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Future Skills Centre

Hospitality Workers Training Centre's Micro but Mighty Evaluation Report

500-294 Albert St, Ottawa,
ON. K1P 6E6
admin@malatest.com
1.888.689.1847

malatest.com

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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

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1. Background and Project Description

The hospitality sector was one of the hardest hit industries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of its efforts to support hospitality sector employers and workers, the Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC) developed the *Micro, but Mighty* project that designed and launched a catalogue of sector-specific micro-credentials to assess and upskill hospitality workers. By creating virtual micro-credentials called e-badges, HWTC aimed to support the post-pandemic recovery of the hospitality sector in Ontario. Through HWTC, the hospitality sector receives:

- access to sector-focused micro-credentials designed to upskill and reskill workers in or looking to enter the hospitality sector,
- competency assessments on the skills developed through training, and
- industry-accepted e-badges on successful completion of assessment.

FSC invested $428,000 to support this 2-year project (March 2021 - March 2023). FSC commissioned R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (Malatest) to conduct an independent evaluation of the project upon its completion. This document summarizes the evaluation's design, methods, results, and implications.

1.1 Project Need

To understand the context for the *Micro, but Mighty* program, this sub-section addresses the following questions:

- Why was this project needed?
- To what extent were these needs being addressed before project implementation?
- What was known about what needed to be improved or expanded?
- Which populations did this project aim to serve?

1.1.1 Need for the Micro, But Mighty Program

The hospitality sector was one of the hardest hit industries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Ontario, employment in the sector dropped more than 24% from over 780,000 in 2019 to fewer than 600,000 in 2020.[1] Workers most impacted included youth aged 15 to 24, those with lower levels of education, and seasonal or temporary workers.[2]

As restrictions were eased and the sector began to recover, the demand for workers increased. However, many employers struggled to hire workers due to labour shortages in the hospitality sector.[3] Reports suggest that approximately 18% to 20% of Ontario's hospitality workers were lost to other sectors in 2021.[4] Further exasperating the labour shortage is the high turnover rate typical for this

[1] Tourism HR Canada (February 2023). Snapshot of the Tourism Sector Labour Market: Ontario Report. Retrieved from: https://tourismhr.ca/wp-content/uploads/Ontario-Report.pdf..
[2] Ibid.
[3] Hg, J (June 2021). *The Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on Ontario's Tourism Businesses and Capacities to Reopen, Rebuild, and Recover*. Toronto: Tourism Industry Association of Canada, 2021.
[4] Tourism HR Canada (February 2023). *Snapshot of the Tourism Sector Labour Market: Ontario Report*. Retrieved from: tourismhr.ca/wp-content/uploads/Ontario-Report.pdf.

sector as compared to other Canadian industry sectors.[5] Reasons for this turnover include long or irregular hours, shift work, low wages, stressful and physically demanding working conditions, and lack of training opportunities.[6]

To support hospitality sector employer and worker recovery, recent reports called for strategies and initiatives to upskill or reskill workers and promote the hospitality sector as a career choice. Recommendations included:

- Support employers to develop strategies to attract and retain quality workers;[7]
- Support reskilling of unemployed and underemployed Ontarians looking to enter or move up in the hospitality sector;[8]
- Support workplace-based training and consulting services specifically designed for small and medium sized enterprises' unique needs as they struggle to recover;[9]
- Continue to support targeted, industry-led workforce programs that boost recruitment and retention from underrepresented groups;[10]
- Leverage partnerships between industry and training providers to accelerate skills development;[11] and
- Continue to support micro-credential programming targeted towards jobseekers looking to pursue careers in tourism and hospitality, and workers looking to upskill within the tourism industry.[12]

Angus Reid Institute (October 2022). *Out of Service: Hospitality sector sheds employees of all ages during COVID-19 while migration to tech surged*. Retrieved from: angusreid.org/canada-workers-employment-labour-market-shortage/.

[5] Murray, W. et al (July 2017). *Human Resource Challenges in Canada's Hospitality and Tourism Industry Finding innovative solutions.* Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes. 9. 00-00. 10.1108/WHATT-04-2017-0022. Retrieved from: www.researchgate.net/publication/318257182_Human_resource_challenges_in_Canada%27s_hospitality_and_tourism_industry_Finding_innovative_solutions.

[6] McAdams, B; Gordon, R (Sept 2021). Worker Shortage? Lack of Decent Work? What's Really Vexing Canadian Restaurants. Gordon S. Lang School of Business and Economics. Guelph: University of Guelph, 2021. Retrieved from: www.uoguelph.ca/lang/news/2021/09/worker-shortage-lack-decent-work-what%E2%80%99s-really-vexing-canadian-restaurants.

[7] Murray, W. et al (July 2017). *Human Resource Challenges in Canada's Hospitality and Tourism Industry Finding innovative solutions.* Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes. 9. 00-00. 10.1108/WHATT-04-2017-0022. Retrieved from: www.researchgate.net/publication/318257182_Human_resource_challenges_in_Canada%27s_hospitality_and_tourism_industry_Finding_innovative_solutions.

[8] MacDonald, C (May 2020). Labour market info to assess need for project: Sectors at Risk: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Canadian Tourism Industry. LMI Insight Report no. 30. Labour Market Information Council. Ottawa. Retrieved from: https://lmic-cimt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LMI-Insight-Report-no-30.pdf.

[9] State of the Ontario Tourism Industry Report, 2022. Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Retrieved from: https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/State-of-the-Ontario-Tourism-Industry-Report-December-13-2022-FINAL.pdf.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

1.1.2 Need for Improvement or Expansion

The demand for training options that are of short duration, cost-effective and focused on specific skills have gained momentum over the past decade, especially in response to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.[13] Micro-credentials are "learning and assessment experiences" that are focused on "a narrow set of skills and competencies."[14] Micro-credentials are usually created with industry input, can be delivered in person, online or a hybrid of both, and are shareable via a digital wallet as proof of competency in the specified skills learned.[15]

Governments at both the federal and provincial level have endorsed micro-credentials as solutions to meeting the skills development need of Canadian workforces moving forward. In 2020, the Future Skills Advisory Council outlined key priorities and specific recommendations for building a learning nation including "develop[ing] more customized, short-term training supported by micro credentials".[16] In 2020, the Ontario Government invested almost $60 million over three years to support micro-credentials and develop a micro-credentials strategy to increase access to opportunities for training and upskilling in high demand industry sectors.[17]

For close to twenty years, HWTC has been providing training and conducting research to address hospitality workforce needs. Through their research and engagement with hospitality employers and sector leaders, HWTC identified micro-credentials as a viable solution to help reskill or upskill sector workers and provide options for employers to enhance their recruitment and retention strategies.

HWTC identified several advantages of micro-credentials for both employers and workers in the hospitality sector including:

- For workers, the opportunity to:
    - Acquire skills that demonstrate transferable competencies for various positions and emerging career pathways;
    - Access learning options in a cost-effective and manageable timeframe; and
    - Validate and make recognizable practical experience, in lieu of formal education and qualifications.
- For employers, the opportunity to:
    - Recognize and access talent specifically prepared to meet the needs of a recovering/evolving sector;
    - Enable new workers to be more efficiently on-boarded;
    - Enhance training strategies and options to increase employee retention; and
    - Improve equity, diversity and inclusion among their employees.

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[13] Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) (July 2023). Ontario Micro-Credentials: Harnessing the Potential. Retrieved from: www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf.
[14] TeachOnline.ca webpage (December 2020). Ten Facts You Need to Know About Micro-Credentials. Contact North. Retrieved from: https://teachonline.ca/tools-trends/ten-facts-you-need-know-about-micro-credentials.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Future Skills Council (November 2022). Canada – A learning nation: A skilled, agile workforce ready to shape the future. Employment and Social Development Canada. Retrieved from: www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/futureskills/report-learning-nation.html.
[17] 2020 Ontario Budget. Ontario's Action Plan. Chapter 1, Section C: Recover – Creating the Conditions for Growth. Retrieved from: https://budget.ontario.ca/2020/chapter-1c.html#s-9.

HWTC developed the *Micro, but Mighty* project as a way for sector workers to gain a competitive edge with industry recognized credentials and to enhance employers' recruitment and retention practices.

1.1.3 Target Populations

The *Micro, but Mighty* project's micro-credentials were made accessible online to residents of Ontario currently working or looking to work in the hospitality sector, including:

- Youth,
- Women,
- Indigenous peoples,
- Newcomers and refugees,
- Racialized Peoples,
- Individuals from the 2SLGBTQ+ community,
- Persons with disabilities,
- Individuals living in official language minority communities, and
- Individuals with essential skills gaps.

1.2 Theory of Change

The *Micro, but Mighty* project aimed to test the extent to which sector-focused micro-credentials can:

- Offer advantages to those seeking employment in the hospitality sector or for hospitality workers to advance their careers;
- Be recognized by employers as a recruitment and retention tool to help them recover and support their skilled workforce; and
- Better align the skills of workers to an evolving post-pandemic business ecosystem.

The following sub-sections describe HWTC's delivery model for the *Micro, but Mighty* project, resources and activities, anticipated outcomes, assumptions and contextual factors that may have affected success, and how the project would achieve its goals.

A detailed logic model for the *Micro, but Mighty* project can be found in Appendix A.

1.2.1 Delivery Model

The *Micro, but Mighty*'s delivery model was based on the development and launch of a catalogue of 22 to 25 sector focused micro-credentials informed by the needs of hospitality employers. To help prioritize and validate the micro-credentials, HWTC sought input from hospitality employers, educators and other key stakeholders. Participants enrolled in HWTC's training programs were given the opportunity to complete micro-credentials applicable to the training they had received. Employers hiring HWTC trainees were engaged by HWTC to determine the extent to which micro-credentials were recognized by employers and helped program participants gain employment.

1.2.2 Process

Activities implemented by HWTC and their stakeholders for the *Micro, but Mighty* project are summarized in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1 Micro, but Mighty Project Resources and Activities

Resource	Activities
HWTC	• Researched the use of micro-credentials and how they could be situated in the context of Ontario's hospitality sector. • Engaged with hospitality employers and stakeholders for input on the design of micro-credentials and feedback on the content and uptake of micro-credentials. • Developed a communication and marketing strategy to inform and accelerate buy-in from stakeholders, sector workers, community and policy representatives. • Developed and tested the catalogue of micro-credentials developed by HWTC. • Researched and selected an appropriate platform for accessing the e-badges. • Hired and trained a manager and instructors to deliver training on each micro-credential. • Assessed the awareness, impact, and uptake of HWTC's micro-credentials in the hospitality sector. • Developed and published four learning briefs explaining micro-credentials and their benefits, and one insights report on the research they conducted with sector employers.
Project Partner, Bow Valley College	• Developed the assessment content to test the student on what they have learned for the training received on a micro-credential.
Advisory Committee	• Provided input on the design of micro-credentials. • Tested and validated the content of micro-credentials. • Provided feedback on recognition and use of micro-credentials.
Employers in the hospitality sector	• Provided insight on current needs and gaps in worker skills. • Provided feedback on the content, recognition and use of micro-credentials.

1.2.3 Outcomes

HWTC identified outcomes for participants gaining micro-credentials and for employer partners of the *Micro, but Mighty* project. Longer term outcomes at the institutional level and at a broader systems level were also identified.

1.2.3.1 Participant Outcomes

Outcomes identified for *Micro, but Mighty* participants include:

- Positive gains along the common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up;
- 80% complete (target of 300 participants) and demonstrate skills gained for 500-800 badges assessed and issued;
- 80% report satisfaction with program outcomes; and
- 70% report improved employment outlook.

1.2.3.2 Employer Outcomes

Outcomes identified for *Micro, but Mighty* employer partners include:

- Positive gains along the common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up;
- 80% report positive indicators of program satisfaction; and
- 80% positive indicators of improved hire quality and hiring channel satisfaction.

1.2.3.3 Institutional Level Outcomes

Although no institutional level outcomes were formally identified in the project proposal submitted to FSC, HWTC anticipated embedding the micro-credentials as extensions of their ongoing training programs. HWTC intended to use the learnings from this project to:

- Further inform and support sector focused, demand-led credentialing models;
- Establish the market value of their micro-credentials to develop a new revenue stream for their organization;
- Ensure existing micro-credentials remain relevant in addressing sector needs and are scalable; and,
- Support the development of new micro-credentials.

1.2.3.4 System Level Outcomes

No system level outcomes were formally identified in the *Micro, but Mighty*'s project proposal submitted to FSC. However, interviews with HWTC staff indicated that they envisioned their micro-credentials would encourage employers to modernize their recruitment and hiring practices by incorporating micro-credentials that recognized alternative, but relevant, learning and experience. HWTC also anticipated that their micro-credentials could support the development of a pan-Canadian approach to standardize micro-credentials as essential recruitment and training tools for the hospitality sector across the country.

1.2.4 Assumptions

Several initial assumptions were made about the *Micro, but Mighty* project that would help to ensure the project's success:

- Project partners and stakeholders would actively support and provide feedback on the design, validation and promotion of micro-credentials;
- HWTC would have the capacity to deliver the training associated with the micro-credential created; and,
- A virtual platform to deliver the e-badges would be easily developed.

1.2.5 Contextual Factors

Several contextual factors impacted how the project was delivered:

- Identification of a virtual platform to deliver the e-badges;
- Maintaining constant communication with industry partners to inform the development and validation of the micro-credentials;
- Obtaining buy-in from industry partners to promote the benefits of micro-credentials as recruitment and retention tools.

1.2.6 Articulating Success

Success for the *Micro, but Mighty* project was initially articulated through the following objectives:

1. **Situate HWTC's demand-driven micro-credential offerings:** Initiate and learn from a full review of HWTC and other existing sector-focused (pre- and post-COVID) catalogues of vocational development content, in conversation with +50 sector employer partners and other key sector stakeholders, to identify demand-driven micro-credential offerings.
2. **Draft, develop, and deploy a catalogue of 22-25 sector-focused micro-credentials** to be delivered by HWTC, focused on timely upskilling and reskilling of impacted workers.
3. **Validate micro-credentials with employer stakeholders:** Undertake a soft validation with +30 sector stakeholders leading up to delivery of micro-credentials. This validation will include securing engagement and buy-in from sector stakeholders in the work of validating the micro-credentials and their subsequent release.
4. **Calibrate the assessment and evaluation process for micro-credentials:** Develop and deploy program assessment and renewal (evaluation) processes to underpin the market currency, regeneration, and sustainability of the corresponding micro-credentials catalogue beyond this project timeline. This will include a growth plan for sustainability beyond project timelines.
5. **Develop and deploy a knowledge mobilization strategy:** Share project learnings with a wide release of four research briefs as learnings emerge and two summative reports at critical project milestones.
6. **Champion and support diversity and inclusion** as a cornerstone of HWTC's program operations and services.
7. **Integrate developmental and summative project evaluations:** Engage an external evaluator to assess risks and success factors throughout the project and evaluate the impact and lessons learned from HWTC's micro-credentials project.

2. Stakeholders and Evaluation Goals

To assess the extent to which *Micro, but Mighty* achieved its intended outcomes, HWTC collected data from hospitality sector leaders and employers, and participants who received training on various micro-credentials developed by HWTC. FSC commissioned Malatest to conduct an independent evaluation of *Micro, but Mighty* upon its completion. This section describes *Micro, but Mighty*'s key stakeholders, the planned evaluation activities, and limitations impacting the evaluation results.

2.1 Program Key Stakeholders

Micro, but Mighty's key stakeholders consisted of:

1. **Program participants** that accessed the micro-credential training online and earned e-badges, including:
   - Youth (18-29 years);
   - Women; and
   - Marginalized individuals.
2. **Sector employment partners and industry leaders, including an Advisory Committee** that provided feedback on skills needs and gaps, and the design and testing of micro-credentials.
3. **Project partner**, Bow Valley College, developed the assessment for each micro-credential created. The assessment indicates whether an individual has attained sufficient knowledge and learning to be awarded the e-badge associated with the micro-credential.
4. **Lead partner**, HWTC, developed the micro-credentials, created the digital e-badge certificates.

2.2 Planned Evaluation Activities

Several evaluation activities were planned to obtain feedback from stakeholders at various points throughout the project, including:

- Consultations with Advisory Committee and hospitality sector leaders and employers to determine the demand for micro-credentials and prioritize skills gaps to be addressed by micro-credentials;
- Consultations with participants to determine satisfaction with and effectiveness of micro-credentials earned; and
- Consultations with HWTC staff, Advisory Committee and project partners to understand the challenges related to the design and delivery of micro-credentials and how they were addressed.

As indicated in Figure 2.1 below, HWTC staff conducted interviews and surveys with participants, hospitality sector leaders and employers during the project, while Malatest completed post-project evaluation activities.

Figure 2.1 Summary of Evaluation Activities

Planned activities	Intended use by partners	HWTC	Malatest
Discussions with hospitality sector leaders and employers, including with the *Micro, but Mighty* Advisory Committee	To gain perspectives on how micro-credentials could best address identified skills gaps for workers in the hospitality sector and provide input on the design of such micro-credentials.	✓	
Survey with hospitality sector leaders and employers (n=72)	To understand the context of micro-credentials in Ontario's hospitality sector, identify system gaps, assess the value of micro-credentials for sector employers and workers, and inform a strategy to commercialize HWTC's micro-credentials.	✓	
Interviews with hospitality sector leaders and employers (n=43)		✓	
Review of 10 relevant research reports		✓	
Interviews with employers of HWTC trainees (n=8)	To assess the extent to which the project met its stated goals for employer recognition and satisfaction with workers who had attained HWTC micro-credentials.	✓	
Review of reports prepared by HWTC for FSC	To learn about the progression and outcomes of the *Micro, but Mighty* project (including observed immediate outcomes, emerging intermediate outcomes and potential longer-term outcomes).		✓
Interviews with five HWTC staff, one project partner, and one member of the *Micro, but Mighty* Advisory Committee (n=7)	To assess the extent to which the project met its stated goals and any lessons learned (including key strengths and weaknesses that influenced outcomes).		✓
Survey of participants (n=84) who received HWTC micro-credentials			✓
Brief literature review	To provide context and background information on the need for the *Micro, but Mighty* project.		✓

2.3 Evaluation Limitations and Other Considerations

The results of this evaluation should be viewed in light of the following limitations.

Lack of data on key performance indicators: Several key performance indicators such as positive gains along the common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up for employers and program participants were not tracked by HWTC staff. This limited the extent to which the effectiveness of some program objectives could be determined.

Lack of primary employer data: The lack of consent agreements for third-party evaluators meant that Malatest was unable to obtain first-hand information from sector employers engaged in the project. Therefore, data from project employers were limited to the data collected by HWTC. Given the inability

to conduct a full independent review, assessing the extent to which outcomes were realized for project employers is limited.

Lack of a comparison group: Participants that received training but did not attain a micro-credential were not included in the evaluation. Although all individuals trained by HWTC during the time frame for the *Micro, but Mighty* project (March 2021 to March 2023) were invited to participate in the survey administered by Malatest, all survey respondents had attained at least one micro-credential. Given the lack of this comparison group, examination of participant versus non-participant outcomes limited the ability to fully assess program outcomes.

Lack of generalizability. While the information gathered from the participants, employers, and stakeholders that were consulted can be reported with confidence, these perspectives may not reflect those of all stakeholders.

Selection bias: Participation in data collection activities was voluntary. This may have resulted in a selection bias where those who hold particularly strong views about the topic (whether positive or negative) may have been more likely to participate in the evaluation than those who were neutral or had no opinion.

Attributing system outcomes to *Micro, but Mighty*: Micro-credentials are relatively new to the hospitality sector and are not standardized. As a result use of micro-credentials as recruitment and retention tools is not widespread. Therefore, the extent to which system level outcomes can be reliably attributed to the *Micro, but Mighty* project is limited.

3. Evaluation Questions, Data Sources and Indicators

Evaluation questions were developed to assess *Micro, but Mighty*'s implementation process, effectiveness, efficiency, and any causal attribution. A detailed table noting the evaluation questions, sub-questions, indicators, data collection methods and data sources can be found in Appendix B.

3.1 Implementation (Process)

The evaluation sought to learn about how the *Micro, but Mighty* project was implemented through the following questions:

- What factors drove the need for this project?
    - How has the understanding of those factors changed from proposal to implementation?
- How did HWTC staff engage with the different stakeholders?
    - What worked well? And why?
- What were the strengths of the project from the perspective of the project, its participants, and other key stakeholders?
    - What worked well? And why?
- What challenges were incurred while implementing the *Micro, but Mighty* project and how were they addressed?
    - Are these challenges more related to the design of the project, its implementation, or environmental factors?
    - How did these challenges affect the development of the micro credentials?
- What lessons can be drawn to be shared with other organizations in the skills development sector?

3.2 Effectiveness (Outcomes)

The evaluation sought to learn about the extent to which outcomes of the intervention were achieved from the perspective of the project leads, project participants, and other key stakeholders through the following questions:

- What were the outcomes from this project?
    - How did HWTC define success for the project and what benchmarks did it use to measure success?
    - What do you see as the potential longer-term outcomes for the project? How did micro credentialing support these longer-term outcomes?
    - What lessons can be drawn from these factors to be shared with others in the skills development sector?

Questions posed by HWTC to gain perspectives from hospitality sector employers, HR practitioners, and sector leaders included:

- What is the landscape of non-post-secondary, non-corporate micro-credentials in Ontario?

- Where are the system gaps where our product can be competitively positioned?
- For whom are micro-credentials the optimal solution? What problem are they trying to solve and why is investment in micro-credentials worth it to them? What is the market value?

3.3 Efficiency

The evaluation sought to learn about the extent to which resources were used or could have been more efficiently used to achieve the desired outcomes through the following questions:

- What worked well? And why?
- What challenges were incurred and how were they addressed?
- What were HWTC's experiences working with FSC?

3.4 Causal Attribution

To determine the extent to which outcomes can be causally attributed to the *Micro, but Mighty* project, evidence was gathered from the following sources:

- Employer survey and interview data collected by HWTC;
- Quarterly and annual project reports provided by HWTC to FSC;
- Research reports produced by HWTC;
- Interviews conducted by Malatest, including HWTC staff, project partners and with a member of the *Micro, but Mighty* Advisory Committee; and
- Post-program survey administered by Malatest with participants who earned micro-credentials.

4. Evaluation Results

This section discusses the findings of the evaluation with respect to project implementation, effectiveness of achieving project outcomes, efficiency of project activities, and any causal attributions.

Summary of evaluation results

- **Project implementation.** The HWTC implemented the *Micro, but Mighty* project as planned; however, only a summative evaluation was conducted at the close of the project as HWTC was unable to secure an evaluator to conduct an ongoing evaluation during the funded period (April 2021 – March 2023). In this context, it was not possible to assess the extent to which implementation could have been improved or modified should similar programs be launched in the future.
- **Project effectiveness.** While HWTC was able to achieve outcomes for participants, employer, institutional and system level outcomes were only partially achieved.
    - While outcomes were met for program participants, there was insufficient primary data and no benchmarking data to assess or infer employer or long-term labour market outcomes. Similarly, institutional and system level outcomes could not be fully assessed due to the relative newness of micro-credentials specific to the hospitality sector and their limited uptake.
    - **HWTC is beginning to demonstrate initial signs of scalability** through partnership building; however, the evaluation found that more time is needed to increase awareness and promote use of their micro-credentials for continued expansion, adoption or investment**.**
- **Efficiency.** Efficiencies for the *Micro, but Mighty* project were realized through the use of HWTC staff to develop curriculum based on industry input. In addition, convening an advisory committee created efficiencies in validating the micro-credentials, testing the assessment platform, and raising the profile of the project within the sector. Finally, outsourcing the digital platform for access and storage of the e-badges was considered more efficient than having HWTC develop their own digital platform.
- **Causal attribution.** While the *Micro, but Mighty* project led to the achievement of participant and most employer outcomes, there was limited evidence to determine whether anticipated institutional or system level impacts could be attributed to the program.

Figure 4.1 outlines the program objectives, the activities completed to meet the objectives and the outcomes expected to be attained as a result of the activities.

Figure 4.1 Micro, but Mighty Objectives, Activities, and Outcomes

Objectives	Activities	Outcomes
Situate HWTC's demand-driven micro-credential offerings	• Researched use of micro-credentials and how they could be situated within Ontario's hospitality sector. • Engaged employers to provide insight on current training needs and gaps in worker skills.	**Participant outcomes:** • 80% complete and demonstrate skills gained for 500-800 e-badges assessed and issued. • 80% report satisfaction with program outcome. • 70% report improved employment outlook. • Positive gains for common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up. **Employer outcomes:** • 80% report positive indicators of program satisfaction. • 80% report positive indicators of improved hire quality and hiring channel satisfaction. • Positive gains for common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up. **Institutional level outcomes:** • Embedding micro-credentials as extensions of HWTC's ongoing training programs and establishing the market value of their micro-credentials. **System level outcomes:** • HWTC micro-credentials are incorporated in employer recruitment and hiring practices. • HWTC micro-credentials support
Draft, develop, and deploy a catalogue of sector-focused	• Engaged hospitality stakeholders for input on design and content of micro-credentials. • Determined platform for accessing the e-badges. • Hired and trained staff to deliver training	
Validate micro-credentials with employer stakeholders	• Tested and validated the content of micro-credentials. • Engaged employers to provide feedback on recognition and use of micro-credentials.	
Process to assess and evaluate awarding of micro-credentials	• Developed assessment content to test skills and knowledge on a micro-credential. • Stakeholder feedback on the content, recognition and use of micro-credentials.	
Develop and deploy knowledge mobilization strategy	• Created communication and marketing plan. • Editorial, newsletters, and social media impressions. • Published 4 learning briefs, research report, blogs	
Champion and support diversity and inclusion	• Provided training to marginalized populations. • Enhanced HWTC's DEI policies. • Encouraged staff participation in workshops to promote diversity and inclusion.	
Integrate developmental and summative project evaluation	• Summative evaluation conducted by third-party evaluator.	No project outcomes were associated with this objective and activities

4.1 Project Implementation

Summary of Implementation activities

Based on a review of quarterly activity reporting by the HWTC team, the project was implemented as planned with the exception of integrating evaluation of the program by an external evaluator during the project's funding period (April 2021 – March 2023).

Figure 4.2 below outlines the project objectives and the extent to which the objectives were met.

Figure 4.2 Micro, but Mighty Project Objectives

Objective	Objective Met
1. Situate HWTC's demand-driven micro-credential offerings	Yes
2. Draft, develop, and deploy a catalogue of 22-25 sector-focused micro-credentials	Yes
3. Validate micro-credentials with employer stakeholders	Yes
4. Calibrate the assessment and evaluation process for micro-credentials	Yes
5. Develop and deploy a knowledge mobilization strategy	Yes
6. Champion and support diversity and inclusion	Yes
7. Integrate developmental and summative project evaluation	Partially as evaluation activities were not conducted during the program funding period.

The extent to which program activities were executed as intended during program implementation are discussed in detail below.

4.1.1 Situate HWTC's Micro-Credentials

HWTC began their *Micro, but Mighty* project by engaging employers and other hospitality sector leaders to determine the training needs and skills gaps in hospitality sector workers. Quarterly reports indicated that HWTC staff conducted over 60 interviews and convened an advisory committee[18] to help identify and prioritize the training needs and to inform the design of the micro-credentials. Insights from these discussions also helped guide the development of their marketing campaign and publication of learning briefs to promote the benefits of micro-credentials to employers and those working or seeking work in the sector.

To further situate HWTC's micro-credentials as recruitment and training tools for the hospitality sector, HWTC was granted an FSC Accelerator investment to help undertake a market research study to highlight gaps and opportunities, and to inform a strategy to commercialize and scale HWTC's micro-credentials. As noted previously in Figure 2.1, HWTC conducted a survey and interviewed sector employers, and reviewed relevant reports to understand the context of micro-credentials in Ontario's hospitality sector. Insights gleaned from this research are discussed in Section 4.2.3 of this report.

[18] The Advisory Committee consisted of training development experts, human resource specialists, and representatives from Hyatt, Pan Pacific, Sheraton, The Distillery Restaurant Group and WorkWolf.

4.1.2 Develop Catalogue of Micro-Credentials

Working with sector leaders and employers, HWTC identified 25 potential micro-credentials to be developed. HWTC prioritized the development of the micro-credentials based on current sector trends and feedback from sector leaders and employers about which skills were most in demand and relevant to the sector. A total of 18 micro-credentials were developed and validated[19]. The first four to be launched were identified as credentials most needed for the workplace:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) for hospitality;
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in hospitality;
- Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) for hospitality; and
- Workplace Violence and Harassment for hospitality.

With the input of sector employers and leaders, an additional eight micro-credentials were developed and launched:

- Cultural Awareness;
- Unconscious Bias Awareness;
- Customer Service for Hospitality;
- Transferable Skills for Hospitality;
- Working in Teams;
- Workplace Compliance;
- Adapting at Work for Hospitality; and
- Self-regulation at Work for Hospitality.

An additional six micro-credentials were developed; however, these had not been launched prior to the end of the FSC funding period (March 2023) for the project:[20]

- Time Management for Hospitality;
- Active Listening Strategies for Hospitality Building;
- DEI[21] for Supervisors: Introduction;
- DEI for Supervisors: Micro-aggressions, Allyship and Safe, Inclusive Spaces;
- DEI for Supervisors: DEI as Conscious Practice in the Workplace; and
- DEI for Supervisors: Understanding Structural, Systematic, Institutional, and Interpersonal Racism and Bias.

During their interviews, HWTC staff indicated that while they had identified a total of 25 micro-credentials for their catalogue, they were unable to develop and launch all the micro-credentials. The main reason HWTC did not launch all micro-credentials was due to the time involved to create and validate curriculum, develop assessments and test each micro-credential. Staff noted that the process was slower than they had anticipated as some curriculums took more time to develop. HWTC relied on

[19] The remaining micro-credentials are in the development stage as of the writing of this report.
[20] As of the writing of this report (November 2023), these micro-credential were not listed on HWTC's website as available.
[21] Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

the input and feedback of sector employers and workers to ensure that the content of the micro-credentials were accurate and appropriate for a variety of learners and levels of education. As such, some micro-credentials required several iterations to produce the final product. An HWTC Advisory Committee member confirmed during their interview that it took time to ensure that each micro-credential included all essential information in an easy to understand format that was engaging and manageable to cover in a brief period of time.

In addition to the time needed to bring the micro-credentials to launch, HWTC experienced challenges in finding an appropriate virtual platform to house and deliver the digital e-badges that represented proof a micro-credential had been earned. HWTC had originally intended to make the e-badges available on *e-Campus Ontario*; however, owing to their status as a private training institution, HWTC was not permitted to use this platform.[22] Their quarterly report also indicated that almost a year was spent researching and testing 14 major e-badging platforms[23] before selecting BadgeCert to host their e-badges. To assist their selection of an e-badging platform, each platform was considered against a set of 17 criteria,[24] which added to their testing time.

HWTC also experienced challenges with staff turnover, as indicated through HWTC's quarterly reports and interviews. For instance, HWTC staff explained that they struggled to hire a training manager who could train other HWTC staff to deliver the training relevant to some micro-credentials, which impeded their ability to deliver all micro-credentials that they designed.[25]

> ***"We have not been able to provide all micro-credentials that have been designed. We need to have more trainers[…] to deliver the micro-credentials. We have had three training managers in the past three years; we hoped they would be able to train staff to deliver the micro-credentials but it did not happen."***
>
> ***– HWTC Staff***

4.1.3 Validate Micro-Credentials

In addition to engaging employers to identify training needs and skills gaps, HWTC also engaged sector workers and industry leaders in the process of validating the micro-credentials. HWTC utilized their advisory committee, approximately 30 sector employers, and trainees enrolled in HWTC's programs to review and test the micro-credentials. This review process helped finalize the micro-credentials prior to

[22] e-Campus Ontario is the online platform for access to Ontario Micro-Credentials (OMCs). Only institutions that are recognized as an External Quality Assurance Agency are permitted to offer micro-credentials designated as OMCs can use e-Campus Ontario for their e-badge platform. See: Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) (July 2023). Ontario Micro-Credentials: Harnessing the Potential, pg. 51. Retrieved from: https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf

[23] Platforms tested included: BadgeCert, Accredible connect, Certify Me Premium, Certify Me VIP, Sertifier Premium, Sertifier Premium Plus, Accredible launch, Badgr Free, Badgr Pro, Credly, Give My Certificate, Hyperstack Credential Cloud, Certif-ID, Certifier standard, and Net Credential

[24] The criteria for determining the most appropriate e-badge platform included: accessible to Canadians, set up cost, set up time, annual cost, minimum and maximum user numbers, minimum and maximum number of certificates that can be issued, LMT Integrations, social sharing, mobility options, potential for stickability, coding requirements, automated badges, open API, documentation provided, blockchain wallet, customer service practices, and visual representations.

[25] Although training programs and micro-credentials offered by HWTC are free of charge, a prerequisite to accessing a micro-credential was completion of a training program offered by HWTC.

their launch and ensured each micro-credential contained the required content, was easy to understand, and could be delivered within a brief period of time.[26]

4.1.4 Micro-Credential Assessment and Evaluation Process

As noted previously, HWTC partnered with Bow Valley College to develop the assessment protocol and evaluation process for each micro-credential. The assessments were designed as a series of tests to determine whether an individual understood the concepts associated with the micro-credential and could use the skill in the workplace. If a given test was successfully completed, an e-badge was awarded to certify that the individual had earned the micro-credential.

The curriculums for the micro-credentials developed by HWTC were shared with Bow Valley College who then developed the assessment questions to test the knowledge to be delivered by each curriculum. During an interview, HWTC and Bow Valley College staff indicated challenges in developing the assessments within the constraints of an online format. The micro-credentials were designed to be delivered and assessed online so they could be easily accessed and relatively quick to complete. Therefore, the format of the assessments needed to facilitate automated validation of responses to the questions. This meant the question response categories had to be in a yes/no, true/false, or multiple select option format.

Once the assessments were developed, they were merged with the micro-credential training material and uploaded to HWTC's online platform. HWTC staff and members on the Advisory Committee tested the micro-credentials and provided feedback to Bow Valley College. The college made any necessary changes based on the feedback and the micro-credentials were again tested by a select group of sector workers and employers prior to the full launch of the micro-credentials. The launch of each micro-credential was staggered to ensure each micro-credential had been thoroughly tested for quality, accuracy and ease of use.

4.1.5 Knowledge Mobilization

HWTC staff engaged in a number of activities to share the learnings from research and engagement with hospitality sector employers on micro-credentials, including the following:

- **Created and distributed a communication and marketing plan.** The plan included details on partner roles, how they would contribute to the project and communicate with HWTC and other project partners;
- **Developed a news editorial** to announce the launch of the *Micro, but Mighty* project, posted April 7, 2021, and pursued media coverage through television and radio interviews;[27]
- **Created more than two million annual impressions** across project partners' web and social media platforms. The impressions were tailored to each stakeholder group: sector workers, employers, and policy leaders;

[26] Training programs are a prerequisite for accessing a micro-credential. HWTC's training last 2-3 weeks depending on the program. https://hwtc.ca/work/j2j_restaurant_ready/. The online assessment to earn a micro-credential is approximately 30 minutes. https://hwtc.ca/work/micro-credentials/.
[27] A copy of the editorial is available at: www.hwtc.ca/knowledge-centre/media/.

- **Developed and published four learning briefs** explaining micro-credentials and their benefits (*E-Badging Journey* and *Monograph Issues 7a, 7b, 7c*). The learning briefs were published on HWTC's website and in their newsletter;[28]
- **Developed and published a report** on the research they conducted with sector employers (*Key Insights: Employer Consultations on the Potential of Sector-Focused Micro-Credential*). The report was published on HWTC's website;[29]
- **Published an article** on micro-credentials in HWTC's 2022/2023 *Impact Report*;[30]
- **Developed blog posts, short videos, and a webinar session** about micro-credentials;[31]
- **Launched a monthly LinkedIn newsletter** to drive traffic content about micro-credentials; and
- **Presented findings** and updates on the development of micro-credentials at industry conferences, symposia, and during meetings with sector employers.[32]

4.1.6 Supporting Diversity and Inclusion

Based on review of HWTC's quarterly activity reports, HWTC adopted several measures to ensure diversity and inclusion in their programs, daily operations and services. Their activities included enhancing organization diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies and encouraging staff, including those involved in the *Micro, but Mighty* program to regularly participate in workshops that promote diversity and inclusion. For example, HWTC staff were trained on:

- Workplace harassment and violence,
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act certification, and
- Learning about Truth and Reconciliation such as the legacy of residential schools and anti-Indigenous racism.

HWTC's quarterly activity reports also noted that HWTC follows plain language principles in the written components of their training materials and have adopted their learning activities to reflect diverse learning styles. HWTC also revised their assessment strategies to decrease barriers for those looking to access HWTC training programs.

With respect to diversity among HWTC staff, quarterly activity reports noted that two-thirds or all of HWTC senior management identify as women or non-binary, 2SLGBTQ+ peoples, or racialized persons. In addition, two-thirds or all of HWTC's board of directors identify as women or non-binary, with fewer than one-third identifying as Black or racialized or persons with disabilities.

DEI was also embedded into the design of the project. Studies show that some of the benefits of micro-credentials are that they are more accessible to those with low income or lower levels of education

[28] The learning briefs can be found on HWTC's website: hwtc.ca/knowledge-centre/publications-list/.
[29] The report can be found on HWTC's website: hwtc.ca/knowledge-centre/publications-list/.
[30] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (2022/20223) *Hospitality Forward: Innovation in a Year of Recovery Impact Report*. Retrieved from: hwtc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IMPACT-REPORT-2022-2023-_final-1.pdf.
[31] A total of 14 blog posts and three videos were developed. The webinar host 53 individuals in February of 2023.
[32] Presentations occurred throughout the project and included over 350 attendees from the following associations and businesses: Tourism Skills Net Ontario, Ontario Hotels and Motels Association, Hotel Association Canada, Tourism HR Canada, Restaurants Canada, Group Accor Hotels, Toronto Board of Trade, Regional Tourism Ontario, Destination Canada, Hospitality Human Resources Professionals Association, Labour Market Forum, The Distillery Restaurant Group, WorkWolf, Hyatt, Pan Pacific and Sheraton Hotels.

because they are significantly less costly than attaining a postsecondary diploma or degree and require fewer or no prerequisites to complete.[33]In addition, micro-credentials demonstrate competency achieved through training or experience. These features allow those with foreign credentials not recognized in Canada, and those with experience but no formal education, to obtain an assessment and verification of their competency towards specific skills that can be recognized by employers.[34] Interviews with HWTC staff indicated that they made special efforts to encourage newcomers and those with low levels of education to complete the micro-credentials as it could improve their prospects for employment.

> ***"Micro-credentialing is a quick and cost-effective way to recognize skills that may have been attained outside of traditional training programs […] They help employers quickly spot the skills they need to support their business when they are hiring."***
>
> ***– HWTC Staff[35]***

Although demographic indicators were not available for HWTC participants that earned micro-credentials, information from HWTC's 2022/2023 *Impact Report*[36] provides a snapshot of characteristics of HWTC's program participants compared with Ontarians. As shown in Figure 4.3 many HWTC program participants identified as belonging to a marginalized group.

[33] Harvey, D; Wilde, R; Roy, P (April 2023). *Employer and Employee Perceptions of Micro-Credentials,* pg. 2. Ottawa: Future Skills Centre 2023. Retrieved from: fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NAIT_FSC_Report_April2023-1.pdf.
Gauthier, T. (2020). The value of microcredentials: The employer's perspective. *The Journal of Competency-Based Education*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe2.1209
Pichette, J., Brumwell, S., Rizk, J., & Han, S. (2021). *Making Sense of Microcredentials*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. https://heqco.ca/pub/making-sense-of-microcredentials/

[34] The Future Skills Centre (March 10, 2022). *The Future is Micro: Digital Learning and Microcredentials for Education, Retraining and Lifelong Learning*. https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/micro-credentials-for-retraining-and-lifelong-learning/.

[35] As noted in HWTC's April 7, 2021 press release. Retrieved from: Hospitality Workers Training Centre and Bow Valley College Launch New Skills Micro-credential Digital Certification Program for Devastated Ontario Hospitality Industry - Hospitality Workers Training Centre (hwtc.ca)

[36] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (2022/20223) *Hospitality Forward: Innovation in a Year of Recovery Impact Report*. Retrieved from: hwtc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IMPACT-REPORT-2022-2023-_final-1.pdf.

Figure 4.3 Demographic Comparison of HWTC Participants and Ontarians

Characteristic	Average Rates Available for Ontarians	Average HWTC Participant Rates, at Intake
Women	50%	77%
Indigenous	3%	6%
Black Canadians	6%	24%
Racialized communities or visible minorities	16%	74%
Persons with disabilities	15%	16%
LGBTQ2+ Community	4%	15%
Newcomers	30%	38%
No high school	6%	9%
Youth (18-29)	16%	70%
Unemployed	6%	94%
Average # of weeks out of work	22	191
Dependent on social assistance income	7%	>90%

Source: HWTC 2022/2023 Impact Report. Retrieved from: hwtc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IMPACT-REPORT-2022-2023-_final-1.pdf.

4.1.1 Project Evaluation

According to activities reporting, HWTC struggled to secure a third-party evaluator to complete evaluation activities during the project. Although HWTC had reached out to several evaluators none were available to undertake the evaluation work for the project. As noted previously, FSC retained Malatest to complete an evaluation of HWTC's *Micro, but Mighty* project. However, as this evaluation occurred at the conclusion of the project, only limited insights could be gained with respect to program implementation and actual operations.

4.2 Project Effectiveness

The Micro, but Mighty project was effective in meeting its most of its participant outcomes. However, the extent to which the program met its employer level outcomes could not be fully assessed as not all metrics related to these outcomes were collected. Similarly, institutional and system level outcomes could not be fully assessed due to the relative newness of micro-credentials specific to the hospitality sector and their limited uptake.

As shown in Figure 4.4, three of four participant outcomes were met, with the remaining outcome partially met. Evidence for employer outcomes were not robust enough to fully assess whether all outcomes were met; however, two of three employer outcomes were partially met. Likewise, institutional and system level outcomes were partially met as micro-credentials are relatively new to the hospitality sector with low awareness among employers, therefore little data on the broader impacts of micro-credentials for this sector have been collected.

Figure 4.4 Extent Micro, but Mighty Outcomes were Met

Outcome	Extent Outcome was Met
Participant Outcomes	
80% of participants complete and demonstrate skills gained for 500-800 e-badges assessed and issued	High extent: 236 participants collectively earned in excess of 1,620 e-badges; however, the exact proportion of participants this represents is unknown
80% of participants report satisfaction with program outcome	Some extent: 72% of survey respondents (n=84) expressed interest in earning additional micro-credentials and 89% would recommend that their friends and colleagues earn micro-credentials from HWTC
70% of participants report improved employment outlook	High extent: 72% of survey respondents (n=84) reported improved employment outcomes as a result of obtaining one or more micro-credentials
Positive gains along the common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up	Some extent: positive gains related to employment, promotion and increased work responsibilities were measured post-program
Employer Outcomes	
80% of employers report positive indicators of program satisfaction	Some extent: employers of 40 participants who earned HWTC micro-credentials reported awareness of micro-credentials on resumes and indicated they would support employees or new hires earning HWTC micro-credentials
80% of employers report positive indicators of improved hire quality and hiring channel satisfaction	Low extent: employers of 20 participants reported the earned micro-credentials influenced their decision to hire and employers of 10 participants said earned micro-credentials may have influenced hiring decisions
Positive gains along the common socio-demographic indicators at start, exit, follow-up	Unknown, no indicators were tracked to measure against this outcome
Institutional Level Outcomes	
Embedding micro-credentials as extensions of HWTC's ongoing training programs and establishing the market value of their micro-credentials.	Some extent: micro-credential have been embedded in HWTC's training and development programs; however a market value for micro-credentials in the hospitality sector has yet to be established
System Level Outcomes	
HWTC micro-credentials are incorporated in employer recruitment and hiring practices as a trusted industry endorsed method to recognize alternative, but relevant, learning and experience. HWTC micro-credentials support the development of a pan-Canadian approach to standardize micro-credentials as essential recruitment and training tools for the hospitality sector.	Low extent: HWTC is recognized as a high-quality training organization within Ontario's hospitality sector and have provided a catalogue of micro-credentials that have been endorsed by some employers as recognized tools for hiring and training workers. However, micro-credentials are relatively new to the sector and more work is needed to establish a standardized approach for the recognition of hospitality focused micro-credentials.

The extent to which the *Micro, but Mighty* project effectively met its outcomes is discussed in detail below.

4.2.1 Meeting Participant Outcomes

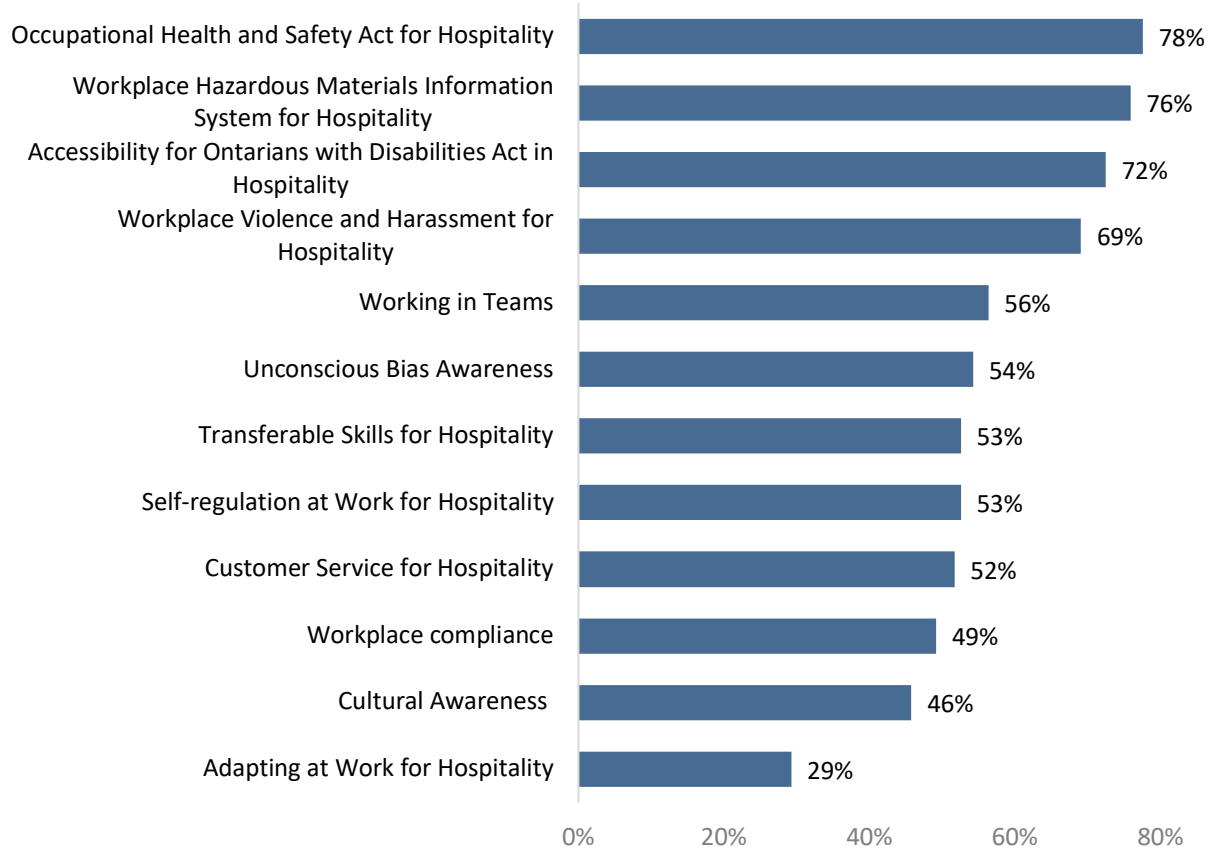
The Micro, but Mighty project exceeded its target of 500-800 micro-credentials earned with the majority of participants reporting improved employment outlooks and satisfaction with the program.

More than 1,600 micro-credentials were earned across 236 training participants.

According to administrative data, 236 of HWTC's program participants collectively earned more than 1,600 micro-credentials in the form of e-badges. This represents approximately 6 micro-credentials earned per individual. While the number of participants earning micro-credentials fell short of the targeted 300, the number of e-badges earned exceeded the 500-800 target. However, the outcome of 80% of participants having earned micro-credentials cannot be confirmed as the exact proportion of participants earning micro-credentials in relation to the total number of participants trained is unknown.

Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of micro-credentials earned, with the majority of participants (range of 69% to 78%) having earned the four most in-demand micro-credentials as identified by employers. It should also be noted that these four micro-credentials were the first to be offered. As such, the lower proportion of participants earning other micro-credentials may be due to these micro-credentials being available for a shorter period of time.

Figure 4.5 Micro-Credential e-Badges Earned



Micro but Mighty administrative data, n=236.

Interviewed staff observed that in addition to the micro-credentials serving as recognition of the competency of specific skills, they also helped to boost the confidence of individuals who had not obtained higher education. Staff also noted that increased confidence contributed to an individual's success in gaining employment and on the job.

> ***"It's an achievement too for participants without higher education because it builds their confidence which goes a long way to help them be successful."***
>
> ***– HWTC Staff***

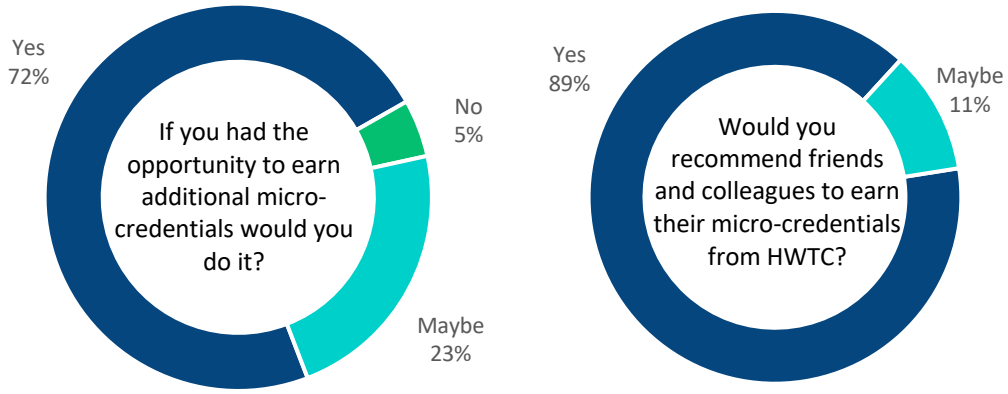
One survey respondent commented on the potential benefits of micro-credentials in helping to recognize newcomer skills.

> ***"A lot of newcomers trying to join the hospitality sector in Canada could benefit immensely by saving them time to find work."***
>
> ***– HWTC Program Participant***

HWTC program participants appear satisfied with the micro-credentials earned.

Evidence suggests that HWTC program participants were satisfied with the micro-credentials they earned. All survey respondents (n=84) earned at east one micro-credential. When asked whether they would earn additional micro-credentials if given the opportunity, 72% said yes. Further, 89% of respondents indicated that they would recommend their friends and colleagues earn their micro-credentials from HWTC (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6 Earning Additional Micro-Credentials and Recommending to Others

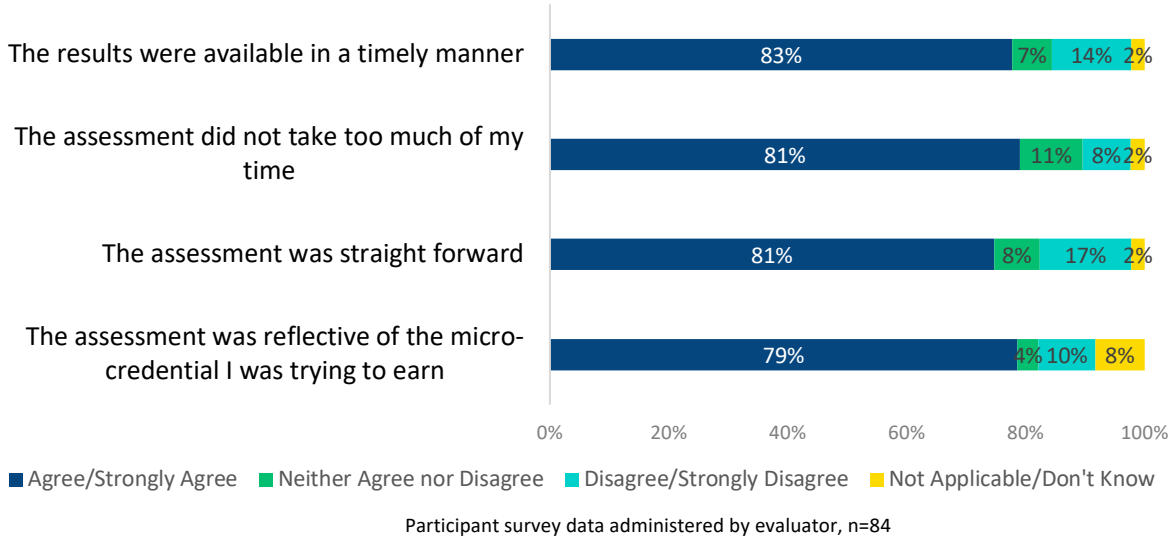


Participant survey data administered by evaluator, n=84

Most survey respondents agreed that the assessment to confirm attainment was reflective of the micro-credential they were trying to earn. Most also agreed that the process to obtain their micro-credential was straightforward, did not take much time to complete, and that results were provided in a timely manner.

As shown in Figure 4.7, the majority of survey respondents agreed that the process to obtain their micro-credential was straightforward (81%), did not take too much time (81%), and results were provided in a timely manner (83%). Most (79%) respondents also agreed that the assessment to determine whether they would be awarded the micro-credential was reflective of the micro-credential they were trying to earn (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7 Agreement with Statements on Process to Obtain Micro-Credential

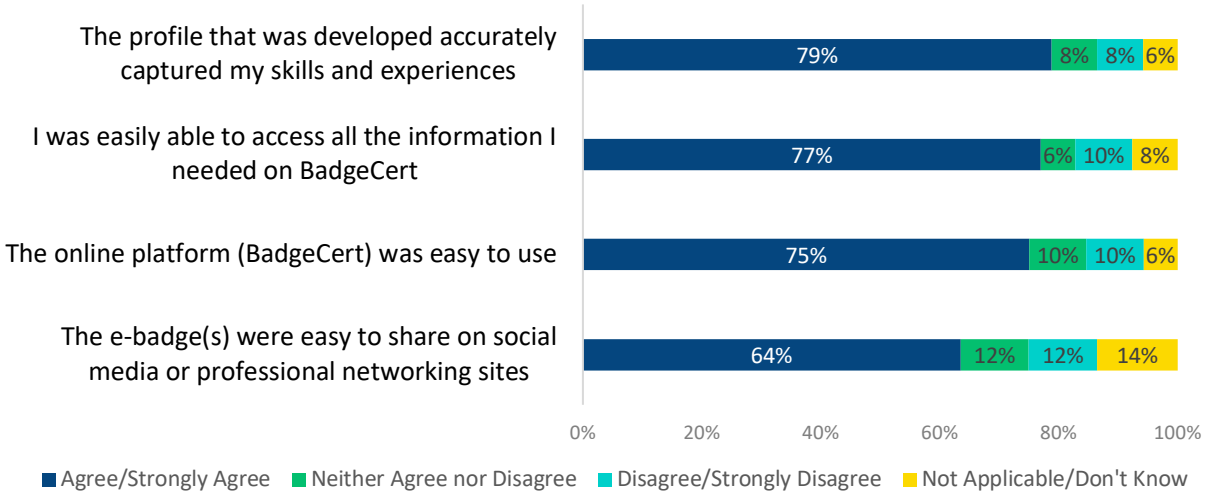


Participant survey data administered by evaluator, n=84

Most survey respondents who accessed their e-badge on BadgeCert were satisfied with this platform.

As shown in Figure 4.8, survey respondents agreed that the BadgeCert platform was easy to use (75%), and they were able to access all of the information they needed (77%). Most survey respondents also indicated that the profile developed for the e-badges accurately captured their skills and experience (79%) and that the e-badges were easy to share on social media and professional networking sites (64%).

Figure 4.8 Agreement with Statements on Process to Access e-Badge



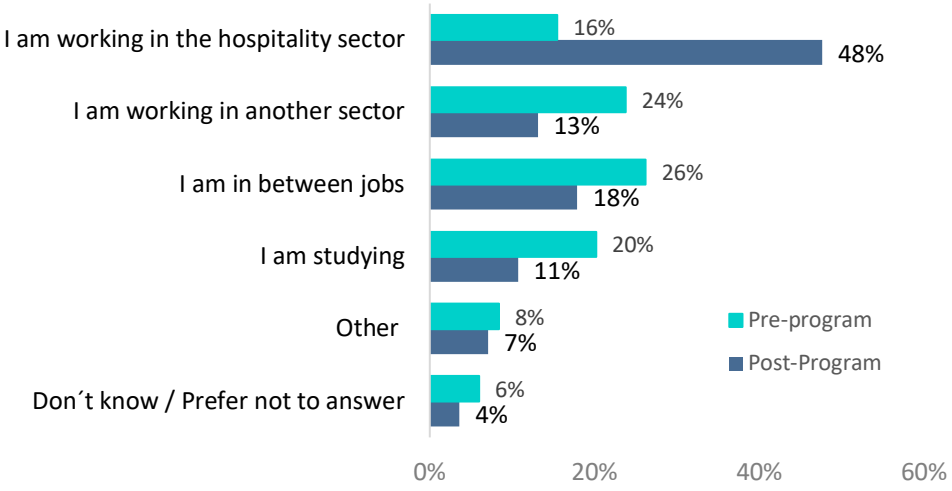
Participant survey data administered by evaluator, asked of those who accessed their e-badge on BadgeCert, n=52

Most survey respondents (72%) reported improved employment outcomes as a result of obtaining one or more micro-credentials, thereby exceeding HWTC's target of 70%.

Participation in the Micro, by Mighty project resulted in significantly higher employment rates among survey respondents (40% pre-program to 61% post-program). Employment in the hospitality sector also

saw a significant increase (16% pre-program to 46% post-program). Although fewer survey respondents were pursuing additional studies (11% post-program vs. 20% pre-program), it can be assumed that employment outcomes for these respondents had improved. Therefore, the combined proportion of survey respondents with improved employment outcomes at 72% exceeds HWTC's 70% target (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Pre- and Post-Program Employment Status

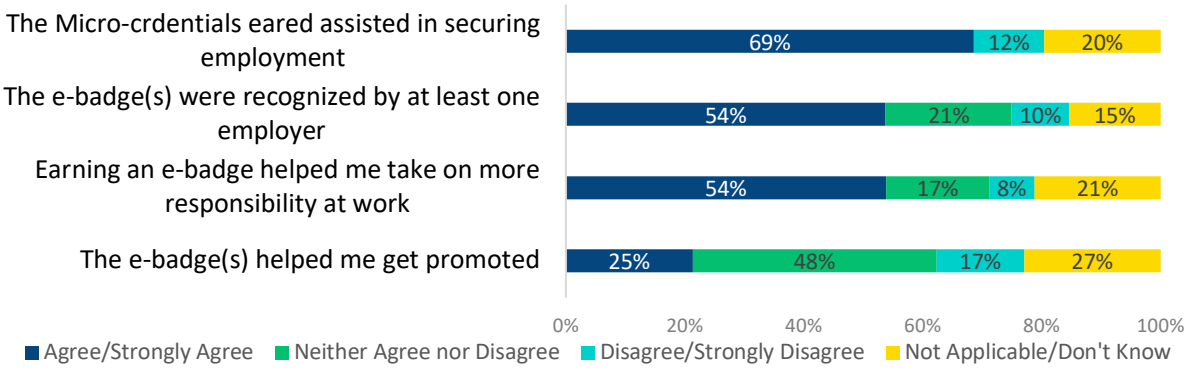


Participant survey data administered by evaluator, n=84

Perspectives are mixed on the extent to which the Micro, but Mighty project was effective in helping program participants secure employment, get promoted, and take on more responsibility at work.

Survey respondents who had found employment post-program (n=51) provided mixed perspectives on the usefulness of the micro-credentials they obtained. For instance, although two-thirds (69%) indicated that their micro-credentials assisted them in securing employment, there was one-third that disagreed or did not know whether the micro-credentials were effective in helping them secure employment. Additionally, only half of those that accessed their e-badge on BadgeCert reported that their micro-credentials were recognized by their employer (54%) or that they helped them take on more responsibility at work (54%). Further, only 25% of these respondents indicated the micro-credentials helped them get promoted in their workplace (Figure 4.10). It should be further noted that in the absence of a control group, it was not possible to assess the net impact of the program in terms of enhancing employment outcomes. Overall, these findings indicate that the micro-credentials are still in the early phase of recognition or adoption by employers and in the sector at large.

Figure 4.10 Effectiveness of Micro-Credential on Employee Recognition by Employer



Participant survey data administered by evaluator, asked of those who accessed their e-badge on BadgeCert, n=51

4.2.2 Meeting Employer Outcomes

Employers known to have hired HWTC trained participants who had acquired micro-credentials reported some satisfaction with the Micro, but Mighty program, including recognition and relevance of micro-credentials which influenced their decision to hire. These findings could not be validated through an independent evaluation, however, and are therefore more likely to be susceptible to selection bias.

The employers interviewed by HWTC reported some degree of satisfaction with the micro-credentials. These insights were gleaned from HWTC's interviews with eight employers who had each hired a minimum of five participants who had earned at least one micro-credential issued by HWTC. It is important to note, however, that these interviews were not conducted by an independent evaluator and therefore may be biased towards employers that are more likely to recognize micro-credentials.

All eight employers interviewed by HWTC indicated they recognized the micro-credentials on potential employee's resumes and that the micro-credentials were relevant to the position offered to the new hires. However, only four of eight employers indicated that their decision to hire a HWTC program participant was influenced by the micro-credential(s) the individual had earned. An additional two employers said having a micro-credential may have influenced their hiring decision.

When asked whether these employers would consider offering existing or new employees the opportunity to earn HWTC micro-credentials, all affirmed that they would. Of the catalogue of micro-credentials offered by HWTC, the top micro-credentials these employers would like their employees or new hires to earn included:

- Cultural Awareness (6 of 8 employers selected this micro-credential);
- OHSA, AODA, WHMIS, and Workplace Harassment (5 employers selected these micro-credentials); and

  Customer Service, Working in Teams, and Unconscious Bias (3 employers selected these micro-credentials)

Some employers found value in hiring individuals with micro-credentials, while other employers found the performance of new hires with micro-credentials were at least the equivalent to that of other employees.

Interviewed members of HWTC's Advisory Committee who were involved in hiring for their company indicated they saw value in hiring workers with micro-credentials as it ensured they were hiring people with in-demand skills and it took less time to onboard these individuals. In addition, three of eight employers interviewed[37] said the performance of their new hires with micro-credentials exceeded their expectations noting that these new hires performed better than employees with no micro-credentials. However, five of eight interviewed employers indicated the performance of new hires with micro-credentials were equivalent to that of established employees.

> ***"The program provides participants with many of the skills we are looking for. While we do some training, it is good if we don't have to start from scratch; we can onboard them faster."***
>
> ***– HWTC Advisory Committee Member***

No further data were collected to determine the extent to which the *Micro, but Mighty* program was effective in meeting its employer outcomes (previously identified in Figure 4.4).

4.2.3 Meeting Institutional Level Outcomes

While HWTC has embedded their catalogue of micro-credentials into the training programs they offer, continued engagement with employers is needed to promote micro-credentials and establish their market value in order to enhance their adoption and scalability.

Interviewed HWTC staff indicated that engagement with sector employers in the design and later validation of their micro-credentials helped to promote micro-credentials as viable solutions to address the skills gaps identified by employers and help meet the demand for skilled hospitality workers. As a result, HWTC has embedded their catalogue of micro-credentials into the training programs they offer.[38]

Through their engagements with employers, HWTC staff found that more effort is needed to educate employers on the benefits of micro-credentials and promote their use within the hospitality sector. For example, most employers interviewed (n=43) as part of HWTC's research would consider using micro-credentials in the future. However, their survey of 72 sector employers found that seven in ten had little or no understanding of micro-credentials.[39] Staff acknowledged that they needed to expand their network of employer and sector partners to increase awareness of HWTC's micro-credentials. Written reports noted that HWTC intended to continue engaging with employers beyond the *Micro, but Mighty* project.

HWTC's research also found there was insufficient evidence to place a market value on their micro-credentials at this time. HWTC's research found that while most human resource and operational managers saw micro-credentials as training and retention tools, few were using micro-credentials for talent attraction, recruitment, or hiring practices within Ontario's hospitality sector.[40] Interviewed staff indicated that micro-credentials were relatively new to the hospitality sector and it would take time to

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[37] The reader is reminded that a minimum of 40 program participants were hired across the eight employers interviewed by HWTC.

[38] The reader is reminded that program participants can access the micro-credentials online once they have completed an HWTC training program.

[39] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (March 2023). *CULTIVATING CAPACITY: Sector-focused Micro-credentialing for Ontario's Hospitality and Tourism Sector*. Toronto: Hospitality Workers Training Centre.

[40] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (March 2023). CULTIVATING CAPACITY: Sector-focused Micro-credentialing for Ontario's Hospitality and Tourism Sector. Toronto, Hospitality Workers Training Centre.

establish their market value. Their perspectives aligns with recent research conducted by FSC on the extent to which micro-credential were recognized and valued by employers and employees. FSC's report recommends building awareness of micro-credentials by implementing "more focused value proposition marketing to employers and potential earners" and that "increasing the awareness of metadata embedded in digital icons has great potential to enhance adoption rates of micro-credentials."[41]

HWTC staff noted that findings from their research were promising as 59% of the 72 employers surveyed indicated a potential willingness to invest up to $250 for an employee to receive training on a specific skill set and obtain a micro-credential.[42] HWTC staff noted that this finding was an indicator that employers found micro-credentials to be valuable and further instilled HWTC's commitment to fully embed all micro-credentials into their training programs and to develop additional micro-credentials based on the training needs of employers.

> ***"The more [micro-credentials] we have out there in the work world, the more recognizable [they are] and can be validated by employers as useful."***
>
> ***– HWTC Staff***

4.2.4 Meeting System Level Outcomes

The evaluation found that the extent to which the Micro, but Mighty project achieved its system level outcomes were mixed. While HWTC is recognized as a high-quality training organization within Ontario's hospitality sector, micro-credentials are relatively new to the sector and more work is needed to increase awareness and establish a standardized approach for the recognition of hospitality focused micro-credentials.

Evidence suggests that the *Micro, but Mighty* program was somewhat effective in increasing awareness of micro-credentials and in encouraging some hospitality employers to incorporate micro-credentials into their recruitment and hiring practices. HWTC's survey of employers (n=72) found that 41% of hiring managers had indicated the completion of micro-credentials were important when making hiring decisions between multiple candidates.[43] Interviews with Advisory Committee members and four of eight employers who had hired workers with HWTC micro-credentials indicated that their decision to hire was influenced by the micro-credential(s) an individual had earned. Further, most of the 43 employers interviewed as part of HWTC's research said they would consider using micro-credentials within their organization.[44]

> ***"It would be great if the micro-credentials could be shared in all the provinces. Have standardized micro-credentials so it is recognized and accepted across Canada."***
>
> ***– HWTC Advisory Committee Member***

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[41] Harvey, D; Wilde, R; Roy, P (April 2023). *Employer and Employee Perceptions of Micro-Credentials,* pg. 2. Ottawa: Future Skills Centre 2023. Retrieved from: fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NAIT_FSC_Report_April2023-1.pdf.
[42] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (March 2023). *CULTIVATING CAPACITY: Sector-focused Micro-credentialing for Ontario's Hospitality and Tourism Sector*. Toronto, Hospitality Workers Training Centre.
[43] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (March 2023). CULTIVATING CAPACITY: Sector-focused Micro-credentialing for Ontario's Hospitality and Tourism Sector. Toronto, Hospitality Workers Training Centre.
[44] Ibid.

Several studies stress the importance of micro-credentials created by established trusted institutions, are recognized by employers, institutions and industry, and have met quality assurance standards.[45] These studies also advocate for the standardization of micro-credentials to ensure the learning reflected by the micro-credential is verifiable.[46] To this end several organizations have developed frameworks to guide the development of micro-credentials offered by post-secondary institutions, including the province of British Columbia,[47] eCampusOntario,[48] and Colleges & Institutes Canada.[49] However, micro-credentials developed by private colleges and industry organizations are not entitled to register their micro-credentials with these organizations unless they have formed partnerships with public postsecondary institutions to develop the micro-credential. Although HWTC is "regarded as a high-quality training organization with a focus on job placements and candidate development" [50] among hospitality employers in Ontario, staff acknowledged that more needs to be done with respect to advocating for the recognition of sector developed micro-credentials and to develop a standardized data base of recognized micro-credentials for the hospitality sector.

> ***"We would like to see more research and critical reviews [that] include workers and job seekers that are not served by post secondary systems."***
>
> ***– HWTC Staff***

4.3 Efficiency

As noted previously, the evaluator did not have access to financial data or reports for the *Micro, but Mighty* project. As such, the assessment of efficiencies were based on activity reports submitted by HWTC and interview data collected by the evaluator.

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[45] The Future Skills Centre (March 10, 2022). *The Future is Micro: Digital Learning and Microcredentials for Education, Retraining and Lifelong Learning*. https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/micro-credentials-for-retraining-and-lifelong-learning/
Gauthier, T. (2020). The value of microcredentials: The employer's perspective. *The Journal of Competency-Based Education*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe2.1209
Usher, A. (2022, November 16). *Stacking and micro-credentials*. HESA. https://higheredstrategy.com/stacking-and-micro-credentials/
Pichette, J., Brumwell, S., Rizk, J., & Han, S. (2021). *Making Sense of Microcredentials*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. https://heqco.ca/pub/making-sense-of-microcredentials/

[46] See for example, Usher, A. (2022, November 16). *Stacking and micro-credentials*. HESA. https://higheredstrategy.com/stacking-and-micro-credentials/
Peter Gooch and Associates (2020). Micro-certifications: Policy and Regulatory Context in Ontario. Available at https://www.ecampusontario.ca/publications-reports/

[47] Micro-credential Framework for B.C.'s Public Post-Secondary Education System. Available at: www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/micro-credentials/mc_framework.pdf.

[48] eCampusOntario is a provincially funded non-profit organization that leads a consortium of the province's publicly funded colleges, universities and indigenous institutes to develop and test online learning tools to advance the use of education technology and digital learning environments. Retrieved from: www.ecampusontario.ca/about/.

[49] Colleges & Institutes Canada supports Canada's publicly supported colleges, institutes, CEGEPs, and polytechnics. Available at: www.collegesinstitutes.ca/news-release/cican-releases-new-national-framework-for-micro-credentials/.

[50] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (March 2023). *CULTIVATING CAPACITY: Sector-focused Micro-credentialing for Ontario's Hospitality and Tourism Sector*. Toronto, Hospitality Workers Training Centre.

Several activities in the implementation of the *Micro, but Mighty* project contributed to project efficiencies including:

- **Developing the curriculum for each micro-credential in-house based on input from hospitality sector employers and leaders.** HWTC staff interviewed noted that their senior staff had many years of experience in developing training programs for hospitality sector workers and were well equipped to develop the curriculum for the micro-credentials. HWTC indicated staff worked collaboratively with employers and sector leaders during each phase of development to ensure that the curriculum accurately captured the skill it was designed for and reflected the competency needed to master the skill. By keeping the development of the micro-credential in-house, HWTC could ensure a quality product that was vetted by industry professionals;
- **Convening an advisory committee to validate the micro-credentials, test the assessment platform, and raise the profile of the project within the sector**. The establishment of an advisory committee helped to facilitate the development of HWTC's micro-credentials by ensuring that each micro-credential was designed with the input of sector experts. The advisory committee was also instrumental in vetting the curriculum and how the content of each micro-credential was being delivered, thus ensuring industry oversight. As many members of the advisory committee were senior directors within their respective companies and organization, they helped to increase awareness and promote HWTC's micro-credentials; and
- **Outsourcing the digital platform to store and access e-badges.** HWTC staff indicated that although it took them some time to identify the most suitable digital platform to sponsor their e-badges, it was considered more efficient and effective than developing their own platform. As noted in Section 4.1.2, HWTC had developed a set of criteria for selecting the digital platform based on compatibility with their system, shareability, potential for stacking, secure access, and visual appearance.

4.4 Causal Attribution

While the Micro, but Mighty project led to the achievement of participant and some employer outcomes, there was limited evidence to determine whether anticipated institutional or system level impacts could be attributed to the program.

The evaluation determined that the program had a direct impact that resulted in participants earning over 1,620 micro-credentials and improved employment outcomes. The *Micro, but Mighty* project also impacted employer outcomes with increased interest in using micro-credentials as recruitment and training tools among employers engaged in the project.

Challenges to determining causal attribution for institutional and system level outcomes included:

- **Low understanding of micro-credentials**. According to research conducted by HWTC, there is a limited understanding of micro-credentials within Ontario's hospitality sector employers. While most employers see micro-credentials as training tools, few were aware of how they can be used to attract and retain workers.
- **Micro-credentials are not widely used for recruitment and retention in the hospitality sector**. According to research conducted by HWTC, micro-credentials are not seen as a solution for every sub-sector of employers in the hospitality sector. Smaller businesses and many restaurants do not have the capacity or budgets to support employee training and are more

willing to take on employees with no work experience. However, resort, tourism and attraction employers indicated a demonstrated interest in micro-credentials as a hiring tool and to supplement their employee training programs. Although the potential for micro-credentials as recruitment and retention tools exist, their adoption throughout the sector has yet to be established.

- **Market value of hospitality sector-focused micro-credentials have not been established**. According to research conducted by HWTC, micro-credentials are relatively new to the hospitality sector. While there is evidence that the micro-credential issuing organization is important to employers and that HWTC is well regarded as a high-quality training organization, it is too early to assess the market value of HWTC's micro-credentials.

5. Discussion and Implications

Summary: Results from the evaluation demonstrate that the *Micro, but Mighty* project is early in the journey towards expansion, adoption, investment and partnerships. FSC's support enabled HWTC to create, assess and deliver micro-credentials aimed to fill labour market gaps in Ontario's hospitality sector. The evaluation resulted in lessons learned for organizations looking to create a catalogue of micro-credentials to help employers recruit workers with in-demand skills and meet the training needs of their employees.

5.1 Expansion

There is potential for HWTC's *Micro, but Mighty* program to be expanded to other regions, however more work is needed to increase recognition of micro-credentials in the hospitality sector. Research conducted by HWTC indicates there is growing interest in micro-credentials as a solution to meet the demands for skilled workers in Ontario's hospitality sector. However, micro-credentials are relatively new to the sector and more work is needed to increase recognition and establish market value of HWTC's micro-credentials catalogue. According to HWTC's research and quarterly reports, it was recommended that HWTC increase the promotion of their micro-credentials and to develop an awareness strategy to commercialize their micro-credential catalogue. Similarly, studies recommend continued support for micro-credential programming targeted towards jobseekers and upskilling workers in the hospitality sector.[51]

Should a project like the *Micro, but Mighty* be expanded into other regions, the following should be considered:

- Ensure that relationships have been developed with sector employers from that region to obtain a greater understanding of the training needs and skills gaps, as well as to gauge interest in using micro-credentials as a hiring tool and as a supplement to the employee training programs.
- Work to standardize micro-credentials so they are recognized and accepted in other Canadian provinces. This would include rigorous testing to validate the micro-credential and assess the validity of the test process (for example the proportion of those who pass the assessment the first time).
- Ensure that proof of micro-credentials (e-badges) can be readily shared on a variety of virtual platforms.
- Conduct research to establish the market value of micro-credentials among the several types of hospitality sector employers across Canada.

5.2 Adoption

There is potential for HWTC's catalogue of micro-credentials to be adopted by other organizations serving hospitality sector employers and workers. HWTC recognized the need for a catalogue of industry specific micro-credentials that would provide evidence of core skills and competencies valued by sector employers. Micro-credentials can serve to recognize and validate practical experience or

[51] State of the Ontario Tourism Industry Report, 2022. Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Retrieved from: https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/State-of-the-Ontario-Tourism-Industry-Report-December-13-2022-FINAL.pdf.

foreign training not recognized in Canada. For employers, micro-credentials are valuable economic tools for upskilling their workers and to more efficiently on-board new hires.

Should elements of the *Micro, but Mighty* program be adopted by other organizations, the following should be considered:

- Engaging with employers to ensure the catalogue of micro-credentials address skill gaps and meet the training needs of local employers,
- Engaging with local employer and industry leaders to help ensure the micro-credentials meet recognized standards for these employers,
- Partnering with a reputable assessment agency to ensure that participants can be appropriately assessed in terms of skills/knowledge acquisition,
- Developing a marketing campaign to raise awareness, recruit participants and attract employer and investment partners, and
- Ensuring the platform for accessing the e-badges was easy to use, cost effective, and allowed for shareability with other platforms such as social media and LinkedIn.

5.3 Investment or Partnership

Demonstrating the ability to successfully build partnerships and engage sector employers can enhance scalability. HWTC engaged with hospitality sector employers and leaders to identify in-demand skills and prioritize the development of their micro-credentials. To ensure HWTC's catalogue of micro-credentials met industry skill demands and were validated within the industry, partner employers also assessed and vetted the micro-credentials. This aligns with recommendations from several studies that advocate for endorsing the use of verifiable micro-credentials developed by trusted sources.[52]

There was no evidence of additional investments over the course of FSC engagement in HWTC's quarterly report. However, potential for investment from employers exists as HWTC reported that many employers saw value in the micro-credentials for training and upskilling their workforce, with some noting they would be willing to pay for workers to be trained by HWTC and attain micro-credentials.[53] However, more work is needed to continue forging partnerships with sector employers and leaders to increase the use and recognition of HWTC's micro-credentials. This will help to establish the marketability of their micro-credentials and attract new partners and investors.

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[52] The Future Skills Centre (March 10, 2022). *The Future is Micro: Digital Learning and Microcredentials for Education, Retraining and Lifelong Learning*. https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/micro-credentials-for-retraining-and-lifelong-learning/
Gauthier, T. (2020). The value of microcredentials: The employer's perspective. *The Journal of Competency-Based Education*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe2.1209
Usher, A. (2022, November 16). *Stacking and micro-credentials*. HESA. https://higheredstrategy.com/stacking-and-micro-credentials/
Pichette, J., Brumwell, S., Rizk, J., & Han, S. (2021). *Making Sense of Microcredentials*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. https://heqco.ca/pub/making-sense-of-microcredentials/

[53] Hospitality Workers Training Centre (March 2023). *CULTIVATING CAPACITY: Sector-focused Micro-credentialing for Ontario's Hospitality and Tourism Sector*. Toronto, Hospitality Workers Training Centre.

5.4 Lessons for Service Delivery

The evaluation demonstrated that organizations seeking to enhance their service delivery and expand into other regions should demonstrate several competencies. For instance, HWTC demonstrated their ability to:

- Invest in human resources and capacity building within their enterprise (for instance, by educating their staff on how to better incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion in working environment and the programs they offer);
- Understand the needs of sector specific employers;
- Develop relationships with sector employers and specialists to provide input and feedback on solutions such as micro-credentials to address employer needs and better prepare their workforce;
- Promote the benefits and awareness of micro-credentials to support worker recruitment, training and retention; and
- Measure the results of their program's activities and objectives.

The results of the evaluation do however point out some of the challenges associated with such an initiative. For example:

- The program rollout was delayed by the loss of internal resources tapped to develop the training. Consideration could be given to the use of contractors to develop the training and/or having appropriate back-up staff in place to develop the required training.
- There were limited formal mechanisms to track participant and employer satisfaction with the program. The program also had limited formal mechanisms to provide continuous feedback from participants and employers as to program modifications. Future design should include a more formal process to monitor training quality and program outcomes on a continuous basis.

5.5 Implications for FSC and Other Funding Organizations

Funding organizations should work with potential projects to ensure inclusion of third-party evaluations of project enhance impact measurement. Although HWTC made a number of attempts to engage a third party evaluator to conduct a process evaluation of the *Micro, but Mighty* project, they were unsuccessful. Quarterly reporting indicates that a potential barrier was the amount HWTC had allocated for a process and a summative evaluation. Funding organizations may wish to consider establishing budget guidelines for the evaluation of funded projects either as a part of the total funding or as a separate funding agreement with third-party evaluators.

The evaluation also shed light on areas for further investigation. For instance, while HWTC is considered as a quality training provider among sector employers and their catalogue of micro-credentials was vetted by employers and sector leaders, there is no method to standardize micro-credentials for the hospitality sector unless they have been developed in collaboration with and Ontario publicly funded college or university. Consideration should be given to establishing a method to standardize micro-credentials for the hospitality sector developed by private training institutions such as HWTC.

Appendix A: Micro but Mighty Program Logic Model

VISION: To assist employers to rapidly recognize and recover their skilled workforce and to better align the skills of workers for an evolving post-pandemic business ecosystem

Inputs
Networks, Human & financial resources

Activities in 2021 and 2022	Outputs in 2021 and 2022	Immediate Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Ultimate Outcomes
•Discuss content with employment partners through the faciliation of employment specialitsts •Confer with Employer Committee on industry needs •Develop catalgouge of sector focused micro-credentials •Partner with Bow Valley College to develop assessment content •Create sector focused e-badges and platform for issuing e-badges to participants	•Platform for participants •11 courses published •e-Badges offered	•Number of e-badges issued •Number of employer partners •Number of occupational skills represented by the micro-credentials •Number of engagements with employer patners •Number micro-credential assessments created •Number micro-credentials accepted by employer partners	•Participants with e-badges report career stability/development •Employees are able to demonstrate they have the skills needed for their position •Employers are able to recognise skillsets of hospitality workers for hiring and promotion	•Employers embed micro-credentials as tools to support recruitment and employee retention

REACH: Hospitality sector workers, employers, service providers, and policy leaders in Ontario

BARRIERS: Identification of virtual platform to deliver the e-badges, mainitaining constant communication and buy-in from industry partners

Appendix B: Review Framework

Evaluation Question	Indicators	Methods	Data Sources
Implementation (Process) What did we learn about how the program is being implemented?	• Context – demographics, jurisdiction, employment rates in the community • Industry and employment trends in the community • Assumptions at the time on proposal • Assumptions which were validated during implementation • Assumptions which were altered during implementation • Factors which were overlooked • Challenges with creating micro-credentials • Challenges with developing e-badges • Lessons on what worked. • Lessons on what did not work. • Lessons on what needed to be done but was not done.	• Document and literature review • Interviews • Surveys • Data analysis	• Needs assessment reports • Industry benchmark reports • Prior evaluation reports • Review documents • Quarterly and annual reports to FSC • Stake holder interviews • Participant survey
Effectiveness (Outcomes): What did we learn about the outcomes of the intervention? After what time period?	• # e-badges created and updated • Skills gained with each e-badge • # e-badges gained • # accessing micro-credential • # gaining e-badge(can have multiple e-badges) • Participant satisfaction of the micro-credential earned • Participant satisfaction of the micro-credential assessment process • Participant satisfaction with e-badge certificate • Continuous feedback from industry • #/% of e-badge certified individuals who gain work experience relevant to their post-project employment	• Document review • Interviews • Surveys • Anecdotal • Data analysis	• Needs assessment reports • Industry benchmark reports • Prior evaluation reports • Review documents • Quarterly and annual reports to FSC • Stake holder interviews • Participant survey

	• #/% employers hiring workers with micro-credentials or encouraging employees to attain micro-credentials • Lessons on what worked. • Lessons on what did not work. • Lessons on what needed to be done but was not done.		
Efficiency: What will we learn about how to use resources more efficiently to achieve the desired outcomes?	• Lessons on what worked. • Lessons on what did not work. • Lessons on what needed to be done but was not done.	• Document review • Interviews • Surveys • Data analysis	• Needs assessment reports • Industry benchmark reports • Prior evaluation reports • Review documents • Quarterly and annual reports to FSC • Stake holder interviews • Participant survey
Causal Attribution: To what extent will we learn about the extent to which any outcomes can be causally attributed to the project intervention? What information (qualitative or quantitative) would improve our confidence in the role the project played in achieving outcomes?	• Number of outcomes achieved	• Document review • Interviews • Surveys • Anecdotal • Data analysis	• Needs assessment reports • Industry benchmark reports • Prior evaluation reports • Review documents • Quarterly and annual reports to FSC • Stake holder interviews • Participant survey

Appendix C: Data Collection Tools

Master Interview Guide

This master interview guide has been developed for the following four stakeholders:

- Lead partner
- Content partner
- Advisory committee
- Employment specialists

Each question has been labeled by stakeholder. This master guide will be split into four individual guides prior to conducting interviews.

Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC): *Micro, but Mighty*	
The *Micro, but Mighty*: Sector-specific Micro-credential Virtual Training Project is funded in part by the Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates, an external and independent research firm, to conduct this study in collaboration with HWTC. We are looking to understand how HWTC's "*Micro, but Mighty*: Sector-specific Micro-credential Virtual Training" project has provided value to hospitality sector employers and workers. We will use the findings from this review to generate knowledge and learnings about the strengths, challenges and outcomes of the micro-credentials project to direct HWTC's future work and other projects like it. The main objectives of this project are to shed light on the successes and challenges related to: • designing the catalogue of micro-credentials for the hospitality workers that participated in the program (i.e. program participants); • developing the assessments of the skills that participants must demonstrate to earn their e-badge, as well as the development of e-badges sharable on social media; and • participant outcomes related to skills and employment, where applicable. **Note: it is not necessary to have been involved in all phases of this project or to be able to discuss all these topics in the interview.** Your participation is voluntary and your responses will remain anonymous. Your choice to participate will have no impact on your relationship with HWTC. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes depending on your answers.	
Confidentiality and Anonymity:	No one other than Malatest researchers will have access to any identifying information from this interview. Your responses to interview questions will be anonymized (that is, reported without your name or any identifying information attached). In some cases, we may use anonymized quotations that exemplify a trend among interviewees' responses; in this case, we will make sure that the quote does not contain any information that could be used to identify you. All identifying data will be destroyed by Malatest when the report provided to FSC is finalized. More information on our privacy policy can be found on our website at http://www.malatest.com/Privacy.htm

Informed Consent:	Your participation is voluntary, and you may end participation at any time. You can also skip any question that you do not want to answer, or that is not applicable to you. With your permission, we hope to audio record this interview, for Malatest's note-taking and quality assurance purposes only. This recording will be destroyed once the interview notes have been verified and completed. Do I have your permission to audio record the interview?
Questions:	If you have any questions about this interview or this project, please feel free to contact Neha Khullar, Assistant Research Manager, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., at 1.888.689.1847 ext. 116 or via email at n.khullar@malatest.com.

A. Background information (up to 5 min)

All stakeholders

1. Can you tell me about yourself:
    a. What are your typical roles and responsibilities in your current job?
    b. What is/was your role in the development or implementation of HWTC's micro-credentials project (as part of the *Micro, but Mighty Program*)?

Lead partner, advisory committee and employment specialists

2. What factors drove the need for the micro-credentials project?
    a. To your knowledge, how, if at all, has the understanding of those factors changed from design to implementation?

Lead partner, advisory committee

3. How would you define success for the project and what benchmarks would you use to measure success?
    a. What do you see as the potential longer-term outcomes for participants and other stakeholders?

B. Designing the catalogue of micro-credentials (up to 20 minutes)

Lead partner, advisory committee and employment specialists

4. Can you walk me through the design of the catalogue of the micro-credentials:
    a. Which stakeholders or partners did you work with?

(If worked directly with employers / employer partners)

    b. What were the specific occupational demands and skills needs of the employers / employer partners you worked with?
    c. How did you or your team capture these needs?
    d. How was this knowledge applied in the design of the catalogue of micro-credentials?

Lead partner, advisory committee and employment specialists

2. What worked well?

Lead partner, advisory committee and employment specialists

3. What challenges did you or your team encounter when designing the catalogue? How were these challenges addressed?

Lead partner, advisory committee and employment specialists

4. What would you do (or like to see done) differently next time in the design of a similar catalogue?
    a. What lessons can be drawn to be shared with others in the skills development sector?

C. <u>The micro credentials assessment (20 mins)</u>

Lead partner and Content partner (i.e. Bow Valley College)

5. May you briefly explain the assessment process?
    a. How was the design of the assessments for the micro-credential project different compared to other micro-credential assessments you have designed?
    b. What, if any, tools, information or supports were needed to create the assessments? (If applicable) How did they help?

Lead partner and Content partner (i.e. Bow Valley College)

6. Did you experience any challenges developing the assessments?
    a. If so, how were these challenges mitigated?

Lead partner and Content partner (i.e. Bow Valley College)

7. If you were to develop similar assessments again with a similar pool of participants, what would you do (or like to see done) differently next time?
    a. What lessons can be drawn to be shared with others in the skills development sector?

Lead partner

8. How many individuals did you assess through the micro-credential project? (Note: The period of reference is (March 2021 through March2023).
    a. How many individuals were successfully awarded their e-badge?
    b. What distinguished successful e-badge candidates from those who were unsuccessful?
        i. What were their strengths?
    c. For those who were not successful, what were their challenges?

D. <u>The e-badge development (20 mins)</u>

Lead partner, Advisory committee

9. Can you walk me through the design of the e-badge and the platform to support the e-badge:
    a. Which, if any, stakeholders or partners did you work with to create the e-badge and its platform?
    b. What worked well? What, if anything, would you have liked to see done differently?

i. *Possible probes, if needed: set up on the online platform, summary/profile of the skills obtained, information about the awardee, the visual that is sharable on social media.*

Lead partner, Advisory committee

10. What challenges did you or your team encounter when designing the e-badge and e-badge platform? How were these challenges addressed?

Lead partner, Advisory committee

11. How was the e-badge and the e-badge platform used by those who earned the e-badges?

Lead partner, Advisory committee, employment specialists

12. How were the e-badges and the e-badge platform used by employers / employer partners?

Lead partner, Advisory committee, employment specialists

13. What would you do (or like to see done) differently next time with respect to the e-badge and e-badge platform?

E. <u>The Micro but Mighty Participant Outcomes (20 min)</u>

This section: Lead partner only

14. How many individuals participated in the Micro but Mighty project?
    a. How many individuals successful attained an e-badge?
15. How were the micro-credentials participants different compared to other people you train?
    a. What skills did participants acquire?
    b. How did e-badges help their performance?
    c. What were their strengths?
    d. What were their challenges?
        i. For participants who did not get to sign up or who did not get their e-badge, what were their challenges?
        ii. For participants who completed, to what extent did the e-badge earned help them overcome their challenges?
    e. What does their career progression look like?
16. Of those who got the e-badges, how many got hired in the hospitality sector?
    a. What does the profile of a successful candidate look like?
    b. What were their starting salaries?
    c. Are they still employed in the hospitality sector"
        i. If not, how long did they keep their job?

If applicable:

    d. How did you support the trainees in finding a job?
17. Of those who got the e-badges, how many were already working in the hospitality sector?
    a. Did the micro-credential help them get promoted or move to a different position with the same employer?
    b. Did the micro-credential help them get a raise or increase their wages?
    c. Did the micro-credential result in any other type of recognition from their employer?

18. What do you see as the potential longer-term outcomes for participants and other stakeholders?

F. Experiences with FSC (10 mins)

This section, Lead partner only

19. How did you hear about the Shock-Proofing the Future of Work grant project by FSC?
20. How was the information for application and approval conveyed?
21. What were FSC's strengths?
22. What were the challenges in working with FSC? What could they do differently next time?
23. What kinds of supports did FSC offer?
24. How satisfied are you with FSC and the support it is providing organizations?
25. Would you apply again?

G. Wrap up (5 min)

All stakeholders

26. Do you have any recommendations for HWTC/ FSC to enhance support services for workers in your sector?

All stakeholders

27. Do you have anything else to add, or any questions for me?

Thank you for your time!

Participant Survey

HWTC's Micro-credential training project review survey

Welcome to the review of HTWC's e-badge project.

We are looking to understand how the Hospitality Workers Training Centre's (HWTC's) "*Micro, but Mighty*: Sector-specific Micro-credential Virtual Training" project has helped you. Findings from this survey will help direct HWTC's future services.

We would like to ask you questions about your experience with the HWTC's skills assessment and e-badge project. The survey will take only 5 to 10 minutes. If you have any questions about this survey or this project, please feel free to contact Neha Khullar, Assistant Research Manager, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., at 1.888.689.1847 ext. 116 or via email at n.khullar@malatest.com.

More about this study:

The *Micro, but Mighty*: Sector-specific Micro-credential Virtual Training & Assessment Project is funded in part by the Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates, an external and independent research firm, to conduct this study in collaboration with HWTC. During this review, Malatest will hear from project participants, partners and employers.

Your participation is voluntary. You will not be asked to provide your name. The results will be summarized in aggregate only. No individuals will be reported. Your responses will be protected *as per* Canada's *Privacy Act*. Management of the information collected through this study will be compliant with Government of Canada's *Policy on Service and Digital*. For Malatest's privacy policy, please visit: https://www.malatest.com/Privacy.htm.

Do you consent to having your feedback collected and used for the purposes outlined above?

- **Yes**
- **No**

Background information (2 mins)

1. What do you do now? <select one>

   - I am working in the hospitality sector (01)
   - I am working in another sector (02)
   - I am in between jobs (03)
   - I am studying (04)
   - I am on parental leave (05)
   - Other (Please specify) (77)o _____
   - Prefer not to answer (99)

2. What did you do before enrolling in the HWTC program? <select one>

   - I worked in the hospitality sector (01)

- I worked in another sector (02)
- I was in between jobs (03)
- I was studying (04)
- I was on parental leave (05)
- Other (Please specify) (77)o _____
- Prefer not to answer (99)

4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. <check one box for each statement>

Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Prefer not to answer (9)
a. The assessment was straight forward.						
b. The assessment did not take too much of my time.						
c. The assessment was reflective of the micro-credential I was trying to earn.						
d. The results were available in a timely manner.						

5. Which e-badges/micro-credential did you earn? <select all that apply>

- ☐ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in Hospitality (01)
- ☐ Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) for Hospitality (02)
- ☐ Workplace Violence and Harassment for Hospitality (03)
- ☐ Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) for Hospitality (04)
- ☐ Unconscious Bias Awareness (05)
- ☐ Cultural Awareness (06)
- ☐ Customer Service for Hospitality (07)
- ☐ Adapting at Work for Hospitality (08)
- ☐ Self-regulation at Work for Hospitality (09)
- ☐ Transferable Skills for Hospitality (10)
- ☐ Teamwork for Hospitality (11)
- ☐ Other (If other, please specify) (77)o _____
- ☐ Not applicable (I did not earn an e-badge) (98)x ->10
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (99)x

6. When did you earn your first e-Badge/micro-credential? <select one>

- 2022 (2022)

- 2023 (2023)
- Prefer not to answer (9999)

7. Have you ever tried to access your micro-credential e-badge on Badge Cert?
   - Yes (01)
   - No (02)
   - Prefer not to answer (99)

If accessed e-badge on Badge Cert (Q7=1)

8. What did you do with your badge once you accessed it?
   - Text

If currently employed (Q1=1 or 2)

9. Do you believe that the micro-credentials you earned assisted you in securing employment?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don't know / Prefer not to answer (99)

Skip Q10a thru 10h if Q7=no

10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. <check one box for each statement>

Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Prefer not to answer (9)
a. The online platform (Badge Cert) was easy to use						
b. I was easily able to access all the information I needed on Badge Cert						
c. The profile that was developed accurately captured my skills and experiences						
d. The e-badge(s) were easy to share on social media or professional networking sites.						

e. The e-badge(s) were recognized by at least one employer.						
f. Earning an e-badge helped me take on more responsibility at work.						
g. The e-badge(s) helped me get promoted.						
h. The e-badge(s) helped me find a new job.						

Ask if Q7h=agree/ strongly agree

11. Was this your first job in the hospitality industry?

- Yes (1)
- No (0)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Ask if Q5=not applicable (if q5=98).

13. Why did you not earn an e-badge? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Did not pass the assessment (01)
- ☐ Due to a technical error (02)
- ☐ Did not complete the assessment (03)
- ☐ Others (please specify) (77)o _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (99)x

14. If you had the opportunity to earn additional micro-credentials would you do it?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Maybe (3)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

15. Which micro-credentials, if any, do you think could assist you to advance in your career? *Select all that apply.*

- ☐ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in Hospitality (01)
- ☐ Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) for Hospitality (02)
- ☐ Workplace Violence and Harassment for Hospitality (03)
- ☐ Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) for Hospitality (04)
- ☐ Unconscious Bias Awareness (05)
- ☐ Cultural Awareness (06)
- ☐ Customer Service for Hospitality (07)
- ☐ Adapting at Work for Hospitality (08)
- ☐ Self-regulation at Work for Hospitality (09)
- ☐ Transferable Skills for Hospitality (10)

- ☐ Teamwork for Hospitality (11)
- ☐ Other (If other, please specify) (77)o _____
- ☐ None of the above (98)x
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (99)x

16. Would you recommend or refer other friends and colleagues to earn their micro-credentials from HWTC?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Wrap up

17. Do you have any recommendations for HWTC on how the **assessment** could be improved?

- ○ Answer (specify) (77)o _____[100 word limit]
- ○ Prefer not to answer (99)

18. Do you have any recommendations for HWTC on how the **e-badge** or the **online platform** could be improved?

- ○ Answer (specify) (77)o _____[100 word limit]
- ○ Prefer not to answer (99)

19. Please select your age bracket

- ○ 18-24 years (1)
- ○ 25-40 years (2)
- ○ 40-65 years (3)
- ○ 65 years or older (4)
- ○ Prefer not to answer (9)

20. Do you belong to any of the following groups? (*Select all that apply*)

- ☐ Women (1)
- ☐ LGBTQ2S+ (2)
- ☐ Newcomers to Canada (3)
- ☐ Visible minorities (4)
- ☐ Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis or Inuit (5)
- ☐ Persons with disabilities (6)
- ☐ None of the above (7)x
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (99)x

Thank you for your participation!

Please select 'next' to submit your survey.

Appendix D: Communication Materials

HWTC Staff and Stakeholder Interview invitation

Subject: Interview invitation: "*Micro, but Mighty*", a sector-focused micro credential project by Hospitality Training Worker Centre (HWTC)

Dear [name],

We'd like to learn about how the micro-credential project is supporting employees and employer in the hospitality sector.

Future Skills Centre (FSC) has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, an external and independent research firm, to understand the how "*Micro, but Mighty*", a sector-focused micro-credential project by Hospitality Training Worker Centre (HWTC) has provided value to the hospitality sector employers and workers. FSC aims to use the findings from this study to generate knowledge and learning for FSC and their funded organizations.

We would like to schedule a time to talk to you about your work with HWTC.

We would like to talk to you about:

- designing the catalogue of micro-credentials for the hospitality workers that participated in the program (i.e. program participants);
- developing the assessments of the skills that participants must demonstrate to earn their e-badge, as well as the development of e-badges sharable on social media; and
- participant outcomes related to skills and employment.

The interview will take approximately 30 to 90 minutes depending on your answers.

Please let us know what dates and times over the next couple of weeks you're available and we will schedule a discussion with you.

For your reference, we have attached a document with the questions that will guide the discussion, including details regarding privacy and anonymity.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Neha Khullar, Assistant Research Manager, at n.khullar@malatest.com or 1-888-689-1847 ext. 116.

We appreciate all the support you provide to this research.

Sincerely,

Participant Survey invitation

Subject: Invitation to share your experiences with HWTC's e-Badge Project

Greetings,

We would like to invite you to participate in a survey about your micro-credential project experiences.

We are looking to understand how the Hospitality Workers Training Centre's (HWTC's) "*Micro, but Mighty*: Sector-specific Micro-credential Virtual Training" project helps hospitality sector employers and workers. Findings from this survey will help direct HWTC's future work and other projects like it.

We would like to ask you questions about your experience with the HWTC's e-Badge Project.

The survey will take only 5 to 10 minutes and can be accessed at **www.hwtc.malatest.net**.

If you have any questions about this survey or this project, please feel free to contact Neha Khullar, Assistant Research Manager, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., at 1.888.689.1847 ext. 116 or via email at n.khullar@malatest.com.

More about this study:

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Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be asked to provide your name. Your responses will be protected *as per* Canada's *Privacy Act*. Management of the information collected through this study will be compliant with Government of Canada's *Policy on Service and Digital*. Malatest will receive and analyze the results and produce a report with responses in aggregate form only, without identifying you or anyone individually. For Malatest's privacy policy, please visit: https://www.malatest.com/Privacy.htm.