

Blueprint's FSC Evidence Summary 2021: Our Insights

April 2022

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	5
Section 1: Update on evidence activities	7
What we achieved	8
What we learned	12
Identifying evidence generation objectives	13
Section 2: Progress towards our objectives	14
<i>Objective 1: Aligning evidence generation with the innovation cycle</i>	15
Overview	15
Supporting evidence planning for innovation projects	16
Responsive Career Pathways Initiative	17
<i>Objective 2: Multi-dimensional framework for evidence generation</i>	21
Overview	21
Our multi-dimensional evidence framework	22
Applying the framework: Scaling Up Skills Development	23
<i>Objective 3: Technical assistance and capacity-building</i>	26
Overview	26
Technical assistance for innovation portfolios	26
The Practitioner Data Initiative	28
Section 3: Our path forward	30
What we learned	31
Capacity-building is multi-faceted	31
We need broad and diverse expertise to make our approach work	32
Appetite for more practitioner-centred evidence generation	32
What's next	33
Focus on knowledge mobilization	33
Testing future-focused innovations	33
Connecting evidence to the ecosystem	33
Appendix A: Common Outcomes Framework	34
Appendix B: Evidence Planning	36

A Letter from FSC's Executive Director

The Future Skills Centre (FSC)'s mission to strengthen skills development across Canada involves in large part a commitment to knowledge generation and insights. This means collaborating with employers, workers and communities across Canada to assess and evaluate innovations in skills development.

Our commitment to skills development across all provinces and territories manifests throughout our evidence generation practice. This approach to evidence generation involves working in collaboration with **innovation projects** to understand the impacts of these innovations – to determine “**what works**”, but also “for whom” and “under what conditions.” We rely on thoughtful and rigorous evaluation to identify the solutions with the most promise and with the potential to be scaled across Canada to meet the needs of individuals and employers.

As a founding consortium partner in the Future Skills Centre consortium, **Blueprint** works with stakeholders across Canada to generate evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges. This **Evidence Summary** shares Blueprint's work within the FSC consortium over the past year. Blueprint is working to develop and test evidence approaches that help us find new solutions, learn what works and expand impact. We are excited to see Blueprint working alongside many of our grantees to build evidence, strengthen project models, and scale promising approaches. We believe these investments and activities will build our collective strength in supporting workers in Canada to access lifelong learning and skills development support.

In addition to this report, FSC, Blueprint and the other consortium partners will continue to share project-specific lessons and insights as they emerge over the coming months. We encourage you to engage with us through these project reports, our learning bulletins on key thematic topics, and various events and discussions we host that leverage the learning and insights from the innovation projects.

Thank you again for your interest in the progress of skills development,

Pedro Barata

Executive Director, Future Skills Centre

About 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.

FSC was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the [Government of Canada's Future Skills Program](#).

About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change.

Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.



Executive Summary

Introduction

The skills development sector is caught between the need to act fast and the pressure to get it right. Future skills stakeholders are trying to find ways to serve clients better now, while also trying to look ahead to a rapidly changing labour market. To deal with these challenges, policymakers and practitioners need evidence that is timely, actionable and relevant. But current evidence approaches are often too slow, too rigid and too narrow to help future skills stakeholders navigate disruptions and retool in the midst of change.

We believe this is where better use of evidence can have a transformative impact. As a founding consortium partner of the **Future Skills Centre (FSC)**, **Blueprint** works collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to generate evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges. We want to help ensure that Canada's skills development systems are ready for the future.

We believe that this requires us to find new ways of working with stakeholders to generate, mobilize and use evidence. In our role with FSC, Blueprint is working on expanding the traditional evidence toolkit. We're working to develop and test diverse approaches that help us find new solutions, learn what works and expand impact.

Our evidence work has three goals:

Drive innovation

Use data to support experimentation and learning about new skills development approaches

Support scaling decisions

Generate rigorous evidence that supports replicability and scaling of the most promising models to contribute to a more agile and responsive skills development ecosystem

Build a culture of evidence-informed decision-making

Work with stakeholders to build capacity for data-driven learning and continuous improvement

Where We've Been

In our [2020 Annual Evidence Report](#), we shared what we learned in our first full year of evidence activities. We worked with the first wave of skills development innovation projects funded by FSC to generate evidence about their interventions. These projects were diverse — from a skills assessment platform that addresses barriers to employment for newcomers, to an IT training program for displaced oil and gas workers, to a virtual reality simulator that helps prepare the trucking industry for future technological advancements. To reflect this variability, we used a range of evidence approaches tailored to the needs and readiness of each project. These included comprehensive evaluations, lighter-touch technical assistance and continuous learning activities, and alignment of data collection approaches with projects that were conducting their own research and evaluation.

Our experience working with these projects taught us a lot. It showed us the enthusiasm of future skills stakeholders for finding and testing new ways to better serve their communities. It also reinforced to us that traditional evaluation approaches aren't always the best tool for helping achieve these goals. Instead, we need to create methods that go beyond answering “what works,” to figure out how and why interventions work and to develop tools that are tailor-made to the unique challenges of early-stage innovations. What's more, evaluation isn't enough. We need to provide technical assistance and capacity-building supports to help stakeholders design and deliver better models, and continuously learn along the way.

These learnings helped us focus our goals into **evidence generation objectives** — the specific ways that we want to make better use of evidence to build the resilience of our skills development systems.

Our three evidence generation objectives are:

- **Align evidence generation with the innovation cycle:** Develop a toolkit of evidence generation approaches that support innovations at different stages
- **Develop a framework for multi-dimensional evidence generation:** Design a framework for evidence that moves an intervention from initial testing, to rigorous evaluation, to broader scaling
- **Provide technical assistance and capacity-building:** Build approaches to working with practitioners to help them achieve their objectives and learn along the way

Each of these objectives has required us to invest in our own social R&D — developing new tools, frameworks and models that guide our evidence work and help us drive innovation, scaling and capacity-building. And, in collaboration with FSC, we have found exciting opportunities in the last year to test these new approaches.

What We've Achieved

This year, we have made great progress toward our three evidence generation objectives, including launching new evidence initiatives in partnership with FSC. Below we highlight our key achievements against each of these objectives:

1. Align evidence generation with the innovation cycle

- ***We developed and implemented a new framework and tools that help innovation projects develop evidence plans aligned with the innovation cycle.***

We worked with a diverse range of new innovation projects funded by FSC over the past year to develop tailored evidence plans that address their most relevant learning needs. This work resulted in the completion and approval of **71 evidence plans** for projects funded by FSC. FSC is continuing to work with these projects to gather insights from their planned evidence generation activities.

- ***We launched a new initiative focused on using evidence to drive mission-oriented innovation.*** We launched the [Responsive Career Pathways Initiative](#) in collaboration with FSC to generate forward-looking concepts for advancing career guidance in Canada. We invested in systematic needs assessment, research and engagement activities to identify future-oriented innovations that can drive systems change and achieve the mission of high-quality career guidance for all. We are currently working with stakeholders to map out a strategy for testing our innovations.

2. Develop a framework for multi-dimensional evidence generation

- ***We have refined our framework and are testing it with 10 future-focused skills development interventions.*** Our multi-dimensional evidence framework provides a way to systematically assess and build the scalability of future skills innovations,

considering not just their impact, but the degree to which they are ready for sustainable growth to meet the level of need in the ecosystem. Through the [Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative](#), we identified 10 projects in the FSC portfolio that have the potential to scale and are strategically relevant to current and future needs in our skills development ecosystem. We are working with each project to build and use evidence needed to refine, evaluate and eventually scale their model.

3. Provide technical assistance and capacity-building

- ***We launched the Practitioner Data Initiative to help practitioners make better use of data and evidence.*** Through the [Practitioner Data Initiative](#), we are working with nine community service agencies to build their capacity to use data to better understand who they are serving and how they can serve them most effectively. The nine participating agencies are receiving funding from FSC as well as strategic support and advice from Blueprint to assess their needs and develop and implement a data capacity-building plan. To date we have conducted over 25 workshops and completed nine data capacity-building plans.
- ***We have also found ways to weave more technical assistance and capacity-building into all of our engagements.*** Across the FSC portfolio, we are providing advice and assistance to projects on how to design and deliver innovations effectively, continuously learn about what's working and what's not, and align their evidence activities with their long-term goals. For example, we are working with several innovation projects funded by FSC to provide ongoing coaching and advice to implement their evidence plans by collecting high-quality, relevant data about the effectiveness and implementation of their interventions.

What We've Learned

Our ambitious approach to building and using evidence to drive change in the skills ecosystem means that we are on an ongoing learning journey. As we work alongside FSC and our partners to create change, we are continually identifying challenges, adjusting and finding new areas of need and opportunity. Our **three most important insights** from the last year are:

1. We need to go beyond pilots

We've learned that while many stakeholders are aware of how hard it is to scale, there is no clear playbook to draw on to help address these challenges. That's why, with the **Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative**, we are building and testing a new scaling playbook, anchored by our multi-dimensional evidence framework. This work isn't easy, and it takes time. Though challenging, we believe that this work is critical for creating change in the skills development ecosystem. We are excited to continue this learning journey by refining our understanding of the different pathways to scale and working with projects to progress their journey.

2. There is a strong appetite for more practitioner-centred evidence building

We've learned that future skills practitioners are eager to participate in evidence building activities that are driven by their own learning questions. Many service providers are eager to work with us to design and implement approaches that help them design, test, iterate, improve and scale their programs and services. This was highlighted by the enthusiastic responses from organizations invited to participate in the **Practitioner Data Initiative**. Our experience highlights the value of evidence building that is driven by the learning needs of those working to deliver services to Canadians. Based on these learnings, we are exploring new ways that we can empower service providers in their learning journeys.

3. Our toolkit needs to keep expanding

We've learned that we need to continue building and expanding our toolkit beyond traditional evidence generation approaches. The list of disciplines and methods that we need to draw on to meet our ambitious aims keeps growing. We have built and are continuing to grow our skills and expertise in implementation science, knowledge mobilization, innovation tradecraft, stakeholder engagement, human-centred design, strategic consulting and data management. All of these tools are necessary to make better use of evidence and increase the resilience of our skills development systems.

Where We're Going

Based on the progress we've made and the learning we've done along the way, there are a few areas where we want to continue refining our evidence strategy moving forward. The world of work is changing fast, and with that comes the need to find new ways to design, prototype and test future-focused innovations. At the same time, different practitioners, service providers and policymakers have different needs, and we need to strengthen our understanding of these dynamics to develop evidence practices that are relevant to their unique contexts. All of these learnings need to be widely available. We need to find effective ways to mobilize evidence and key learnings to help drive the future of skills development.

Through our collaboration with FSC, we're excited to continue working with skills development practitioners and policymakers to keep driving innovation, supporting scaling decisions and building a culture of evidence-informed decision-making. By using innovative evidence generation approaches to learn what works and how to improve, we can foster a resilient skills development ecosystem that responds to the pressing challenges facing Canadians in the future of work.

Introduction

As a founding consortium partner of the **Future Skills Centre (FSC)**, Blueprint works collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to generate evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges. Our work has three goals:

- **Drive innovation:** Use data to support experimentation and learning about new skills development approaches
- **Support scaling decisions:** Generate rigorous evidence that supports replicability and scaling of the most promising models to contribute to a more agile and responsive skills development ecosystem
- **Build a culture of evidence-informed decision-making:** Work with stakeholders to build capacity for data-driven learning and continuous improvement

Achieving these ambitious aims requires using data and evidence in new and creative ways. In last year's [Evidence Report](#), we documented what we learned from our first full year of collaborating with partners to find innovative ways to generate and use evidence.

Section 1 of this report provides an update on the evidence activities from our first year, what we learned from these activities and how these learnings are driving our approach going forward. Based on our learnings from our first year, we identified three evidence generation objectives to help us drive innovation and impact in Canada's skills development ecosystem:

- A. Align evidence generation with the innovation cycle**
Develop a toolkit of evidence generation approaches that support innovation at different stages

- B. Provide technical assistance and capacity-building –**
Build approaches for working closely with practitioners to achieve their objectives and learn along the way

- C. Develop a framework for multi-dimensional evidence generation –** Design a framework for evidence building that moves a project from initial testing, to rigorous evaluation, to scaling

Section 2 of this report outlines our achievements against these three evidence generation objectives.

Over the past year we have developed and tested a toolkit of evidence approaches to help us innovate, scale and build capacity. We have launched **three new evidence initiatives** in partnership with FSC that are designed to align evidence generation with the innovation cycle, provide technical assistance and capacity-building and develop a framework for multi-dimensional evidence generation. Through this work we have engaged stakeholders across Canada in our efforts to build evidence in new ways that move us toward solving pressing future skills challenges.

Section 3 of this report explores key insights from the past year and charts our path forward. We've learned some valuable lessons from our work with the FSC and have used these learnings to identify some key areas where we want to continue refining our evidence strategy.

Our evidence principles



Policy relevance

Generate evidence that is relevant to policy and practice.

We need flexible evidence approaches that produce information policy-makers and practitioners need to make decisions about not only what works, but how to learn, improve and adapt.



Systems lens

Use evidence to assess and respond to the strengths and opportunities in our skills development systems.

Evidence will be most impactful when it provides information on scalable solutions that can strengthen our skills development systems and equip all Canadians to navigate a changing labour market.



Future-oriented

Identify, prototype and test forward-looking solutions that don't exist in the current state.

We need to combine traditional evaluation with experimentation and out-of-the-box thinking to find forward-looking skills development solutions that build resilience for the future.



Innovation-enabling

Adopt fit-for-purpose evidence methods that foster the development of new ideas.

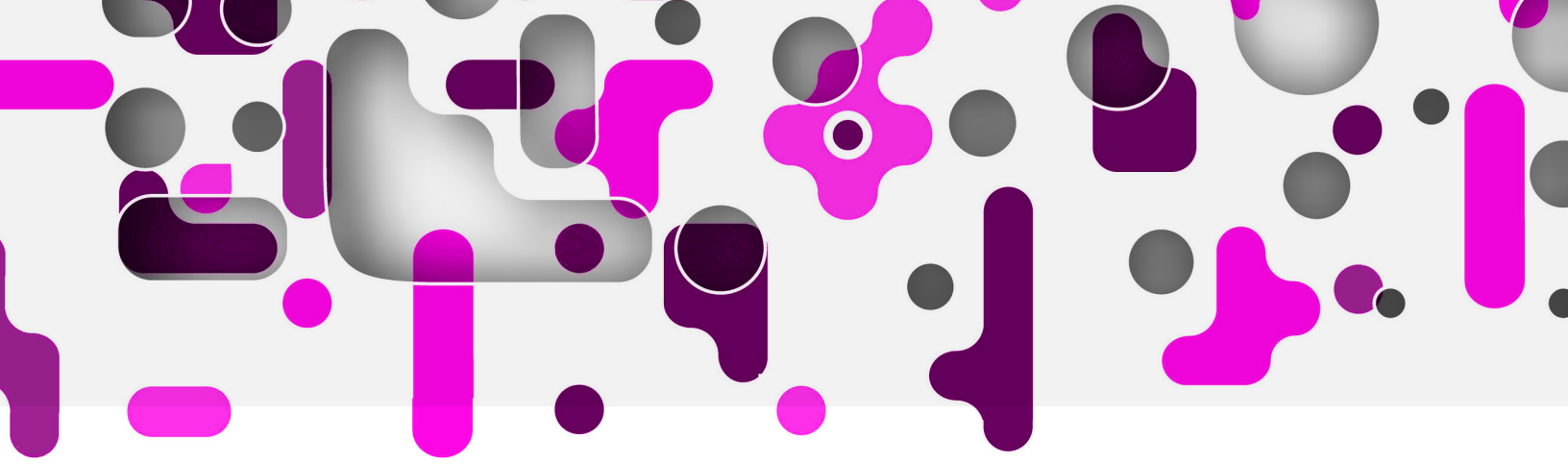
“One-size-fits-all” evaluations that focus on rigorous measurement of outputs and outcomes can stifle innovation and don't generate the timely insights needed to experiment with and adapt new approaches.



Capacity-building

Build practitioners' skills, resources, and connections to increase their data and evidence capacity.

Engaging and empowering practitioners as partners is critical to generating high-quality and actionable evidence.



Section 1

Update on Evidence Activities

Update on Evidence Activities

This section provides an update on the evidence activities described in our last [Evidence Report](#), what we learned from these activities and how these learnings have driven our approach over the past year of work and beyond.

What We Achieved

In its first full year of operations FSC funded 16 development projects spanning a range of sectors, populations, and intervention types. We worked with several of these projects to generate evidence about their interventions. These projects were diverse — from a skills assessment platform that addresses barriers to employment for newcomers, to an IT training program for displaced oil and gas workers, to a virtual reality simulator that helps prepare the trucking industry for future technological advancements. To reflect this variability we used a range of evidence approaches tailored to the needs and readiness of each project.

We used three models of generating evidence with these projects:

- **Blueprint-led evaluations** of projects to generate learnings about the outcomes they achieved and how they were implemented

- **Continuous learning approaches** for projects in early stages of design and development
- **Data sharing** with projects that were conducting their own research and evaluation but collected data aligned with the FSC Common Outcomes Framework and shared this data with Blueprint

The remaining projects planned to conduct their own evidence generation activities and have pursued their own learning agendas.

For projects that participated in Blueprint-led evaluations or data sharing, we measured a consistent set of shared outcomes across projects using our FSC Common Outcomes Framework. Measuring common outcomes and characteristics is part of our commitment to understanding if, and how, projects are reaching diverse groups of individuals, and the degree to which they experience these projects differently. See Box 1 for more information on the Common Outcomes Framework.

BOX 1 • Common Outcomes Framework and Data Linkage

For FSC projects that are undergoing outcomes or impact evaluation, we measure a set of shared outcomes and participant socio-demographic characteristics across projects. This core set of measures was developed in consultation with our partners and was informed by review of employment-related outcomes frameworks and measurement approaches both within Canada and internationally. [The full Common Outcomes Framework can be found in Appendix A.](#)

Measuring common characteristics and outcomes is part of our commitment to understanding if, and how, projects are reaching diverse groups of individuals, and the degree to which they experience these projects differently. In particular, we aim to understand how FSC's portfolio serves groups underrepresented in the labour market, including racialized people, Indigenous people, newcomers and people with disabilities.

Using this Common Outcomes Framework allows us to measure and compare the performance of the projects based on project type, sector or target population, and estimate the collective impact of all funded projects. The outcomes framework includes: intermediate outcomes that reflect participant experiences or capture milestones such as program completion; long-term outcomes such as employment and educational outcomes that measure the long-term effectiveness of each project; and customized outcomes, which are outcomes for which indicators and measurements will differ by project.

To enable the efficient measurement of long-term earnings and employment outcomes, we are also planning to link data from our evaluations with Statistics Canada administrative records. We are working with Statistics Canada to use their Social Data Linkage Environment to measure long-term participant employment and education outcomes for FSC project participants. We anticipate results from this long-term outcomes monitoring will be available in early 2023.

Three of the projects that partnered with Blueprint to conduct evaluations have received additional funding from FSC as part of the [Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative](#). Through this initiative, Blueprint is working closely with projects delivering promising models to generate evidence that supports further scaling and expansion. Box 2 and Box 3 summarize key evaluation findings from two of these projects: Facilitating Access

to Skilled Talent (FAST) and Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling (EDGE UP). See Section 2 for more details on the **Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative** and the work Blueprint is doing alongside project partners to drive scaling and impact.

Blueprint has begun sharing final reports from our evaluations including FAST and EDGE UP. Please visit our [website](#) to learn more.

BOX 2 • FAST Evaluation Findings

Can an online skills assessment and development platform help newcomers overcome barriers to entering the Canadian labour market?

Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST) is an online skills assessment and development platform designed by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) to help newcomers enter the Canadian labour market. It aims to help newcomers overcome barriers related to international credential recognition, lack of Canadian work experience and unfamiliarity with Canadian workplace cultural norms. The long-term evidence goal for the project is to test the causal impact of FAST on employment outcomes for newcomers.

IEC-BC received a grant from FSC in 2019 to expand the delivery of FAST into new sectoral streams and to newcomers in other provinces, including Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. Our initial evaluation of FAST from 2019–2021 found that the platform addresses an important need in the ecosystem. Service providers that referred clients to FAST felt that it meets a gap in existing programming by offering sector-specific information for newcomers that can be accessed flexibly and remotely.

Participant outcomes reflect the promise of the program and point to opportunities for the future. Our evaluation demonstrated that half of FAST participants were employed five months after registering for the program. Given that FAST is a light-touch intervention that was delivered during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, this highlights the model's promise as well as the need to continue to strengthen the program to address the varying and specific employment barriers faced by newcomers.

FAST was selected as one of the interventions that received additional funding from FSC under the **Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative**. In this phase of the project, Blueprint is working with IEC-BC to continue to improve and codify the model and ensure that the program reliably produces key outcomes to prepare it for more rigorous impact testing. We are planning to conduct a rapid-cycle evaluation to help iteratively improve the models' design and implementation as well as implementation supports to ensure the success of a new occupational stream that is being added to the platform.

BOX 3 • EDGE UP Evaluation Findings

Can an ICT training program help displaced oil and gas workers successfully transition to in-demand jobs?

Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling (EDGE UP) is a collaborative short-duration skills development program that seeks to transition displaced mid-career oil and gas professionals into digital and technology-based opportunities. The program offers workplace readiness training, technical training and employment support and services. The lead partner, Calgary Economic Development, received a grant from FSC in 2019 to design and launch the initial pilot of the program. The long-term evidence goal for the project is to test the causal impact of EDGE UP on **long-term employment and earnings in ICT occupations**.

Our initial evaluation from 2019–2021 found that the program was successful in reaching mid-career professionals displaced from the oil and gas sector, and had a very high completion rate (94%). Participant interviewees indicated that EDGE UP helped them achieve their learning outcomes, gain more confidence and hope and have clearer career goals. Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents reported satisfaction with the program overall.

While **less than 10%** of participants were employed at program exit, **50%** reported being employed nine months after program exit. The low employment rate at program end and the increase over time could be related to COVID-19 and its impact on the labour market as well as the continuing employment support provided by the EDGE UP team.

EDGE UP received additional funding from FSC through the **Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative**. In this phase our evidence generation activities focus on continuing to improve and codify the model and ensuring that the program reliably produces key outcomes to prepare it for more rigorous impact testing. We are conducting a cost analysis to get a baseline understanding of value for money as well as generating additional evidence of outcomes to assess program effectiveness during the pandemic recovery period.

What we learned

Three key lessons stood out from our work with the first wave of FSC funded projects.

- **We need to answer more questions than just “what works.”** Traditional evaluations focus primarily on whether or not a model is effective in achieving outcomes and impact at a single point in time. Yet many of our partners had unanswered questions about how to align their model with existing evidence, define and understand their target population, understand participants’ journeys and effectively implement or scale their intervention.
- **We need to support early-stage innovation.** Some of the projects we worked with were in the early stages of design and implementation planning. We saw a need to expand our toolkit to help these projects gather and use evidence that could help them define, plan and iterate their interventions, to prepare them for rigorous testing in the future.

- **We need to offer more than just evaluation.** The projects that we worked with had ambitious aims and were interested in new ways of doing things. We saw that more technical assistance and capacity-building support — in addition to evaluation — would help them innovate, design and deliver effective models and continuously learn along the way.

Overall, these learnings have highlighted the importance of shifting from a traditional evidence generation approach to a more flexible, multi-dimensional and learning-focused approach. Driving innovation in our skills development systems requires agile and action-oriented approaches to evidence generation. We need to generate real-time and actionable evidence that meets decision-makers and practitioners where they are at and answers real-world questions about how to innovate and scale skills development solutions.

Identifying evidence generation objectives

The variation that we observed in projects' stages of development highlighted the importance of aligning evidence approaches with a project's stage in the innovation cycle. Not all projects were ready for rigorous evaluation — some required more support designing and defining their model and conducting preliminary feasibility tests. Going forward we see a need for a more systematic way of aligning evidence with the innovation cycle, to ensure that we are asking evidence questions that make sense given where a project is at in its lifecycle.

The questions that emerged about how to optimize the design and implementation of the projects we were working with highlighted the need for a framework for multi-dimensional evidence generation. While many grantees want to know if their project works, they also have learning questions about how to improve the design of their model, whether it will work in new contexts or which components can or should be adapted. We saw a

need for a framework that would help us systematically identify and answer the broad range of learning questions that are important for helping a model move from initial testing to broader scaling and impact.

Grantees' need for hands-on support to participate in innovation and evidence generation activities highlighted the need for more technical assistance and capacity-building. We identified an opportunity to work more intentionally with practitioners to build their expertise and capacity to achieve their objectives and learn along the way.

These objectives are the driving force of our evidence generation work. They have both guided our ongoing collaboration with the innovation projects funded by FSC and been the catalyst for the launch of new evidence initiatives in the past year that are designed to intentionally drive innovation, scaling and capacity-building. Section 2 outlines our progress against these objectives.

Figure 1 • Our evidence generation objectives



Align evidence generation with the innovation cycle

Develop a toolkit of evidence generation approaches that support innovations at different stages



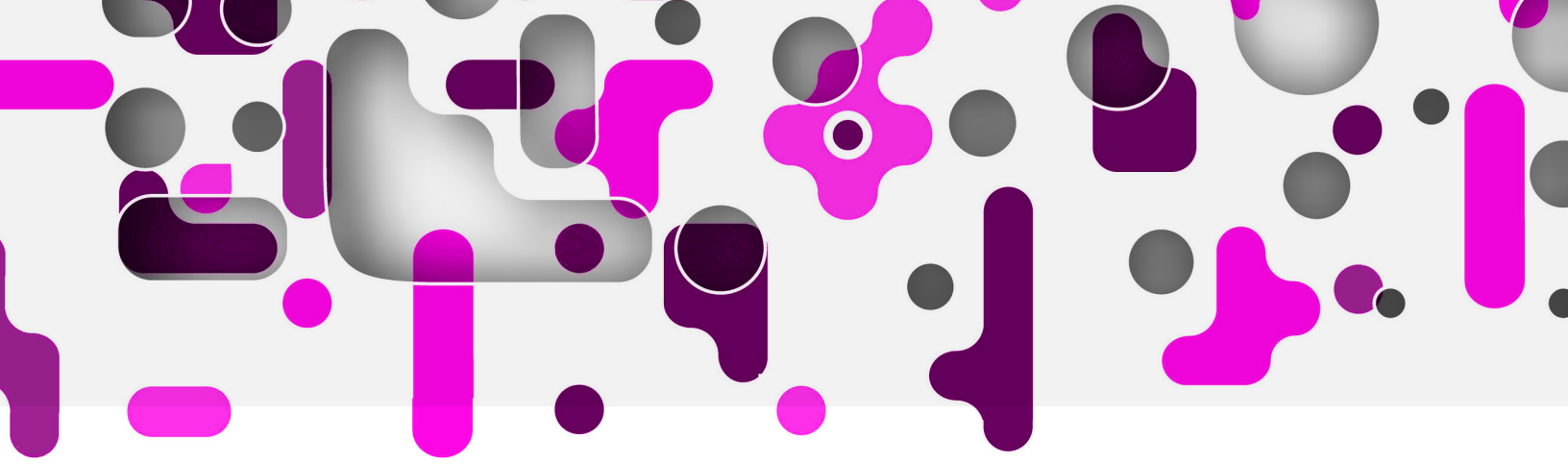
Design a framework for multi-dimensional evidence generation

Design a framework for evidence that moves a project from initial testing to rigorous evaluation to broader scaling



Provide technical assistance and capacity-building

Build approaches to work closely with practitioners to achieve their objectives and learn along the way



Section 2

Progress Towards Our Objectives

Progress Towards Our Objectives

This section provides an overview of our three evidence generation objectives and outlines our key achievements against each objective.

OBJECTIVE 1:

Align evidence generation with the innovation cycle

Overview

To generate evidence that is relevant and actionable, we first need to diagnose an intervention's stage in the innovation cycle and apply evidence approaches that are relevant for that stage. Projects progress along an innovation cycle moving from needs assessment, to conceptualization and design, to delivery and eventually to scaling and broader systems change (see Figure 2). Knowing where a project is in the innovation cycle, we can ask the right questions and collect the right evidence to move the project forward on its journey.

Projects that have moved into delivery and scaling can be rigorously evaluated to assess their effectiveness in achieving participant outcomes. But projects focused on the early stages of the cycle have different learning objectives. Fostering early-stage innovation requires understanding and assessing complex issues, generating

new and untested concepts, and exploring the feasibility and desirability of these concepts with stakeholders.

Over the past year, we have tested approaches to generating evidence aligned with the innovation cycle in two very different contexts:

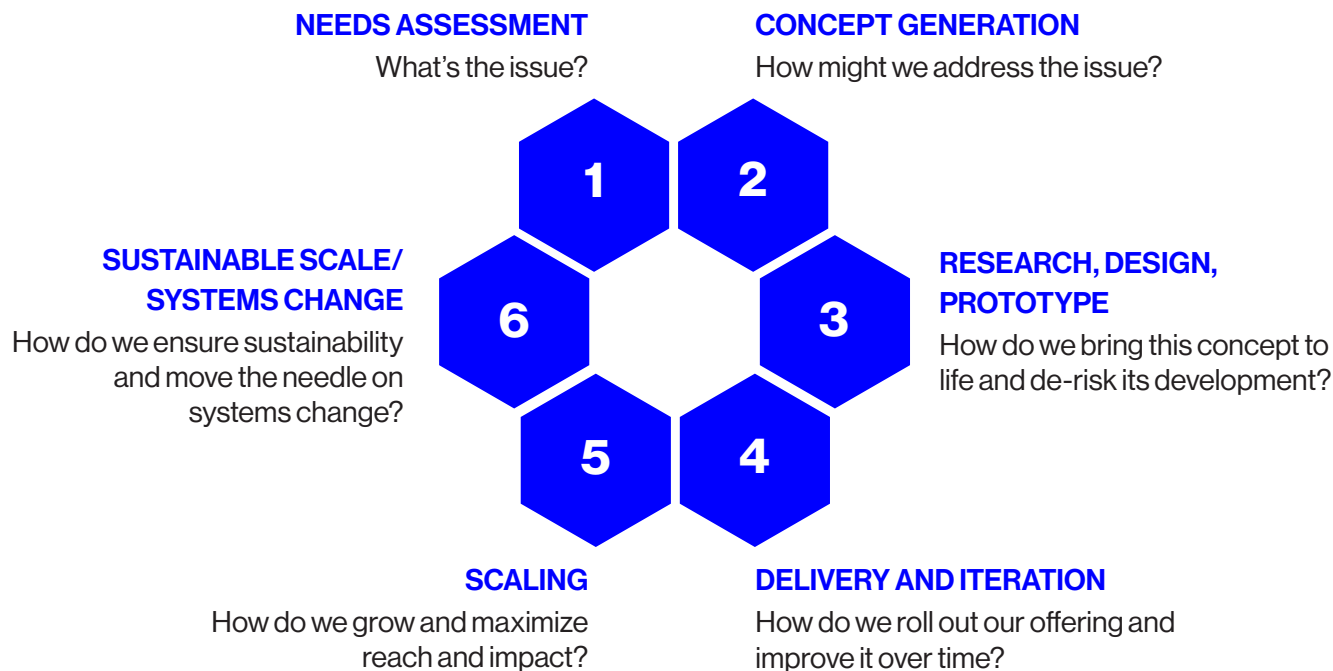
Supporting evidence planning for innovation projects

FSC has funded a range of diverse innovation projects to test skills development solutions. We developed an approach to working with project grantees to develop evidence plans aligned with the innovation cycle.

Responsive Career Pathways initiative

We developed and began testing an approach to innovation that focuses on identifying forward-looking solutions to the need for new approaches to help individuals navigate their career pathways.

Figure 2 • Innovation Cycle



Supporting evidence planning for innovation projects

FSC has invested in a range of innovation projects through portfolios such as [shock-proofing the future of work](#) and [upskilling for new technology in key economic sectors](#).

Blueprint supported the launch of evidence generation activities for these projects by developing and implementing a system that would help projects design evidence plans aligned with their position in the innovation cycle. We developed a series of evidence planning templates and worked with grantees to apply these templates to their projects. Ultimately, we developed and approved evidence plans for 71 projects.

To kick off the process, we worked with grantees to identify what stage of the innovation cycle their intervention was in and then developed guiding questions aligned with each stage that they could use as the foundation of their evidence plans (See Figure 3). We then provided user guides and advice to help grantees identify indicators (the information needed to answer their evidence questions) and data collection methods and approaches (how they plan to gather the information). Moving forward, FSC is working with innovation project grantees to collect evidence about their projects and to synthesize and share insights.

[For more information on our evidence planning approach, see Appendix B.](#)

Figure 3 • Supporting evidence planning

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Guiding Questions:

What factors contribute to the need or issue you're trying to address?

How does it affect stakeholders or your target population?

Does the need/issue affect stakeholders differently?

What key supports, tools, or interventions currently exist to respond to this need/issue and what gaps remain?

2. CONCEPT GENERATION & 3. DESIGN

Guiding Questions:

How does your proposed program address the needs of your target audience?

How is it different from similar existing programs?

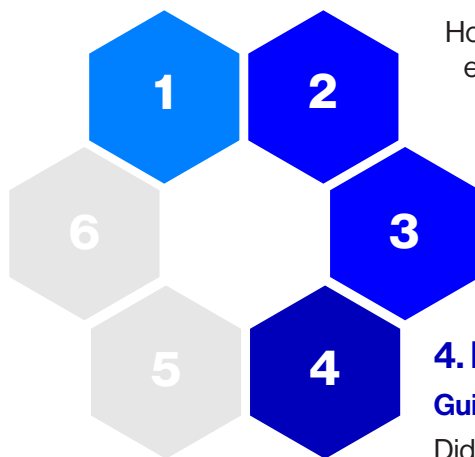
4. DELIVERY

Guiding Questions:

Did your program change during delivery?

What were the key successes and challenges?

What outcomes were achieved?



Responsive Career Pathways Initiative

In partnership with FSC, Blueprint launched the [Responsive Career Pathways Initiative](#) in 2021 to identify innovative and forward-looking solutions to career guidance for Canadians. Our focus is on charting a roadmap to a future where all jobseekers and workers in Canada have access to high-quality career guidance that will help them prepare for the future of work.

Fostering new and better approaches to providing career guidance for Canadians and enhancing their career adaptability skills is a critical part of FSC's strategic vision. The **Responsive Career Pathways Initiative** is designed to build the resilience of jobseekers, learners, employees, employers and other stakeholders, all of whom are working to adapt and adjust to the changing world of work.

Moving toward a future in which everyone in Canada has access to high-quality career guidance requires

thinking critically and creatively about new solutions that we can start prototyping and testing now. To generate ideas that don't exist in the current state, we invested in systematic needs assessment and concept generation activities that helped us understand the complexities of our current employment and careers systems, and foster dialogue and bold ideas for change. Our research and consultations explored the questions:

- What is the current state of career guidance in Canada?
- What is already changing and what do we think could happen in the future?
- What do we already know about what's working and not working?
- What examples or ideas could we draw from other fields?

We relied on a range of research and evidence activities to answer these questions, including engaging external experts to conduct [thematic research](#) (see below for more details), consulting stakeholders and assessing trends in career guidance in Canada and internationally. Building on these learnings, we designed a collaborative and generative process for consolidating findings and translating them into forward-looking ideas that have the potential to create real change in the career guidance ecosystem (see Figure 4).

Some of the important features of our approach included:

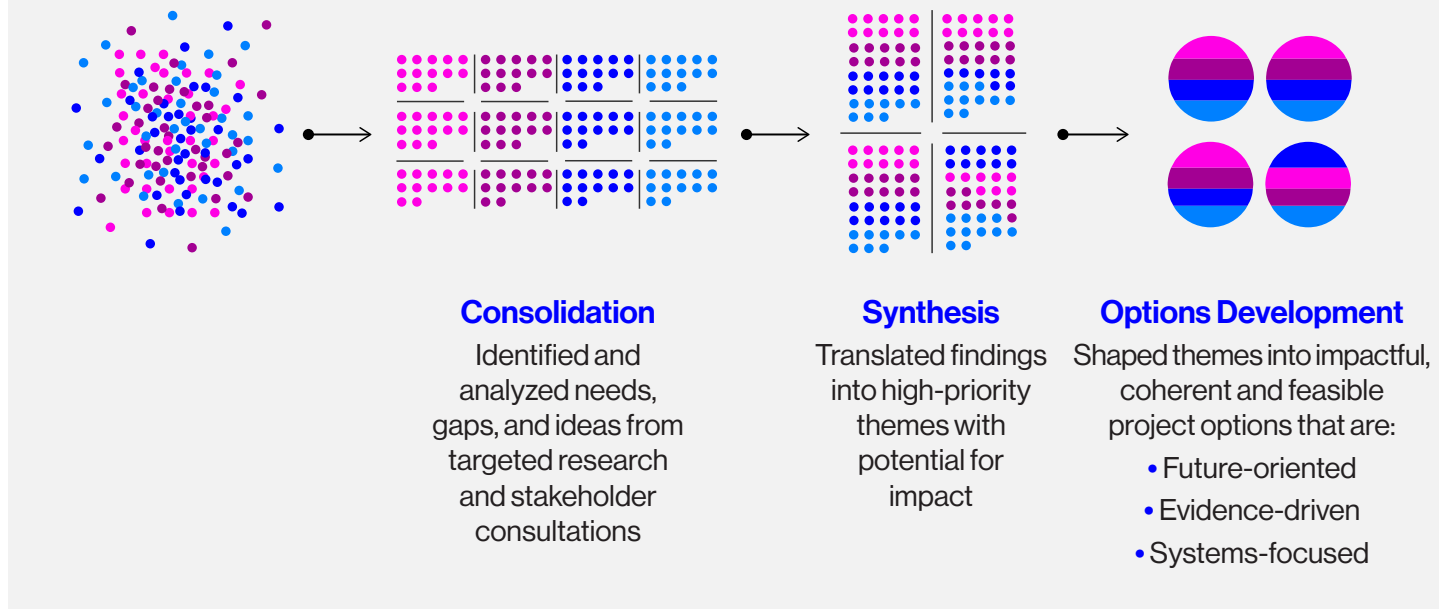
- Investing in foundational research to understand what's currently happening, what we know and what we don't know
- Asking stakeholders the “big questions” about what's working, what's not and what's possible
- Soliciting fresh perspectives from different fields — such as policy, technology and behavioural science — to generate bold and forward-looking solutions

Responsive Career Pathways Research Papers

Report title	Summary
Building Responsive Career Pathways in a Post-Pandemic World (Sandra McKenzie & Tannis Goddard)	In response to the growing need for high-quality career and employment services since the COVID-19 pandemic, this report explores the readiness of the Canadian career and employment services sector to engage in transformational change. The authors highlight the importance of collaboration across government and developing a shared vision and operating framework for responsive career pathways; and the need for better infrastructure to improve access to labour market information, investments in practitioner capacity and integration of lifelong career-guidance throughout one's education.
Applying Behavioural Insights to Career Guidance (Sasha Tregebov, Andreea Seusan & Michelle A. Krieger)	Drawing on academic and grey literature, this report identifies barriers and potential solutions related to Canadians' behavioural and motivational likelihood to access career guidance services across Canada. The authors argue that moving forward, career guidance practitioners should look to reduce administrative processes for jobseekers, build strong and trusting relationships with their clients, implement more structured and personalized assessments and allow clients to take the lead when developing their employment goals.
Breaking Down Barriers to Career Development (Jasmine Irwin, Adrienne Lipsey & Samantha Coronel)	As Canadians continue to require upskilling and occupation changes to adapt to changing labour markets, this paper explores the key barriers limiting access to, and the impact of, career guidance services and considers promising practices to mitigate these challenges. The report highlights ways for governments, and entities like the FSC, to increase the visibility of career guidance services, connect individuals with complementary supports (as needed), expand government training benefits to include career services and utilize technology to expand its access and efficacy.
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Responsive Career Pathways (Michelle Zhong & Tanvi Shetty)	Building on the understanding that equity-seeking groups tend to experience worse labour market outcomes, labour market segregation and discrimination, and are disproportionately impacted by negative workforce trends, this report explores the implications of these inequities for career pathways in Canada. As a way forward, it considers how employers and other stakeholders can look to empower workers and advance equity through efforts to increase access to re-skilling opportunities and wraparound supports, train equity-driven career practitioners and collect better evidence within the careers system.

Report title	Summary
Labour Market Information in Responsive Career Pathways (Mustafa Sayedi & Aryeh Ansel)	<p>Given the crucial role labour market information (LMI) plays in the promotion of responsive career pathways, this report examines the LMI landscape in Canada and the challenges around usability across the employment services and career development ecosystem. The authors find that for LMI to become more effectively used in support of responsive career pathways and strengthened employment systems, it must become more tailored to the needs of users (individuals and practitioners), better understood by practitioners to support their clients and more accessible and relevant by addressing cognitive and behavioural biases.</p>
Navigating Canada's Messy Education and Training Marketplace for Career-Focused Learning (André Côté, Danielle Olsen & Jake Hirsch-Allen)	<p>This paper explores the state of education and training information in Canada and its utility for navigating career-focused choices. It provides a snapshot of the learning marketplace, the informal infrastructure for understanding it and a scan of the tools and resources available to assist with navigating it. Recognizing our current state, the authors conclude that our capacity to navigate this learning marketplace hinges on an adequate education and training information infrastructure that does not currently exist in Canada.</p>
The Career Development Profession in Canada and the Emergence of Online/ Multi-Modal Practice Delivery (Jenny Bimrose & Tannis Goddard)	<p>This report explores the turbulent and unpredictable context within which career development practitioners operate and addresses fundamental issues around career development support and the integration of online practice. In the effort to overcome these issues, the authors discuss the need for a radical re-think around career development in Canada organized around a funded workforce strategy, national quality standards and an understanding of sector needs.</p>
The Role of Employers in Responsive Career Pathways (Kelly Pasolli & Steve Cumming)	<p>Aware of the critical role employers play in establishing more responsive career pathways, this paper explores how they can best support and advance the career development and skills training landscape. It describes how employers are also striving to understand and adapt to the changing nature of work and are looking beyond the scope of their own business in fostering skills development. Moving forward there is an opportunity for publicly funded services to strengthen their collaboration with employers to provide better labour market support, build on employer innovations and explore different models that account for the diverse needs of employers.</p>
The Use of Technology and Tools (Ben Berres)	<p>Through a scan of technologies supporting responsive career pathways (referred to as "RCP tech") in Canada and worldwide, this paper examines the context in which RCP tech is evolving, barriers impacting wider adoption — especially for early-stage technology — and examples of how they are used. It is found that the RCP tech market is young and underdeveloped, focusing predominantly on the job search and the transaction of sorting and placing individuals into new occupations. The author concludes by discussing potential applications for the FSC, and other system actors, to consider in promoting responsive career pathways enabled by technology.</p>

Figure 4 • Generating innovative solutions in career guidance



Some key findings emerged from our research and stakeholder engagement about needs and opportunities in Canada's career guidance system:

- Ensuring access to high-quality publicly-funded career guidance services for all individuals at all stages of their career life-cycle is critical to preparing for disruptions and the future of work.
- We need closer collaboration between the public and private sectors, including more upstream engagement with employers to proactively support employees who may be at risk of disruption due to technological change.
- Opportunities for enhanced training and professional development for career development practitioners are needed to ensure that our current career and employment services are equipped to help individuals and employers navigate the future of work.

- We need to optimize the role of technology in service delivery and explore the potential use of technological tools to scale career guidance services
- More support and infrastructure is needed to help individuals and practitioners make sense of labour market information and the increasingly complex education and training marketplace

The findings highlight the need for new solutions that broaden access, build capacity, increase quality and foster greater collaboration in our careers and employment systems.

We are working closely with FSC and partners on the next steps of the Responsive Career Pathways Initiative to put our innovative ideas into practice through further design, prototyping and testing. We look forward to sharing more information about next steps in Spring 2022.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Multi-dimensional framework for evidence generation

Overview

There are many factors that determine whether a model or intervention is effective, and whether that effectiveness translates to other contexts, geographies and populations. Yet pilot projects in Canada are generally funded as one-off interventions and are not supported along a path to scale. As a result, even where we have evidence that a skills intervention works, we often lack confidence that its effectiveness can be scaled to match the level of need in the ecosystem.

To create lasting change in our skills development ecosystem, we need to understand what it takes to effectively scale interventions. This requires more than rigorous evidence — it also requires paying attention to design and delivery, and ensuring that interventions are properly prepared for rigorous evaluation.

Recognizing this, we have designed and begun testing a new multi-dimensional framework that specifies what is needed to move an intervention from initial testing, to rigorous evaluation, to broader scaling and impact.

- **Creating a new multi-dimensional framework** – We have designed a new multi-dimensional framework that specifies the types of evidence needed to move an intervention from initial testing to rigorous evaluation to broader scaling and impact.
- **Applying the framework to the Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative** – We have refined and begun testing the new framework through our work helping promising projects scale.

Our multi-dimensional evidence framework

Our framework incorporates evaluation of a model's outcomes and impact alongside other dimensions including implementation quality, demand, value for money, ongoing learning and integrated knowledge mobilization. We built it with the recognition that we need new tools to identify models that are both evidence-based and scalable.

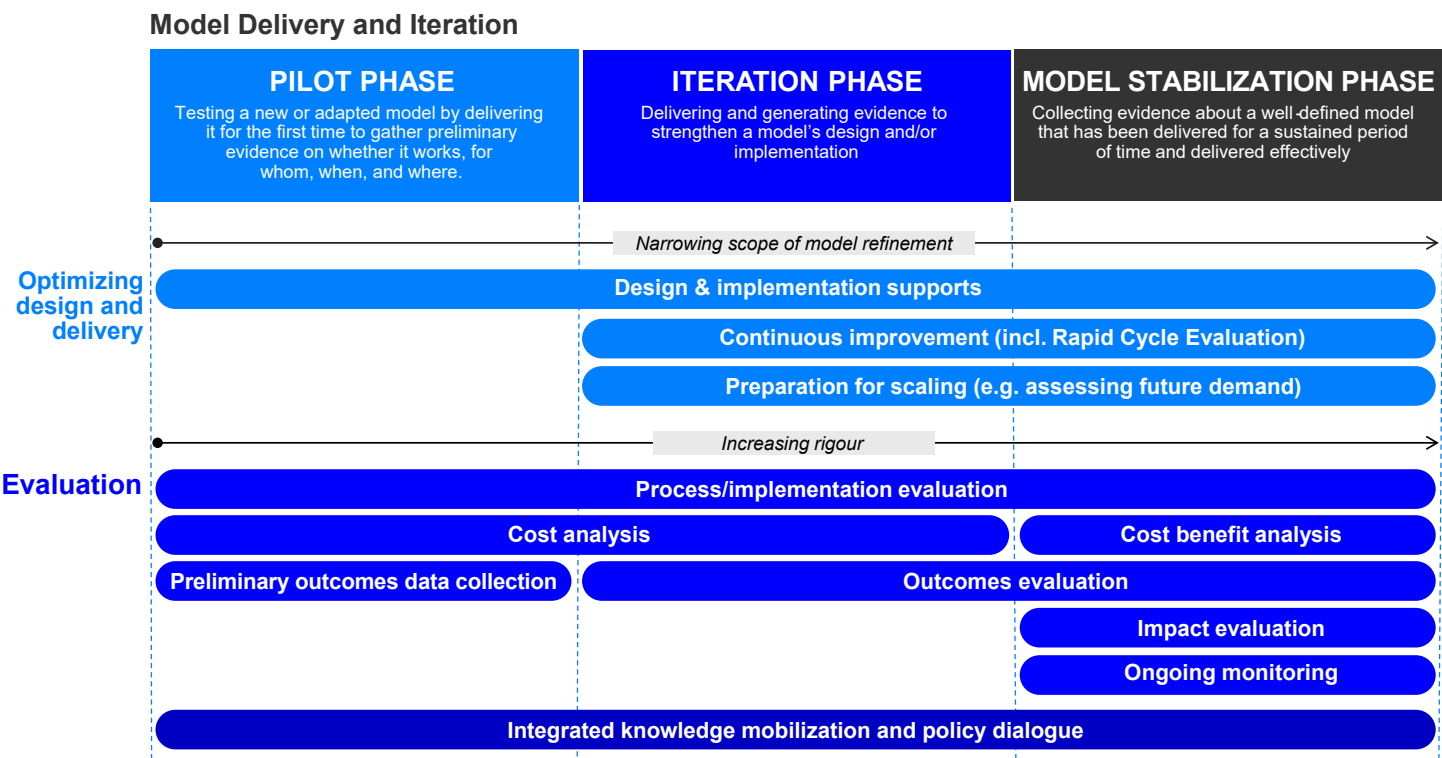
This framework goes beyond traditional evaluation activities to incorporate the multiple activities that help projects move along a path toward scaling, including:

- **Measuring effectiveness** – Calibrating measurement of outcomes and impact to align with a model's stage of development and learning goals.

- **Optimizing design and delivery** – Ensuring models are designed and implemented as effectively and efficiently as possible, using methods from implementation science, rapid-cycle evaluation and continuous learning.
- **Integrated knowledge mobilization and systems dialogue** – Translating evidence into actionable next steps for funders and practitioners to drive scaling.

Our refined framework dives deeply into a project's journey through the “delivery” stage of the innovation cycle. With this portfolio of projects we have recognized the need for a systematic and refined approach that helps us understand what needs to happen from when a model delivery is first piloted, to when it is ready for broader scaling and impact.

Figure 5 • Multi-dimensional evidence framework



Applying the framework: Scaling up skills development

We have had the opportunity to refine and test our multi-dimensional evidence framework through the [Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative](#).

Through this initiative we have worked with FSC to identify 10 projects in the FSC portfolio that:

- Are strategically relevant to the future skills ecosystem
- Meet our criteria for scalability including promising early evidence of effectiveness, high levels of client demand and partner capacity to deliver

The projects received grants to support additional service delivery and evidence generation activities in the spring of 2021. In partnership with these projects, we have begun formally testing our multi-dimensional evidence framework.

We are working with each of the 10 projects to diagnose their position on the evidence framework and carry out evidence activities that advance them toward broader impact and scale. This involves developing customized evidence plans for each project and providing tailored assistance that aligns with grantees' expertise and capacity. We are also engaging external independent evaluators where models are ready for impact evaluation to ensure objectivity and credibility.

Scaling Up Skills Development Projects

Material Handling 4.0

The Material Handling 4.0 program, originally offered by **Mohawk College**, provides introductory training and a two-week paid placement to individuals on social assistance, newcomers and youth to support them in securing employment in warehouses or distribution centres. **Mohawk College** is partnering with **Nova Scotia Community College**, **Red River College** and **Vancouver Community College** to expand the delivery of the program across Canada. As the program scales, Blueprint is working with the project team to capture evidence on key outcomes for participants and the new sites delivering the model for the first time.

AspireAtlantic

The AspireAtlantic project is a sector-based training model that aims to support workers seeking to advance from unemployment or low-wage jobs into middle-skilled jobs in the construction, home building/renovation and manufacturing sectors. Led by **Pier Labs** in collaboration with Nova Scotia service provider organizations, sector councils and industry associations, the approach identifies local sectors' employment demands and works with employers to develop skills training and job placements to help address the need. Blueprint and **Pier Labs** aim to establish evidence to support an initial proof of concept and the necessary information needed to prepare for more rigorous impact assessment.

In Motion & Momentum+ (IM&M+)

IM&M+, offered by **Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)**, is a 13-week program that seeks to break the long-term cycle of dependence on social assistance by supporting unemployed individuals to develop the skills needed to enter the labour market. This is done by working with community-based agencies to help participants identify their own strengths, set goals and use an action-oriented learning model to develop a project that addresses a need in their community. Drawing on the effectiveness of the model to date,

Blueprint is preparing to work with an external consultant to conduct a randomized control trial to examine the effect of IM&M+ on skill and employment outcomes of participants.

Upskilling Canadian Youth for In-Demand Tech Careers

Through **NPower's** Upskilling Canadian Youth program, low-income and diverse young adults are given access to professional and technical skills training, direct job placement and post-hire services to help them secure employment in the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) sector. Drawing on the initial success of the program in Toronto, Calgary, Halifax and Vancouver, this program is currently being expanded into Indigenous, francophone and northern communities, small and mid-sized cities and larger metropolitan hubs such as Ottawa-Gatineau and Montreal. To further understand the impact of the program, **NPower** and Blueprint are preparing for a randomized control trial to examine the effect of this ICT training model on participants' employment outcomes.

ADaPT

Created in response to a growing gap between the skills of post-secondary grads and technical skills required by employers, **Technation Canada** and the **Diversity Institute** developed the ADaPT program. Through utilizing new approaches to defining digital competencies and developing new career pathways, the program aims to make it easier for non-STEM graduates, internationally educated professionals and high-potential workers who lack traditional credentials to secure employment in the tech field. Based on a promising pilot, ADaPT is now expanding its engagement with remote communities and testing affordable and accessible delivery approaches that best serve diverse Canadians. ADaPT will be the subject of a randomized control trial that examines the effect of its program components on participant employment outcomes in the coming year.

Assessing and Developing Workplace Employability Skills with ESAT

The Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT) is an online assessment and coaching tool developed by **Futureworx Society** to support employability and soft skill development in workforce development and training programs. The tool enables employers, educators and the individual to identify and address social and emotional skill gaps. Current evidence generation activities led by Blueprint focus on identifying the necessary program factors for a causal test of the tool and launching the validation process through testing the tool's predictive validity of employment outcomes.

What Works for Work? Employment Integration in Youth Service Hubs across Canada (LIFT)

The **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (CAMH)** LIFT program model provides youth with personalized and optimized opportunities for employment, education and training by integrating an employment specialist into a mental health services team. Using this approach, an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) worker collaborates with participants and employers to arrange needed accommodations, wraparound supports and other services to help young people find, secure and retain meaningful employment. **CAMH** is building off program success to date by expanding to 12 new sites across Canada. Evidence generation activities focus on identifying how the model can be effectively adapted to the new contexts and ensuring the program reliably produces key outcomes to prepare it for more rigorous impact testing.

Tourism Hospitality Emergency Recovery (THER)

The Tourism Hospitality Emergency Recovery (THER) is an **Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC)** initiative that provides employment supports and information to hospitality workers displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an online portal, individuals

are able to locate services and access current information on relief programs, grants, community support and available re-skilling, upskilling and employment programs. For businesses, the program offers a way to engage and support laid-off employees, while creating a framework for tracking the stages of recovery and coordinating sector needs. Blueprint is supporting the project's scaling efforts through activities to optimize design and prepare for scaling by assessing labour market trends and tracking the needs of displaced workers.

Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST)

FAST is an online, occupation-specific, pre-arrival program designed to aid newcomers in overcoming barriers in the labour market — for instance the lack of recognition of international credentials and the absence of Canadian work experience. This is done by providing newcomers, while still in their home country, access to an online portal that allows them to compare their skills against standards required to work in Canada. The program also helps employers by increasing the number of skilled potential hires. Evidence generation activities for FAST focus on improving and codifying the model and ensuring the program reliably produces key outcomes as it prepares for more rigorous impact testing.

Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling Project (EDGE UP)

Led by **Calgary Economic Development** and delivered in collaboration with six local partners, EDGE UP is a 5–10-month training program that assists displaced oil and gas workers in Calgary to learn new digital skills to help them transition into Information Communication and Technology (ICT) jobs. This is done through in-class training culminating in a four-month work placement. To help support the implementation of the project, Blueprint is working with **Calgary Economic Development** to better define their program model into core and adaptable aspects as well as ensuring the program reliably produces key outcomes as it prepares for more rigorous impact testing.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Provide technical assistance and capacity-building

Overview

To develop, rigorously evaluate and scale interventions, practitioners need support executing on their project goals. The continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pressure it has placed on practitioners to be more responsive, innovative and adaptable than ever highlights the need for investments in technical assistance and capacity-building to support the resilience of service providers.

The need for technical assistance and capacity-building was an important early learning in our evidence generation work. We have embedded technical assistance as an important part of our evidence work

with innovation projects. In addition, in partnership with FSC we launched a new initiative focused specifically on technical assistance for practitioners to build their capacity to use data and evidence.

- **Included technical assistance in our evaluation of innovation projects** – We have embedded technical assistance in our work with innovation portfolios
- **Launched the Practitioner Data Initiative** – In partnership with FSC we created a new initiative focused specifically on technical assistance for practitioners to build their comfort and capacity to use data and evidence

Technical assistance for innovation portfolios

Through its innovation portfolios, FSC has funded a wide range of organizations with different levels of capacity and expertise in innovation and evidence generation. To support these organizations in applying our evidence planning approach, Blueprint has designed and delivered training and provided flexible one-on-one coaching through regular weekly “office hours” and email requests.

We also reviewed and provided customized feedback on the draft evidence plans developed by many of the organizations delivering innovation projects. This resulted in the completion and approval of 71 evidence plans for innovation projects funded by FSC.

The ongoing coaching that we provide to organizations delivering innovation projects has varied depending on their stage of development, the timing of their progress in delivering their project, existing capacity and interest in building out their evidence generation expertise and approaches. See Box 4 for an example of the technical assistance we have provided to one grantee to develop a robust evidence generation plan and generate promising early evidence of the project's progress.

BOX 4 • Technical assistance case study: TRIEC

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council's (TRIEC) mission is to create and champion solutions to better integrate immigrant professionals in the Greater Toronto Area labour market. With funding from the FSC, TRIEC launched the Career Advancement for Immigrant Professionals (CAIP) program in 2020. Recognizing that most existing employment programs for immigrant professionals concentrate focus on securing their first jobs in Canada, the CAIP program addresses the challenges immigrants encounter with advancement. Delivered to immigrant and manager cohorts within employer partner organizations, the customized program aims to address change at a few levels:

- Identify opportunities for employers to enhance their current talent management tools and practices to create more inclusive workplaces
- Increase managers' inclusive leadership skills
- Increase newcomer employees' insights and skills for navigating the organizational culture around career advancement as well as access to networking opportunities
- Advance career progression outcomes for newcomers and address employers' talent shortages by helping employers to identify and more fully leveraging internal immigrant talent.

With a small staff team primarily dedicated to the implementation of the program, TRIEC requested additional support from Blueprint to support evidence generation in 2021. Acknowledging that their initial efforts had focused on program design and hiring staff, there had been little attention paid to developing an evidence plan. As a result, Blueprint and TRIEC engaged in ongoing conversations to identify TRIEC's internal capacity, strengths and infrastructure that could be used to support evidence generation. With this additional context, Blueprint developed an ongoing coaching plan.

More specifically, the coaching plan focused on developing the program's research questions, determining the appropriate methodologies, creating an evidence generation framework, building data collection tools and sharing best practices for data analysis. With a focus on capacity-building and supporting TRIEC throughout the process, the Blueprint team facilitated meetings to explain key concepts and considerations and encouraged TRIEC to use the templates and guidance to develop the desired resources or tools. TRIEC then shared these materials with Blueprint for further feedback and support before finalizing the documents. This approach allowed TRIEC to maintain ownership of their work and leverage their programmatic- and population- specific experience, while ensuring that their evidence generation was rigorous and valid.

In September 2021 TRIEC completed the training and evaluation activities for their first employer partner using the tools created in partnership with Blueprint. Early results suggest that immigrant professionals have gained clarity about their career pathways and are taking steps to advance their careers, and that employers are supporting newcomers differently and taking new actions as a result of the program. TRIEC is also using feedback from the surveys to make improvements to the delivery of the program going forward. TRIEC has shared that this collective effort to building and implementing an evidence plan has been highly appreciated and impactful for their work.

The Practitioner Data Initiative

Data capacity — the combination of human, technical, organizational, cultural and business resources that enable a given organization to use their data to make better decisions more confidently — is an important skill of the future for community service agencies. Many agencies already have a strong desire to make better use of their data to design and deliver more effective and efficient services.

However, many agencies lack the capacity and tools to achieve these goals, creating barriers to more data-informed decision-making. To make sure that these agencies have the capacity to change, adapt and innovate, we also need to make sure they have the skills to understand who they are serving, where there are needs and gaps and how to make their services as effective and adaptable as possible.

The [Practitioner Data Initiative](#) (PDI) is an innovative approach to this challenge. The initiative provides direct technical assistance, resources and support to community service agencies to help them use data and evidence to learn what works.

In spring of 2021, nine organizations received grants from FSC through the PDI. Blueprint is providing strategic support to each of these projects to support their data and evidence capacity-building. This support is offered in three phases:

- **Discovery** – Understand the organization's goals, needs and gaps related to use of data and evidence
- **Planning** – Develop plans for the resources and skills they will need to meet their goals including organizational capacity-building, training and technological adaptations
- **Implementation** – Support organizational leadership in the execution of this plan

The goal of each engagement is for organizations to move toward a place where they can efficiently and strategically use their data to see who they are serving and what impact they have, helping them strengthen their services and ultimately achieve better outcomes for the people they serve. To date we have completed capacity-building plans for all nine organizations and are supporting them with implementation.

BOX 5 • Case study: Practitioner Data Initiative

WOODGREEN COMMUNITY SERVICES

WoodGreen Community Services is one of the largest social service organizations in Toronto, working to address some of the city's most pressing and complex challenges, including affordable housing, unemployment, mental health, newcomer settlement, vulnerable seniors, and youth facing multiple barriers. Their vision is a Toronto where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

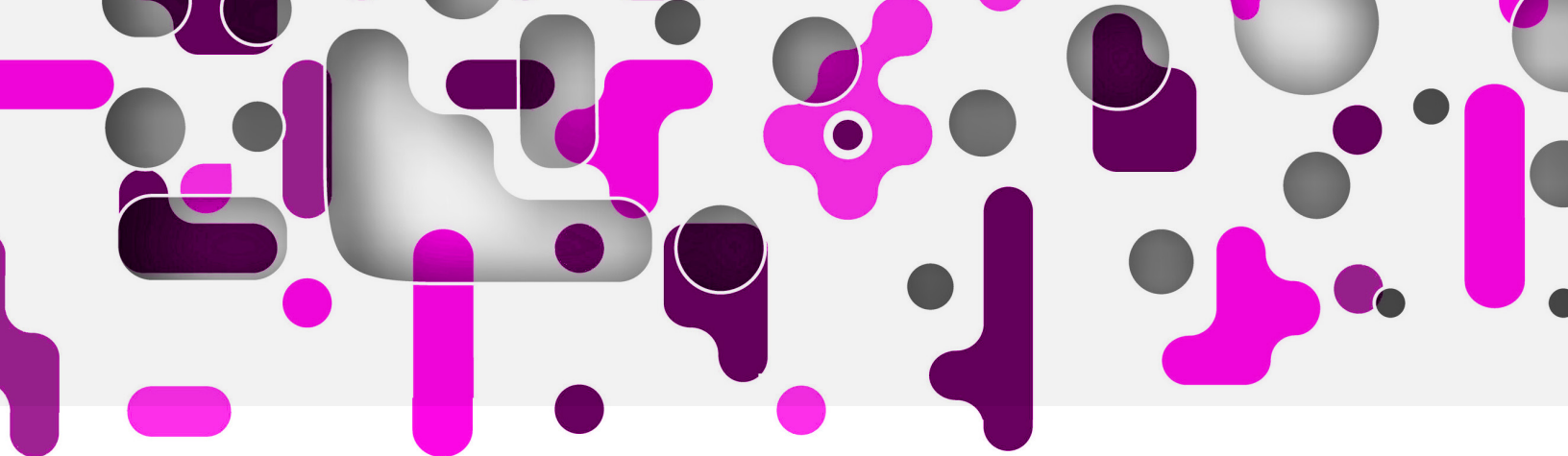
WoodGreen received a grant to participate in the PDI and began working with Blueprint to build its data capacity in summer 2021. In our discovery sessions with organizational leadership, they shared that they want to improve their data capacity to:

- Improve their programs, and test and evaluate program innovations
- Report to funders more efficiently and effectively
- Communicate successes to stakeholders
- Create an easily accessible data dashboard with user-friendly overviews of data on programs, services and the outcomes achieved by clients

Based on our understanding of these goals and the organization's context, Blueprint has worked with WoodGreen to create an initial capacity-building plan that focuses on six areas:

- **Capacity:** Building an internal data team with the right skills
- **Digital transformation:** Introducing a client information management system
- **Data management and integration:** Setting up a cloud-based data repository
- **Business intelligence:** Developing meaningful reporting dashboards
- **Measurement and evaluation:** Building an actionable learning agenda with key questions, relevant metrics and an enhanced organizational theory of change
- **Data and learning culture:** Embedding data and learning across organizational activities

We are currently working with WoodGreen on next steps to support the implementation of this plan.



Section 3

Our Path Forward

Our Path Forward

Launching new evidence initiatives focused on innovation, scaling and capacity-building has been both exciting and challenging. We are using what we are learning from this work to chart our path forward. We are building on what we have achieved and continuing to pursue new and better ways of generating and using evidence to strengthen the future skills ecosystem.

What we learned

Capacity building is multi-faceted

Over the past year, we have recognized the different areas of capacity-building needed to equip our partners for success and achieve our ambitious innovation, scaling and systems change goals. We have continued to build out our technical assistance toolkit to help organizations at different stages of the innovation cycle and to meet specific evidence generation goals.

Too often, service provider organizations are funded to deliver pilot projects and meet pre-established key performance indicators without the tailored assistance and guidance they may need to design an effective innovation, deliver it well and generate the data and evidence needed to learn and improve. Our work has highlighted the opportunity to collaborate with organizations in a deeper and more meaningful way to achieve their goals and generate meaningful evidence along the way.

Initiatives like the [PDI](#) are helping us better understand how service provider organizations work and the challenges they face in applying innovation, evidence and learning to their work. Based on these insights we are exploring potential new ways that we can empower service providers in their learning journeys, such as through peer mentorship.

Adapting to a rapidly changing labour market will require future skills organizations to become ever more data-driven, agile and responsive. Going forward our work will continue to prioritize working with partners to equip them with what they need to be resilient, future-oriented organizations.

We need broad and diverse expertise to make our approach work

Our evidence generation objectives require us to draw on multiple disciplines and approaches that go beyond traditional evaluation. We aim to develop high-quality innovations, work with partners to deliver models consistently and effectively, generate rigorous and actionable evidence, and share what we have learned with partners and stakeholders. Over the past year we have identified many areas where we need to continue to build and expand our toolkit to achieve these lofty goals, – including areas like implementation science, knowledge mobilization, innovation tradecraft, stakeholder engagement, human-centered design, strategic consulting, and data management.

Building our own capacity in these areas is important to achieving our goals as well as for making sure that we show up as an informed, responsive and helpful partner for the organizations that we work with. We look forward to continuing to learn, increase our skills and add to our toolkit as we work with organizations to drive change in the skills development ecosystem.

Appetite for more practitioner-centred evidence generation

An important learning for us in the past year has been the level of interest and eagerness among service providers across Canada to make better use of data and evidence. This was highlighted in the enthusiastic response from many of the organizations participating in the **PDI** who are eager to find ways to more effectively and efficiently use their data to learn and improve.

Our work on the [Scaling Up Skills Development Initiative](#) has also highlighted this trend. We have received positive feedback from the organizations we are working with about the emphasis our multi-dimensional framework places on strengthening the design and delivery of their interventions, and participating in evaluation activities that are aligned with the project's stage of development and learning goals.

This learning highlights the appetite across the ecosystem for new ways of thinking about evidence building that are less rigid and top-down and more driven by the learning needs of those working to deliver services to Canadians. Organizations are eager to move past the traditional model of pilot projects that are delivered to meet standard KPIs set by funders. We are excited about working with these organizations to think more deeply about what they are trying to achieve for whom and how we can work with them to design, test, iterate, improve, adapt and scale to meet future skills challenges.

What's next

We have made important progress in building and testing an evidence generation approach that will help meet FSC's innovation and systems change mandate. Going forward, we have identified three areas where we want to continue refining our evidence generation strategy.

Focus on knowledge mobilization

Finding effective ways to share our results and learnings with those who can put the evidence we generate into practice is critical. Our shift toward an evidence approach that is more flexible and learning-oriented also means that we need fresh and dynamic ways of sharing evidence and insights with practitioners and policymakers. Moving forward we are eager to work with our project partners and other collaborators to mobilize the evidence and learnings we create to help drive innovation and scaling in the skills development ecosystem.

Test future-focused innovations

In 2021 we focused on identifying innovative ideas for career guidance under the [Responsive Career Pathways Initiative](#). In 2022 we are focused on putting these ideas into practice, with an emphasis on design, prototyping and early testing and experimentation. We will need to continue to build out our toolkit for this work in a way that balances our ambitious goals with a deep recognition of the process, partnerships and nurturing needed to develop and advance these projects along the innovation cycle and embed opportunities for learning and reflection along the way.

Connect evidence to the ecosystem

Advancing our ambitious evidence goals requires a deep understanding of the needs and context of future skills organizations and the policy landscape that they operate in. We emphasize generating evidence that is relevant to practitioners and policymakers, which requires understanding the questions they are asking and the information that would empower them to future-proof our skills development systems. Moving forward we are eager to find ways to continue and deepen our engagement with partners and stakeholders to build our understanding of the needs, gaps and opportunities in our skills ecosystems that exist now and are likely to exist in the future, and to connect the evidence that we generate to the pressing policy and program questions on our partners' minds.

APPENDIX A:

Common Outcomes Framework

	Outcome	Indicators
Socio-demographics	Sex & Gender	Sex at birth
		Self-identified gender
	Age	Age
	Location	Province
		Region & Municipality
	Marital status	Marital status
	Children & Dependents	Children
		Dependents
		Household size
	Household Income	Household income
	Education	Highest credential obtained
		Location of highest credential attainment
	Indigenous Identity	Self-identified Indigenous identity
	Francophone status & languages spoken	First language spoken
		Official languages
		Language spoken at home
		Other languages spoken (At home)
	Citizenship Status	Place of birth
		Year of arrival
		Citizenship status
	Racial identity	Self-identification as member of racialized group
	Disability	Self-identified disability

	Outcome	Indicators
Employment status and history	Employment	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/ part-time)
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Work history	Time since last employed
		NOC code of job
		NAICS code of job
	Income source	Income sources
Intermediate outcomes	Program completion	Successful completion of planned activities
	Participant satisfaction	Satisfaction with program
		Perceived Utility of Program
Customized intermediate outcomes		Likelihood to recommend
	Skills gains	Measured gains in specific skills
Long-term outcomes	Program-specific credential attainment	Attainment of program-specific credentials
	Employment and retention	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/ part-time)
		Retention
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Benefits	Presence of benefits including: Paid leave, Health and dental coverage, Pension plan
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Job Satisfaction	Satisfaction with job
		Perceived opportunity for career advancement
		Perceived job security
	Enrolment in further education	Enrolment in further education
		Type of training
		Field of study
	Credential attainment	Attainment of high school or PSE credentials
		Field of study credentials

APPENDIX B:

Evidence planning

Blueprint has developed a strategic and systematic process to support evidence planning for the innovation projects funded by FSC. Using the Innovation Cycle as the foundation of our approach, projects are categorized along the cycle to determine what stage they are anticipated to complete during the grant. Each stage of the Innovation Cycle then is linked to key research questions to help guide organizations in determining what type of evidence they should be collecting at each stage of their program. For example, an organization who is completing a needs assessment would only need to answer questions related to:

- The methods they used for the needs assessment
- What they learned about the need/issue across the different populations
- The conditions or factors that contribute to the issue
- What the existing solutions to address the issue are
- What the present gaps to addressing the issue are
- How this work will continue in the future

In contrast, an organization at the delivery and iteration stage would be expected to answer questions related to:

- The challenge and/or need their program aims to address
- The methods they used for evidence generation
- What changes were made while delivering the program
- The core and adaptable aspects of the program model
- The successes and challenges of the program
- The types of organizations who could deliver the program if scaled
- Outcomes achieved to date
- Next steps

To help build the capacity of grantees and to support them in being able to generate the necessary information to answer these questions, Blueprint developed an Evidence Generation form that is to be completed at the onset of a project. The form asks the grantee to reflect on the applicable questions related to their Innovation Cycle stage and explicitly state what indicators and data collection methodology will be used to answer each of the research questions. In an attempt to set projects up for success, the form also encourages grantees to reflect on the potential risks for their project and what strategies they anticipate using to mitigate these challenges should they arise.

To ensure organizational success, the form is hyperlinked to a user guide to support grantees in completing the form. At the onset of the user guide, the grantee is able to familiarize themselves with what each stage of the Innovation Cycle includes and why this evidence generation approach is being utilized. As the grantee progresses, they are introduced to what an indicator is and how they can be used to help support collecting evidence for a specific research question (Table 1).

Table 1 • Sample Indicators for Research Questions

Evidence generation questions	Potential corresponding indicators
What factors contribute to the identified need/issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social, economic, political, and/or historic factors that have contributed to the need/issue • Perceptions of the target population and/or intervention stakeholders about the need/issue
What were key successes and challenges in your program design and delivery?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff perceptions of program delivery successes and challenges • Participant/stakeholder perceptions of program effectiveness and barriers
What type of organizations and resources or features do you think are key to delivering your program successfully?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff perceptions of factors needed to deliver the program • Analysis of key inputs and budget

Following information about indicators, the user guide explains different data collection methods can be used to collect information about each indicator. To help support capacity-building, the user guide provides information on the potential uses and limitations of each data collection method (Table 2).

Table 2 • Information on Potential Methodologies

Methods/ Approaches	Description	Uses and Limitations
Secondary data collection (e.g., literature or jurisdictional scan)	Review information from existing sources like practitioner reports, academic articles, policy reports, and datasets. It can also involve research on policies and programs in your local context or other jurisdictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand existing needs/challenges, their effect on stakeholders and target populations, and gaps in responses to those needs/challenges • Gather evidence about the program, or components of the program, that you are designing or delivering, and the key outcomes that program has achieved in other contexts <p>Limitation: Findings are limited to what others have already found</p>
Administrative data	This is data that is collected by you or a third-party partner during the normal course of delivering your program (e.g., start dates, participant enrolment).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track participant progress through a program (e.g. completion rates), outcomes (e.g., credential attainment), and participant demographics • Using administrative data can be a good way to leverage data that you or your partners already collect <p>Limitation: Administrative data may suffer from data entry errors and/or missing data</p>

The document concludes by explaining common risks and mitigation strategies organizations often use when implementing a program to help prime the grantee to think about what is applicable to them and their project (Table 3).

Table 3 • Risk and Mitigation Strategies

Possible Risks	Potential Mitigation Strategy
Lack of internal experience and capacity to implement the Evidence Generation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build team capacity with training • Leverage external expertise (e.g., Blueprint, partners, stakeholders, consultants) • Establish team roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines, and outline what is expected of each person on the team for evidence generation
Low response rate for evidence generation activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit more respondents than you think you will need, so if some drop out you will still have a sufficient amount • Incorporate evidence generation into program delivery where possible (e.g., administer surveys during the program on the first and last day) • Consider providing incentives to complete surveys, focus groups, etc. • Do online marketing through social media engagement and optimize website • Recruit participants through grassroots outreach to local neighbourhood organizations • Incentivize existing program participants to conduct word-of-mouth outreach to networks

Once the grantee has completed their Evidence Generation Form, the team at Blueprint reviews the submission to ensure the plan is responsive, effective and reasonable for the organization to achieve and will provide any necessary support and feedback to the organization to ensure success.

