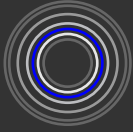


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Research Brief

Guiding Careers for the Future

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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.

About The Future Skills Centre

[The Future Skills Centre](#) 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 Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the [Government of Canada's Future Skills Program](#).

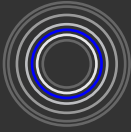
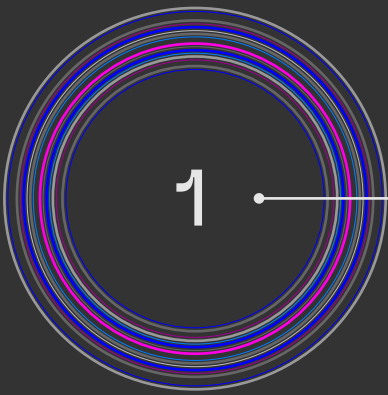


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Introduction



Introduction

Canadians need access to high-quality career guidance throughout their professional lives. Career guidance helps people adapt to the future of work, builds paths to lifelong learning, and closes skills mismatches in our labour market. But many adults don't have access to the supports needed to navigate their career paths.

The structure of career guidance services in Canada doesn't match the evolving world of working life. Currently, publicly funded employment and career services for older adults primarily focus on helping those who are unemployed quickly get work. These services are not well-suited for most working-age Canadians who are seeking career guidance – for example, people who are in precarious jobs or are changing industries.

At the same time, we know that more and more Canadians are changing jobs or industries throughout their working lives, and that for many, career transitions are the result of seismic shifts in the labour market – from increased automation, to the rise of the gig economy, to climate change. We know these changes are coming; yet we also know many working adults don't have access to the services and supports they need to prepare for and navigate these changes. There is an urgent need to act, to rethink how we support working adults to navigate career transitions and identify some promising ways to move forward.

That's why Blueprint is leading an initiative on behalf of the Future Skills Centre, working with partners across Canada to develop and test innovative career guidance models that can be delivered at scale. To start, we led a research program that explored the needs, gaps and opportunities in career guidance for adults in Canada.

Five key findings emerged from our research program:

1. Many Canadian adults are not aware of career guidance services and their potential benefits
2. Many Canadians face barriers to accessing personalized career guidance services
3. Current career and employment systems do not proactively support those already working, including workers in precarious and changing industries
4. Career development practitioners need more support and capacity to navigate the increasingly complex world of work
5. Publicly-funded services are not meeting the needs of employers and their employees

This research brief provides an overview of these key findings and introduces next steps for stakeholders across Canada to work together to chart a new path in career guidance.

I About Our Approach

Our research program addressed three overarching questions:

1. How do Canadians navigate their career paths and what barriers do they face along the way?
2. What role do our current career and employment services systems play in helping Canadians navigate their career paths?
3. What are promising service approaches, tools and resources for strengthening career guidance?

To explore these questions, we engaged **twelve Canadian and international experts** with diverse backgrounds in career development theory and practice, workforce development, research and policy analysis, behavioural science, and technology. We worked with these experts to co-create a research agenda and supported their research on specific topics aligned with their expertise. We also drew on our internal Blueprint team of expert researchers to address key questions that were part of our agenda.

This process resulted in [9 research papers](#) that provide a rich, detailed picture of the landscape of career guidance across Canada and highlight opportunities for innovation and systems change to improve supports and services for Canadians.

As part of this phase of work, we also partnered with the [Forge Institute](#) to host roundtable discussions with pan-Canadian stakeholders from government, industry, and service delivery. The roundtables explored stakeholder perspectives on how career services are organized, managed and delivered in Canada. They also generated ideas on ways to help ensure Canadians have the guidance and skills they need to make well-informed career choices in an ever-changing world. The key themes and findings from the roundtables are summarized in one of our research papers, [Building Responsive Career Pathways in a Post-Pandemic World](#).

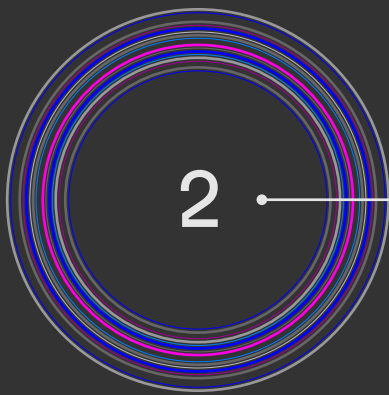
We also worked closely with the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) and the Future Skills Centre to integrate their [survey findings on the use of career services in Canada](#) into our work.

I About Career Guidance

Career guidance refers to services and activities that are designed to guide individuals in making educational, training, and occupational choices. These services and activities are provided by a range of different actors (including publicly-funded employment services, schools, employers and the private sector) and are offered through multiple channels including face-to-face services and technological platforms.

A growing body of research suggests that career guidance plays a pivotal role in supporting employment and career transitions. Career guidance can reduce barriers to information, training, and employment, allowing individuals to identify opportunities and successfully navigate their career pathways (OECD, 2021). There is also emerging evidence that career guidance increases confidence, encourages self-awareness, and boosts self-efficacy – which results in more effective decision-making in training and occupation choices over the long term (Carpentieri, et.al, 2018).

Increasingly, stakeholders in Canada and internationally are recognizing that career guidance is a key policy lever in preparing for the future of work, especially in the context of the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an international survey of career guidance practitioners, policy officials, and researchers, 40% of respondents reported that career guidance had received policy attention from government during the pandemic (Siebel et al., 2020). Respondents, especially policy professionals, stated that career guidance measures were important to achieving policy aims including supporting upskilling and reskilling, combatting unemployment, supporting youth employment, encouraging effective skills training, and increasing labour market efficiency (Siebel, et al, 2020).



2

Findings: Key Challenges
and Opportunities in
Career Guidances



Findings: Key Challenges and Opportunities in Career Guidance

Many Canadian adults are not aware of career guidance services and their potential benefits

Career guidance can be a powerful tool to help Canadian workers understand labour market changes, evaluate their options and plan next steps in their careers. But only 17% of Canadian adults over 25 used career services in the last five years, compared to an average of 44% across six OECD countries¹ ([LMIC, 2021](#); [OECD, 2021](#)). Compared to adults from other peer jurisdictions, Canadian workers are not actively using career services to help navigate their career pathways.

Our researchers reviewed the evidence on barriers to career development across jurisdictions and found that a large part of the problem might be a lack of awareness about the existence and value of career guidance services in Canada ([Irwin, Lipsey and Coronel, 2021](#)). A recent LMIC ([2021](#)) survey shows that of Canadian respondents who did not use career guidance services, 21% did not know that services existed. Of these respondents, 44% had lower education and 54% had lower household income – both groups that are vulnerable to future labour market disruptions ([LMIC, 2021](#)). This indicates that some groups who would most benefit from career guidance are also the least likely to know about services ([Irwin, Lipsey and Coronel, 2021](#)).

Even people who are aware of career guidance services can be skeptical about their usefulness, applicability, and benefits ([Irwin, Lipsey and Coronel, 2021](#)). In fact, 40% of Canadians who did not use career guidance services reported that “they did not feel the need to” ([LMIC, 2021](#)). These respondents disproportionately included people who were older, those with lower education attainment and those with lower household income ([LMIC, 2021](#)). Through a review of the literature on behavioural and motivational barriers to career guidance, our researchers found that such attitudes are also compounded by perceived stigma associated with using social services and people’s overestimation of their capacity to conduct career guidance activities independently ([Tregebov, Seusan & Krieger, 2021](#)).

Many Canadians face barriers to accessing personalized career guidance services

Canadians who have childcare responsibilities, lack access to reliable transportation, are pre-occupied with existing work obligations, or are unable to afford high costs of private career services, all face barriers to accessing career guidance services ([Irwin, Lipsey & Coronel, 2021](#)). Our research found that these challenges are heightened for equity-seeking groups – including women, racialized people, people with disabilities and people with intersectional identities – who are more likely to experience intersectional marginalization and barriers to work ([Zhong & Shetty, 2021](#)).

One strategy for expanding access to career guidance is to offer guidance through technological tools. In recent years there has been a proliferation of technological tools that use tools, databases, and resources to support self-led career guidance. However, interviews, marketplace scans, and literature

¹ The six countries surveyed in the 2020 OECD Survey of Career Guidance for Adults include Italy, Chile, France, Germany, New Zealand, and United States.

reviews on Canada's education and training marketplace conducted by one of our research teams revealed that the data and information that these technological products leverage, such as information on education and training options, tend to be fragmented and inconsistent ([Côté, Olsen & Hirsch-Allen, 2021](#)). Notably, as all 13 provinces and territories use different system structures, taxonomies, and terminologies to define and govern education and training markets in their jurisdictions, data collection and cross comparison of skill development opportunities is highly challenging. Currently, there is “no common, comprehensive and open repository of education information” for all of Canada ([Côté, Olsen & Hirsch-Allen, 2021, p.17](#)). In addition to data collection challenges, our researchers also found that few technological products focused on career guidance are designed to process data in a way that can provide nuanced, tailored, and personalized career navigation advice beyond data-based occupational sorting ([Berres, 2021](#)). Moreover, technological tools for self-led career guidance require both digital literacy and consistent digital access, which can disadvantage Canadians who are older, those who are rural or remote, and those who have low-income ([Irwin, Lipsey & Coronel, 2021](#); [Zhong & Shetty, 2021](#)).

Current career and employment systems do not proactively support those already working, including workers in precarious or changing industries

Canada's current employment and career services are largely oriented towards helping people who are unemployed. In our roundtable consultations with stakeholders in the workforce development ecosystem, several noted that this “fail-first” approach requires workers to wait until they are in crisis before they are able to access or benefit from services ([McKenzie & Goddard, 2021](#)). Insights from behavioural science show that this approach is far from optimal. For instance, the stress associated with unemployment and lack of stable income can result in a scarcity-induced cognitive load that increases one's tendency to prioritize short-term employment gains over long-term career benefits ([Tregebov, Seusan & Krieger, 2021](#)).

In addition to being reactive, rather than proactive, Canada's employment service systems also tend to prioritize helping individuals re-enter the labour market as quickly as possible. Through our stakeholder roundtables, we heard that a more holistic, person-centered, lifelong approach to career guidance could reduce “churn” in the system and help set individuals on meaningful and sustainable career pathways ([McKenzie & Goddard, 2021](#)).

Career development practitioners need support and capacity to navigate an increasingly complex world of work

Canada's current systems have few mechanisms or supports in place to ensure that career development practitioners (CDPs) have the necessary skills and competencies to deliver high-quality career guidance. Unlike other professions, CDPs are not regulated at the federal level or in any provinces except Québec. And while voluntary certification is available in eight provinces, uptake is low ([Bimrose & Goddard, 2021](#)). Furthermore, a CERIC (2019) survey found that 29.9% of CDPs in Canada spend less than one hour per month on career development ([Bimrose & Goddard, 2021](#)).

The complex needs of service users within an increasingly volatile labour market also means that CDPs' responsibilities are growing in scope and sophistication (see Box 1 for more details). But literature

reviews, roundtables, and key informant interviews conducted by our researchers have shown that investments in professional development opportunities have not been sufficient for practitioners to acquire and update the skills necessary to navigate these changes ([Bimrose & Goddard, 2021](#)). Across intersecting focus areas, our research found that while CDPs recognize the need for professional development and training opportunities to improve their capacity to support clients, they find opportunities to be limited, inaccessible and inconsistent ([Bimrose & Goddard, 2021](#); [Côté, Olsen & Hirsch-Allen, 2021](#); [McKenzie & Goddard, 2021](#)).

Publicly-funded services are not meeting the needs of employers and their employees

Employers are an important source of career guidance, but in our stakeholder roundtables and in conversations with employers, we heard that many are currently ill-equipped to meaningfully help employees navigate their career paths ([Pasolli & Cumming, 2021](#)). This is especially true for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which often lack the workforce planning expertise to define what skills their organizations need now and in the future ([McKenzie & Goddard, 2021](#)).

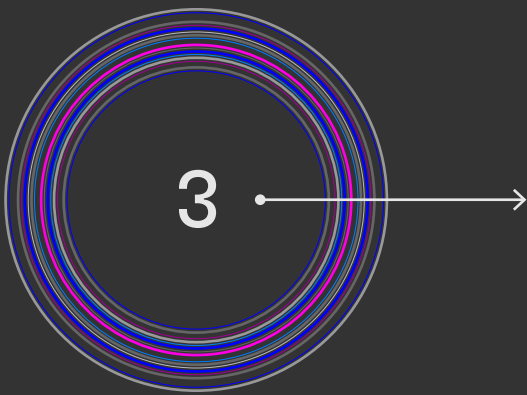
Our researchers found that this challenge is compounded by the lack of coordination between employers and the publicly-funded employment service system, including services delivered through public agencies and government-funded services delivered by community organizations, to facilitate high-quality service offerings ([Pasolli & Cumming, 2021](#)). There are gaps in information sharing, integration of services, and effective communication between the private and public sectors, especially around preparing for disruption. To help employers, their employees, and jobseekers prepare for the future of work, we need more collaborative, proactive workforce planning to create seamless career and training pathways ([Pasolli & Cumming, 2021](#)).

Encouragingly, some employers have already recognized the need to invest in career guidance and training to ensure a resilient workforce. Conversations with employers revealed that some organizations have begun to experiment with strategies like mapping non-linear career transitions within their business, building transferable soft skills and providing new “out-skilling” supports for employees who may be facing disruption in the future ([Pasolli & Cumming, 2021](#)).

BOX 1 – KEY CDP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Throughout our research program's investigation into CDPs, several key skills and competencies emerged as important areas of need:

- **Incorporating information and communications technology (ICT) into services:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of ICT in the delivery of career guidance. Increased familiarity and use of these technologies are expected to change the ways in which CDPs interact and interface with clients. As a result, the career development workforce will require additional skills, knowledge and training to effectively utilize digital technology in services (Bimrose & Goddard, 2021).
- **Interpreting and mobilizing labour market information (LMI):** While 95% of career practitioners in Canada use some sort of LMI to advise clients, only 60% of practitioners said that existing LMI is easy to understand (LMIC, 2019). This signals not only the need for CDPs to increase competencies in interpreting LMI, but also for LMI providers to improve the clarity and usability of the information they provide (Sayedi & Ansel, 2021). There is an opportunity for practitioners and LMI providers to collaboratively design data communication and interpretation tools and processes to fully leverage the power of LMI in career guidance.
- **Using career guidance technologies and tools:** CDPs report using different sets of tools and technologies to help clients identify their career needs and pathways (Côté, Olsen & Hirsch-Allen, 2021). However, there is a lack of consistency in how CDPs use these tools and methods to support clients. As the career guidance technological market continues to develop and grow, CDPs will need support to effectively leverage these tools for career guidance (Berres, 2021).
- **Mental health support:** In a survey (n=188) conducted by Côté, Olsen & Hirsch-Allen (2021), career development practitioners shared a desire for more support to support clients with mental health needs. This sentiment was also echoed by stakeholder roundtable participants, who saw an increasing demand for CDPs to develop skills and competencies around mental health.
- **Anti-oppression and cultural competencies:** Recognizing that many clients are members of equity-seeking groups, participants of our stakeholder roundtables underscored the importance of training for practitioners on anti-racism, anti-oppression and culturally competent practice.



Where Do We
Go From Here?



Where Do We Go From Here?

Our research findings highlight the increasing importance of career guidance and the critical role it can and should play in building our collective resilience to the future of work.

We identified **four key conclusions**, which we consider a call to action for stakeholders in the career guidance ecosystem:

- **“Career guidance for all” is critical to preparing for the future of work.** We need all Canadians, including working-age and mid-career Canadians, to have access to personalized, high-quality career guidance that aligns with their level of need and helps them navigate career transitions.
- **We need new approaches to working with employers.** We have a significant opportunity to experiment with new models of public-private collaboration that help us reach workers before they are in crisis and develop a strong pipeline of in-demand talent for employers
- **Well-trained and well-resourced career development practitioners are key to an inclusive system.** We need to support and elevate those who provide career guidance to ensure high-quality services for Canadians.
- **Pilots will not be enough.** While piloting new service models is critical for testing and learning, we need to pay attention to scaling solutions that work to make meaningful and sustainable change. Preparing our workforce for the future means building impactful approaches at a systems level.

To realize this call to action, and to chart the path forward for career guidance in Canada, Blueprint and FSC are engaging stakeholders across the country to discover innovative and inclusive approaches to career guidance. Our goal is to continue working with partners to learn from their experience and realize a shared vision for career guidance that works.

Already we’re working with partners and stakeholders across Canada to explore opportunities to **develop and test scalable** innovations that will help us realize this goal:

- Through our **Career Hubs of the Future** innovation stream, we are working with partners to design innovative service approaches that provide career guidance to people at all stages of their career journey.
- Through our **Employer Partnership** innovation stream, we are testing approaches that proactively engage employers and workers facing changes – turning these changes into opportunities instead of crises.
- Through our **Career Development Capacity** innovation stream, we are working with partners to build and test ideas to offer quality, consistent, and accessible training for career practitioners.

We want to keep building on this momentum and create new opportunities for creative conversation and collaboration across the skills and employment ecosystem. To help Canadians meet the workforce demands of the future, we need to collectively reimagine career guidance today.

I Interested in learning more?

We'd love to continue the conversation. If you'd like to learn more about this initiative, please reach out to:

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