

McKENNA INSTITUTE



IMPACT REPORT 2024-25

DIGITAL INNOVATION SUMMIT

MCKENNA
INSTITUTE



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\$70 MILLION+ RAISED TO DATE



\$6 million

raised to date in support of the Research Institute in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence



\$3 million

committed to rural digital transformation, and equity and diversity initiatives



\$13.9 million

in scholarship funding received



\$516,250

awarded to date over **60** scholarships



50+

ongoing projects



4,500+

registered users of IBM SkillsBuild through the McKenna Institute



3,500+

followers on social media



ACADEMIC GROWTH THROUGH THE FACULTY OF COMPUTER SCIENCE



30%

average year-over-year growth in student population over last five years



300

co-op program student job placements over the last year



**“ YOUR BELIEF IN WHAT WE’RE DOING
FUELS EVERYTHING WE ACCOMPLISH. ”**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

The future of New Brunswick lies with the people who care enough to shape it. People like you. This journey has always been personal for me, for our team and for everyone who believes that this province has what it takes to lead in a digital world.

The progress is real. The momentum is undeniable. And at the heart of it is a growing community of people like you who believe in what this province can achieve. New Brunswick may be small but we've always known how to punch above our weight, and we're proving it.

We're not just building programs; we're building a future. One that gives our young people the tools to thrive and ensures the next generation inherits a stronger, smarter New Brunswick. That kind of responsibility doesn't fall to one organization — it takes a community.

Thanks to your support, the McKenna Institute and UNB are positioning our province not just as a local leader but as a national and global example of what a digitally driven economy can look like when it's built with purpose and inclusivity.

We've made bold investments in digital education, AI, entrepreneurship, agriculture, health and data science rooted in the belief that education is the

great accelerator. We've embraced platforms like IBM SkillsBuild to expand access and opportunity, and we're working shoulder to shoulder with our educational partners to bring a comprehensive rural strategy to life.

And the momentum is growing. More learners, more partners, more projects, more breakthroughs. What began as a vision is now a movement with impact you can see across the province.

We know this for sure: none of it is possible without the community behind it. Whether you've been with us from the beginning or just joined the mission, your belief in what we're doing fuels everything we accomplish.

Thank you for being part of this journey and for believing in New Brunswick's potential.

Together, we are not just transforming a province — we're setting a course that others can follow.

Let's keep going.

THE HON. FRANK MCKENNA, PC OC ONB KC

OUR TEAM

Meet our team members at the McKenna Institute who work with our donors and partners to achieve our collective goals.



ADRIENNE OLDFORD
Executive Director



MELISSA O'ROURKE
Associate Executive Director



LISA JOHNSTONE
Executive Assistant



LIAM FLOYD
Communications and Events Officer



JOSH WAITE
Director of Development



ABBY DAVID
Strategic Program Director



LYNNE FAUGHT
Strategic Program Director



LANA REID
Strategic Program Director



MIKE REITHMEIER
Strategic Program Director



TUSHER SAMADDER
Digital Success Coordinator
IBM SkillsBuild



DAVID ITOAFA
Digital Success Coordinator
IBM SkillsBuild



STANLEY OGBUCHI
Digital Success Coordinator
IBM SkillsBuild



CRAIG POOLE
Associate Director, Fundraising
Development and Donor Relations



SONYA HULL
Managing Director, Strategic
Industry & Community Partnerships
Faculty of Computer Science

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In 2021, the McKenna Institute at the University of New Brunswick was founded with an ambitious vision: to bring together leaders from industry, academia and government to catalyze the growth of New Brunswick's digital economy. Our mission from the outset has been to build a digitally confident and prosperous province that leads, innovates and thrives in a rapidly evolving world.

Since then, what began as a bold idea has transformed into a dynamic effort that is making a tangible impact across New Brunswick and beyond. We've seen that driving digital progress is not simply about technology or innovation for its own sake. It's about empowering people and forging resilient partnerships that connect ideas to action and action to outcomes.

Today, the McKenna Institute is proud to be leading more than 50 diverse and forward-looking projects that span the province and stretch across sectors. From the digitization of health care and agriculture to advancements in smart

forestry and the blue economy, our work is laying the foundation for a more sustainable, inclusive and competitive future. These aren't abstract concepts; they are real investments in the lives and livelihoods of New Brunswickers.

This report reflects the energy, creativity and commitment that fuels our work. Each initiative featured here represents a collaboration — between businesses and researchers, academics and policymakers, donors and communities. It also reflects the trust that many of you — our supporters — have placed in us.

To our donors, partners and contributors: thank you. Your generosity, your belief in the power of innovation and your dedication to New Brunswick have been vital to our success. Your support has enabled us to accelerate digital adoption, empower learners and tackle some of our province's most pressing challenges with bold, tech-enabled solutions.

As we look to the future, we are energized by what lies ahead. With your continued partnership, the McKenna Institute will keep pushing boundaries, nurturing talent and shaping a digital economy for everyone.

Together, we are building something lasting — and we are just getting started.

ADRIENNE OLDFORD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



“

WHAT BEGAN AS A BOLD IDEA HAS TRANSFORMED INTO A DYNAMIC EFFORT THAT IS MAKING A TANGIBLE IMPACT ACROSS NEW BRUNSWICK AND BEYOND.

”

DIGITAL



BUILDING THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL AGRICULTURE

A landmark \$3.75-million investment from a partnership led by McCain Foods and other New Brunswick institutions will revolutionize digital agriculture, progress regenerative farming practices and minimize the impact of climate change on farmland.

Over the next five years, McCain Foods is committing \$2.76 million to create a project that imitates farming with regenerative agriculture practices and to establish a Chair of Digital Agriculture at the University of New Brunswick. The goal of the “digital twin” project is to globally increase the uptake of more sustainable potato farming. This digital model will act as a simulation for farmers, showcasing the environmental and

business impacts of regenerative agriculture. This investment aligns with McCain Foods’ commitment to implement regenerative agriculture across 100 per cent of its global potato acreage by 2030.

Adding to McCain Foods’ substantial contribution, ResearchNB, the Government of New Brunswick’s Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture & Fisheries, and the McKenna Institute are collectively contributing an additional \$990,000. This combined investment marks a pivotal step toward fostering a sustainable, resilient agricultural landscape.

This investment will enhance agricultural research at UNB by creating a “digital twin” of McCain’s Farm of the Future in Florenceville, N.B. This commercial-



This partnership between McCain Foods and the McKenna Institute was unveiled at the third annual Digital Innovation Summit in Saint Andrews, N.B., in June 2024.

scale research farm demonstrates sustainable farming practices, producing positive results on crop yield and quality while prioritizing soil health, water use, biodiversity and climate resilience. Work at the Farm of the Future will reduce the carbon emissions associated with farming while bolstering the resiliency and productivity of the farm.

"A key part of our effort to promote smart and sustainable farming is leveraging technology solutions to help us redefine the way we grow a potato," says Max Koeune, president and CEO of McCain Foods. "This cutting-edge digital farm model will help potato farmers worldwide adopt practices that help regenerate soils, improve water management and biodiversity, and ensure a resilient farming operation."

A Chair in Digital Agriculture at UNB will be established with \$1.5 million of the contribution. The Chair will oversee a range of research initiatives that may include digital agriculture, crop simulation modeling, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), sensor data and Internet of Things (IoT) devices to support their initiatives.

Additionally, the investment will support various academic-led research projects in agricultural science, regenerative agriculture and smart farming practices, utilizing interactive analytics and digital twin technologies.

THE MCKENNA SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The acclaimed McKenna Scholars program, now in its third year, has established a reputation for academic excellence, consistently drawing high-achieving students from across Canada and around the world.

With a focus on women, Indigenous students and students in financial need, McKenna Scholars are building a community of future leaders to accelerate talent and ideas in a digital New Brunswick.

The McKenna Institute is proud to assist in UNB's mission to grow its computer science faculty to be inclusive, equitable and diverse. Together, with the support of our donors, we are creating opportunities for underrepresented students in computer science and engineering programs, ensuring them a place in New Brunswick's exciting digital future.

Twenty-four students benefited in 2024-25 from the 10 awards within the McKenna Scholars program. With a total award value of \$205,000, these scholarships are changing lives for exceptional students in computer science, software engineering and related programs on UNB's Fredericton and Saint John campuses.





STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

"This scholarship has provided me the opportunity to obtain some of the additional resources I need to excel in my studies and bring peace of mind in terms of post-secondary education affordability."

— HERMIONE CATT, RECIPIENT OF THE
G. WALLACE F. MCCAIN, CC, ONB SCHOLARSHIP

"Being awarded the John Khoury Scholarship in Computer Science has truly been a transformative experience. It has not only lifted a significant financial burden but also empowered me to fully immerse myself in my studies, deepen my passion for technology, and confidently pursue a brighter, more promising future in my career."

— GIA-KHANH TRUONG
RECIPIENT OF THE JOHN KHOURY SCHOLARSHIP

"Receiving this award has been a tremendous honour. It has provided both motivation and a sense of responsibility as I continue my studies."

— JOSHUA FERGUSON, RECIPIENT OF THE
GEORGE F. DOHERTY MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

"Receiving the Frank McKenna Computer Science Scholarship has relieved some financial burden and aided me in accomplishing my academic goals. I am truly grateful for this generous support."

— KAITLIN MARTIN, RECIPIENT OF THE
FRANK MCKENNA COMPUTER SCIENCE SCHOLARSHIP



WHALE-SAVING SCIENCE GETS A BOOST

Thanks to the support of the Murphy Family Foundation, the Conservation Oceanography Lab at UNB is protecting critically endangered North Atlantic right whales from ship strikes and fishing gear entanglements.

Led by Prof. Kim Davies, the lab's efforts were significantly increased in the 2024 field season. Acoustic gliders patrol shipping lanes and fishery

areas in Canada, leading to the slowing of ships and the management of fishery in areas around the whales. With new battery-saving modifications, one glider achieved a record-breaking six continuous months at sea.

The foundation's support also allowed for the establishment of the Murphy Family Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in Marine Conservation.

The inaugural fellow, Dr. Leila Fouda, is leading critical research and on-the-water conservation activities that reduce risk to whales. Dr. Fouda’s research has already provided valuable insight into the varying ways ships respond to glider detection zones and the impact high speeds can have on the periphery of these zones.

This support is making a difference. For the first time in 13 years, the North Atlantic right whale consortium reported a small increase in population size in 2023, and in 2024 there were zero ship strikes in Canadian waters. The whale population did experience ship strike and calf mortality in U.S. waters, however, highlighting the importance of this work to protect these critically endangered whales.

Public engagement and outreach are key to conservation efforts. Watch for a feature on the lab’s work in a new documentary adventure series on Apple TV+: *The Wild Ones* will premiere on July 11, 2025, highlighting global efforts to protect some of the world’s most endangered species.



DONOR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

We substantially increased our efforts to protect whales in 2024 with your support. This included hiring new students and a postdoctoral fellow, and increasing our on-the-water surveillance effort.

2023	2024	
6	12	LAB MEMBERS Our lab has doubled in size to increase our efforts.
331*	525*	GLIDER SURVEY DAYS We increased survey effort for whales by 60%.
43	92	VESSEL SPEED LIMITS TRIGGERED We doubled the number of days that vessels were under speed restrictions near right whales detected by gliders.
48	51	FISHERY CLOSURE AREAS TRIGGERED We continued to detect whales in actively fished waters, triggering closures around the animals.

*Survey days are aggregated over multiple deployed gliders.

MCKENNA FELLOWS & RESEARCH CHAIR

DR. MATT MCGUIRE

McKenna Fellow in Digital Education



Since July 2023, Dr. Matt McGuire has served as the inaugural McKenna Institute Fellow in Digital Education, thanks to the generous support of an anonymous donor. His work integrates digital literacy and artificial intelligence into education across New Brunswick and reflects UNB's strategic priorities in teaching, learning and research.

A key contributor to the New Brunswick Digital Literacy Framework, now adopted in K-12 schools, Dr. McGuire also helped shape the McKenna Institute's Digital Literacy Strategic Plan and contributes to provincial working groups focused on digital and AI education.

He has led digital literacy initiatives for educators in both anglophone and francophone districts, including a school-wide pilot at Barkers Point Elementary and the upcoming video series *Empowering Digital Learners to Create a Brighter Future*, launching across New Brunswick in fall

2025. He also launched a teacher exchange program connecting UNB pre-service educators with local schools.

Dr. McGuire is collaborating with author Paul Farlow-McAllister and Monster House Publishing to develop a cross-platform reading app. The app features an AI-powered assistant — Herman the Monster — to support elementary-level readers.

At UNB, Dr. McGuire is advancing AI dialogue through leadership in the faculty of education's AI Retreat and service on the AI in Academics Subcommittee. He is also helping design a proposed master's program in digital pedagogy and has presented at events such as the Atlantic AI Summit.

Through strategic partnerships and educational innovation, Dr. McGuire is building a foundation for long-term, sustainable impact in digital education throughout the province and beyond.

DR. DAVID FOORD

Wilson-McKenna Fellow
in Digital Sustainability



Supported by a \$300,000 gift from Jane and Mike Wilson of Sackville, N.B., the Wilson-McKenna Fellowship in Digital Sustainability empowers leadership in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) innovation. Dr. David Foord, the inaugural fellow, has made impactful contributions at the intersection of technology, governance and environmental responsibility.

Dr. Foord developed a new credit course on ESG for UNB's business programs in collaboration with Dr. Taylor Gray. This curriculum also serves as the basis for upcoming short courses for government, industry and academic audiences.

In research, Dr. Foord partnered with the Smart Grid Innovation Network, Siemens Canada and others to deliver a benchmarking study on smart energy systems, leading to a digital knowledge hub and future course content. His collaboration with Net Zero Atlantic, the City of Fredericton and Black Arcs

focuses on how digital tools can influence citizen behavior toward climate action.

Additional initiatives include studies on power system transition readiness, the evolution of ESG practices, and how policymakers can better leverage energy modelling tools. Dr. Foord is also exploring innovation through historical research, including a study on NB Tel and Canada's shift from telegraphs to telephones.

Through the McKenna Speaker Series, he has brought forward voices in civic decarbonization and behavior change, with more thought leaders scheduled for the coming year.

Dr. Foord's work exemplifies the McKenna Institute's mission: to advance digital transformation that serves the public good.

DR. KENNETH KENT

Barrett Chair in Entrepreneurship for Digital Transformation



As the Barrett Chair in Entrepreneurship for Digital Transformation, Dr. Kenneth Kent delivered an impactful academic year in 2024-25 through innovative courses and dynamic student experiences. His work fosters a culture of digital innovation and entrepreneurship within the faculty of computer science. The Barrett Chair was created through a generous \$2.5-million commitment from New Brunswick business leaders and entrepreneurs Edward (Ed) and William (Bill) Barrett.

Dr. Kent designed and launched two new three-credit courses: Entrepreneurship for Digital Transformation I and II, both focused on hands-on learning and venture creation. Across the year, 21 students completed the course series, which culminated in a venture pitch and demo event held on April 10 at the Wu Centre during the faculty of computer science Research Expo. Five student teams presented their prototypes and business ideas to a panel of judges, with prizes awarded

for first and second place. Prior to the event, donor Bill Barrett visited the final class to share his entrepreneurial journey and engage with students.

Complementing the course experience, Dr. Kent led the Barrett Chair Speaker Series, which brought founders, CTOs and CEOs from local startups into the classroom. Over seven sessions, students gained insight into the realities of entrepreneurship and participated in interactive discussions on strategy, innovation and leadership.

Dr. Kent is also mentoring students as they work with local start-ups to help them overcome challenges with new technologies and improve their products to support growth in the market.

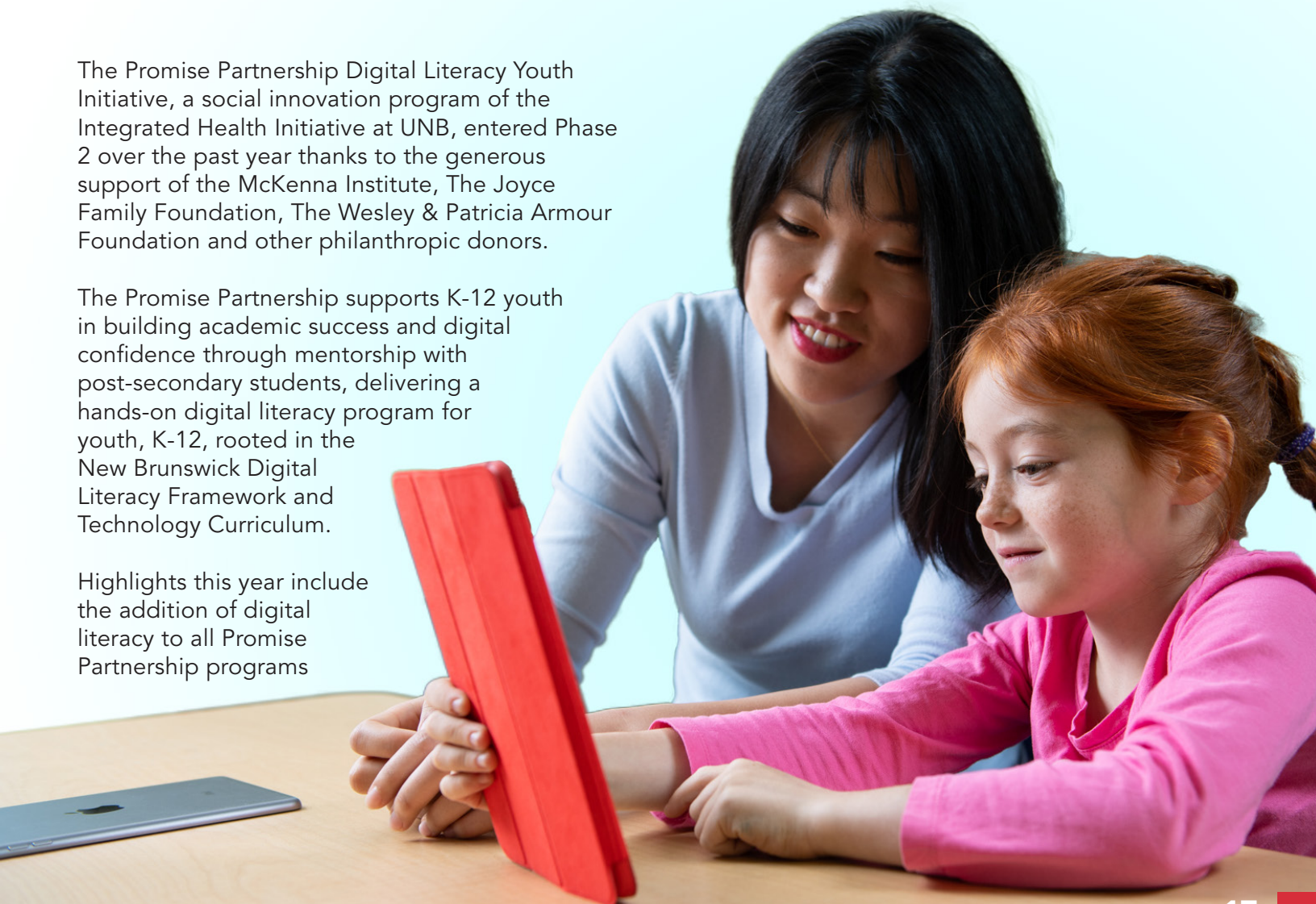
Through education, mentorship and real-world exposure, Dr. Kent is equipping students with the tools and confidence to lead in Atlantic Canada's digital economy.

DIGITAL LITERACY YOUTH PILOT PROGRAM EXPANDS

The Promise Partnership Digital Literacy Youth Initiative, a social innovation program of the Integrated Health Initiative at UNB, entered Phase 2 over the past year thanks to the generous support of the McKenna Institute, The Joyce Family Foundation, The Wesley & Patricia Armour Foundation and other philanthropic donors.

The Promise Partnership supports K-12 youth in building academic success and digital confidence through mentorship with post-secondary students, delivering a hands-on digital literacy program for youth, K-12, rooted in the New Brunswick Digital Literacy Framework and Technology Curriculum.

Highlights this year include the addition of digital literacy to all Promise Partnership programs



and a successful expansion of the Promise Partnership's mentorship program into a Moncton school through new relationships with UNB's Moncton nursing program and the New Brunswick Community College.

Catherine Vanderburgh Kerr, managing director of the Promise Partnership, attributed the rapid progress to the successful collaboration between staff at multiple sites, including UNB's Saint John-based curriculum developer, Kate Saeedi; Prof. Matt McGuire, McKenna Fellow from UNB's faculty of education in Fredericton; and Madison Bell, the Promise Partnership's Moncton program expansion coordinator.

"Bringing digital literacy mentoring to other communities is a top priority, and we are pleased to have made this much headway in our first year," said Vanderburgh Kerr.

In fall 2024, staff began creating the Promise Partnership Digital Literacy Assessment Tool to measure the impact of the new programs. In 2025, this tool will be piloted in different locations, with the goal of refining and sharing it with teachers.

"We plan to explore additional areas across New Brunswick," Vanderburgh Kerr said. "Our next steps include conducting a provincial needs assessment with a focus on starting in Fredericton first, and developing a comprehensive needs assessment guide to prioritize future expansion, particularly in rural regions."



IGT POWERS UP AI RESEARCH, EDUCATION

What does a New Brunswick-based gaming company do after conquering the global market?

If you're International Game Technology (IGT), you invest in developing New Brunswick's talent pipeline.

IGT is engaging the next generation of game development and AI specialists through student scholarships, internships and co-op placements at UNB; support for UNB's e-Sports Society and computer science camps; and development of the recently completed SPRiG Lab. The lab is an innovative space that connects those with a shared interest in games, play and media as rich subjects for cultural research, artistic experimentation, teaching development and design innovation.



The SPRiG Lab: Significant Play and Research in Games.

Aaloak Jaswal (BScCS'93, D-TME'93), innovation director of UNB's Research Institute in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence (RIDSAI), is bullish on the transformative power of AI.

"Digital innovation and AI hold immense potential to drive innovation, improve student learning experiences and foster innovation and economic growth," Jaswal said. "Integrating these technologies can position UNB as a leader in cutting-edge research and education, attracting top talent and funding opportunities."

UNB faculty, staff and graduate students are already pursuing high-level applied research in AI thanks to IGT's support. Four professors, one post-doctoral

student, three graduate students, one full-time staff research developer and the innovation director are leading several research and development projects for IGT partners around the world. Their activities include investigating end-to-end test automation, using AI to enhance performance optimization, utilizing AI to optimize energy consumption and predict hardware failures, and modelling player behaviour to use AI and machine learning in game development.

And this is just the beginning: investment in two new tenured faculty positions who can contribute to AI R&D will fuel further collaborations and growth in the faculty of computer science.



Through the McKenna Institute IGT has generously funded scholarships in support of students enrolled in a computer science field, like Austin Jamieson, left, and Kirsten Donovan.



Hugh Hicks of the Canadian Institute for Cybersecurity, Dr. Paul J. Mazerolle, The Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, Dr. Frank McKenna and Dr. Luigi Benedicenti of the faculty of computer science announce the Cyber Attribution Data Centre in December 2024.

\$10M BOOST FOR CYBERSECURITY

The University of New Brunswick's Canadian Institute for Cybersecurity (CIC) will lead the creation of a new Cyber Attribution Data Centre (CADC), supported by a \$10-million investment from the Government of Canada. The centre will address one of Canada's most pressing digital threats: identifying and attributing malicious cyber activity.

The CADC will employ the latest cyber attribution intelligence analytics with the ultimate goal of

identifying malicious cyber actors. It will also develop comprehensive programs to train and equip the next generation of artificial intelligence cyber attribution specialists.

A key aim will be establishing AI-powered data services to report findings and intelligence to vital government stakeholders. This will be accomplished by establishing a robust data centre capable of capturing, storing and analyzing —



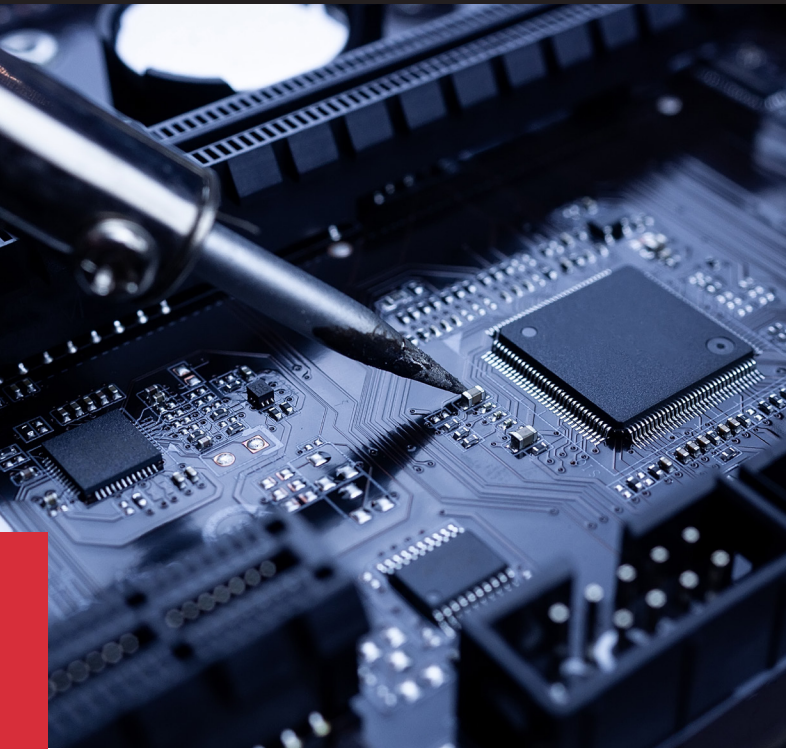
through the use of cyber attribution intelligence analytics — data and producing actionable reports for member partners.

The initiative is led by Dr. Ali Ghorbani, director of the CIC, and supported by the McKenna Institute. Together, the CIC and McKenna Institute will foster collaboration across academia, government and industry.

The CIC is a comprehensive multidisciplinary training, research and development, and entrepreneurial unit that draws on the expertise of researchers in the social sciences, business, computer science, engineering, law and science.

With support from the CIC, the new centre will have access to researchers and practitioners from various academic disciplines to share innovative ideas and conduct groundbreaking research on the most pressing cybersecurity challenges of our time.

The CADC will strengthen Canada's cyber deterrence strategy, protect critical infrastructure and position New Brunswick as a national leader in cybersecurity innovation. By combining cutting-edge research, real-world impact, and workforce development, the centre will play a vital role in securing Canada's digital future.



BUILDING A DIGITAL FUTURE — TOGETHER

Our progress wouldn't be possible without the strong partnerships we've built across industry, government and the non-profit sector. We're proud to work alongside organizations that are equally committed to shaping a thriving, innovative future for New Brunswick.

Over the past four years, these collaborations have played a critical role in accelerating digital transformation across the province — driving talent development and championing bold, forward-thinking ideas.





SHOPPERS DRUG MART

The McKenna Institute's collaboration with Shoppers Drug Mart was first announced in 2022 with the objective of creating innovative, patient-centric community health-care solutions. These initiatives will advance work to help address health-care gaps in the province and across the country.

This collaboration has funded a project supporting research led by Dr. Ted McDonald and Dr. Chris Folkins of the New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training at UNB, examining diabetes and cardiovascular conditions among New Brunswick residents with analysis by location, socioeconomic status and demographic characteristics.

Building on these insights, a Rapid Innovation Challenge led by UNB's Pond-Deshpande Centre launched in March 2025. This initiative aims to identify innovative solutions and collaborations with systems leaders and community health-care providers that address identified disparities in diabetes and cardiovascular care, with a focus on underserved and female populations.

The results of this challenge will help inform the themes of a call for proposals the McKenna Institute will be organizing later in 2025, with the goal of providing funding for research and/or innovation projects that will help address the diabetes and cardiovascular health-care gaps in the province.

Shoppers Drug Mart is also supporting the work of Dr. Jalila Jbilou at Université de Moncton (UdeM) to expand the Truckers' Health Adaptive Technology Clinic Project. This project enables long-haul truckers to access physical, mental health and social services virtually while on the road. This collaboration will facilitate the program's expansion and adaptation for other relevant population segments.

Dr. Sarah Pakzad's research at UdeM will also benefit from the McKenna Institute's ongoing collaboration with Shoppers Drug Mart. Her study focuses on how pharmacists' use of her screening tool — the Neurocognitive Frailty Index — can improve the timely identification of cognitive disorders and result in earlier treatment and better care for patients.



AGRICULTURE ALLIANCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK

The McKenna Institute worked with the Agriculture Alliance of New Brunswick (AANB) on developing a Digital Agriculture Strategy for New Brunswick.

The New Brunswick agriculture industry is comprised of over 1,800 farm operations located in rural areas throughout the province. Implementing digital agriculture technologies has been identified as the foundation to the next major wave of agriculture productivity. The growth of digital agriculture is being fuelled by opportunities to increase profitability and the need for data to demonstrate to consumers the food industry's commitment to environmental sustainability.

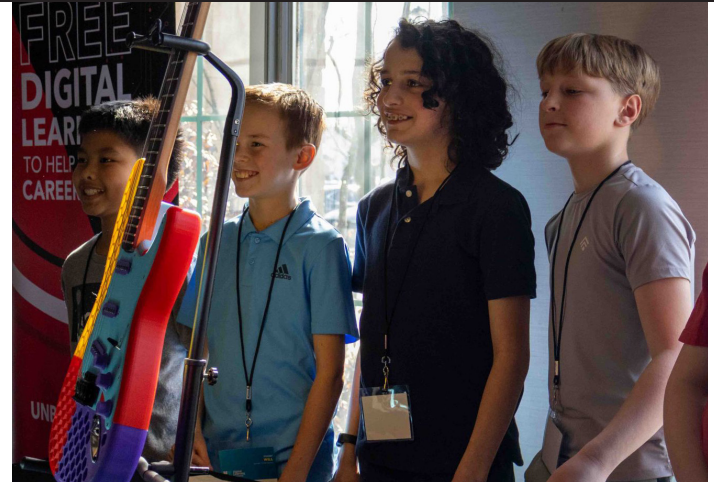
The Digital Agriculture Strategy will serve as a transformative blueprint for the future of agriculture in New Brunswick. By leveraging digital technologies and fostering collaboration across the region, the AANB and other stakeholders can ensure the sector's growth, sustainability and competitiveness in the global market.



CRABTREE FOUNDATION

With support from the Crabtree Foundation, the McKenna Institute is working with the UNB faculty of management's Catalyst program to connect students with their local communities, empowering them to improve and deliver digital literacy and skills training to businesses, stakeholders and citizens to drive economic growth and development.

The Crabtree Community Rural Student Digital Ambassador Program launched in spring 2025 and will run all summer. It is aimed to push economic development within rural communities, promote digital literacy and boost business development by enhancing digital adoption, empowering digital skill use within the community and working with the community to determine the needs, training and technology required to improve efficiency and productivity within businesses and citizens.



DATA TRUST

The Data Trust project, a collaboration between the New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data, and Training (NB-IRDT) and the McKenna Institute, is designed to strengthen NB-IRDT's role as a key data steward in the province. Together, they're working to improve data governance and expand research and data capabilities. The project is partially funded by CGI and the Godin Family Foundation.

Through this initiative, researchers in New Brunswick will gain secure remote access to sensitive data, making it easier to collaborate with peers across Canada and around the world. This improved access will help drive innovation and economic growth in important sectors like health, energy, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. By bringing in industry data, the project will also support evidence-based decision-making and policy development across public and private sectors. Data Trust aims to put New Brunswick on the map as a leader in advanced analytics and AI research. The project is currently working toward launching remote access by August 2025.

DICE AND CAREER SUMMITS

Digital Innovation Community Events (DICE) invite parents, students and community members to events at New Brunswick schools. A group of tech leads and educators offer digital skills training during the school day to all students at the hosting school. In the evening, breakout sessions are offered to parents, students in all grades and members of the community, with hands-on sessions and learning about digital careers, future workforce and post-secondary opportunities in the province. To date, we have hosted three events in St. George, Salisbury and Dalhousie.

In 2024-25, we continued to support the DICE philosophy by funding the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD)/Center of Excellence (COE) for Digital Innovation Career Exploration Summit, The COE for Skills Trades Summit and the COE for Energy Summit, in making the summits accessible and affordable for participants, students, educators and parents from rural schools and communities. These events are made possible by the River Phillip Foundation funding for Rural Strategy.



LEARNSPHERE

LearnSphere and the McKenna Institute are working together to empower 1,000 women entrepreneurs in Cameroon and Senegal. With a \$4-million investment from the Government of Canada over four years, this initiative will break down barriers to digital access and provide women with the tools, training and resources they need to succeed in today's online marketplace.

This project involves working with l'Institut Universitaire de la Côte in Cameroon, and Groupement d'intérêt économique FariFima (Dr. Mariane Ouattara) in Sénégal. Together, we're not just closing the digital gender gap — we're creating a future where women entrepreneurs can thrive.



IBM SKILLSBUILD

The McKenna Institute is providing enhanced access to IBM Skillsbuild with partners such as UNB, Université de Moncton, the Joint Economic Development Initiative and TechImpact, with funding provided by the Government of New Brunswick's Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

IBM SkillsBuild is a free digital training program that prepares users for in-demand, entry-level IT and non-IT roles in many industries. The platform delivers more than 10,000 courses in fields ranging from project management, IT, data analytics and AI technologies. Credentialed badges, career assessments and customized learning plans are also offered.

With more than 4,500 users registered through the McKenna Institute, we are expanding the reach of IBM SkillsBuild in the province. The platform is being used by individuals looking to upskill or reskill, by students as a complement to their studies, and by non-profits.



MESH DIVERSITY

As part of the UNB faculty of computer science EDI vision, supported by the McKenna Institute and MESH CEO and computer science alumnus Mike Wright (BBA'96, BCS'99), the MESH Inclusive Leadership Program was given to 25 students, faculty and staff over two academic years, concluding winter 2025.

Through a series of expert-led sessions, participants developed the skills to foster cultures of inclusion and belonging while promoting diversity and equity in their classrooms, workplaces and communities. This marked the first time the MESH Inclusive Leadership Program was delivered at a Canadian university.

MOBILE MAKERSPACE

Through the support of philanthropic gifts worth \$5.2 million from the Mastercard Foundation and \$750,000 from TD Ready Challenge, UNB and the McKenna Institute have worked collaboratively with the Joint Economic Development Initiative and the Ulnooweg Education Centre in supporting the development of a mobile unit that will bring educators and necessary tools directly to Indigenous communities.

Launching later in 2025, this mobile STEAM learning experience will empower Indigenous youth through culture-driven innovation. Designed with and for Indigenous communities, this makerspace bridges traditional knowledge with modern technologies — right at the source, in community. Continuous community engagements have helped with the development, curriculum, content delivery and naming of the unit.

The curriculum, designed by Ulnooweg Education Centre, will include a wide range of subjects including soldering, math with dash, 3D modelling, beading, rocket science, and arts and culturally based subjects.



RIDSAI

Since launching in August 2023, the Research Institute in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence has become a vital hub connecting academic research with industry innovation in Atlantic Canada. RIDSAI focuses on real-world impact through inclusive, interdisciplinary research.

In 2025, RIDSAI co-led the Atlantic AI Summit in Halifax, which drew over 400 participants and spotlighted themes of trust, governance and innovation.

RIDSAI also launched pilot projects in ocean tech, health data and generative AI, and helped form the Atlantic AI Consortium — a regional partnership focused on collaboration and capacity building.

To meet rising demand for AI literacy, RIDSAI expanded professional training through the College of Extended Learning. It also advanced funding proposals in energy, fisheries and public service innovation.



RURAL STRATEGY FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

In 2025, the McKenna Institute announced the Rural Strategy for Digital Transformation that will accelerate New Brunswick's digital economy. This strategy is made possible by a \$1-million investment led by the River Philip Foundation.

The Rural Strategy for Digital Transformation aims to bridge the rural-urban divide in New Brunswick's digital economy. The strategy proposes initiatives to increase digital adoption, public engagement and support for the province's rural communities and smaller centres through skills development, digitalization initiatives and partnerships.

EY Canada will support the strategy with an in-kind donation as part of their Ripples Program, which connects EY to not-for-profits and social enterprises to help deepen their impact to create an equitable, sustainable future for all. With the help of this contribution, the McKenna Institute will lead a data collection and asset mapping exercise to identify regional challenges and how technology can contribute to local economic growth.



SENIOR ADVISOR IN AI

In 2024, the McKenna Institute partnered with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and hired Armand Doucet as senior advisor in artificial intelligence for both anglophone and francophone districts. Doucet's role was created to augment work already started in the department to research global best practices in responsible use and efficiency of policy implementation for both students and teachers.

In March 2025, the McKenna Institute partnered with EECD and the senior advisor in artificial intelligence to host experts and leaders for a week of sessions around the challenges and opportunities in implementing AI in both K-12 and post-secondary education.



TECH CONNECT

In partnership with Venn Innovation, the McKenna Institute launched TechConnect Southeast in May 2025, a program designed to break down barriers and connect job seekers with real opportunities in the Greater Moncton Area. The program is designed for newcomers, underrepresented groups and those seeking Canadian work experience to connect them to paid work placements, hands-on training and one-on-one mentorship opportunities. Funding for the project comes from WorkingNB, the Government of New Brunswick and the Southeast Regional Service Commission.

The program is inspired by Greater Fredericton Social Innovation's success with a similar IT jumpstart program with their local Civic Tech chapter. Stanley Ogbuchi, digital success coordinator with the McKenna Institute, was connected to the McKenna Institute through the program on a term contract, directly leading to him joining the Institute full-time.



TECH FOR TEACHING

Since 2022, the McKenna Institute has hosted Tech for Teaching conferences each August in different communities around New Brunswick. Since then, we have had more than 250 attendees.

The third annual Tech for Teaching retreat took place in Fredericton in summer 2024. The McKenna Institute brought together more than 100 educators, tech leads, technology coaches and school district leaders for two days of collaborating and learning new ways to integrate digital technology into their classroom, supported by UNB's faculty of computer science.

The conference was attended by educators across grade levels throughout the province. The McKenna Institute, along with its partners the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Centre of Excellence for Digital Innovation and New Brunswick's school districts, were excited to bring in leaders like Dell Technologies, Thales and Science East to speak and provide insights on how to integrate technology into learning at all age levels and speak to opportunities that exist for their students.



THALES

The McKenna Institute has partnered with Thales, a global cybersecurity and defence company with a head office in France, to develop their Canadian National Digital Excellence Centre (NDEC) at Fredericton's Cyber Centre. In February 2025, the NDEC held its grand opening, bringing together students from New Brunswick schools participating in programs like CyberTitans and Cyber Leagues to participate in innovative learning opportunities.

With Thales, the McKenna Institute has developed a project plan for the delivery of a K-12 cybersecurity program in both official languages to be offered throughout the province to engage students in cyber education and STEM careers.

Thales will be offering summer internships and job placements to students from ICTC's Women+ in Cybersecurity program, the Joint Economic Development Initiative and a francophone student to help develop the New Brunswick Cybersecurity Education program for our schools so that it's ready to launch in fall 2025.



UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING TEACHERS

The McKenna Institute is supporting grants for educators in the Anglophone North School District (ASD-N) to upskill and develop new skills to enhance their teaching. Through the Teacher Digital Upskilling Bursary program, more than 75 educators took part in sessions on creative tools like Canva, Adobe Creative Suite, GarageBand and AI applications. This number represents almost 10 per cent of the teachers in ASD-N. These sessions were offered at no cost to teachers, with full supply coverage and travel expenses included.

The McKenna Institute has expanded this initiative to ASD-W and will be expanding to ASD-E. The program itself was born out of a partnership between the McKenna Institute and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that began in 2022, which is part of the McKenna Institute's sector strategy supported by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training, and Labour. The partnership launched the Digital Learning Network and the Tech for Teaching summer conference.



WOMEN+ IN CYBERSECURITY

The McKenna Institute has teamed up with UNB's faculty of computer science, New Brunswick Community College's School of Information Technology, CCNB cybersecurity program and UNB's faculty of engineering on the New Brunswick pilot of the federal ICTC Cybersecurity Training and Work Integrated Learning Program. This program offers the opportunity for women and non-binary students to become Microsoft certified in cloud security, network security and a unique certification on artificial intelligence in cybersecurity.

The program ran for eight months, including a work placement of up to 16 weeks, so students are prepared for work placement upon graduation. The second cohort is wrapping up their projects and summer placements. Federal funding is offered to employers to hire the students and enhance their capacity in cybersecurity and cyber threats awareness. This program includes a wide range of professional development, enrichment and networking opportunities such as a global mentorship program with professional women in the tech industry.

OUR GRATITUDE

Thank you for your generous support of the McKenna Institute.

Together, we are working to design a technology-enabled tomorrow that improves life for every New Brunswicker.

Your support is vital to our success.

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McKENNA INSTITUTE

"This is the chance to do
something truly breathtaking."

— **FRANK MCKENNA**

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