



For Employment & Career Services Providers

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 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 and jobseekers** to identify key barriers and enablers to uptake.
3. **Tested follow-up emails in Saskatchewan** through an randomized controlled trials (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.



What you need to know

- **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.

Best practices for career and employment service providers:

Enhancing Communications and Outreach Efforts

- ✔ **Emphasize trust and legitimacy by clarifying your connection to government.** Outreach emails may be seen as spam or a scam, particularly unexpected TRF outreach; use logos or other signifiers of legitimacy and compelling subject lines that avoid marketing language.
- ✔ **Highlight services that are most compelling to jobseekers,** such as connections to employers, financial supports, flexible service offerings, and access to training.

- ✔ **Keep outreach simple & concise.** Remove jargon and complex terms, keep sentences and paragraphs concise, and ensure readability is at a Grade 6 level.
- ✔ **Include a clear call to action.** Bold exactly what you want recipients to do next, making sure that it is the focus of attention. Group all relevant details about next steps in one place.
- ✔ **Personalize outreach communications** by including the first name of the recipient and the sender, where possible, as well as tailoring content to jobseekers, by NOC code, for example.

Here are three templates that use these best practices:

1. Initial outreach email A

Subject line: [First name], the job market is changing

Hello [First name],

You have received this email because you recently applied for Employment Insurance (EI) with Service Canada.

What employers are looking for is changing. Don't get left behind. At [provider name], we help give you an edge in this competitive job market.

We are experts that provide:

- Connections with **employers**
- **Free**, personalized services, like [career counselling and resume help]
- Valuable opportunities, like **[training]**
- **[Phone, online or in-person]** services

Call [555-5555] to speak with a team member today.

In the meantime, here are some resources that may be helpful in your job search:

- [\[link to training and employment services directory\]](#)
- [\[link to provincial and regional job banks\]](#)

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[provincial logo]

[personal signature block]

Changing standards

- Creates a sense of **urgency**. People are motivated to act if they anticipate future regret.
- Boosts the **perceived value** of employment services.
- **Challenges misperceptions** about static service offerings
- Lists **key benefits**, since many people think of employment services narrowly.
- Includes best practices from behavioural science, like **personalization, simple and concise** language, **legitimacy** from logos, and a clear **call to action**.

Subject line: [First name], you're one step away from valuable job resources!

Hello [First name],

You have received this email because you recently applied for Employment Insurance (EI) with Service Canada.

Thank you for taking this first step. I recognize this may be a difficult time for you.

I wanted to let you know about [provider name], a government-funded service that may also be helpful. We're here to assist, whether you want to improve your skills, explore career options, or find a job when the time is right.

Take one final step to access job training and direct links to employers.

- 1. Applied to federal benefits
- 2. Opened this email.
- 3. Call [555-5555] to speak with a team member today.

Why use [provider name]?

- Connections with **employers**
- **Free**, personalized services, like [career counselling and resume help]
- Valuable opportunities, like **[training]**
- **[Phone, online or in-person]** services

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[provincial logo]

[personal signature block]

2. Initial outreach email B

Checklist

- Leverages **set completion**. People like to finish an incomplete process.
- Boosts the **perceived value** of employment services.
- Uses **empathy** while creating agency to take the next step.
- Lists **key benefits**, since many people think of employment services narrowly.
- Includes best practices from behavioural science, like **personalization, simple** and **concise** language, **legitimacy** from logos, and a clear **call to action**.

Subject line: [First name], [provider name] is waiting to hear from you!

Hello [First name],

In case you missed our last email, here's a quick reminder that we're here to help you find your next job.

Why [provider name]? We've helped [hundreds] of people with:

- Connections with **employers**
- **Free**, personalized services, like [career counselling and resume help]
- Valuable opportunities, like [training]
- [Phone, online or in-person] services

Call [555-5555] to speak with a team member today. If you haven't signed up yet, let's get started.

Looking forward to meeting you!

Working in partnership with:

Canada 

[provincial logo]

[personal signature block]

3. Follow-up email

Send follow-ups 10 weeks after your initial outreach. Use the template below:

- Creates a sense of **urgency**. People are motivated to act if they anticipate future regret.
- Leverages **social norms**. People are influenced by what others are doing.
- Includes **personalization** with first names, **simple** and **concise** language, friendly tone, **legitimacy** from logos, and a clear **call to action**.
- Lists **key benefits**, since many people do not know the range of employment services.

Recommendations for Operations

Beyond communications and outreach, **operational changes are a key pathway to address barriers to uptake.** We present recommendations by stage in the journey into service. They are based on our evidence review, expert interviews, jobseekers interviews, and trial results.

Referrals

- **Leverage existing networks to reach jobseekers**, like implementing programs that incentivize word-of-mouth referrals by current and former clients or building relationships with organizations that jobseekers may already be associated with for targeted outreach.

Outreach Communications

- **Use email platform technology**, where possible, for personalization (like the first names of recipient and sender) and content tailored to jobseekers (like local office or industry-relevant information).
- **Regularly assess success** of any adjustments to communications (with A/B testing and click-through data), taking into consideration current labour market conditions.
- **Consider mobile capabilities** for SMS outreach (paired with email for legitimacy) or step-by-step SMS reminders once jobseekers are on the journey into service.
- **Optimize for different digital displays**, like various screen sizes and email providers, with email subject lines that front-load key information (in the first 30 characters) and email text that delivers the same sense of legitimacy to jobseekers even if images (like logos) are blocked.

Registration

- **Simplify the process for jobseekers** by reducing steps, minimizing requests for documents and information, especially sensitive information, before a first appointment, and providing assistance with what to do when (like visuals that clearly show the process or one-on-one assistance from a staff member to complete key steps).
- **Reduce the time between registration and a first appointment**, ideally with same-day time slots.

Access and Retention

- Alleviate barriers related to costs by offering financial support for transportation (like taxi vouchers) or caregivers so that jobseekers can attend appointments, job fairs, or interviews.
- Look at other parts of the pathway to uncover reasons that people drop off after registration and address pain points (like enhancing call scripts and re-engaging jobseekers at timely moments).



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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