



ACG[®] Toronto

4TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

ATLANTIC NETWORK 2025

Wednesday, September 24, 2025 | Stewart McKelvey Halifax, Nova Scotia
Thursday, September 25, 2025 | Pier 21, Canadian Museum of Immigration

Speakers & Moderators



Introductions: Andrew Frazer

Title: Lead National Accounts

Company: CIBC

CIBC Commercial Banking provides tailored end-to-end solutions to support business' financial needs at every stage of growth from privately held, owner-managed or professionally-managed companies to publicly traded junior corporates. Andrew and his team help companies finance growth, manage cash flow, increase efficiency and mitigate risk.

Andrew has spent over 11 years with CIBC in Toronto and Halifax holding progressive individual contributor and team leadership roles across CIBC Corporate Finance (Leveraged Finance and Asset-Based Lending) and CIBC Commercial Banking's Independent Business, Mid-Market, Cross Border, and National Accounts businesses.



Speaker - Cathy Bennett

Title: President

Company: *Bennett Brown*

Cathy Bennett is a seasoned investor, entrepreneur, and former public servant whose career spans finance, entrepreneurship, and venture capital. She served as Minister of Finance and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women in Newfoundland and Labrador, sat on the board of the BDC, and is a founding and managing partner of Sandpiper Ventures—one of Canada's first venture capital funds dedicated to women-led innovation.

Recognized nationally for advancing inclusive economic growth, Cathy has built and led companies that contributed significantly to Atlantic Canada's economy.



Moderator - Christine Pound

Title: Partner

Company: *Stewart McKelvey*

Christine practices in business law with a focus on mergers and acquisitions, corporate governance, and infrastructure projects. She has an ICD designation, was the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, and has received national recognition for her work by Best Lawyers, Lexpert, and Chambers and Partners in various areas.



Speaker - Corey MacKinnon

Title: Chief Legal Officer

Company: *Cooke Inc.*

Cooke, headquartered in Saint John, New Brunswick, is a multi-national seafood leader and one of the largest integrated seafood businesses in the world with operations in 15 countries. He is responsible for Cooke's legal affairs globally with a focus on leading M&A teams to successfully execute complex cross-border transactions – acquisitions since joining Cooke include the largest salmon farming business in Australia and the largest holder of anchovy quota in Peru. Prior to Cooke, Corey was General

Counsel at J. D. Irving, Limited and prior to that practiced M&A and securities law on Bay Street for more than 15 years.



Speaker - Cory Bell

Title: President & CEO

Company: Lindsay Construction Limited

Cory Bell is a transformative leader, investor, developer, and mentor whose vision has reshaped both Atlantic Canada's construction industry and its broader business community. As CEO, President, and co-owner of Lindsay Construction, he has guided the company's evolution into the premier general contracting firm in Atlantic Canada, delivering growth and

innovation with a blend of strategic business acumen, technical expertise, and an unwavering focus on people.



Speaker - Damian Burke

Title: Managing Director

Company: Main Street Capital Corporation

Damian Burke is a Managing Director on Main Street Capital's lower middle market team. Mr. Burke joined Main Street in September 2019 and has also served as a Managing Director of MSC Income since October 2020. Prior to joining Main Street, from 2016 to 2019, Mr. Burke served as Chief Financial Officer of Melior Innovations, Inc., a Houston, Texas based company focused on commercializing new technologies in the semiconductor,

coatings and oil field service sectors. Prior to joining Melior, from 2011 to 2016, Mr. Burke served as VP Corporate Development for Kraton Corporation (NYSE: KRA), a leading global specialty chemicals company, where he created and built out the corporate development group and led the execution of an acquisition program that doubled the size of the company.



Speaker – David Benoit

Title: President and Chief Executive Officer

Company: Build Nova Scotia

David previously worked for the Department of Health Wellness as the Senior Executive Director of Strategic Investment and Infrastructure Planning for the healthcare facilities across the province. While in the Department, he co-led the provincial COVID 19 Vaccine and Immunization program. Prior to his joining the Province, he served 30

years with the Canadian Armed Forces as an engineering officer in the Royal Canadian Navy retiring as a Captain (N). He served on the east and west coasts and in Ottawa, with his last appointment in Command of the Fleet Maintenance Facility Cape Scott in Halifax.



Introductions by – Derrick Dempster

Title: Partner

Company: Deloitte

Derrick is an Audit and Advisory partner at our Deloitte Halifax practice. Derrick is the firm's co-leader of the Canada's Best Managed Companies program. Derrick brings over 30 years of unique experience to his clients, having been an entrepreneur and involved in running many successful companies in a variety of industries. Derrick's client portfolio consists primarily of private companies, but also includes not-for-profit and public sector organizations. Derrick's number one priority is to bring value to his clients and to help them improve.



Moderator – Don Mills

Title: Co-Host

Company: INSIGHTS

Don is the President of Crane Cove Holdings Limited, his family investment firm, and a partner and Director with CABCO Communications, an IT infrastructure company in Canada. He is a co-founder and partner with Total Marketing & Communications (TMC) in Bermuda and its affiliate Narrative Research Bermuda. He currently serves as Senior Counsel to TMC. He is the co-founder and former owner and CEO of Corporate Research Associates (now Narrative Research), which has an on-going and long-term relationship with TMC. Don sold his company to his senior management team in late 2018 and remained Chair of the Board and Senior Counsel of Narrative Research until early 2023. He was a regular columnist with both the Saltwire Network and Brunswick News and continues as a columnist for the MacDonald Notebook, as well as being a frequent media commentator on public affair issues. He is also the Co-host of the Insights Podcast on the Acadia Broadcasting Network. He is the co-author of "Toward Prosperity: The Transformation of Atlantic Canada's Economy". He continues to be active as a consultant in marketing and strategy.



Keynote Speaker - Erin O'Toole

Title: P.c., C.D. – Managing Director

Company: ADIT North America

Erin O'Toole is the President and Managing Director of ADIT North America and serves on the executive committee of ADIT Group in Paris. He assumed this role after leaving elected office and having served as the Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. Erin was elected to the Canadian Parliament four times serving in cabinet and as Leader of the Opposition. He had a particular policy focus on foreign policy, defence, trade and economic issues. Erin ran to become Prime Minister in the 2021 general election held amid the COVID-19 pandemic winning the popular vote.



Introductions by - Geoff Bennett

Title: President

Company: Bennett Brown

Leveraging on a diverse 30-year career in business, Bennett Brown is a boutique advisory firm that connects some of Canada's most enterprising and affluent families with private investments, M&A services and philanthropic planning opportunities. Having built much of his practice while living in Western Canada, Geoff found great value in being an ACG member in Vancouver and attending events in Calgary and Edmonton. Bennett Brown's greatest asset is its coast-to-coast network of investors and

business professionals, and ACG has once again been instrumental in helping to grow his network in Toronto, and Atlantic Canada, upon Geoff's return to Halifax in 2020.



Speaker – Gioia Usher

Title: CEO

Company: We'koqma'q L'nue'Kati

Gioia Usher is the CEO of We'koqma'q L'nue'kati, an Indigenous community in Cape Breton advancing economic development and strategic investment across Mi'kma'ki and beyond. A Chartered Professional Accountant, Gioia brings expertise in financial governance and investment to the community. Under the strategic leadership by Chief and Council, Gioia has helped We'koqma'q become a co-owner of Clearwater Seafoods and was one of the participating communities in the landmark acquisition of PURE Canadian Gaming in Alberta through Indigenous Gaming Partners.



Speaker – Greg Wanger

Title: CEO

Company: Oberland Agriscience

With a Ph.D. in Geology and Environmental Microbiology, Dr. Wanger is an experienced research scientist whose career milestones include five years at the NASA Jet Propulsion Lab, culminating in their optical organics' mapper, SHERLOC, landing on Mars in February 2021 with the Perseverance rover. Jumping

back to 2016, Greg and his family relocated to Halifax, Nova Scotia in Atlantic Canada. Shortly after, Dr. Wanger founded Oberland Agriscience Inc. out of his desire to address the escalating global protein shortage.



Speaker – Jack Dallaire

Title: Principal

Company: SeaFort Capital

Jack Dallaire is a Principal at SeaFort Capital, a Halifax-based private equity firm. In his role, he focuses on investment origination, transaction execution, and supporting portfolio company growth. Prior to SeaFort, Jack worked in RBC's Mid-Market Mergers & Acquisitions group and in corporate development for a publicly traded media company. He holds a BBA from the University of New Brunswick, an MBA from Dalhousie University, and is a CFA Charter holder.



Introductions by - Jeff MacKenzie

Title: Partner

Company: Confederation M&A

Jeff has been a part of the Confederation M&A team since 2015 and a Partner since 2017. Jeff oversees the M&A practice, working with clients across a variety of industries to help them meet their business growth or succession planning goals.

Prior to joining Confederation M&A Jeff worked for a global management consulting firm, helping clients create rapid and sustainable performance improvement. During his time as a consultant and project manager, Jeff led teams in a variety of industries, helping businesses in designing and implementing a variety of profitability improvement plans, corporate restructuring initiatives, and mergers & acquisitions.



Speaker – Jennifer LaPlante

Title: Deputy Minister, Cyber Security & Digital Solutions

Company: Government of Nova Scotia

Jennifer LaPlante joined the Government of Nova Scotia as Deputy Minister of the Department of Cyber Security and Digital Solutions in July 2025 after more than two decades in digital transformation, data governance and artificial intelligence. Much of her work has focused on the intersection of technology, innovation, and data analytics.



Speaker – Jenny Brake

Title: Chief

Company: Qalipu First Nation

Chief Jenny Brake has served as Chief of Qalipu First Nation (QFN) since October 2024, following 10 months as Interim Chief. She brings a diverse background as a welder, artist, and community advocate, always striving to build meaningful relationships and advance the well-being of the people she represents.

As Chief, she has led significant initiatives for the Nation, including the acquisition of New Dock on behalf of QFN, strengthening the Nation's economic foundation and future opportunities.

Chief Brake's dedication extends to broader Indigenous platforms. She serves on the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Indigenous Women's Steering Committee and contributes nationally through her roles on the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chief's Committee on Charter Renewal, the AFN Fisheries Committee, and the AFN Economic Development Committee. She is also an ambassador with the Canadian Seals and Sealing Network and sits on the Newfoundland and Labrador RCMP Commanding Officer's Indigenous Advisory Committee.

Grounded in Mi'kmaq values and traditions, Chief Brake is supported by her family in her unwavering dedication to the growth and prosperity of Qalipu First Nation.



Speaker – Jordan Kyriakidis

Title: Co-Founder & CEO

Company: QRA Engineering Intelligence

I began my career in downtown Toronto, took a detour through quantum physics, and landed at the intersection of AI, engineering, and business transformation. After earning a PhD in Quantum Theory from the University of Basel (Switzerland), I spent 14 years as a professor at Dalhousie University, leading the Quantum Theory Group — until I left academia to build something new.

As CEO of QRA, I lead the development of AI-driven tools that help global aerospace, energy, and biotech companies design and validate complex systems. Our technology enables organizations to uncover hidden risks early, accelerate integration, and create enduring value — all crucial in high-stakes, high-complexity environments.



Speaker – Lauren Ledwell

Title: CEO

Company: PEI BioAlliance

Lauren Ledwell is an Atlantic Canada-based leader with a proven track record in business transformation, venture capital, and innovation strategy. Lauren has most recently been a Principal with Sandpiper Ventures, leading investments focused on inclusive, high-growth technology companies across Canada. In September, Lauren was appointed the CEO of the PEI BioAlliance

Lauren has a breadth of cross-sector experience — spanning early-stage startups to global multinationals. Her previous roles include a global leadership role in driving digital customer experience at Manulife, corporate strategy and digital innovation at RBC, and commercial operations at Maple Leaf Foods. Before joining Sandpiper Ventures, Lauren was CEO of discoverygarden.



Speaker – Loren Rafeson

Title: Partner, Growth Equity Partners

Company: BDC Capital

Loren Rafeson is Partner, Growth Equity Partners, at BDC Capital where he helps leading Canadian companies scale nationally and internationally. Since joining BDC in 2018, Loren has been involved in the execution of BDC's investments in BCES Global, Firmex, Groupe Tecnic, Monarch House, Preciseley Microtechnology, and Resolute Health. He currently serves on the boards of BCES Global, Groupe Tecnic, Monarch House, and Resolute Health and previously served on the boards of Firmex, InvestorCOM, and Neighbourly

Pharmacy (formerly Rx Drug Mart).



Speaker: Louis Beaubien

Title: Chief Scientific Officer

Company: ResolveHD



Moderator – Matthew Galgay

Title: Partner, Local Market Leader Atlantic Canada

Company: BDO Canada LLP

Matthew is a Partner at BDO, with over 20 years of professional experience providing financial reporting and advisory services to clients in multiple industries including private equity, real estate & construction, retail & consumer business, and technology.

As an advisor to companies in these sectors, Matthew has been required to have intimate industry knowledge to support his high-quality deliverables.

This includes financial statement audits and reviews, internal control work, and advising companies during key moments of innovation, compliance, and growth such as navigating cross-border transactions.



Speaker – Melanie Nadeau

Title: Chief Executive officer

Company: COVE

Melanie Nadeau is the Chief Executive Officer of COVE where she is responsible for leading the strategic direction and managing overall operations. She brings over 20 years of experience in business development initiatives that drive high-tech innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment. Melanie has been a noted expert for

the International Energy Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Electrotechnical Commission. She has earned multiple awards, including Canada's Clean16 Award for her outstanding contribution towards clean capitalism, has been named Atlantic Canada's 25 most powerful women, was an invited speaker to TEDGlobal, and is a strong supporter for Canada's tech ecosystem as a mentor for the Creative Destruction Lab.



Speaker – Michael Maracle-Polak

Title: President & CEO

Company: AKWEKON Enterprise

Michael Maracle-Polak (Mohawk, Bear Clan—Six Nations of the Grand River) is President & CEO of Akwekon Enterprise, Chief Administrative Officer of Glooscap First Nation, and a Harvard alumnus in First Nation Leadership. Over the past decade, he's guided Chiefs and Councils through governance reform, operational turnarounds, band management and the creation of community owned economic development corporations.



Moderator – Michael Young

Title: Partner, Data-Driven Growth Strategy

Company: Deloitte

Michael Young specializes in Private Equity with a particular focus on identifying and creating technology informed value creation opportunities at all stages of the Private Equity lifecycle. Previously as VP of Products at Private AI, he drove innovation in AI and privacy technologies, led GTM strategy (including pricing, packaging, and distribution strategy) and Marketing. His background includes leadership roles in private equity and technology at Birch Hill, Salesforce, and SAP, where he has excelled in guiding teams and fostering growth across various sectors. Michael's expertise spans across product management, technology

strategy, corporate development, and leadership, enabling organizations to develop and implement cutting-edge solutions.



Speaker – Michelle Robichaud

Title: President

Company: Atlantica Centre for Energy

Michelle has more than 25 years of public relations, education and business management experience. She has led research projects and community engagement initiatives in various sectors for government, industry and non-profits. In her role as President of the Atlantica Centre for Energy, Michelle proactively advocates for the evolution and growth of Atlantic Canada's energy sector.



Introductions by – Sally Ng

Title: Client Partner, Advisory Services

Company: BDC

Sally Ng is a seasoned ecosystem builder driving entrepreneurial growth across Atlantic Canada and beyond. Known for her entrepreneurial spark and ability to turn strategy into action, she's founded multiple accelerator centres and programs, led innovation projects globally, and held roles from CEO and senior executive to angel investor. Her experience spans entrepreneurial centres, venture capital, corporate innovation, and working closely with

family-owned businesses to support succession, growth, and governance transitions



Introductions by – Sean Flinn

Title: VP M&A Practice

Company: BFL Canada

Sean is a Vice-President at BFL CANADA, one of the largest risk management, insurance brokerage and benefits consulting firms in Canada. The BFL M&A team is a leading Canadian broker of transactional risk insurance and insurance due diligence. Commitment to customer excellence has allowed the BFL M&A team to grow to the largest in Canada servicing the entire Canadian M&A market, including pensions, strategic acquirers, private

equity funds, family offices, search funds and independent sponsors.



Moderator – Sean Stager

Title: Director – Transactions

Company: Doane Grant Thornton

A Director in the Transactions group based in Halifax, Sean provides advisory services to our clients, specializing in financial modelling and analysis, due diligence, debt financing, M&A, and business valuation.

Sean is responsible for developing complex financial models to assist clients with internal benchmarking and analysis, and projecting cash flows for purposes of leveraging their business, as well as facilitating both buy and sell-side due diligence mandates. Sean leads the Financial Modelling & Analysis practice nationally for Doane Grant Thornton.



Speaker – Tim Houtsma

Title: CEO and Co-Founder

Company: Marid Industries Limited

Marid is a steel fabrication and erection company focused primarily on the Atlantic Canadian market. Marid prides itself on providing both innovative and unique design and construction solutions for their clients. Projects range from warehouses, schools, long- term care facilities and bridge repair.



Moderator - Tim Robbins

Title: Market Vice President

Company: CIBC Commercial Banking

Tim Robbins is a seasoned banking executive with over 20 years of progressive leadership experience in commercial banking. He has an extensive background supporting large corporate energy clients in Calgary in addition to leading multiple commercial banking teams across the Greater Toronto Area. Currently, Tim oversees the Commercial Banking team and National Accounts business for CIBC in Atlantic Canada.



Speaker – Zac McIsaac

Title: Managing Partner

Company: McCain Capital Partners

Zac has more than 15 years of experience in private equity investing, M&A, and corporate finance and strategy. He leads McCain Capital Partners (MCP), a long-term investor in great businesses, on behalf of the McCain family in Toronto. Prior to leading MCP, Zac was an investment professional at a mid-market private equity firm, where he was responsible for acquiring and creating value in market-leading businesses. He previously made and managed investments on behalf of another ultra-high net worth family. Zac has a Bachelor of Commerce from Mount Allison University, where he now serves on the Board of Regents; he received his MBA from Queen's School of Business, and he is a CFA charter holder.