



NEWCOMER EMPLOYEMNT RESILIENCE NETWORK NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (NERNNL)

**PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT
MARCH 2023**



**Presented To
AXIS CAREER SERVICES
ASSOCIATION FOR NEW CANADIANS
Presented By
LENNIKA CONSULTING INC.**

Acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge the land on which we gather as the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk, whose culture has been lost forever and can never be recovered. We also acknowledge the island of Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland) as the unceded, traditional territory of the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq, and we acknowledge Labrador as the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Innu of Nitassinan, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, and the Inuit of NunatuKavut.

Executive Summary

In March 2023, the Association for New Canadians (ANC) Employment Services division (formerly AXIS Career Services) completed a two-year project, Newcomer Employment Resilience Network Newfoundland and Labrador (NERN-NL), funded and supported by the Future Skills Centre (FSC). The project aimed to mobilize key stakeholders/employers and newcomer professionals in regulated and non-regulated professions to work together to build resilience in the face of social and economic shock. The network focused on specific industries that were significantly affected by Covid-19 either by increased demand or layoffs, namely the IT sector, financial sector, and natural resources/R&D sector. To this end, the ANC organized and delivered dozens of activities, including networking events, in-person and virtual industry-specific sessions and workshops, and mentoring. These undertakings encouraged knowledge exchange and collaboration across three levels of the skills eco system - individual, organizational, and systemic – to improve career pathways for newcomer professionals and revive the local labour market. Over the two-year period, the ANC mobilized close to 300 individuals, including 170 newcomer professionals and over 60 local companies, employers, and stakeholders. The partners ranged from municipal representatives, CEOs of local corporations and smaller enterprises, regulatory bodies, professional associations, not-for-profit agencies, educational institutions, and many more.

At the end of the project, Lennika Consulting Inc. conducted an evaluation to critically examine the effectiveness of the network and the benefits of this undertaking for all the stakeholders and the host organization. Lennika completed a key stakeholder survey, in-depth interviews with the NERN team, analyzed the mentoring exit surveys and other mentoring feedback, reviewed event feedback, and examined the notes collected through observation and staff meetings.

Key findings

Over the last two years, NERN has made significant impact on and created value for the many different stakeholders who took part in the networking project.

- i) The ANC experienced a significant outcome through enhanced employer engagement as a result of the project. In terms of network implementation and expansion, the ANC exceeded the initial participant estimates outlined in the proposal. Although engaging employers posed some challenges initially, by the project's conclusion, local stakeholders proactively reached out to the ANC, referring and recommending their peers to join the network. This demonstrates the substantial growth potential of employment support networks when they are given sufficient time and attention for development and nurturing.
- ii) Local employers and other key stakeholders indicated substantial increase in their awareness of newcomer skills, talent, and potential while engaging in NERN activities and collaborating with the ANC. Through NERN and the ANC employment training programs, local employers and businesses have also discovered new pathways to address newcomer job seekers and potential employees' reskilling and upskilling for

- optimal skills matching in the current labour market and for the future. 60% of the core networking group said that their relationship with the ANC improved over the last two years, and that they would like to continue this collaboration.
- iii) Newcomer participants experienced increased connectivity and improved access to organizations and HR professionals who could provide first-hand knowledge and information about employment opportunities. This helped newcomers gain better understanding of the workplace requirements and skills requirements in the post-Covid period. When asked if the mentorship program met their expectations, over 2/3 of the respondents said that it either met or exceeded their expectations. Almost half of the mentoring participants secured employment in their professions, as a direct result of being part of NERN.
 - iv) Community agencies can play an important role in creating social capital through networking initiatives and collaboration in order to build economic resilience on a local level. Through building partnerships with private sector and government agencies, community service groups are well positioned to create social structures and pathways that facilitate action such as labour market participation or skills development for new job seekers.

The NERN team has also observed additional ways for project improvement, such as intensified marketing and promotion through social media channels, wider organizational engagement, and inclusion of other professions experiencing labour shortages.

The ANC Employment Services division aims to incorporate networking into its long-term strategic plan, leveraging the success of this approach in employer engagement to tackle ongoing and future labor market challenges across diverse professions and industries within the province.

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1. Introduction

1.1 About the Association for New Canadians Employment Services Division

Association for New Canadians (ANC) is a community-based organization delivering settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Employment Services division (formerly AXIS Career Services) has been assisting newcomers in the province for almost 30 years by providing customized, career-focused pre-employment programs and services to facilitate sustainable labour market attachment for our immigrant community. Each year, the organization assists approximately 700 newcomers, including internationally trained professionals, international students, and entrepreneurs looking to start businesses in our province. The division offers in-house programs, as well as online training for those at home or outside of the province. Some of the programs offered include workforce connections, career essentials e-learning and e-mentoring, internship placement program, financial literacy training, workplace communication and integration training program, occupational specific language training, IELTS preparation, and more.

1.2 Project Background

In May 2020, the Future Skills Centre (FSC) announced an investment of \$15 million in innovative projects to support workers in hard-hit sectors and build resiliency in the face of social and economic shock. As a pan-Canadian initiative, FSC was seeking new ideas for research, network development, and innovation pilot projects across Canada through *the Shock-proofing the Future of Work: Skills Innovation Challenge* call for proposal. The purpose of the challenge was to address the needs of various sectors, regions, and/or populations for skills development and training to ensure that local, regional, and national economies thrive.

While engaging and assisting job seekers during the early stages of the pandemic and lockdowns in the province, the ANC Employment Services observed how COVID-19 impacted the labour market for highly trained newcomers with work experience in professions such as IT, research, oil and gas, or finance, and in both regulated and non-regulated professions. While some struggled to stay connected to their industry in the midst of layoffs and closures, others experienced challenges as they switched to working from home. At the same time, employers were faced with the new responsibility to manage abrupt change within their workplace. It was evident that there was a need for additional supports and workforce connections for both newcomer professionals and local businesses. The ANC employment division responded to the FSC call for proposals and was selected among 64 national organizations to deliver a two-year,

networks-based project, “**Newcomer Employment Resilience Network Newfoundland and Labrador (NERNNL): Optimizing Connections; Making the Match**”. The proposed network would provide employment support and engage stakeholders, professional organizations, regulators, employers, and training providers to maximize newcomers’ existing skills while developing the resilience sought by employers today and in the future. At the same time, the organization planned to leverage its resources and expertise to support small and medium businesses and other companies in need as they pivoted their operations, assessed their skill demands, and adapted flexible working and hiring practices.

NERN project was implemented between **March 5, 2021 and March 31, 2023**. The project team consisted of a NERN Project Coordinator, ANC Employment Development Manager, and ANC Employment Director, supported by the NERNNL Advisory Committee and project partner, Lennika Consulting Inc. The network consisted of a core stakeholder group with industry champions and newcomer peer-champions, and three industry-specific sub-networks representing IT, natural resources, and finance (Table 1).

At the start of the project, a project partner Lennika Consulting Inc. conducted a needs assessment in order to gain a better understanding of the needs of those who are active in the labour market and affected by Covid-19, and to identify major issues and barriers in skills development and labour market participation, specifically for non-regulated professions. An initial review of evidence confirmed that more supports are needed for highly trained newcomers in non-regulated professions, e.g., professions in the areas of information technology, research, oil and gas, and the financial service sector. The review also emphasized the importance of connectivity within a local labour market to boost social and economic resilience. Through key stakeholder/employer consultations, environmental scan, and interviews with newcomers, the assessment confirmed that Covid-19 made the job search and recruitment process quite challenging. The onboarding process for recent hires was affected by the lack of daily support and job shadowing opportunities. The uncertainty made employers terminate ongoing hiring processes and focus on crisis management. By establishing a supportive employment network connecting job seekers to employers, and supporting employers in meeting their demands, the ANC was on the right track to foster resilience, reduce social isolation, and maintain newcomer connection to the labour market.

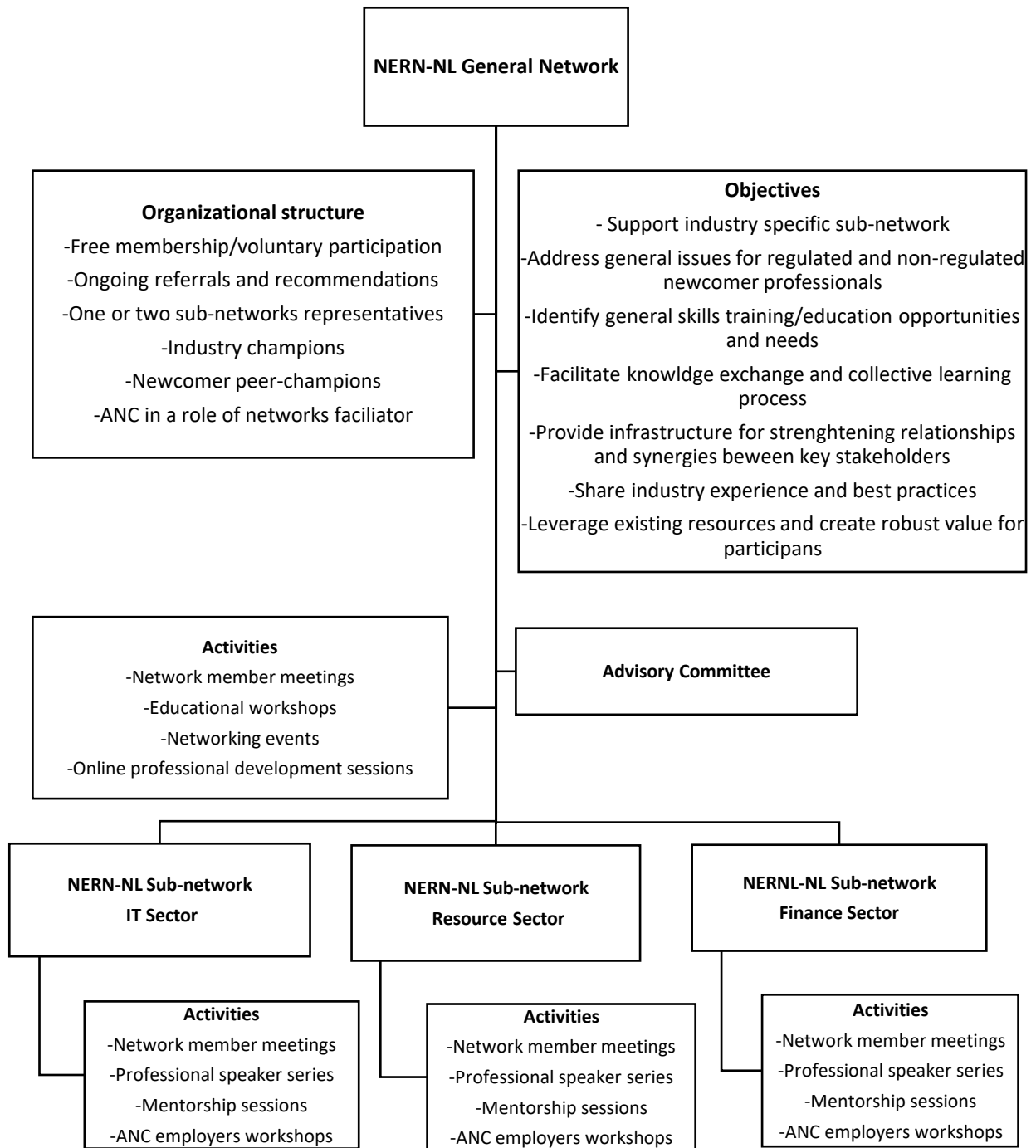


Table 1. NERNNL Structure

1.3 NL Economic Context

The idea for an employment support network was born within the context of imposed social isolation and economic downturn in order to re-activate labour market participation and keep prospective job seekers connected, up-to-date, and hopeful. Like the rest of our country, NL's labour market has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, resulting in industry shifts and changes. While some areas saw unprecedented growth, others have struggled to regain the same level of economic activity post-pandemic. The unemployment rate climbed in 2020 to 14.1%, as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the economy (Statistics Canada, 2020). Approximately 13,000 mostly full-time jobs were lost. In 2022, however, the provincial economy has added over 7,000 jobs, considerably lowering its unemployment rate. The rate is still significantly higher than the national average (10.7% vs. 5.1%); and the labour market participation rate remains low in comparison as well (56.4% vs. 64.8%) (Statistics Canada, 2022). On the positive side, the NL population grew to 525,927 in 2022, which is over a 1% increase from the previous year, and this gain was mostly due to migration to the province (NLSA, 2022). Continuing to increase the arrival of immigrants is a goal supported by many local stakeholders, including employers, academics, and opposition parties (Employers' Council of NL, 2020; CBC 2022a). Having met the goal of welcoming 1700 newcomers annually by 2020, the provincial government has set a new goal to triple the current immigration target to 5100 newcomers per year by 2026 (Gov NL, 2022a).

While the provincial economy has challenges, there are many dynamic areas that require skilled workers. There is a vibrant and expanding technology sector. The province is specifically targeting the recruitment and immigration of software developers and engineers (Immigration.ca, 2021). A recent review by the U.S. consulting firm McKinsey & Company (2019) identified several key areas of potential economic growth and diversification. The federal government recently approved the Bay du Nord offshore oil megaproject. In addition, a return to full operations for the Terra Nova and White Rose projects has increased overall oil production. Hydroelectric power from Muskrat Falls is now available. The province's mining industry is expanding, with construction on the province's new Valentine Lake gold mine set to begin. Wind, hydrogen, and other clean energy projects in the transition to the Net-Zero economy are underway and will create new jobs and require new skills to further develop these vital technologies. According to a recent publication by the Canadian Climate Institute (2022), lack of skilled labour is a barrier to scaling clean growth in every province. There is a renewed effort to return the tourism industry to pre-pandemic levels. Finally, Memorial University remains a significant economic driver, adding \$627 millions annually to the provincial economy and supporting nearly 10,000 jobs (KPMG, 2021).

All of these positions will likely need to be filled to large extent through migration to the province. Recognizing this situation, the provincial government, regulatory bodies, and other key stakeholders are developing and enhancing targeted supports and services for education, training, upskilling, and reskilling of newcomer professionals and international graduates already living in the province, as well as those planning to immigrate to NL. Given the underlying demographics, economic trends, and opportunities open to the province, it is expected that these efforts to improve and streamline the pathways for newcomer professionals to work in their chosen field will continue and expand further over the coming years. Considering the economic environment of the past two years, NERN has been delivered at a critical point in the transition from an initial economic shock and decline to the recovery and steady growth.

1.4 Project Objectives

NERN project aims to mobilize and engage employers, industry experts, and newcomer professionals with skills and competences to create opportunities for knowledge exchange, upskilling, re-skilling, and successful labour market attachment. The partners range from municipal representatives, CEOs of local corporations and smaller enterprises, regulatory bodies, professional associations, not-for-profit agencies, educational institutions, and many more.

The project's key objectives, as outlined in the proposal, are:

- To establish a vibrant network of professional organizations, community partners, employers, and key stakeholders engaged in meaningful collaboration to offer intentional and purposeful supports to facilitate labour market attachment of newcomer professionals
- To organize and facilitate networking events, industry-specific workshops, and professional speaker series to support knowledge exchange, skills development, licensure and job matching supports
- To collaboratively find leveraging points for successful interventions to ensure positive labour market outcomes
- To raise awareness of the existing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling of newcomer professionals, foster resilience and reduce risk of social isolation
- To connect and actively engage 150 newcomer professionals in sub-networks representing the IT, Natural Resources, and Finance sectors; to support newcomers in developing their skills and resiliency, and enhance their ability to successfully adapt to today's evolving labour market
- To match and connect 45 mentees to industry experts and professionals in order to expand their skills, gain confidence, obtain first-hand knowledge regarding current

workplace demands, and strengthen their professional relationships to advance their careers; to complete a 3-month mentorship

1.5 Importance of evaluating the project's effectiveness and impact

One of the key aspects of this final evaluation of the project is enabling the engagement of all stakeholders and participants in the assessment process. Their experience and feedback are important considerations in shaping future interventions. In addition, this fosters a sense of ownership and a sense of trust among partners and participants, leading to increased collaboration and long-term commitment. Furthermore, this evaluation generates knowledge and insights that can contribute to the broader understanding of effective strategies for connecting employers, service providers, and newcomer job seekers. The project can contribute to the body of evidence on best practices and inform similar initiatives in different contexts or regions.

2. Evaluation

2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation report aims to critically examine the effectiveness and impact of the two-year project, understand the challenges and opportunities, and inform the next steps. In the project proposal, Lennika Consulting Inc. was identified as the project evaluator. Together with the NERN Project Coordinator, Lennika conducted ongoing activity assessments and observations throughout the implementation and delivery phase of the project to better understand how the network was taking shape, and how to maximize the ongoing success of the project. The final evaluation aims to determine the extent to which the project goals were met, identify factors that contributed to the success of the project, and learn about the key lessons and takeaways.

2.2 Scope of the Evaluation

In line with the evaluation objective, the scope of the evaluation covers all the activities conducted throughout the project, including networking events, professional workshops, and mentoring. In addition, as the project heavily depended on the continuous engagement of team members,

Evaluation focused on several key indicators:

- network implementation and growth
- activity impact on engagement and connectivity
- stakeholder engagement and satisfaction
- project delivery and management - understanding the successes, gaps, and opportunities; and
- sustainability of developed networking infrastructure.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

For this evaluation, the data collection methods were determined based on the key indicators (Table 2). In order to determine the participation and engagement rate and determine whether the project goals were met, we reviewed the data collected throughout the two-year period, including: FSC quarterly reports, feedback surveys, exit surveys, notes and reflections, and comments shared through social media platforms.

In additions, we conducted in-depth interviews with the NERN ANC team to gain a better understanding of the successes and challenges during the project delivery, and to learn about their experience of developing collaborative networks within a designated framework.

Indicators	Method	Data Source
Participation and engagement rate	Surveys, interviews, document reviews	Employers/stakeholders, newcomer professionals, staff
Activity impact on engagement, professional growth, skills development	Surveys, interviews, document reviews	Employers/stakeholders, newcomer professionals, staff
Employer/stakeholder engagement	Interviews and surveys	Mentors, mentees, staff
NERNNL efficiency, relevance, and sustainability (successes and gaps)	Interviews and document reviews	NERNNL team

Table 2. Data collection methods based on the key indicators

3. Project Implementation Assessment

3.1 Project Activities and Deliverables

Conclusive with March 31, 2023, NERN has engaged almost 300 individuals on a regular basis in knowledge exchange and skills development activities, learning opportunities, mentoring, and more. The participation data was collected by the Project Coordinator over the two-year period. The project engaged and supported **167 newcomer** professionals from the three specified sectors. NERN engaged approximately **115 employers, stakeholders, and industry experts** from **65 different companies** representing the three sectors (Appendix A).

Networking participation and engagement had a relatively slow start, but later intensified and exceeded expected outcomes. The rate of participation in NERN for both newcomer professionals and employers had been consistently growing over the past two years, which is documented through quarterly reporting to the FSC. This was not surprising considering the team effort to reach out to as many potential partners as possible, but also considering the changes in the labour market circumstances, nationally and in the province. Statistics Canada (2022) reported that the demand for workers accelerated to record levels during the second half of 2021, and that the “job vacancies in the third quarter rose over 60% compared with pre-pandemic levels, reflecting increases in all provinces and most industrial sectors”. NL labour market, as indicated previously in the report, also experienced growth and increased labour demand. It is reported that half of all businesses in Atlantic Canada, surveyed by the Business Development Bank of Canada, have had difficulties recruiting employees – the highest rate in Canada (Government of Canada, ACOA 2022) As a response, businesses were lowering education requirements to fill their positions, and the governments were considering new ways to improve foreign credentials recognition for newcomer professionals (Government of Canada, 2022). The efforts to ensure that trained immigrants are working in an area related to their education and experience have been crucial to bridge the gap between supply and demand.

a) Networking activities overview

NERN organized and hosted **36 various workshops and networking events**, including roundtable discussions, industry-specific workshops, and professional speaker series sessions. Roundtable discussions were usually organized in-person and hosted a number of field experts, HR professionals, industry representatives, and small business owners. The industry-specific, skills development workshops were largely held virtually and were designed to help and support both local employers and newcomer professionals in acquiring necessary skills and knowledge to re-

emerge in the labour market better prepared for current and future demands. In addition, the workshops aimed to motivate and inspire those who are impacted by the changes in the labour market due to Covid-19 and may be considering alternative career paths or looking for ways to improve their skills. The number of participants attending the events fluctuated between 12 and 25 newcomers and employers combined. The last event held on March 27th, "Empowering Newcomer Engineers- Exploring Opportunities in the Energy Sector of NL", welcomed over 40 participants.

Common topics/questions raised during the workshops were:

- What do job seekers need to know about the trends of the particular industry in NL at this moment? Are there any skills gaps?
- What are some of the most valuable technical skills one would need to have to be successful in the industry? Can you take us through those technical skills and explain where and why they are required?
- How difficult it is to gain basic industry skills? Why would one want to retrain to be in this sector?
- What are some of the soft skills industry professionals need to be successful

The pace and success of employer outreach and participation in NERN activities varied among selected industries and reflected the challenges those industries experienced over the last two years. The demand for IT professionals and workers with the finance background was consistent and high from the beginning of the project. The IT Networking Cafe event was held in October 2021 with 25 attendees, and most newcomer participants/job seekers were employed in their field shortly after the event. The event was envisioned as an informal, informative meet-and-greet. While the event was considered a success in both the format and the outcome, the response for our feedback survey was low. Only four participants completed the form. When asked about what they liked most about the event, the respondents highlighted the structure and the opportunity to meet and talk to all the employers within the allocated time. An employer participant was surprised to see so many good newcomer IT candidates. All respondents confirmed that they would attend similar events in the future. We shared one more feedback survey with the IT participant for the subsequent IT Virtual Skills Development Workshop with the Get Coding company, and received 3 responses. The responses indicated that the participants enjoyed the presentation, would like to have more time for communication, and would appreciate having more opportunities like these for skills development in the future. The low response rate on our feedback surveys, even after multiple follow-ups and prompts by the Project Coordinator, led to a change in how we evaluated participant satisfaction. Most of the feedback related to the quality of presentations and workshops was subsequently gleaned

from the Zoom comments section or in a verbal follow up with the Project Coordinator. Additional and voluntary feedback was often shared via social media, namely Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn.

“We had an excellent time today at the Axis networking event for IT professionals. I encourage all of my local business friends to get in touch with Axis - Whether you are a business that is hiring or a newcomer looking for employment. Thank you for all that you do for our community. Superheroes!” – Oliver POS, Employer Partner (from LinkedIn)

Compared to the IT sector, the resource sector at that time was still experiencing layoffs and was not as responsive in joining the network, as the Project Coordinator reflects. At the end of 2019, employment tied to oil and gas projects in the province stood at almost 6,800, but there have been thousands of layoffs since then as a direct result of a low price of oil and a downward trajectory in global demand tied to the COVID-19 pandemic (The Telegram, 2021). However, the resource sector bounced back with vigor, and not just in the oil and gas area, but also in renewable and green energy sector. This sparked new stakeholder interest in NERN and led to significant increase in new partners. It subsequently led to the NERN team completing the FSC Accelerator project that helped the organization to broaden and enhance the network with industries, employers, and professionals involved in the net-zero economic transition in NL. As part of the FSC Accelerator, NERN hosted a successful roundtable discussion on "Building a more diverse, resilient, and inclusive workforce for the Net-Zero transition in NL." This event helped secure and strengthen the partnerships with key energy sector players including, Hatch, the Port of Argentia, World Energy GH2, Growler Energy, Energy NL, Econext, The Net Zero Project NL, Enamico and the College of North Atlantic. The stakeholders recognized the significance of the project and urged the ANC to strengthen and increase its scale to engage and involve more industry experts, leaders and professionals who are involved in the energy sectors of NL. They suggested hosting bigger networking events, inviting executives and decision makers, highlighting newcomer success stories, and sharing their experiences. The ANC should consider developing more tools and resources that help educate CEOs and managers about the benefits of hiring and assisting newcomer professionals in accessing co-op/internships, mentorship programs and workplace training programs. The participants agreed that companies in the energy sector of NL should provide more support to the ANC. Participants also expressed their willingness and commitment to supporting the ANC employment initiatives and agreed that collaboration is key for the development of a diverse workforce and the skills needed for the transition.

This was a great event and we would like to say thank-you to all who contributed their time and knowledge, and the Association for New Canadians for organizing the event. There was a lot of interest and passion from newcomer engineers – as our energy sector grows, it is important that we look for opportunities to engage everyone who is looking to contribute. We encourage all companies to reach out to the Association for New Canadians to see where we can all help and support -
Growler Energy

b) Mentorship overview

The NERNN Project Coordinator completed **49 mentorship matches** with 98 individuals. Each mentorship was 3 months long, and there was a 100% completion rate, unless it resulted in a mentee securing employment prior to completion. Some mentorships extended longer than suggested time, and evolved into a long-term relationship. As the Project Coordinator pointed out, “this demonstrated the success and effectiveness of our mentorship program in helping our participants to advance their careers”.

The key activities involved in the mentorship matching process included assessing and selecting mentees, recruiting mentors, delivering mentorship orientation sessions, matching mentor and mentee based on their skills and expertise, and mentorship progress follow-up.

Out of 49 newcomer participants, 22 completed a Feedback Survey for Mentees. Fourteen of those were in the engineering field, four in the finance sector, three in the IT sector, and one with an environmental science background. When asked if the mentorship program met their expectations, over 2/3 of the respondents said that it either met or exceeded their expectations.

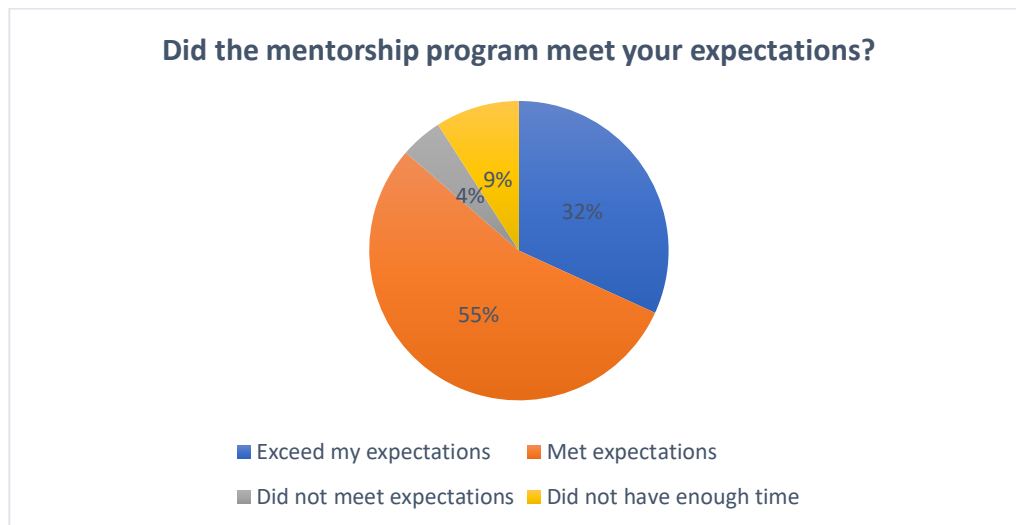


Chart 1. Mentorship program expectations

The survey respondents also emphasized the benefits they received through the mentoring process. Key benefits selected in the feedback survey for mentees by all respondents include:

- “the experience helped me to build my professional network”
- “I learned more effective job research and application strategies”

- “the experience helped me to secure more interview opportunities”
- “I gained knowledge and insight into the Canadian workplace culture”
- “the experience helped me to explore resource for upskilling or re-skilling opportunities”
- “the experience helped me to improve my interpersonal skills”
- “the experience helped me to set my career path ways and goals”

The newcomer mentees were encouraged to keep a journal of activities and reflections over the course of their mentorship period. The journal was submitted and reviewed by the Project Coordinator. For each meeting with a mentor, a participant was asked to describe the main discussion points, any new skill, knowledge or information shared by a mentor, and any additional comments. The journal was not only valuable in keeping track of the number of meetings and the topics discussed, but it also provided an opportunity for a newcomer participant to write, synthesize information and data, and reflect on the new knowledge.

Selected mentee journal entries	
<p><i>3rd meeting.</i></p> <p><i>“On March 24, James and I had an hour of informative meeting on the Newfoundland Oil and Gas industry. The significant stakeholders that work together and how they all operate contribute to this province's economy. During the meeting, I briefed James on the jobs I have applied to and the feedback I have been getting from companies. James shared with me some of his life, career decisions and how it has helped him in his career. James and I worked on my resume and cover letter to make some corrections and take in some suggestions from him. The meeting was very informative and inspiring from an engineering manager and how I can excel in the job market and put my skills to use.”</i></p>	<p><i>4th meeting</i></p> <p><i>My mentor eventually introduced me to his senior colleague (boss) at work. This gives me an opportunity to relate well and know what the key responsibilities entails and if possible, keep an eye for potential and exciting careers in the company” Now, I have contacts at LGL who is also an environmental consulting firm with diverse opportunities even though am yet to hear from the company.”</i></p>

3.2 Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction

When assessing the impact of networking activities and events on project participants, Lennika conducted a key stakeholder survey to find out more about the experience of local employers and businesses when it comes to collaborating with the ANC Employment Services to support newcomer workers’ training and skills development. The online survey was distributed to 25 core network members by the NERN Project Coordinator between March 15 and March 30, 2023. We received ten (10) responses (40% response rate). The in-depth, semi-structured interviews with

NERN team were also beneficial in understanding the extent to which the stakeholder engagement developed.

One of the goals of the network for the ANC was to foster new and strengthen the existing relationships with the community and business partners. Many new collaborators who were not familiar with the ANC employment programs and services were also not familiar with educated and talented pool of newcomer professionals living in the province. When asked to describe the extent to which networking with ANC increased awareness about newcomer professionals in NL, 90% saw improvement, and 60% of those described it as “significant” (Chart 2).

How has networking and collaborating with AXIS Career Service (ANC) increased your understanding of newcomer professionals and their skills in the past two years?
10 responses

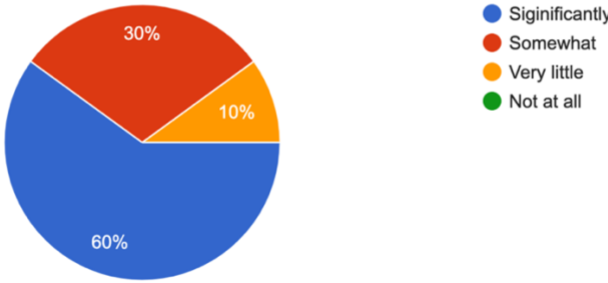


Chart 2. Stakeholder Survey – Understanding newcomer professionals’ skills

When asked about the benefits of networking and collaborating with the ANC, 9 out of 10 key stakeholders highlighted increased awareness of newcomers’ skills and/or challenges, as seen in Chart 2. Almost equally beneficial were increased knowledge of the ANC programs and services and having a new opportunity to share knowledge and experience with newcomer professionals. It is interesting to note that only 3 out of 10 stakeholders found identifying and hiring skilled professionals an important outcome of networking and collaborating with the ANC. The reason for this, as pointed out by the NERN team members, may be that there is no shortage of job applications by newcomers and immigrants, but rather a disconnect in terms of workplace expectations and skills matching that needs to be better supported in the hiring process.

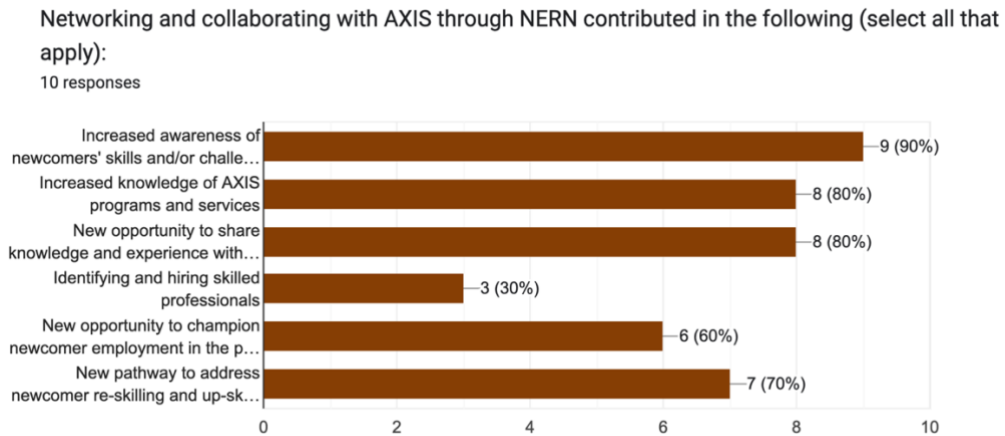


Chart 2. Benefits of networking and collaborating with ANC

The key stakeholders found the quality of the employment programs and supports at the ANC as one of the main contributors to the success of networking and collaboration through NERN (Chart 3). Equally important was the Project Coordinator's commitment and relationships building skills. More than half of the respondents thought that the calibre of newcomer professionals and the quality of professional events and workshops contributed to the positive outcomes of the project. The topics covered through professional development sessions appear to be a less significant contributor to the success of the project. These results highlight the importance of human connection and overall organization/facilitation of services when it comes to employment supports, which are defining markers of networking and building social capital.

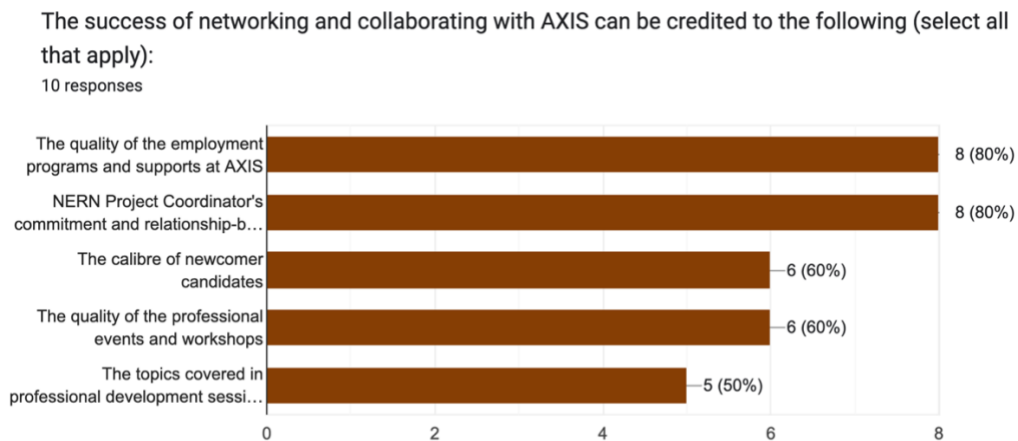


Chart 3. Main contributors to the success of networking and collaborating with ANC

In addition to the benefit and outcomes of the two-year networking experience, the key stakeholders were asked to rate their relationship with the ANC at the end of the project (Chart 4). Six out of ten described the relationship as excellent, while the rest thought it was good. This is in line with our earlier findings that relationship-building is a continuous process. As some of the partners joined later in the project, according to the NERN Project Coordinator, there is always room for those connections to strengthen and improve.

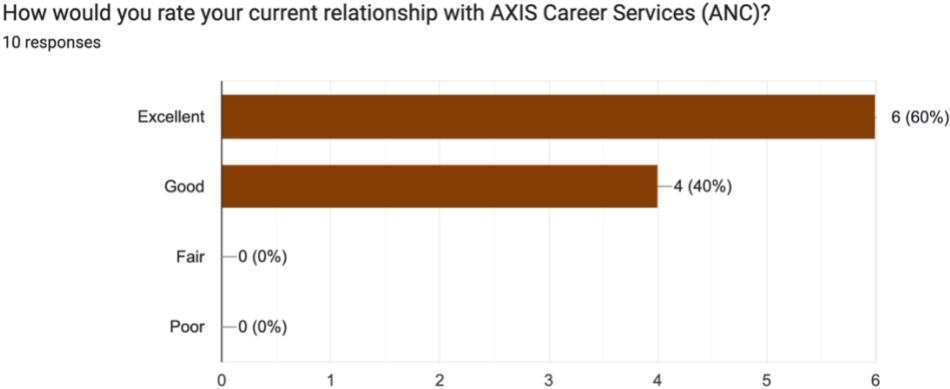


Chart 4. Current relationship with ANC

Six out of ten stakeholders saw their relationship with the ANC improved over the last two years, as seen in Chart 5, with two describing it as “greatly improved”. Four respondents saw their relationship with ANC remain unchanged, which may indicate an already existing partnership with a steady pace. According to the NERN team members, new collaborators tend to be more curious, energetic, and more engaged early in the partnership, and the progress may seem more intensified when it starts from scratch. The Project Coordinator who worked closely with employers and mentors, noticed great enthusiasm with new partners, as some of them mentored several newcomer professionals, and continue to “be available” to volunteer in any capacity.

How has your connection with AXIS Career Services (ANC) changed over the last two years?
10 responses

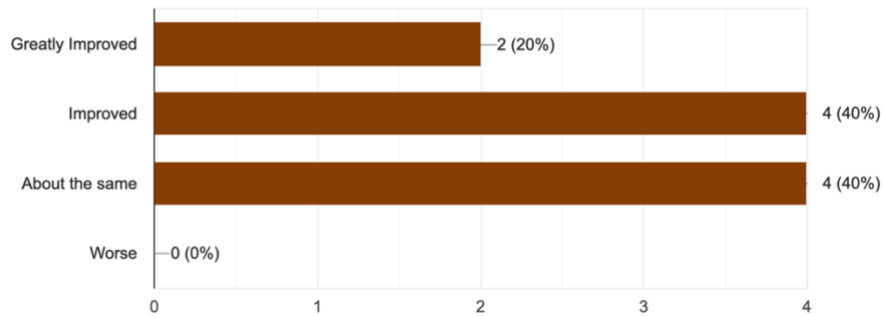


Chart 5. Stakeholder connection with ANC

Overall, there seems to be general satisfaction with the way NERN engaged all the relevant stakeholders and newcomer professionals, and provided valuable pathways to share information and knowledge in order for the main labour market participants to enhance resilience, compatibility, and confidence in today's labour market.

"I really appreciated my involvement with the Association for New Canadians and the NERN network. As an academic advisor and a member of the project's advisory panel, it was excellent to have the opportunity to see how the whole organization of the network was working together. I attended numerous functions such as meetups, panels, and networking sessions. Each was a great opportunity to talk with new Canadians, many of whom have interesting and impressive backgrounds. With the help of an opportunity like NERN, they could easily and quickly transition into the Canadian labor market. In fact, some of the sessions I attended were hosted by new Canadians who had already transitioned into the Canadian labor market and were giving back to other new Canadians. It was great to meet with entrepreneurs and other businesspeople across a range of industries and see how they are forging a relationship with new Canadians and the value they saw in an opportunity like NERN to connect with the talent they needed to grow their companies. Overall, it was just a really great experience, and I am so glad to see that it was such a success." – Dr. Roger Chafe, Advisory Committee Member

Strengths of the Project

According to the NERN team, the project has been instrumental in identifying gaps and shaping the future strategies for the ANC Employment Service division. As the Employment Development Manager states, the ANC aims to leverage the knowledge gained and the connections established through NERN, and if the plans unfold as intended, the ANC will establish an employer engagement team to further nurture these important partnerships. The focus will be on leveraging social media platforms for improved promotion and awareness. NERN has provided a solid foundation for ANC to continue progressing, building, and expanding the employer engagement initiatives. It has laid the groundwork for the organization's ongoing efforts.

Flexibility has also been a key strength of NERN over the past two years, enabling the ANC to adapt to the evolving demands of the labor market. Initially, organizing events such as job fairs and public forums posed challenges, but NERN made the process significantly easier. For instance, the ANC visit to Carbonear and the Board of Trade meeting was an example of a successful adapting to market demands and responding to a new request for partnership.

NERN-NL project has provided an opportunity for the ANC Employment Services to raise awareness about immigrant employment issues beyond the regular programs and services. The network provided new options for skills development and employment, and helped validate activities that have been conducted individually and on a smaller scale. This gave newcomer professionals and talented workers increased visibility and a recognized voice in our professional community. In addition, through the employment outreach, the ANC Employment Services has participated in the Energy NL Annual Conference & Exhibition 2022, Tech NL Innovation Week 2021, a number of open house events organized by local businesses specifically for newcomer job seekers, and other local business gatherings.

The information and knowledge shared through mentorships played a transformative role in the newcomers' life, observed the Project Coordinator. It is crucial to recognize that newcomers often struggle to find mentors on their own. The labor market is complex, and understanding skills, demands, and workplace culture is vital for making informed decisions. NERN enabled this type of exchange of experience and knowledge between individuals, in a focused and friendly one-on-one situation. There is a tremendous strength in this type of connection.

NERN has made a substantial impact on the ANC Employment Services Division, particularly in establishing connections with employers. It has also revealed areas for improvement and provided a strong foundation for ongoing efforts. The project's flexibility and focus on

sustainability have enabled adaptation to market demands. The significance of mentorship for newcomers' labor market attachment and decision-making has been underscored through impactful stories. Moving forward, the organization will continue building on these achievements, expanding the employer engagement initiatives, and leveraging the lessons learned from NERN.

Challenges of the Project

While the project was an overall success, the NERN team had to address and overcome certain challenges along the way. Some of the early challenges arose in ensuring a sufficient number of activities and events to maintain engagement and connectivity among participants.

NERN had a significant impact on the ANC Employment Services Division, as stated by the ANC Employment Development Manager. The project facilitated the establishment of numerous connections with new employers and community partners. The Project Coordinator played a crucial role in fostering these connections. However, for the project's sustainability, it would have been beneficial to have more in-house gatherings involving the entire employment team. Increased team events could have enhanced collaboration and effectiveness.

While the project prioritized employer-focused relationship building, attracting employers posed significant challenges. Initial meetings and mentorship engagements encountered numerous rejections and unresponsiveness. Persistence played a key role in overcoming these hurdles, as well as the strong emphasis on the project benefits and the ANC stakeholder supports. In addition, the NERN team encouraged participants to reach out to their friends and colleagues, and many of them did so even without explicit prompting. This organic outreach expanded the project's network and enhanced engagement.

Mentorship emerged as a prominent component of the project, yielding tangible outcomes. It became the main focus of the Project Coordinator's efforts to establish relationships with employers and industry professionals. Securing mentors proved to be no easy task. Despite having a pool of newcomer professionals interested in mentorship, an informal approach involving letters and emails was necessary. For the Project Coordinator, introducing oneself boldly and directly, and seeking connections in a general sense, yielded favorable outcomes. Subsequent steps involved arranging meetings, making introductions, and forging connections.

One of the key challenges was allocating time and resources to utilize social media for marketing and promotion. While accessible and relatively quick and easy to use, this type of promotional

activity often requires significant time commitment to keep the momentum of the project going over a two-year period. LinkedIn proved to be a valuable resource, offering a visual representation of individuals and facilitating better response rates by providing context and personal history. The NERN team had not directly utilized the LinkedIn connections, but has encouraged stakeholders and newcomers to connect through the platform and share their positive experience with the rest of the NERN community.

Future opportunities

The NERN model holds significant potential for application in other projects, emphasizing the importance of networking in the job search process. Consultants within the ANC are currently adopting this model, and valuable experiences from the NERN project can be directly transferred to other programs within the organization.

Remaining attentive to specific sectors and closely monitoring fluctuations in the labor market is vital. This model encourages continued network development and a focus on sectors in demand, recognizing that industry needs evolve over time. Identifying sectors with high demand is crucial. According to the Employment Development Manager, there is currently a strong emphasis on trades, construction, carpentry, and early childhood education, rather than degree-based sectors. The focus lies on practical labor within college sectors. The volume of work and demand in these areas is significant, and so is the need for support.

Furthermore, healthcare presents ongoing challenges, particularly in the homecare sector, where numerous individuals express interest but lack the necessary background. Early childhood education also ranks among the top three sectors of interest.

It is worth noting that there is a substantial pool of individuals who have the potential to pursue trades professions, especially if they follow designated pathways. For example, Ukrainian immigrants who have recently arrived to Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador possess backgrounds and expertise in these professions, but do require upskilling and reskilling for accelerated labour market attachment.

Considering the Health Accord NL (2022) plan to reshape the healthcare system, with an emphasis on community-based programming and service realignment, it is anticipated that the demand for workers with different skillsets and ability to innovate will increase. To address reported shortages of healthcare professionals, including physicians, the provincial government has taken various measures (CBC 2021, 2022b). Collaborating with the College of Physicians and

Surgeons, efforts are underway to ensure long-term stability in the physician work force (Gov NL, 2022b). Resident positions have been added to the Family Medicine residency program, specifically for internationally trained medical graduates.

In the nursing field, initiatives are in place to make it easier for Canadian and internationally trained nurses to work in the province. Recruitment efforts and partnerships with training institutions in India are being established (Gov NL, 2022c). The College of Registered Nurses is overseeing regulatory alignment and comparable educational programs, streamlining education and English language reviews (Gov NL, 2022d). Furthermore, there is a push to recruit more nurse practitioners across the province.

Continuing to emphasise the importance of networking and providing insights into sector-specific demands can help better align the needs of the local employers and economy with the newcomer skills and talent that already exist on the ground.

Lessons Learned

- a) **Supportive employment networks are necessary to equally empower employers and job seekers, even if the jobs are scarce.** Evidence suggests that on a municipal level, economic resilience is universally and uniquely determined by the connectivity within a city's job network (Moro, E., Frank, M.R., Pentland, A. et al., 2021). When discussing regional resilience, Boschma (2014) brings up the value of connectivity of local resources, and asserts that knowledge networks could be the key to economic resilience. Knowledge networks generally involve related industries in regions connecting and exchanging knowledge and skills, and building capacity to develop new growth plans after a shock. Towards the end of the second year, the stakeholder relationships made through NERN project were strong, trusting, and reliable, and consequently paved the way for efficient and effective recruitment as the demand for labour continues to increase in the post-pandemic era.
- b) While newcomer job seekers generally have weaker social and professional ties than the Canadian born, **no connection is insignificant.** Research has found that weaker social connections have a greater beneficial effect on job mobility than stronger ties (Rajkumar, K, 2022) NERN's focus was sector-specific and relatively narrow at first, fostering connections that met very specific requirements. For example, newcomer engineers were matched with local engineers or professionals from natural resource industry. This created strong but fewer connections. The assumptions that initially guided the project

shifted to encourage a wider-reaching, inclusive network and build a valuable, lasting social capital that also had a better chance of being self-sustaining in the future.

- c) **Collaborative networks can effectively mobilize knowledge and facilitate action when it comes to the acquisition of skills, upskilling and reskilling of workers, in order to respond to the changes in the labour market.** Within the last two years, Covid-19 has shifted the focus for many employers and businesses from growth and scaling up to crisis management and building resiliency, and finally to recovery planning. Needless to say, employers have been busy. The NERN experience has shown that despite, and perhaps, because of all this, businesses are willing to invest time and leverage their resources to collaboratively create pathways for skills development and optimal job matching. Forging partnerships between public and private stakeholders is considered an effective mechanism to increase the availability of accessible learning solutions, develop new training programs and share resources for mitigating skills and labour shortages in sectors affected by the pandemic (ILO, 2021).

- d) **Promotion and social media are invaluable tools for increasing the outcomes and raising awareness.** Not every organization has imbedded social media strategies, especially smaller community agencies focused on providing dedicated client services. When it comes to networking, one of the biggest unanticipated factors that contributed to the increase in connections was LinkedIn, closely followed by Twitter and Facebook. Leveraging these networking and marketing channels can greatly contribute to any project's success.

- e) **Every new project is an opportunity for an organization to learn something new about its own internal operational processes and try to improve.** NERN was an outreach project, and as such it required continuous community engagement. The ANC Employment Services division recognized the importance of investing in community outreach, especially in the times of economic downturn. This kind of recognition of the right investment at the right time has not only provided solutions for current problems, but has also laid a solid foundation to easier address future challenges.

Conclusion

The Newcomer Employment Resilience Network Newfoundland and Labrador (NERN-NL) project, implemented by the Association for New Canadians (ANC) Employment Services division, successfully achieved its objectives over the course of a two-year period. With funding and support from the Future Skills Centre (FSC), the project aimed to build resilience among key stakeholders and newcomer professionals in regulated and non-regulated professions, addressing the social and economic shocks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

By focusing on industries heavily impacted by the pandemic, including the IT sector, financial sector, and natural resources/R&D sector, NERN-NL facilitated numerous activities such as networking events, industry-specific sessions, workshops, and mentoring. These initiatives fostered knowledge exchange and collaboration at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels, ultimately improving career pathways for newcomer professionals and revitalizing the local labor market.

A comprehensive evaluation conducted by Lennika Consulting Inc. revealed several key findings regarding the effectiveness and benefits of the network for all stakeholders involved, namely a significant increase in employer engagement, a heightened awareness of newcomer skills, talent, and potential, and increased connectivity and improved access for newcomers to organizations and industry professionals.

The evaluation also identified areas for improvement, such as enhanced marketing and promotion through social media channels, expanded organizational engagement, and the inclusion of other professions facing labor shortages.

The experience gained from this project serves as a solid foundation for employer outreach programs planned by the ANC into the future. Looking ahead, the ANC Employment Services division plans to incorporate networking into its long-term strategic plan, leveraging the success of NERN in employer engagement to address ongoing and future labor market challenges across various professions and industries in the province. Current partnerships are now well-positioned to continue meaningful collaborations, and all the infrastructure is in place to attract new partners and collaborators. The project's success also has the potential to inform structural solutions for network development and collaborative projects in supporting employment outcomes for not only newcomer professionals, but all current and potential labour market participants.

Finally, FSC has been instrumental in the successful implementation and delivery of the NERN project. Throughout the project, FSC encouraged learning and reflection, supported flexibility, adaptation, and innovation, and offered advice and guidance at every step.

Appendix A: List of companies engaged in NERN-NL activities from Aug 2021-March 2023

1. Advanced Access Engineering	2. Marine Institute	3. Rothlochston Constructions
4. Aker Solutions	5. Memorial University of NL	6. Samanna Development Corp
7. Angler Solutions	8. Meridia Recruitment Solutions-HR company - World En. GH2	9. Smiling Land Farm
10. Avalon Holographics	11. Mobile Guest-Marketing	12. Stantec Consulting
13. BDO Canada	14. Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro	15. Staples
16. Blue Drop	17. NL Chocolate Company	18. Strobel TEK (AS Works)
19. Byond Trust	20. North Star Payroll	21. SucSeed
22. Caron Hawco Group	23. NSB Omega (eng)	24. Suncor
25. Clarified Accounting	26. Oliver POS	27. TechnipFMC
28. College of North Atlantic	29. Pattern Energy (Port of Argentia)	30. The Net Zero project NL
31. Compusult Limited	32. Pennecon Ltd	33. Trajectory E Engineering
34. Deloitte	35. People Stuff	36. Vale
37. DH Accounting	38. Plum Creative works	39. Whelan Wellness
40. Digital Six Consulting	41. Port of Argentia -supply chain	42. Wood Plc
43. DOF Subsea	44. Ray Creative Agency -	45. Worl-Energy GH2
46. Econext	47. RBC	
48. Economic Development of Carbonear	49. Reddy Kilowatt Credit Union	
50. Enamico	51. Horizon Maritime	
52. Energy NL	53. Husky Center of Excellence	
54. Equinor	55. Madera Engineering	
56. ExxonMobil	57. Harvey Company Ltd	
58. Fundamental Inc	59. North Stat Associates	
60. Genesis	61. GET Payroll (Fintech)	
62. Genoa Design	63. Growler Energy	
64. GET Coding	65. Hatch	

Appendix B: NERNNL Advisory Committee members

	Name	Title and Organization
1.	Colin Krulicki,	Vice President Business Markets, Atlantic Canada, RBC (Finance)
2.	Mark Shrimpton	Principal, Stantec Consulting (Engineering)
3.	Dr. Roger Chafe	Professor, Medicine, Memorial University (Medicine, R&D)
4.	Kerri Abbott	Economic Development and Tourism Officer, Town of Carbonear (Community Engagement)
5.	Sara Teo	Manager, International Programs and Partnerships, Memorial University (International Graduates)

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