

Project Insights Report

Talent Perceptions Study of Economic Growth Sectors in the Calgary Region



PARTNERS

Calgary Economic
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Executive Summary

Calgary's economy is poised for significant growth in key sectors like energy transition, technology and health care. However, a critical misalignment threatens this progress: a major disconnect exists between the in-demand occupations, as identified by employers, and the local talent pool's skills and perceptions. This skills and information gap risks constraining economic development and leaving high-priority jobs unfilled.

Research reveals that job seekers are largely unaware that high-growth sectors urgently require tech-focused roles like software developers and data scientists. The research has identified significant knowledge gaps, particularly in construction, agribusiness, and aerospace and defence, which represent major barriers to attracting new talent. Concurrently, the labour market faces a stark imbalance, with a projected oversupply of 167,000 individuals in roles like retail and food service, highlighting a pressing need for strategic upskilling and transition pathways.

The findings from this project provide a crucial road map for navigating economic transformation. They mandate a shift in policy toward funding targeted upskilling; encouraging employers toward skills-based hiring practices to access untapped talent from oversupplied fields; and encouraging educational institutions to deliver more agile, industry-responsive training. Addressing these gaps is essential not only for Calgary's competitiveness and its transition to a low-carbon economy but also for building a resilient and inclusive workforce capable of thriving in a changing market.

KEY INSIGHTS

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Seventy percent of surveyed job seekers gather opportunity information from online job boards, yet networking is rated as the most influential on their decision-making.

- 2 Employers value transferable enabling skills, like critical thinking, more than specific sector expertise, highlighting a need for skills-based hiring practices.
- 3 Job seekers experienced in construction are much more likely than job seekers inexperienced in construction to seek employment in the construction sector.

► The Issue

Calgary's economy is projected to grow in key sectors like health care, professional services, and energy and environment, driven by roles in technology, engineering and sustainability. However, a critical misalignment exists between the in-demand occupations identified by employers, and the local talent pool's perceptions of these skills and information gap threatens to constrain economic growth by leaving high-priority jobs unfilled.

The core problem is a dual challenge of awareness and attraction. Job seekers are often unaware that sectors like aerospace and defence, agribusiness and food, and life sciences and health urgently require tech-focused roles such as software developers and data scientists.

Furthermore, the local talent pool has significant knowledge gaps about certain sectors—particularly construction, agribusiness, and aerospace and defence—which create major barriers to attracting new talent. This is evidenced by the fact that job seekers with no experience in construction are far less likely to seek employment there compared to those with experience, indicating a perception issue.

While a dynamic labour force of prime-working-age individuals is actively seeking new opportunities, effective informational campaigns and targeted outreach are urgently needed to connect this supply with the specific demands of Calgary's evolving economy.





What We Investigated

This project undertook a comprehensive skills development and gap study to investigate the critical misalignments between talent supply and demand within the Calgary Economic Region. The primary research objective was to identify specific skills shortages, occupational oversupplies and the perceptual barriers that prevent job seekers from pursuing careers in high-growth sectors. The study was guided by the following key questions:

- What are the most significant skills gaps in Calgary's key industries?
- How do job seekers' perceptions of sectors and occupations differ from the realities of those sectors and occupations?
- What strategies—including upskilling and the use of AI—can best facilitate workforce transition and address these imbalances?

To answer these questions, the project employed a mixed-methods approach including a robust quantitative survey, administered between May 5 and May 23, 2025, which gathered 1,009 completed responses from job seekers across southern Alberta. This was complemented by qualitative insights from over 320 employers, providing a dual perspective on pressure points, emerging skills needs and the impact of AI. The methodology built on previous work from 2024—namely the *Calgary Economic Region Labour Market Outlook*—to offer a deeper, sector-based analysis.

This approach was chosen to move beyond raw employment numbers and quantify the knowledge and perception gaps that act as major barriers to an efficient labour market. By directly consulting both the supply (workers) and demand (employers) sides of the equation, the research provides an actionable data set to inform targeted informational campaigns, strategic workforce planning, and the development of precise upskilling pathways for displaced workers.



What We're Learning

The findings of this project transcend a simple labour market analysis; they provide a critical road map for navigating the profound economic and social transitions defining Alberta and Canada. The identified gaps between talent perception and economic reality, if left unaddressed, will act as a direct drag on Calgary's and Alberta's economic resilience, competitiveness and ability to capitalize on transformative opportunities like the low-carbon energy transition.

Moving from reactive to proactive and predictive models

The research demands a fundamental shift in labour market policy from a reactive to a proactive and predictive model. The stark projection of an oversupply of 167,000 individuals in roles like retail sales and food service, concurrent with critical shortages in tech and skilled trades, is a clarion call for strategic intervention. Policy must prioritize funding for specific, targeted upskilling rather than general employment programs. This means directing resources toward micro-credentialing in AI, data analytics and digital marketing, and heavily subsidizing training in skilled trades using industry-specific tools. Furthermore, immigration policies must be finely tuned to align with these specific regional shortages, moving beyond broad occupational lists to a more granular, place-based approach. The housing crisis and affordability challenges, acutely felt in Calgary, are directly tied to this issue; without a coordinated plan to ensure residents can transition into higher-wage, in-demand careers, the ability to afford living in the city diminishes, creating a wider socioeconomic problem.

Talent attraction should be a priority for employers and business

The study reveals that talent attraction is not just an HR issue but a core business imperative, particularly in stigmatized or misunderstood sectors like construction and agribusiness. The 49-percentage-point gap in attraction for construction highlights a severe branding problem.

Employers in these critical industries can no longer passively post job ads; they must actively invest in sector marketing campaigns that demystify their industries and showcase the advanced, tech-driven nature of modern roles. The lesson on “enabling skills” (e.g., critical thinking, project management) being more valued than sector-specific knowledge should revolutionize hiring practices. It mandates a shift toward skills-based hiring, reducing unnecessary credentialism and opening candidate pools to those with transferable skills from oversupplied occupations. This is a crucial strategy for building a more diverse and adaptable workforce.

Updating and modernizing educational and training institutions

Colleges, universities and boot camps must embrace an agile, responsive curriculum model. The rapid pace of technological change, with AI expected to automate 30% of tasks by 2030, means static, multi-year degree programs are insufficient. There is an urgent need to integrate AI literacy across all disciplines and develop shorter, modular,

industry-co-designed programs that address specific skills gaps like forklift operation or refrigeration systems knowledge. Institutions must also become hubs for lifelong learning, facilitating the transition for mid-career professionals in oversupplied fields through tailored pathways that recognize their transferable soft skills and provide accelerated technical training.

Why It Matters

This project is intrinsically linked to Canada’s most pressing challenges:

**State of Skills:
Quality of Work**

Transition to a low-carbon economy: Calgary's economic future hinges on its ability to leverage its existing energy expertise toward renewables and cleantech. The high demand for roles like renewable energy engineers and environmental scientists underscores this shift. A failure to re-skill the existing workforce and attract new talent into these sectors risks stalling this critical economic transformation.

Improving quality of work, through better wages and benefits, social environments, security, safety, and inclusion, alongside skills and professional development is one part of a larger strategy to address these labour shortages.

Read Thematic Report

National productivity and competitiveness: Widespread skills mismatches contribute to lower productivity. Workers in oversupplied roles are underutilized, while companies in growing sectors cannot scale due to talent shortages. Closing these gaps is essential for boosting Canada's overall economic output and competitive edge on the global stage, particularly in technology and advanced manufacturing.

Social equity and inclusion: The focus on wraparound supports (childcare, transportation) and the need for inclusive "microcultures" in the workplace is not merely altruistic; it is an economic necessity. Removing barriers to participation, particularly for underrepresented groups, is perhaps the single largest untapped opportunity to address the labour shortage. A human-centric work model that fosters well-being is directly correlated with higher performance, reducing the economic cost of burnout and turnover.

This project matters because it moves the conversation from identifying a problem to prescribing a collaborative solution. By aligning policy, education and industry practice around a shared, data-driven understanding of the talent landscape, the region can not only mitigate a crisis but also forge a more resilient, inclusive and prosperous economic future for all its citizens. The lessons learned are a blueprint for any jurisdiction seeking to navigate the complex interplay of technological disruption, economic transition and social change.

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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