

# What works?

## Learning & insights bulletin #1

The past year has brought unprecedented challenges to Canadians. The twin health and economic crises of COVID-19 have disrupted the activities of our businesses, schools, and households. As many activities – school, work and social – moved online, changing and adapting to COVID’s disruptions was not optional. And as the days turned into weeks and then into months, it became increasingly evident that innovation, adaptation, and preparation for the future of work, would only become more pressing in the coming years.

So how do we adapt to the present times and also prepare for the future of work? The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is dedicated to answering that question, through investments in skilling innovations across Canada, with a focus on inclusive and shared prosperity. We’re working with thousands of partners in every province and territory to experiment with new approaches, models, and tools around skilling, in close collaboration with training providers, employers, and others in the skills ecosystem, to innovate towards a future that works for all.

We’re early in our learning journey, but we’re committed to sharing what we hear and learn with our innovation project partners. We recently announced investments in scaling several projects to reach more people and wider geographies. We were committed to scaling 20 per cent of our projects to other sectors and regions. The goal was to accelerate key interventions and practices that were showing promise, particularly during the pandemic, when Canadians need this assistance the most. The disruption caused by COVID-19 in fact gives us an opportunity to try new approaches and adopt new and better practices in skills development. This Learning & Insights Bulletin shares some of the early evidence we assessed in making these investments and briefly profiles the organizations with whom we’re working.

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As we enter a critical period of economic recovery in Canada, we’re committed to working with these partners to innovate for learning and solutions that work for people across this country. We’ll continue to liaise with our innovation partners to understand better what is working, for which groups, and under which conditions. The challenge before us as a country – and the tremendous opportunity – is to ensure that our economic recovery is both sustained and inclusive, and benefits all Canadians.

## 1. What we're learning: Effective training is leading to employment success

In a year of economic hardship, it's never been more critical to understand which investments and skilling approaches lead to meaningful employment for Canadians, particularly amongst those most affected by the current economic challenges. Across our innovation projects, we're tracking not just the numbers of people who complete a training course, but also how those skills training and learning opportunities translate into employment results. Wherever possible, we're following up with program participants after they complete a program to see how they are doing 6 or even 12 months later.

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Across the projects we're scaling, we saw evidence of positive results of individuals' transitions from training to job opportunities. For example, the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia provided pre-arrival immigrants to Canada with a skills assessment and development program to assist them in transitioning to the Canadian labour market. Prior to the pandemic, 71% of participants were employed within months of program completion. Similarly, the Canadian Career Development Foundation has implemented the In Motion & Momentum+ program across New Brunswick and recently in selected pilot locations in Ontario. Working with particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups that face more challenges in accessing stable employment, CCDF offers an intervention of wraparound support services that saw tremendous results over recent months. Independent evaluation found that 31% of program participants in Ontario were employed within three months of completing the program, and 80% of these people were in permanent positions. In addition to the positive employment results, participants also cited improved psychosocial health and improved ability to manage their own career pathways.

Another example of successful employee transitions is seen in our partnership with EDGE UP, a multi-stakeholder program led by Calgary Economic Development. Focused on mid-career workers transitioning from oil & gas to the technology sector, the program has been keenly focused on shifting people into emerging IT jobs across multiple sectors. EDGE UP brings together employer engagement, targeted and applied skill development, and strong labour market analysis to assist workers with personalized support. Amongst the first program cohorts, 70% of graduates are either employed or pursuing further training/education.

Not all programs had employment data available, however. In some cases, a training program that is working closely with industry partners, accompanied with low drop-out rates from participants, was an indication that employment numbers would likely be strong. This is the case, for example, in our partnership with Mohawk College around [Material Handling](#). This partnership is a dynamic and innovative new approach to supporting vulnerable workers, in tandem with employers and industry partners, and a local community college. The program has seen tremendously positive responses from both participants and employers, and there are strong indications that participants will have positive employment results from the program. An independent evaluation to examine employment results is currently in progress.

An integrated approach that combines assessment tools, online training, employer engagement, and customized coaching is showing positive results in the [ADaPT Digital Competencies](#) project. Led by the Diversity Institute of Ryerson University and Technation, the program focuses on digital skill development amongst non-STEM participants for tech-related careers, with a focus on diverse and equity-seeking groups. Over the previous eight years, job placement rates have been over 87% for program respondents, and even higher (94%) during the pandemic.

What's working in these situations? All of the organizations are using assessment tools to identify specific skill areas and development needs for participants. They're also leveraging technology to deliver information and provide resources that are timely and accessible to participants. Employers are engaged throughout the program design and delivery, not just when graduates are looking for work. However, a key ingredient in all of the programs is highly customized support and coaching, providing a personalized experience for participants. Although the personalized support requires dedicated resources and investment, the programs are showing that the investment of training and support services is translating into jobs.

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## 2. What we're learning: Agility is the new normal

We know that COVID forced many organizations to adapt their approach. Amongst workforce development and training partners, this was both a challenge and opportunity. Most training courses moved online due to public health restrictions, and models and approaches adapted accordingly. Many organizations reported challenges but also learning from these adaptations in difficult times.

Across our innovation projects, we've been closely watching how COVID-19 has affected people in skilling programs and their labour market experiences. Our partner NPower has also been attentive in observing the experiences of its participants in the pandemic-affected economy. NPower Canada works with lower-income and diverse Canadians on workforce development for in-demand technology careers. NPower tracks its program participants for up to 1 year after completing the program, and prior to the pandemic, alumni consistently had a 93% employment rate at the one-year post-graduation mark. After the pandemic, employment rates were noticeably lower, but about 6 months post-graduation, 80% of participants had secured employment. NPower has adapted its approach through online program delivery, and the cohorts that have completed training during the pandemic are seeing gradually increasing post-graduation employment results. However, these post-pandemic groups are less likely to have permanent jobs than alumni were pre-pandemic. NPower is providing post-program support to alumni for five years after they complete the program, and we will continue to learn about the employment trajectories of these cohorts in the midst of the pandemic and post-pandemic economy.

Adaptation and transitions are affecting not only individuals, but also the ways in which programs deliver training and skill development supports. In the midst of a shift to online learning and approaches, more organizations in the skills ecosystem are looking for tools and resources to assess participant skills and capacities. The Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT) was developed by our partner Futureworx to support their own program delivery and enable individuals to achieve their work and life goals. In the first phase of our partnership with Futureworx, the tool was shared with other organizations, along with implementation support for its use. The organizations that used the ESAT reported positive results from its use, and 61% of organizations using the ESAT indicated that participants had better employment success.

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These positive indications signal that the ESAT could add value to even more organizations – particularly as more organizations shift to online training. Scaling and supporting the application of ESAT will allow Futureworx and FSC to better understand how the tool can be applied and how it impacts participants. While the pivot to online delivery and new tools is undoubtedly a challenge for many workforce development organizations, it is also an opportunity to adapt and innovate new approaches in the midst of challenging times, such as using the ESAT. Our continued focus on learning and evidence will track closely the experience of organizations using the tool in their engagement with job-seekers, and we'll continue to learn about how the ESAT works in practice, and to what effect.

### 3. What we're learning: Employers are eager to engage on sectoral solutions

The pandemic brought significant challenges to many sectors and employers across Canada. Whole regions and sectors are seeing significant economic disruption from COVID-19, and many employers are struggling to navigate the challenge. Several of FSC's innovation project partners are investing explicitly in working with sectors and regions in transition. For example, our partner [Pier Labs](#) completed the first phase of its partnership with the Future Skills Centre, which demonstrated a clear need to support workers in three pivotal sectors: construction, homebuilding / renovation and manufacturing. Pier Labs is in the midst of adapting a evidence-based intervention approach to the Atlantic region and these sectors – and will be collaborating closely with FSC to track the experiences of supported workers in these sectors in transition.

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Another sector seeing significant impacts from COVID-19 is that of [tourism and hospitality](#). Early on in the pandemic, the Ontario Tourism Education Commission (OTEC) knew that workers and businesses across the sector would need extensive support in navigating the challenges of pandemic disruptions. Through targeted job surveys and information resources for businesses and displaced workers, OTEC's partnership with FSC shed light on the human dimensions of economic disruption. In conjunction with other public support programs, OTEC's support for workers and small and medium enterprises has helped many workers and organizations navigate an unprecedented crisis. OTEC's business partners reported that information was critical in navigating the economic crisis, while also asking FSC and OTEC to support more targeted and localized data to support their economic recovery.

We're working with employer groups across several sectors to innovate for skills-related challenges in Canada's economic recovery. These organizations and their employer constituents are eager to look for win-win solutions: innovations that both support workers' skills and employers' ability to grow and succeed in challenging markets. We'll continue working with OTEC and others to support innovation and learning in support of an inclusive recovery.

#### 4. *What we're learning: Job-seekers need inclusive supports*

In addition to witnessing the challenges of specific sectors, we've also been keenly attentive to the differentiated needs of certain populations in the current pandemic. FSC takes an inclusive approach across its work, focusing on supporting the most marginalized and vulnerable groups that face the greatest obstacles in equitable access and opportunity to training and labour markets. One of the groups often overlooked in the COVID period has been youth with mental health challenges.

Our partnership with CAMH is focused on integrating employment support in youth service hubs across Canada. The first phase demonstrated that the intervention model, which has strong evidence from outside Canada, would have similar success in the Canadian context. Given the pressing challenges facing youth with mental health needs, scaling this project will increase the opportunity for both impact and learning about this intervention and support services for a critical population in transition.

A need for inclusive support is a common thread across many of our projects, and the ones we're scaling will add to our shared knowledge about which kinds of supports are most appropriate, for which groups, and under what conditions. For some individuals, this may mean some translation assistance, or an accommodation for a testing process, or perhaps transportation to a training or job site. We'll continue to work with our partners to understand better which supports are most effective.

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## What's next: Scaling up for skills development

We're excited to be working with a strong group of Canadian organizations on the front lines of skills innovations. By working with employers, training providers, and most importantly, job-seekers, these innovation partners are looking for solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our era. We know there is much work to be done, and we'll be working together over the coming months and years to deliver excellent programs and seek the best possible results for the participant. However, we'll also continue to work together towards the attainment of learning and knowledge. We're investing in evaluation and research to understand better which programs, supports, and approaches are most effective, and what change they are creating in the world. We'll continue sharing our learning and insights along the way for broader discussion and dialogue.

### **Aspirations to action: Putting learning into practice**

Various organizations across the skills ecosystem are implementing some key approaches to effective skills training. Several of these approaches have been discussed extensively in recent years (such as working with employers), and we're excited to work with our innovation partners to put these aspirations into action.

The top seven things we're seeing around effective skills training include:

- ✓ Centering program design around participants' needs and experiences
- ✓ Using assessment tools to evaluate participants' individual skill levels
- ✓ Ensuring skills training programs are demand-driven, and working closely with employers throughout a program (not just when trainees are looking for jobs)
- ✓ Leveraging technology resources – both for developing key digital competencies – but also for ensuring cost effectiveness and economies of scale
- ✓ Providing wrap-around support services that address specific barriers and challenges (such as childcare, mentoring, networking, etc.)
- ✓ Customizing services through personalized and inclusive support – this is time-consuming and costly, but it is also an essential program aspect for many disadvantaged individuals
- ✓ Tracking participants over time, even after program completion, to build our understanding of participants' labour market successes and challenges.

Partner	Accomplishments in Phase 1	Goals for Phase 2
<u>CAMH: The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAMH completed a feasibility study to implement an established model of supported employment for people with mental health challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project will expand to 12 sites, allowing CAMH and its partners to reach more youth with mental health and substance use challenges and to better understand program implementation across additional contexts in northern and rural communities and with diverse youth populations.</li> </ul>
<u>Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The In Motion &amp; Momentum+ project was pilot-tested across 27 sites in six provinces. The pilots have engaged 210 participants to date, with positive results for training completion and employment success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 2 will expand the program to multiple locations across Canada to build on its success improving the employment prospects for participants. The second phase will also expand the evaluative testing of the program implementation across multiple sites.</li> </ul>
<u>Futureworx Society</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Phase 1, the Employability and Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT) was deployed with organizations across Canada. A survey of partnering organizations showed high satisfaction rates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The next phase of the project will refine the ESAT tool and establish more evidence about how it can be used effectively. The project will reach over 1,000 participants through partners across the country.</li> </ul>
<u>Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first phase of partnership established strong relationships with employers, training providers and local government. The program design was successfully completed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of this project will see the approach replicated in three additional regions across Canada, in cooperation with local employers and community colleges. At least 243 people will be trained through the program.</li> </ul>
<u>NPower Canada</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program enrolled over 1,000 people, with over 845 completing the program. The job placement rates demonstrate strong success, with over 85% from the early 2020 groups obtaining jobs or further education less than 12 months after finishing the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 2 will expand enrollment targets to 7,835 young adults in the IT workforce development program. The program will continue a hybrid approach, combining virtual program delivery with in-person wraparound supports across Canada.</li> </ul>
<u>Pier Labs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pier Labs completed a design phase to adapt an existing model to the Atlantic Canadian context. The local needs assessment identified sectors with a skills gap, job seekers' needs, and current strengths and gaps in the existing employment services delivery organizations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The second phase will implement the adapted program across Nova Scotia. 150 participants will receive 18 months of coaching and support to enter into construction, homebuilding / renovation, and manufacturing sectors.</li> </ul>



<p><u>Calgary Economic Development</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first phase of the EDGE UP program was extremely successful in training mid-career workers for in-demand technology jobs. 98 individuals participated in the training, and over 70% of the first cohort are working in tech jobs or furthering their education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expanded program will engage 320 more participants and deepen partnerships with employers. The project will also strengthen the evidence base and understanding of program success and learnings.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although immigration was significantly affected by the pandemic, the project engaged 540 participants. Individuals report high levels of satisfaction with the program, and participants who have entered the Canadian labour market are showing success in employment placements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expanded project will include a focus on skill and labour shortages in long-term care, facilitating the successful transition of qualified immigrants to address these critical skill shortages.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 1 gathered critical information about workers displaced from the tourism &amp; hospitality sector due to the pandemic. An upskilling portal was developed to offer resources for displaced workers, and several activities were undertaken to support workers, employers, and industry actors with information, training, and guidance for the economic recovery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 2 of the project will expand the portal to offer additional upskilling opportunities to workers, and also provide more localized data and resources to employers. Through investments in the wider tourism sector, the project will support not only a substantial number of affected workers, but also large numbers of small and medium enterprises in the tourism and hospitality sector.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Technation Canada &amp; Diversity Institute</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 300 people engaged in training through the ADAPT program, which explores new approaches to defining digital competencies and creates new pathway opportunities into digital roles for non-STEM graduates, internationally-educated professionals, and high-potential workers who lack traditional credentials. Over 87% of trainees successfully obtained job placements at the end of the course.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project will expand to engage 535 more individuals from more demographic groups with particular labour market challenges. Phase 2 will include two French language cohorts, and will also target skilled immigrants from underrepresented groups and mid-career racialized workers. The next phase will also focus on generating high quality evidence to evaluate program effectiveness.</li> </ul>



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The **Future Skills Centre (FSC)** is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada.



**The Conference  
Board of Canada**

**Blueprint**

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

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