



Data and AI Vancouver Island (DAVI)

Working Reference for DAVI Leaders Forum

February 5, 2026 – Victoria, BC

Over 60 stakeholders from government, Crown corporations, academic institutions, NFPs, and tech companies participated in separate three roundtables (Nov 2025–Jan 2026) exploring Vancouver Island's data and AI ecosystem potential. This reference document summarizes the conversations, prospects, and opportunities identified by those groups and provides the focus for the Leaders Forum.

The contents of this document have not (yet) been adopted by DAVI as its go-forward plan. A separate guidance document will be provided to Forum attendees to address governance, planning, and launch.

Strategic Context

Key Assets: 620+ company startup ecosystem (\$6B revenue), strong technical talent, sector expertise (ocean/marine, health informatics, data sovereignty/governance), and significant data holdings.

Critical Barriers: Organizational siloes, cultural risk aversion, literacy gap between AI capabilities and business adoption, youth exodus (77% of BC out-migrants under 40), and brain drain threaten competitiveness.

Opportunity for Data Ecosystem: Transform underutilized assets into coordinated economic and social value through strategic focus, cultural change, and concrete action.

Validated Assumptions

1. Economic Value of Data – Confirmed. Value derives from accessibility, analytical capability, and sector application as much as proprietary ownership. Shared access creates competitive advantage.

2. Objectives Go Beyond AI Products – Strongly validated. Education, literacy programs, infrastructure, productivity improvements are equally critical. Must bridge "literacy chasm" between AI capabilities and business adoption.

3. Public Sector Opportunities – Confirmed with nuance. Government as innovative customer and data partner, not innovation driver. BC's health informatics leadership and Connected Services BC offer near-term opportunities.

4. Data Sovereignty as Governance – Reframed as practical data governance. Indigenous OCAP achievements as signal. Focus on governance solutions versus infrastructure competition.

5. Focus on AI-Readiness – Only 11-14% truly "AI-ready," but 40-50% "AI-curious." Enabling AI-ready, moving curious segment forward generates significant impact and justifies literacy investment.

6. Regional Capacity – Talent and data assets confirmed, but cultural fragmentation limits impact. Success requires shift from silos to collaboration.

Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Data Services Foundation – Platforms, standards, and services for data management, governance, and sharing. Creates network effects and addresses systemic underutilization.

Priority 2: Prospective Focus Areas:

- **Ocean/Marine Technology** – 12+ companies, BC Ferries anchor, defense alignment, natural cluster momentum – support for COAST
- **Health Informatics** – Largest North American deployment, clear ROI, substantial data assets, Island Health and Ministry of Health
- **Data Sovereignty and Governance** – First Nations leadership in digital identity, federal taskforce recommendations, governance best practices, alignment with infrastructure
- **Manufacturing/Housing/Agriculture** – 33% of BC GDP in construction, productivity wins, critical social benefits and stimulus,

Priority 3: Literacy and Adoption Programs – Education for 40-50% "AI-curious" SMEs through sector-specific literacy, implementation facilitation, proof-of-concept support, case studies.

Priority 4: Barrier Reduction – "Possibility Charter" streamlining permitting (currently 7+ years for data centers), procurement, pilot approvals. Cultural change addressing risk aversion and building collaboration.

Priority 5: Infrastructure and Capital – Strategic infrastructure decisions (400+ MW data center capacity available), federal funding alignment, sustainable coordination models.

Near-term Opportunities (Q1-Q2 2026)

Professional Services Productivity Pilot – GenAI for documentation in law, accounting, medical, veterinary practices. Target: 2 hours recovered daily per practitioner across hundreds of firms. Low risk, high visibility, clear ROI.



Support Ocean/Marine Data Cluster – Enable extant cluster (12+ companies) through partnerships, supporting initiatives (e.g. BC Ferries data, company network, talent development, government procurement alignment)

Leverage Connected Services BC Data – Partner with provincial IT consolidation to break silos, establish interoperability standards, demonstrate cross-ministry data value.

3-5 Year Goals

Economic: 500-1,000 high-value jobs; 15-25 new startups (\$50M+ funding); \$100M+ productivity impact

Workforce: 40-50% of SMEs from "AI-curious" to "AI-competent"; 500-1,000 trained annually; youth retention improvement; retention and growth

Infrastructure: 3-5 mission-critical data platforms; governance standards adopted by 50+ organizations

Social Value: Healthcare delivery improvements; public sector cost savings; environmental monitoring enhancement; Indigenous language and governance initiatives

Ecosystem: Increased partnerships; reduced silos; compelling regional AI leadership identity; cultural shift toward collaboration and innovation

Critical Barriers

Literacy Chasm – Gap between AI capabilities and business adoption. Most struggle with basic implementation despite tool availability.

Fragmentation – Economic development organizations in silos with scarcity mindset. Limited coordination mechanisms.

Risk Aversion – Regulatory timelines (12-month cycles for minor modifications, 7+ years for data centers) and bureaucratic inertia. Public sector employment (34% of income) creates complacency.

Youth Exodus – 77% of BC out-migrants under 40. Limited career pathways and affordability drive migration.

Data Silos – Government and industry data locked. Privacy concerns used as excuse despite legitimate sharing pathways.

Brain Drain – University research not commercializing locally. Underdeveloped venture capital and regulatory barriers.

Source: Three DAVI roundtables (60+ participants, November 2025–January 2026) and DAVI Briefing (November 2025)
Contact: Cynthia Lynam vicepresident@victoriadatasociety.ca, Loki Jorgenson loki.jorgenson@circleinnovation.ca



Roundtable Recommendations

Governance: Define clear DAVI structure with decision authority, accountability, regular coordination. Move from dialogue to action through working groups, project management, metrics.

Prioritization: Confirm 2-4 focused priorities (Data Services Foundation + Marine/Health/Indigenous Data). Approve 1-2 Q1 2026 quick wins (Professional Services Pilot, Ocean/Marine Cluster).

Resources: Mobilize committed resources from participating organizations. Develop sustainable funding model including government, research, federal alignment.

2026 Timeline:

- **Q1:** Finalize priorities, launch quick wins, establish working groups, design literacy programs
- **Q2:** Early pilot results, first literacy cohorts, sector initiatives launched, data platforms underway
- **Q3-Q4:** Expanded pilots, case studies, proven governance, secured 2027 funding

Success Metrics: Define indicators for economic impact (jobs, companies, revenue), adoption (SME participation, training completion), ecosystem health (collaborations), cultural change (youth retention).

Next Steps

Three roundtables validated DAVI's strategic direction while surfacing critical refinements. Broad alignment exists among 60+ stakeholders representing significant intellectual capital and commitment.

Success requires three elements:

1. **Concrete Focus** – Select 2-4 priorities with disciplined execution
2. **Collaborative Culture** – Break down silos, shift from competition to co-opetition
3. **Drive to Early Wins** – Substantial wins demonstrating value and building momentum

The foundation exists. The opportunity is clear. Success depends on stakeholder commitment to resources, focus, and cultural change—moving from exploratory concept to concrete initiatives with cross-organizational ownership.

Vancouver Island can establish itself as a leading Canadian hub for responsible, human-centered data and AI innovation—generating economic opportunity while addressing brain drain, diversification, and youth career challenges.

The DAVI Leaders Forum represents the next step transitioning from "nebulous but expansive" discussion to "specific and ambitious" action. Reach out to get involved, stay informed, or learn more about DAVI.

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