A PLACE FOR PLACE

POLICY BRIEF

The Role of Place-Based Industrial Policy in a More Ambitious Canada

The Community Transformations Project

IRPP

ABOUT THIS PAPER

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HIGHLIGHTS

Canada is facing a range of challenges that will drive economic transformation at the national, regional and local levels. The relationship with the United States, its largest trading partner, is changing. Investment in defence is growing. Global energy markets are shifting as investment in clean energy and electrification is rising. The changing climate and geopolitical tensions are creating new risks for supply chains. And automation and artificial intelligence are increasingly being adopted in manufacturing and resource sectors.

A 2025 report by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) argues that Canada needs a smarter industrial strategy to successfully navigate change. Part of this success lies in understanding the importance of place: national industrial priorities are implemented in specific places, where local assets, infrastructure, labour markets and institutions shape whether investments succeed and who benefits.

This brief builds on the IRPP report's recommendations and findings from the IRPP's multi-year Community Transformations Project. We examine how Canada's industrial policy connects national priorities with regional and local economic development, and where gaps remain. We then consider how place-based industrial policy could address those gaps.

Many of the assets and industries central to Canada's national priorities — from diversifying trade and developing major projects to building defence industrial capacity — are concentrated in particular communities and regions. So are key economic development opportunities in areas such as critical minerals and clean electricity. Major projects and other priority areas, including housing and infrastructure, also depend on place-specific capacity, supply chains and institutions.

These geographic patterns and local conditions matter for both economic performance and equity. From an economic performance perspective, progress toward national goals depends on the ability to address local barriers to development. It also hinges on the ability to draw on assets, skills and innovation beyond major urban and well-established industrial centres, including in smaller cities, rural areas, northern regions and Indigenous traditional territories. From an equity perspective, national investments and major projects do not automatically translate into strong local benefits, broader regional resilience or more equitable outcomes. Their benefits and risks can be unevenly distributed across places and people.

Place-neutral policy is not necessarily neutral in effect. Investment and support can disproportionately flow toward regions that already have stronger industrial ecosystems, research institutions and access to capital.

Place is already reflected in parts of Canada's industrial policy system. However, links to regional and local economic development remain uneven and limited. Gaps arise at three levels:

1. Strategy — Federal industrial strategies give uneven and limited attention to specific regions, clusters and local economic systems.
2. Implementation — Federal institutions, through their mandates and policy instruments, are not consistently designed to account for where investment goes or how local economies are affected.
3. Capacity — Federal programs do not systematically support the community-level capacity needed to deliver policy effectively and translate investment into local economic outcomes.

In Canada, responsibility for accounting for differences across regions and places often falls to Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and subnational governments, while place-based approaches remain insufficiently integrated into national strategies and policies.

A more place-based approach to industrial policy could help address these gaps by bringing top-down and bottom-up approaches together. In practice, industrial strategies and major projects with significant regional and community implications should consider local assets, barriers and priorities in industrial policy decisions. These efforts should be supported by the human, financial and institutional capacity needed to translate national investment into local outcomes.

The IRPP recommends a comprehensive framework to address these gaps at three levels: industrial policy strategy, implementation and community capacity.

Recommendation 1: Strategy — Federal, provincial and territorial governments should work together, in collaboration with Indigenous governments, municipal governments, communities and regional and local economic development actors, to incorporate place-based elements in industrial strategies and major project plans.

- Industrial strategies — especially where local conditions materially shape implementation and outcomes — and major projects should account for differences across regions and places, including rural, northern and Indigenous communities. Conditions facing local businesses should also be considered.

  Designing industrial strategies and major projects with these regional and local conditions in mind can help ensure communities capture a reasonable share of the benefits without bearing a disproportionate share of the associated risks.

  Governments should identify early where place-based elements are needed and adapt policy design accordingly. This can be done through differentiated eligibility, project size thresholds, financing and cost-sharing terms for public funding and tax incentives, complementary local investments and supports, and major project planning that addresses potential local and regional benefits, risks and capacity needs. This process should draw on the knowledge and expertise of regional and local actors, including Regional Development Agencies, Community Futures Organizations (CFOs), municipal economic development offices, Indigenous economic development corporations, colleges, workforce development bodies, local unions and community innovation hubs.

Recommendation 2: Implementation — Leverage the capacity and knowledge of Regional Development Agencies to help unlock local potential in the national interest.

- The federal government should give Regional Development Agencies a more formal role in connecting national industrial policy with provincial, territorial, Indigenous, regional and local economic development priorities.

  For major federal industrial policy initiatives with significant regional or local implications, Regional Development Agencies should have a standing role in program design, project assessment or implementation, as appropriate. Regional Development Agencies should work with provincial, territorial, Indigenous and municipal governments, communities and local economic actors, including economic development organizations, sector and technology associations and cluster organizations, to identify significant local opportunities and the barriers that limit them. They should also work together to help connect those priorities to the federal programs and policy tools that can support them. This would formalize and strengthen functions that Regional Development Agencies already perform.

Recommendation 3: Capacity — Invest in rural, northern and Indigenous capacity to lead innovation, entrepreneurship and economic development.

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should allocate a greater share of industrial policy and economic development funding to building capacity in communities *before* opportunities become investment-ready, rather than waiting until major investments or projects arrive.

  They should support innovation and entrepreneurship that reflect the distinct assets, knowledge and economic opportunities of rural, northern and Indigenous communities. Capacity funding should include multi-year support for economic development staff and strategic planning, funds for feasibility and early project development work, and technical support to prepare proposals and manage implementation. Communities hosting or affected by major projects should also receive capacity funding early in project planning so they can identify priorities, assess options and negotiate local and regional benefit arrangements before key decisions are finalized.

CANADA'S ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS CONVERGE IN PLACES

Industrial policy is playing a more prominent role in Canada's response to a changing economic and geopolitical environment. Shifting trade relationships, growing defence commitments, the global energy transition, climate-related supply chain disruptions and the diffusion of automation and artificial intelligence are reshaping the conditions for growth and competitiveness in Canada.

These shifts are often framed as national or sectoral challenges, but they also have a spatial dimension. The economic transformations underway, and the national priorities emerging in response, ultimately converge in places. They interact with the assets, industries and capabilities in specific communities and regions. National economic transformations affect, and are experienced by, communities and regions differently.

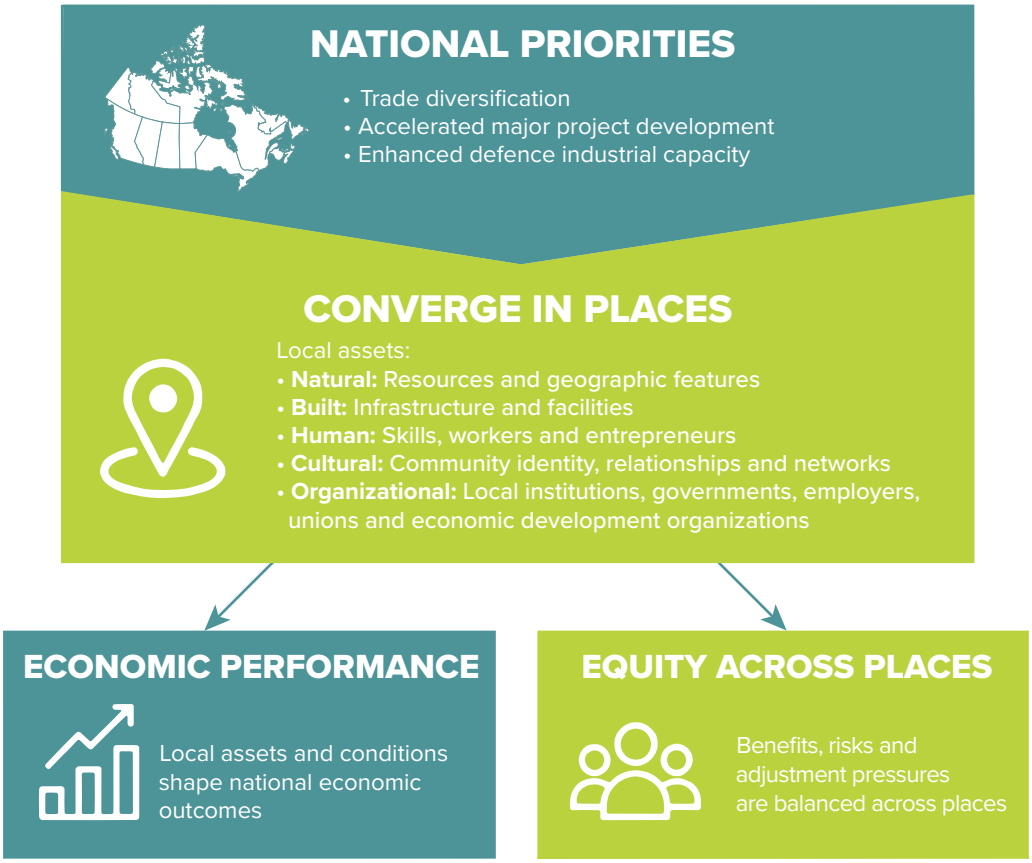
This policy brief is the fourth in a series under the IRPP's Community Transformations Project examining how to better support communities and workers across Canada through economic transformations. Previous briefs focused on community-led economic development, place-based skills development, and community-wide supports for mass layoffs and major closures. This brief turns to industrial policy and examines how place can shape both national economic performance and local outcomes. It also builds on the recommendations of an IRPP (2025a) report that argues Canada needs a smarter industrial strategy to successfully navigate economic change.

What we mean by "place"

In this brief, we use "place" as a working term for the subnational geographies — like communities, regions, industrial clusters and other functional economic areas — where people and economic activity are connected (McCann, 2023; OECD, 2020a). These places do not always align with existing administrative boundaries. Labour markets, supply chains, infrastructure networks and other economic relationships often link multiple municipalities or regions, making functional economic geographies an important complement to administrative ones (OECD, 2020a). Different places also bring together different combinations of natural and physical assets, workers and skills, firms, infrastructure, institutions, knowledge and networks that shape their economies and economic opportunities (McCann, 2023; OECD, 2025a).

This spatial dimension of economic transformation has implications for both national economic performance and the distribution of its benefits and costs (Barca et al., 2012; OECD, 2025b). From an economic performance perspective, national ambitions depend in part on mobilizing assets and opportunities across places and on the local conditions that shape how effectively they can be used (OECD, 2026a). From an equity perspective, economic transformations can create benefits, risks and adjustment pressures that are distributed unevenly across communities and populations (figure 1).

Figure 1. Economic transformations and national priorities converge in places, shaping both national economic performance and local outcomes



Source: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP).

National economic ambitions depend on local assets and conditions

Canada's current national priorities, including trade diversification, accelerated major project development and enhanced defence industrial capacity, draw on assets and productive systems across the country (Prime Minister of Canada, 2025). These national priorities are advanced through economic development in critical minerals, defence, clean electricity, energy exports, advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence (Department of Finance Canada, 2025a; Karpinski & Carré, 2026; Natural Resources Canada [NRCan], 2026a).

Many assets and systems underpinning those priorities are geographically concentrated. Mining activity and investment, including in critical minerals, are concentrated in particular provinces, territories and mining centres (Karpinski & Carré, 2026). Provincial and territorial electricity systems reflect different regional resource endowments (NRCan, 2026a). And trade diversification depends on specific ports and transportation corridors (Department of Finance Canada, 2025a). The federal government's current portfolio of major projects further reflects this pattern, with nationally significant investments spanning mines, ports, energy infrastructure and trade corridors, located where assets and opportunities are concentrated (Department of Finance Canada, 2025a; Major Projects Office [MPO], 2026a).

The economic value of these assets also depends on the conditions surrounding them (Karpinski & Carré, 2026; OECD, 2025c). Major investments require workers with the appropriate skills, transportation and energy infrastructure, housing and community services, suppliers, access to capital, and institutions that can support training, innovation and implementation. These surrounding conditions can influence project competitiveness and the extent to which investment generates wider economic activity (Karpinski & Carré, 2026; OECD, 2025b, 2025c). Evidence from mining regions, for example, shows that workforce capacity, infrastructure, suppliers and local institutions can influence both project competitiveness and regional economic outcomes (OECD, 2025c).

Research on industrial clusters also reflects this relationship between economic performance and local productive systems. Wolfe and Southin (2026) draw on a wide body of cluster research to highlight the association between geographically concentrated networks of firms, specialized suppliers and knowledge institutions, and outcomes including productivity, innovation and new firm formation. Earlier Canadian research finds that the concentration of related industries in city-regions is associated with higher incomes and employment growth (Spencer et al., 2010). Research on eight Canadian ICT (Information and Communications Technology) clusters highlights the importance of both local factors — including civic associations and networks among firms and institutions — and external connections to knowledge, customers and markets in shaping cluster dynamism and competitiveness (Lucas et al., 2009). Geography alone does not determine economic performance, but the economic and institutional systems surrounding firms and investments can shape their ability to contribute to broader national economic objectives.

When local assets are underused, economic potential can remain unrealized; mobilizing those assets more fully can contribute to the national economy (OECD, 2025b). Rural areas, for example, account for around one-quarter of Canadian economic activity. But if the rate of new business creation in Canada's rural areas had matched that of urban areas in 2018, there would have been approximately 8,100 additional rural businesses (OECD, 2024). While a variety of factors may contribute to lower rates of business creation in rural areas, the estimate illustrates the potential for increasing economic activity outside large urban centres.

Taken together, these dynamics mean that local assets and conditions matter beyond regional economic development: they can shape how effectively Canada is able to mobilize the resources, productive systems and investment opportunities on which national economic ambitions depend.

National investments do not automatically produce strong local outcomes

But local conditions also matter beyond national economic performance. They can shape how communities experience economic transformation.

The IRPP's Community Transformations Project shows that the adjustment pressures associated with broader economic changes can be highly uneven across places. The IRPP's

analysis identifies 68 Canadian communities among the most susceptible to workforce disruption associated with the global energy transition, based on their dependence on large-emitting industries or globally traded sectors undergoing transformation (Chejfec et al., 2025). A similar analysis of local employment in sectors with a high proportion of exports to the United States identified 19 communities as among the most susceptible to workforce disruption from both changes in U.S. trade policy and the global energy transition (Chejfec, 2025; Yassin et al., 2026). Susceptibility does not predict that job losses will occur; rather, it identifies places where disruption, if it occurs, could have a greater impact. Many of these communities are on average smaller, rural or remote and less economically diversified than those not susceptible (Chejfec et al., 2025; Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025).

Research from the United States suggests that geographically concentrated trade shocks can also have political consequences: greater local exposure to Chinese import competition was associated with shifts in electoral outcomes, including increased ideological polarization (Autor et al., 2020).

Uneven exposure to disruption is one side of how economic transformation is experienced across places. The distribution of new economic opportunities is another. An investment can advance national objectives, such as increasing output, exports, energy security or supply chain resilience (Department of Finance Canada, 2025a; Karpinski & Carré, 2026), without delivering proportionate benefits to the community where it occurs (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026; OECD, 2025c; Söderholm & Svahn, 2015). Therefore, the presence of a major investment in a community does not, by itself, determine the extent to which the resulting employment, income and economic activity are connected to the surrounding economy.

Participation in economic opportunities

Local benefits can depend on whether workers, businesses and Indigenous communities are able to participate in the economic activity that an investment generates. Employment and skills development, local procurement and supplier relationships, and Indigenous participation and ownership influence the extent to which income, business activity and economic value are linked to the surrounding economy (OECD, 2025c; Söderholm & Svahn, 2015). Evidence from mining regions shows that the strength of local employment and supplier linkages, as well as Indigenous participation and benefit-sharing arrangements, can influence how broadly the economic gains associated with resource development are distributed (OECD, 2025c; Söderholm & Svahn, 2015).

Capacity to absorb growth

Communities can also face challenges in accommodating investment and population growth. Housing, transportation, utilities and public services can influence whether workers are able to live locally and whether growth strengthens rather than strains the surrounding community (OECD, 2025c). The IRPP's profile on Neepawa, Manitoba, shows how rapid growth associated with agri-food investment generated employment and business opportunities while simultaneously increasing demand for housing, schools, health services and infrastructure (IRPP, 2026a). Economic growth can therefore bring substantial local benefits while also creating costs and pressures that can be concentrated in the communities experiencing that growth.

Capacity to turn investment into longer-term development

The extent of local benefits can also depend on whether communities can connect major investments to broader economic development. The extent of these connections can differ substantially across places depending on their existing firms, workforce, infrastructure and institutional capacity. Research on civic capital highlights how local networks and governance arrangements linking firms, governments and civic organizations can support collective action around regional economic opportunities, with different forms of collaboration emerging across local contexts (Creutzberg et al., 2024; Nelles & Wolfe, 2024; Wolfe, 2026a). Stronger connections to local supply chains and related economic activity can create opportunities for local firms and entrepreneurs and allow the effects of an investment to extend beyond the project itself, whereas weaker linkages can limit the amount of economic activity that remains in the surrounding region (OECD, 2025c; Söderholm & Svahn, 2015).

CANADA'S INDUSTRIAL POLICIES ARE NOT CONSISTENTLY CONNECTED TO REGIONAL AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Place is not absent from Canadian industrial policy. But it is unevenly integrated across jurisdictions and throughout the architecture of industrial policy. Table 1 shows how place can be integrated into this architecture.

Table 1. A framework for understanding how place can be integrated across different levels of industrial policy

Level	Concept	What the concept means	What integrating place requires
Strategy	Place-based orientation	Identifies where policy should act and recognizes that different contexts (including the different economic opportunities, barriers and needs across regions, clusters or communities) may require different approaches. Also referred to as spatial targeting, territorial differentiation or territorial anchoring.	Clear priorities for where different approaches may be needed and why.
Implementation (institutions and instruments)	Spatially differentiated instruments	Translates strategy into delivery through institutional mandates and policy tools that can account for differences across places. These can include grants or loans, tax incentives, regulation, and procurement or investment criteria.	Institutions and policy tools that account for differences in regional and local contexts when determining where investment goes, the scale of support provided, who benefits and how support is delivered.
Capacity	Local capabilities to translate policy into local outcomes	Determines whether policy design can be implemented and produce local economic change.	Institutional capacity, investment authority and partners able to turn policy into outcomes on the ground.

Source: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on Criscuolo, Gonne, et al. (2022), Krawchenko, Earley, and Shaw (2026), and Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026).

The extent to which place is incorporated varies across jurisdictions, with some provincial industrial approaches integrating it more strongly than others. At the federal level, where many of Canada's largest-scale industrial policies sit, place is unevenly integrated. Even where policies and programs have substantial regional and local implications, they often give limited consideration to regional and local economic development (Krawchenko & Arcand, 2026; OECD, 2025a). The result is an underlying structural disconnect between national industrial priorities and local economic development (OECD, 2025a; Wolfe & Southin, 2026). The disconnect is reflected in three gaps:

1. Strategy — Federal industrial strategies give uneven and limited attention to specific regions, clusters and local economic systems.
2. Implementation — Federal institutions, through their mandates and policy instruments, are not consistently designed to account for where investment goes or how local economies are affected.
3. Capacity — Federal programs do not systematically support the community-level capacity needed to deliver policy effectively and translate investment into local economic outcomes.

Gap 1: Strategy — Federal industrial strategies give uneven and limited attention to specific regions, clusters and local economic systems.

An industrial strategy guides a co-ordinated group of policy instruments to achieve specific policy objectives (Criscuolo, Gonne, et al., 2022). These objectives can include economic growth, trade diversification, productivity and innovation, as well as social objectives, the energy transition, resilience to supply chain and economic disruptions, and economic development in particular sectors or places (Department of Finance Canada, 2025b; Krawchenko & Arcand, 2026; Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026).

An analysis of 61 federal, provincial and territorial industrial strategy documents from 2015 to 2025 finds that "place" is unevenly reflected in Canadian industrial policy (Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026). The analysis assesses the high-level strategy documents against 14 criteria spanning five dimensions — vision, instruments, governance, social justice and geography (box 1).

Box 1. Assessing Canadian industrial strategies

To assess federal, provincial and territorial industrial strategies, Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026) use 14 criteria organized under five analytical dimensions:

- Vision: supply-demand integration, measurable targets, competitive framing
- Policy instruments: carrots-and-sticks mix, state investment direction, demand-side market creation, explicit funding
- Governance: public-private partnerships, accountability, climate integration
- Social justice: recognition of specific groups, procedural justice, distributional justice
- Geography: place-based orientation

Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 indicates weak or limited integration, 2 shows moderate integration, and 3 signals strong or explicit integration. See Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026) for the full coding methodology.

Place-based orientation in strategies varies across jurisdictions and sectors

Among the jurisdictions assessed, the federal government has the largest portfolio of industrial strategies. But the analysis finds its strategies score below the provincial and territorial average on place-based orientation.

Figure 2 (Panel A) shows the distribution of weak, moderate and strong place-based orientation scores across jurisdictions. Of the 12 federal industrial strategies assessed, only two had a strong score on place-based orientation. Federal strategies are less likely to identify specific regions, clusters or local systems and use policy tools that reflect regional and local differences in implementation (figure 2). Place-based orientation of industrial strategies also varies across industrial sectors (see Appendix A). For instance, the analysis finds that, on average, strategies covering sectors such as agri-food, forestry and advanced manufacturing integrate place to a relatively greater degree than those that cover other sectors like fossil fuels, innovation and digital technologies (Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026).

Some provincial portfolios show that industrial strategies can incorporate strong place-based elements. Eight of Quebec's 11 industrial strategies score strongly on place-based orientation; four of British Columbia's six strategies do so as well. Together, the two provinces account for nearly half of the assessed strategies that score strongly on place-based orientation (figure 2). Two top-scoring strategies illustrate what this looks like in practice.

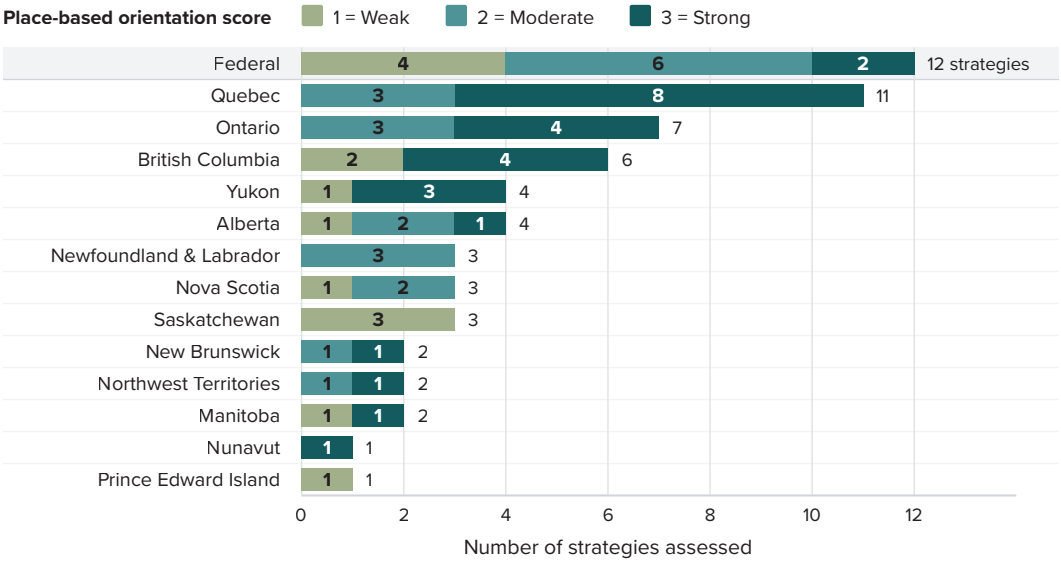
- The Government of Quebec funds its 2030 Plan for a Green Economy through carbon market revenues and updates its five-year implementation plan annually (Gouvernement du Québec, 2026). A **Green Hydrogen and Bioenergy Strategy** complements the plan and supports the development of regional energy ecosystems, including those based on local biomass. These ecosystems link production, distribution and consumption. The broader strategy also supports collaborative innovation, specialized workforce training, and local and Indigenous participation (Gouvernement du Québec, 2022, 2025).
- British Columbia's **Maritime Industries Strategy** targets the province's coastal maritime sector through dedicated institutions and funding tools. The strategy establishes the West Coast Maritime Office, supports local shipyards to increase capacity and participate in Canada's National Shipbuilding Strategy, and provides $25 million in grants to modernize and upgrade maritime infrastructure (Government of British Columbia, 2023a).

Place-based orientation and strategy design

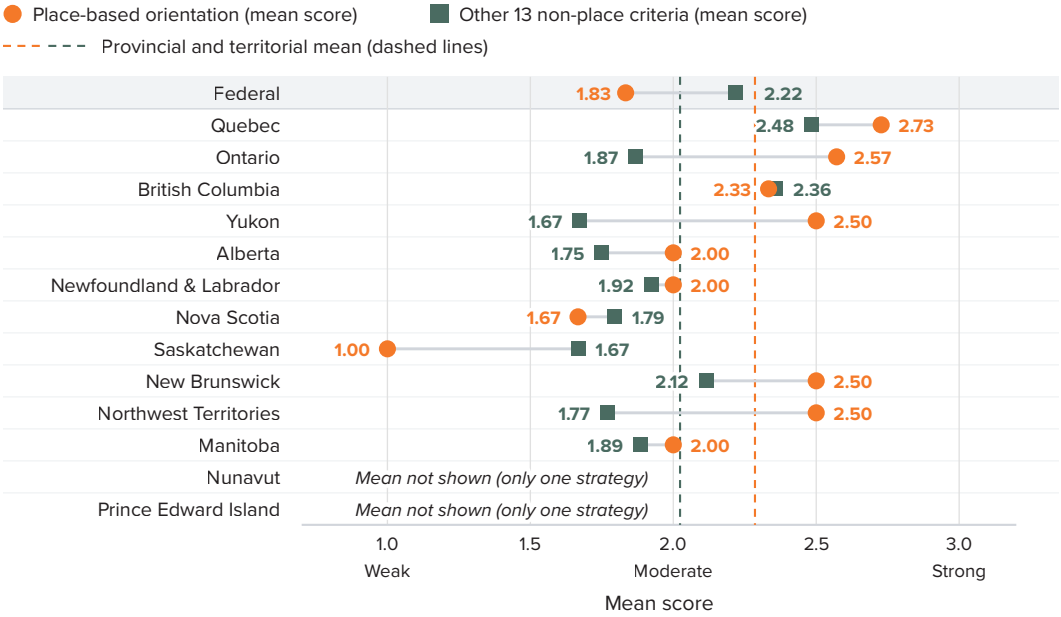
Figure 2 (Panel B) compares each jurisdiction's average (mean) place-based orientation score with its average across the other 13 non-place assessment criteria covering vision, policy instruments, governance and social justice (the non-place composite). The dashed lines show the averages across all provincial and territorial strategies for each of these measures, providing a benchmark for comparing jurisdictions.

Figure 2. Place-based orientation of industrial strategies varies across Canadian jurisdictions

A. Place-based orientation across jurisdictions



B. Place-based orientation and other aspects of strategy design



Source: Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026).
Notes:

- Based on 61 industrial strategy documents from federal, provincial and territorial governments, 2015-2025. The "place-based" dimension is assessed on a three-point scale: weak (generic or incidental references to geography), moderate (acknowledgment of place without integration into instruments), and strong (explicit identification of regions, clusters or local systems with tailored tools).
- The dashed lines indicate the means across all 49 provincial and territorial strategies combined: 2.29 for place-based orientation and 2.02 for the other 13 non-place assessment criteria. Each strategy contributes equally to these means.
- Jurisdictions with only one strategy are not shown in Panel B but are included in the provincial and territorial means.

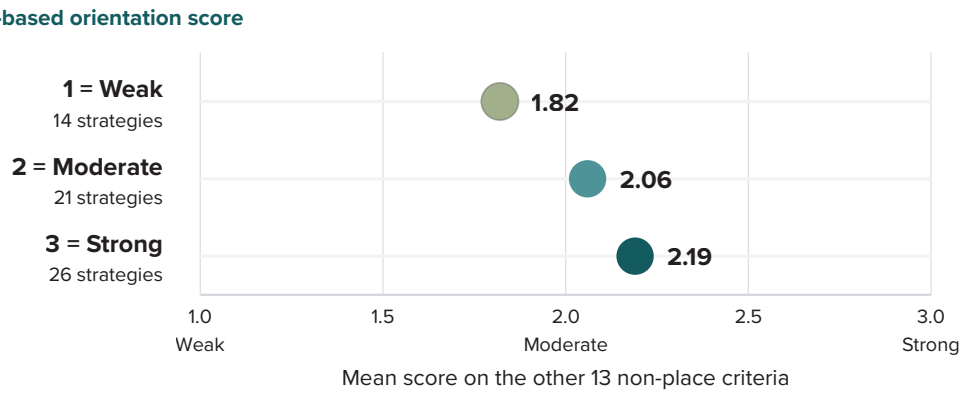
Federal strategies score below the provincial and territorial average on place-based orientation (1.83 versus 2.29), but above the provincial and territorial average on the other non-place criteria taken together (2.22 versus 2.02). This contrast suggests that place-based orientation is a particular gap in federal industrial strategies, even though they score comparatively well on other aspects of strategy design overall. On individual criteria, federal strategies score higher than the provincial and territorial average on competitive framing, social justice recognition and procedural justice, but lower on some operational elements of strategy design.

Provincial portfolios also vary in how they score on other non-place aspects of strategy design. Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario all score above the provincial and territorial average on place-based orientation. On the other 13 criteria combined, Quebec and British Columbia score above the average, while Ontario scores below it. In particular, Ontario's strategies score lower on combining financial incentives with regulatory requirements and on specifying how proposed measures will be funded.

Place-based orientation correlates with overall strategy quality

Across the 61 strategies analyzed, 14 have a weak place-based orientation. On average, these strategies score about 17 per cent lower on the non-place composite (the mean score across the other 13 assessment criteria of the strategy design) than those with strong place-based orientation (figure 3). The degree of place-based orientation in strategies appears to be associated with their overall quality on other dimensions, including operational components, the use of mixed incentives and accountability mechanisms.

Figure 3. Strategies with stronger place-based orientation score higher, on average, on other aspects of strategy design



Source: Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026).
Notes: Based on 61 industrial strategy documents from federal, provincial and territorial governments (2015-2025). Strategies are grouped by their place-based orientation score (1 = weak, 2 = moderate, 3 = strong), regardless of jurisdiction. Each dot represents the mean score across the other 13 non-place assessment criteria for strategies within that group.

Gap 2: Implementation — Federal institutions, through their mandates and policy instruments, are not consistently designed to account for where investment goes or how local economies are affected.

An uneven focus on place also extends into the architecture of delivery and implementation across federal institutions and instruments. A scan of the federal industrial policy toolkit (see Appendix B) finds that tools with the most capital to spend are often not those with the strongest local development mandate.

Canada has federal institutions with regional or local economic development mandates, including Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the independent Community Futures Organizations (CFOs) they support. These institutions generally operate at a smaller scale than major industrial policy programs. Major federal industrial policy programs, on the other hand, are often organized around other criteria like sector, investment size, asset class or firm-level financing. Federal policy development and program decisions also have no consistent mechanism for drawing on the knowledge and expertise of local and regional institutions (Wolfe & Southin, 2026).

These two parts of the policy system are therefore not consistently integrated or co-ordinated (Samson et al., 2025) (see Appendix B). In a federation, weak policy co-ordination across orders of government can be a source of missed opportunities because national programs cannot deliver their full benefits without alignment with regional institutions and local conditions (Bradford, 2017; Conteh, 2020; Wolfe & Southin, 2026).

Promising local ideas and innovations, including in rural and remote communities, can also fall between the cracks if no formal mechanism connects local economic development opportunities with different levels of industrial planning at the provincial, territorial and federal levels (Wolfe & Southin, 2026). A project may extend beyond the mandate or capacity of conventional regional development programming, but remain too small, early-stage or locally specific for national industrial policy programs (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency [ACOA], 2023; OECD, 2026b; Prairies Economic Development Canada [PrairiesCan], 2025a).

These examples illustrate how gaps in federal programming can leave regionally or locally significant projects underserved:

- The **Strategic Response Fund** supports projects across Canada without regional eligibility restrictions. It contributes a minimum of $10 million for projects with total eligible costs of at least $20 million (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada [ISED], 2025a). This approach may make it less accessible to projects that are of modest size in national terms but economically significant to a region.
- A 2021 evaluation of its predecessor, the **Strategic Innovation Fund**, also found that funded projects were concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, while the Western region was underrepresented relative to its share of applications. The evaluation recommended more regionally tailored project assessment and outreach to improve regional representation (ISED, 2021a).

- Another example comes from the **Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI)** program. The program supports business scale-up, productivity and technology commercialization, and aims to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems. Regional Development Agencies tailor its delivery to regional economic conditions and priorities (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario [FedDev Ontario], 2025). A national evaluation of REGI notes that FedDev Ontario used the program to support projects in the $3-million-to-$10-million range partly to address a funding gap for innovation firms seeking to expand production or commercialize below the minimum project scale of the former Strategic Innovation Fund, which has since been replaced by the Strategic Response Fund (ACOA, 2023; ISED, 2026a).
- Consultations under the ***Building a Green Prairie Economy Act*** similarly found some medium-sized projects are too small or too large for traditional federal programs, allowing strong regional projects to "slip through the cracks" (PrairiesCan, 2025a, Bringing the Framework to life section, para. 2).

Conversely, a major project may advance a national priority while leaving local workforce, housing, infrastructure, suppliers, Indigenous participation or diversification needs as an afterthought (Barca et al., 2012; Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026).

Regional Development Agencies have place-aware mandates, but their role in major industrial policy is limited

By design, Regional Development Agencies reflect regional economic differences and maintain deep local networks with municipalities, firms, Indigenous organizations, post-secondary institutions and others in the ecosystem (Bradford, 2017). They also deliver some nationally co-ordinated industrial policy programs at the regional level (see Appendix C) (ISED, 2026b). In addition, Regional Development Agencies support a national network of Community Futures Organizations that are governed by local boards and provide local business support, financing and, in some cases, workforce development co-ordination (Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025).

Strengths

Canada's Regional Development Agencies have demonstrated strengths, including their ability to adapt national programs to regional contexts. The 2023 evaluation of REGI — a national program that is delivered through Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies — found that firms receiving support through its business scale-up and productivity stream outperformed comparable firms that did not receive REGI support on revenue (18.3 per cent higher), employment (12.8 per cent higher) and export growth (13.5 per cent higher) (ACOA, 2023). The Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor), for example, tailored the REGI program to its region by expanding eligibility to a wider variety of organizations, lowering investment maximums, focusing on regional innovation centres and offering targeted manufacturing streams (FedNor, 2024). Regional Development Agencies also deployed COVID-19 recovery and tariff-response programming through existing regional networks (see Appendix C).

Limitations

However, the role of Regional Development Agencies in major industrial policy is constrained by scale (ACOA, 2023). Programs they deliver often support local infrastructure, small and medium-sized enterprises, tourism, community development and innovation ecosystems (see Appendix C) (ISED, 2026b; Samson et al., 2025). Compared with the largest federal industrial policy tools, these programs generally support smaller-scale and targeted projects (see Appendix B). More recently, the federal government expanded the use of Regional Development Agencies to deliver national priorities, including tariff response, defence-related investment and local infrastructure (FedDev Ontario, 2026a; Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada [HICC], 2026; ISED, 2026c, 2026d).

The REGI evaluation also identifies operational capacity pressures, including concerns about sufficient human resources for ongoing project monitoring and opportunities to improve approval timeliness and referral services (ACOA, 2023).

In addition, performance frameworks that guide Regional Development Agency spending tend to focus on firm- or program-level outputs (Samson et al., 2025). A review of the top 10 per cent of Regional Development Agency expenditures between 2019 and 2023 shows that some of the most common performance indicators included metrics such as the number of businesses and organizations supported, total cash invested in a project and the value of total investments generated (Samson et al., 2025). While useful, these indicators do not measure whether communities are becoming more economically diversified, more resilient to industrial disruption or better positioned to capture benefits from major projects (Bramwell et al., 2019).

Many of the largest federal industrial policy instruments do not include binding spatial conditions

Instrument design determines whether eligibility rules, thresholds, selection criteria and conditions account for where investment lands and how local economies are affected. Spatial considerations can be binding (i.e., built into eligibility or delivery), or soft, where geography matters through project location, cluster or resource location, Indigenous engagement or the inclusion of geographic factors in project scoring, but does not determine eligibility (Austin et al., 2018). Place-neutral design is not necessarily neutral in effect. Where spatial conditions are absent or have a limited role in eligibility, selection decisions or program delivery, support can disproportionately flow toward regions that already hold strong industrial ecosystems, research institutions and access to capital (Barca et al., 2012; McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2015; OECD, 2024).

Assessing place in federal industrial policy instruments

We assessed how spatial conditions feature in Canada's largest federal industrial policy instruments by examining the OECD's 2023 Quantifying Industrial Strategies (QuIS) database and selected federal programs not captured by QuIS.

What the 2023 QuIS ranking reveals

We reviewed the 10 largest targeted federal instruments by reported spending and financing amounts from the QuIS database (Criscuolo, Lalanne, & Díaz, 2022; OECD, n.d.).

Six of the top 10 largest instruments do not include a binding spatial condition that targets investments to specific geographies or places (see table 2 and Appendix D). Five have no meaningful spatial condition, while one — the Clean Fuels Fund — incorporates place more softly, where funded projects are tied to specific locations, but eligibility is not restricted to particular regions or community types.

Among the four that do have binding spatial conditions, the form varies:

- The **Atlantic Investment Tax Credit** is administered federally through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and limits eligibility to a defined region (CRA, 2026a).
- Three entries from **REGI** are also spatially binding, but the mechanism differs across regions. The three entries captured in the top 10 programs are delivered by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED), ACOA and PrairiesCan. REGI-CED and REGI-ACOA are spatially binding through regional delivery, while PrairiesCan's requirements go further by linking eligibility and expected benefits to the region itself. For example, PrairiesCan's business scale-up stream requires applicants to have staffed operating facilities in the Prairie provinces, while its regional innovation ecosystems stream requires eligible activities to generate economic or employment benefits primarily within the Prairies (ACOA, 2023, 2024; CED, 2024, 2026; PrairiesCan, 2025b, 2025c, 2026a).

While regional delivery is a meaningful spatial condition, it is not the same as a fully place-based design. It anchors program delivery to a defined region and allows support to be tailored to regional conditions. But it does not necessarily distinguish among communities within that region or require particular local benefits from funded projects (ACOA, 2023; OECD, 2025a, 2025b).

The scale of these instruments is also notable. None of the four highest-ranked instruments in the 2023 QuIS ranking — Farm Credit Canada (FCC) loans to manufacturing, the Clean Technology Investment Tax Credit, the Strategic Innovation Fund's Net Zero Accelerator, and the Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit — has a binding spatial condition. The Atlantic Investment Tax Credit ranks fifth, while the three REGI entries appear eighth through 10th. In this 2023 snapshot, binding spatial conditions are found in smaller instruments in the ranking rather than in those with the largest reported amounts of federal spending or financing (see Appendix D).

What other programs show

We supplemented the 2023 QuIS ranking with a scan of selected federal programs and investment vehicles either introduced after 2023 or otherwise not captured in the QuIS top 10 ranking. Our supplementary scan shows a range of spatial features, from binding regional delivery or eligibility targeted to rural, remote or Indigenous communities, to softer forms of project, resource, corridor or cluster geography. Yet, even where spatial features are present, they often reflect where a program is delivered or a project is located, rather than systematically differentiating support according to local conditions or development priorities (table 2):

- The **Canada Growth Fund's (CGF's)** investment criteria consider Canadian presence, the development of Canadian workers and Canadian value chain creation, but do not explicitly differentiate investments according to regional economic conditions (CGF, n.d.-a).
- The **Defence Industrial Strategy** presents a more mixed picture. It establishes federal-provincial-territorial mechanisms focused on defence industry development, workforce planning and infrastructure priorities. It includes commitments to Indigenous participation in supply chains, infrastructure development and procurement, as well as a distinct focus on northern and Arctic infrastructure. It also encompasses the Regional Development Agency-delivered **Regional Defence Investment Initiative**, which supports the integration of businesses and regional ecosystems into domestic and international defence supply chains. However, its published framework does not clearly set out whether or how regional and local knowledge of economic conditions and opportunities systematically informs the co-ordination of the strategy's broader procurement, financing, innovation and skills measures (ISED, 2026d; National Defence, 2026a).
- A different pattern appears in the **Global Innovation Clusters (GIC)** program. It is built around geographically embedded innovation ecosystems but operates as a pan-Canadian, sector-led network rather than through geographically defined eligibility or local economic development institutions (ISED, 2026a, 2026e). Drawing on a qualitative analysis of interviews with federal and provincial officials, industry and cluster organizations, Wolfe and Southin (2026) examine the initiative from its original **Innovation Superclusters Initiative (ISI)** design in 2017 through its revision as the GIC in 2022. They find that the ISI/GIC were only partially aligned with local programs and weakly integrated with existing provincial and local initiatives.

Assessing place in public financing institutions

We also examined how place is reflected in selected major public financing institutions.

- **Export Development Canada's (EDC's)** 2026-30 plan increasingly supports place-linked investments, such as domestic trade infrastructure, energy corridors and critical-mineral projects. It includes support for Indigenous partnerships but does not establish a territorially differentiated financing framework (EDC, 2026).
- The **Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB)** has explicit place elements in parts of its portfolio, including dedicated Indigenous infrastructure financing, and infrastructure in the North and Arctic as a portfolio priority. However, its statutory functions focus on infrastructure investment, project structuring and advice, rather than broader community economic development or supplier development (*Canada Infrastructure Bank Act*, 2017; CIB, n.d.-a).
- At the provincial level, **Investissement Québec** illustrates a more explicitly territorially differentiated approach. Its **DÉPART** program restricts eligibility to designated regional county municipalities, or *municipalités régionales de comté* (MRCs), and other specified territories. Eligible geographic areas include MRCs with low economic vitality scores. The program also considers local and regional economic impacts in project assessments (Investissement Québec, 2026).

Table 2. Types of spatial conditions in major federal industrial policy instruments

Spatial conditions	What it means	Program examples
Binding spatial eligibility	Access to the program, tax credit or stream is formally limited by geography, jurisdiction or community type. This includes regional eligibility, provincial/territorial eligibility, and community-type eligibility such as rural, remote or Indigenous communities.	Atlantic Investment Tax Credit; REGI-PrairiesCan; Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities
Binding regional delivery	The program is delivered through geographically defined institutions, including Regional Development Agencies. The delivery structure is spatially binding, although the projects themselves may not have binding local-benefit requirements.	REGI-CED; REGI-ACOA; Regional Tariff Response Initiative; Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative
Soft spatial incentive	Geography matters through project location, cluster geography, resource location, Indigenous engagement or scoring, but place is not a hard eligibility rule. This includes project geography, cluster geography, corridor geography and procurement-related spatial incentives.	Clean Fuels Fund; Defence Industrial Strategy; Strategic Response Fund; Global Innovation Clusters; Canada Critical Minerals Accelerator; National Trade Corridors Fund; First and Last Mile Fund
No meaningful spatial condition	Eligibility is based on national, sectoral, technological, firm-based or identity-based criteria, with no binding geographic eligibility or regional delivery requirement.	Farm Credit Canada manufacturing loans; Clean Technology Investment Tax Credit; Net Zero Accelerator; Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit; Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit

Sources: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on QuIS Data (Criscuolo, Lalanne, & Díaz, 2022; OECD, 2026c). Spatial conditions definitions based on Austin et al. (2018), Hanson et al. (2025), OECD (2025a), and Suedekum (2025). Program examples based on ACOA (2024, 2026a), Canadian Heritage (2026a, 2026b), CED (2026), CRA (2026a, 2026b), FCC (n.d.), Government of Canada (2026a, 2026b), ISED (2025a, 2025b, 2026e, 2026f), National Defence (2026b), NRCan (2026b, 2026c), PrairiesCan (2025b, 2026a), and Transport Canada (2024a).
Note: Examples draw from the 2023 QuIS top 10 ranking and a supplementary scan of selected federal programs. Categories reflect the principal spatial feature identified; some programs may incorporate more than one. Funding measures across the two groups are not directly comparable.

Conclusions: Place is present, but uneven

Taken together, these examples show that place is not absent from major industrial policy instruments and institutions, but is incorporated unevenly. Regional and local considerations may enter through project or resource geography, Indigenous or northern priorities, or particular streams of support, without consistently shaping core eligibility rules, financing terms, project-scale thresholds or connections to regional and local economic development institutions.

Recent efforts to improve co-ordination of industrial policy across regions and levels of government are promising, but don't go far enough

Recent federal initiatives point toward promising co-ordination across regions, levels of government and mandates:

- The **Major Projects Office (MPO)** provides a single point of federal co-ordination ("one project, one review") for projects of national interest, representing almost $200 billion in proposed investment as of October 2026, and is supported by

an Indigenous Advisory Council (Department of Finance Canada, 2025a; MPO, 2026b). Federal procurement tied to these projects is subject to applicable Canadian-content rules, but the approval process imposes no local or regional procurement requirements (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026). In addition to specific projects, the MPO also supports transformative strategies, some of which are strongly place-oriented, including an **Atlantic Energy Strategy and a Northwest Critical Conservation Corridor** (MPO, 2026c).

- MPO currently evaluates projects against five national-interest factors: autonomy, resilience and security; economic or other benefits to Canada; likelihood of successful execution; Indigenous interests; and clean growth (MPO, 2026d). However, the framework does not include a stand-alone assessment of broader regional and community outcomes. Its intake process already asks proponents to quantify regional employment, describe Indigenous economic benefits and identify engagement with affected local communities (MPO, 2026e).
- The **Regional Energy and Resource Tables** bring together federal, provincial and territorial governments, with Indigenous partners and broader stakeholder input, to identify regional low-carbon opportunities and develop regional economic strategies (NRCan, 2022a). The tables function as federal, provincial and territorial co-ordination forums but do not systematically involve local governments and community-level actors in setting priorities or making decisions (NRCan, 2022b; Samson et al., 2025). There has been uneven progress in formalizing shared priorities across jurisdictions. By March 2025, regional tables were established in 10 provinces and territories, but only four had published Collaboration Frameworks — British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (NRCan, 2025a).
- The **Prairie Partnership Initiative (PPI)**, led by PrairiesCan, the Regional Development Agency for Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, brings together 10 federal departments to co-ordinate policies, programs and decision-making in the Prairie economy (PrairiesCan, 2026b). The PPI advances job creation, export diversification and economic growth in the region by improving co-ordination on key projects and streamlining engagement that identifies opportunities, aligns federal supports and guides proposals (PrairiesCan, 2025d).

Canada does not lack the building blocks to better align national industrial priorities and policy with regional and local economic development. It has regional and local development institutions with deep community knowledge and some federal-provincial-territorial co-ordination forums. However, there is a tendency to shift responsibility for accounting for differences across regions and places to Regional Development Agencies rather than integrating place-based approaches into national strategies and policies (Krawchenko & Arcand, 2026).

Existing initiatives do not yet amount to systematic linkages between major industrial commitments and local or regional development plans. They do not consistently provide mechanisms through which community knowledge can shape, from the outset, key industrial decisions with substantial local or regional implications. They also have not

yet established consistent formal mechanisms through which regional and local actors can connect locally identified opportunities for large-scale economic development with federal industrial policy programs.

Gap 3: Capacity — Federal programs do not systematically support the community-level capacity needed to deliver policy effectively and translate investment into local economic outcomes.

Local organizations — including municipal economic development offices, Indigenous economic development corporations, colleges, workforce development bodies, local unions and community innovation hubs — often hold a deep understanding of local investment opportunities, infrastructure gaps, skills needs and supplier capacity, particularly in areas relevant to their respective roles (ACOA, 2023; Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025). Having local knowledge, however, is not the same as having the capacity to act on it. Local organizations, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities, also need sufficient staff capacity, planning and governance capabilities, leadership and networking skills, access to finance, and the ability to build partnerships and regional alliances to advance economic development priorities (OECD, 2020b, 2020c).

These capacities are uneven across communities. Smaller firms, rural and northern regions, and Indigenous communities face structural disadvantages in participating in national industrial policy processes — particularly when they lack human or financial capacity, and therefore struggle with grant applications and reporting requirements that are easier for large firms or well-resourced municipalities to manage. In some smaller communities, economic development responsibilities may rest with very limited staff capacity (in some cases, a single staff member). In rural Canada, 85 per cent of firms employed fewer than five people between 2010 and 2019 (OECD, 2024). Indigenous Peoples and communities have also had difficulty accessing many industrial policy programs because of their minimum scale or competition from applicants with greater capacity (IRPP, 2025a).

Federal and provincial innovation policies have also historically emphasized research and development conducted through universities and research clusters, which are disproportionately concentrated in large metropolitan areas (Bramwell et al., 2019; OECD, 2024). In some rural and northern areas, limited access to universities and colleges can reduce the reach of innovation systems built around these institutions (OECD, 2024). Rural and northern communities have fewer post-secondary institutions and local youth may leave to pursue education, training or employment opportunities elsewhere, which can weaken the long-term capacity for innovation and economic diversification (Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025; OECD, 2020b). Canadian research on university-industry knowledge transfer emphasizes that regional innovation depends on research capacity, firms' ability to absorb and apply knowledge, and the partnerships and intermediaries connecting them with research institutions (Bramwell et al., 2012).

Large-scale programs and policies designed to strengthen Canada's industrial competitiveness may inadvertently favour regions that already possess strong industrial ecosystems, infrastructure and access to capital (Nathan & Overman, 2013; OECD,

2025a, 2026a; Pinheiro et al., 2022). Castle and Phillips (2022) observe that many federal technology-focused innovation initiatives target sectors in major cities, while similar provincial and territorial approaches can give less attention to innovation in rural, resource-based industries.

Concentrating additional investment in major urban centres can also intensify local pressures on housing, transportation and infrastructure, creating additional costs and constraints for workers, firms and communities. In Toronto, high housing costs can constrain worker mobility and access to employment opportunities, while congestion can further limit mobility within the city (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2025; City of Toronto, 2026). In Vancouver, further expanding trade capacity requires additional industrial land and container-handling and rail capacity, with existing infrastructure constraints risking greater congestion and higher shipping costs (Government of Canada, 2026c).

Similar tensions can arise between nationally significant infrastructure and local urban conditions. In Halifax, port-related truck traffic contributes to traffic congestion, noise pollution, poor air quality and vibration, while also raising pedestrian safety concerns in downtown Halifax (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2023). The Halifax Port Authority is developing an inter-terminal rail project that aims to shift container movements from road to rail, thereby helping to reduce port-related truck traffic through downtown Halifax, and the related congestion and emissions (Port Halifax, 2026).

Regions with weaker institutional innovation capacity may also be less able to attract and absorb public and private investment, while less investment can in turn constrain development of the institutions, networks and expertise needed to support future innovation and investment (OECD, 2024; Oughton et al., 2002; Pinheiro et al., 2022). The regional innovation paradox describes the tension between regions' greater need for innovation investment and their limited capacity to absorb it (Oughton et al., 2002). Addressing this paradox requires building local capacity alongside other major industrial investments, rather than assuming it will emerge as an outcome of investment alone.

Some programs in Canada show promising elements of capacity-building alongside economic development

Some existing federal and provincial programs in Canada show promising ways to support different forms of capacity alongside industrial and economic development. These examples remain dispersed across jurisdictions and programs and do not form a systematic approach to building local capacity:

- **Inclusive Diversification and Economic Advancement in the North (IDEANorth)** is a federal program delivered by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor). It supports economic infrastructure, sector development and capacity-building to help Northerners take advantage of economic opportunities (CanNor, 2026a). Its sector and capacity development stream funds research and planning, sector strategies, needs analyses, expert services and economic development training, while other streams focus on business scale-up and economic infrastructure (CanNor, 2018). In 2023-24, CanNor provided $11.6 million

to 66 projects through this stream, representing approximately one-third of the $35 million supplied through IDEANorth overall (CanNor, 2025a).

- British Columbia's **Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP)** supports rural communities across economic capacity-building, economic diversification and infrastructure development. Eligibility is differentiated by a matrix that accounts for community size and remoteness, with the capacity stream targeted at smaller and more remote rural communities and all Indigenous communities in British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 2025a). The capacity stream provides up to $50,000 annually for three years. Recipients can also access up to $100,000 in subsequent project development funding, subject to the completion and approval of the required reporting (Government of British Columbia, 2025a). Separate development and implementation streams support business planning, feasibility work, and the implementation of economic opportunities and infrastructure (Government of British Columbia, 2025b).
- In Northern Ontario, FedNor adapted **REGI** delivery to regional economic needs through continuous intake, broader organizational eligibility, lower target investment maximums, a focus on regional innovation centres and targeted manufacturing streams. Its regional innovation ecosystems (RIE) stream also supports accelerators, incubators, clusters, collaboration and SME innovation capacity, helping strengthen the networks and institutions that support regional economic development (ACOA, 2023; FedNor, 2024). Across Canada, the RIE stream received $1.21 billion in Regional Development Agency funding across 1,296 projects between 2018 and 2023 (ACOA, 2023).
- The federal **Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities (CERRC)** program targets Indigenous, rural and remote communities. It includes a dedicated capacity-building stream that supports skills, training, planning and development to advance community-led energy projects. From 2018-19 to 2024-25, CERRC allocated approximately $110 million to capacity-building agreements, representing 35 per cent of the program's $313 million in total funding and 62 per cent of the program's 240 funding agreements over that period (NRCan, 2026c). The program also aims to reduce the administrative burden on communities through simplified reporting requirements, more flexible terms and conditions, and it commits to ongoing conversations and information sessions to improve program delivery (NRCan, 2026c). CERRC is scheduled to close in March 2027. NRCan's 2026 evaluation notes that lessons from the program will inform future or successor programming (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2026; NRCan, 2026c).
- In 2025, the **Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)** committed $100 million to a new initiative with the Community Futures/SADC+CAE/CBDC network to expand access to financing and advice for the 520,000 entrepreneurs living in rural and remote communities. The initiative combines BDC's financing and advisory expertise with the network's local presence of 267 non-profit offices across Canada and is expected to generate up to $250 million in GDP over five years (BDC, 2025). The initiative is particularly relevant from a place-based perspective given that a federal legislative review found that rural areas, Atlantic Canada and the Prairies are comparatively underserved by BDC. The review recommended stronger regional partnerships and greater consideration of local circumstances (ISED, 2025c).

PLACE-BASED INDUSTRIAL POLICY CAN CONNECT NATIONAL PRIORITIES WITH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

A more place-based approach to industrial policy could help address gaps in the current suite of industrial policies. Place-based policies intentionally target specific locations. Tailored policies provide greater support to a place to improve long-term economic and well-being outcomes (OECD, 2025b). A place-based approach goes beyond directing funding or industrial investments to a particular location. It deliberately takes account of differences in local contexts and opportunities, seeks to mobilize local assets, and co-ordinates across levels of government and policy areas. It can also address local market failures and other barriers that may differ across places (OECD, 2025b).

Italy's **National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)**, a nationwide, place-based regional development policy targeting functionally peripheral municipalities, illustrates this approach. An evaluation of the strategy finds that it increased the number of local business units by about two per cent on average, while short- to medium-run effects on employment, population and housing prices were limited (Mariani, 2025). Positive business effects were concentrated in municipalities classified as intermediate under Italy's inner areas framework, particularly those with lower market accessibility, existing industrial specialization and stronger administrative capacity. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of place-based interventions depends on where investment is targeted as well as on pre-existing local conditions (Mariani, 2026).

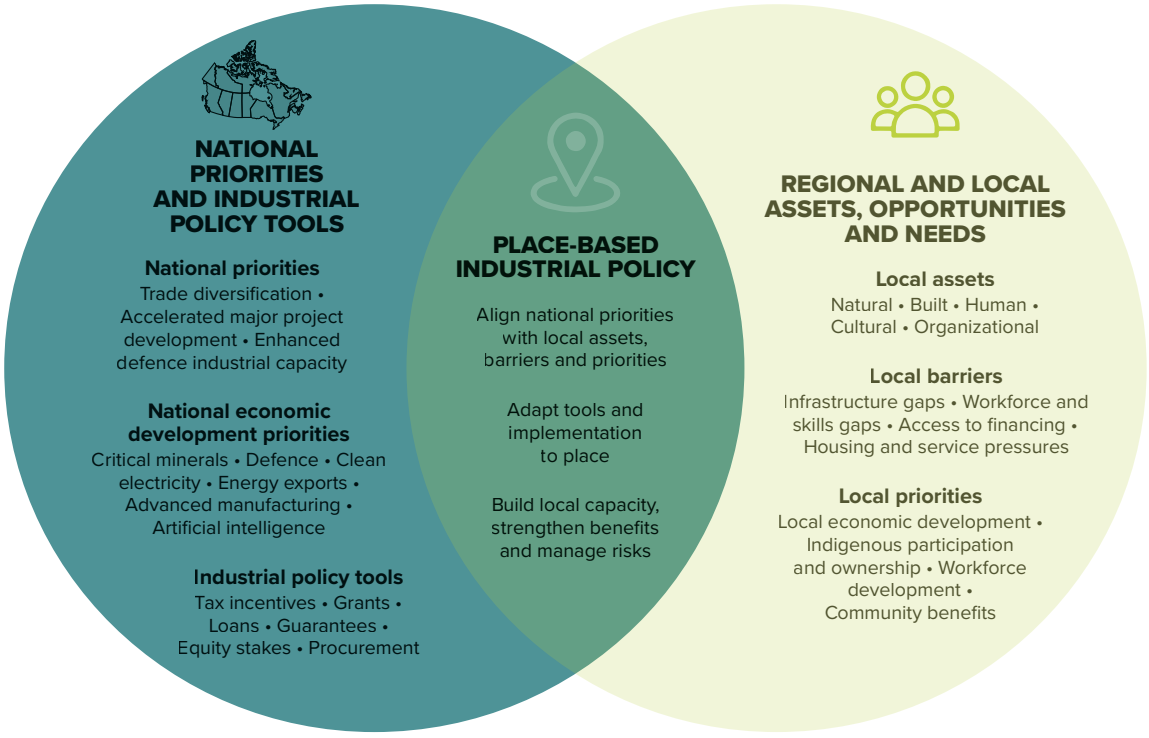
The OECD (2025a) describes place-based industrial policy as an approach that can support national competitiveness and place transformation — broader changes in a place's economy, institutions and capacity to pursue new development paths — by aligning national sectoral priorities with local capabilities. Krawchenko and Arcand (2026) identify place-based thinking as one of five key elements of robust industrial policy. They describe it as recognizing and addressing differences in economic conditions, including assets, opportunities and challenges across places and regions.

The balance between national and local direction of place-based industrial policies can vary. In more nationally led (top-down) approaches, governments start by identifying strategic sectors or objectives and direct support toward places with relevant opportunities and capabilities. In more bottom-up approaches, regional and local governments and stakeholders start from the strengths, needs and opportunities of a place and identify economic activities that can contribute to broader national competitiveness and priorities. Increasingly, place-based industrial policy combines national direction with locally driven collaboration. This approach gives regional and local actors greater roles in identifying priorities and shaping implementation within broader national objectives and funding frameworks (OECD, 2025a). Research on regional innovation policy also emphasizes that collaboration should extend beyond initial priority-setting, with governance networks bringing together governments, firms and industry associations, post-secondary institutions, innovation intermediaries and civic organizations to support policy learning, monitoring and adaptation (OECD, 2020d).

Top-down and bottom-up approaches need not be mutually exclusive. As figure 4 shows, place-based industrial policy sits at the intersection, connecting national strategic priorities, major funding and policy tools with regional and local assets, capabilities, opportunities and priorities (Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026; OECD, 2025a). It also gives regional and local actors a role in identifying opportunities that may not be visible through national or sectoral approaches alone. Regional and local actors can also help identify and address barriers that can leave local assets unused or underutilized, limit the effectiveness of investments, or constrain communities' ability to participate in and benefit from the resulting economic activity (Hoicka et al., 2026; Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026; Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026; OECD, 2025a, 2025b; Wolfe & Southin, 2026).

The relevance of place varies across industrial policy interventions. Place-based elements are most relevant where local conditions materially shape implementation and outcomes, including in major projects and areas such as infrastructure, skills and innovation. Regional and local considerations are important where industrial activity can carry direct implications for local labour markets and housing, supplier participation, Indigenous partnerships and the extent to which communities retain benefits over time (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026; OECD, 2025a).

Figure 4. National priorities and local economic development can intersect in place-based industrial policy



Source: Institute for Research on Public Policy based on Criscuolo, Gonne, et al. (2022) and OECD (2025a, 2025c).

International experiences with place-based industrial policy

International experience reflects a range of place-based approaches in industrial policy. The OECD identifies five broad routes for place-based industrial policy that differ in whether sectoral priorities are set nationally or locally, how places are targeted, and how funding and governance are organized. These routes range from nationally driven approaches to those that are more locally driven. In nationally driven approaches, national priorities are targeted to selected places or opened to competition among places through targeted place-development models like special economic zones. In locally driven approaches, place priorities operate within national frameworks or through decentralized implementation (OECD, 2025a). These routes are not mutually exclusive, and different approaches can coexist within the same national industrial policy system (OECD, 2025a).

To examine how these approaches are structured in practice and what lessons they may offer Canada, we scanned selected international models and positioned them along an illustrative spectrum — from more nationally led models, where central governments set strategic priorities and tailor their implementation to particular places, to more regionally or locally led models, where places identify priorities based on their own capabilities within broader national or supranational policy and funding frameworks (figure 5). Our scan illustrates different ways jurisdictions connect national industrial priorities with regional and local development, including differences in how regional and local actors participate, how funding is connected to local strategies and which institutions co-ordinate implementation. Appendix E summarizes our scan and the evidence used to characterize each model.

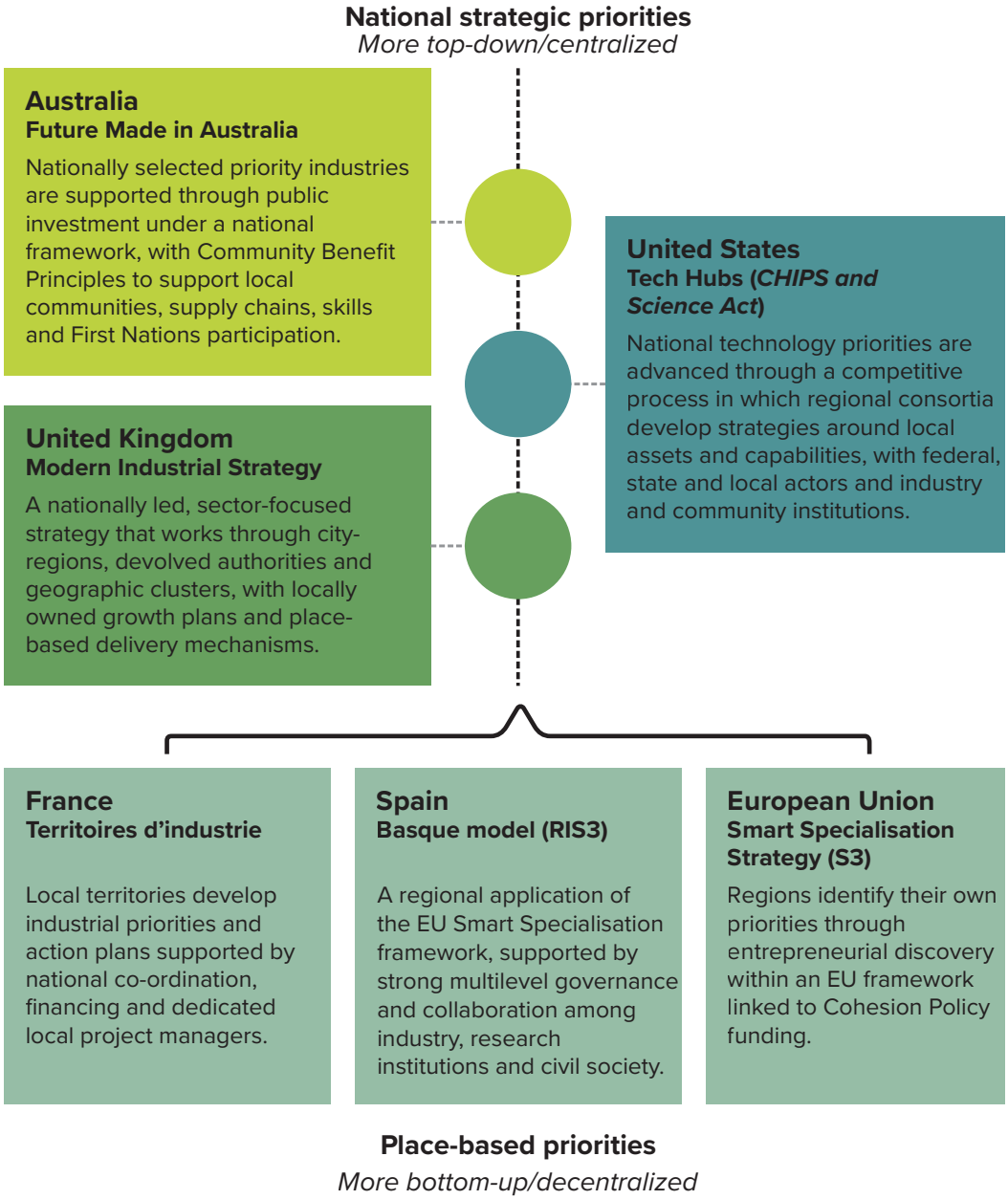
These models are not templates for Canada to replicate exactly. Instead, they illustrate different ways to connect national industrial priorities with regional and local development. Across the models, national direction can coexist with regional or local priority-setting. Formal processes can link local priorities to larger funding and policy decisions. And implementation depends on institutions that can co-ordinate across levels of government and adapt support to local conditions (OECD, 2025a). A comparison of Biden-era place-based policy in the United States and EU Smart Specialisation argues that nationally or supranationally (beyond national borders) designed policies depend on regional governance arrangements capable of connecting top-down priorities with bottom-up, place-based processes (Wolfe, 2026b).

Three examples in particular illustrate these different approaches to place-based industrial policy and can provide lessons for addressing the gaps we identified in Canada's policy system.

The United Kingdom's Modern Industrial Strategy: A nationally led strategy that incorporates place

The United Kingdom's Modern Industrial Strategy is a nationally led model that incorporates place into strategy and implementation. The strategy identifies eight growth-driving sectors, while recognizing the clusters and places where relevant capabilities are concentrated. It also gives regional and local institutions a role in shaping place-specific priorities and implementation (Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026; U.K. Department for Business and Trade, 2025). This builds on a broader tendency in U.K. industrial strategies

Figure 5. Selected international approaches to place-based industrial policy span a spectrum from more nationally led to more regionally and locally led models



Source: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on OECD (2025a).
Note: Selected programs are positioned along a spectrum from more nationally led to more regionally and locally led approaches, drawing on the OECD (2025a) framework for place-based industrial policy. U.S. Tech Hubs, France's Territoires d'industrie and the EU Smart Specialisation Strategy are directly classified within the OECD framework. Australia's Future Made in Australia, the United Kingdom's Modern Industrial Strategy and Spain's Basque model are examined by the same OECD report but not assigned to a specific route; their placement reflects the IRPP's application of the OECD framework based on each model's characteristics. See Appendix E for a broader set of international examples.

to combine place-sensitive strategy design with relatively strong policy instruments (Krawchenko & Arcand, 2026). However, the approach is still evolving, and it is too early to assess the outcomes of the associated governance changes (Krawchenko, McCann, et al., 2026).

The European Union's Smart Specialisation: Regional and local priorities can link to larger funding decisions

The European Union's Smart Specialisation framework shows a more regionally led model that formally connects national or regional priority-setting with supranational funding (Directorate-General for EU Regional and Urban Policy, n.d.; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021). National or regional strategies identify research and innovation priorities through an entrepreneurial discovery process that brings together stakeholders from the business, academic and research, civil and government spheres (Radovanovic & Bole, 2024). For the 2021-27 period, good governance of a national or regional Smart Specialisation strategy is an enabling condition for funding under two specific objectives of the European Regional Development Fund: research and innovation capacity and skills for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021). These governance requirements include having a responsible institution, stakeholder co-operation, monitoring and evaluation and, where relevant, actions to manage industrial transition (OECD, 2025a; Radovanovic & Bole, 2024). The Smart Specialisation framework provides a formal structured route from regionally identified strengths and priorities to larger funding decisions.

France's Territoires d'industrie: Local priorities and capacity can be supported within a national framework

France's *Territoires d'industrie* is a more locally driven model within a national industrial framework. The program is explicitly framed as a strategy of industrial renewal "by and for territories" (*par et pour les territoires*) (Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires [ANCT], n.d.). Its 183 designated industrial territories develop action plans based on local needs through partnerships between elected officials and industry, within broader national reindustrialization priorities. The program supports implementation by co-funding local project managers and regional co-ordinators, providing engineering support and helping identified projects access national investment programs, including France 2030 (ANCT, n.d.; Direction générale des Entreprises [DGE], 2023a; Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle, énergétique et numérique, 2023; OECD, 2025a). This illustrates how locally developed priorities can connect to national financing and implementation support while building the local capacity needed to develop and co-ordinate projects. *Territoires d'industrie* operates alongside France's *Pôles de compétitivité*, which connect firms, universities and research organizations to support collaborative innovation (OECD, 2026d).

Connecting industrial policy with the realities of Canadian communities

The IRPP's Community Transformations Project shows how major economic transformations, including the global energy transition and changes in U.S. trade policy, can affect communities differently across Canada (Chejfec, 2025; Chejfec et al., 2025). Our community profiles, based on local interviews, complement statistical analysis with local perspectives on the assets, barriers, capacities and priorities that shape how communities experience economic transformation and their ability to participate in emerging opportunities (IRPP, n.d.).

Viewed through a place-based industrial policy lens, these community profiles can help illustrate how national priorities intersect with local assets, barriers and economic conditions in different ways across communities. A community may have a skilled workforce, natural resources, industrial infrastructure or a strategic location that could contribute to national objectives, while facing constraints related to financing, infrastructure, research capacity, workforce development or access to markets. For example, Estevan, Saskatchewan, has an experienced energy workforce, existing transmission infrastructure and emerging critical mineral potential, but its local research capacity and access to capital are limited (IRPP, 2025b). In Nova Scotia, Cape Breton has offshore wind potential and marine skills, but it also has gaps in deepwater port infrastructure and specialized skills (IRPP, 2025c).

Different assets, opportunities and barriers therefore require different combinations of policy tools (OECD, 2026a). Table 3 provides examples of what these combinations could look like in practice, drawing on insights from the IRPP community profiles published in 2025 and 2026 as part of the Community Transformations Project. These examples are illustrative, not prescriptions for particular communities. They show how place-specific assets and barriers can point to different combinations of investment, policy tools and institutional support that advance national priorities while strengthening regional and local economic development.

Table 3. Illustrative place-based industrial policy opportunities based on local conditions in Canadian communities profiled by the IRPP

Community	Assets and barriers	Place-based industrial policy idea
Cape Breton, Nova Scotia	**Assets:** Offshore wind resource; deepwater harbour and port development potential; marine workforce and skills from fishing industry; Canadian Coast Guard Academy and existing defence presence **Barriers:** Limited skills in offshore wind; lack of existing deepwater port infrastructure	**National priority/strategic opportunity:** Increase clean electricity production to support economic growth and attract investment. Develop **community benefit agreements** between the federal and provincial governments, offshore wind firms, municipalities and Indigenous communities to ensure local workers and businesses benefit from offshore wind development.
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario	**Assets:** Strategic location in northern Ontario; manufacturing expertise; access to Lake Huron and Lake Superior; clean energy infrastructure and energy transition capabilities; access to nature and recreation; existing rail, road and marine connections; deepwater access; existing industrial infrastructure and redevelopment-ready land at the Algoma Steel site; established steel and manufacturing base **Barriers:** Transportation costs to non-U.S. markets; lack of publicly available port infrastructure; Algoma Steel's existing port is at capacity; limited clean electricity with Algoma's shift to electric arc furnace; limited domestic demand for flat-rolled steel in the face of U.S. tariffs	**National priority/strategic opportunity:** Expand trade infrastructure to unlock economic opportunity. Advance the proposed **public Port of Sault Ste. Marie and multimodal trade** corridor, building on existing federal support for technical assessments and development planning through FedNor and Transport Canada (Corporation of the City of Sault Ste. Marie, 2026; FedNor, 2025; Transport Canada, 2024b). Algoma Steel's expansion illustrates the need for additional port capacity beyond existing private facilities already at capacity.
Neepawa, Manitoba	**Assets:** Rail line; highways; agricultural feedstock; young population **Barriers:** Limited access to economic development resources and capacity; demand uncertainty; trade and market uncertainty	**National priority/strategic opportunity:** Develop value-added opportunities drawing on agricultural resources. Work to identify firms that could take advantage of local agricultural resources in areas such as **vegetable dehydration or pet-treat production**. Federal financing could help advance viable, value-added processing projects, including potentially through Farm Credit Canada's new $1-billion Agri-food Project Finance Fund. This fund is intended to expand domestic processing capacity and support small- to medium-sized strategic projects that may be difficult to finance through conventional lending alone.
Estevan, Saskatchewan	**Assets:** Experienced energy-sector workforce; transmission lines; carbon capture and storage (CCS) infrastructure; rail, highway and airport infrastructure; solar, geothermal and wind production; lithium from brines; graphite from coal; provincial plans for potential small modular reactor development; emerging local research and innovation capacity **Barriers:** Limited access to large-scale public financing and sustained federal support for locally led innovation; limited access to university education and broader research networks	**National priority/strategic opportunity:** Energy and critical mineral innovation. Create an **energy and mineral innovation hub**, which could build on existing local research and innovation capacity with larger-scale federal and provincial financial support for research and development, entrepreneurs, education, and training. These efforts could help develop capacity in small modular reactors, renewable energy, and critical minerals as well as related supply chains.
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories	**Assets:** Critical mineral resources; skilled mining workforce; Indigenous governance **Barriers:** Higher costs of mining; infrastructure gaps; risk of losing skilled workers associated with diamond mine closures	**National priority/strategic opportunity:** Develop critical minerals and improve Arctic sovereignty. Introduce a 15% stackable North of 60 **Mineral Exploration Tax Credit**.

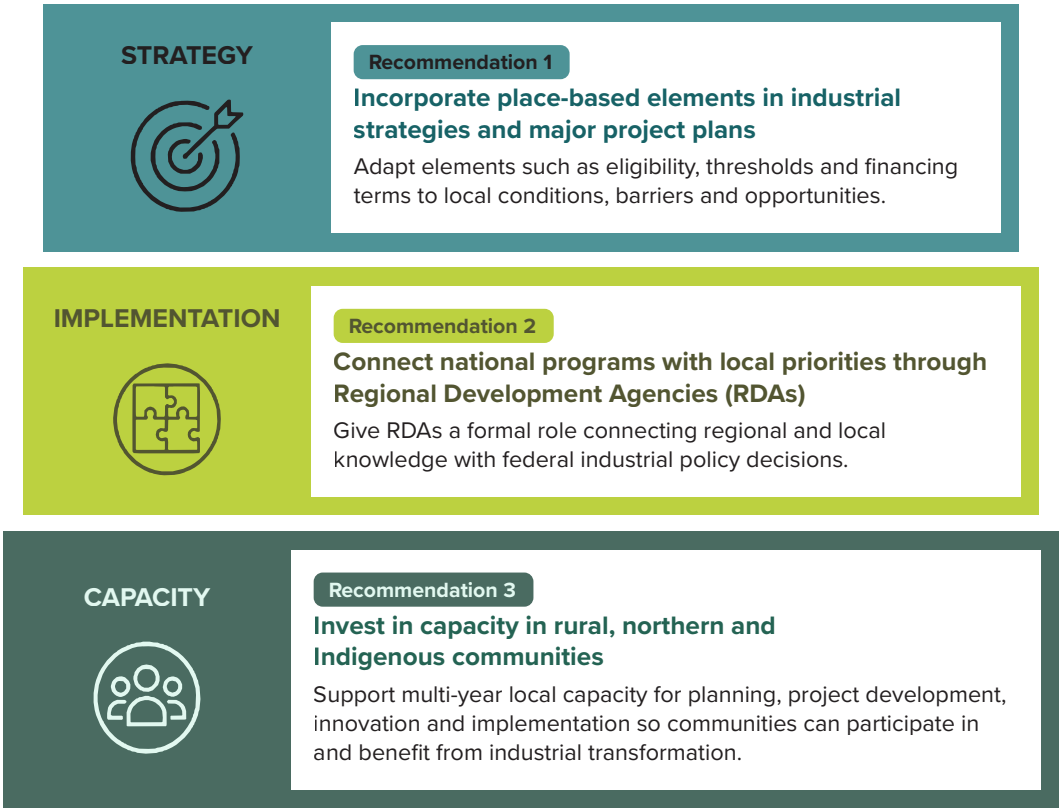
Sources: Cleveland (2025); Corporation of the City of Sault Ste. Marie (2026); FCC (2026); FedNor (2025); Government of Canada (2026d); Government of Northwest Territories (2025, 2026); Government of Saskatchewan (2025); Innovation Saskatchewan (2026); IRPP (2025b, 2025c, 2025d, 2026a, 2026b); National Defence (2026c); NRCan (2025d, 2026d); Transport Canada (2024b).

RECOMMENDATIONS: A THREE-LEVEL FRAMEWORK FOR PLACE-BASED INDUSTRIAL POLICY IN CANADA

The Institute for Research on Public Policy recommends a comprehensive framework to address the gaps we identified in Canada's existing industrial policy system at three levels: strategy, implementation and community capacity (figure 6).

These three levels reinforce each other. Place should be built into industrial strategy, carried through the institutions and policy tools that shape implementation, and supported by community capacity to translate national investment into local outcomes.

Figure 6. A three-level framework for place-based industrial policy in Canada



Source: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP).

Recommendation 1: Strategy — Federal, provincial and territorial governments should work together, in collaboration with Indigenous governments, municipal governments, communities and regional and local economic development actors, to incorporate place-based elements in industrial strategies and major project plans.

This collaboration should begin at the planning stage and continue through implementation and evaluation, with clear mechanisms to connect policy and investment decisions to relevant regional and local economic development plans and priorities. Governments

should tailor the form and degree of place-based elements in strategy and implementation to the policy objective and the significance of those regional and local implications.

How should Canada's industrial strategies and policy instruments account for place?

Governments should identify early in policy or project design where place-based elements are needed and which elements are appropriate, drawing on regional and local knowledge to assess relevant opportunities, barriers and risks (OECD, 2025a, 2025b). Federal, provincial and territorial governments should use industrial strategies and sector plans to identify the relevant regions, clusters or local economic systems, the capabilities and barriers that matter for delivery, and where differentiated or complementary policy measures may be needed (OECD, 2025a).

Where warranted, they should incorporate these considerations in industrial policy and major project design by varying program rules, financing terms and funding conditions, making complementary investments and providing supports.

The United Kingdom's **Modern Industrial Strategy** (see Appendix E) illustrates this approach by concentrating place-based efforts in city-regions, high-potential clusters and strategic industrial sites, and aligning national industrial priorities with 10-year Local Growth Plans in England (U.K. Department for Business and Trade, 2025).

Differentiate program rules, financing terms and funding conditions by place

Governments in Canada should work together to adapt, where necessary and possible, existing industrial policy instruments by varying eligibility rules, project size thresholds, selection criteria, financing and cost-sharing terms, timelines or administrative requirements to reflect differences in project scale, costs and delivery conditions across places. Governments should consider regional economic significance alongside absolute project size when setting program thresholds and terms, including a project's importance to regional employment and supply chains, role in a strategic cluster or local economic system, and contribution to economic diversification (OECD, 2025a).

Some existing Canadian programs show that differentiation can be feasible:

- The Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor) (2024) tailored the **Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI)** program to Northern Ontario through broader organizational eligibility, lower target investment maximums and continuous intake.
- The Government of British Columbia's (2025a) **Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP)** varies access to funding streams by population and remoteness.
- The federal **Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities (CERRC)** program used grants, simplified application processes and reduced reporting requirements (NRCan, 2026c).

Capital investment programs

For capital investment programs, governments could lower project size thresholds, offer more favourable financing terms or provide non-repayable support for projects meeting defined place-based criteria. For example:

- The federal government could adapt the **Strategic Response Fund** by lowering its minimum project cost or contribution thresholds for regionally significant projects, adjusting repayment terms to reflect place-based considerations, or considering non-repayable contributions where projects meet defined place-based criteria (ISED, 2025a).
- Farm Credit Canada's (FCC's) new $1-billion **Agri-food Project Finance Fund** could also incorporate place-based considerations as FCC develops the program's eligibility criteria, proposal processes and timelines. These considerations could include a project's regional significance and its potential to expand processing capacity and strengthen regional supply chains (FCC, 2026).

Infrastructure programs

For infrastructure programs, governments and public financial institutions could build on existing approaches and, where needed, further tailor project size thresholds, financing terms and cost-sharing requirements for rural, northern, Indigenous or other places facing distinct local conditions.

- The Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) already applies elements of this approach through its **Indigenous Infrastructure** investments, which offer concessional long-term financing and equity investment lending at a range of investment sizes for eligible Indigenous infrastructure projects via the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Initiative and the Indigenous Equity Initiative (CIB, n.d.-b). The federal government should complement this financing, where needed, with capacity-building and supplier development measures that can help communities and local firms participate in the economic opportunities that come with infrastructure investments.
- Germany's **Joint Federal/Länder Task for the Improvement of Regional Economic Structures (GRW)** is an international example of this approach (see Appendix E). The program varies funding terms and maximum rates of support according to each region's level of structural weakness and needs. In regions facing significant population decline, reforms effective in 2026 halved investment volume and permanent job creation requirements for SMEs through 2028. These reforms also count newly created apprenticeship positions as double toward job creation requirements (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, 2026).

Co-ordinate complementary policy tools to address place-specific barriers, needs and opportunities

Federal departments should combine industrial policy financing with complementary infrastructure, skills, innovation and demand-side measures to respond to barriers and opportunities in a particular place rather than applying the same package everywhere. Demand-side measures can include procurement, off-take agreements or market-based standards.

- For major defence investments, for example, the Defence Investment Agency, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) and relevant Regional Development Agencies could jointly assess regional supplier, workforce, infrastructure, financing and innovation needs early. They could co-ordinate existing **Defence Industrial Strategy** tools, including procurement, Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) financing, investment delivered through Regional Development Agencies, innovation and skills measures to address these needs (National Defence, 2026a).
- Australia exemplifies this integrated approach: its Net Zero Economy Authority identifies regions undergoing industrial transition, while **Future Made in Australia** provides location- and sector-specific complementary financial and regulatory support to foster alternative industries and employers, alongside training and other industrial policy initiatives (Stanford, 2025).

How should Canada's major project planning account for place?

For major projects, all levels of government should work together, in collaboration with communities and regional and local economic development actors, early in the planning stage. This early collaboration helps ensure that place-based considerations shape project design and complementary investments, rather than being an afterthought (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026; Wolfe, 2026a).

They should identify expected local and regional benefits, risks and complementary investment needs. Where appropriate, these elements should be reflected in project conditions, funding agreements or implementation plans. Depending on the project and local context, this could include local supplier development and procurement, workforce and training measures, housing or transportation investments, Indigenous participation and ownership, community-benefit mechanisms, and environmental and cumulative-effects governance (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026).

A potentially promising development is the federal government's Responsible Data Centre Development Principles, which set out expectations for early engagement with host communities and Indigenous rights holders, lasting local benefits, and transparency about electricity, water and infrastructure impacts (ISED, 2026g). The principles recognize important local considerations. However, the key question is whether and how these considerations will systematically inform project design and investment decisions from the outset.

Standardize assessments of local conditions and expected outcomes

The **Major Projects Office (MPO)**, building on the information it already collects, should add a systematic and more standardized assessment of expected regional and community outcomes, local pressures and complementary investment needs to its project assessment process.

Recent proposals to strengthen MPO assessment similarly emphasize standardized project information, clearer consideration of distributional impacts and better tracking of project interdependencies, including associated transportation infrastructure (Jones & Fariha, 2026).

Establish place-based Community Transformation Agreements

Governments could also formalize these measures through place-based implementation agreements (Wolfe, 2026a). These agreements could include regional and local objectives, complementary measures and investments, responsibilities across governments and local partners, funding commitments and delivery timelines (Yassin et al., 2026).

The IRPP has previously recommended that governments establish Community Transformation Agreements to co-ordinate roles in highly susceptible communities and align local economic development and workforce, infrastructure and community social supports with locally identified priorities, opportunities, assets and barriers (Yassin et al., 2026). In Spain's coal-dependent regions, Just Transition Agreements have brought national, regional and local governments together with unions, businesses and other local actors to co-ordinate investment, employment and training, site restoration and economic diversification within a common regional framework (Instituto para la Transición Justa & Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, 2023; Yassin et al., 2025).

Use regional assessments to inform major project planning

The federal government has proposed enabling Regions of National Interest under Bill C-39, building on an earlier proposal for **Federal Economic Zones.** Under the proposed process, designation would follow regional impact assessments that include consultation with Indigenous Peoples. Certain developments identified through those assessments could be considered pre-approved subject to conditions and mitigation measures (Government of Canada, 2026e, 2026f).

If implemented, regional assessments could identify cumulative environmental, social and economic effects, impacts on Indigenous Peoples and their rights, and broader regional development needs before individual projects advance. Regional assessments under the *Impact Assessment Act* can examine impacts from multiple projects and activities and cumulative effects within a region. They can also provide early opportunities for Indigenous and public participation and support regional planning and development plans (Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, 2025a, 2025b). Using regional assessments in this way could help decisions about individual projects be informed by the conditions, cumulative pressures and development priorities of the wider region, rather than considering each project in isolation.

How should success be defined and evaluated?

Governments should evaluate place-based elements against the regional and local outcomes they are intended to achieve, rather than simply tracking whether funding was allocated or a spatial condition was applied. For industrial strategies, programs and major projects with explicit place-based objectives, performance frameworks should specify the expected outcomes, baseline conditions and a focused set of relevant indicators from the outset. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous learning should be built into the policy cycle so that governments can adjust investments and approaches as evidence emerges (IRPP, 2025e; OECD, 2025b).

Depending on the policy objectives and local context, indicators could include:

- Regional employment and wage gains
- Participation by local and Indigenous businesses
- Local procurement and supplier development
- New investment
- Economic diversification
- Improvements in enabling infrastructure
- The extent to which identified community benefits materialize
- How much risks are mitigated

These illustrative indicators draw on OECD (2025b, 2025c).

A common core of indicators can support program comparability, while place- and project-specific measures can capture locally relevant outcomes (IRPP, 2025e; OECD, 2025b). Regional and local partners should help develop those indicators. For example, under European Union funding rules, national and regional **Smart Specialisation strategies** must be supported by monitoring and evaluation tools to measure progress toward their objectives. Having these tools in place is a requirement for fulfilling the EU's Smart Specialisation enabling condition — a set of criteria that the European Commission must confirm has been met before it can reimburse member states for expenditures under the relevant research, innovation and skills objectives of the European Regional Development Fund (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021).

Governments should also use monitoring and evaluation findings to update and adapt place-based strategies as conditions change. New Zealand provides an example in Taranaki, a region transitioning from a long-standing oil-and-gas base. The **Taranaki 2050 Roadmap** and its subsequent Action Plan were designed to be updated as local conditions evolved. When oil and gas activity declined faster than anticipated, some medium-term goals were realigned with changing local realities (Jackson, Yassin, & Gu, 2025; Venture Taranaki, 2024).

Recommendation 2: Implementation — Leverage the capacity and knowledge of Regional Development Agencies to help unlock local potential in the national interest.

The federal government should give Regional Development Agencies a more formal role in connecting national industrial policy with provincial, territorial, Indigenous, regional and local economic development priorities. Regional Development Agencies should work with provincial, territorial, Indigenous and municipal governments, communities and local economic actors to identify local opportunities and the barriers that limit them. They can also work together to help connect those priorities to federal programs and policy tools that can support them (OECD, 2025a, 2025b).

How can we formalize the role of Regional Development Agencies in federal industrial policy?

A more formal role for Regional Development Agencies would build on functions they already perform. In their current role, these agencies tailor federal programs to regional contexts, develop regional and local knowledge, build relationships with economic development actors and help address gaps left by other programs (ACOA, 2023). Regional Development Agencies also draw on regional networks and sectoral knowledge and play a role in multilevel governance (Bradford, 2017). Some agencies like the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) also provide non-financial support through advice, pathfinding and convening (ACOA, 2023). Research on provincial and territorial innovation policy has similarly recommended a stronger role for Regional Development Agencies in co-ordinating and directing strategic investments (Castle & Phillips, 2022).

For major federal industrial policy initiatives with significant regional or local implications, the relevant Regional Development Agency should have a standing role in program design, project assessment or implementation, as appropriate. Federal departments should establish protocols specifying when Regional Development Agency involvement is triggered, what regional evidence and partner input the agency should provide, and how that input is considered in the decision-making process. These protocols should also establish channels through which local economic development organizations, sector and technology associations, and cluster organizations can bring regional knowledge and ongoing initiatives into federal program design and implementation through Regional Development Agencies (Conteh, 2020; OECD, 2020d).

How can Regional Development Agencies help identify and advance regional and local opportunities?

Regional Development Agency input should identify significant regional opportunities, including opportunities for local businesses to supply major projects and develop related economic activities. The input should also identify complementary needs, such as workforce and supplier capacity, enabling infrastructure, housing and community service needs, access to financing or other place-specific constraints, that may materially affect whether an investment succeeds and generates broader regional benefits (OECD, 2025a, 2025b).

Where a regionally significant opportunity requires engagement with several federal programs, departments or institutions, the relevant Regional Development Agency should be able to convene a multi-departmental project table to develop a co-ordinated federal pathway. The federal government could initially link these tables to major federal investment and co-ordination mechanisms with significant regional implications, including the **Strategic Response Fund**, the **Major Projects Office**, the **Global Innovation Clusters**, and future national industrial strategies or funds (ISED, 2026a, 2026e; MPO, 2026a). The Regional Development Agency role would complement these institutions' mandates by providing regional intelligence, identifying complementary needs, connecting relevant actors and helping co-ordinate federal tools.

The **Prairie Project Table** provides an emerging Canadian model for this approach. Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan) convenes participating federal

departments to co-ordinate pathfinding and investment decisions for high-impact regional projects (PrairiesCan, 2025a, 2026b). The broader **Prairie Partnership Initiative** also provides a single-window mechanism for smaller-scale and more localized projects (PrairiesCan, 2026b).

While international institutional structures differ from those in Canada, they can demonstrate how locally grounded knowledge can connect to national investment and implementation. France's ***Territoires d'industrie*** program, for example, combines locally developed industrial action plans with dedicated project managers who co-ordinate local actors, help advance industrial projects, and connect those projects with engineering support and national financing instruments (ANCT, n.d.; Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle, énergétique et numérique, 2023).

How can Regional Development Agencies work together across regional boundaries?

Where an opportunity spans Regional Development Agency jurisdictions, the relevant agencies should co-ordinate their response. The **REGI** evaluation identified stronger linkages among Regional Development Agencies and improved cross-jurisdictional collaboration as areas for improvement (ACOA, 2023).

How can the federal government support Regional Development Agencies?

The federal government should provide Regional Development Agencies with sufficient analytical, staffing and co-ordination capacity to take on this expanded role, rather than add it to existing program delivery responsibilities without additional resources.

The federal government should also assess the co-ordination function directly, including timeliness of federal pathfinding, the proportion of qualifying opportunities receiving a co-ordinated federal response, progress in addressing identified complementary investment needs and regional partners' experience navigating federal supports.

How can locally rooted institutions contribute?

Locally rooted institutions should also play a role in identifying and advancing community-level economic development priorities. The IRPP has previously recommended expanding the mandate and resources of Community Futures Organizations to strengthen community planning and the alignment of economic and skills development (Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025; Samson et al., 2025). These organizations and other local partners can help identify and develop priorities at the community level, while Regional Development Agencies can connect opportunities across communities and regions and provide a route into federal programs and decisions (Bradford, 2017; Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025).

A stronger rural voice in federal economic decision-making could also complement a place-based approach to industrial policy (box 2).

Box 2. Strengthening the rural voice in federal economic decision-making

The Build Canada cabinet committee includes the Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, but it has no standing member with a dedicated rural development portfolio (Prime Minister of Canada, 2026). The Carney government has appointed a Secretary of State for Rural Development within the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) portfolio who is helping guide the development of a Rural Development Action Plan, expected later in 2026. The plan aims to help federal policies and programs better reflect rural realities and incorporate rural perspectives into decision-making (ISED, 2026h, 2026i; Prime Minister of Canada, n.d.).

However, Secretaries of State are not members of cabinet, although they may participate in cabinet or cabinet committee meetings when issues related to their responsibilities arise. Rural development could be elevated from the Secretary of State role to a full cabinet position within ISED's portfolio, with an overarching responsibility to co-ordinate across Regional Development Agencies, federal departments and levels of government on rural affairs. The Minister could build on ISED's existing rural development capacity, which could also manage program funding dedicated to supporting rural, place-based industrial policy (ISED, 2026j, 2026k).

Recommendation 3: Capacity — Invest in rural, northern and Indigenous capacity to lead innovation, entrepreneurship and economic development.

Federal, provincial and territorial governments should allocate a greater share of industrial-policy and economic-development funding to building capacity in communities before opportunities become investment-ready, rather than waiting until major investments or projects arrive (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026). They should support innovation and entrepreneurship that reflect the distinct assets, knowledge and economic opportunities of rural, northern and Indigenous communities (OECD, 2024).

Capacity funding should include multi-year support for economic development staff and strategic planning, funds for feasibility and early project development work, and technical support to prepare proposals and manage implementation. Capacity funding should also support local community institutions dedicated to skill development, innovation and entrepreneurship. Where individual communities cannot sustain these functions on their own, programs should allow them to pool funding and share expertise across a region (OECD, 2024).

How can governments strengthen local innovation capacity?

Federal and provincial innovation programs should provide multi-year support for locally led innovation hubs and other intermediaries where they serve a broader regional role. They should also help rural and northern firms and entrepreneurs develop, adopt and scale new ideas by connecting them with post-secondary institutions, research networks, financing and markets. Ontario's experience with successive iterations of its regional innovation programs, including the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs, shows the role regional intermediaries can play in connecting actors within and across entrepreneurial ecosystems. It also highlights the need for sustained co-ordination across the innovation support system, as well as the challenge of maintaining policy continuity as governments revise existing program structures (Bramwell et al., 2019).

Saskatchewan's **Southeast Techhub (SETH)** is an example of a locally led model that could inform similar efforts elsewhere (More, 2025). The community created the hub by leveraging provincial funding allocated to places facing coal plant closures to transform the economy through technology and innovation (More, 2025).

SETH reflects several elements the OECD (2024) identifies as important to rural innovation, including building networks and linkages, connecting rural entrepreneurs with wider innovation supports and expanding local capacity for innovation. It achieves these elements by not just focusing on economic or technology development. It promotes technology literacy and helps build public trust in innovation (More, 2025). It also has partnerships with the local college and the University of Regina. In 2026, Innovation Saskatchewan committed $149,000 over three years to the hub's Rural Innovation Startup Ecosystem program to expand startup support and strengthen regional innovation (Innovation Saskatchewan, 2026).

How can existing local governments and institutions help build capacity?

Governments should strengthen existing local economic development institutions like Community Futures Organizations and support Indigenous governments and communities in building the capacity to identify, develop and pursue their own economic opportunities.

Community Futures Organizations

The federal government should strengthen the mandate and resources of Community Futures Organizations to support strategic planning and capacity-building, connect local businesses with relevant networks and financing, and better align economic and skills development (Jackson, Samson, & Chejfec, 2025; Samson et al., 2025).

The partnership between Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) and Community Futures/SADC+CAE/CBDC to support rural entrepreneurship is a positive step. In 2025, they launched a $100-million initiative combining BDC financing and advisory services with Community Futures' local reach (BDC, 2025). Similar partnerships could be explored with other federal financial institutions, such as Export Development Canada and Farm Credit Canada, where their mandates align.

Indigenous governments and communities

Federal, provincial and territorial governments should support the financial, technical and governance capacity of Indigenous governments and communities to assess economic opportunities, negotiate participation and ownership arrangements, and generate long-term own-source revenues.

Existing Indigenous-led economic development models show different approaches to Indigenous economic participation and ownership:

- The Haisla Nation has majority ownership of Cedar LNG (ISED, 2025d).
- Fort McKay First Nation developed businesses and contracting opportunities associated with oil sands development (Fort McKay First Nation, 2025; Fort McKay Group of Companies, 2022).

- Membertou First Nation has equity participation in wind, port and seafood ventures (EverWind Fuels, 2026; Membertou First Nation, 2020; Novaporte, n.d.).

Federal and provincial/territorial governments should also support sharing lessons learned and models of success to promote greater wealth generation in Indigenous communities. This could be done through Indigenous-led peer learning and access to independent financial, legal and technical advice for communities considering similar opportunities (OECD, 2020b, 2025c).

For example, the federal **Indigenous Loan Guarantee Program** pairs access to capital with funding for investment analysis and due diligence (NRCan, 2025c). Similar capacity support should accompany other efforts to expand Indigenous ownership and participation in major industrial opportunities (OECD, 2025c).

How should capacity connect to major projects?

Communities that host or are affected by major projects should receive funding for capacity-building to help develop local benefit frameworks, including community benefit agreements, Indigenous equity participation, and local procurement and employment plans (Krawchenko, Earley, & Shaw, 2026; OECD, 2025c). This support should be available early in project planning so that communities have the capacity to identify priorities, assess options and negotiate benefit arrangements before key project and funding decisions are finalized.

The MPO's dedicated funding for Indigenous capacity to engage early and consistently on major projects provides one example of this approach (MPO, 2026f). Similar attention to capacity should accompany the development of local and regional benefit frameworks.

This approach should align with federal commitments under the **2026-2030 Sustainable Jobs Action Plan**, particularly the use of community benefit agreements and commitments to skills development and Indigenous-led solutions (NRCan, 2026e). Local supplier development efforts could also complement the plan's Buy Canadian policies (NRCan, 2026e).

CONCLUSION

Canada's national industrial priorities take shape in diverse communities and regions — from urban neighbourhoods and industrial clusters to smaller towns, rural and northern communities, and Indigenous territories. These places each have a unique set of assets, barriers and priorities, and their economic relationships often extend beyond administrative boundaries.

Local conditions shape whether industrial strategies and major projects achieve national objectives, who benefits from the projects and who bears the associated pressures. Developing critical minerals projects, for example, depends in part on suitable energy and transport infrastructure, workers with the appropriate skills, and firms' capacity to supply mining equipment, materials and specialized services. Major investments can also

increase demand for housing, transportation and public services in host communities, creating pressures when complementary investments lag.

Place-neutral policy is not necessarily neutral in effect: programs with uniform rules can disproportionately benefit regions that already have stronger industrial ecosystems, infrastructure and capacity to access funding.

Gaps between national industrial priorities and local economic development persist at the strategy, implementation and capacity levels: federal industrial strategies give uneven and limited attention to regional and local conditions; federal institutions and programs do not consistently connect major investment decisions with regional and local economic development; and federal support for community capacity is limited.

In practice, Regional Development Agencies and subnational governments often carry much of the responsibility for responding to regional differences, while major federal strategies and programs do not consistently incorporate place-based considerations from the outset. These federal strategies and programs also do not systematically include Regional Development Agencies in decision-making or establish clear mechanisms for regional and local actors to inform key decisions.

To address these gaps, the IRPP recommends a comprehensive three-level framework:

- Incorporate place-based elements into industrial strategies and major project planning from the outset, working with Indigenous governments and municipal governments, communities, and regional and local economic development actors.
- Formalize the role of Regional Development Agencies in major federal industrial policy initiatives with significant regional or local implications.
- Invest in the capacity of rural, northern and Indigenous communities to identify opportunities, develop projects and help ensure they benefit from investment.

Canada has the building blocks to advance this approach. Governments can draw inspiration from existing Canadian initiatives with strong place-based elements like Quebec's Green Hydrogen and Bioenergy Strategy, the Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) program delivered by Regional Development Agencies, and BDC's partnership with the Community Futures network to support rural entrepreneurship. International approaches, including those in the United Kingdom, European Union and France, also offer lessons on connecting national industrial priorities with regional and local development.

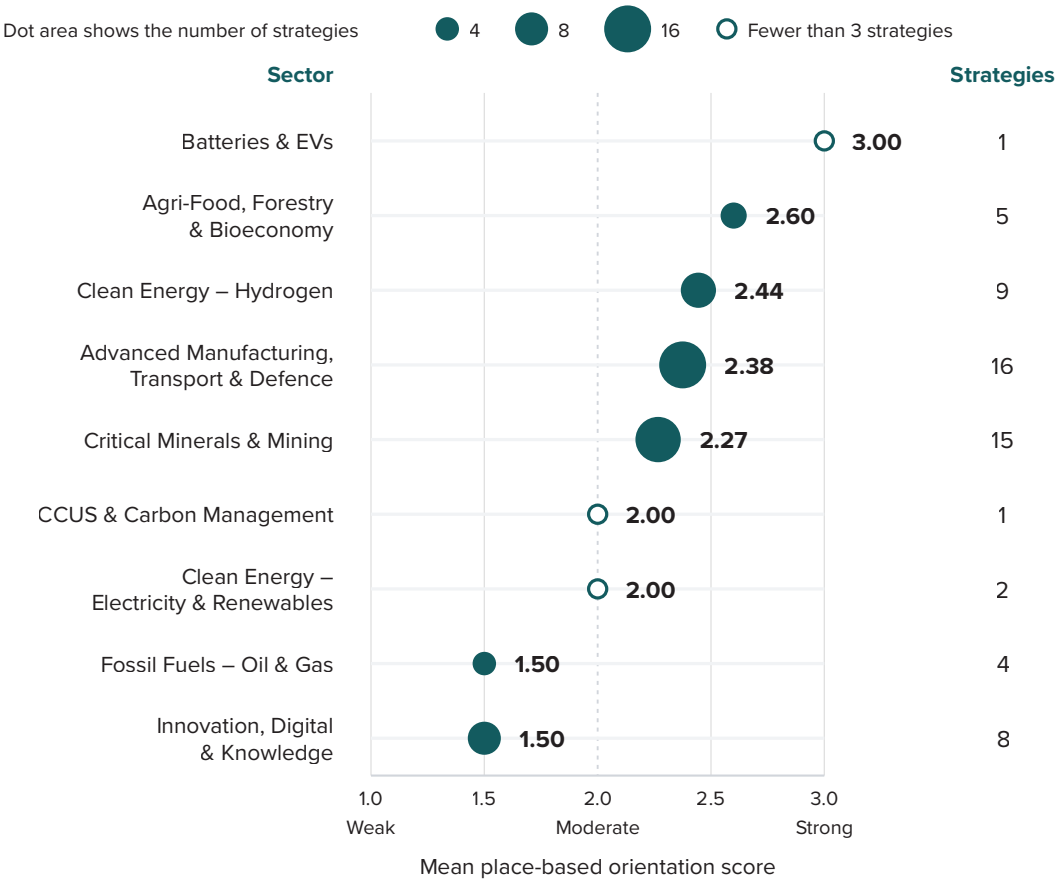
In a pivotal moment of geopolitical and economic change, Canada is embarking on an ambitious nation-building agenda. A smarter industrial strategy — one that takes a place-based approach — can strengthen both national economic performance and outcomes for the communities and regions where investments take shape.

APPENDIX A. PLACE-BASED ORIENTATION OF STRATEGIES VARIES ACROSS INDUSTRIAL SECTORS IN CANADA

Sectoral patterns also reveal differences in the extent to which place is incorporated into industrial strategies. Our discussion below focuses on sectors with at least three strategies.

In agri-food and forestry, hydrogen, and advanced manufacturing, transportation and defence, strategies tend to score higher on place-based orientation. These sectors often depend on geographically specific clusters, supply chains and production systems (see figure A1). By contrast, fossil fuel, innovation and digital sector strategies tend to score lower on place-based orientation, with more sector-wide approaches that are less differentiated by local conditions (Krawchenko & Arcand, 2026).

Figure A1. Place-based design of strategies varies across industrial sectors in Canada



Source: Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026).
Note: Dot size reflects the number of strategies. White circles indicate sectors with fewer than three strategies; these mean scores should be interpreted with caution.

APPENDIX B. INVENTORY OF SELECTED MAJOR FEDERAL INDUSTRIAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND DELIVERY MECHANISMS

Appendix B provides an inventory of selected federal industrial policy strategies, programs, funds, investment vehicles and delivery mechanisms examined in this brief. It summarizes their scope, purpose, timing, lead federal organization and funding. Appendices C and D build on this inventory to examine the role of Regional Development Agencies and how place is incorporated into federal industrial policy instruments.

Table B1. Selected federal industrial policy strategies, programs and delivery mechanisms

Scope and delivery	Program/initiative	Type of tool	Timeline/status	Lead federal organization(s)	Publicly reported funding	Description
National in scope and design (driven by national priorities)	Defence Industrial Strategy	Strategy	Launched in 2026; 10-year strategy	Department of National Defence (DND); Defence Investment Agency (DIA) leads defence procurement	$6.6 billion over five years from 2025-26, including $4.6 billion in initial investments	National strategy to strengthen Canada's defence industrial base, sovereign capabilities, domestic supply chains and innovation. It introduces the Build-Partner-Buy procurement framework and includes regional delivery through the Regional Defence Investment Initiative (RDII), alongside measures to strengthen Canadian production, workforce skills and strategic capabilities.
	Strategic Response Fund (SRF), formerly the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF)	Fund	SIF launched in 2017; SRF replaced SIF in 2025-26; ongoing	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)	$5 billion over six years beginning in 2025-26; minimum contribution of $10 million for projects with at least $20 million in eligible supported costs	Federal fund supporting major business investments in innovation, productivity, expansion and diversification, including tariff-affected firms seeking to adapt and grow. The SRF replaced the SIF while continuing support for innovation projects and adding a broader trade-response role.
	Canada Growth Fund	Public investment vehicle	Incorporated in 2022; began investing in 2023; ongoing	Canada Growth Fund (CGF) Inc.; overseen by Canada Development Investment Corporation (CDEV)	$15 billion capitalization; $5.69 billion committed across 24 transactions involving 22 companies and projects as of July 2026	Arm's-length federal investment vehicle using equity, debt, hybrid instruments and commercial contracts to attract private capital into emissions reduction projects, clean technology and low-carbon supply chains, including critical minerals. Investments are made on commercial terms while pursuing emissions reductions and Canadian economic benefits.
	Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy	Strategy	Launched in 2022; progress update published in 2026	Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)	Approximately $4 billion in initial federal investments; current linked funds include up to $1.5 billion through the First and Last Mile Fund and $2 billion through the Canada Critical Minerals Accelerator	National strategy to expand critical mineral production, processing and value chains while strengthening supply chain resilience, economic security and Indigenous partnerships. Current tools include the First and Last Mile Fund for mining and enabling infrastructure and the Canada Critical Minerals Accelerator for strategic investment through equity, debt and off-take agreements.

Table B1. Selected federal industrial policy strategies, programs and delivery mechanisms (cont.)

Scope and delivery	Program/initiative	Type of tool	Timeline/status	Lead federal organization(s)	Publicly reported funding	Description
National in scope and design (driven by national priorities) (cont.)	Major Projects Office	Co-ordination	Established in 2025; ongoing	Privy Council Office (PCO)	$213.8 million over five years beginning in 2025-26	National co-ordination office created to accelerate projects of national interest by co-ordinating federal approvals and financing. It works with provinces, territories, Indigenous Peoples, industry and project proponents under the *Building Canada Act*.
	National Trade Corridors Fund	Fund	2017-18 to 2027-28; funding ends March 31, 2028	Transport Canada	$4.6 billion total; $3.7 billion committed to 130 projects, including 23 Arctic and northern projects	National infrastructure fund supporting trade corridors, gateways and supply chain fluidity through investments in ports, airports, rail, roads and related infrastructure. It includes dedicated funding for Arctic and northern transportation; municipalities and Indigenous governments are among eligible applicants.
National in design and scope, with regional impact	Global Innovation Clusters	Innovation network	Launched in 2017-18; funding through March 31, 2028	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)	Nearly $2 billion over 10 years	Federally funded program supporting five industry-led innovation clusters in digital technology, plant proteins, advanced manufacturing, AI-enabled supply chains and oceans. The clusters bring firms, research organizations and other partners together on collaborative research, commercialization, skills and ecosystem development and operate as pan-Canadian networks.
Regionally delivered and tailored (through regional mandates)	Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI)	Fund	Launched in 2018; ongoing	Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	$3.06 billion in approved contributions across RDAs from 2018-19 to 2022-23; ongoing RDA funding	National program delivered through the RDAs to support business scale-up and productivity and strengthen regional innovation ecosystems. The nationally consistent framework is tailored by each RDA to regional economic conditions and priorities.
	Regional Defence Investment Initiative (RDII)	Fund	2025-26 to 2027-28; projects to be completed by March 31, 2028	Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	$379.2 million over three years	National initiative delivered through the seven RDAs to integrate businesses and regional ecosystems into domestic and international defence supply chains and strengthen industrial and innovation capacity.
	Regional Tariff Response Initiative (RTRI)	Fund	2025-29; time-limited initiative	Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	$3.45 billion over four years	National initiative delivered through RDAs to help tariff-affected small and medium-sized enterprises manage liquidity pressures, improve productivity, diversify markets, strengthen supply chains and build trade resilience.

Table B1. Selected federal industrial policy strategies, programs and delivery mechanisms (cont.)

Scope and delivery	Program/initiative	Type of tool	Timeline/status	Lead federal organization(s)	Publicly reported funding	Description
Regionally delivered and tailored (through regional mandates) (cont.)	Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative (RAII)	Fund	Launched in 2024-25; original five-year initiative through 2028-29; expansion announced in 2026	Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	$200 million over five years; an additional $500 million expansion announced in 2026	National initiative delivered through RDAs to support AI commercialization and adoption, including in sectors of regional importance. Supports target startups, growing firms and SMEs developing or adopting AI technologies and solutions.
	Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund (NICI)	Fund	Launched in 2019-20; renewed for three years starting in 2024-25	Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor), Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED) and Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)	$14.9 million over three years: $9 million through CanNor, $4.081 million through CED and $1.773 million through ACOA	Geographically targeted fund supporting community-led food initiatives across the North and Inuit Nunangat. It supports local and Indigenous food production, processing, distribution and food system innovation to strengthen and diversify northern economic activity and improve food security.
	Northern Projects Management Office	Co-ordination	Established in 2010; ongoing	Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor)	Operational funding through CanNor, including $1.6 million over 2023-25 and an additional $0.6 million in 2025	CanNor office that co-ordinates federal participation in environmental assessments and regulatory reviews for major resource and infrastructure projects in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. It convenes proponents, governments and Indigenous organizations and supports Crown consultation.
	Prairie Partnership Initiative (PPI)	Co-ordination	Launched December 2025; ongoing	Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan)	PrairiesCan committed $200 million over three years; the initiative also co-ordinates access to existing federal programs and investments	Regional co-ordination mechanism that brings federal departments together with provincial, municipal and Indigenous governments, industry and communities to identify and advance high-impact projects across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Its Prairie Project Table provides streamlined engagement and pathfinding for project proponents.
Locally delivered development programs	Community Futures Program	Transfer payment program/ locally delivered development program	Established in 1985; administered by RDAs since 1995; ongoing	Six RDAs; delivered through independent local Community Futures Organizations	About $95.5 million in contributions across six RDAs in 2023-24; funding is appropriated annually	National community economic development program delivered through a network of 267 independent, not-for-profit Community Futures Organizations serving primarily rural areas. Organizations provide business financing and advisory services, strategic community planning and support for local economic development under local volunteer boards that tailor financing and services to community economic conditions.

Sources: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) analysis based on ACOA (2023, 2026a, 2026b), CanNor (2021, 2025b, 2026b), CDEV (n.d.), CGF (n.d.-b, 2026a, 2026b), Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (2024, 2025), Defence Investment Agency (2026), Department of Finance Canada (2025a, 2025b, 2026), FedDev Ontario (2026a, 2026b), Government of British Columbia (2025c), Government of Canada (2023a, 2023b, 2026f), National Defence (2026a), ISED (2021b, 2025a, 2025d, 2025e, 2026d, 2026f, 2026k, 2026l), MPO (2026a, 2026g), PrairiesCan (2025c, 2025d, 2026b, 2026c, 2026d), and Transport Canada (2023, 2024b, 2026).

APPENDIX C. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (RDAS): STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS FOR DELIVERING PLACE-BASED INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Table C1. An overview of the strengths and limitations of Regional Development Agencies in delivering place-based industrial policy

	Strengths	Limitations
Regional presence	RDAs operate through regional offices and have direct, established relationships with firms, municipalities, Indigenous governments, community organizations and other ecosystem actors. Their regional presence and deep networks provide knowledge of local economic conditions and the ability to tailor programs to regional and local contexts.	RDAs differ in their mandates, administrative systems, staffing, budgets and delivery capacity. The Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) evaluation identifies cross-RDA co-ordination and cross-jurisdictional collaboration as areas for improvement.
Program delivery	RDAs deliver a broad suite of regional and industrial development programs, including the REGI program and newer national initiatives such as the Regional Tariff Response Initiative (RTRI), Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative (RAII) and Regional Defence Investment Initiative (RDII). REGI approved more than $3.06 billion in funding across RDAs over five years.	The role of RDAs in industrial policy is constrained by scale. RDA-delivered programs generally support smaller-scale and more targeted projects than the largest federal industrial policy instruments. REGI recipients identify opportunities to streamline application processes and improve approval timeliness, and report lower satisfaction with referral services. Recipients of REGI delivered by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor) also identify duplication in reporting requirements. The national REGI evaluation identifies operational capacity pressures and a need for greater consistency in performance measurement across RDAs.
Regional tailoring	REGI is explicitly designed to provide nationally consistent but regionally tailored support for productivity, scale-up, clusters and innovation ecosystems. FedNor's delivery of REGI illustrates this approach through continuous intake, broader organizational eligibility, lower target investment maximums, a focus on regional innovation centres and targeted manufacturing streams.	RDA boundaries and administrative regions do not always align with functional economic geographies. Supply chains, labour markets and production systems can span administrative regions, requiring co-ordination across RDA jurisdictions.
Ecosystem-building role	REGI's Regional Innovation Ecosystems (RIE) stream supports accelerators, incubators, regional innovation centres, clusters, collaboration and SME innovation capacity.	Places with weaker institutional and innovation capacity can be less able to access and absorb investment and support. This can reinforce existing regional disparities, particularly in rural, northern and remote communities with more limited access to innovation networks and institutions.
Adaptive capacity	RDAs have demonstrated rapid-response capacity during economic shocks like COVID-19 and tariff disruptions. During COVID-19, RDAs drew on existing programs, systems and regional delivery capacity to launch the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) much more quickly than typical new federal program development. More recently, the RTRI has used the existing RDA network to deliver support to tariff-affected businesses across Canada; Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED) reported approving its first projects within weeks of the initiative's launch.	Temporary shock-response programs are helpful to address immediate adjustment needs but may not provide the sustained support necessary for longer-term regional economic transformation. The RTRI, for example, provides time-limited support to tariff-affected firms for liquidity, productivity, market diversification and resilience.

Table C1. An overview of the strengths and limitations of Regional Development Agencies in delivering place-based industrial policy (cont.)

	Strengths	Limitations
Community capacity	RDAs are well placed to reach SMEs, underrepresented entrepreneurs, Indigenous communities, local intermediaries and smaller communities through their regional networks and ecosystem partners. Nearly 40 per cent of REGI funding was directed to rural regions, and RIE organizations report reaching underrepresented groups, including women, youth and Indigenous Peoples.	Equity, diversity and inclusion data collection and reporting remain uneven across RDAs, limiting their ability to assess program impacts and barriers for underrepresented groups. The national REGI evaluation also finds that program design can be better adapted to rural and remote realities, where capacity needs and forms of innovation can differ from those in larger centres.

Sources: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on ACOA (2023), Bioindustrial Innovation Canada (2025), Department of Finance Canada (2025c), FedDev Ontario (2026a), FedNor (2024), ISED (2026b, 2026c, 2026d, 2026f), OECD (2020b, 2020c, 2024), Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2021), and Oughton et al. (2002).
Note: Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies are the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED), Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor), Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor), Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario), Pacific Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan) and Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan).

APPENDIX D. SPATIAL CONDITIONS IN FEDERAL INDUSTRIAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS

This appendix examines spatial conditions in two groups of federal industrial policy instruments. Box D1 defines spatial conditions. Table D1 presents the 10 largest targeted federal instruments in the OECD's 2023 Quantifying Industrial Strategies (QuIS) database. Table D2 supplements this snapshot with selected federal industrial policy instruments introduced after 2023 or otherwise not captured in the QuIS top 10 ranking.

Box D1. Definitions of spatial conditions

- Binding spatial eligibility: Access to the program, tax credit or stream is formally limited by geography, jurisdiction or community type (OECD, 2025b; Suedekum, 2025)
- Binding regional delivery: The program is delivered through geographically defined institutions, including Regional Development Agencies, but funded projects do not necessarily have binding local benefit requirements (OECD, 2025b)
- Soft spatial incentive: Geography matters through project location, cluster geography, resource location, Indigenous engagement or scoring, but does not necessarily determine eligibility (Austin et al., 2018; Hanson et al., 2025; OECD, 2025b)
- No meaningful spatial condition: Eligibility is national, sectoral, technological, firm-based or identity-based, with no clear binding geographic eligibility or regional delivery requirement (OECD, 2025b)

Table D1. Spatial conditions in the 10 largest targeted federal industrial policy instruments in the OECD's 2023 QuIS snapshot

Program/ fund	2023 QuIS reported value	Lead federal organization(s)	Principal spatial conditions	How place is incorporated
Farm Credit Canada — Loans, Manufacturing	$1.533B	Farm Credit Canada (FCC) is a federal Crown corporation. The responsible minister is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and FCC reports to the Parliament of Canada through that minister.	No meaningful spatial condition	A national financing instrument for food processing and manufacturing. Eligibility is sector-based, with no binding subnational geographic requirement.
Clean Technology Investment Tax Credit	$1.1B	Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) administers the credit; Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) provides engineering and scientific guidance on qualifying clean technology property.	No meaningful spatial condition	A national refundable tax credit for investment in eligible clean technology property in Canada. Eligibility is based on qualifying property and investment criteria, with no binding subnational geographic requirement. Although not spatially targeted, the credit can influence investment geography indirectly through the location of qualifying investments.

Table D1. Spatial conditions in the 10 largest targeted federal industrial policy instruments in the OECD's 2023 QuIS snapshot (cont.)

Program/ fund	2023 QuIS reported value	Lead federal organization(s)	Principal spatial conditions	How place is incorporated
Net Zero Accelerator (currently inactive; under the former Strategic Innovation Fund [SIF])	$780M	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) through the Strategic Innovation Fund	No meaningful spatial condition	A national program supporting large-scale industrial decarbonization and transformation across Canada. Eligibility was not geographically restricted, although investment decisions could consider regional environmental, industrial and economic needs and alignment with provincial and territorial priorities. The Net Zero Accelerator, a dedicated initiative under the SIF, was sunset in November 2025. The broader SIF was replaced by the Strategic Response Fund, which continues to support innovation projects while expanding its focus to trade disruption, adaptation, diversification and other strategic industrial investments.
Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit	$365M	Canadian Heritage, through the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO), and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), jointly administer the credit.	No meaningful spatial condition	A national refundable tax credit for film and video production services. It supports production in Canada but has no binding subnational geographic eligibility or regional delivery requirement.
Atlantic Investment Tax Credit	$335M	Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) federally administers the credit.	Binding spatial eligibility — regional	A federal investment tax credit for qualifying investments in new buildings, machinery and equipment used primarily in Atlantic provinces, the Gaspé Peninsula and associated offshore regions. Geographic location is a condition of eligibility.
Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit	$335M	Canadian Heritage, through the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO), and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), jointly administer the credit.	No meaningful spatial condition	A national refundable tax credit that supports the creation of Canadian film and television programming and the domestic independent production sector. Eligibility requires certification as a Canadian film or video production, but there is no binding subnational geographic eligibility or regional delivery requirement.
Clean Fuels Fund	$309M	Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)	Soft spatial incentive — project geography	A national fund supporting new or expanded clean fuel production across Canada. Projects are tied to specific sites, but general program eligibility is not restricted to subnational geographies.

Table D1. Spatial conditions in the 10 largest targeted federal industrial policy instruments in the OECD's 2023 QuIS snapshot (cont.)

Program/ fund	2023 QuIS reported value	Lead federal organization(s)	Principal spatial conditions	How place is incorporated
Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) — CED	$289M	Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED), the federal Regional Development Agency for Quebec	Binding regional delivery	A national program delivered by CED in Quebec and tailored to regional economic conditions, needs, priorities and opportunities. Its two streams support business scale-up and productivity and regional innovation ecosystems.
Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) — ACOA	$229M	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), the federal Regional Development Agency for Atlantic Canada	Binding regional delivery	A national program delivered by ACOA in Atlantic Canada. Projects are assessed on their economic benefits to Atlantic Canada, including employment, productivity and revenue growth, competitiveness and contributions to regional clusters or supply chains.
Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) — PrairiesCan	$169M	Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan), the federal Regional Development Agency for Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba	Binding spatial eligibility — regional	A national program delivered by PrairiesCan in the Prairie provinces. In addition to regional delivery, its program rules contain explicit geographic conditions. Business Scale-up and Productivity stream applicants must have staffed operating facilities in the Prairie provinces, while activities in the Regional Innovation Ecosystems stream must generate economic or employment benefits primarily within the Prairies.

Sources: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on the OECD Quantifying Industrial Strategies (QuIS) database (Criscuolo, Lalanne, & Díaz, 2022; OECD, 2026c), a supplementary OECD publication (OECD, 2026b), and federal program documentation (ACOA, 2023, 2024; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada [AAFC], 2026; Canadian Heritage, 2026a, 2026b; CED, 2026; CRA, 2026a, 2026c; Department of Finance of Newfoundland & Labrador, n.d.; ISED, 2025b; NRCan, 2025e, 2026c; PrairiesCan, 2025c, 2026a, 2026e).

Note:

- The table presents the 10 targeted federal industrial policy instruments with the largest positive values reported for Canada in the 2023 OECD Quantifying Industrial Strategies (QuIS) database.
- The ranking is a 2023 snapshot; instruments are retained based on their reported 2023 values even if they have since been sunset, replaced or restructured.
- We included only federally funded instruments. Where the funding source was not explicit in the QuIS data, agency and budget source information was cross-checked. Measures funded by provincial governments but administered by federal agencies, including some tax expenditures administered by the Canada Revenue Agency, were excluded.
- QuIS measures grants and tax expenditures differently from financial instruments such as loans, guarantees and public equity. Financial instruments are reported using financing amounts rather than direct expenditures, so the values should not be interpreted as directly comparable amounts of government spending across instrument types.
- Spatial condition categories are based on IRPP analysis of federal program design and identify the principal way place is incorporated into each program; some programs may include more than one spatial element.

Table D2. Spatial conditions in selected additional federal industrial policy instruments

Program/ fund	Publicly reported funding	Lead federal organization(s)	Principal spatial conditions	How place is incorporated
Strategic Response Fund (SRF)	$5B over six years, starting in 2025-26	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)	Soft spatial incentive — project geography	A national fund supporting major business investments in innovation, productivity, expansion and diversification across sectors and regions, including tariff-affected firms seeking to adapt and grow. Applicants identify the location of the proposed project, and the assessment of project benefits can include investment in local communities and impacts on Indigenous communities. Eligibility is not restricted to particular subnational geographies.
Canada Critical Minerals Accelerator (CCMA), formerly Critical Minerals Sovereign Fund	$2B over five years (2026-31). Budget 2025 also provided $50M over the same period to NRCan to support fund delivery.	Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) provides strategic policy direction; Export Development Canada (EDC) leads the execution of investments.	Soft spatial incentive — project geography	Projects are tied to specific critical mineral projects and processing locations, so their geography follows the location of resources and related processing activity. However, eligibility is national and focused on critical minerals, with no binding subnational geographic eligibility requirement.
Regional Tariff Response Initiative (RTRI)	$3.45B over four years (2025-29)	Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	Binding regional delivery	A national initiative delivered through RDAs in their respective regions to support tariff-affected businesses and organizations. Regional delivery anchors the program geographically, and funding allocations can reflect the location of tariff-affected industries. Eligibility focuses primarily on tariff impacts and business adaptation, while some streams incorporate local or regional economic benefit criteria; e.g., non-repayable Pivot Projects of up to $1 million are available for projects demonstrating such benefits.
National Trade Corridors Fund (NTCF)	$4.6B over 11 years (2017-28)	Transport Canada	Soft spatial incentive — corridor geography; some binding spatial eligibility for some dedicated northern funding and calls	A national, merit-based fund for strategic transportation infrastructure that improves trade corridors, gateways and supply chain fluidity. Place enters through the location of transportation bottlenecks and corridor infrastructure. Dedicated funding and calls have also targeted Arctic and northern transportation needs. The program is not generally designed around binding local benefit requirements, although some calls assess local and regional benefits.

Table D2. Spatial conditions in selected additional federal industrial policy instruments (cont.)

Program/ fund	Publicly reported funding	Lead federal organization(s)	Principal spatial conditions	How place is incorporated
Global Innovation Clusters	Nearly $2B over 10 years (2017-28)	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) delivered through five clusters — independent, industry-led not-for-profit organizations	Soft spatial incentive — cluster geography	The program supports five industry-led innovation clusters in key sectors. Cluster activity is geographically embedded through firms, research institutions, projects and innovation ecosystems, but the clusters operate as pan-Canadian networks and eligibility is not restricted to predefined subnational geographies.
First and Last Mile Fund (FLMF), which subsumes and builds on the Critical Minerals Infrastructure Fund (CMIF)	Up to $1.5B through March 2030	Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)	Soft spatial incentive — project geography	A national fund supporting critical mineral development projects and related infrastructure. Place enters through the location of mine sites, processing facilities and enabling transportation and energy infrastructure. The fund also supports Indigenous engagement, participation and capacity-building related to funded projects.
Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities (CERRC)	$220M over eight years (2018-19 to 2025-26), plus $233M over five years through 2026-27 ($453M total)	Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)	Binding spatial eligibility — community type	A national program supporting renewable energy and capacity-building projects in Indigenous, rural and remote communities. Eligibility is explicitly tied to community type and location, making geography a condition of access to the program.
Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative (RAII)	$200M over five years beginning in 2024-25; an additional $500M announced in 2026 to expand and enhance the initiative	Canada's seven Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)	Binding regional delivery; some RDA streams also have binding regional eligibility	A national initiative delivered through RDAs in their respective regions to support AI commercialization and adoption, including in sectors of regional importance. Regional delivery is binding, and some RDA program rules also explicitly tie eligibility to the region; for example, PrairiesCan requires businesses to have staffed operating facilities in the Prairie provinces.

Sources: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on Department of Finance Canada (2025b, 2025c), FedDev Ontario (2026a), Government of Canada (2026a, 2026b), ISED (2025a, 2026c, 2026e, 2026f, 2026l), NRCan (2026c, 2026f), Transport Canada (n.d., 2024a); PrairiesCan (2026c, 2026d).
Notes:

- The table presents selected federal industrial policy programs introduced after 2023 or otherwise not captured in the 2023 QuIS top 10 ranking. The selection is illustrative rather than exhaustive.
- Funding figures reflect publicly reported multi-year program envelopes, total allocations or subsequent program expansions, rather than a standardized annual measure. They should therefore not be directly compared or ranked against the 2023 QuIS values in Table D1 or, in all cases, against one another.
- Spatial condition categories are based on IRPP analysis of federal program design and identify the principal way place is incorporated into each program; some programs may include more than one spatial element.

APPENDIX E. INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO PLACE-BASED INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Table E1. An overview of selected international approaches to place-based industrial policy

Jurisdiction/ initiative	What it is and scale	Governance and implementation	What it illustrates
European Union — Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3)	A place-based innovation framework that asks regions or countries to identify priority research and innovation domains through an entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP). Introduced in 2010, S3 became a condition for relevant cohesion funding in 2014-20 and remains an enabling condition for certain European Regional Development Fund investments in 2021-27.	A responsible strategy body leads priority-setting with firms, universities, public bodies and other territorial stakeholders. Regions use S3 to guide eligible research and innovation investments, including innovation diffusion, industrial transition and skills.	Shows how regionally identified priorities can be formally linked to larger funding decisions, while requiring stakeholder co-operation and monitoring and evaluation capacity.
France — Territoires d'industrie	The territorial arm of French industrial policy, designed to support reindustrialization by organizing local industrial ecosystems around needs such as land, skills, innovation and the ecological transition. Launched in 2018, its second phase (2023-27) covers 183 designated industrial territories.	Locally led and nationally enabled. Local governments, regions, the state and industrial leaders develop action plans, supported by local project managers, regional co-ordinators and national operators. The program also provides engineering support and helps identified projects access national investment programs, including France 2030.	Shows how dedicated local project management capacity can turn locally defined industrial priorities into co-ordinated project portfolios and connect them to national financing.
Germany — GRW and transition instruments	Combines Germany's long-standing regional development instrument for structurally weak areas (GRW) with place-specific transition instruments for coal regions and the automotive supply chain. GRW has operated since the early 1970s; coal region structural aid runs through 2038 and automotive transformation networks continue under a 2027-29 funding period.	Federal and Länder governments jointly set and co-finance the GRW framework, while Länder select and administer projects. GRW funds business investment and economic infrastructure in eligible regions; transition programs add region-specific structural aid, networks, knowledge transfer and supplier supports.	Shows how a durable regional development instrument can be complemented by temporary, place-specific transition funds and networks.
United Kingdom — Modern Industrial Strategy	A 10-year national industrial strategy published in 2025 to raise investment and growth in eight priority sectors, with explicit attention to the places and clusters where relevant capabilities are concentrated.	Nationally led and sector-focused, but place-sensitive through devolved governments, mayors and local leaders. Delivery combines sector plans, place-based initiatives and public/private investment tools.	Shows how national sector priorities can be combined with place-sensitive strategy and implementation. The approach is still evolving and long-run outcomes are too early to assess.
China — rural revitalization and locally adapted industrial upgrading	Combines a national rural revitalization strategy with locally differentiated industrial upgrading. Rural revitalization became a national strategy in 2017; a new agricultural and rural modernization plan covers 2026-30.	Central government sets overall direction, provinces assume principal responsibility, and city, county and township governments implement measures adapted to local conditions. Measures span rural industry development, infrastructure and services, employment and income supports.	Shows how strong national direction can coexist with substantial subnational tailoring, although the governance model reflects China's distinct institutional system.

Table E1. An overview of selected international approaches to place-based industrial policy (cont.)

Jurisdiction/ initiative	What it is and scale	Governance and implementation	What it illustrates
Spain — Basque RIS3 and Just Transition	Combines the Basque Country's RIS3, a regional application of the EU Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3), with Spain's national Just Transition framework for territories affected by coal mine and power plant closures. Basque RIS3 continues under PCTI Euskadi 2030; Spain adopted its national Just Transition Strategy in 2019, with the coal transition framework running through 2027.	Basque RIS3 concentrates innovation in agreed priority areas. Just Transition Zones and agreements use territorial diagnostics and stakeholder participation co-ordinated through the Just Transition Institute, combining territorial agreements, worker supports, training, grants and diversification projects.	Shows how dedicated transition institutions and territorial agreements can connect industrial transition with regional diversification.
Italy — National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)	A national place-based strategy targeting territories distant from essential service centres and facing demographic decline and marginalization. The 2021-27 cycle covers 124 project areas and 1,904 municipalities.	A national framework with locally developed area strategies and multilevel governance. Areas are identified using functional distance and socio-economic indicators; strategies combine education, health and mobility improvements with local economic development projects through intergovernmental agreements and national, regional and EU funding.	A 2026 causal evaluation found a moderate increase in local business units, with stronger effects where administrative capacity and intermunicipal co-operation were greater, but limited average effects on population, employment and housing prices.
Australia — Net Zero Economy Authority and Future Made in Australia	Combines a national net-zero industrial agenda with the Net Zero Economy Authority (NZEA), a statutory body focused on workers, communities and regions most affected by decarbonization. Future Made in Australia is an A$22.7-billion, 10-year package; NZEA became an independent statutory authority in 2024.	NZEA works with workers, employers, unions, governments, First Nations people and communities in priority industrial regions. It administers the Energy Industry Jobs Plan and supports regional transition planning and investment facilitation, while major investment and tax instruments remain federal.	Shows the potential role of a dedicated statutory institution in linking regional transition needs with a broader national industrial policy agenda.
New Zealand — Taranaki 2050 Roadmap and Action Plans	A regional just transition framework developed to support Taranaki's shift from a long-standing oil-and-gas base toward a high-value, low-emissions economy. Published in 2019, it generated 12 Transition Pathway Action Plans; outstanding actions were later incorporated into the refreshed Tapuae Roa regional strategy.	Regionally led and participatory. Businesses, iwi (the Māori term for 'clan'), community members, unions and local and central government participated in co-design, with Venture Taranaki co-ordinating implementation. The pathway plans span energy, food and fibre, tourism, the Māori economy, skills, infrastructure, innovation and other regional priorities.	Shows how transition roadmaps can be embedded in standing regional institutions and integrated with broader regional economic development strategies.
United States — Tech Hubs (*CHIPS and Science Act*)	A federal place-based program supporting regional technology ecosystems in critical and emerging technologies. Thirty-one inaugural Tech Hubs were designated in 2023. Congress authorized $10 billion over five years; more than $800 million had been appropriated by July 2026.	Competitive, region-led consortia bring together firms, universities, governments, economic development organizations and workforce partners around a defined geography and technology area. Implementation projects combine workforce and business development, technology development, infrastructure and governance.	Shows how national technology priorities can be paired with region-defined strategies addressing multiple bottlenecks, while also illustrating that statutory authorization does not guarantee funding at the authorized scale.

Sources: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) based on ANCT (n.d.), Australian Treasury (2024), Bailey et al. (2026), Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie [BMWE] (2021, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c), CHIPS and Science Act (2022), U.K. Department for Business and Trade (2025), Department of Industry, Science and Resources (n.d.), Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (n.d.), Dipartimento per le politiche di coesione e per il Sud (2025), Direction générale des Entreprises (2023b, 2026), European Court of Auditors (2025), Eusko Jaurlaritza (2020, 2021), Instituto para la Transición Justa (n.d.), Krawchenko, McCann, et al. (2026), Mariani (2026), Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico (2019, 2026), Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (n.d.), National People's Congress (2021), Net Zero Economy Authority (2025), Perianez-Forte & Wilson (2021), U.S. Economic Development Administration (n.d., 2023, 2024, 2026), Venture Taranaki (2019, 2024), and Xinhua (2018, 2021, 2024, 2026).

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