

Project Insights Report

Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT)



PARTNERS

Diversity Institute
Blueprint ADE
Technation Canada



LOCATIONS

Alberta
Nova Scotia
Ontario



INVESTMENT

\$7,478,244



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CONTRIBUTORS

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Executive Summary

The Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT) program was designed to address the disconnect between the skills of post-secondary graduates and employer needs. Originally created in 2014 by the Diversity Institute for Ontario, the program has been adapted and delivered in different formats over the years.

The ADaPT model includes skills training, wraparound support for equity-deserving groups including racialized peoples, women, and individuals with non-STEM backgrounds, and optional work placements. In 2019, FSC supported the Diversity Institute and TECHNATION to update the training curriculum and deliver it in Toronto, Halifax and Calgary. This phase resulted in an increase in employment in digital jobs among participants, as well as increased job satisfaction and high program satisfaction.

Another FSC grant followed in 2021 to scale ADaPT and measure its impact through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) carried out by [Blueprint](#). The RCT had two program streams: a synchronized virtual classroom setting with personalized job coaching and an online self-directed program. A control group had access to LinkedIn Learning. This phase has included a newcomer cohort and expanded to Vancouver and Lower Mainland, British Columbia.

Early findings from the trial, which enrolled 971 participants, show that both program streams have a positive effect. Participants' self-assessed skills improved in digital design, career planning and business finance. Compared to the control group, participants in both streams had higher rates of employment in digital roles nine months after the program ended.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 The ADaPT trial reached its target demographic, with 97% belonging to an equity-seeking group among 971 participants enrolled in four provinces.
- 2 After program completion, participants in both the virtual classroom and self-directed online training groups were more likely to be working in digital jobs than the control group, according to preliminary trial findings.
- 3 Key challenges were decreases in participant engagement in the virtual stream towards the end of the trial, and finding placements for international students.

The Issue

Post-secondary graduates, particularly those from equity-deserving groups, often face challenges in transitioning into digital careers due to a mismatch between their skills and industry needs. This disconnect leaves a significant untapped talent pool, exacerbating labour shortages.

The ADaPT (Advanced Digital and Professional Training) program was designed to equip recent post-secondary graduates with in-demand digital, professional, and job-search skills.

Originally funded by the province of Ontario from 2014-2019, the program was designed in close collaboration with industry partners. Through a 9-week, 70+ hour intensive training, ADaPT was delivered in different formats over the years.

In 2019, the Future Skills Centre funded the Diversity Institute of Toronto Metropolitan University and TECHNATION to update ADaPT and expand its reach. The revised program was delivered in Toronto, Halifax and Calgary. While this phase of ADaPT met most of its diversity targets for equity-seeking groups, women and Indigenous persons remained underrepresented. In 2021, FSC provided additional funding to the Diversity Institute and Blueprint to further expand the program and generate evidence for future scaling through a randomized controlled trial.



What We Investigated

The ADaPT training model targeted recent graduates from post-secondary institutions with diverse backgrounds for entry-level digital roles. The program was delivered through a virtual classroom with an instructor (synchronous), along with career coaching, or an online self-directed course (asynchronous). Over 9 weeks, more than 70 hours of intensive training in digital literacy, communications, research, and business finance was delivered.

In terms of optional work placements, TECHNATION provided employers with wage subsidies for eligible participants through its Career Ready program, part of the federal Student Work Placement Program funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. The subsidy covered 50% of a student's pay (up to \$5,000) and increased to 70% (up to \$7,000) for students from underrepresented groups.

Phase 1: The Diversity Institute and TECHNATION delivered the program in Toronto, Calgary, and Halifax between September 2020 and June 2021. An evaluation assessed employment outcomes and skills gains for participants, as well as participant satisfaction and partner implementation processes.

Phase 2: Through the Scaling Up Skills Development initiative in 2021, ADaPT expanded to include a newcomer cohort and additional students in Vancouver and Lower Mainland, BC. Using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design, the study compared outcomes in three groups: a virtual classroom group setting with a live instructor and 1:1 coaching, an asynchronous online self-directed learning program, and a control group with access to LinkedIn Learning. The trial was run between fall 2021 and winter 2023. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and administrative records, with long-term outcomes linked to Statistics Canada datasets. The research focused on implementation fidelity, participant reach, program satisfaction, skills gains, employment outcomes, and long-term labour market impact.

What We're Learning

Phase 1: The 2022 evaluation showed increases in overall employment, digital job employment, and improvements in digital and professional skills among 231 participants. Overall, 93% of participants finished the program. Employment rates increased from 69% at program exit to 78% at nine months after program completion. Digital roles rose from 56% to 78% over the same period. Employed participants experienced increased job satisfaction and career advancement confidence. Participants showed statistically significant improvements in self-assessed skills across five of six areas, with an average Likert score increase of 0.47, most notably in Advanced Digital Skills and Career Planning. While recruitment included a diverse group, it fell short of meeting targets for Indigenous people (1%) and women (63%).

Phase 2: Early results from the randomized controlled trial, which included 971 participants (out of 1500 across 22 cohorts of the ADaPT program), are showing positive results. Overall, 80% of participants completed the program – 82% in the virtual classroom stream and 77% in the asynchronous online stream. Additionally, 97% of participants identified as a member of one or more equity-deserving groups, surpassing the target of 75%. Among these groups, Indigenous Peoples remained the most under-represented with a recruitment rate of 1%.

ADaPT has a positive impact on securing work

Among both program groups, 80% of participants had employment nine months after program exit, compared to 50% when the program began, as reported by 441 who were reached at follow-up. In terms of digital work, there were differences among all three groups at nine months: 59% from the virtual classroom had employment, compared with 50% in the online group and 38% in the control group.

Program participants reported an improved sense of job security and career advancement

The most significant skill gains were in advanced digital skills, while oral communication showed the least perceived gains. Semi-structured interviews with 33 participants showed that networking with other participants and employers was valued, especially in the employer session. Participants also indicated they could benefit from opportunities for peer interaction outside of the program, as well as a less intensive curriculum.

Wage subsidies played a crucial role in increasing employer engagement and securing placements for ADaPT participants

TECHNATION's Career Ready program supported 68 placements. It was a key driver for employer participation, lowering hiring costs and encouraging businesses to onboard ADaPT graduates. The impact of wage subsidies was especially evident in the newcomer cohorts.

Partners highlighted the successful collaboration, which facilitated a standardized curriculum and expansion into Western and Atlantic Canada. Targeted outreach and employer focus groups ensured training remained aligned with industry needs. However, the program faced hurdles such as difficulties securing placements for international students ineligible for subsidies, and participant fatigue during the intensive final stages of the virtual stream.

★ Why It Matters

With the growth of artificial intelligence and automation, programs like ADaPT are critical in addressing both labour shortages and equity gaps in the digital economy.

By tailoring its approach to underserved groups, ADaPT ensures broader participation in the workforce while meeting the needs of an evolving IT sector. The program's success highlights the importance of inclusive, scalable training models that respond to regional and demographic needs.

ADaPT also presents policy makers with a well-documented example of a project that has successfully scaled from an initial pilot, through to a randomized control trial and expansion. [Canada has challenges with successful adoption of proven approaches](#), but ADaPT's ample evidence base provides a clear understanding of program components that drive impact.



State of Skills: Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth

To stem the recent downturn in labour market conditions of youth and to lay the groundwork for them to play a pivotal role in fostering growth and inclusion, it is imperative to address and dismantle the multiple and intersectional barriers they encounter.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

► What's Next

A Final Report will provide a more complete analysis using additional data from three- and nine-month follow-up surveys and long-term employment data from Statistics Canada. It will also examine how different subgroups of participants experience the program, providing us with a deeper understanding of ADaPT's effects and who may benefit most from participating.

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

How to Cite This Report

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