



Future Skills Centre

Evaluation of Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition Project: Layoff Aversion Program

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Executive Summary

Canada's manufacturing sector, in particular automotive and steel production, is navigating a period of uncertainty that has led to companies implementing innovative manufacturing processes and strategies to maintain competitive. This disruption is further complicated by escalating trade tensions. In 2025, the U.S. placed 25% tariffs on Canadian steel, aluminum, and vehicles that do not comply with existing free trade agreements. These tariffs have the potential to erode Canada's competitive position in North American supply chains and have served to accelerate layoffs in the sector.

The Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition (CSTEC) sought to support manufacturers in averting layoffs by reskilling and upskilling their workers. The Future Skills Centre provided funding to the *Layoff Aversion Program* under the Pathways to Jobs and Sustainable Jobs thematic priorities. Through their program activities, the program aimed to help Ontario manufacturers minimize layoffs by re-training their workforce. Training included programs to enrol workers in apprenticeships, to upskill tradespeople and retraining to support workers to be able to adopt and utilize environmentally-friendly manufacturing processes.

R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. conducted an independent rapid evaluation of the program to assess the extent to which program objectives were met and, where possible, to assess the impact of program activities on the short-term and intermediate outcomes associated with the program. This evaluation collected data through pretraining surveys with workers and employers, semi-structured interviews with CSTEC staff, employers, unions, and program partners, and focus groups with CSTEC coordinators and trained workers. This program demonstrated the effectiveness of shorter term targeted training programs in helping employers meet their needs for skilled trades by equipping incumbent workers with desired skills and in avoiding potential layoffs.

Key Insights

- The program exceeded its target of supporting 16 employers by serving 29 employers. In total, 576 workers received training.
- Although the program did not meet its targeted number of 50 apprentices, 20 workers entered apprenticeships.
- Although safety and emergency preparedness was noted by only 21% of employers as reasons for the training, many (20 of 29 employers) enrolled their workers in safety or regulation-related training.
- The program supported workforce development through skills training which increased worker confidence and competence, helped them earn promotions or new responsibilities, advanced their careers, increased engagement with their workplaces and coworkers, and enhanced their attitude towards work.
- Not only did the program help employers avert layoffs, but the training also resulted in increased productivity, revenues and clients.



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CSTEC's LAYOFF AVERSION PROGRAM
March 2026

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The Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition's Layoff Aversion Program is funded by the Government of Canada's [Future Skills Program](#).



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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 are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and Signal49 Research, and are funded by the Government of Canada's [Future Skills Program](#).

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Consortium – A group of companies, organizations, or people that have joined together to work on a particular project.¹ CSTEC has a group of five region specific consortiums across Ontario.

CSTEC – Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition

FSC – Future Skills Centre

ISTM – Industrial Skills Transferability Matrices

Layoff Aversion – Strategies and activities aimed at preventing or minimizing the duration of unemployment resulting from layoffs. These strategies and activities include providing training to workers and connecting companies with resources to avoid layoffs. The goal is to save jobs and reduce the negative impacts of unemployment on workers and communities.²

Malatest – R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.

¹ Cambridge English Dictionary. Retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/consortium>

² (Steel Valley Authority).

1. Introduction

The Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition (CSTEC) program, *Layoff Aversion Program*, aimed to help Ontario industrial manufacturers minimize layoffs and upskill their workforces. Specifically, the program aimed to:

- Support industrial manufacturers to develop strategies that minimize layoffs and that upskill their workers,
- Support production workers to explore careers in the industrial trades, and
- Fund short-term training for production workers that allow them to become an apprentice or to move to a higher skilled occupation in their plant or workplace.

This report summarizes Malatest's evaluation of and learnings from CSTEC's program activities from June through November of 2025.

1.1 The Issue: Industrial changes create workforce challenges

Canada's manufacturing sector, in particular automotive and steel production, is navigating a period of uncertainty that has led to transformed manufacturing processes and to strategies to maintain their competitiveness. Driven by global mandates to reduce emissions, the automotive industry is transitioning from producing internal combustion vehicles to zero-emission vehicles, particularly electric vehicles. Similarly, shifting from coal fired blast furnaces to electric arc furnaces for steel production will allow manufacturers to produce high quality steel more efficiently with a lower carbon footprint.

These shifts present both strategic opportunities and economic risks. On one hand, it offers the potential to develop new domestic supply chains, to attract foreign investment and to create high-quality jobs across advanced manufacturing and the skilled trades. On the other hand, the transition is disruptive as production lines retool and demand for traditional know-how declines. Thousands of jobs are at risk: particularly among production workers, parts suppliers, and raw material sectors such as steel and aluminum. Employers will need workers with leading edge skills if they are to navigate these disruptions.

This disruption is further complicated by escalating trade tensions. In 2025, the U.S. placed 25% tariffs on Canadian steel, aluminum, and vehicles that do not comply with exiting free trade agreements.³ These tariffs could erode Canada's competitive position in North American supply chains. The viability of major industry anchors such as Ford, Stellantis, Algoma Steel and Stelco is now in question, with several parts plants suspending production and supply contracts. Canada's fourth-largest auto parts supplier, ABC Technologies, moved key operations out of the country in April 2025.⁴ In the near future, Stellantis will

³ (CFIB, 2025).

⁴ (TI Fluid Systems , 2025).

move production of its Jeep Compass from its Brampton Assembly Plant to a plant in Illinois.⁵ These changes introduce the risk that there will be reduced demand for Canadian labour engaged in traditional manufacturing activities

Thus, the sector's current workforce faces two significant threats: the need to upskill while facing potential layoffs. Building on their previous program, Better Outcomes for Laid Off Workers, CSTEC sought to support industrial manufacturers and their workers through layoff aversion strategies including short-term targeted training programs. These strategies were modelled on similar strategies operating in the United States since the late 1980's.⁶

1.2 The Issue: Employers struggle to develop skills

Many employers indicated that they regularly track workers' skills, complete annual assessments to identify gaps and work with employees to develop training and succession plans. However, employers also stressed that the tariffs levied by the US Government has forced them to focus on survival rather than planning for growth. Economic conditions have also reduced budgets for training and succession planning processes.

Other employers noted that while the funded training augmented their training budgets, they were challenged in how many could receive the training because they did not have the resources to fill workers' places on the factory floor while they attended the training. Where possible, employers looked to keep training inhouse to limit the number of positions to be backfilled and reduce other expenses associated with off-site training such as travel and accommodation.

Employers and union representatives acknowledged that while some government programs exist to support employers looking to train their workers, such as the Canada-Ontario Job Grant and the Skills Development Fund Training Stream, they involve complicated application processes and strict eligibility requirements.^{7,8} Smaller employers indicated that they do not have the time or resources to pursue such programs, while others admitted that they did not know where to look to find training support funding.

⁵ (CBC News, 2025).

⁶ (Steel Valley Authority).

⁷ The Canada-Ontario Job Grant (COJG) provides funding to help businesses train their employees and update their skills. The grant supports eligible training costs up to a maximum of \$10,000 per trainee, with businesses having over 100 employees expected to contribute half the costs and smaller employers contribute one-sixth of the training costs. Retrieved from: www.ontario.ca/page/canada-ontario-job-grant-cojg.

⁸ Skills Development Fund Training Stream offers funding to organizations and consortiums for innovative projects that address challenges to hiring, training, or retaining workers. Retrieved from: www.ontario.ca/page/skills-development-fund-training-stream.

CSTEC staff and training partners agreed that training support for employers is limited and not flexible enough for effective outcomes to be realized for many industrial manufacturers and workers. They noted that support is often reactive (for example, after layoffs or plant closures have been announced) or the program window is too narrow (for example, less than a year which restricts access to some college programs) or not applicable to industrial manufacturing. For instance, the Canada Retraining Opportunities Initiative, requires a layoff notice to be given before benefits can be accrued and before workers can qualify for retraining.⁹ In another example, The Union Training and Innovation Program's Sustainable Jobs Stream provides funding for training on sustainable processes for journeypersons and Red Seal apprentices.¹⁰ However, most industrial manufacturing processes are not considered as green jobs and thus do not qualify for the program.¹¹

"I believe initiatives like this one are an asset for upskilling workers. Often, companies cite a lack of funds or time as reasons for not supporting such programs. Knowing that there is government-funded programming available can help initiate the process and allow companies to evaluate the valuable outcomes it can bring."
(CSTEC training partner)

1.3 Program Description: A focused retraining program

To help minimize layoffs and upskill the manufacturing workforce, CSTEC launched a Layoff Aversion Program for industrial manufacturers. A total of 576 workers from 29 Ontario manufacturing firms received training between February and September 2025.

A complete logic model, which describes the program's activities, outputs, and anticipated outcomes, can be found in Appendix B. Although the logic model specifies intended short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term outcomes, only short-term and intermediate outcomes are evaluated in this report as long-term outcomes will take more time to be realized. The anticipated short-term outcomes included:

- Employers meet regulatory training obligations.
- Management and labour reduce tensions over potential or planned layoffs.

⁹ Canada Retraining Opportunities Initiative provided \$30 million over two years (2024-2026) to support communities and workers significantly impacted by mass layoffs. Retrieved from: www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/canada-retraining-opportunities-initiative.html.

¹⁰ Sustainable Jobs Stream - Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy - Union Training and Innovation Program. Applications for the program closed in 2024 and project must be completed by March 31, 2030. Retrieved from: www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/cas-utip-sustainable-jobs-stream.html

¹¹ Sustainable Jobs Stream - Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy - Union Training and Innovation Program. Description of green training. Retrieved from: www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/cas-utip-sustainable-jobs-stream/overview.html#green-training



- Workers gain job-relevant skills and safety certifications.
- Workers develop a clearer understanding of career paths that align with their interests and preferred work environments.
- Workers increase their confidence and awareness of future job paths and job security.

The anticipated intermediate outcomes included:

- Increased number of workers entering or exploring skilled trades/apprenticeships.
- More workers transition into higher skilled, stable occupations and careers.
- Reduced permanent layoffs among participating employers.
- More collaborative workforce planning between employers and unions.

These short-term and intermediate outcomes are based on the assumptions that manufacturing companies and their employees would be willing to participate in the program and key partners, such as colleges, training consultants and union representatives would be willing and have the capacity to collaborate with CSTEC for this program.

2 Methods

Malatest conducted an evaluation of CSTEC program activities to assess the extent to which short-term and intermediate outcomes were achieved. This included assessing the effectiveness of the Layoff Aversion Program and the impact short-term targeted training had on industrial workers and their employers. Data were collected between August and November 2025 and incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods.

2.1 Key Evaluation Questions

Four key evaluation questions were developed in collaboration with CSTEC. These questions formed the basis for survey, interview and focus group questions, as well as the results summarized in this report. The figure below shows the key evaluation questions along with sub-questions used to develop the data collection instruments. Please refer to Appendix C for the evaluation matrix.

Figure 2.1 Program Specific Evaluation Questions and Sub-questions

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions
1. How effective is short-term, targeted, and accredited training for incumbent industrial trade workers in meeting employers' needs for skilled tradespeople?	- To what extent did the Industrial Skills Transferability Matrices (ISTM) tool support workers in determining a career route and finding skills training? - To what extent did the layoff aversion model reduce the time needed to retrain workers?
2. How effective is the Layoff Aversion Program at minimizing the negative impacts being faced by manufacturers (such as production workers, assemblers, and machine operators)?	- To what extent does the layoff aversion model have a positive and meaningful impact on the employment outcomes of workers? - What types of resources are necessary to support the career development of workers?
3. To what extent has the project and training provided supported industrial tradespeople who are members of equity deserving groups?	- How were underrepresented groups supported? - To what extent do employers include EDI&R practices as part of their workforce planning and recruitment strategies?
4. How effective is the Layoff Aversion Program in promoting dialogue between employers and unions about worker retention and sustaining manufacturing operations at the facility?	- What roles and supports were most effective in promoting dialogue and collaboration between employers and unions? - What were the challenges faced by employers and unions that impacted their collaboration? How were these challenges mitigated?



The key evaluation questions were also aligned to questions developed by Future Skills Centre that focus on the thematic priority areas for:

- **Pathways to Jobs** (strategic question #5: How can the career development ecosystem improve services to Canadians?) and
- **Sustainable Jobs** (strategic question #12: What models for ensuring collaboration among key local actors are effective at delivering solutions that can be implemented locally/regionally in coordination with actors in the skills ecosystem?; and strategic question #15: What skills-related measures are most effective at optimizing the transition of workers from declining to growing sectors or occupations?).

Please refer to Appendix C for the evaluation matrix and alignment of FSC thematic questions with program specific evaluation questions.

2.2 Lines of Evidence

Data collection methods to answer the evaluation questions for this program included a brief review of literature, data and documentation; a pre-training survey of employers and workers; interviews with employers, CSTEC staff and key training partners; and focus groups with workers and CSTEC coordinators. The gathered information was then assessed for its contribution to FSC's thematic priorities of pathways to jobs and SME adaptability. The table below summarizes the data collected for each line of evidence. The associated data collection tools are presented in Appendix D.

Figure 2.2: Data Collected per Line of Evidence

Evidence	Respondents	Information Collected	Sources or Sampling
Literature and document review (administered by Malatest)	Not applicable	Malatest reviewed CSTEC's evaluation report on a previous layoff aversion program. Malatest also reviewed online literature and related documentation about layoff aversion models implemented in several US States.	Information was sourced from documents and reports provided by CSTEC and an online search
Administrative data on employers and workers (administered by CSTEC)	Employers = 23 Workers = 576	Employer data included products manufactured, number of employees, number of workers to be trained, employment status of workers, type of training, cost of training, and how training will assist company.	Employers and workers registered for the program through an online portal which also collected demographic data.



		Worker data included demographics such as gender, income, level of education, ethnic identity, and immigration status.	
Post training worker survey (administered by CSTEC)	n= unknown; data not available	Questions included type of training, delivery method, length of training, satisfaction with training, impact of training, extent skills learned have been used on job, concerns about job security.	CSTEC asked workers who had completed their training to provide feedback via an online survey.
Focus group with CSTEC coordinators (administered by Malatest)	1 with CSTEC coordinators, n=5	Feedback was gathered on the promotion of the program, types of training, and effectiveness of the layoff aversion activities.	CSTEC coordinators were asked by CSTEC management to voluntarily participate in a group discussion. Those agreeing were sent a link to a virtual meeting.
Focus groups with workers who received training (administered by Malatest)	2 with workers; n=6	Questions included skills needs, training selection process, satisfaction with training, skills obtained, impact of training on current and future job positions.	CSTEC provided Malatest with contact information for 275 workers who had agreed to be contacted about participating in an interview or focus group. Individuals were sent an email invitation that explained the purpose of the discussion and that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Those who participated received a \$75 e-gift to thank them for their time.
Staff and stakeholder interviews (administered by Malatest)	14: 1 interview with 2 CSTEC staff, 1 Union,	Questions examined perceptions of skills needs, how training supported workers and employers, impact of layoff aversion activities on employer	Malatest received participant contact information from CSTEC. Individuals were sent an email invitation which



	2 CSTEC partners, 11 employers	and union relationships, worker retention, and partnering with CSTEC.	explained the purpose of the interview and that participation was voluntary and anonymous.
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It should be noted that while pre/post-training survey data from participants in CSTEC training programs were considered for comparison, post-training survey data received too few responses. As the post-training survey results could not be reliably reported, they were not shared with Malatest.

2.3 Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Reconciliation

The intent of the program was to upskill or retrain workers employed in industrial manufacturing facilities in Ontario. As it welcomed all workers that were referred by their employer, the program was not specifically intended to support individuals from equity deserving or underrepresented groups. However, the evaluation assessed the extent to which these groups were represented among participating workers. In particular, intake surveys asked workers to indicate their gender, immigration status, ethnicity, level of education, and whether they had a disability.¹²

Further, the evaluation sought to ensure that all stakeholders would be respected. For instance, all evaluation participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their privacy and any data collected would be kept secure and protected. The purpose of the evaluation was included in all communication materials and explained prior to questions being posed to participants. Individuals were also given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification, and encouraged to provide as much information as they wished to ensure they were comfortable participating in the evaluation's data collection activities.

CSTEC's Layoff Aversion program did not specifically focus on advancing commitment to reconciliation. However, the program could be informally or indirectly contributing to reconciliation through the training provided to participating Indigenous workers by supporting their economic rights under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, specifically Articles 5, 20 and 21.¹³

2.4 Limitations and Other Considerations

Malatest took actions to mitigate the limitations associated with these methods and remains confident in the strength of the evaluation. However, the following limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

¹² Information provided was self-reported and voluntary. Some workers chose not to provide a response to a specific demographic question.

¹³ (United Nations, 2007).

- **Not all program impacts could be fully assessed within the program's timeframe.** Training programs for some workers were only completed by the program's end date of September. As a result, the full impacts and benefits stemming from the program could not be fully assessed by the time of this evaluation. Some benefits of the training may not be fully realized for several months after the program had ended. For example, some workers may have received promotions after the program had ended and these impacts would not have been reported back to CSTEC. In addition, some employers indicated that they would not consider offering promotions or adding responsibilities until the worker had more on-the-job time to practice their new skills and be reassessed by the employer.
- **Limited employer administrative data.** Not all registered employers provided administrative information. CSTEC noted that some employers, especially smaller employers, were reluctant to disclose detailed information about their business, such as error rates, productivity gains, number of redesigned workflows, or training budgets. As such, no comparative cost analysis could be made to determine actual savings or monetary benefits.
- **Limited feedback was received from participating workers.** Too few worker feedback surveys were received to allow results to be reported. CSTEC staff indicated that they were unable to obtain feedback from most participating workers. They offered several reasons for why this information was not forthcoming. One was that workers may have been reluctant to complete the feedback survey online as they were not given work time to do the survey and many did not have access to computers or smartphone during work hours. Another was that the literacy level of many workers may have impacted their understanding of the survey questions or made them reluctant to provide feedback. While some employers attempted to collect feedback data from their workers after training had ended, such data were not provided in a useable format.
- **Low worker engagement in focus groups:** The evaluation also faced limitations with recruiting workers for the focus groups. Despite the offer of a \$75 incentive to participate in a virtual focus group, few workers (n=6) joined the virtual sessions.
- **Selection bias.** Participation in data collection activities was voluntary. This may have resulted in a selection bias where those who hold particularly strong views about the topic (whether positive or negative) may have been more likely to participate in the evaluation than those who were neutral or had no opinion. For example, interested employers that were already engaged and invested in CSTEC likely hold positive views about their workers' participation in the training activities. To mitigate potential bias, the majority of survey questions were closed-ended questions that focused on recall and process, rather than opinions. For the focus groups and interviews, participants were also asked to provide feedback on challenges and areas for potential improvement.



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3 Evidence and Insights

CSTEC was successful in meeting most of the program's short-term outcomes (4 out of 5) and progress was observed on two of the four intermediate outcomes. The training allowed workers to gain new skills, which increased their confidence, supported trades careers and for some workers, led to promotions. Employers indicated that training supported employee retention and strengthened relationships with labour by helping avoid layoffs. At least some employers pointed to impacts to the bottom line, including increases to productivity, sales and clients.

Figure 3.1 provides a summary of the program's short-term and intermediate outcomes and an assessment on the extent to which these outcomes had been achieved.

Figure 3.1: Achievement of Program Objectives

Intended Short-term Outcomes	Assessment
1. Employers meet regulatory training obligations.	Achieved. Workers at 29 manufacturers filled 598 training placements related to health, safety and industry regulations. This helped employers to meet various regulatory training obligations. ¹⁴
2. Reduction in union/worker management tensions over potential or planned layoffs.	Unclear. It is unclear the extent union and management tensions over planned or potential layoffs had eased. Only five participating manufacturers had unionized environments. Of these, only one union representative and two unionized employers were interviewed. Only one employer and one union representative could speak to the issue. However, both the employer and union representatives reported reduced tensions as both parties collaborated to provide training opportunities through CSTEC's program in an effort to minimize layoffs.
3. Workers gain job-relevant skills and safety certifications related to carbon reduction or automation.	Achieved. Many workers earned certifications from safety-related courses. Some workers received training related to operating advanced furnaces that do not require the use of coal.
4. Workers develop a clearer understanding of career paths that align with their interests and preferred work environments.	Achieved. Interviewed workers indicated the training they received supported their career paths by providing training related to apprenticeship opportunities or training that led to a promotion or new work responsibilities. However, the Industrial Skills Transferability Matrix tool intended to support workers in

¹⁴ Retrieved from: www.tssa.org/training-and-professional-certification.



	exploring career pathways had not been implemented at the time of the evaluation.
5. Workers report increased confidence and awareness of future job paths and/or job security.	Achieved. Interviewed workers reported increased confidence in their job security as a result of the training. Interviewed employers also observed an increase in worker confidence and engagement as a result of the training. Employers also stated they were less likely to lay off workers who had been trained with the desired skills to help ensure quality production.
Intermediate Outcomes	Assessment
1. Increased number of workers entering or exploring skilled trades/apprenticeships.	Progress Made. Only 20 of the targeted 50 new apprenticeships were realized due to challenges with aligning apprenticeship training programs within the program's timeframe. Several interviewed employers indicated that due to the current economic environment they were unable to increase the number of sponsored apprenticeship positions in their company.
2. More workers transition into higher skilled, stable occupations and careers.	Progress Made. Although some interviewed employers stated that workers who had received training through CSTEC's program had been promoted, data on the exact number of workers transitioning to higher skilled occupations were not available.
3. Reduced permanent layoffs among participating employers.	Unclear. It is unclear to what extent planned or potential layoffs were reduced through CSTEC's program. Although employers reported that participating workers were less likely to be laid off, this does not necessarily indicate a reduction in overall layoffs; rather, the training may have influenced which workers employers retained. While several employers reported no immediate plans for layoffs, many noted that economic uncertainty made future layoffs possible. As a result, it remains unclear whether the program reduced the need for layoffs or merely altered layoff decisions.
4. More collaborative workforce planning between employers and unions.	Unclear. Only five participating manufacturers had unionized environments. Of these, only one union representative and two unionized employers were interviewed. As such only limited data were collected. However, one employer and the union representative reported they collaborated to provide training opportunities through CSTEC's program.

3.1 Activities Conducted

The program exceeded its target of supporting 16 employers by serving 29 employers. A total of 576 workers received training. Although the program did not meet its target of having 50 workers begin apprenticeships, 144 trades-related training placements resulted in 20 new apprenticeships and many more tradespeople receiving training. CSTEC's Industrial Skills Transferability Matrices (ISTM) tool, while not implemented during the program, shows promise as a useful tool that will help support workers transitioning to apprenticeships and other skilled trades.

In early 2025, CSTEC staff reached out to their network of manufacturers, colleges, training consultants and union representatives to inform them of the program.¹⁵ They received an overwhelming response from employers looking to receive support to train their workers. Due to the short timeline for the program and limited funding, not all interested employers could be accepted into the program. A total 29 companies participated, which exceeded the target of 16 employers. This resulted in a total of 576 workers being placed in 827 training programs, as many workers attended more than one training program (See Figure 3.2). Through the program, 20 workers entered apprenticeships, lower than the target of 50. Training was also provided for many more who were already tradespeople or interested in becoming one. In all, workers accessed 144 trades course placements.

3.1.1 Training Provided

The training provided helped workers upskill:

- to meet health, safety and industry regulations (such as Technical Standards and Safety Authority certifications, fork and scissor lift, working at heights, fall prevention, automotive standards, and first aid),
- for the skilled trades, such as millwrights, gas technicians, steam fitters, and other trades such as those requiring hydraulics, welding, troubleshooting, and leadership skills, and
- to operate new machinery or learn new techniques and workflows such as technical design, arc furnace operation, inspection and quality control.

Figure 3.2: Summary of Training by Type and Number Trained

Training Type	Employers Receiving*	Training Placements*
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¹⁵ Specifically, CSTEC rolled out communication through its five regional consortiums (Hamilton, Sault Ste Marie, Kitchener-Waterloo, Peel Region and the Greater Toronto Area) made up of employers, colleges, training consultants and union representatives that collectively address workforce development issues. Retrieved from: <https://cstec.ca/employer-consortiums/>.



Health, safety and industry regulations	20	598
Trades or apprenticeship related	20	144
New machinery, techniques, processes	12	85
Total	29 participating employers	827 placements, 576 workers

Source: CSTEC employer and worker administrative data. *Note: Employers could request multiple types of training and workers could take more than one type of training or course. A total of 576 workers were placed in 827 training programs, with 57 workers taking more than one training program.

3.1.2 Developed an ISTM Tool

To what extent did the ISTM support workers in determining a career route and finding skills training? (Evaluation question 1, sub-question 1)

Responds to FSC question #15, sub-question 3: What skills development strategies are the most effective in optimizing people's labour market mobility under conditions of uncertainty, unpredictability and/or volatility in the labour market?

Although CSTEC had designed an Industrial Skills Transferability Matrices (ISTM) tool to support workers participating in this program, the online version had yet to be implemented. Interviewed CSTEC staff indicated that the program aimed to develop a tool that could produce valid, meaningful results that would support workers looking to transition to industrial Red Seal apprenticeships or other industrial skilled trades. As a result, the tool took longer to design than anticipated. In addition, the design required further refinement based on validation sessions with employers, workers and industry partners. CSTEC anticipates their ISTM tool will be available in the first quarter of 2026.

3.2 Engagement and Population Served

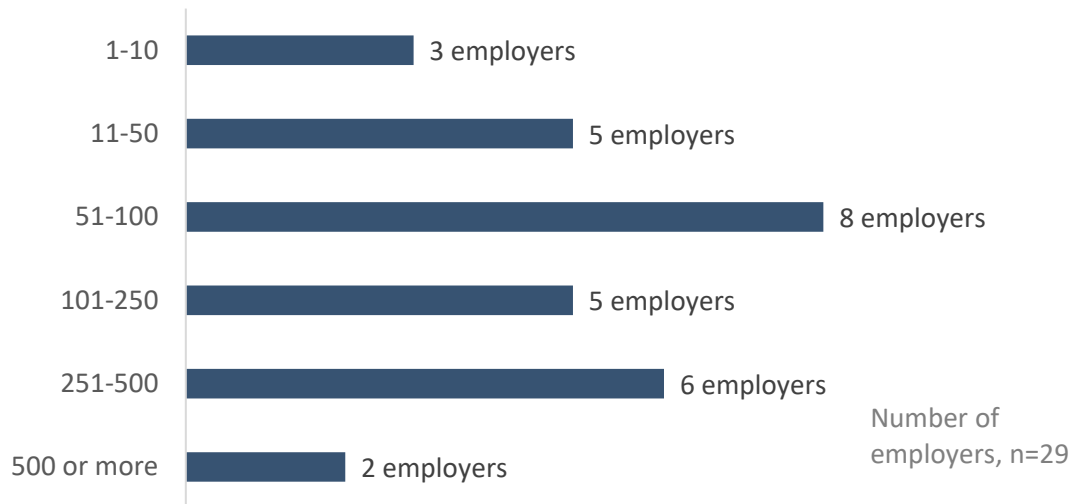
3.2.1 Employers

The majority of participating employers were non-unionized small and medium sized enterprises involved in the manufacturing of metal products, automotive and transportation equipment, and plastic or rubber products.

A total of 21 of 29 participating employers employed 100 or fewer workers and only two employed 500 or more workers (Figure 3.3). Among the 29 participating employers, only five reported they had a unionized workforce, all of which employed at least 50 workers.



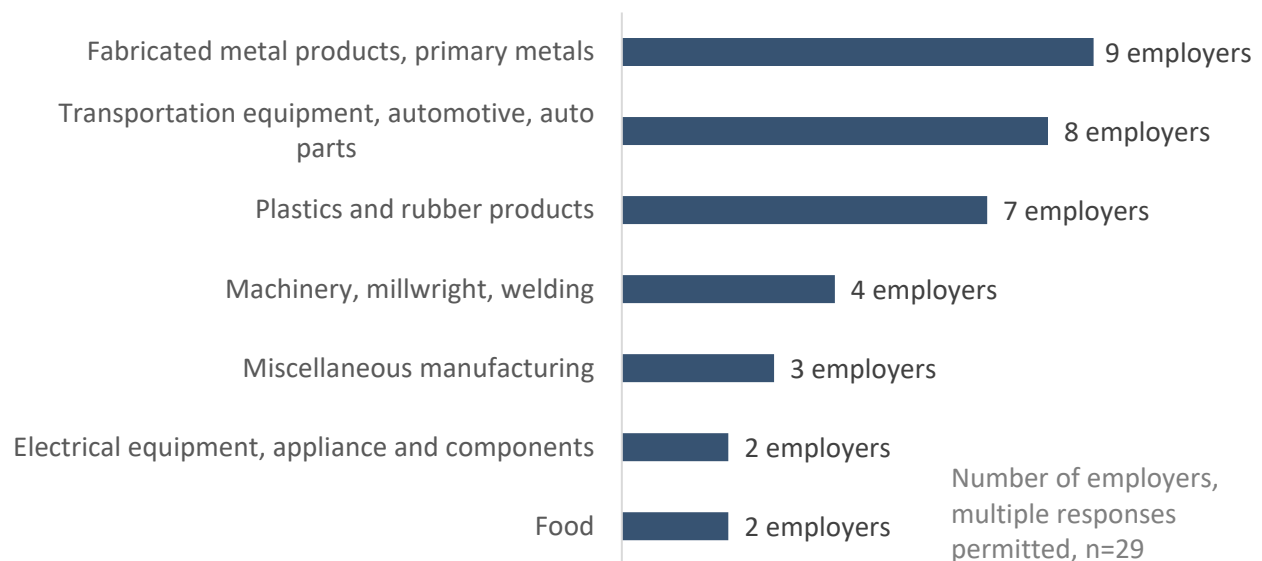
Figure 3.3: Employer Size (By number of workers)



Source: CSTEC employer administrative data.

Most employers manufactured products within three categories, primary metals or metal products (nine employers), transportation equipment including automotive and auto parts (eight employers), and plastics and rubber products (seven employers) (Figure 3.4). While the majority of employers (23 of 29), manufactured products in one category, a few indicated their firm produced a broader range of products, for example, fabricated metal products and plastics and electrical equipment.

Figure 3.4: Employer Manufacturer Type



Source: CSTEC employer administrative data.



3.2.2 Participating Workers

Most participating workers were Canadian born, male, and had non-university levels of education. Close to one-third identified as being of White descent, while 29% identified as an ethnic minority.

As shown in the table below, three-quarters of participating workers self-identified as being a man.¹⁶ Workers' ethnic background is not easily known as 38% choose not to disclose this information. A third (32%) indicated White and slightly more than 29% were a member of an ethnic minority. The majority (61%) of workers were Canadian born, while 30% were immigrants to Canada (Figure 3.5).

¹⁶ A further 14% indicated they were a woman, fewer than 1% were non-binary gender, and 11% preferred not to disclose their gender.



Figure 3.5: Participating Workers by Demographic Characteristics

Gender Identity	Number of Workers Trained	% of Total
Man	430	75%
Woman	81	14%
Gender non-binary (including gender fluid, genderqueer, androgynous)	2	<1%
No answer	63	11%
Total workers trained	576	100%
Ethnic Identity	Number of Workers Trained	% of Total
White (European descent)	187	32%
South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean)	94	16%
Southeast Asian (Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, Indonesian, other Southeast Asian descent)	24	4%
Black (African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent)	24	4%
Middle Eastern (Arab, Persian, Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Turkish, Kurdish)	11	2%
Latino (Latin American, Hispanic descent)	8	1%
East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese descent)	6	1%
Indigenous (First Nation, Métis, Inuit)	2	<1%
No answer	215	38%
Total workers trained	576	100%
Immigration Status	Number of Workers Trained	% of Total
Canadian born	353	61%
Immigrant*	175	30%
No answer	48	8%
Total workers trained	576	100%

Source: CSTEC administrative data for participating workers (Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding). *Note: 28 immigrant workers identified as Canadian citizens, 37 as permanent residents, 11 as temporary residents and 99 did not indicate their immigrant status.

Among participating workers, 39% reported having high school level education or less (including high school diploma or equivalency certificate, or no certificate, diploma or degree), while 18% were registered apprentices or held other trades certificates, 16% had college, CEGEP or other non-university education, and 19% had some level of university education (Figure 3.6).



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**Figure 3.6: Participating Workers by Level of Education**

Level of Education	Workers Trained	% of Total
No certificate, diploma or degree	7	1%
High school diploma or equivalency certificate	217	38%
College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma	95	16%
Registered apprenticeship or other trades certificate or diploma	103	18%
University certificate, diploma, or degree below bachelor level	15	3%
University bachelor's degree	59	10%
University certificate, degree, or diploma above bachelor level	32	6%
No answer	48	8%
Total workers trained	576	100%

Source: CSTEC administrative data for participating workers (totals may not add to 100 due to rounding).

3.3 Meeting the Need for Skilled Tradespeople

How effective is short-term, targeted, and accredited training for incumbent industrial trade workers in meeting employers' needs for skilled tradespeople? (Evaluation question 1)

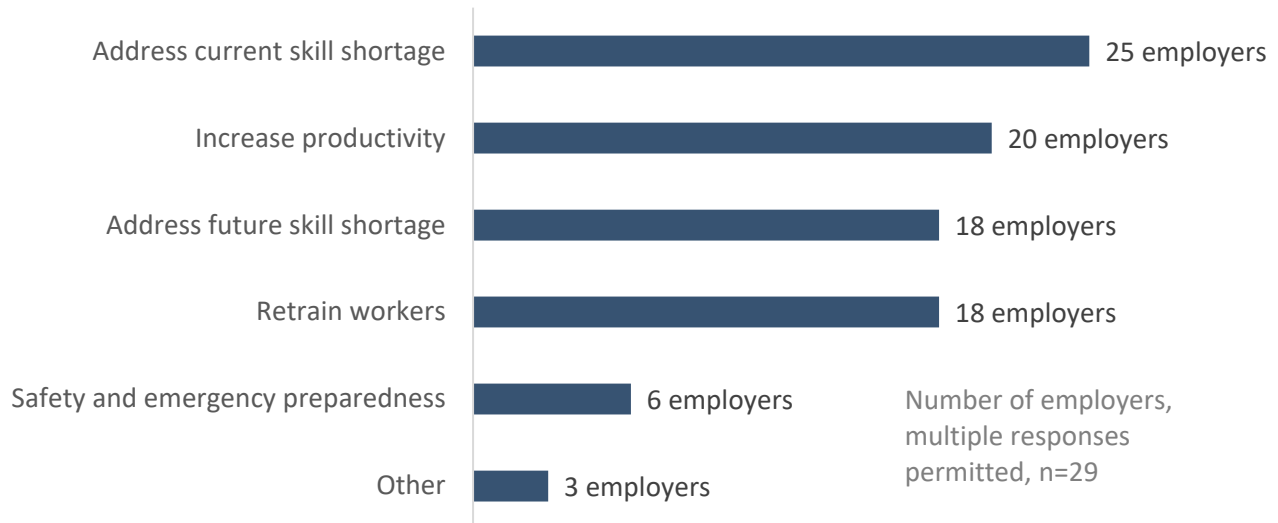
Responds to FSC question #15, sub-question 2: What are the roles of upskilling/reskilling, wraparound supports, career guidance, and LMI in this process and how do key delivery actors have to change to bring about optimal delivery?

The training provided through CSTEC's program helped employers meet their need for tradespeople by increasing the skills of their existing workforce, including opening some doors to apprenticeship. This, in turn, contributes to the development of a stronger industrial workforce. Many employers reported that the training enhanced their training capacity and reduced errors and safety risks associated with the implementation of new skills. The use of virtual reality training helped workers learn new skills that they could practice in a safe environment without risk of injury. However, the tight timeliness of the program may have limited opportunities for training, especially for workers to enter apprenticeships.

As shown in the figure below, employers often chose to participate in CSTEC's program to help address current skill shortages (noted by 25 of 29 participating employers). The majority of employers also sought training to increase productivity, address future skill shortages, and to strengthen their workforce by retraining some workers (Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7: Employer Reasons for Training



Source: CSTEC employer administrative data (Multiple responses allowed; will not add to 100%).

3.3.1 Adding Trades Capacity

Although the program trained fewer apprentices than anticipated, many participating tradespeople received training relevant to their trade. Participating employers acknowledged the importance of retaining skilled tradespeople and were grateful for the opportunity to provide training to these workers.

As noted in Section 3.1.2, fewer apprentices than anticipated received training through the program. CSTEC staff indicated that the short timeframe for the program made it difficult to align workers with ongoing college apprenticeship training programs. However, a few apprentices (n=20) were able to complete four-month training programs that allowed them to enter an apprenticeship.

Interviewed employers acknowledged that although interested workers may not have been able to enter an apprenticeship, many of their apprentices and other tradespeople received training relevant to their trade. Additionally, some employers noted that the training allowed individuals interested in pursuing apprenticeships to gain prerequisite experience and knowledge so they could apply for an apprenticeship once one became available at their workplace. One employer indicated that they were able to find suitable training for 47 workers across three trades (millwrights, welders, and electricians). The training allowed their workers to revisit and refine existing skillsets, to obtain additional certifications (such as gas fitting certifications for electrical and mechanical tradesmen), to transition to specialized roles (such as a port driver or crane operator), or to learn focused skill sets to perform troubleshooting.



"Everybody needs apprentices for skill training, which can be very challenging. Employers are reluctant to pay higher wages to attract skilled workers, leading them to seek higher-paying opportunities elsewhere. The challenge lies in retaining skilled tradespeople and keeping them satisfied. Continuous training and investment in young apprentices are crucial for the future of the industry." (CSTEC training partner)

Such training helps to build trades capacity within the industrial manufacturing sector. Several employers commented on the limitations they face when recruiting and providing training for skilled tradespeople. Limitations included the lack of skilled industrial tradespeople, availability of training courses that aligned with program funding windows, whether certification for courses taken out side of the province would be valid in Ontario, and the extent sending workers for training impacted production lines. Interviewed CSTEC staff acknowledged these limitation and stressed the importance of their project in helping to reduce barriers to training and build trades capacity for industrial manufacturers.

3.3.2 Increasing Ability to Train Workers

The program allowed employers to enroll their workers in courses they would not otherwise have participated. Employers appreciated the ease of accessibility to the program and the support of CSTEC coordinators in finding programs that trained specific skills.

Several interviewed employers noted that the program allowed them to enroll employees in courses that they would not otherwise be provided. Interviewed employers indicated that the CSTEC's program made training funding more accessible and less complicated than other programs such as the Canada-Ontario Job Grant. One training partner indicated that CSTEC coordinators have many years of industry experience in understanding employer training needs and matching employers with training programs that specifically address the need for unique skills.

3.3.3 Unclear Impact on Time to Retrain Workers

To what extent did the Layoff Aversion Program reduce the time needed to retrain workers? (Evaluation question 1, sub-question 2)

Responds to FSC question #15, sub-question 1: What is the best way to scale up approaches to reducing the time needed to retrain workers?

While the tight timelines helped spur action in some workplaces, it was the source of lost opportunities in others.

Little evidence was available to determine the extent to which the program reduced the time needed to retrain workers. A condition for receiving program funding was that training had to occur before the end



of September 2025. Participating employers, CSTEC staff and training partners noted that the actual time needed for each training program could not be reduced. As such, employers had to select training programs that could be completed within this timeline. For some employers, this limitation meant passing on some training that would have been beneficial. As apprenticeship programs often onboard newcomers in January and September, the number of workers that entered an apprenticeship was limited to 20, missing the program's target of 50.

For some employers, the aggressive timelines allowed them to move up training that had been scheduled for a later date. This allowed workers to gain new skills sooner and helped to strengthen a company's workforce and improve overall efficiency.

3.3.4 Reducing Errors and Improving Safety

Responds to FSC question #5, sub-question 4: What role do new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, play in optimizing the delivery of career services?

Many workers received training that helped increase quality control, reduce errors and improve safety, especially in applying newly-acquired skills. "Train the trainer" courses ensured that workers could be safely trained on site without the need to bring in trainers. Training also included virtual reality simulators that allowed workers to learn new skills in a safe environment, to gain proficiency, and to develop a better understanding of their work environment.

One employer and a union representative reported high satisfaction among employees who had received virtual reality training as it helped workers transition to new manufacturing processes. They noted that this training experience allowed their workers to learn new processing techniques and repeatedly practice on the equipment without fear of injury or errors. The training helped workers develop proficiency, confidence in their skills, a better understanding of their work environment and equipment maintenance. The interviewees also noted that the virtual reality program will be of benefit to the company and workers moving forward as it will be used to onboard new employees, to train other employees, or to refresh skills for those who received the training. In addition, the training program allows for flexibility to upskill workers at their convenience, reducing the need for down time or to backfill positions.

Employers, workers and union representatives indicated that having a breadth of knowledge of operating procedures helped to increase quality control that reduce errors and costs. Employers indicated that employees trained as trainers supported onboarding for new hires and delivered refresher training, helping to prevent errors and equipment damage. Workers on their joint health and safety committee who obtained certification through the training frequently took on added responsibilities tied to health and safety compliance, such as conducting quality control checks and audits.



"Simple training sessions can have a significant impact on attitudes and job performance, making everyone's work easier. Safety, often underinvested in, is a crucial aspect that initiatives like these supports. By focusing on the human element as a valuable asset, we can improve the core of our business." (Industrial manufacturing employer)

3.4 Addressing Industrial Challenges

How effective is the Layoff Aversion Program at minimizing the negative impacts being faced by manufacturers? (Evaluation question 2)

Responds to FSC question 15: What skills-related measures are most effective at optimizing the transition of workers from declining to growing sectors or occupations?

The training provided through CSTEC's Layoff Aversion Program helped to minimize negative impacts faced by employers. The training helped employers to integrate new technologies into the workplace to boost productivity and to reduce reliance on carbon-intensive processes. The training also had a positive impact on workers as they increased their competence, advanced their careers, and had a more positive work attitude.

3.4.1 Integrating New Technologies

Several employers trained workers to better incorporate new technologies that gave their business a competitive edge and increased efficiencies.

Employers stressed the importance of keeping up with the latest in technology to give them a competitive edge and increase efficiencies. Workforce training on operating new technology was highly valued by employers. Several employers stated that the training their employees received has helped to ensure that they have the capacity and knowledge to work with leading manufacturing processes. For example, one employer has incorporated more robotics in their manufacturing process, while another is transitioning from coal furnaces to arc furnaces.

3.4.2 Increasing Productivity, Revenues and Customers

Upgrading workers' skills led to improvements to organizational performance that should drive participating employers' bottom lines, including increases to productivity revenues and clients.

The training provided by CTESC helped employers increase productivity. Several employers noted that the training helped their employees work more efficiently, while others noted that the training led to fewer errors and greater quality control. Other employers commented that workers returning from training often shared new ideas the company could implement to improve efficiency. Equipment training helped workers troubleshoot for defects and in some cases reduce downtime. One employer noted that



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as employees acquired new skills, they had the ability to complete a greater breadth of tasks, which led to increased orders and new customers.



3.4.3 Developing Workers' Competence and Confidence

To what extent does the Layoff Aversion Program have a positive and meaningful impact on the employment outcomes of workers? (Evaluation question 2, sub-question 1)

Responds to FSC strategic question #5, sub-question 3: How can we demonstrate that such interventions are having a positive and meaningful impact on the employment outcomes of Canadians?

The training provided through CSTEC's program had a positive and meaningful impact for participating workers. In addition to learning new skills, the training increased worker confidence and competence, increased engagement with their workplace and coworkers, and gave many a more positive work attitude. Thus, the training helped to further develop workforce capacity for participating industrial manufacturers.

Workers participating in focus groups agreed that the training had a positive impact on their work performance and attitude. In addition to learning new skills, the training helped them improve other skills including conflict resolution, problem solving and critical thinking. One worker indicated that the training helped them to work more collaboratively with their coworkers and to provide mentoring to new workers.

"The training was helpful to understand how the equipment works and to identify the various components, enhanced our critical thinking and problem-solving skills. We learned together and got perspectives from those working in different departments, which was helpful in bettering our understanding of how the equipment works and is used. It is also good to have a group in the training with a mix of experience levels. Even those with lots of experience can learn as they sometimes get accustomed to doing things a certain way and best practices may have changed, so they can learn new processes. The newer employees can benefit from the experienced ones which help all to problem solve together." (Industrial manufacturing worker)

Employers indicated that many of their workers expressed appreciation for the training they received. Employers also observed that morale among workers trained had improved with many gaining new perspectives on the tasks they were performing. Workers indicated to their employers that the training empowered them to handle critical issues with a better foundation and understanding of how to navigate such situations. These examples highlight the impacts of training on further developing capacity within an employer's workforce.



"Those who completed the training excelled and became gurus in their field. They were proud to display their certificates at their workstations and even added the training to their LinkedIn profiles." (Industrial manufacturing employer)

3.4.4 Averting Layoffs and Facilitating Promotions

What types of resources are necessary to support the career development of workers? (Evaluation question 2, sub-question 2)

Responds to FSC question #5, sub-question 2: What types of resources are necessary to enhance career development services and how can these resources be allocated effectively to meet the diverse needs of Canadians?

The majority of employers acknowledged that ongoing skills training helped to avert layoffs, and in some cases facilitated promotions. However, given the economic uncertainty and evolving tariffs, the potential for layoffs exists. Employers indicated that they were less likely to lay off workers with training in the desired skill sets, suggesting that the program may have only shifted employees to be targeted for layoffs. Additionally, workers who were reskilled or acquired new skills were more likely to get promoted or given additional responsibilities with a commensurate pay increase.

Employers indicated that upskilled workers strengthened the company. By developing their employees, the company became more resilient. Interviewed employers cited examples of workers being able to complete a greater breadth of tasks and assuming greater leadership roles within their units. Some workers participated in train-the-trainer courses which meant they could then train their coworkers. Employers stated that the skills workers gained often resulted in additional responsibilities, sometimes with a promotion and commensurate pay increase.

Interviewed workers stated that the training supported their current position and helped facilitate promotions for some. For example, one worker indicated that the training helped them to better understand machining which supported their design drawings. Another worker indicated that the training allowed them to assume a leadership role in their unit. Still another worker was able to complete their apprenticeship and was promoted to a new position.

"I did receive a promotion and became a tool-and-die maker because of this training, so it did help me move upward." (Industrial manufacturing worker)

Data were not available to determine the number of layoffs averted as a result of the program. The evidence suggests that trained workers potentially avoided layoffs as employers noted they were less likely to layoff workers with desired skills. However, employers also noted that despite the training provided, not all layoffs could be avoided. Thus, rather than reducing the need to lay off workers, the program may have only shifted the lay offs from participating workers to non-participating ones.

While the majority of interviewed employers confirmed they were not planning any layoffs in the immediate future, one company indicated that layoffs were unavoidable due to the restructuring of their manufacturing processes. Another company that received training through CSTEC's program shut down, laying off its entire workforce. In such cases, employers and union representatives expressed that the new skills these employees had gained could help them be more attractive to other employers.

3.5 Enriching Industrial Workplaces

3.5.1 Promoting Dialogue and Collaboration

Responds to evaluation question 4: How effective is the Layoff Aversion Program in promoting dialogue between employers and unions about worker retention and sustaining manufacturing operations at the facility? What roles and supports were most effective in promoting dialogue and collaboration between employers and unions? What were the challenges faced by employers and unions that impacted their collaboration? How were these challenges mitigated?

Responds to FSC question 12: What models for ensuring collaboration among key local actors are effective at delivering solutions that can be implemented locally/regionally in coordination with actors in the skills ecosystem?

The impact of the program on labour-management relations is unclear, given that most participating work environments were non-unionized. For those with unions, there is at least some anecdotal evidence that the program helped foster dialogue and collaboration.

Participating employers and union representatives highlighted the importance of working together to strategize, to develop ways to improve worker retention, and to ensure manufacturing is sustained. One employer noted that they have a joint steering committee and a joint training team that meet monthly to discuss efforts to train employees, to minimize layoffs and to enhance efficiencies.¹⁷ Their training team also connects with CSTEC staff to learn of any training opportunities and to advise CSTEC on the type of training they are seeking for their workers. CSTEC coordinators affirmed that they are regularly in contact with employers to provide guidance on how to develop and upskill employees and inform companies about funding programs for training.

A few interviewed employers with unionized workforces indicated they had worked with their unions to identify training programs and workers who received training through CSTEC's program. One employer noted that CSTEC's program promoted discussion with their union around additional training

¹⁷ Limited data were available to fully assess the extent to which the layoff aversion program promoted dialogue between employers and unions about worker retention and sustaining manufacturing operations. Of the 29 participating employers, only five had unionized employees; of these only three employers and one union participated in interviews for the evaluation.



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opportunities outside of their regularly planned training. One union representative reported having discussions with the employer to ensure that some workers received training through CSTEC's program to help support their return to work should they get laid off.



Responds to FSC question 15, sub-question 2: What are the roles of upskilling/reskilling, wraparound supports, career guidance, and LMI in this process and how do key delivery actors have to change to bring about optimal delivery?

One union representative indicated that one of the challenges impacting collaboration with an employer was the use of external contractors. Due to a lack of qualified unionized employees to provide services, make repairs or fill workforce gaps, the employer retains external contractors to fill such roles or perform these services. By participating in CSTEC's program, the union and employer worked together to identify key tasks being completed by external contractors. They then looked to the CSTEC program to provide the requisite training. For example, some workers received training to complete quality control inspections and testing. Others attended train-the-trainer programs that helped boost internal training capacity. In turn, this reduced the use of external contractors and demonstrated employer investment in their unionized workers.

3.5.2 Increasing Worker Retention and Engagement

The training helped to increase worker retention and engagement by providing opportunities to grow within the company. This, in turn, helped to strengthen the employer's workforce.

Training opportunities helped retain employees by giving them the opportunity to learn new skills. This helped to keep workers engaged in their workplace and more likely to stay with the employer, strengthening their workforce with in demand skills. Some employers stated that they considered training as a crucial part of their retention strategy. They noted that upskilling workers was more cost effective and efficient compared to the time and resources for onboarding new workers and the additional oversight needed until they are confident in their role. One employer indicated that lack of opportunities for upskilling or retraining was previously cited as a reason for leaving during exit interviews.

"Retention is costly, and losing experienced employees can set us back by requiring us to hire and train new staff." (Industrial manufacturing employer)

Workers reported being more engaged in their roles as a result of the training. One worker noted that the training helped them to increase the functionality of their team, which resulted in increased engagement and collaboration among team members. Another worker commented that they engaged in group problem solving scenarios for both experienced and new workers. This training gave the worker more confidence to suggest solutions to solve operational issues in the workplace.



3.5.3 Complying with Safety Standards and Industry Regulations

The training helped ensure a safe work environment and compliance with industry regulations. The training allowed workers to earn or maintain their safety-related and other industry certifications which helped to avoid the potential for work stoppages and fines due to lapsed certifications.

Although safety and emergency preparedness was noted by only six of 29 employers as reasons for the training (see Figure 3.7), many (20 of 29 employers) enrolled their workers in safety or regulation-related training (See Figure 3.2). In the end, participating employers stated that safety and regulation-related training was one of the most important impacts as such training helped ensure a safer work environment and comply with industry regulations.

Employers noted that the nature of work in manufacturing requires employees to be certified to operate equipment safely. Companies that are compliant with industry standards avoid work stoppages and fines. In many instances, employees are required to take refresher courses to maintain their certification. Instead of letting certification lapse, employers took advantage of the training provided through CSTEC to allow more workers to earn or maintain the safety-related and other industry certifications.

Safety-related training included forklift and scissor lift training, crane operation, working at heights, fall protection, first aid (including CPR and defibrillation), lockout-tagout, spills response, hoisting and lifting, and occupational safety training. Regulation related training included training on quality management systems for the automotive industry, regulated industry certifications¹⁸, and joint health and safety committee training.

"Certifications ensure we were in compliance with any industry regulations; having access to this training is huge." (Industrial manufacturing employer)

"We place a strong emphasis on legislative training and refresher courses to enhance worker skills and ensure their continued relevance in supporting the company's progress." (Industrial manufacturing employer)

3.6 Supporting Equity Deserving Groups

To what extent has the project and training provided supported industrial tradespeople who are members of equity deserving groups? (Evaluation question 3)



Responds to FSC question 5, sub-question 1: How can the quality of career services for underrepresented and unemployed populations be improved?

The program was limited to accepting workers identified by employers for training and therefore could not directly target equity deserving groups. The program did however support many workers who were members of disadvantaged groups, in particular workers with lower levels of formal education.

CSTEC staff stated that the program accepted workers that were selected by employers to receive training. As such, the program did not specifically target equity deserving groups; however, individuals from such groups did participate in the training funded by the program. Yet still, CSTEC staff noted that the Layoff Aversion Program was designed to support at least one disadvantaged group: those with lower levels of education. For example, the questions on the worker post-training survey was designed for a grade eight reading level. As noted in Section 3.2.2, 39% of participating workers had only high school level education or less, a group often overlooked when it comes to workplace training.

Many of the training programs selected by employers, especially those related to safety, did not require advanced education as a prerequisite for taking the course. First Aid, Fall Protection, Working at Heights or Lockout Tagout training were designed to be taught to those with lower levels of literacy.

To what extent do employers include EDI&R practices as part of their workforce planning and recruitment strategies? (evaluation question 3 sub-question)

Given that the program is dependent on the workers sent its way, its level of diversity is dependent on the selection criteria of the individuals recommending employees for training. For unionized workforces, selection of employees to be trained is also influenced by their seniority. As such, the evaluation asked participating employers about their EDI&R strategies. All interviewed employers indicated that EDI&R practices are included in their workforce planning and recruitment strategies. However, they stressed that their main recruitment criteria was to hire individuals with the requisite skills for the position being offered regardless of whether an individual belonged to an underrepresented group. These requisite skills include having an adequate English proficiency to work safely and understand instructions. The evaluation found no evidence on the extent language appropriate for workers with lower levels of education was used in the workplace. However, employers offered several examples of initiatives and opportunities specifically targeted for equity deserving workers, including:

- Internal training programs to coach young employees and immigrants new to Canada, who may lack practical work experience;
- A six-month contract-based cross-training program for immigrants with engineering degrees who lack Canadian manufacturing experience;
- Hiring mature students (aged 40+) who lacked manufacturing experience;
- Providing student internships to women (six of eight co-op placements were offered to women);



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- Securing government finding to hire minority individuals;
- Encouraging equity deserving workers to volunteer for the Joint Health and Safety Committee; and
- One employer indicated that more than 60% of their workforce were immigrants (not all were recent immigrants).



4 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

4.1 Challenges

CSTEC's Layoff Aversion Program faced a few challenges, mostly related to the short window for program completion.

Little time to fully assess employers' skills needs and develop the most effective training solutions.

CSTEC staff and training partners noted that the short duration of the program meant that there was little time to assess employers' skills needs and to plan for the required training. Although CSTEC staff were confident that the training selected by employers helped address skills gaps, having more time to assess employers' and employees' needs and tailor training could lead to more effective training and more employers participating.

Program's window did not align with some college timetables.

Finding training programs to support apprenticeships was identified as a challenge by CSTEC staff and employers as many college apprenticeship training programs typically have start dates in September or in January. The program timelines were to mid-February to September. While employers were able to secure specific college apprenticeship training for some apprentices, other employers would have been better served by providing their workers access to more formal college programs.

4.2 Success Factors

The program served 29 employers and 576 workers; exceeding some targets. Several factors were identified that helped to ensure the success of CSTEC's Layoff Aversion Program. This included having previous experience implementing a similar program in 2019 and the ability to leverage CSTEC's extensive network. The training was also affordable as the only cost to employers was to pay their employees for their training time.

Previous experience with Layoff Aversion Programs.

CSTEC staff used the lessons learned from a similar program conducted during the COVID pandemic to help them design their Layoff Aversion Program.¹⁹ These lessons led to CSTEC designing simplified data collection questionnaire and forms, developing written agreements with employers to clarify roles and expectations, and incorporating flexibility to allow for program changes to respond to external factors (for example, imposition of tariffs by the American government).

¹⁹ (Prism Economics and Analysis , 2022)

***CSTEC coordinators leveraged relationships established through their network.***

CSTEC coordinators were able to leverage support for the program through the existing relations with employers, colleges, government training consultants and union representatives across five regions of Ontario. These partners helped promote the program, identify suitable employers, and support the delivery of training programs.

Paid training allowed employers to offer training employees might not otherwise receive.

Many employers indicated that the paid training allowed them to offer their employees training they would not otherwise have received. Small employers often lack the resources to offer training to employees. Other employers noted that while they could manage course fees, additional costs make training prohibitive. These additional costs include fees for travel and expenses and labour costs to backfill the worker's position to continue production.

"There is no other program like this one. I have tried looking into other options, and it seems like this is the only program that truly offers something like this." (Industrial manufacturing employer)

4.3 Recommendations

With the evaluation findings in mind, the following is recommended:

Recommendation 1: Continue working with employers to support worker training needs. Equipping workers with needed skills and certifications ensures a safe, efficient workplace. Many small and medium sized employers struggle to provide training to employees due to limited budgets. Programs such as CSTEC Layoff Aversion Program allowed employers the opportunity to provide training that worker would not otherwise receive.

Recommendation 2: Continue working with employers, unions and training providers to develop layoff aversion programs. CSTEC demonstrated that the Layoff Aversion Program and strategies helped to avoid layoffs and increase the resilience of companies during uncertain economic and political times. Helping companies to be more reactive and develop a workforce with desired skills allows them to increase productivity and gives them a competitive edge.

Recommendation 2: Consider incorporating additional EDI&R practices in future such projects. Intermediaries such as CSTEC could encourage employers to seek training for employees that can support EDI procedures and processes. For example, employers indicated that some workers received training to support leadership skills. Such training could also include training to equip individuals to better understand how to handle conflict and develop strategies to resolve issues using an EDI&R lens.

4.4 Implications for Intermediaries such as CSTEC

Continue working with industry, training providers and communities to better understand how to best develop strategies to avoid layoffs and workforce disruptions. CSTEC's ability to leverage support through their network of consortiums was instrumental in the success of their program. Through these networks, CSTEC can promote the benefits of their Layoff Aversion Program and work with their partners and communities to develop strategies to avoid layoffs and ensure industry has the trained workforce to help them respond to the current economic challenges.

Continue to lobby provincial and federal governments to advocate for more support for layoff aversion programs. The Layoff Aversion Program was found to be effective in providing short-term training to upskill workers and avoid or lessen the impact of potential layoffs. It helped employers to strengthen their workforce, increase productivity and supported the career development of industrial tradespeople. The challenges faced by participating employers are not unique to their situation. Industrial employers across the country are wrestling with environmental regulations, tariffs and new technologies that require they have a skilled workforce to meet these challenges and be competitive. CSTEC should continue to lobby government to develop policy that supports proactive solutions to workforce disruptions.

4.5 Implications for FSC and Other Funding Organizations

Funding that supports innovation for retention and aversion strategies can help strengthen industries and avert manufacturing job losses.

CSTEC's Layoff Aversion Program delivered a simple but effective approach to help employers strengthen their workforce, to improve employee retention and to buttress workers against layoffs. Although programs exist to support workers who have been laid off or are looking to enter the workforce, few exist that support employees to gain skills that will expand their competencies and will secure their employment. Funders should look to support more programs that proactively work to strengthen the workforce and help avoid workforce disruptions.

4.6 Implications for Policy

CSTEC's program has several policy implications for government to consider:

- CSTEC's program exceeded its recruitment targets with close to double the expected number of employers registering for the program. This suggests the need for further action to address the challenges industrial manufacturers face in maintaining a skilled workforce and remaining resilient through uncertain economic conditions.
- CSTEC staff suggested that to better support career development for industrial workers, public policy related to industrial labour market issues should consider supporting programs that



proactively address and plan for workforce disruptions, such as layoff aversion programs. This would include more support for training programs that focus on industrial trades and the jobs needed to develop the metals and resources required for a low-carbon economy.

- Evaluation findings also suggest that employers need more support to effectively plan for training that increases workers skills and avoids the cycle of hiring and layoffs as a result of economic cycles. While several programs are in place to support employers looking to upskill their workers, many have strict criteria for eligibility and complicated application processes. Access to funding without complicated conditions would simplify the process of upskilling employees.
- Finally, the program was limited in the number of workers supported to enter apprenticeships as the timing of the program did not align with many college apprenticeship training programs. Industrial manufacturing relies heavily on tradespeople, with many employers supporting apprentices. Consideration should be given to better coordinating funded training opportunities for apprentices in industrial trades to participate in required training at designated colleges.



5 What's Next

CSTEC staff indicated that it is moving forward with other training programs to support workers and employers facing workforce disruptions. For example, CSTEC has partnered with the United Steelworkers Union to launch a Power Action Centre to support workers impacted by recent Algoma Steel layoffs.²⁰ CSTEC also hopes to fully implement its ITSM online tool in 2026 to help industrial workers plan their career pathways and better understand how qualify for apprenticeships and transition to other skilled trades. They are also exploring funding opportunities for similar programs in the mining sector as there is a shortage of miners and current political tariffs will continue to impact all sectors of the economy.

²⁰ Retrieved from: <https://usw.ca/united-steelworkers-cstec-launch-steelworker-power-action-centre-in-sault-ste-marie/>



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Appendix B: Logic Model

Figure B.0.1 CSTEC Layoff Aversion Program Training Logic Model





Appendix C: Evaluation Matrix

The following evaluation matrix details the evaluation questions, sub-questions, data collection methods and sources.

Figure C.1 CSTEC Layoff Aversion Program Evaluation Matrix

Key Learning Questions Including FSC Strategic Questions	Sub-questions	Administrative & Survey Data	Employer, Union, Partner Interviews	Staff, Interviews & Focus Groups	Worker Focus Groups
1) How effective is the Layoff Aversion Program at minimizing the negative impacts being faced by manufacturers? Pathways to Jobs #5: <i>How can the career development ecosystem improve services to Canadians?</i> Sustainable Jobs #15: <i>What skills-related measures are most effective at optimizing the transition of workers from declining to growing sectors or occupations?</i>	a. To what extent does the Layoff Aversion Program have a positive and meaningful impact on the employment outcomes of workers? b. What types of resources are necessary to support the career development of workers?	✓	✓	✓	✓
2) How effective is short-term, targeted, and accredited training for incumbent industrial trade workers in meeting employers' needs for skilled tradespeople? Pathways to Jobs #5 Sustainable Jobs #15	a. To what extent did the ISTM support workers in determining a career route and finding skills training? b. To what extent did the Layoff Aversion Program reduce the time needed to retrain workers?	✓	✓	✓	✓



3) To what extent has the project and training provided support to industrial tradespeople who are members of equity deserving groups? Pathways to Jobs #5	a. How were underrepresented groups supported? b. To what extent do employers include EDI&R practices as part of their workforce planning and recruitment strategies?	✓	✓	✓	✓
4) How effective is the Layoff Aversion Program in promoting dialogue between employers and unions about worker retention and sustaining manufacturing operations at the facility? Sustainable Jobs #12: <i>What models for ensuring collaboration among key local actors are effective at delivering solutions that can be implemented locally/regionally in coordination with actors in the skills ecosystem?</i>	a. What roles and supports were most effective in promoting dialogue and collaboration between employers and unions? b. What were the challenges faced by employers and unions that impacted their collaboration? How were these challenges mitigated?	✓	✓	✓	✓



Figure C.2 Alignment of FSC Strategic Questions with Evaluation questions

FSC's Thematic Priority Questions and sub-questions: Pathway to Jobs	Alignment with Project Specific Evaluation Questions			
	Q1) Meeting need for skilled trades	Q2) Minimizing negative impacts	Q3) Supporting equity groups	Q4) Promoting Union/ Employer Dialogue
5. How can the career development ecosystem improve services to Canadians?				
How can the quality of career services for underrepresented and unemployed populations be improved?			✓	
What types of resources are necessary to enhance career development services and how can these resources be allocated effectively to meet the diverse needs of Canadians?		✓		
How can we demonstrate that such interventions are having a positive and meaningful impact on the employment outcomes of Canadians?		✓		
What role do new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, play in optimizing the delivery of career services?	✓			
FSC's Thematic Priority Questions: Sustainable Jobs	Q1) Meeting need for skilled trades	Q2) Minimizing negative impacts	Q3) Supporting equity groups	Q4) Promoting Union/ Employer Dialogue
12. What models for ensuring collaboration among key local actors are effective at delivering solutions that can be implemented locally/regionally in coordination with actors in the skills ecosystem?				✓
15. What skills-related measures are most effective at optimizing the transition of workers from declining to growing sectors or occupations?				
What is the best way to scale up approaches to reducing the time needed to retrain workers?	✓			
What are the roles of upskilling/reskilling, wraparound supports, career guidance, and LMI in this process and how do key delivery actors have to change to bring about optimal delivery?	✓	✓		✓
What skills development strategies are the most effective in optimizing people's labour market mobility under conditions of uncertainty,	✓	✓		



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unpredictability and/or volatility in the labour market?				
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Appendix D: Data Collection Instruments

This master interview guide has been developed for the following:

- CSTEC staff
- Employers
- Unions
- Partners

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

CSTEC Interview Guide

The **Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition (CSTEC) Layoff Aversion Program (LAP): Retooling Labour Adjustment in the Automotive Industry**, has been funded by The Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates, an external and independent research firm, to conduct an evaluation of funded activities in collaboration with CSTEC.

The purpose of this interview is to collect information for the evaluation including the extent to which:

- CSTEC's Layoff Aversion Program has helped to minimizing the negative impacts being faced by manufacturers, unions and workers.
- Short-term, targeted training meets employers' needs for skilled tradespeople.
- The layoff aversion project and training supported industrial tradespeople.
- The Layoff Aversion Program has promoted dialogue between employers and unions about worker retention and sustaining manufacturing operations.

The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes depending on your answers.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Privacy:	No one other than Malatest researchers will have access to any <u>identifying information</u> from this interview. Your responses to interview questions will be <u>anonymized</u> (that is, reported without your name or any identifying information attached). In some cases, we may use anonymized quotations that exemplify a trend among interviewees' responses; in this case, we will make sure that the quote does not contain any information that could be used to identify you. All identifying data will be destroyed by Malatest when the report provided to FSC is finalized. Your responses will be protected <i>as per</i> Canada's Privacy Act. The information you provide will not be used for any purposes except those described above. Management of the information
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	collected through this study will be compliant with Government of Canada's Policy on Service and Digital . For Malatest's privacy policy, please visit: www.malatest.com/Privacy.htm .
Informed Consent:	Your participation is <u>voluntary</u>, and you may end participation at any time. You can also skip any question that you do not want to answer, or that is not applicable to you. With your permission, we will audio record this interview, for Malatest's notetaking and quality assurance purposes only. This recording will be destroyed once the interview notes have been verified and completed. Do I have your <u>permission to audio record</u> the interview?
Questions:	If you have any questions about this interview or this project, please feel free to contact April Balunda, Senior Research Analyst, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., via email at a.balunda@malatest.com .

A. Background information

Ask all

1. Can you tell me a bit about your organization and how it got involved in the project?
2. Can you tell me about yourself:
 - a. What are your typical roles and responsibilities?

B. Training

3. *[CSTEC staff, partners]* In what ways has the training helped manufacturers meet their needs for a skilled industrial workforce?
 - a. Did the training support more workers to pursue apprenticeships? How so?
 - b. Did the training support more workers to pursue other skilled occupations? How so?
 - c. Did you receive any feedback back from employers as to whether workers were placed in new roles or took on new responsibilities as a result of the training they received?
 - d. *[CSTEC staff]* how effective was the ISTM in supporting workers who were trained?
- [Employers]* In what ways has the training helped your company meet its needs for a skilled industrial workforce?



- a. Did the training support more workers to pursue apprenticeships? How so?
- b. Did the training support more workers to pursue other skilled occupations? How so?
- c. Were retrained workers placed in new roles or take on new responsibilities? If so, how many and what were their new roles/responsibilities and how do they differ from the previous role?
- d. Did any workers earn industry certifications as a result of the training? If so, how many and what type of certifications were earned?

[Unions] In your opinion, did the training programs help your members to meet the skills needs of their employers?

- a. Did the training support more members to pursue apprenticeships? How so?
- b. Did the training support more workers to pursue other skilled occupations? How so?
- c. Were retrained workers placed in new roles or take on new responsibilities? If so, how many and what were their new roles/responsibilities and how do they differ from the previous role?
- d. Did any workers earn industry certifications as a result of the training? If so, how many and what type of certifications were earned?

Ask all

4. What types of resources are necessary to support the career development of workers?
 - a. Were any of these resources accessed for this project and if so, how did such resources support participating workers?
 - b. How were underrepresented groups supported to access and complete the training?
 - c. *[Employers]* In what ways have equity, diversity, inclusion or reconciliation practices been used by your company to help support workforce planning and recruitment strategies for underrepresented groups?
 - d. What could be done to better support workers looking to upskill or retrain?

C. Layoff Aversion Program

Employers

5. From your perspective, was the Layoff Aversion Program used in this project effective at minimizing the negative impacts being faced by your company? If so, how?



- a. Did upgrading workers' skills lead to productivity gains, or to other improvements in efficiency or output?
- b. Did upgrading workers' skills reduce error rates, defect rates, or rework costs?
- c. Did upgrading workers' skills lead to the need to adapt or incorporate new technologies?
- d. Were there any cost savings or other efficiencies as a result of the Layoff Aversion Program?
- e. How did the costs of training compare versus costs related to severance, recruitment, or EI utilization?

Employers, Unions

6. To what extent did the Layoff Aversion Program have a positive and meaningful impact on the employment outcomes of workers?
 - a. Were any workflows changed through upskilling rather than eliminating the role?
 - b. Were job losses averted as a result of the program?

Employers, Unions

7. Did participation in the Layoff Aversion Program used in this project help encourage discussions around worker retention and sustained operations at the facility? If so, how?
 - a. What roles and supports were most effective in promoting dialogue and collaboration?
 - b. What, if any, were the challenges that impacted collaboration?
 - c. How were these challenges mitigated?

Employers, Unions, Partners

8. What, if any, were some of the challenges encountered by you or your team with respect to implementing the Layoff Aversion Program and how were these challenges mitigated?
 - a. Were there any areas that you felt could be improved or done differently?

CSTEC staff

9. From your perspective how effective was the Layoff Aversion Program in helping employers, unions and workers respond to skill gaps, employment outcomes and develop innovative solutions to address labour market challenges?
 - a. What worked well?
 - b. What, if any, were some of the challenges encountered by you or your team?



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- c. How were these challenges mitigated?
- d. Were there any areas that you felt could be improved or done differently?

D. CSTEC Partnerships

Employers, unions, partners

- 10. Would you consider partnering with CSTEC in the future?
 - a. Please explain why or why not?
 - b. What are the benefits of working with a workforce intermediary such as CSTEC in terms of supporting your facility or company?



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E. Wrap up

Ask all

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

Thank you for your time!



CSTEC Coordinator Focus Group Guide

Hello, welcome and thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. My name is <NAME> and I am conducting today's discussion. We are interested in understanding your experiences with CSTEC's *Layoff Aversion Program (LAP)*. Our discussion should take about 90 minutes depending on your responses.

CSTEC's project has been funded by The Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates, the company I work for, which is an external and independent research firm, to conduct an evaluation of funded activities in collaboration with CSTEC.

All of the information that you share will be kept confidential and is protected under the privacy policies of our firm and the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#). To facilitate notetaking, we will be audio-recording our sessions. The focus group notes captured will be anonymized and no individual will be identified in any resulting reports.

Is everybody comfortable with this? Do you have any questions?

My role today is to guide the discussion from topic to topic. We want everyone to have the chance to share their ideas, so please talk one at a time so I can be sure to hear what everyone has to say. There are no right or wrong answers, and all comments are welcome! Only share as much as you are comfortable sharing. I want to provide everyone with the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences.

Does anyone have any comments or concerns before we begin?



A. Introduction

Let's start by doing a quick round of introductions. Please tell us your first name and which region you are responsible for and a bit about your role.

B. Partnerships

1. Can you describe the process for how employers and unions were notified about the Layoff Aversion Program?

Probe: Did you reach out to the employers to let them know about the project or did they contact you:

Was there a process for selecting employers to participate in the program?

Did employers have to meet certain criteria to be eligible for the program?

C. Training

2. What feedback, if any, have you received from employers and unions about how the training workers received helped manufacturers meet their needs for a skilled industrial workforce?

Probe: Did you receive any feedback back from employers as to whether workers were supported to pursue apprenticeships or other skilled occupations?

Did you receive any feedback back from employers as to whether workers were placed in new roles or took on new responsibilities as a result of the training they received?

What could be done to better support workers looking to upskill or retrain?

Were there any other impacts, positive or negative as a result of the training?

D. Layoff Aversion Program

3. What, if any, feedback did you receive from employers and unions with respect to the effectiveness of the Layoff Aversion Program?

Probe: What worked well?

Did the program lead to any innovative solutions to address labour market challenges?

Did the program help to initiate discussion around worker retention?

What, if any, were some of the challenges encountered by you or your team?

How were these challenges mitigated?

Were there any areas that you felt could be improved or done differently?



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E. Wrap up

4. Is there anything else you would like to share to further our understanding of how the project supported the training you received?

Thank you for your time!



CSTEC Worker Focus Group Guide

Hello, welcome and thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. My name is <NAME> and I am conducting today's discussion on behalf of **Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition (CSTEC)**. We are interested in understanding your experiences with the training you received as part of CSTEC's funded project.

CSTEC's project has been funded by The Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates, the company I work for, which is an external and independent research firm, to conduct an evaluation of funded activities in collaboration with CSTEC.

This discussion is one of several being held with workers who participated in training organized by CSTEC. Over the next 90 minutes we will talk about your perspectives and experiences with the training you received and how it supported the work you do.

All of the information that you share will be kept confidential and is protected under the privacy policies of our firm and the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#). To facilitate notetaking, we will be audio-recording our sessions. The focus group notes captured will be anonymized and no individual will be identified in any resulting reports.

Is everybody comfortable with this? Do you have any questions?

My role today is to guide the discussion from topic to topic. We want everyone to have the chance to share their ideas, so please talk one at a time so I can be sure to hear what everyone has to say. There are no right or wrong answers, and all comments are welcome! Only share as much as you are comfortable sharing. I want to provide everyone with the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences.

Does anyone have any comments or concerns before we begin?

A. Background information

Let's start by doing a quick round of introductions. Please tell us your first name, what type of work you do.

B. Training

1. What type of training did you receive as part of this project? (As a reminder, we are looking specifically at training taken as part of this project which occurred between February and September, 2025).

Probe: Did the training help you:



Pursue an apprenticeship?

Pursue other skilled occupations or develop new technical skills related to machinery/equipment?

Earn any industry certifications, such as health and safety, working at heights, etc.?

2. In what ways has the training supported you in your current role?

Probe: Did the training help you to take on a new role or new responsibilities?

Did upgrading your skills help you be more productive?

Did upgrading your skills help you to make fewer errors?

Did upgrading your skills help you work with new technologies?

3. Were there any other impacts, positive or negative as a result of the training?

Probe: Are you considering an apprenticeship or other skilled trades?

Did you face any challenges related to accessing the training or with the training itself? How did you address these challenges?

Did you require or receive any other resources to support your training?

Were you paid your regular wages when taking the training?

4. How were you selected for this training?

Probe: Was this based on seniority or was it because you work on a particular team or have certain responsibilities?

Did you suggest or request this training?

5. Is there anything that could be done to better support your upskilling or training?

Probe: Is there any other training you would like to have?

C. Wrap up

6. Is there anything else you would like to share to further our understanding of how the project supported the training you received?

Thank you for your time!