



For provincial, territorial & federal policymakers

Applying Behavioural Insights to Labour Market Challenges:

Increasing Employment and Career Services Participation





The opportunity

Employment and career services benefit unemployed Canadians, helping them return to work faster and earn more.

However, only 27% of unemployed Canadians used these services in the last 5 years ([Future Skills Centre, 2021](#)).

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) partnered with the Future Skills Centre and the Governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan to **develop and test ways to increase uptake**. We focused on the **timing and content of emails** sent to recent EI applicants, leveraging the Targeting, Referral, and Feedback (TRF) database.



What did we do?

1. **Reviewed the existing evidence base (50+ studies)** on what influences uptake.
2. **Interviewed practitioners & jobseekers** to identify key barriers and enablers to uptake.
3. **Tested follow-up emails in Saskatchewan** through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) with 1,491 jobseekers; **designed and implemented a new initial outreach email**.
4. **Designed and tested three new email templates for initial outreach** through an RCT with 10 service providers and 4,364 jobseekers in Alberta.



Why it matters

- **Keep outreach communications simple, concise, and personalized** and convey the legitimacy of the service (see the following pages for more detail on these design principles and for templates).
- **Follow up with jobseekers if they do not respond to initial messages** by sending an email 4-10 weeks after initial outreach, supporting jobseekers who are not ready or motivated immediately after job loss.
- **Provide flexible service offerings**, including virtual and phone appointments, non-standard hours, and drop-in services. Offer services in convenient locations that are accessible by public transportation.
- **Use multiple channels to reach jobseekers:** SMS messages are an underutilized channel with demonstrated success reaching jobseekers, but should be combined with email to support legitimacy.

Suggestions for Policymakers:**Refining Targeting, Referral, & Feedback Administration**

The following policy and program suggestions could enable all employment and career services providers to better utilize the TRF database. Many of these suggestions may also apply to other referral pathways.

**Provincial & territorial governments using TRF:**

- **Reduce administrative burdens** if third-party providers are contracted to access and use the TRF system (for example, streamlining the onboarding process).
- **Provide guidance and templates for service provider outreach**, using the principles and templates developed in this project. Ensure that paperwork uses respectful language that empowers jobseekers.
- **Encourage or require providers to implement follow-up communications** for TRF referrals that do not immediately convert to service.
- **Enable better data quality and tracking** to help service providers understand what outreach strategies are working for whom. E.g., a provincial data hub allowing providers to view aggregated historical data.
- **Provide evaluation tools, guidance, and resources** to help providers test different strategies, then create forums for sharing what works.

**Federal government (ESDC):**

- **Better signal the possibility of TRF outreach during the EI application process** so that jobseekers expect communications from providers and are more likely to perceive outreach as legitimate.
- **Improve data quality** to enhance targeting. Apply form design best practices (e.g., wayfinding, worked examples, smart suggestions) to enhance the quality of contact details and NOC codes, among other data points obtained during the EI application process. Consider providing data to provinces on benefits exhaustion.
- **More ambitiously consider combining EI application with registration for career services** through a collaborative pilot with one or more provinces. Consider defaulting some EI applicants into service and automating appointment times (with simple cancellation or rebooking processes).
- **Clarify guidelines** to encourage providers to follow up with TRF referrals that do not convert to service.
- **Develop infrastructure for continued learning and sharing of effective practices** for boosting uptake. This would bring together policymakers and providers to establish R&D priorities, disseminate findings and resources, provide tools for evaluation, and support technology adoption.



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



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