

# EPI@entre

## ANNUAL REPORT



# 2020/2021



University  
of Windsor

EPI@entre  
Entrepreneurship + Practice + Innovation





# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Windsor sits on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie.

We respect the longstanding relationships with First Nations people in this place in the 100-mile Windsor-Essex peninsula and the straits – les détroits – of Detroit.





# A Message

## From The Director



A challenging year required a nimble response. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many disruptions to our work and lives in the past year and even to this date. I am grateful for my EPIC team members who were able to respond quickly and continue our programming through the challenging time.

Entrepreneurs need our support more than ever. Many existing businesses were forced to adapt and pivot last year. At the same time, we have also seen an increasing demand from first-time entrepreneurs. We received over 270 applications for our five accelerator programs where over 42 ventures were accepted. Over \$160,000 in direct funding was provided to support these businesses. Each program was designed to support a specific cohort of entrepreneurs, ranging from women-led ventures to early-stage innovative ideas to social purpose organizations. We have also launched a one-of-a-kind micro-credentialled program called the NextGen CTO to train the future chief technology / technical officers the fundamentals of intellectual property. Over 130 participants completed the program over two different cohorts.

Our social media reach has significantly increased. Social media engagement has gone up 135% compared to last year. Our website was visited by almost 27,000 visitors from 176 different countries. The data indicated a strong interest in innovation and entrepreneurship.

Despite the challenges, last year was a very productive year for EPICentre. We will continue our efforts to provide experiential entrepreneurial learning opportunities to students and skills, tools and network to help entrepreneurs succeed. They are the backbone of a better future.

In closing, I'd like to thank the University of Windsor, our board of advisors, mentors, partners and sponsors for supporting EPICentre. Thank you to our students and entrepreneurs as well who believed in the work we do and took part in our programming.

We look forward to the day when we can all safely meet in person again.



# Vision



University  
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EPICentre  
Entrepreneurship • Practice • Innovation

EPICentre's vision is to support the transformation of people into entrepreneurial thinkers, and innovative ideas into successful economic and social enterprises through training, mentorship and networking.

# Mission

To provide experiential entrepreneurial learning opportunities that enhance University of Windsor's mission regarding education and research.

To provide skills, tools, and network to entrepreneurs and professionals to launch and grow economic and social initiatives.

# Values

We hold ourselves accountable by performing our duties with passion and integrity.

We embrace a diverse and fun work environment through trust and respect.

We achieve service excellence through teamwork, empathy and continuous improvement.

We shape the future with constant experimentation and innovation.





# Supporting Entrepreneurs & Economic Development



Photo taken pre-covid

As the entrepreneurial hub on the University of Windsor campus, EPICentre strives to not only support entrepreneurs through government funding, guided mentorship and connections with industry professionals, EPICentre also works hard to drive economic development within the Windsor-Essex region by helping startups integrate into the entrepreneurial landscape and supporting them on their journey.



# Encouraging new startups

## RBC EPIC Founders Program



The 2020 RBC EPIC Founders Program, funded by RBC Foundation, accepted 7 teams comprising 12 entrepreneurs in May 2020. This 12-week accelerator program provided mentorship, workshops, and up to \$6,000 stipend to participants who gained the tools and knowledge needed to turn their ideas into businesses.

Due to challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time, the entire program was run virtually. The program concluded with the Final Pitch Day on August 6, 2020. The Top Founder Award of \$3,500 sponsored by RBC Foundation went to Jaydee Tarpeh and Nyasha Kapfumvuti, founders of Xenia Education. The 2nd Prize of \$1,000 sponsored by Lucas Imagine Fund went to Braunte Petric, Adam Dunn and Oliver Balmokune, founders of Vectorgaze.



"The EPIC Founders program was a game-changer for us. As a small startup, it was hard to balance our drive to launch with making sure we understood the business side and were paying our bills. The Founders program gave us the stability we needed to focus on building our product. It also provided invaluable mentorship that would cost a whole lot if you had to pay for it. You get to build lasting relationships with other founders going through the same struggles as you. All rooting for each other! It is such a fantastic experience. We are incredibly grateful that the program exists to help founders like us. This program gave us our start, and we'll make sure everyone knows that when we hit unicorn status! Thank you, EPICentre!"

Jaydee Tarpeh, Co-Founder of Xenia Education





"The Epic Founders program equipped me with the resources and support to turn my business idea into an actual business! It was a wonderful experience getting to meet the program leads, and working with other budding entrepreneurs. I would recommend this program to anyone looking to take their first step into launching their business."

Supriya Ramesh, Founder, SeniorCentral.ca



**Over 50% of the program participants in these early ideation programs launched a business.**



The EPIC Founders Accelerating 2020s Program was launched last September 2020. The program was designed for startups and early-stage businesses that are ready to take their innovative ideas to market. This four-month accelerator program provided participants with mentorship, workshops, networking opportunities and funding up to \$2,500 on eligible business expenses. Seven startups participated in this inaugural cohort. The program wrapped up with the Final Pitch Day on February 25th, 2021 where the seven startups had the opportunity to compete for one of two cash prizes. The Top Prize of \$3,000 sponsored by RBC Foundation went to Jana Hallam, founder of bKind.

The EPIC Founders Accelerating 2020s Program is funded by FedDev Ontario under the Community Economic Development and Diversification stream program.



# Supporting existing small businesses



## EPIC Nimble Program

In response to the adverse impacts the COVID-19 pandemic brought to many small businesses in our community, EPICentre launched the EPIC Nimble Program in partnership with WEtech Alliance, Small Business Centre and RISE Windsor-Essex in April 2020. The program, valued at over \$6,000 in cash and services, provided mentorship, access to WEtech Alliance's client perks (such as eligible discounts and credits on various cloud platforms and software) and access to Small Business Centre's programs and services as well as up to \$4,000 in funding on eligible business expenses. Seven small businesses gained the skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to help them create new revenue streams or pivot to a new business model in order to achieve sustainability and stay competitive in the fast-changing marketplace. In addition to the above partners, the program was funded by FedDev Ontario and Lucas Imagine Fund.



**These small businesses are projected to  
produce an amazing 867% ROI on the  
funding they received!**



"[EPIC Nimble] opened up a whole new networking opportunity that I didn't know existed," said Sue Brunet, owner of Ergonow Inc. "The program increased my awareness of the services we have available for small business owners locally. I have had the opportunity to benefit from receiving services performed by a University of Windsor student and the talent and performance to date has been excellent."



# Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

## EPIC VentureWomen Program

The EPIC VentureWomen Program is a four-month accelerator program providing mentorship, workshops, networking opportunities and funding up to \$2,500 on eligible business expenses to participants.

EPICentre accepted ten women-led ventures in October 2020. The cohort culminated on the Final Pitch Day on February 4th, 2021. Jennifer Charron, founder of Logic Executive Search & Workplace Solutions and Melissa Hopper, co-founder of Om Ice won the two top prizes of \$3,000 each sponsored by Lucas Imagine Fund and Shibley Righton LLP.

The third cohort consisted of seven women-led ventures who started their journey in the Program on March 8th, 2021. The program is currently in progress and will conclude with the Final Pitch Day on July 8th, 2021.

The EPIC VentureWomen Program is a program supported by RISE Windsor-Essex and funded by the FedDev Ontario's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy fund.

EPICentre  
**VENTURE WOMEN**

**EPICentre is actively addressing inequity in entrepreneurship. One way is by providing more than \$107,000 of funding and support to female changemakers & women-led ventures in the last year alone!**

"As female entrepreneur who launched her business during the pandemic, I am so thankful for the VentureWomen program. The tools, resources, mentorship, business advisors and support that I have received from this program has been invaluable in the success of my business thus far and I will continue to utilize the knowledge that I have gained from this program as I continue to build my business for years to come."

Jennifer Charron, Founder of  
Executive Logic Search & Workplace Solutions





# Leveraging business for good

## Libro-EPIC Social Enterprise Program



**Libro-EPIC**  
**SOCIAL IMPACT**  
**INITIATIVE**

Our partnership continued with Libro Credit Union as the 3rd Libro-EPIC Social Enterprise Program welcomed six social enterprises into the 3-month accelerator program.

The cohort had the opportunity to attend workshops specifically hand-picked for social purpose organizations. They also received one-on-one coaching provided by our partner Pillar Nonprofit Network as well as up to \$2,000 in funding on eligible business expenses. At the end of the program, the cohort had the opportunity to showcase their business ideas during a Final Pitch competition on May 6th, 2021.

The Top Pitch Award of \$5,000 went to the Community Family Fitness Centre. The People's Choice Award of \$1,000 was won by The Working Class.

"Libro EPIC Social Enterprise program offered through the University of Windsor provided us with so much more than we bargained for. Going in we simply were chasing the money to launch our business. Coming out of this program we gained so much more. The resources, networking, mentoring one-on-one to launch our business further and provided additional focus. This allowed us to line ourselves up with other similar social enterprises to learn the pros and cons of taking this venture was much more rewarding. Although we were in a good place to launch, we were able to critique and polish our business and ensure we did it with great success. We would encourage all of you to take a chance. It will be well worth your time. Thank you for all you do for our communities and especially women entrepreneurs!"

Vita Fiore, Co-Founder of Working Class



EPICentre launched the Social Enterprise 101 Coaching Program in January 2021. This program provided budding changemakers with free coaching service as well as tools and resources that enabled participants to refine and develop their social enterprise ideas. Five changemakers took part in this program that was funded by Libro Credit Union.

Our Social Enterprises project that they will impact a remarkable 11 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS





# Providing students with entrepreneurial learning opportunities

As the entrepreneurial hub on the University of Windsor campus, EPICentre not only strives to help budding startups grow and flourish, but also strives to encourage entrepreneurial thinking. Through various programs, collaborations and competitions, we've been able to invite students across a variety of disciplines to learn and explore the entrepreneurial landscape.



Photo taken pre-covid



Funded by FedDev Ontario and in collaboration with Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), EPICentre launched the NextGen CTO Program in October 2020. This one-of-a-kind five-week program was designed to develop and guide the future generation of CTOs (Chief Technology / Technical Officers) by equipping participants with knowledge in intellectual property (IP) fundamentals and strategies. Each week, participants completed the required modules of the Foundations of IP Strategy online course developed by CIGI before attending the virtual session featuring guest speakers on the subject matter learned during that week. Graduates of the program were issued micro-credentials and digital badges, a skilled-based system that helps validate their skills and accomplishments.

Two cohorts of participants completed the program in November 2020 and March 2021, respectively, with 131 graduates.

**In addition to university students, program participants also included entrepreneurs from 13 different industries from Windsor-Essex and beyond!**



"The [NextGen CTO Program] was really great and far better than what I expected. It really introduced me to a new field which I did not know exist and had such a huge value. After this whole session, I really believe that intellectual property is really an important and valuable asset and everybody should know"

Jobanpreet Singh, a Master of Applied Computing student.





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## EPIC Blue Sky Competition

The annual EPIC Blue Sky Competition is an idea competition fostering entrepreneurial and innovative thinking. Participants are required to work in a team of at least two members showcasing an idea that has the potential of solving an existing problem or satisfying a need in the marketplace.

Due to the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we changed the format of the competition this year to a fully virtual platform. Videos of eight competing teams were posted on our Youtube channel and Facebook page for viewers to select their favourite. The five teams with the most votes were chosen to go on to a panel of judges where the top two winners were selected. Congratulations to:

**1st Place  
\$1000**

**Albatross  
by Sheikh Ubaid,  
Ankit Bhat and  
Haroon Ahsan**

**2nd Place  
\$500**

**Eye of Sauron  
by Abishek  
Rajagopal and  
Sayee Shruthi**



**With a reach of over 15,000 people and  
3,799 social media engagements, this competition was  
a great way for young entrepreneurs to feature their  
bright ideas**

Thank you to the University of Windsor Alumni Association for their support and sponsorship



University  
of Windsor  
Alumni Association





## Flourishing Social Enterprise Summit

Social enterprises strive to make our community better by embracing the triple bottom line approach in their business models, which are: social environment and financial. This is an initiative that is very important to EPICentre as well as our sponsoring partner Libro Credit Union.

On May 14th, 2021, the full day event “Flourishing Social Enterprise Summit” was held virtually with workshops, networking session and moderated panel discussion on various social enterprise related topics. Eleven experienced speakers from across Southwestern Ontario brought insightful discussion to over 140 registrants.

## Hosting High School co-op Students

We were pleased to host three high school co-op students from F.J. Brennan Catholic High School, one in 2020 and two in 2021. All three students showed interest in entrepreneurship by starting their own ventures. Their co-op placement gave them an opportunity to learn the ins and outs of running a business through EPICentre mentorship, research and more.

We're thrilled that we could help local youth on their journey through entrepreneurship.



EPICentre continued our collaboration with Prof. Myra Tawfik, Distinguished Professor of Law and EPICentre Professor of IP Commercialization and Strategy through her EPICentre Practicum course. We had the pleasure of working with eight law students throughout the Summer 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters. This unique collaboration provided law students with an experiential learning opportunity. Their projects included developing a webinar series on topics related to intellectual property (IP), resources on IP valuation and IP resilience and providing legal triage service to our entrepreneurs by helping them identify potential business and IP legal issues.

Two IP clinics and webinars were organized by students in March 2021. This two-part IP sessions included a presentation delivered by students that was open to the general public, followed by a one-on-one IP clinic. We were fortunate to have Aaraf Dewan from Own Innovations Inc. providing one-on-one sessions to five EPICentre startups and Joel Berkovitz and Bill Northcote from Shibley Righton LLP providing one-on-one sessions to four startups.

**The law students worked with 145 entrepreneurs and attendees through seminars and one-on-one meetings**

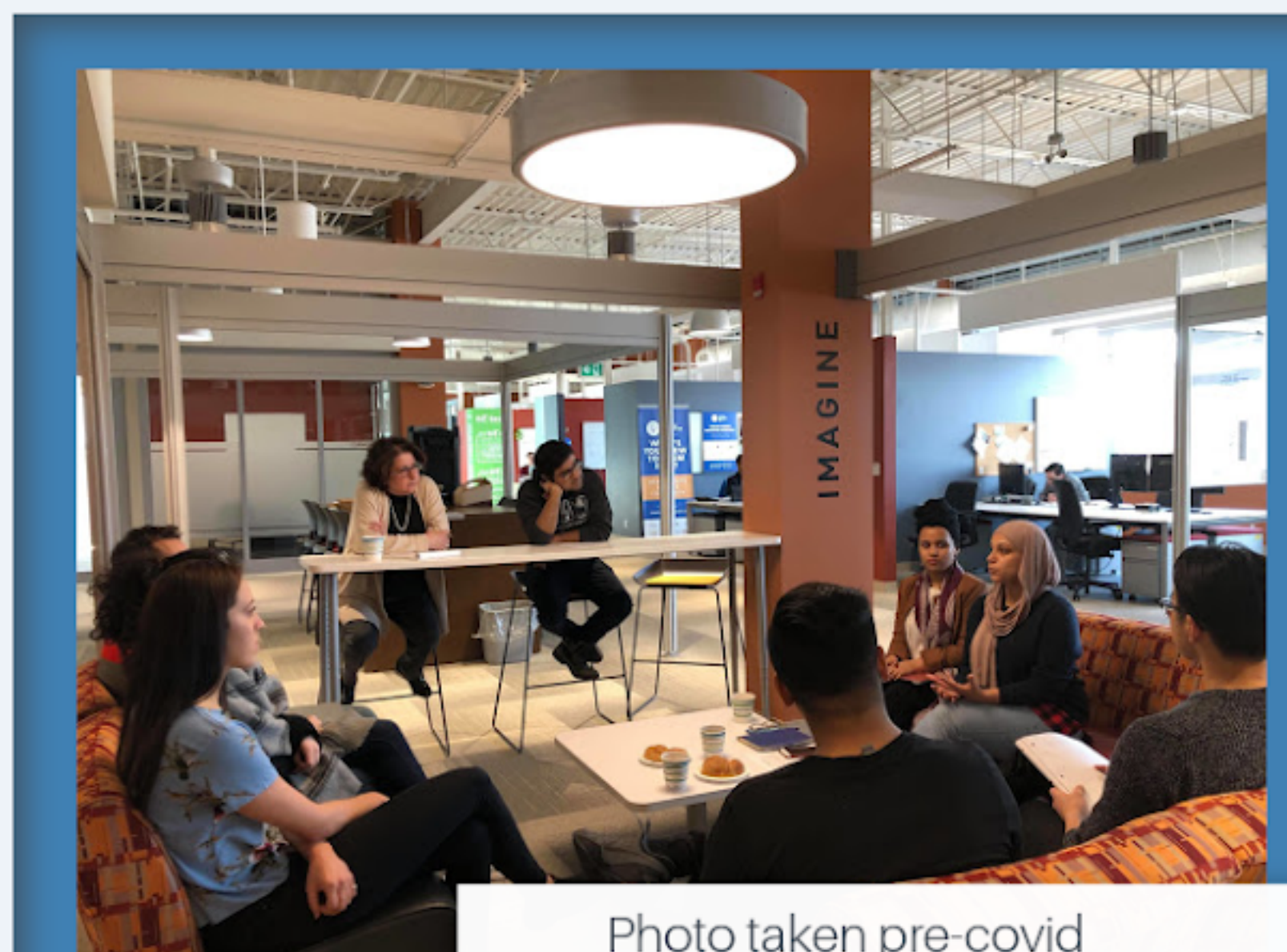


Photo taken pre-covid



## EPICentre Founders Award

Sofia Skara, an undergraduate student from the Faculty of Law, was the recipient of the 2021 Alumni Association EPICentre Founders Award. Made possible through the generous endowment fund by the Alumni Association, this \$1,000 annual scholarship is awarded to students who demonstrate good academic standing and involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

Sofia was involved in the EPIC Legal Triage program where she worked with startups to assist them in their legal endeavours.

"I am honoured to be recognized by the EPICentre for my entrepreneurial initiatives at the University of Windsor. The EPICentre has created an opportunity for me to pursue my legal training while exploring my creative drive. I am grateful for the guidance and training the EPICentre has provided and I'm excited for the future of entrepreneurship and law in the Windsor community."





# Virtual makerspace learning workshops and resources

Just like most facilities across campus, EPICentre's makerspace, the Windsor Mold Group EPIC Makers' Base, was physically closed due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. While we were not able to open the facility and equipment to students and members, we managed to host monthly "Make It & Take It" workshops on a completely virtual platform. Many of these workshops were recorded and shared to our Resources page on the EPICentre website, allowing anyone to access these unique and creative projects to keep the entrepreneurial spirit.

EPIC  
MAKERS'  
BASE



Photo taken pre-covid

Over 200 people attended the makerspace's 14 virtual workshops







# Expanding our network to support entrepreneurs

EPICentre is always looking for new opportunities for collaboration to help empower members of our community to seek out entrepreneurial ventures. Through education, resources and sharing success stories of past participants, EPICentre hopes to encourage anyone with an innovative idea to take the first step into entrepreneurship

## EPIC Expert Advisor

To enhance our advisory services for our startups, we were excited to welcome the EPIC Expert Advisor Panel to EPICentre. Our startups now have access to the team of expert advisors with specific business challenges.

- Santiago Rivera, President & Owner, Rivera Building Maintenance, Inc.
- Kit Moore, President, BluePrint CPAs
- Shalicia Harris, Founder & CEO, In Charge Inc.
- Noah Campbell, Government Relations and Strategic Projects, WaveDirect
- Jennifer Charron, President, Logic Executive Search & Workplace Solutions
- Jesse Thompson, Senior Product Designer, QuoteToMe
- Dane Charles, Associate Investment Advisor, Allison Martinello Group, RBC Dominion Securities



# Podcast

We were excited to team up with Sarah Haefling and her podcast “Made It Happen” to showcase some of our entrepreneurs. The Made It Happen podcast has drawn significant attention, reaching the #36 spot in the Entrepreneurial Category in Canada.

In her Rise Thursdays series, three female entrepreneurs from EPICentre were featured among other female entrepreneurs from the Windsor Essex region. Through the Libro-EPIC Social Impact series, three local social enterprises were highlighted. We were delighted to be able to bring our local entrepreneurs to a wider audience outside of our region.

We would like to thank the RISE Windsor-Essex for sponsoring the Rise Thursday series and Libro Credit Union for sponsoring the Libro-EPIC Social Impact series.



TRISHAUNA LINTON &  
DELNA BUHARIWALLA  
FOUNDERS OF COOK-UP INC.



ADRIAN DESCHAMPS, SHANE  
TROWBRIDGE AND JORDAN BONNEAU  
FOUNDERS OF HALF STEP AWAY



ALLEY BINIARZ & DANE FADER  
FOUNDERS OF GROWN LADY  
GARMENTS & GREENERBINS





# EPICentre Impact by the Numbers

## 2020-21



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### Providing Entrepreneurial Learning Opportunities

EPICentre hosted

142

virtual events

with

2,865

people engaged



107

educational  
webinars with

1,718

participants



35

presentations, sessions  
& virtual networking  
attended by

1,147

people



speakers  
included

49

Industry  
professionals  
across

18

different  
disciplines



EPICentre  
collaborated with

10

departments  
at the  
University of Windsor





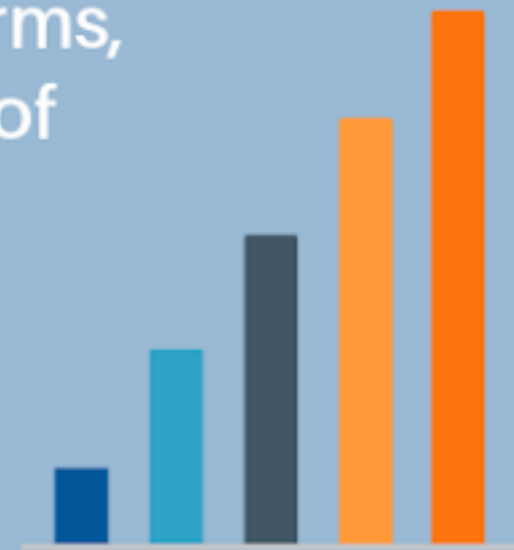
# Promoting Entrepreneurship

## Social Media Stats

across all social media platforms,  
EPICentre saw an increase of

# 172%

In total engagement



## Total Followers Across All Platforms

across all social media platforms,  
EPICentre saw an increase of



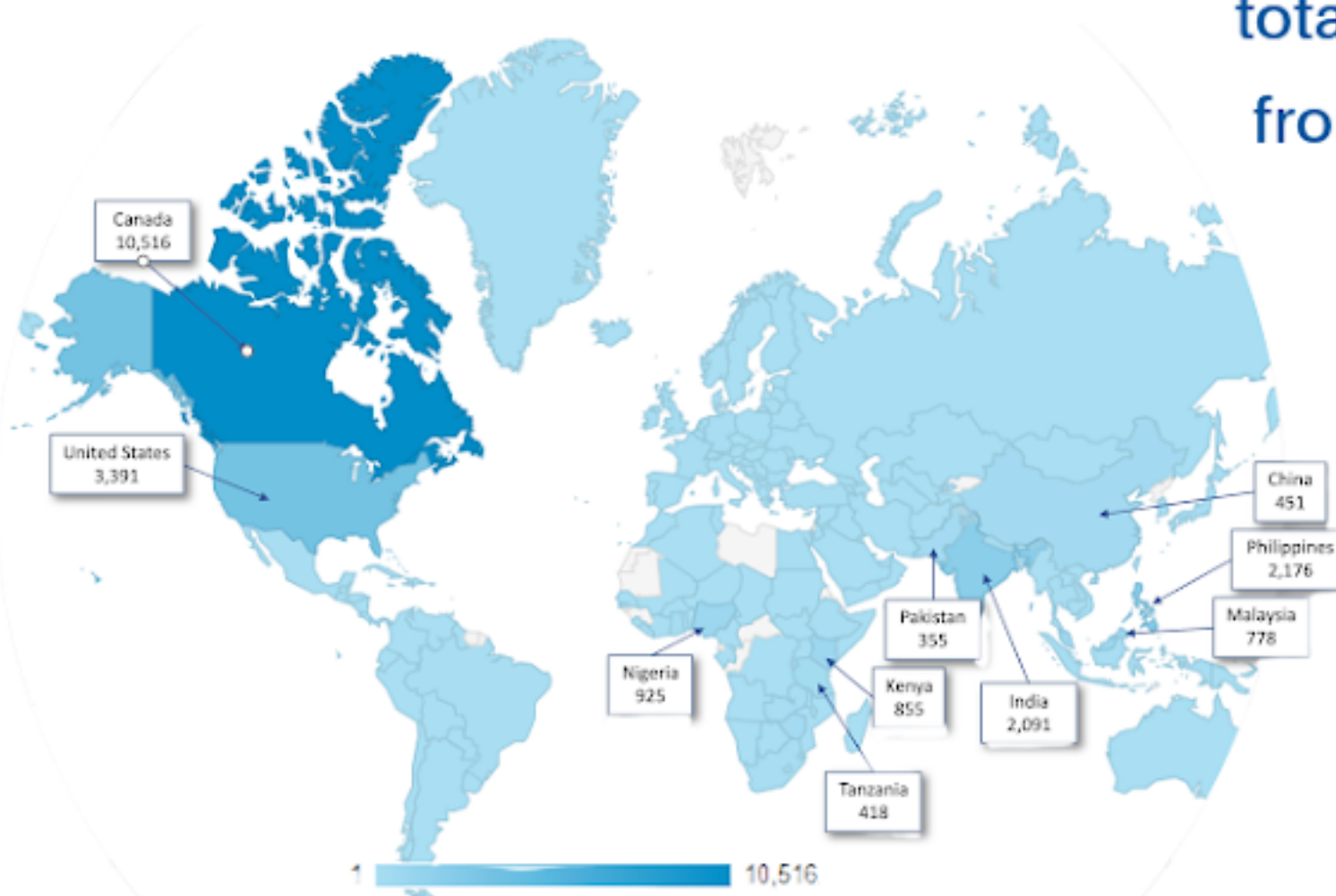
# 1,171

new followers



## Website Traffic

The EPICentre website had a  
total of **26,891** unique users  
from **176** different countries





# Preparing Startups for Success



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Over  
**\$161,000**

in direct funding awarded to startups and  
early stage businesses

A Total of  
**91**  
ventures  
supported



**60%** small-business  
enterprises

**40%**

innovation-driven  
enterprises



out of

**284**

applicants



**46**

were  
accepted



**6**

competitive  
programs

**3**

open enrolment  
programs  
accepted

**185**

startups & entrepreneurs

**76%**

of our workshops  
were exclusive to  
our EPIC community  
of startups





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