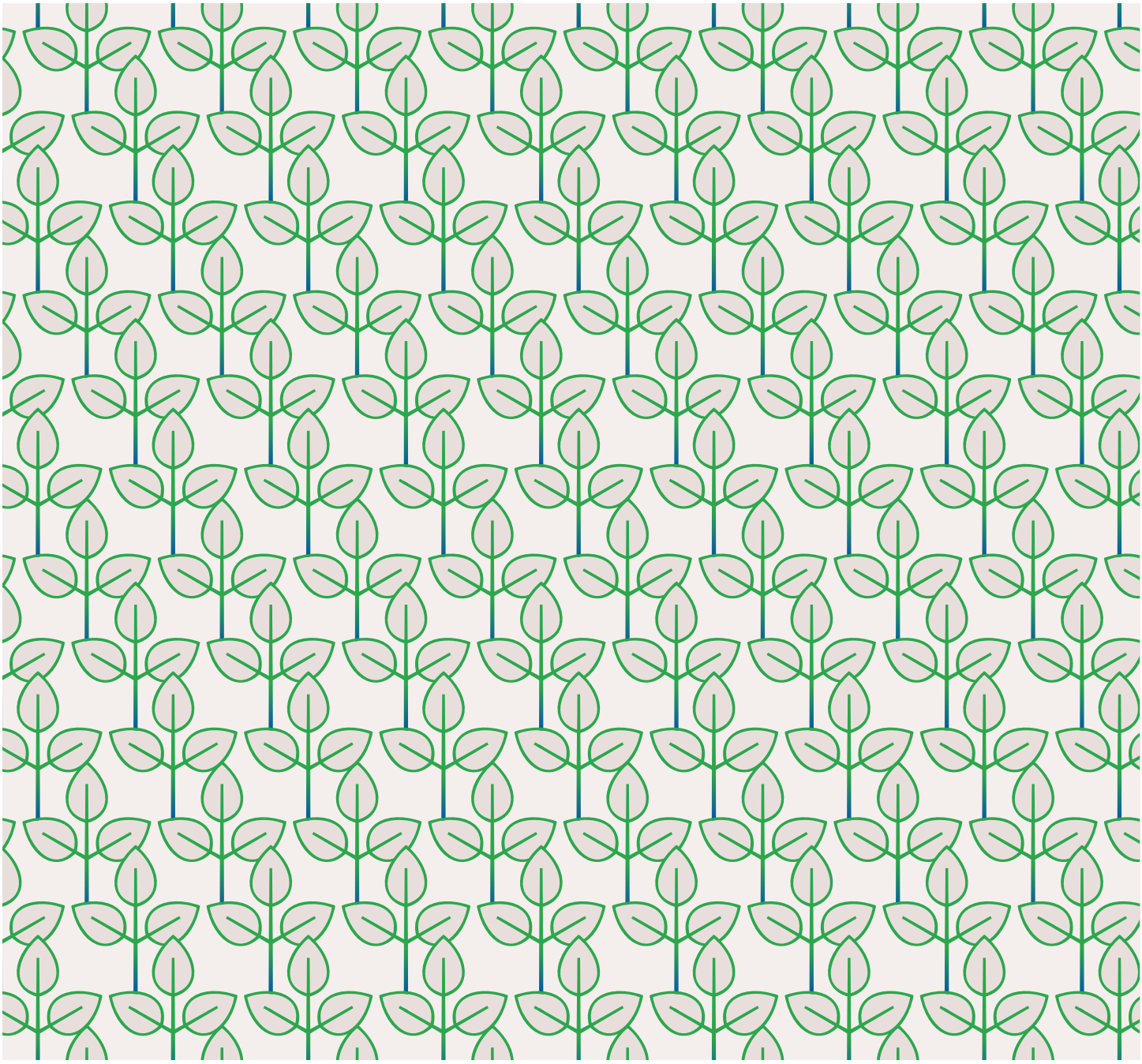


thriving WORKPLACES

A Dual-Client Approach to Career Services

Phase 2 Report

August 2026

mixtmode Blueprint

Project partners

Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour groups, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and Signal49 Research, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

Blueprint

Blueprint helps leaders use data and evidence to tackle complex public policy challenges across Canada.

We partner with government, community, philanthropic, and industry leaders to strengthen public systems and deliver better outcomes. We bring together policy analysts, evaluators, economists, data scientists, and implementation experts—people who know how to turn insight into action. Our work is grounded in deep subject-matter expertise, rigorous methods, and a real-world understanding of how systems operate and evolve. More than just an advisor, we're also partners in change. We provide key support at every stage of the policy and program lifecycle: from early strategy and design to implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

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

Government of Nova Scotia

This project was initially scoped in partnership with the Government of Nova Scotia, Departments of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI) and Economic Development. As the initiative evolved to have a keen focus on a dual-client approach with the Nova Scotia Works (NSW) public employment system, the Department of LSI and the project's Demonstration Sites from within the NSW network (Futureworx, Job Junction, TEAM Work Cooperative Ltd., and Southwest Employment Services) became invaluable partners in co-design, testing, refinement, and system innovation.

Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures | Blueprint | NOVA SCOTIA | Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Project team

MixtMode Consulting

MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode) is a project-based consulting agency that focuses on strengthening and modernizing career and workforce development services. MixtMode's expertise evolved from operating government-funded career services for 25 years in British Columbia, delivering services in rural and remote settings across many different client needs and demographics. With a comprehensive understanding of all facets of the career development sector, MixtMode offers relevant and innovative solutions for practitioners, service providers, educational institutions, and governments. Tannis Goddard, CEO of MixtMode, is the Thriving Workplaces project co-lead.

Canadian Career Development Foundation

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) is an internationally renowned organization with proven expertise in the field of career development. CCDF is a non-profit, project-based organization with a national Board of Governors, expert staff, and a global network of specialist Associates. CCDF leverages career development to enable Canadians to manage learning and work, acquire and enhance skills, seek/create employment, and access community services in an increasingly complex, interdependent, and changing world. Through this work, CCDF promotes positive health, social and economic outcomes for individuals, institutions, and communities. Sareena Hopkins, CEO of CCDF, is the Thriving Workplaces project co-lead.

KP Consulting

Kelly Pasolli is a policy and research consultant working with clients in the social sector to improve outcomes through research, evaluation, policy analysis, and program design.

mixtmode | ccdf | kelly pasolli policy research insights

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Executive summary

Thriving Workplaces is a systems innovation project launched in 2022 to explore the question:

What strategies are needed to re-orient our publicly funded employment services (PES) systems and evolve service delivery towards a more effective, dual-client approach?

Funded by the **Future Skills Centre (FSC)** with evidence generation support from **Blueprint**, the project is led by **MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode)** and the **Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)**. It operates in partnership with the **Government of Nova Scotia**.

PES systems across Canada face persistent challenges in helping both work seekers and employers thrive in a rapidly changing world of work. Thriving Workplaces is working with the Government of Nova Scotia and PES providers to develop, test, and refine a new approach to employment services delivery that engages work seekers and employers with a parallel framework, language, and service approach.

The project is not testing a new program or service in an isolated environment. Instead, it is integrating a new practice framework into an existing system—the Nova Scotia employment services system. It is engaging with the complex web of actors, interests, and mindsets that shape the current ecosystem in ways that are not always easy to see and address. This approach requires a deep understanding of context and a commitment to co-design, learning, and reflection to create meaningful, sustainable change.

This report documents Phase 2 of the field-testing period (January 2025–January 2026). In Phase 2, the project team built on learnings from Phase 1 and worked intensively with four Nova Scotia Works (NSW) service providers to explore how to implement the Thriving Workplaces approach.

The project team pursued five interconnected strategies to support implementation:

1. **Development of new service tools:** The project team developed and iteratively refined a set of service tools to help practitioners integrate the approach into their work with work seekers and employers. These service tools are based on the Magnetic Factors framework: a set of six factors, identified through primary research with workers and employers, that help determine the success of a workplace match. The team adapted its approach in this phase to offer a range of Magnetic Factors tools and delivery formats aligned with the varying needs of practitioners and the work seekers and employers they serve.
2. **Capacity-building and change management:** The project team held introductory, in-person training sessions and ongoing coaching, site visits, and virtual check-ins to support implementation and onboard new staff.
3. **Co-design with frontline practitioners:** Recognizing the need for practical, relevant, and useful tools and resources grounded in frontline practice realities, the team invested significantly in co-design with Case Managers and Employer Engagement Specialists (EESs).
4. **Policy and systems dialogue:** The team engaged regularly with government partners to explore ways to align NSW guidelines and tools with the Magnetic Factors approach and build the conditions for scale and sustainability.

5. **Sustained dialogue and relationship-building:** Alongside changing tools and processes, the project team invested consistently in relationship-building and dialogue needed to shift underlying mindsets and assumptions about the purpose and possibilities of employment services to help both work seekers and employers thrive at work.

Findings

Results suggest that this phase resulted in important shifts in key factors influencing systems change: practices, policies, and mental models.

Shifts in practices: Practitioners experimented with new service tools and built their comfort with and buy-in to the Thriving Workplaces initiative. Comparing pre- and post-survey responses, a greater proportion of Case Managers (who work directly with work seekers) reported that they were able to understand the unique needs and preferences of their clients (**+12** percentage points) and understand why their clients were or were not meeting their goals (**+16** percentage points).

At the end of the phase, Case Managers shared that the Magnetic Factors framework helped improve the quality of service they offer (**58%**); improve their skills (**63%**); and better understand their clients' needs (**84%**). Qualitative evidence from site visits and focus groups reinforced these findings, with the majority of Case Managers describing positive impacts on the quality of client relationships and their own professional practice. EESs (who work directly with employers) also embraced the Magnetic Factors framework as a structure for engaging employers more meaningfully and proactively.

Shifts in policy and systems environment: This phase identified concrete leverage points where existing NSW guidelines and tools can be adjusted to integrate the Magnetic Factors framework to better support dual-client service delivery. A key finding was that meaningful progress towards the Thriving Workplaces future-state vision is possible without major formal policy change. Targeted adjustments to existing service infrastructure, combined with close engagement with service providers, can drive meaningful change towards a more effective, dual-client approach.

Shifts in mental models: Many of the frontline practitioners, leaders, and government partners involved reported that the approach fostered more reflection and awareness about what employment services can do to help both work seekers and employers thrive in the workplace. In particular, several practitioners who were initially skeptical about the Magnetic Factors approach came to embrace it and its value for their clients. Some shared that the project helped them reconnect to their core purpose of creating positive change in their clients' lives.

This phase also generated important preliminary evidence about outcomes for work seekers and employers.

Work seeker outcomes: During this phase, **214** work seekers engaged in the Magnetic Factors approach and consented to data collection. Following their engagement, work seekers reported increased clarity about what they want and need from work, stronger understanding of their skills and what they can offer an employer, greater confidence communicating their needs and preferences, and more focused and intentional job search strategies.

Employer outcomes: Though the small sample of employers who consented to participate in the research (**12**) limits generalizability, employers consistently reported high satisfaction with the personalized support provided by EESs and learning about the Magnetic Factors. In one-on-one meetings with EESs and in workshops, employers reported that Magnetic Factors conversations strengthened their clarity about organizational needs and what they can offer to their staff. Some employers also described how the framework could strengthen their retention practices.

Important learnings were generated about what it takes to shift PES systems towards more purposeful, effective dual-client models within NSW, which may have relevance to other jurisdictions:

- **In-person engagement and relationship-building:** The trust and buy-in needed to meaningfully shift systems cannot be assumed or manufactured. Trust is built through sustained, in-person engagement, responsiveness to emerging needs, and a genuine commitment to working in partnership with practitioners and leaders at every level of the system.
- **'Bottom-up' systems change is a viable strategy:** Engaging service providers and practitioners directly, co-designing tools and resources in partnership with them, and providing ongoing support can move a system forward in meaningful ways, even in the absence of formal policy change.
- **Systems are not uniform:** Employment service providers vary considerably in their regional contexts, organizational cultures, and service delivery processes. Effective implementation of change requires adapting approaches to different contexts and needs.
- **Distributed buy-in supports sustainable change:** Durable change depends on buy-in—not only from a few enthusiastic champions, but also from the full range of system actors, including frontline practitioners, service provider leadership, and government.
- **History and context matter:** Service providers are working in a complex, demanding environment, shaped by shifting labour market conditions and policy change. Effective systems change must meet system actors where they are, acknowledge the pressures they face, and incorporate their input to ensure changes are practical and useful.

Looking ahead

Phase 2 demonstrated that the Magnetic Factors approach can be meaningfully embedded in employment service delivery. It also generated early evidence suggesting real value for work seekers, employers, and practitioners.

In the next phase, the project team will engage the full complement of NSW service providers to introduce and support the adoption of the approach. The team will work closely with the Government of Nova Scotia to create the enabling conditions for system-wide change. Learnings from Phase 2 provide a strong foundation for this next step toward a PES system that helps both employers and work seekers thrive.

1. Introduction

1.1. About Thriving Workplaces

Thriving Workplaces is a systems innovation project focused on re-imagining public employment services (PES) to meet the evolving needs of individuals, businesses, and communities. Funded by **FSC** with evidence generation support from **Blueprint**, the project is led by **MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode)** and the **Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)**. It operates in partnership with the **Government of Nova Scotia**.

The project's primary goal is to develop and test an approach that enables publicly funded employment services (PES) to work with both work seekers and employers using a parallel service delivery framework. This framework is designed to create stronger worker-employer alignment and promote the conditions needed for workers and employers to thrive together at work.

Thriving Workplaces originated through Blueprint's *Reimagining Career Services* initiative, which found that PES are struggling to meet the workforce needs of employers, and especially small businesses. At the same time, funding, performance, and labour market pressures can create incentives to prioritize rapid labour market attachment. This may limit opportunities to support stronger long-term matches between workers and employers. Career and employment service practitioners require resources and tools to help navigate the complex interplay between the supply and demand sides of the labour market and set individuals and businesses on trajectories toward long-term success.[1]

In response to these findings, the Thriving Workplaces project was launched in 2022. The project team has worked in partnership with the Government of Nova Scotia and service providers to explore how the province's PES (Nova Scotia Works, or NSW) can evolve to address these challenges. Through research, design, capacity-building, and field testing with partners, the project team has developed and refined a roadmap for shifting PES to a more effective, dual-client approach.

Box 1 | Defining a dual-client approach to employment services

The Thriving Workplaces project team defines a dual-client approach to employment services as one that goes beyond simply engaging both work seekers and employers. Instead, it provides parallel services to both parties using a consistent, common language and an integrated approach, addressing the factors that lead to or hinder successful workplace matches. More details can be found in **Section 3. About Thriving Workplaces**.

1 Zhong, M., Conte, N., Pasolli, K., & Yusuf, Z. (2022, August). *Responsive Career Pathways research brief: Guiding careers for the future*. Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FSC-RCP-Guiding-Careers-EN.pdf

1.2. About this report

This report presents findings from Phase 2 of field-testing Thriving Workplaces in partnership with NSW service providers (from January 2025 to January 2026). Previous reports described findings from an initial Discovery and Needs Assessment phase (*Discovery Report*) and from Phase 1 of our field-testing period (*Interim Report*).

In Phase 2 of field testing, the project team worked intensively within and across four NSW service providers to explore how to systemically embed the project's dual-client approach and service framework into NSW delivery. This report documents how the team worked with service providers to co-create, test, and adapt the approach. It shares findings from practitioners, work seekers, and employers on their experiences and the perceived effectiveness of this approach.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

2. **Context (pp. 10–11)** provides background on the challenges and opportunities that Thriving Workplaces seeks to address.
3. **About Thriving Workplaces (pp. 12–17)** outlines the project approach and history.
4. **Evidence generation strategy (pp. 18–23)** describes the strategy used to generate evidence about implementation and outcomes.
5. **Findings (pp. 24–48)** shares the results and learnings from this project phase.
6. **Conclusions and next steps (p. 49)** summarizes key insights and next steps.

2. Context

2.1. Challenges facing PES systems

Thriving Workplaces emerged from a recognition that, with the appropriate tools, training, and supports, PES systems are one of the few existing infrastructures that can serve both supply and demand sides of the labour market in a rapidly changing world of work. Building on findings from Blueprint's *Reimagining Career Services* initiative on the challenges facing PES in Canada and internationally, the Thriving Workplaces project team explored and experimented with new pathways to address some of these pressing issues:

Limited and transactional employer engagement. Most PES systems face issues of trust, visibility, and confidence among employers. This is compounded by the fact that services offered to employers are often limited, focused on particular types of businesses/sectors only, and/or operate in isolation from other services offered to work seekers. Existing employer engagement is often transactional, and focused on meeting immediate hiring needs through job postings or sharing resumes. More strategic collaboration between employers and PES is needed to help employers, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), keep pace with a rapidly changing world of work, and build workplaces where employees thrive.[2]

Overemphasis on rapid job placements. As employment services providers face increasing pressures to achieve employment outcomes for clients, many work seekers may be prematurely moved into jobs without a meaningful understanding of what they actually need to thrive at work. These workers often return for further services after their employment is unsuccessful. In a recent survey of 434 career development practitioners across Canada, respondents shared that, on average, over a third of their caseload repeatedly returns for service.[3]

Need for more professional support for practitioners. Employment service practitioners are working in an increasingly complex environment. Administrative requirements, client volumes, and the diverse and often intersecting needs of work seekers can limit the time and flexibility available for individualized, relationship-based support. At the same time, evidence suggests that many work seekers continue to face significant challenges related to pre-employability skills and workplace readiness. For example, a recent randomized controlled trial of an employment-related intervention found that control-group participants receiving business-as-usual PES in Canada experienced declines in employment hope and emotional intelligence,[4]

2 Pasolli, K., & Cumming, S. (2021). *The role of employers in responsive career pathways*. Blueprint and Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FSC-RCP-RoleofEmpl-EN.pdf; FutureFit AI. (n.d.). *The future of employment services: What Canada can learn from global leaders*. https://www.futurefit.ai/resources/the-future-of-employment-services-what-canada-can-learn-from-global-leaders; European Commission. (2018). *Employer's toolkit: Engaging with and improving services to employers*. https://share.google/04fOfdFd9D1ELagrK; International Labour Organization. (2025). *How to support an employer? Manual for managerial and operational teams in Public Employment Services*. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/HowToEmployer_EN_11_RGB%5B1%5D.pdf

3 Domene, J. F., Redekopp, D., & Warner, L. (2024). *Addressing the "spin cycle" in employment services across Canada: Understanding the need for pre-employability programming*. Canadian Career Development Foundation. https://immplus.ca/wp-content/uploads/CCDF_SpinCycleReport.pdf

4 Blueprint. (2025). *In Motion & Momentum+: Interim update*. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5f805a9b45d5c1289b00e8d1/67e56eb571596178b74d42c4_FSC%20-%20IM%26M%2B%20Interim%20Update%20-%20March%202025%20-%20Final.pdf

suggesting there is an opportunity to equip practitioners with approaches and tools to better support clients.

On the employer-serving side, guidance on scope of practice, competency frameworks, and specialized training remain limited or non-existent. Practitioners need more practical, evidence-based supports, standards, tools, and resources to help them understand what work seekers and employers need to thrive and to deliver integrated, high-quality services that support them to achieve these goals.

The pervasive, systemic nature of these challenges means they are unlikely to be addressed through a new program or service downloaded as an add-on to the current system. The Thriving Workplaces project team engaged partners in the Nova Scotia system to understand the root causes of these challenges and find ways to shift the existing infrastructure to address them in more scalable, sustainable ways.

2.2. Nova Scotia's context

Nova Scotia faces many of the same challenges as other PES systems across Canada while being well-positioned to explore system innovations to address these issues.

Employer Engagement Specialist (EES) role. In 2016, the province created a specific role within the NSW system focused on employers: the Employer Engagement Specialist (EES). This was an important development in evolving the system towards a more effective, dual-client approach. However, there have been continuing challenges in clarifying the scope of the role, building the service infrastructure and training to support it, and ensuring integration with other services offered through NSW. Given these challenges, the Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration (LSI) and service providers are invested in supporting the development of this new role to ensure it can operate effectively within the NSW system.

Training and certification for practitioners. Nova Scotia is the only Canadian jurisdiction that requires practitioners working in PES to become Certified Career Development Professionals, receiving targeted training in career development and completing the national competency-based certification program. As the professional association for the sector, the NSCDA receives funding from the government of Nova Scotia through the Canada – Nova Scotia Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) to provide a range of training and professional development activities and administer certification. This commitment to supporting the capacity and ongoing professional growth of those delivering career and employment services is an essential foundation for quality and ongoing service innovation.

Focus on continuous improvement. The LSI team that oversees Nova Scotia's PES uses a service design approach to continuously improve elements of the NSW system and service delivery, making them ideal partners to test the system innovations developed through Thriving Workplaces.

Regional and labour market diversity. The variation across Nova Scotia in regions and labour markets makes the province a useful place to explore and test employment service innovations in different contexts, including urban, rural, and remote geographies.

3. About Thriving Workplaces

3.1. Project approach

The Thriving Workplaces initiative focuses on addressing the question: *What strategies are needed to re-orient our publicly funded employment services (PES) systems and evolve service delivery towards a more effective, dual-client approach?*

In early stages, the project leads worked intensively with a Government of Nova Scotia working group to co-create a shared project vision focused on building capacity for effective dual-client services. It focused on addressing recruitment, retention, and productivity challenges in Nova Scotia's workforce.

Building on this shared vision, the project team launched a Discovery Phase to better understand the Nova Scotia service landscape and the needs of service users. This included primary user research, conducted by The Moment, with workers and small businesses across the province to understand their challenges and priorities. This research revealed a set of six 'Magnetic Factors' that both workers and employers said were at the heart of whether they thrive at work. The project team then used the Magnetic Factors to develop a framework and approach aimed at helping work seekers and employers gain clarity about their needs, offerings, and mindsets across the six factors, as well as assess the extent to which prospective workplaces and workers are well-aligned. For more detail on these findings, see the *Discovery Phase Report*.

Building on the Discovery Phase, the project entered Phase 1 of its field-testing component. In this phase, the project team developed a service model that translated the Magnetic Factors into a series of parallel activities for work seekers and employers to help them gain clarity in finding aligned work and workers. The team then collaborated with a small group of practitioners (working at five NSW employment service providers) to test this prototype framework and service approach.

Phase 1's initial evidence suggested that the Magnetic Factors approach helps bridge the gap between understanding and expectations between employers and work seekers. Evidence suggested that the framework is intuitive, relevant, and easy to understand for practitioners, work seekers, and employers. For additional details on this phase's findings, see the *Interim Report*.

In Phase 2, the project team worked with all service delivery staff at four NSW service providers to learn how to apply and integrate the Magnetic Factors approach into the NSW system more broadly. The team worked with each service provider to experiment with different strategies for integrating the framework into their delivery. Findings from this phase are the focus of this report. Additional details about the project history can be found in **Appendix A**.

Box 2 | NSW provider partners for Phase 2

Futureworx: Founded in Nova Scotia in 1984, Futureworx Society is a charitable organization that helps individuals facing employment barriers realize their full potential at home, work, and in the community. Working closely with our clients, we uncover and address the real obstacles that affect their ability to enter and maintain employment, with strategies as varied as the people we serve. We deliver accessible and relevant tools, resources, and programs that support our clients to find meaningful work that leads to better lives.

Job Junction: Job Junction is an employment service centre open to anyone and everyone who is looking for information about employment. We support job seekers, employers, and service providers by providing a customized and holistic approach to identifying and meeting their employment objectives. Our services and resources are dynamic and flexible, delivered by knowledgeable, diverse, and dedicated staff. These services include access to job search tools and software, one-on-one professional consultations, workshops and webinars, access to community resources and employer support.

Southwest Employment Services: Southwest Employment Services has received funding federally and provincially, with over 27 years of experience in delivering employment services and programs to the community. Our mission statement is to provide pathways to meaningful, inclusive employment for all. We do this by helping job seekers navigate the job market and by helping employers meet their human resource needs.

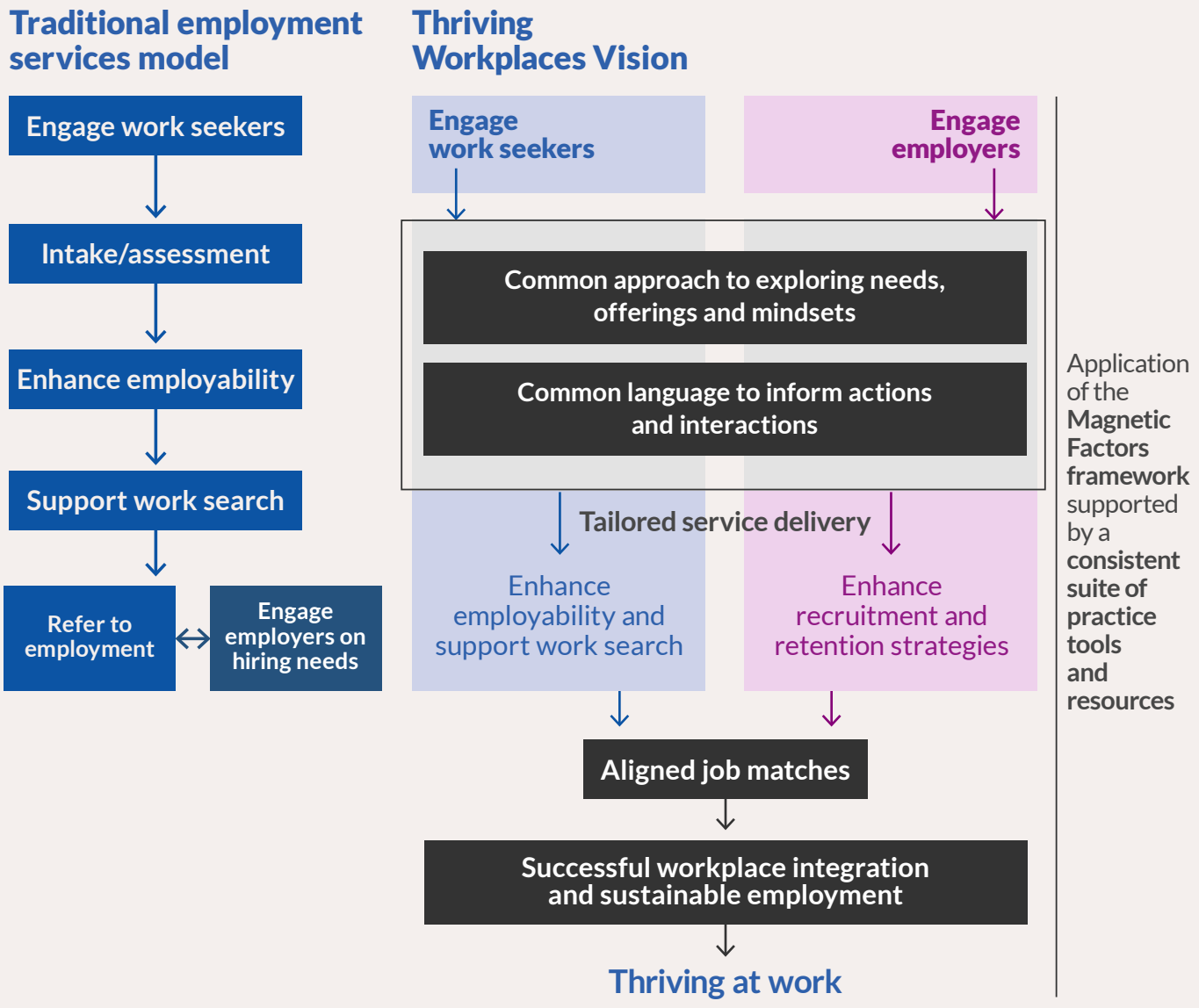
TEAM Work Cooperative: Since 1997, TEAM Work Cooperative Limited has been a leading provider of employment services for individuals experiencing barriers to employment and income. Our primary focus is to assist Nova Scotians in finding and maintaining employment, with the community's best interests always in mind. Serving as a one-stop shop for job seekers and employers alike, we offer a range of services including case management, career counseling, job development, and ongoing support. Employers can benefit from our recruitment services, training programs, and employee assistance. Our dedicated and skilled staff bring diverse experiences to the table, ensuring that clients have access to the resources they need.

3.2. Thriving Workplaces future-state vision

Through each phase, the project team used research and field-tested findings with partners in Nova Scotia to continually develop, test, and refine components of a future-state vision for employment services offering more effective dual-client services. This vision (see **Figure 1**) includes:

- an innovative, dual-client service model that offers a parallel service pathway for employers and workers;
- the Magnetic Factors framework, based on primary research with workers and employers, which structures and informs the delivery of these services (see **Section 3.2.1.**, on the next page, for information on the Magnetic Factors); and
- a suite of practice tools and resources that equip practitioners to deliver consistent, high-quality, dual-client services.

Figure 1 | Thriving Workplaces: A future-state vision for employment services



3.2.1. Magnetic Factors framework

The Magnetic Factors are a set of variables, identified through primary research with workers and employers, that influence the success of a workplace match. They have no 'good versus bad' dichotomy. Employers and work seekers have unique strengths and stressors related to each factor, the importance of which may vary over time. The factors can be used as a framework for employment services delivery to help users build clarity and awareness of their needs, offerings, and mindsets to find aligned job matches. The framework has been refined based on our learnings in later project phases.[5]

Figure 2 | The Magnetic Factors framework



5 Based on the learnings from Phase 2, the Magnetic Factors framework underwent an additional refresh that will be fully implemented in the next phase of the project. Notably, the "Engagement & Productivity" factor has been redefined as "Capacity & Contribution."

3.3. Roadmap to change

The Thriving Workplaces project team has been working in collaboration with partners in Nova Scotia to test strategies for moving towards this future state vision. The team developed and iterated a "roadmap to change," outlining the key strategies needed to shift PES systems towards a more effective, dual-client approach.

The roadmap is informed by a framework developed by FSG (an organization specializing in social change and impact) outlining the conditions that influence systems change, including:

- **Practices:** Activities, procedures, guidelines, and informal shared habits in the work of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities.
- **Policies:** Government, institutional, and organization rules, regulations, and priorities.
- **Mental models:** Habits of thought, or deeply held beliefs, assumptions, and taken-for-granted ways of operating.[6]

In early phases, the project focused on assessing opportunities to shift these conditions to help the NSW system evolve to a more effective, dual-client approach. These findings directed the project team towards specific change strategies that focus on shifting practices, policies, and mental models.

1. Practice:

- **Design new service tools:** Design new tools and resources to enable dual-client service delivery.
- **Build capacity and manage change:** Provide training, coaching, and follow-up support and engagement to employment service providers to support the adoption of practice change.
- **Engage service providers in co-design:** Provide opportunities for organizational leadership and frontline practitioners to provide direct input into the design and iteration of tools and resources.

2. Policy:

- **Explore policy and systems dialogue:** Work with government partners to explore what changes to policies, protocols, processes, and resources at the system level are needed to enable the delivery of the Magnetic Factors approach.

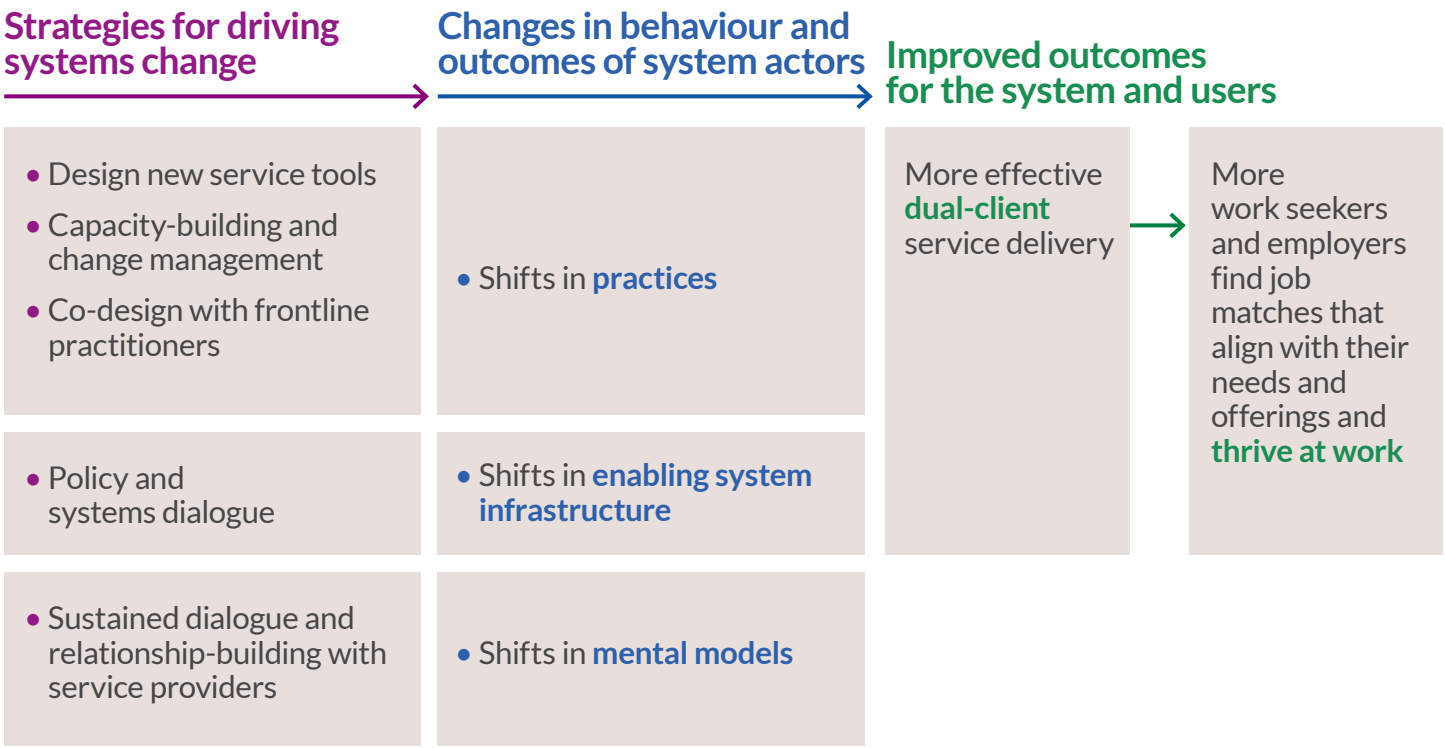
3. Mental models:

- **Engage in sustained dialogue and relationship-building:** Invest in ongoing communication, dialogue, and relationship-building with all system actors to reinforce the rationale for change, as well as shift assumptions about the potential of employment services to help both work seekers and employers thrive at work.

6 For the full framework outlining the conditions that influence systems change, see Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). *The water of systems change*. FSG. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

Informed by Cabaj's (2019) framework for evaluating systems change results,[7] the project team, in collaboration with Blueprint, has explored how these systems change strategies lead to changes in the behaviour and outcomes of system actors and improve outcomes for the system and service users. (**Figure 3**). **Section 5** examines the extent to which these changes occurred during this phase of the project.

Figure 3 | Roadmap to change to the Thriving Workplaces future-state vision



7 Cabaj, M. (2019). *Evaluating systems change results: An inquiry framework*. Tamarack Institute. https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Paper Evaluating Systems Change Results Mark Cabaj.pdf?hsLang=en-us

4. Evidence generation strategy

4.1. Learning agenda

This phase focused on refining the Magnetic Factors service framework and exploring pathways to integrate it into NSW service delivery. The learning agenda prioritized learning, reflection, and timely insights. The priority was to understand how the project's system change strategies were implemented, how these strategies influenced practitioners and other system actors, and initial experiences and outcomes for service users. The learning agenda also focused on exploring promising approaches for systems change. The specific questions in the learning agenda included:

Implementation

- **How has the project team implemented the drivers of system change?**
  - Co-design with service providers
  - Design of new service tools
  - Capacity-building and change management
  - Policy and systems dialogue
  - Sustained dialogue and relationship-building

System actor behaviour and outcomes

- **How has project implementation shifted the behaviour and outcomes of system actors** (i.e., government, service providers, and frontline practitioners)?
  - Were there shifts in practices?
  - Were there shifts in enabling system infrastructure?
  - Were there shifts in mental models?

Work seeker characteristics, experiences, and early outcomes

- **What are the characteristics and service needs of work seekers who engaged with Thriving Workplaces?**
- **How are work seekers experiencing the approach?**
  - Are they satisfied with the Thriving Workplaces-informed service?
  - What are their service journeys?
- **Are work seekers experiencing the following intended outcomes from engaging with the Magnetic Factors approach:**
  - increased clarity and awareness of what they want and need from work;
  - increased understanding of their skills;
  - greater confidence communicating their needs and preferences;
  - more focused and intentional job search strategies; and
  - secured employment?

Employer characteristics, experiences, and early outcomes

- What are the characteristics and service needs of employers who engaged with Thriving Workplaces?
- How are employers experiencing the approach?
  - Are they satisfied with the service?
  - What are their service journeys?

- Are employers experiencing the following outcomes from participating in Thriving Workplaces:
  - increased clarity on their workforce needs and offerings to staff; and
  - more effective recruitment and retention practices?

Learning about systems change

- What have we learned about achieving systems change in employment services systems?

4.2. Evaluation design and data sources

4.2.1. Evaluation design and roles

We adopted a mixed-methods **developmental evaluation** approach for this phase. This approach is well suited to systems change contexts, where complexity and uncertainty require ongoing learning and adaptation. This approach was intended to build trust with delivery partners by allowing them to share insights on what was working and what was not, review outcomes for employers and work seekers, and contribute directly to the project's evolution. The project team and Blueprint collaborated to implement this approach:

- The **Thriving Workplaces project team** focused on understanding implementation and systems change. The team prioritized ongoing reflection and real-time learning as key to the project strategy. Project leads **Tannis Goddard** (MixtMode Consulting) and **Sareena Hopkins** (CCDF) acted as project leads and researchers. Team member **Kelly Pasolli** served as an embedded developmental evaluator, using data, observations, and ongoing partner engagement to help interpret emerging findings and integrate learnings into project strategy and design.
- **Blueprint**, as the external evaluation partner, played a key role in defining the work seeker and employer evaluation outcomes and collecting and tracking data on them.
- The project team also collaborated with Blueprint to systematically gather data on the perspectives and outcomes of frontline practitioners and service provider leaders through surveys, interviews, and focus groups (see **Table 1**, on the next page).

Emerging findings were regularly reviewed and discussed at project team meetings to inform evolving strategy. Results were periodically shared with NSW service provider partners and the government to facilitate additional learning and reflection. Blueprint also led a joint reflection session with project leads and the developmental evaluator in December 2025, focused on strategic learning that occurred throughout the project and the implications for systems change.

4.2.2. Data sources

Table 1 presents evaluation data sources. **Box 2** provides information on service provider staff roles.

Table 1 | Data sources and sample sizes

Data source	Dates	Description	Sample size/ response rate[8]
Work seekers			
NSW administrative data	March–Dec. 2025	Government of Nova Scotia's case management system, collecting administrative data about work seekers, including socio-demographic information, employment history, education, training participation and service outcomes.	394
Work seeker initial survey	March–Dec. 2025	Online survey collecting data on participants' demographics, satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness of the approach after a focused conversation about Magnetic Factors with a Case Manager.	214
Work seeker two-month follow-up survey	March–Dec. 2025	Online survey capturing sustained outcomes of the Thriving Workplaces approach. The survey was administered only to work seekers who completed the initial survey.	29% (61/214)
Work seeker focus group	March–Dec. 2025	Online or in-person discussion to capture participants' feedback and insights into their experience learning about Magnetic Factors and their application to their service journey.	15
Employers			
Employer initial survey	Apr.–June 2025	Online survey collecting data on employer profiles, satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness of the approach, after a focused conversation about Magnetic Factors with an Employer Engagement Specialist (EES).	5
Employer initial interviews	Sept.–Dec. 2025	Online interview, facilitated by Blueprint or the EES, or paper form to capture employers' experience, satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness of the approach.	7

8 Response rate provided when total sample is available.

Data source	Dates	Description	Sample size/ response rate[8]
Employer workshop survey	Oct.–Dec. 2025	Short paper survey to capture employers' perception of the introductory Magnetic Factors workshop.	20
Service providers			
Practitioner baseline survey	March 2025	Online survey collecting practitioners' initial awareness of the Thriving Workplaces approach and its perceived applicability and benefit for work seekers.	63
Practitioner post-training survey	March 2025	Online survey capturing practitioners' perceptions and feedback on initial two-day, in-person training on the Thriving Workplaces approach.	27
Practitioner co-design survey	June 2025	Short online survey to capture practitioners' experience and satisfaction with a mid-point co-design session.	63% (5/8)
Focus group with Case Managers	Nov.–Dec. 2025	Focus groups with Case Managers at each site to explore their experiences implementing the approach.	81% (21/26)
Case Manager survey	Nov.–Dec. 2025	Short online survey to capture Case Managers' perceptions of the approach.	96% (25/26)
Interviews with Thriving Workplaces site Executive Directors and Operations Managers	Spring 2025 and winter 2025	Online, semi-structured interviews with Executive Directors and Operations Managers to learn how the approach unfolded in their organization and their learnings from this phase of implementation.	Winter 2025: EDs: 75% (3/4) Ops Managers: 75% (3/4)
Focus group with EESs	Sept. 2025 and Nov.–Dec. 2025	In-person and online discussions to capture experiences implementing the approach and perceived benefits for employers.	Sept.: 66% (4/6) Nov.–Dec: 66% (4/6)

Box 3 | Roles within NSW service providers engaged in data collection

Within each NSW service provider:

- Executive Directors provide overall leadership and direction for the organization.
- Operations Managers manage NSW staff and provide day-to-day oversight of service delivery.
- Case Managers are the primary point of contact and support for work seekers and manage their service plan and follow-up.
- EESs are responsible for building and maintaining relationships with employers to understand and address their recruitment and retention needs.

4.3. Limitations

Findings in this report should be interpreted within the context of certain limitations:

- **Limited generalizability and incomplete data on work seeker reach.** Project leads encouraged practitioners across all delivery sites to implement the Thriving Workplaces approach with work seekers, but did not set participant targets. The number of work seekers introduced to the Thriving Workplaces approach was tracked through the NSW case management system.[9] While this tracking suggests 394 work seekers were engaged, only 214 of these were engaged in the research project, sharing information on their experiences and outcomes with the Magnetic Factors. This creates potential for non-response bias if those who consented differed systematically from those who did not. As a result, findings on work seeker experiences and outcomes should be interpreted as indicative and may not fully reflect the experience of everyone introduced to the approach.
- **Potential bias in retrospective outcome measurement.** Some work seeker outcomes were measured using retrospective self-assessment questions completed immediately after a focused conversation with a Case Manager about the Magnetic Factors approach. Participants were asked to compare their current levels of clarity and confidence with how they perceived themselves prior to the conversation. Because no true baseline was collected, findings may be affected by response-shift bias, in which participants' understanding of their workplace needs, preferences, and job fit changed during the conversation, influencing how they assessed their earlier status. As a result, findings reflect participants' perceived changes rather than changes measured over time.
- **Limited generalizability of work seeker follow-up responses.** The work seeker follow-up survey achieved a 29% response rate, creating an additional risk of non-

9 Labour Market Programs Support System (LaMPSS) is the province's online platform used to manage and administer employment and training programs.

response bias if respondents differed systematically from those who did not complete the follow-up survey. For example, participants with more positive experiences or outcomes may have been more likely to respond. Accordingly, follow-up findings should be interpreted as descriptive of survey respondents rather than representative of all participants.

- **Limited generalizability of employer results.** Employer findings should be interpreted with caution due to a small sample and limited information about the broader employer population introduced to the Magnetic Factors approach. Throughout this phase, EESs noted that while employers were generally willing to learn about and apply the approach, many were reluctant to participate in data collection due to concerns about sharing information or limited capacity. Sites also did not systematically track the number of employers introduced to the Magnetic Factors. Despite attempts to increase participation through surveys and interviews, response rates remained low. As a result, findings should be considered exploratory rather than representative of all employers introduced to the approach.

5. Findings

5.1. Implementation

How has the project team implemented the drivers of systems change?

In this phase, the project team worked intensively with four NSW service providers to design and adapt different strategies for implementing the Thriving Workplaces approach:

- **Co-design with frontline practitioners.** The project adopted a co-design approach, working with frontline practitioners to design and iterate practical and feasible service approaches.
- **Developing new service tools.** While initially the project team set out to embed the Magnetic Factors approach in the existing NSW assessment process, early implementation challenges led the team to focus on developing a suite of different service tools that allowed practitioners to exercise flexibility and professional judgement in integrating the Magnetic Factors into service delivery.
- **Capacity-building and change management.** The project team provided ongoing training, coaching, and leadership engagement to support capacity-building and change management across sites and offered targeted opportunities for support and learning for EESs, recognizing how important effective employer engagement is to the Magnetic Factors approach.
- **Policy and systems dialogue.** The project team's sustained engagement with government partners enabled early exploration of changes to systems and service infrastructure that could support scaling.
- **Sustained dialogue and relationship-building.** The project team fostered shifts in the underlying mindsets that underpin successful dual-client service delivery through continuous dialogue and relationship-building with service provider partners.

5.1.1. Co-design with frontline practitioners

As this phase evolved, the project team identified a need to work in close partnership with frontline practitioners to co-design tools and resources that are relevant, practical and feasible for implementing the Magnetic Factors approach. Following early feedback on the initial tools, the team convened Case Managers and EESs from across service providers in a spring 2025 co-design session to shape new tools, delivery formats, and greater flexibility for practitioners to apply the approach using their professional judgement. Ongoing site visits and virtual check-ins were then used to refine and adapt these resources.

5.1.2. Developing new service tools

Based on findings and service provider input from previous phases, the project team's initial strategy for integrating Thriving Workplaces into practice involved embedding the Magnetic Factors framework into the existing Nova Scotia Works common assessment process. The project team redesigned the existing assessment tools for work seekers and employers to include a focus on the Magnetic Factors to ensure that all employers and work seekers could build their clarity and awareness on the Magnetic Factors as part of their initial service assessment.

In early site visits, practitioners reported that integrating the Magnetic Factors into the assessment came with some challenges—specifically that it often took longer to complete the new assessment relative to the existing NSW common assessment process. In response, the Thriving Workplaces team shifted the implementation strategy to allow for more flexibility in when and how the Magnetic Factors were introduced, and worked with service providers to develop and iteratively refine a suite of practical tools to support this flexible integration into service delivery.

- **Magnetic Factors Snapshot booklets:** User-friendly, plain-language reflection tools for work seekers and employers to build their awareness and understanding of the Magnetic Factors, either independently or through a facilitated conversation with a Case Manager or EES. Digital versions (fillable PDFs and online forms) were also available.
- **Group workshops:** Content and guidelines to support service providers in delivering Magnetic Factors group workshops.
- **Next Steps Document:** A planning tool that helps clients identify next steps in their service journey, aligned with the Magnetic Factors. Although introduced later in the phase, practitioners have responded positively about its relevance and usefulness in integrating Magnetic Factors into their service delivery.
- **Online Job Description Form:** A tool to help employers develop job descriptions aligned with the Magnetic Factors.
- **Marketing materials:** Resources to support outreach and build awareness of the Thriving Workplaces approach among employers and work seekers.

Practitioners have experimented to different degrees with all these tools and delivery formats, and have tried a range of strategies for integrating the Magnetic Factors into different points of the employer and work seeker service journey. In addition to 1:1 and self-directed opportunities for work seekers and employers to explore the Magnetic Factors, all four service providers have also begun delivering Magnetic Factors workshops to groups of work seekers, and the Thriving Workplaces team has partnered with EESs to co-deliver Magnetic Factors sessions at multiple employer engagement events.

5.1.3. Capacity-building and change management

In the spring of 2025, the project team held introductory sessions with each of the four service providers to introduce the Thriving Workplaces approach to all of their NSW staff members. These sessions were followed by a two-day in-person training session for work seeker- and employer-serving staff across the four providers to dive more deeply into the Magnetic Factors framework and introduce the redesigned assessment tools.

The project team relied on ongoing in-person site visits and regular virtual check-ins to provide additional capacity-building and coaching, and to support onboarding new staff.

Throughout this phase, the project team also emphasized regular engagement and relationship-building with Executive Directors and Operations Managers at each site to test assumptions, get early input on project strategies and tools, and ensure that these leaders had the support they need to champion and promote the implementation of the Magnetic Factors approach at their sites.

EESs face some unique challenges and opportunities in implementing the Magnetic Factors approach because the EES role is less well-defined and integrated into the NSW service system. Given this, the project team worked to build connections among EESs working across the four service providers to share lessons and insights, including through bi-weekly virtual check-ins and an in-person meeting in September 2025.

5.1.4. Policy and systems dialogue

The project team continued to meet regularly with partners in the Nova Scotia government (LSI) throughout this phase to provide updates and explore potential pathways for scaling and sustaining the Thriving Workplaces approach. These conversations included ongoing explorations and discussion of potential strategies for shifting the existing policy and service infrastructure to enable the adoption of the Magnetic Factors approach, such as changes to the NSW case management system, assessment process and online platform service delivery (NSW Online). To support the implementation and data collection for Phase 2, the project team worked with the LSI team to adjust their existing case management system (LaMPSS) so that practitioners could track which clients were engaged in the Thriving Workplaces initiative.

In January 2026, the project team brought together LSI representatives and Executive Directors and Operations Managers from the four Demonstration Sites to reflect on the learnings from Phase 2 and discuss potential next steps. This meeting gave LSI a chance to hear directly from service providers about their experience with the project and incorporate these considerations into their own future planning.

5.1.5. Sustained dialogue and relationship-building

The project team's engagement with practitioners, leaders and other partners in this phase focused not only on changes to system infrastructure, processes and practices, but the accompanying shifts in the mental models that underlie employment services delivery. The project team has continually referenced the underlying rationale for the Thriving Workplaces approach and the research that supports the need for a parallel approach to service delivery to effectively serve both work seekers and employers. The team prioritized open-ended conversation about successes and challenges and joint problem-solving to create space for partners to envision a different approach to service delivery.

5.2. System actor behaviour and outcomes

How has implementation shifted the behaviour and outcomes of system actors?

Implementation strategies led to experimentation with new service tools, an improved understanding of client needs, and a more structured approach to engaging employers. Case Managers shifted from transactional approaches to more tailored, relational service delivery, using the Magnetic Factors to strengthen their understanding of client needs and their confidence in practice. EESs embraced the Magnetic Factors to more meaningfully engage employers and transcend transactional interactions, though employer readiness remains a key constraint to deeper engagement.

Practice changes were reinforced by shifts in mental models to embrace the Magnetic Factors approach and the dual-client services, with initial skepticism giving way to broader buy-in and perceived value over time. The project also used ongoing policy dialogue to explore and identify enabling changes to existing service infrastructure, demonstrating that meaningful system shifts are possible within existing policy frameworks.

5.2.1. Shifts in practice

Implementing the Magnetic Factors approach led to important shifts in how Case Managers and EESs delivered services to work seekers and employers. Throughout Phase 2, practitioners increasingly integrated the Magnetic Factors framework into their services, using it as a foundational framework for understanding the needs and offerings of their clients. Following initial training in June 2025 focused on the redesigned NSW assessment tools, Case Managers and EESs had positive survey responses about their ability to implement the Magnetic Factors approach:

- **93%** of Case Managers and EESs (25/27) felt confident in their ability to use the assessment,
- **81%** felt excited to start using it, and
- **81%** felt that using it would improve services for work seekers and employers.

Organizational leaders also expressed in the survey that they felt confident implementing Magnetic Factors in their organization (N=6).

However, in early site visits and check-ins, many practitioners reported that they were struggling to incorporate the new, longer assessment seamlessly into their service delivery (see **Section 5.1.2.**). As a result, the project team began to experiment with different strategies for integrating the Magnetic Factors in service delivery.

This phase highlighted the importance of finding the right balance in approach between a highly structured one, specifying when and how practitioners should integrate the Magnetic Factors, and a more flexible one to give practitioners space to experiment. It also highlighted that shifting practices towards a more effective, dual-client approach is an ongoing journey with further room to test tools.

> *"We are working with these living documents. From Phase 1, when we first started, to now, it's grown, and become so much more than it was in the beginning. And it's easier to deliver it knowing that once we give feedback on what's going on, it's heard."*
>
> — **Case Manager**

Below, we outline detailed findings about the shifts in practice for both Case Managers and EESs.

Case Managers

In site visits and focus groups, many Case Managers reported they now view the Magnetic Factors as a framework that is "baked in" to their service delivery. Rather than using a "one-size-fits-all" approach, they are using their professional judgement to incorporate the Magnetic Factors into their clients' service journeys based on the unique needs of their clients and their distinct organizations and practices. This included engaging clients in conversations about the Magnetic Factors at different stages in their service journey rather than relying on a single assessment tool.

> *"If a new Case Manager was starting this for the first time, I would say, give yourself some time to grasp all the Magnetic Factors, then try with clients in different ways. We all tried different ways and not one way worked for every client."*
>
> — **Case Manager**

> *"I mean, there's no arguing that this [Magnetic Factors framework] is important. That's what motivates me: to be able to keep it in the back of my mind to see, 'where will this fit?' And then we talk as a team about how we are going to implement it."*
>
> — **Case Manager**

This ability to experiment built Case Managers' comfort and confidence applying the approach. At the end of Phase 2, **88%** (**21/24**) reported feeling they had the right support to use the Magnetic Factors in the Case Manager survey.

Survey data also suggest this shift was associated with improvements in Case Managers' confidence and understanding of client needs. As shown in **Table 2** (on the next page), between the beginning and end of Phase 2, Case Managers reported improvements in their ability to understand the unique needs and preferences of their clients (**+12 pp**), understand why their clients are meeting or not meeting their goals (**+16 pp**), and confidence that they can understand both work seeker and employer needs (**+21 pp**). We also saw gains in Case Managers reporting that they have the resources they need to effectively support clients (**+8 pp**).

A majority also shared that the Magnetic Factors helped increase the quality of service they offer (**58%**; **14/24**), improve their skills (**63%**) and help them to better understand their clients' needs (**84%**).

Table 2 | Changes in Case Managers' understanding of clients' needs and resources from the beginning to end of Phase 2

	Beginning of Phase 2 (N=18)	**End of Phase 2** (N=25 unless otherwise noted)	**Change** (pp)
I'm confident that I can understand both work seeker and employer needs.	67%	88%	+21 pp
I'm confident I understand why the people I serve are meeting or not meeting their goals.	84%	100%	+16 pp
I'm confident I understand the unique needs and preferences of the people I work with.	88%	100%	+12 pp
I have the resources needed to effectively support the people I serve.	88%	96% (23/24)	+8 pp

Source. Practitioner baseline survey (Case Manager responses) and Case Manager survey

Focus groups and site visits demonstrated that for some Case Managers, the approach enabled a shift from a transactional service to a more relational one, inviting deeper conversations with work seekers about their needs, preferences, and workplace expectations.

> *"It just makes our work more valuable … the quality of the work, or the support we're providing is better, just to have this knowledge in our mind."*
>
> — **Case Manager**

EESs

EESs also reported in focus groups and site visits that they embraced the Thriving Workplaces approach. Many now view the Magnetic Factors framework as foundational to their service delivery.

> *"When they come in, we start talking and I just sort of flow it into the conversation …some of them are already thinking about some of the Magnetic Factors, but there's others that they're not … I find once I get them in and start chatting about it, they're engaged and they're interested."*
>
> — **EES**

For many EESs, the Magnetic Factors approach helped them build confidence in engaging employers in a more meaningful service relationship beyond sharing job postings or filling vacancies as quickly as possible. EESs shared examples of how conversations about the Magnetic Factors were used to help employers edit their job postings to better reflect the conditions

and expectations of their workplace, shift their approach to interviewing candidates, and reflect on changes they could make to their workplace culture or informal benefits to attract candidates.

At the same time, EESs struggled to engage some employers in in-depth Magnetic Factors conversations. Some EESs noted that they are still working to determine when and how to best integrate the Magnetic Factors based on employers' readiness to engage.

> *"I think they have to be an employer who is willing to look at how they're doing things, who can be reflective … I find even though the concept would apply to every employer and business owner, it's not every employer and business owner who will engage in the conversation."*
>
> — **EES**

5.2.2. Shifts in enabling system infrastructure

In collaboration with LSI, the team identified some important leverage points where NSW guidelines and tools could be adjusted to support delivery aligned with the Thriving Workplaces approach. Work is now underway with LSI, for example, to explore how to adjust the existing NSW online job matching tool to align with the Thriving Workplaces approach.

While the project team and government partners explored the potential of policy change to promote more effective dual-client service delivery, the project has demonstrated that even small changes to existing tools and guidelines can promote the adoption and consistency of new approaches to service delivery. By engaging directly with frontline staff and leaders at service providers to determine how to infuse the approach in the context of their own organizations, the project team identified some important opportunities to move towards a more effective dual-client system within the existing policy context.

> *"I think it's a great opportunity for us to take the language that's been implemented and uncovered in the project work and start to fold that into the existing infrastructure we have already on Nova Scotia Works Online."*
>
> — **LSI representative**

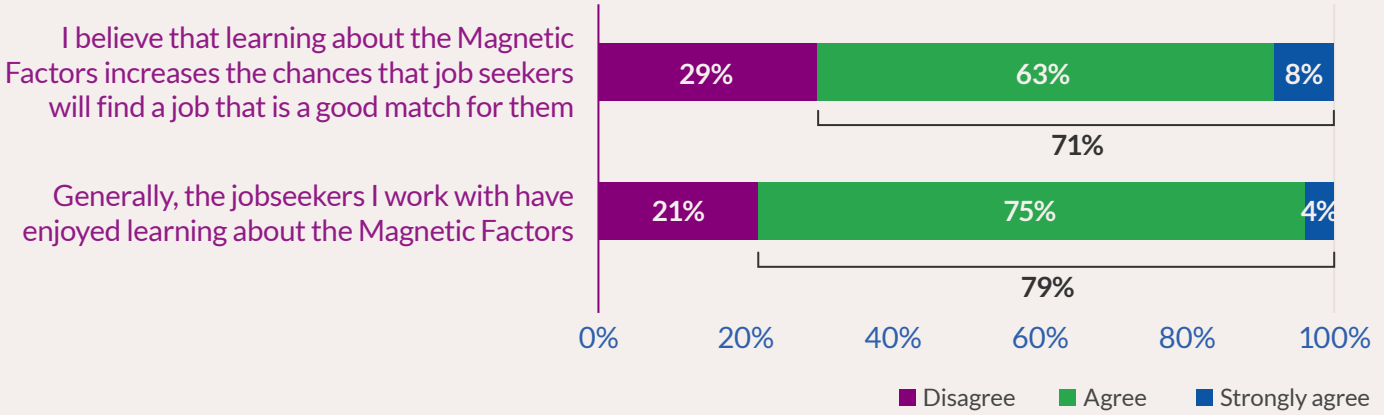
5.2.3.Shifts in mental models

Focus groups, interviews, and site visits with practitioners and system leaders revealed that participating in Thriving Workplaces contributed to some shifts in how they think about how employment services can move to an approach that considers the parallel needs of both work seekers and employers and focuses on long-term workplace success rather than rapid job placement.

> *"We see value in the common language, common framework, and common approach that allows for what I could describe as a more granular understanding of the complexity of both the job-seeker's and the employer's issues."*
>
> — **Executive Director**

Many practitioners who were initially skeptical of the value of the Thriving Workplaces approach—including its relevance for service users—shifted their mindset and embraced the Magnetic Factors as a service framework. As shown in **Figure 4** (on the next page), at the end of this phase, a majority of Case Managers agreed or strongly agreed that the Magnetic Factors can help improve a work seeker's chances of finding a job that is a good match for them (**71%**; **17/24**) and that engaging with the Magnetic Factors was a positive experience for work seekers (**79%**).

Figure 4 | Practitioners' perspectives on the value of the Magnetic Factors approach for work seekers (N=24)



Source. TW Case Manager survey

> *"When I was first introduced to it, I was a little negative about it and didn't really see the relevance. And I just kind of got into it and did it, and as you get more familiar with it, you explain it better. This was a very new idea. For work seekers, nobody has asked, 'what do you want besides pay?' It's a totally different perspective [and] I think it makes sense. I think it's very good for clients to reflect on."*
>
> — **Case Manager**

For some practitioners, participating in Thriving Workplaces helped reinforce their commitment to reflective practice and engagement in ongoing service innovation to meet user needs. As shown in **Table 3**, pre- and post-surveys show increases in the proportion of Case Managers taking time out of their day to reflect on how they were meeting the needs of their clients (**+13 pp**) and on what is working or not in their practice (**+9 pp**).

Table 3 | Changes in Case Managers' reflective practices from the beginning to the end of Phase 2

	Thriving Workplaces site practitioners		
	Beginning of Phase 2 (N=18)	**End of Phase 2** (N=24)	**Change** (pp)
Take time out of the day to reflect on how you are meeting the unique needs of those you serve.	83%	96%	+13 pp
Take time out of your day to reflect on what's working or not working in your practice.	78%	87%	+9 pp

Source. Practitioner baseline survey and TW Case Manager survey

Many EESs also reported in focus groups and site visits that Thriving Workplaces gave them a stronger sense that they are service providers with something relevant and useful to offer employers proactively. By providing a structure and framework for engaging employers that speaks directly to their needs, the approach helped EESs see that they have influence in helping employers reflect on their strengths and opportunities for change.

> *"I love the idea of an employer finding their best match and the employee finding their best match."*
>
> — **EES**

> *"The structure for the EES, I think, is really needed. There is no formal structure for that process. I think the Magnetic Factors are magnificent because they are the part that says, 'when we're out talking with employers, we need to help the employer understand that this is what people are looking for.' When we're out talking with work seekers, we need them to understand that this is what employers are looking for. And those two languages need to be the same. And they're not."*
>
> — **Executive Director**

Many of the leaders at the Demonstration Sites reported in interviews that the project contributed to broader shifts in organizational innovation and learning to support more effective service delivery and dual-client service.

> *"We haven't just helped inform the research. The research has also helped us inform ourselves, internally, in terms of what we do."*
>
> — **Operations Manager**

5.3. Work seeker findings

5.3.1. Work seeker participant profile and needs

What are the characteristics and service needs of work seekers engaged with Thriving Workplaces?

Participants were primarily unemployed, adults of prime working age (25–44 years), with most based in Halifax. Most were recently unemployed, with a substantial proportion experiencing longer-term unemployment.

Table 4 (on the next page) shows the socio-demographic characteristics of participating work seekers. Among these **214** work seekers, participation was generally balanced between men and women. Most lived in Halifax (**77%**) and were between the ages of 25 and 44 (**62%**). Participants were primarily unemployed (**67%**), with over half being unemployed for six months or fewer (**62%**).

Table 4 | Socio-demographic characteristics of participating work seekers

Demographics	% (N=214)
City of residence	
Halifax	77%
Non-Halifax	23%
Gender identity	
Female	52%
Male	44%
Transgender	1%
Non-binary	2%
Prefer not to answer	1%
Age	
Below 18 years	<1%
18–24	15%
25–44	62%
45–64	23%
Place of birth	
Canada	50%
Another country besides Canada	50%
Self-identified member of equity-deserving group	
Neurodivergent	14%
Person with disability	15%
Person of colour	14%
2SLGBTQIA+	9%
Francophone	3%
African Nova Scotia	8%
Indigenous peoples	4%
Other: Please specify[10]	7%
None of the above	18%
Prefer not to answer	11%

10 Other responses include: South Asian (3), Immigrant (3), Acadian (2), White (2), ADHD (1), Caucasian Canadian (1), Dual citizenship (1), Latin (1), Permanent resident (1), and Punjabi (1).

Demographics	% (N=214)
Current employment status	
Employed full time[11]	13%
Employed part time (fewer than 20 hours)	13%
Working casually (e.g., seasonally, on contract)	7%
Unemployed	67%
Period of unemployment (N=143)	
Less than a month	7%
1–3 months	30%
4–6 months	25%
7 months to 11 months	7%
1–3 years	24%
4 years+	4%
Never been employed	1%
Response not applicable	2%

Source. Work seeker initial survey

Work seekers engaged in services to seek employment-related supports, especially job-search assistance and resume development.

As shown in **Table 5**, most of those engaged hoped that NSW would help them find a job (**88%**), improve their resume (**60%**), and/or find relevant training or educational opportunities (**54%**).

Table 5 | Work seeker service needs (N=214)[12]

Goal	% (N)
Finding a job	88%
Improving my resume	60%
Finding training/education opportunities	54%
Identifying a work target	44%
Not sure	<1%
Other[13]	9%

Source. Work seeker initial survey

11 Note: 26 out of 56 employed (part-time and full-time) participants (46%) considered themselves underemployed. Eight individuals did not answer this question.

12 A total of 549 responses were collected across 214 respondents, with an average of 2.57 choices selected by each respondent.

13 Some of the other needs included support with job interviews, networking, and job placements (4), funding for further education (3), helping with starting a business (2), managing a toxic work environment (1), self-employment (1), SEB (2), "employment community" (1), support to overcome barriers to employment (1), a "skills development project" (1), career guidance (1), would like to be a resident of Nova Scotia (1), regain self-confidence (1), start application (1), and "support with adhd & cptsd" (1).

5.3.2. Work seeker experience

How are work seekers experiencing the approach?

Nearly all work seekers were satisfied with the services they received from their Case Manager. They appreciated the ability to learn about the Magnetic Factors and explore how they apply to their career paths.

Among participants who completed the initial survey, **85%**[14] said they were introduced to the Magnetic Factors in a one-on-one meeting with their Case Manager. The remaining participants learned about them through other means, such as group workshops. Practitioners were encouraged to integrate the Magnetic Factors into their existing service flow.

To measure service satisfaction, we asked work seekers about their overall experiences. As shown in **Table 6**, **97%** of work seekers were satisfied with the service they received from their Case Manager.

Table 6 | Satisfaction with NSW services (N=212)

	%	Sum of positive responses
Not at all satisfied	<1%	
A little bit satisfied	3%	
Somewhat satisfied	20%	**97% (205)**
Very satisfied	77%	

Source. Work seeker initial survey

Focus groups explored participants' experiences in greater depth, including their experiences with the Magnetic Factors. Most individuals (**12/15**) were highly satisfied with the open, informal conversations with their Case Manager, which allowed them to reflect on their skills, clarify what they wanted from a job, and explore alternative career paths. They also felt that their Case Manager cared about their career growth and supported them in finding the best role or job for them.

> *"I think informal is better while we are following the process. The [Case Manager] gave me a lot of time to speak, to introspect, to really evaluate."*
>
> — **Work seeker**

A few focus group participants (**3/15**) shared they had a more formal conversation, which felt like a mandatory exercise, wherein the Case Manager presented the Magnetic Factors as a "check-box" activity. These individuals shared that the conversation felt rushed for the Case Manager. They did not think the discussion helped their Case Managers understand their needs or abilities.

> *"I did find that the [Case Manager] seemed to feel like [the Magnetic Factors conversation] was burdensome. Some of the language coming from my caseworker himself seems like, 'oh, it's just something we've got to do. We've got to check the boxes.'"*
>
> — **Work seeker**

Comparable data about satisfaction from non-Thriving Workplaces services were unavailable, making it unclear how these satisfaction levels compare to those for 'service as usual.'

14 While the sample size for most questions is 214, some questions were added to the survey later in the phase, resulting in smaller sample sizes for those questions. The question on how work seekers were introduced to the Magnetic Factors was among those added later and was answered by 75 respondents.

What are work seekers' service journeys?

In the two months following their introduction to the Magnetic Factors, most work seekers continued their job search independently. Among those who met with their Case Manager, the majority discussed the Magnetic Factors as part of their employment planning.

As shown in **Table 7**, in the two months following their first conversation with their Case Manager about the Magnetic Factors, work seekers often searched for jobs (**79%**) and applied for them (**70%**), and **59%** met with their Case Manager.

Table 7 | Work seekers' service journey post introduction to Magnetic Factors (N=61)

Activities post-introductory session	%
Looked for a new job	79%
Applied for job(s)	70%
Met with Case Manager	59%
Explored potential post-secondary/ training options	34%
Started a new job	20%
None of the above	2%

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

As shown in **Table 8**, of those who met with their Case Manager, most had either one (**44%**) or two (**31%**) sessions.

Table 8 | Number of sessions with Case Manager two months following introduction to Magnetic Factors (N=36)

Number of sessions	%
1	44%
2	31%
3	17%
4	3%
6	3%
8	3%

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Of respondents, **75%** noted they talked about the Magnetic Factors in their follow-up conversations, as shown in **Table 9**.

Table 9 | Frequency of discussion about Magnetic Factors with Case Managers (N=32)

Number of sessions	%	
Often	50%	**75%**
Sometimes	25%	
A little	13%	
I don't remember	6%	
Not at all	6%	

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Further, **82%** of individuals who discussed the Magnetic Factors with their Case Manager found doing so helpful in their career planning. Focus group participants shared different ways that Magnetic Factors conversations helped them with their next steps, including finding a new job (**11/15**), developing a work target (**8**), and improving their resume (**8**).

5.3.3. Work seeker outcomes

How effective is this approach in achieving outcomes for work seekers?

Early results suggest the Magnetic Factors approach achieved several outcomes for work seekers, including greater overall awareness of their employment needs, deeper understanding of their skills, and increased confidence in communicating their preferences with employers. Work seekers reported more intentional job-search behaviour; some identified roles that were a better fit. At the two-month follow-up, 12 had secured work, with most noting their new jobs were better aligned with their needs and aspirations compared to their previous.

The Magnetic Factors prompted deeper reflection on employment needs. While participants reported greater overall awareness of what they want from work, changes in clarity about specific employment needs were mixed.

The initial work seeker survey collected data on participants' clarity about their employment needs both prior to and after a conversation about the Magnetic Factors with their Case Manager.

As shown in **Table 10**, increases in clarity were observed for ideal workplace (**72%**; **+6 pp**), desired flexibility (**69%**; **+4 pp**), and workplace culture (**67%**; **+2 pp**). Decreases in clarity were observed across the remaining needs, with the largest decline reported for minimum required pay (**58%**; **–20 pp**).

Table 10 | Work seekers reporting they were able to clearly identify employment needs, before and after conversation about Magnetic Factors

	% able to clearly identify their need prior to Magnetic Factors (N=213 unless otherwise noted)	**% able to clearly identify their need post Magnetic Factors** (N=206* unless otherwise noted)	**Change** (percentage points)
Your ideal workplace	66%	72% (146/204)	+6 pp
The level of flexibility you would like in a job (N=212)	65% (138/212)	69%	+4 pp
Your ideal workplace culture	65%	67%	+2 pp
Your minimum required pay (i.e., what you needed to earn to pay for your needs)	78%	58%	-20 pp
How demanding of a job you were looking for (e.g., amount of time, energy, and attention you would want to give to a job)	75%	68%	-7 pp
Your preferred benefits (e.g., health care)	68%	63%	-5 pp
Your ideal work arrangement (e.g., hybrid, in office) (N=212)	65% (137/212)	63%	-2 pp

Source. Work seeker initial survey

* Denominators for post-Magnetic Factors survey responses are fewer than pre-Magnetic Factors responses as some respondents exited the survey before completing these questions.

Despite these mixed changes in clarity, many participants reported greater overall awareness of what they want from work. In the two-month follow-up survey, **88%** (42/48) of respondents indicated they felt more aware of what they wanted in a job after learning about the Magnetic Factors. Together, these findings suggest that the Magnetic Factors may have supported a broader process of self-reflection, even when work seekers became less certain about some specific employment needs or preferences.

> *"I didn't know what jobs I was looking for at the time. And [the Magnetic Factors] helped me narrow that down because I knew what my issues were, but I didn't know how to correlate those to specific jobs or situations. Basically, I didn't know how to put my ideas on paper. And this helped me map that out."*
>
> — **Work seeker**

Participants developed clarity about the skills they offer and skills they need to strengthen, helping them communicate their skills and experience to employers more effectively.

Table 11 shows that, after the initial conversation(s) with their Case Manager about the Magnetic Factors, **74%** of work seekers reported that they were clear about what skills and experiences they could offer an employer as well as what skills they could strengthen or improve.

Focus group participants noted that they were able to better articulate their transferable skills on their resume and in job interviews. For other respondents, the Magnetic Factors helped them identify gaps in their current skills, resulting in two individuals enrolling in post-secondary programs to strengthen their offerings to employers.

> *"I have much more confidence in the skills and competencies I have to offer an employer."*
>
> — **Work seeker**

Table 11 | Work seekers' clarity about their skills and areas for improvement (N=206)

After this recent session, to what extent are you clear about…	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	I was already clear/aware	Not applicable
What skills you could strengthen/improve	2%	7%	29%	45%	16%	2%
			74%			
What skills and experiences you can offer an employer	3%	2%	24%	50%	18%	1%
			74%			

Source. Work seeker initial survey

Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

This increased understanding of skills offerings persisted over time. Among two-month follow-up survey respondents who had applied for a job, **79%** (34/43) reported they were better able to highlight their skills and experiences on job applications than before.

Work seekers gained confidence in expressing their needs and preferences, and realized doing so is an important part of determining a good fit with an employer.

In the initial work seeker survey, **70%** (150/213) of respondents said they felt confident expressing their needs and preferences to potential employers prior to learning about the Magnetic Factors. After meeting with their Case Manager, **77%** (158/206) reported feeling more confident.

In open-ended survey responses and focus groups, participants explained that they realized their needs and preferences were just as important as those of employers and should be discussed during the interview process. For example, one work seeker noted they would now ask about work schedules and travel expectations during interviews.

> *"It just helped me understand that my needs are as important to what an employer wants from me. The right fit is important so we are both happy."*
>
> — **Work seeker**

Work seekers reported greater clarity about their job search approach, increasing their confidence and ability to identify roles aligned with their needs. Gains were largely sustained over time and reflected in more intentional job searches.

At the end of their first Magnetic Factors session, most work seekers reported feeling clear about their job search approach. As shown in **Table 12**, **80%** were clear about their next steps, and **83%** felt more confident about what to look for when searching for a job.

Table 12 | Work seekers' reported clarity and confidence about next steps and job searches (N=206)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	I was already clear/confident	Not applicable
Clarity about next steps in your career search	1%	4%	17%	62%	14%	2%
			80%			
Confident in what to look for when searching for a job	2%	6%	29%	54%	9%	0%
			83%			

Source. Work seeker initial survey

Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As a result of these conversations, and as shown in **Table 13**, respondents reported a **21 percentage-point** increase in their confidence in identifying jobs that were a "good match" for them compared to before learning about the Magnetic Factors (an increase from **61%** to **82%**).

Table 13 | Work seekers' confidence in finding jobs that were a good match before and after their conversation about the Magnetic Factors

	% confident in identifying jobs prior to Magnetic Factors	% confident in identifying jobs post Magnetic Factors	Change (percentage points)
Confident in finding a job that is a "good match"	61% (129/213)	82% (168/206)	+21 pp

Source. Work seeker initial survey

Two months later, these outcomes largely persisted. As shown in **Table 14**, among work seekers actively searching for employment, **73%** continued to feel more intentional and confident about what they should be looking for in a job than they had previously.

Table 14 | Work seekers' reported clarity and confidence about next steps and job search two months after learning about the Magnetic Factors (N=48)

	Not at all (the same)	A little bit	Somewhat	A lot more	Not sure
Intentional when looking for a new job	10%	15%	31%	42%	2%
			73%		
Confident in what to look for when job searching	10%	15%	35%	38%	2%
			73%		

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Follow-up respondents also reported considering a broader range of criteria when reviewing job postings. In the initial work seeker survey, respondents were asked to reflect on how clear their job search criteria had been before and after learning about the Magnetic Factors, and to identify the range of search criteria they consider. As shown in **Table 15** (on the next page), compared to work seeker respondents before learning about the Magnetic Factors, a larger proportion of two-month follow-up respondents reported considering factors such as location, number of hours, sector, and alignment of their values with the employer when applying for jobs. These findings suggest that work seekers who responded at follow-up considered a broader range of factors beyond the basic characteristics of a job when assessing employment opportunities. However, because the initial and follow-up groups may include different respondents, differences between the two groups should not be interpreted as changes in individual work seekers' considerations over time.

Table 15 | Criteria work seekers consider when applying for a job before (N=212) **and two months after** (N=48) **learning about the Magnetic Factors**

Criteria	Before learning about Magnetic Factors, %	Two months after learning about Magnetic Factors, %	Difference (pp)
Location	62%	81%	+19 pp
Number of hours	48%	65%	+17 pp
Sector	31%	44%	+13 pp
Alignment of my values with the employer	43%	54%	+11 pp
Type of work	74%	85%	+11 pp
Working arrangements (e.g., in person, hybrid)	44%	52%	+8 pp
Level of flexibility/ demand in role	44%	50%	+6 pp
Developmental opportunities	52%	58%	+6 pp
Ability to use my favourite skills	51%	56%	+5 pp
Workplace culture	53%	58%	+5 pp
Informal benefits (e.g., free lunch, training)	20%	23%	+3 pp
Benefits offered	50%	52%	+2 pp
Salary/wage	75%	73%	-2 pp

Source. Work seeker initial survey and work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentage point changes are calculated using the underlying counts and sample sizes, so figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

As shown in **Table 16**, at the two-month follow-up, **60%** of work seekers said they were better able to identify jobs that were a good match for them. As shown immediately below in **Table 17**, **64%** of respondents attributed this improvement directly to the Magnetic Factors.

As shown in **Table 18**, among those who applied for jobs during this two-month period, **60%** reported being more intentional about applying only to roles aligned with their needs and values.

Table 16 | Ability to identify jobs that were a 'good match' two months post-Magnetic Factors (N=48)

Very easily	Somewhat easily	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	Not sure	Did not find any jobs that were a good match
17%	44%	25%	2%	4%	8%
60%					

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 17 | Magnetic Factors helped work seekers identify jobs that were a "good match" (N=42)

A lot	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't remember
33%	31%	21%	7%	7%
64%				

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 18 | Work seekers' reported degree of intentionality in applying to job(s) that met their needs/values (N=43)

A lot less	A little less	The same	A little more	A lot more
5%	2%	33%	26%	35%
			60%	

Source. Work seeker two-month follow-up survey

Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

A few work seekers secured employment and reported that the Magnetic Factors influenced their decision to accept a job offer.

At the two-month follow-up, **12** work seekers reported securing employment. **Eight** of them indicated that the Magnetic Factors influenced their decision to accept the offer. **Eight** reported that their new job better met their needs than their previous, citing stronger alignment with their skill sets, professional aspirations, skill development interests, and desired number of hours.

5.4. Employer findings

5.4.1. Employer uptake and characteristics

What are the characteristics and service needs of employers who engaged with Thriving Workplaces?

All employers in the research were small businesses, reflecting the project's focus on supporting employers with limited workforce planning and HR capacity. Employers primarily reached out to NSW for support with recruitment and job posting.

Twelve employers consented to participate in this phase. **Table 19** presents their characteristics. Most (**10**) had small businesses, with between **five** and **99** employees. Employers represented a range of sectors, including finance and insurance, educational services, and health care and social assistance.

Table 19 | Characteristics of participating employers (N=12)

Profile	Number
Number of employees	
1–4 (micro-enterprise)	2
5–99 (small)	10
100–499 (medium-sized)	0
Sector	
Finance and insurance	3
Educational services	2
Health care and social assistance	2
Other	5

Source. Employer initial survey and employer initial interview

A subset of these employers provided additional organizational details (**five** to **seven** employers, depending on the question). Among these, most reported being in rural Nova Scotia (**4**). Most had been in operation for over 10 years (**5**) and did not have a dedicated HR staff member (**5**). As shown in **Table 20**, most employers had reached out to an EES at NSW for support with recruitment (**7**).

Table 20 | Employer service needs (N=12)

Service needs	Number
Recruitment assistance	7
Job posting and advertising	4
Training and development	2
Wage subsidies	2
Retention support	2
Other	5

Source. Employer initial survey and employer initial assessment

5.4.2. Employer experience

How are employers experiencing this approach?

Employers reported positive experiences with the Magnetic Factors approach, valuing the personalized support from the EES and the practical, jargon-free tools offering immediately actionable guidance. Workshop participants found the content clear, relevant, and useful for strengthening their recruitment and retention practices.

All **12** employers in the research were introduced to the Magnetic Factors during one-on-one meetings with their EES. EESs provided the Magnetic Factors booklet and introduced the Magnetic Factors as a strategy to address hiring and retention needs. Employers reviewed the booklets with the EES in the session or independently after. Some received a follow-up email with links to other Magnetic Factors tools to explore at their own pace.

In surveys and interviews, employers consistently reported high satisfaction with this approach. They valued the personalized support from the EES, noting that the one-on-one conversation helped them better understand their business contexts and needs and allowed them to develop a tailored action plan for recruitment and/or retention. They appreciated that the Magnetic Factors were easy to understand and presented without the HR jargon often encountered in other tools and resources. In interviews, several described the materials as immediately actionable, and a value-add for their businesses, enabling them to quickly identify opportunities to strengthen communication with existing and potential staff and consider other opportunities to integrate the Magnetic Factors within their workplaces (e.g., employee handbook, job postings, etc.).

> *"[Other resources] can be a lot of fluff [and] it just can be very generalized. So as an employer, I'm like, 'That's all great, but what do I do?'"*
>
> — **Employer**

The Thriving Workplaces team also collaborated with EESs to deliver Magnetic Factors workshops. These were sometimes embedded into existing NSW employer engagement events. In total, three workshops were held, attended by 20 employers across all sessions. Employers unanimously agreed that the workshops clearly explained the Magnetic Factors, were relevant to their business needs, and were an effective use of their time (as shown in **Table 21**). In open-ended feedback, employers noted that the sessions encouraged them to think more intentionally about their workplace culture and offerings and how these insights could inform future hiring practices.

Table 21 | Employer perceptions of Magnetic Factors workshop (N=20 unless otherwise noted)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The session clearly explained the Magnetic Factors.	0%	0%	50%	50%
I can see how the Magnetic Factors are relevant to my business needs (N=19)**.**	0%	0%	42%	58%
I am interested in learning more about Magnetic Factors.	0%	5%	55%	40%
The Magnetic Factors session was a good use of my time.	0%	0%	50%	50%

Source. Employer workshop survey

What are employers' service journeys?

Most employers had multiple sessions with their EES to discuss how to apply the Magnetic Factors to their recruitment and/or retention needs.

In focus groups, EESs shared that most employers met with them one or two additional times after their initial session to further apply the Magnetic Factors to their workforce development needs. These follow-ups, often held in person at the employer's worksite, focused on discussing their responses to the online questionnaire and identifying concrete actions related to their needs.

5.4.3. Employer outcomes

How effective is the Thriving Workplaces approach in achieving outcomes for employers?

Some employers shared positive outcomes from learning about the Magnetic Factors. These included being better able to articulate their needs and expectations and improved strategies to support hiring and retention practices.

Magnetic Factors conversations strengthened employers' clarity about their organizational needs and what they offer to staff; their ability to identify desired employee qualities; and their ability to communicate expectations and benefits more clearly.

In surveys and interviews, **9/12** employers shared that Magnetic Factors conversations strengthened their clarity about organizational needs and what they offer to staff. Among the **five** survey respondents, **four** noted an improved ability to articulate their organizational purpose, values, and workplace culture after their initial session with the EES. Interviewed employers (**7**) explained that the Magnetic Factors helped them better identify the qualities they need from employees and recognize the importance of clearly communicating expectations to current and prospective staff. Doing so would support effective working relationships and the benefits they offer beyond pay and hours.

> *"She kind of helped me get out some of the things that you don't think about as an employer when you're going to hire, like having an office fully equipped with standing desks, flexible lunch hours, and Christmas paid off."*
>
> — **Employer**

Magnetic Factors helped employers gain greater clarity about their recruitment and retention practices. They reported improved understanding of how to better attract suitable candidates and a stronger focus on creating supportive workplace environments.

In surveys and interviews, **10/12** identified a need for support from their EES for job postings and recruitment. Of those, **9/10** reported that the Magnetic Factors improved how they plan to recruit. Employers shared that the sessions helped them clarify what to highlight in job postings, including organizational values, day-to-day responsibilities, and benefits, such as pensions. Many also shared that they now better understand which factors motivate and attract candidates and felt better able to identify the ideal candidate.

> *"Sometimes you are unaware of the benefits you offer, or might take them for granted or [as a] given. Magnetic Factors help lay out all of the benefits neatly and easily so that future employees see beyond the basics of pay and hours. Future employees really look at the full employment package when deciding on where to work."*
>
> — **Employer**

Although only **two** employers sought support related to retention, **8/12** described how the Magnetic Factors will strengthen their retention practices. Employers explained that they now see value in having more intentional conversations with current staff about their needs and ensuring employees are aware of the full range of available benefits. A few indicated plans to enhance benefits, such as increasing sick time, while others emphasized the importance of integrating Magnetic Factors into strategic planning to cultivate a supportive environment that benefits both themselves and their employees.

5.5. Learning about systems change

What lessons have emerged about how to change employment services systems?

This phase generated lessons about how to shift employment services systems in Nova Scotia. It highlighted the importance of trust and relationship-building with actors across the system, the opportunity to drive practice change through direct engagement with service providers, and the importance of acknowledging system-wide history, context, and variation. Building on these learnings, the team refined its roadmap to change for a more effective dual-client approach, which may be relevant to other PES systems.

The Thriving Workplaces project partners with Nova Scotia's PES system to address systemic challenges. The project team has generated important learnings about effective change strategies. While these reflections are grounded in implementation in Nova Scotia, insights may be relevant to other employment service contexts dealing with similar challenges.

In-person engagement and relationship-building. Trust and relationship-building are critical enablers of systems change. Change requires sustained, in-person engagement to understand needs and challenges and co-develop responsive strategies. At multiple points in the project, partners in Nova Scotia acknowledged the importance of in-person collaboration and conversation with the project team as key ingredients for implementing and sustaining the changes required for the Thriving Workplaces approach. The project team is increasingly focused on strengthening relationships and connections to build and sustain momentum for change outside the direct project lifespan.

'Bottom-up' systems change. This phase demonstrated the opportunity to drive change in PES systems through engagement, coaching, capacity-building, and iteration with service providers. Changes to system behaviour and outcomes can be achieved within the existing policy framework. However, service providers must be meaningfully engaged as partners in designing and sustaining them. The project team and partners have identified how small adjustments to existing service infrastructure and guidelines can enable the Thriving Workplaces approach.

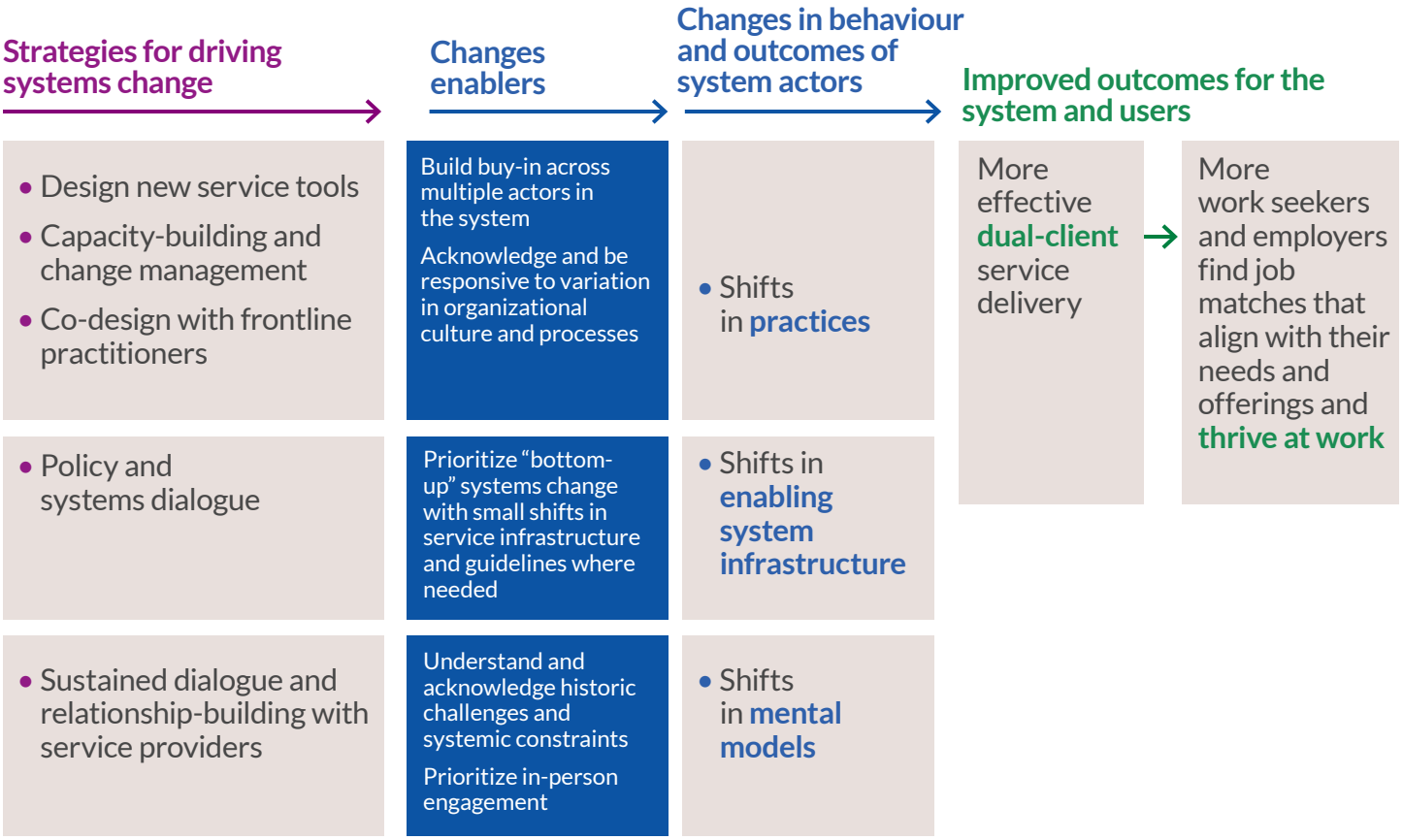
Systems are not uniform. Variation in regional contexts, organizational cultures, and service delivery processes require a high degree of agility and responsiveness in implementation. Early in this phase, the project team recognized that variation across service provider partners would require more flexibility in implementation strategies and guidelines. The team is now focused on refining the Magnetic Factors approach to achieve the right balance between structure and consistency, and space for adaptation to align with organizational and local needs and context.

Distributed buy-in supports sustainable change. Sustained systems change depends on buy-in across multiple parts of the system: from frontline delivery staff to government. No single person or organization is positioned to fully understand the system and influence change at all levels. When support and buy-in are established at multiple levels and places, system actors are better positioned to champion and sustain change. This helps ensure that system changes are sustained even with turnover in key roles. Building buy-in and confidence in change across the system requires flexibility, especially when service providers must meet increasingly complex client needs with limited resources.

History and context matter. Past experiences with change also shape buy-in and momentum. System actors have shared how previous experiences with service transformations have shaped their mindset towards future changes. The project team is working closely with partners in Nova Scotia to design change strategies that are responsive, intentional, and sensitive to the constraints and challenges in the system.

Building on these learnings, the team refined its "roadmap to change" for PES, as shown in **Figure 5**. The new design identifies critical enablers to help these systems evolve towards a more effective, dual-client approach.

Figure 5 | Refined roadmap to change



6. Conclusions and next steps

This phase of Thriving Workplaces focused on understanding the conditions, relationships, and practices needed to shift PES from a jobs-first, work seeker–focused approach to one where work seekers and employers are served using a parallel framework and a common language.

The findings show meaningful early progress toward a dual-client approach across the three conditions the project set out to influence: practices, mental models, and the enabling policy environment. Practitioners adopted and adapted the Magnetic Factors framework in their service delivery and frequently reported that it improved the quality of their work with both work seekers and employers. Government partners engaged substantively with the question of how to create enabling conditions for system-wide change. Work seekers and employers who experienced the approach reported important benefits, including greater clarity, stronger confidence, and more intentional approaches to hiring and job searches.

These findings were generated through an evaluation designed to support real-time learning and adaptation within a complex systems change initiative. Findings on user experience and outcomes are exploratory in nature and should be interpreted with caution given small sample sizes. However, the evidence from across data sources provides early signals that the approach is feasible to implement, valued by many participants, and can enable the intended shifts related to systems change.

This phase also reinforced the fact that systems change is challenging, complex, and time-intensive. Variation across organizations and regions, staff and leader turnover, and external pressures are ongoing features of the employment services landscape. Going forward, the Thriving Workplaces project team is committed to an ongoing learning journey to continue to refine the Magnetic Factors approach and address the system factors needed to support implementation.

Next steps

Phase 3 will focus on sustaining and scaling the approach, informed by the learnings, opportunities, and challenges identified above. The project team will begin engaging the full network of NSW service providers, extending the reach of the Magnetic Factors approach across the province. This expansion will generate additional learnings about the implementation and outcomes of the approach and the factors that enable or hinder its scaling to new contexts.

Appendix A: Project history

Developing, refining, and testing the Thriving Workplaces future-state vision and roadmap to change has been a multi-year journey for the project team.

Project inception (2022)

The Thriving Workplaces project was launched in 2022 with conversations between FSC, Blueprint, MixtMode, CCDF, and senior decision-makers in the Government of Nova Scotia. Conversations explored opportunities to collaborate on an initiative that would translate Blueprint's RCS findings into real-world design and innovation. While there was general agreement on creating an initiative in response to the key issues identified by the RCS research, it became clear that more work was needed to understand the Nova Scotia context—to establish shared goals and strategies for the project aligned with the province's unique needs and opportunities.

The project leads began working intensively with a Nova Scotia government working group to co-create a shared project vision aligned with NSW system context and priorities. This shared vision focused on understanding and addressing the root causes of workforce "churn": the misalignment between employers' and workers' needs and offerings that create challenges with recruitment, retention, and productivity.

Discovery and Needs Assessment (May 2022 to October 2023)

Building on this shared vision, the project leads embarked on a Discovery Phase to better understand the Nova Scotia service landscape and the needs of service users. This included primary user research, conducted by The Moment, with workers and small businesses across the province to understand their challenges and priorities. The project leads also emphasized building trust and connections with the multiple players in the Nova Scotia workforce development ecosystem. This would help assess system constraints and opportunities for innovation, build buy-in, and solidify the opportunity to work within the NSW system to experiment with new service approaches.

Key findings from the Discovery Phase:

- Employers, particularly small businesses, face recruitment and retention challenges that are exacerbated by a lack of resources and capacity for onboarding, employee development, and long-term workforce planning.
- Negotiating the "workplace bargain" between an employer and work seeker is complex and multi-faceted and requires close attention to the factors that create a thriving workplace experience for both.
- Services for employers and services for work seekers are largely disconnected from each other; employment service providers need more support to work cohesively and concurrently with employers and workers.
- Addressing these challenges requires more than new services, resources, or information; it requires innovation to deliver more accessible, tailored, practical, and timely services.

The user research in the Discovery Phase led to the development of the Magnetic Factors framework: the six factors that make up the "workplace bargain" that are foundational to the Thriving Workplaces service approach.

For more detail on the findings from the Discovery Phase, see the *Discovery Phase Report*.

Phase 1: Research, Design, and Prototyping (November 2023 to December 2024)

Building on Discovery Phase findings, the project entered Phase 1 of the field-testing component. In this phase, the project team developed a service model that translated the Magnetic Factors into a series of parallel activities for work seekers and employers to support them through each phase of their service journey. The team then collaborated with a small group of practitioners working across five NSW employment service providers to test this prototype model with **44** work seekers and **15** employer clients.

This phase generated initial evidence demonstrating that the Thriving Workplaces approach does help bridge the gap between understanding and expectations between employers and work seekers. It showed that the Magnetic Factors framework is intuitive, relevant, and easy for practitioners and clients to understand. Work seekers reported that the Magnetic Factors activities helped them gain clearer insights into what they want and need from work, boosting their confidence and optimism. Employers shared that the activities helped them delineate what they offer and how to communicate it transparently to potential candidates.

For additional details on the findings from this phase, see the *Interim Report*.

Phase 2: Refinement and System Research (January 2025 to January 2026)

In Phase 2, the project team worked with four NSW service providers to dig deeply into what is needed to apply and incorporate the Thriving Workplaces approach into the NSW system. The team worked with each service provider to experiment with different strategies for integrating the framework into their delivery. The findings from this phase are the focus of this report.

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