof. We need to put the roof on."



[https://www.pwc.com/ca/en/services/deals/trends.html?WT.mc\\_id=CA-25-C57-H10-AL7-AC7-R1-L1-F-AS21-AF30-ADS29&gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAlPu9BhAjEiwA5NDSA49QQloHUNoSTsnLYOa4jf-wgudafMgKlk8cNUFVWfaK-tNEokNseRoCNaMQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.pwc.com/ca/en/services/deals/trends.html?WT.mc_id=CA-25-C57-H10-AL7-AC7-R1-L1-F-AS21-AF30-ADS29&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAlPu9BhAjEiwA5NDSA49QQloHUNoSTsnLYOa4jf-wgudafMgKlk8cNUFVWfaK-tNEokNseRoCNaMQAvD_BwE)

**Build a strong portfolio:** To create true commercial value, companies need a portfolio of rights. Having a collection of multiple rights changes the risk calculus and investment required to issue a challenge and helps companies avoid litigation or a challenge to individual rights .

But: IP Portfolio development can take years, if not decades, to create and differentiate an IP position: 3 -5 years to secure a patent, 10 - 15 years to build a collection of rights that can be a competitive differentiator. Companies will need resources and policy support from the government to assist them in developing these differentiated positions, and those do not exist today.

Clearly, Industry has a significant role to play in positioning Alberta as an IP leader. This includes both increasing R&D activities to create more IP in Alberta, and acting as "IP Receptors," partnering with PSIs and startups to acquire game-changing IP and bring it to the global market.





## Discussion Point:

### **A centralized entity or a centralized approach? Organizational challenges and opportunities**

While acknowledging that a centralized entity would have its benefits, roundtable experts felt that creating a collaborative community dedicated to IP-related matters would be better for the Alberta tech community. We need a centralized approach and not a centralized agency. This will be a successful approach because collaboration is our superpower – and the reason we gathered in such enthusiastic numbers for this first Roundtable.

Commercialization is complex and demands that everyone across the ecosystem works together. If we choose not to adopt a centralized agency or a rigid framework, we'll still require a certain level of organization to ensure accountability and that all aspects of IP generation and protection are covered.

We think the best way to help Alberta innovators create and implement competitive IP strategies and build the IP positions needed for freedom to operate is to explore a system in which Alberta Innovates, Elevate IP Alberta and Innovation Asset Collective (IAC), as organizations with IP-specific mandates, work together -- along with the province's Business Accelerators and Incubators, rural Regional Innovation Networks, and Technology Development Advisors -- to provide comprehensive provincial supports that align with national strategies.



# What are we doing in Alberta right now that we don't want to lose?

Because we need support at every step of IP creation, IP protection and IP commercialization, each organization present at the IP Roundtable plays an important role in helping Alberta achieve success.

In terms of growing IP ownership, Alberta is well positioned in terms of education, funding, organizational support and workforce. The "Alberta Advantage" is multi-faceted:

1. **Benchmarking:** Elevate IP AB has produced a benchmarking study of IP filing prosecution in Alberta. How many jurisdictions really know what's changing year to year?
2. **Wayfinding:** We point our startups to where we think the best education is for them, given their stage of development.
3. **Education:** Alberta is home to powerhouse research universities. Together, the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary invest over \$1 billion dollars annually in research.
4. **Workforce:** Alberta's workforce is highly educated and entrepreneurial, with training in such future-forward fields as business, engineering, artificial intelligence and medicine.
5. **Community:** Our sense of community is our super-power. We bring together founders and IP experts from communities and organizations across Alberta.



Given such advantages and deep infrastructure, Alberta is in position to lead the nation not only in building companies but, crucially, in creating and protecting their IP. Our fiscal strength and anchors in agriculture, energy, and healthcare can encourage national digital sovereignty and the generation of new IP on infrastructure not owned by another country.

## **Another way to think about this question in a more provocative way is: What do we want to lose?**

We can all agree on one thing to avoid: duplicative, inefficient programming that doesn't drive impact or create value for startups. As a community, we should develop an inventory of IP education and sensitization programming, mapping existing programming to understand what exists and where potential opportunities for future programs may lie. We have an opportunity here to increase our ecosystem's efficiency.

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As one roundtable participant put it: “If I had \$1 for every IP 101 course I've seen being reproduced, I could retire.”

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# What are we not yet doing that we must explore?

**Develop more robust tools:** We need an analytics and AI-driven online portal to bolster efforts already made toward uniting multiple stakeholders (startup founders, researchers, coaches, advisors, mentors, investors, business accelerators, incubators and legal professionals) in a well-informed, organized community.

**Strategy:** We've been living with the narrative that "we're really good at startups and we're really bad at scaleups." It's actually more like we form a lot of startups that don't have the right IP strategy from day zero, and therefore can't scale. We need a common definition of what makes a strong IP strategy that can be shared by all stakeholders including founders, coaches, advisors, mentors, investors and legal professionals.

**Implementation:** There will never be enough money to pay for and prosecute all the patents sought by Alberta startups, so it's important to pick winners. We need a proven methodology to identify the best business models with the strongest IP positions, then double down on support.

**Provide additional funding for IP being commercialized:** We should redouble efforts to secure staged funding that's linked to startup business models from community, PSI and industry players. This would supplement the funds that Elevate IP is already sourcing and providing.

**Expand outreach:** How can we expand IP education and funding to support SMEs that require protection but are not highly scalable? How can we help PSIs without TTOs develop pathways to strategize and protect IP being commercialized even if they don't own it? How can we ensure equal access to IP resources to all founders no matter where they live or what special protection needs are required?

**Learn from elsewhere:** We must explore and adopt learnings (such as patent box regimes and patent pools) from other jurisdictions, internationally and from across Canada.

**Bolster Canadian ownership:** We need to develop mechanisms that will ensure ownership and benefit for Albertans/Canadians. This may lead to changes in how funding is provided and build on the IP pools that IAC has begun developing at the national level.

**Attract IP-generated investment:** How can we make Alberta the destination of choice for IP creation for large companies/data centers? We'll need new policy and coordination with attraction activities by Invest Alberta, CED, Edmonton Global, and other organizations.

**Establish a framework:** We need a tool to evaluate where IP-generating companies and entrepreneurs are, identify the support they actually need, and then track their progress over time, so we can adapt our programming as we go. That gives us the data to support those investments as well.



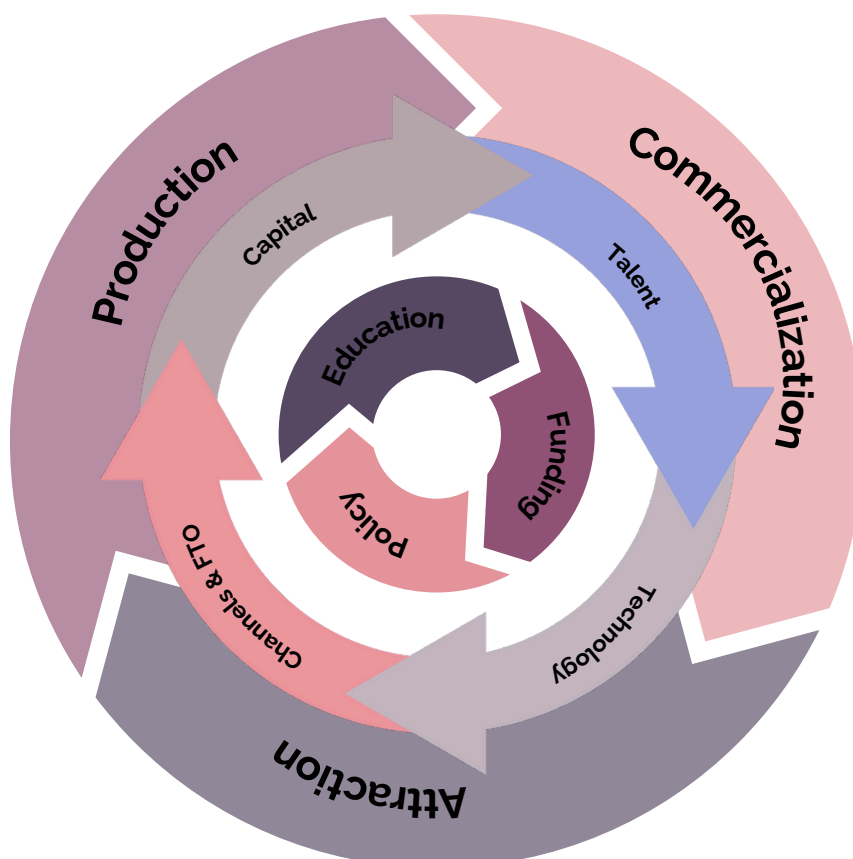
## Looking ahead/next steps

And now to perhaps the most important part of this report: what we're going to do to ensure our ambitions move off the page and into reality. It's no small task. As noted during our meeting, the real question here is: how do we create and change the productivity equation of a nation under stress?

Based on the discussion, it was clear that we need to get the Alberta IP Flywheel spinning. But what comprises the Alberta IP Flywheel and how do we kickstart it?

We propose that the Alberta IP Flywheel has three layers, which must be considered inclusively:

1. **The Foundational layer:** Education, Funding & Policy
2. **The Business Needs layer:** Capital, Talent, Technology/Innovation, Channels to Customers & Freedom to Operate (FTO)
3. **The IP Action layer:** Production, Commercialization & Attraction of IP





We have identified the following recommendations for kickstarting the IP Flywheel in Alberta:

1. ElevateIP Alberta, IAC and other Funders across the province will endeavor to embed IP targets and metrics within their funding programs.
2. As organizations mandated to provide IP support - IAC and ElevateIP Alberta pledge to work together to strengthen IP strategy education and support for companies in the province.
3. Economic Development Lethbridge will convene rural RINs and PSIs to integrate and advance rural Alberta access to a provincial IP strategy and management framework.
4. ElevateIP Alberta and IAC will keep the momentum going by committing to holding the next IP focused event during the Inventures Conference in May 2025.

This inaugural IP Roundtable brought together key stakeholders from across government, industry, and academia to engage in meaningful discussions on the evolving landscape of intellectual property policy and innovation. Through open dialogue, we identified critical IP challenges faced by startups and researchers within Alberta's post-secondary institutions, while also exploring opportunities to foster stronger collaboration.

Together, we took a foundational step toward identifying the key elements required to kickstart the Alberta IP Flywheel. As we move forward, the insights shared during this event will help shape future initiatives, ensuring that Alberta remains at the forefront of IP-driven innovation and commercialization.

We look forward to continuing this important conversation and working together to drive impactful change.

**So let's keep the conversation going. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this document and on what's coming next.**

**[Click Here](#)**

## IP Roundtable Participating Organizations:

Government of Alberta  
University of Calgary  
University of Alberta  
Economic Development Lethbridge  
Innovate Calgary  
Innovation Asset Collective (IAC)  
Alberta Innovates  
AltaML  
Athabasca University  
BDC  
BioAlberta  
Bipoc Foundation  
Calgary Chamber of Commerce  
Calgary Economic Development  
Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB)  
Cenovus Energy  
Creative Destruction Labs  
Edmonton Unlimited  
GHB Ventures  
Government of Manitoba  
Hunter Hub  
Innovate BC  
IP Ontario (IPON)  
Kent Imaging  
Osney Capital  
Panache Ventures  
Peer Guidance  
Platform Calgary  
PWC  
Ranovus  
Rogers Communications THINKLab  
Six Ring  
University of Lethbridge