



Project Insights Report

# Employability Skills Assessment Tool



**PARTNERS**

Futureworx Society  
Blueprint ADE



**LOCATIONS**

Alberta  
British Columbia  
Manitoba  
Newfoundland and Labrador  
Nova Scotia  
Ontario  
Prince Edward Island  
Saskatchewan



**INVESTMENT**

\$100,000 – Phase I  
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\$150,000 – Phase III



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## Executive Summary

In today’s labour market, employers value social and emotional skills (SES), such as adaptability, collaboration and creativity. These skills provide a foundation for developing other job-specific skills and support individuals to thrive in learning and at work. They are also important for supporting longer-term employment outcomes and adapting to future labour market changes.

While there are many programs in place to help individuals develop SES, they overwhelmingly target children and youth and face limitations due to observer bias and inaccurate self-assessments. To address these gaps, Futureworx developed the Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT), an online tool that supports the assessment and development of SES. ESAT’s approach is grounded in the belief that individuals who understand their competency and consistency in SES levels will be more self-aware and motivated to build on their strengths and close their skills gaps.

This interim report presents early insights on these lines of inquiry to assess readiness and support next steps in ESAT’s evidence generation and scaling journey. A future report will dive deeper to assess the relationship between participants’ SES and employment outcomes and ESAT’s validity and potential for scalability.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 ESAT is a valid tool for assessing SES. The results of our item reliability testing suggest that ESAT uses clear language, aligns with skills definitions from other frameworks in the literature and reliably assesses its core SES areas.
- 2 Participants and staff are highly satisfied with ESAT and see its value in the employment journey. Eighty-one percent of participants are satisfied or very satisfied with ESAT. A large majority of participants reported that ESAT helped them understand which skills they need to develop for advancing their career (77%) and feeling confident they can reach their employment and education goals (72%).
- 3 Participants perceived improved awareness of their SES, and staff observed SES increases among participants. Most participants reported that after using ESAT, they were more aware of their SES (83%) and more comfortable discussing their SES (78%). At the end of the program, staff reported increases in participant SES, with 72% of participants' scores improving across all skills areas, and the largest gain being in teamwork.

## The Issue

In today's labour market, employers value SES, such as adaptability, collaboration and creativity. Also known as "soft skills," SES provide a foundation for developing other job-specific skills and help individuals thrive in learning and at work. Recent Canadian surveys demonstrate that most businesses focus on SES while hiring—prioritizing skills like willingness to learn and ability to solve problems—and many organizations feel SES contribute to better employment outcomes, especially through skills like communication, teamwork and time management. There is also evidence that SES are important for supporting longer-term labour market outcomes and adapting to future labour market changes and disruptions.

While there are many programs in place to help individuals develop SES, there are two notable gaps in the ecosystem: (1) existing SES programs overwhelmingly target children and youth and (2) there is no suitable way to assess SES development.

To address these gaps, Futureworx developed the ESAT, an online tool that supports the assessment and development of SES. Since 2014, ESAT has been used by 137 different service delivery partner organizations across various contexts.



## What We Investigated

Since 2014, ESAT has been widely used by delivery partners across Canada. In 2021, Futureworx received funding from the Future Skills Centre to work with [Blueprint](#) to generate evidence on ESAT's implementability, validity and utility across 15 sites. At this stage in ESAT's scaling journey, there are four lines of inquiry that will help us understand how ESAT can fill the gap in SES development and assessment in Canada:

1. Validity: Is ESAT a valid assessment of SES?
2. Value and effectiveness: Is ESAT valuable to its participants and staff and effective in achieving SES outcomes?
3. Setting: Does the delivery setting affect ESAT's value and effectiveness?
4. Adaptability: Do delivery partners need to implement ESAT in a way that closely matches the original design and guidelines in order for it to be effective and valuable?

## What We're Learning

We are seeing that ESAT is a valid assessment of SES, and at this interim stage, the tool has face validity and inter-item reliability. In the final report, we will expand on our test of ESAT's validity to include additional validity tests.

We have early indications that participant and staff outcomes are positive. There are high satisfaction rates with ESAT, and participants and staff report, respectively, increased awareness of SES and SES improvements. Positive results across settings suggest that ESAT may be successfully implemented in a variety of programs, as it adapts to the needs, strengths and goals of the implementation site rather than requiring adherence to specific implementation criteria. In the final report, we will explore through quantitative measures the relationship between implementation fidelity and outcomes such as participant satisfaction. We will also discuss any difference in outcomes across sociodemographic metrics.

## ★ Why It Matters

As an online tool to assess and develop SES, ESAT addresses a key gap in employer needs and skills development programs. Interim findings presented in this report are promising and suggest that implementing ESAT in college programs, essential/life skills trainings and technical trainings can help produce individuals with strong SES and awareness thereof.



### **State of Skills: Better labour market transitions for mid-career workers**

Many mid-career workers suffer from a lack of self-confidence, discouragement, mistrust in the education system and doubts about the value of their work experience. This can be overcome through an awareness of these socio-emotional factors, individualized attention and a commitment to addressing equity.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

## ► What's Next

In our final report, we will further explore the relationship between ESAT scores (and/or growth in ESAT scores) and employment and education outcomes. In 2024, Blueprint will also begin analyzing long-term outcomes using linked administrative data held by Statistics Canada.

To attribute employment outcomes (e.g., employment status, salary, employment satisfaction) directly to ESAT usage, we would need a research design that would include (a) a control group receiving no intervention, (b) a program group receiving an existing skills intervention, and (c) an ESAT program group receiving a combination of ESAT and the skills intervention. Ongoing evidence generation activities will allow us to assess the feasibility of such a study and, if feasible, provide recommendations to inform the future phases of work.

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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