Backgrounder:
Future Skills Centre funds 64 projects to shock-proof the workforce of the future

In May 2020, Future Skills Centre launched a call for proposals called *Shock-proofing the Future of Work*. This call was part of FSC's "The Future is Now" pandemic response that invited organizations across the country to submit applications for funding of projects. These projects aim to explore and demonstrate skills innovation to promote resilience and new ways forward for the Canadian workforce in the face of social and economic shocks like COVID-19.

Various sectors of the workforce, including hospitality, health care and technology, are facing significant demand for workers with new skills. This call aimed to accelerate promising research and best practices in skills training to help workers and employers navigate a rapidly-changing job market.

FSC sought proposals targeting sectors, regions, and populations facing acute employment needs due to economic shocks. It also looked for pilot projects that test emerging opportunities for skills development and those exploring new insights and models within or across three levels of the skills ecosystem:
- innovation in support of individuals
- innovation in support of organizations
- systems change

More than **450 proposals** were submitted from institutions across Canada, including community groups, not-for-profit organizations, and universities.

Selection process:

An independent and objective evaluation process was used to ensure that all projects were adjudicated fairly. Projects were evaluated according to a set of seven criteria published in our application guidelines (i.e., relevance; impact; coherence; capacity; evidence; equity, diversity and inclusion; and innovation). A group of 86 external reviewers identified as relevant subject-matter experts participated in this process. All external reviewers were independent of FSC and subject to conflict-of-interest checks.

Reviewers were provided with a scorecard to ensure that every project was assessed according to identical criteria and assigned a numerical score. Each project was reviewed independently by four different reviewers: projects requesting $200,000 or more had three external reviewers and a member of our pilot steering committee made up of internal and external advisors; projects requesting $200,000 or less had three external reviewers plus a director or manager of programs at FSC.

Projects ultimately selected for funding represent those that received the highest scores and are recommended for funding by the Pilot Steering Committee and FSC senior leadership.

Visit our website to see the complete list of projects.

Funded projects:

Through all 64 of the shock-proofing projects, FSC is helping Canada's skills development ecosystem to recover and thrive by investing in three essential elements of a fair and prosperous recovery:

Navigating change – Catalyzing adaptation, using and generating labour market information for informed decision-making, adapted training and rapid retraining to help job seekers with learning and new skills.

Driving the future of work – Investing in emerging industries, Indigenous innovation, and technologies that could revolutionize training methodologies in certain sectors.

Shared prosperity and a focus on equity – Ensuring that no-one is left behind by working across industries and alongside employers to create pathways to full participation in the workforce for people facing more barriers. Many projects support an enhanced presence in the workforce for marginalized or disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous peoples, youth, racialized groups, women, newcomers, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, those lacking post-secondary education, persons with disabilities, disadvantaged individuals.

Projects highlights and examples:

Key highlights and themes among the 64 selected projects are: Indigenous innovations; untried innovations; rural and remote; new technologies; and inclusive workforce.

Indigenous innovations - These projects aim to provide opportunity and access for Indigenous peoples through partnerships that support Indigenous economic development, values, and ways of learning.

- Example: [Fisheries for economic and environmental development](#) - This network aims to future-proof small Arctic fisheries in Nunavut by ensuring that their local catch can be sold in southern markets and across Canada. The project uses a new tool to measure and categorize the seafood as sustainable, promoting the expansion of potential markets for local fish products.

Untried innovations - These projects test untried approaches, create or anticipate change, invest in new fields or mobilize emerging industries.

- Example: [Virtual learning in Canada's infrastructure sector](#) - Learning shifts from in-person to virtual for people training to work in utilities and infrastructure. This new learning approach stresses cyber security while eliminating the need for trainees to be present in the lab but enabling them to interact in real time with utility-grade critical infrastructure.

New technologies - These projects apply new technology to transform the delivery of training or service.

- Example: [Connecting youth to jobs with AI](#) - Hiring practices will become more inclusive for young people facing many barriers to employment through a new job posting tool enabled by artificial intelligence (AI). By addressing systemic barriers in hiring, this tool will help diverse youth in three Canadian regions to access entry-level jobs and create better matches for employers seeking talent.

Rural and remote - These projects in rural, remote or Northern communities often involve virtual training or learning through online platforms and cultivate local industries.

- Example: [Gauging the potential of occupational pluralism in the Maritimes](#) - This project will examine the seasonal nature of many jobs in the region in order to assess the feasibility of education and training innovations, support expanded labour force participation and promote a greater range of jobs among rural workers in the Maritimes.

Inclusive workforce - These projects target specific populations such as women and youth to create a more diverse and equitable workforce.

- Examples: [Paths to customer success](#) **-** Diverse and marginalized women in Ontario who have lost service sector jobs due to COVID-19 will become equipped with the skills and tools for resilient careers that will advance their economic inclusion. [Immigrant onboarding in non-gateway Quebec enterprises](#) - This project aims to improve the experience of recruiting and retaining immigrants to manufacturing sector jobs in small- to medium-enterprises outside of large gateway cities, where it is harder to attract newcomer talent despite the fact that immigrants will be key to filling future labour market demand.

Project evaluation and learning:

FSC will ensure that projects are evaluated using tools and approaches aligned with the goals and context of those projects. The evaluation approach, led by consortium partner Blueprint, ensures accountability for the investments but also enables relevant learning. Projects are assessed for relevance, impact, coherence, capacity, evidence, equity, diversity and inclusion. The overall evidence approach is designed to reveal learning about critical interventions and key populations as well as producing relevant insights for key external audiences. FSC is committed to surfacing these insights for the benefit of employers, program implementers, policymakers, and other key decision-makers, and will share these lessons externally on a rolling basis.

About the Future Skills Centre

Future Skills Centre is a pan-Canadian organization that is passionate about creating a future in which everyone has life-long access to high-quality career advice and learning opportunities. As outlined in our Strategic Plan, we collaborate with partners to create a more responsive, effective, and co-ordinated skills development ecosystem. This effort rests on four strategic pillars:

1. Easy-to-access, practical labour-market information;
2. Responsive career pathways
3. Agile labour-market responses
4. "What Works" replication

For more information about FSC, download our press kit.