



Project Insights Report

Skills Matching and Opportunities in Wood Manufacturing



PARTNERS

Wood Manufacturing Council



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

\$228,578



PUBLISHED

May 2024

☰ Executive Summary

The Wood Manufacturing Council (WMC), with support from the Conference Board of Canada (CBoC), launched the Skills Matching and Opportunities in Wood Manufacturing project to address the gap between job seekers' desires for viable and desirable career transitions and the recruitment challenges faced by the wood manufacturing sector. Using the CBoC's career transition tool, OpportuNext, the project identified potential career transitions from non-wood sectors into wood manufacturing, focusing on roles with positive employment prospects and growth potential. The WMC plans to continue using skills-matching information to target additional occupations, with the goal of attracting a broader pool of candidates to the woodworking sector.

The WMC initiative aimed to raise awareness of the diversity of career opportunities in the woodworking sector, highlighting the need for a wide range of skills. Efforts to update and develop career awareness materials were supported by sector employers, educators and industry associations that provided expertise, access to facilities and networking introductions. These stakeholders facilitated plant tours, work experiences, and presentations at recruitment events, enhancing the sector's recruitment efforts.

In addition, workforce agencies, career centers, and community groups played a critical role in distributing career awareness materials and hosting information sessions to introduce job seekers to woodworking careers and related training programs. This collaborative approach resulted in valuable resources for small and medium-sized businesses to strengthen their recruitment strategies.

KEY INSIGHTS

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Collaborative efforts among industry stakeholders highlight a shared commitment to nurturing talent pipelines and addressing skills shortages.

- 2 Involvement of workforce agencies and community groups underscores the importance of grassroots outreach in promoting woodworking careers and training programs.
- 3 Success in strengthening recruitment strategies for small and medium-sized businesses showcases the potential of collective action in addressing industry challenges.

▶ The Issue

Similar to other industries and sectors, the wood manufacturing sector in Canada is faced with a shortage of qualified workers as a result of changing skills requirements, difficulty attracting new workers and replacing those retiring. A lack of awareness about the sector, in addition to negative perceptions about it, pose serious challenges and ultimately limit the sector's growth.



🔧 What We Investigated

The Wood Manufacturing Council (WMC) launched the Skills Matching and Opportunities in Wood Manufacturing project to increase awareness of career opportunities and educational pathways in the wood manufacturing sector, particularly among groups who are under-represented currently. This initiative aimed to facilitate the transition of individuals from low-wage, high-risk positions requiring minimal re-skilling or upskilling into more stable roles within the wood manufacturing industry. By identifying occupations in non-wood sectors with transferable skills, the project sought to attract a diverse workforce into wood manufacturing.

The project used the Conference Board's [OpportuNext](#) platform, aimed to facilitate career transitions for Canadians by identifying job opportunities that match their existing skills, education, and experience, to raise awareness of the wood manufacturing sector and to attract individuals, particularly from under-represented groups, with transferable skills from other industries.

Using the OpportuNext tool, the Conference Board provided the WMC with 135 matches under seven job categories for occupations in the wood industry. The WMC chose to pursue three job categories: cabinet makers, interior designers and decorators, and lumber graders and other wood processing inspectors and graders. OpportuNext was also used to identify occupations with similar skills and education to which WMC could look to expand recruitment efforts.

The project used the results of the skills matching to develop and disseminate recruitment materials and presentations at schools and career fairs to raise awareness of the sector and specifically target equity-deserving communities. These outreach materials were also designed to provide small and medium-sized businesses in the wood manufacturing sector with relevant career awareness materials to support their recruitment efforts, thereby increasing the sector's overall recruitment capacity.

The project specifically targeted individuals who have traditionally been under-represented in the wood manufacturing sector, such as new Canadians (including immigrants and refugees), women (who may be deterred by the sector's male dominance or unaware of the diverse opportunities available), and Indigenous communities (who may be unaware of off-reserve opportunities or believe that credentials are required to enter the sector).

What We're Learning

Evidence to inform recruiting strategies that work

Effective recruitment strategies are essential to industry sustainability and growth. The WMC's success in identifying individuals with transferable skills across industries underscores the importance of using research-backed tools and targeted approaches to recruitment. By using platforms such as the OpportuNext, the WMC demonstrated the importance of adopting innovative methods to attract talent to the wood manufacturing sector. Key informants with the WMC were very satisfied with the OpportuNext platform and its usefulness in identifying potential career matches and felt the results have directly informed their targeted marketing and recruitment strategies.

Building awareness as the foundation

The project highlighted the power of increased awareness in changing perceptions and generating interest in wood manufacturing careers. By broadening the scope of its outreach efforts and emphasizing the sector's sustainability and diverse career pathways, the WMC effectively engaged potential job seekers and expanded the talent pool. The growth of this awareness is set to serve the industry well, as despite a temporary slowdown in employment growth towards the end of 2023, which can be attributed to reduced construction and renovation activity due to interest rate fluctuations, many companies maintained their staffing levels. However, with continued demand for housing, industry partners anticipate a resurgence in job growth as interest rates decline and construction activity recovers.

The WMC was successful in developing new partnerships

The project led to the development of strong partnerships with industry stakeholders, educators, and workforce agencies. These collaborations facilitated resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and innovation, demonstrating the critical role of partnerships in driving meaningful change and achieving common goals within the sector. The WMC engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including companies, sector trade associations, educators, and industry representatives including the Canadian Kitchen Cabinet association, Canadian Hardwood Bureau and other sector trade associations and post-secondary institutions with wood processing programs. WMC also consulted with Le Comité Sectorial de Main D'oeuvre in Quebec for the sector. Those engaged provided feedback, facility access, dissemination of career information, and recruitment assistance.

★ Why It Matters

Businesses in wood manufacturing continue to report limitations on their ability to expand or to take on new projects due to staffing shortages. About 32% of industry partners cited shortages at the lower-skilled-worker level and 50% at the skilled-worker level. Concerns over high turnover rates were cited by 45% of respondents to an industry survey.

This project was designed to address the significant human resource challenges facing Canada's wood manufacturing sector and to revitalize the sector by increasing awareness of its career opportunities, particularly among under-represented groups. The project supported a coordinated human resources and promotional approach, facilitating collaboration across the sector, including with educational institutions. The role of a national recruiter in raising sector awareness and the project's success in identifying individuals from industries with transferable skills were particularly influential. Moreover, efforts to engage diverse audiences, including immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples through partnerships with employment agencies and community groups have shown promise in diversifying the sector's workforce.



State of Skills: Quality of Work

As Canada navigates continuing labour shortages in critical areas of the economy, policymakers and employers are looking for more effective approaches to recruit and retain workers

[Read Thematic Report](#)

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