

Project Insights Report

# Micro but Mighty: Sector-Specific Microcredentials for a Recovering Hospitality and Food Service Industry



## PARTNERS

Hospitality Workers  
Training Centre (HWTC)



## LOCATIONS

Ontario



## INVESTMENT

\$601,826



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## Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated Ontario's hospitality and food service industry. A labour shortage persisted even after pandemic recovery began. The Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC) developed and launched sector-specific microcredentials as a promising solution to the sector's increased demand for short and cost-effective training solutions.

Between 2021 and 2023, the HWTC team developed and tested over 24 microcredentials, which engaged 236 participants, who collectively earned over 1,620 e-badges (an average of six per participant). Eighty-nine percent expressed willingness to recommend the microcredentials to others, and 74% reported improved employment outcomes. Program participation improved employment rates from 40% to 61%, including 16% to 46% in the hospitality sector specifically.

While the program demonstrated effective curriculum development and implementation through industry validation and an advisory committee, the project encountered low employer awareness and integration of microcredentials into recruitment practices within Ontario's hospitality sector.

This project serves as a promising model for addressing training gaps in the hospitality sector and beyond, leveraging microcredentials effectively as an agile solution for post-pandemic workforce recovery and upskilling initiatives.

### KEY INSIGHTS

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Seventy-four percent of respondents reported that earning the microcredentials improved their employment outcomes, and 69% stated the microcredentials helped in securing employment.

- 2 Low knowledge and adoption of microcredentials in Ontario's hospitality sector are key barriers to wider implementation.
- 3 Deep engagement with industry employers and other stakeholders during the microcredential development and testing process resulted in a higher-quality, more responsive product.

## ► The Issue

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on Ontario's hospitality and food service industry, with over 180,000 workers (24%) losing their jobs in 2020 and an estimated 18%–20% of workers lost to other sectors by 2021. Disproportionately affected by these changes were young people, those with lower levels of education, seasonal or temporary workers, as well as the small and midsize businesses employing them. The resulting labour shortage once the sector began to recover was further exacerbated by its high turnover rate, which was attributed to low wages, long or irregular hours, stress, physically demanding work conditions and lack of training opportunities. These challenges have increased demand for short and cost-effective training solutions to help the sector bounce back from the economic impacts of the pandemic.



## 🔧 What We Investigated

Through their research and engagement with hospitality sector employers and other key stakeholders, the Hospitality Workers Training Centre identified microcredentials as a promising solution to help re-skill and upskill sector workers. The project was developed to test how sector-specific microcredentials (in the form of transferable e-badges), personalized skills assessments and developmental supports enhanced the skills and employability of hospitality workers.

The intervention included the development and launch of 24 microcredentials (18 of which had been validated and launched by the end of the project's activity period, with another eight launched but not validated, and another six developed but not launched) based on sectoral trends and engagement with sector employers and key stakeholders. They were further tested with 30 sector employers and trainees. Testing was used to iterate on the credentials prior to launching to a broader audience.

## **What We're Learning**

The project engaged and upskilled 236 participants between 2021 and 2023. Collectively they earned over 1,620 e-badges, an average of six per participant. Among respondents, 89% stated they would recommend HWTC microcredentials to friends and colleagues, and 72% expressed interest in earning additional microcredentials.

### **The program showed promising employment outcomes**

Seventy-four percent of respondents reported that earning the microcredentials improved their employment outcomes, and 69% stated the microcredentials helped in securing employment. This improvement could also be partially attributed to the increased confidence gained after completion, particularly for those without higher education credentials. Employment rates among survey respondents rose from 40% pre-program to 61% post-program. Employment in the hospitality sector saw a significant increase, from 16% pre-program to 46% post-program.

### **Employers need a standardized approach for recognizing hospitality-focused microcredentials**

Engagement with some participants' employers revealed that 40 employers were aware of microcredentials on applicant résumés. Twenty of them reported that these microcredentials influenced their hiring decisions. The Micro but Mighty program was able to raise some awareness of microcredentials as a training solution within Ontario's hospitality sector. However, engagement with employers found that there is still more work to be done to increase awareness and establish a standardized approach for recognizing hospitality-focused microcredentials to ensure verifiability and quality assurance standards.

### **Curricula should be industry-informed**

One of the key success factors for the project was the in-house development of curricula for each credential, with significant input from hospitality-sector employers and leaders, ensuring the content accurately captured the necessary skills and competencies. An advisory committee was established to validate the microcredentials, test the assessment platform and raise the project's profile within the sector, ensuring expert input and industry promotion.

## **Why It Matters**

The project showcased a promising approach to solving training gaps in the hospitality sector in a fast and efficient way using microcredentials, as the sector still struggles with skills and labour shortages.

The programming and curricula developed by this project are relevant to other jurisdictions outside Ontario, with due consideration to regional industry standards and regulations differences, and coordinated efforts to increase awareness of microcredentials in the sector. Some of the developed microcredentials, such as “Working in Teams” and “Unconscious Bias Awareness,” could also be used to train workers in other sectors. Other credentials, such as “Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act for Hospitality,” could be adjusted for other sectors.

Microcredentials are often hailed as a panacea for diverse training and upskilling challenges but can be difficult to develop and implement effectively. This project’s success in creating credentials that are not only well received but also well implemented provides a strong example of how to leverage this solution for other skills challenges.



**State of Skills:  
Effective Employer Engagement  
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Supporting employers in overcoming structural barriers to training investment is key to addressing labour and skill shortages.

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## ► What's Next

Hospitality Workers Training Centre continues to offer microcredentials as a core part of their training and employer services delivery. Additionally, they are exploring ways to build upon their work through new partnerships for employer-paid delivery opportunities and increasing awareness of microcredentials within the sector.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact [communications@fsc-ccf.ca](mailto:communications@fsc-ccf.ca).

### How to Cite This Report

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