Data and AI Vancouver Island (DAVI) Ecosystem Initiative

Consolidated Roundtable Report and Strategic Framework

January 2026

Executive Summary

Over three roundtable sessions held between November 2025 and January 2026, over 60 stakeholders from across the south Vancouver Island participated in structured dialogue toward building a regional data and AI services ecosystem to support all of BC. These sessions brought together representatives from BC government ministries, Crown corporations, academic institutions, technology companies, innovation agencies, Indigenous communities, industry non-profits, and entrepreneurs.

This report synthesizes key findings from all three roundtables, organized around four critical decision areas for the subsequent leadership forum:

1. **Validated Assumptions** – The foundational premises underlying DAVI, refined through stakeholder dialogue
2. **Prospective Priorities** – Strategic focus areas identified as highest-impact opportunities within reach
3. **Prospective Opportunities** – Specific initiatives and sectors offering near-term potential to achieve impact, economic and social
4. **Potential Goals and Outcomes** – Measurable objectives and transformational outcomes with that align with participant interests

The roundtables developed broad consensus on DAVI's strategic direction while surfacing critical refinements, important caveats, and substantial barriers requiring deliberate attention. Participants emphasized that success depends not merely on programmatic activity but on cultural and organizational change—breaking down silos, fostering genuine collaboration—that moves from exploratory discussion to concrete, coordinated action.

Part One: Key Assumptions Behind DAVI

Overview

DAVI rests on six foundational assumptions that guide strategic direction.

Across the three roundtables, stakeholders validated all six with important refinements and qualifications. This section presents both the validated core and the critical nuances that should inform implementation.

Assumption 1: Unique, Relevant, and/or Proprietary Data Are Economically Salient

Validated: Yes, with important refinement

Refined Statement: Economically valuable data is not primarily defined by ownership status (proprietary vs. public) but rather by the combination of:

- **Relevance** – Data that directly addresses specific market needs or business challenges
- **Sector-specific application** – Context-dependent analysis that creates competitive advantage
- **Accessibility** – Data that has been digitized, structured, and made discoverable
- **Novel analytical capacity** – The ability to apply new technologies or methodologies to unlock insights previously unavailable

Qualification and Examples:

Participants emphasized that "unique or proprietary" should be understood more broadly to include:

- Publicly available but poorly accessible data (e.g., mining archives, environmental datasets, historical scientific collections) that gain significant value through digitization and analysis.
- Open-source and publicly accessible data sources remain valid if they unlock new insights through novel analysis.
- The critical distinction is between data that generates genuine economic value through innovative analysis versus undifferentiated information streams.

Implication: DAVI's data services strategy should focus on accessibility, structure, and analytical capability as much as on proprietary data protection. Investment in digitization, metadata frameworks, and analytical platforms may be as important as protecting proprietary datasets.

Assumption 2: AI-Enabled Products Are Not the Sole Deliverables

Validated: Yes, strongly expanded

Core Insight: The DAVI ecosystem must deliberately support multiple categories of value creation beyond commercial product development:

Education and Literacy

- Training for SMEs and individual workers
- Socialization of AI/data concepts among non-technical business leaders
- Sector-specific education programs addressing the critical "literacy chasm" between advanced innovation discussions and mainstream business understanding

Infrastructure and Shared Services

- Data governance frameworks and best practices
- Components and platforms that other companies can build upon (reducing duplicative effort)

- Standards for data exchange, security, and compliance

Operational Improvement and Productivity

- Productivity improvements across existing sectors (e.g., generative AI reducing documentation time for health professionals by 2 hours daily)
- Operational analytics and efficiency gains
- Service delivery enhancement in healthcare, education, and government

Knowledge Sharing and Community

- Cross-organizational learning and collaboration mechanisms
- Community building and relationship strengthening
- Regional identity and shared narrative development

Qualification: Participants noted a critical gap between cutting-edge AI/data conversations and practical business implementation. Most businesses are struggling with basic adoption questions: *How do I use this? What's my ROI? Who do I hire? How do I govern this?* Bridging this chasm through education, facilitation, and accessible support is essential for meaningful economic impact.

Implication: DAVI should explicitly position itself to deliver multiple outcomes, with literacy and capability-building receiving equal emphasis to product commercialization. Early quick-win projects demonstrating concrete productivity gains are essential for building momentum and credibility.

Assumption 3: Public Sector Represents Key Opportunities and Priorities

Validated: Yes, with important nuance and caveats

Core Opportunity: BC's public sector represents significant potential to the south island ecosystem through:

- Massive data assets (citizen services platforms, health records, regulatory data, operational systems)
- Substantial procurement power that can drive innovation adoption
- Service delivery mandate directly aligned with data and AI applications (healthcare, education, transportation, environmental management)
- Specific provincial advantages (largest health informatics program in North America; largest health information system deployment in North America)

Critical Qualification: While public sector opportunity is real, implementation requires nuanced approach:

- **Driver vs. Customer:** The private sector should drive innovation; the public sector's appropriate role is as innovative customer and partner. Government should focus on removing barriers, opening data for compliant use, and creating procurement pathways—not attempting to lead new ventures.
- **Adoption Barriers:** Government agencies face low digital maturity in data and AI adoption. While anecdotal evidence suggests key mindset shifts (e.g., health providers adopting genAI for note-taking), larger commitments will require targeted demonstrations of value and proof-of-concept projects.

- **Consolidation Opportunity:** Connected Services BC's data consolidation initiative represents a significant opportunity to unlock silos and enable innovation - but requires deliberate effort to realize broadly experienced benefits.

Evidence of Shifting Attitudes: Multiple participants cited concrete examples of public sector innovation:

- Health providers adopting generative AI for clinical documentation, reducing time burden by 2 hours per day
- Openness to data-driven approaches within government agencies
- Willingness to partner on pilot projects with private sector innovation partners

Implication: DAVI should engage public sector strategically as both data source and early adopter, using specific proof-of-concept projects and productivity demonstrations to build confidence and commitment for larger initiatives.

Assumption 4: Data Sovereignty Represents Both Opportunity and Challenge

Validated: Yes, but requires sophisticated framing

Core Insight: Sovereignty and partnership capacity are inversely correlated. Greater data sovereignty (maintaining full control, processing locally, avoiding external platforms) inherently limits partnership opportunities, access to advanced tools, and economies of scale.

Refined Framing: Rather than treating sovereignty as abstract geopolitical concept, DAVI should frame this as **data governance and control**—more practical and more actionable:

The Practical Questions:

- Who owns data?
- What uses are permitted?
- How is it protected?
- Who has access under what conditions?

Indigenous Data Leadership: First Nations have invested decades developing sophisticated frameworks for data governance (e.g. OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access, Possession). This represents significant insight and should be:

- Recognized as thought leadership in the ecosystem
- Engaged rather than reinvented in isolation
- Reflected on other sectors facing governance challenges

Technical Dimensions:

- On-premises AI infrastructure (e.g., NVIDIA DGX systems) offers potential for organizations seeking data control without complete isolation
- IEEE standards emerging around Indigenous data governance provide technical framework
- Data sovereignty is ultimately about the entire technology stack (software, platforms, governance frameworks), not merely physical infrastructure location

Qualification - Strategic Realism: Vancouver Island currently has approximately 400 MW of available data center power capacity, with several hundred additional MW in pipeline. However, data sovereignty should not be narrowly defined as building sovereign physical infrastructure competing with global scale. The region's advantage lies in specialized software, compliance-enabling platforms, and high-value services.

Implication: DAVI should develop practical data governance frameworks applicable across sectors, with particular emphasis on Indigenous data sovereignty and on solutions for organizations seeking control without complete isolation.

Assumption 5: AI-Ready SMEs Offer the Largest Near-Term Impact

Validated: Yes, with important qualifications and realistic expectations

Definitional Clarity Needed: True "AI-readiness" is rare—approximately 11-14% of North American SMEs meet threshold[1] of:

- Necessary infrastructure (data systems, computing capacity)
- Technical talent or access to expertise
- Strategic clarity about data and AI role in competitive advantage
- Willingness to invest in adoption

Tiered Segmentation: Rather than treating all SMEs equally, DAVI should operate with three-tier approach:

Tier 1: AI-Ready Enterprises (11-14% of SMEs)

- Companies with clear product-market fit, scalability potential, and readiness to adopt
- Target revenue range: $1-5 million, with demonstrated growth trajectory
- Appropriate for intensive support and investment
- Highest ROI for structured mentorship and capital support

Tier 2: AI-Curious Companies (40-50% of SMEs)

- Organizations recognizing potential value but lacking resources, knowledge, or confidence to proceed
- Characterized by barriers such as limited technical talent, governance uncertainty, ROI skepticism
- Appropriate for education, community participation, and low-barrier facilitation
- Moving meaningful numbers from "curious but stalled" to "ready to adopt" creates significant economic impact

Tier 3: Traditional/Disconnected Businesses

- Limited awareness or engagement with data/AI opportunities
- May benefit from sectoral literacy campaigns and accessibility initiatives

Realism About Productivity Gains: Participants cautioned that AI adoption has not yet achieved productivity gains originally anticipated. Implementation complexity remains high,

[1] Cisco AI Readiness Index 2025

and ROI justification is challenging for many businesses. However, early adopters in specialized sectors (gaming, medical devices, marine technology) provide proof points.

Implication: DAVI should develop differentiated approaches for each segment, with concentrated intensive support for truly AI-ready SMEs and broader accessibility initiatives to move "curious" companies forward.

Assumption 6: South Island Has The Critical Data Skills Capacity to Deliver to BC

Validated: Yes, with important qualifications about what "capacity" means

What Is Present:

- **Significant technical talent:** Strong local pool of data and AI professionals, though concerning brain drain to Vancouver, Toronto, and Silicon Valley continues
- **620+ startup ecosystem:** Aggregate revenue of $6 billion, though potentially dispersed across uncoordinated organizations
- **Sector-specific expertise:** Demonstrated strength in ocean/marine technology, health informatics, Indigenous governance, music data analytics, mining data, fintech, medical devices, and advanced manufacturing
- **Quality-of-life advantages:** Victoria's lifestyle attracts remote workers and professionals seeking opportunities without relocating

What Is Not Present:

- **Cultural collaboration:** Regional fragmentation and "scarcity mindset" discourage information sharing; multiple economic development organizations operate in silos fearing competition will disadvantage them
- **Unified narrative:** The region lacks clear "North Star" vision uniting stakeholders and channeling competitive energy toward collective goals
- **Critical mass in single domains:** While talent exists in multiple sectors, organizational fragmentation limits ability to achieve ecosystem critical mass in any single area

Qualification - Strategic Focus: The region cannot compete across all domains. Success requires strategic focus on 2-4 sectors where Vancouver Island has demonstrated strength, existing infrastructure, key differentiation, and proven expertise.

Implication: While talent and data capacity exist, success hinges on deliberate cultural change—moving from organizational silos and scarcity mindset toward healthy "co-opetition" (competing while collaborating) and unified strategic focus.

Part Two: Prospective Priorities for DAVI Development

Overview

Based on stakeholder dialogue across three roundtables, several strategic priorities emerged as having highest potential for driving meaningful economic and social impact. These priorities reflect both ecosystem assets and market opportunity.

Priority 1: Data Services Foundation (Cornerstone Initiative)

Rationale: Participants across all three roundtables identified data services as critical enabling infrastructure for entire ecosystem.

What Is Meant by "Data Services":

- Platforms and tools for managing, governing, and sharing data
- Standards for data exchange, security, and compliance across organizations
- Components and APIs that other companies can build upon
- Consulting and implementation services for data governance
- Metadata frameworks making previously inaccessible data discoverable
- Digitization capabilities for converting legacy paper and analog records
- Highly qualified talent with critical data skills

Strategic Importance:

- Serves as foundation enabling innovation across all sectors (marine, health, manufacturing, etc.)
- Creates network effects—platforms and standards become more valuable as more organizations adopt them
- Addresses systemic underutilization of data assets across public and private sectors
- Reduces redundant effort by providing shared solutions rather than requiring every organization to build independently

Market Opportunity:

- Estimated 40-50% of SMEs accumulate data without strategic use—representing significant opportunity for adoption and capability-building
- Government agencies hold substantial data but lack mature platforms and governance frameworks
- Regulatory and compliance pressures create demand for governance solutions

Implementation Approach:

- Establish DAVI as focal point for data services through combination of facilitation, platform development, and standard-setting
- Leverage existing technical talent and platforms in region; increase capacity
- Partner with academic institutions on research and capability development
- Create pilots demonstrating value in high-opportunity sectors

Priority 2: Sector-Focused Pilot Initiatives

Rationale: Rather than attempting region-wide ecosystem development, DAVI should launch focused initiatives in 2-4 sectors where Vancouver Island has competitive advantage and existing momentum.

High-Opportunity Sectors Identified:

Marine Technology and Ocean Data

- Natural cluster with 12+ marine technology companies already operating
- Applications: vessel optimization, fleet management, marine surveillance, autonomous systems, critical minerals identification, ocean monitoring and climate data
- Advantages: First-mover coastal position, existing talent concentration, global market demand, alignment with national defense and economic priorities, Crown corporation anchor (BC Ferries)
- Data density: Significant untapped oceanographic and marine operations data

Health Informatics and Digital Health

- Regional assets: Largest health informatics program in North America; largest health information system deployment in North America
- Growing adoption: Generative AI in health practice for clinical documentation, reducing time burden significantly
- Opportunities: Patient outcome optimization, healthcare delivery efficiency, predictive analytics, administrative automation
- Market drivers: Clear near-term ROI, large employer base, substantial data assets, evident demand from health providers

Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Applications

- Organizations and communities working at intersection of Indigenous governance, language revitalization, and land/water management
- Applications: Digital identity systems, language revitalization programs using AI-enabled tools, traditional ecological knowledge documentation and analysis
- Strengths: First Nations' decades of thought leadership; significant demand from Indigenous communities; applications spanning cultural, economic, and environmental domains
- Funding alignment: Potential federal funding and policy support
- Sector leadership: Indigenous private industry as drivers

Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, and Precision Agriculture

- Economic impact: Construction represents 33% of BC GDP; manufacturing and agriculture are major employment sectors
- Adoption barriers: Widespread use of digital tools exists, but literacy and ROI clarity remain barriers; "chasm" between available tools and business adoption
- Quick-win potential: Productivity gains through adoption of existing tools offer immediate impact
- Scaling potential: Success in one manufacturing/construction company can be replicated rapidly across sector

Cross-Cutting Opportunity: Productivity Enhancement in Professional Services

- Immediate application: Generative AI for documentation (law, accounting, medical, veterinary practices, etc.)
- Scale: Hundreds of professional firms across region

- Impact: Quick wins building momentum; demonstrates concrete value; foundation for more sophisticated data work
- ROI clarity: Clear productivity metrics and cost savings

Priority 3: Literacy and Adoption Bridging Programs

Rationale: Critical gap exists between advanced AI/data conversations and practical business implementation—the "literacy chasm."

Market Segment: The 40-50% of SMEs characterized as "AI-curious" represent significant opportunity if provided with education, confidence-building, and accessible support.

Specific Program Areas:

Sector-Specific Business Literacy

- Targeted programs for construction, agriculture, manufacturing, professional services
- Focus: How to assess data opportunities, understand ROI, structure implementation, govern responsibly
- Delivery: Online and in-person workshops, peer learning groups, facilitation services

AI and Data Concepts for Non-Technical Leaders

- Helping business leaders understand AI as platform shift comparable to PCs (1980s) or Internet (1990s)
- Reframing around practical value extraction from data already possessed
- Addressing misconceptions and building confidence

Adoption Facilitation Services

- Support for companies considering adoption: assessments, implementation planning, vendor selection, risk management
- Pilot project support: proof-of-concept development with minimal risk
- Case study development: documenting successes to build proof points for sector

Skill Development and Micro-Credentials

- Entry-level data skills training aligned with job market needs
- Sector-specific certifications and micro-credentials
- Partnerships with post-secondary institutions for curriculum development and delivery

Priority 4: Regulatory and Cultural Barrier Reduction

Rationale: Stakeholders identified regulatory inefficiency and cultural risk aversion as significant barriers to innovation and talent retention.

Specific Barriers Identified:

Permitting and Compliance:

- Data center development timelines of 7+ years for permitting incompatible with innovation timelines

- 12-month permitting cycles for minor modifications
- Inconsistent municipal standards creating uncertainty
- Complex procurement rules limiting agility in government purchasing

Cultural and Mindset Issues:

- Regional culture characterized by risk aversion and comfort with status quo (34% of household income from public sector, creating complacency)
- Youth exodus: 77% of out-migrants from BC are under 40, citing affordability and lack of compelling career pathways
- Organizational silos and scarcity mindset discouraging collaboration

Strategic Response:

"Possibility Charter" Approach

- Work with municipal and provincial government to identify unnecessary regulatory friction
- Develop streamlined processes for innovation-enabling activities (data center development, procurement, pilot projects)
- Establish "common-sense" approach to regulation balancing legitimate safety/compliance with enabling innovation

Cultural Change Initiatives

- Establish DAVI as convening and unifying force for ecosystem
- Develop compelling shared narrative about Vancouver Island's data and AI leadership potential
- Create visible quick-win projects building momentum and demonstration value
- Support peer-to-peer learning and relationship-building across organization boundaries

Priority 5: Infrastructure and Capital Development

Rationale: Ensuring physical and financial foundations support innovation initiatives.

Physical Infrastructure:

- Current data center capacity: ~400 MW available power, with several hundred additional MW in pipeline
- Strategic decision needed: Build sovereign local infrastructure or leverage existing Canadian facilities while specializing in software/services?
- Assessment needed: What infrastructure is required to support priority sectors and initiatives?

Capital and Funding:

- Federal alignment: Seek alignment with emerging federal AI strategy and funding to attract resources to BC/South Island

- Co-funding mechanisms: Mobilize resources from participating organizations, private sector, and government
- Sustainability models: Develop funding structures supporting ongoing coordination and initiative implementation

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Part Three: Prospective Opportunities and Potential Initial Wins

Overview

Beyond strategic priorities, participants identified specific opportunities for near-term action—initiatives that can generate early momentum and demonstrate concrete value.

Immediate Opportunity 1: Professional Services Productivity Pilot

Opportunity Description: Launch visible pilot project using generative AI for documentation in professional services (law firms, accounting practices, medical offices, veterinary clinics).

Market Scope:

- Hundreds of professional firms across South Island
- Each firm: 5-20 practitioners
- Potential aggregate productivity impact: Thousands of hours recovered annually

Concrete Value Proposition:

- GenAI adoption: 2 hours recovered per practitioner daily through automated documentation
- Cost savings: Significant reduction in administrative staff time or redeployment to higher-value work
- Implementation simplicity: Using existing commercial tools (Microsoft 365 Copilot, specialized legal/medical AI tools)
- ROI clarity: Straightforward cost-benefit analysis with immediate payback

Timeline: Launch Q1 2026; Results and case studies available for sector promotion by Q2 2026

Ecosystem Role:

- Builds momentum and confidence in ecosystem
- Generates proof points for broader adoption
- Creates visible success story attracting attention and resources
- Foundation for deeper data/AI adoption in subsequent phases

Immediate Opportunity 2: Ocean/Marine Data Cluster Initiative

Opportunity Description: Enable and accelerate development of marine technology cluster already established in region.

Existing Assets:

- 12+ marine technology companies operating
- COAST developing as global force within the sustainable blue economy
- Strong anchor: BC Ferries (Crown corporation with massive operational data)
- Research capacity: University of Victoria, marine research institutions
- Data availability: Oceanographic, marine operations, fisheries data

Specific Initiatives:

Data Accessibility Project

- Assess marine data assets across government, Crown corporations, academic institutions
- Identify highest-value datasets for commercialization or research
- Develop governance framework enabling responsible data sharing
- Support digitization and structuring of legacy marine data

Technology Cluster Development

- Reinforce marine technology company network
- Contribute to shared resources and collaboration platforms
- Pursue joint marketing and capital-raising initiatives
- Support cross-company innovation projects

Talent Development

- Sector-specific skills training aligned with marine technology needs
- University partnerships on applied research and capstone projects
- Apprenticeship and entry-level program development

Government Partnership

- Engage BC Ferries as early adopter and data partner
- Leverage government procurement and regulatory authority to support sector
- Align with federal defense and infrastructure priorities

Immediate Opportunity 3: Indigenous Data Sovereignty Engagement

Opportunity Description: Pursue practical implementation of Indigenous data governance frameworks, engaging First Nations thought leadership, identifying shared opportunities to guide the ecosystem.

Specific Initiatives:

OCAP Framework Implementation

- Engage and learn from Indigenous communities and organizations to understand practical application of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) principles

- Draw upon Indigenous knowledge to guide implementations and tools
- Expand training and certification programs with Indigenous support

Language Revitalization Technology

- Seek to support Indigenous-led development of AI-enabled tools for language preservation and education
- Evolve successful models for translation to other contexts
- Expand market opportunities for Indigenous technology companies

Land and Water Management

- Support traditional ecological knowledge documentation using data and AI tools
- Develop platforms enabling Indigenous-led environmental monitoring and management
- Connect to government environmental management systems

Indigenous Leadership

- Invite Indigenous organizations as innovation leaders in data governance
- Engage Indigenous technology entrepreneurship
- Ensure DAVI governance includes Indigenous representation and leadership

Immediate Opportunity 4: Connected Services BC Data Unlocking

Opportunity Description: Work strategically with provincial IT services consolidation (Connected Services BC) to unlock data silos and enable innovation.

Opportunity Elements:

Data Accessibility Initiative

- Identify valuable datasets currently locked in siloed systems
- Develop governance and technical frameworks enabling secure cross-ministry access
- Create pilot projects demonstrating value of consolidated data (e.g., citizen services optimization, regulatory compliance monitoring, public sector efficiency)

Platform and Standards Development

- Leverage consolidation momentum to establish data exchange standards
- Support interoperability between ministry systems
- Create API frameworks enabling third-party innovation

Public Sector Modernization

- Use data consolidation as catalyst for broader digital maturity improvement
- Support Crown corporations (BC Hydro, BC Ferries, etc.) in data and AI adoption
- Develop proof-of-concept projects with early-adopter agencies

Immediate Opportunity 5: Digitization and Archival Access Projects

Opportunity Description: Unlock significant value locked in inaccessible formats through targeted digitization initiatives.

Specific Opportunity Examples:

Mining Archives

- Historical mining survey archives and field records
- Digitize and apply AI analysis to identify overlooked opportunities
- Potential: Significant competitive advantage in mineral exploration

Environmental and Scientific Datasets

- Historical oceanographic data
- Environmental monitoring records
- Scientific research archives
- Potential: Climate science, environmental management, commercial applications

Business and Regulatory Records

- Historical regulatory compliance documents
- Business transaction records
- Potential: Compliance monitoring, historical analysis, research

Implementation Model:

- Identify archive owners and stakeholders
- Assess digitization costs and commercial value potential
- Structure partnerships enabling digitization with value-sharing arrangements
- Apply AI-enabled analysis to unlock insights

Part Four: Potential Goals and Outcomes

Overarching Vision

Vancouver Island becomes a leading Canadian hub for responsible, human-centered data and AI innovation, characterized by:

- Strong, collaborative ecosystem of data-driven companies and service providers
- Skilled workforce equipped with data and AI capabilities
- Responsible practices in data governance, AI ethics, and innovation
- Broad-based adoption of data and AI tools across all sectors
- Economic diversification reducing dependence on public sector employment
- Regional identity and pride around technological leadership

Quantified Goals and Outcomes

Economic Growth Targets:

- **Revenue generation:** Growth of data and AI services sector from current baseline to $X00 million by [timeframe]
- **Job creation:** Development of 500-1,000+ new high-value technology jobs in data and AI services over 3 years
- **Startup ecosystem:** Support emergence of 15-25 new data/AI-focused startups with $50+ million aggregate funding
- **Broader sector impact:** Productivity improvements and efficiency gains across target sectors (marine technology, health, manufacturing, professional services) valued at $100+ million in economic impact

Talent and Workforce Development:

- **Literacy improvement:** Movement of 40-50% of SMEs from "AI-curious" to "AI-competent" within 2-3 years through education and adoption support
- **Workforce expansion:** 500-1,000 individuals completing data/AI skills training and micro-credentials annually
- **Youth retention:** Measurable improvement in retention of talent under 40 through compelling career pathways and regional identity
- **Diversity:** Active recruitment and advancement of women, Indigenous peoples, and other underrepresented groups in data and AI roles

Infrastructure and Capability Development:

- **Data services platforms:** Deployment of 3-5 mission-critical data services platforms serving multiple sectors
- **Research translation:** Movement of 5-10 research projects from academic institutions to commercial application or public sector implementation
- **Standards adoption:** Broad adoption of data governance, security, and interoperability standards across 50+ organizations
- **Talent retention:** Reduction in brain drain through combination of career opportunities, regional identity, and supportive ecosystem culture

Social and Public Value:

- **Health outcomes:** Measurable improvements in healthcare delivery and patient outcomes through adoption of data-driven analytics
- **Public sector efficiency:** Cost savings and service improvement in government service delivery through data and AI application
- **Environmental stewardship:** Enhanced capacity for environmental monitoring, climate science, and land/water management through data and AI tools
- **Indigenous empowerment:** Expansion of Indigenous-led data and AI initiatives in language revitalization, governance, and economic development

Ecosystem Health Indicators:

- **Collaboration metrics:** Increase in cross-organizational partnerships and joint initiatives
- **Information sharing:** Reduction in silos through increase in formal data-sharing relationships
- **Regional narrative:** Development of compelling shared identity and vision for Vancouver Island's data and AI leadership
- **Cultural shift:** Measurable improvement in risk tolerance, innovation mindset, and celebration of learning from failure

Transformation Goals

Movement from current state to future state across critical dimensions:

Dimension	Current State	Future State (3-5 years)
Data Access	Siloed; limited cross-organizational sharing	Open; governed; enabling innovation
Innovation Culture	Risk averse; isolated organizations; complacency	Collaborative; risk-tolerant; continuous learning
Economic Dependency	34% public sector employment	Diversified; 50%+ private sector employment
Workforce	Stagnant; youth exodus	Growing; youth retention; skills development
Technology Adoption	11-14% AI-ready SMEs; 40-50% curious	30-40% AI-ready; 60-70% actively adopting
Regional Identity	"Government and tourism"	"Innovation and responsible AI leadership"
Capital Investment	Limited; primarily public-sector driven	Growing; mix of private, public, research funding
Sector Leadership	Hidden assets and strength	Recognized regional leadership in 3-4 sectors

Success Factors and Critical Dependencies

For DAVI to achieve these goals and outcomes, certain critical factors must be addressed:

1. **Sustained Organizational Commitment:** Partners must maintain engagement and resource commitment beyond initial enthusiasm—requiring structured coordination mechanisms and visible progress.

2. **Cultural and Behavioral Change:** Success ultimately depends on shift from organizational silos and scarcity mindset to collaborative culture and shared purpose—requiring deliberate cultural initiative alongside programmatic work.

3. **Clear Strategic Focus:** Region cannot pursue all opportunities equally; success requires disciplined focus on 2-4 priority sectors and initiatives, saying "no" to less critical opportunities.

4. **Regulatory Streamlining:** Removal of unnecessary regulatory friction is essential for attracting and retaining talent and enabling rapid experimentation and scaling.
5. **Leadership and Governance:** Effective coordination and decision-making structures must replace ad-hoc collaboration; clear accountability is essential.
6. **Adequate Funding:** Success requires sustained investment—from government, private sector, research institutions, and federal programs—not merely volunteer coordination.
7. **Initial Wins:** Early visible projects demonstrating concrete value are essential for building momentum, credibility, and stakeholder confidence.
8. **Inclusive Participation:** Indigenous peoples, women, underrepresented groups, and diverse stakeholder perspectives must be genuinely included in governance and decision-making.

Part Five: Barriers and Challenges to Address

Critical Barriers Identified Across Roundtables

Challenge 1: The Literacy and Adoption Chasm

Nature of Challenge: Enormous gap between cutting-edge AI/data innovation conversations and mainstream business understanding and capability.

Manifestation:

- Advanced AI/data professionals discussing GPT models and large language model fine-tuning
- Meanwhile, most businesses struggling with basic questions: *How do I use this? What's my ROI? Who do I hire? How do I govern this?*
- Sector-specific examples: Agriculture (precision agriculture tools exist but farmers don't know how to adopt them); Construction (33% of BC economy, but literacy nearly nonexistent); Manufacturing (value evident but pathways unclear)

Root Causes:

- Education and training focused on technical specialists rather than business adoption
- Limited practical guidance for implementation and ROI assessment
- Scarcity of case studies and proof points in relevant industries
- Perception risk and uncertainty among potential adopters

Strategic Response:

- Develop sector-specific education and adoption facilitation programs
- Create accessible business literacy content for non-technical leaders
- Support pilot projects and proof-of-concept work
- Document and widely share case studies demonstrating concrete value

Challenge 2: Organizational Fragmentation and Silos

Nature of Challenge: Regional organizations operate in relative isolation rather than collaboration, limiting collective impact.

Manifestation:

- Multiple economic development organizations working separately rather than coordinating
- "Scarcity mindset" discouraging information sharing and joint initiatives
- Each organization protecting perceived competitive interests
- Limited cross-organizational learning and relationship-building

Root Causes:

- Fragmented funding mechanisms rewarding individual organizational success rather than collective impact
- Lack of shared vision or identity rallying stakeholders toward common purpose
- Competitive dynamics and perceived zero-sum thinking
- Absence of formal coordination mechanisms

Strategic Response:

- Establish DAVI as convening body with regular engagement mechanisms (not just occasional roundtables)
- Develop compelling shared narrative about Vancouver Island's data and AI potential
- Create joint initiatives generating collective benefit
- Implement collaborative governance and decision-making structures

Challenge 3: Cultural Risk Aversion and Resistance to Change

Nature of Challenge: Regional culture characterized by risk aversion, bureaucratic inertia, and resistance to emerging technologies.

Manifestation:

- Regulatory processes reflecting caution more than genuine safety concerns (e.g., 12-month permitting cycles for minor modifications; 7+ year timelines for data center development)
- Complacency driven by comfortable public sector employment (34% of regional income) and high quality of life
- Reluctance by municipal and provincial government to streamline processes
- Innovation-friendly organizations and entrepreneurs migrating to more supportive environments

Root Causes:

- Historical organizational culture and "this is how we do things" mindset
- Genuine but overstated risk concerns embedded in regulatory frameworks
- Lack of shared understanding of innovation as economic necessity

- Absence of visible examples and proof points of successful innovation

Strategic Response:

- Develop "Possibility Charter" approach with government to identify and eliminate unnecessary regulatory friction
- Create visible quick-win projects demonstrating successful innovation
- Build case for innovation as imperative for economic resilience
- Support peer-to-peer learning and cultural change initiatives

Challenge 4: Youth Exodus and Talent Loss

Nature of Challenge: BC experiencing net outward migration for first time in 20 years, with 77% of out-migrants under age 40.

Manifestation:

- Loss of talented young professionals to Vancouver, Toronto, Silicon Valley, and elsewhere
- Concerns about workforce development and tax base sustainability
- Limited compelling career pathways on Vancouver Island
- Affordability challenges making relocation difficult for many young people

Root Causes:

- Limited high-value career opportunities outside public sector
- Perception that innovation and opportunity lie elsewhere
- Housing affordability and cost of living concerns
- Lack of regional identity and vision attracting young professionals

Strategic Response:

- Create compelling career pathways in emerging data and AI sectors
- Develop strong regional narrative and identity around technological leadership
- Support diverse and inclusive opportunities for underrepresented groups
- Collaborate with housing and affordability initiatives to address systemic cost barriers

Challenge 5: Data Access and Standardization Barriers

Nature of Challenge: Data locked in organizational silos; limited standards enabling responsible sharing and use.

Manifestation:

- Government ministry data remains siloed despite consolidation initiatives
- Privacy and compliance requirements create legitimate barriers often used as excuse for inaction
- Each organization duplicates solutions rather than leveraging shared platforms
- Researchers and entrepreneurs lack access to datasets valuable for innovation

Root Causes:

- Legitimate but often overstated privacy and compliance concerns
- Lack of governance frameworks enabling compliant data sharing
- Siloed organizational structures and data management practices
- Absence of standards and shared infrastructure

Strategic Response:

- Develop practical data governance frameworks enabling responsible sharing
- Create data services platforms supporting secure exchange
- Establish standards for data security, privacy, and interoperability
- Support Connected Services BC and similar consolidation initiatives in unlocking value

Challenge 6: Brain Drain and Loss of Commercially Realized Innovation

Nature of Challenge: Despite Canadian leadership in AI research, many innovations move offshore for commercialization.

Manifestation:

- University research not transitioning to market in BC
- Commercialization gaps leading to "hollowing out" when successful companies migrate
- Venture capital and investment ecosystem underdeveloped
- Entrepreneurs relocating to pursue funding and market opportunities

Root Causes:

- Inadequate venture capital and funding ecosystem
- Gaps in commercialization support and business development capability
- Regulatory and talent immigration barriers
- Limited market opportunities relative to other jurisdictions

Strategic Response:

- Develop explicit commercialization pathways for university research
- Build venture capital and funding ecosystem
- Support startup mentorship and business development
- Align with federal innovation and funding initiatives

Part Six: Recommendations for Leadership Forum

Governance and Decision-Making

Recommendation 1: Establish Clear DAVI Governance Structure

- Define decision-making authority and accountability
- Clarify roles of coordinating organizations (VDS, Circle Innovation, government, etc.)
- Establish regular governance meetings (monthly or quarterly)
- Create workstreams for specific priority areas

Recommendation 2: Move from Dialogue to Action

- Transition from roundtable discussions to structured working groups on specific initiatives
- Establish project management and accountability for priority projects
- Define success metrics and reporting cadence
- Create mechanism for regular progress communication to stakeholders

Strategic Prioritization

Recommendation 3: Select Focused Priority Set

The forum should confirm 2-4 strategic priorities from options presented:

- Data Services Foundation (likely essential)
- Sector focus areas (Marine + Health + Indigenous Data likely candidates)
- Literacy and adoption bridging (likely essential)

Recommendation 4: Approve Initial-Win Projects

Endorse launch of 1-2 visible quick-win initiatives by Q1 2026:

- Professional Services Productivity Pilot (low risk, high visibility)
- Ocean/Marine Data Cluster formalization (builds on existing momentum)

Resource and Funding

Recommendation 5: Mobilize Resources and Funding

- Assess resource commitments from participating organizations (technology, expertise, funding, staff)
- Identify government and research funding available for DAVI initiatives
- Develop sustainable funding model for ongoing coordination and initiative implementation
- Pursue federal alignment and funding opportunities

Implementation and Timeline

Recommendation 6: Establish 2026 Implementation Roadmap

Q1 2026:

- Finalize priorities and governance
- Launch 1-2 quick-win projects
- Establish formal working groups

- Initiate literacy program design

Q2 2026:

- Early results from quick-win pilots
- First cohorts completing literacy/skill programs
- Marine cluster and Indigenous data initiatives launched
- Data services platform development underway

Q3-Q4 2026:

- Sector-specific pilots expanded
- Proof points and case studies available for broader promotion
- Governance structures proven effective
- Funding secured for 2027 initiatives

Success Metrics

Recommendation 7: Establish Clear Success Metrics

Define measurable indicators for:

- Economic impact (jobs created, companies launched, revenue generated)
- Adoption and capability (SMEs adopting AI, literacy completion, sector participation)
- Ecosystem health (organizations collaborating, data shared, partnerships formed)
- Cultural change (risk tolerance, youth retention, regional narrative strength)

Conclusion: From Dialogue to Action

The three roundtables have validated DAVI's core strategic direction while surfacing important refinements, critical caveats, and substantial barriers requiring deliberate attention. The 60+ stakeholders who participated represent significant intellectual capital, expertise, and willingness to invest in regional innovation.

Key Takeaways:

1. **Broad Strategic Alignment:** Stakeholders across sectors, organizations, and perspectives share fundamental agreement on DAVI's direction and potential.

2. **Refined Assumptions:** The six foundational assumptions remain valid but require important qualifications and clarifications that should guide implementation.

3. **Significant Opportunities:** Concrete near-term opportunities exist for quick wins (productivity pilot, marine cluster), priority initiatives (data services, sector development), and transformational change (cultural, regulatory, economic diversification).

4. **Critical Barriers:** Success is not merely programmatic but requires addressing cultural, regulatory, and organizational barriers that have limited regional innovation historically.

5. **Opportunity for Leadership:** The forum has opportunity to translate discussion into action, moving DAVI from exploratory initiative to concrete, coordinated ecosystem development effort.

The Path Forward:

Success hinges on three elements:

1. **Concrete Focus** – Selecting 2-4 priority opportunity areas and disciplined focus rather than attempting everything
2. **Collaborative Culture** – Deliberate effort to break down organizational silos and move from competing against each other to healthy co-opetition
3. **Visible Early Wins** – Initial early projects demonstrating concrete value and building momentum for more ambitious initiatives

With sustained commitment from stakeholders, strategic focus, and deliberate attention to cultural and organizational change, Vancouver Island can establish itself as a leading Canadian hub for responsible, human-centered data and AI innovation—generating significant economic opportunity while addressing regional challenges of brain drain, economic diversification, and opportunity creation for young professionals.

The foundation is in place. The opportunity is clear. The question now is whether stakeholders will commit the resources, focus, and cultural change required to move from the "nebulous but expansive" framing of initial DAVI concept toward "concrete but ambitious" specific initiatives executed with cross-organizational commitment and shared ownership.

Appendix: Source Documents

This synthesis report draws from analysis of:

- **DAVI Roundtable 1 Summary** (November 20, 2025, KPMG Victoria, 25 participants)
- **DAVI Roundtable 2 Summary** (December 16, 2025, Fort Tectoria, 22 participants)
- **DAVI Roundtable 3 Summary** (January 14, 2026, COAST Victoria, 19 participants)
- **Briefing on the Data and AI Vancouver Island Cluster** (November 2025, VDS and Circle Innovation)

Across the three roundtables, more than 60 stakeholders participated in structured dialogue under Chatham House rules, representing:

- BC Government ministries and Crown corporations
- Innovation agencies and economic development organizations
- Academic institutions and research organizations
- Technology companies and service providers
- Indigenous communities and organizations
- Industry associations and non-profits
- Private entrepreneurs and independent consultants

Document prepared: January 28, 2026

For: DAVI Leadership Forum (February 25, 2026 @ CGI Canada in Victoria – 9am-12pm)

Purpose: Strategic decision-making regarding DAVI assumptions confirmation, priority selection, and immediate opportunity identification