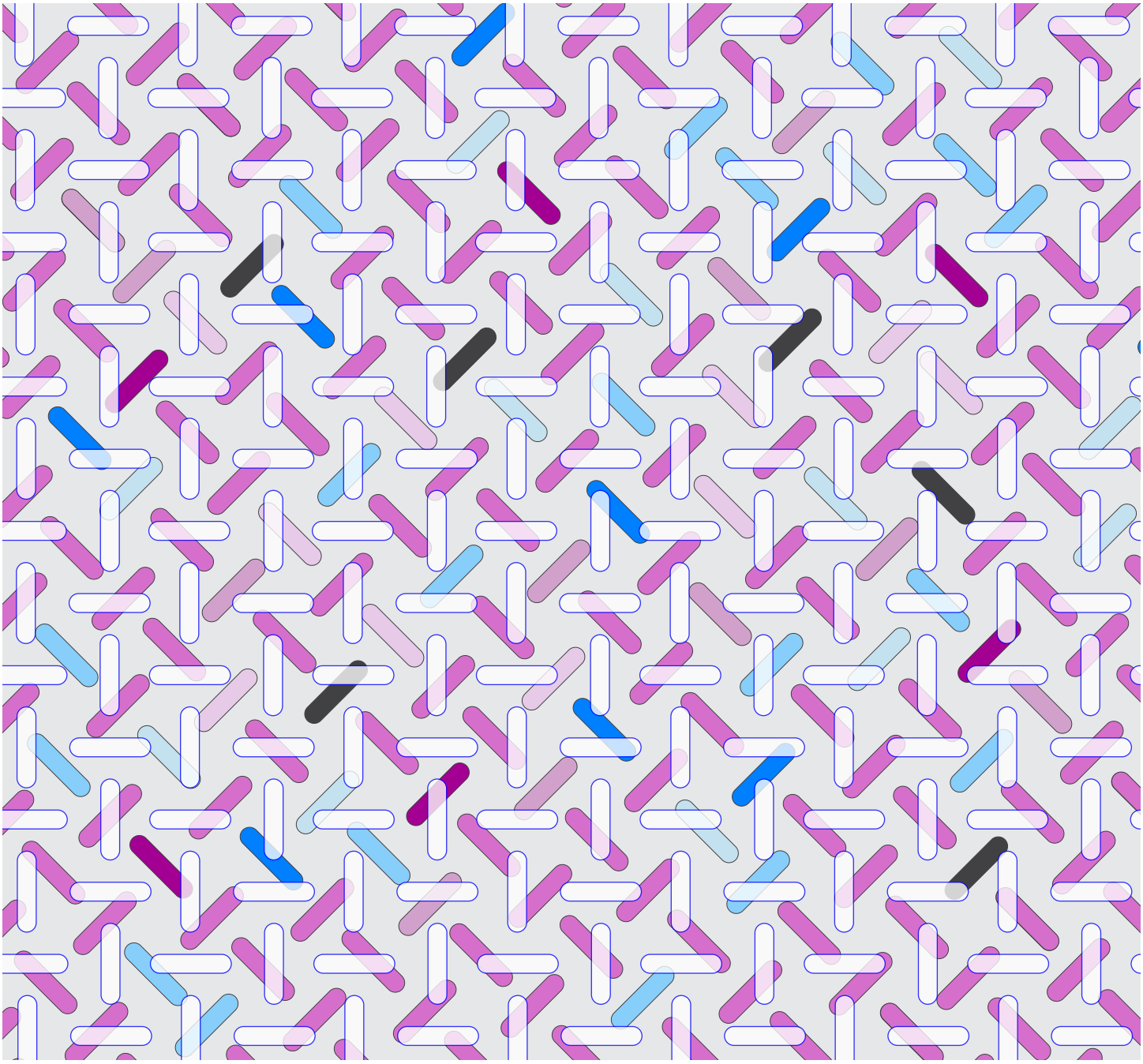

NPower Canada

Interim Report

June 2024

Blueprint

This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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

Table of Contents

About the Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

About Blueprint

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

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

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

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Preface

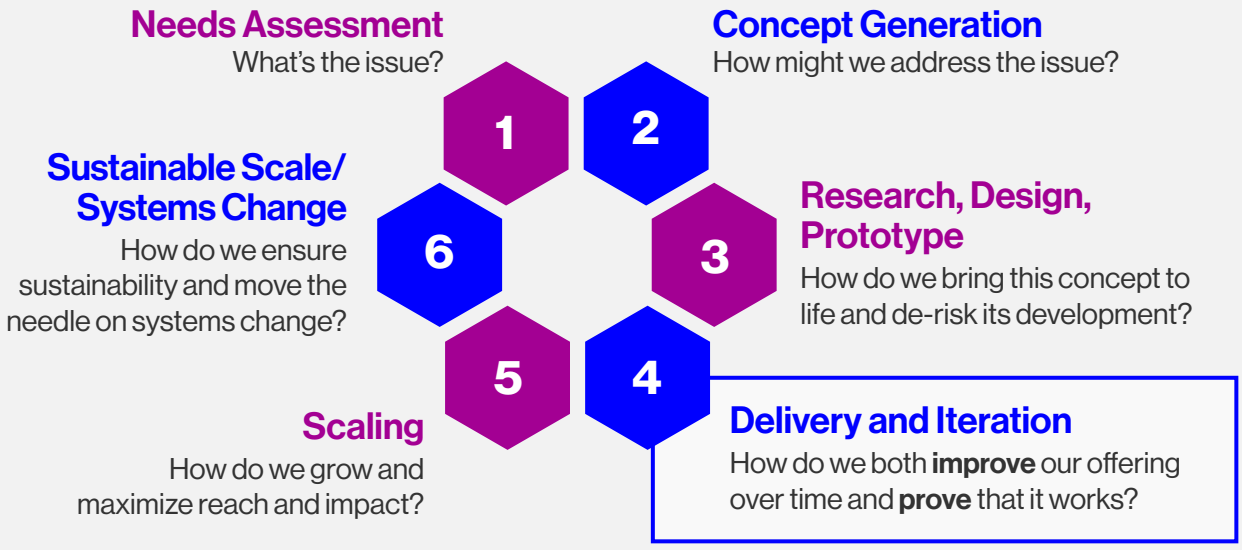
Canada's labour market is rapidly changing. To keep pace with these changes, Canadians need skills development opportunities that respond to demands and apply evidence-informed practices. Many skills development innovations have emerged to meet these needs, but they often face barriers to scaling their interventions beyond a pilot stage.

To address this challenge, the Future Skills Centre (FSC) and Blueprint launched the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio.

In this initiative, FSC is partnering with 10 organizations with promising skills development interventions that began scaling up their impact. As part of the FSC consortium, Blueprint is working closely with each grantee organization to generate evidence to support their scaling journey. This is an opportunity to disrupt the current "one study at a time" approach to evidence-building in favour of continuous evidence generation and program improvement. The hope is that this approach will better produce the quality and quantity of evidence needed to help promising interventions progress in their scaling journeys. For more information about Blueprint's approach to scaling, see our Scaling Social Innovation webpage.

Blueprint's evidence generation approach is aligned with the six-stage innovation cycle (see **Figure 1**). Our focus for the Scaling Portfolio is to work alongside partner organizations to generate evidence that helps move their interventions through **Stage 4** to **Stage 5**, with the ultimate goal of supporting sustainable scale and systems change (**Stage 6**).

Table 1 | The Six-stage Innovation Cycle



About this report

This Interim Report shares early findings from NPower Canada, a sector-based talent solution that helps people experiencing labour market disadvantages launch meaningful and sustainable digital careers. The model responds to long-term trends towards the increasing digitalization of Canadian workplaces and the sustained demand for ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and digital skills. This report covers program cohorts delivered between May 2022 and June 2023. A subsequent *Final Report* will present the full findings from the project.

This work is part of Blueprint's contribution to the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio, which involves collecting and monitoring implementation stories and participant outcomes along their scaling journey.

This report is organized into six sections:

1. **Introduction** (pgs. 8–9)
   provides background on the NPower Canada model and the labour market needs it helps address.
2. **About the NPower Canada Dual Client Model** (pgs. 10–14)
   introduces sector-based models, the NPower Canada model and its two training streams.
3. **Methodology** (pgs. 15–18) presents Blueprint's evidence generation approach, learning agenda and the data sources used in this report.
4. **Early insights into participants' experiences** (pg. 19-28)
   contains early findings on program reach, completion and satisfaction rates.
5. **Early insights into participants' outcomes** (pgs. 29–34)
   presents preliminary insights into the employment and earnings outcomes of program participants.
6. **Conclusions** (pgs. 38-39) provides a recap of results and an account of future reporting.

Executive summary

NPower Canada is a registered charity that provides a sector-based employment solution intended to help individuals facing labour market disadvantages, launch into meaningful and sustainable digital careers. The program places individuals into a range of junior-level jobs that require digital skills ("tech-enabled jobs"), both within and outside of the ICT industry. In 2021, NPower Canada was selected as one of 10 interventions to receive Future Skills Centre funding as part of the **Scaling Up Skills Development** portfolio. Since then, Blueprint collected data about the intervention, capturing implementation and participant outcomes along NPower Canada's scaling journey.

More specifically, we are generating evidence on the outcomes and impact of NPower Canada's programs delivered between May 2020 and August 2024, with a focus on the Junior IT Analyst (JITA) program and the Junior Data Analyst (JDA) program. Each targets unemployed and underemployed individuals from equity-deserving groups including those identifying as BIPOC, women and non-binary individuals, immigrants to Canada, 2SLGBTQI+ and individuals with disabilities.

In this phase of NPower Canada's delivery, most applicants to the JITA and JDA programs in Ontario and Alberta (the regions with the highest demand for these programs) were included in a randomized control trial (RCT), in which they were randomly assigned to either a 'treatment group' who could enrol in the programs or a 'comparison group' who were prohibited from enrolling for 24 months following their assignment. Applicants from several priority groups (e.g., Indigenous applicants and those receiving government disability benefits) were chosen by NPower Canada to bypass random assignment and receive a guaranteed enrolment opportunity. Participants in the study were recruited via NPower Canada's typical outreach and recruitment processes, including social media advertising, word-of-mouth referrals and referrals from community partners.

This *Interim Report* covers the delivery period between May 2022 and June 2023. Findings are based on enrolment and administrative data, as well as exit, six-month and 12-month follow-up survey responses, for treatment group participants only. To gain further insights into participant experiences in the program, the report also includes findings from interviews with participants from across program regions who completed (n=17) and did not complete (n=7) one of the programs.

Early insights into treatment group participants' experiences

- NPower Canada reached its **target demographic of equity-seeking groups**. Most participants in the treatment group experienced a form of labour market disadvantage through race, gender, class or ability (e.g., **92%** of participants identified as BIPOC, **65%** were immigrants and **31%** were receiving a form of public benefit at intake, such as income assistance, employment insurance, housing benefits, etc.).
- **Program completion rates were high** (**86%** of participants who enrolled **completed** the program).
- Treatment group members were also **generally satisfied with the training**; **86%** of exit survey respondents who completed the program reported being either "very satisfied" (**61%**) or "somewhat satisfied" (**25%**) with their experience. Most participants (**79%**) had either already recommended the JITA or JDA programs to others or were likely to do so. Participants found the digital skills training, professional skills training and career coaching and wraparound supports quite useful.

- **Newcomers rated the program slightly higher** than Canadian-born participants. Interviews with participants suggest this may be because the program provided them with additional benefits, including a means to gain Canadian work experience, build networks and gain insights into Canadian workplace culture and expectations.
- The **interviews highlighted a range of program strengths**, including dedicated and responsive staff, the program's free, online availability, the format and structure (mixing independent and group work), regular assessments aligned with course material, industry speakers, interview practice and CV workshops. **Participants also noted pacing challenges** for varying experience levels, a sense of disorganization during orientation and skills training, overreliance on Coursera content (and a desire for more hands-on learning) and lack of alignment between skills/interests and job opportunities.

Early insights into outcomes for treatment group participants

- **Employment rates** among participants increased from the time of program application (baseline) to the 12-month follow-up survey, growing by **254 percentage points**.
- The proportion of participants **enrolled in formal education** also grew from program exit to the 12-month mark by **19 percentage points**.
- Among employed treatment group participants, **earnings** increased between baseline and 12-months post-program; the median salary increased from $24,000 at baseline to $40,000 at 12 months post-program (an increase of **66.7%**).
- While Blueprint was unable to examine the number program graduates who found a tech-enabled job, both within and outside of the ICT industry, we were able to examine the proportion of treatment group participants who found roles in jobs identified as targets by the JITA and JDA programs 12 months post-program. We found that, despite a hiring downturn in the ICT sector across Canada, **approximately 43%** of participants **held ICT roles, specifically**.

Our *Final Report* will present the full RCT results, estimating the impact of the programs by comparing outcomes achieved by treatment group participants with those achieved by the comparison group. It will also analyze impacts by stream (JITA vs. JDA) and relevant socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, race/ethnicity and immigration status.

1. Introduction

The demand for workers with ICT skills has grown steadily in Canada for over a decade. Employment in the ICT industry rose from 525,000 workers in 2007 to 717,000 in 2021: a 37% increase.[1] But while the longer-term outlook for the ICT industry in Canada is positive, there are challenges for both employers and workers. Digital skills are increasingly sought after by employers—they are an increasingly important aspect of work, both within and outside of the ICT industry[2]—but finding workers with the right skillsets remains challenging as firms compete for workers in a tight labour market.[3] Canada also lags behind the global average on the Global Digital Skills Index,[4] and four out of five Canadians report not having access to the tools they need to acquire digital skills.[5]

Meanwhile, approximately 13.6% of youth in Canada (aged 15–29) are neither in employment, education or training[6]—a group often called "NEET youth" (Not in Employment, Education or Training), "opportunity youth" and/or "disconnected youth."[7] These young adults face significant labour market barriers, including a lack of qualifications and work experience and the high cost of education and training. They are frequently from disadvantaged, racialized communities with limited resources and few local opportunities.[8] Many "opportunity youth" want to work,[9] but without accessible training and support options, they often find themselves outside of employment, education and training for long periods.

Launching its first digital skills training program in New York in 2002, NPower Inc. (NPower Canada's American counterpart) aimed to bridge this divide by helping disadvantaged young adults move into junior-level digital positions. Over its first two decades in operation, NPower offered in-person training across a network of training centres. The Canadian version of NPower, Inc., NPower Canada, was launched in Toronto in 2014 and served 87 youth in its first year of operation (2015).

Following promising evaluation results in 2020,[10] NPower Canada expanded eligibility to include all age groups in 2021, significantly altering the reach of the program—older applicants (30+) seemed equally, if not more,

1 Statista. (2022). *Employment in the information and communications technologies (ICT) sector in Canada from 2007 to 2021.* https://www.statista.com/statistics/734119/canada-ict-sector-employment/

2 LinkedIn Learning. (2023). *Building the agile future: Workplace learning report.* https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/learning/en-us/pdfs/workplace-learning-report/LinkedIn-Learning_Workplace-Learning-Report-2023-EN.pdf

3 Business Development Bank of Canada. (2022). *Tech industry outlook: What's next for the technology sector in Canada.* https://www.bdc.ca/globalassets/digizuite/34010-tech-industry-outlook-study-2022.pdf?utm_campaign=AUTO-TO-ST_TechOutlook2022-EN&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua

4 An index that shows, on an international scale, workforce readiness to use digital technologies.

5 Salesforce. (2022). *Global digital skills index, 2022.* https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/salesforceresearch/viz/DigitalSkillsIndex/CountryDB?publish=yes

6 OECD. (2023). *Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET).* https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.htm?context=OECD

7 The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2024). *Who are opportunity youth?* https://www.aecf.org/blog/who-are-opportunity-youth

8 Cukier, W., Mo, G. Y., Karajovic, S., Blanchette, S., Hassannezhad, Z., Mohamed, E., & Higazy, A. (2023, March). *Labour market implications for racialized youth.* Future Skills Centre and Ted Rogers School of Management Diversity Institute. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023-03-Labour-Market-Implications-for-Racialized-Youth.pdf

9 Blueprint. (2018). *Towards a better understanding of NEET youth in Ontario: Findings from the "Made in Ontario" NEET Youth Research Initiative.* https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5f80fa46a156d5e9dc0750bc/5fd223a5e5a89c9087781f02_NEET-draft-DEC2020.pdf

10 Eighty-five percent of participants secured employment or enrolled in further education within 11 months of completing the program. See: Future Skills Centre. (2024). *Upskilling Canadian youth for in-demand tech careers.* https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/upskilling-canadian-youth-for-in-demand-tech-careers/

disadvantaged and in need of assistance so the decision aligned with the organization's mission of lifting people out of poverty. In the same year, NPower Canada also placed a greater emphasis on improving access to its training programs for equity-deserving groupsIA2S+, BIPOC, and so forth; for more, see section **2.b. The NPower Canada model**).

Today, approximately 3,200 people complete an NPower Canada program nationally each year. Participants receive mentoring, ICT skills training, professional skills training, wraparound supports, work placements and job retention support. In return, expectations are high: participants must immerse themselves in the training and work through a high volume of material in a short period, as well as comport themselves in a professional manner (i.e., arrive on time, submit assignments in a timely fashion, etc.).

As a dual-client model, NPower Canada aims to meet the needs of both participants and employers. Support services are built into the participant pathway through the model to give them the best chance of success. Employers are heavily involved in the model's development and operations; they help NPower Canada develop and continually refine training programs to meet industry needs. Employers also support program delivery through classroom visits, site tours, job shadowing opportunities for work-integrated learning (WIL), individual mentorship to jobseekers and by recruiting graduates directly from the program.

In 2020, funding from the Future Skills Centre (FSC) supported the expansion of NPower Canada's existing programming in Ontario and Alberta and added new programming in Nova Scotia. At this point, NPower Canada developed a virtual training stream in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, based on its potential to meet Canada's digital skills needs using a well-codified model, NPower Canada was selected as one of 10 interventions to receive additional FSC funding as part of the **Scaling Up Skills Development portfolio**. This funding allowed NPower Canada to expand activities to British Columbia and Quebec and to test more blended learning models, leveraging technology to achieve greater impact through expanded reach and economies of scale (i.e., to offer virtual skills training and remote opportunities to Indigenous, Francophone and small-to-mid-sized cities).

As part of this funding phase, Blueprint is evaluating two of NPower Canada's dual-client programs—its Junior IT Analyst (JITA) program and its Junior Data Analyst (JDA) program—using a randomized control trial (RCT) design. This *Interim Report* presents early outcomes based on survey data from the treatment group of participants in the RCT who received NPower Canada training. Survey findings are further contextualized by data from interviews with participants across NPower Canada's programming. Our *Final Report* will present the full RCT results, estimating the impact of the programs by comparing the outcomes achieved by both treatment and comparison groups, as well as outcomes for participants in the training who did not take part in the RCT. More information on our methodology can be found in section **3c. Research design and data sources**.

2. NPower Canada

This section outlines how sector-based models (SBMs) can be used to help individuals prepare for the workforce. It also introduces the NPower Canada model, its populations served, eligibility criteria and other core components.

2.a. Sector-based models

SBMs prepare individuals for roles in specific industries. Research shows that they can help both employers and workers: employers by identifying skill needs for in-demand occupations (and designing training that responds to them), and workers by offering entry points to quality jobs in growth industries—those offering competitive wages, tenure and career opportunities.[11,12,13]

Many SBMs provide 'on-ramps' to entry-level jobs for un- or under-employed workers with lower levels of education and training[14] and have some, or all, of the following features:

- participant pre-enrolment screening to test motivation, suitability and readiness.
- sector-specific pre-employment and career readiness services.
- sector-specific occupational skills training to match employer needs.
- job development and placement services for program graduates.
- retention and advancement services to help participants make career progress.

However, evidence also shows that SBMs can be challenging to deliver. They require deep industry knowledge, training in program design and delivery and cross-organizational collaboration skills. They require expertise in serving populations with complex needs and strong relationships with regional employers. Even those run by high-capacity service providers with deep industry relationships take time to reach full delivery maturity.[15]

As SBMs help participants acquire jobs in a target sector (e.g., IT, logistics, construction, manufacturing, etc.), labour demand from the target sector is also a key determinant of their success. Sectoral downturns, as well as downward trends in the wider economy, can restrict the ability of these models to transition participants into employment.[16] As we discuss later in the report in section **7. Conclusions**, a downturn in the global ICT industry in 2022 and 2023[17] may have affected NPower Canada participants' employment opportunities by increasing competition for available jobs in this sector.

11 Myers, K., Harding, S., & Pasolli, K. (2021). *Skills training that works: Lessons from demand-driven approaches.* IRPP. https://irpp.org/research-studies/skills-training-that-works-lessons-from-demand-driven-approaches/

12 Holzer, H. (2022). *Do sectoral training programs work? What the evidence on Project Quest and Year Up really shows.* Brookings Institution.

13 Ratledge, A., Miller, C., & Schaberg, C. (2023). *Sector strategies for workforce development: A synthesis of the research for employers and local governments.* MRDC.

14 An 'on-ramp' sector-based model involves a mix of technical skills training and employability skills training, which aims to build 'soft skills' like leadership, teamwork and communication. 'On ramps' provide non-traditional talent pipelines for employers. See Weise, M. R., Hanson, A., Salisbury, A., & Qu, K. (2019). *On ramps to good jobs: Fueling innovation for the learning ecosystem of the future.* Strada Institute for the Future of Work and Entangled Solutions. https://stradaeducation.org/report/on-ramps-to-good-jobs/

15 Hendra, R., Greenberg, D. H., Hamilton, G., Oppenheim, A., Pennington, A., Schaberg, K., & Tessler, B. L. (2016). *Encouraging evidence on a sector-focused advancement strategy: A preview summary of two-year impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration.* MRDC. https://www.mdrc.org/work/publications/encouraging-evidence-sector-focused-advancement-strategy

16 See Blueprint's reporting on the Calgary Economic Development-led EDGE UP 2.0 project, which was affected by global economic change – namely, a downturn in IT (the model's target sector) and a resurgent oil and gas industry from which the model recruited displaced mid-career workers.

17 Scott, J. (2022, December 16). *Layoffs persist at Canadian tech companies amid bleak outlook for 2023.* Betakit. https://betakit.com/layoffs-persist-at-canadian-tech-companies-amid-bleak-outlook-for-2023/

2.b. The NPower Canada model

NPower Canada is a sector-based 'on-ramp' program with all the key features outlined above. It is a model for delivering digital skills training—for equipping participants with the basic tech skills and job placements they need to obtain and retain junior-level jobs that use digital skills and supporting them along their career paths.

This report focuses on findings from two streams of programming: the Junior IT Analyst (JITA) program, which provides a Google IT Support Professional certificate, and the Junior Data Analyst (JDA) program, which provides a certificate in AI-900 Microsoft Azure AI Fundamentals and the IBM Data Analyst Certificate.[18] Training is delivered online by NPower Canada instructors ('in-house,' as opposed to a partner organization) and supplemented by the Coursera platform; it covers a wide spectrum of ICT-related skills directly related to a number of in-demand ICT roles. See **Table 1** for more information on the JITA and JDA programs.

Table 1 | Details of JITA and JDA programming streams

	JITA	JDA
Duration	**Three months**	
Geographic regions	**BC, AB, MB, ON, QC, NS**	
Certificate	Google IT Support Professional	AI-900 Microsoft Azure AI Fundamentals; IBM Data Analyst Certificate
Languages	English (with French offered in QC and NS)	English (with French offered in QC)
Target job titles	• Help Desk Specialist • Project Analyst • Junior Systems Administrator • Customer Care Agent • Service Technician	• Junior Data Analyst • Help Desk Specialist • Junior Database Specialist • Business Analyst • Project Analyst • Junior Database Administrator
Expected learning outcomes	• Skills required for a junior-level ICT job • ICT support tasks, including computer assembly, wireless networking and installing programs • End-to-end customer support, including troubleshooting and debugging • Different operating systems, such as Linux and Open Lab	• Excel, SQL, fundamentals for data science, data interpretation and data visualization • Python skills for applied data science and AI, including conditions, loops, functions and various python libraries. • Microsoft Azure AI Insights, exploring AI workloads, machine learning principles and Azure features like computer vision and NLP

The *Final Report* will also contain findings on additional streams that ran from 2020–2022: the Google User Experience Design (UXD) program and the Junior Security and Quality Assurance (JSQA) program.

18 NPower Canada also provides a Security Operations Analyst (SOA) program and previously offered a Google User Experience Design (UXD) and Junior Security and Quality Assurance (JSQA) programs.

Eligibility and target groups

From its establishment in 2014 until 2021, NPower Canada focused on serving opportunity youth aged 18–30. As mentioned, in 2021, NPower Canada expanded eligibility to all age groups and to equity-seeking groups. NPower Canada also accepts referrals into the JITA and JDA programs from caseworkers in the publicly funded employment services systems in Ontario and Alberta. Caseworkers identify recipients of income assistance[19] among their caseloads who are a good fit for NPower Canada's programming. This is a key priority group for the model as members often face significant, persistent labour market barriers, including skills gaps and lower educational attainment.

Table 2 provides a full set of eligibility requirements for the JITA and JDA programs.[20] As detailed below, eligibility requirements for the JDA program are more stringent than for the JITA program, which results in participants in the JDA program having more work experience and/or higher levels of education. These differences, and an analysis of impacts by program, will be presented in the *Final Report.*

19 Income assistance includes Ontario Works POES (Purchase of Employment Services), the Ontario Disability Support Program and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped in Alberta. The participation of these priority groups in in Ontario is funded by the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

20 NPower Canada. (2024). *NPower Canada.* https://npowercanada.ca/

Table 2 | Eligibility criteria for JITA and JDA

	Common eligibility criteria for JITA and JDA
Age	• At least 18 years old at the program start date.
Financial and immigration status	• Maintain legal status in Canada (Citizen, Permanent Resident or Work Permit) with a valid Social Insurance Number (SIN). • Open Work Permit holders must have validity extending one year beyond the program start date. • Eligible to work full-time in Canada and begin employment in the next three to nine months. • Have a household income below $100,000 and an individual income below $40,000[21]
Career	• Seeking full-time employment in tech and digital roles in Canada post-program. • Currently facing unemployment, underemployment or financial barriers to employment. • Residing in the program's catchment area.
Language	• Demonstrate advanced English or French-language proficiency (in QC). • CLB examination score of level 7 or above for non-native English speakers.
Education	• Not currently enrolled full-time in post-secondary education. • Not confirmed for future full-time post-secondary enrollment. • Not studying ICT or tech part-time or full-time. • Does not hold equivalent or more advanced certifications (as determined by NPower Canada).[22] • Hold a high school diploma, GED or recognized high school equivalence from Canada or internationally. • Possess basic computer skills: typing, email, internet navigation. • Have not previously completed an NPower Canada Core Program.
	Eligibility criteria for JDA only
	• Demonstrate an interest in or working knowledge of Structured Query Language (SQL) and experience working with Microsoft Excel programming. • Possess a minimum of Grade 12-level statistics, calculus or advanced functions knowledge. • Have taken courses or gained experience in R or Python Statistical Programming. • Either taken courses or have an understanding of machine learning. • Enjoy working with data and solving logic puzzles.

21 NPower Canada does not distinguish between gross and net income.

22 By "equivalent or more advanced certifications," NPower Canada is referring IT-related qualifications or credentials at a similar or higher level to the certifications offered by the JITA and JDA programs – in other words, these eligibility criteria are meant to exclude those who are likely to know much of the course content already.

Program components

While JITA and JDA programs differ in their focus on discrete digital skillsets (as outlined above in **Table 1** under expected learning outcomes), the NPower Canada model is otherwise consistent across both programs. **Figure 1** presents the five key features of the model: outreach and recruitment, applications and screening, technical and employability skills training, job placement and alumni services. These features are presented as a participant pathway. All skills training is delivered online (see below **Figure 1** for more details).

Figure 1 | The NPower Canada model as participant pathway

1) Recruitment and Outreach

Continuous engagement through social media, information sessions, and partnerships with local community organizations to build strong, sustainable pipelines of applicants with cross referrals to partner organizations when wraparound supports are needed for our participants.

2) Application and Screening (one to two months pre-training)

Assessing applicants for elig1b1lity, suitability and motivation through a technical assessment, interviews, group information session and preparatory activities

3) Skills Training (14 to 15 weeks)

Digital skills training (JITA and JOA training programs)

Work-simulated skills training through group work, individual tasks and career coaching.

Professional skills training, such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, reliability, etc.

Certificates

Each stream has its own certificate option (e.g. JITA has Google IT Support and CISCO IT Essentials)

Wraparound supports and services

Participants are provided with individual counselling and referrals to local services, like childcare, mental health and housing services.

Graduation

At the completion of training, participants graduate the program.

A graduation ceremony marks their achievement.

Employer engagement

Corporate partners host site tours and job-shadowing opportunities to introduce participants to workplaces and to facilitate work-based learning.

4) Job Placement

Job matching

Job placement specialists assess participants skills, strengths and employment needs and liaise between employers and graduates to match graduates with job openings.

Job placement

Job placement specialists work with participants to support them securing employment.

Job search assistance

Graduates have access to job matching and placement services, as well as support navigating the job market and employment, including coaching, mentorship and networking supports, for five years post-graduation.

5) Alumni Services

Program graduates receive at least five years of career development services, including Job retention coaching, support with continuing education, connections to industry mentors and access to networking opportunities

In the first two cohorts of the project, all participants had to demonstrate their willingness to work toward employment readiness for a tech-enabled job during the first few weeks of the program to retain a place in the remainder of the program. However, in response to participant feedback, the early onboarding period shifted from a 'bootcamp' to an 'orientation': a more welcoming, inclusive, lower-stakes, lower-pressure introduction to the program.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all training content is now presented online through **Coursera** (the online course-, certificate- and degree-provider), with training in program topics delivered directly by NPower Canada staff. As a result of its successful pivot to online training, digital skills training can be delivered fully to participants across Canada (provided they have internet access) without the need for any in-person meetings. Other parts of the NPower Canada model remain constrained by geography: NPower Canada helps place participants into jobs with its employer partners, but for in-person or hybrid roles, it can only do so in the geographic areas in which those employer partners operate.[23] Similarly, staff supporting participants frequently make referrals to local services (e.g., mental health services, housing supports, etc.), which may prove challenging in areas with limited service availability.

For these reasons, NPower Canada's programs have intentionally scaled towards overcoming geographic limitations to enhance accessibility (especially via connectivity to remote work opportunities) for rural and remote communities. While NPower Canada's goal is to eventually be available to any participants nationally, programming is currently still limited to six provinces (see **Table 1**), and in some cases, certain cities and regions (e.g., the JDA program accepts Ontario-based applicants only from the GTA, Cambridge, Kingston, Kitchener, Hamilton, London, Waterloo, Windsor, Gananoque, Ottawa and individuals living within a 90-minute commute of these communities).

23 NPower Canada has gradually expanded their employer network to additional regions and will continue expanding into smaller and northern communities. Funder limitations and employer partners determine which regions are served (e.g., provincial funding can ensure the program is offered province-wide, whereas local funding often means it is offered in one city or region).

Program stakeholders

NPower Canada has a network of external stakeholders who play important roles in determining strategic direction, developing and refining training content, supporting outreach, providing job opportunities and disseminating insights from the programs. **Table 3** presents a brief overview of the role of each stakeholder group.

Table 3 | NPower Canada stakeholders and their roles

Stakeholder	Role
Board of directors	Provides strategic and fiduciary oversight. The board consists of private sector executives, community leaders and NPower Canada graduates.
Industry council	Informs the NPower Canada curriculum and ensures that participants are equipped with in-demand technical and professional skills. The industry council is composed of leaders from a variety of organizations that employ junior IT talent.
Alumni advisory council	Provides NPower Canada with strategic direction and input from an alumni perspective to ensure that the council curriculum, wraparound supports, employment services and alumni interventions respond to the needs and priorities of underserved jobseekers. The alumni advisory council provides outreach to other jobseekers in the community who face employment barriers
Community partners	Provides support with NPower Canada recruitment activities, acting as a source for potential participants and advertising platforms for the program. Some partners are part of a referral network upon which NPower Canada staff rely to complement wrap around services. Community partners include government agencies, non-profits and schools as well as grassroots organizations, such as ethno-cultural organizations, places of worship and youth-led meet-up groups.
Funders	Ensures the financial viability of NPower Canada and supports program scalability into new areas. Funding comes from a mixture of government, corporate and foundation sources. NPower Canada established a wide network of more than 200 employers with interest
Employers	NPowerCanada established a wide network of more than 200 employers with interest in hiring NPower Canada graduates in digital roles. Employers help NPower Canada develop and tailor programs to meet industry needs.
Workforce development organizations	NPower Canada shares its best practices and lessons learned in forums such as the United Way Career Development Navigator Network, CivicAction Champions Council, Sector Skills Academy and Calgary Youth Employment Lab.

3. Methodology

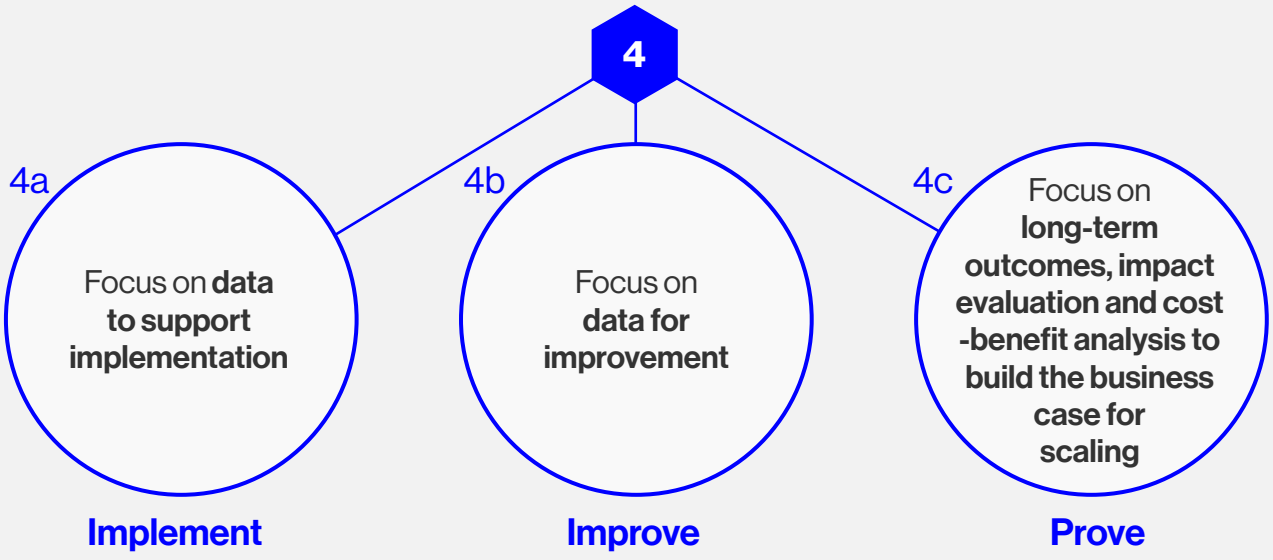
The following section discusses Blueprint's approach to addressing the evidence and scaling needs of the NPower Canada model, our learning agenda and research questions, and the overall design of our data collection and analysis. It outlines what data were collected and how we implemented a multi-step process of creating comparisons and assessing outcomes.

3.a. Blueprint's evidence generation approach

Blueprint has developed a novel approach to evidence generation that fits within the six stages of the innovation cycle to support the scaling-up of promising interventions. By understanding an intervention's stage of development, we can determine the most appropriate tools to advance it to the next stage. **Box 5** of the Scaling Design Report provides more details on our evidence generation approach.

Like all other **Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio** interventions, NPower Canada is in Stage 4 of the innovation cycle, **Delivery and Iteration**. Stage 4 is further broken down into three levels of delivery maturity: **Implement, Improve** and **Prove** (see **Figure 2**). NPower Canada is a well-established model. For this reason, we categorized it at Stage 4c of the innovation cycle, Prove, where evidence generation is focused on long-term outcomes, estimating impact and cost-benefit analysis to build the business case for scaling.

Figure 2 | **Phases of Delivery Maturity**



Our measurement approach includes both indicators that are specific to the NPower Canada model and common indicators drawn from our Common Outcomes Framework (see **Box 1**).

Box 1 | Common Outcomes Framework

Our measurement approach includes indicators that are specific to an intervention as well as a set of common indicators that are measured for every intervention in the Portfolio.

These common indicators are drawn from Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework, which was developed in consultation with our partners and informed by a review of employment-related outcomes frameworks and measurement approaches both within Canada and internationally. They include:

- Intermediate outcomes that reflect 'in-program' participant experiences and gains (e.g., program satisfaction and skills development).
- Long-term outcomes such as employment and educational attainment.

Using a consistent approach to measuring outcomes is part of our commitment to understanding how each intervention in the Portfolio is reaching people across Canada and allows us to measure long-term outcomes using Statistics Canada's Social Data Linking Environment.

For more information on Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework, see **Appendix A**.

3.b. Learning agenda

This Interim Report explores the following questions:

- What are early insights into participant experiences in the program?
  - Is the program reaching its target population?
  - Do participants complete the program? Are they satisfied with the model? What do they see as strengths and areas for improvement? What factors hindered completion for those who did not complete, and what additional supports might be needed?
- What are early insights into the outcomes of participants?
  - What labour market and educational outcomes do participants achieve? How do these outcomes vary across participants and across program streams?

In our *Final Report*, additional questions will be explored, including:

- What resources are required for the successful implementation of the model, and what success and challenges occurred during delivery?
- What causal effect does the program have on participant employment and education outcomes, and how do they vary across participants?
- How much does the program cost to deliver and what is the return on investment?

3.c. Research design

Blueprint and NPower Canada are collaborating to implement an RCT to estimate the causal impact of the JITA and JDA programs on participant outcomes. Applicants to NPower Canada's programs in Ontario and Alberta were randomly assigned to a treatment group (those who were able to enrol in the programs) or to a comparison group (those who were not). NPower Canada provided administrative data on these participants, including anonymized data for those who did not consent to participate in Blueprint's evaluation, which has been included in the analyses of program reach and completion provided below. Data provided by NPower included socio-demographic and completion data as well as baseline measures of participant employment and earnings at the time of program application. Participants in both groups were surveyed at program exit, six months and 12 months post-program. Longer-term impact analysis may be possible in the future through Statistics Canada data linkage.

This Interim Report presents preliminary findings from data collected for the RCT treatment group (n=2665) of participants only. Though all treatment group members were offered enrolment, some chose not to enrol (n=861, or 32%), while others enrolled but did not complete the program (n=258, or 14% of the enrolled treatment group and 10% of the treatment group overall). Analyses presented here show results for the treatment group as a whole, including those who did not enrol in or complete the program.

Included analyses

This report excludes the comparison group (n=609) from our analysis as the sample is not yet large enough to allow us to draw meaningful conclusions about program impact by comparing outcomes of treatment and comparison groups. Thus, this report's findings cannot be considered causal; we cannot be sure that outcomes achieved by the treatment group are caused by participation in the program and not by factors external to NPower Canada, such as changes in the ICT industry and wider economy.

Due to sample size constraints, we focus our discussion of early insights on specific groups within the full sample. At this point, we do not include administrative data or survey findings from the following two groups of participants, hereafter referred to as the "non-RCT" group. These groups include:

1. **Applicants to NPower Canada's programs outside of Ontario and Alberta.** This group includes applicants to programs in Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec. These applicants were not included in the RCT because applicant pools in these regions were too small to allow for the addition of a comparison group. They did not receive surveys but were included in participant interviews asking about their program experience.
2. **Applicants to NPower Canada's programs in Ontario and Alberta who identified as Indigenous, were participating in the POES program through Ontario Works[24] or were receiving government disability benefits through AISH (Alberta) or ODSP (Ontario).** These participants were not included in the RCT because it was important to program stakeholders that, as priority groups, they all received the training instead of being randomized into treatment and comparison groups. These participants were included in both surveys and interviews, but because they were not randomized, they will not be included in analyses of impact that compare the outcomes of treatment and comparison group members.

24 The POES (Purchase of Employment Services) program was launched in 2015 by Toronto Employment and Social Services to provide programs and customized support to job-seekers with a focus on training in high-demand sectors and work-based learning.

Our *Final Report* will present the full RCT results, estimating the impact of the programs by comparing outcomes achieved by the participants who took the training with those achieved by the comparison group. It will also analyze impacts by stream and socio-demographic characteristics and present analyses of the outcomes achieved by the non-RCT group.

Randomized controlled trial

Box 2 presents an explanation of the benefits of using an RCT, including a discussion of the contexts required to implement these designs.

Box 2 | RCTs, outcomes and impacts

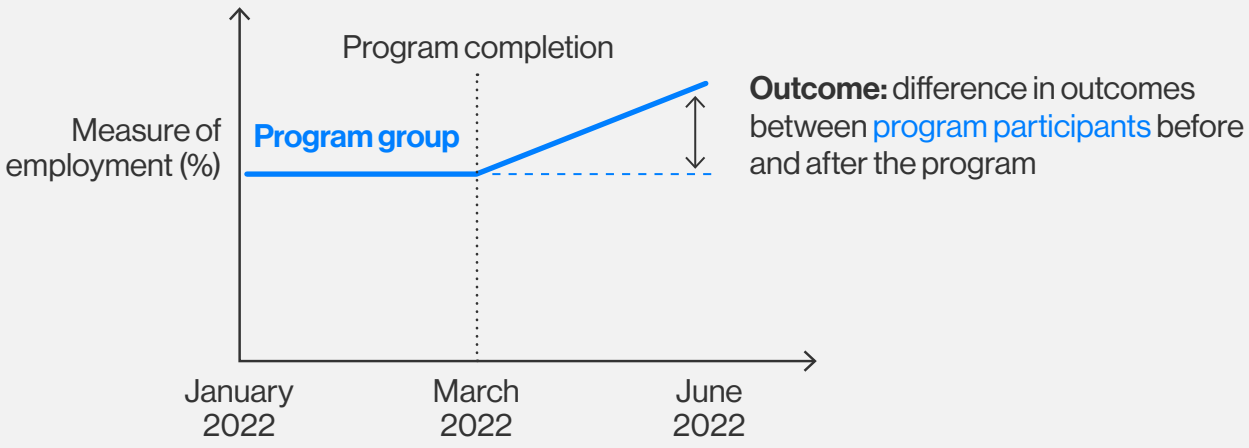
Randomized control trials (RCTs) seek to understand a program's impacts by comparing those who take the program (called the 'treatment group') with those who do not (called the 'comparison group').

Randomization increases the likelihood that participants across groups have comparable characteristics so we can attribute any differences in *outcomes* to the program rather than to other factors (e.g., changes in the wider economy or labour market).

RCTs require large sample sizes to be effective. This is usually achieved through over-subscription to protect against loss of participation over time, which means there are significantly more eligible participants than the program can accommodate. NPower Canada aimed to oversubscribe its programs at each site, generating 25% more qualified applicants per cohort than available spaces.

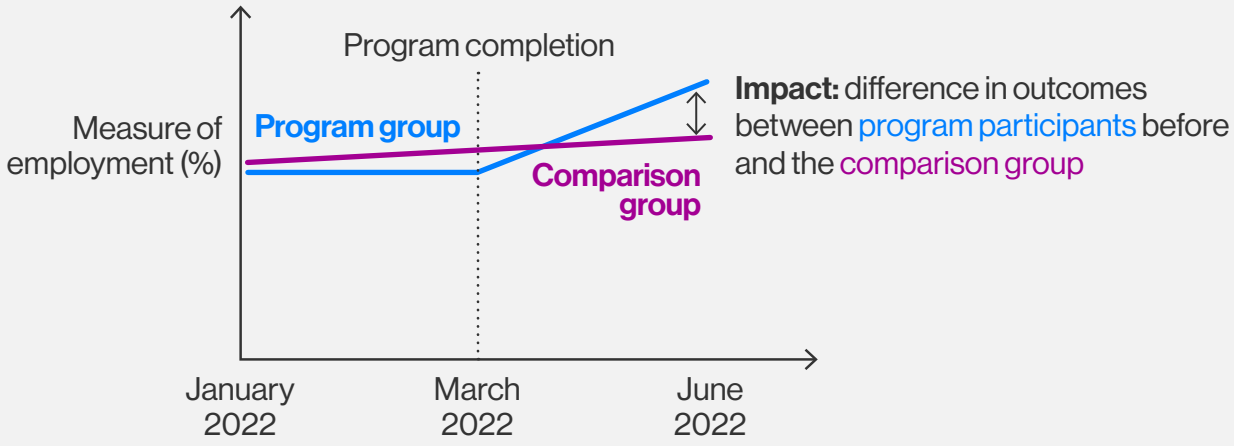
Program *outcomes* refer to the changes in key indicators experienced by participants from program entry to program exit and beyond (typically up to a year after program exit). **Figure 3** illustrates the employment outcomes of a hypothetical program from program exit to three-months post-exit.

Figure 3 | Illustration of program outcome



Program *impacts* are the differences in outcomes experienced by program participants and those experienced by a similar group of people who did not take the program. **Figure 4** shows the employment impact of a hypothetical program from exit to three-months post-exit.

Figure 4 | Illustration of program impacts



3.d. Data sources

Our data sources include participant surveys and interviews as well as program administrative data. We focus on the 2,665 participants assigned to the treatment group for the JITA or JDA programs delivered in Ontario and Alberta from May 2022 to June 2023.

Table 4 provides the socio-demographic characteristics of participants within the RCT treatment group.

Table 4 | Participant characteristics within the RCT treatment group

Characteristic		n	Total respondents	%
Age	35+	696	2661	26
	25-34	1524	2661	57
	Under 25	441	2661	17
Employed at Application	Yes	1060	2652	40
	No	1592	2652	60
Disability	Yes	111	2645	4
	No	2444	2645	92
	Prefer not to answer	90	2645	3
Gender Priority Group	Yes	1427	2652	54
	No	1204	2652	45
	Prefer not to answer	21	2652	1
Highest Education Completed	University Degree	1382	2212	62
	College Diploma or Certificate	349	2212	16
	High School	481	2212	22
BIPOC	Yes	2428	2652	92
	No	122	2652	5
	Prefer not to answer	102	2652	4
Immigration Status	Newcomer (2017+)	1495	2665	56
	Immigrated before 2017	227	2665	9
	Canadian Born	943	2665	35
LGBTQIA2S+	Yes	108	2638	4
	No	2334	2638	88
	Prefer not to answer	196	2638	7

To help contextualize the administrative and survey findings presented here, this report also includes findings from semi-structured participant interviews conducted with participants from across NPower Canada's regions. The interviews were carried out at the point of exit for participants completing the program (n=17) and at the point of withdrawal for participants who did not complete the training (n=7). The sample was chosen at random but adjusted to reflect the diversity of program participants (i.e., to prioritize Indigenous representation, ensure gender balance and include at least some participants from each stream and program location). The interviews were coded using Condens software. Participants were asked about their experiences in the program: program strengths, areas for improvement and reasons for leaving the program before completion (where applicable).

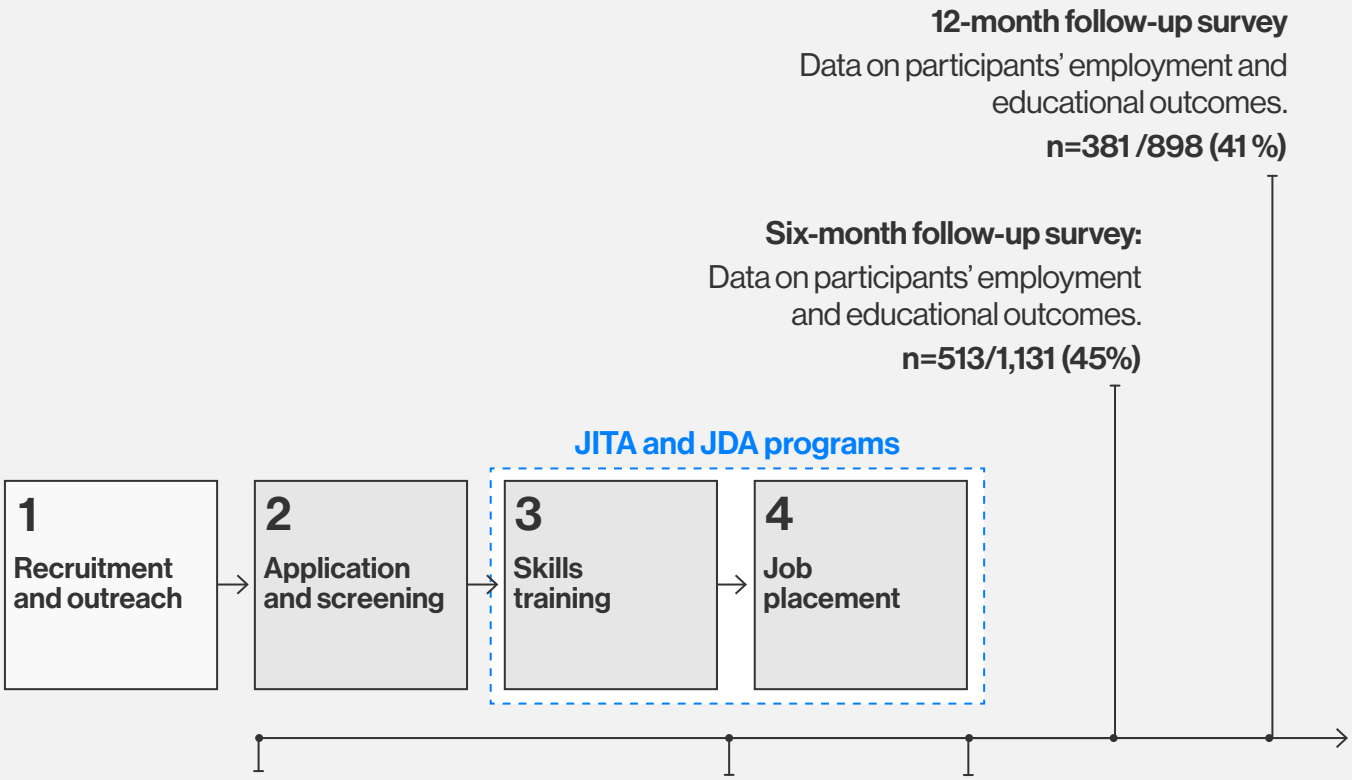
The characteristics of interview participants are summarized in **Table 5**.

Table 5 | Cohort and participation targets

		Completer	Non-Completer
Program Stream	JITA	11	4
	JDA	6	0
	UX	0	3
Gender	Woman	11	5
	Man	5	0
	Non-binary or prefer not to answer	1	2
BIPOC	Yes	15	5
	No	2	2
Province	ON	4	2
	AB	7	1
	BC	3	3
	QC	2	1
	NS	1	0

Figure 5 (below) maps the data collection points in the participant journey through JITA or JDA. The sample size and response rates for this treatment group decreased over time as not all participants responded to each survey or question within it. The number of treatment group participants eligible to complete the 12-month follow-up survey (898) is lower than the number eligible to complete the exit- or six-month follow-up surveys because several cohorts graduated fewer than 12 months before the time of analysis.

Figure 5 | Data collection points in the participant journey



3.e. Data limitations

- **Generalizability of findings to all NPower Canada participants.** The findings presented in this *Interim Report* cannot be generalized to all NPower Canada program participants for two reasons:
  - **Our analysis excludes the non-RCT group**, characterized by individuals in Ontario receiving income support and Indigenous participants. Because there are many observable differences[25] between the treatment group and non-RCT group (differences that arguably characterize the latter as having more disadvantages), we cannot generalize our findings to the non-RCT group.
  - **Research participation and survey response rates were relatively low.** Fifty-two percent of all program participants consented to participate in the research, and among those who consented, survey response rates were below 50%. Findings based on survey and interview data may not be generalizable to the full treatment group. Efforts to increase consent and survey participation have been ongoing throughout the research and have included adjustments to participant communication methods, increasing incentives for participation and changing consent processes to an opt-out, rather than opt-in, model. Some of these changes took effect in the cohorts included in this report; the full effects will be seen in the Final Report. The low survey response rates may also be mitigated through Statistics Canada administrative data, which can be used to track longer-term participant outcomes and do not require participants to actively respond to surveys.
- **Limited subgroup analysis.** Due to the limited sample size, we could not reliably conduct various subgroup analyses, including an analysis of outcomes by program stream and for some socio-demographic groups. Where sample sizes permit, we report on outcomes for specific subgroups only.
- **Limitations to analysis for participants' employment in IT:** To assess whether participants held ICT roles specifically, we asked respondents to choose from a list of NAICS/NOC codes (based on JITA and JDA target job titles) or input their own job titles if they could not find a suitable option from the code list. Both methods may not provide enough information to accurately determine the extent to which a role involves ICT skills, likely suggesting that our data represents an underestimate of participants with ICT roles. Additionally, NPower Canada targets tech-enabled jobs, many of which also fall outside the ICT sector, and these are not reflected in our analysis.

25 The most prominent differences are eligibility criteria for membership (i.e., social assistance receipt), educational attainment, LGBTQIA2S+ identification, Indigenous identity, disability, employment at baseline and immigration histories.

4. Early insights into participants' experiences

To explore early insights into participants' experiences, this section looks at who the program reached, completion rates and program satisfaction. As a high-level summary of findings:

- NPower Canada effectively reached its target demographic of equity-seeking groups: most participants in the JITA and JDA programs experienced some form of labour market disadvantage through race, gender, class and/or ability.
- Program completion rates were high.
- Participants were generally satisfied with the JITA and JDA programs.

4.a. Reach

Data Source:	NPower Canada administrative data, collected at the time of program application
Sample:	RCT treatment group (Ontario and Alberta JITA and JDA participants irrespective of research and evaluation consent)

Most participants experienced some form of disadvantage in the labour market.

Based on program administrative data (n=2661), a large majority of participants experienced some form of labour market disadvantage, as captured in the list below. See **Table 4: Participant characteristics on p. 22** for a full breakdown based on age, disability status, newcomer status and beyond.

- **92%** of participants identified as BIPOC.
- **60%** were unemployed at program start.
- **54%** were from priority gender groups underrepresented in IT (i.e., women, non-binary, trans and/or gender-fluid).
- **4%** reported having a disability.
- **4%** reported identifying as LGBTQIA2S+.

Additional characteristics of the participants are outlined below.

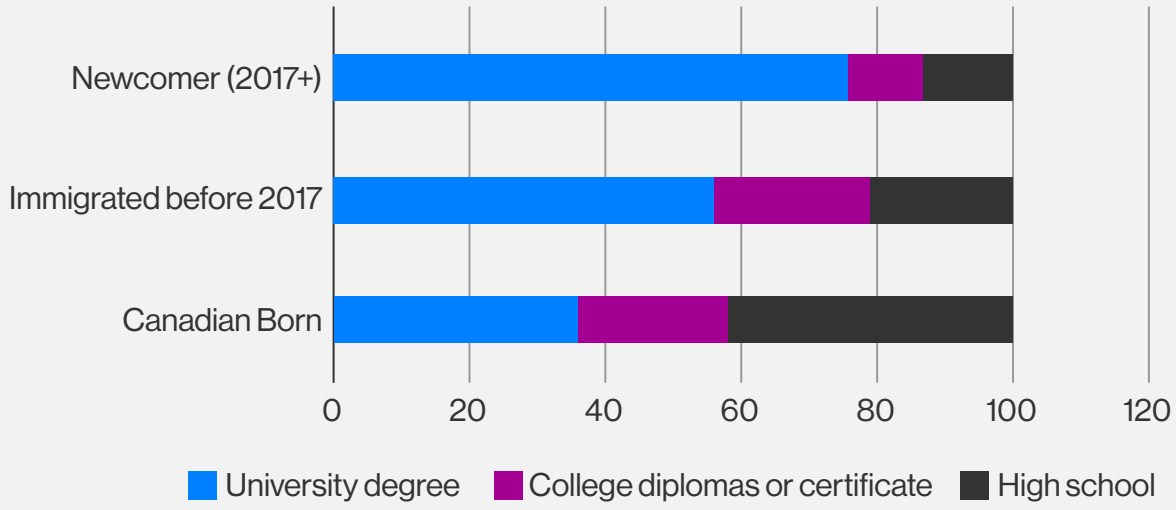
Most participants have a post-secondary credential.

Most participants in JITA and JDA have a post-secondary qualification: **62%** have a university degree, **16%** have a college degree or certificate and 22% hold a high school diploma as their highest qualification.

Most participants were immigrants, with the majority being newcomers.

The majority (**65%**) of participants were born outside of Canada. Over half (**56%**) were newcomers who arrived in Canada 2017 or later. As shown in **Figure 6**, newcomers were more likely to have PSE than Canadian-born participants, likely due to Canadian immigration requirements, which helps explain the high numbers of participants with PSE credentials.

Figure 6 | Educational attainment by immigration status



Most participants were young adults.

In 2021, NPower Canada removed the age limit for the JITA and JDA programs (previously set at 30 years old). Correspondingly, a considerable number of participants in our sample were not youth. However, most participants were young adults, falling into the 25–34 age range (**57%**). This was followed by **26%** who were over 35, and **17%** under 25.

Nearly one-third of participants were receiving some form of public benefit.

Thirty-one percent were receiving some form of public benefit at intake (e.g., income assistance, employment insurance, housing benefits, etc.): **20%** of participants were receiving Income Assistance and **4%** were in receipt of Employment Insurance.

4.b. Completion

Data Source: NPower Canada administrative data

Sample: RCT treatment group (Ontario and Alberta JITA and JDA participants irrespective of research and evaluation consent)

Program administrative data show that program completion rates were high.

- **86%** of participants who enrolled in the program completed it.
- **11%** withdrew from the program at some point after enrolment.
- **3%** were dismissed from the program.

Interviews with a small sample of non-completing participants (n=7) revealed that many left the program due to scheduling conflicts, often with existing part-time jobs. Others found employment before they completed the program, and some decided to pursue other training opportunities.

Some non-completing participants reported leaving the program because the curriculum or instructional style was not a good fit for them. Reasons included familiarity with the course content, finding that the training did not align well with their desired career outcomes and finding it difficult to find a suitable space to complete the online training. The characteristics of interview participants are summarized in **Table 5** in section **3.d. Data sources**.

4.c. Satisfaction

Data Sources:	Blueprint exit survey, administered to consenting RCT treatment group participants in Ontario and Alberta (JITA and JDA) at program exit
Participant interviews:	Conducted during the program or at program exit with a subset of participants who did or did not complete one of NPower Canada's programs (JITA, JDA or UXD) in one of five provinces where programming was offered (ON, AB, BC, QC, or NS)

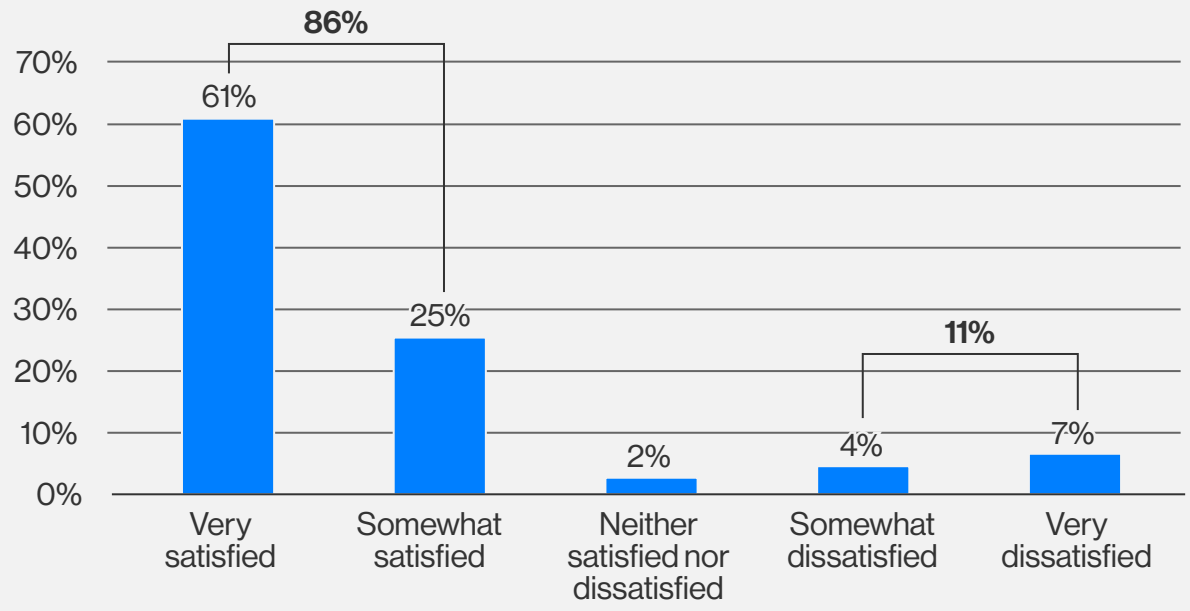
Data from the exit survey show that participants were generally satisfied with the program overall and with its parts. The data presented below reflects the total percentage of participants who endorse each item within the scales profiled.

Overall satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate their overall program experience on a five-point Likert scale. Results show participants were generally satisfied with the JITA and JDA programs overall (see Figure 7, below).

- **86%** of exit survey respondents who completed the program reported being either "very satisfied" (61%) or "somewhat satisfied" (25%) with their experience.
- Only **11%** reported being "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied."

Figure 7 | Participant overall satisfaction with the program (N=458)

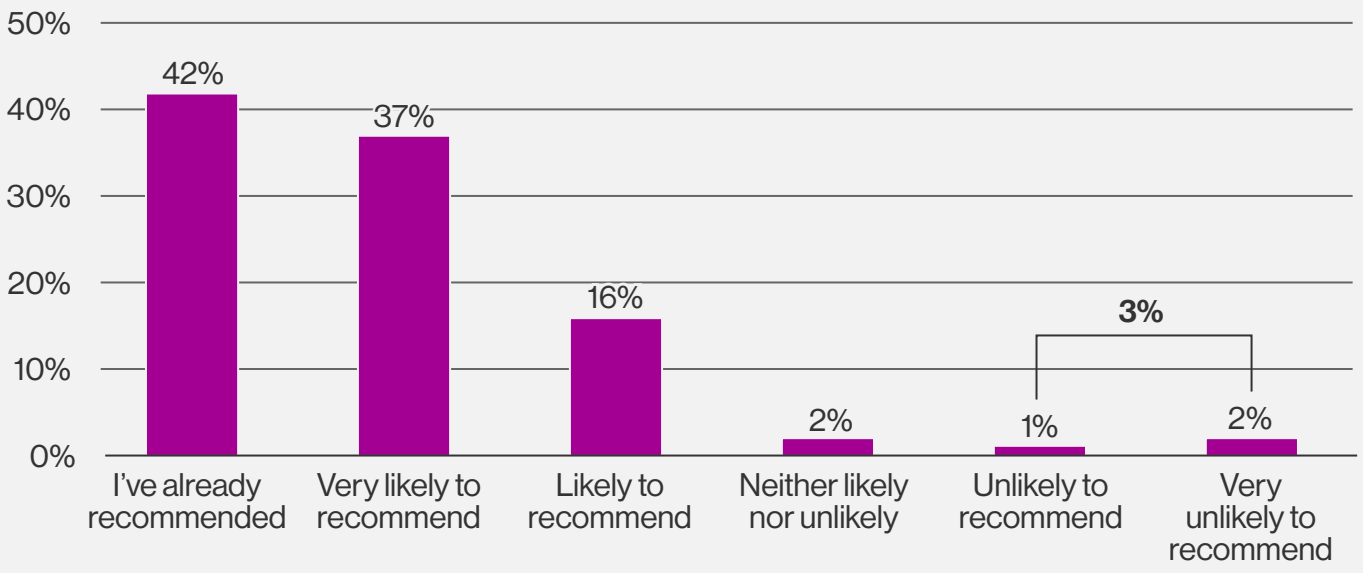


Likelihood of recommending

Participants were also asked to indicate their likelihood of recommending the program. Most participants (**79%**) had either **already recommended** the JITA or JDA programs to others or were **very likely to do so** (see **Figure 8**, below).

- **42%** had either "already recommended NPower Canada to others" or were "very likely" to do so (**37%**).
- A further **16%** were "likely to recommend" the program.
- Only **3%** reported being "unlikely to recommend" (**1%**) or "very unlikely to recommend" (**2%**) the program.

Figure 8 | Likelihood of recommending (N=458)

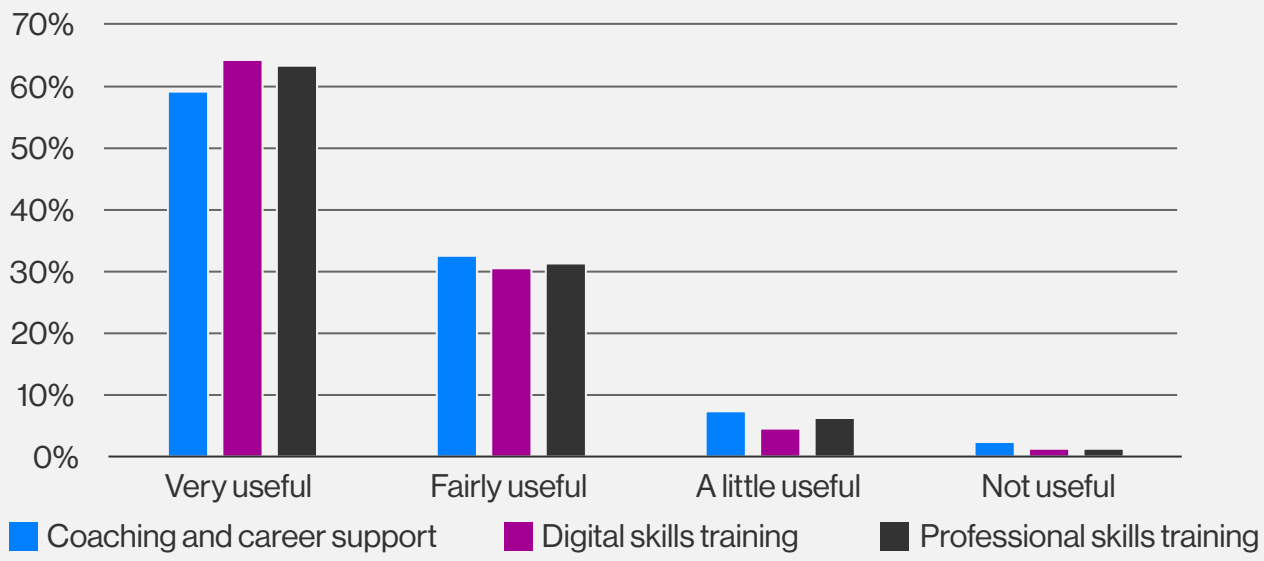


Satisfaction by component

Participants were also asked to indicate the usefulness of each program component. Satisfaction trends were fairly consistent across program components: approximately two-thirds of participants found each component "very useful," and approximately one-third found it "useful." A small remainder found it "a little useful" or "not useful" (see **Figure 9**, below).

- **94%** of respondents found the digital skills training useful; 64% found it "very useful" and **30%** found it "fairly useful."
- **94%** of respondents found the professional skills training useful; 63% found it "very useful" and **31%** found it "fairly useful."
- **91%** of respondents found the career coaching and supports useful; 59% found it "very useful" and **32%** found it "fairly useful."

Figure 9 | Satisfaction by component (N=458)



Satisfaction by newcomer status

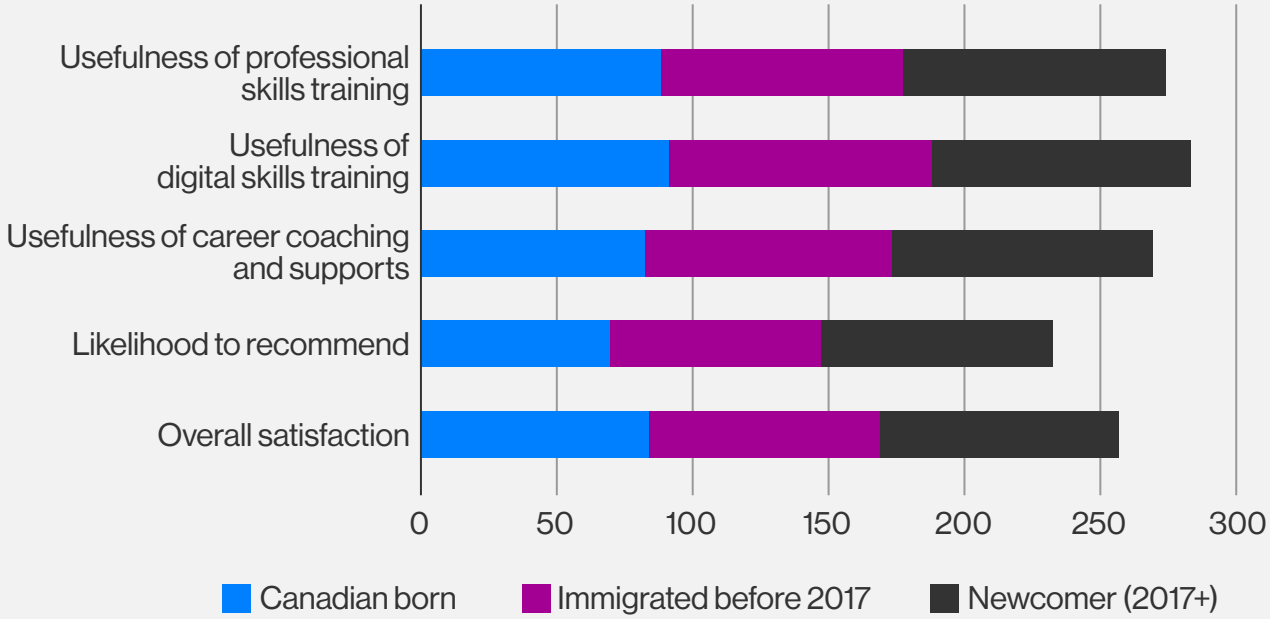
Within the exit survey satisfaction data, we had sufficient sample size to conduct a sub-group analysis to examine how satisfaction differed according to immigration status. Newcomers were consistently more satisfied with the program than both Canadian-born participants and immigrants who arrived in Canada before 2017.

Table 6 shows the percentage of respondents who gave a positive response (either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied")[26] to the program overall and the various program components. The difference in positive responses between newcomers and Canadian-born participants was largest when looking at the

26 Our Likert scale (five points): very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied.

likelihood to recommend the program (**85%** vs **70%**), the usefulness of career coaching and supports (**96%** vs **83%**) and the usefulness of professional skills training (**97%** vs **89%**).

Figure 10 | Educational attainment by immigration status



Satisfaction by region

As mentioned, only the participants in Alberta (n=102)[27] and Ontario (n=355) are included in our RCT. Participants in Alberta reported slightly higher rates of satisfaction with the program overall and with each component than their Ontario counterparts:

- **90%** of participants in Alberta reported a positive response to the program overall compared to **86%** in Ontario.
- **88%** of Alberta participants had already recommended the program, or were very likely to do so, versus **77%** of Ontario participants.
- **93%** of participants in Alberta responded positively about the usefulness of the career coaching and support compared to 91% of Ontario participants.
- **97%** of Alberta participants responded positively about the usefulness of the digital skills training versus **94%** of Ontario participants.
- **97%** of participants in Alberta gave a positive response about the usefulness of the professional skills training compared to 93% of Ontario participants.

27 In this section, n represents, for a given group, the number of treatment group participants belonging to that group who responded to NPower Canada's satisfaction survey.

Satisfaction by gender

Satisfaction did not vary greatly between gender priority and non-gender priority groups:

- **88%** of participants from gender priority groups (n=290) gave a positive response to the program overall, compared to **86%** of participants from non-gender priority groups (n=162).

Satisfaction by education

Satisfaction was highest among those with a college diploma or certificate:

- **92%** of participants with a college diploma or certificate (n=49) gave a positive response to the program overall, compared with **86%** of participants with a university degree (n=255) and **85%** of people with a high school diploma (n=68).

Table 6 | Satisfaction by region, gender and education

	Province		Priority Gender Group			Highest Education Completed		
Dimension of satisfaction	**Alberta**	**Ontario**	**Prefer not to say**	**No**	**Yes**	**High School**	**College Diploma or Certificate**	**University Degree**
Overall satisfaction with program	**90%** (92/012)	**86%** (305/356)	**40%** (2/5)	**86%** (140/162)	**88%** (254/290)	**85%** (58/68)	**92%** (45/49)	**86%** (219/255)
Likelihood of recommending program	**88%** (90/102)	**77%** (273/356)	**20%** (1/5)	**79%** (128/162)	**81%** (234/290)	**71%** (48/68)	**73%** (36/49)	**83%** (211/255)
Usefulness of career coaching and support	**93%** (95/102)	**91%** (323/356)	**20%** (1/5)	**90%** (146/162)	**93%** (270/290)	**87%** (59/68)	**88%** (43/49)	**93%** (238/255)
Usefulness of digital skills training	**97%** (99/102)	**94%** (335/356)	**60%** (3/5)	**94%** (153/162)	**96%** (277/290)	**94%** (64/68)	**90%** (44/49)	**96%** (244/255)
Usefulness of professional skills training	**97%** (99/102)	**93%** (330/356)	**40%** (2/5)	**93%** (150/162)	**95%** (276/290)	**96%** (65/68)	**88%** (43/49)	**94%** (239/255)

Program strengths and areas for improvement

Interviews with participants investigated their experiences with aspects of the program they felt were positive and satisfying as well as those they felt represented opportunities for refinement. Below, we summarize experiences that emerged consistently across the sample of interviewees (n=24). Because this group was

very small relative to the population of program participants, their views should not be taken to represent the views of all participants.

The interviews highlighted a range of program **strengths**.

- Participants felt that **NPower Canada staff** were dedicated, passionate and responsive to their needs.
- They appreciated that the program was **free** and **available online**.
- They enjoyed the **format** and **structure** of the program and how it mixed independent and group work, which they felt reflected a realistic work environment.
- Participants saw the regularity and predictability of **assessments on Coursera** as another program strength. Participants felt assessments aligned well with the course material and enjoyed having the option of re-taking tests to re-enforce their learning.
- Most participants found the **industry and alumni speakers, the interview practice and CV and cover letter workshops useful.**
- **Newcomers** reported finding the content on **Canadian workplace expectations and cultures** particularly helpful.

Participants also identified some areas for improvement.

- **Pacing** proved to be a challenge at both ends of the spectrum of experience: some participants found the orientation and skills training too fast to fully absorb, while others, typically those with more tech experience, found the pace too slow and the content too easy.
- Some participants found the **orientation week** and **skills training** disorganized. They sought more clarity around course logistics and the use of the various online platforms during JITA and JDA, which they felt could be streamlined (i.e., they suggested that fewer platforms were used).
- Some participants felt the **reliance on Coursera**, which is the primary platform through which content is presented through the program, was a drawback and wanted more in-class reviews and hands-on learning through labs, industry visits or capstone projects.
- Some participants reported a **lack of alignment** between skills and interests and the jobs sent to participants during job matching. In some cases, participants felt their salaries were too low, the jobs were more junior-level than desired or simply not the kind of role they were looking for (e.g., customer-service jobs). In other cases, participants thought they didn't have enough skills or experience for the opportunities that were being sent to them.
- Several participants in the first two cohorts noted that they felt under **too much pressure** to prove themselves to keep their spots on the program during the first week, which they felt was an overly tense and competitive environment. In response to feedback about the feel of the first week, NPower Canada quickly remodeled it (formerly the 'bootcamp,' in which some participants were not invited to full enrolment past the first week based on instructor assessments of whether they were arriving on time, submitting assignments, acting appropriately in class, etc.) to become an 'orientation' period: a more welcoming, inclusive, lower-stakes, lower-pressure introduction to the program. Following this shift, no participants included in the interviews mentioned feeling the need to prove themselves in week one.

5. Early insights into participant outcomes

Data Source: NPower admin data, Blueprint exit, six-month and 12-month surveys | Sample: RCT treatment group (Ontario and Alberta JITA and JDA participants who consented to research and evaluation)

This section provides early insights into the following outcomes achieved by treatment group participants in the JITA and JDA programs: employment, education and training, and earnings.

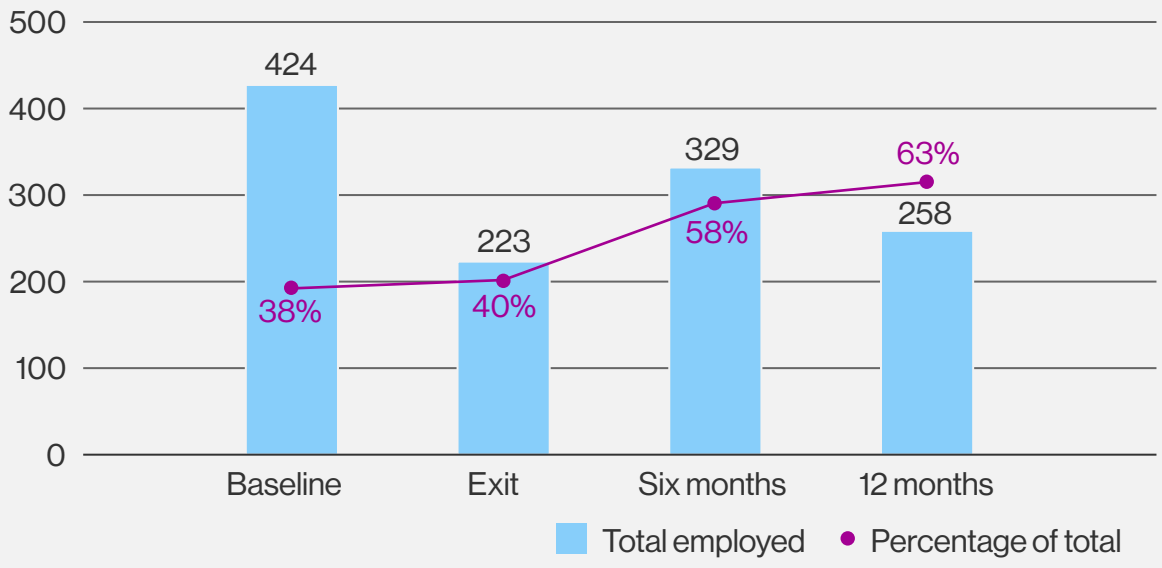
Overall, we find that:

- Employment rates for participants increased from the time of program application onwards.
- Earnings for participants increased from baseline to exit, and then at each subsequent data collection timepoint.
- Just under half of participants held ICT jobs at 12 months post-program.

5.a. Employment

Administrative data from the time of application (baseline) and survey data from exit, six- and 12-months post-program show that **employment rates for participants in the JITA and JDA programs increased from the time of application onwards. Figure 11** shows employment rates for participants at each follow-up point. At baseline, **38%** of participants were employed, with this proportion rising to **40%** at exit. The percentage of employed participants increased further to **58%** at six months and **63%** at 12 months post-program. This is an increase of **25 percentage points i**n the proportion of participants employed from baseline to the 12-month mark.

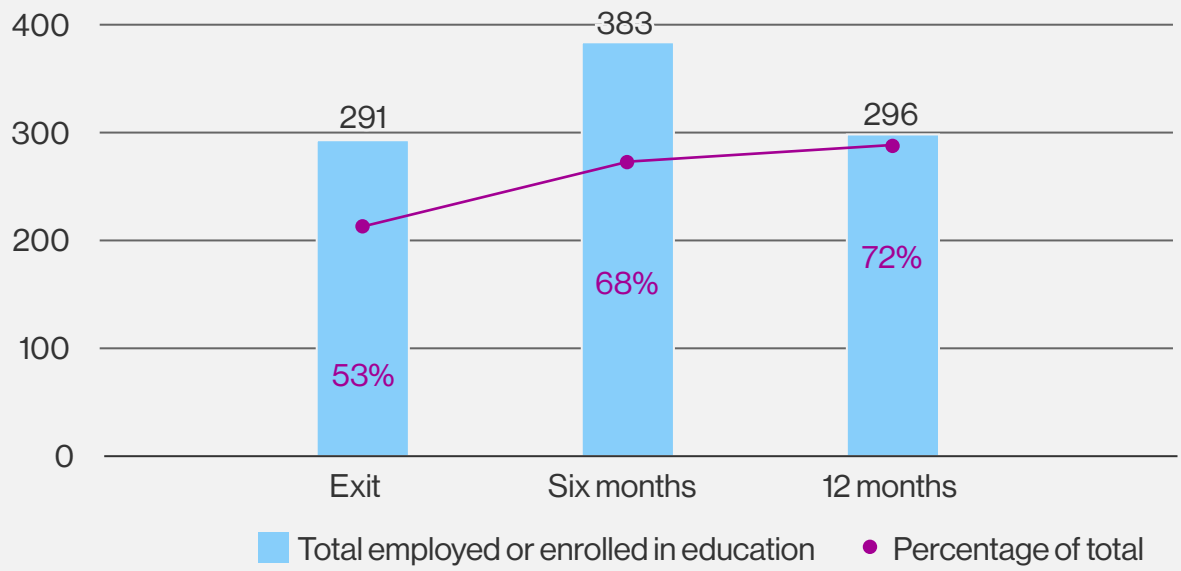
Figure 11 | Employed respondents at exit, six months and 12 months



Adding participants in education to the employment numbers shows that **53%** of participants were either employed or enrolled in education at exit (see **Figure 12**). This number increased to **68%** at six months and **72%** at 12 months (an increase of 19 percentage points, or **36%**, from exit to 12 months).

Note that the total number of respondents was lower for education and employment than for employment alone because fewer respondents answered this specific survey question.

Figure 12 | Employed respondents at exit, six months and 12 months



5.b. Employment in ICT

We analyzed the extent to which participants obtained ICT jobs specifically articulated by the JDA and JITA programs as target outcomes. To do this, we analyzed participant responses about their job titles and industry of employment in the 12-month follow-up survey. The survey invited participants to select from a list based on NAICS/NOC codes (as above, drawn from JDA and JITA program specifications). There was also an option to enter their job title and/or industry manually if they could not find a suitable option from the list.

Based on this analysis, we found that **43%** (102/240[28]) of employed participants held ICT jobs 12 months after exiting the program. This finding should be interpreted with caution. Job titles alone may not provide enough information to accurately determine the extent to which a role involves digital skills. Roles like "process assistant" and "administrative assistant" could involve a significant digital component not captured by the job title. For this reason, our analysis may underestimate the percentage of NPower Canada graduates who were hired to perform tech-enabled roles.

28 At the 12-month point, 296 participants were employed; however, due to missing and poor-quality data, we had usable job titles for only 240 respondents.

5.c. Earnings

Using data from the participant surveys, we calculated median annual earnings at baseline, exit, and six- and 12-months post-program, and the change in these median earnings over time across all job titles and industries of employment reported by participants. Results presented in **Figure 13** show that median annual earnings of employed participants in the JITA and JDA programs rose from the time of application onwards. The median salary increased from $24,000 at baseline to $40,000 at 12 months, an increase of $16,000 (**+66.7%**) across all employment categories.

Figure 13 | Median salary (C$)

6. Conclusions

NPower Canada's JITA and JDA programs reached their new and expanded target populations; participants also completed the programs at high rates and were generally satisfied with their experiences with them. They appreciated the skill and dedication of program staff, the online format, the mix of independent and group work and industry touchpoints.

Newcomers were also consistently more satisfied with the program than both Canadian-born participants and immigrants who arrived in Canada before 2017. Newcomer interviewees reported seeing additional benefits to the program: a means to gain Canadian work experience, build networks and gain insights into Canadian workplace culture and expectations.

Some areas for improvement were noted: namely, clarity around course logistics, the use of the various online platforms and lack of alignment between skills and jobs sent. Pacing was also an issue, as some participants had considerably more ICT skills and experience than others entering the program.

Preliminary findings on outcomes are encouraging. Examining the changes in employment and earnings among treatment group participants from exit onwards, we find that both employment rates and earnings increased over time. The question is whether these outcomes are directly attributable to participation in NPower Canada. In our *Final Report*, we will attempt to address this question (and estimate the program's impact) by comparing these increases in employment and earnings to the changes experienced by the comparison group. The Final Report will also present analyses of the outcomes achieved by the non-RCT groups.

Moreover, results here are promising because they suggest that NPower Canada is reaching a range of equity-deserving groups as well as participants over the age of 30 (a relatively new target group with different skills, experiences and needs compared to opportunity youth). It can be challenging to provide training that is not only feasible and challenging for diverse equity-seeking groups, but also meets and matches employer needs. High rates of participant satisfaction across different groups and provinces indicate that NPower Canada is achieving these goals. Additionally, the shift to online training during the COVID-19 pandemic is also quite new. NPower Canada is continually improving and refining online delivery through Coursera while expanding to new regions (with very real geographical constraints around employment options and services), effectively taking on two challenges at once.

Our analysis of sectoral employment suggests that **43%** of employed participants held ICT jobs at 12-months. This number is likely an underestimate due to methodological limitations (as explained above, self-described job titles submitted by participants or captured through a list of NAICS/NOC codes may not provide enough information to accurately determine the extent to which a role involves ICT-related skills). There was also a significant downturn in hiring in the IT sector in 2022 and 2023—the period when most NPower Canada participants in the RCT would have graduated from the program—which may have limited the number of available ICT-related positions. For example,

- May to December 2022 saw a 32% drop in postings for tech roles across Canada.[29]
- Approximately 100,000 ICT workers across 344 firms lost their jobs in the first six weeks of 2023. [30]

29 Deschamps, T. (2022, December 13). Tech job postings down 32% since May, nearing pre-pandemic levels: Indeed. BNN Bloomberg. https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/tech-job-postings-down-32-since-may-nearing-pre-pandemic-levels-indeed-1.1858631

30 Lindzon, J. (2023, February 20). Who is getting laid off in Canada's tech industry? The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-who-is-getting-laid-off-in-canadas-tech-industry/

- Data from Statista[31] show a sudden sharp spike in worldwide layoffs in Q4 2022 to Q2 2023.
- Data from Indeed show a 48% drop in Canadian job postings for ICT operations and helpdesk and a 53% drop in postings for software developers from November 2022 to November 2023.[32]

This indicates that large numbers of NPower Canada graduates demonstrated sufficient skills to obtain ICT roles *in spite of* an unexpected downturn in the job market, which is itself believed to be a short-term correction following a sharp uptick in hiring driven by the shift to online work during the pandemic.[33,34] While demand for labour was not sustained post-pandemic, leading many ICT companies to cut staff, there are strong indications that ICT/tech skillsets remain highly relevant to the current labour market, particularly as non-tech companies hire more ICT workers.[35]

Blueprint's Final Report will build on the analyses presented here by providing the results from the RCT, which will estimate the impact of JITA and JDA on employment, earnings and education. This analysis will also control for economic conditions—both treatment and comparison groups are seeking employment in the same labour market.

31 Statista Research Department. (2024, March 21). Number of tech employees laid off worldwide from 2020 to 2024, by quarter. https://www.statista.com/statistics/199999/worldwide-tech-layoffs-covid-19/

32 Bernard, B. (2023, November 29). Indeed 2024 Canada jobs and hiring trends report: Trying to hold on. Hiring Lab. https://www.hiringlab.org/en-ca/2023/11/29/indeed-2024-canada-jobs-and-hiring-trends-report/

33 Silcoff, S. (2022, June 15). Shopify-backed ecommerce delivery startup Swyft latest Canadian tech company to cut staff. The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/technology/article-shopify-backed-ecommerce-delivery-startup-swyft-latest-canadian-tech/

34 Armstrong, P. (2023, January 21). Tech layoffs mount – but skilled workers are still hard to find. CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/tech-jobs-layoffs-google-amazon-microsoft-1.6721163

35 Ibid.

Appendix A
Common Outcomes Framework

	Outcome	Indicators
Socio-demographics	Sex & Gender	Sex at birth
		Self-identified gender
	Age	Age
	Location	Province
		Region & Municipality
	Marital status	Marital status
	Children & Dependents	Children
		Dependents
		Household size
	Household Income	Household income
	Education	Highest credential obtained
		Location of highest credential attainment
	Indigenous Identity	Self-identified Indigenous identity
	Francophone status & languages spoken	First language spoken
		Official languages
		Language spoken at home
		Other languages spoken (At home)
	Citizenship Status	Place of birth
		Year of arrival
		Citizenship status
	Racial identity	Self-identification as member of racialized group
	Disability	Self-identified disability
Employment status and history	Employment	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/part-time)
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Work history	Time since last employed
		NOC code of job
		NAICS code of job
	Income source	Income sources

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

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