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Project Insights Report

# Doing It Right



## PARTNERS

Yukon Women in Trades Yukon  
and Technology



## LOCATIONS



## INVESTMENT

\$229,410



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## Executive Summary

The representation of women in skilled trades in Canada has seen growth over the past decade, notably in the Yukon, where women are making up a growing part of the labour force in trades and transport as equipment operators and related roles. Despite this progress, women and gender-diverse individuals continue to face substantial barriers to entry and retention in these careers due to systemic gender biases, lack of mentorship and inadequate support systems.

The Doing It Right project, based in the Yukon, sought to address the barriers faced by women and gender-diverse individuals in the skilled trades. The project aimed to explore and develop support mechanisms through Yukon Women in Trades and Technology (YWITT) to enhance individual and organizational capacities and foster community partnerships.

The project involved interviews and focus groups with 26 tradespeople, which led to community meet-ups and conferences to pilot new support strategies. These activities highlighted the critical moments in career trajectories where support is essential, such as transitioning into apprenticeships or new jobs. The project's findings emphasized the importance of mentorship and peer support. This influenced the creation of initiatives like the Community Action Leaders team, which played a pivotal role in community engagement and data collection over the life of the project, and for YWITT.

The project demonstrated the effectiveness of community-driven approaches in creating inclusive work environments. It advocates for adopting feminist and participatory action research principles in other sectors, particularly those where long-standing gender disparities are playing a role in limiting labour force growth.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Broadening recruitment is not enough; inclusive work environments are essential for the retention of diverse, skilled tradespeople.
- 2 Tradespeople emphasized the importance of support and mentorship received during critical life and career stages, thereby highlighting the role of mentors, supervisors and community networks in promoting personal growth, mutual support and a sense of belonging.
- 3 Embedding feminist theory into interventions to address lack of representation in the trades can be an effective framework for change and developing networks of support.

## The Issue

In the Yukon, women and gender-diverse individuals in the skilled trades have historically faced significant barriers to entry and retention in their careers. This region, characterized by its remote and rugged landscape, presents unique challenges that exacerbate issues of workplace inclusion and equity. The skilled trades in the Yukon, much like elsewhere, have been predominantly male-dominated and face persistent issues related to gender bias, lack of mentorship and inadequate support systems for more diverse workers. These systemic issues have been compounded by a cultural milieu that often does not recognize or accommodate the diverse needs of women and gender-diverse tradespeople.

Previous attempts to address these challenges have included initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and providing training specific to women entering the trades. However, these efforts have often fallen short in creating lasting change, primarily due to their sporadic nature and limited scope. Programs have been frequently under-resourced and have lacked a comprehensive approach to tackling the deep-rooted cultural and systemic barriers. For instance, while some training programs were set up to introduce women to the trades, they did not sufficiently address ongoing support needs or facilitate pathways to leadership and long-term career development. This resulted in high attrition rates and continued under-representation of these groups in the trades.

The lack of a supportive community and mentorship opportunities specifically tailored to the needs of women and gender-diverse individuals in the trades has been a significant gap. Many individuals in these groups have reported feeling isolated and unsupported in their professional environments, which often leads to a sense of alienation and, ultimately, departure from the trades. The need for a holistic approach that not only introduces women and gender-diverse individuals to the trades but also supports them throughout their career is critical for fostering a more inclusive and equitable trade sector in the Yukon.



## What We Investigated

This project explored the peer and group support needs of women and gender-diverse tradespeople in the Yukon. The project aimed to understand how YWITT could develop tradespersons' and organizations' capacities, and foster new community partnerships toward effective program delivery and advocacy. Additionally, the project explored potential support interventions that could be developed and piloted with women-identified and gender-diverse students in apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

The project involved multiple stakeholders, including tradeswomen, gender-diverse tradespeople, community organizations and educational institutions, like Yukon University. Research was conducted through a series of interviews and focus groups with tradespeople. These activities were part of a broader feminist, participatory-action research approach that aimed to empower participants and actively involve them in the research process.

Informed by these interviews and focus groups, the project developed and facilitated community meet-ups, employer conferences and tradesperson conferences, which were designed to gather insights and foster community among tradespeople. These events also served as platforms for piloting new support strategies and interventions.

The methodology emphasized creating safe and inclusive spaces for participants to share their experiences and insights, which were crucial for developing a theory of change and logic model for YWITT. This model articulated how the organization's activities could lead to systemic changes in the trades and technology sectors by promoting equity, diversity, inclusion and Reconciliation.

## ✔ What We're Learning

Over the course of the project, 26 tradespeople participated in individual interviews, providing valuable insights into their experiences and needs within the trades sector and informing the development of broader peer and group support initiatives. These interviews highlighted the importance of mentorship and peer support at various stages of their careers, from early childhood to formal employment.

### **Participants value mentorship during pivotal transitions**

Participants in the interviews, focus groups and events emphasized the value of mentors and supportive networks during pivotal transitions, such as entering an apprenticeship or starting a new job. This feedback directly influenced the development of pilot initiatives to enhance peer and group support mechanisms.

### **Tradespeople benefit when they're involved in the solution**

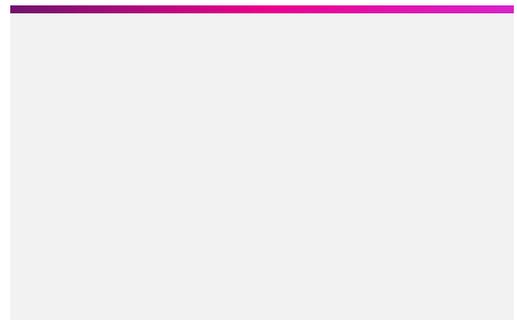
The project included the creation of a Community Action Leaders team, which played a pivotal role in conducting interviews and organizing community outreach activities. This team facilitated access to valuable data and empowered tradespeople by involving them directly in the research process. The team's efforts culminated in several community meet-ups and conferences, which were attended by a diverse group of stakeholders, including tradespeople, employers and community partners. These gatherings proved to be instrumental in broadening the scope of the project's impact. For instance, the [Building Strong Leaders for Skilled Trades](#) conference attracted around 30 participants and sparked discussions on retention strategies and workplace culture improvements. Similarly, the [Tools for Change](#) event provided a platform for tradespeople of all genders to envision and discuss future changes in the trades sector, emphasizing the need for inclusive and supportive work environments.

### **The findings have contributed to YWITT's organizational development**

As a result of the engagement that occurred during this project, YWITT developed an organizational theory of change and logic model to guide their actions going forward. This planning process has positioned the organization to evolve its past activities (workshops, after-school programs and conferences targeting young women) to better meet the needs of women and gender-diverse peoples in the trades, promoting leadership and retention.

## ★ Why It Matters

Skilled tradespeople are a critical component to Canada's most pressing issues, including the housing crisis and the transition to a net-zero economy. The insights from this project underscore the need for tailored support systems within the trades and technology sectors, particularly for under-represented groups, such as women and gender-diverse individuals.



Decision-makers who are serious about increasing diversity in the trades can take lessons away from this project, particularly that grassroots initiatives that employ feminist and participatory action research can foster a sense of belonging and community connection. The feedback from participants in this project emphasizes that efforts focused on recruitment are not enough to ensure retention of these tradespeople. More emphasis must be placed on ensuring under-represented groups receive support at critical points in their careers.



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## ► What's Next

[Yukon Women in Trades and Technology](#) continues to offer programming for women and gender-diverse people in the Yukon. YWITT is currently piloting a leadership training program for women and gender-diverse people in trades, an initiative that was informed by the outcomes of this project.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact [communications@fsc-ccf.ca](mailto:communications@fsc-ccf.ca).

### **How to Cite This Report**

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