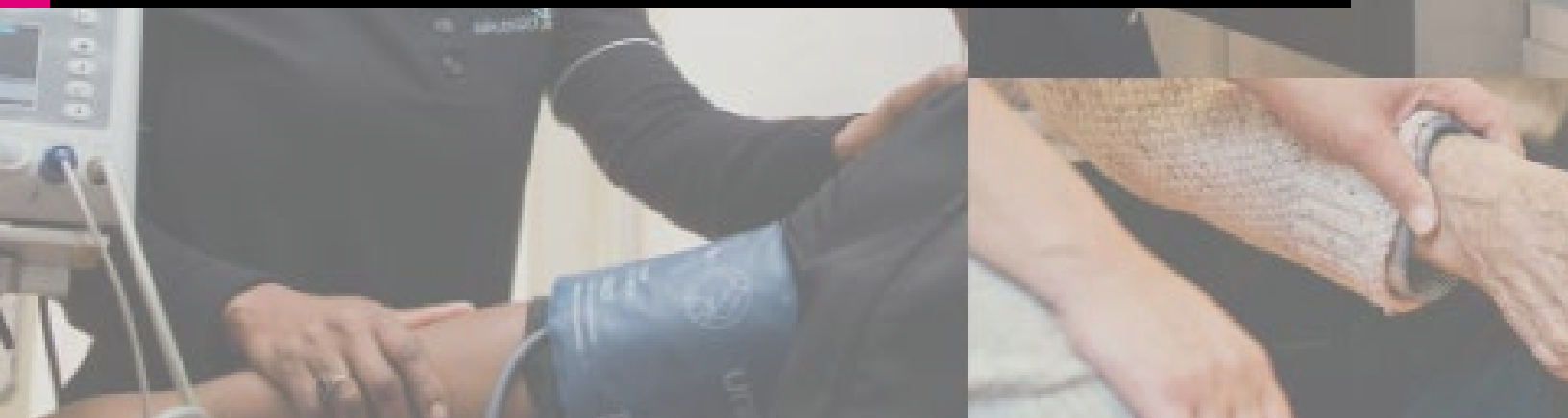




Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures

**Call for proposals**

# Shock-proofing the Future of Work: Skills Innovation Challenge



## Introduction

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The COVID-19 crisis is leading to unprecedented economic disruption, uncertainty and hardship for many Canadians. We are also beginning to understand that some sectors, regions, and populations will be harder hit than others. Notably, two-thirds of the record 3 million job losses in March and April occurred in sales and services occupations — jobs where young people, women, indigenous, immigrant, and racialized workers are all over-represented.

At the same time, alongside these serious challenges come emerging opportunities. Some sectors, such as healthcare, are facing significant, unmet demand that require new skills. In others, there will be a need to accelerate the adoption of new technologies. Innovations in skills training will become essential to more effectively help people make transitions in the job market. This evolution of work offers a timely opportunity to put the principle of inclusion front and center as we chart a way forward for a stronger economy.

Future Skills Centre is a pan-Canadian, forward-looking lab for advancing innovation in skills development. In the coming months, we are seeking partnerships that will help us understand how skills needs will evolve in rebuilding the economy. We aim to support the incubation and testing of innovative solutions that take advantage of opportunities and confront the challenges ahead, as well as contributing to a more effective learning agenda that works for everyone.

## Call overview and objectives

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The Shock-proofing the Future of Work: Skills Innovation Challenge invites proposals that will explore and demonstrate ways in which skills innovation can promote resilience and new ways forward in the face of social and economic shocks like COVID-19.

Proposals should seek to examine new insights and models within or across three levels of the skills ecosystem:

- **Innovation in support for individuals:** Given rapid and often confusing changes in the labour market, individuals need diverse supports to navigate changing conditions and emerging opportunities in order to make informed decisions about their training and career paths. New approaches to training will be required in this new reality. As part of this process, we must ensure we reach communities and populations that have previously been excluded in a way that engages everyone in ongoing opportunities to access skills development.
- **Innovation in support for organizations:** The current crisis has led to unprecedented disruption in organizations — whether large or small business employers, government, educational institutions, or service delivery organizations. It has also precipitated unprecedented levels of innovation in approaches to work, policy development, and program delivery. Through innovation and agile responses to disruption there are new opportunities to extend flexibility, reach, efficiency, and effectiveness. Rapid deployment of technology and virtualization has created massive challenges but also chances to improve co-ordination, and sharing across organizations, and to extend the reach of services. Organizations may need support as they re-engineer existing processes through the skills development and employment cycle.
- **Systems change:** The skills and employment ecosystem has long faced challenges due to fragmentation, duplication, and uneven results. How can we use systems-wide levers — policies and funding programs, industry associations, infrastructures — to grapple with challenges and opportunities or scale innovative solutions? How do we examine the role of skills in addressing disproportionate barriers that have led to under-employment of disadvantaged populations on a systems wide level?

In the face of this crisis, we are seeking opportunities for innovation in the above areas, through the following kinds of activities:

- [Research](#): Conduct research to understand the new skills reality and generate responsive solutions.
- [Networks](#): Foster networks and partnerships to engage communities in skills development opportunities, especially organizations and populations facing barriers, and ensure dissemination and uptake of promising practices.
- [Pilots](#): Conceive, develop, test, and scale new models for individual or sector-based skills development pilots that demonstrably break from current approaches.

We will prioritize proposals that target sectors, regions, and populations where disruption — positive and negative — will be most pressing and long-lasting. Emerging evidence about economic and labour market trends will guide our priorities.

Additionally, FSC is seeking partnerships that are intentional about breaking new ground and deliberate about testing innovative models. Investments to sustain existing, proven models—while absolutely needed—fall outside of the Centre’s mandate to nurture and test innovation.

## Funding Guidelines

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Given the unprecedented and widespread impact of the current crisis on workforces, we anticipate potential innovative solutions will necessarily look different across regions, sectors, and populations. Therefore, we will adopt a flexible, nimble, and open approach to onboarding ideas that is tuned to this diversity of experiences and responsive to the need for different paths and timelines.

This means:

- The Centre welcomes proposals at any stage of the innovation cycle, including early-stage innovation processes such as needs assessment and concept generation through research, design, and prototyping, to delivery and iteration.

At this initial stage, FSC will remain flexible regarding the scale, stage, speed, and scope of potential partnerships.

For example:

- Novel local partnerships or ideas for early-stage innovation projects (needs assessment, concept generation, research and design) may require smaller amounts of up-front investments to spur further development. These smaller amounts could lead to additional second-stage funding.
- At the other end of the spectrum, game-changing prototypes and scalable ideas that advance our understanding about the next generation of sector-based approaches or build forward-looking models for adult career advice and guidance are also welcome.

As a general guide, early seed ideas could be as small as \$25K, while large scale approaches with exceptional potential for impact could reach \$2.5M, with potential for further scaling.

With these general guidelines in mind, we look forward to well-crafted ideas that tie project deliverables, outcomes, and scope of work to a realistic budget. Proposals and corresponding budgets will be judged on the selection criteria outlined in the next section.

We also anticipate as discussions of submissions evolve between FSC and applicants there may be re-considerations of the original pace, scope, and requested funding.

Based on early responses to this call, and an understanding of the emerging needs and possibilities of the skills development ecosystem in the uncertain months ahead, FSC will further refine and adjust its criteria and communicate these changes on an ongoing basis.

# Selection criteria

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## Core criteria

The following selection criteria will apply to all proposals received through this call:

- **Relevance:** Priority will be given to projects focused on populations and sectors most affected by the current crisis.
- **Impact:** Project has potential to strengthen the capacity of the skills ecosystem by advancing new knowledge, generating and testing new insights into skills development models, and/or creating new approaches to connections that improve access to skills solutions.
- **Coherence:** There is a logical connection between the proposed activities and the project's objectives with a workplan and budget that is reasonable, appropriate, and aligned.
- **Capacity:** The lead organization (and partners if applicable) have the skills, experience, resources, and network required to execute the project.
- **Evidence:** There is a desire for continuous learning and iteration throughout the life of the project. Applicants' plan for generating evidence is appropriate for their research question, stage of innovation, or network.
- **Equity, diversity, and inclusion:** Project incorporates the perspectives of end-users, particularly members of groups facing barriers, in the design and execution of the project.

## Additional criteria

Given the diversity of projects that will be submitted, FSC will apply appropriate criteria depending on project type and the level of innovation ambition by projects. Therefore, additional selection criteria will be applied based on the type of project submitted.

### Early-stage innovation projects

Early-stage innovation projects will focus on understanding needs, generating ideas, and/or conducting research and design activities. Early-stage innovation projects do not include the delivery and testing of skills development interventions. The following additional criteria apply to early-stage innovation projects:

- Project is focused on new ways of doing things that don't yet exist or on introducing new services or new users to the status quo;
- Project proposes methods and activities that will advance the proposed innovation to the next stage of the innovation cycle; and
- The lead organization (and partners if applicable) have expertise and experience relevant to the proposed early stage innovation activities

### **Later-stage innovation projects**

Later-stage innovation projects include the delivery and testing of interventions. The following additional criteria apply to later-stage innovation projects:

- Project proposes a thoughtfully designed intervention that responds to a well-documented need;
- Project is supported by a theory of change that demonstrates how the proposed intervention will contribute to resilience and a way forward from the COVID-19 crisis
- Project has the potential to generate meaningful and actionable evidence about the proposed intervention; and
- The lead organization (and partners if applicable) have experience and expertise delivering interventions of similar scope and scale

## Application process and timelines

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Applications for the *Shock-Proofing the Future of Work: Skills Innovation Challenge* will be accepted and reviewed on a continuous intake basis starting May 14, 2020 and continue through at least September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

Applicants should submit their proposals for funding by completing the [online form](#), including attached [budget template](#).

The target for funding decisions is within one month of submission date, with a maximum time for consideration and negotiation of options of 8 weeks.

Recommendations for funding will be backed by an independent evaluation by external reviewers.



## Organization eligibility

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Applications may be submitted by a sole organization, or a partnership/consortium of organizations, including:

1. Legally incorporated not-for-profit organizations, including not-for-profit social enterprises and registered charities;
2. Publicly funded post-secondary institutions;
3. Industry associations;
4. Professional associations;
5. Indigenous organizations that are a legal entity
6. Municipalities or district social services administration boards
7. For-profit organizations (provided the project is undertaken at cost, with no mark-ups or profit incorporated);
8. Individual persons.

The following types of organizations are not eligible to apply:

1. Provinces or territories; and
2. Federal government bodies.

For applications with multiple partners, one organization must be identified as the lead applicant for the purpose of signing the funding agreement, receiving and managing the funds, ensuring co-ordination of project parties and activities, and communicating with the Centre regarding the status of the project on behalf of all partners. The lead organization must be a Canadian entity. All participating organizations must be eligible as set out above.

Applicants are only eligible to lead on one application but may participate in more than one application.

## Tri-Council Policy Statement

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The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) is a Canadian Government policy statement that sets ethics standards for conducting research on human subjects. All funded projects must comply with the guidelines set out in TCPS 2, and must be approved by a qualified research ethics board if required by those guidelines. Organizations that do not otherwise have an internal research ethics board may utilize the services of the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board to obtain approval. All such approvals must be obtained prior to the commencement of the project.

## Due diligence

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Future Skills Centre reserves the right to conduct thorough due diligence on shortlisted projects invited to submit a full application.

Due diligence will include a review of the lead organization's financial health and funding sources, the project's management team, operational plans, and existing resources.

FSC will also conduct reference checks and will reach out to provincial/territorial governments in those jurisdictions where activities would be undertaken to provide them with advance notice of the shortlisted projects to ensure they address local needs and complement existing initiatives.

It is the responsibility of any potential recipient of FSC funds in Quebec to determine if the Ministère du Conseil Exécutif (M-30) applies to them. Any entity that is subject to the act is responsible for obtaining the necessary authorization prior to the conclusion of the agreement. The Centre will abide by the determination of the recipient whether they require an M-30, and will allow a reasonable amount of time for the Quebec proponent to obtain the authorization from the Government of Québec, should it be required.

FSC will work with successful proponents to establish project agreements. As the host organization for the Centre, all project agreements will be made with Ryerson University.

## Confidentiality

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Hosted by Ryerson University, the Future Skills Centre is subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). The act provides every person with a right of access to information in the custody or under the control of the Ryerson University, subject to a limited set of exemptions. Section 17 of the act provides a limited exemption for third-party information that reveals a trade secret or scientific, commercial, technical, financial, or labour relations information supplied in confidence where disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to result in certain harms.

Any trade secret or any scientific, technical, commercial, financial, or labour relations information submitted to the Future Skills Centre in confidence should be clearly marked as such. The Centre will provide notice before allowing access to a record that might contain information referred to in s. 17 so that the affected party may make representations to the Centre concerning disclosure in accordance with FIPPA.

The Future Skills Centre is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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