

**Responsive Career Pathways:**

# **Reimagining Career Services for the Future of Work**

**November 2023**

**Blueprint**

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

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.



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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.





# Introduction

## About the Responsive Career Pathways Initiative

The Responsive Career Pathways Initiative (RCP) is a Future Skills Centre (FSC)-funded initiative led by Blueprint that is re-imagining career services to better support workers and employers facing labour market disruptions, especially mid-career workers and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who are set to experience increasing economic uncertainty and a rapidly changing labour market.

The initiative recognizes that adult workers must be ready to upskill, reskill and transition to new careers as needed, but Canada's learning ecosystem does not facilitate such agility. While Canada boasts a robust public 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.

Together with our partners, Blueprint is leading **three user-centered research projects** that are designing and testing new approaches to career services, and generating evidence on different potential functions and services that could be part of **a new, future pillar of Canada's learning ecosystem that focuses on working adults**.

## About This Report

This report describes the RCP initiative. It lays out our process for building the project portfolio and outlines our mission-oriented research approach that is generating evidence on career services for the future. The report proceeds in four parts:

- 1. Context:** Describes the context for the initiative and the challenge it is focused on.
- 2. The RCP portfolio:** Provides an overview of the portfolio, including how it was developed, what challenges each intervention is addressing and why it matters for Canada.
- 3. Our learning approach:** Describes our overall approach to RCP and how it differs from traditional approaches, introduces Blueprint's learning agenda for the RCP portfolio and our evidence generation methodologies for addressing the learning agenda research questions.
- 4. Project summaries:** Presents the three innovation projects and their research goals.

This report is an introduction to the Responsive Career Pathways initiative, its design and early implementation. It does not present evidence findings, learnings or insights for each specific project. Project-specific results will be shared through a series of reports that will be published starting in early 2024.



# 1. Context

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 the 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 this dynamic landscape, workers must be ready to upskill, reskill and transition to new careers as needed. But to achieve such agility, we must fundamentally rethink our traditional notions of work and learning.

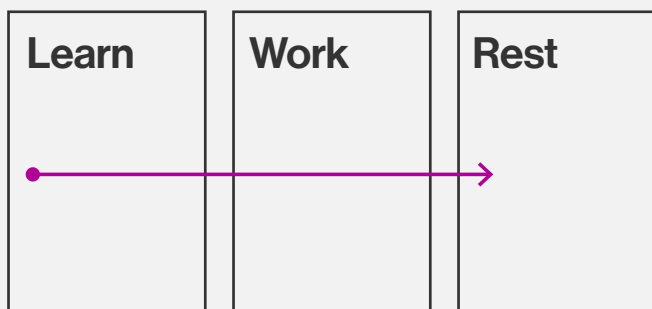
**Figure 1** describes the need to move beyond our assumption of a linear learning model—where people learn, earn then rest—toward a cyclical learning model that enables people to be workers and learners simultaneously.

However, our existing system is based on this linear model and does not meet the needs of working adults. While Canada boasts a robust public 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. As shown in **Figure 2**, there is an urgent need for a new third pillar of services that support a cyclical learning model.

To thrive in this dynamic landscape, workers must be ready to upskill, reskill and transition to new careers as needed.

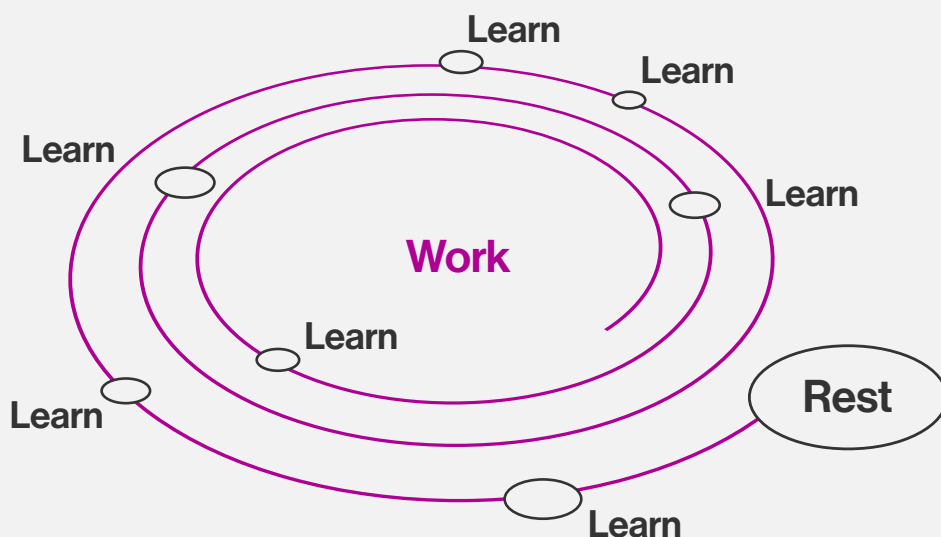
| **Figure 1** | Moving toward a cyclical learning model

## Linear model



Traditionally, 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.

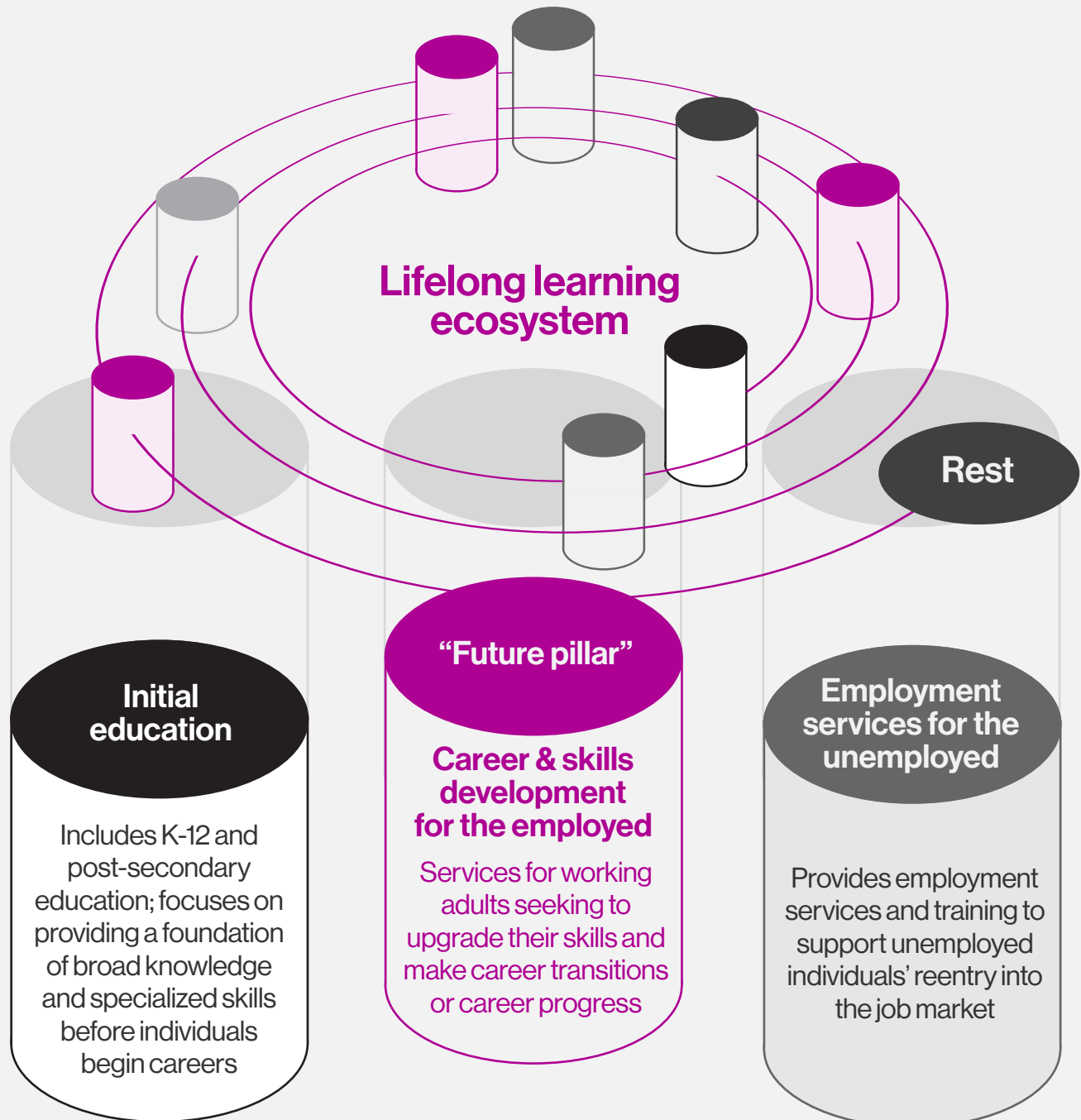
## Cyclical model



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

The increasing pace and depth of labour market change suggests an urgent need for a new third pillar within Canada's learning ecosystem that supports a cyclical learning model, allowing individuals to seamlessly juggle work and learning.







Stakeholders  
in Canada and  
internationally are  
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in preparing for the  
future of work

Career services are approaches that support individuals with their career development, which CERIC defines as “the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future.” They have a critical role to play in the missing third pillar by supporting employment and career transitions. They can reduce barriers to information, training and employment, allowing individuals to identify opportunities and successfully navigate their career pathways.<sup>1</sup> There is also emerging evidence that career services can increase confidence, encourage self-awareness and boost self-efficacy—which results in more effective decision-making in training and occupation choices over the long term.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, stakeholders in Canada and internationally are recognizing that career services are a key policy lever in preparing for the future of work.<sup>3</sup>

There is also an opportunity for career services to help employers identify and articulate their current skills needs, as well as anticipate and plan for future ones. By engaging both workers and employers, career services have the potential to close skills mismatches by helping all parties acquire the right skills, at the right times and in the most efficient and effective ways.

However, many adults in Canada are not aware of career services and their potential benefits. Only 17% of Canadian adults over 25 used career services in the last five years, compared to an average of 44% across

1 OECD. (2021). *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work: Getting Skills Right*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en>

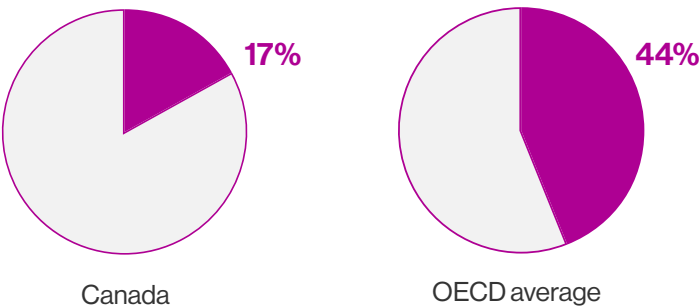
2 Carpentieri, J. D., Litster, J., Cara, O., & Popov, J. (2018). *Final Cross-Country Evaluation Report*. UCL Institute of Education. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10043122/1/GOAL%20final%20cross-country%20evaluation%20report.pdf>

3 Cedefop; European Commission; ETF; ICCDPP; ILO; OECD; UNESCO (2020). *Career guidance policy and practice in the pandemic: results of a joint international survey – June to August 2020*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/318103>

six OECD countries.<sup>45</sup> Compared to adults from other peer jurisdictions, Canadian workers are not actively using career services to help navigate their career pathways. And those who are aware of these services struggle to access them. All too often, career services for working people are inaccessible, infrequently used and of inconsistent quality.

**Through the Responsive Career Pathways Initiative (RCP), Blueprint is responding to these challenges by leading three user-centered research projects that are designing and testing new approaches to career services. These projects are generating evidence on different potential functions and services that could be part of career services in a future third pillar.**

**Adults over 25 who used career services in the last five years**



Source: LMIC, 2021; OECD, 2021.

Compared to adults from other peer jurisdictions, Canadian workers are not actively using career services to help navigate their career pathways

4 LMIC. (2021, November). *Are Adults Making Use of Career Services in Canada?*  
<https://lmic-cimt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Are-Adults-Making-Use-of-Career-Services-in-Canada.pdf>

5 OECD. (2021). *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work: Getting Skills Right*. OECD Publishing.  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en>

## 2. The Responsive Career Pathways Portfolio

### Developing the Portfolio

Blueprint took an evidence-based approach with a systems lens to develop our project portfolio. Practically speaking, we did research to understand the current state of Canada's learning ecosystem, and identified strategic opportunities within this ecosystem for innovation to meet the future skills needs of Canadians.

The project portfolio was developed and is evolving based on three broad inputs:

**1**

Our research findings on key gaps and opportunities (from RCP Phase 1)

**2**

Five guiding principles for a future state learning ecosystem

**3**

Partnership opportunities

#### 1. RCP Phase 1 findings

In Phase 1 of the RCP initiative, Blueprint partnered with a multi-disciplinary team of Canadian and international experts to co-create a research agenda and produce nine research papers that highlight gaps and opportunities for innovation and systems change.

More detailed information and findings from Phase 1 can be [found here](#).

#### Five key findings emerged from our research program:

1. Many Canadian adults are not aware of career guidance services and their potential benefits.
2. Many Canadians face barriers to accessing personalized career services.
3. Publicly funded employment services do not proactively support those already working, including workers in precarious and changing industries.
4. Career development practitioners need more support and capacity to navigate the increasingly complex world of work.
5. Publicly-funded services are not meeting the needs of employers and their employees.

## 2. Guiding Principles for a Future Learning Ecosystem

The RCP initiative is guided by Blueprint's future state vision. This vision imagines a learning ecosystem in Canada that includes a third pillar of career and skills development services for working people and that aligns with five key principles inspired by Michelle Weise,<sup>6</sup> a leading expert on the future of learning and work. The principles state that a **lifelong learning ecosystem should be navigable, supportive, targeted, integrated and transparent (see Box 1 for more details)**. By establishing high-quality, user-centred career services, we can help to achieve an ecosystem that embodies these principles.

### | Box 1 | Five guiding principles for a future learning ecosystem



**Navigable** - Working adults will need accurate, timely and accessible information to help them choose the right career pathways. They will need a bird's eye view of sections 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, qualifications and experience. Employers will need up-to-date information on the local skills supply and forecasts that are relevant to their 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 wraparound supports to overcome barriers and manage multiple commitments and priorities, like balancing earning and learning with caregiving commitments. Similarly, employers—especially SMEs—will need proactive support and guidance to address their current needs and anticipate and plan for future disruption.



**Targeted** - Workers and employers will need education and training options that are targeted and tailored to their needs. Training will need 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 should avoid 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.



**Integrated** - Education and training should be structured to integrate into existing workflows to balance earning and learning, and encourage employers to support upskilling without worrying about their bottom line. Low-barrier learning opportunities integrated the workplace, reducing friction and making reskilling and upskilling more accessible through better, more flexible funding options for employers and workers.



**Transparent** - To de-risk training also requires hiring and advancement processes to be unbiased and fair, and based on candidates' skills and competencies. Workers must be able to articulate their skills to employers, and employers must be able to understand the skills they need and how to recognize them. To do this, we need to develop effective skills and competency indicators beyond traditional educational credentials.

6 Weise, M. R. (2021). *Long Life Learning: Preparing for Jobs that Don't Even Exist Yet*. John Wiley & Sons P&T.

### 3. Partnership opportunities

Once we developed our understanding of the key gaps and opportunities for career services in Canada and identified potential areas for service innovation, we teamed up with partners experienced in innovating career and skills development services and collaborated to outline, design and test new ideas in line with our future vision.

#### Portfolio Overview

Together with our partners, Blueprint is leading three innovation projects, which will generate evidence to understand potential functions and services that could be part of career services of the future. See **Box 2** for information on our project partners.

Our three projects are “user-centred.” This means that we are taking time to thoroughly assess the challenges, needs and preferences faced by key user groups (e.g., workers, SMEs, career development practitioners) and building solutions around them. We are also gathering user feedback throughout testing to inform iteration and continuous improvement.

These three projects are focused on addressing three specific gaps:

- **Services for mid-career workers:** A significant portion of our current workforce is facing future changes, with many transitioning to new roles, occupations and/or industries. However, Canada's career services do not serve working people well. Those who are employed but would benefit from career services typically have few accessible options. There is an opportunity to demonstrate what career services for these mid-career workers could look like and build evidence on how to deliver them effectively. **We are exploring this in the Mid-Career Transitions project and the NS Dual Client Public Employment Services project (see Section 3 for more information).**
- **Services for SMEs:** SMEs, particularly small employers with under 100 employees, make up the vast majority of all Canadian businesses and employ more than two-thirds of Canada's private sector labour force. They often do not have the time or resources to think about future staffing and skills needs, leading to low levels of training investment and uptake. SMEs often see private-sector skills development services as effective but expensive, and public services as ineffective, hard to access and generally not worth the effort. There is a strategic opportunity to explore how to engage SMEs in accessible and affordable career services. **We are exploring this in the Mid-Career Transitions project and the NS Dual Client Public Employment Services project (see Section 3 for more information).**



Together with our partners, Blueprint is leading three innovation projects, which will generate evidence to understand potential functions and services that could be part of career services of the future

- **Professional development for career practitioners:** There are few supports in place to ensure that career development practitioners (CDPs) in Canada have the necessary skills and competencies to deliver high-quality career services. Unlike other professions, CDPs are not regulated at the federal level or in any provinces except Québec. Voluntary certification is available in eight provinces, but uptake is low, and professional development does not typically equip practitioners with the skills necessary to navigate labour market changes and support lifelong learning. **We are addressing this in the Career Development Professional Centre project (see Section 3 for more information).**

Our RCP projects are building evidence to help illuminate what potential functions can look like for specific user groups in a future state. But they alone will not get us to the career services of the future: it is a long-term goal, which will require much more experimentation, scaling support and a systems shift. We hope that our career services of the future vision can help to direct future work within RCP, across Blueprint and the wider ecosystem. More information about each project can be found in Section 3. See **Box 2** for information on our project partners.

### **| Box 2 | Our partner organizations**

To design and deliver ambitious projects that demonstrate how to move the needle on key challenges facing the sector, Blueprint is collaborating with career development experts.

- The **Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)** is a non-profit organization that works to enhance career services and develop practitioner capacity. Based in New Brunswick, CCDF has worked in career development for over four decades. The organization has considerable experience designing programs, developing training resources for practitioners and providing thought leadership for the career development sector in Canada and internationally. CCDF developed and maintains Canada's Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners, a key foundational resource for career development professionals.
- The Training Group at **Douglas College** delivers government-funded training and employment programming for individuals and employers alongside a range of other services, including essential skills training, language services for newcomers and self-employment training. It has significant experience and expertise in program development, implementation and improvement within BC's publicly funded employment services system, as well as demonstrating new innovations outside of it.
- The **Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology** is a post-secondary education provider based in Winnipeg which provides technical training across several key industries, including skilled trades, manufacturing and healthcare. The college works closely with industry to identify critical technical and essential skills gaps and address them through training programs, using practicums and mentorships to build connections between employers and learners.
- **MixtMode Consulting** has deep subject matter expertise on career development. The organization was founded by career practitioners with decades of experience developing innovations in career services and working to serve end-users. MixtMode has expertise and experience in using new technologies to support the work of career development practitioners.





## 3. Our Learning Approach

### A Mission-Oriented Approach

The RCP initiative is inspired by a mission-oriented research (MOR) approach. MOR initiatives are designed to tackle complex challenges by adopting a purpose-oriented approach that involves taking an active role in convening and coordinating actors around complex, cross-sectoral issues that cannot be solved by individual actors alone.<sup>7</sup> Actors from diverse sectors and disciplines are brought together to take a broad, collaborative and solutions-based research approach to identify priorities and solutions. Research is systematic and coordinated, so that investments are placed in the right areas. This contrasts with conventional approaches where funding is dispersed for research projects in duplicative and uncoordinated ways, resulting in organizations testing different problems in relative isolation. Such approaches lack cohesion and a common mission, ultimately failing to move the needle on scaling evidence-based solutions and achieving systems change.

We are inspired by the MOR approach and have adopted key features of it in our RCP initiative. For instance, rather than launching straight into a broad call for proposals to support research into innovative career development models, we did something different. We began with a broad mission focused on understanding the problem from cross-sectoral perspectives and identifying opportunities to transform Canada's learning ecosystem into one that is responsive to future labour market disruptions.

We began in **Phase 1** by engaging 12 Canadian and international experts with diverse backgrounds to build a deep, cross-sector understanding of the gaps and opportunities for innovation in Canada's career services. Together, we co-created a research agenda and supported research on specific topics aligned with their expertise. We also partnered with the Forge Institute to host roundtable discussions with pan-Canadian stakeholders from government and service industries. The roundtables explored stakeholder perspectives on Canada's career services and generated ideas for helping ensure Canadians have the guidance and skills they need to make well-informed career choices in an ever-changing world. From there, we developed a clear goal for our initiative that is focused on designing and testing innovative, scalable career services that support workers and employers facing labour market disruption, with a particular emphasis on mid-career workers and SMEs.

In **Phase 2** we are taking a coordinated and collaborative approach to design and implement a portfolio of innovation projects in service to our goal. We are co-designing models with partners and end users, developing multiple solutions to avoid "locking in" to any single pathway at an early stage, and facilitating knowledge-sharing across projects to optimize our collective impact. Our efforts are grounded in a common vision and conceptual framework where all partners see their contributions and connections. We aim to make the insights generated by our RCP work available to the wider learning ecosystem. Building networks and bringing together experts and other stakeholders to discuss and stress-test our models is a key component.

We began with a broad mission focused on understanding the problem and innovation opportunities from cross-sectoral

<sup>7</sup> Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI). (n.d.). *What is Mission-Oriented Innovation?*  
Retrieved from <https://oecd-opsi.org/work-areas/mission-oriented-innovation/>

## Overview of our Learning Agenda

Our Learning Agenda for the RCP portfolio captures what we want to learn from our portfolio of projects. It is comprised of two broad lines of inquiry.

The **first line** of inquiry is focused on the **outcomes** of our initiative, and addresses the broad question:

**What are promising and scalable career services models to meet the needs of workers and employers facing disruption, and what conditions are needed to bring them to scale?**

The **second line** of inquiry is focused on identifying **lessons learned** from our process, and addressing the question:

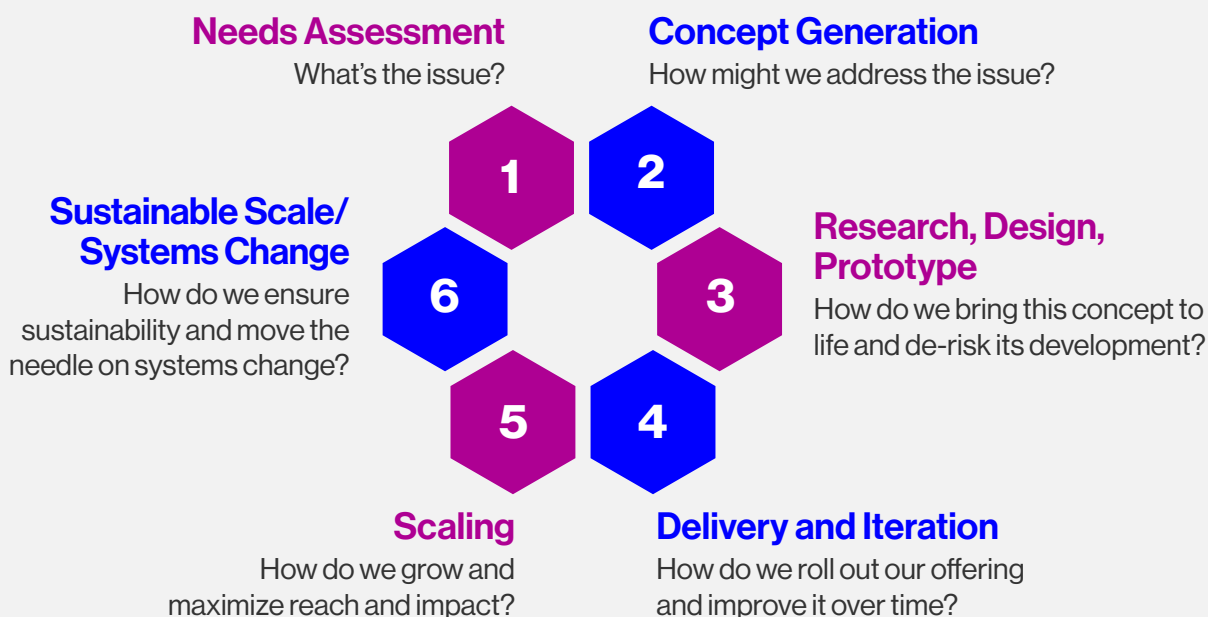
**What are insights and lessons learned from our approach to social innovation?**

### 1. What are promising career service models and how can we scale them?

We are answering this first line of inquiry—promising models and how to scale them—using a common research framework that Blueprint is applying to all RCP projects. In this framework, Blueprint understands each project and intervention in the context of the **innovation cycle**.

As **Figure 3** shows, in a well-functioning innovation ecosystem, innovations move along the cycle starting with needs assessment, moving to conceptualization and design and then to delivery, testing and iteration. For those interventions that are proven to work, the goal is to expand to meet the need at scale and create system changes to institutionalize the innovation. (See our [2021 Annual Evidence Report](#) for more detail about Blueprint's evidence approach).

| **Figure 3** | The Innovation Cycle and Blueprint's Evidence Generation Framework





Knowing where an intervention is in the innovation cycle allows us to ask the right questions and collect the right evidence to move the project forward. Fostering early-stage innovation requires understanding and assessing complex issues, generating new and untested concepts, and exploring the feasibility and desirability of these concepts with stakeholders. Projects that have moved into the delivery, testing and iteration stage are typically ready for evaluation.

### **Understanding promising models of career services and the conditions needed to scale them**

Blueprint is building our understanding of what models are promising, and the conditions needed for them to scale by considering them in five dimensions:

- Users and service needs (*who are the target users, what are their needs and preferences?*)
- Effective and scalable service models (*what are promising/effective and scalable models for addressing users' needs?*)
- Service provider capacity (*what practitioner/provider characteristics, resources and assets are required to deliver the models?*)
- Career ecosystem (*how can models leverage existing ecosystem strengths, and what does it take to build successful partnerships for delivery?*)
- Policy and systems (*what would need to be true from a policy and practice perspective to operate the models at scale?*)

As seen in **Figure 4** below, we are studying these dimensions as projects move through the innovation cycle. For example, Stage 1 of the cycle is when we are starting to map out users and service needs. While questions of feasibility and viability are always on our minds, we are not heavily focused on answering questions about the policies and systems needed to support an intervention until that intervention starts to be scaled. Since the RCP projects are currently in the early stages of the innovation cycle, right now we are focused on addressing research questions that align with Stages 1 to 3: Needs Assessment, Concept Generation and Prototyping.

| Figure 4 | RCP project research questions mapped to the innovation cycle

### 1 Needs Assessment (user research)

- Who are the **target users**?
- What are their **needs and desired outcomes**?

### 2 Concept Generation (model design)

- What **career development function(s)** should the model serve for users?
- What **outcomes** would be desirable for users?
- What **design considerations** are relevant to increase users' access to and completion of the model?
- What **opportunities or constraints** impact service providers' capacity to deliver the model?

### 3 Research, Design, Prototype (user testing)

- What **service needs and pain points** is the prototype able or unable to address, and what iterations are needed?
- What **model components** show promising user outcomes?
- What **outcomes** are experienced for users? Is there sub-group variation?
- What **practitioner and organizational characteristics, resources and assets** are required to deliver the model?
- What **opportunities and constraints** affect providers' capacity to deliver the model?
- How might involving career ecosystem stakeholders in **co-designing** models add value?

### 4 Delivery and Iteration (early-stage innovation, continuous improvement, model stabilization)

- What **outcomes** are experienced for users? Is there sub-group variation?
- What are the **core and stable components** of the model?
- How does the model get **adapted** for different users and contexts while maintaining model fidelity?
- What is the **cost/cost benefit** of the model?
- What **evidence generation capacity** do service providers need to monitor and continuously improve delivery?
- What career ecosystem **resources and networks** contribute to the success of the model?

### 5 Scaling (expansion)

- What level of **adaptation** would be needed for it to respond to the needs of new contexts while maintaining model fidelity?
- Is there **demand** for the model in other contexts from relevant stakeholders, delivery partners and funders?
- What **organizational resources** are needed to deliver the model in new contexts?
- What **scaling strategies** could be considered?

### 6 Sustainable Scale/Systems Change (institutionalization)

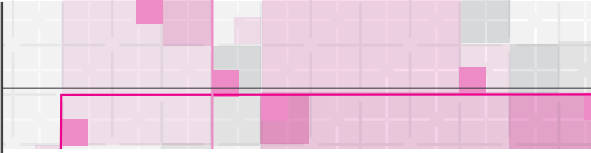
- What **policy and system factors** impact the model's scalability?
- What **policy and system features** would enable the model to operate at scale and sustainably?

## Moving through the innovation cycle

To move our three projects through Stages 3 and 4, we are working with our partners to understand user needs and support data-driven continuous improvement. We are using different methodologies and evidence generation tools to do this work.

- **Investing in gaining a deep understanding of user needs and preferences:** We are conducting research with potential end users of new services to understand their goals, challenges, service needs and preferences, and building services around them. Methods for this work include stakeholder consultations and in-depth qualitative research including human-centred design (HCD) user research approaches.
- **Investing in continuous improvement of design and delivery:** We are working with practitioners to help them better understand the needs of their target population. We are doing this by engaging in co-design activities with end users to improve the models to meet needs, assessing model delivery and seeing whether modifications or new components are needed to better serve end-users and achieve better outcomes. Methods for this work include qualitative and quantitative data collection (participant surveys, interviews, focus groups, design workshops) and analysis to inform model iterations aimed at improving the experience and preliminary outcomes of users.
- **Understanding enablers and constraints:** As we build, test and iterate the models, we are learning about the factors and conditions that matter for efficient and effective delivery. Methods for this work include interviews with project staff and other key stakeholders to identify the practitioner, organizational and systemic conditions that enable or impede the successful delivery of the models.

Our evidence generation work will position us to deliver insights into promising models that meet the needs of workers and employers facing labour market disruptions, and the conditions needed to bring them to scale.



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## 2. What are we learning from our approach to social innovation?

Where our first line of inquiry is concerned with promising career service models and their scalability, the second line of inquiry is focused on identifying lessons learned from our process and experiences implementing social innovation projects in the learning ecosystem. It sets out to answer the question: *What are insights and lessons learned from our approach to social innovation?* This includes everything we are learning from curating, developing and managing the entire RCP portfolio. This approach is forward thinking and the lessons learned may be useful for future work in Canada's learning ecosystem that adopts a portfolio approach.

This line of inquiry is based on research questions grouped under six broad themes:




- **Developing and overseeing a portfolio of innovations/interventions:** What have we learned about how to build and manage a group of projects addressing different aspects of a common theme?
- **Designing and delivering services for users:** What have we learned about how to design services for specific groups? And what do service providers need to do this work?
- **Systems-level collaboration (including collaborating with governments):** What have we learned about how to collaborate with diverse stakeholders?
- **Generating evidence:** What have we learned about how to generate evidence with partner organizations?
- **Scaling innovation:** What have we learned about how to scale innovations? And potential roadblocks?
- **Policy as an enabler or blocker for innovation:** What have we learned about policy challenges and tensions?



We are answering these questions through engaging with our partners. Blueprint is convening a series of engagement sessions with project partners to identify the challenging and promising aspects of our approach to this work with a view to learning how to improve it.



We believe the combination of our Learning Agenda with its project and portfolio-level components, and our careful, purposeful and thoughtful approach to evidence generation, lay the enabling conditions for both successful and effective projects and a set of insightful, actionable learnings.

# 4. Project Summaries

The summary tables below give more details about the three RCP projects. They provide background details on each project’s aims, history, partners and current state.

<div><div>Project:</div><div>Nova Scotia Dual Client Public Employment Services Project</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>		
<div>Focus:</div> <div>Services for SMEs and workers</div>	<div>Partners:</div> <div>Government of Nova Scotia, CCDF, MixtMode Consulting</div>	<div>Location:</div> <div>Nova Scotia</div>
<div>Description:</div> <div><p>SMEs employ a significant portion of the workforce, but do not always have the financial and human resources required to respond to economic disruptions. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, human resource management (recruiting, retention, worker development) has become a top priority for many SME employers.</p><p>This project is designing and testing services for SMEs that could be integrated into the Nova Scotia Works public employment services system to achieve a dual client service model that meets the needs of both individuals and SMEs. The services being designed are intended to help SMEs address their current and future workforce challenges related to hiring, retention, onboarding and development by supporting employers and workers to achieve alignment towards a thriving workplace experience.</p><p>The project partners have engaged human-centred design experts from The Moment to conduct in-depth user research to better understand the province’s local labour markets and workplaces from the point of view of workers and SMEs, including equity-deserving workers and employers. In addition, extensive field inquiry has occurred with senior government staff, Nova Scotia Works Service Providers and other key stakeholders.</p><p>By the end of the project, we will have designed and tested a prototype of a service model in four selected Nova Scotia Works sites, with a goal to scale up the demonstration to all locations. We will also explore the feasibility of adapting and testing the model in other provinces/territories.</p></div>		
<div>Current status:</div> <div><p>The project is in the concept generation phase (Stage 2) There is a working model concept that continues to develop and evolve as we gather more evidence and consult key stakeholders through a series of co-design workshops and consultations.</p><p>We expect to complete the concept generation phase in early 2024.</p></div>		

<b>Project:</b> <b>Mid-Career Transitions Project</b>			 
<b>Focus:</b> Services to support mid-career worker transitions	<b>Partners:</b> Douglas College, Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology	<b>Location:</b> British Columbia and Manitoba	
<b>Description:</b> <p>Future of work trends point strongly to a need for workers to make career changes multiple times throughout their lives. However, a key finding from RCP Phase 1 was that there is a major gap in the learning ecosystem in terms of proactive, accessible and affordable career and skills development services for working Canadians.</p> <p>This project is designing and testing new career service models that proactively support career transitions for working Canadians, with a focus on designing services for mid-career workers. We are creating two types of service models: models that are accessed directly by working individuals looking to make a transition, and models that are accessed by employers looking to support their employees' transitions into and within the organization.</p> <p>Each project partner is conducting needs assessments, including in-depth user research with workers and employers in their region/province, and developing and testing their own worker- and employer-focused models. We have also engaged strategic foresight and human-centred design experts from The Moment to understand future needs of workers and design a model concept within the context of a future Canadian labour market and economy.</p> <p>By the end of the project, we will have tested and iterated at least two prototypes with end users and will prepare them for future scaling.</p>			
<b>Current status:</b> <p>The project is currently in Stage 3 of the innovation cycle—research, design and prototyping—for its worker-focused models. After an in-depth worker needs assessment and concept development phase, we are now conducting rapid prototyping and iteration in collaboration with working Canadians using a co-design approach.</p> <p>For employer-focused models, we are currently in Stage 1, the needs assessment stage, but beginning to ideate what services could look like in anticipation of Stage 2—Concept Generation.</p>			

<b>Project:</b> <b>Career Development Professional Centre</b>			 
<b>Focus:</b> Building career development practitioner capacity	<b>Partners:</b> CCDF, MixtMode Consulting	<b>Location:</b> Online/virtual	
<b>Description:</b> <p>Career development practitioners (CDPs) have a critical role to play in supporting Canadians to effectively prepare for and navigate labour market changes and future skills needs of the economy. However, there is a critical need to build the capacity of CDPs in Canada to meet this challenge.</p> <p>This project is building and testing a Career Development Professional Centre: a pan-Canadian, virtual professional centre of excellence that provides access to the necessary training, resources and learning community to respond to new and changing needs within the sector, and in alignment with the new Pan-Canadian Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals. The Centre also houses the Pan-Canadian Competency Framework, the National Competency Profile for Career Development Professionals and the Code of Ethics for Career Development Professionals, with an eye to ultimately provide national certification that is recognized in every Canadian province and territory.</p> <p>Through this project, we are building, testing and iterating the Centre model and assessing its effectiveness in improving practitioners' competencies and professionalization. As the model evolves, ensuring the future sustainability of the model is a core objective.</p>			
<b>Current status:</b> <p>The Centre is currently in the prototyping phase (Stage 3). The prototype platform is live, and the first phase of hybrid foundational training was delivered to career development professionals across Canada through April—June 2023. Over 1,000 CDPs have engaged with the Centre to date. The prototype will be iterated over the coming months based on user feedback collected throughout the initial delivery.</p>			

More information about the projects and the models we are testing will be available in future project- specific reports.





# Conclusion and what's next

Our RCP work is guided by the idea of career services of the future: a collection of services and functions that would contribute to a future third pillar of services for working Canadians to help them navigate career transitions in the face of labour market changes and disruption. By taking a user-centred, evidence-informed approach, Canada will move towards a learning ecosystem that is navigable, supportive, targeted, integrated and transparent.

However, establishing this third pillar and strengthening career services is a journey we are just starting. It will involve carefully and intentionally designing, developing and delivering projects that aim to enhance specific aspects of career development and generating timely, actionable evidence that helps us to move them from early delivery and ongoing improvement towards rigorous evaluation, replication and scaling.

We believe that, with our partners and our modest yet innovative project portfolio, our Learning Agenda and approach to evidence generation, we can begin to build the evidence needed to chart a path forward.

## Upcoming reports

A series of reports are planned for the RCP initiative to share our findings and key insights. These include a series of project-specific reports and a portfolio-level final report.

We plan to release reports for each of our projects that will give insight into the following:

- **User Needs:** key findings from project needs assessment.
- **Model Concepts:** description of the models we are testing in the project and an overview of how we are testing them.
- **User Testing:** key findings from prototype testing.
- **Final Results and Insights:** key findings from the testing of subsequent iterations to the prototypes and key insights from the overall project.

An RCP Final Report will identify key insights generated from across the portfolio related to key themes in our Learning Agenda.



