

IP ROUNDTABLE

Aligning Atlantic Canada's IP Priorities

OCTOBER 2025



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Innovation Asset Collective (IAC) and Springboard Atlantic hosted an IP roundtable in Halifax on October 22, 2025. Stakeholders from across government, industry, IP programs, and the broader innovation ecosystem met to discuss intellectual property (IP), commercialization, and competitiveness in Atlantic Canada. The goal was to understand what's working, where support is needed, and how we can start building stronger pathways for local innovations to drive economic impact for the region.

A few clear priorities emerged. The following points reflect both the opportunities identified, and the actions we can take to help strengthen IP strategy, education and commercialization across the region.



1. Build capacity for companies to treat IP as a strategic advantage.



Key Insight: A good IP strategy is driven by the business goals

- **IP should not be an afterthought.** It influences partnerships, investment, and competitive advantage from the start.
- Companies **cannot outsource strategic thinking.** They must understand the commercial value of their IP to direct external service providers effectively.
- Many business leaders still **view patents narrowly** (e.g., only as legal tools) instead of seeing their **commercial potential.**
- [Springboard Atlantic](#) is championing IP education in Atlantic Canada, delivering IP education and workshops to SMEs and individuals working in innovation support organizations.

Current Gaps

- Erin Pisko presented a whitepaper written by a national IP education working group, [Powering Productivity Growth: Why Canada Needs a Unified Approach to IP Education](#), highlights some key gaps in Canada's IP education landscape:
 - **Redundancy and gaps** in existing IP education resources.
 - **Overreliance on introductory content** with limited pathways for advanced learning.
- **Firm reliance on external service providers to drive their IP strategy**, leading to IP decisions or filings that are not always aligned with the firm's commercial goals and opportunities.

Recommendations and Next Steps

1. When speaking with innovation-based industry leaders, highlight that:

- **Early IP strategy development** is a critical element of business planning.
- **Building in-house IP capacity** will enable them to get more value from their work with service providers and IP experts.
- **Availability of IP upskilling** resources through:
 - Springboard Atlantic and ElevateIP
 - Innovation Asset Collective
 - CIPO

2. A **coordinated national approach** to IP education will help:

- Expand collaboration with **ecosystem partners** like CIPO.
- Reduce duplication of effort.
- Enable the creation of **specialized, sector-specific training.**
- Align resources with a clear **IP maturity framework** for more targeted support.

3. There is a need for a coordinated, national effort to:

- Begin **mapping existing education resources.**
- Align them to an **IP maturity framework.**

2. Understand freedom to operate (FTO) as a spectrum of risk.

Key Insight: Canadian firms need to be more aggressive in building strategic IP ownership positions

- **FTO is not binary.** It exists on a **spectrum of legal and commercial risk**, and must be managed accordingly.
- Canadian companies risk **being frozen out of key markets** if we do not increase IP filing and activity.
- FTO is strengthened by **creating IP positions** that provide leverage, particularly around **high-value patent streams** aligned to the company's commercial objectives.
- Assertion risk is growing in sectors where it was once rare, and it is increasingly impacting **companies as soon as they gain commercial traction**.

Current Gaps

- Canadian firms often **lack internal capacity** to assess or build strategies around FTO.
- There is **no coordinated national approach** to identifying and backing Canadian companies with the potential to become **anchor firms** in key sectors.
- Academic IP that could support commercial FTO is **often underutilized or siloed within institutions**.

Recommended Next Steps

1. **Establish sector-aligned patent pools** such as the one IAC is building, and encourage **donation of strategic patents from academic institutions**.

2. **Connect SMEs** to relevant FTO support resources such as:

- IP insurance
- IP risk intelligence services
- Strategic portfolio planning
- Funding to invest in IP filings

3. **Identify and support high-potential regional companies with strong commercial potential, and coordinate ecosystem support** around them to enhance market access and defensibility.



3. Strengthen pathways from research to commercialization.



Key Insight: Alignment is needed to establish the conditions and skills needed to translate research in Atlantic Canada into commercial outputs

- Canada consistently **underperforms in translating research into commercial outputs** despite strong scientific productivity.
- A major constraint in Atlantic Canada is limited **receptor capacity**; the presence of large firms positioned to commercialize research.
- **Blackberry** was a national enterprise that served as a large-scale receptor for innovation and produced highly skilled IP practitioners through real-world experience; a **training ground that no longer exists at scale in Canada**.
- There is wide **variability across tech transfer offices in Atlantic Canada** around policies and approaches to tech transfer.
- **Springboard Atlantic strengthens research commercialization** in the region by connecting institutions with industry partners and providing targeted support that accelerates market-ready innovation.

Current Gaps

- Academic researchers face **incentive structures that prioritize publishing** over commercialization. Incentives should be explored towards commercialization.
- There is a lack of **consistency** in tech transfer processes and policies across institutions that make industry collaboration and startup spinouts challenging.
- Many first filings focus on academic novelty rather than commercial use, resulting in **IP that doesn't fully support a spinout's ability to commercialize or secure freedom to operate**.
- **There are limited tools or platforms** to make it easier for companies to port innovation out of institutions efficiently.
- There is also **limited exposure to real-world commercialization** for graduate researchers, which limits practical application of academic knowledge.
- There is a gap in **IP expertise within tech transfer offices**. Springboard Atlantic is addressing this gap through IP training on the importance of IP and considerations for early-stage startups.

Recommended Next Steps

1. **Work with universities** to align research activity with strategic, sector-specific commercial opportunities or needs.
2. Continue building strong **institutional relationships** to create a more consistent and aligned pathway toward commercialization outcomes.
3. To create innovation receptor capacity:
 - Focus on **attraction and incentives** for receptor firms to establish or maintain a presence in Atlantic Canada.
 - Create the conditions for receptor firms to **reliably and consistently work with academic institutions**.
4. Recognize and support the **range of skill sets** needed to port innovation out of research institutions.
5. **Promote standardized policies and tech transfer practices**, leveraging commercialization templates, such as:
 - [Simple Agreement for Innovation Licensing \(SAIL\)](#)
 - **BDC's SAFE term sheet**

Final Thoughts

The roundtable surfaced a clear consensus: Atlantic Canada has the talent, research excellence, and entrepreneurial drive needed to compete globally, but unlocking the commercial potential requires a deliberate and coordinated approach to IP. Building stronger IP capacity across the region will depend on collective action: aligning academic and commercial priorities, supporting companies at every stage of their IP journey, and ensuring that IP is treated not as a legal formality, but as a strategic asset for growth.

By working together across institutions, sectors, and support organizations, we can help Atlantic Canadian innovators protect their ideas, scale their businesses, and deliver lasting economic impact for the region.

