



Project Insights Report

Bridging the Gap: Developing a Flexible Learning Platform for Reskilling and Upskilling



PARTNERS

Bow Valley College
Georgian College
New Brunswick Community College
NorQuest College
Langara College
Red River College Polytech
Vanier College



LOCATIONS

Alberta
British Columbia
Manitoba
New Brunswick
Ontario
Quebec



INVESTMENT

\$1,570,000



PUBLISHED

February 2025



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Executive Summary

Though many groups continue to face barriers to employment, Canada is challenged by widespread labour shortages.

To improve the employability of job seekers and address the labour needs of employers, this project tried to develop a flexible learning platform (FLP) that would deliver micro-credentials that met the direct needs of employers. The project aimed to partner with other colleges and employers to identify in-demand jobs and their associated competencies requirements, and to develop and deliver micro-credentials that meet the specific needs of individual job seekers.

During implementation, the project faced challenges recruiting employers and developing micro-credentials that were in demand. Additionally, the original plan to have IBM develop a flexible learning platform ended up being too costly and complex to fully implement. As a result, the project team were unable to award micro-credentials or document the improved job prospects and performance of micro-credential holders. Overall, this project highlights the importance of involving employer partners at the outset, especially in the design of micro-credentials that actually meet existing needs. Complex technology projects also require significant planning and agile project implementation to successfully deliver on their goals.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Tailoring micro-credentials to the needs of individual learners holds the promise of being more cost effective and motivating.
- 2 Engaging employers as key partners in the development of micro-credentials is essential to making them relevant.
- 3 While engaging potential technology partners early in the project planning process is important, it is equally crucial to remain flexible and be willing to adjust or even change partners to meet shifting needs.

▶ The Issue

The number of unfilled jobs in Canada is growing, and many employers across sectors with labour shortages have difficulty identifying the competencies workers actually need to fill those positions. Meanwhile, certain groups face barriers to having their skills and experiences recognized by employers, including newcomers, Indigenous Peoples, youth and women.

Colleges and training institutions want to address these challenges, yet existing skills-recognition and retraining efforts are costly, both for employers and workers, and are limited in their effectiveness. These challenges call for innovative and collaborative solutions that bring employers, training institutions and workers together.



What We Investigated

To improve the employability of job seekers, Bow Valley College and partners aimed to develop a flexible learning platform, called Pivot-Ed, to create micro-credentials that would meet the specific hiring needs of employers.

To accomplish this, college staff planned to identify job roles that their local employers found difficult, yet important to fill. Project partners would then develop competency-based job profiles, which outline the specific tasks and sub-tasks required for each role, and associated competency profiles, which describe the underlying skills necessary to perform those tasks effectively. Once the profiles were completed, coordinators would develop an online assessment to evaluate job seekers' existing skill sets. College staff would encourage learning that assisted job seekers in building the competencies required by their employers.

Next, candidates with an interest in a job role would be recruited, undergo the assessment and then fill any competency gaps through the prepared, curated learning opportunities. The cycle of assessment and learning would continue until the job seeker successfully completed all components of the assessment, at which point they would receive the micro-credential. If a candidate were to be assessed as competent in all the competencies at first assessment, the micro-credential would be awarded without any further learning. The project aimed to document the improved job prospects and job performance of these micro credential holders.

As originally conceived, this project proposed a unique approach to the development and delivery of individual learning modules designed to build the competencies for each job-related micro-credential. Individual learners would only access the modules they needed to fill any competency gaps—a radically different approach from the more traditional building of courses and programs designed to teach all required materials.

What We're Learning

Unfortunately, this project was unable to deliver on many of its objectives, including engaging employers to explore their learning needs. Employers were not widely onboard at the conception of the project, and assumptions were made about their needs and the ability of the project to meet those needs. The college partners focused their employer engagement on employers with whom they had pre-existing relationships, but they engaged too late to cultivate interest within the timelines of the funding. Project partners ended up creating a micro-credential solution where it was not needed, with an assessment technology that could not adequately assess competencies. In the end, rather than meeting the needs expressed by employers, the inflexible assessment tool led colleges to seek employers and jobs that met the specifications and restrictions of their tools. The project evaluation/learning partner mentioned that the project tried to provide “a solution for which no one had a suitable problem.”

The idea of having IBM develop a flexible learning platform ended up being too costly and complex to fully implement. Project coordinators selected IBM as a technology partner at the project proposal phase without fully understanding their technology needs. While engaging potential technology partners early in the project planning process is important, it is equally crucial to remain flexible and be willing to adjust or even change partners to meet shifting needs.

★ Why It Matters

This project demonstrates 1) the importance and difficulty of engaging employers to identify needs and 2) choosing the appropriate technology platform to meet those needs. This project proposed a novel approach to micro-credentials that had the potential to meet the needs of employers. However, if the right partners are not engaged appropriately and committed to the project, a good idea will not yield results.

In terms of policy, the idea of providing very targeted micro-credentials focused on only the skills that are lacking is worth exploring, as it could be more cost-effective and motivating for the target population. In addition, a one-stop-shop flexible learning platform where job seekers can be assessed, get trained and search for jobs is a good idea that could reduce the burden of accessing multiple services at different locations.



State of Skills: Innovation in Training, Recruitment and Upskilling for Skilled Trades

Canada needs to address long standing shortages of skilled tradespeople to advance policy priorities around decarbonization, affordable housing and transforming industry to add more value to what we produce.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

▶ What's Next

Moving forward, Bow Valley College reported that it would focus on partnering with technology providers and employers rather than with other colleges. It will use the Pivot-Ed platform to support its existing micro-credential programs on early childhood education, people strategy and technology. These existing micro-credentials already include competency profiles and assessments. Pivot-Ed will also be used to connect with new employers to develop other micro-credentials.

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

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Future Skills Program



Bridging the Gap: Developing a Flexible Learning Platform for Reskilling and Upskilling is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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