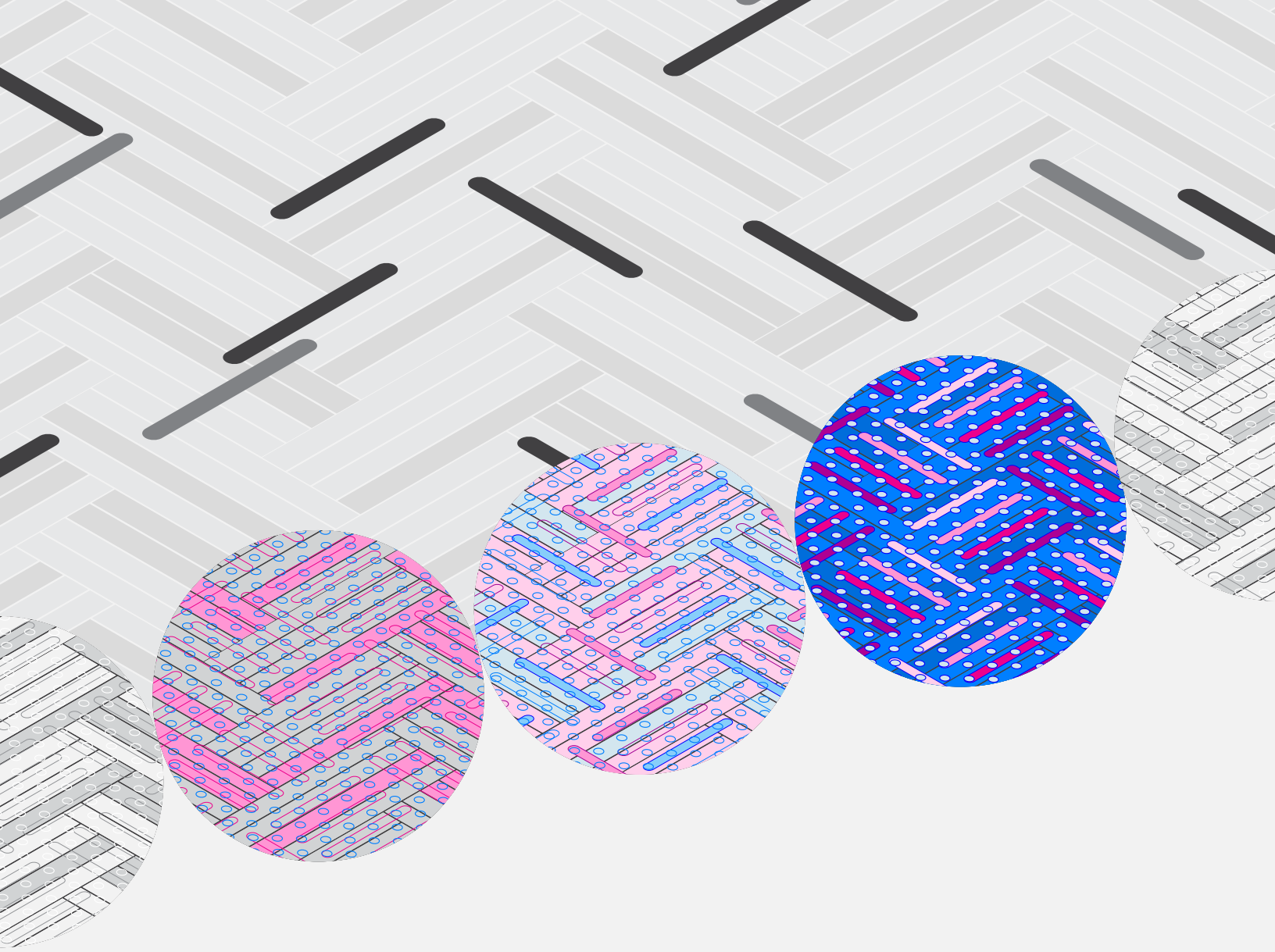

Towards a Canadian Lifelong Learning Ecosystem:

How to build Canada's "missing third pillar" to respond to the future of work

November 2023

Blueprint

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Acknowledgements

About the Future Skills Centre

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

Le Centre des Compétences futures (CCF) est un centre de recherche et de collaboration avant-gardiste qui se consacre à l'innovation dans le domaine du développement des compétences afin que toutes les personnes au Canada soient prêtes pour l'avenir du travail. Nous travaillons en partenariat avec des personnes chargées de l'élaboration des politiques, des personnes chargées de la recherche, des spécialistes, des employeurs et des travailleuses et travailleurs, ainsi qu'avec des établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire, afin de résoudre les problèmes urgents du marché du travail et de veiller à ce que chacun puisse bénéficier de possibilités pertinentes d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie. Nous sommes fondés par un consortium dont les membres sont l'Université métropolitaine de Toronto, Blueprint et le Conference Board of Canada, et nous sommes financés par le Programme du Centre des compétences du gouvernement du Canada.

About Blueprint

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

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

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

Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures

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Canada

Introduction

The landscape of Canada's economy is rapidly shifting, driven by the relentless march of technological advancement, with automation and AI at the forefront. This wave of innovation is reshaping the world of work and the Canadian job market in ways we haven't seen since the aftermath of World War II. What's more, this transformation is unfolding at an astonishing pace.

Unlike previous generations, today's workforce—particularly the digitally native generation—has had to adapt to multiple technological revolutions within the span of just two decades. And generations to come may face an even swifter cadence of change. While there are debates about the scale and timing of these transformations, there's a resounding consensus that changes are on the horizon, and we must be prepared.

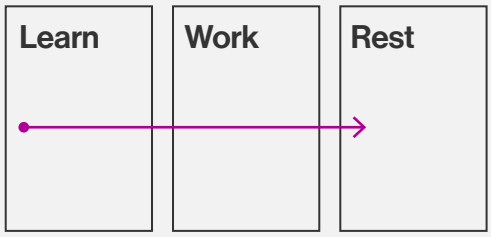
In addition to technological shifts, we must also grapple with the consequences of climate change, which promise to disrupt the labor market. Industries dependent on carbon-intensive practices must navigate uncharted waters, and their workforce must reinvent themselves in their existing sector or pivot toward new opportunities in emerging industries.

To thrive in a rapidly changing economy, individuals must embrace the roles of both worker and learner simultaneously

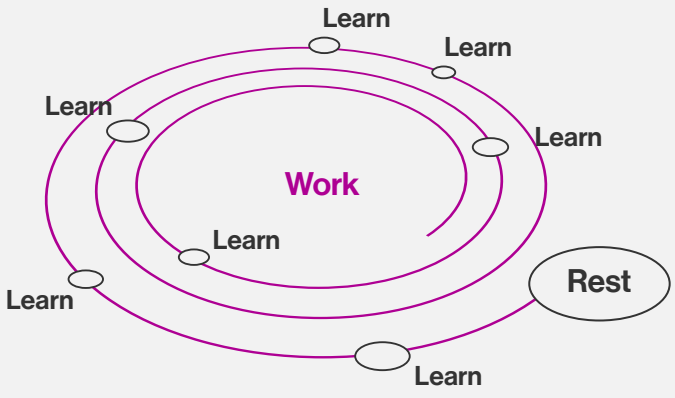
To thrive in this dynamic landscape, workers must be agile and ready to upskill, reskill and transition to new careers as needed. To meet this need, we must fundamentally rethink our traditional notions of work and learning. Commonly, individuals have been viewed either as 'workers', putting their skills to use in the labour market, or as 'learners', sitting on the sidelines of the labour market. But the assumption of a linear path of learning, working and then resting through retirement is no longer tenable. Instead, to thrive in a rapidly changing economy, individuals must embrace the roles of both worker and learner simultaneously, engaging in a continuous cycle of acquiring new knowledge throughout their working lives **(Figure 1)**.

| Figure 1 | Contrasting linear and cyclical learning models

Linear model



Cyclical model

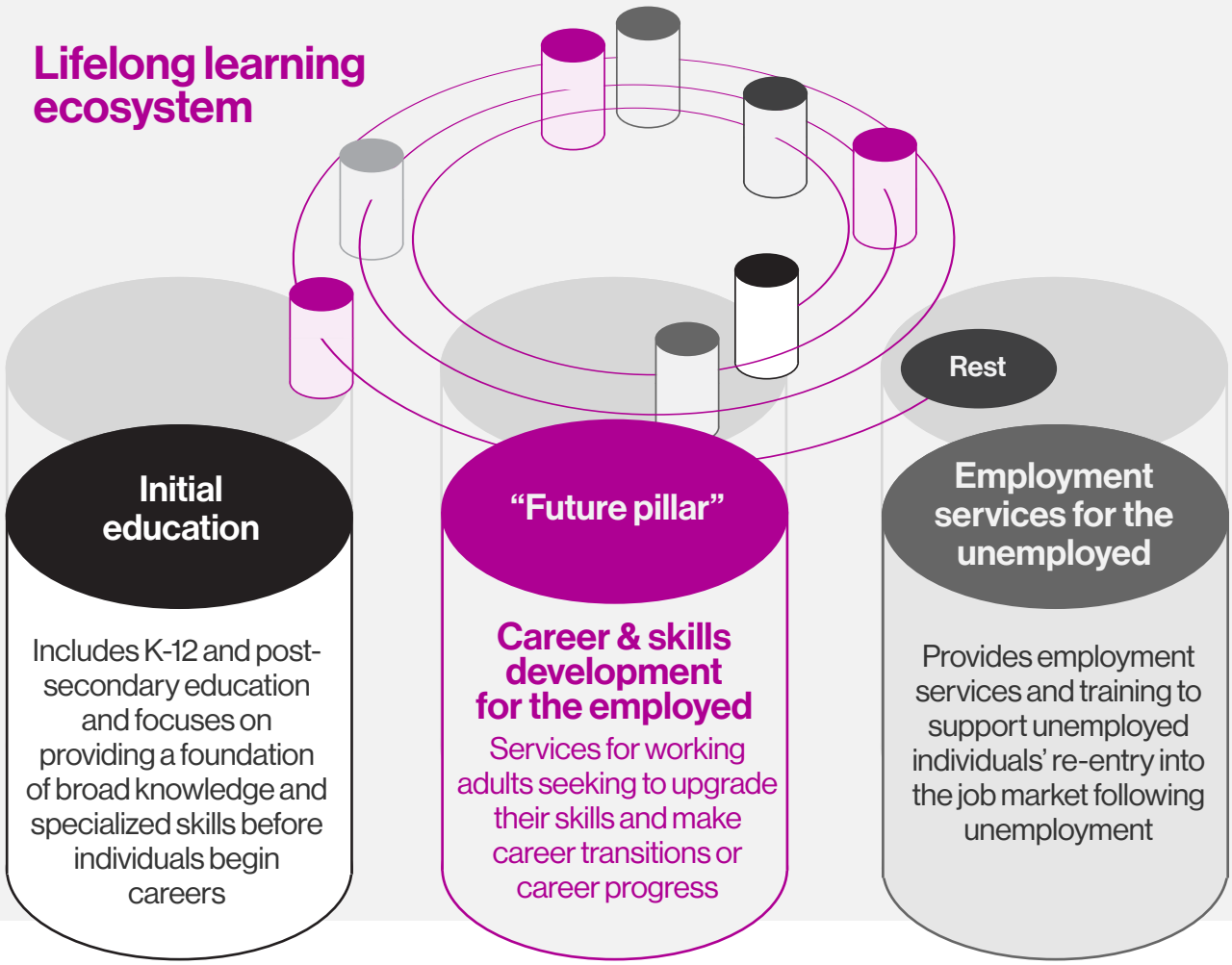


Our current system does not meet the needs of working adults. While Canada boasts a robust initial education system and a strong second pillar that helps unemployed individuals find work, there's a glaring gap for those seeking to upskill and reskill while remaining employed. The increasing pace and depth of change suggests an urgent need for a new third pillar that supports a cyclical learning model, allowing individuals to seamlessly juggle work and learning **(Figure 2)**.

Through Blueprint's extensive work in the learning ecosystem over the past six years—including our collaboration with the Future Skills Centre—we've had the opportunity to partner with many enterprising organizations that are leading the way and fostering innovation towards a third pillar. Drawing inspiration from our partners across Canada and reflecting on international trends and an emerging evidence base, we have developed a perspective on how to move towards a learning ecosystem that prepares workers across Canada to thrive in rapidly changing labour markets.

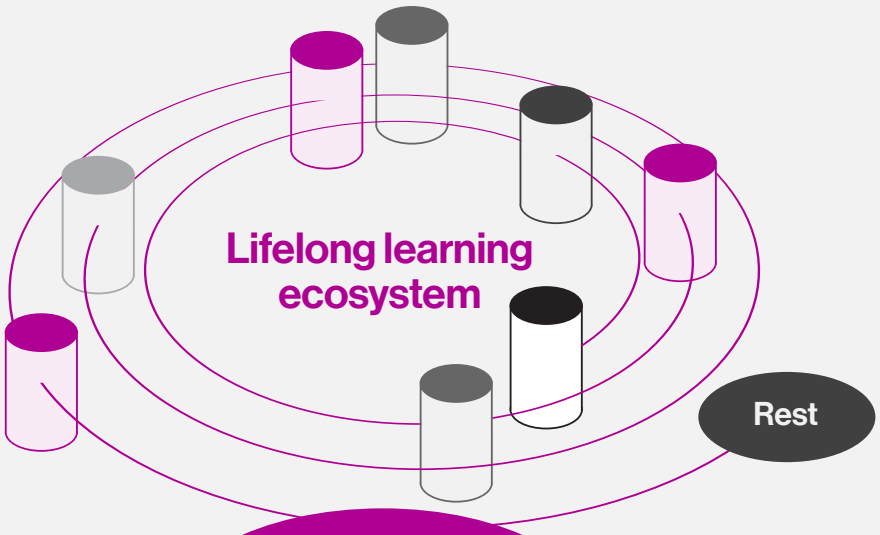
In this report, we lay out a set of guiding principles and the supporting infrastructure for constructing this vital third pillar. We also offer broad recommendations to collectively build the foundation necessary for forging ahead into this new era.

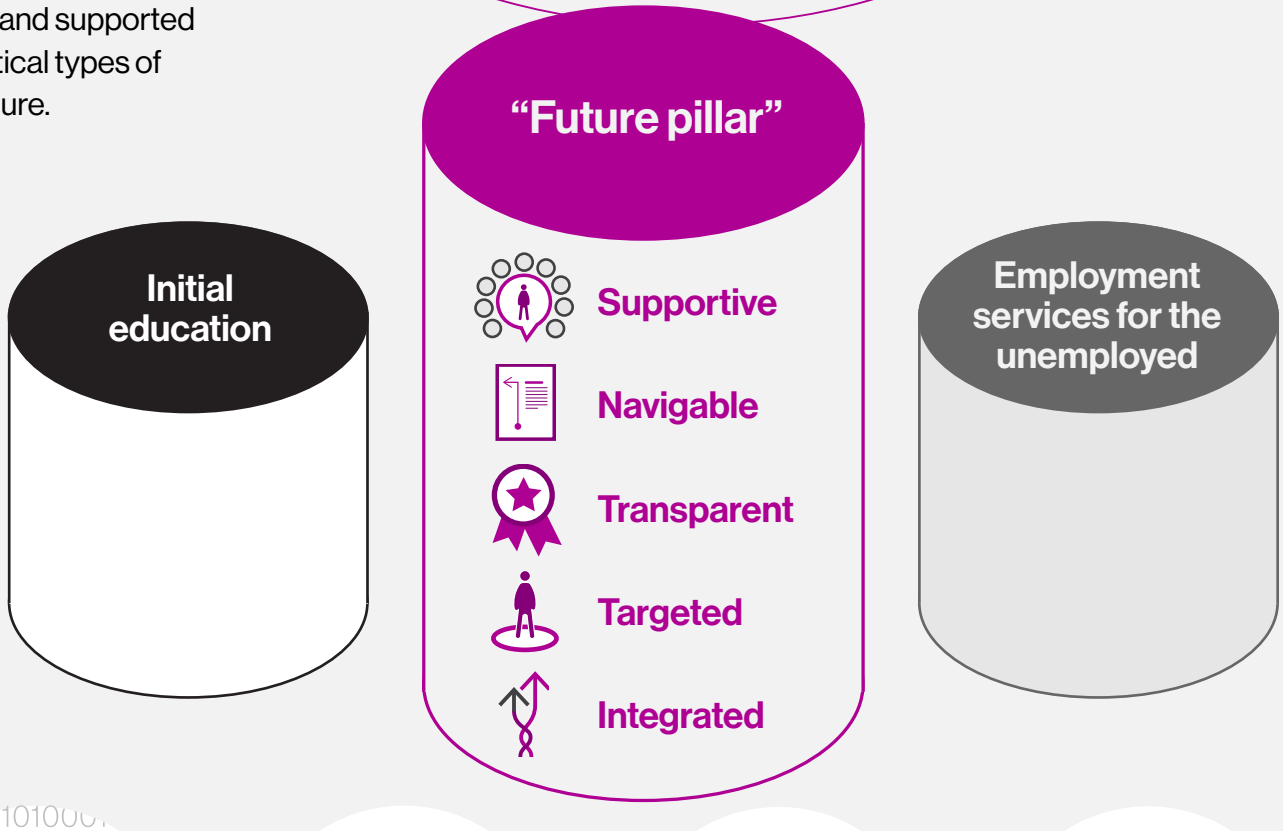
| Figure 2 | The missing third pillar of Canada's lifelong learning ecosystem



Lifelong Learning in Canada

To realize the potential of workers and employers, and plan for shifting economic landscapes, Canada must advance towards a lifelong learning ecosystem. This ecosystem would be supported by two existing pillars and a third new one. This new pillar would be informed by five key principles and supported by four critical types of infrastructure.

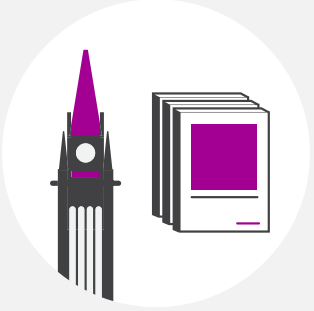




Robust data infrastructure

Cross-government governance and coordination

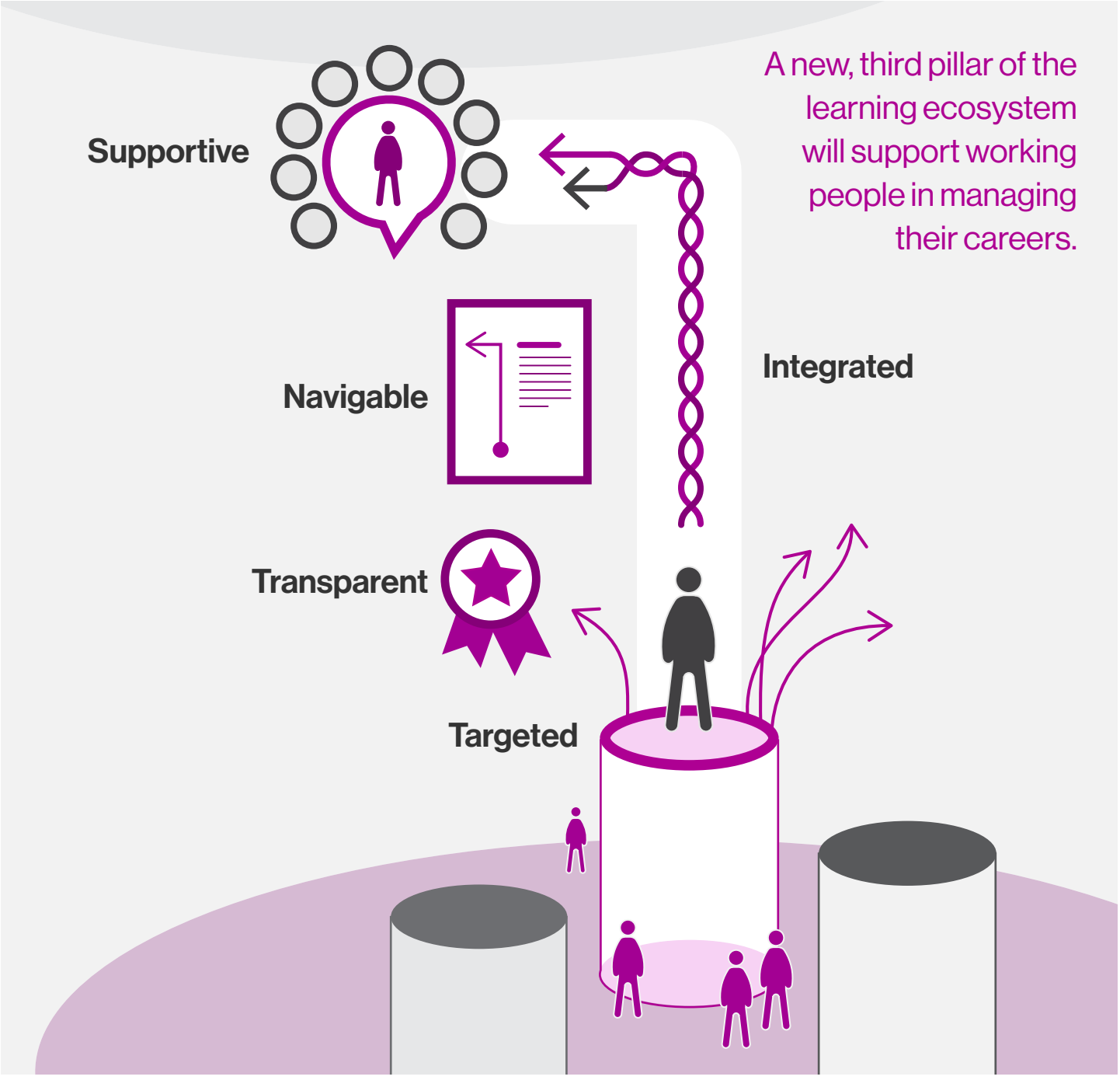
A recognized role for employers



Public policy that supports research, social innovation and scaling

1. Five guiding principles for a third pillar

A new, third pillar of the learning ecosystem will support working people in managing their careers. It will also engage employers to help them attract, retain and develop the talent they need to achieve their business goals. Inspired by Michelle Weise's groundbreaking book, *Long Life Learning*[1], we see five key principles that we believe should underpin a third pillar of the learning ecosystem. To be successful, this new pillar must be **navigable, targeted, supportive, integrated and transparent.**



1 Weise, M. (2020) *Long Life Learning: Preparing for jobs that don't even exist yet.* Wiley, Hoboken.

Navigable

Working adults will need accurate, timely and accessible information to help them choose the right career pathways. They will need to have a bird's eye view and future outlooks of large segments of the labour market, as well as better assessments of their skills and experience, so that they can pick pathways that align with their interests, skills, qualifications and experience. Employers will need up-to-date information on the local skills supply and forecasts that are relevant to their business needs.

Supportive

Presenting workers with the right information is not always enough. Many will need support in the form of advice and guidance on which pathways will be effective and affordable. Workers may also need additional wraparound supports to overcome barriers to learning and to manage multiple commitments and priorities, like balancing earning, learning and family/caregiving commitments. Similarly, employers, especially small- and medium- sized employers (SMEs), will need proactive support and guidance to address their current needs and anticipate and plan for future disruption.

Targeted

Workers and employers need education and training options that are targeted and tailored to their needs. Training needs to focus on the right skills and the right career pathways, all at the right times. It must be affordable and accessible to all workers and employers, including equity-deserving groups and SMEs, and it should avoid duplication or re-teaching skills workers already have. It must also be low risk: upfront investment should be minimized, and workers and employers should be assured that training is a worthwhile use of time and resources because it provides value in the form of needed knowledge, skills, professional networks, and/or hands-on application.

Integrated

To enable workers to balance earning and learning and encourage employers to support upskilling in alignment with their business goals, we need to structure education and training so that it is better integrated into existing workflows. This means working towards integrated, low barrier learning opportunities within the workplace. Integrated learning and earning reduces education 'friction' and can make reskilling and upskilling more accessible through the provision of better, more flexible funding options for employers and workers.

Transparent

If we are serious about de-risking training, then we need to ensure that hiring and advancement processes are unbiased and fair, and based primarily on candidates' skills and competencies. To enable this, workers must be able to articulate their skills to employers, and employers must be able to understand the skills they need of existing and potential employees and recognize them. To do this, we need to develop effective skills and competency indicators beyond traditional educational credentials.

How would a worker be supported in a future state based on these guiding principles?

Scenario:

Amir finished high school at the age of 18 and went to work as a machinist at a local auto parts manufacturer. Having worked for 20 years, and moved up to a plant supervisor position, Amir loses his job when the business announces it is closing, as it can no longer compete with other auto parts manufacturers that invested in advanced automation technologies and lowered their production and logistics costs. Now in his late 30s, Amir finds himself working part-time, picking up sporadic shifts in a warehouse to pay the bills. But he finds the physical labour tough and the frequent night shifts hard on his health and family life. The pay is not good and there is little prospect of career progress. Amir begins planning his next move.

Current state:

As a first step, Amir talks to his former supervisor colleagues from the auto parts manufacturer to see if they are aware of any local job opportunities like the job he was performing there, and whether they may have any advice to give based on their experiences post-layoff. Unfortunately, the colleagues he speaks with are in a similar situation as him and offer little advice.

Amir's next step is to visit online job posting platforms like Indeed and LinkedIn where he searches for supervisory positions within local manufacturing firms. He doesn't find any vacancies for supervisors in auto parts manufacturing. He does identify a couple of postings for supervisor roles in food processing firms, but he doesn't think he has the skills or experience to be a good candidate, and he doesn't have the post-secondary credentials the employers are looking for. Amir checks these job posting websites several times each week for the next month but fails to identify any opportunities he thinks are aligned with his interests, skills, experience and education.

After a month of unsuccessful online job searches, Amir decides that he needs professional support. He does an online search for "job search help" and receives several hits for employment service agencies located in his town. He completes an online intake form and after two days receives a phone call from a staff member at one of the agencies. They ask him some questions and then **direct him to online resources** to help him with his job search, including job search websites that he had already been using, as well as tips and templates for resume writing and job interviewing. **Amir asks if he can get one-on-one career counselling and personalized job search support, but he's told that since he's not unemployed, he isn't eligible for those services.** Should he decide to leave his current job, he can visit the centre during their operating hours (9am to 5pm) and speak to an employment counsellor. He also learns that if he's unemployed, he may also be able to go back to school to gain a credential that could help him get another job, at no cost to him. If his family income is low enough, he may even qualify for a living allowance. However, the thought of quitting his job and going to college sounds too risky and overwhelming to Amir, even if there is a possibility that he could eventually get a better job.

After three more months of searching for supervisor jobs, Amir gives up and settles for a warehouse position with a large auto parts and hardware retailer. The wages are much lower than what he was previously making as a supervisor, but the job is full-time, isn't as physically demanding as his previous warehouse positions and he receives paid sick time and 15 paid vacation days per year.

Future state:

As a first step, Amir talks to his former supervisor colleagues from the auto parts manufacturer to see whether they are aware of any local job opportunities like the job he was performing there, and whether they may have any advice to give based on their experiences post-layoff. A couple of his former colleagues have successfully landed positions as supervisors in other organizations. **They tell him about a free online platform that they learned about through an ad on their social media feed. The platform helped them identify occupations for which they were a good match, connected them with useful training programs and access to a career counsellor and identified local job postings for the roles they were interested in pursuing.**

Navigable

Amir decides to check out the platform. He finds it quickly through an online search and easily creates a profile by uploading his resume. **The platform identifies 15 key skills he possesses drawn from his resume as well as 12 additional skills that the platform suggests he has based on its analysis of data from thousands of online resumes and job postings. Amir is surprised to see all the skills he has that he hadn't thought of highlighting before. Amir selects 10 of the 12 suggested skills to add to his profile.**

Transparent

Based on Amir's skills, the platform identifies 15 occupations for which he is a strong match (at least 75% of skills matched), that pay a living wage and that have strong growth prospects over the next five to 10 years. Amir is astonished at some of the matches—he never thought he had the skills to be a supervisor in a food processing facility or a restaurant manager! Amir selects five occupations from the list that he is interested in learning more about. **He reads information about the competencies required for the roles, and the platform identifies which he has and which he will need to build if he wants to pursue the role. He also watches real "day-in-the-life" videos to get a realistic picture of what it might be like to work in those roles.**

Navigable

After a few hours of exploring, Amir decides that he is very interested in two of the job roles and would like to learn more. **The platform identifies a list of training programs that target the competencies where he has gaps.** The training options include a mix of virtual, in-person, synchronous and asynchronous programs.

Targeted

Navigable

Integrated

Supportive

Transparent

Key information about the programs is shared to support training decisions, including information on the competencies and learning outcomes Amir can expect to achieve, the credentials awarded upon successful completion and quality ratings from past learners and training sponsors (e.g., star ratings out of five across four key quality dimensions). Amir is relieved to see that many of the training options are less than six months long, offered in the evenings or virtual and asynchronous—he can fit the training into his busy work and family schedule.

Amir is very interested in two of the programs – both fit his schedule and have high quality ratings from learners and employers in the sectors -- but he is still hesitant to make a move. He'd like to talk through his options with someone. Luckily, **the platform provides access to one-on-one career counselling with a highly trained career development professional.** Amir inputs his contact information and preferred time of contact (evenings between 6pm and 8pm). That evening, Amir receives a phone call from a career counsellor that works at a career centre in his town. After a few minutes of introductions and questions, Amir and the counsellor agree to schedule a virtual 1-hour counselling session the following evening.

After three virtual counselling sessions and one in-person session, Amir is excited to pursue training to qualify for supervisor jobs within chemical processing and utilities. Through the platform, he can register for the training, and easily access government benefits available to him to cover the training costs.

After just four months of training, Amir has the competencies for his desired role. Through the platform, he searches for vacancies in his chosen occupation and applies to all of them. **The employers that post vacancies on the platform take a competency-based approach to hiring (rather than relying on credentials)** and see that Amir has all the competencies they are looking for, and Amir is contacted by all of the employers to schedule a job interview. Amir receives two job offers, and he decides to accept a position as a supervisor with a logistics company where he makes $70,000 and receives a generous benefits package, paid sick time and 25 vacation days per year.

Current state:	Future state:
Outreach: No proactive targeting or outreach.	**Outreach:** Proactively targets people where they're at and before they are in crisis, based on their risk of unemployment/displacement.
Career services: Services for the employed are self-serve, self-guided online resources. Intensive services are reserved for the unemployed and offered only during regular business hours.	**Career services:** Services are available outside of regular business hours to accommodate people's schedules, are tailored to individual needs, and available to all, regardless of employment status. Includes access to AI-driven online tools to support broader and higher-quality job matching and informed decision-making about jobs and training, as well as one-on-one career counselling from a professional.
Skills training: Upskilling or reskilling entails enrolling in formal post-secondary programs, which are generally long and inflexible, and difficult to juggle with a full-time job and other life responsibilities.	**Skills training:** Training is targeted on skills gaps and flexibly designed so workers can get the skills they need in the least possible amount of time, and in a way that fits their busy lives.
Employers: Employers use credentials as a proxy for skills, and miss out on potentially suitable candidates.	**Employers:** Employers have a broader talent pool and better retention because they take a primarily skills-based approach to hiring rather than using credentials as a proxy for skills.

2. Four Critical Areas for Supporting Infrastructure

Moving away from our current linear system towards a more cyclical and overlapping lifelong learning model will require us to identify gaps, find or design innovations to fill them and implement, iterate and scale them. This process will not be possible without four areas of critical supporting infrastructure: **a robust data infrastructure, cross-government governance and coordination, a recognized role for employers and public policy that supports research, social innovation and scaling.** These critical components act as the 'connective tissue' for implementing the five principles.

Robust data infrastructure

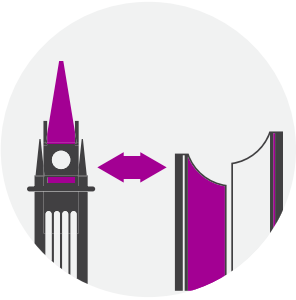
There must be a robust data infrastructure in three areas:

1	2	3
Labour market information (LMI)	Information on education and training programs	System analytics

High quality, timely and granular LMI that is publicly accessible is a critical component of a future third pillar that is navigable. LMI tools can indicate in a specific geographic area what occupations and skills are in supply and demand now and in the future, information that can be used for career planning for workers and workforce development planning for employers.

Workers and employers also need information to navigate the increasingly complex training marketplace so they are empowered to make the right choices. They need **easily accessible information on training programs** that directly target the skills they want to build to support career transitions and professional development, and that will suit their specific learning contexts and preferences. This means providing information on the skills and learning outcomes programs target and on program quality (such as through learner feedback ratings), in addition to typically provided information about program location, format or credentials provided.

Finally, **a robust data infrastructure that enables system analytics** is needed to support policy and program design and iteration. With good, reliable data on what is working and what is not, we can figure out what services, models and interventions to lean into and what to pivot away from. We will need to collect data on a wide range of areas, going beyond a traditional focus on simple outcomes for participants. The data we will need will have to also focus on implementation, iteration and ongoing improvement of interventions, focusing on the potential for scaling. We also need to build infrastructure and capacity within organizations that generate—or could generate—relevant data. This will allow us to have more sophisticated analysis and generation of key insights to improve program design, identify unmet needs and determine broad program impacts and value-added. This kind of analysis will benefit all levels of the ecosystem, from program funders to community-based service providers.



Cross-government governance and coordination

Learning and career development intersect with multiple other policy areas. For example, income security programs influence who can participate in training, and skills development is critical for achieving innovation and economic development goals. Moreover, in the context of Canadian federalism, different orders of government play a role in the funding and design of labour market programs and supports. Because of this interdependence, successful development of a third pillar will require coordinated government action. This means aligning skills development policy with economic growth trajectories, innovation capabilities, and labour market and employment policies. A common understanding and a coordinated strategy across the federal, provincial/territorial and regional/municipal orders of government in Canada are vital pre-conditions for developing a learning ecosystem that is connected, aligned, and ready for the future.

A recognized role for employers

Employers also have critical a role to play in, and will stand to benefit from, the building of a third pillar. Large employers in particular have much to offer in a lifelong learning ecosystem: sharing their current and projected skills needs with governments and sector councils to inform funding and strategic planning; fostering partnerships with education and training institutions to ensure programs align with labour market needs and fit the context of the workplace and preferences of employers and workers; sponsoring the reskilling and upskilling of their employees by covering costs and/or providing paid release time; and providing internships and job placements to support smoother and more informed career transitions for workers and the creation of talent pipelines for employers. While small- and medium-sized employers have much less capacity, given their predominance in the Canadian economy and labour market, they have an important role to play in ensuring that their specific needs are communicated to and understood by funders and program implementers so that their capacity to attract, retain and develop their employees is optimized and, in turn, Canada's economy can thrive.

Public policy that supports research, social innovation and scaling

Ongoing research, innovation and experimentation will be critical for ensuring that our learning ecosystem stays responsive and relevant in the future. Some of the interventions that will help people in Canada do not exist yet: they have to be built, tested and refined. The need for research and development will not diminish over time. It will continue as the labour market continues to shift and evolve. It will be important to have policies and programs in Canada that support ongoing research, innovation, experimentation and scaling to ensure our systems stay responsive and agile.

3. Bringing the principles to life – Where do we start?

Having identified guiding principles and supporting conditions of a future user-centred lifelong learning ecosystem, where do we go from here? How do we begin to build a third pillar that embodies these principles? In this section, we present Blueprint's perspective on the key immediate areas of focus for generating the evidence needed to chart a path forward.

Review what we already know

These key principles and system features provide a foundation of a future state learning ecosystem, but before we can identify next steps, there is work to be done to understand the here and now. Where is the current learning ecosystem in relation to the five key principles and supporting infrastructure? What innovations exist, either in Canada or internationally? What is the degree of uptake of these innovations? Which innovations are promising and feasible in a Canadian context? Which Canadian innovations are worthy of scaling? Where do we still have questions and need to do more research?

As part of our FSC work, Blueprint is working on addressing many of these questions. Our **Innovations in Career and Skills Development** report (forthcoming) provides a comprehensive picture of what we know about existing innovations in career and skills development. It describes what is known about innovations and tools for mid-career working individuals, and it describes the current uptake, or "state of play", of these innovations in Canada. It also provides an overview of the evidence on their effectiveness, for whom and under what conditions.

Design and test new innovations to fill gaps

Where we find gaps in the knowledge base and cannot identify the most promising models and tools, we must support the design and testing of new ideas. These efforts should take a user-centred approach, beginning with a deep understanding of the end users, their goals, challenges, behaviours, preferences and needs, in order to design services and tools to meet users "where they are". Adopting co-design approaches that involve users in the design and development of new models, and seeking frequent feedback from users to iterate and continuously improve interventions, are promising ways to achieve this and improve uptake and outcomes.

Blueprint is already doing some work in this area. For instance, through Phase 1 of the Responsive Career Pathways (RCP) initiative and our Innovations in Career and Skills Development report (forthcoming), Blueprint has identified significant gaps in knowledge and practice on accessible and affordable user-centred approaches to career development services for mid-career workers and small- and medium-sized employers, and a critical need to build the capacity of career development professionals.

In response to these gaps, and **with funding from FSC, Blueprint is currently leading Phase 2 of the RCP initiative** which is re-imagining career services to better support workers and employers facing labour market disruption. The initiative focuses on the growing part of the workforce facing mid-career transitions, and for SMEs facing current

and future workforce challenges. Together with our partners, Blueprint is leading three user-centred RCP projects to design and test innovative career services for workers and employers that aim to make responding to labour market disruption more navigable, supportive, integrated and transparent. The goal is to generate evidence and insights to inform what models could be included in career services in Canada as part of a future third pillar. More detailed information on the RCP initiative is available in the forthcoming RCP Design Report.

Other areas where we are innovating include our work to design and test data capacity-building solutions. See Box 1 for more details.

| Box 1 | Blueprint's data capacity building initiatives

Our Practitioner Data Initiative (PDI) is designing and testing capacity-building models that help non-profit organizations build better data systems and approaches. We partner with nonprofits in the learning ecosystem to understand their data needs and gaps, and design and implement customized solutions, such as providing technical assistance and advice on technology investments and solutions, hiring/training staff to manage and analyze data and building a data culture within the organization. For more information on how we're supporting non-profit organizations harness the potential of data, see the Practitioner Data Initiative Design Report (forthcoming).

Blueprint is also taking steps to build the capacity for **long-term outcomes tracking and causal impact measurement**. Through our **Scaling Up Skills** initiative, we have partnered with Statistics Canada to link participant data collected from our Scaling projects with **Statistics Canada's Social Data Linkage Environment** (SDLE). By linking our data with the SDLE, we can leverage existing administrative and survey data to address important research questions about participants' longer term labour market outcomes, as well as conduct causal impact analysis to determine programs' effectiveness.

We are also investing in our **data analytics capacity to leverage existing survey data and governments' program administrative data.** This allows insights to be generated about current and potential users of programs to inform program design, continuous improvement and scaling decisions. This will unlock the potential to provide data-driven insights about service demand, equity issues and cost effectiveness of programs.

Support scaling of promising interventions

Where there are already promising and proven innovations, we must focus on supporting their scaling up.

However, scaling promising interventions is not straightforward. There are some innovative models, tools and services in Canada, but not enough of these move beyond the pilot stage. This is because workforce development innovators face barriers to scaling their interventions, such as inadequate funding, ecosystem fragmentation and talent gaps. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the "stagnation chasm" — the space where good ideas get stuck before they have a chance to maximize their impact.[2]

Moreover, it can be challenging to even know if or when an intervention should be scaled up. For example, some interventions are too expensive to scale or impossible to scale because they rely on the talents of specific people. How do we choose 'winners' to begin to scale?

A significant focus of Blueprint's work is identifying scalable service models and supporting them in their scaling journey. Some criteria we use for identifying scalable interventions include:

- the strength of the evidence of its effectiveness (e.g., whether and how many times it has been evaluated using an experimental design)
- whether there is a well-defined target population that wants and needs the service now, and for the foreseeable future
- its estimated value-for-money
- its relative cost-effectiveness compared to other interventions focused on the same issue
- the extent to which there is capacity in the ecosystem to deliver it so it can actually be replicated and scaled.

Each intervention's potential will depend not just on its own effectiveness, but also a range of other factors, including changing demographics, labour market dynamics and what other comparable or complementary programs are being offered to the target population.

As part of our FSC-funded initiative Scaling Up Skills initiative, Blueprint has developed a roadmap for scaling, which we are using to support the continuous improvement and scaling of promising, targeted interventions that de-risk training, including programs that are accessible to working people and that could be part of a future third pillar.

One example of the types of interventions we are focused on is NPower Canada's Dual-Client Workforce Development Model. The program provides free technical and professional skills training to learners from equity-deserving groups and helps them transition to meaningful and sustainable digital careers with some of Canada's largest employers in the technology sector. Notably, the program is available to both unemployed and employed workers.[3] Training is targeted to building the specific skills that employers in the sector are looking for, and is delivered part-time over just 15 weeks, so workers don't have to leave the labour force to participate.

2 Deiglmeier, K., & Greco, A. (2018). *Why proven solutions struggle to scale up.* Stanford Social Innovation Review

3 Employed applicants must be making less than $40,000 per year in wages and have a family income below $100,000.

In order to test bringing this intervention to scale, Blueprint and NPower Canada are working together to evaluate its impact using a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) design. This ground-breaking study will provide much needed rigorous evidence on what works for individuals in these equity-deserving groups.

Another project we are working with includes IEC-BC's Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST) program, which is focused on helping unemployed and employed newcomers close skills and accreditation gaps. The program was developed in collaboration with employers and industry partners,[4] and provides occupation-specific labour market information, industry-specific competency assessments, referrals for skills designation, workplace culture training, resources to address knowledge gaps and employment supports. Because the program is entirely online and self-paced, working newcomers can access it outside of their working hours in a way that fits with their individual circumstances. Blueprint is generating evidence on the program's implementation, user experience and outcomes to support its continuous improvement and preparation for future scaling.

Our scaling playbook is a groundbreaking way of using evidence to understand how a program can continuously learn, grow and adapt to deepen its reach and impact. Supporting the progress of the initiatives in our Scaling Up Skills Development portfolio required Blueprint to develop a novel approach to evidence generation that fits within the stages of the innovation cycle. By understanding a program's stage of development, we can use the right tools to bring it to the next stage. This approach helps us strengthen each intervention, assess whether its costs are commensurate with its benefits and systematically address the broader question of what role this intervention could play in solving our most pressing skills challenges.

For a more in-depth view of the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio, see the Designing For Scale report.

4 Existing industry partners include Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), BioTalent and BC Care Providers' Association.

Conclusion

As Blueprint makes progress in evidence generation work and engagements within the learning ecosystem, we will continue to grow our understanding of what is needed and what is promising. We will share our learnings and insights to help illuminate a path to a future third pillar of services and supports for working Canadians so they can respond to future labour market shifts and disruption.

We may find some things that work well: innovations that are considered useful and, maybe, game changing, by practitioners and users alike; skills training models that deliver results in multiple places; and effective and efficient ways to support providers build their data capacity. However, we are also prepared for things that offer more challenges than solutions, which we will approach with curiosity and a learning attitude.

Throughout this work, we will keep the systems lens front and centre. Our work goes beyond the findings of any individual project or initiative. We aim to show how Canada's learning ecosystems can move towards a future system that enables lifelong learning; one that is navigable, supportive, targeted, integrated and transparent. There is plenty more work to be done, and much still to learn and test before we have clarity on how learning systems across Canada can move towards the lifelong learning system laid out in our Future State Vision.

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