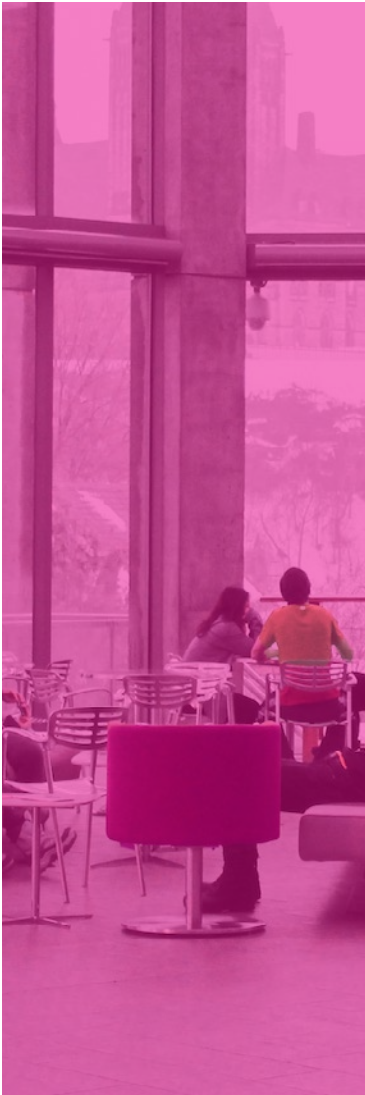


Learning From One Another

Skill Gaps in Labour Markets in Northern Ontario, Yukon,
and Nunavut





The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada.

If you would like to learn more about this report and other skills research from FSC, visit us at fsc-ccf.ca or contact info@fsc-ccf.ca.

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Key findings

- Our analysis of the labour markets and economic forecasts in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut shows that demand for skilled labour in each region will continue to grow into 2045. The demand for occupations and skills is comparable across the regions and includes the demand for skills in healthcare, trades, and technology roles.
- Roadblocks to expanding labour pools in these regions include limited access to local post-secondary education for residents and difficulties attracting skilled workers to rural and remote communities to fill the demand.
- Attracting labour to each region is difficult because of overarching challenges such as inadequate housing, limited access to services, goods, and leisure activities, and complex interjurisdictional professional certification processes.
- As sectors evolve, the demand for digital, leadership, business, and administrative skills, as well as soft skills, is increasing. Employers and industry representatives are recognizing the need to equip workers with these essential workplace competencies.
- Tracking labour market demands in the region can help post-secondary institutions ensure their program offerings reflect that demand.
- Work-integrated learning opportunities in high school can help Northern employers increase the visibility of northern careers and establish connections with local students before they make decisions about their post-secondary education. These opportunities also support the development of technical and soft skills.
- Post-secondary education pipelines that reserve seats for Northern, rural, and remote students in programs for highly trained professions can increase the number of students who return home to Northern regions following their training.
- Collaborative efforts between Indigenous communities, employers, and post-secondary institutions need funding and logistics support to get skills training into communities.
- Community-led initiatives can create a network of support that helps integrate new professionals taking on employment opportunities in Northern communities.
- Simplifying and centralizing processes around professional certification for both Canadian- and international-trained workers are needed to attract workers to these Northern regions.

Closing skill gaps in the North

Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut share similar challenges to workforce development related to their shared Northern, rural, and remote contexts. Current challenges will only grow as sectors increasingly require more digital, leadership, business and administrative, and soft skills.



Major roadblocks to growing the labour pools in these regions include limited access to relevant post-secondary programs and overarching challenges such as lack of housing and services in remote areas that make it difficult to attract labour. New approaches are required to address the looming labour market challenges for Northern regions. Because of their shared Northern, rural, and remote contexts, there is an opportunity for each region to learn from the others on approaches and strategies that can be used to manage the demand for labour and skills gaps across the regions.

This impact paper provides an overview of the occupations and skills in demand across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. We also examined the challenges that these Northern regions face in developing a local workforce as well as approaches to skills development that are currently being implemented. It is part of a multi-year collaborative research project that explores labour markets in Nunavut, Northern Ontario, and Yukon. (See textbox “Learning from one another project.”)

The research in this impact paper builds off the results of our economic forecasts that were completed in our *Learning From One Another: Economic Labour Forecasts for Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut*. The forecasts project employment demand by sector and occupational demand between 2024 and 2045 for each region. We conducted interviews and focus groups with representatives from organizations across key economic sectors in each region. We identified key sectors based on the results of the economic forecasts, which projected the demand for employment by sector in each region and the top 50 occupations with job openings.

Through interviews and focus groups, we gathered regional perspectives on the skills and occupations in demand in these regions along with the challenges and solutions to workforce and skill development. Participants included employers; industry representatives; and regional organizations with a mandate for workforce development, including Indigenous organizations and communities, economic development corporations, chambers of commerce and business support organizations, government departments, and government-funded labour market organizations. We conducted interviews with 40 organizations in Northern Ontario, 22 organizations in Nunavut, and 22 organizations in Yukon. We also conducted two focus groups in Yukon with representatives from organizations to discuss strategies being implemented for workforce and skills development. Representatives from various employers, industry organizations, and organizations with a workforce development mandate took part in these focus groups.

The methodology section includes more information on the sectors and types of organizations that participated in the research. To protect the confidentiality of each organization, the types of organizations are aggregated across the regions. (See Appendix A.)



Learning from one another project

Learning From One Another: A Comparative Analysis of Labour Market Needs and Corresponding Skills in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut is a multi-year collaborative research project led by The Conference Board of Canada. This project, undertaken for Canada's Future Skills Centre, drew in various Indigenous, government, and post-secondary partners from Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. It features a labour market analysis and economic forecast for each region from 2024 to 2045, as well as descriptions of in-demand skills and the key challenges to workforce and skills development in these Northern regions. This is complemented by an analysis and showcase of training and skills development initiatives across the regions.

See our other [Learning From One Another](#) publications for our in-depth analysis.

Growing shortage of skilled Northern workers

The labour markets in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut are employee-driven. This means the demand for labour exceeds the supply of skilled workers, which directly contributes to labour shortages and competition for skilled labour. Based on our analysis of the labour markets in each region, several factors are driving these shortages, including aging populations, disparities in education and labour force participation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, limited access to education and skills training, and out-migration. The results of our labour market analysis for each region can be found on our [webpage](#).



Demand for skilled workers is projected to grow

The Conference Board of Canada forecasts project growth in real GDP for Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut's economies between 2024 and 2045 by 20 per cent, 41 per cent, and 8 per cent, respectively. The demand for employment is also expected to increase in each region. Employment is expected to grow by 5 per cent in Northern Ontario, 10 per cent in Yukon, and 18 per cent in Nunavut between 2024 and 2045. Labour demand will be driven by different sectors in each region:

- In Northern Ontario, the sectors driving employment growth are non-commercial services, which is expected to increase by 22 per cent, manufacturing by 23 per cent, and commercial services by 2 per cent.¹
- In Yukon, the sectors driving employment growth are non-commercial services, which is expected to increase by 14 per cent, commercial services by 11 per cent, and public administration and defence by 9 per cent.
- In Nunavut, the sectors driving employment growth are public administration and defence, which is expected to increase by 30 per cent, non-commercial services by 18 per cent, and wholesale and retail trade by 24 per cent.

The results of our economic forecast for each region can be found on our [webpage](#).

The demand for skills that require post-secondary education will also be high across the regions. According to our forecasts, in Northern Ontario, 55 per cent of jobs in the top 50 occupations in demand require a post-secondary education compared with 63 per cent of jobs in Yukon and 62 per cent of jobs in Nunavut. But, in all three regions, there will still be demand for positions that require some or no formal education, especially in sales and service occupations. (A list of in-demand occupations for each region can be found on our [webpage](#).)

¹ In our economic forecasts, commercial services include the following sectors: professional, scientific, and technical services; business, building, and other support services; information and cultural services; arts, entertainment, and recreation; and accommodation and food services. Non-commercial services include healthcare, social assistance, hospitals, and educational services.

Occupations and skills most in demand by sector

Based on the findings of our forecasts and interviews, the demand for occupations and skills is comparable across sectors in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. Major barriers to workforce development in each sector also align across the regions.

Healthcare

Healthcare systems in the North experience challenges arising from the remoteness of communities, which amplifies and compounds the pressures that shape healthcare services in the rest of Canada.

According to our forecasts for Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, the demand for labour in the health sector over the next 20 years will be driven by the demand for occupations in nursing. This includes registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses; nurse aides, orderlies, and patient service associates; and licensed practical nurses. In fact, these three occupations make up 11 per cent of the top 50 jobs in Northern Ontario, 6 per cent in Yukon, and 7 per cent in Nunavut. And registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses fall in the top 10 occupations in demand in each region.

Building a local workforce in nursing

The main barriers to labour force development for nurses are access to education, challenges around attracting labour, and the expanded skill set required to practise in Northern, rural, and remote regions.

We heard in our interviews and focus groups that expanded regional post-secondary training programs would support the development of local nursing workforces. Across most sectors, interviewees were concerned that limited access to post-secondary education in these regions contributes to out-migration among young adults and a loss of skills. Many youth who relocate for their post-secondary education do not return to these jurisdictions after they complete their schooling. While Nunavut and Northern Ontario have post-secondary institutions that offer training for registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and personal support

workers, the training capacity for these programs is limited compared to Southern institutions. And in Yukon, there is no registered nursing program. Some interviewees suggested that a bridging program for registered nurses in Yukon would help secure more nurses from within the territory. Bridging programs for registered nurses do exist in Canada and help existing practical nurses update their skills to meet registered nursing licence requirements.

Northern jurisdictions that have limited or no access to relevant post-secondary programs face higher recruitment challenges since the resident population cannot be trained locally. Often, nursing talent must be recruited from outside the region. However, there are major barriers to attracting nurses to these regions, including limited affordable housing, the expanded skill set required to practise in these regions, and interjurisdictional licensing.² There are also challenges to living and working in rural and remote communities, including isolation and access to goods and services, infrastructure, and extracurricular activities.

Employers and industry representatives in nursing told us that nurses working in Northern, rural, and remote areas are operating with less support from doctors and allied health professionals. Due to their limited access to health support networks, community health nurses working in Northern regions are required to have advanced skills in emergency and critical care treatment. Other skills mentioned as being critical in these regions include pediatrics, obstetrics, and mental health. In Northern Ontario, skills in wound care are also in demand, as the rates of lower limb amputations are higher in Northern Ontario compared to Southern Canada and even higher among populations living in Indigenous and remote communities.³

Regulations around interjurisdictional professional certification is also a challenge to attracting nurses to these regions.⁴ For nurses trained in Canada, the length of time to process applications to practise in

² Participant interviews.

³ Sibbald and others, "Lower Extremity Amputations;" and Luther and others, "A Northwestern Ontario Perspective."

⁴ Participant interviews.

these jurisdictions is a barrier and for internationally trained nurses, the process is not only lengthy but also difficult to navigate. For example, the nursing regulatory bodies in Nunavut and Yukon are not able to recognize international educational credentials.⁵ Instead, internationally trained nurses must first obtain a licence in another Canadian province before applying for a licence in these territories.

Additional skills in demand in the health sector

The aging populations across the three regions will also increase the demand for skills in geriatrics and home care supports. The pandemic has also accelerated the pre-existing mental health crisis in Canada.⁶ We heard from our interviewees that rising rates in addictions and overdoses are driving the demand for mental health and addictions specialists across the three regions. The demand for these skills is also prominent for Indigenous peoples and communities located in these regions who are disproportionately impacted by the mental health crisis in Canada.

Interviewees also highlighted the demand for digital skills and skills in research, technology, and program evaluation to support healthcare innovation, which will drive better access to services for Northern communities. For example, virtual care and remote patient monitoring require the use of information technology by frontline staff. These changes are also creating the demand for skills in data confidentiality, privacy, and cyber security.

With large Indigenous populations across these three regions, professionals in the healthcare system need skills in cultural competency to ensure that the delivery of care is culturally relevant and safe in these regions.⁷

Education

According to our forecasts, elementary and kindergarten teachers, secondary school teachers, elementary and secondary school teacher assistants, and early childhood educators and assistants are projected to be among the top 50 occupations in demand across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut over the next 20 years. In fact, of the top 50 jobs projected to be in demand in Northern Ontario between 2024 and 2045, primary and secondary educational professionals will make up 10 per cent, while in Yukon and Nunavut, they will make up 11 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively.

Building a local workforce

The main challenges to developing a workforce of educational professionals across these Northern regions revolve around difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers.

In each region, there are post-secondary institutions that offer training in education, but the capacity for these programs is limited compared to Southern institutions. We learned through our interviews that many schools in remote and rural communities in these regions still have difficulty attracting educational professionals to fill the demand. And similar to the health sector, the process and regulations around obtaining a teaching certificate for the jurisdiction, limited affordable housing, and the challenges to living and working in rural and remote communities all work against attracting teachers.⁸

To fill the gap in educational professionals, schools are relying on early childhood educators and assistants to fill teacher positions as well as recruiting unqualified individuals from within the community to teach in schools.⁹ This approach places added pressure on the school administration and support staff to ensure the delivery of quality education.

5 CBC News, "Provincial efforts to fast-track nurse licensing"; and College and Association of Nurses of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, "Internationally Educated Nurses."

6 Globe and Mail, The, "The pandemic's 'transformational' impacts."

7 Participant interviews.

8 Participant interviews.

9 CBC News, "Algoma District School Board recruiting unqualified teachers"; George, "School's back in Nunavut"; Hatherly, "Yukon schools without teachers in classrooms"; and participant interviews.

Burnout was also mentioned to us by employers and industry representatives as a barrier to retaining educational professionals. Research shows that behavioural issues in schools are on the rise across the country, and employers indicated that there is demand for more mental health professionals within Northern schools to support educators.¹⁰

Additional skills in demand

Changing classroom environments are creating shifts in demand. As technology advances, skills in using information technology in class to deliver education and navigating artificial intelligence will be in demand among educators.¹¹ We also heard from our interviews that behavioural management training, mental health awareness, and skills for supporting neurodiversity in the classroom are in demand among educational professionals across these Northern regions.

In Nunavut, amendments to the *Education Act* set the deadline of 2039 to fulfill the commitment to deliver bilingual education in Inuktitut and English in all schools in the territory for all grade levels.¹² As schools in Nunavut work to develop greater capacity for instruction in Inuktitut, there will be a demand for bilingual Inuktitut-speaking teachers. Nunavut Arctic College has expanded its offerings of the Nunavut Teacher Education Program in several communities across the territory in an effort to increase the number of Inuktitut-speaking teachers available to enter Nunavut's bilingual education system.¹³

Construction and mining sector

Similar to Canada, trades are in demand across all three regions. Given the investments in housing and infrastructure across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, and considerable mining activity, the demand for skilled trades will continue to grow.

According to our forecasts for 2024 to 2045, several occupations in trades, transport, and equipment operators are among the top 50 occupations in demand across each region. In fact, trades, transport, and equipment operator occupations make up 22 per cent of the top 50 jobs projected to be in demand in Northern Ontario, 25 per cent in Yukon, and 11 per cent in Nunavut. These include transport truck drivers; carpenters; construction millwrights and industrial mechanics; heavy equipment operators; construction trades helpers and labourers; and automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics, and mechanical repairers.



¹⁰ Ferlick, "Responding to Behavioral Challenges in the Classroom."

¹¹ Participant interviews.

¹² Canadian Press, The, "'Cultural genocide:' Nunavut passes changes."

¹³ Government of Nunavut, "Re-focused Nunavut Teacher Education Program."

Building a local workforce

One of the main drivers of the shortage is the aging workforce in the trades sector in Canada.¹⁴ We heard that in order to meet demand, employers and certified tradespeople will need to increase training opportunities for apprentices. However, there can be challenges to accessing on-the-job training opportunities in the skilled trades in the North.

Opportunities for apprenticeship or on-the-job training, particularly in rural and remote communities, are limited across these regions. There are a limited number of licensed tradespeople who can take on an apprentice living and working in these regions. Instead, the construction and mining sectors in these northern regions rely on fly-in fly-out licensed tradespeople to complete projects.¹⁵ And fly-in fly-out licensed tradespeople are sometimes only in a community for a short time to complete a project. This leaves residents with inconsistent opportunities to earn the necessary hours to complete an apprenticeship or on-the-job training. Once a project is complete the fly-in fly-out licensed tradesperson leaves the community and there are a limited number of local licensed tradespeople needed to complete the training. However, we learned that there are more opportunities for apprenticeships for Northern and Indigenous people in the mining sector where projects are long-term.

According to the employers and industry representatives we spoke with, another major barrier to growing a workforce in the trades across the three regions is the perception that a career in trades is viewed as a less prestigious path than a university education. According to existing research on this issue across Canada, educators and parents do not encourage a career in the trades, and the contributions of tradespeople to the economy is not always recognized.¹⁶ Many organizations are now working to change this perception. For example, in

Ontario, Skilled Trades Ontario launched a media campaign in 2023 to raise awareness of skilled trades, and the federal government has followed with its own media and advertising initiative.¹⁷ However, we heard across the three regions that more efforts are needed to encourage youth to pursue a career in the trades.

Similar efforts are being made to increase diversity and inclusion in trades, which is also a priority across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. Research in Canada suggests that females and immigrants are less likely to consider a career in the trades.¹⁸ Among the interviewees we spoke with in the trades sector, knocking down barriers and promoting the trades for women, Indigenous people, and youth is a priority for industry, employers, governments and post-secondary institutions across these regions. Our report *Learning From One Another: Building a Stronger Skills Development Landscape in Nunavut, Northern Ontario, and Yukon* showcases training and skills development initiatives that are being implemented to increase inclusion in the skilled trades across the three regions.

Additional skills and occupations

In each region, the employers and industry representatives we spoke with in the mining and construction sector said that health and safety skills are in demand in their organizations. And in the construction sector, there is a demand for digital skills as more companies move to integrate information technology on-site.¹⁹

The field of mining is also becoming more technologically advanced, and the use of automation is driving the demand for skills in robotics.²⁰ At the same time, advancements in automation may reduce the number of jobs in occupations where tasks can be performed by robots. Conference Board research has

¹⁴ Jin and others, "Factors associated with the completion of apprenticeship training."

¹⁵ Thompspon, *The Borders of Labour*.

¹⁶ Deussing, *Attitudes and perceptions of Canadian youth towards careers in the trades*.

¹⁷ HPAC Magazine, "Province of Ontario Launches Skilled Trades ad campaign"; Skilled Trades Ontario, "STO launches 'Sounds like Opportunity' campaign"; and Employment and Social Development Canada, "Government of Canada promotes in-demand skilled trades."

¹⁸ Deussing, *Attitudes and perceptions of Canadian youth towards careers in the trades*.

¹⁹ Participant interviews.

²⁰ Participant interviews.

shown that smaller regions in Canada with economies that depend on only a few sectors are most susceptible to job losses.²¹ Investments in upskilling and retraining will be necessary to transition workers whose skill sets are vulnerable to being replaced by automation.

Several employers we spoke to also raised concerns that while the transition to environmental sustainability was under way in the North, there was not enough skills training available to support the implementation and adaptation of new energy technologies for Northern contexts and climates. For example, as companies continue their efforts to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels, there will be a demand for skills in the operations, maintenance, and repair of electric vehicles.²²

Public service

According to our labour market analyses, the public service is a top employer in Nunavut and Yukon, and the results of our forecasts show that employment in the public service is projected to increase by 3 per cent in Northern Ontario, 9 per cent in Yukon, and 30 per cent in Nunavut between 2024 and 2045.

Several occupations in relevant business, finance, and administration fields are projected to be among the top 50 occupations in demand across the regions. This includes administrative officers, administrative assistants, general office support workers, accounting and related clerks, and receptionists. The territorial governments we spoke with also discussed the need for skills in developing policy and in writing. And at the level of Indigenous and municipal governments, there is a demand for municipal planners, lands administrators, economic development officers, and people with financial and administration skills.²³ The forecasts for each region also project that social and community service workers are in the top five jobs in demand across the regions.

Building a workforce

Key challenges to developing a skilled workforce in the public service across the regions include competition between levels of governments and building an inclusive workforce that is representative of the populations living in these regions.

Across the regions, interviewees from different levels of government said that there is competition for skilled employees. Municipal governments compete with federal and territorial governments for skilled labour and are not able to offer the same incentives to employees. Higher wages, pensions, hybrid work arrangements, and housing are all incentives that the federal and territorial governments are able to provide to their employees.²⁴ And in Nunavut, despite the attractiveness of many public service jobs, demand remains unfulfilled. In 2023, two out of five jobs in the territorial government remained unfilled.²⁵

Our labour market analyses in Yukon and Nunavut show that Indigenous people are under-represented in the public service. However, the gap is widest in professional and management occupations.²⁶ Centralized and coordinated programs for recruitment, retention, and career progression are needed to support skills development for Indigenous people in the public service, according to our interviewees in the federal, provincial and territorial governments. While federal, provincial, and territorial governments in each region are implementing initiatives to increase Indigenous representation within the public service, there is also competition with Indigenous governments to attract Indigenous employees with specialized skills.²⁷

21 Sonmez, *Preparing Canada's Economies for Automation*.

22 Participant interviews.

23 Participant interviews.

24 Participant interviews.

25 Haws, "2 in 5 Jobs at the Government of Nunavut are unfilled."

26 Bell, "Nunavut government aims for 58 per cent Inuit employment"; and Government of Yukon, *Final Agreement: Representative Public Service Plan*.

27 Participant interviews.

Additional skills

Digital skills are also in demand within the public service. While there is a demand for basic computer skills and knowledge of project management software, information technology professionals are also needed to maintain and upgrade systems.²⁸ And similar to the health and education sectors, there is also a need for training on data confidentiality, privacy, and cyber security.

In January 2024, nearly 25 years after Nunavut was established as a Canadian territory, the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement was signed. This agreement transfers responsibility for land use and natural resource management in Nunavut from the federal to the territorial government.²⁹ Many of the responsibilities for land and resource management will require skills that are new to the government. The Government of Nunavut estimates that over 40 per cent of new occupations will require a post-secondary science education or a working knowledge of scientific principles.³⁰ The government also anticipates challenges in filling these positions due to the limited number of Inuit with science post-secondary degrees and the limited availability of post-secondary training in science in Nunavut.

Tourism and accommodations

Tourism plays an important role in the economies of Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut.³¹ According to our forecasts, over the next 20 years in these three regions, occupations in sales and services are projected to make up 30 per cent of the top 50 occupations in demand in Northern Ontario, 21 per cent in Yukon, and 23 per cent in Nunavut. These occupations include retail salespersons and visual merchandisers; food counter attendants, kitchen helpers, and related support occupations; cooks; cashiers, light duty cleaners; janitors, caretakers, and heavy-duty cleaners; and other customer and information services representatives.

While these occupations are not exclusive to the tourism sector, each occupation plays a role in that sector.



Building a workforce

Building a skilled regional workforce in tourism was a major priority for the representatives from the tourism sector we spoke to in each region. In Northern Ontario and Yukon, many operators are relying on international students, new Canadians, and non-permanent residents to fill the demand for labour.³² At the same time, existing businesses have been unable to expand their businesses due to a shortage of skilled labour.

Tourism has traditionally been viewed as a non-sustainable career and instead as a short-term employment opportunity and entryway into the labour market. In Canada, almost 30 per cent of jobs in tourism are filled by youth, which is a good fit due to the part-time and seasonal nature of these types of jobs.³³ However, the interviewees we spoke with across the regions discussed the need to change this perception of tourism as a non-viable career and at the same time diversify their workforce.

²⁸ Participant interviews.

²⁹ Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Nunavut devolution."

³⁰ Government of Canada and others, *Transitional Human Resources Development Strategy for Devolution*.

³¹ Fiser and others, *Canada's Indigenous Tourism Sector*.

³² Participant interviews.

³³ Tourism HR Canada, *Youth Remain a Vital Part*.

Access to training was identified as a common barrier to employment especially in rural and remote communities. While some regions have post-secondary programs, these programs often focus on skills that are required in corporate operations and the training required to work front-line positions for local workers is often less accessible.³⁴ We heard there is a demand for first aid training, outdoor adventure training, Smart Serve, and safe food handling training, to name a few.

Similar to other industries, housing was also identified as a major challenge to attracting employees from outside the region to take on job opportunities in the tourism sector in the three regions.

Additional skills in demand

Business and financial skills training opportunities are needed to help existing operators grow their businesses, which support regional growth in the tourism sector.³⁵ This includes an emphasis on digital skills in areas such as website development, marketing, and social media to help the businesses connect to new markets. But we also heard that fostering partnerships and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators in these regions is important to the growth of regional tourism.

Skills training along the lines of building trust and establishing relationships between operators is required, as well as training in cultural integrity and cultural sensitivity for non-Indigenous operators and workers looking to sell or deliver Indigenous products and services.

Arts

While occupations in the arts sector are not among the top jobs in demand in the three regions, the art industry plays an important role in the economic development of Northern, rural, and remote communities.³⁶ Interviewees across sectors said that communities can leverage an active arts and culture sector to support local economic development. The sector plays a role in attracting and retaining skilled labour and businesses to communities, and also supports tourism.

Supporting the development of artists

Access to training and funding are barriers to growing the arts sector and supporting employment in the arts. Through our interviews, we learned that there is not only a need for training to support the development of artistic skills, but also the development of business skills for artists, such as grant writing and how to access funding, project management, marketing, and accounting. While training is available at some post-secondary institutions in the regions, the majority of skills development in the arts sector is occurring through informal mentorships and by art service organizations.³⁷ Funding for arts organizations is often short-term, making it difficult for these organizations to staff positions and offer consistent programming.³⁸ Investing in infrastructure in the arts sector across these regions was also mentioned as a way to support informal skill development among artists. These spaces not only provide a place for artists to work and showcase their art but also promote mentorship between artists.

³⁴ Participant interviews.

³⁵ Participant interviews.

³⁶ Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "Policy Statement: Social-Economic Development"; and Ontario Arts Council, *What is the return on Ontario's investment in the arts?*

³⁷ Participant interviews.

³⁸ Participant interviews.

In-demand skills that cut across sectors

We also found out through our interviews that there are skills in demand that are common across sectors in these three regions. These skills include digital skills, management and leadership skills, and social and emotional skills (known as soft skills).

Management and leadership skills

In almost every sector across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, employers we spoke with identified the development of management and leadership skills as a priority. According to our forecasts over the next 20 years, occupations that require management skills make up 9 per cent of the top 50 jobs in Northern Ontario, 8 per cent in Yukon, and 10 per cent in Nunavut.

Building management and leaders

Employers across these regions are having to grow their own leaders, and many interviewees told us that there is competition between the private and public sectors for people with management and leadership skills.³⁹ There is also limited access to continuing education for management skills outside of post-secondary institutions.



Indigenous peoples are under-represented in management and leadership positions across most sectors in the three regions.⁴⁰ Access to education was identified as a major barrier for Indigenous advancement to management positions, but language used at work—especially English or French—was also identified as a barrier for Indigenous workers.

From our interviews, we also discovered that managers are increasingly expected to have skills in managing employee's mental health and well-being. This is especially crucial for smaller organizations that do not have human resources departments, and access to this type of management training is more limited in the North. Moreover, as organizations in these regions begin to diversify their workforce, inclusive management skills will be in demand.

Soft skill

Across the sectors in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, there is a demand for social and emotional skills.⁴¹ In fact, the employers we spoke to in the tourism, accommodation, and retail sectors told us that they hire for personality and soft skills and train for technical skills. The most common skills in demand that employers mentioned included work ethic and dependability, problem-solving and initiative, communication, teamwork, and cultural competence. Conflict resolution and de-escalation were also identified as in demand in the service sectors—especially in the public service, retail, tourism, and health sectors.

³⁹ Participant interviews.

⁴⁰ Participant interviews.

⁴¹ Participant interviews.

Skills in cultural competency are in demand, particularly for employees who came from outside the regions.⁴² Cultural competency is needed to not only promote cultural safety in the workplace but also to provide culturally safe services for Indigenous populations living in the regions. While our interviewees told us that some large employers offered this training, access to training is not always mandatory or accessible for smaller employers. Yukon University, in partnership with the territory's First Nations, created an online course on the history and culture of Yukon First Nations that is accessible to businesses and non-governmental organizations.⁴³ The course is mandatory to receive a licence to work in some professions in the territory.⁴⁴

Building soft skills

The interviewees we spoke with told us that Northern education systems are not doing enough to prepare students with the soft skills needed for employment. Research shows that work-integrated learning opportunities such as co-ops and internships are crucial for developing social and emotional skills.⁴⁵ However, not everyone has access to these opportunities; this creates inequities for some workers, especially those in Northern regions where post-secondary education and employment opportunities can be more limited.

Managing labour demands and skills gaps

Our analysis of the skills and occupations in demand by sector in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut revealed that the sector-specific skills that are in demand are similar across the regions. The challenges to skills and workforce development are also similar. Given the similarities, there is an opportunity for each region and sector to learn from the approaches and strategies that are being put in place to manage the demand for labour, fill the skills gaps, and support training opportunities for workers in these Northern regions.

Across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, competition between sectors, access to post-secondary education, and barriers to attracting skilled workers to rural and remote regions were all identified as challenges to workforce development in occupations that are in demand.

Strategies to attract and retain workers in a competitive labour market

There is competition for skills and labour between sectors in these Northern regions. In particular, the public service was identified as a major competitor for private enterprises given the higher wages and benefits.⁴⁶ In the current labour market in these regions where demand exceeds supply, employers need to develop more effective strategies for attracting and retaining local workers. Suggested strategies include increasing the visibility of careers for youth and developing workplace policies and cultures that make employment more attractive.

42 Participant interviews.

43 CBC News, "Yukon College, First Nations develop online course."

44 Yukon Medical Council, "Get a medical licence."

45 Giammarco and others, *The Future Is Social and Emotional*.

46 Participant interviews.

Engaging youth in high school can expose them to Northern career paths

The employers and industry representatives in several sectors we spoke with mentioned participating in career fairs at Northern post-secondary institutions to showcase the different occupations and career paths in their industries. However, across all the sectors, employers and industry representatives said they would like more opportunities to partner with the high school educational system to support career development that moves beyond a focus on post-secondary students. These collaborations and events provide employers with the opportunity to reach a broader audience of youth before they start making decisions about their post-secondary education and career path. As an example of outreach to high school students, several mining industry organizations in the North have developed career booklets to showcase career opportunities in the mining industry. Industry representatives reported working with governments and the educational system to get that information to high school students.

Introducing more opportunities and promoting work-integrated learning opportunities like co-ops and work opportunities as part of high school curricula can also provide youth with insights into career paths in a given field, while at the same time developing technical and soft skills.⁴⁷ Programs like the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program provide work experience in a trade that is credited toward a high school diploma.⁴⁸ However, according to our interviews, financial and logistical support is needed so that more employers can participate in these learning opportunities and expand the availability of these opportunities in these regions.

Policies that emphasize work–life balance can support recruitment and retention

Workplace culture is also becoming increasingly important to support the recruitment and retention of employees, especially among the younger generation of workers who place greater emphasis on work–life balance.⁴⁹ Flexible work arrangements and wellness support programs were identified as valuable tools for recruitment.⁵⁰ For example, one company in our study region offers employees access to virtual healthcare, which is a perk in the North where healthcare is limited.

Innovative approaches to attracting and retaining labour are also being used to reduce the number of local residents moving out of communities for employment opportunities. According to our interviews, in some communities, businesses with part-time and seasonal positions are working together to share labour and skills. Some immigration programs are also seeking to make it easier for employers to share skills among new Canadians. For example, the Yukon Community Program grants work permits for immigrants who have offers to work in up to three part-time jobs within the same or different businesses in one community.⁵¹

While improving recruitment and retention of employees is important to workforce development, improving regional access to post-secondary training for in demand occupations can help residents who are interested in developing these skills to remain living and working in these regions.

47 Giammarco and others, *The Future Is Social and Emotional*.

48 Ontario Workinfo Net, "Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program."

49 Rodriguez- Sanchez and others, "Investing Time and Resources for Work–Life Balance."

50 Participant Interviews.

51 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Yukon Community Pilot"; and Government of Yukon, "Apply to hire a foreign worker through the Yukon Community Program."

Strategies to increase access to local post-secondary educational training

According to our forecasts for Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, the majority of the top 50 occupations in demand across the three regions will require some form of post-secondary education. However, in these regions post-secondary programs for many of the in-demand occupations are limited or simply not available.

The limited access to post-secondary education contributes to out-migration among young adults and the loss of skills from these regions. According to our interviews and existing research, many youths do not return to these Northern, rural, and remote regions after they complete their post-secondary education. Instead, they settle in urban areas, often in Southern Canada.⁵²

More funding and strategic planning could ensure that the post-secondary education offered in the regions reflects the needs of the labour market.⁵³ This includes coordinating efforts to track labour market demands in the regions and support innovative approaches to delivering post-secondary education to rural and remote communities. We also heard that policies around incentivizing youth to return home following their education would be beneficial.



⁵² Dupuy and others, *Rural Youth*.

⁵³ Participant interviews.

⁵⁴ Participant interviews.

⁵⁵ Participant interviews.

⁵⁶ NVision Insight Group Inc, "Kivalliq Labour Market Needs Foundational Assessment."

⁵⁷ Workforce Planning Ontario, "Champions of Ontario's Local Labour Market Solutions."

⁵⁸ Participant interviews.

Tracking labour market demands can inform post-secondary program offering

In Northern Ontario and Yukon, post-secondary institutions are required to balance program offerings that reflect local labour market needs with courses that may be less locally relevant, but attract international and domestic students from outside the regions.⁵⁴ Nunavut Arctic College on the other hand only accepts students from Nunavut. At the same time, the cost of expanding program offerings is also greater in these Northern regions.⁵⁵ For example, the higher cost of paying instructors, limited housing for teachers and students, and limited classroom space have all been identified by Northern institutions as barriers to expanding programming.⁵⁶ Provincial and territorial governments need to offer sustainable funding to ensure that post-secondary institutions can offer the programs needed in local labour markets.

Northern Ontario benefits from a coordinated regional approach to the collection of labour market data that post-secondary institutions can use to align their program offerings with labour market demands. The Province of Ontario funds a system of workforce planning boards that serve communities and regions by identifying and coordinating community-level responses to local labour market issues and demands.⁵⁷ This includes collecting labour force data and forecasting occupations in demand across sectors at the regional level. While some industry representatives and organizations in the other regions told us that they also collect labour market data specific to their sectors, a more coordinated approach is necessary because some occupations and skills are in demand across multiple industries. Data collection on the demographics and socio-economic status of regional subpopulations can also help anticipate and prepare for the skills and specialties needed in the future.⁵⁸ For example, tracking the age of the population can help determine the skills needed in geriatrics and home care support in the health sector.

Innovation and partnerships in education can get training into community

Innovation in the delivery of education was identified as essential to support training and skills development in the North.⁵⁹ This can include fast-tracking and compressing courses and building programs to develop the skills that communities and employers need without sacrificing quality. One way that post-secondary institutions and employment skills and training service providers across the country have responded to this need is by offering micro-credentialing programs and continuing education to help learners develop the competencies and skills that employers need.⁶⁰ These programs are developed through consultation with industry and employers. In our interviews, we heard that expanding offerings while bridging micro-credentialing programs with businesses in these regions can support work-integrated learning opportunities.

Indigenous populations in these rural and remote regions are disproportionately impacted by the limited access to post-secondary education. A major barrier to post-secondary education for many Indigenous people is having to leave their community and culture for school, especially when connectivity for online learning is a challenge.⁶¹ In addition, the lack of capacity by communities to organize and administer programs, smaller student populations, and escalating costs due to remoteness were all identified in our interviews as challenges in the delivery of skills training programs in Indigenous communities. And we learned that delivering training in person in a community is often superior to online learning where learners receive fewer supports and connectivity is an issue.

Despite the challenges, we heard numerous examples of Indigenous communities that have partnered with industry, employers, and post-secondary institutions to develop innovative ways to deliver training programs and leverage major projects and other regional employment opportunities to secure

funding for training. For example, Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute's Level Up trades program in Northern Ontario uses mobile trades training labs built using modular trailers to bring trades training into a community.⁶² This type of training is undertaken in partnership with communities and employers in the region to ensure that trades training reflects community needs and labour market demand. Please see our report *Learning From One Another: Building a Stronger Skills Development Landscape in Nunavut, Northern Ontario, and Yukon* for a case study on this training program.

"Understanding the Early Years" is an early childhood educator course being offered through a partnership between the Yukon government and Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, which advocates for and supports the delivery of education to First Nations in the territory.⁶³ This program is delivered in rural communities and offers a Level 1 certification to practise as an early childhood educator in the territory. In Nunavut, Sakku Investments Corporation, a development corporation representing communities across the Kivalliq region, is building a modular home factory in Arviat that will focus not only on building houses but on training Inuit in construction trades.⁶⁴ This initiative takes advantage of recent investments in housing in the territory to support the development of a construction workforce within the territory. And Sakku Investments is partnering with Nunavut Arctic College and the government to create a training program that meets the territory's apprenticeship requirements.

These examples highlight the benefit of supporting partnerships and collaborative efforts to pool resources to get skills training in a community, as well as building programs that specifically address community and employer needs without sacrificing quality.

59 Participant interviews.

60 Colleges and Institutes Canada, "Covid-19 and beyond."

61 Monkman, "Panel: The challenges faced by Indigenous students."

62 CBC News, "Partnership between Northern College, Keepers of the Circle"; and Jung, "Oshki Wenjack Education Centre hopes to stop training."

63 Government of Yukon and others, "Understanding the Early Years Course."

64 Pelletier, "Construction begins on Arviat modular home factory"; and Procter, "Nunavut modular home factory."

Northern and rural education pipelines train of students from the North

Our interviewees also discussed the need to develop and implement strategies to incentivize students from Northern, rural, and remote regions to return home following their post-secondary education. Research in the health sector shows that training doctors from rural regions and integrating work experiences in rural settings in medical school increases the likelihood that these students will enter into primary care in a rural setting.⁶⁵ The Northern Ontario School of Medicine has followed this Northern and rural education pipeline to increase the number of primary physicians in Northern Ontario by securing seats in the medical school program for students from Northern Ontario.

Integrating a Northern, rural, and remote education pipeline in other sectors, especially for highly trained positions, may increase the number of students who return home to Northern regions following their training. There is an opportunity for industry, governments, and post-secondary institutions to work together and with communities, to secure seats in programs for students from Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut.

Tuition reimbursements with return-to-service obligations could also incentivize students to return home following their post-secondary education.⁶⁶ However, alleviating the ongoing housing crisis will be essential to convincing youth with skills to return to their communities in the North.

While improving access to education in these regions may help alleviate skills gaps in the long term, there is an immediate need to attract skilled labour to Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut to fill existing labour shortages, especially in highly skilled positions.

Strategies to support attracting skilled labour to these regions

According to our labour market analysis for each region, many sectors are relying on fly-in fly-out and temporary workers to address labour shortages in highly skilled positions. But we heard that there are benefits to having skilled labour relocate to the region when taking on employment opportunities.⁶⁷ Supporting the relocation of skilled labour to these regions benefits not only the socio-economic wellbeing of communities, but also helps workers develop stronger, more meaningful relationships with the community members they work alongside.

The employers we interviewed in each region said that while they can often attract skilled labour from elsewhere in Canada or internationally to apply for positions, many applicants ultimately turn down offers or leave their positions after a short time. They told us that relocation to Northern regions can often be difficult. Important barriers identified in our interviews and research include housing, isolation, and limited access to services, infrastructure, and extracurricular activities, along with complex certification processes for licensed professions.⁶⁸

Prioritizing housing can increase the number of professionals who relocate

The housing crisis was identified across the regions as one of the biggest barriers to attracting skilled labour to relocate.⁶⁹ While initiatives are in place to increase housing across the regions, it was suggested that prioritizing and subsidizing housing for in-demand positions outside of the public service would be beneficial. This includes subsidies for businesses in the private sector to help them buy, build, and maintain their own staff housing.

65 College of Family Physicians of Canada, *The Review of Family Medicine within Rural and Remote Canada*.

66 Participant interviews.

67 Participant interviews.

68 Labelle, *Magnetic North*; and Esses and others, *Beyond the Big City*.

69 Participant interviews.

Integration into rural and remote communities is also a challenge to attracting labour. Interviewees in the health and education sectors discussed the benefits of community-led initiatives that focus on creating a network of support for new professionals who take on employment opportunities in their community. This includes pairing a newcomer with a family or co-worker from the community who can provide guidance on where to access services, goods, and entertainment and who can help a newly arrived family to integrate into the community.

Simplifying professional certification can attract internationally trained workers

While professional certification for regulated professions was identified as a major barrier to attracting highly skilled labour across the regions in the health sector, the representatives we interviewed in several sectors told us that there was a need to simplify and centralize processes around professional certification for both Canadian-trained and internationally trained workers.

Data from Statistics Canada suggests that Canada is not doing enough to take advantage of and recognize the training and education of people trained internationally. As a result, newcomers to Canada are working in jobs for which they are overqualified.⁷⁰ Recent figures from Canada in 2021 suggest that 26 per cent of all immigrants aged 25 to 64 with a post-secondary degree from a foreign institution were working in a job that required at most a high school diploma.⁷¹ This compares to 31 per cent in Yukon, 25 per cent in Ontario, and 14 per cent in Nunavut. For internationally trained immigrants wanting to work in Yukon and Nunavut, we heard that there is a need for greater collaboration between the territorial and provincial regulators to speed up application processes.

Many professional regulatory bodies in the territories are not able to recognize international credentials and rely on provincial licensing bodies. At the same time, in all three regions more resources are needed to help internationally trained professionals navigate this process.

While policies aimed at attracting skilled workers to the Northern regions are needed, there is also a need to support employment in the local populations that are under-represented in the labour market.



⁷⁰ Wong, « Le Canada n'en fait pas assez avec ses immigrants hautement qualifiés ».

⁷¹ Statistics Canada, "Occupation (training, education, experience and responsibility category - TEER) by immigrant status and period of immigration." Jobs that required at most a high school diploma were defined as TEER 4 and TEER 5 occupations using the Training, Education, Experience and Responsibility Category from the 2021 National Occupation Classification system.

Strategies to support inclusion in the workplace can increase the talent pool

Across the Northern regions, we heard that employers are looking at ways to diversify their workforces and promote inclusion. According to our [labour market analysis for each region](#), Indigenous peoples are under-represented in the labour market across most sectors in each region while women are under-represented in the trades and natural resource occupations. Interviewees discussed several strategies that were being implemented to support inclusion. This includes providing wrap-around supports to promote success in post-secondary education and adapting workplace policies that advance diversity and inclusion.

Wrap-around supports reduce barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education

Central to advancing inclusion in Northern industries is a need to improve access and remove the barriers to post-secondary education and skills development for under-represented populations. Interviewees discussed the importance of wrap-around supports in post-secondary training to address barriers to pursuing and completing post-secondary training. Important barriers mentioned include enrolment costs, housing cost and availability, food insecurity, family responsibilities, feelings of belonging and safety in school, and the lack of support networks. Our recent publication [Learning From One Another: Building a Stronger Skills Development Landscape in Nunavut, Northern Ontario, and Yukon](#) provides more details on what some training programs set in these Northern contexts are doing to provide wrap around supports for female and Indigenous learners in these regions. Supports that address some of the common barriers to training include childcare, rent, food and emergency subsidies for participants, career networking, and cultural and peer support.

Diversity policies can increase career development of under-represented groups

Policies and strategies are also being adopted in our study regions to support career development for Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, and women. For example, we heard that mentorship and increasing the visibility of diverse leaders supports representation in management positions. And some employers across the regions discussed how they have adapted their hiring practices to make employment more accessible. This includes replacing formal hiring practices with informal applications and interview processes and developing job networking databases to help businesses and employees in these regions connect. And in one organization in the private sector, part of leadership training for employees involves cultural immersion, where trainees go into Indigenous communities to get a better understanding of the reality of their Indigenous employees.

While many employers across the regions are implementing diversity and inclusion policies, there is also a need for sectors to collect data on diversity in their workforces to determine which strategies are working.⁷² This information is necessary to develop and adopt a coordinated approach and best practices on diversity and inclusion.

⁷² Participant interviews.

Employers are developing strategies to manage skills gaps

Across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, the employers we spoke with told us that they have had to adapt to manage labour shortages and skills gaps. This includes increasing wages and offering more flexibility at work and non-monetary incentives to compete for employees. Employers also mentioned initiatives to incentivize workers close to retirement to stay even on a part-time basis. They are also reducing hours and services, sharing highly skilled labour across organizations, and contracting work out.

Most importantly, employers discussed what was needed to support their efforts in growing skills internally in their organizations.

Employers are focused on growing skills internally

In an effort to manage the skills gaps that organizations across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut are seeing, some employers say they are focused on growing the skills they need internally as opposed to recruiting from outside the organization. Employers felt that it is advantageous to attract people to their businesses with entry-level skills and invest in their training rather than trying to attract employees after they are certified. Skills training opportunities offer employees opportunities for growth and career advancement within a business, which also supports retention.⁷³

However, getting access to skills training at the local level can be a challenge.⁷⁴ Financial subsidies would increase the ability of employers to invest in skills training for their employees. Many employers indicated that the cost of enrolling in skills development training and the time lost on the job due to training are an additional barrier to getting their employees the skills they need. During the pandemic, government subsidies introduced to support workforce development in the tourism sector resulted in an uptick in training for businesses in Yukon and Northern Ontario.⁷⁵ The resulting workforce development initiatives were, however, supported by industry organizations and skills and training service providers who invested in developing accessible training programs for both workforces and operators.⁷⁶



73 Kennedy Insurance Brokers Inc, "Top Recruitment Challenges Facing Northern Ontario Small Businesses in 2019."

74 Participant interviews.

75 Participant interviews.

76 Canadian Press, The, "Ottawa outlines new financial help"; Tourism SkillsNet Ontario, "Tourism SkillsNet North (TSNN)"; and Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, "Yukon Tourism Training Fund."

Conclusion

Over the next 20 years across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, there will be a demand for occupations requiring post-secondary education, including professionals in healthcare, education, trades, and the public service. There will also be a demand for digital, leadership, business and administrative, and soft skills.

Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut share many of the same challenges to building workforces in key occupations and skills. The common challenges include competition between sectors, limited local access to post-secondary education, and barriers to attracting skilled workers. Because of the shared challenges and similar Northern and remote contexts, the regions and sectors we have profiled can learn from one another's perspectives and from the strategies they are testing and implementing to address skills gaps and meet labour market demands.

Work-integrated learning opportunities in high school can help employers establish connections with students from the regions and introduce career paths early before students make decisions about their post-secondary education. These opportunities and connections can also support a return to community after post-secondary training. At the same time, developing policies and programs to improve diversity and inclusion across sectors can increase the pool of qualified candidates in these regions. Wrap-around supports for post-secondary training and adopting accessible hiring practices have been shown to be effective in diversifying local labour markets. However, a data strategy aimed at tracking diversity in Northern workforces is needed to identify which strategies are working.

Communities, governments, employers, and industry representatives are seeking to increase access to post-secondary training across these Northern regions, especially in rural and remote communities. Coordinated efforts to track labour market demands across sectors can help post-secondary institutions and training organizations offer programs that meet the demands of the regional labour market. At the same time, provincial and territorial governments can also support post-secondary institutions by providing sustainable funding to ensure that the programs needed are available.

Addressing future needs will also involve innovative approaches to training in a Northern context, including expanding the delivery of micro-credentialing and bridging training programs with regional employment opportunities. There is also a need to strengthen funding and logistical support for initiatives aimed at developing partnerships between Indigenous communities and employers to get skills training into a community. Finally, there is an opportunity for industry, governments, and post-secondary institutions to work together and with communities, to secure seats in post-secondary programs for students from Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. These Northern and rural education pipelines for post-secondary programs have been shown to increase the likelihood that educated professionals from the North will return to live and work in their Northern home communities.

Building on these approaches across the regions can support workforce and skills development across Northern Ontario, Yukon, Nunavut, and in other Northern regions across Canada.

Appendix A

Methodology

In the project Learning From One Another: A Comparative Analysis of Labour Market Needs and Corresponding Skills in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut, The Conference Board of Canada in partnership with the Future Skills Centre takes a comparative look at the labour markets in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut.

This project was developed by The Conference Board of Canada with the support of partners from each region. These include:

- Nunavut Arctic College
- Government of Nunavut
- Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
- Government of Yukon
- Yukon University
- Yukon First Nation Education Directorate
- Council of Yukon First Nations
- Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute
- Yukon First Nations Chamber of Commerce
- Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund
- Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology
- Federal Economic Agency for Northern Ontario
- Indigenous Affairs Ontario

The research in this component of the project provides a comparative analysis of the occupations and skills that are in demand across Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut across a variety of sectors, along with the challenges and solutions to workforce and skills development. This component of the research builds off the results of the economic forecasts for each region that project employment and occupational demand. (See the forecasting methodology below.) We identified sectors to study in our qualitative research based on the results of the economic forecasts for each region. More specifically, sectors were chosen based on the projected employment growth in an industry in the forecast and on occupations that were forecast to fall within the top 50 occupations with job openings. The sectors that we focused our qualitative research on include health, education, mining, construction, arts, tourism, and the public service. The arts and tourism sectors were also profiled based on research highlighting their impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of communities in these regions.

Northern Ontario was defined using the geographical boundaries set by Statistics Canada and the Government of Ontario. Northern Ontario includes the following census divisions: Algoma, Cochrane, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Greater Sudbury, Sudbury, Timiskaming, Kenora, Rainy River, and Thunder Bay.

The project went through ethics review and all interview participants were guaranteed confidentiality.

Interviews

We conducted interviews to gather regional perspectives in our chosen sectors. Participants included employers; industry representatives; and regional organizations with a mandate for workforce development, including Indigenous organizations, economic development corporations, chambers of commerce and business support organizations, government departments, and government-funded labour market organizations. The majority of employers were medium to large-sized organizations. We also wanted to ensure that Indigenous organizations were represented in the data, so we invited a range of Inuit and First Nations organizations that have a mandate for workforce development.

The interviews were conducted using a questionnaire that covered the following topics:

- the key occupations in demand by sector
- additional skills in demand in each sector
- the challenges to sourcing labour locally
- the strategies being used by organizations to support skills development and sourcing labour locally

To build the recruitment list, we compiled contacts from online sources and recommended contacts from project partners. Virtual interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams between September 2022 and March 2023. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

We conducted interviews with 40 organizations in Northern Ontario, 22 organizations in Nunavut, and 22 organizations in Yukon. Across these three regions, there are in some cases only a small number of organizations in a given sector. Therefore, to protect confidentiality, the breakdown of the number of organizations interviewed in each sector is aggregated across the regions. (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Organizations we interviewed by sector

	Number of organizations
Health	7
Education	6
Mining	10
Construction	7
Public service	7
Arts and tourism	18
Other	4
Organizations with a workforce development mandate across sectors	25
Total	84

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Teams live transcription, which resulted in approximately 60 hours of interviews and 2,838 pages of transcript with 635,731 words.

Interview transcripts were manually coded using NVivo. Coding themes were developed based on the research questions and further developed during coding and analysis.

Focus groups

We also held two focus groups with representatives from 15 organizations in Yukon to discuss strategies to workforce and skills development in the territory. While we did not conduct focus groups in Northern Ontario and Nunavut, the topics covered in the focus groups were also addressed in the interviews with participants in each region.

To build the recruitment list, we compiled contacts from online sources and recommended contacts from project partners. Participants included representatives from various employers, industry organizations, and organizations with a mandate for workforce development. To protect their confidentiality, no additional information on the characteristics of the organizations is provided.

The focus groups were held in March 2023 and lasted approximately two hours. The participants were split into two groups. The audio of the focus group was recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams, which resulted in approximately 3.5 hours of audio and 238 pages of transcript with 45,743 words.

The focus group transcripts were manually coded using NVivo. Coding themes were developed based on the research questions and further developed during coding and analysis.

Forecasting methodology for Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut

Additional research activities in this multi-year collaborative research project included economic forecasts for Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. The findings from the forecast were used to inform the research in this component of the project and can be found on our [webpage](#).

We used The Conference Board of Canada's Territorial Forecasting Model (TFM) to produce economic forecasts in Nunavut and Yukon from 2024 until 2045. We used the Provincial Medium-Term Forecasting Model (PMTFM) and a custom regional model to generate forecasts for Northern Ontario over the same time period. The model builds on consistent assumptions formed from our global, Canadian, and provincial forecasts, alongside ongoing monitoring of international, national, and provincial/territorial events.

We developed the additional assumptions used in these models through engagement with our project partners, including post-secondary institutions, Indigenous organizations, and provincial and territorial government stakeholders, and through reviews of publicly available information on the status of projects and investments in the Northern regions. The forecasts were completed in September 2023.

We forecast baseline, high, and low cases for each region. For each scenario, we forecast both real GDP and employment by industry defined using the 2017 version of the Northern American Industry Classification System.¹

We also developed occupational-demand scenarios based on the forecasting assumptions and economic outlooks. These occupational scenarios forecast the number of job openings in a given occupation using the 2021 National Occupational Classification at the five-digit level.² Job openings are the combined number of expansion demand and replacement demand openings. In this impact paper, we refer to the results of the occupational forecast for the baseline scenario for each region for the period between 2024 and 2045. The top 50 occupations by job openings were sorted by skill level and occupation type.

Please refer to our other [Learning From One Another](#) publications for more information on the results of the forecast and the methodology.

1 Statistics Canada, "Introduction to the North American Industry Classification System Canada 2017 Version 3.0."

2 Economic and Social Development Canada, "About the National Occupational Classification."

Appendix B

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