

UNBC Active Minds youth program wins national excellence award

The program has received the 2025 Actua Award for Excellence for its leadership in delivering hands-on STEM outreach to youth across northern British Columbia.

PRINCE GEORGE, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA, January 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The

[University of Northern British Columbia's Active Minds](#) program has received the 2025 [Actua](#) Award for Excellence recognizing outstanding leadership and impact in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) youth outreach.

“

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*UNBC Youth and Transition Programs Coordinator
Rathika Balthasar Preston*

UNBC Active Minds delivers year-round, hands-on science, engineering and computer programming through camps, workshops and community-based events for youth aged 6 to 16 across northern British Columbia.

“This national recognition speaks to the power of UNBC’s community-centred approach and the University’s commitment to supporting, encouraging and inspiring

learners of all ages,” says UNBC Interim President Dr. Bill Owen. “By introducing young people to research-informed, hands-on STEM learning, Active Minds is empowering northern communities to build pathways into post-secondary education.”

Actua is a leading Canadian STEM outreach organization, mobilizing a national network of 43 universities and colleges to engage youth aged 6–26 in inclusive, community-driven STEM learning. Founded in the mid-1990s, Actua goes beyond engagement to dismantle systemic barriers in STEM by uniting educators, institutions, industry and policymakers to ensure diverse perspectives shape Canada’s future.

The selection committee highlighted Active Minds’ adaptable delivery model, strong partnerships and ability to deliver meaningful, barrier-free programming across a geographically vast region. Active Minds works closely with Indigenous communities, school districts, libraries, community organizations, industry partners and government agencies to bring hands-on STEM experiences directly to youth.

Among the initiatives recognized through the award are research-informed summer camps and outreach programs designed to support girls, Indigenous youth and other historically underserved groups. Youth participants have explored topics ranging from water science and canoe buoyancy to machine learning and quantum physics, often working directly with UNBC faculty and researchers.

“Active Minds exemplifies UNBC’s focus on cultivating curiosity and supporting learning journeys from an early age,” says UNBC Provost Dr. Michel Beaulieu. “By connecting young people with UNBC researchers in emerging fields such as robotics and artificial intelligence, Active Minds is helping youth explore future career possibilities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.”

The award also recognizes Active Minds’ expanded and deepened engagement with Indigenous communities across Northern B.C. The creation of an Indigenous Youth Outreach Coordinator position, in partnership with UNBC’s Office of Indigenous Initiatives, has strengthened relationship-building with Indigenous groups and supported the delivery of culturally grounded, community-informed STEM programming.

This year, Active Minds delivered programs in collaboration with the Nisga’a Nation, Binche Whut’en and Lheidli T’enneh First Nation.

“Through land-based programming, Indigenous-led outreach and meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities across northern B.C., Active Minds supports Indigenous youth in seeing themselves in STEM while honouring their knowledge systems, cultures and connections to place,” says UNBC Interim Associate Vice-President, Indigenous, Penina Sara-Lynn Harding. “This national recognition affirms the importance of programs that are grounded in respect and community priorities.”

Overall, Active Minds increased its engagement by more than 200 per cent in 2025, reaching more than 5,000 youth across all its programming. In addition to programs in Prince George, Active Minds hosted activities in Terrace, Prince Rupert, Fort St. John, Burns Lake, Vanderhoof, Quesnel and the Bulkley Valley.



From left, UNBC Active Minds staff Joelle Chille Cale, Rathika Balthasar Preston, Nicoleta Grama and Madyson Campbell were part of the team that help UNBC win the Actua Award of Excellence for outstanding youth outreach programming.

Actua CEO Jennifer Flanagan praised the program's leadership and impact.

"The 2025 Actua Award for Excellence recognizes a network member whose leadership and commitment have transformed STEM outreach across communities, and this year, UNBC Active Minds exemplifies exactly that," she says. "Through inclusive, partnership-based programming and a strong focus on representation, they continue to create impactful STEM experiences for youth across northern B.C. We are honoured to present this award and congratulate UNBC Active Minds on an exceptional year."

Looking ahead, Active Minds will continue expanding programming across northern B.C., with free spring offerings in partnership with Indigenous Nations and public libraries, high-school career-focused programs such as Adventure in Tech and Adventures in Health Care and a full slate of summer camps and community-based InSTEM programs. Summer schedules will be released in March, with registration opening in April.

"This recognition is deeply meaningful because it reflects the inspiration and sense of possibility we see young people experience every day," said Rathika Balthasar Preston, Coordinator for UNBC Youth and Transition Programs. "It is an honour to see this work recognized nationally."

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