



AspireAtlantic

Implementation Toolkit: Scaling for Greater Impact

March 2024
(Report 1 of 2)

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

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Note on Language: Program vs. Project - AspireAtlantic was funded as a project but designed and implemented as a program. We use both terms interchangeably.

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It is with tremendous gratitude that we thank our sector and service provider organizations who leaned in and committed to learning how this type of model could better support job seekers and employers. The program staff were exceptional and showed their dedication by going the extra mile to ensure program participants had the necessary supports available when they needed them.



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As the originator of the WorkAdvance model, we would like to acknowledge the valuable time and contributions made by MDRC to support the design and implementation of the AspireAtlantic program. Through MDRC, we connected with WorkAdvance sites to learn and seek advice from practitioners about operational challenges and strategies they deployed. We would also like to thank the staff of Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment who provided insight and guidance as we worked to learn more about the operations of the WorkAdvance model and make adaptations to the Canadian context. Having insights from the originator of the model and WorkAdvance practitioners along the way has been instrumental to the success of the AspireAtlantic program.

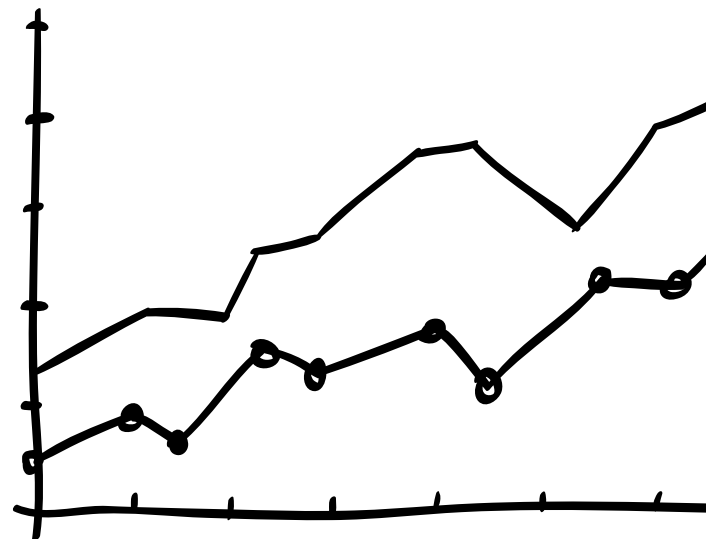
Also, a special thanks to our provincial partners at the Nova Scotia Government (Department of Labour and Advanced Education and Department of Community Services), and Government of PEI (Department of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture), Centre for Employment Innovation, Valley Regional Economic Network, and Blueprint who provided knowledge, guidance, and encouragement along the way. Each one of you has contributed to the co-creation of AspireAtlantic and taken a step towards strengthening the skills development ecosystem of Canada, thereby creating meaningful opportunities for all Canadians.

Executive Summary

AspireAtlantic presents a comprehensive employment program designed to provide targeted support and guidance beyond that traditional employment training or education initiatives, which can fall short in assisting job seekers to secure sustained employment. Recognizing the need for a holistic, relationship-centred approach, AspireAtlantic integrates employment strategies that guide job seekers towards meaningful positions in a sector with prospects for career growth. The program's foundation rests on the assumption that specific sectors have an increasing demand for skilled labour, and there are participants in need of foundational skills training to prime them for meaningful careers.

The program implementation is made up of 6 stages: pre-launch activities, recruitment and selections, Career Readiness Services or Training, Occupational Skills Training, post-training and employment support and post-employment support. AspireAtlantic is an integrated employment model that bridges the gap between job seekers and employers by fostering relationships, emphasizing career readiness, and offering ongoing support, ultimately contributing to the success and growth of both participants and the sectors they enter.

The intent of this document is to share promising practices, provide a description of the AspireAtlantic implementation experience in Nova Scotia with the Manufacturing, Industrial Commercial and Institutional (ICI) Construction, and Residential Home Construction sectors. It is our hope that practitioners will use this document as a case example and resource to inform the further applications of the core components of AspireAtlantic to scale for impact and success in other sectors and jurisdictions.



Introduction

The rate of economic growth in Atlantic Canada is 50% of the projected federal rate. To grow its economy, the Atlantic region will require investments in infrastructure and skill development, along with an expanded workforce. The Government of Canada reports that job vacancy rates have risen across Canada over the last two years, with particularly high numbers in the three Maritime provinces (when compared to Newfoundland and Labrador).¹ Nearly half of all vacancies are in sales and service, construction trades, or transportation, but the fastest growing vacancies are in health care-related jobs. Despite difficulties filling these positions, most vacancies require candidates with less than two years' experience.

Historically the unemployment rate in Nova Scotia exceeds the expected number outlined by the federal government. When this project began in 2019, the Nova Scotian labour force was on a four-year upward trend.² Despite this promising growth, Nova Scotian employers in manufacturing and construction continued to see unemployment rates higher than the national average.³

AspireAtlantic was implemented as a demonstration program aimed at showcasing innovation in sector-based workforce development. The focus is on a range of industry- or sector-driven activities such as training and reskilling job seekers, helping employers retain and attract a skilled and diverse workforce and other creative solutions to help sectors address labour market needs. AspireAtlantic was adapted from the WorkAdvance model, designed by the Mayor's Office to Advance New York City, the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, and MDRC. WorkAdvance is a dual-client model, as it is informed by the needs of both job seekers and employers. The WorkAdvance study, a randomized control of four sites, was designed to enhance workforce development by addressing sector-specific needs, by training and upskilling individuals who are unemployed or underemployed toward secure employment that provides opportunity for career advancement. The goal of WorkAdvance is more than employment and retention (as with many other programs), it helps participants prepare for and enter quality jobs in selected sectors with opportunities for career growth. Once placed, participants are provided further assistance to guide them on a path of career advancement. Advancement is defined as attaining better-paying, middle-skill jobs that offer competitive benefits packages and opportunities for growth. The strategic combination of screening, preparation, skills training, placement support, and post-employment assistance ensures a holistic approach to career development.

Introduction



Though Nova Scotia has numerous employment support programs, no program had incorporated key elements of WorkAdvance in a comprehensive way. The AspireAtlantic model (Figure 1) was adapted as a dual-client approach to support both Nova Scotian job seekers and employers to improve retention and career advancement. AspireAtlantic was adapted and delivered by way of collaborations with government departments, sector councils, social service provider organizations, and other pivotal stakeholders. AspireAtlantic was designed to attract and serve underrepresented groups such as women, new immigrants, and individuals from diverse backgrounds – Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. Program staff stay informed about industry trends by maintaining strong connections with employers, to tailor the program to meet sector needs. Service providers work closely with participants to support them through the program and help them take full advantage of the opportunities that the program provides. Additionally, service providers assist participants in solving challenges that could hinder their career advancement. The program provided the knowledge, supports, and opportunities essential to access employment that would meet participants’ needs and offered sustainable career pathways in high demand sectors.

The purpose the AspireAtlantic Implementation Toolkit (Toolkit), is to share the program experience and promising practices that can support further program scalability. The promising practices described below stem from the impact evaluation conducted and documented in the AspireAtlantic Technical Report. Based on the AspireAtlantic implementation experience in Nova Scotia with the Manufacturing, Industrial Commercial and Institutional (ICI) Construction, and Residential Home Construction sectors, this Toolkit is shared as a case example and resource for knowledge dissemination purposes, with the intent that it may inform the further applications of the core components of the WorkAdvance for success in other sectors and jurisdictions.



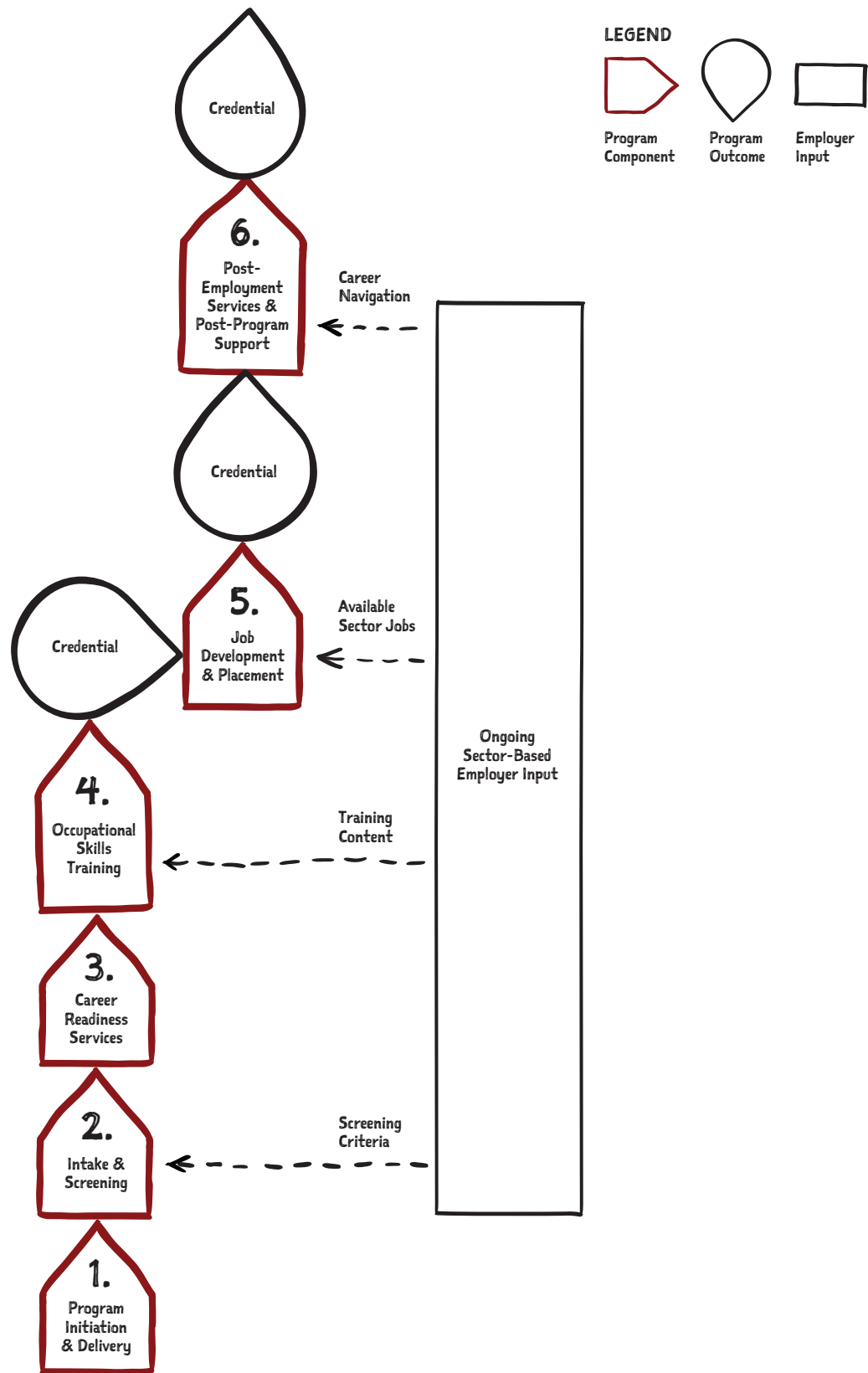


Figure 1 - AspireAtlantic Model (adapted from WorkAdvance: A Promising Sector-Focused Strategy. MDRC, October 2016. Web 11 Dec. 2016. <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/workadvance-promising-sector-focused-strategy>)



**AspireAtlantic
Experience**

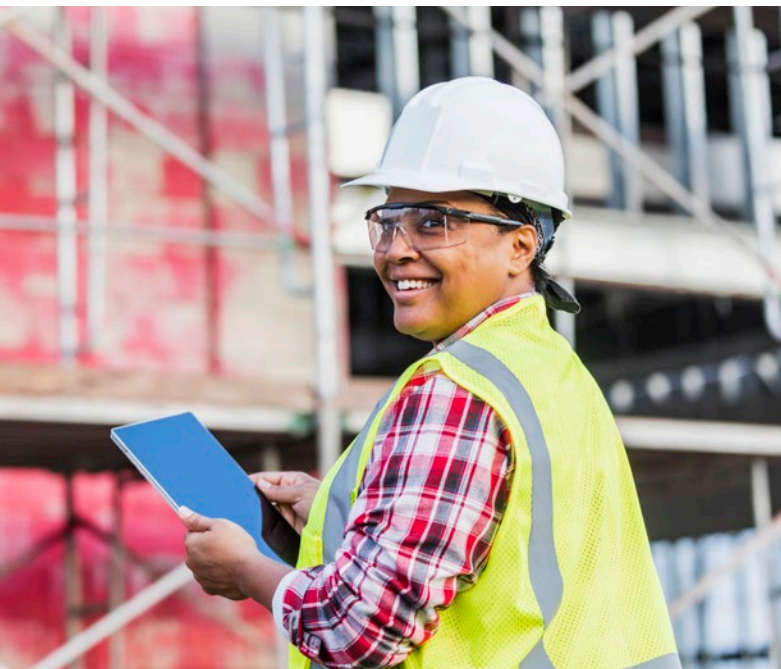
AspireAtlantic Experience

This section provides highlights of what it was like to be a part of the AspireAtlantic program. While Figure 1 (above) shows the linear components that define the program, here we describe how people navigate through these components with perspective from many of the core actors. A full version of the document can be found online.⁴

Income is one of the most influential determinants of health and wellbeing⁵ and, therefore, access to meaningful employment opportunities and career choices become significant issues. Fundamentally, AspireAtlantic goes beyond employment and job placement services forming strong relationships with the goal of support the needs of growing sectors with skilled labour.

The following core actors are involved in a dynamic ecosystem designed to build trusted relationships that trains job seekers to compete for vacant positions in particular sectors as part of the AspireAtlantic program.

- **Job Seekers & Program Participants** – applicants who are seeking meaningful employment opportunities in the identified sector pathways.
- **Service Providers** – agencies that provide employment services and have agreed to be AspireAtlantic program partners.
- **Case Managers** – working for the Service Provider, they support participant recruitment, screening, and intake, facilitate career readiness training, and perform ongoing case management to help participants with social and emotional skills to navigate life challenges.
- **Sector Organizations** – agencies that are connected to employers and have industry knowledge and have agreed to be AspireAtlantic program partners.
- **Advancement Coaches** – working for the Sector Organizations, they work with program participants during training and post training to prepare job seekers for job opportunities in the sector. Also, connect with employers in the design of training curriculum, promoting the program, and supporting participants post-employment.
- **Employers** – share hiring practices and provide advice on the technical skills needed for success in their sector and hence organization. They also interact with advancement coaches and program participants in getting to know AspireAtlantic.
- **AspireAtlantic Team** – program oversight and foundational research and evaluation to understand the efficacy of the model and impact.



AspireAtlantic Experience

The AspireAtlantic experience begins with awareness and understanding of the program, both by potential program participants and Service Providers and their Case Managers. Figure 2 shows three general employment situations of individuals who Aspire Atlantic is designed to serve. Potential participants may be new to the service provider offering the program or be an existing client. Employers and other potential partners across sectors, similarly, need to become aware and understand the program.

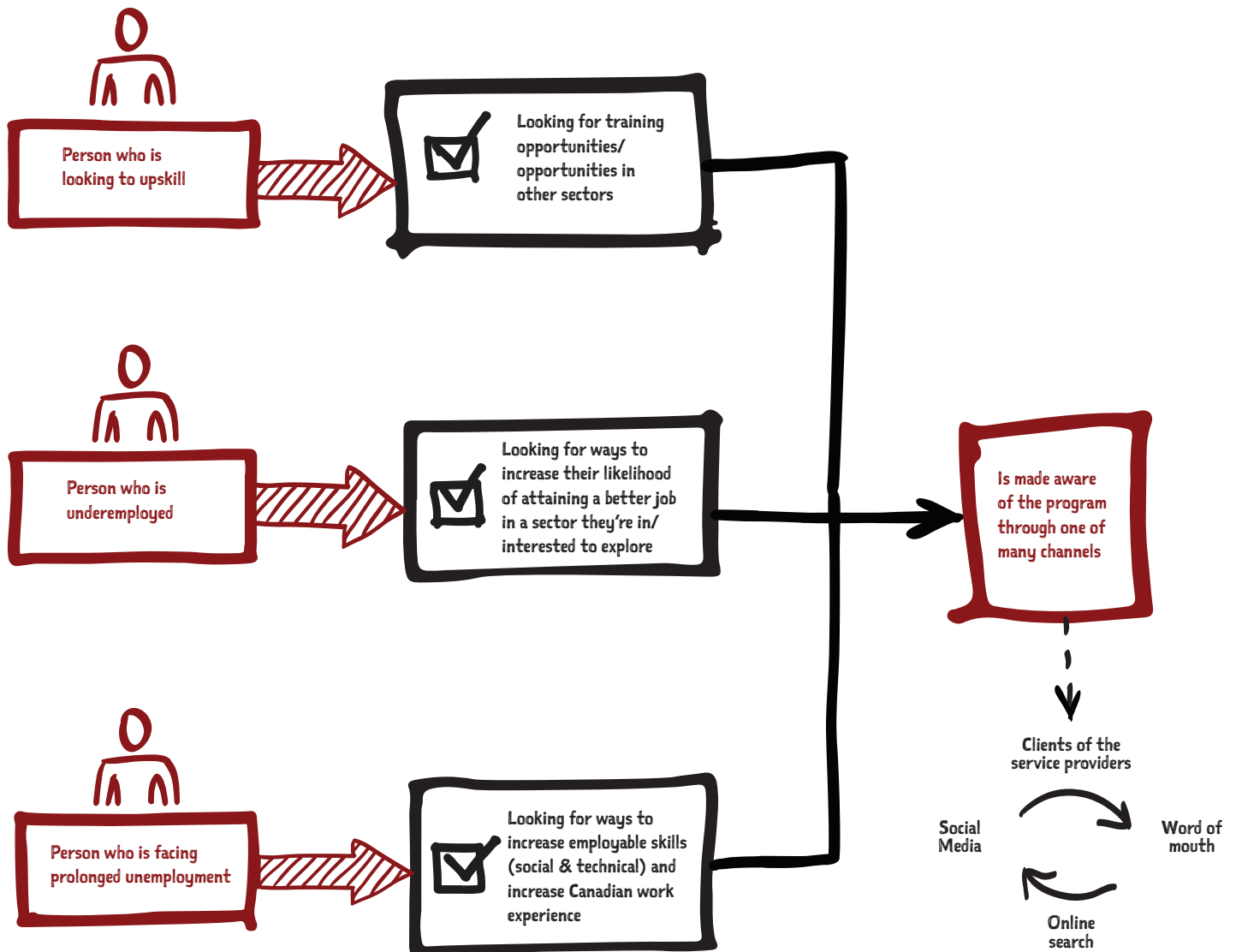


Figure 2. Raising awareness of Aspire Atlantic amongst the individuals in 3 unique employment scenarios

AspireAtlantic Experience

During the Intake & Screening phase of the program (Figure 3), the participants understanding of the program begins through the relationship with the Case Manager. This phase prioritized relationship building and allows the participant to learn more about what it is, and what it is not, and for both the participant and the Case Manager to assess fit. This allows the participant to make an informed decision about entering the program, with the intent to be sure that they will be able to complete the program and secure employment.

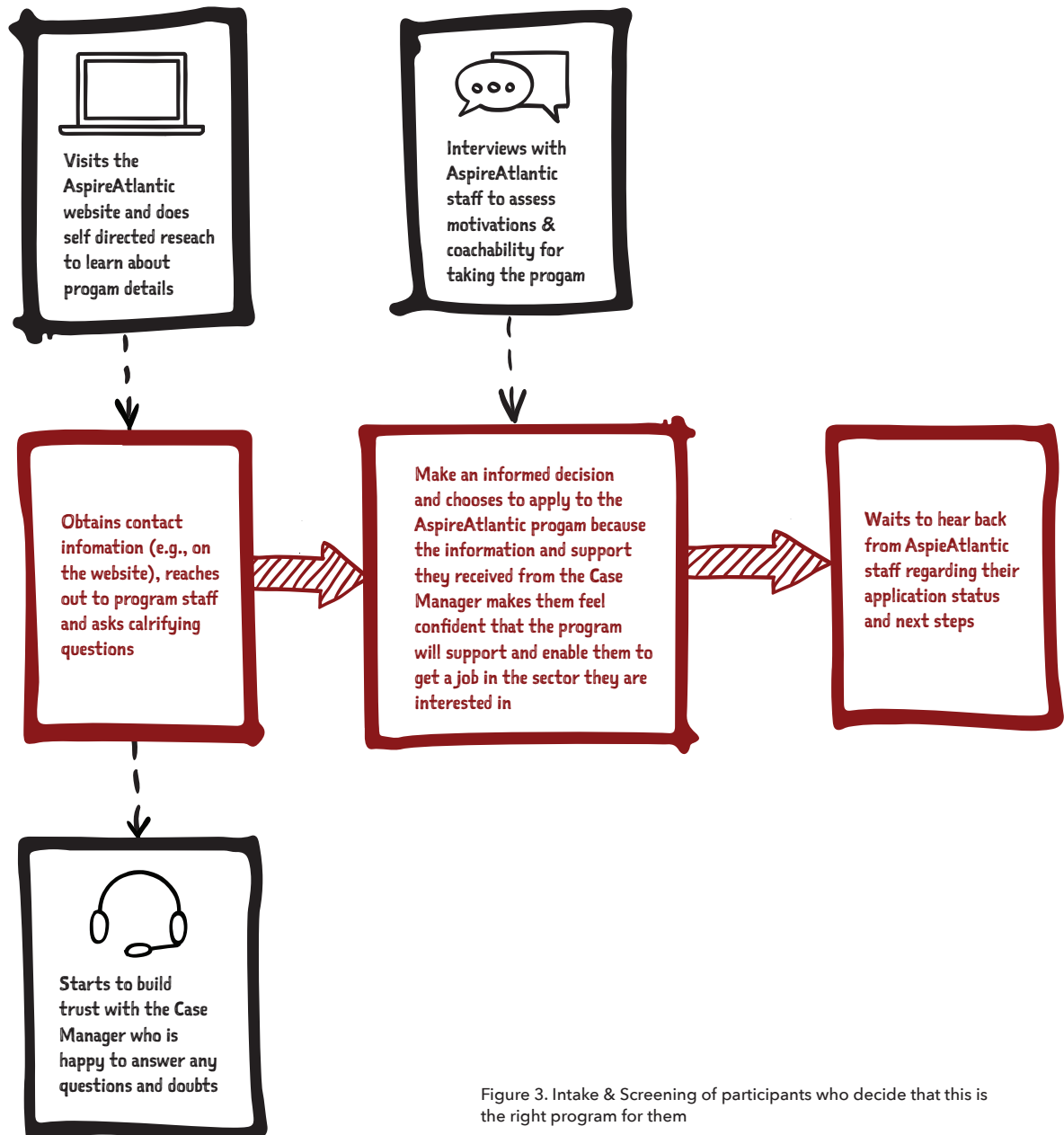


Figure 3. Intake & Screening of participants who decide that this is the right program for them

AspireAtlantic Experience

Once the participant accepts the offer into the AspireAtlantic program, the relationships and connections increase in number and in depth. In the first part of the program, Career Readiness Training (CRT, see Figure 4), the participants:

- Begin the AspireAtlantic program as a cohort to take virtual and in-person classes designed to ready participants for a career in a particular sector.
- Are experiencing orientation to the program, that includes overall etiquette and expectations as CRT is meant to simulate the workplace environment as much as possible.
- For example, there are typically attendance requirements and topics related to social and emotional skills for the workplace.
- Meet regularly with their Case Manager, fostering more understanding and trust, and begin goal-oriented meetings with the Advancement Coach. These meetings are focused on individual support and career advancement. It is also an opportunity to participants to deepen their understanding of the sector as well.

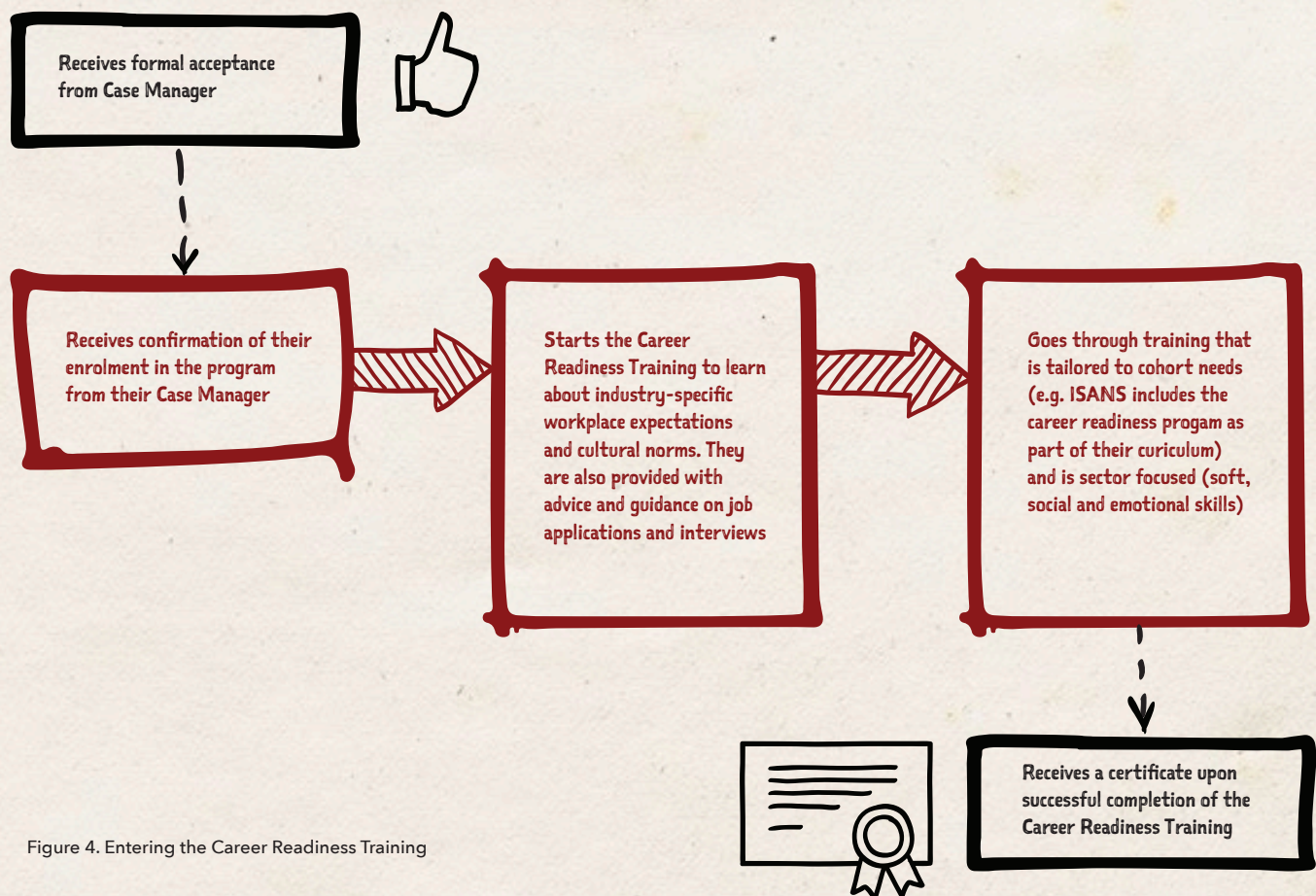


Figure 4. Entering the Career Readiness Training

AspireAtlantic Experience

Sector-specific training, or Occupational Skills Training (See Figure 5), is aligned with the needs of the sector, to prepare participants with technical and hands-on knowledge to be successful in job applications and interviews to best position them for gainful employment in the sector.

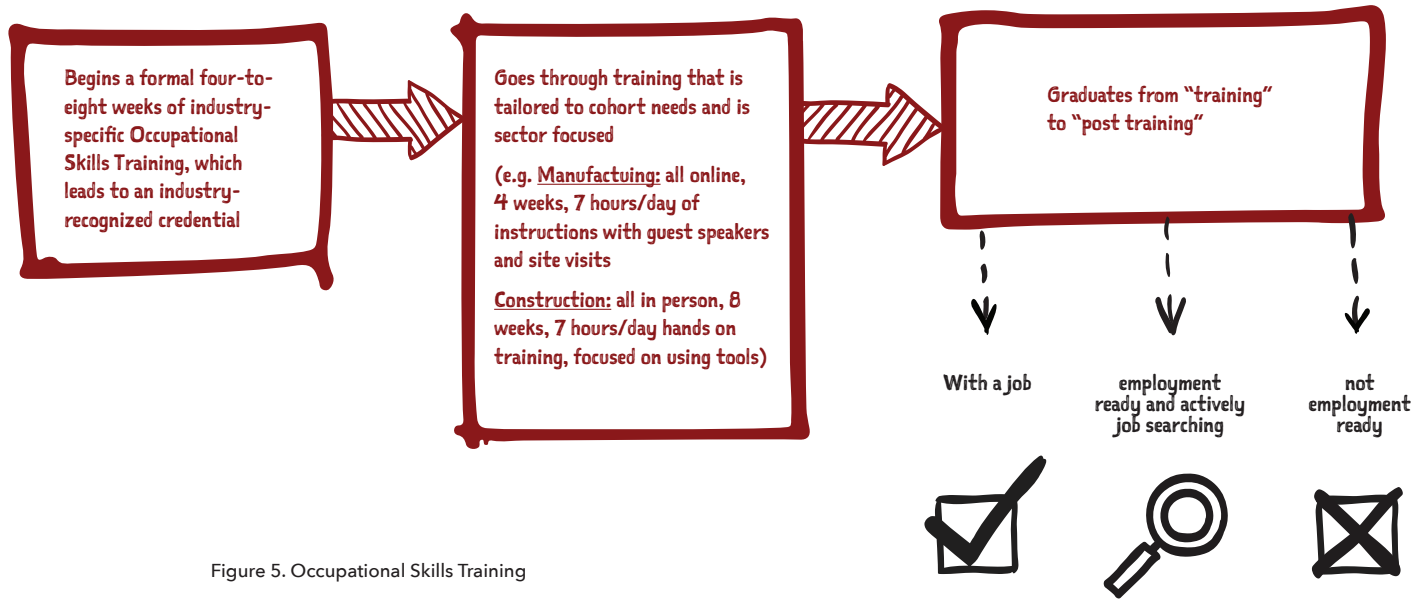


Figure 5. Occupational Skills Training

At this stage, the Case Manager is less involved while the Advancement Coach plays an increasing role. Participants also gain exposure to industry experts and leaders, and gain a sense of sector work environments through site visits. They continue to receive support, if needed, to continue the program. The staff, mainly the Advancement Coach at this stage, are directing participants toward self-sustaining career advancement. Coaches will help participants set goals and identify next steps in the program. There is an opportunity to identify any challenges in attaining employment, such as transportation or child care, and direct participants toward managing these challenges.

During the training stage of the program, participants have the opportunity to learn together and build peer to peer relationships. This shared learning experience has built enduring relationships and connections to support participants through and beyond the training experience.

Upon completion of the training, a graduation event is held to celebrate the completion of the program. At the graduation event, each participant receives an industry-recognized credential.

AspireAtlantic Experience

After successfully completing training, the participant is now also a graduate of the program and moves to the Job Development and Placement Support stage of the program (see Figure 6).

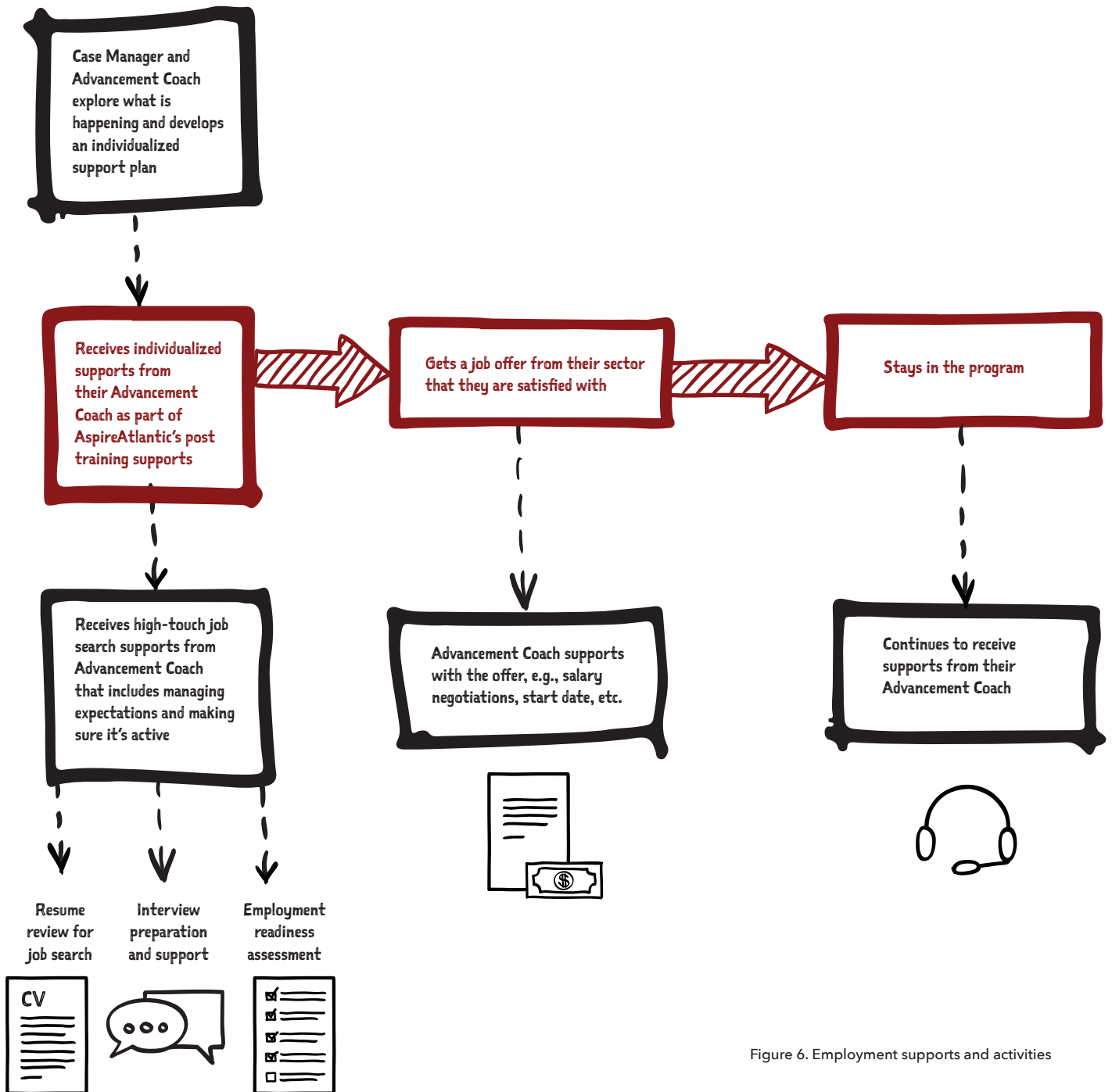


Figure 6. Employment supports and activities

AspireAtlantic Experience

The participant, Case Manager, and Advancement Coach work together to determine an individual plan, and the participant is supported through all the steps of pre- and post-employment—from resume development, job application, interview preparation and debrief, and ongoing coaching towards career advancement. Any career or professional goals are owned by the participant, with the intention of moving toward self-sufficiency in managing their challenges and identifying their own needs. Additionally, the Advancement Coach works with employers, to better understand their needs, make a connection between the employer and the participant and support the participant in their application or even transition into their new job and help them adapt to their new job.

Following employment, the participant continues to receive support from the Advancement Coach and Case Manager (as needed). As a part of the Post Employment Services & Post Program Support stage (see Figure 7), the Advancement Coach works with both the participant and the employer to help navigate job transition and career sustainability.

Designed as a demonstration project, the AspireAtlantic program ended December 2023. Ideally the Advancement Coach would remain connected to participants for 12 to 24 months post-employment for continued coaching and mentorship towards career advancement. The Advancement Coach role also continues to work with employers to help understand challenges and monitor the progress of participants through employer feedback in their new employment roles.

The career coaching model serves participants in AspireAtlantic by focusing on identifying goals and motivating factors, ongoing coaching and mentorship; identifying the steps to success

and actioning them with guidance as needed, exposing graduates to industry connections, networks, and employers, and individualizing wraparound supports that lead to self-sufficiency and independent career decision making. None of this is possible without relationships. Building genuine relationships takes time and intention and makes ongoing engagement between staff and participants positive and lasting. After training, as check-ins and meetings become less frequent, the relationship between staff and participants was vital support when career tracks are less linear and job seekers are navigating work and life challenges.

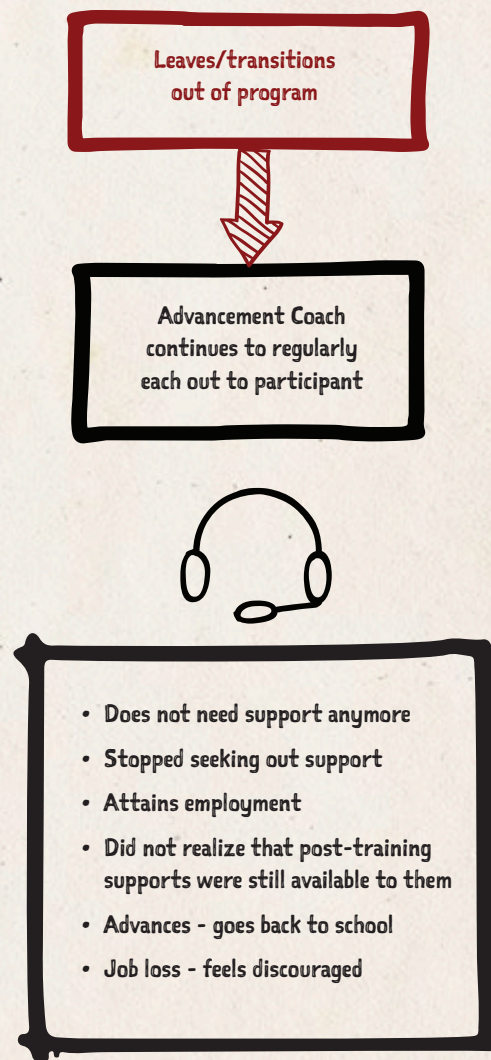
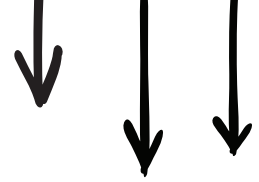


Figure 7. Post program

Scaling Practices





1. Program Initiation & Delivery

As part of a Phase 1 report that summarizes needs assessment findings and outlines the AspireAtlantic concept and workplan, there is some information about the Nova Scotia employment ecosystem that can inform strategies and tactics for implementation and delivery. Within the employment ecosystem in Nova Scotia, there are numerous programs delivering pre-employment and employment services. However, there was outlined a desire, on the part of Service Providers, to expand post-employment services. Service Providers are interested to see how post-employment services can help their clients to find and retain employment, but the capacity to provide this kind of services is lacking depending on the organization.

Key Insights & Observations

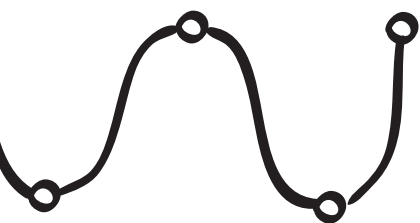
- Training or education as part of employment programs does not guarantee that an attendee will find a job as a result, hence the clear need for a holistic targeted employment program that can drive job seekers toward meaningful jobs with career growth and advancement potential.
- AspireAtlantic was adapted based on the assumption that there is a strong demand for positions in particular sectors and that employers will have vacancies that need to be filled. Program participants are expected to compete with other candidates in the market, although they will benefit from the established relationships between employers and AspireAtlantic staff.
- AspireAtlantic is an integrated, concentrated employment model to serve both the job seeker and employer needs. As such, each of the phases of the program are not necessarily discrete practices or independent components or practices. Together they form a holistic approach centred heavily around support and encouragement of job seekers and the needs of employers.

Promising Practices

a) Relationship-Centred Design: Building and adapting the program based on continuous learning about the job seekers and sector needs.

- The dual-client model is a distinct focus on serving employers and job seekers. These groups must remain at the forefront of the development and delivery of the program.
- Designing a program that puts the job seeker at the centre must focus on addressing the inequities that exist in the employment ecosystem and within the chosen sectors. Participants, staff, and employers are aware of these issues and the barriers that prevent some seeking employment from reaching their goals.
- Networking with key parties can be challenging. Investing time and effort from the onset to develop trusting relationships is a critical factor in building success and achieving program outcomes for job seekers and employers, as well as supporting sector needs.

- Offering proactive wraparound supports at every stage to support the human journey through the program enables timely, trusted, and honest conversations. Wraparound supports are defined as those supports that are flexible, family or person-oriented and comprehensive. In AspireAtlantic, Case Managers and Advancement Coaches work together to provide or refer an individual to a variety of services which make up a holistic system of supports. (see Appendix for sample job descriptions)
 - Program success is dependent on adaptive supports which are flexible and responsive to changing needs of participants and employers. However, applying a structured evaluation approach to collect and understand learnings (inhibitors and facilitators), enables adjustments and improvements to program delivery throughout the program implementation.
- b) Partnership and Collaboration:
Working collectively across the employment services ecosystem to learn and achieve dual-client objectives**
- Establishing service delivery partnerships early in the design process is critical for operational success. Relationships with service delivery partners and across the ecosystem of employment service supports need to be well developed prior to recruitment.
 - Successful promotion of the program is dependent on the solid connections or connectivity to both the target sector(s) and the employment services industry. Early involvement of the sectors, who ideally are well connected to employers, and Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) helped with effective implementation. Sector organizations and advancement coaches worked to understand the sector needs and provided a connection to employers.
 - There was an initial intent to engage employers early in the program, not just in the job search or employment part of the program. To be sure that the training, particularly the Occupational Skills Training, will address current and emerging job seeker skill gaps or general labour shortages, some connection to employers is beneficial. It also helps to create early buy-in to improve awareness of the program. Once employers are aware of programs that are industry focused, small and medium sized business can see the value in having a pipeline of talent that has been developed to suit their needs. This kind of access to employers is often possible with robust relationships with active sector or industry organizations as well.



c) Staffing: Forming the right team from the onset, recruiting team members who are open to learning new ways of working in a highly collaborative program delivery model

- With six partners, three SPOs, and three industry or sector council organizations—and the need for participatory decision-making and innovative thinking—a highly collaborative approach was required. Partner organizations embraced a team approach that incorporated a growth mindset, their industry and employment knowledge, participant-centred thinking and open-mindedness for new approaches in sector growth and meeting demand.
- Each partner was responsible for hiring staff that could work as a team began by seeking out partners who would put forward enthusiastic, skilled, and ideally experienced staff was a priority. Case Managers and Advancement Coaches who have the knowledge and skills to promote and engage job seekers and underrepresented people while assessing employers' needs for skilled labour can seem a bit counterbalanced. In a sense, the program builds the capacity to understand and respond to the labour market in particular sectors by provide skills training and support to job seekers that will qualify them for quality employment roles in their chosen sector. It is a challenging balance.
- When staff are on board, they need adequate time to understand all the different parts of the program and prepare effective materials to communicate the program objectives to the referral partners (other employment practitioners, case workers for social support programs, etc.)
- With Advancement Coaches in place from the onset of program delivery, participants were able to focus on long-term career goals as early as the career readiness services/training phase. In fact, there are benefits to having the Advancement Coach role hired and ready even earlier. Case Managers and Advancement Coaches work effectively together to recruit participants through the intake and screening phase of the program toward two main goals.
- First, the advancement coaches can help the intake and screening process by fully explaining the career path and kinds of jobs in the sector that are possible at the end of the program and the skills that employers in the industry are looking for, thereby helping participants understand the program outcomes well.
- The second benefit is all about relationships. If the Advancement Coaches are involved at the beginning of the program, they can instill the principles of career advancement with participants from the start. Also, as Advancement Coaches are beginning to look ahead to building relationships with employers, they can tell the story of the participants that are in the program, not individually, but rather as a general profile. For a new program, the more that employers know earlier, the better and stronger those relationships will be later in the program when looking at vacancies in organizations.

2. Intake & Screening

Through our initial research, it was determined that many job seekers have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to gain employment. It is the quality of the employment opportunities that was uncertain. There were apparent barriers to their entry into significant opportunities. The recruitment and screening process was meant to uncover these barriers, whether they were personal or professional. Ideally, industries could also provide information about particular skills required for particular jobs in their sectors. However, AspireAtlantic sector organizations did not use skills tests or assessments as part of qualifying for the program as these were industries that had never used them fully before. This was something that WorkAdvance sites employed as part of recruitment and screening of participants in most cases but was heavily influenced or requested by the sector.

The responsibility of recruitment and admittance into AspireAtlantic fell mainly upon the Case Managers, who were hired by SPOs. Early on, Case Managers involved Advancement Coaches, who were hired by industry and sector partners, in order to be sure that the sector perspectives and needs could be considered.

The following criteria, which were developed as part of a participant decision making by the AspireAtlantic team in consultation with sectors and WorkAdvance partners and advisors varied slightly in relation to the sector for which job seekers were recruited. The following is the general criteria for entry level roles in the Residential/Home Construction Fundamentals Program and the Manufacturing Fundamentals Program. They were general employment criteria, e.g. there were few employers who would consider removing a minimum of high school equivalency from their employment considerations.

AspireAtlantic minimum entry requirements examples:

- Former/current participants who have successfully completed an intensive program (i.e., requires high level of commitment motivation, 3+ days a week)
- Individuals with limited (less than 2 years) Canadian work experience.
- High school graduation (lower level of post-secondary education is acceptable)
- People who earn less than \$32,000CAD or approximately \$15.50/hour or experiencing financial barriers or hardships (self-reported).
- People in underrepresented groups including women, new immigrants, and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) are welcome to apply.

Scaling Practices

Please note: Some sectors added requirements such as an ability to stand for long periods or able to lift a minimum of 30–40 pounds.

ICI Construction criteria was centred on more middle skill-type jobs and hence the admissions requirements were different. This was a targeted program for a large group of skilled newcomers (mainly engineers educated outside of Canada and/or had work experience in the industry) who reported difficulties in attaining employment in the ICI Construction Project Coordination and Management sector. As these are middle-skill or better type roles, it was an uncertain endeavour to provide assistance to “qualified” or educated, in some cases highly educated people, to find meaningful employment. However, the AspireAtlantic program seemed to meet an employer need in priming new Canadians’ skills for employment and exposure to the culture of the sector. This was a gap in services that was worth exploring.

The criteria generally included:

- You have completed a high school or GED program from a Canadian or international educational institution
- You have some past professional experience (in some field applicable to the construction sector) or some post-secondary education (or both)
- You are eligible to work in Canada and available for this full-time, 12-week training program

- You are unemployed, under-employed, or facing financial challenges and barriers to employment
- You have a strong motivation to learn online and to work in the Construction industry

Please note: This particular program is for those with past professional experience only. It is not a beginner’s program.

Key Insights & Observations

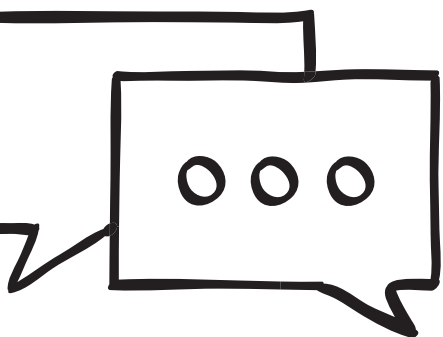
- Attracting job seekers to apply for a program requires a clear understanding of the program and training objectives and expectations of the program. It stands to reason that job seekers must understand the timing and schedule of the program, what they will learn during the program, and potential jobs available at the end of the program. This is important for job seekers and for the staff who are promoting the program as well. It is not easy to explain and promote a program that is not clearly developed or is subject to changes once recruitment has started.

“Need to show up on time - one individual would show up 30 or 45 minutes late, almost every day. Then the instructor would go over everything again. Slowed the day down some days.”

- Participant

Scaling Practices

- Program criteria by which job seekers or applicants will be chosen, must be clear and established validated by the sector early in the selections and recruitment stage to ensure the program is selecting for job readiness aligned with sector opportunities.
- In conducting selections interviews, staff have criteria that act as an initial benchmark. For example, staff would note if an applicant has completed high school equivalency, a history with the criminal justice system that has not been pardoned, and available for the daily hours of the program, for example. However, staff also document other criteria regarding a person's current financial situation, that is, this program could improve one's financial situation. Also, staff might make note of their observations in their propensity to learn or be coached and some kind of personal readiness for this program. This holistic approach allows staff identify candidates who not only have a high likelihood of program completion but also demonstrate the potential for long-term success and growth within the sector. It also means that concepts of an applicant's appropriateness for the program outside of the admissions criteria, that which is more subjective, to make allowances for those that may be struggling in some way and would benefit the assistance and guidance of this program to find a job.



- The participant selection process is unique can be an assurance to employers that the program staff have screened for job seekers with advancement potential. By the time participants are making connections in the sector and beginning to meet employers, they represent the program. Naturally, those that represent the program should be high quality potential job candidates who have taken full advantage of the program and now have greater chances for job search success and growth in the sector.

Promising Practices

a) Criteria for Advancement: Screening job seekers to balance program suitability and career advancement readiness

- Selections criteria should be established early and can include criteria that is vetted by the sector and a guideline to assess an applicant's readiness for this program. For example, if an applicant is interested in working online from home, an onsite manufacturing job would not be suited for them. For some job seekers, the selections interview with an AspireAtlantic staff member is the first time they have explored their interest a career rather than a job, their abilities or their concept or perception of their own abilities, and their innate coachability and motivation despite potential previous difficulties. It is important that the selection and interview process also include a sensitive and thoughtful discussion of the applicants' self-confidence and other personal factors, which can affect a job seeker's plan for their future, propensity to make mature career-related decisions and hence their overall success.

- Selecting participants who are ready to learn, can make a commitment to the program (simulating a job environment), and who are interested in the industry is important and yet requires balance. Program staff may interview folks who need help with personal or professional barriers to attend the program. However, strong and flexible screening criteria allows AspireAtlantic staff to look for potential. And the program is built to foster confidence and train for the skills needed to complete the program, find a job and advance through a meaningful career.
- A scoring system or rubric assists in ensuring that participants are interested in the industry and know what to expect in the program. It could also be used as a tool to provide information about the program so that they can decide to enrol. For example, a rubric might include questions what they know about jobs in the sector and perhaps what might motivate them to find quality employment. This is an opportunity to provide information about job prospects and their associated job readiness skills that will be covered in the program, and any other information about the program and its potential commitments that a candidate will need to know.
- In collecting this information, AspireAtlantic staff can first determine if their marketing activities have been useful, and second, inform participants about the sector and potential opportunities and the post-training and program support available. Some of the SPOs operated differently with respect to the populations served and the size and variety of the organizations or even their networks who can refer clients.
- Some other questions will focus on gathering more personal information regarding personal struggles, past work history or difficulties, and any history with the criminal justice system. AspireAtlantic staff can encourage applicants to share their struggles for extra assistance and referrals to community resources or other supports.
- Employers benefit as strong selection for AspireAtlantic helps act like a “pre-screening” for future employers. Early discussions with employers, sectors, and SPOs about selection criteria can help but is not the only considerations for overall suitability. Regular assessments of the selections process, including the criteria, should be ongoing.
- It is essential to have the resources and knowledge to serve the diverse needs of the participants in the program. In discussions with staff, many difficulties reported with participants who struggled or were not finding employment seemed to have been attributed to accepting people into AspireAtlantic who were not well matched or ready for the program. This was a powerful tool for staff in selecting participants for future cohorts, that is, staff had a deeper understanding of the kinds of help the program can provide or if the needs of the individual is beyond any assistance of the program.



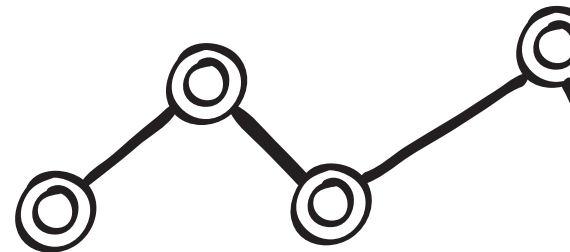
b) Promotion & Outreach: Attracting Job Seekers requires proactive and systematic outreach with a variety of community groups

- Effective recruitment and selection methods are critical for driving job seekers to apply for the program. Proactive and systematic outreach and well-established networks increases the volume of applicants. From a larger pool of well-informed applicants, AspireAtlantic staff can more easily select strong candidates who can benefit from the program.
- Adequate time is essential for this stage. This helps staff feel that their work is more manageable. Appropriate timing between recruitment, selection, and training also allows for job seekers to prepare for the time commitment in the program.
- It takes time to market a program and acquaint other employment practitioners with a new program as this is the target audience for outreach. Ideally other employment service providers community groups who have access to job seekers can recommend folks to the program.
- Particularly in early cohorts, the bulk of the intake and screening responsibility fell on the Case Managers of our SPOs. In later cohorts, Advancement Coaches were working with Case Managers to be sure that all information related to the program is relayed to the applicant in the process.

- Recruitment materials should clearly discuss the intentions of the program and be easily accessible by the target audience. The value of the program must be clear to community partners who send prospective candidates to apply to the program and to the participants themselves. Staff found that participants were more likely to engage in the selections process when they understood the program commitment (start times, number of classroom hours, learning schedule, total program length, etc.) and the kinds of jobs that they could apply for/be considered for.
- Strong relationships with SPOs who have diverse outreach and networking tactics is important. Recruiting underrepresented groups proved challenging to enroll women and gender diverse people in the program.

c) Responsive and Flexible Support: Job Seekers' needs are emergent and unique

- AspireAtlantic had budget flexibility to provide a range of wraparound supports such as gas cards, training stipends, bus passes, referrals to mental health related resources, professional interview clothing, laptops to participate in training or job search, and even further supplementary training for program alumni. For many participants in the program, these supports made enrolling to the program possible, not to mention were helpful for retention in our program.



- Participants were provided with a weekly training stipend while enrolled in the program that was meant to provide some support as they completed the training part of the program. Because they could have been taken away from paid work or other benefits, Case Managers asked applicants to carefully consider the repercussions of accepting a training allowance or stipend in case it influenced their eligibility. They advised prospective participants to check about Employment Insurance (EI) benefits or other social assistance payments.

3. Career Readiness Service (or Training)

Career Readiness Services or Training (CRT), taught by Case Managers, included skills deemed to be “non-technical”. The programming, taught by Case Managers in AspireAtlantic, includes training in soft skills or social and emotional skills, writing cover letters and resumes, and preparing for interviews. Ideally, this is the part of the training in which staff bring a sectoral focus to their topics and training, e.g. resume for a particular industry, not just resumes in general. In addition, Case Managers can teach and prompt discussion and honest conversation on things such as the unwritten rules of workplaces and industry norms.

It is of note that there were newcomer groups were mainly taught by a Case Manager very familiar with CRT elements that would benefit new Canadians. CRT was developed with the experience of Case Managers who understand the needs of their participants and consultation with sector organizations. Case Managers facilitated CRT and focused on providing information relating to interpersonal skills, self-care and resiliency, digital skills, soft skills, workplace expectations, job search processes, and job applications.

Key Insights & Observations:

- Building on the relationship and trust from the selections and intake process ensures that participants will share and seek out or even accept help.
- Career readiness training that focuses on both societal, cultural and sector norms, recognizes and prepares job seekers for the unique context in their career. It’s more than just resumes and cover letters.

“They have gone beyond what I expected, by helping my family, with my child going to school as well. They asked a few extra questions about life in general. My son refused to go to the high school, and I could only homeschool, and they helped me found an alternative program. They helped me not have to move... [My Case Manager] was quite good at going the extra mile.”

- Participant

Promising Practices:

a) Continuous Support: responsive to the unique participant needs throughout their program journey

- Many participants will share their struggles in the selections process. For those who have identified that they require additional supports, the AspireAtlantic staff can follow up on issues or life circumstances that can be supported early in the program and in anticipation of any needs that could be recurring. Every situation will be different,
- One on one meetings with Case Managers and Advancement Coaches begin early in the training. Though both of these roles take on the tasks of providing feedback and encouragement and to check in on a participant's overall well-being, there is a slight difference in their focus. The Case Manager's attention tends to be wrap-around supports such as bus passes or gas cards that the SPO is equipped to provide as part of the project. Advancement Coaches are interested in a job seeker's personal and professional goals, and this begins with coaching conversations to about personal and career goals and talk about where a participant's interest lies and jobs in a particular industry. In particular, the personal goal(s) can represent a motivating factor for completing the program to encourage strength and resilience. The training program that is meant to mimic the workplace can be intense for some. The advancement coach can use a motivating factor as a touchpoint to bring up

with participants throughout their engagement, to remind them why they chose to do this program. Also, coaches can discuss how participants are making progress towards their goal/motivating factor.

- For example, if there is a single mother who is struggling in the program, with assignments or attendance then this could be an important way to keep her on track. In addition to a natural goal of finding work to support her family, she may also share something such as, "I would like to earn \$19 per hour or more" or "I want to be able to give my children experiences I didn't have". The coach would then ask, to be more specific in identifying one experience for instance it could be going on a family vacation or her kids joining a soccer club. This goal would then be used in subsequent sessions with the participant. This example may be how to use motivation with some specific illustrations to remind the participant how their work and effort in the training can get them closer to their goal.



b) Sector Norms: Having the social and emotional skills to understand, adapt, and navigate the workplace, cultural and industry

- CRT generally marks the beginning of the training part of the program. When a participant's commitment or understanding of expectations is in question, it is vital to be curious about what could be going on. This is an essential point to set out a plan to get a participant on track for assignment deadlines or attendance issues, for example. The expectations in the training environment are meant to simulate the expectations in the work environment, such as attendance, punctuality or even dress codes. Thus, if a participant is not attending or "showing up" to class, then there is no reason to think that the employer experience will be any different.

"There were parts of the course where we went over scenarios ... [AspireAtlantic staff] taught us to stand up to bullies and negative people ... it helped me in such a way, that there was this guy who was speaking negatively about another person, and I stood up for the other person. I probably would have usually kept quiet, but I had the courage to say I am not with that."

- Participant

- Getting participants back on track or exiting participants who cannot meet the standards of the simulated work environment can be difficult, but it is crucial. It benefits the participant and the reputation of a new program in a well-established employment services ecosystem with many players and practices that have not changed significantly.
- The CRT part of the program is meant to be a safe space to begin curious conversations about the work, workplace cultures, and industry norms and expectations. It begins with expectations regarding attendance, professional dress and conduct for the industry (if applicable) and how to get your resume noticed. Topics such as conduct in the workplace, how superiors generally like to be addressed, how to ask for a raise (and when) or how to ask for feedback to improve performance are important discussion points for coaching sessions and can help in solidifying goals and motivating factors. This is also a part of the program in which Advancement Coaches, with their industry knowledge, can contribute and facilitate conversations about workplaces and employers with participants in the program. This was particularly useful for newcomers who were keen and curious about the cultural differences in a particular industry and having struggles in finding work in their industries in Canada.

- The program is meant help participants learn the habits and expectations of employers in their targeted industries. Though the program does not guarantee that a participant will get a job, there is an opportunity for Advancement Coaches to recommend or refer to an employer inside or even outside their network. Advancement Coaches do their best to connect job seekers and employers for networking purposes, however, the participant must still do the work to get a meeting or interview. AspireAtlantic alumni are coached to take charge of their job search and candidacy with some guidance and advice. There is no guarantee of a job after the training however Advancement Coaches are likely making connections and “vouch” for the program graduate with employers, particularly in the post training part of the program. Career coaching continues.

“I think it was well equipped, and delivered effectively, we got to meet some industry experts, who had a lot of experience. it also had certifications, and important introductions. They did a good job explaining the information in the Canadian context.”

- Participant

c) Sector Preparedness: Tailoring resumes and interview preparation to a particular sector

- CRT with a sectoral focus helps participants to practice emerging skills, such as promoting their own achievements or using sector specific terminology, in supportive settings.
- Preparing a participant for job searching and applications in a particular industry requires some guided practice in a safe environment. For some learning how to promote themselves in an interview or as part of an “elevator pitch” or regularly update their resume with new training achievements or skills is something that job seeker will do as a lifelong skill that can boost their self-confidence. This can provide hope and optimism for their prospects toward a meaningful career.

- Case Managers or facilitators can set up the conditions needed for practicing new skills with mock interviews or with alumni from previous cohorts who can give feedback on resumes or interview skills. Often debrief sessions or information sessions or presentations with alumni provide a powerful testimonial for the program and hope for the end of a challenging program.



4. Occupational Skills Training

The implementation of Occupational Skills Training focuses on the skills and outcomes that employers deemed to be essential skills and knowledge for success in their industry. The OST curriculum was informed by the sector partners with Advancement Coaches supporting, and in one case facilitating and leading, OST. The industry organizations informed the content and approach that would fit local employers' wish list of skills for prospective employees. As a result, topics covered in OST included sector fundamentals as advised by sector organizations and employers.

Key Insights & Observations

- One of the strongest aspects of this program was the prospect of learning about the industry-related skills that are in demand by employers. The type of training was likely to make a difference in this program. It was meant to fill a gap that did not exist in the training or employment services ecosystems. This training was intended to be practical and would provide skills that employers would appreciate. Though a credential could be attained at an educational institution, it is not meant to be post-secondary school.
- OST is made possible by involvement of employers and sector experts in developing sector-related curriculum. Participants interviewed felt that much of what they learned was going to be helpful for their future careers. Sector and employer feedback on the OST learnings and outcomes was important to keep the program relevant.

- The concept or ideas behind microcredentials were useful for guidance and perspective on training. OST is meant to be of short duration and impart skills that other program such as high school or post secondary level training cannot. A microcredential is defined as a recognition of assessed competencies or skills earned through a short learning experience. Microcredentials should align with labour market, employer or community needs to train for critical skillsets and yet remain agile and responsive to changing labour market requirements. source novascotia.ca/

microcredentials

Promising Practices

a) Industry-recognized credentials: Sector-based programs offer industry informed training with sector input and a base for fundamental industry knowledge

- Developing strong, industry-informed OST programming can create the best chance that the skills are relevant for the sector. For graduates to find jobs after the program is complete, the OST should be sanctioned by industry groups, and if possible, employers.
- It is also important to note that AspireAtlantic was developed to fill a gap and to improve the success of the trained participant in getting, keeping, and advancing in a job. This program was not meant to compete with college level programs such as certificate, diploma or degree studies. The training in AspireAtlantic was more like microlearning to teach the fundamentals of an industry or particular entry level job. This kind of training could certainly spark a desire for further learning, which is also a favourable outcome.

- Skills training or even post-secondary training does not guarantee that an individual will attach to employment, as evidenced in instances where a college or university graduate may not be employed in their field of study. By taking on the principles of just-in-time learning or priming someone with knowledge and the vernacular of an industry, AspireAtlantic was able to graduate folks with a good base of understanding of an industry.

“Have more opportunities to practice. It’s important that you can perfect the specific exercise. In real time, you need to understand, it’s important. Have more practical exercises before they try to get a job. More hands-on work - with blueprints especially.”

- Participant

- Ideally, a sector-focused training program has a credential that is recognized by a particular industry, but is not a post-secondary or “school” program. In AspireAtlantic, the three industries did not have an existing widely recognized credential, and so with industry input, the AspireAtlantic program made one of its own. The job of the Advancement Coach was to use personal sector knowledge and “shop” the program to new networks and employers to validate the learning outcomes. Employers in certain sectors have the potential to lean on a particular way of finding new talent. Our work with sector organizations This is also helpful in making employers aware that this program will soon have graduates that will potentially be well-suited for their organizations as a form of promotion.
- In the development of the AspireAtlantic model, our team referred to WorkAdvance which referred to preparing job seekers for high-demand and middle-skill jobs.^{MDRC, 2016} It makes sense that if participants have been trained or primed for a particular industry and in a more targeted way compared to other job seekers than outside of AspireAtlantic, then it follows that the AspireAtlantic alumni would better prepared, more qualified or more likely to be considered for more advanced roles. In the AspireAtlantic program, many of the high-demand opportunities were entry-level roles, and most organizations in AspireAtlantic reported having fairly solid advancement potential.



Scaling Practices

- The ICI Construction sector and a service provider who serves a group of highly educated and foreign trained newcomers reported a need for more middle-skill job opportunities for this groups. They were not successful in attaining entry-level roles. This particular stream of participants had slightly different selections and intake criteria and requirements. The training was targeted to those with more advanced skills and knowledge because the jobs required more advanced skills and were well-suited to participants who had previous education and industry experience.

b) Integrating soft skills and technical skills training: Providing holistic and industry related context

- In early cohorts, CRT and OST training were offered somewhat independently. For example, the 8-week Manufacturing Fundamentals program began with 4 weeks of CRT followed by 4 weeks of OST. CRT sessions were generally half days of training, and OST training days were full days to simulate working days as much as possible.



“Programs that I took before were not as helpful as this. When I was in [a local community college] they also were not willing to do 1 on 1 and would not accommodate me.”

- Participant

- In later cohorts, AspireAtlantic staff integrated CRT and OST over the length of the program in order to enhance both parts of the training. The technical topics and soft skills topics could be combined in a weekly or daily schedule, to better simulate a work environment. Both staff and participants responded positively to this scaffolding of the content. [outline pros and cons]
- Participants felt that OST was unique to AspireAtlantic. They appreciated receiving customized training and sectoral based learnings to guide them through their employment journey.

c) Continued support: Helping participants through training as needs change

- Training delivery methods, like overall support, should be dynamic and responsive where possible. For example, demand post-covid for flexibility in training and work seemed to be on the rise, and so the program endeavoured to prepare participants for flexible work environments. While building in this form of resilience and adjustment is possible in some aspects of the program, the jobs that AspireAtlantic are training for are largely in person. Hosting in person session to showcase the hands-on practice and skills deemed to be required in the roles in the sector can provide a balanced learning experience.
- Balancing the learning needs of a variety of participants is a challenge. Regular check ins not only between Advancement Coaches and participants are important to be sure that participants are supported, but also between program staff and the facilitator of the Occupational Skills Training to address behavior and any recurring needs.

"I really love the fact that we get to do site visits, showing us what to expect, and it also shows us what we can do, what we could end up doing for ourselves."

- Participant

- There are opportunities to use additional course work and/or one on one support for those who struggle. For those who were a bit more advanced, staff reported allowing them to act as peer mentors for others.
- Site visits or employers as guest speakers in the program were built in as often as possible. Participants get the benefit of information directly from an employer and employers get a preview of the calibre of participants that are in the program soon to graduate. For a program that simulates a genuine work environment, participants meet real employers communicating real expectations while making connections with industry professionals.

5. Job Development & Placement

The goal of AspireAtlantic was to provide job seekers with the skills necessary to promote success in future job searches. Though the original model referred to this part of the program as "Job Placement Services", the AspireAtlantic team called this "Job Placement Support" as placement services in Canada usually refers to a job that is guaranteed at the end of some ind of pre-employment training or programming. This slightly different philosophy means that Advancement

Coaches are not "placing" alumni into jobs, but rather curating posted job opportunities and providing dynamic career and job search coaching and support for participants. For example, Advancement Coaches would make contact with employers with whom they had close relationships and new employers. At the same time, they also supported participants to search for jobs using a variety of sources while helping participants evaluate different job opportunities. For example, one employer may not have a benefits plan but may have higher wages, while others may have lower hourly wages and shift work but they offer health and vacation benefits. This post program support (along with was intended for up to 18-months following graduation.

Key Insights & Observations

- Job development or job placement has a particular meaning in the AspireAtlantic program. At the beginning of the program, the employer is the second of the "dual" customers, and so the relationship with employers begins with a strong understanding of the career options and general workforce trends.
- Making a strong match between alumni skills and abilities and skills outlined in vacant positions in the sector is made somewhat easier with established and trusting relationships with employers. If employers feel that the program has an understanding of their needs or even workplace culture.

Promising Practices

a) Employment Readiness Post Training: Assisting and supporting those who are employed, job searching, or experiencing job loss

- AspireAtlantic staff established certain criteria and identified behaviours that made alumni job ready. Advancement Coaches will identify who is ready to job search and who perhaps needs additional training or support based on their progress in the training and their attitudes and mindset post training. When Advancement Coaches are putting forward to employers those participants that have the best success of doing well in an interview.
- Advancement Coaches are supporting the job search process beginning with exploring job postings and vacancies with alumni who are job or employment ready. Alumni and ACs work together to identify job postings and vacancies which are in line with the sector and their strengths and interests all while keeping realistic expectations at the forefront. Staff (AC) leverage their industry credibility and are well positioned to vouch for job seekers and help overcome employers' potential biases.
- After a participant has found employment, follow up is reasonably immediate and has particular goals in mind. For instance, an AC may follow up with the employee after Day 1 at the job, then Week 1, and then Month 1. Coaching conversations early on and throughout are important with both employers and employees. Staying connected is important for retention and this will look different for each participant depending on their circumstances. There are a variety of negative situations can arise, and with regular contact, they can be avoided and perhaps overcome. This is a chance to help a graduate with self-reflection, motivation and employer expectations in an employment role.
- Job loss happens in employment programs for a variety of reasons. Advancement Coaches have an opportunity to collect valuable about these situations. It could be that the applicant or alumni was not employment ready or there is an unexpected trend in the sector or situation with the employer. ACs can follow up with employers to get feedback that can help inform ways to support the job seeker.
- Depending on the situation, the Advancement Coach can support by providing more training or personal support for participants experiencing job loss. Support could take the form of referrals to helpful resources and talking through this setback and looking forward. Every situation will be different, so coaching to uncover a systemic issue around actual job readiness will be important. Some participants will be eager to find another job and others may feel disappointed or frustrated. For those who are employment ready and can be coached past the



Scaling Practices

set back of job loss, applying for other jobs and continuing to job search are generally the best next steps.

- If Advancement Coaches are able to maintain the employer relationship from this situation, it is a chance to show the employer that there is something to be learned from this situation. The AC will have perhaps better insight about the employer and employment opportunity in this organization. In this case, the AC can use this to inform their practicing of matching job seekers to these opportunities. These situations ought to handle with care, as letting a program participant go from a job could negatively influence an employer's opinion of the program or quality of graduates. Some employers may not be ready to engage with program staff after a job loss.

"I let [my Advancement Coach] know I applied to this position, I asked him if he had any contacts for this position, because he knows many people in this industry. He did have contacts at this company. [The AC] asked his contact to share my resume for me. [The AC] also offered me a mock interview before my interview for my new job.

- Participant

- Advancement Coaches use their extensive sector-based knowledge and relational capital to help employers make connections between the skills learned in the program and the employability skills in certain job postings. Advancement Coaches can help employers see how alumni are suited for opportunities in their organizations.
 - Staff Advancement Coach understand enough about the industry and what matching a job seeker to a job looks like. Meeting employer needs creates the positive conditions for success.
 - The network that Case Managers and ACs had were essential for the success of this program. Case Managers were able to provide participants with information regarding further supports through their extensive knowledge of social supports. Advancement Coaches felt that their relationships with employers and sector professionals often helped the participants secure jobs. Advancement Coaches often utilized different tactics to help promote the program to employers and AspireAtlantic graduates such as calls to hiring managers to inform them of the program its value and benefits to them and even invites to AspireAtlantic information sessions and celebrations. Employer involvement can lead to buy in which helps to create a stronger ecosystem of support for the participant.
- b) Employer Relationship: Keeping in close touch with employers and communicating AspireAtlantic graduates as attractive, screened candidates**
- Advancement Coaches can highlight the quality of alumni that are interested in roles with employers. By emphasizing the distinctive

benefits for employers such as pre-screened candidates for their job vacancies, the support services that Advancement Coaches can provide for job retention, and well-poised candidates with industry-recognized skills, the program can answer the question “what’s in it for us” as the employer or hiring manager.

- This part of the program may feel familiar to those with a “sales” background. This is an opportunity to show employers the kinds of services that the program can offer to employers. Advancement Coaches can showcase the knowledge of the employer needs, thereby building a relationship of understanding. A strong relationship makes it easy for Advancement Coaches to get information and feedback about how the employee is performing on the job, which areas to work on, and insight into advancement paths and opportunities.
- Advancement Coaches, with feedback from new employees, can also provide some insights about an organization. For instance, an organization could learn more about their workplace culture for new employees including the onboard process. With the right approach, this information could be positioned as something to help the employer and enhance the relationship.

6. Post-Employment Services/Post Program Support

Advancement coaches and case managers maintain relationships with job seekers to provide supports as necessary. Some of the supports provided by AspireAtlantic staff included

supporting them in finding specialized education for their children or additional funding to gain skill gaps identified through their job search.

Key Insights & Observations

- In order to prioritize support for graduates through job search and attaining employment, the program prioritizes strong relationships with both employers and participants.
- Mentorship scaffolds the experience of the participants in the training and through the employment experience. This program provides job seekers with mentors in the form of Advancement Coaches who have knowledge of their specific needs and can help and support to them succeed in the workplace. This mentorship can transition to mentorship and trust in the workplace as well.
- Follow up with graduates becomes more challenging after the program training is completed. Advancement Coaches follow up regularly and Many participants do not keep in touch regularly and help alumni see the added value the after training support. Planning and promoting relevant events that will entice alumni to stay in contact with program staff and continue learning can certainly assist. Post-training programming can also take the form of support to employers and participants. Events that assist with networking, industry guest speaker events and skill-building training sessions can increase the likelihood that participants will stay in touch and share their struggles, and accept support offered to them.

Promising Practices

a) Alumni Relationship: Maintaining relationships with program alumni keeps participants engaged, confident, and resilient.

- Relationship-building continues to be an important part of supporting the job seeker. Maintaining channels for open and authentic communication are beneficial in at least two ways. First, participants can continue to receive support from program staff, as they job search and begin their new jobs, which is important in keeping on top of a participants' progress. Second, participants can provide valuable information about their experiences and insights in job searching and employment with a particular organization that can help uncover points of feedback for employers and other alumni.

"Most importantly I met knowledgeable people, who are helpful and supported me a lot. It was an honour for me to meet them, and through them I met other people in the industry. It has been a great program for me, and the most important part is that they are still trying to support me, even though I already got a job."

- Participant

- Prior to and following graduation, Advancement Coaches set up expectations that post-program support keeps graduates connected to the program staff and to their peers. Case managers were available augment advancement coach support to provide various wraparound supports and connection to other social resources as needed.
- Post-training becomes mentorship and mentorship takes time, just as advancement takes time in meaningful career paths. Support from employers, program staff and even peers can help when issues arise at work or even at home. With Advancement Coaches and Case Managers managing graduates and issues as a team, the alumni have more all-encompassing support for both personal and professional issues.
- Consistent and regular connections with alumni for career planning (such as 4 times a year) to follow up with intention, e.g., updating career goals, sharing difficulties, check in overall wellbeing and providing guidance and coaching for difficult situations.

"[The Case Manager] was the leader, and she was open, to answer questions and to follow up anytime. I am still in contact in[sic] [the CM]. She would hold your hand and say that we are going to make it."

- Participant

Scaling Practices

- Advancement Coach can balance working with both job seekers and employers as a bridge with proactive follow up and ensuring that the needs of both are sufficiently met.
- Supplementary training post OST is beneficial to support continued learning and build skills necessary to get, keep, and advance in a job. Program staff reported that keeping lines of communication open and maintaining consistent contact with participants was harder after the program. Long-term focused engagement that scaffolds the learning of participants by providing networking, industry guest speaker events and skill-building training sessions increases the likelihood that participants will accept the support offered to them.

b) Employer relationship: Keeping in close touch with employers after alumni are hired as an additional benefit of the program

- Instilling a lifelong learning philosophy has benefits for employers and graduates. With continuous learning or supplementary training and performance and career planning with opinions and view from employers, employees get real time support with feedback directly from their workplaces.
- There were additional reported benefits ICI Construction part of the program. This particular program was developed in response to a need identified by the sector organization and a service provider who noticed an influx of highly skilled internationally trained engineers who were having difficulty finding work in their field, mainly engineering, in Canada. This program admitted applicants with degrees and in some cases years of experience in the

project management field. This meant that the kinds of roles they sought with the help of the Advancement Coaches were middle-skill type roles such as Junior Estimators and Project Coordinators. As the need in the sector had been identified, the skills training, cultural context for the industry and job search support was focused on filling this need.

- Some AspireAtlantic graduates reported that without the AspireAtlantic program, they had trouble even getting interviews with Construction and Engineering firms. After AspireAtlantic, graduates interviewing more frequently and more job offers after this program. With the work of the Advancement Coach to inform employers about the program and with more Canadian context given to participants as part of the program, the graduates now seemed to be well matched for the project management vacancies at many firms.
- For employers, with trust and confidence in the ACs and the program, there is an opportunity to use the AspireAtlantic program staff as an additional support in performance management or employee development. This service or guidance from staff, particularly the Advancement Coach, to the employer maybe unwelcome. We have certainly heard from employers that the Advancement Coaches service sounds interesting but is not needed now that they are employed—this is the employer's job. That is mentorship, support and job coaching in the early weeks of employment is the employer's role and the Advancement Coach service is not required.

Scaling Practices

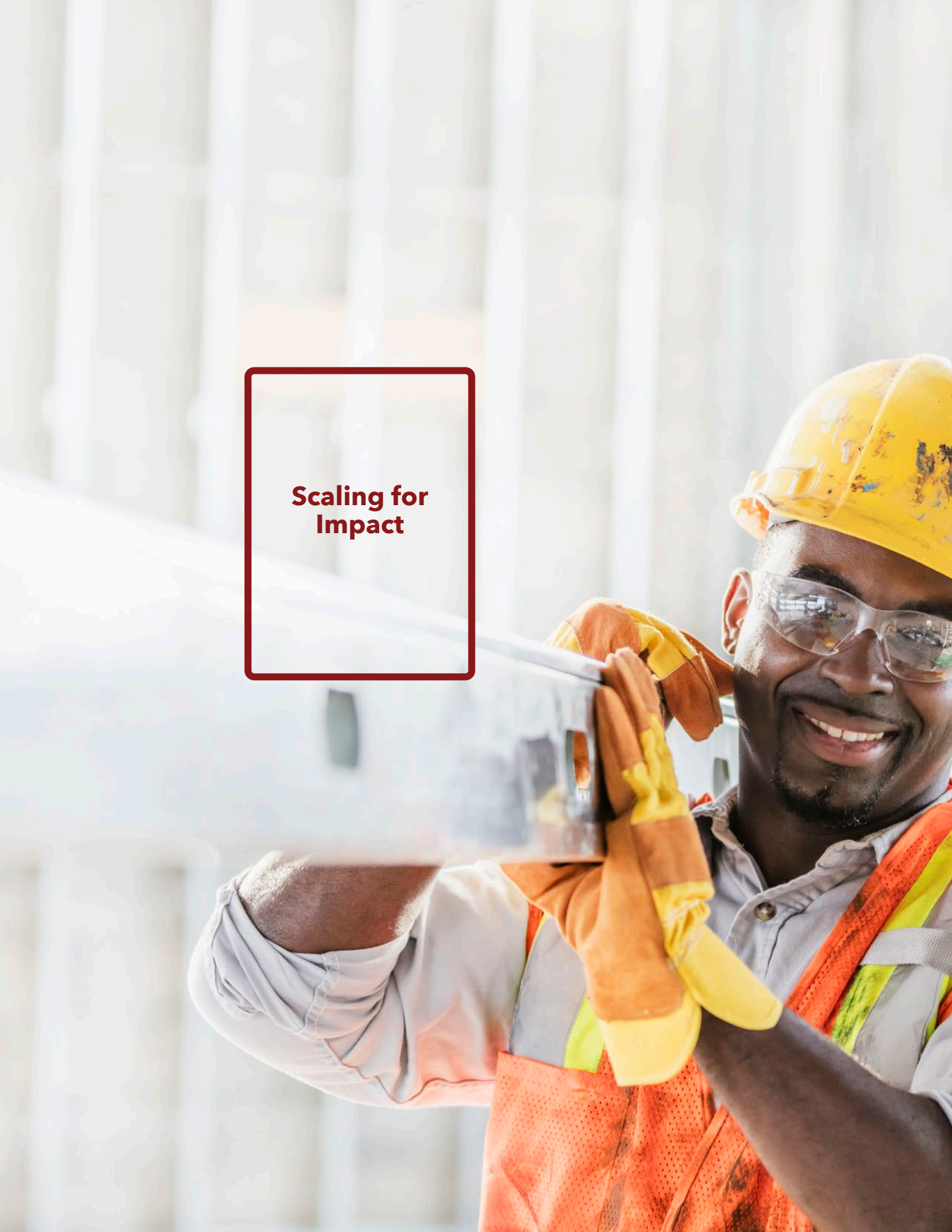
- AspireAtlantic had additional funds to obtain additional training for participants if they were in need of any personal and professional development training that some employers might not be able to afford. For example, some newcomers were keen to continue English language training in their own time, and the AspireAtlantic program provided funding or community referrals for graduates to pursue additional support or learning.
- With strong relationships and trust, AspireAtlantic staff can showcase other additional or residual benefits of the program. For example, advancement coaches could support HR functions in some organizations, by recommending another AspireAtlantic graduate to make recruitment easier.
- AspireAtlantic has the potential to enlighten industry leaders and employers to the diverse talent that advancement-focused, sector-based programs can offer. Because the economy in both Nova Scotia is characterized by small to medium-size enterprises (SMEs), sectors in AspireAtlantic highlighted the lack of Human Resource (HR) capacity. The work of Advancement Coaches to support employers and employees has potential to address this issue. Advancement coaches were a new human resource tested through the model and intended to be a compliment to case management.

Below is a summary table, outlining the AspireAtlantic promising practices significant to the design and delivery of the scaling model to support better outcomes for job seekers and employers.

PROGRAM INITIATION & DELIVERY	INTAKE & SCREENING	CAREER READINESS SERVICES
• Employment programs ought to be designed to serve job seekers holistically, to drive them towards meaningful jobs with career growth and advancement potential with employers. • Relationships-centered design needs to be considered when building and adapting the program to factor in continuous learning about the job seekers and sector needs. Strong relationships build strong trust with participants.	• Program criteria must be clear and established early in the recruitment process and validated by the sector to ensure the program is selecting for personal and professional attributes in alignment with sector opportunities. • Attracting job seekers to make a commitment to the program requires a clear understanding of the program, expectations, training objectives and potential jobs available at the end of the program.	• Career readiness services or training (CRT) should focus on both societal and sector norms, recognizes and prepares job seekers for the unique context in their career. The training teaches more than just resumes and cover letters. • Social and emotional skills, the “non-technical” skills, and awareness figure prominently in the CRT.

OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING	JOB DEVELOPMENT & PLACEMENT	POST-EMPLOYMENT SERVICES & POST-PROGRAM SUPPORT
- Ensuring that the training was practical, hands-on, and strongly based on sector need allowed participants to map their future careers and make connections between the training topics potential jobs. - The sector-based program and credentials offered industry informed curriculum with employer input. The most appropriate kind of training that would benefits participants in a matter of weeks was fundamentals training in the form of “micro-learning”. - Participants benefited from receiving continuous supports throughout training as needed.	- Relationships with employers begins with a strong understanding of the career options and general workforce trends. - Making a strong match between alumni and vacant positions in the sector is made easier with established and trusting relationships with employers to understand an employer’s needs and even workplace culture. - Participants benefited from further training while employed, job searching or experiencing job loss. - Advancement Coaches stayed in close contact with employers to encourage on-going communication to support the develop the Advancement Coaches understanding of the organization’s needs.	- Strong relationships, with employers and participants means identifying potential issues early for better job retention and chances for career advancement for an AspireAtlantic alumni. - Advancement Coaches provided coaching and HR support to employers as well.



A close-up photograph of a Black male construction worker. He is wearing a yellow hard hat, clear safety glasses, and orange and yellow work gloves. He is smiling and looking towards the camera while holding a long metal rod or pipe. He is wearing an orange safety vest over a light-colored shirt. The background is a blurred construction site with vertical rebar.

**Scaling for
Impact**

Scaling for Impact

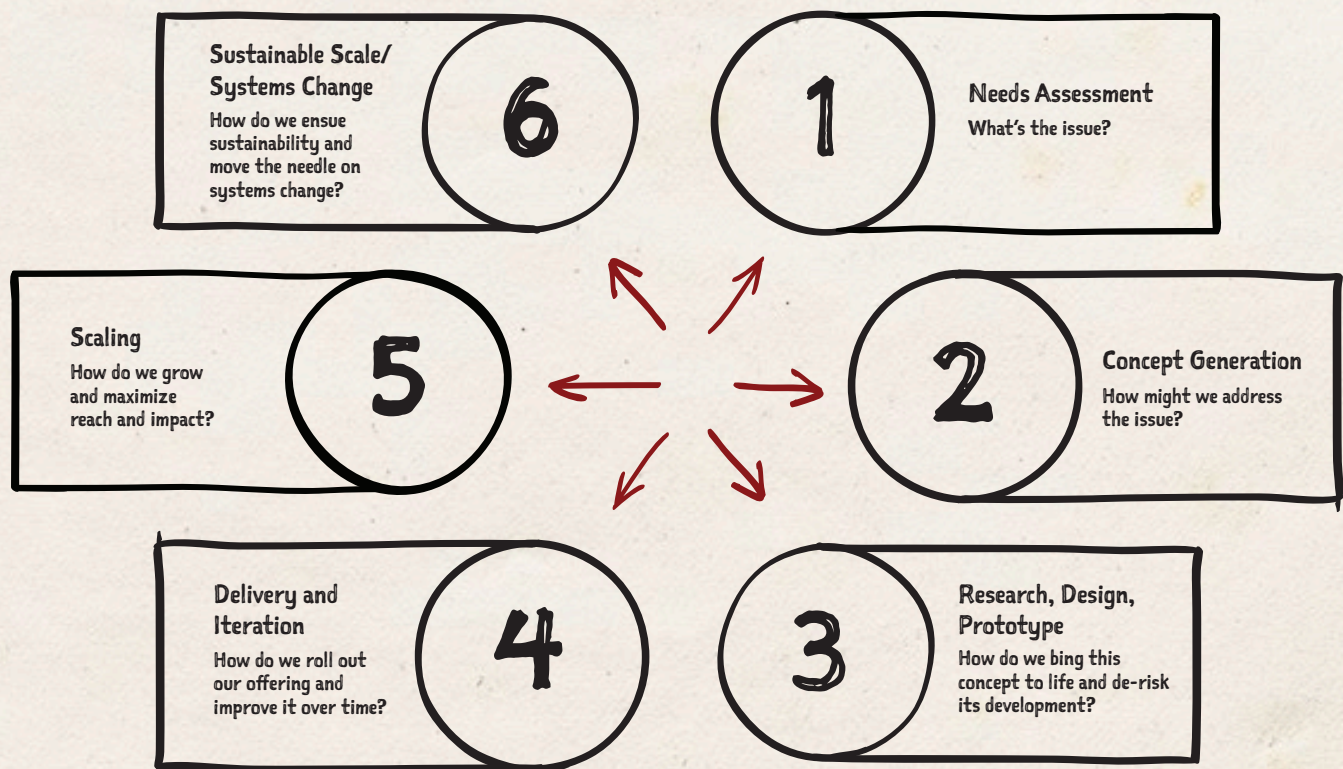
Finding solutions to complex social issues takes time and many iterations to build evidence and scale social innovation. The innovation cycle (Figure 8), developed by Blueprint, is rooted in an evidence-generation approach to support the effective scaling of promising programs.

The goal of scaling the promising practices is to:

- Fill the vacancies in the sectors identified by connecting job seekers with employment opportunities with advancement potential that will grow the sector.

- Build on the partnerships that have been established through the AspireAtlantic program with funders, service providers, sector associations and training institutions.
- Enhance employment services to enable sector growth toward economic prosperity.

Scaling will require support from funders and committed partners, including sector associations, service providers, and training organizations. The recommendations below outline the pathways for continued momentum and innovation to enable (1) scaling of active sectors (manufacturing and construction), (2) expansion to other sectors, and (3) ongoing impact measurement.



Blueprint, 2023. Source: <https://www.blueprint-ade.ca/insights/scaling-social-innovation>
Figure 8: Innovation Cycle

Scaling for Impact

In the initial Design phase (Phase 1), the Pier Labs research team worked our way through steps 1, 2, and 3 to deepen our understanding of the issues facing the employment landscape and designed an adapted version of the model to facilitate upward mobility for job seekers in Nova Scotia. In the Implementation phase (Phase 2), Pier Labs and the consortium of service delivery partners conducted

a prototype and pilot (steps 3 and 4) of the AspireAtlantic model. The model was demonstrated in manufacturing and construction sectors.

The results of Phase 2 have shown persuasive evidence and promising practices that, with some enhancements to stabilize the model (step 4), would be beneficial to scale (step 5) for maximized reach into the employment landscape in Nova Scotia.

Recommendation 1: Scaling for Active Sectors

Integrate the learnings and promising practices to adjust and stabilize the model to generate a steady supply of potential participants to focus efforts on maximizing the reach and impact to support workforce needs in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

Adjusting the AspireAtlantic model to improve stability will require partnerships with service providers who have ready access to potential participants (e.g., Nova Scotia Works and ISANS). Having service agreements in place with service providers who can reach and connect with a steady supply of participants, will enable employers to find skilled labour to support high growth sector needs. The service providers would continue to provide services for program intake, screening, career readiness training, and ongoing case management support for participants.

Integrating the promising practices into the existing employment services landscape should be completed through a stepwise approach as follows.

Step 1: Pre-Launch (3 months)

During this phase, the research team will work with identified Sector Organizations and SPOs and establish service agreements and adjust the model. The service delivery team, including SPOs and the research team, to build the needed infrastructure to support the program.

Key Activities:

- Identify service providers
- Establish service agreements
- Review and confirm the sector workforce gaps continue to exist
- Adapt model based on prototype learnings
- Adapt evaluation framework and plan
- Onboarding service delivery partners (staff)

Step 2: Program Delivery (12 months)

The service delivery team will be responsible for developing the needed materials for the program, preparing to deliver the training and support and engaging with employers and job seekers. Program launch includes the recruitment and screening of participants, delivery of career readiness training and Occupational Skills Training, and employment or job placement support post-training.

Key Activities:

- Developing marketing materials and networking with community serving employment groups
- Engaging employers and job seekers
- Assessing job seeker needs and support any training related expenses
- Developing and adapting curriculums and training materials

- Building the understanding of employer readiness and offering the HR support
- Recruitment of program attendees
- Training Delivery

Step 3: Evaluate & Iterate

The research team works with the service delivery team to collect and analyze data to support continuous adaptation of the program.

Key Activities:

- Holding regular meetings between research teams and service delivery to understand what is working and what opportunities for improvement.
- Conducting developmental evaluation activities to understand what may be needed for future applications.

Recommendation 2: Expanding to Other Sectors

A key factor in choosing the WorkAdvance model to adapt and test in Nova Scotia, was the demonstrated flexibility and adaptability of the model to expand in response to high growth sector needs. Leveraging the wealth of evidence, insights, and learnings from other WorkAdvance sites and practitioners, enabled our research team to accelerate the design and testing of the model here in Nova Scotia.

Additionally, having demonstrated a working model in Nova Scotia, provides a base of knowledge and expertise that will further aid in the expansion to other sectors. However, with the expansion to other sectors, it is vital for delivery partners circle back to step 1 in the innovation cycle (Figure 8) to understand localized issues facing the employment landscape and design an adapted version of the model to facilitate upward mobility for job seekers in the sector(s) identified suitable for expansion.

Scaling for Impact

Acknowledging that many interventions and best practices fail to translate to the employment assistance services ecosystem, our research team found value in using a systematic and comprehensive approach to support the design and implementation phases. Expansion efforts of the model to other sectors would benefit from the

use of an implementation process model, known as the Quality Implementation Framework (QIF; Figure 9).⁶ The QIF provided a valuable frame to understand the sector needs, facilitators and inhibitors facing job seekers, and assess the fit and readiness of the employment landscape to implement the model.

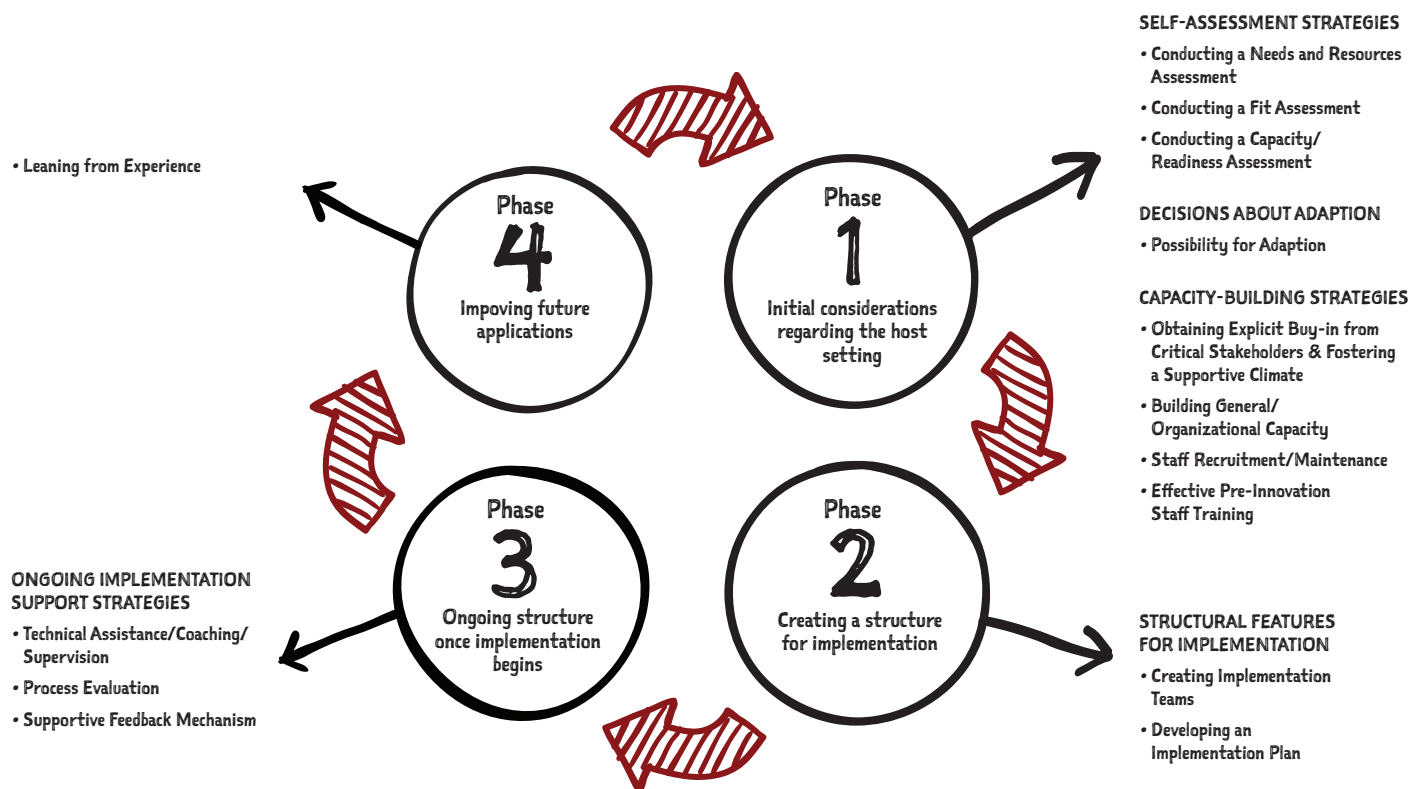


Figure 9: Quality Implementation Framework

Recommendation 3: Measuring Cumulative Impact

As the sector-based model continues to scale and expand, the ongoing measurement and evaluation to understand the efficacy and impacts of the AspireAtlantic model over time is critical. While the findings to date are promising, continuing

to examine and understand the impacts for participants, employers, sectors, and systems, will inform better pathways toward income security and respond by seizing the opportunity to enable economic prosperity.

Conclusion

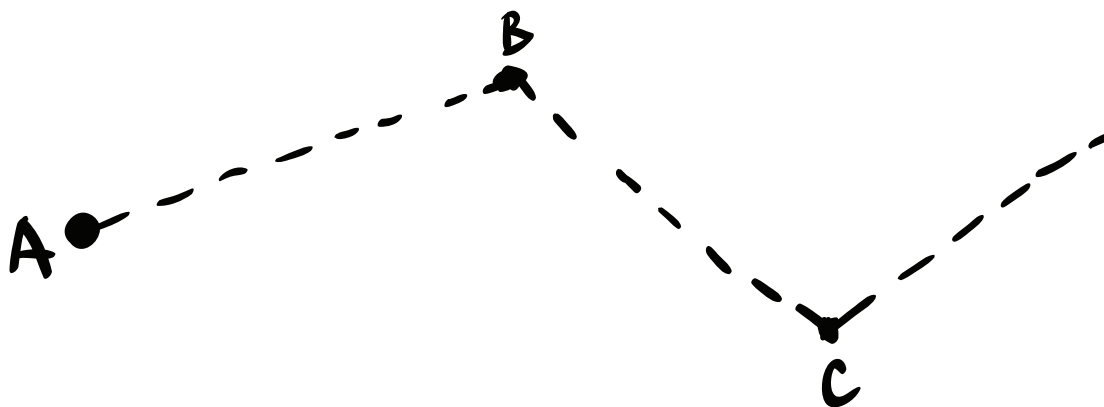


Conclusion

Adapted from WorkAdvance, AspireAtlantic was implemented as a demonstration program aimed to showcase innovation in sector-based workforce development. This dual-client model focused on a range of sector-driven activities to build stronger connections across the employment services continuum. Through this demonstration program, we learned that job seekers benefited from training and reskilling, helping employers retain and attract a skilled and diverse workforce to support sectors specific labour market needs.

Perhaps the most significant impact of the AspireAtlantic program was the relationships-centred approach, that strengthened connections and integrated services from across employment system to better meet the needs of employers and participants.

The AspireAtlantic results have shown persuasive evidence and promising practices that would be beneficial to scale for maximized reach into the employment landscape in Nova Scotia. While regional variations are expected, we have demonstrated that AspireAtlantic has significant potential. The flexibility and adaptability of the model means it can be expanded to other sectors and geographic regions. Scaling and expansion of this model will require further investment and committed partners for continued momentum and to realize its full potential. Adopting this model or aspects of this model, into any employment ecosystem needs sponsorship and support. Sponsorship goes beyond funding for the model but can also take the form of promotion and backing from allies and partners from across the employment continuum to create an ecosystem approach that best supports job seekers and employers, as enablers of economic prosperity.



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- 3 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410002301&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.4&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.6&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=5.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2018&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2022&referencePeriods=20180101%2C20220101>
- 4 AspireAtlantic Journey Map coming soon
- 5 Bryant, et al (2020). Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts.
- 6 Meyers, D.C., Durlak, J.A., & Wandersman, A. (2012). The quality implementation framework: A synthesis of critical steps in the implementation process. American Journal of Community Psychology. doi: 10.1007/s10464-012-9522-x

Appendix

Staff sample job postings



AspireAtlantic Case Manager

Job description

The [insert sector here], in partnership with Pier Labs, is seeking a dynamic and enthusiastic Case Manager to provide support to an evidence-based workforce development program across multiple sites in Nova Scotia called AspireAtlantic.

AspireAtlantic is a new initiative which aims to bridge the gap between the needs of employers and workers seeking to advance from unemployment or low-wage jobs into middle-skilled jobs with advancement opportunities.

Accountable both to the AspireAtlantic program and the [insert sector name here] the Case Managers will work with AspireAtlantic participants and graduates to boost their career opportunities through training and career mentoring and with employers to support the effective integration of new hires to their organizations.

Organisation Overview

SPO to include brief description of the SPO

AspireAtlantic Overview

AspireAtlantic is a new workforce development initiative with the primary goal to move unemployed and low-wage working individuals into sectors with good quality middle-skill jobs. AspireAtlantic is newly adapted from a model developed and tested in the US called WorkAdvance. The model is dual-client, serving both employers and job seekers by bridging job seekers with in-demand middle-skill jobs in specific sectors, and providing long-term retention and advancement supports.

AspireAtlantic is a collaboration between three service providers in Nova Scotia, of which {insert organization name} is one, supported by a Technical Assistance Team and Program Director that operates out of Pier Labs. The Program focuses on three sectors: construction, home building and renovation and manufacturing. The program delivery involves intensive pre-screening of participants, career readiness training, sector specific Occupational Skills Training, job placement support, and post-employment advancement services to the participant and their employer.

AspireAtlantic will launch in September 2021 and will run for approximately 2.5 years. During this time the AspireAtlantic team will implement the model with a focus on learning and adaptation to discover what is working and what is not.

About the Opportunity

Our ideal AspireAtlantic Case Manager will have previous experience in the sector, values evidence-based programs and practice, and is familiar with training development. Additionally, this person would also have prior experience delivering program training (virtually and in-person) specifically in the areas of career development, support and personal growth. A learning, curious mindset is essential for this role.

SPO to include job location and details about work hours/environment

Your responsibilities

- Actively supporting recruitment selections efforts to find eligible participants for the program
- Leading the development and delivery of career readiness workshops
- Work with participants to navigate any emerging life challenges that might serve as a barrier to completing the Occupational Skills Training
- Work closely with sector organizations and/or training providers to actively respond to participant needs as they come up during training
- Support participants with their job search, which may include help with writing resumes/cover letters, preparing for interviews, and various other job application activities
- Support participants in navigating any life challenges that might impact their ongoing participation in the AspireAtlantic program
- Participate in all training and learning throughout program delivery
- Participate in data collection activities

What You bring

Your Skills & Attributes

- Enthusiasm and a conviction to deliver positive outcomes for persons facing barriers to employment
- Ability to assess participants readiness
- Good understanding of workplace culture and employer expectations
- Learning, adaptive and outcomes-driven mindset with willingness and experience in resolving challenging and complex client service issues.
- Collaborative nature with the ability to work effectively in an inter-organizational setting
- Adherence to inclusionary practises, ethical decision making, and respect for diversity
- Experience evaluating program curriculum and delivery to identify what is working and where improvements are possible.
- Demonstrated ability to maintain a safe, professional and supportive learning and service environment.
- Flexibility and adaptability and thrives in a rapidly changing environment.

Your Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience
- Minimum of 3 years of work experience in career development in the last 5 years
- Experience working directly with job seekers from marginalized backgrounds or experiencing barriers to employment
- Experience in developing and delivering career development workshops
- Being a Certified Career Development Practitioner is an asset or willingness to work toward the Career Development Practitioner certification
- Must be eligible to work in Canada

Commitment to Diversity, Equality, & Inclusion

We welcome candidates from diverse backgrounds and who are representative of the communities that we serve, in particular those with lived experience of the barrier's individuals face to employment.

We encourage applications from women, BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+ and people with disabilities as we strive to build a more inclusive society. We would like to invite applicants to self-identify if they belong to an equity seeking group and disclose this information in their cover letter if they wish. Self-disclosure is completely optional.

If you will require accommodations at any stage of the selection process, please state the nature of the accommodations in your cover letter.

AspireAtlantic Advancement Coach

Job Description

The [insert sector here], in partnership with Pier Labs, is seeking a dynamic and enthusiastic Advancement Coach to provide support to an evidence-based workforce development program across multiple sites in Nova Scotia called AspireAtlantic.

AspireAtlantic is a new initiative which aims to bridge the gap between the needs of employers and workers seeking to advance from unemployment or low-wage jobs into middle-skilled jobs with advancement opportunities.

Accountable both to the AspireAtlantic program and the [insert sector name here] the Advancement Coach will work with AspireAtlantic participants and graduates to boost their career opportunities through training and career mentoring and with employers to support the effective integration of new hires to their organizations.

Organization Overview

*Sector Organization to include brief description of the organization.

Appendix

Pier Labs, Davis Pier's social innovation outpost, works with partners in government, healthcare, academia, and the not-for-profit sector to help solve some of the toughest problems our country is facing. From poverty and healthcare, to education and public safety, their approach is to use all forms of evidence to develop policy and program improvements that they then rigorously test through experimentation.

Program Overview

AspireAtlantic is a new workforce development initiative with the primary goal to move unemployed and low-wage working individuals into sectors with good quality middle-skill jobs. AspireAtlantic is newly adapted from a model developed and tested in the US called WorkAdvance. The model is dual-client, serving both employers and job seekers by bridging job seekers with in-demand middle-skill jobs in specific sectors, and providing long-term retention and advancement supports.

AspireAtlantic is a collaboration between three service providers in Nova Scotia supported by a Technical Assistance Team and a Program Director that operates out Pier Labs. The Program focuses on three sectors: construction, home building and renovation and manufacturing. The program delivery involves intensive pre-screening of participants, career readiness training, sector specific Occupational Skills Training, job placement support, and post-employment advancement services to the participant and their employer.

AspireAtlantic will launch in Fall 2021 and will run for approximately 2.5 years. During this time the AspireAtlantic team will implement the model with a focus on learning and adaptation to discover what is working and what is not.

About the Opportunity

Our ideal AspireAtlantic Advancement Coach will have significant previous experience within the sector, values mentorship and education, and is familiar with best organizational practices within the sector. Additionally, this person would also have prior experience providing one-on-one career coaching and/or mentorship as well as experience in organizational capacity building. Because evaluation and technical assistance are key components of this project, a learning mindset is essential for this role.

The successful candidate will mainly work out of our office at [address here]. Typical work hours will be 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM, Monday to Friday, with modification to accommodate training sessions, meetings and travel as needed.

Your Responsibilities

- Support recruitment efforts by providing sector specific information that will help inform recruitment strategies
- Support participant screening process by advising on sector-specific participant criteria
- Work with participants to develop individual career advancement plans
- Hold regular individual career advancement coaching and check-ins and work closely with the AspireAtlantic Case Managers to ensure alignment of support services
- Provide ongoing employer and sectoral input in Occupational Skills Training curriculum and lead job development activities

Appendix

- Develop an in-depth understanding employers' needs, values, and available positions, and then matching the employer with candidates whose goals, interests, and aptitudes are aligned with their needs.
- Work with employers to support individualized HR efforts, including diversity and inclusion, conflict resolution, performance reviews where necessary.
- Participate in all training and learning throughout program delivery
- Participate in data collection activities

What you Bring

Your Skills & Attributes

- Solid understanding of the {insert sector} labour market and existing career pathways
- Enthusiasm and a conviction to deliver positive outcomes for persons facing barriers to employment and advancement
- Ability to define and manage career advancement goals and transitions
- Good understanding of employment issues impacting a participants' ability to advance their career
- A self-starter and collaborative mentality who can work effectively in an interorganizational setting.
- Maintain a dual-client approach, matching graduates with opportunities best aligned with their skills and interests, while offering employers a high-quality, reliable talent solution.

- A learning, adaptive and outcomes-driven mindset who can provide sensitive and constructive feedback.
- Committed to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion practices with culturally sensitivity.

Qualifications

- Relevant bachelor's degree or equivalent industry experience
- X to X years of progressive experience within the {insert sector} sector in a variety of roles
- Experience in a mentorship role within the {insert sector} sector preferred
- Performance management and training management experience is an asset.

How to Apply

Please apply with your cover letter and resume.

Commitment to Diversity, Equality, & Inclusion

We welcome candidates from diverse backgrounds and who are representative of the communities that we serve, in particular those with lived experience of the barrier's individuals face to employment.

We encourage applications from women, BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+ and people with disabilities as we strive to build a more inclusive society. We would like to invite applicants to self-identify if they belong to an equity seeking group and disclose this information in their cover letter. Self-disclosure is completely optional.

If you will require accommodations at any stage of the selection process, please state the nature of the accommodations in your cover letter.