Skills for Success implementation guidance

Final report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS PROJECT?

In May 2021, the Government of Canada launched Skills for Success as a new model that reflects the evolving skills needs of the modernized labour market. Skills for Success are foundational and transferable to all aspects of work, learning, and life. The model gives prominence to the core literacy skills – Numeracy, Reading, and Writing – and expands the scope of skills that are increasingly important for today's job – Digital and Problem Solving. It also responds to a growing demand for socio-emotional skills from employers across sectors. Particularly, it broadens the scope of two existing socio-emotional skills – Communication and Collaboration – and introduces two more – Adaptability and Creativity and Innovation.

The current project, *Skills for Success Implementation Guidance*, produced a set of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices to support the implementation of Skills for Success training and assessment. The Principles and Practices aim to ensure future Skills for Success initiatives address the needs of groups underrepresented in the labour market and underserved by the traditional educational system (i.e., Indigenous people, racialized Canadians, members of the LGBTQ2+ community, newcomers, and people with disabilities). They also aim to ensure the priorities of employers and industry stakeholders are incorporated so that Skills for Success programming can be responsive to the needs of major sectors in the Canadian economy (e.g., Bioeconomy, Construction, Food Processing, Manufacturing, and Tourism).

Ultimately, this project:

1. Identified the training and assessment needs of key learner groups and sectors;

2. Developed Guiding Principles for implementing Skills for Success programming; and

3. Shared Promising Practices around Skills for Success training and assessments.

The final report synthesizes all project findings. It starts with a synthesis of training and assessment needs from the perspectives of practitioners serving underrepresented groups as well as representing sectoral priorities. It then describes the Guiding Principles that can inform the design, development, delivery, and evaluation of Skills for Success programming to address these needs. Promising Practices that have emerged from organizations that have made the early steps in transitioning into this new skills model are then provided to illustrate the feasibility and practicality of the Guiding Principles.

HOW ARE THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES STRUCTURED?

Training and assessment needs, as well as Guiding Principle and Promising Practices, are organized into four stages of training. As shown in Figure 1, training entry represents information that is key to learners' access and uptake of training, and/or employers' decisions to provide learning opportunities to current and prospective employees. Training engagement includes the factors that influence the success of training implementation and delivery. Assessment are tools used to measure skills gains, monitor learning progress, and collect data to demonstrate program value and accountability. Finally, learning transfer involves the application of skills, behaviours, and attitudes learned during the training to a new situation or context.

Figure 1   Stages of training
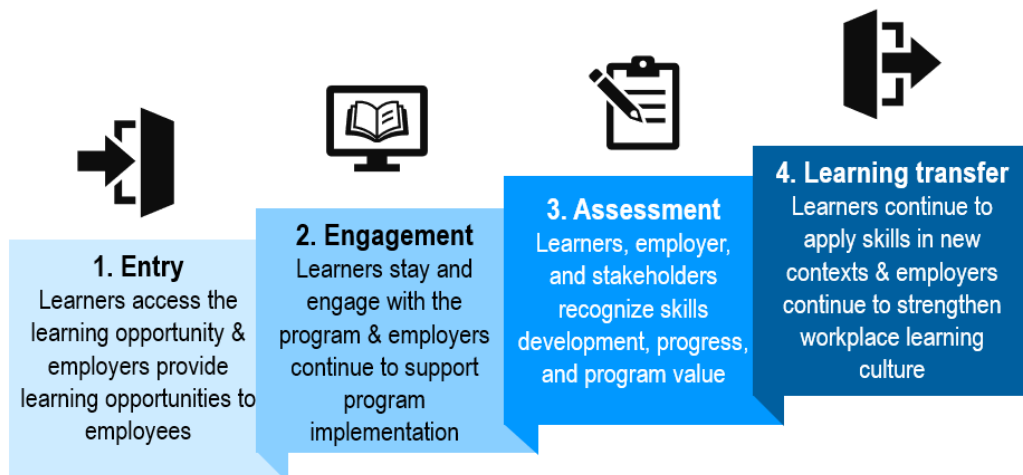
Along with the final report, a series of infographics have been created and can be accessed here.

WHO IS THE INTENDED AUDIENCE?

This project is designed to provide relevant and practical guidance for a range of key players within the Canadian skills training and employment systems. They are organized into five groups representing enactors who can lead, facilitate, and influence the implementation of Skills for Success programming:

- **Funders:** At the federal and provincial/territorial levels, funders set strategic direction, allocate budgets, and decide which components and activities are eligible for funding.

- **Training organizations:** Training organizations such as employment and career development organizations, community-based training organizations, and colleges with continuing education programs design and offer specific forms of training.

- **Employers**: Employers, industry associations, and other sectoral groups provide or support sector-based skills development initiatives aligned with their own talent acquisition and workforce development goals.

- **Practitioners:** Practitioners include instructors and other individuals who directly engage with learners throughout the learning event.

- **Mentors, supervisors, and community members:** These include a wide range of people who are not formal instructors but can integrate social supports and community assets to influence the learning environment as well as skills development and application progress.

Guiding Principles and Promising Practices highlight the specific roles that each enactor group can play to ensure Skills for Success implementation address learner and employer needs. The roles of enactors are overlapping and interconnected, and the successful implementation of Skills for Success will require multi-enactor collaboration to meet the needs of diverse learners and sectors.

WHAT WAS THE APPROACH?

The project involved depth engagement and collaboration with an Advisory Panel of nine prominent organizations across the Canadian skills and employment training sector, as well as extensive engagement with their networks of employers and practitioners through focus groups.

This research and consultation process involved focus groups with over 100 practitioners, the development of two workbooks for written feedback from the Panel, and four conference calls to discuss and finalize the summary of learning needs as well as Guiding Principles and Promising Practices. To facilitate knowledge dissemination and mobilization, a series of short summaries were also developed.

WHAT WERE THE KEY FINDINGS?

Table 1 provides an overview of the key themes across the Guiding Principles.

Table 1   Guiding Principles by stages of training and enactor groups

	Entry	Engagement	Assessment	Learning transfer
Funders	Set up equitable conditions for success	Modernize the employment and skills training sector	Accept multiple definitions of programming success	Promote continuous and lifelong learning
Training organizations	Make strategic investments in communication	Align learning with unique learner needs	Link Skills for Success outcomes with other milestones	Incorporate long-term follow-up in programming model
Employers	Minimize the opportunity cost of training	Align skills training with business priorities and job requirements	Facilitate a data-driven approach to workforce development	Facilitate industry-wide accreditation of Skills for Success
Practitioners	Enhance access to role models and mentors	Create safe learning space while building learner self-efficacy	Triangulate formal assessments with informal reflection	Develop tools and resources for continued skills application after training
Mentors, supervisors, & community	Foster long-term training partnerships	Promote holistic service delivery through partnerships	Identify and track community outcomes as part of program evaluation	Enhance learning culture through Skills for Success champions

To further showcase each Guiding Principle in practice, a list of Promising Practices is provided based on current innovative programming ideas, tools, and resources from organizations that have made the early transition to Skills for Success. One example Practice per Principle is provided in Table 2. More examples from sectoral representatives and practitioners experienced working with groups of learners underrepresented in the labour market are integrated throughout the report to illustrate how the content relates to diverse employment contexts and groups of learners.

Table 2   **Examples of Promising Practices by stages of training and enactor groups**

	Entry	Engagement	Assessment	Learning transfer
Funders	Encourage funding recipients to customize wrap-around supports to align with the lived experiences and realities of learners	Explore Skills for Success initiatives that incorporate diverse cultural methodologies and approaches	Support research that develops proficiency descriptors, occupational profiles, and other tools informing benchmarks of Skills for Success levels	Promote the broad applicability of Skills for Success across multiple contexts, including and going beyond employment
Training organizations	Leverage partner networks to enhance outreach and communication, especially for organizations with less extensive capacity	Incorporate a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach	Create a repository of assessment results and certifications to help learners keep track and provide proof of learning	Build check-ins and follow-ups with learners, employers, and communities after Skills for Success training delivery
Employers	Engage in sectoral collaboration and coalition-based training to enhance the training capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)	Support and coordinate organizational needs analysis to align Skills for Success with job performance expectations and business priorities	Partner with educators and assessment developers to align Skills for Success measurement with job competency tracking	Enhance the capacity of multiple levels of managers, supervisors, and HR staff to champion Skills for Success among employees
Practitioners	Promote case studies, success stories of program graduates with shared lived experiences with diverse learner groups	Incorporate trauma- and violence informed approaches to training and service delivery	Use Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) to document Skills for Success developed in other contexts	Find opportunities to engage with employers and community members to prepare for learning transfer
Mentors, supervisors, & community	Contextualize skills development as part of community development	Create and sustain a network of supports, resources, and opportunities to help learners persist in training	Involve trusted community members in assessment	Establish opportunities for peer support and mentorship, particularly for underrepresented groups

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

The Skills for Success model offers a common structure to align program and policy transformation with evolving skills and workforce development needs. The model aims to be responsive to the modern labour market, providing a foundation to address future upskilling and reskilling demands across all sectors of Canada.

As a renewed skills model, Skills for Success leverages the core strength of the previous Essential Skills framework while tightening the alignment with modern labour market needs. Particularly, Numeracy, Reading, and Writing – skills that continue to play a key role in the majority of job openings – maintain their prominence. Digital skills are expanded and modernized to encompass the requirements that will arise from not only rapid technological advancements but also increasing digital adoption in all realms of work, learning, and life. The revised Communication and Collaboration reflect the increasing diversity and inclusivity of the Canadian workforce. Problem Solving is now updated to be more action-oriented, strengthening its alignment with employer needs. The new additions – Adaptability and Creativity and Innovation – respond to the growing importance of soft and social-emotional skills in the labour market. As an overarching conceptual model, Skills for Success provides a crucial first step to help address future upskilling and reskilling demands and opportunities in Canada.

Ensuring training and assessments meet the needs of underrepresented groups is key to the success of the Skills for Success framework. Many equity-seeking groups are more likely to be employed in occupations that are more exposed to layoffs and more susceptible to automation. They may also have limited opportunities to access training, putting them at a risk of being caught in a "low-skill trap" – a cycle of low-paying jobs with limited on-the-job learning. It is therefore important to align training opportunities with the learning needs of these groups.

The skills documented within this model can be defined as follows:

- **Reading** is the ability to find, understand, and use information presented through words, symbols, and images.

- **Writing** is the ability to share information using written words, symbols, and images.

- **Numeracy** is the ability to find, understand, use, and report mathematical information presented through words, numbers, symbols, and graphics.

- **Digital** is the ability to use digital technology and tools to find, manage, apply, create, and share information and content.

- **Problem-solving** is the ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions.

- **Communication** is the ability to receive, understand, consider, and share information and ideas through speaking, listening, and interacting with others.

- **Collaboration** is the ability to contribute and support others to achieve a common goal.

- **Adaptability** is the ability to achieve or adjust goals and behaviours when expected or unexpected change occurs, by planning, staying focused, persisting, and overcoming setbacks.

- **Creativity and Innovation** is the ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel, unexpected, or challenge existing methods and norms.

Further information on these skills, including their components, preliminary proficiency descriptors, as well as recommended next steps to further develop and validate the proficiency levels can be found in the "Research report to support the launch of Skills for Success: Structure, evidence, and recommendations" final report.

Throughout this project, Panel members and focus group participants reflected on their perspectives and early experiences transitioning to the Skills for Success model. The updated language that focuses on the actionable, process-based framing of skills was well-received. One practitioner shared, "I love the fact that all the Skills for Success are defined as observable and measurable. That gives us a lot of hope – the ones who develop training materials and train people – that gives us a lot of hope that those skills can be upgraded."

The renewed focus on social emotional skills resonated with practitioners, who reaffirmed the priority that their employer partners place on these skills. Adaptability was widely recognized as a foundational skill that supported learners to succeed in training and employment, while Creativity and Innovation was seen as a skill that would support learners in the changing labour market and encourage learners from diverse groups to apply skills learned in other contexts to the workplace. The integration of Document Use into Reading, Writing, and Numeracy was widely appreciated, with one organization sharing that these updated skills are more easily understood by learners. Another focus group participant also mentioned that the updates to Problem Solving have made this skill easier to explain to learners and employers, who see a more direct relevance to their work. Finally, the expanded definitions of Communication and Collaboration were seen as supporting learners to succeed in multi-cultural, diverse teams in the Canadian workplace.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The current project, *Skills for Success Implementation Guidance Development*, brought together an Advisory Panel representing a wide range of sectors and serving the training and employment needs of key underrepresented groups. With input from the Panel and their professional networks, SRDC developed this guidance document to support the design and implementation of Skills for Success training and assessment tools that includes information on:

- **Skills training and assessment needs** from the perspectives of practitioners serving clients from groups traditionally underrepresented in the labour market and underserved in the educational system, as well as practitioners in sectoral training space.

- **Guiding Principles** to inform the design and delivery of Skills for Success training and assessment, focusing on a) overarching themes underlying existing good practices, including lessons learned from the pandemic; b) alignment with the unique learning needs and priorities of underrepresented groups and major sectors; and c) implications of increasing digitization and the changing nature of work on skills development.

- **Recommendations on Promising Practices** in the design and delivery of Skills for Success training and assessments, prioritizing emerging best practices and areas of research that can inspire innovations, especially in light of recent changes due to the pandemic.

OVERARCHING CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS

Learner groups and sectors

To generate group-specific information on skills training and assessment needs, as well as more specific insight into how Guiding Principles and Promising Practice may be applicable in different ways, the project focused on specific:

- **Underrepresented groups**, emphasizing the unique learning needs of groups traditionally underrepresented in the labour market, including Indigenous people, racialized people, newcomers, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community. Unique strengths representing assets that can support their training and employment success are also discussed; and

- **Employer perspectives**, representing the current and forward-looking workforce development needs of employers as they maneuver the modern global, regional, and national economies. Where possible, we position these sectoral considerations within the context of Bioeconomy, Construction, Food Processing, Manufacturing, and Tourism.

Whenever possible, this report highlights diversity within underrepresented groups. The underrepresented groups identified are broad and include distinct subgroups. For example, "Indigenous" is an umbrella term that is used to refer collectively to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit. SRDC acknowledges the diversity within each of the underrepresented groups and, whenever possible, information pertaining to distinct subgroups are reported. Focus groups were also formed with diversity and inclusivity in mind. For example, different focus groups were formed to gather more insights on the experience of practitioners working with racialized Canadians, and practitioners working with newcomers, some of whom are refugees. While not explicitly discussed in this report, intersectionality was a key framework consulted to understand how individuals' overlapping identities and experiences combine to create non-additive factors of exclusion or interlocking systems of oppression.[1]

It is also important to highlight that gender identity was not included among the factors defining underrepresented groups in the present project. However, findings from the scientific literature, feedback from members of the Advisory Panel, and examples shared by focus group participants often reflected inequities in the treatment of women and non-cis-gender individuals in learning and the workplace. Similar to the information pertaining to the broader question of intersectionality, this information was integrated whenever possible.

> **What is intersectionality and how does it impact training?**
>
> Intersectionality underlines the diversity of experience across individuals who share a given identity and exposes how cumulating multiple disadvantaged identities multiplies barriers to inclusion. Research on intersecting identities in the context of learning and employment is still fragmented. Given the current state of knowledge, it was not possible to cover intersecting identities in sufficient breadth and depth. SRDC recognizes the need to investigate and document the experience of people with intersecting identities in learning and in the workplace. Many of the examples provided by focus group participants carried notions of intersectionality, such as transportation issues of Indigenous women in rural areas; challenges of newcomers who are learning a new language and have a learning disability; exclusion faced by LGBTQ2+ individuals who are members of a religious community. While more in-depth examination of programming guidance is needed, these early examples show that practitioners and sectoral groups were often aware of and sensitive to intersectionality.

Stages of training

From the considerations of learning needs to the Guiding Principles and Promising Practices, project activities are organized in four stages of training:

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[1]   Crenshaw, 2018.

- **Entry:** This represents training uptake and enrollment. For example, barriers to entry are factors that explain the low training participation rates of certain groups. From the employer perspective, these explain their reluctance to provide workplace training. Conversely, strengths include factors that enhance learners' receptivity to learning, and/or employers' recognition of training as a business priority. Guiding Principles and Promising Practices aims to address barriers and leverage strengths to facilitate training entry.

- **Engagement:** These are the factors that influence the success of training delivery. For learners, these factors influence their learning engagement, training persistence, and program completion. For employers, these relate to the extent to which they can contextualize and incorporate the training into their existing processes and environment.

- **Assessment and measurement:** These are the tools to document skills gains, monitor learning progress, and collect data to demonstrate program value and accountability. Key considerations in this section include factors that can facilitate a more inclusive data collection process that reflects learner diversity. For employers, a key need is to ensure assessment and measurement tools are relevant to job performance requirements and competency needs of their sectors.

- **Learning transfer:** This involves the application of skills, behaviours, and attitudes learned during the training to a new situation or context. For learners who face labour market attachment barriers, especially those from underrepresented groups, these factors influence their success onboarding or completing the probationary period in a new job. For learners in workplace training programs, these factors relate to their skills application on the job and the extent to which they can improve job performance as a result.

COVID-19 specific consideration across the stages of training

COVID-19 has led to both challenges and unexpected innovations across all training stages. For example, COVID-19 mitigated some barriers to entry – e.g., virtual learning can mitigate the needs for childcare or transportation – while exacerbated others, including further highlighting the digital divide across urban and rural areas of Canada. The lessons learned and the training innovations developed, including the increased availability of remote and online training, are likely to endure and continue to shape the Skills for Success landscape. Throughout the report, we explore COVID-related factors that influence entry, engagement, assessment and learning transfer.

Social ecological levels

Across the programming stages, barriers and strengths are further conceptualized through four overlapping levels of social ecology, as outlined in Figure 2. **Societal considerations** focus on the systematic and large-scale social and cultural contexts of Skills for Success programming.

Organizational considerations focus on factors within the training organizations, employers, and other institutions that define the immediate environment within which skills development and application can occur. **Interpersonal considerations** focus on the relational aspects of training, such as student-teacher, worker-supervisor, mentor-mentee interactions, as well as on learners' interactions with other community members such as other peer learners, family members and friends. **Individual considerations** focus explicitly on the everyday training experiences of learners as they interact with various learning and skills application situations.

Figure 2   Overview of social ecology levels
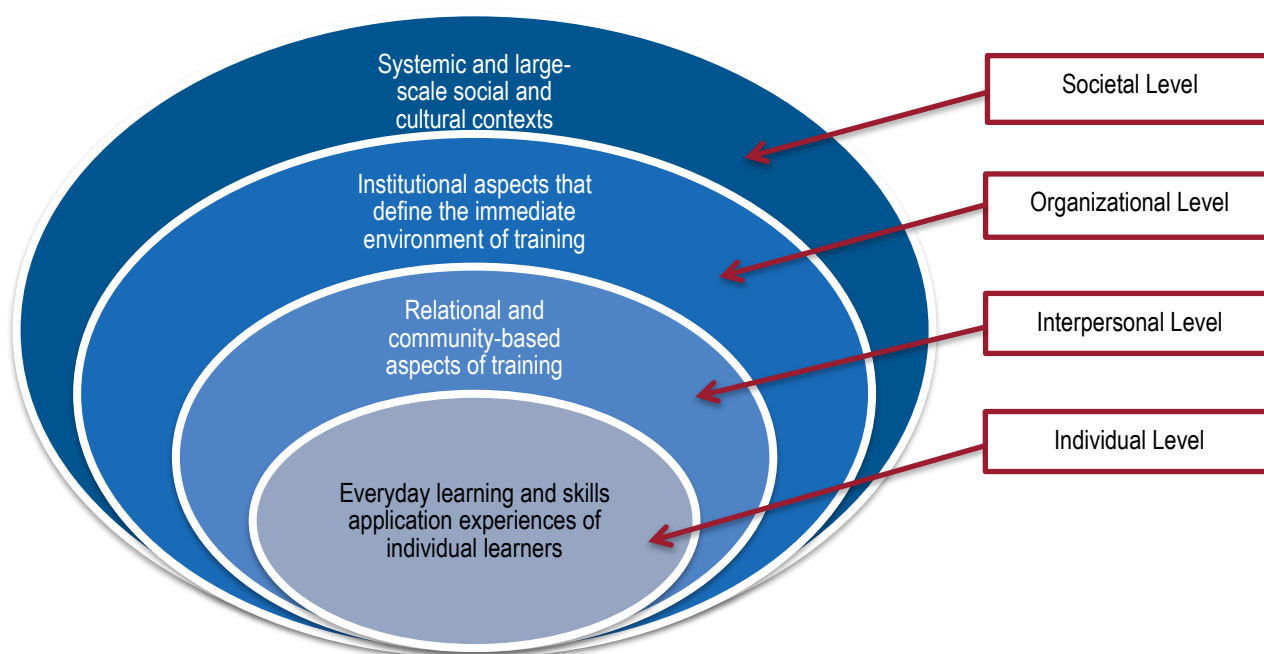
Key enactors

Guiding Principles and Promising Practices are specifically made relevant to key enactors that represent groups with specific roles, responsibilities, and expertise that allow them to design and implement Skills for Success strategies at different levels of the socio-ecological framework (see Figure 3). All enactors share the ultimate goal of enhancing the skills development success of individual learners.

- **Funders:** Funders, including federal and provincial/territorial governments, decide how to allocate funding for Skills for Success initiatives and define the eligibility of related components and activities such as wrap-around supports. Funders are in the best position to influence the direction and capacity of Skills for Success programming at the societal level, addressing systemic barriers while building on structural strengths and opportunities.

- **Employers and training organizations:** Employers, industry associations, and other sectoral groups provide or support sector-based skills development initiatives aligned with their own talent acquisition and workforce development goals. Training organizations design and offer specific forms of training. They are key to prioritizing training investment and ensuring skills development strategies and directions are aligned with work and social needs. Employers and training organizations are well placed to address barriers and strengths at the organizational level.

- **Practitioners, mentors, supervisors, and community members:** Practitioners include instructors and other individuals who directly engage with learners throughout the learning event. Mentors, supervisors, and community members are not formal instructors but can integrate social supports and community assets to influence the learning environment as well as skills development and application progress of earners. These enactors can address barriers and leverage strengths at the interpersonal levels.

Figure 3   Role of enactors across training stages
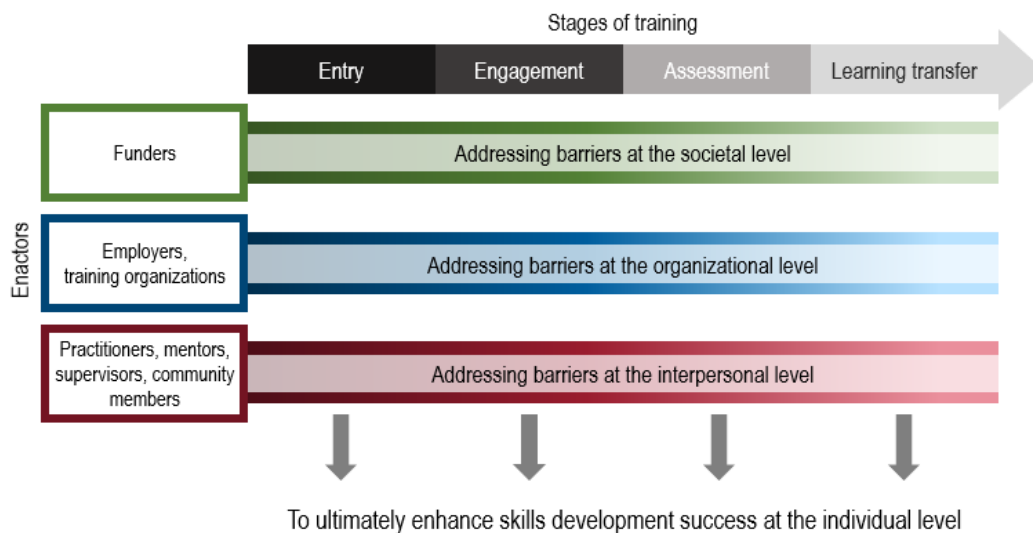
Ultimately, Guiding Principles and Promising Practices aim to inform and inspire key players within these enactor groups to implement Skills for Success to enhance the skills development outcomes of individual learners, facilitating their use of these skills within employment and everyday life.

The Guiding Principles and Promising Practices described in this document will benefit from a concerted effort across enactor groups. To maximize the efficacy of implementation, collaboration across enactors is needed to promote the continued development of a Skills for Success ecosystem that meets the needs of diverse learners and sectors.

As described in Figure 4, interaction across enactor groups can be conceptualized through "top-down" and "bottom-up" influence:

- **Top-down influence:** Funders can set the direction of programming design, delivery, and evaluation by promoting and prioritizing proven and innovative approaches. Directions, strategies, and influences from funders can empower training organizations and employers to better equip instructors, supervisors, and other community members with the right tools and materials.

- **Bottom-up influence**: Community members and instructors working directly with learners can provide meaningful insight into resource gaps, advocate for learner needs, and provide data on the efficacy and effectiveness that can influence funding decision-making. From the bottom-up, this information can inform and shape training adaptations and development (e.g., by advocating for tools and training innovations, employers and training providers transmit this information to funders).

Figure 4   Interaction of Enactors

Top Down

Funders set the direction for programming design, delivery, and evaluation. They promote and prioritize proven and innovative approaches.

Funders can promote change within training organizations and among employers to support instructors, supervisors, and community members so they can better serve learners.

Funders

Training Organizations

Employers

Instructors

Community

Bottom Up

Community members and instructors working directly with learners provide meaningful insight into training gaps, advocate for learner needs, and provide data efficacy and effectiveness to inform funding decision-making.

Information shared from practitioners and individuals on the ground can shapes training development. Through advocating for necessary changes, employers and training providers can transmit this information to funders.

Special consideration: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on training

The COVID-19 pandemic has, and continues to, impact training delivery and learning. While some organizations have transitioned permanently to online or hybrid models, others have transitioned back to in-person modes, often deemed necessary when a program entails hands-on components that are difficult to replicate online.

> **The pandemic has altered the experience of both school- and work-based learning.** The pandemic changed training expectations for instructors and students alike and many COVID-related challenges are still present at the time of writing due to ongoing health risks and restrictions.

As emphasized by multiple focus group participants and in the research reviewed, pandemic-related health, economic, and social outcomes of various groups continue to be drastically different. In particular, certain learner populations are at a higher risk of contracting COVID and/or face larger repercussions if they get sick.[2,3] For example:

- One study showed that **racialized women** with young children were more likely to experience career interruptions than fathers with young children.[4] Specific racial groups also faced challenges related to trauma and violence; in particular, anti-Asian racism has increased over the pandemic.[5]

- Public health campaigns in Canada may be less effective in reaching people who do not speak French or English.[6] As focus group participants highlighted, many **newcomers** may face challenges accessing health information and keeping-up with rapidly changing recommendations.[7] Additionally, the pandemic exacerbated existing settlement barriers and the mental load of moving to a new country, both of which contributed to training drop-out. For both community and learning organizations, connecting, and maintaining relations with those who were most vulnerable and isolated during lockdowns was a major challenge.

- **Indigenous people in Canada** were more likely to be laid off at the start of the pandemic and many reported their mental health became worse because of physical distancing.[8]

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[2] Tayaben & Younas, 2020; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2021.

[3] Etowa et al., 2021.

[4] Nardon et al., 2021.

[5] Government of Canada, 2021c.

[6] Tayaben & Younas, 2020; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2021.

[7] They mentioned that adults who normally rely on their children for translation relied on them even more, which put a heavy burden on children who had to appraise and filter large quantities of information that was contradictory and unreliable at times.

[8] Arriagada, Hahmann & O'Donnell, 2020; Meissner, 2021; Shingler, 2020.

- In certain cases, the transition to remote learning and work increased accessibility for **people with disabilities**, especially those with mobility-related challenges. Remote work became commonplace, increasing the numbers of accessible jobs.[9] In other cases, remote work and learning generated new constraints, especially when living spaces were inadequate to the needs of an individual and/or their family.[10]

- Partially attributed to the higher share of youth workers and their presence in specific employment sectors, **LGBTQ2+** people were more likely to experience job loss or reduced working hours at the start of the pandemic.[11]

The pandemic also had a disproportionate impact on specific sectors. From February to August 2020, accommodation and food services, construction, and manufacturing and retail services had the highest levels of net employment losses, although most have recovered since this period.[12]

Spotlight on how the COVID-19 impacted specific industries
- Between April 2020 and June 2021, only five per cent of workers in accommodation and food services worked from home compared to 70 per cent of those in finance and insurance and professional, scientific, and technical services sectors.[13]
- While the tourism industry experienced significant job losses at the start of the pandemic, the industry began to experience labour shortages when restrictions lifted.[14]
- Many workers who were previously employed in the tourism and hospitality sector transitioned to other industries during the pandemic in response to the contraction of the sector.[15]

The pandemic has resulted in profound and long-lasting impacts on training and employment. On the one hand, it has demonstrated that it is possible to mobilize existing resources to create innovative solutions, especially through accelerated digital adoption across sectors. On the other hand, it has exacerbated numerous dimensions of social inequality and injustice. As explored throughout this report, the response to the pandemic has important positive and negative implications for each of the four stages of training and work.

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9   Shaw et al., 2021.
10   Martel et al., 2021.
11   Appiah et al., 2021; Baboolall et al., 2021; Egale, 2020; Tayaben & Younas, 2020.
12   Statistics Canada table: 14-10-0355-01.
13   Statistics Canada, 2021.
14   Marani et al., 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2021; Tam et al., 2021.
15   Destination Canada, 2021.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

Phase one: Identifying learning needs

First workbook

SRDC conducted a review of the scientific and grey literature on the barriers, strengths and needs of learners from underrepresented groups and sectors of the economy. We structured the content in preliminary themes and topics, highlighting common factors and specificities. Themes and topics were further refined throughout the consultation process.

Written feedback from Panel members

The original workbook was sent to members of nine organizations on the Advisory Panel on February 10, 2022 (see Appendix A for the full list of Panel members). Members of the Advisory Panel were asked to provide feedback and comments by answering questions included at the end of each section of the workbook. Questions probed for the breadth and depth of content and invited Panelists to identify elements that should be covered in more details in focus groups and in further versions of the workbook. Panelists also had the opportunity to provide feedback by adding comments directly in the text, sending an email, or organizing a meeting with SRDC. The feedback provided by Panelists was used to develop customized focus group protocols that probed for specific issues pertinent to the reality of each underrepresented group and sector. Written feedback was also integrated into the revised version of the workbook.

First set of focus groups

Members of the Advisory Panel identified people in their professional networks who could participate in focus groups. Nine focus groups were organized to complement the information gathered from the literature with practical insights from service providers and industry members. The groups were formed based on the experience and expertise of participants, all of whom work and/or share lived experience with learners from underrepresented groups and employers from major sectors. Focus groups ran between March 9 and April 6, 2022. For a list of participating organizations, see Appendix B of this report or the two-page infographic at this link.

> **Round One Focus Groups**
> - 9 focus groups: 7 on barriers and strengths of underrepresented groups, 2 on business sectors
> - 70 participants in total
> - Participants from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, and the Yukon
> - 8 focus groups in English, 1 in French
> - Representation of people with lived experience across focus groups

First conference call

SRDC then summarized the key elements from the literature review and contributions of focus group participants in a slide deck that gave a general overview of main findings, more detailed descriptions of key themes, case studies illustrating a key theme in one underrepresented group or sector, and implications for post-COVID recovery.

The slide deck was sent to Panelists ahead of the conference call, which was held on May 5, 2022. During the 90-minute meeting, SRDC presented the approach, key findings, and overview of next steps. Panelists from nine organizations provided feedback on the scope of the review, the breadth and depth of content, and the approach envisioned for next steps.

Phase two: Identifying Guiding Principles and Promising Practices

Second workbook

Using key findings from the first workbook and feedback from Panelists during the conference call as the overarching structure, SRDC identified Guiding Principles and Promising Practices to support the implementation of Skills for Success training and assessment. As previously discussed, Guiding Principles and Promising Practices are organized by specific enactor groups who have the capacity to address barriers, needs, and strengths at different levels of the socio-ecological framework.

The second workbook was sent to Panelists on June 28, 2022. Questions included in the workbook invited Panelists to provide feedback on the structure used to develop Guiding Principles, on the breadth and depth of Guiding Principles, and on the breadth and depth of Promising Practices. Panelists were also invited to provide other examples of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices that are helpful in their own practice.

Second conference call

Panel feedback was summarized and discussed in a second conference call held on July 28, 2022. During the 60-minute meeting, SRDC presented the approach to drafting the Guiding Principles and Promising Practices, as well as an overview of next steps. Panelists from nine organizations provided feedback on the wording and structure of the Principles, the breadth and depth of the example Practices, and the approach envisioned for next steps in the project.

Second set of focus groups

Panel members reached out to their professional networks to invite participants who could speak to the relevance of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices. Focus groups were organized to collect the perspectives of training organizations and employers, as well as instructors and other members of the skills training community. Focus group sessions ran between August 19 and August 31, 2022. For a list of participating organizations, see Appendix B of this report or the two-page infographic at this link.

Round Two Focus Groups

- 5 focus groups: 3 focusing on the perspectives of training organizations and employers, 2 focusing on the perspectives of instructors and other members of the training community
- 34 participants in total
- Participants from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario

Phase three: Validating material

Development of the final project materials

Along with the interim and final reports, a series of communications materials was developed to promote awareness of the Implementation Guidance. The communications materials include summaries and examples of the Guiding Principles and Promising Practices for each enactor group and each stage of training, as well as a project overview document. To start navigating through these communications materials, please follow this link. For a brief overview of the Skills for Success model, please follow this link.

Third and fourth conference call

Communication materials were discussed in the third conference call, which was held on September 16, 2022. The materials were sent to Panel members ahead of the meeting to leave time for review. During the conference call, samples from the 11 communication documents were presented to Panelists and their feedback was collected regarding the approach used to develop documents; design and content; readability and accessibility; level of detail; and usefulness to various audiences.

For the final conference call, Panel members provided feedback on the draft final report, focusing on the coverage of key topics, accessibility of information presented, and accuracy of examples described. Feedback on the consultation process was also collected, with the view to inform future engagement and discussions, setting the foundation for a Skills for Success community of practice that can facilitate longer-term knowledge sharing, partnership, and collaboration across the skills and employment training sector. SRDC then integrated all feedback to finalize the Implementation Guidance.

KEY LEARNING NEEDS

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

This section presents a review of barriers, strengths and needs of learners and employers involved in skills training. To reiterate, barriers, strengths, and needs were identified through a review of the scientific and grey literature, consultation with Panelists from participating organizations, and focus groups with training practitioners, employers, and other members of the skills training community.

Content is organized according to the four stages of training: entry, engagement, assessment, and learning transfer. Within each stage, barriers, strengths, and needs are organized according to four levels of the socio-ecological model: the societal, organizational, interpersonal, and individual level. Key themes and topics are identified, and common factors and specificities of each underrepresented group and sector are noted, when relevant.

TRAINING ENTRY

An overview of the key barriers and strengths related to training entry is provided in Table 3.

Table 3　　　Overview of barriers and strengths

ENTRY	
Barriers & challenges	**Strengths & opportunities**
▪ Systemic marginalization leading to limited conditions for success (📖➥more details) ▪ Lack of branding on the relevance and value of training (📖➥more details) ▪ Employers seeing training as costly (📖➥more details) ▪ Limited access to role models, those who can motivate with success stories (📖➥more details) ▪ Negative or limited past educational experiences leading to low self-efficacy (📖➥more details) ▪ Limited "bandwidth" due to competing life responsibilities (📖➥more details) ▪ History of trauma (📖➥more details) ▪ Living in remote areas (📖➥more details)	▪ Changing nature of work requires modernized approach to workforce development (📖➥more details) ▪ Increased emphasis on transferable skills and prior life experiences (📖➥more details) ▪ Labour shortage necessitates training investment and workforce diversification (📖➥more details) ▪ Connections with community organizations and social groups (when available) (📖➥more details) ▪ Resilience and grit (📖➥more details) ▪ Adaptability, perceived opportunity to start or change careers, and previous experiences and credentials that can be transferable to the modern Canadian labour market given the right supports (📖➥more details)

Societal-level barriers and opportunities

Systemic marginalization leading to limited conditions for success

Learners from underrepresented groups face multiple social barriers that hinder their ability to access training. These barriers are systemic in nature and manifest across all areas of life, and all stages of training. To support learners and employees, it is necessary to be mindful of the systemic barriers that they face and consider their whole situation and living circumstances.

> *"In general, training programs for vulnerable populations should consider the whole human, including not only mental health, but also prior/concurrent challenges such as realities of chronic/deep or working poverty, food security and transportation, to name a few."* (Panel member feedback, Frontier College)

Indigenous people: As a result of residential schools and other colonial systems, many Indigenous people in Canada face geographic, social, health, and other barriers (e.g., accessing affordable and appropriate housing) that can limit their access to skills training.[16] focus group participants reported that meeting basic needs, such as accessing safe housing, nutrition and food security, childcare, and transportation underlie barriers to training access. Compounding these challenges, focus group participants shared that Indigenous women can face safety concerns that further limited access to in-person training, as one focus group participant shared. For example, some women are not comfortable using certain forms of public transportation (e.g., buses) due to elevated levels of violence towards Indigenous women.

> **How does poverty impact training?**
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> Many groups underrepresented in training face systemic barriers related to absolute or relative poverty. Poverty can result in multiple obstacles to engage in training: for example, inadequate shelter, utilities, food, and clothing; labour force exclusion; or lack of access to health and social services necessary for well-being.

Newcomers: When first coming to Canada, newcomers need to focus on meeting immediate survival integration needs (e.g., finding housing).[17] This may represent a bigger challenge for immigrant women with childcare responsibilities. Indeed, a high proportion of immigrant women report having unmet job training needs due to family responsibilities.[18] One focus group participant identified the urgency of having earnings as a barrier to longer-term, intensive training: "Even though our program is eight weeks long and has good success in connecting people with employment opportunities – even with low language levels – sometimes it just feels

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[16] Brooks-Cleator et al., 2021; Fang & Gunderson, 2014; Goldmann & Racine, 2021; Skudra, Avgerinos, & McCallum, 2020.

[17] Boadi et al., 2021.

[18] Park, 2011.

that eight weeks is too long, and people have a strong push to try to get earning a little bit quicker." (Focus group participant, OFE)

People who come to Canada by choice and people who come as refugees have different goals, resources, and access to services. For example, refugees are not eligible to the Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada (LINC) program from the Federal Government and rely on community organizations for language learning. Challenges accessing transportation are a major and multifaceted barrier that includes availability, reliability, and awareness of public transportation, costs of owning a car, and limitations of relying on established members of the community for transportation.

The move to online learning and working creates new opportunities and barriers

Virtual learning and working can increase accessibility and ease accommodations (e.g., related to time, transportation, childcare, and location). It can allow for wider programming reach, especially to those in rural or remote areas, those with mobility disabilities, and those with varying and unconventional schedules.[19] As one focus group participant from Frontier College noted, the pandemic increased awareness of job opportunities that offer more flexible work conditions and motivated some people to enter and further engage in training.

However, digital adoption can exacerbate the "digital divide." The transition to online learning can reveal – and increase – several types of inequities, especially in:

- access to digital devices and high-speed Internet;[20]

- training and/or confidence in using new technology on the part of the instructors and learners;[21]

- living circumstances that support learning and working from home, such as having a quiet, private, and safe space to concentrate;[22] and

- social isolation and the ability for organizations to provide outreach to groups. As a member of the French newcomer focus group discussed, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the need for greater and new forms of outreach. In these and other cases, new and customized outreach initiatives can be necessary.[23]

Racialized Canadians: Focus group participants cited transportation barriers, and the unmet need for wrap-around supports as a challenge to accessing training. In addition, for individuals who are "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) and who have been out of education and training systems for a long period of time, there is a need to clearly communicate the benefits of training, the training process, and the expectations of learners participating in training to support learners in overcoming hesitation and facilitating re-entry into training.

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[19] Shaw et al., 2021; Martel et al., 2021.

[20] OECD, 2020.

[21] Shaw et al., 2021; Martel et al., 2021.

[22] Shaw et al., 2021; Martel et al., 2021.

[23] Schleicher, 2020; UNESCO, n.d; World Economic Forum, n.d.; Dorn et al., 2021.

> *"They [learners]might receive a flier, they might visit a website, but they might need more customized things/answers. So sometimes, when you don't get enough information […] it's easier to retreat and just stay with the status quo or in their comfort zone without engaging further."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

People with disabilities: People with disabilities face multiple personal, interpersonal, social, and institutional barriers, which vary across individuals and contexts. Some barriers are systemic and are more difficult to address (e.g., economic precariousness and poverty, limited functional independence, institutionalization, higher risk of being a victim of violence, limited participation in society and civic life). Others can be addressed in training, through accommodations, or through access to financial and other supports (e.g., difficulties accessing the natural and built environment; difficulties accessing transportation; difficulties accessing healthcare, rehabilitation, and community services; difficulties accessing information and assistive technologies; difficulties forming and maintaining relationships; difficulties finding suitable housing; limited social support; limited self-determination and constraints over personal choices).

LGBTQ2+: One study found that a third of LGBTQ2+ participants reported finding it difficult or very difficult to meet needs related to transportation, housing, food, and other necessary expenses. They were twice as likely as the non-LGBTQ2+ population to experience homelessness or housing insecurity.[24] Other systemic barriers faced by LGBTQ2+ individuals are related to values and expectations held by the society. One participant described the struggle of growing up in a society that expects everyone to be cisgender and straight, and the internalized biases and subsequent difficulties (e.g., mental health and substance use issues) that result from this.

> *"Think about what it means to grow up in a culture that tells you that you have to be straight and cis and the internalized issues that you go through and how that builds up over time. And shame is something that comes up a lot and it makes people very prone to substance abuse, depression and mental health issues.".* The same participant further commented: *"It's hard to show up when your brain is telling you that the world isn't always a secure place."* (Focus group participant, QMUNITY)

Indigenous people: Many Indigenous groups persistently face poverty and labour force exclusion.[25] However, their labour market outcomes are particularly well served by additional education and training, with returns that are often comparable to those observed in the non-Indigenous population.[26]

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[24]   Statistics Canada, 2021.

[25]   Fang & Gunderson, 2014.

[26]   Goldmann & Racine, 2021; Park, 2011.

> **Opportunity Cost**
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> Learners experiencing poverty and other systemic barriers often have limited opportunities to engage in training, which leads to challenges gaining skills or experience that can be used to obtain stable employment with improved compensation. For example, subsistence jobs (often with limited opportunities for on-the-job training), attending to family responsibilities, finding stable housing, or addressing health challenges limit learners' ability to enter into training.

Racialized Canadians: Some groups face higher rates of underemployment, regardless of their education and skill level.[27] For example, young Black males are almost two times more likely to be not in education, employment, or training (NEET) compared to other young men in all other racial categories.[28]

Newcomers: Newcomers living in poverty have fewer options for affordable housing and may have poorer living conditions, in addition to living far from their place of employment. They may have difficulties accessing affordable and reliable transportation and hold more than one job to make ends meet, which compounds this issue. Childcare and eldercare represent important responsibilities, and limited access to support and affordable services cause additional stress. Lack of financial resources also impacts access to technology and contributes to the "digital divide". As explained by focus group participants, technology is a "double-edged sword" that solves some issues but comes with others.

> *"With all the technology now, on one hand, it's more accessible. But if they don't have reliable Internet, if they don't have computers at home, or they have one [but] their kids are using it for school. [Parents' learning comes] last. [...] On one hand it opens up [more opportunities] because it eliminates the transportation part. But then there are other challenges that come with that."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

People with disabilities: People with disabilities live on less than people without disabilities. They are more likely to be unemployed, have lower salaries than people without disabilities in the same sectors of activity, and are more likely to work part-time compared to people without disabilities. This results in a heightened risk of precarious and unstable employment and more limited opportunities for career development.[29]

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[27]   Park, 2011.

[28]   Turcotte, 2020.

[29]   Brucker et al., 2014; Holwerda et al., 2013; Holwerda, van der Klink et al., 2013; Kruse et al., 2017; Schur, 2003; Sundar et al., 2018.

LGBTQ2+: As a whole, the LGBTQ2+ population in Canada faces higher rates of poverty (41 per cent) than the non-LGBTQ2+ population (26 per cent).[30] In particular, transgender populations consistently report lower earnings and higher poverty rates.[31]

There is evidence that suggests workers from vulnerable learner groups are less likely to be included in career development opportunities and have more barriers to training. For example, opportunities that are framed as an "opt-in" choice for high-level employees or offered using gendered language (e.g., for "assertive, ambitious" employees) may not receive engagement from learners from underrepresented groups. In several sectors, certain occupations and positions, especially leadership positions, remains highly gendered and women tend to be underrepresented in higher-paid positions. Gender stereotypes in the industry "delimit peoples' possibilities and influence their preferences, skills, emotions, or aspirations,"[32] pointing to a need for skill training that addresses stereotypes and inequities.

> **Changing Skill Ecosystem**
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> The introduction of new technologies generates new learning needs around Digital skills, as workers operate new types of machines and learn how to use them to their full potential. At the same time, both employers and employees increasingly recognize the importance of social emotional skills for employment success. In the context of increasing automation, "people-skills" are especially valued and support job transferability and employment resiliency.[1]

Changing nature of work requires modernized approach to workforce development

Across sectors, labour markets are changing. With increasing automation and workplace digitization, as well as changes related to the integration of green technology and environmental sustainability practices, sectoral skills landscapes are evolving rapidly. Over the past decade, the pace of new technology introduction often exceeded training capacity.[33] Workplace training needs to align with not only current business priorities, but also future sectoral demands and trends.

Tourism: This sector is facing increased digitization and automation; uncertainty related to the impact of environmental change and environmental disasters on future travel; changing travel trends (e.g., decreasing business travel); financial recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the threat of future large-scale epidemics.[34] Other changes to the industry include the emergence of new or growing market segments (e.g., LGBTQ2+ community), and increasing hiring from non-traditional labour pools.

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[30]   Government of Canada, 2021.

[31]   Bauer et al., 2011.

[32]   Araujo-Vila et al., 2021.

[33]   de Boer et al., 2020.

[34]   Destination Canada, 2021; Marani, 2021.

Manufacturing: This sector is faced with unprecedented challenges associated with the accelerating pace of technological change, digitization, automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and other technologies. Workforce development strategies that align with industry needs and rely on labour market information are critical for the sector to keep up with current and future demands.[35]

Construction: This sector is facing significant challenges in the coming years regarding its commitments to climate change. A skills development strategy that ensures its workforce can successfully deliver low-carbon infrastructure projects is needed, with the goal to address gaps in the ability, capacity, and adaptability of the industry to respond to the emerging – and pressing – environmental needs.[36]

As noted by a member of the Advisory Panel, the launch of the new Skills for Success model represents an excellent opportunity to reach out to all interested parties including instructors and employers, as well as students in post-secondary education and learners completing skills training to increase the awareness of Skills for Success, their importance, and the return-on-investment (ROI), not only on skills training, employment outcomes, but also on broader social implications such as facilitating contributions to the environment.

Tourism: In this sector, both employers and workers recognize the need for social emotional skills (e.g., Collaboration, Communication, Adaptability) that can improve interactions with clients and co-workers. There is a need to expand current training options and train skills such as "service orientation, negotiation, social perceptiveness, and persuasion" that are required by many positions in the industry.[37] Employment in the tourism and hospitality sectors represents the first job for 30 per cent of individuals in the labour market. Working in this sector provides many opportunities to gain marketable skills for further career progression. One focus group participant noted that training is less of a Human Resources check-the-box activity now, in that employers are increasingly proactive when it comes to identifying training needs and implementing continuous learning initiatives. In general, employers are dedicating more resources to supporting their workforce "because it will pay dividends." (Focus group participant, Centennial College). The same participant noted that working in the tourism sector provides many opportunities to move into positions of leadership quickly, and to make professional connections with various actors upstream and downstream of the supply chain.

Manufacturing: Industry members recognize that training, whether it is provided in-house or through external organizations, is essential to fill skills gaps.[38] Advanced computer skills

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[35]   EMC, 2022.

[36]   Building It Green, 2021.

[37]   Conference Board of Canada, 2021a.

[38]   Food Processing Skills Canada, 2018; Deloitte, 2018; George & Chewning, 2021.

necessary to program machines and robots are already in high demand in the manufacturing industry. As automation frees up space for skills that are uniquely human, soft skills (e.g., critical thinking, creativity and originality, attention to detail, problem solving, people management) could become increasingly sought-after qualities in employees.[39] While soft skills are emerging as new priorities, still more attention should be paid to digital skills. As a first step, barriers accessing digital technologies should be addressed through concerted efforts. There are opportunities for employers, industry associations, and other sectoral representatives to discuss "[ways] to leverage this research, learnings from COVID and the collective will of partners in this and other projects to lobby for universal access to digital training, access to digital tools and reliable interconnectivity." (Panel member feedback, EMC)

Construction: Employers often cite Communication, Collaboration, and Problem Solving to be the key skills they look for in their employees. However, the formal apprenticeship system places more emphasis on the development of technical skills, leaving apprentices to look elsewhere to develop these "people" skills critical to their work on jobsites. Such soft and social-emotional skills gaps represent a critical need from the employer perspective.

Organizational-level barriers and opportunities

Lack of branding on the relevance and value of training

Practitioners highlighted the need to improve the quality of the information learners receive to better inform their decision to enroll in training programs. Learners may be reluctant to engage in training simply because the information they receive does not sufficiently illustrate the relevance of the training to their learning needs. Employer representatives participating in the focus group also noted challenges accessing information about the training in advance, to assess its quality and alignment with their organizational needs. One practitioner highlighted that "the information flow is usually just one way – [learners] might receive a flyer, visit a website, but they might need a more customized answer […]. Commonly it's easier to retreat and just stay with the status quo or stay in their comfort zone without engaging further [and miss out on a training opportunity]."

Newcomers: Lack of awareness of training opportunities was identified as a long-standing problem by some: "It has been mentioned at different meetings by representatives of different organizations, and it's been mentioned for years, and I think it's still a challenge." (Focus group participant, NorQuest College). However, other training providers felt that awareness of training opportunities was good, but that "brand awareness" of their organization, their training, and the

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[39]   Deloitte, 2018.

benefits they provide was low. In other words, people know the training exists, but they lack the information to evaluate its value. Another focus group participant echoed this concern, sharing that learners often question the reliability of information and training provided online. As well, internationally trained professionals who need to complete reskilling or re-accreditation may be discouraged if they feel that they are repeating something that they have already done: "It can curb the will to get the necessary skills when they have the impression that they've been through that process already" (Focus group participant, Frontier College). Other focus group participants noted that learners may choose training that is most accessible upon arriving to Canada, not necessarily training that best addresses their needs.

> *"I've seen people then just go with training – maybe not the most specific one or the most beneficial – but [the one that] provides funding. So, for example, they'll choose ESL [English as a second language] to improve their language because they get funded […], but maybe it's not just the language that they need. They need something else in addition to it. But that is not accessible, so they choose the next best thing."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

One focus group participant described how newcomers may choose to work in "the cash economy" (small businesses including shops, restaurants) where they can make money without having to complete language and skills training.

Racialized Canadians: The time commitment of training is a significant investment that can be challenging for learners with competing priorities (e.g., other jobs, family responsibilities): "When you've been out of structured learning before for a long time, it's very difficult to jump back in. They have life, family, work to balance.". (Focus group participant, Frontier College). The notions of cost, investment and balancing losses and benefits was echoed by another focus group participant.

> *"The adult learners have to lose something to join the program. The programs are often 3 months long, full time, they can't work during the training period. The opportunity cost is big, especially if they're not sure about the benefit they will get after the program. 'Am I going to get a job that pays more than what I'm just getting now?' They want to make sure, before they join the program, that there's benefit for them"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

LGBTQ2+: These learner groups perceive fewer available employment supports than their non-LGBTQ2+ peers and are more likely to report that employment counsellors do not understand their concerns.[40]

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[40]   Chen & Keats, 2016.

Employers seeing training as costly

For employers, the need to address day-to-day operational issues can sometimes take priority over longer-term considerations and decision-making around training. It therefore can be challenging for employers to provide release time for employees to participate in training. As another example, employers may seek to fill immediate labour shortages by hiring experienced outside talent rather than investing in upskilling and career planning for existing employees.

Tourism: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent nearly 90% of businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector. "[The] biggest factors are often awareness of opportunities, enough staff to run training cost-effectively [...]. Where these issues can be addressed through strategic sector-based workforce planning and consortium-based implementation, uptake in formal instructor-led or virtual training increases dramatically." (Panel member feedback, OTEC). Focus group participants noted that their organization struggles to find the time to navigate the large number of training options, identify the right training to meet their current needs, organize the training, and complete documents required to access and report training. Many SMEs do not have dedicated Human Resources personnel to plan and implement training for employees. Many participants stressed the challenges of having employees take time for training and losing capacity in a context where the labour shortage already represents an issue. Because a lot of activities in tourism are seasonal, this issue becomes more critical at specific times of the year: "The time issues become bigger now than ever in businesses that are trying to bring people back desperately to start the season. Any number of hours where they're off the floor and not serving customers and guests is a real issue." (Focus group participant, Go2HR). Participants stressed the challenges of assuming training costs for SMEs. This issue is compounded for people in rural regions where training is already more difficult to access. One participant noted that large corporations can make an economy of scale by training large segments of their workforce at once, but that SMEs typically have only two or three people "wearing multiple hats." In order to prepare for upcoming changes and training needs, and to measure and document the benefits of training, participants raised the need for complete and up-to-date statistics on workforce and industry trends. Organizations started collecting their own data to meet those information needs.

> *"Despite the stereotypes applied to small business, most want to learn, be more supportive and engaging with staff but competing priorities and lack of resources get in the way. In the past several years we have been ensuring adequate resources are in place to provide this support to management but face regulatory barriers in supporting the smallest businesses. When funding guidelines prevent you from supporting owners, directors, or their family members, helping businesses of 3 to 5 employees in rural markets gets difficult."* (Panel member feedback, OTEC)

Manufacturing: In manufacturing, many employers see outsourcing as an appealing solution. However, in addition to creating risks in terms of quality control, intellectual property, and supply chains, this represents lost opportunities to strengthen local economies, develop high-

potential employees, and create internal talent.[41] Focus group participants noted that the nature and contexts of key job tasks can impose constraints on training and acquiring new skills and responsibilities. For example, there are limitations on using technology in wet and cold environments within food production that can impact training investment decisions. One focus group participant highlighted that tracking tasks required by the Safe Foods Act could be done by front-line employees, but that the particular work environment of their company is not conducive to using automatic tracking technology. Employers hire employees for separate data entry jobs rather than implementing new technology and providing training to existing employees, suggesting that strategic training decision-making needs to be contextualized in realistic workplace conditions.

Construction: In construction, although mentorship is widely recognized as key to skills development in the sector, employers may not have the time to address the drastically uneven quality of mentorship on job sites. While some journeypersons are well-prepared to take on mentoring roles, many lack the 'soft' and social-emotional skills (e.g., Communication and Collaboration) to be effective teachers on the job. At the same time, apprentices may lack key social-emotional and employability skills to be proactive mentees who can take charge of their own learning and make the most of their apprenticeship. The apprenticeship curricula place a heavy emphasis on technical and vocational skills training, leaving apprentices to look elsewhere to develop other critical skills – including Problem Solving, Adaptability and Creativity and Innovation – to become effective mentees and contributing members of the workplace during their apprenticeship.

Increased emphasis on transferable skills and prior life experiences

Practitioners increasingly recognize and integrate prior life experiences into training programs. Transferable skills developed in other contexts, such as community work, volunteering, or travel and leisure, can be solid starting points for practitioners to discuss skills needs and training goals with learners. Learner groups with high proportions of youth are well-positioned to engage in skill development and training in the early- to mid-stages of their careers. They can develop a continuous learning and growth mindset early on and keep this mindset as they progress in their career path and acquire more skills and responsibilities. For others with more experience, re-contextualization and application of prior skills can be an opportunity for more meaningful and better work.

Indigenous people: The average age of Indigenous people in Canada is 32 years old, as compared to the average 41 years of non-Indigenous people.[42] Ensuring Indigenous-based

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[41]   Deloitte Insights, 2018.

[42]   OECD, 2020.

learning, education, and training are properly recognized and integrated into the training and career pathways of Indigenous youth will become increasingly important to support their entry and advancement in the labour market.[43]

LGBTQ2+: Nearly a third of the self-identified LGBTQ2+ population are youth (15-30), more than double that of the non-LGBTQ2+ population (14 per cent).[44]

People with disabilities: Research continually finds that people with disabilities indicate that working is important and that it is a significant part of their life.[45] Indeed, work is meaningful for social participation and can be a social determinant of health. It has several benefits for workers with disabilities and other groups of workers alike: it promotes quality of life and a greater sense of control over one's life, it allows workers to learn new skills, and it contributes to higher self-esteem.[46]

Newcomers: Many newcomers can bring valuable skill sets, work experience, and education outside of Canada into the Canadian labour market; however, costly accreditation processes may discourage newcomers from seeking work in their areas. Without obtaining Canadian accreditation, internationally trained professionals may enter careers that are lower than their pre-arrival skill level.[47] Focus group participants cited flexible training that provides many forms of education as a strength to meet learners' diverse needs, including language and literacy skills (including in official language minorities), courses required to complete a high school diploma, and preparing mature students for entry exams in post-secondary institutions.

Labour shortage necessitates training investment and workforce diversification

Aging and upcoming retirement of a large proportion of workers in addition to increasing demands has led to forecasts of labour shortages across multiple major sectors, including tourism, construction, and manufacturing. To address the combined impacts of changing demographics and ongoing labour demand, a core strategy has been to expand the talent pool and increase recruitment from underrepresented groups, including women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and youth.

Construction: One key strategy to respond to forecasted labour shortages in the coming decade has been to increase recruitment from groups traditionally underrepresented in the sector,

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[43] Acharya, Jere, & Robinson-Pant, 2019.

[44] Statistics Canada, 2021a.

[45] Ellenkamp et al., 2016; Toglia et al., 2019.

[46] Ellenkamp et al., 2016; Ruhindwa et al., 2016; Sundar et al., 2018; WHO, 2001.

[47] Buzdugan & Halli, 2009; Guo, 2013; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018.

including women, newcomers, racialized Canadians, Indigenous people, and youth.[48] Parallel to this is the need for the existing workforce to enhance their Communication and Collaboration skills to continue being productive and supportive members of the increasingly diverse crews. These skills can be integrated into the existing learning approach taken in the industry – the nature of the apprenticeship pathways means that hands-on, experiential learning is preferred and viewed as more valuable and applicable by apprentices.

Manufacturing: Employers in the sector have also been searching outside of traditional worker demographics to prevent productivity losses. Employers have been expanding their talent pools and aiming to recruit workers from groups traditionally underrepresented in the sector, including newcomers, Indigenous people, youth, and women. The increasingly diverse workplace requires strong Collaboration, Communication, and Adaptability skills.[49]

Increasing diversification of the workforce also highlights the needs and opportunities for employer-level training, providing managers and supervisors with the skills to onboard, train, and retain employees from diverse groups.

Tourism: A focus group participant from OTEC highlighted: "We do have a great deal of demand for support and becoming better at onboarding and supporting newcomers to Canada, people with a disability and tapping into labour pools that they might not have in the past."

People with disabilities: One training provider noted that funding is available to integrate people with disabilities in the job market but that those initiatives lack awareness on the part of employers and are underused. The same provider noted that training lacks accessibility for people with disabilities and that they quit training because they are not provided with accommodations. Advocating for the rights of people with disabilities represents a major challenge considering the need to support a culture shift in a large number of organizations.

> *"It's a task that, you know, none of us could operate or could do on our own. We just don't have the capacity to do that, but it slows down our ability to do what we want to do by not being able to reach those employers."* (Focus group participant, Abilities to Work)

Newcomers: As a result of Canada's immigration policy, there are large numbers of newcomer workers, creating a very diverse talent pool. However, newcomers face barriers entering the workforce, including employers' lack of recognition of their value and potential. Another challenge is the limited ability of SMEs to provide training to address language upskilling needs. One strategy to overcome this barrier is to provide co-work models, where teams of employees work together, with one bilingual employee acting as an interpreter when needed. However,

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[48] BuildForce Canada, 2018.

[49] Food Processing Skills Canada, 2018; EMC, 2022.

niche solutions to meet the needs of specific populations may lack appeal and relevance to employers. They may also limit job mobility for non-bilingual employees.

> *"So in the new immigration space we talk about the skills gaps for immigrants. But I think truthfully, the biggest skills gap preventing immigrants from finding meaningful work is on the employer side. It's their ability to actually recognize the talent that's in front of them."* (Focus group participant, Immigrant Employment Council BC)

LGBTQ2+: Similarly, education for employers is key to raise awareness of underrecognized talent pools in relatively smaller populations, including subgroups within the LGBTQ2+ community.

Interpersonal-level barriers and opportunities

Limited access to role models, those who can motivate with success stories

Without the positive influence of role models, individuals may not know certain opportunities are accessible or even lack awareness of possible career pathways. With limited support, these people may be less likely to pursue training or see the value in building skills.

Indigenous people: Mentorship that emphasizes relational learning and changes the power imbalances that are often present in traditional learner-teacher relationships can promote meaningful skill building through the establishment of an important and trusting relationship.[50]

Newcomers and racialized Canadians: Prior research suggests that racial and cultural similarity between mentors and mentees generates more beneficial outcomes;[51] however, when groups are underrepresented in certain sectors, there may be limited opportunities for career mentorship. This issue is perpetuated and compounded by underemployment.

People with disabilities: To increase access to training and education, disability-informed mentorship can provide a positive influence and additional support.[52]

LGBTQ2+: Learners who have faced continued discrimination may have reduced career aspirations and self-efficacy and may not pursue skill training or career development opportunities. Learners are further limited by reduced access to mentors and fewer LGBTQ2+ role models to guide and inspire career decision-making.

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[50] Britton et al., 2020.
[51] Ghosh, 2014.
[52] Medina & Kreider 2021.

Connections with community organizations and social groups (when available)

Community connections and long-term program presence within communities foster awareness of training opportunities and trust in training providers. Many learners find training programs through word-of-mouth and referrals from members of their community. People who share their positive experience with a training opportunity can have a major influence over whole communities.

Indigenous people: Focus group participants shared that the "connection they have with the community is critical to [them] having access to the learners", as many learners enter programs through referrals. Generating this connection requires time and investment in relationships with members of the community, and service providers identified a need to continue supporting long-term programs and service presence to develop that relationship with the community and community members. One focus group participant shared their experience: "I would call the [community members], [...] and they would often say, 'Oh, good programs are so hard to find'... If the contracts or partnerships could evolve to be more consistent, more long-term, the Nations themselves could benefit from not having to scramble to find providers." (Focus group participant, Frontier College). Another one also noted: "One of the most important aspects of how to work with Indigenous communities is to be in for the long haul and to be adaptive and flexible to changing conditions, changing needs". (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Newcomers: Focus group participants described the key role that communities play in raising awareness and promoting their training programs:

> *"So usually, if members of the community engage in certain programs, and they find success in it, a lot of the time [...] it's word-of-mouth. So, if one finds success, they sort of say, 'This is a really great program. This is a really great opportunity'. And then others come and engage in this training program, and that becomes a community building opportunity."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

The same participant described an instance where a person who had been very satisfied with their services wrote a piece on their personal blog and had a major impact over a whole community of newcomers. Personal stories from people who have similar backgrounds and completed similar training are a powerful source of inspiration: "These communities are often very tight knit [...]. There is a lot of support for each other, for how to navigate training, or all the various things about living in Canada." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Individual-level barriers and opportunities

Negative or limited past educational experiences leading to low self-efficacy

Negative experiences with education (e.g., discrimination, repeated failures in primary and/or secondary school) can act as a barrier to learners' willingness to re-engage with training in the adult learning context. Similarly, limited prior experiences with learning can be a vicious cycle – lack of familiarity with learning modes and methods can lead to further disengagement.

Indigenous people: As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report in 2015 outlines in detail, the legacy of residential schools has generated significant educational, economic, and other life-altering disparities between Indigenous people and other Canadians that contribute to training barriers. The legacy of residential schools and the use of Euro-centric teaching methods have contributed to gaps in educational achievement.[53] Focus group participants also reported that shame and stigma related to help-seeking behaviour was an additional barrier to accessing training and support. "There's a bit of shame and stigma around asking for help – being told by older family members to not ask for help, feeling shame around having a tutor, stigma around using that kind of title for the program [i.e., literacy training]." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Newcomers: Refugees or recent immigrants who have limited prior education may need additional supports to engage in structured classroom learning.[54] In addition, their previous educational and training experience may have offered limited support and encouragement of learning. For those learners, being in a class with other people may be intimidating. Depending on service programming, newcomers may be offered training that is not aligned with their skills. Social and cultural considerations may also add barriers (e.g., learners from some cultures may not want to be taught by female instructors; learners from opposite sides of a conflict may end up in the same class together).

Being able to explain skills and competencies in a way that can be understood by Canadian employers was seen as a priority. However, one participant noted that the journey to achieving this skill outcome can be more complex than it seems – there may be multiple layers of needs that interact with learners' own past personal and learning history:

> *"There's the culture, there's the language and then there's, not just the histories or what people are sometimes bringing with them, but there's disability and different kinds of abilities layered in."* (Focus group participant, NorQuest College)

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[53] OECD, 2020.

[54] Fang, Neil, Brake, & Sapeha, 2018.

Many participants noted that the language barrier often masked other skills, and that it needs to be transcended so that learners can demonstrate the full extent of their competencies. Making the difference between language learning needs, literacy needs, and other skills training needs remains a challenge. The discrepancy between the level of language required for a job and the level of language required to access more specialized training was seen as putting learners at risk of falling in a service gap and as a major barrier to access better job opportunities. Several focus group participants raised challenges associated with low Digital skills, which are compounded by the need to provide digital training in learner's non-native language. Participants agreed that older learners face more challenges or are initially more reluctant to engage in Digital training. Managing children's remote school during the pandemic was seen as a major challenge, especially for people who had no or very limited digital skills. "There were moms who had no access to a computer whatsoever and who had never used computers. Internet, Zoom, Teams […] It was a lot of things to manage." (Focus group participant, Frontier College). However, many also reported benefits, as summed up by one participant: "I personally think it's worth wrestling with the technology challenges because I think the benefits far outweigh the challenges." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Racialized Canadians: In Canada, certain racial groups (e.g., Black and Latin American students) are more likely to be streamed into educational courses and occupations that limit further training and upgrading.[55] Service providers reported that lower levels of self-esteem, confidence, and self-efficacy are common barriers to entering training; these barriers may be related to negative previous experiences in education and/or as a result of systemic discrimination.

People with disabilities: People with learning and other neurodevelopmental disabilities may face skill accumulation delays or barriers that prevent them from having the same education and training experience as their peers. If a child struggles in school and experiences repeated failures without receiving support, this may result in a negative perception of education and training.[56] This notion was echoed by focus group participants:

> *"For some of the folks that we support, they have such a negative experience in school [that] to put them in a classroom [is to] bring some stress… I know a lot of the folks we support don't want classroom [portion of the training] because they had such a terrible experience in school."* (Focus group participant, Inclusion Langley)

LGBTQ2+: Prior Canadian research shows LGBTQ2+ school-aged youth often report experiencing homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, as well as verbal and physical harassment

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[55]   Anisef et al., 2010, 2011; Robson et al., 2018; 2019; 2021; Thiessen, 2009.

[56]   APA, 2013.

when at school.[57] From this experience, many LGBTQ2+ people report not feeling safe in educational environments. For example, transgender learners who want to register in training may feel uncomfortable communicating over the phone if they fear not being welcomed based on their voice (Focus group participant, WorkBC Langley). Fear and anxiety related to coming-out were mentioned by many participants. Concerns about the perception and reaction of peers, instructors, and supervisors was described as a major barrier. Coming-out was described as an ongoing process that needs to be repeated with new peers, new instructors, and new colleagues. One participant described the struggle of deciding not to come out to avoid doing it repeatedly. Participants noted that support groups in secondary schools are still rare, and learners might not have benefitted from a supportive and safe learning environment in key periods of their life. One participant noted the importance of making the difference between skill gaps and concomitant difficulties that had a negative impact over learning, especially in adolescence and early adulthood: "So [it's important to] remind people, just because you have this gap doesn't mean that you're not good at this. It just means maybe you came at it at the wrong time in life." (Focus group participant). While inclusivity has made great leaps for gays and lesbians, transgender individuals still face considerable challenges.

Limited bandwidth due to competing life responsibilities

Learners may be unable or unwilling to access training that is offered at-cost, outside of working hours, or in different locations due to financial, practical (e.g., transportation, childcare), or time constraints (e.g., second job, other responsibilities). Remote courses, while more accessible, may not meet the schedule and learning needs of the target population. Training that is not sponsored by employers and offered during working hours may receive low(er) levels of participation. For learners, finding the right programs and opportunities and navigating the training landscape is an access barrier, even when programs are available.

> *"There are many good programs and supports; however, one cannot be a full-time navigator of systems and also try to be an employee or student."* (Panel member feedback, BioTalent)

Newcomers: Many participants described the challenges of learners who have more than one job, who have shift-based schedules that make it hard to plan in advance, and who work night shifts and attend training during the day. "When it comes to newcomers, quite often they end up in entry-level positions that are usually just hourly based. [...] A consistent schedule is something that they don't have, and because they need the resources, they need the money, they always put [the job] as a priority. So, if there is training that has a certain schedule, it's really hard to navigate that, because if a shift comes up you decide to take it. So that's another thing

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57   Peter, Campbell, & Taylor, 2021.

that adds on in terms of being able to attend training." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Construction: The block training portion of apprenticeship is often in-person, which may require some apprentices to relocate or leave the home communities for about eight weeks to attend classes. Some programs are changing and offering online options, but it is not common.

One element that was often mentioned as contributing to the heavy mental workload of learners, employees, and employers, was complex information and systems, paperwork, and bureaucracy. Focus group participants made several comments that reflected challenges navigating a complex and, at times, inflexible system.

Newcomers: Many focus group participants described newcomers' challenges related to processing large amounts of complex information when coming to Canada. Participants shared many examples around the lack of familiarity with Canadian institutions and the need to navigate and self-coordinate access to services given by many different providers (e.g., childcare, social support, language training, skills training, employment preparedness). One shared: "It's not so much about the language all the time. Sometimes they do have the language, [but] they don't understand the system, they don't understand how to present their skills or their ability in a way that will be understood in the Canadian context." (Focus group participant, AWES). Difficulties coordinating multiple services were also mentioned: "People with caregiver responsibilities can't find places for their children – because you have to navigate different social structures and different service structures in order to be able to then get to your training for example. So those are things that I've seen come up repeatedly. Even if they find [the support], systems navigation challenges [could] act as barriers." (Focus group participant, AWES). Providing wrap-around support is seen as a solution, but it comes with its own set of challenges: "Of course, it [a pilot project that provided wrap-around support] required a lot of investment in terms of human resources, also on the part of the [training] centre that had to have people to take care of children, space as well, it's not something that is easy to organize." (Focus group participant, Frontier College). Being a Canadian citizen helps access a range of services, but obtaining citizenship is a long and complex process for permanent residents. Filling out all the documents to get established takes up a lot of

> **Navigating a complex training landscape**
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> The fractured and complex training landscape can be a barrier to learners, particularly learners with limited time, resources, and experience navigating the Canadian system. Navigating the complex training landscape to find a training that aligns with learners' skill level, schedule, desired length of training, and learning goals can be a challenge. Learners may also face barriers related to limited eligibility criteria or bureaucratic hurdles (e.g., multiple forms, requiring specific IDs). Learners with negative past experiences with education and training, competing life priorities, and/or concerns about the accessibility or inclusiveness may have increased difficulty identifying and entering appropriate training.

mental energy. After it is done, learners can start to focus on training, but new priorities or requirements may arise.

> *"One thing is also just this: mental space, [what] it takes [for] people to get established. It takes a lot of mental energy to get your driver's license and then the next thing is to get citizenship. So once all of those things are sort of taken care of, then they can move on to thinking about extra training..."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

LGBTQ2+: Forms such as intake forms, registration forms, and surveys can be discriminatory due to their phrasing and content (e.g., questions and options that assume that the person is cisgender and straight). Questions around sex/gender often lack inclusivity (e.g., only a question about sex assigned at birth with male-female options and no question about gender identity) and are seen as intrusive because they force learners to disclose their gender or sexual orientation even if they are not ready or comfortable doing so (e.g., having to reveal the sex/gender of the spouse or partner). Participants reported trying to support learners who are uncomfortable answering these questions, although it is not always easy – one mentioned having been pressured by management to ask learners to answer all questions, even those that are intrusive or potentially discriminatory.

People with disabilities: The amount of paperwork needed to access training was described as a barrier. Forms and other types of written communications lack accessibility in terms of format (e.g., electronic version that is not compatible with digital readers) and content (e.g., complex terminology, no version in simple English or French available). "There are a lot of forms, and not all of them are accessible. The forms need to be accessible to enable them to complete them quickly. Making documents accessible to clients should be a priority." (Focus group participant, Neil Squire Society). Questions can be intimidating or intrusive (e.g., personal and household income to calculate the amount of personal monetary contribution to funding). The necessity (or impossibility) to have someone else fill out forms on behalf of the person with disability because the form lacks accessibility compounds this issue. Requirement to provide proof of disability, even to access low cost/low tech accommodations such as a note taker, discourage learners from accessing training. Inflexible eligibility criteria and support claw-back were also perceived as factors that limit entry and access to training.

History of trauma

In cases where trauma and violence were perpetrated by institutions – such as the systematic violence towards Canada's Indigenous Peoples – learners may distrust institutions and be reluctant to engage in programs. On an individual level, the experience of trauma can result in memory challenges and other cognitive and behavioural barriers that reduce learners' ability to focus on skill training.

Indigenous people: Violence against Indigenous people in Canada, as well as intergenerational trauma, can act as a barrier to participation in training. A Trauma and Violence-Informed (TVI) approach to employment and skills training can have significant benefits, particularly for those who have experienced discrimination or marginalization.[58]

Newcomers: Some refugees can suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, while others may face physical impairments and emotional scars that impact learning.[59]

Racialized Canadians: Focus group participants shared the need to make training a safe space for learners to build confidence, share experiences, and develop supportive social relationships, including mentorship and peer support.

People with disabilities: Both as children and adults, people with disabilities are at a higher risk than people without disabilities to be victims of violence and maltreatment.[60] Violence can also be a cause of disability, resulting in mental and physical harm.

LGBTQ2+: Gender and sexual minorities in Canada are more likely than non-minorities to report being assaulted or victimized throughout their life course.[61] Therefore, trauma- and violence-informed services can be essential to ensure LGBTQ2+ learners have support when accessing training.[62]

Living in remote areas

For those who live in rural or remote areas, there may be limited access to in-person training locally, as well as Internet connectivity issues creating barriers accessing online training. In both rural and urban centres, learners may not be aware of the training options and support that are available.

Indigenous people: In rural and remote regions, Indigenous groups often have lower education and training attainment rates.[63] Focus group participants working in both rural and remote communities cited lack of awareness of services as a barrier to entering training. Programs that provide clear information, reduce the stringency of eligibility criteria, and support participants in

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[58]   Bobadilla et al., 2021.

[59]   Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005.

[60]   Jones et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2012.

[61]   Statistics Canada, 2020.

[62]   Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; Streeter et al., 2020.

[63]   OECD, 2020.

their applications (e.g., completing forms, gathering necessary documents) can also encourage entry into training programs.[64]

Newcomers: Through pilot immigration initiatives (e.g., Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot), newcomers to Canada are encouraged to migrate to rural communities. However, in these places, they may face barriers in accessing suitable training to meet their needs. Beyond having good awareness of training opportunities and organizations, being able to locate the actual place where services are given can be a challenge, as one training provider explained: "There are settlement organizations, and there are partnership organizations that also enhance [community supports]. But unless someone guides you to them, they can be difficult to access and to find if you don't have the language skills that you need to be able to read the street signs that say: 'this is the local immigration partnership office'" (Focus group participant, Frontier College). The same participant expressed the need to have one person who could accompany newcomers and show them around the community, acknowledging the role that established members of the community play to provide orientation to newcomers. However, they also noted that this approach has limitations as well.

LGBTQ2+: Location and context can influence the identification and expression for LGBTQ2+ individuals, as well as impact their sense of community, support, and sense of belonging.[65] The availability of support groups varies across regions, and even within regions or cities. Learners who are part of or interacting closely with multicultural and/or religious communities may face specific challenges.

People with disabilities: Rural areas may have limited capacity and resources available to support the needs of people requiring assistive technology and mobility assistance to ensure they can fully participate in training.

Manufacturing: Access to reliable public transportation in non-urban/rural areas was described as critical to enable participation, not only in training but also in the job.

Resilience and grit

Resilience, adaptability, and other personal skills and assets can help individuals overcome hardship so they can take on new training opportunities. Being able to handle and respond to unexpected and challenging situations is a strength that can aid in multiple types of life course outcomes and improve access to training.

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[64] Brooks-Cleator et al., 2021.

[65] Hulko & Hovanes, 2018.

Racialized Canadians: In Canada, a higher percentage of Black individuals selected "always" when asked how often they are able to bounce back after hardships compared to the rest of the population. They are also more likely to report being able to learn from hard experiences.[66] Focus group participants shared that seeking supports and engaging with service-providing organizations were factors that supported entry into training. "Just the fact that they reach out to us, communicate that they need support, either to our community partner or to us, that's already a step forward in terms of beginning to actively access the available resources." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

People with disabilities: With support and accommodation, people with disabilities develop alternative methods or compensatory strategies to perform tasks.[67] Focus group participants noted that many people with disabilities already possess strong Digital skills. Furthermore, excellent Digital literacy training programs exist,[68] staff is highly skilled, and staff can often provide specialized support such as Sign Language interpreting.

Adaptability, perceived opportunity to start or change careers, and previous experiences and credentials that can be transferable to the modern Canadian labour market given the right supports

Within the vulnerable learner groups, some sub-populations report higher levels of educational attainment and participation in training programs. As a result, these learners are likely to be receptive to training opportunities and may already have high skill levels. However, they may require support to overcome systemic barriers to leverage these skills into gainful employment.

Indigenous people: Many Indigenous groups in Canada are increasing their full participation in education and training. For example, the share of Indigenous people with a high school diploma increased 8-9 percentage points between 2006-2016.[69] Indigenous women in particular have increasingly higher levels of achievement. For example, a recent Statistics Canada (2021) report indicates that over half (52 per cent) of Indigenous women had a post-secondary credential in 2016 and of these, 14 per cent were Bachelor's degrees.

Racialized Canadians: Many groups also report higher levels of educational attainment[70] and engagement in training programs.[71] For example, working-aged, racialized women are significantly more likely to hold a university degree than non-visible minority women and are

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66   Statistics Canada, 2020.

67   Sundar et al., 2018; EY in association with Made by Dyslexia, 2018.

68   Neil Squire Society, n.d.

69   OECD, 2020.

70   Hou, Lu, & Schimmele, 2019.

71   SRDC, 2020.

more likely to have prior education in traditionally well-compensated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.[72] Service providers working with racialized populations shared that many participants are highly motivated to receive credentials, including high school, GED credentials and certificates, or micro credentials, as these are valued by employers. A need for training programs to provide and/or prepare learners to obtain these certifications was identified.

Newcomers: Many groups also report higher levels of educational attainment[73] and engagement in training programs.[74] Focus group participants reported many examples showing the personal strengths of newcomers, including adaptability, resilience, having a hard-working attitude, persistence, high drive, and high motivation. One also noted newcomers' capacity to set goals and stay focused on their goals, i.e., "the capacity to have a long-term objective and to project yourself [in the future] – a dream that allows you to make small steps in daily life." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

People with disabilities: On average, individuals with more severe disabilities have lower levels of educational attainment compared to those with milder or no disabilities. However, people with disabilities have increasingly higher rates of employment as their educational levels increase.[75] Accommodations can be very effective and lead to training and employment success when they meet the needs and are provided long enough in advance so that learners can be trained and develop enough proficiency.

LGBTQ2+: Gays and lesbians report higher levels of education than the non-LGBTQ2+ population. Bisexual men and women report lower levels of education than their non-LGBTQ2+ peers but are more likely to be current students. Despite facing multiple barriers, 71 per cent of trans people report completing some college or university education, similar to the non-LGBTQ2+ population (72 per cent).

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[72]   Hudon, 2016.

[73]   Hou, Lu, & Schimmele, 2019.

[74]   SRDC, 2020.

[75]   Morris et al., 2018.

TRAINING ENGAGEMENT

An overview of the key barriers and strengths related to training engagement is provided in Table 4.

Table 4   **Overview of barriers and strengths**

ENGAGEMENT	
Barriers & challenges	*Strengths & opportunities*
▪ Traditional approaches to learning leading to rigidity in training delivery (📖➥more details) ▪ One-size-fits-all delivery modes (📖➥more details) ▪ Lack of career laddering or contextualization in longer-term professional development (📖➥more details) ▪ Unclear alignment between technical and transferable skills (📖➥more details) ▪ Limited access to champions who can create safe learning space (📖➥more details) ▪ Interactions of barriers leading to risks of falling behind (📖➥more details) ▪ Lack of recognition of skills needs, wanting immediate results due to subsistence needs (📖➥more details) ▪ Limited access to wrap-around supports leading to challenges keeping up attendance (📖➥more details)	▪ Technology to modernize and operationalize training as lifelong learning (📖➥more details) ▪ Cultural diversity can inspire training innovation (📖➥more details) ▪ Increased recognition of Universal Design in Learning (📖➥more details) ▪ Opportunities for sectoral storytelling to enhance perception of entry-level jobs (📖➥more details) ▪ Mentorship from staff and program graduates with shared lived experience (📖➥more details) ▪ (Large) employers' efforts in developing learning ecosystem with welcoming communities (📖➥more details) ▪ Need to cultivate a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy before and throughout training (📖➥more details) ▪ Need for clear, flexible learning pathways that facilitate celebration of interim milestones (📖➥more details)

Societal-level barriers and opportunities

Traditional approaches to learning leading to rigidity in training delivery

A need to modernize training was identified by participants across learner and sectoral focus groups. One focus group participant representing a major construction employer said that "When they think of training, employers think of classroom learning, and then there's a test, that's how you know you've learned something. There is a lack of understanding of different types of training – it does not have to be classroom, it could be microlearning, it could be self-

directed, it could be field competencies." Another focus group participant agreed and shared that "the classroom learning mode, be it in person or virtual, is stuck in people's head, as opposed to microburst learning on the job or a 10-minute segmented learning, you know, all sorts of different ways of delivering the training as well as the competency, not just the book theory stuff." Course content is also changing, with employers increasingly recognizing the need for social emotional skills training. Training providers highlighted the importance of emphasizing inclusivity instead of having a single and rigid approach to workplace norms. There is a need for training that encourages the innovation that can emerge from increasing diversity in the workforce. The new Skills for Success framework can support this while helping training organizations and employers navigate changing workforce development needs.

> **Modernizing training** includes incorporating innovative training approaches, addressing emerging skill needs, and creating a more inclusive training and employment landscape to better support learners and to attract workers from diverse populations to meet labour needs.
>
> Learners from different groups, and those working in different industries may prefer training formats such as hands-on, virtual training, which may differ from traditional classroom approaches. Offering training in formats that appeal to learners is likely to support learner engagement and persistence in training, and ultimately produce better outcomes.

> *"When they think of training, employers think of classroom learning, and then there's a test, that's how you know you've learned something. There is a lack of understanding of different types of training – it does not have to be classroom, it could be microlearning, it could be self-directed, it could be field competencies."* (Focus group participant, Employer in construction)

Technology to modernize and operationalize training as lifelong learning

Increasing digital adoption and accelerating technological advancement provide ample opportunities to modernize training. Industry leaders in multiple sectors have started to conceptualize learning as an iterative, non-linear process that can be integrated into daily life and work. This includes "microburst learning" contextualized in on-the-job demands. It also includes the use of new technological innovations – such as virtual reality – to provide safe and practical learning formats.

Construction: Major employers in the sector have started to incorporate digital devices in their daily work, which provides opportunities for app-based learning. For example, a representative from an industry organization shared that "the trades sector is moving toward the direction where "you need an iPad in your toolbox" today." That said, technological adoption also comes with its challenges, especially around receptivity among workers. As that industry representative reiterated, "we have the older generation – which is a big part of the trades – who are still resisting the idea [of technology], they're still struggling."

People with disabilities: A representative from a large construction company shared that "when we provide choice in learning platforms, we become more inclusive for neurodiverse people. It just really opens up the accessibility of training for people with different circumstances." That said, it is important to ensure that learners are set up for success. For learners with disabilities, this include supports in choosing the right technology to meet individual needs, obtaining the technology (including the funding to purchase it), making sure that all pieces of technology are compatible, receiving training on the technology in advance of the skills training program, keeping the technology in good functioning order and up-to-date, and developing sufficient proficiency with the technology to succeed in training and at work.

> *"[There is a] high rate of abandonment of technology, it can be a waste of equipment and software if there is no training. When new technology is provided, a list of goals is set up, outlined right off the bat so that the client knows what they should achieve, and we know what their goals are. Goals should be tailored to ensure there is retention, and participation is required. If the stage is not set well, they are not prepared for what comes next. If a client is provided tech today, they are generally okay [with it today]. But software is continually updated [with] new features. Some clients are savvy and keep up, others need a refresher. [The priority is] meeting the client where they are at."* (Focus group participant, Neil Squire Society)

Accelerated adoption of virtual delivery during the pandemic could be rocky but, in some cases, offered opportunities for innovation

Technological change and adaptation during the pandemic enabled alternative training approaches that may benefit some learners. Technologies and forms of learning that were previously associated with accessibility became more mainstream as some trainers adapted Universal Design principles (e.g., asynchronous, self-paced learning; "bite-sized" learning or learning on-the-go; micro-credentialing). Virtual learning could also explicitly or implicitly include Digital skills training.[76] As mixed sector focus group participants highlighted, in some cases, the pandemic had a positive impact on the quality of online learning: "Our organization took the time to break down learning topics into specific, small skills and found the activity very helpful" (Mixed sector focus group).

Cultural diversity can inspire training innovation

Learners often enter training with diverse experiences related to their cultural backgrounds and life experience. Integrating learners' experiences and insight into instruction can be a powerful tool to promote training innovation and learner engagement.

Indigenous learners often bring skills gained from cultural practices and teachings to training. Best practices for programming staff and instructors working with Indigenous learners tend to centre around incorporating awareness of cultural implications into programming content.

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[76]   Shaw et al., 2021; Martel et al., 2021.

Newcomers: Focus group participants highlighted the importance of giving learners opportunities to share their prior experiences, skills, and accomplishments. This approach can help learners move from passive learning to active engagement and connection with the training, in addition to building confidence through reflecting on past success and resilience. Furthermore, providers shared that instructors with lived experience of immigration can connect with learners and act as a powerful source of motivation for learners. Additional representation, to build feelings of inclusion, can take place in examples in course material and assessments.

People with disabilities: Teaching approaches that have been proven to be successful with learners with disabilities can be effective strategies to use with a diverse range of learners. A practitioner working with people with disabilities highlighted that a strength for pan-disability learning environments is a need for repetition of learning materials in different formats: "If facilitated well, you have to repeat things using different words, you have to use visuals, you have to use language, you have to use closed captioning." This essentially creates a robust community of learning, "whereas if you assume a neurotypical way of learning, you don't have the same input and output, you miss out on the community aspect [among different learning methods], the collaboration" among different learners with different needs.

Racialized Canadians: Many Racialized Canadians are also newcomers and bring international experience. However, discrimination was cited as a barrier that prevented the full recognition of previous skills and experience, illustrating the need for inclusive training.

> *"I worked with a lot of people who came from other countries [...] They had the qualifications; they had the international experience – that's a strength they can bring to the workplace. But some of the feedback I got was that having an accent was sort of a deterrent – they got looked down upon because they had an accent. So, these are the little things I think that's systemic."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Organizational-level barriers and opportunities

One-size-fits-all delivery modes

Learners from groups traditionally underrepresented in the labour market and underserved in the education system have unique training milestones, goals, and obstacles. To engage learners and provide the best possible outcomes, trainers must develop relationships and "walk with" learners to identify learning needs and goals. Training must then address issues and topics that are relevant to learners. For example, prior to proceeding to employability skills training,

> Incorporating **relationship-focused activities** such as networking and mentorship can promote role models that may have been absent in previous learning and life contexts, as well as offer opportunities to expand learners' social networks, build social capital, and increase motivation to complete training.

engaging in career exploration, job pathfinding, and training and employment goal development can be beneficial for those who are more distant from the labour market. Programs that are based on prior skills and expertise, and combine theory, hands-on learning and work experience are thought to be particularly impactful.

Indigenous learners: To meet the training needs of Indigenous learners, it is necessary to generate culturally informed educational and training opportunities through culturally and socially relevant engagement and mentorship that can encourage persistence and training completion.[77] Focus group participants shared the need to invest time in developing relationships with learners on an individual basis to build trust, provide encouragement and social support, and identify learning needs and challenges. This included supporting learners who exit the program and continuing to provide options and encouragement to help them re-enter training when possible and if necessary. Tailoring learning goals and material to individual learners and celebrating milestones throughout the learning journey were successful strategies participants used to engage learners.

> *"One of the things that we see as a great success factor in terms of learner engagement is the fact that our programming is student centred, not one-size-fits all, tailored to the individual learners or the individual community and learning context. So, we do use general and generic materials, but overall our model is to develop very customized supports."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Additionally, some learners may enter training with low literacy levels and do not have access to supports to build these skills, which makes it very difficult to participate and succeed in training. Service providers identified the need to promote lifelong learning, e.g., making work-integrated training opportunities available to lower-skilled workers as part of continuous professional development.

> *"[T]hey are trying to meet standards that are externally imposed – for example in the trades, getting them ready to write the trades entrance exam is challenging, as they're coming with a literacy level that isn't even approaching what it needs to pass that exam. So, when they are required to do that in the training, the disconnect is too great."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Newcomers may be most interested in training that contextualizes skills within the Canadian workplace culture. Training providers described that these learners often set out to accomplish several learning goals at the same time – understanding the Canadian training and workplace culture, developing language skills, and absorbing the training content, which increases the complexity of supporting learners. For example, trainers gave the example of the difficulty of using English or French as the language of instruction to teach Numeracy or Digital skills.

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[77]   Deonandan et al., 2019; Restoule et al., 2013.

Newcomers with foreign credentials and certifications often benefit from training that introduces alternative pathways to recertification, including retraining programs to enter similar but non-regulated professions.[78] While service providers recognized credentials and certifications as a priority for learners, many working in the non-profit sector explained that they cannot offer certifications that are recognized outside of their organization. As summarized by one focus group participant: "As a service provider, we're wanting to meet needs, but sometimes our hands are tied." (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

> *"Newcomers are most interested in an integrated framework that builds language skills and [Skills for Success] contextualized to the occupation or field of study they are interested in at the level of language they are ready to learn. Workplace culture needs to be contextualized as well. In order to build meaningful, integrated, content, developers must have a thorough grasp of the originating material."* (Panel member feedback, AWES)

In addition, newcomers may enter training with high levels of education and work experience. For these learners, increasing engagement may require focusing on adapting existing skills and experience to the Canadian context, including learning how to position skills acquired and accumulated internationally to align with Canadian employers' requirements. Learners that are at a distance from the labour market may need to engage in training to enhance their employability skills before they can meaningfully engage with sectoral training. Incorporating self-reflection on the purpose of training and how it applies in real life was one proposed strategy to engage learners.

The pandemic heightened the need for additional professional development to improve the quality of instruction and learning online

Both instructors and learners may face challenges in the areas of online Communication and Collaboration as the use of gestures and non-verbal Communication to support verbal Communication is often more difficult. Some students can also struggle to engage with virtual forms of learning and lack the necessary training and skills to use online learning tools efficiently.[79] In the words of one focus group participant, "being tech savvy is super challenging for learners – how to use Zoom, how to navigate different kinds of platforms. Our volunteers spend the bulk of their session, especially at the beginning, to try to provide tech support, showing learners how to access the white board, share screen, join a breakout room" (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

It is necessary for training programs to account for the specific strengths and limitations of online/in-person and synchronous/asynchronous training formats on learning engagement. As one participant discussed: "There may be a population of people who strongly prefer physical programming, like they don't feel the same level of engagement from online programming. And so they're not going to show up for these online classes and not even apply" (Focus group participant, Frontier College). The same participant later emphasized: "I had a variety of learners who would rather not do it at all than do it online" (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

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[78]   Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

[79]   Engzell et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2021.

Additionally, focus group participants identified challenges in designing training that are aligned with employer priorities and workplace realities, including the need to adapt training to address local and sectoral needs. Frontier College training providers described a series of workplace-contextualized training across Canada, with some cities having many successful examples of workplace-integrated training (e.g., Whitehorse, YT) and others having some early success (e.g., Sherbrooke, QC).

LGBTQ2+: Members of the LGBTQ2+ community may benefit from supports around career exploration and assessments of personal strengths and skills, particularly those that complement reflection of other aspects of identity (e.g., gender identity, sexual orientation) and development of self-efficacy. One researcher explains: "It would be extremely challenging or nearly impossible for [LGBTQ2+] students to choose what they want to do for living before making sense of who they are, as well as feeling totally confident and comfortable with who they are as persons."[80] In addition, those who are ready to enter the labour market may benefit from strategies to help navigate difficult interpersonal situations and deal with discrimination in the workplace.[81]

People with disabilities: Focus group participants emphasized the importance of having programs organized based on reaching milestones, and services that support learners at all distances from the labour market. Training providers identified the need for pre-employment services (including personal strengths assessment, career exploration), work placement services, and ongoing supports so that individuals are able to continue to progress once they are employed. Those ready to engage in employment activities may also benefit from learning about accommodations that are available and useful in the workplace.[82] The importance of addressing service gaps and supporting individuals through periods of transition (e.g., the transition from youth to adulthood, transitions into employment) was also emphasized. Currently, services are fragmented across multiple organizations, which may lead to service disruption, especially during transitions.

Lack of career laddering or contextualization in longer-term professional development

To ensure high engagement and motivation from employees, training needs to be contextualized to the job performance requirements and employers' business priorities, such as improving key performance indicators related to productivity, health and safety, service or product quality, and customer service.[83] Training content should be contextualized to focus on skill and behavioural changes that can be applied in the workplace and can contribute to improve business bottom

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[80] McFadden, 2015.

[81] Chen & Keats, 2016; Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2018.

[82] Shaw et al., 2021.

[83] National Literacy Secretariat.

lines. However, practitioners noted that while programs that are tailored to learners' skill levels and specific learning outcomes are important, they are very resource-intensive to create. Training innovations, such as work-integrated learning, also have their own limitations. In the words of one practitioner, "[it] is difficult to control for the conflicting priorities that arise in the workplace that disrupt formal learning plans and can make working with third-party training partners challenging."

Multiple sectors: A theme that emerged from focus groups was conceptualizing training as not necessarily enabling them to "climb the career ladder" but rather to "traverse a jungle gym" (Focus group participant, PCL Construction); that is, employers can highlight how individual skills and core competencies relate. This allows learners to become more self-directed in terms of shaping their careers and advancing laterally rather than simply hierarchically. One service provider noted that, "often positions are self-created, and people can see a new need to create their own job and get the skills they need to do so. Not everything leads in the same direction" (Focus group participant, CLAC Training).

Tourism: Focus group participants noted that training holds different value propositions for different audiences. The benefits of training need to be presented differently for each target audience. When communicating with a younger audience, the industry needs to embrace and reflect the values of the younger generation: sustainability, reconciliation, and equity, diversity and inclusion. Training also needs to be responsive to the emerging in-demand skills. The need to provide training to employers to better onboard and retain diverse employees was emphasized by many participants.

Newcomers: Training providers emphasized the need to support job mobility and career progression for newcomers entering the Canadian workforce, as many bring with them prior experience but may first enter subsistence jobs while settling, recredentialing, or developing language skills. For example, people with low levels of language or unrecognized education can access entry-level positions but have limited opportunities for progression. Providing opportunities for job mobility and career progression would be beneficial.

Unclear alignment between technical and transferable skills

In the context of changing labour needs – especially in the context of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as increased workplace digitization, providing foundational and transferable skills training that aligns with occupation-specific competencies is essential. The unclear alignment between technical and transferable skills is a barrier, as is employers' reluctance to invest in training that is not perceived to directly improve employee's workplace performance. The increased focus on social-emotional skills – which can be directly applied to the workplace and support future career mobility – presents opportunities to facilitate better alignment of employers' and learners' needs.

> *A focus group participant noted that while social emotional skills can be formally taught, much of this learning happens informally through in-person socialization and contact with instructors, peers, and colleagues: "This learning can be done formally, but is also done informally through work or training, or even daily life."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Tourism: One focus group participant noted that training is still perceived by some as a "box ticking exercise." Many employers do not support training, feel training is not their responsibility, and/or expect employees to come in ready for work. The Skills for Success model can be filtered through the lens of the employers, so they can use the framework to recognize and capitalize on the talent that is already present in their labour force. Developing the skills of employees already in the sector is seen as one way to address industry needs but will require employers to emphasize and create career growth possibilities.

> *"This aligns with the tourism industry where there is such a large labour shortage. They needed to build career ladders for entry-level employees in the past but did not and are now facing a shortage"* (Focus group participant, Food processing industry representative).

Construction: As one participant representing a large construction employer put it, "the concept of emotional intelligence is starting to take off more in the industry and throughout the corporate world. [...] The thoughts that are going through our head about how we're feeling can impact how well we learned, it can impact our ability to actually execute other skills. And so, I think that's a pretty important one to get out there because it complements every other type of learning that we're going to do in the workplace."

Increased recognition of Universal Design in Learning

Individuals enter training and employment with a diverse range of skills, abilities, goals, and needs. This can create challenges in providing relevant and appropriate training for all groups. One approach to overcome this barrier is to support a Universal Design in Learning (UDL) approach, in which material is planned and designed to be accessible to all. Increasing the accessibility and ease of engagement in training through a UDL approach is one way to remove barriers to engagement in training, and to provide extra supports where necessary. This theme came up in multiple focus groups and is, by definition, applicable to all groups and sectors.

> *"I would like to see that, eventually, the materials and the delivery are organized in a way that we don't have to create separate streams to address separate needs. In using UDL, we make it work for everybody. That's the future I look forward to."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

> *"If we're not applying UDL practices to give people the autonomy to decide for themselves what they're capable of, we're not going to keep the future generations engaged in longer-term workforce development."* (Focus group participant, PCL Construction)

Opportunities for sectoral storytelling to enhance perception of entry-level jobs

Major sectors such as construction, tourism, and manufacturing are often perceived as training grounds as entry-level employees often develop foundational skills that are transferable to other contexts. However, such transferability of competencies may also lead to a misperception that there are limited opportunities to deepen sector-specific skills and develop longer-term career paths within the sector. As one focus group participant put it, "we have not shared the story of all career possibilities in an industry well, especially when an employee moves from entry to advance careers." Practitioners and members of the industry recognize the need to develop and distribute more informative and engaging messages to illustrate and recommend multiple exciting career paths within the sector. As one practitioner with experience providing training in multiple sectors put it, the key question to address is "what is the story that we tell in tourism in Canada that would get people excited to go in. We don't have a story and it's not very exciting and same would be the case in food processing and construction."

Tourism: In the tourism industry, the average turnover rate is 70 to 80 per cent for regular full-time workers and as high as 100 per cent for hourly workers.[84] The majority of workers in the industry do not perceive their jobs as a "career", which is partially attributed to the lower average hourly wage in the sector as compared to other sectoral averages. The negative perception and misperception of the hospitality and tourism industry were echoed by many focus group participants. Many participants stressed the need to change perceptions about the industry and made suggestions about how this could be achieved. From their experience, employers can be reluctant to invest in training when employers see many employees leaving for other companies and other industries. This also contributes to employer expectations for employees to come in already fully trained. Other participants highlighted the positive aspect of tourism being perceived as a "training ground" and noted that this could be used to attract workers and eventually encourage them to stay: "[There is a] need for employers to use training as a hook, and to incentivize it, and to make it very attractive." (Focus group participant, Ontario Tourism RTO12). The same participant also added: "But the onus is now on the owner to take a breath and say, 'What am I going to offer in order to make it worthwhile for these people?' And if you can't, if you're a small business and you can't afford to pay more money, then maybe you can do some training, right? So, the rethinking around that, that there is

> **Training in high-turnover industries**
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> In industries such as tourism, focus group participants shared that the high levels of turnover can be a deterrent that discourages employers from providing training. Poaching and loss of talent is something that many participants experienced firsthand: "Fortunately, or unfortunately, over the last 15 years, we've trained some incredible individuals out of the hospitality and tourism industry, and they're very versatile, of the 'Swiss army knife individual' that you want on your team" (Focus group participant, Centennial College).

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84   Conference Board of Canada, 2021a.

a benefit in addition to that, to actually get people to stay. Loyalty." Keeping workers in the industry is paramount to training ROI. This idea was summarized by a participant who shared the tagline for an upcoming campaign: "We're going to attract workers. We're going to develop professionals". (Focus group participant, Ontario Tourism RTO12)

> *Industry stakeholders need to explain the importance and value of skills along a training pathway to show the opportunities for progression right from the start. One described it as showing learners that "You can do this now, if you'd like to be doing something else, these are some of the options that could be out in front of you."* (Focus group participant, Immigrant Employment Council, BC)

Manufacturing: Factors that contribute to labour shortage in manufacturing include lack of appeal and negative perceptions among the new generation of workers.[85] There is a clear need to reach out to a younger audience and change their perception about the sector. Initiatives to change perceptions should focus on current and upcoming innovations, such as "[…] discussions about advanced manufacturing and what the fourth wave will look like and the implications for career options" (Panel member feedback, EMC). The changing nature of skill sets required to perform in the industry should also be considered: "Helping people see that the future of manufacturing will likely require less hands-on, manual work, may also positively change how diverse workers view their options" (Panel member feedback, EMC).

Interpersonal-level barriers and opportunities

Limited access to champions who can create safe learning space

Many population groups, including Indigenous people, racialized Canadians, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ2+ individuals have an increased likelihood of experiencing violence and trauma. Trauma and violence exposure often translates to reduced ability to engage in programs, through decreased trust in organizational systems, impaired memory, challenges with attention and focus, negative self-perception (e.g., low self-efficacy), and other difficulties that hinder learning new skills.[86] When entering training, there is a risk of exacerbating symptoms of trauma or re-traumatization through social exclusion (e.g., being involved in training that fails to consider and reflect their needs and interests), stigmatization, and micro-aggressions. These experiences can further discourage learners to engage with an institution and can further harm their mental health and sense of inclusion or belonging. To support learners in achieving training and employment milestones, there is a need for trainers and educators who can speak to

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[85]   Food Processing Skills Canada, 2018; Deloitte, 2018; Bailey and Manyika, 2013.

[86]   Bobadilla et al., 2021.

the unique challenges and barriers faced by vulnerable learner groups, link learners to resources, and create a safe space for learners.

> *"We place our learners in an environment where they can learn. We have mentors who work with them, we have workshops to work on their Communication skills, language that can be used in the workplace. Lots of self-reflection too. It's a safe place where people can speak about their challenges, what scared them, how they would be looked upon, judged from where they're coming from or their inexperience. We did place students in the workplace. At first it wasn't positive because they felt so stressed. But they were pushed and [encouraged by] the mentors. Now they know they are capable [...]. When they go into the workplace, the mentors continue to be there to work with them."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Indigenous learners, particularly descendants of residential school survivors, may find training settings to be triggering. Learners will likely benefit from trauma-informed programs where training providers are informed about trauma symptoms and can provide resources to culturally relevant supports.[87] Training organizations engaging Indigenous learners must learn, listen, reflect, and understand how the legacy of colonialism continues to affect the lives of Indigenous people.[88] This may include employing trainers that are attuned to the racism, discrimination, and bias and are knowledgeable about the impacts of discrimination on learners' training and employment pathways. At an organizational level, incorporating time and space for relationship- and trust-building into the program planning and curriculum development is one example of adapting to orient training towards Indigenous learners.[89]

LGBTQ2+: Trauma- and violence-informed services are consistently identified as essential for LGBTQ2+ learners.[90] Focus group participants identified a need for trainers that are informed and competent in providing training to LGBTQ2+ populations. The extent to which trainers can implement trauma- and violence-informed training design, including measures to address cultural safety and LGBTQ2+ inclusivity may influence learner engagement. Trainers and educators that are members of the LGBTQ2+ community can speak to the unique employment challenges and barriers faced by LGBTQ2+ individuals, direct learners to resources, and draw connections between classroom learning and workplace responsibilities.[91]

Racialized Canadians: Service providers spoke to the need to create training environments that functioned as a safe, non-judgemental space for learners to reflect on and share their experiences, build skills and confidence, and receive social support. Staff also need to be trained and aware of the realities and experiences of the learners that they work with.

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87   Brooks-Cleator et al., 2021.

88   Thistle, 2017.

89   Brooks-Cleator et al., 2021.

90   Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; Streeter et al., 2020.

91   Chen & Keats, 2016.

> *"The people who are giving the training or delivering the programs also need to be aware and trained, so that it's a two-way understanding"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

> *"A lot of people coming in experience trauma. I don't really know how to address this in a training program really, unless you had some other wrap-around services"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Newcomers: While instructors who work in settlement programs have training and experience in teaching English as a second language (ESL), instructors in sector-based or employment training contexts may have limited experience instructing newcomers with diverse backgrounds, including recognizing diverse starting language levels, or the ways in which low language levels may mask learners' employability skills. Several focus group participants noted a discrepancy between the language level required for training and language required for work, and discrepancies between language levels required to *enter* specialized training and those required to *succeed* in training. Providers agreed that in their programs, skills training and language training are integrated and that a closer alignment between actual and required language level is needed.

Furthermore, training providers emphasized that newcomers' learning needs extend beyond language levels; learners may face other barriers, such as low literacy or learning disabilities which can be misinterpreted as language challenges. Many newcomers are also engaging in cultural learning and gaining an understanding of Canadian customs, social expectations, and systems, which adds an additional facet to their training experience. In short, learners are asked to learn language, training content, and Western ways of teaching and learning concurrently. There are strategies that educators can take to adapt their teaching to the challenges certain newcomer groups face; however, trainers may be limited by time constraints, as well as large workloads and limited resources to provide additional support.[92]

> *"They need to be socialized to our systems of training and knowledge acquisition, in addition to all the information we're trying to convey to them at the same time. And I just wonder if that's like layer upon layer of learning."* (Focus group participant, NorQuest College)

People with disabilities: Disabilities are extremely diverse. The functional impacts of conditions that lead to disabilities vary from individual to individual, and the learning needs of people with disabilities are often not correctly identified due to misconceptions and a lack of financially accessible, high-quality assessments and diagnoses. Furthermore, some disabilities (or their expression) may remain underrecognized and "invisible", which prevent individuals from accessing support and may lead instructors to mistake their difficulties for skills gaps. Overall,

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[92] Benseman, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Windle & Miller, 2012.

lack of awareness can result in negative biases, misconceptions, and reduced willingness to provide accommodations in a learning context.

In addition to a lack of awareness and barriers to obtaining diagnoses, individuals may face barriers disclosing their disability due to stigmatization, a history of negative experiences around disclosure, or having a disability that affects communication and interpersonal relationships.[93] Focus group participants noted that supports and accommodations should also be made accessible to instructors and staff, who may also have lived experience of disability and may benefit from a flexible and ability-aware work culture.

> *"Providers of these service supports and training programs should realize that their own staff, who run these programs, may be persons with disabilities themselves and thus [should] offer the same flexibility prior and during employment as they afford their clients…Those who talk the talk should also walk the walk."* (Focus group participant)

Mentorship from staff and program graduates with shared lived experience

In multiple focus groups, service providers emphasized the key role that personal support (formal and informal) play in learner engagement. Personal support can be provided by mentors, individuals with shared lived experience, people in the community, or members of organizations who developed cultural competence and empathy that make themselves available to learners.

People with disabilities: In addition to supportive mentors, employers that provide mentorship and interpersonal support were seen as valuable to work placement success.

> *"[…] When we are doing job development, we are increasingly looking for employers interested in taking on more of a mentoring role and providing flexibility and accommodations to support success, as opposed to employers who place the full weight of success on the individuals' efforts."* (Focus group participant, Richmond Society for Community Living)

Indigenous people: Some service providers shared the value of working with fewer participants at a time and focusing on developing individual relationships. In the provider's words: "Right now we're not focusing on how much we can do but how well we can do it" (Participant, Indigenous people focus group). Connecting with participants via text, phone, and home visits, were successful methods to promote and sustain training engagement.

Racialized Canadians: Mentorship relationships are valuable tools to support learners in building skills and confidence. However, providing such supports could be a challenge in many mentorship relationships, particularly when mentors were working on a volunteer basis and were not trained to safely provide a high level of socioemotional support.

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[93] von Schrader et al., 2014; Lingsom et al., 2008.

> *"I agree that mentorship is really key, the confidence that you might boost for the learners actually counts for a lot more than the subject matter you're working on. We prepare them to do this. It's sometimes a bit too much for the volunteers – a bit too much for them to be their learners' best cheerleaders – some volunteers get it and bring it to the full picture, some don't, so those volunteer-learner pairings do fall apart. This idea of mentorship is quite important, it's just that it doesn't always work with our volunteers – which is normal, our volunteers are not experts or psychologists."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Newcomers: Learning about the personal experience of other people who have succeeded is a great source of motivation. Training providers described bringing past learners in class to talk about their personal history with their background, the services they received, and where they are now. These personal stories acted as a source of inspiration and motivation for many learners, provided real-life examples of settlement and career pathways, and provided motivation to persistently pursue learning objectives and further engage in training. One strategy to further reinforce connections was checking in with learners by phone; another was to involve employers as partners.

> *"I've seen that [successful learner engagement] with teachers that have immigrant background, or that come from immigrant families, but not even that. If the teachers make that connection with their students where they share their experience, how they found work, how they overcame something, it creates that bond. It becomes real. It's not just this educational program that somebody created – these are real people. These are real stories. And I think that helps engagement and connection. Once you have a connection, then again, you have more engagement. So, it's kind of like this cycle of trust."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

> *"The need is to have people […] who have the capacity or the interest to dedicate time, to develop ties with learners, and to make people progress with services that are as personalized as possible. This is what, in my opinion, works best with clients who are remote from the job market."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Support from the community is also important. However, the learning space must also encourage learners to get out of their comfort zone: "If you can fall back into the arms of your community and rest a little in your native language or in the food that you're familiar with, or whatever it is that gives you that sort of rest space, it sometimes [can be] hard to come back out of it" (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

LGBTQ2+ learners: Focus group participants identified increasing numbers of supports, including peer support groups, LGBTQ2+ customized job-readiness programs, employer support for inclusive and queer-competent workplaces and increased awareness and education among people who want to be allies to the LGBTQ2+ community. For example, there is increasing awareness and competence around the use of pronouns. The LGBTQ2+ community itself was identified as a strength, and at an individual level, members of the LGBTQ2+ described themselves as having high levels of empathy, resourcefulness, resilience, and patience. However, experiences of discrimination, micro-aggressions, and exclusion are still frequent, even within

the LGBTQ2+ community, and can result in barriers and contribute to mental health difficulties. Interpersonal supports were identified as important to cope with and mitigate the impact of negative experiences. For example, participants reported experiences with allies reaching out to them after an incident where something hurtful was said, or instructors actively addressing microaggressions in the classroom. A suggestion for further inclusivity was to designate an ombudsperson for the training: a peer that anyone can go to throughout the program to safely and confidentially report on instances of discrimination or bullying.

(Large) employers' efforts in developing learning ecosystem with welcoming communities

Focus group participants shared encouraging examples of employers and communities coming together to cultivate open, inclusive, welcoming, and sustainable working and learning environments. These emerged from discussions with the tourism sector, with participants representing other sectors seeing opportunities to replicate in their environments as well.

Tourism and newcomers: As part of the broader workforce development effort, this focus group participant has been involved in developing welcoming inclusive community connections – "we were trying to get [newcomers] to come and stay in our community and help us develop economically." This was part of the employer's sustainability plan where they aimed to develop and invest in resources that can continue to benefit both the people working in the business and the people living in the community. It included concrete organizational resources such as workplace policies and infrastructure focusing on anti-racism, as well as culture-based assets such as collaboration with community organizations to provide intercultural events for employees and residents. Another focus group member put forth the concept of "regenerative tourism" in which employers recognize the two-way nature of their business, seeing the close links between their business priorities and community wellbeing, which in turns motivate their investment in the community. Such employers would be more likely to have better retention rates, as employees would be more likely to develop a strong sense of belonging to the community in which they work, learn, and grow their career paths.

Individual-level barriers and opportunities

Interactions of barriers leading to risks of falling behind

There are a variety of barriers that can negatively impact learner engagement. At the societal level, learners may face discrimination, which has far-reaching effects, including increasing difficulty to find and maintain work and employment, risk of discrimination and barriers in interpersonal interactions, and internalization of negative messaging which may lead to lower levels of self-efficacy and mental health. Navigating these barriers can reduce the time and energy that learners can allocate to training participation, leading to risks of falling behind. In

addition to social barriers, learners may have competing life priorities, including family responsibilities, other employment, and meeting subsistence needs.

Newcomers: Learning to navigate the Canadian system and engaging in settlement tasks (e.g., immigration hearings, finding housing, registering children for school, etc.) may limit time available for training.

People with disabilities: The need to adapt to new assistive technology and self-advocate for accommodations (in training or in other areas of their lives) may limit learners' ability to focus on training.

> *"When people start to feel like they're getting left behind, they don't want to participate. So, you lose people in your training programs. If you identify those who are struggling early enough, then you can put in supports to help them, but if they slip through the cracks, then they're kind of starting the process all over, or they're not even going into employment at that point."* (Focus group participant, Douglas College)

Lack of recognition of skill needs, wanting immediate results due to subsistence needs

Many learners perceive a high opportunity cost in investing in training due to subsistence needs (e.g., need for immediate income, need to find and maintain stable housing) and competing life priorities, including entry-level employment and family responsibilities. Across focus groups, trainers reported learners' desire for work-integrated training, or contextualized skills training that can immediately be applied to find and succeed in employment.

Newcomers: Motivation to persist in training is often linked to specific goals, such as joining the workforce. For some skills, such as Digital, learning outcomes can be observed right away, since the training is concrete – one can observe their progress with basic Digital literacy, or proficiency of Excel right after the training. In general, hands-on, practical training linked to these goals is often more engaging because learners see concrete results and benefits. Training on skills that are more abstract, such as Creativity and Innovation, requires more efforts on the trainers to help learners make the connection between the present program and the longer-term benefits.

> *"So, for example, in our programs, we do basic computer skills – you teach somebody how to use the mouse, how to use the keyboard, how to use a browser, the next day they can go on their computer try it out and it works for them, and I would say for those skills in terms of engagement in terms of attainments, there's not a lot of trouble because you learn that, you use that… it's useful for you."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Limited access to wrap-around supports leading to challenges keeping up attendance

Challenges related to lack of transportation, lack of access to affordable childcare, lack of access to mental health supports may interfere with learners' full participation, as well as persistence and completion of training. Persistence in training can also be challenging due to a large number of external responsibilities, including family, immigration processes, other employment, and settling in a community.

People with disabilities: Disabilities can be related to mental health challenges, co-occur with mental health challenges, or lead to mental health challenges as the consequence of a primary disability. For example, people with learning disabilities and ADHD are at higher risk of suffering from depression.[94]

LGBTQ2+ individuals are more likely to report low levels of mental health than the non-LGBTQ2+ population (e.g., 3 times more likely among bisexual individuals and 1.7 times more serious among gay and lesbian individuals).[95] Instructors should be aware of higher risks of burnout in LGBTQ2+ learners and make adjustments accordingly.

Indigenous people are 1.5-1.9 times more likely to report low levels of mental health than non-Indigenous people in Canada.[96] Focus group participants shared the importance of supporting learners and helping them to a place where they are prepared to learn. "And from a social emotional perspective, they are often coming in with a lot of "baggage" – feeling demoralized – so getting them to the place where they are feeling good and motivated to learn is the first and biggest challenge" (Focus group participant).

Racialized Canadians: Service providers identified the need for instructors and mentors to provide socioemotional supports, check-in on participants on an ongoing basis, and provide referrals or support to participants facing challenges. However, organizations often lack the capacity to provide these intensive supports, resulting in learners disengaging from programs. "The partners often don't have the capacity for this. Learners get onboarded, but issues come up, they stop coming, things start falling apart. And they don't have the capacity to deal with it" (Focus group participant).

Need to cultivate a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy before and throughout training

The repeated experiences of discrimination faced by some populations, compounded by negative school experiences and low visibility of traditionally successful role models can result in

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94   APA, 2013.

95   Public Health Agency, 2018.

96   Public Health Agency, 2018.

internalized negative messaging and low perceived self-efficacy, limiting engagement in training and skill development. Training that recognizes learners' strengths and supports the development of confidence and career goals may increase learner retention.[97]

For Indigenous learners, incorporating culturally relevant activities can help strengthen learners' cultural identity, increase learners' confidence, and enhance motivation to succeed in training.[98] Training providers highlighted the importance of programs that create opportunities for learners to develop organizational skills, adaptability skills, and to experience success. These skills and positive experiences were seen as a way to generate confidence and increase persistence later in training. For example, one practitioner shared that learners stay engaged because "after the first couple sessions, if I show them how to use an agenda, or how to organize their binder, and they have kind of a light bulb moment. And they [would be] like 'Oh, my gosh! I never knew this, and I think it's going to be really helpful.' Sometimes those light bulb moments make them realize, 'Why did I wait so long to ask for help?' And then they trust that it's going to be a positive experience going forward and continue to come back."

> **Aligning virtual adaptations with unique learner needs and priorities**
>
> When adapting training to virtual environments, it is necessary to ensure the learning space engages and aligns with Indigenous knowledge development and skills sharing.[1] Focus group participants that work with Indigenous participants cited the need for online Indigenous material and engagement practices. With limited group-specific online material currently available, practitioners relied on generic material that was less relevant to the lives of their learners: "*One missing piece is a gap in the availability of Indigenous online material. It's really hard to find anything that we can use that's more relevant to their lives and or emerging from their research and their areas of learning. […] I just see that as a whole separate area that needs to be looked into – where and how do we create Indigenous materials or access Indigenous materials"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

> *"The learners that feel most successful are the ones that most likely to stay excited about the training and the learning, but that's not an easy thing to achieve"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Newcomers: Participants noted that a large proportion of resources are dedicated to recruitment, but not enough support is provided during the program, or once individuals begin employment. There is a need for resources to support learners in overcoming challenges and gaining confidence so that they can better succeed in training and employment. Many training providers highlighted that newcomers already show great persistence in doing all they needed to

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97 Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2018.

98 Brooks-Cleator et al., 2021.

do to come to Canada. They saw their role as being able to build on this. One training provider explained how the pride of being successful in Canada becomes part of learners' identity.

> *"What I'm seeing are people who are very keen to understand what they need to be successful in Canada, and they are looking for workplace, Canadian workplace ethics, Canadian workplace language."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

On the other hand, training providers noted that the learners who face engagement challenges are those who are in training to "tick a box," for example, to fulfill a requirement of programming participation for their immigration process.

Trainers emphasized the need to explicitly describe the benefits of investing time in training instead of going straight to the job market. Expressing the value of social emotional skills training was perceived to be a greater challenge, due to the abstract nature of the skills. It can be hard for learners of all backgrounds to understand their purpose and relevance. For example, one practitioner working with newcomers shared that learners "don't get any primary feedback from other life contexts" that they need to improve "time management, problem solving, or even something that is literacy-based" such as expanding their vocabulary, improving on grammar and punctuations, etc. Learners may also be disappointed if training does not provide immediate results, reducing motivation for training skills that require time and practice.

Racialized Canadians: Building confidence and self-efficacy was viewed by many service providers as foundational to training success. Strategies included minimizing power imbalance between learners and teachers and supporting learners to feel comfortable making mistakes.

> *"Another piece is around self-esteem, self-confidence: a lot of our learners come to us and have this idea that they can't do it – they come in thinking that the volunteer is here, it's not an equal relationship. We try to work toward that, we want them to feel safe and comfortable to make mistakes and learn. It's something that we work toward, it's a process"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

People with disabilities: Learners who have experienced repeated failures without having any explanations or support may have a negative perception of education and training in general. Repeated failures in school can lead to poor self-esteem, learned helplessness, and mental-health related disabilities.[17] In addition, covert ableism in the form of low expectations from parents, instructors, and employers may lead to a vicious cycle of low self-esteem.[99] Training providers highlighted that grades are a poor indicator of the level of effort put into training and progress accomplished. Feedback (such as grades) that do not reflect effort reduces motivation, especially if no other ways of tracking progress (e.g., personal goals, milestones, etc.) are made available to

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[99]   Ellenkamp et al., 2016; Wilson & Campaign, 2020.

learners. Providers recommended building independence and giving learners' enough space and autonomy to come up with their own solutions and definitions of success.

LGBTQ2+: Attributed in part to bullying and hostile learning environments, LGBTQ2+ learners have higher risks of school dropouts, absenteeism, and lower grades than their non-LGBTQ2+ peers. These negative school experiences may reduce persistence and self-confidence in learning environments.[100] For example, focus group participants with lived experience shared personal experiences and examples of bullying from peers, instructors, and other people in positions of authority. While they agreed that bullying should be addressed as it happens, barriers include a limited willingness to act, a requirement of involving external groups, or a limited availability to report or address bullying. Proactive approaches suggested include providing education to everyone involved in learning and training environments, noting that there are disparities in the level of education even within the LGBTQ2+ community. For example, participants noted progress in the awareness and use of pronouns, but also the emergence of policies that lack flexibility and put pressure on people to disclose their pronouns.

Need for clear, flexible learning pathways that facilitate celebration of interim milestones

The training landscape of some Canadian sectors is complex. Sector-based training programs need to recognize this complexity to better align with learners' starting skills levels and educational backgrounds. Learners may lose motivation to persist in training that are not at the appropriate skill level.

In **construction**, the apprenticeship pathway is quite different and not as structured as that of postsecondary students. About 80 per cent of apprenticeship is completed on-the-job, with the remaining 20 per cent being technical, in-class, block training. Apprentices are paid while working and learning on-the-job. After completing the required training, the apprentice can write a qualification exam to become a certified journeyperson.[101] Training customized to the construction sector needs to supplement and be aligned with this complex learning pathway.

In the **tourism** sector, there are a variety of training and learning pathways, depending on the occupation type and level. Training pathways include university degrees (e.g., tourism, hotel management, business, accounting), certificates/diplomas, micro-credentials, apprenticeships (e.g., cooks, technicians), and on-the-job training.[102] There is a need for training that aligns with various levels of skills and educational experience.

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[100]   Chen & Keats, 2016.

[101]   Statistics Canada, 2020.

[102]   Government of BC, ND.

In **manufacturing,** there is a small number of certified occupations in specific areas, mostly supervisory roles in natural resources extraction and transformation (e.g., mining, oil and gas, production of plastic and rubber products). Across the manufacturing industry, there is a broad disparity in the development of micro-credentials, with some sectors having high levels of training quality and recognition by members of the industry, and others not benefitting from widely recognized and accessible resources. Approximately 20 per cent of manufacturers partner with the government and just over 30 per cent partner with private education/training institutes to train their workforce. Manufacturers have the capacity to train but their access to new workers is limited, while public education may lack direct applicability to work. Innovating training approaches for this sector include the further exploration and validation of micro-credentials. Apprenticeships and job-based mentorship or experiential learning are also seen as promising models for future training. However, this training pathway is not well-known or frequently applied in this sector and there is limited experience, expertise, infrastructure, and funding required to coordinate programming effort.[103]

ASSESSMENT

An overview of the key barriers and strengths related to assessment is provided in Table 5.

Table 5   Overview of barriers and strengths

ASSESSMENT	
Barriers & challenges	*Strengths & opportunities*
▪ Challenges in moving toward practical demonstration of competencies (📖➥more details) ▪ Trade-off between transferability of results and alignment with occupational competencies (📖➥more details) ▪ Need for multiple types and formats for different measurement purposes (📖➥more details) ▪ Challenges communicating social-emotional skills progress due to under-developed markers of skills acquisition (📖➥more details) ▪ Biased language and examples leading to lack of representation and relevance (📖➥more details) ▪ Risks of equating personal differences with lack of skills (📖➥more details) ▪ Limited opportunities to demonstrate different learning styles and lived experiences (📖➥more details)	▪ Increasing recognition of multiple ways to define outcomes of success (📖➥more details) ▪ Recognition of importance of intake needs analysis and regular interim check-ins (📖➥more details) ▪ Collaboration between employers, instructional designers and assessment developers (📖➥more details) ▪ Instructor-created milestone-based, strength-based tools (📖➥more details) ▪ Increasing recognition of community outcomes (📖➥more details) ▪ When used properly, assessments can enhance learning motivation and provide opportunities to celebrate achievements of goals (📖➥more details)

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[103]   Deloitte, 2018.

Societal-level barriers and opportunities

Challenges in moving toward practical demonstration of competencies

Focus group participants expressed a need to connect assessments with specific learning objectives, skills, and abilities. For practitioners, aligning assessments with learning activities was a priority. For example, a practitioner working with newcomers shared that if part of their training focuses on teaching learners how to send proper emails, then they would like to see Writing assessments that include tasks directly related to email writing, not just any generic writing tasks. Employers also emphasized the need for assessments that demonstrated skill competencies that can be directly applied to workplace performance. Challenges with current assessments include a disconnect between assessment content, format, and real-life performance. Sectoral focus group participants shared that many industries, sectors, and employers are considering adopting innovative assessment practices in new and novel ways to increase the alignment between assessments and practical demonstration of skills and competencies. However, a need for further implementation and development of new methods was emphasized.

> *"Sometimes it can be done in a purely academic way. But if you are training to be a cashier, the output is not you being able to do a quiz, the output is using a cash register"* (Focus group participant, AWES).

> *"Assessments and training that are more scenario based, interactive, possibly gamified, and less like the traditional 'pen and paper' assessments that people may have negative experiences with, would be important to explore."* (Panel member feedback, EMC)

Increasing emphasis on social emotional skills development brings challenges around assessments. Some practitioners perceived social emotional skills as intrinsically contextualized within social environments (e.g., workplaces) and therefore challenging to assess; individuals may easily demonstrate a social emotional skill in one context but be unable to apply it in another. Providers also expressed doubts about the reliability of social emotional skills assessments due to the complex nature of the skills. One participant argued that knowledge-based assessments are all that "we know how to test with any efficiency," and that even assessments for formal or objective skills may have gaps. For example, an assessment may conclude that a learner has an excellent level of English, but they may still need to learn informal language, workplace language, and "Canadianisms" to perform in the workplace.

> *The problem with soft skills such as work ethic "is that there's no such thing as global work ethic [...]. It's not that you are either a person with work ethic, or you are a person without... It's actually that work ethic is subjective based on your personal alignment with the goals involved with the task."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

> *"I almost feel like we're looking for a heuristic for something that is vastly complex, and we try to find ones but none of them as far as we can tell are all that effective. It's a really important piece of research"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Increasing recognition of multiple ways to define outcomes of success

Construction: Within the construction industry, focus group participants reported a shift away from standardized testing that relies only on memorization, to practical assessments with a targeted focus on learning outcomes and "experiential demonstration of the competency" (Focus group participant, AWES). The shift in focus encourages employers to define what counts as an outcome of success in more practical terms, including observable demonstration of skills on the job.

Tourism: Some participants working in tourism reported an awareness of innovative methods but reported seeing little implementation in teaching or assessment. In the sector, traditional assessments are commonplace among many large industry members (e.g., completing a big battery of tests at onboarding and no further assessments after that). Other participants highlighted the importance of inclusive assessment tools that screen people *in*, rather than screen people *out*, and identified the need for coaching and active sharing of results with individuals so that they can gain awareness of their skills and identify areas to improve.

> *"If we can come up with something really innovative and different that could actually test your skills – you could be put in a scenario, you could be put in a safe space to see how that could work – I think there's an opportunity for innovation there."* (Focus group participant, Canadian Ecotourism Services)

Organizational-level barriers and opportunities

Trade-off between transferability of results and alignment with occupational competencies

Focus groups indicated a tension between assessments that measured widely applicable skills (and thus would be applicable across occupations and sectors) and those that were closely aligned with specific occupational competencies. In many sectors, key skills (e.g., social emotional skills such as Communication) are often gained through experience rather than formalized training. Without documentation, employees have difficulty demonstrating or articulating skills, reducing job mobility. The need for a sector-wide system to assess and credential skills has been identified.[104]

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[104]   Conference Board of Canada, 2021a.

Tourism: In the tourism sector, focus group participants expressed a variety of views on worker retention and job mobility. One participant highlighted that a significant proportion of employees in the sector view their employment as an early-career role and are interested in moving occupations or sectors. The tourism industry could better attract such employees if the skills gained in employment were assessed, documented, and transferable to support future job mobility. Training that incorporates widely recognized skill assessments has the potential to address labour needs for entry-level tourism positions and workers' need for recognized experience and skill development.

> *"[T]here is an audience there who does want to move on. Why should they spend time in tourism at the beginning? Well, it works as a training ground. [If only] we did a better job of selling that and documenting those skills so that people know what they're going to get in those critical 2, 3, 4 years when they're just getting started"* (Focus group participant, OTEC).

Need for multiple types and formats for different measurement purposes

Assessments can serve multiple purposes, including documenting an individual's learning progress, making hiring or promotional decisions, and demonstrating the efficacy of training through aggregated, class-wide, or cohort-wide scores. Assessment tools therefore may vary in precision, user-friendliness, and interpretation of scores. Tools that provide more precise scores with implications of skills of an individual learner tend to take more time and resources to administer and are therefore more burdensome to complete. Tools that are more user-friendly, on the other hand, tend to provide scores that are not precise enough to measure individual skills and instead can only illustrate progress at a group level. There is a need for clear guidelines to support practitioners in selecting the types of assessments that are appropriate for high- and low-stakes decisions. Furthermore, there is a need for assessments that reliably measure skill gains across learning and training contexts (e.g., classroom learning, virtual learning, on-the-job training).

Digital adoption leads to adaptable and innovative virtual assessment approaches

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerates the adoption and acceptance of online assessments. Virtual assessments present a variety of opportunities and challenges. For example:

- While virtual assessment platforms exist and new platforms are continually being innovated, there are few policies and guidelines to support consistent implementation.

- Assessment practices, especially those that require hands-on components or are adjudicated in a highly secure environment, are difficult to replicate online.

- There is often need for data-security protocols for online evaluation methods, as evaluating competency online can be a liability issue when there are multiple online security issues to address.

- The cost of translating paper assessments to virtual delivery can be a key challenge.

Tourism: There needs to be more transparency in how assessments are scored as well as how their reliability and validity are examined. Practitioners reported that a current challenge in selecting assessments, particularly social emotional skill assessments, is limited information on the quality of the assessments.

> *"With the increasing importance of social emotional skills, many psychometric tools involving Big 5 indicators are moving into the employment and training marketplace, but rarely do they include detailed descriptions of how their scores are calculated, the level of precision, validity."* (Panel member feedback, OTEC)

People with disabilities: There is a need for assessments that are aligned with learners' abilities and learning objectives. Tools that are too long and require too much introspection may not be suitable for to the clientele that many instructors serve.

LGBTQ2+: Focus group participants noted issues related to assessments' categorical and standardized nature, and their overall lack of flexibility. One participant raised limitations of assessments that do not consider issues around mental health, that are not mindful of the different ways people learn, and that do not value subjective experience.

Newcomers: Training providers highlighted the importance of clearly communicating the assessment purpose to support informed decision-making among learners. For example, learners may need to spend large sums of money on interpreter services to take an exam and may benefit from a clear understanding of the purpose and value of the investment. Practitioners can further support learners by providing low-stakes assessments to help learners determine their readiness for high-stakes assessments (e.g., certification exams, assessments related to hiring) to maximize their opportunities for success.

Racialized Canadians: Service providers described the need for a combination of academic assessments and behavioural assessments (e.g., monitoring engagement, completion of activities, changes in behaviour). The academic assessments provided learners opportunities to measure skill gains and track progress towards reaching certifications (e.g., preparing for entry exams or GED exams), while the behavioural assessments helped service providers identify when participants may require additional support due to difficulties with course material or competing life priorities.

> *"You are not only a teacher, you have to be a psychologist, you have to dig into their challenges and the psychology behind the behaviour. If someone is not doing their homework you have to find out why. They might not be having a good time at home, struggling with kids, or [struggling to pay] rent. We've had the experience of learners being on the street because they were kicked out of their place because they couldn't pay. And they want to finish the program because they know they will get a job after."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Providers also shared that while they were aware of a variety of different assessment approaches, conducting and analyzing assessments that are customized and appropriate for learners in vulnerable circumstances – such as those without stable housing, or recently out of the justice system – remains a challenge.

> *"We have such informal evaluations, and it's so different from program to program, it's difficult to keep track. That's the biggest challenge, to have all of these learners and all of these needs and keeping track of that."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

Recognition of importance of intake needs analysis and regular interim check-ins

Service providers identified the need for pre-program assessments that record baseline skills, identify learners' needs (e.g., for supports, accommodations, resources), provide opportunities to connect with learners and start conversations related to learning goals and expectations. Intake assessments can measure baseline skills, be used to tailor learning plans, and serve as comparison data to demonstrate learners' development. More in-depth needs analysis that goes beyond skills needs can inform wrap-around supports and accommodations choices, providing information for practitioners to discuss learning goals and expectations, which can in turn build relationships and trust between practitioners and learners.

> *"I'm speaking generally here from previous experience with ESDC Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership which was preparing Indigenous people across Canada to do training and move into jobs in their communities. And one of the big themes or positive patterns is that people have access to training [...] and then from there people with weaker skills may be identified to go get extra support. But it's almost like it needs to be inverted so that the essential skills assessment happens first, and then a learning plan is built out from there. So rather than our service being like an add-on remediation, it's almost like it needs to be built into the first instance as a best practice"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

> *"Some experiences [...] could be included or taken into consideration in the needs assessment, then the training could be much, much shorter, if exactly what and why, and how what kind of approach could be helpful"* is identified from the start (Focus group participant, AWES).

Racialized Canadians: Service providers shared the importance of conducting individualized, strength-based assessments to engage learners in realistic goal setting and to create a customized learning plan. After intake sessions, practitioners can help learners identify incremental steps towards reaching these goals (e.g., completing learning activities, writing entrance exams for different programs, starting a business). In addition to managing learners' expectations and helping set realistic timelines towards reaching goals, goal setting allows programs to track progress towards outcome measures that are relevant to learners.

> *"We should help learners set a goal. Without their goal, I don't know how we can measure their achievement"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

> *"We do an initial assessment to determine their goal, whether it's GED or finding employment. But there is no grade. The assessments are task-based – can you do the task?"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

> *"It's not so much about the skills that were gained, but about their confidence and feelings about their skills. That's a great approach"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Indigenous learners: Intake assessments provide the opportunity to assess needs for additional training supports for foundational skills so that learning needs can be addressed within the learning plan, rather than identifying needs once it becomes clear that learners are struggling with material. Practitioners identified the need for ongoing assessments that "meet learners where they are at", i.e., assessments tailored to learners' skill level and personal circumstances, goals, and challenges. Ongoing assessments also provide the opportunity for service providers to "walk with" learners and adapt programming as learners progress through programs. For example, some providers shared that they allow learners to decide if they would like to start with challenging areas to "get it out of the way", or if they would like to begin in areas they are confident in to "experience success".

Furthermore, assessments were conceptualized as a two-way conversation, in which learners have the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback on the programs they just receive. One practitioner asked, "What are their opportunities to assess _us_ and critique how successful _we_ are as service providers in a genuine way – not just another 'write your feedback on paper' kind of way?"

Newcomers: Intake assessments are an opportunity to develop feasible goals and manage learners' expectations. The results of assessments can be shared with learners along with information on how long it will take to bring their skills up to job-ready level, and to set learning goals. Managing expectations and supporting realistic goal setting is important to avoid exposing learners to repeated failures that may have negative impacts on self-confidence and reduce learners' motivation.

> *"It ends up creating additional issues with self-confidence, with the person, with their belief [or lack thereof] that they are able to reach goals or succeed at something. The person can end up putting up roadblocks for themselves because they think that they won't be able to succeed overall anyways. And then it's not worth it, even if it's not true"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Collaboration between employers, instructional designers, and assessment developers

Across focus groups, participants spoke to the need for increased communication between employers, training designers and instructors, and assessment developers. In the absence of ongoing communication between these groups, there is the risk for skill assessments that are poorly aligned with employers' needs and the course content provided within training. For

example, one representative of a large construction employer expressed the concern that human resource managers responsible for the skills development of their workforce often do not have access to skilled instructional designers who can provide "an appropriate recommendation for a solution that meets their specific circumstances and their specific business needs." This focus group participant later elaborated that "having a trained instructional designer and learning development professional to work with you [...] to add that pedagogical lens onto it, besides the job competency lens, to know the skills development process, the components including soft skills components of technical competency development" is important for both training and assessments.

Interpersonal-level barriers and opportunities

Challenges communicating social-emotional skills progress due to under-developed markers of skills acquisition

More work is needed to develop consistent and valid markers that signal the development of proficiency in social emotional skills. While the launch of Skills for Success has provided a structured set of definitions and components of social emotional skills, practitioners expressed a need for evidence-based descriptions of skills acquisition that can inform assessment and training design. Participants in sectoral focus groups also indicated that such markers of social emotional skill development may be available in other sectors such as health care or arts, but more work is needed to adapt them to the sectors that have traditionally been more focused on technical competencies such as construction or manufacturing.

Biotechnologies: One participant shared feedback that social emotional skills may not be covered in sufficient breadth and depth in formal education (e.g., undergraduate or graduate). From the employer perspective, these skills are essential to succeed and progress in the sector, especially to move up the ladder into leadership and managerial roles. However, there is an unmet need in terms of widely and consistently recognized performance and competency frameworks to assess current and prospective employees' skills.

Instructor-created milestone-based, strength-based tools

Learning motivation is better supported and maintained in programs based on learning milestones or personal goals. Focus group participants experienced in working with people with disabilities and newcomers shared that celebrating accomplishments, big or small, is key to maintaining learner engagement. Furthermore, the milestone approach provides ongoing feedback on performance that can identify areas for further support, and help learner's adjust expectations. This approach provides the opportunity to address challenge areas and provide ongoing support and feedback on progress towards learning goals.

"For my clients in the WorkBC setting, it is extremely important for motivation.... that motivation of smaller goals, or smaller things to achieve is important... celebrating those successes all along... it makes a difference for them, [including] wanting to stay in employment" (Focus group participant, Douglas College).

"For vulnerable learners, assessments can be used in a strengths-based, learner-centred dialogue about goals and learning plans" (Panel member feedback, Frontier College).

Increasing recognition of community outcomes

Service providers shared positive experiences of customizing assessments to learners' social and cultural context. Customized assessments that track outcomes that are valued by the community were thought to promote engagement in training, perhaps due to greater perceived alignment with their life, community, and values. For example, one service provider shared that outside of urban communities, assessments are often integrated within or held on the same day as community activities, such as drum-making and cooking, and service providers are expected to engage in activities with learners and community members.

> **When the assessment format changes, there are new challenges around ensuring comparability**
>
> As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, the implementation of new assessments and programs means assessment outcomes may not be comparable with prior implementation.[105] Along with changes to assessment tools and curriculum, recruitment changes can result in fewer program participants than anticipated or the enrollment of different groups of learners, which may impact the statistical power and sample size to analyze assessment data.
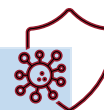
Other trainers working in Indigenous spaces have highlighted the potential of non-formal or oral assessment practices. Assessments such as Prior Life Experiences Skills Portfolio can be an important resource to facilitate conversations with learners to contextualize their past experiences and their future training goals and aspirations.[106] The launch of Skills for Success provides the opportunity to incorporate assessments that reflect community-based outcome measures and understandings of success.

"How do communities themselves define success? In the context of the Skills for Success launch, how do communities see success? Because it is very subjective and cultural" (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

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[105] Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2021; Schleicher, 2020; UNESCO, n.d; World Economic Forum, n.d.; Dorn et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021.

[106] Nguyen et al., 2019.

Individual-level barriers and opportunities

Biased language and examples leading to lack of representation and relevance

Assessments may perpetuate stereotypes and make cultural assumptions, resulting in inaccurate results and a negative or confusing experience for learners. Cultural competency is essential in assessment development, administration, scoring, interpretation, communicating the results, and making recommendations for next steps. Many skill assessment tools did not include members of diverse ethnocultural groups (e.g., immigrant and racialized Canadians) in the development or testing of the assessments and there is often insufficient research on the validity of assessment tools for these diverse populations. Furthermore, assessments that do not include examples and representation of members from diverse populations can limit learners' feelings of belonging in the assessment environment.

Indigenous people: Assessment tools that are not culturally informed or grounded in Indigenous knowledge may misidentify the skill level of learners and diminish their sense of belonging in a program. Acknowledging and responding to the different assessment needs among Indigenous learners, as well as unique evaluation possibilities, can help foster program success and effectiveness.[107]

> **Breadth vs. depth: There is often limited availability of customizable tools that align with learning objectives and contexts**
>
> There is often limited availability of customizable tools in terms of assessment formats and content. Training organizations that look for specific assessment tools and formats to support their specific learning objectives and context may often find that available content and approaches are too broad and generic.

LGBTQ2+ persons: Assessments that use gendered language or stereotypes (e.g., consistently portraying women and vulnerable learners as performing lower-skilled work) may result in a negative assessment experience for learners and decrease their satisfaction with training. For example, career inventories may have heterosexist biases, which may make it difficult for LGBTQ2+ learners to identify their career goals.

Risks of equating personal differences with lack of skills

There is the risk that assessment results may be misinterpreted as a lack of skills in circumstances when the assessment failed to capture learners' abilities. Low performance on a test may reflect a skills gap or may reflect difficulties with the test itself (e.g., method, approach, question framing). For example, assessment can give an inaccurate portrait of learners' skills due to the language barrier. In some cases, being able to identify the underlying cause of difficulties can be a major challenge, preventing assessments from accurately capturing skills

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[107] Ball, 2021; Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, 2016.

that can be applied in real-world situations. Some service providers expressed doubts about assessments' capacity to measure skills realistically required to complete tasks. Practitioners identified a need for a personalized approach to intervention that is challenging to address with existing one-size-fits-all assessments.

> *"We have some things that we kind of do but it's often different, depending on the individual person, and I'd say like it's very hard to find an assessment, because they are by definition sort of one size fits all while everybody has different goals, different levels, different abilities."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

> *"The one example that comes to mind [...] is with a young adult who had, who thought he had difficulties with math to find out he had difficulties with reading because [...] in real life, he was able to use his competencies to solve problems, but not when it was written on a sheet of paper"* as a word problem (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Limited opportunities to demonstrate different learning styles and lived experiences

Recognizing the range of skill levels required by different occupations, there is a need for reliable assessments that are accessible and sensitive to skill gains. For example, a representative of a large construction company shared a personal story to illustrate the importance of providing diverse methods of assessment: "Truthfully, I don't feel I have a disability, I have a difference. It only becomes a disability when people force me to do something a certain way."

This also includes the need to create assessments customized to the learning needs of front-line workers (e.g., production workers in manufacturing, apprentices and journeypersons in construction, front-desk staff in tourism) as well as assessments customized to supervisors and managers. Members of the Advisory Panel also highlighted the need for assessments that capture prior learning and skill level.

> *"We need to think about things like open book exams and assessments, and not necessarily assuming that everyone has access to computers or the skills and confidence or levels of comfort to be able to go through exams online, and it just depends on the audience"* (Focus group participant, Tourism Saskatchewan).

> *"I was glad to hear [...] that you're using oral responses, case studies and on the job stuff [for assessments], which is really a better way to evaluate someone, instead of giving them a memory test in a darkened room... It's not a good way to indicate someone's ability to do a job right"* (Focus group participant, Abilities to Work).

When used properly, assessments can enhance learning motivation and provide opportunities to celebrate achievements of goals

Learners may perform poorly on formal assessments, especially if they had negative schooling experiences in the past or have faced internalized discrimination and lower self-efficacy. For

some learners, anxiety related to assessments (i.e., test anxiety) may limit their ability to successfully demonstrate skills. Conversely, if communicated appropriately, assessments can serve as an opportunity to establish a starting point and demonstrate progress as learners improve. To achieve this, there is a need for practitioners to communicate assessment results to learners within the broader context of their learning pathways to ensure learners receive a realistic picture of their starting skills without feeling discouraged.

Indigenous people: Service providers shared that assessments often generate anxiety in learners due to negative past experiences with learning institutions and fears that assessment results may exclude them from further participation in the program. However, some focus group participants recognized the need for standardized assessments and shared strategies to conduct assessments and communicate results, in ways that support a positive experience for learners, including explaining what happens if learners perform "poorly".

> *"For example, asking learners if they're ready, if they've had breakfast, offer alternative ways of taking assessment [...] and explaining the purpose and what happens if failure occurs"* helped (Focus group participant, Frontier College).
>
> *There is often a need to "walk with learners" by providing additional programing throughout the online assessment procedure* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).
>
> *We need to figure out "if the learner gets every question wrong, what is the next step we [instructor and learner] will take together?"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Newcomers: Training providers shared that funders often require annual assessments that use a pass/fail format and do not communicate feedback directly to learners. These assessments were described as something that is used for internal purposes and to make decisions about continuing to work on a skill or to progress. Practitioners expressed the need for assessments that collected more meaningful and nuanced results. Furthermore, while assessments demonstrate skill gains to learners, the importance of credentials and concrete results that can be communicated to employers and community members was reiterated. This speaks to the need for a verifiable and portable system to document assessment results, such as a micro-credential or certificate to provide evidence of skills acquisition. This is especially helpful for newcomers who can then use it as proof of Canadian experience, for example for job application purposes. This is further discussed in the Learning Transfer section.

LEARNING TRANSFER

An overview of the key barriers and strengths related to learning transfer is provided in Table 6.

Table 6   Overview of barriers and strengths

ASSESSMENT	
Barriers & challenges	*Strengths & opportunities*
▪ Approaching training as a linear series of self-contained training events (📖➥more details) ▪ Limited capacity for long-term follow-up and tracking of post-program outcomes (📖➥more details) ▪ Need for industry-recognized accreditation of skills (📖➥more details) ▪ Lack of constructive feedback and tools for safe and continuous skills development (📖➥more details) ▪ Lack of supports from supervisors and peers to apply new skills on the job (📖➥more details) ▪ "Shock" when transitioning from a safe and supportive learning space to less structured, newer contexts (e.g., new job, further education) (📖➥more details) ▪ "Inertia," tendency to revert to old ways of doing tasks (📖➥more details)	▪ Increasing emphasis on transferability of learning, skills development, and workforce development (📖➥more details) ▪ Opportunities for micro-credential programs (📖➥more details) ▪ Opportunities for work-integrated learning (📖➥more details) ▪ Opportunities for managerial and supervisory training to cultivate inclusive, constructive learning culture (📖➥more details) ▪ Community-building opportunities (📖➥more details) ▪ When well-supported, learners can progressively build self-confidence and independence (📖➥more details) ▪ Individualized career laddering leading to self-directed, self-driven skills application (📖➥more details)

Societal-level barriers and opportunities

Approaching training as a linear series of self-contained training events

Traditionally, training and education are often conceptualized as a linear series of self-contained training events, starting from elementary, secondary, to post-secondary schooling. Even with training in the employment context, the traditional training program is often self-contained, with concrete start and end dates. However, this linear approach to training can lead to the risk of treating training as a one-off event, losing the opportunity to contextualize it in a broader learning and development pathway.

> **Focus groups practitioners and employers pointed out the multiple reasons why learning transfer is complex**
>
> Learning transfer requires practice and application, a process that changes rapidly when a learner transitions from a classroom (or another learning environment) to the workplace or any environment where a new skill can be applied. As focus groups participants discussed, learning that is decontextualized can create barriers when transferring knowledge to "real life."

> *Training providers also reflected on lifelong learning as a concept that not everyone is familiar or comfortable with: "We always say 'I'm sure that learning is something that is done over the lifetime'. We [as training providers] know that, and we live well with that. It's something that we're sensibilized to, but not everyone realizes that"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Increasing emphasis on transferability of learning, skills development, and workforce development

Increasingly, interested parties in major industries – including employers, educators, and other industry leaders – recognize the need to conceptualize learning as a continuous, iterative, and expansive process that promotes the transferability of skills and competencies. For example, one training provider stressed the need to keep the scope of learning broad. There are risks both on the part of the employee and the employer to focus all training on something that is very specific and that presents very little opportunity for skill transfer, such as a highly specific piece of technology or equipment (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Organizational-level barriers and opportunities

Limited capacity for long-term follow-up and tracking of post-program outcomes

A lack of follow-up after training can challenge learners' ability to transfer the skills, attitudes, self-efficacy, and other facets acquired within the program to a new context. Many focus group participants stressed the need for longer term follow-up with learners; nevertheless, they noted that the process of follow-up can present many challenges.

For example, limited connections with employers also present a barrier to longer-term follow-up with participants post-training. Success stories shared by focus group participants highlighted that employer engagement is key to ensure post-program outcomes can track successful learning transfer. Furthermore, even if they had the capacity to collect the data, many organizations may lack the capacity to analyze, interpret, and incorporate the results of long-term measurement to fully demonstrate program values and inform program innovations.

> **Long-term follow-up can be challenging**
>
> Practitioners shared that practical challenges and limited capacity were barriers to consistently collecting outcome data. They also indicated that when learners are in transitional periods of their lives – moving to find work, resettle in new communities, entering or exiting formal education – addresses and contact information often changes. Nevertheless, practitioners recognize the need and value of longer-term follow-ups with participants.

> *"A lot of our partners have the best intentions but don't really have the capacity to do the kind of follow-up where you really understand what the needs are, what the progress is. That's definitely a challenge"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Some employers may also expect employees to be fully ready to work without further follow-up and training. In focus groups, training providers expressed the need for more people within workplaces to identify timely training needs and refer people to services. In terms of training for employers themselves, focus group participants expressed the need for training that would help them support their employees and have a better understanding of their own competencies.

Need for industry-recognized accreditation of skills

Advisory Panel members emphasized the need for industry-wide recognition of skills. Building on the idea of a milestone-based pathway to training, one Panel member shared that milestone-based approaches can be a useful tool to increase motivation and momentum; however, they tend to be confined to a single intervention. This drawback means that ongoing learning and other later outcomes are not documented. To support learning transfer, sector organizations, industry associations, and training networks can establish industry-supported records of

individuals' skills, competencies, and development paths, ideally establishing longitudinal skills profiles that follow the individual across learning and job opportunities.

Other practitioners participating in focus groups also stressed the need for a system that formally documents and validates skills and competencies that are recognized by employers. Documenting learning was seen as a tool that could promote learner engagement and provide learners with a "ticket" that could support later labour market transitions.

> *"How can industry and training networks establish industry-supported records of individuals skills, competencies, and development paths so that an individual can continue that path despite changing jobs, moving into another program, or exiting training for a period of time?"* (Panel member feedback, OTEC).

Opportunities for micro-credential programs

Parallel to the need for industry-wide recognition of competencies is the opportunity for micro-credential to facilitate continuous, lifelong skills development and application. Several focus group participants working with newcomers and Indigenous learners mentioned this as a tool that could signal or communicate learning progress and skills development to others outside of the training program.

> Micro-credentials could be especially helpful **for areas like Collaboration and Adaptability skills training. They provide proof of acquisition** for skills that may be seen as "less concrete" than the technical skills, or skills that often do not have established accreditation pathways.

> *"If there were something we could give people that had some kind of practical value to them in terms of their progression – [...] maybe it opens some doors to other opportunities for them, and we are able to give that ticket – then yes, I would say that would help a lot, [especially] for [social-emotional skills] where there's no tangible benefit"* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

> *"We can show them that they've made that progress. But we have nothing concrete, for the individual to take away. So, it's based on their individualized learning plan and the goals that they've accomplished. But it's harder to have this recognition outside [the program] – with employers, with the community."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

Opportunities for work-integrated learning

From an organizational-level perspective, employers who want to promote learning transfer and ensure training is put to use on the job must generate opportunities for work-integrated learning. Workers who face pressure to manage multiple responsibilities or meet productivity targets and are not offered explicit opportunities for work-integrated learning may face time-deficits in applying new skills. That is, high workloads can prevent learners from taking the time they need to practice new skills in the workplace, which can generate a barrier to learning transfer.[108]

> **Supports and approaches to ensure successful learning transfer are changing**
>
> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, training may have shifted to online and virtual practices even when the associated occupations remained in-person. Learning transfer may be hindered when training is only offered online for in-person jobs. As one focus group participant highlighted, during the pandemic, job site visits and internships – which were previously used so learners could develop more familiarity with a workplace – stopped or diminished.

Along with time-based barriers to work-integrated learning, there may be a misalignment between training, skill level, and workplace responsibilities. Training that does not align with job tasks or performance expectations cannot be easily transferred to the job. In addition, training that is offered at too high or too low of a skill level may not be applied in daily work. Similarly, training that focuses on knowledge when behavioural changes are needed may not produce improved work performance.

Interpersonal-level barriers and opportunities

Lack of constructive feedback and tools for safe and continuous skills development

Learners need constructive feedback alongside tools for continuous skills application and reinforcement. Many may benefit from ongoing guidance and information on how their skills, education, and experience map onto different occupations and what further training may be necessary to advance their careers.

Strong training and professional development programs that promote self-directed learning and assessment can be helpful to continue and build upon the process of learning transfer. As one mixed sector focus group participant mentioned, employers can provide ongoing supports and resources, as well as explicit opportunities to engage in self-reflection on how skills impact their everyday work.

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[108]   National Literacy Secretariat, ND.

> *"I think another barrier [to the] ability to actually apply skills in the field has a lot to do with the workplace culture. The classroom instructors, trained like good instructors, create a very safe place for us to make mistakes, for us to practice, and it gives us that empowerment to actually be vulnerable, try and make mistakes, but then you go out into the field. Some industries are worse than others: You make a mistake, and you are beat up so what's the point in trying, right? Or I'll fake it and make a dire mistake [that leads to serious injuries]. [...] So I think creating a learning culture that's safe in the field is a really important measure to take"* (Focus group participant, PCL Construction).

Productive and positive feedback, especially when engaging diverse learners and employees, dovetail with inclusive and welcoming workplaces. That is, as the quote above describes, constructive feedback is only possible when employees feel safe or accepted at work.

Lack of supports from supervisors and peers to apply new skills on the job

A key barrier in transferring skills is the lack of reinforcement of learned skills and support applying these skills on the job. Supervisors and peers play a key role in facilitating and encouraging learning transfer that leads to better long-term job performance.[109] There may also be group-specific barriers in the ability to apply new skills on the job. For example, workplace organizational policies need to support skill application for people with disabilities by providing access to any accommodations that may be needed.[110] In addition, supporting positive mental health and wellbeing can also facilitate skill use on the job.[111]

Recognizing and applying certain skills on the job may be more straightforward than others. As participants in the mixed sector focus group discussed, employers may be less aware of when employees are using or need skills like Collaboration and Adaptability on the job – a gap that leads to a lack of explicit reinforcement of this learning. While the concept of these skills may be known to employers, what it looks like in everyday job performance may be more difficult to articulate and recognize. Because of this, Collaboration and Adaptability skills training may be inaccessible for certain employees, especially when it is not perceived as essential for their job.

> *"Soft skills, essential skills, emotional intelligence [...] the contractor wants their foreman and supervisors to have these skills, but not the crew [however...] the crews need to work together well [...] and you need to be able to communicate. You need to have those soft skills, you need to hopefully have some emotional intelligence"* (Focus group participant, CLAC Training).

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[109] National Literacy Secretariat, ND.
[110] EMC, 2022.
[111] Deloitte Insights, 2019.

Opportunities for managerial and supervisory training to cultivate inclusive, constructive learning culture

The Skills for Success emphasis on skills that require ongoing learning – such as Problem Solving, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity and Innovation – provide opportunities to engage managers, supervisors, and human resources staff in the continuous development of their employees. Addressing these training needs may also help to foster a supportive learning culture collectively. In particular, a open and inclusive workplace learning environment supportive of the continuous professional development of its existing workforce can also lead to an overarching welcoming culture to attract and retain new employees from diverse groups.

Indigenous learners transitioning to employment may be more readily able to succeed in jobs where the cultural competencies of existing employees continue to be strengthened through ongoing training. Such training may include enhancing the cultural competence of supervisors and managers, strengthening the cultural awareness of team members, and facilitating the mentoring skills of more experienced workers to provide practical support during the onboarding process. Effective mentorship can also generate a sense of workplace belonging, especially when it helps mitigate possible cultural and social organizational barriers.[112]

People with disabilities: A supportive workplace culture also meets the needs of people with disabilities, especially as discrimination and a lack of accommodation is one of the main factors of decreased workplace retention for people for this group. People with disabilities often struggle to obtain effective accommodations, and people with more complex and more severe disabilities face particular challenges in that respect.[113] Many may also decide not to disclose their disability at work, especially if they perceive they will receive little or no support.[114] Enhancing the Creativity and Innovation skills of managers, supervisors, and peers can be useful, for example, as such training can help them challenge existing workplace norms that inadvertently act as accessibility barriers. Even employers with overall positive attitudes towards people with disabilities will likely benefit from ongoing training and work to support a more positive workplace environment. For example, people with a disability may have to continually educate managers and colleagues about their disability and its functional impact, which creates additional burden on the employee.[115] Empower the existing workforce with the social emotional skills to communicate and collaborate effectively with new employees with disabilities can be beneficial.

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[112]   Chan, 2008.

[113]   Morris et al., 2019.

[114]   von Schrader et al., 2014; Lingsom et al., 2008.

[115]   Bonaccio et al., 2020.

LGBTQ2+: Positive workplace cultures also support LGBTQ2+ jobseekers and employees, many of whom may be uncertain when and how to disclose aspects of their identities (e.g., self-identification as LGBTQ2+). Managerial training that aims to support an open, inclusive, and collaborative workplace is helpful, to complement individual preparation for coping with challenges and communication.[116]

Community-building opportunities

Learning transfer and other program outcomes can be rooted in community outcomes and opportunities. Training models may need to consider both individual and community benefits when framing learning transfer goals. In addition, community-based factors can influence the learning transfer context.

As an example from the **tourism industry**, a focus group participant discussed how potential workers may be reluctant to work in geographical areas they perceive as less diverse and inclusive. This participant expressed the need for employers and service providers to work together to build ties with communities and support a more welcoming environment. As an example, they described how members of one particular rural community worked to welcome immigrant workers who were new to the area and beginning work in tourism – members of the community "…recognize the need for this sector to thrive in order for everybody to thrive."

Indigenous learners: Community-building opportunities are also unique for specific learner groups. For example: when working with Indigenous learners, successful training models tend to incorporate opportunities for learners to contribute back to their communities as a form of learning transfer. This may include integrating community development principles and experiential learning activities within the community as part of the training curricula to facilitate community contributions.[117]

Newcomers with successful work placement may promote specific Canadian industries and occupations to their broader and international networks, facilitating additional opportunities for more newcomers while also helping to address workforce shortages. Focus group participants discussed the need to provide community connection opportunities, such as cultural events, networking opportunities, and community-based mentorship, to engage people in particular communities, help others learn more about specific groups, and reduce discrimination and racism by achieving better mutual awareness and understanding.

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[116]   Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2018.

[117]   Gallop & Bastien, 2016 Silver et al., 2003.

"It can be an advantage for living together too, it can decrease racism too, prejudices, because all of that comes from knowledge, because when you don't know a person, you have negative feelings towards people" (Focus group participant, Frontier College).

People with disabilities: Evidence supports a range of workplace community benefits associated with hiring people with disabilities, including the promotion of inclusive work culture and ability awareness.[118]

Individual-level barriers and opportunities

"Shock" when transitioning from a safe and supportive learning space to less structured, newer contexts (e.g., new job, further education)

Learners from underrepresented groups may face discrimination during the hiring process, as well as harassment and bullying once on the job. It is therefore important for programs targeting employment as an outcome to provide learners with support to manage and address such relational difficulties in a new context post-training. This could mean acknowledging the discriminatory barriers faced by groups, preparing learners for these experiences, and providing strategies to address these challenges. Learners from vulnerable groups may have unique criteria for desired workplaces that should be taken into consideration when matching learners with job placements and workplaces.

The need for tools and resources to support skills application in a virtual environment

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to show, learning transfer cannot be assumed to take place within only in-person or online environments.

Training programs often need to include learning transfer support to ensure learners can apply skills within in-person and virtual/remote work environments.

Employers may now need tools to help new employees onboard in either a virtual or in-person setting.

Indigenous: Prior research suggests that Indigenous employees in Canada may feel their workplace is incongruent with cultural and family practices, which generates additional work-life conflict.[119] Additional post-training support for both employers and employees to work together to address these and other concerns may be beneficial to increase job retention.

People with disabilities: This group may benefit from scaffolding to transition from training into employment, including job coaches that work with learners, trainers, and employers; peer support at the place of employment; and on-site coaching and teaching as learners adapt to new employment positions. Focus group participants highlighted that people with disabilities are

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[118]   Lindsay et al., 2018.

[119]   Julien, Somerville, & Brant, 2017.

particularly vulnerable in periods of transition. Leaving the supportive school environments and moving into the workplace may represent a challenge.

> *"One of the big barriers is leaving the supportive environment of school […] We are working with our school board to support the […] progressive move to independence. Another thing is changing funding organizations […] Who is going to cover this person's services? Background services are so fragmented"* (Focus group participant, Richmond Society for Community Living).

Focus group participants highlighted that training can also aim to help learners progressively build independence, especially younger learners with disabilities. Because services are fragmented, learners may find themselves in a "service gap" once they are done training.

Newcomers can face discrimination in the labour market. For example, when searching for a job, individuals with foreign-sounding names are 20 percent to 40 percent less likely to be invited to interviews than those with Western names.[120] Once a job placement is made, recent immigrants may benefit from occupational health and safety support, guidance and training on workers rights, anti-discrimination laws, and pathways for support and/or retribution.[121] Focus group participants working with newcomers discussed how workplace expectations may not always be clear or clearly communicated to new employees. They noted that training should entail information and preparation strategies on how best to navigate the Canadian systems. While some participants provided successful examples of work exposure programs with workplace tours, mock interviews, and feedback from employers, others highlighted the lack of such programs in their area – pointing to unmet needs.

Racialized groups: The focus group for practitioners working with racialized Canadians highlighted that social relationships could serve as support factors during learning transfer. Service providers shared that learners with strong social support tend to transition more easily: "It depends on the support that they've had along the way, whether it was their partners, their children, their friends. It's a transition period, and the supports are just so key."

LGBTQ2+: Members from the LGBTQ2+ community may be likely to self-select into "safe" workplaces with a lower perceived risk of harassment and comprehensive discrimination policy. They may value explicit diversity and inclusion policies, gender neutral bathrooms, supportive management, and other supports and accommodations.[122] For transgender individuals, medical coverage that incorporates gender-affirming medication or surgeries may also be a priority. Focus group participants acknowledged employers' willingness and efforts to create more queer-competent workplaces but noted that employers should make their values and commitments

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[120] Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

[121] Kosny et al., 2020.

[122] McFadden, 2015; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021; Streeter et al., 2020.

more explicit. Education should be provided to colleagues who want to be better allies but do not know how to go about it. One participant noted that education to develop queer-competency should start early (in elementary and high school), but that this would require more government involvement. Another participant noted the reluctance or resistance of employers to have important discussions for fear of doing or saying the wrong thing.

> *"A lot of employers are really worried about saying the wrong thing and therefore would rather just not have the conversation at all and try to say whatever feels scripted and politically correct." Work culture centred around productivity was also perceived as a barrier for people who are "primed for shame"* (Focus group participant, QMUNITY).

"Inertia" and tendency to revert to old ways of doing tasks

To support learning transfer, it is necessary to ensure a workplace has a positive orientation to the various forms of change that may be associated with the skills and abilities new and existing employees have or gain through training. A workplace culture that does not support learning and innovation can limit the implementation of new skills and strategies learned in training. In some cases, new strategies can be viewed as "disruptive" to existing methods.[123]

"Inertia" and the tendency to revert to old ways of doing things may be due to both attitudes and a lack of workplace resources. A lack of adequate resources, tools, or equipment to implement new skills can limit the applicability of training. For example, Digital skills training may not transfer to workplaces that have not yet incorporated these same digital tools.

When well-supported, learners can progressively build self-confidence and independence

To support learning transfer, people may need a range of services and additional training, such as skills to ensure learners can present key information about themselves in job interviews, supports for collecting or obtaining documents necessary to begin employment, and help with navigating workplace resources (e.g., extended health care and other benefits) once employed. In this sense, individuals may need to build confidence, self-efficacy in accessing resources, and develop orientation towards life-long learning. In focus groups, service providers shared the need to support learners in building the skills necessary to continue learning and accessing supports after the program. Recognizing the need for repeated upskilling and adapting to new job responsibilities and circumstances, providers highlighted that equipping learners with the tools and self-efficacy to access support and leverage skills and resources is crucial to successful learning transfer and long-term employment.

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[123]   National Literacy Secretariat, ND, p. 9.

Indigenous learners: Focus groups participants shared that transitions out of training, particularly training that is deeply rooted in relationship and mentorship, can be difficult for some Indigenous learners. In order for the transition to "not set learners back", they must be supported in developing internal resources (e.g., adaptability skills) that they can draw on as well as additional support when necessary. For example, Indigenous learners from remote or rural communities may need support obtaining government-issued ID and other documents necessary for employment.[124] It is also crucial for employers to provide opportunities for new hires to demonstrate their skills and gain confidence applying skills in a new context.

Newcomers: Members of the group may not be aware of the documents needed for employment and may benefit from supports to collect or translate documents (e.g., transcripts, police record checks from country of origin). In addition, in focus groups, training providers observed that many newcomers reach high levels of competence in training but lack the confidence to apply skills in real life. Some instructors described strategies to provide further opportunities to practice (e.g., practicing a dialogue that the learner can use with a customer or having an interaction where the instructor is intentionally blurring their words, so the learner has to practice asking for clarifications).

Racialized groups: Service providers in the racialized Canadians focus group discussed how a lack of confidence in applying skills outside of training environments can be a barrier to learning transfer, even though they may thrive during or immediately after training. Providing access to resources and encouraging self-efficacy in accessing learning resources were discussed as successful strategies.

> *"One of the difficulties is actually putting everything you learned into action. Sometimes we'll have learners where during the session everything is going well, they're making progress… but they're not comfortable putting it into practice in the real world"* (Focus group participant).

People with disabilities: Focus group participants highlighted that job placements have varying levels of success (based on learner's job readiness) but overall tend to be positive. They are seen as particularly effective when they are paired with ongoing job coaching to help with orientation and skill development, and address other needs (e.g., new or updated formal diagnosis to receive accommodations within new jobs[125]). British Columbia's WorkAble Internship program was described as a good example of a program that is based on effective principles: flexible locations – including online employment – and flexible amounts of hours.

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[124] Brooks-Cleator et al., 2021.

[125] Often, people need to use personal insurance and their own financial means to pay for assessments, which are costly and difficult to access (Shaw et al., 2021).

Individualized career laddering leading to self-directed, self-driven skills application

Many learners bring skills, education, and experience that may not be immediately recognized by employers. For example, rather than highlighted through credentials, social emotional skills (i.e., Communication, Collaboration, and Adaptability) are likely to be informally developed through prior experience. In addition to building on existing skills, trainers can support learners to understand and articulate their skills and experience to employers.

Special learning transfer considerations for self-employed people in Canada

Self-employed people may benefit from a community who can share best practices and lessons learned around starting, owning, and operating a business. Perhaps as a response to employment discrimination, challenges obtaining skill-commensurate employment and/or taking advantage of existing community ties, many vulnerable groups are more likely to be self-employed. For example, Indigenous people and people with disabilities are more likely to be self-employed.[126] In Canada, many newcomers work as entrepreneurs – 35 per cent of all start-ups are launched by first-generation immigrants in Ontario.[127] Supporting learnings transfer for these and other groups may include providing training specific to entrepreneurship, such as networking with venture capital firms and start-up pitch support.[128]

Indigenous people: Indigenous learners often bring skills and experience gained through cultural practices, events, and activities. There may be a need for trainers to help solidify the connection linking these assets with employment goals, which may include the Communication skills for learners to articulate these experiences to employers during job interviews.

Newcomers: Members of this group often enter Canada with international credentials and experience. To maximize positive employment outcomes, trainers can support learners in leveraging these experiences and articulating skills in ways that are appealing to Canadian employers. As focus group participants highlighted, this requires support. Employer recognition of international experience may also vary. In parallel to enhancing employer capacity and building skills among hiring managers and supervisors, empowering learners to present and explain their skills effectively can be helpful. In addition, this has positive impacts on the learners themselves, enhancing their self-confidence in their ability to progress.

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[126] OECD, 2020; Martel et al., 2021.

[127] Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

[128] Lee & Kaplan, 2021.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PROMISING PRACTICES

As discussed in the previous section, skills development needs are complex and multi-layered, influenced by a set of barriers and strengths that have implications ranging from the societal, organizational, interpersonal, to individual levels. Multiple enactors in the skills and employment training sector have important and unique roles to play in implementing Skills for Success programming to address these needs. This section aims to provide enactors with a set of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices aligned with their roles, not only to enhance their own approach but also to facilitate further coordination across the ecosystem. These Principles and Practices were informed by the needs analysis (previously summarized) and further refined in collaboration with the Panel and in consultation with more than thirty additional employers, training organization administrators, and instructors who participated in the second round of focus groups. Input from a range of organizations helped ensure the wide appeal of the Guiding Principle and Promising Practices, contributing to address the overall goal of applicability across formal and informal Skills for Success programming spaces, especially to support the key learning needs of underrepresented groups and sectors emphasized in this project.

More specifically, the **Guiding Principles** aim to capture the overarching ideas informing and inspiring Skills for Success training and assessment design, delivery, and evaluation. These Principles encompass multiple practices that have emerged as early successes since the launch of Skills for Success, based on the experiences of enactors in the field. The Guiding Principles are intended to be generalizable enough to inform further customization aligning with a variety of learner groups, sectoral needs, and training contexts.

The **Promising Practices** make the Guiding Principles more concrete and illustrate the practical ways to implement them in Skills for Success programming. These Practices include specific examples from existing programs and early Skills for Success initiatives. They are intended to show an implementable path forward, providing examples of how existing practices, tools, and resources can be adopted, adapted, and enhanced to tighten the alignment with Skills for Success while contributing to addressing the learning needs. As well, these Practices aim to inspire further implementation innovations, setting the stage for continual discussions on Skills for Success best practices and lessons learned going forward.

The Guiding Principles and Promising Practices described in this document are overlapping and interconnected and will benefit from a concerted effort across enactor groups. As observed by Panelists and focus group participants, Guiding Principles and Promising Practices may resonate with more than one enactor group. Readers are encouraged to consult information pertaining to all enactors and stages of training for a broader view of Skills for Success implementation across the skill and employment training landscape.

TRAINING ENTRY

Table 7 provides a summary of the Guiding Principles as well as Promising Practices related to entry and access to Skills for Success opportunities.

Table 7   Summary of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices for entry

Levels	Enactors	Guiding Principles	Examples of Promising Practices
Societal	Funders	Set up equitable conditions for success by addressing the systemic barriers challenging access to training and employment.	Encourage funding recipients to customize wrap-around supports to align with the lived experiences and realities of learners from groups traditionally underrepresented in the labour market.
Organizational	Training organizations	Make strategic investment in communication, marketing, and outreach to improve Skills for Success awareness.	Provide program descriptions, summaries, interactive information sessions to highlight the value of Skills for Success training, especially in the context of labour market integration, participation, and advancement.
Organizational	Employers	Minimize the opportunity cost of training (e.g., time investment, foregone income).	Engage in sectoral collaboration and coalition-based training to enhance the training capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
Interpersonal	Instructors	Enhance access to role models and mentors with shared lived experiences who can build trust with learners facing multiple barriers.	Promote case studies and success stories of alumni/program graduates who have shared lived experiences with diverse learner groups.
Interpersonal	Supervisors, mentors, peers, community members	Foster long-term partnerships and connections with communities to work toward a sustainable training ecosystem.	Facilitate referrals to effective learning opportunities from well-known and trusted members in the community.

For funders: Set up equitable conditions for success by addressing the systemic barriers challenging access to training and employment opportunities. This broad overarching principle includes ensuring strategic directions and funding priorities related to Skills for Success are set with individual beneficiaries in mind. This includes providing predictable, ongoing funding models to continuously build and maintain sustainable, high-impact partnerships within the training ecosystem. As discussed in the first part of this report, learners from underrepresented groups face multiple social barriers that hinder their ability to access training. These barriers are systemic in nature and may manifest across all areas of life. At the

societal level, ensuring funding, resources, and tools are available to provide equitable conditions for success can lead to positive outcomes for learners at the individual level, providing the right environment for learners to enter and engage in skills development opportunities. As one Panel member succinctly put it, "in general, training programs for vulnerable populations should consider the whole human." They further elaborated that this includes "considerations about not only mental health, but also prior/concurrent challenges such as realities of chronic/deep or working poverty, food security and transportation." Practices related to this Principle include:

> **Promising Practices for funders, based on practitioner input:**
>
> - Ensure skills development programs have access to long-term funding and resources for wrap-around supports.
>
> - Encourage funding recipients to customize wrap-around supports to align with the lived experiences and realities of learners.
>
> - Where funding for accommodations and assistive technologies are available, recognize the importance of minimizing bureaucratic and other hurdles to accessibility.
>
> - Incorporate the reality of various economic ecosystems into funding considerations.
>
> - Provide opportunities to address systemic barriers in the training referral process.
>
> - Seek opportunities to incentivise employers to provide training.

- **Ensure skills development programs have access to long-term funding and resources for wrap-around supports** to meet learners' basic needs, such as accessing safe housing, food security, childcare, and transportation. Focus group participants and Panelists expressed the importance of being able coordinate and integrate wrap-around resources into training delivery so learners can easily access the services they need before, during, and after training. When available, opportunities to incorporate such services into funding requests should be clearly communicated to training organizations, sectoral organizations, and other relevant enactors.

    > *"Poverty is a major issue and has impacts across the board. Learners, whether from marginalized groups or not, do better when poverty is not part of the equation."* (Focus group participant, Bow Valley College)

- **Encourage funding recipients to customize wrap-around supports to align with the lived experiences and realities of learners** from groups traditionally underrepresented in the labour market. Learners may face safety concerns that further limit access to in-person training. For example, some women are not comfortable using public transportation and may need a different form of transportation support. Other learners may have the pressure of earning an income to meet basic needs while attending training to achieve longer-term employment goals. Providing scope for funding recipients to investigate these unique and intersectional challenges in order to find effective ways to mitigate them would help enhance the inclusivity of the Skills for Success ecosystem.

- **Where funding for accommodations and assistive technologies are available, recognize the importance of minimizing bureaucratic and other hurdles to accessibility**. Providing accommodations measures is important to enhance the accessibility of Skills for Success programming. Where such funding is available, it is important to consider the practicality of eligibility criteria, timing, duration, and other parameters influencing how it is accessed. For example, learners benefit from having access to necessary tools and training to become proficient with these tools before the start of the skills training program. This allows them to not only make the most of the learning experience but also confidently apply learning in a new context post-program, including in the workplace. One example provided is one-on-one support to during intake to the program or other supports (e.g., funding opportunities, registration for other programs), particularly for participants that may face challenges completing paperwork, such as those with low reading, digital skills, or language levels.

  > *"There are additional barriers to things like registration [...] So for our very entry level training programs. we were you know we have a staff person sitting with each participant and walking them through the registration process and taking them through step by step. Because part of the funding model requires some registration with differential government, and it's an automated process that they're in lots of challenges to it." Just because the funding resources are available in principle does not mean that it is readily accessible in practice.* (Focus group participant, Tourism Saskatchewan)

- **Incorporate the reality of various economic ecosystems into funding considerations.** Some programs have used funding resources creatively to address the reality of workers in specific economic ecosystems, such as entry-level workers earning low wages and living in rural gentrified areas, or workers living in areas characterized by housing supply shortage. This includes support for workers to have good living conditions while building skills and progressing in their careers. For example, Tourism Ontario-Explorer's Edge RTO12 has allocated funding to create community regeneration programs that include supports for the broader environment within which workforce development initiatives may take place.

- **Provide opportunities to address systemic barriers in the training referral process** to make sure learners access the best possible skills training and labour market opportunities based on personal and market realities. This aims to address the potential information or choice overload barrier; that is, it may be too complex for learners and employers to make informed decisions choosing among a wide variety of Skills for Success initiatives. Some degree of coordination across initiatives may be useful to help them see Skills for Success as a continuous and interconnected pathway of skills development, rather than siloed learning events. In addition, encouraging funding recipients to collect data demonstrating program value could be helpful to build the evidence base for further decision-making. Such information can be available both for the general public to inform specific training decisions, as well as for different levels of governments to continue enhancing broader funding decisions.

- **Seek opportunities to incentivise employers to provide training.** The labour shortage creates a climate where employers have little capacity and are very reluctant to release staff for training. Employers could be supported in making training investments such as offering tax credits or providing access to more user-friendly funding guidelines to leverage the Canada Jobs Grant for Training to bring on new employees or upskill existing employees.

For training organizations: Make strategic investment in communication, marketing, and outreach to improve Skills for Success awareness. Practitioners attending focus groups highlighted the need to improve the quality of the information learners receive to better inform their decision to participate in learning opportunities. Learners may be reluctant to engage in training simply because the information they receive does not sufficiently illustrate the relevance of the program to their learning needs or does not make connections with broader employment and life goals. Employer representatives also noted challenges accessing information about the training in advance, to assess if it will meet their organizational needs or quality standards. Therefore, there are opportunities for practitioner organizations to enhance the "brand awareness" of their Skills for Success programming through strategic partnerships and by using newer technologies and platforms, including social media. Promising Practices related to this Principle include:

> **Promising Practices for training organizations:**
> - Provide program description, summaries, and interactive information sessions to highlight the value of Skills for Success training.
> - Leverage the move to online programming since the COVID-19 pandemic to make targeted investments in online communication.
> - Leverage partner networks to enhance outreach and communication, especially for smaller training providers with less extensive capacity.
> - Make use of data and technology to promote career pathfinding and facilitate access to training.
> - Address the unique concerns and motivations of learners with different lived experiences.
> - Create programs that improve brand awareness and career narratives.
> - Integrate values and principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into programming model.

- **Provide program descriptions, summaries, interactive information sessions to highlight the value of Skills for Success training**, especially in the context of labour market integration, participation, and advancement. For example, a Panelist from Douglas College suggested using visual aids and success stories to communicate the value of training. Learners need to know how participation in Skills for Success programming can contribute to their short, mid-term, and longer-term educational and employment goals. Likewise, employers need to know that people who completed those programs gain key skills for employment. These communications should aim to use plain language and maximize accessibility.

> *"Adult learners need to see the value in investing their time into training – messaging needs to connect authentically to their employment goals"* (Focus group participant, Bow Valley College).

> *"Marketing through success story profiles and infographics that are easy to read may capture the attention of potential learners – it's important to gauge the marketing materials at an appropriate level to ensure the targeted audience can comprehend, possibly in multiple languages"* (Panel member feedback, Douglas College).

- **Leverage the move to online programming since the COVID-19 pandemic to make targeted investments in online communication** to better support learners' decision-making. For example, SkillPlan is setting up an interactive, web-based "choose-your-own-adventure" navigation pathway to help apprentices in construction trades select the appropriate Reading and Numeracy courses tailored to their needs and apprenticeship goals (Build Your Skills/Développe tes compétences). SkillPlan is also planning on enhancing this web-based tool with a Help Desk functionality where learners can chat directly with program administrative staff, asking questions about program offerings, and getting real-time guidance as they sign up for courses. This provides a two-way communication channel for learners to interact directly and easily with program staff prior to enrollment, helping them make informed decisions about training participation. Similarly, EMC has been paying closer attention to raising awareness of Skills for Success training through their own Learning Centre outreach, updated website, and outreach to share new and existing programming with members.

- **Leverage partner networks to enhance outreach and communication, especially for smaller training providers with less extensive capacity.** One focus group participant raised the need for smaller organizations to partner with larger organizations that already serve the populations they want to reach. Through strategic partnerships, organizations that may not have the means to organize large-scale communication campaigns can still achieve effective communication with target populations.

  > *"I think another potential [example] is the need to work with partners that are already accessing the population you want to reach. [...] In the absence of funding for communications campaigns, you really need to have strong partnerships with those who are already serving the people that you want to target."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

- **Make use of data and technology to promote career pathfinding and facilitate access to training.** For example, labour market information generated by sectoral organizations and industry associations for broader workforce planning can be integrated in career pathfinding tools for individual learners. Technological advancements can support learners as they find ways to enter and progress in the sector. There are data-driven platforms, such as the Career Atlas Platform built by OTEC and partners, that provide information on career paths based on up-to-date labour market trends and connect learners with training opportunities to address skills gaps.

> *"AI enabled labour market navigation, skills development and employment platforms like Career Atlas are being used in Canada to provide this exact navigational, career planning, skills training, and employment support on an individualized basis. This technology is being used in tourism workforce recovery, being adapted with IRCC to the newcomer settlement system, being used in corporate HR ecosystems to support internal job mobility…The technology could be easily adapted to identify and track Skills for Success demand by industry, individuals' evolving profiles, the result of training interventions and employment outcomes over the career of an individual."* (Panel member feedback, OTEC)

▪ Customize outreach and communication tools to **address the unique concerns and motivations of learners with different lived experiences**. Community involvement and endorsement play a key role in outreach and engagement with learners from marginalized and underrepresented groups. In particular, community involvement may support individuals who have negative past experiences with education and have low trust in institutions. Ensuring that community partnerships and collaboration are properly highlighted in program communications can strengthen learners' trust in the organization and its programs. For example, outreach and communications aimed at newcomers can focus on how Skills for Success learning opportunities can lead to improvements in employability in the Canadian labour market. Programs targeting Communication and Collaboration skills can highlight how training helps enhance participants' understanding of the Canadian workplace culture. Such outreach and communication materials can also advertise the benefits for employers, on the one hand, and future employees on the other hand, recognizing that they have different perspectives, needs and goals. To further illustrate, programs for people with disabilities should put forward not only the benefits for employees but also the variety of support on the employer side, such as wage subsidies. Organizations can better promote the value they see in emerging segments of the workforce, such as members of the LGBTQ2+ community. Communication and outreach initiatives should ensure representation of diverse workers so that larger sections of the population can see themselves as workers in the industry and feel motivated to train and build a career in a specific sector. For example, the Canadian Building Trades Union (CBTU), SkillPlan, and provincial building trades councils have conducted a social media campaign reaching out to members of underrepresented groups. The campaign used multiple platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and was customized regionally.

▪ **Create programs that improve brand awareness and career narratives** within and across key sectors. Major sectors such as construction, tourism, and manufacturing can be the training ground of Skills for Success, as entry-level employees in these sectors get on-the-job opportunities to develop skills that are foundational for career advancement and transferable to other contexts. This was echoed by focus group participants – practitioners and industry representatives wanted more opportunities to develop and distribute informative and engaging "sectoral narratives," such as illustrations of multiple exciting career possibilities that may not be intuitively understood, career paths that may be unconventional, and

success stories from current leaders from diverse backgrounds and starting points. Some organizations have started to incorporate components to raise learner awareness of possible career pathways within the sector before skills upgrading. Initiatives like the [WILWorks (Work-integrated Learning Works) from EMC](#) expand participants' career awareness while providing foundational skills training.

▪ **Integrate values and principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into programming model.** Program staff appreciate ongoing professional development opportunities to enhance their own cultural competence as they engage and work with learners from diverse groups. This includes practical tools and resources for them to create a safe learning space free of discrimination for learners. Better organizational capacity to design and implement programming procedures, policies, and processes to address instances of bullying and harassment in a sensitive and timely manner can also help.

For employers: Minimize the opportunity cost of training (time investment, foregone income). There are innovative ways for employers to structure and implement skills development opportunities that help minimize set-up costs, worker release time, and other opportunity costs, facilitating skills development opportunities for their workforce. Promising Practices related to this Principle include:

▪ **Explore new and innovative programming models**, especially those that can facilitate the integration of skills development into normal operation and day-to-day work. This is particularly important for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Focus group participants further emphasized the importance of developing and strengthening partnerships between the supply (training providers) and demand (employers) actors of training. For example, [Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM)](#) works closely with employers to identify needs, develop and deliver training solutions that are custom designed to fit the workplace.

> **Promising Practices for employers:**
>
> ▪ Explore new and innovative programming models.
>
> ▪ Engage in sectoral collaboration and coalition-based training enhance the training capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
>
> ▪ Consider virtual and hybrid training options.
>
> ▪ Consider shorter training with more targeted learning outcomes to facilitate the integration of learning in the workflow.
>
> ▪ Raise awareness of Skills for Success in HR personnel and others in charge of recruitment and promotions.

▪ **Engage in sectoral collaboration and coalition-based training to enhance the training capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).** One Panel member working in the Tourism sector shared: "In an industry nearly 90 percent small and mid-sized business, the biggest factors are often awareness of opportunities, enough staff to run training cost effectively and support in planning, adapting and delivering the training. Where these issues can be addressed through strategic sector-based workforce planning and consortium-based

implementation, uptake in formal instructor led or virtual training increases dramatically." Other Panel members also highlighted that there are strategic sector-based workforce planning and consortium-based implementation strategies that can help mitigate some of these barriers. Cluster-based training models such as those used in Tourism SkillsNet Ontario are an example where different organizations in the same sector join forces and deliver training to employees in similar roles in a cost-effective way. EMC also implements cluster-based training models and notes that they constitute rich skill development opportunities because they allow participants to share their experiences and the key lessons they have learned.

- **Consider virtual and hybrid training options** to minimize costs and improve accessibility. Virtual learning opportunities remove travel requirements which can reduce stress for participants and increase accessibility. They can involve synchronous components to keep the interactive nature of training and ensure appeal for a variety of learners. Depending on the business cycle, employers can align the timing of virtual and asynchronous learning with quieter times, such as the low season in tourism. Some industry associations and sectoral organizations have explored how to use online learning modules to supplement other training modes, or have completely adapted their training offerings online. For example, in manufacturing, EMC offers a suite of virtual, hybrid, and in-person programs. In the bio-economy, BioTalent Canada has a series of essential skills fundamental courses aligned with the literacy skills in Skills for Success, showing how learners can put Reading, Writing and Numeracy skills to use in the sector. This series has recently been expanded to include three new online social emotional Skills for Success, Communication, Collaboration, and Problem-solving. These courses delve into the extent to which these skills are important in the bio-economy, inviting learners to examine strengths and identify areas for improvement, and bolstering their proficiency and application in the workplace. While virtual options have key benefits, it is important to consider barriers to technology when designing and implementing virtual learning. These include considerations around individuals' Digital competencies, as well as organizational, regional, and provincial differences in capacity and infrastructures.

- **Consider shorter training with more targeted learning outcomes to facilitate the integration of learning into the workflow**. EMC is currently re-evaluating training material to reimagine it for shorter delivery options, such as half-day workshops. BioTalent Canada also mentioned that their essential skills fundamental training was designed to be taken as stand-alone courses or any combination thereof including the entire series. It is estimated that training time would vary per learner, ranging from 12 to 15 hours to complete the entire series including the introduction, pre- and post-assessments, and the full complement of seven courses. Once passed, the learner receives a certificate of completion. Other examples of effective short training segments include workshops focusing on how to use skills such as Adaptability, Communication, Problem Solving for workplace success, contextualized in the learning and working culture.

- **Raise awareness of Skills for Success in Human Resources (HR) personnel and others in charge of recruitment and promotions.** Having the buy-in from people who are in charge of recruitment and promotion can transform the landscape of skills use in the workplace. Getting HR personnel on board can also promote standardization and uniform application of best practice across a company or a sector of industry. For example, one focus group participant raised the idea that the language of Skills for Success can be included in annual performance reviews, providing further linkages between skills such as Communication, Collaboration, and Problem Solving with job performance and career growth. Professional development plans can also be designed to include Skills for Success learning goals, such as improving Digital or Writing skills within the unique context of the sector. Such practices can be implemented at low cost and can be feasible even for SMEs that may not have an HR department. As well, such integration can help facilitate a learning environment that values continuous and lifelong learning, which can lead to higher retention by providing clear pathways to help people progress in an organization.

For instructors: Enhance access to role models and mentors with shared lived experiences who can build trust with learners facing multiple barriers. Hearing stories of people who have similar backgrounds and have succeeded can be a source of inspiration and motivation and can provide guidance to help learners overcome challenges. Promising Practices related to this Guiding Principle include:

- **Promote case studies, success stories of alumni/program graduates who have shared lived experiences with diverse learner groups.** Instructors can invite a former program graduate to speak to prospective learners and share their experience during information sessions before the program starts, for example, to provide examples of pathways or roadmaps for learners who want to achieve similar career goals. Pathways can also be described more formally and be aligned with both Skills for Success and National Occupational Classifications (NOCs) to allow learners to set short-term, mid-term and long-term goals for their career.

> **Promising Practices for instructors:**
> - Promote case studies, success stories of alumni/program graduates who have shared lived experiences with diverse learner groups.
> - Relay success stories on social media.
> - Illustrate opportunities for mentorship based on shared lived experience or shared interests.

- Enhance organic promotion of programs and organizations (e.g., word-of-mouth) by **relaying success stories on social media and other communication channels.** One interesting example emerged from a focus group with practitioners working with newcomers, where a program graduate wrote about their learning experiences and success in a blog that reached a community of prospective newcomers to Canada in their home country. The program therefore had a lot of success enrolling learners from this community

with similar learning needs. Testimonials delivered as short videos can also be widely shared and provide inspiration for learners to join a training opportunity. During a focus group, a practitioner from Opportunities for Employment (OF) shared that they participated in a campaign that included videos on the experience of refugees and videos for employers.

> *"We were participating in a campaign and they had excellent videos with stories of refugees and some videos for employers. And also a case study for employers as well, and those stories were the most watched."* (Focus group participant, OFE)

- **Illustrate opportunities for mentorship based on shared lived experiences or shared interests** (e.g., entrepreneurship) to show how learners can enhance their social capital and community connections. This can help demonstrate program benefits that go beyond skills building, illustrating the full scope of program outcomes to prospective learners. For example, connecting program alumni with current learners through Ambassador Programs can be an authentic and effective way to promote programs and activities while providing recognition for past participants.

For supervisors, mentors, peers, community members: Foster long-term partnerships and connections with communities to work toward a sustainable training ecosystem. Focus group participants as well as members of the Advisory Panel emphasized the importance of building partnerships with community organizations to work toward a sustainable training ecosystem. Building networks of providers who are aware of each other's mission and service offering, and who are familiar with procedures to access services can greatly facilitate access and maximize service effectiveness. Coordination between service providers is also essential to ensure service continuity and minimize service gaps for individual learners. Promising Practices related to this Guiding Principle include:

> **Promising Practices for community members:**
>
> - Facilitate referrals to effective learning opportunities from well-known and trusted members in the community.
>
> - Contextualize skills development as part of community development.
>
> - Engage with members of the community to share in the mission of creating dynamic and successful skills development environment that can lead to labour market success, among other social outcomes.

- **Facilitate referrals to effective learning opportunities from well-known and trusted members in the community.** Building enduring trust requires time and continued effort. Having community champions who can communicate the mission of the training organization and advocate for the importance of skills development can be an efficient way to create and maintain referral channels. Creating central hubs for referrals can also ensure better long-term follow-up and prevent disruptions in service. Overall, achieving better integration of the Skills for Success training ecosystem with the broader social services ecosystem was highly recommended.

- Seek opportunities to **contextualize skills development as part of community development**. For example, program developers who work with Indigenous learners tend to connect with Elders and other members of the community and integrate traditional ways of knowing in training to develop stronger ties and provide training that better meets learner and community objectives. Training in Communication, Collaboration, and Adaptability can help facilitate the development of those partnerships. On major projects near Indigenous lands, impact benefit agreements between industry and First Nation, Métis, and Inuit governments usually include provisions of training for residents so they can benefit from job creation, and sometime includes targets for local hiring that are set in agreement with industry partners and employers. Some organizations, such as Workplace Education Manitoba, have developed specific expertise working with Indigenous learners and employers. An example based on the Essential Skills framework worth highlighting to inspire further adaptation for Skills for Success is Passing It On by ACCESS (Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society) in BC. The overall goal of this project is to build the capacity of partnering ASET holders (Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy holders) to sustainably deliver an essential skill training model; ensuring that Indigenous peoples have access to quality essential skills training and to community-based essential skills expertise regardless of location.

- **Engage with members of the community to share in the mission of creating dynamic and successful skills development environment that can lead to labour market success, among other social outcomes**. People involved in training and the job market at all levels can benefit from a better awareness of Skills for Success, from high school guidance counsellors to members of a community's Chamber of Commerce. There are many opportunities to integrate skills and workforce development into major projects and initiatives. For example, people living in the Muskoka region in Ontario are engaged in supporting newcomers who work in the tourism industry by participating in local initiatives and events. The construction of the MetroLinx project in the Toronto area engaged racialized inner-city youth in training, work, and career development. As part of their CareersNOW! initiative, Food and Beverage Ontario partnered with the City of Brampton to conduct a regional workforce pilot that aimed to explore regional barriers and opportunities for employment.

TRAINING ENGAGEMENT

Table 8 provides a summary of the Guiding Principles as well as Promising Practices related to engagement in Skills for Success programming opportunities.

Table 8   **Summary of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices for engagement**

Levels	Enactors	Guiding Principles	Examples of Promising Practices
Societal	Funders	Modernize the skills training sector by promoting partnerships and collaboration across multiple enactors and jurisdictions.	Explore Skills for Success initiatives that incorporate diverse cultural methodologies and approaches.
Organizational	Training organizations	Align learning content and delivery modes with unique learner needs, objectives, skill levels, and contexts.	Conceptualize Skills for Success outcomes as fundamental and achievable milestones in a longer learning and employment pathway.
Organizational	Employers	Tighten the alignment between training, job tasks, and business priorities using Skills for Success as a common language	Support and coordinate organizational needs analysis to tighten the alignment between Skills for Success programming and job performance expectations as well as business priorities.
Interpersonal	Instructors	Create a safe learning space by leveraging the social emotional Skills for Success to build learner self-efficacy, autonomy, and confidence.	Facilitate safe learning spaces to deal with negative past experiences while building key social emotional skills that are conducive to resilience in the modern economy and society.
Interpersonal	Supervisors, mentors, peers, community members	Advance community connections to promote holistic and seamless service delivery.	Create and sustain a network of supports, resources, and opportunities to help learners persist in training.

For funders: Modernize the skills training sector by promoting partnerships and collaboration across multiple enactors and jurisdictions. Across learner and sectoral focus groups, participants identified a need to modernize training. The launch of the Skills for Success model creates the opportunity for funders to collect feedback from employers, training organizations, and practitioners related to funding priorities, such as eligible program activities, to further facilitate such efforts. For example, focus group participants shared that investment in wraparound supports; equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) capacity building; and culturally grounded training programs would support a more inclusive training landscape that promotes

learner engagement and persistence in programming. As well, learners from different groups and those working in various industries may prefer training formats that differ from traditional classroom approaches – for example, apprentices in the skilled trades may prefer hands-on, experiential training. Having access to funding resources to explore, design, pilot-test, and roll out innovative programming formats that appeal to learners from various backgrounds is key. The role of funders in facilitating engagement and persistence in training is interconnected with the Promising Practices for the other enactors, as funders set the direction and establish the program activities eligible for funding.

> **Promising Practices for funders, based on practitioner input:**
>
> - Promote innovative training delivery formats and methods (e.g., virtual training, work-integrated learning, and micro-learning).
>
> - Explore Skills for Success initiatives that incorporate diverse cultural methodologies and approaches.
>
> - When available, communicate the scope and eligibility for funding recipients to incorporate wrap-around supports promoting learner engagement.
>
> - Promote and fund initiatives that build equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) capacity within training and service delivery organizations.
>
> - Create opportunities for learners, instructors, and community members to share experiences and provide feedback on new and innovative training approaches.

- **Promote innovative training delivery formats and methods, including virtual training, work-integrated learning, and micro-learning.** Industry leaders in multiple sectors have started to conceptualize learning as an iterative, non-linear process that can be integrated into daily life and work. This includes "microburst learning" contextualized in on-the-job demands. Other sectoral organizations mentioned the application of virtual reality as an opportunity to provide safe and experiential learning formats, and encouraged the development of bite-sized training. Funders play an important role in encouraging the continued exploration, pilot-testing, and evaluation of such learning models and delivery formats to modernize the employment and skills training landscape.

- **Explore Skills for Success initiatives that incorporate diverse cultural methodologies and approaches.** An example worth highlighting based on the Essential Skills framework was Douglas' initiative "An Aboriginal Essential Skills Journey – Planting the Seeds for Growth" funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), which aimed to make skills development more relevant to Indigenous communities by incorporating Indigenous world view, themes, learning styles, contexts and experiences. Other examples of such practice could include funding mechanisms to support learners in applying cultural skills to employment contexts, and to facilitate employer recognition of prior life learning and experience among jobseekers and current employees. This is particularly relevant when considering funding priorities for programs targeting Indigenous people and newcomers who may face systemic barriers in ensuring their prior education and experience are widely recognized. A focus group participant shared that it would be cost-effective to prioritize funding programs that seek to increase recognition of experience and credentials, besides the

existing (re)certification processes. For example, an industry association could assess if and how the competencies of internationally trained engineers may align with the Canadian context, offering short courses targeting key gaps. These short courses could include Skills for Success as foundational components to support technical skills development. Learners can also add proof of completion to their resumes as a way to signal to employers that they are ready to enter the Canadian labour market.

- **When available, communicate the scope and eligibility for funding recipients to incorporate wrap-around supports promoting learner engagement into their programming models.** These may include childcare, psychosocial supports, housing, extra tutoring, strategically applied wage subsidies, and more. Focus group participants shared that, in addition to supporting learners' entry into training, funding for wrap-around supports can facilitate persistence in training, as learners may face a variety of barriers and competing life priorities that negatively impact their ability to engage and participate in skills development. Navigating the challenges that result from systemic barriers can reduce the time and energy that learners can allocate to training, leading to an increased risk of falling behind. Wraparound supports are one suggested strategy to reduce this gap.

- **Promote and fund initiatives that build equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) capacity within training and service delivery organizations.** Practitioners shared that dedicated funding would create the opportunity to invest in training, long-term planning, and community outreach to contribute to an organizational environment that is more inclusive and engaging for learners. For example, one practitioner shared the example of incorporating decolonizing and inclusive language into training materials to support the engagement of Indigenous learners. Another practitioner, speaking to the needs of LGBTQ2+ learners, shared the need for funding to increase awareness and inclusion capacity for not only trainers but also employers.

  > *Funding would support training organizations to hire "an EDI manager or specialist to ensure supports are in place for learners and the staff who interface with them; training staff on trauma-informed practices; budgets for expert consultants that can help with needs assessment, strategic planning to address known issues or emerging needs. Investments in this area would support learner outcomes in the long run."* (Written Feedback, Frontier College)

- **Create opportunities for learners, instructors, and community members to share experiences and provide feedback on new and innovative training approaches.** Creating opportunities for feedback could include funding proof of concept, feasibility studies, implementation research, pilot studies, and consultations with learners and communities. Furthermore, practitioners emphasized that while there is a need for training innovations, it takes time, efforts, and resources to generate buy-in from learners and employers to adopt new approaches. For example, one practitioner shared that a shift from test-based to portfolio-based assessment required ongoing explanation to learners, with multiple

examples of how this approach would promote learners' opportunities for employment. This highlights the need for funding to establish an evidence base and associated best practices related to the innovative approach through smaller-scale pilots before wider roll-out.

For training organizations: Align learning content and delivery modes with unique learner needs, skill levels, objectives, and contexts. The Skills for Success model provides the opportunity to increase inclusivity while navigating changing sectoral needs and training preferences. With employers increasingly recognizing the need for social-emotional skills training, course content is also changing. Training providers highlighted that it is important to ensure that the type of skills promoted are inclusive and are not limited by a single and rigid approach to workplace norms; rather, there is a need for training that encourages the innovation that can emerge from increasing diversity in the workforce. Promoting inclusivity in training can mean increasing awareness and compliance with accessibility standards, actively identifying and addressing barriers to learning, and building capacity to provide accommodations to meet a range of learning needs.

The Skills for Success model is another tool that training organizations can leverage to facilitate further achievement of career and life goals. Since the launch of the model, early adopters of Skills for Success have been exploring ways to bring relevant elements to enhance existing services. As examples, organizations previously focused on community literacy are exploring ways to teach Writing in applied contexts or incorporating applied Digital training – such as safe online practices – to their basic computer literacy programs. Other organizations that train employability and work-readiness skills through services such as resume and job interview preparation support are integrating Communication, Adaptability, and even Creativity and Innovation training to strengthen service delivery. Overall, there are a wide range of opportunities to apply Skills for Success in multiple programming contexts, with the ultimate goal of aligning programming with unique learner needs and objectives.

> **Promising Practices for training organizations:**
>
> - Conceptualize Skills for Success outcomes as fundamental and achievable milestones in a longer learning and employment pathway.
>
> - Incorporate a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach.
>
> - Integrate multiple Skills for Success into programing model to reflect the interactive nature of skills.
>
> - Provide upskilling and upgrading support to learners who may not have the skills and knowledge required to be fully prepared to engage in programming.
>
> - Provide professional development opportunities for practitioners to enhance their Skills for Success design and delivery capacity.
>
> - Coordinate with sectoral organizations and employers to align training with skill needs in the workplace.

- **Conceptualize Skills for Success outcomes as fundamental and achievable milestones in a longer learning and employment pathway.** A milestone-based approach to training can help learners define multiple, achievable milestones that lead to the ultimate training goal.

This offers a concrete way for learners to celebrate interim success while working toward longer-term outcomes. This can also support learner autonomy and persistence as learners can use the interim feedback to adjust their effort, adjust goals and expectations, and make achievable steps to reach these goals. Some of these milestone-setting processes can also be aligned with components of Adaptability as part of the training. Focus group participants identified the need for milestones to include pre-employment services, work placement services, and ongoing supports so that individuals are able to continue to progress once they are employed. Throughout the learning and employment pathway, Skills for Success components can be applied and contextualized to strengthen the structure and sequence of these activities. Similarly, for learners who are ready to engage in employment, job coaching to enhance Communication, Problem Solving, and Collaboration in the workplace can contribute to their labour market attachment.

- Incorporate a **Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach**. According to multiple focus group members, UDL not only maximizes the accessibility of training but also minimizes the cost of developing and delivering training, as the program is designed to be inclusive right from the beginning. For example, practitioners shared that incorporating plain language principles into training documents reduced the amount of energy required by learners to absorb information and supported the participation of newcomers and other learner groups. Additionally, plain language documents are more easily interpreted by employers and practitioners as they gain familiarity with new training content.

  > *"In terms of accessibility, using plain language principles would essentially reduce the effort that a person would need to put in in order to really understand what the content is."* (Focus group participant, NorQuest College)

In addition, UDL provides learners with choices to optimize their engagement and, when it is used to incorporate the voices and identities of learners into the curriculum and learning material, it can be a way to address some barriers to entry as discussed in the previous section. As one representative from a construction company shared: "If we're not applying UDL practices to give people the autonomy to decide for themselves what they're capable of, we're not going to keep the future generations engaged in longer-term workforce development" (Focus group participant representing a large construction employer).

- **Integrate multiple Skills for Success into programing model to reflect the interactive nature of skills.** This requires awareness of the ways Skills for Success components overlap, interact, and depend on one another. One focus group participant shared the example of a social emotional skill training that used group work across various levels of a company to build Problem Solving, Adaptability, Communication, and Collaboration skills simultaneously.

> *"We were doing a project with people in the manufacturing industry where they worked together. They brought people from different aspects of the company to form a team to choose a problem that they were going to solve together. So, a lot of these Communication skills and working with others and Collaboration, Adaptability came up there as well a lot of the time. The projects that they were working on involve them getting in touch with other people in different departments, and maybe in a situation where they hadn't done that before. They were really having to explore a lot of those type of Communication skills and ways to get people on board, convince them, motivate them to work together on this new project. I really found that that was such an effective way to see these all in practice"* (Focus Group Participant, SkillPlan).

Additionally, focus group participants identified a need to make social emotional Skills for Success training available across different levels of employer organizations, including supervisory and managerial staff. Including these groups in training creates the opportunity for skill development and supports a culture of life-long learning within organizations.

> *"I really think that every person could benefit from looking at their own soft skills in their own emotional regulation and Collaboration and things like that. I think making sure that we are emphasizing that this is not just for the workers, but for everyone who is a worker."* (Focus group participant, ABC Life Literacy)

- **Provide upskilling and upgrading support to learners who may not have the skills and knowledge required to be fully prepared to engage in programming.** For example, SkillPlan gives learners access to online preparation guides, practice questions, and learning material to prepare for entry assessments to select skilled trades programs through their Enhancing Pre-apprentice and Apprentice Training Tools (EPATT) project. As another example, the Neil Squire Society offers a Digital Jumpstart program to help learners enhance their Digital skills before joining a training opportunity or a job placement.

- **Provide professional development opportunities for practitioners to enhance their Skills for Success design and delivery capacity**. A representative from Bow Valley College shared the need to "explore methods or provide support to instructors familiar with the Essential Skills assessments to make the Skills for Success transition, validating what they already know and understand." This is important for practitioners to build on existing knowledge and practices from the Essential Skills world, as they make the adaptation and enhancement toward Skills for Success. In general, practitioners in focus groups highlighted that having skilled trainers familiar with the learning content and able to adjust to learners' needs throughout the program is key to high-quality training. A promising initiative addressing practitioner competency needs is the Skills for Success Practitioner Competency Framework and Supporting Tools platform developed by SkillPlan, which provides practitioners with key competencies self-assessment tools, and a library of resources for professional development.

In addition, YWCA Toronto designs and delivers Life-Skills and Employer Engagement training to collaborators and partners of their Building Sustainable Futures project. The expected outcomes of this initiative include improved dissemination and application of knowledge and information that allows collaborators to provide enhanced training for marginalized women.

Furthermore, training can also be used to build practitioners' awareness of neurodiversity and diverse learning needs, to build their capacity to increase the inclusivity of training programs. An example is the Supporting Apprentices with Learning Disabilities project led by SkillPlan that aims to equip tutors with such awareness and capacity.

- **Coordinate with sectoral organizations and employers to align training with skill needs in the workplace.** Communication between training providers, employers, and sectoral organizations supports the development of training closely aligned with job requirements. Skill training contextualized to learners' target sectors can increase the relevance of training, enhance learner engagement, and facilitate learning transfer to the workplace. For example, Futureworx uses an Integrated Program Delivery Model in which "literacy skills are developed to meet the specific needs of a target sector, and in which these specific needs are integrated in technical and social-emotional skills training." As further summarized on their website, Integrated Program Delivery "[…] uses a combination of occupation-specific training, contextualized learning, and a work placement to address technical, soft skills and workplace essential skills all at the same time". Contextualization also promotes the relevance and transferability of learning.

The Skills for Success model provides practitioner organizations with the fundamental building blocks and language to discuss skills needs and programming opportunities with employers. This includes opportunities to use Skills for Success to translate job performance gaps and business priorities into learning outcomes that can inform curricula development. Furthermore, the Skills for Success framework allows learners to communicate their skills when transferring to different training and employment opportunities.

> *"Contextualized learning is so important when it comes to learner engagement and training effectiveness, because it reduces the effort of transferring learning at the end of the program, because they know… it also boosts learner confidence, because they enter work and it's not a leap, entering a space where you have to perform. It's an investment, contextualizing learning. The more you build the materials through that lens, the better the program will be. It also builds that relationship with employer[s] and the learning organizations – inserting information about the workplace culture, and how learners can communicate in the workplace culture."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

For employers: Tighten the alignment between training, job tasks, and business priorities using Skills for Success as a common language. Employers increasingly recognize the social emotional Skills for Success as foundational to the acquisition, development, and application of

technical job competencies. Indeed, in our focus groups, sectoral representatives highlighted the need for soft or social emotional skills such as resilience, adaptability, planning and organization, stress management, and openness to learning in the modern labour market. The Skills for Success model offers the foundational building blocks to support a consistent, coordinated, and systematic approach to the development of social emotional skills within and across sectors. As described in the Guiding Principle for training organizations, coordinating labour market needs and skill training will

> **Promising Practices for employers:**
>
> - Support and coordinate organizational needs analysis to tighten the alignment between Skills for Success programming and job performance expectations as well as business priorities.
>
> - Provide opportunities for work-integrated skills development, including using digital training tools.

require strong partnerships between employers and training providers. To support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that may not have the capacity to develop or provide staff opportunities to engage in contextualized training, sectoral collaboration, and coalition-based training models creates the opportunity to increase the accessibility of training for organizations of all sizes.

- **Support and coordinate organizational needs analysis to tighten the alignment between Skills for Success programming and job performance expectations as well as business priorities.** As a model, Skills for Success provides a common language to convey, identify, and analyze skill and competency needs. While the importance of foundational skills such as Communication, Collaboration, and Problem Solving are recognized and emphasized across multiple sectors, how and to what extent these skills contribute to employee-level job performance and employer-level business outcomes vary from sector to sector. To facilitate deep and meaningful engagement of sectoral organizations in Skills for Success implementation, contextualizing and specifying how these skills manifest themselves in specific job tasks within the sector, industry, and/or business is important. There have been some early sectoral efforts to map Skills for Success onto job competency requirements. Such initiatives can set the groundwork for future design and implementation of Skills for Success programming to respond to sectoral skills needs. Furthermore, there are opportunities to leverage AI-enabled platforms and technologies that conduct skills mapping aligning current labour market needs with multiple national and international skills taxonomies. These systems – such as OTEC's Career Atlas, which is currently available in Canada and being used in Tourism workforce recovery – can automatically translate the skills terminology used in any number of sector-based frameworks and identify those that are related to Skills for Success.

- **Provide opportunities for work-integrated skills development, including using digital training tools** to enhance workplace learning processes and practices. For sectors that have started to incorporate digital devices in daily work, there are new opportunities for employers to consider app-based learning. For example, a construction industry

representative shared: "the trades sector is moving toward the direction where 'you need an iPad in your toolbox' today." As another example, Frontier College works with employer partners to embed instructors in the workplace, working with supervisors and senior management to achieve the best results in employee skills development, retention, and career advancement, through individual and small group learning during work hours. Other providers, such as Workplace Education Manitoba, also provide Skills for Success training in the workplace.

For instructors: Create safe learning spaces by leveraging the social emotional Skills for Success to build learners' self-efficacy, autonomy, and confidence. Many groups, including Indigenous people, racialized Canadians, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ2+ individuals have an increased likelihood of experiencing violence and trauma. Trauma and violence exposure often translates to reduced ability to engage in programs, through reasons that range from decreased trust in organizational systems to negative self-perception, low self-efficacy, impaired memory, and challenges with attention and focus. When entering training, there is a risk of exacerbating symptoms of trauma or re-traumatization through social exclusion (e.g., being involved in training that fails to consider and reflect their needs and interests), stigmatization, and micro-aggressions. Instructors can play a direct role in supporting learners in this regard. Instructors should be equipped with pedagogical competencies to address the unique challenges and barriers faced by vulnerable learner groups, have access to resources to refer learners to necessary services, and have the toolkits to create safe spaces for learners.

> **Promising Practices for instructors:**
>
> - Use a relationship-centred approach to engage learners.
> - Facilitate safe learning spaces, while building key social emotional skills to support resilience.
> - Practice active listening to strengthen ties with individual learners.
> - Incorporate trauma- and violence informed approaches to training delivery.
> - Strategically integrate social-emotional Skills for Success into training to maximize learning and skill gains.
> - Implement a flexible training delivery model to address the variety of barriers and competing life priorities of learners.
> - Incorporate diverse training activities and approaches linked to learning objectives.

- **Use a relationship-centred approach to engage learners**. Trainers can "walk with" learners to identify learning needs, engage in collaborative goal setting, customize training to maximize relevance, and support learner retention. One Panel member shared the example of how relationships have been used to identify and address learners' needs: "We worked with an engineer who was writing reports for a company who said if they didn't improve, they would have to let him go. This person came to us seeking help thinking that his language skills were poor. After seeing one of his reports our Skills Coach was able to give him a quick lesson on document use and how to create a report that was 'scannable' with bullet points and headings, which immediately solved the issue."

> *"If you don't spend time upfront getting to know what's unique about your learners needs, you will lose them. I do usually workshops that are 3 or 4 days, half days, but I develop and spend a lot of time establishing my relationship and credibility with them, and getting them to tell me their story, especially when we have people that are newcomers, medically train professionals, foreign trained medical professionals. it's incredible what you learn from them, and how much more engaged they are, and willing to put in the time to stay through all the different workshops that we offer"* (Focus group participant, OTEC).

- **Facilitate safe learning spaces** to deal with negative past experiences **while building key social emotional skills** that are conducive to resilience in the modern economy and society. A safe learning space allows learners to focus on learning and to develop skills and relationships to cope with negative past experiences and build the confidence necessary to succeed. Instructors support of learners' social emotional skill development may enable them to cope with challenges that may be present in the workplace. One example is [PTP's Elevate](#) program, which supports entry into employment in food and beverage manufacturing through a trauma-informed approach that integrates confidence-development, social emotional skills, and Problem Solving skills within training activities to prepare learners for employment.

  > *"Self-management skills and communication development and self-esteem are key [...] We place our learners in an environment where they can learn. We have mentors who work with them, we have workshops to work on their communication and language that can be used in the workplace. Lots of self-reflection [help] too. It's a safe place where people can speak about their challenges and what scares them."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

- **Practice active listening to strengthen ties with individual learners.** Many learners from all underrepresented groups are keen to share their experience with other members of the training community – e.g., instructors, supervisors, mentors, peers, and others who want to act as allies. Practicing active listening and integrating insights from the lived experience of diverse learners in training content can promote inclusion. Communication and Adaptability can be integrated to training curricula for instructors, other program staff, as well as learners to help all interested parties hone these skills. Keeping an open mind and considering the struggle of learners in key periods of their life can also help recast skill gaps and adopt a strength-based approach. Douglas College additionally spoke to the importance of supporting practitioners to engage with the community.

  > *"Ensure program delivery staff have developed community networks and that they participate with specific committee's or communities of practice that help practitioners maintain currency to know what is happening with that population understand current trends and engage in PD opportunities"* (Focus group participant, Douglas College)

- **Incorporate trauma- and violence informed approaches to training and service delivery.** These approaches may be particularly important for vulnerable learner groups but can increase engagement and a sense of safety for all learners. Instructors can explore

professional development opportunities and resources to become aware of the lived realities of learners and to be equipped to address interpersonal challenges, harassment, and conflict within and beyond the program environment. A comprehensive library on Cultural Competence resources can be found at the Minnesota Adult Education Support Network. Additionally, simple tools such as inclusive visual markers (e.g., signs and posters) and language within the training space are one way to contribute to learners' sense of safety. One focus group participant from the LGBTQ2+ community shared that enforcing zero-tolerance policies and addressing interpersonal conflicts and micro-aggressions in the classroom was another way that practitioners could increase psychological safety.

- **Strategically integrate social-emotional Skills for Success into training to maximize learning and skill gains.** For example, training providers shared that subcomponents of Adaptability – including task management, time management, and emotional regulation – are foundational to success in training programs and employment. Introducing these skills early in training can help learners continually engage in training. Practitioners also highlighted the value of embedding social emotional skills such as Communication, Collaboration, and Problem Solving as foundational skills underlying technical or occupational skill training. This includes introducing social emotional skills language and concepts, use group-based activities to develop both Collaboration and technical skills, etc.

  Additionally, focus group participants highlighted the value of social emotional Skills for Success in building learners' self-awareness and preparedness for the workplace. Some practitioners emphasized the need to help learners reflect on their skills and understand how they are perceived by others. Others shared that contextualizing the social emotional Skills for Success within sectoral contexts – such as practicing communication skills using examples of client or co-worker interactions – can increase learner engagement.

  > *"You say you're accountable... Are you always really accountable? What does that mean? You know, what does that mean or, you know, you're always adaptable? Maybe that means one thing to you, but in the workplace it looks different."* (Focus group participant, ABC Life Literacy)

- **Implement a flexible training delivery model to address the variety of barriers and competing life priorities that can negatively impact learner engagement.** Flexible delivery modes and programming parameters, such as allowing learners to exit and re-enter training as needed, can increase learners' persistence and continued engagement. One Panel member affirmed the need for flexibility and added, "the extent of these challenges also affirms the strength and resilience of those who do manage to commit and remain engaged despite the various barriers they face." In addition, exploring flexible tools for learners to reflect on and continually develop their skills could be beneficial. One example of such tools is the mobile and desktop app on Skills for Success of Skill/Competences Canada, which includes a summary of the Skills for Success for the workplace and a comprehensive set of questions that individuals can complete in 15-20 minutes to gauge their readiness to apply

Skills for Success to careers in trade and technology sectors. A new series of interactive workbook has also been released by Skill/Competences Canada to make Skills for Success training fun and engaging for learners. ABC Life Literacy also has the program UP Skill for Work, which is designed for flexible delivery in community learning centres, workplaces and homes to ensure it is accessible to everyone.

- **Incorporate diverse training activities and approaches linked to learning objectives.**
The need to link the purpose of training activities to learning goals was emphasized by several focus group participants as a core element of adult education. Additionally, practitioners suggested incorporating training innovations and activities to support a broad range of learners as they gain confidence in training. For example, training providers shared that gamification, group discussions, videos, and roleplaying activities are exercises that, when appropriate, can help develop Communication and Collaboration skills and build learner confidence. This may involve an incremental approach to curriculum development, in which planning begins with the concrete and structured applications of the skill(s) it aims to teach and then moves toward open-ended and creative applications. The Ontario Skills Passport has a good example of using gamification to enhance learner engagement, SkillsZone.

> *"We need to identify or to find the learning objectives really clearly, so that they know what they are learning, what they are practicing those skills for [...] A lot of us love just the process of learning and acquiring new skills and knowledge – however, there may be people who would need to know what exactly they are learning for."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

For supervisors, mentors, peers, community members: Advance community connections to promote holistic and seamless service delivery. Focus group participants shared encouraging examples of service providers, employers, and industry associations, as well as communities and community organizations coming together to cultivate open and inclusive working and learning environments. Ongoing partnerships and engagement with community can build trust in training providers, increase buy-in from learners, and enhance learners' engagement and retention in the community. As a training provider working in Indigenous communities shared: "Community is everything [...] as much as we connect with them as individuals we have to tap into their connection to community as well. It's a big part of their lives." Promising Practices related to this Principle include:

> **Promising Practices for community:**
>
> - Create and sustain a network of supports, resources, and opportunities.
> - Incorporate mentorship, networking opportunities, and guest speakers as supplements to training.
> - Integrate community wellbeing into workforce development plans to support employee retention.

- Promote collaboration between training providers and community organizations to **create and sustain a network of supports, resources, and opportunities** to help learners persist in training. For example, community organizations may be able to provide wrap-around supports, opportunities to gain work experience, and other resources.

  > *"In some of our programs, particularly for newcomers who 'don't know what they don't know' we include as part of the program a component on community supports – what they are and how to access them. We have them complete activities using the Red Book (211 in BC), how to prepare and write questions of what to ask. This empowers individuals so they are able to access services in the future which helps them to sustain employment. We also promote community connections and participation to help them build new networks. This for any group can help to reduce social isolation as well."* (Written feedback, Douglas College)

- **Incorporate mentorship, networking opportunities, and guest speakers** as supplements to training to promote role models that may have been absent in previous learning and life contexts, as well as to offer opportunities to expand learners' social networks. For example, Douglas College offers <u>Skills for Success coaching services</u> to students in other programs. Students wishing to improve workplace readiness can be matched with a coach to debrief on skill assessment results, develop personalized learning plans, and build strategies to help enhance skills. More broadly, mentors and role models with similar lived experience can inspire hope in learners and serve as an example of success. Volunteers and mentors can also provide learners with one-on-one support and help practitioners track individual learner progress and identify unmet learning needs.

  > *"I've seen that with other teachers that have immigrant background, or that come from immigrant families [...] And I think that helps engagement and connection. And once you have a connection, then again, you have more engagement. So, it's kind of like this cycle of trust."* (Focus group participant, AWES)

Practitioners additionally shared the value of engaging local employers as guest speakers and creating opportunities for professional networking and job shadowing. These approaches increase learner engagement and increase learners' familiarity with workplace environments.

- **Integrate community wellbeing into workforce development plans to support employee retention.** This promising practice emerged from discussions with a representative in the tourism sector, and generated interest from focus group participants representing other sectors. As part of the broader workforce development effort, this focus group participant has been involved in developing welcoming inclusive community connections – "we were trying to get [newcomers] to come and stay in our community and help us develop economically." They elaborated that this particular employer aimed to develop and invest in resources that can continue to benefit both the people working in the business and the people living in the community. It included concrete organizational resources such as

workplace policies, infrastructure focusing on anti-racism, and partnerships with community organizations to provide intercultural events for employees and residents. Another focus group member put forth the concept of "regenerative tourism" in which employers recognize the two-way nature of their business, seeing the close links between their business priorities and community wellbeing, which in turns motivate investment in the community. Such employers would likely have better retention rates, as employees tend to develop a strong sense of belonging to the community in which they work, learn, and grow their career paths.

ASSESSMENT

Table 9 provides a summary of the Guiding Principles as well as Promising Practices related to assessment of Skills for Success.

Table 9   **Summary of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices for assessment**

Levels	Enactors	Guiding Principles	Examples of Promising Practices
Societal	Funders	Accept multiple ways to define and describe outcomes of success and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of varying approaches.	Provide tools, templates, resources, and guidance for funding recipients to tell a more comprehensive story of their programs' progress and achievements.
Organizational	Training organizations	Link Skills for Success measurement with the tracking of contextualized learning, employment, and life milestones.	Create a repository of assessment results and certifications to help learners keep track and provide proof of learning.
	Employers	Facilitate a data-driven approach to workforce development by aligning Skills for Success measurement with business key performance indicators (KPIs).	Partner with educators and assessment developers to bring a pedagogical lens onto workforce development within the business.
Interpersonal	Instructors	Triangulate formal assessments with informal self-reflection or dialogues to facilitate ongoing conversations about skills development.	Use Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) to document Skills for Success developed in other contexts to contextualize learners' past experiences with future training goals and aspirations.
	Supervisors, mentors, peers, community members	Identify and track community outcomes as part of program evaluation.	Involve trusted community members in assessment.

For funders: Accept multiple ways to define and describe outcomes of success and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of varying approaches. Feedback from focus groups suggest that multiple organizations in the employment and skills training field – including practitioners and employers – have a rich set of markers to monitor the success of skills development initiatives. These markers are used internally and, unfortunately, are often currently seen as separate from formal data collection efforts to support outcome reporting. With the Skills for Success model, there are opportunities for funders to formally expand the definitions of success, recognizing and accepting multiple methods and benchmarks that funding recipients can use to illustrate program progress and achievements. This Guiding Principle aims to highlight what many practitioner organizations have already been doing. The goal is to streamline data collection processes to better demonstrate program accountability, strengthening the evidence base to inform further decision-making and innovations. Funders can set strategies and provide support through the following Promising Practices:

> **Promising Practices for funders, based on practitioner input:**
>
> - Provide tools, templates, resources, and guidance for funding recipients to tell a more comprehensive story of their programs' progress and achievements.
>
> - Incorporate qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and outcome reporting.
>
> - Support research that develops proficiency descriptors, occupational profiles, and other tools and resources informing benchmarks of Skills for Success levels.
>
> - Explore and invest in measurement tools that are both user-friendly and rigorous.

- **Provide tools, templates, resources, and guidance for funding recipients to tell a more comprehensive story of their programs' progress and achievements.** Practitioners called for tools and resources that balance both the need for standardized outcome reporting – to support funders in the evaluation of the overarching funding strategy – and the need for customization – to help funding recipients showcase their unique programming objectives and contexts. Assessment frameworks may also need to align with relevant occupational and industry standards, benchmarks, and prior needs analysis findings. An example of such a tool is the upcoming measurement platform that SRDC will be implementing and pilot-testing in Winter 2022.

  > *"Funders need to recognize that assessments done by practitioners (often employment counsellors) require a skill and training level to ensure that assessments are ethical – does the learner recognize and buy into the assessment they are taking? Also the funding of assessments that are relevant and will be of benefit to the learner."* (Focus group participant, Douglas College)

- **Incorporate qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and outcome reporting.** Practitioners highlighted the importance of both forms of data collection. To paint a full picture of program performance, qualitative data can be used to validate findings and implications emerging from quantitative sources. For example, while evidence of skills gains can be documented through quantitative tools such as surveys or objective

assessments, how various programming components and services contribute to skills gains can be better understood through interviews and other qualitative implementation research with service delivery staff. Such qualitative data can shed light on the best practices and lessons learned in program design and implementation and can build the knowledge base for the sector going forward. Further discussion on the development of measures and assessments can be found in the *Skills for Success launch report*.

- **Support research that develops proficiency descriptors, occupational profiles, and other tools and resources informing benchmarks of Skills for Success levels.** Across focus groups, practitioners mentioned the existence of similar tools within the Essential Skills framework and asked for the adaptation and development of similar tools to support the transition from Essential Skills to Skills for Success, especially given the incorporation of social emotional skills. Many of the social emotional skills present within the Skill for Success model may be understood differently depending on the context. Occupational profiles that incorporate Skills for Success can shed light on the role these skills play in different jobs. As well, research that aims to enrich the preliminary proficiency descriptors currently available can be valuable, as practitioners would like to use these proficiency levels to inform their curricula design. Several practitioners emphasized the value of widely accepted assessments, complexity descriptors, and skill profiles that align jobs with skill levels within the new Skills for Success framework.

- **Explore and invest in measurement tools that are both user-friendly and rigorous.** Previously, the Essential Skills framework supported and facilitated the development of rigorous tools such as the suite of objective assessments of Reading and Numeracy that have been used across multiple national and international adult learning and skills development initiatives. While these tools provide data on large-scale samples with high validity and reliability, they have been shown to be challenging to adapt and administer in different training contexts, mainly due to their response burden on learners and administrative burden on program staff. With opportunities for new assessments aligned with Skills for Success, funders are in a good position to provide strategic guidance and funding to expand the availability, format, and methodologies of assessment tools, ensuring that funding recipients can access a variety of assessment options that meet their different measurement needs, objectives, and contexts. This could include encouraging the development of high quality, user-friendly tools utilizing methods that go beyond objective assessments, such as self-report, situational judgement tests, and anchoring vignettes. Some industry representatives participating in focus groups also highlighted the need for experiential and practical demonstration of skills and competencies in the workplace. This represents another opportunity for funders to facilitate the collaboration between assessment developers and sectoral representatives to explore these methods and pilot-test appropriate tools. Early examples of organizations who are conducting research and development work on Skills for Success assessment tools include Bow Valley College through the Skills for Success

Validation Study (focusing on Reading, Numeracy, Writing, and Digital Skills); the Essential Skills Group (focusing on Reading, Numeracy, Problem Solving, Writing, Digital, Communication, and emerging work on social emotional skills); Futureworx (focusing on the social emotional skills); CAMERA (Communications And Math Employment Readiness Assessment); TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills); Valid-8 through Vametric (focusing on portfolio-based assessment methodologies); among others that are forthcoming. This also speaks to the need for the funder to consider supporting training organizations and employers in making informed decisions around which assessment tool is the most suitable for their evaluation objectives.

For training organizations: Link Skills for Success measurement with the tracking of contextualized learning, employment, and life milestones. Evaluations of skills training programs, for example within the landscape of Essential Skills, have shown that focusing on skills metrics alone can underestimate the benefits of training programs. Successful programming

> **Promising Practices for training organizations:**
>
> - Organize measurement and data collection frameworks into milestone-based pathways aligned with program goals and expected learning outcomes.
>
> - Explore user-friendly, recognized, and valid measurement tools to document learning, employment, and life milestones.
>
> - Explore measures of social emotional Skills for Success that have been tested for validity and reliability.
>
> - Build practitioner capacity to perform assessment and measurement aligned with learning outcomes.
>
> - Create a repository of assessment results and certifications to help learners keep track and provide proof of learning.
>
> - Further contextualize training by collecting demographic data to illustrate programming inclusivity and reach, and to identify areas where programming can be improved to better meet diverse learner needs.

models often improve more than just skills; a range of behavioural competencies, attitudinal factors, and psychosocial capital and assets can increase after participation in training. There are opportunities for training organizations to approach Skills for Success outcomes as being part of a broader pathway with other learning, employment, and life milestones for learners. These milestones can include outcomes that are precursors to the acquisition and enhancement of Skills for Success, ranging from life stabilization assets such as self-care and participation in the community to employability assets such as career planning and job search clarity. They can also include psychosocial outcomes that follow a successful and fulfilling learning opportunity, such as self-efficacy and receptivity toward continuous and lifelong learning. Such contextualization can be achieved through practices including the following:

- **Organize measurement and data collection frameworks into milestone-based pathways that are aligned with program goals and expected learning outcomes.** The measurement framework could be designed to align with a milestone-based pathway reflecting learning progress. A milestone-based pathway design uses a series of interconnected indicators of success to guide training and evaluation activities. Milestones are arranged in a logical

hierarchy where achievements of earlier, foundational milestones provide the necessary prerequisites to maximize the chances of achieving subsequent, longer-term milestones. A milestone-based approach can improve not only the strength of an evaluation but also the design and delivery of programs, leading to further innovation and capacity-building for delivery partners and tools to communicate the purpose of assessments to learners. It avoids focusing on a single overarching measure of success and recognizes that multiple small steps are often needed to produce a 'final' outcome.

The milestone approach puts practitioners at the front and centre of measurement and outcome reporting, encouraging practitioner input in selecting appropriate measures for their programs. It facilitates timely tracking of learner outcomes that go beyond skills acquisition, and creates the opportunity to include multiple assessment formats that may increase accessibility for diverse learners. Furthermore, it can stimulate innovation in program delivery by establishing links between earlier and later milestones (e.g., designing a skills curriculum customized to specific job performance targets). Finally, it facilitates demonstration of program value, while maintaining accountability to funders and other interested parties.

- **Explore user-friendly, recognized, and valid measurement tools to document learning, employment, and life milestones**. In the literature of adult learning and skills development, there are a wide range of validated measurement options that can be easily integrated as part of programs' performance measurement, including self-report survey scales and assessments that have incorporated Universal Design principles. Practitioners emphasized the need to promote and develop assessment tools that were authentic and demonstrate learners' progress in domains that are linked to their learning and employment goals. Focus group participants also stressed the importance of communicating assessment results in terms that are understood by both learners and employers.

  > *"Are we having learners demonstrating their progress in a way that is meaningful for the kind of work that they might be doing, or the kind of tasks that have been set up for them? I like that idea of the innovative ideas, and maybe the addition to that is just the authentic assessment portion of it."* (Focus group participant, NorQuest College)

  Some examples of such measurement options were included in previous SRDC reports such as this comprehensive review and development of measurement options for skills training initiatives. As another example, the upcoming SRDC platform supporting the performance measurement of Skills for Success programming will aim to help training organizations choose and customize measurement tools aligned with programming objectives, learner populations, and training needs and contexts.

- **Explore measures of social emotional Skills for Success that have been tested for validity and reliability.** Across focus groups, practitioners highlighted the need to develop tools to measure the social emotional Skills for Success. Recognizing that social emotional skills may be expressed through gendered and cultural lenses, there is a need to test and explore the validity and reliability of assessments with diverse groups of learners. In addition, there is a need to align social emotional skills with employment and job performance in diverse sectors, and to map the language used by employers onto Skills for Success. For example, one SRDC project has begun mapping social emotional Skills for Success with the business outcomes and key performance indicators in the manufacturing, construction, and tourism industries. SRDC has also started to map emerging self-reported social-emotional assessment tools, including the Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Skills Inventory (BESSI), onto Skills for Success to enrich the field with more assessment options for training organizations to explore.

- **Build practitioner capacity to perform assessment and measurement aligned with learning outcomes.** Resources to support practitioners – not only to administer the assessments but also to understand what implications the assessments have on their own training design and delivery – are critically needed, based on feedback from training providers. Focusing organizational resources to build practitioner capacity in assessment administration and interpretation is critical, as practitioners need to communicate the purpose of assessment to learners and translate assessment results into learning goals. Additionally, ensuring that practitioners understand the skill components being assessed and how the assessments align with their training delivery is also important. As an example of such resources, the Community Adult Literacy Benchmarks (CALB) by Decoda Literacy Solutions help literacy practitioners in British Columbia monitor adult learners' progress in community-based adult literacy programs. The benchmarks were developed to guide instructors in monitoring and assessing learner progress in a meaningful way depending on learner contexts, rather than as a standardized curriculum.

  > *"Training the trainer, making sure that our instructors know what to look for is as critical as anything else."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

  > *"We need to have our own skills enhanced in order to meet the needs that we're trying to meet here. […We need to] become more familiar with this new framework, so we can better deliver it and then plan these things."* (Focus group participant, Frontier College)

- **Create a repository of assessment results and certifications to help learners keep track and provide proof of learning.** Leveraging the acceleration of digital adoption since the pandemic, several organizations including SkillPlan have updated their online Learning Management Systems (LMS) to include the capability for learners to track and document skills development progress. This includes certifications and badges signifying course completion and learning achievements. Several Panel Members also highlighted the need for

more coordinated efforts and collaboration – within and across sectors – to build employer recognition of these certifications and credentials as meaningful signals of job readiness and employability. Such initiatives can contribute to not only upskilling and reskilling efforts but also job mobility overall, helping learners document and showcase evidence of skills acquisition to either move up the ladder within their current sectors or transition to a new role in a different sector.

- **Further contextualize training by collecting demographic data to illustrate programming inclusivity and reach, and to identify areas where programming can be improved to better meet diverse learner needs.** In addition to measuring outcomes, the performance frameworks should also include indicators of individual characteristics, collecting data to fully describe the learner populations that the organization typically serves. These include the usual demographic indicators such as age, province of residence, and household income. There are also opportunities to enhance the collection of data showing the extent to which Skills for Success can make an impact on labour market outcomes of groups traditionally marginalized in the economy, for example along the line of gender, self-identified racialized status, and self-identified Indigenous status. This also contributes to the broader efforts around Gender-Based Analysis+ (GBA+), working toward a more inclusive evidence base that better informs the direction of Skills for Success programming going forward. Parallel to the need for such individual data is the need to build organizational capacity for inclusive data collection, secure data storage, and protection individual learners' privacy and confidentiality. One example of such platforms to support these capacity-building objectives is the SRDC measurement platform to be implemented in Winter 2022.

For employers: Facilitate a data-driven approach to workforce development by aligning Skills for Success measurement with business key performance indicators (KPIs). Parallel to the use of Skills for Success training to directly improve technical job competencies, employers can align Skills for Success measures with the tracking of business KPIs to facilitate a data-driven approach to workforce development. This will help employers directly monitor the learning and skills development progress in their workplace while keeping a "pulse check" on the extent to which Skills for Success programming can contribute to business outcomes. It will also provide the necessary data to inform employers' decision-making around training investment, supporting a data-driven approach to the identification of needs and solutions. Sectoral representatives and training practitioners additionally identified program evaluation and impact measurement as key areas of focus, as employers would like to see concrete evidence of training return on investment (ROI). Multiple

> **Promising Practices for employers:**
>
> - Partner with educators and assessment developers to align skills measurement with job competency tracking.
> - Collaborate to develop validated assessments and a widely recognized credential or skill profile system.
> - Establish strength-based assessments within the employment context.

focus group participants highlighted the needs for programs that use Skills for Success as a framework to track skill acquisition and monitor training outcomes. More concretely, Promising Practices illustrating the application of this Guiding Principles at the employer level include the following:

- **Partner with educators and assessment developers to align Skills for Success measurement with job competency tracking.** Across focus groups, participants spoke to the need for increased partnership and collaboration between employers, training designers and instructors, and assessment developers to streamline learning and assessment for workforce development efforts. This may include creating crosswalks between existing sectoral skills and competencies frameworks and Skills for Success, as well as developing specific Skills for Success assessment tools. For example, one representative of a large construction employer expressed concerns that HR managers responsible for the skills development of their workforce often do not have access to skilled instructional designers who can provide "an appropriate recommendation for a solution that meets their specific circumstances and their specific business needs." This focus group participant later elaborated that "having a trained instructional designer and learning development professional to work with you […] to add that pedagogical lens onto it, besides the job competency lens, to know the skills development process, the components including soft skills components of technical competency development" is important for both training and assessments. Furthermore, sectoral collaboration can support the assessment capacity-building efforts of SMEs, which otherwise may not be able to invest in customized assessment.

- **Collaborate to develop validated assessments and a widely recognized credential or skill profile system.** While standardized or sector-based assessments are available for some transferable skills (e.g., Numeracy and Reading), there are limited assessments for the social-emotional skills. Employers can leverage skill recognition systems to evaluate training needs and assess progress over time. Learners can verify skills gained through life experience, formal and informal training, and work experience. A system that formally recognizes the importance of social-emotional skills would reflect the increased value that employers are placing on these skills. Some Panel members and focus group participants even called for a system that includes formal recognition of Skills for Success in conjunction with technical or occupation-specific skills. One early initiative in the tourism sector – in which informal, on-the-job training is common – provides monetary and career-advancement incentives (e.g., job recommendations, further development opportunities) for learners to maintain an up-to-date skills profile, encouraging them to document both occupation-specific and transferable skills.

> *"Documenting the SFS and other skills associated with credentials already secured can provide confidence to the learner and help them build a skills profile they can use to pursue labour market opportunities. For example, Service Excellence training will obviously cover customer service, but by analyzing the learning outcomes of these and other programs, we can attach other skills like Problem Solving and provide additional skills to a learner's profile. Many compliance training programs similarly demonstrate a baseline level of Numeracy and Document Use, but these foundational skills are rarely attached to the learner's profile upon completion"* (Panel feedback, OTEC).

- **Establish strength-based assessments within the employment context**. As highlighted by Panel Members, employers have expressed the need for assessments that can help them monitor the skills development progress of their workforce, providing ongoing feedback to adjust and improve the types of training programs or learning opportunities they provide for their employees. Such assessments can recognize and promote multiple forms of skills development success, identifying opportunities to address skill gaps, and promoting a supportive learning culture. One emerging example of such assessment tools is the ReSET tool being developed and tested by Futureworx, "to address the training of working individuals in the workplace as a part of their day-to-day work" (Focus group participant, Futureworx). This platform will have the capacity to collect employer assessments of competencies and behaviours demonstrated in the workplace, and will additionally collect feedback on employees' workplace satisfaction. This creates the opportunity for both employees and employers to adjust behaviour and build necessary skills, with the intention of improving workplace engagement, sense of belonging, and retention.

> **Promising Practices for instructors:**
> - Use PLAR to document Skills for Success developed in other contexts.
> - Triangulate multiple sources of evidence of skills development.
> - Link assessments to learning goals and objectives.
> - Prioritize learner needs and assessment experience, while balancing the need for assessment for reporting purposes.
> - Explore innovative ways for learners to articulate learning progress and achievements.

For instructors: Triangulate formal assessments with informal self-reflection or dialogues to facilitate ongoing conversations about skills development. Assessment tools and results that are contextualized to the needs of learners have multiple benefits. Through focus groups, practitioners described the need for a combination of summative (e.g., formal or academic-like) assessments and formative assessments (e.g., informal or behaviour-based tools to monitor engagement and completion of activities). Formal summative assessments – especially when designed to be applicable to specific learner groups – can provide rigorous data to measure skills gains and track progress towards final learning and employment goals. Informal, behaviour-based assessments help learners and service providers identify when additional support due to difficulties with course material or competing life priorities may be required.

> *"One thing we've talked a lot about is self-reflection after we do have a quiz or a test and, as far as building autonomy, we want everyone in the class to talk about what their experience was, and what study techniques they use, and the way they prepared themselves for what they were going to be working on, and how that worked for them [...]. We [the instructor] get them to talk about it, and kind of put the onus on them to think about 'What do I have to do to get better?' and not just have that come from the instructor all the time. [...] At a certain point you're going need to be independent and know how to find those answers on your own and self-diagnose and know what you need to do."* (Focus group participant, SkillPlan)

In addition, practitioners shared that while they were aware of a variety of different assessment approaches, conducting and analyzing assessments that are customized and appropriate for learners in vulnerable circumstances – such as those without stable housing, or recently out of the justice system – remains a challenge. Using a mix of formal and informal assessments can provide the much-needed flexibility to collect data on skills development while minimizing response burdens. Promising Practices to help apply this Guiding Principle include the following:

- **Use Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) to document Skills for Success developed in other contexts** to link learners' past experiences with future training goals and aspirations. The Skills for Success model offers an opportunity to formally recognize skill assets and prior life experiences that may have been previously overlooked in formal education, such as the ability to adapt to changes through various life circumstances. To contribute to a strength-based approach to instruction, training delivery staff can use different types of Skills for Success measurement tools to formally recognize, document, and celebrate the transferable skills that learners may have developed in other contexts, such as community work, volunteering, and even travel and leisure. This has been shown to be a productive and constructive way to discuss skills needs and training goals with learners, especially among youth, to foster a growth mindset. Assessments such as Prior Life Experiences Skills Portfolio can be an important resource to collect information and document those skills.

- **Triangulate multiple sources of evidence of skills development.** For example, the use of multi-trait multi-method (MTMM) assessment tools where skills development is reported from the perspectives of the learners, the instructors, and/or the employers have been applied in other countries and international organizations (e.g., the OECD). These tools are especially useful for the assessments of social emotional skills such as Communication, Collaboration, Adaptability, and Creativity and Innovation, as these skills are often perceived as intrinsically contextualized within social environments (e.g., workplaces). Individuals may easily demonstrate a social emotional skill in one context but may struggle to apply it in another. Offering tools for a wide range of observers/assessors can help capture more holistic evidence of skills development. In Canada, Futureworx is one of the organizations exploring and adapting such methods to develop tools aligned with Skills for Success.

- **Clearly link assessments to learning goals and activities,** and prioritize collecting participant information in a directed, purposeful manner. To maximize the utility of assessment and minimize the burden on participants and practitioners, connecting assessments with established training plans, learning goals, and desired outcomes can be helpful. Specific and robust assessments targeting well-defined skills and other outcomes can support instructors' understanding of learners' progress and inform program enhancement. For example, one practitioner suggested tailoring assessments to measure the subcomponents of the Skills for Success that were the targeted learning outcomes of the training.

- **Prioritize learner needs and assessment experience while balancing the need for assessment for reporting purposes,** to increase the accuracy of results. Developing assessments from a Universal Design perspective can be key to meeting learner needs. As one Panel member from Douglas College shared, "in many research projects we see results that do not really reflect what we observe of an individual's learning because they simply are over tested." Accommodating the needs of learners related to assessment – including collecting informed consent, briefing learners on the purpose of assessment – can increase engagement and increase the accuracy of learner results. Instructors can also help learners interpret their results, positioning assessments as a way to track progress and identify opportunities for growth to mitigate learners' anxiety, stress, or limited confidence.

  > *"If learners do not understand the purpose and value of an assessment they don't necessarily buy in and give it their all – which means the assessment outcomes will not be fully reflective of their abilities […] Instructors also need to understand how to debrief assessment results with test takers. Vulnerable populations can easily be devastated by an unexpected outcome, and this can shatter any confidence they had and create disengagement in the program"* (Panel feedback, Douglas College).

Training providers shared that incorporating self-reflection can also promote a positive assessment experience, as learners are able to gain confidence by celebrating successes while build autonomy and ownership over learning by identifying areas in which they would like to improve. This can be as simple as allowing learners to re-take assessments as needed – a practice highlighted by SkillPlan instructors – to empower learners to persevere, master challenging material, and demonstrate learning progress.

- **Explore innovative ways for learners to articulate learning progress and achievements.** This could include the use of digital and analog tools that offer formative and reflective assessments. For example, instructors can provide informal online quizzes to provide quick feedback to learners. Gamification tools (like Kahoots) or polling software (like Poll Everywhere) can also be used in class for assessing prior learning or checking understanding. As another example, in a project engaging youth in employability training, SRDC is exploring methods to help youth articulate training goals by writing a letter to their

future self detailing what they will have achieved six months from time of writing. The intent is to have them review the letter after having gone through the training to see if and how they have achieved these goals as planned. This example illustrates a promising learner-centred approach to skills documentation using an innovative assessment method.

For community members: Identify and track community outcomes as part of program evaluation. Tracking progress and assessment of learning outcomes should be holistic, not only learner-centred but also culturally respectful. In focus groups, service providers shared positive experiences customizing assessments to learners' social and cultural context. For example, one service provider shared that outside of urban communities, assessments are often integrated within or held on the same day as community activities, such as drum-making and cooking, and service providers are expected to engage in activities with learners and community members. Other trainers working in Indigenous spaces have highlighted the potential of non-formal or oral assessment practices. Opportunities to more systematically incorporate assessments that reflect community-based outcome measures and understandings of success can be operationalized through the following Promising Practices:

> **Promising Practices for community members:**
>
> - Consider cultural events or program milestones as opportunities to engage and promote connection with the broader community.
>
> - Involve trusted community members in assessment.

- **Consider cultural events or program milestones as opportunities to engage and promote connection with the broader community**. Strengthening learners' ability to integrate into local community, build networking connections, and engage with a supportive peer community can promote future success in education and employment. Building in opportunities to increase community connection or social capital as formal milestones within a program may provide motivation for learners to engage in such community-based activities – within local, cultural, or sectoral communities. For example, a youth-focused SRDC project integrated measures to track feelings of belonging to community and social network strength, as participating organizations identified these as supporting youth's ability to successfully transition into employment and further education.

- **Involve trusted community members in assessment** and engage learners in broader conversations on progress. Within some communities, partnering with trusted community leaders or organizations to administer assessments may increase participants' comfort and engagement with assessment. Trusted community members that have existing relationships with learners are additionally in a position to provide feedback on participants' demonstration of skills within different contexts. For example, the Futureworx ESAT platform has the capacity to invite community members – including family members, supervisors, or local community service providers – to provide feedback on learners' social emotional skills. By involving community members in monitoring and evaluation, it is

possible to capture a more holistic picture of the skills learners demonstrate within programs, workplaces, and communities.

LEARNING TRANSFER

Table 10 provides a summary of the Guiding Principles and example Promising Practices related to learning transfer that can be enacted within Skills for Success opportunities.

Table 10   Summary of Guiding Principles and Promising Practices for learning transfer

Levels	Enactors	Guiding Principles	Examples of Promising Practices
Societal	Funders	Leverage the transferable and foundational nature of Skills for Success to promote continuous and lifelong learning.	Support funding recipients to develop resources for skills application in new contexts post-training.
Organizational	Training organizations	Incorporate long-term follow-up in programming models.	Build check-ins and follow-ups with learners, employers, and communities after Skills for Success training delivery.
Organizational	Employers	Facilitate industry-wide recognition and accreditation of Skills for Success.	Facilitate an employee-driven approach to Skills for Success development linked with career growth.
Interpersonal	Instructors	Develop teaching tools and resources that support continued application of Skills for Success in new learning and working contexts.	Find opportunities to engage with employers and community members to prepare for learning transfer.
Interpersonal	Supervisors, mentors, peers, community members	Enhance learning culture by promoting Skills for Success champions who can facilitate ongoing skills application and practice.	Use the Skills for Success model to create actionable frameworks that support culturally sensitive and socially-just workplace mentorship and team building.

For funders: Leverage the transferable and foundational nature of Skills for Success to promote continuous and lifelong learning. Panel members and focus group participants recognized the need to conceptualize skills development as an iterative and expansive process, promoting the application of skills across different employment, education, and life contexts. The traditional approach that treats skills development as a linear series of self-contained training events no longer meets the rapidly evolving needs of the modern economy and society. Aiming to address these needs, the Skills for Success model concretely defines and formalizes the transferable nature of foundational skills. With consistent structure and language describing the

core literacy, numeracy, and social emotional skills that are in demand in the labour market, Skills for Success provides the building blocks conducive to the reconceptualization of learning as continuous and lifelong endeavours. There are opportunities to link and contextualize programming to show how Skills for Success can contribute to not only personal and professional growth of individuals but also broad workforce development efforts across organizations, sectors, and communities. Funders have a key role to play to shape the direction of skills and workforce development initiatives in Canada going forward, and practitioners suggested the following Practices as promising:

- **Promote the broad applicability of Skills for Success across multiple contexts, including and going beyond employment.** The Skills for Success model is designed to be inclusive of a wide range of learning transfer contexts, including programming that leads to personal, community, and employment outcomes. Funders can promote learning transfer activities within programming by supporting continuous engagement after training is complete, and can also ensure that the promotion of certain skills, such as Adaptability and Communication, are broadly understood to require ongoing learning.

> **Promising Practices for funders, based on practitioner input:**
> - Promote the broad applicability of Skills for Success across multiple contexts, including and going beyond employment.
> - Support funding recipients to develop resources for skills application in new contexts post-training.
> - Leverage the increased emphasis on social emotional skills to facilitate further discussion, innovation, and investment in continuous and lifelong learning.
> - Encourage funding recipients to apply Skills for Success programming to advance equity, diversity, and inclusivity.

- **Support funding recipients to develop resources for skills application in new contexts post-training.** There is a conversation to be facilitated at the societal level to ensure different training providers – with a wide range of programming objectives, target populations, and core partnerships – see learning transfer as key to their programming models. Funders can support this by making post-training follow-ups aiming to help learners transition from the program to another context – e.g., work, further education, or other community contexts – in scope and eligible for funding. As one Panel member highlighted, additional resources to support long-term follow up and coaching can be helpful.

- **Leverage the increased emphasis on social emotional skills to facilitate further discussion, innovation, and investment in continuous and lifelong learning.** The Skills for Success model provides formal definitions and descriptions of skills intuitively understood as important but not always consistently or concretely defined within training, such as Communication, Collaboration, Problem Solving, Adaptability, and Creativity and Innovation. Funders can set strategic directions – e.g., prioritizing programs that link them with the development of technical job competencies, supporting community literacy

programs that also include upskilling in these social emotional domains – to illustrate the broad applicability of Skills for Success programming.

- **Encourage funding recipients to seek innovative application of Skills for Success programming to advance equity, diversity, and inclusivity.** Suggestions from practitioners included funding programs that target the personnel involved in hiring and onboarding (e.g., supervisors, Human Resources managers, and employers) and provide them with guidelines on how to build and maintain an equitable workplace. This can include leveraging Communication and Collaboration training to enhance workplace inclusivity.

For training organizations: Incorporate long-term follow-up in programming models. Post-program follow-up is key to tracking the extent to which program impacts and learning outcomes are sustained and transferred to new contexts. Success stories shared by focus group participants highlighted that engagement and collaboration with employers, other service providers, other training organizations, etc. in the follow-up process can help support both the long-term sustainability of learning transfer and staying in touch with past learners. When training organizations have the capacity to incorporate formal follow-up processes in their programming models, they can measure and document further achievements of their learners and stakeholders beyond the duration of program delivery. Promising Practices related to this Guiding Principle include the following:

- **Build check-ins and follow-ups with learners, employers, and communities after Skills for Success training delivery.** Training organizations can aim to establish and enhance organizational capacity to collect long-term outcome data, in addition to monitoring skills application progress and providing additional resources to learners. Where resources are available, programs typically include follow-up timelines spanning three- and six-month post-training delivery. Follow-up timelines can be adjusted to best meet the needs and lived experience of learners, e.g., learners facing housing insecurity may benefit from shorter and more frequent follow-ups –

> **Promising Practices for training organizations:**
>
> - Build check-ins and follow-ups with learners, employers, and communities after Skills for Success training delivery.
>
> - Engage employers throughout all stages of Skills for Success programming and use learning transfer check-ins to monitor how the programs meet their skills needs and expectations.
>
> - Leverage follow-up channels and data to re-engage past learners with new and connected Skills for Success training opportunities.
>
> - Explore the "stackability" of Skills for Success training programs offered throughout the organization.
>
> - Explore unique forms of certification and training acknowledgement to support learners in their training and employment journey.
>
>   Incorporate formal follow-up processes in programming models to measure later achievements of learners beyond the duration of Skills for Success program delivery.
>
> - Incorporate broader economic and societal contexts in learning transfer design.

not only to monitor medium-term progress but also to provide timely supports and referrals to additional services when the needs arise.

▪ **Engage employers throughout all stages of Skills for Success programming and use learning transfer check-ins to monitor how the programs meet their skills needs and expectations.** For example, some employment training programs at Douglas College include a work placement component where a career coach liaises with both the employers and the participating learners throughout the design, delivery, and follow-up of the program, with the goal of ensuring there is a match between learners' and employers' skill needs. Check-ins post-program can support learners' workplace integration while addressing employers' potential concerns or bottlenecks throughout the onboarding process. Continued partnerships and collaboration with employers post-training delivery can also raise awareness of future learning opportunities, tools, and resources to facilitate successful transfer and application of skills in the workplace.

▪ **Leverage follow-up channels and data to re-engage past learners with new and connected Skills for Success training opportunities** that further advance their skills development objectives and ensure learning transfer continues. Similar to the idea that skills development should be a continuous endeavour instead of an isolated training event, long-term follow-ups and check-ins with learners can help training organizations "keep the pulse" on emerging learning needs by offering further learning opportunities as learners progress through their learning and employment pathways. Connections with learners post-program can also lead to future programming innovations. As one focus group participant highlighted, this is particularly useful to implement when training is short in duration.

> *"In our organization, the training is very short because we do pre-employment training. And we hope learners keep learning and continue growing, and that the job they get is just the first step, that the training they get is just the first step"* (Focus group feedback, OFE).

▪ **Explore the "stackability" of Skills for Success training programs offered throughout the organization** while still remaining flexible to "non-linear" learning and training approaches. An organization can offer multiple Skills for Success programming and exploring how these programs are linked, including how successful completion of one can be the prerequisite for participation in another, can further illustrate the continuous nature of skills development and ongoing skills application.

▪ **Explore unique forms of certification and training acknowledgement to support learners in their training and employment journey.** As one focus group participant discussed, providing a training certification or even simple documentation that acknowledges training completion can build the confidence of learners and give them tools to demonstrate skill gains to other training providers and employers. As a digitally advanced

example, EMC is exploring an initiative that includes giving learners a digitally verifiable and portable badge demonstrating successful skills and competencies development.

▪ **Incorporate formal follow-up processes in programming models to measure later achievements of learners beyond the duration of Skills for Success program delivery.** Proactively planned follow-ups can also facilitate a longer-term approach to program design that expands program objectives and "goal posts" beyond immediate skills gains to include outcomes such as: further participation in education and training; labour market participation and advancement; job satisfaction; other psychosocial outcomes, such as life satisfaction, self-efficacy, and motivation; engagement in community activities; and health and wellbeing.

▪ **Incorporate broader economic and societal contexts in learning transfer design.** There are opportunities to link and contextualize programming to show how Skills for Success can contribute to not only personal and professional growth of individuals but also broad workforce development efforts across organizations, sectors, and communities. This is only possible when learning transfer endeavours within training are supported and adapted to industry-specific needs. For example, focus group participants from the tourism sector emphasized the cyclical nature of tourism businesses, suggesting that check-ins and follow-ups with employers and employees tend to be more effective outside of peak tourism seasons.

For employers: Facilitate industry-wide recognition and accreditation of Skills for Success. Advisory Panel members highlighted the need for industry-wide recognition of skills. Skills for Success provides a structure that could enable a systematic and coordinated approach to skills development within and across sectors. For this approach to work, employers must be engaged through needs assessments and involvement within workplace training initiatives. Building on the idea of a milestone-based pathway to training, one Panel member shared:

> *"Milestone-based approaches are great at increasing motivation/momentum and reducing barriers, but they tend to be confined to a single intervention and then the progress is lost by the learner until they re-engage the system and start a new training program [...] How can industry and training networks establish industry-supported records of individuals skills, competencies, and development paths so that an individual can continue that path despite changing jobs, moving into another program, or exiting training for a period of time?"* (Panel member feedback, OTEC).

This employer-focus Guiding Principle aims to contribute to the long-term sustainability of Skills for Success programming by encouraging consistent recognition and validation of Skills for Success within and across major sectors. The following Promising Practices highlight opportunities to operationalize this principle:

- **Establish industry-recognized and validated Skills for Success learning pathways, such as micro-credentialing programs**. Micro-credential is a promising approach that offers a shareable learning format conducive to rapid application and cross-sector transfer of skills. This is seen as especially helpful for soft or social emotional skills training programs, as it provides a piece of concrete evidence or proof of skills acquisition. Examples of micro-credentials include those listed on [eCampus Ontario's portal](#). Industry-specific micro-credential programs can also be developed. For example, Food and Beverage Ontario and Food Processing Skills Canada's CareersNOW! Project offers 14 connected courses that lead to a micro-credential for people looking for a job in the food and beverage processing industry. Courses include training that combines technical and transferable skill development, with areas that align with the Skills for Success model.

> **Promising Practices for employers:**
>
> - Establish industry-recognized and validated Skills for Success learning, e.g., micro-credentials.
> - Consider the business or sectoral factors that may dictate the efficacy of Skills for Success learning transfer.
> - Recognize Skills for Success career development and accreditation pathways as a competitive advantage rather than a turnover risk.
> - Explore options to integrate Skills for Success training with day-to-day job tasks.
> - Enhance the capacity of multiple levels of managers, supervisors, and HR staff within the workplace to champion Skills for Success among employees.
> - Work with training providers to establish a seamless transition from training to employment.
> - Facilitate an employee-driven approach to Skills for Success development linked with career growth.

> *"Certainly in manufacturing, I'm seeing a lot of movement toward industry validated micro-credentials by many training organizations and secondary institutions to ensure transferability of skills assessed and/or trained. All the more reason to nail down measures of competencies"* (Focus group participant, EMC).

- When conducting organizational needs analysis, **consider the business or sectoral factors that may dictate the efficacy of Skills for Success learning transfer** in that unique context. This will determine the types of services and supports that management and industry leaders may need to address or seize unique opportunities to maximize the intervention.

- **Recognize ongoing Skills for Success career development and accreditation pathways as a competitive advantage rather than a turnover risk.** There is increasing evidence that employees are more likely to quit if they perceive their position as offering little to no opportunities for growth. As one Panel member shared, employers struggling to attract talent should consider highlighting how entry-level positions in their sector can help build the foundational skills that jobseekers may want to gain to support longer-term career growth.

- **Explore options to integrate Skills for Success training with day-to-day job tasks.** For example, microburst or "bite-sized" Skills for Success learning and reflection can be incorporated throughout the workday and aligned with the immediate work objectives and goals. Some organizations are pilot testing learning apps that provide gamification of skills application, allowing individuals to record and reflect on the extent to which they have been using Communication, Collaboration, and Problem Solving techniques learned in class on the job. An example of this was the Mentorship Advantage project led by BuildForce Canada in partnership with SkillPlan and SRDC, where apprentices and journeypersons in the construction sector practiced applying these social emotional skills in mentorship scenarios on job sites, linked with safety, productivity, and work quality. Other industries such as manufacturing have integrated 10-minute learning segments at the beginning of the workday, blending the teaching mechanical techniques with the reinforcement of social emotional skills such as Collaboration. Breaking down the learning transfer process into manageable and engaging chunks can help facilitate a more organic use of Skills for Success in the workplace.

- **Enhance the capacity of multiple levels of managers, supervisors, and HR staff within the workplace to champion Skills for Success among employees.** Supervisors and managers play an important role in creating a safe and open learning culture where employees are encouraged and supported to try new applications of Skills for Success on the job. Having Skills for Success champions within the workplace who understand and value how foundational and transferable skills contribute to day-to-day technical job tasks can enhance learning transfer and sustain learning impacts over the long run. For example, toolkits to support learning transfer and on-the-job application have been piloted in the construction sector, where employers and Human Resources managers work with superintendent and foremen to integrate social emotional skills in technical toolbox talks, contextualizing how better communication, collaboration, time management, goal setting, and adaptability among tradespersons can lead to better safety, productivity, and quality outcomes. Feedback from focus group participants also suggested that the collaboration and buy-in from middle management across businesses are important to ensure sustainable integration of Skills for Success into existing workplace processes.

- **Work with training providers and instructors to establish a seamless transition from training to employment.** As one focus group participant highlighted, employers can work with a training provider to help shape its design and delivery in ways that ensure the transition to employment for learners is unified, a practice that may also minimize later opportunity costs associated with on-the-job re-training needs.

- **Facilitate an employee-driven approach to Skills for Success development linked with career growth.** Workers can continue to develop their skills when employers provide opportunities for them to design their ongoing learning pathway and continue training while

at work. For example, an OTEC-led research project with the Future Skills Centre, Project Integrate, explored opportunities to move beyond transactional assessment and learning interventions toward longer-term development plans that provide learners with more ownership and self-efficacy over learning gains. To establish such pathways, employees will also need access to resources that describe the skill requirements of their occupations to understand the evolving needs of their jobs. For example, BioTalent Canada has established a library of the skills needs across more than 50 positions in their Bio-economy Skills At-a-Glance library. Another representative from the construction industry highlighted the importance of providing employees with opportunities to become more self-directed as they traverse a "career jungle gym" and advance in their career paths – at their own pace with their own objectives. This could also enhance the inclusivity and celebrate the diversity of the workplace – as this participant further elaborated, this approach helped neurodivergent employees design their own career paths, formally recognizing their social emotional skills assets and needs in the broader context of professional development.

> *"Following a career pathway approach, [it's important to] promote and invest in approaches that enable learners to take their profiles with them between training/employment interventions, so that they can better manage their cumulative learning plan and [make necessary] adjustments through periods of labour market disruption."* (Written feedback, OTEC)

For instructors: Develop teaching tools and resources that support continued application of Skills for Success in new learning and working contexts. Instructors play a key role in bridging the gaps between skills developed in structured programming contexts and skills applied in new and unpredictable contexts, such as within new workplaces, educational settings, or communities. Focus group participants agreed that learners need constructive feedback and tools to transition from a learning space where they are allowed to make mistakes to "the real world." They further shared that actually applying skills in the field has a lot to do with the workplace culture: "In a classroom setting, a trained instructor can be very good at creating a very safe space, but in the field, mistakes can be penalized" (Focus group participant, AWES).

Promising Practices for instructors:

- Find opportunities to engage with employers and community members to prepare for learning transfer.
- Establish and offer Skills for Success transition support within job placements, co-op, practicum, etc.
- Seek opportunities to follow-up with employers to validate learning and collect feedback on training.

> *"What helps with learning transfer is to provide activities that mimic the work environment the learner relates to. This provides a low risk setting or safe place where the learner can try and retry activities. Ensuring that relevance of activities to the learner's goal(s) is critical"* (Panel member feedback, Douglas College).

To support learning transfer, instructors can create learning tools and resources for learners to visualize and plan different applications of Skills for Success beyond the programming setting. This includes the following Promising Practices:

- **Find opportunities to engage with employers and community members to prepare for learning transfer.** For example, employers and community members could be engaged through experiential- and community-based learning opportunities. When this is not possible, instructors can also use career pathfinding resources in class to help prepare learners for later steps within employment. For example, BioTalent Canada has created a series of BioCareer Pathways describing entry-level needs, expectations for later career advancement opportunities, and the education and skills that may be necessary to reach that stage.

- **Establish and offer Skills for Success transition support within job placements, co-op, practicum, and other models of learning transfer.** This may encompass employment supports for learners that are directly hired to positions but still may need supports. Even if formal learning transfers are not yet within scope of the programming model, instructors can seek to provide career-coaching, resources, and guidance to help facilitate the transition from training to employment or other contexts for learners. For example, during training, job shadowing opportunities can provide insight into possible occupations and how specific skills are applied. After training, job coaching can also be offered if the resource is available. Job coaches can work with learners to deconstruct work tasks where they may struggle and commend further support and training to continue learning development. For example, with the right funding supports, in an employment program for newcomers, Douglas' instructors follow up with learners during job placements post-training to offer onboarding supports, such as applied Communication tips and techniques in a Canadian workplace context.

- **Seek opportunities to follow-up with employers to validate learning and collect feedback on training.** As an example, as part of the Manufacturing Essentials Certification (MEC) program offered by EMC, employers were asked to validate that recent learners had been using the skills covered in training through a Workplace Performance Project (WPP). WPP is the practical or hands-on component of the MEC program. Participants form small groups with colleagues from their company. They select a problem (either by proposing one to management or selected by management) that is affecting workplace performance. The groups apply what they learn in class to solve the problem (i.e., go through the Problem Solving process, collect or use existing data, come up with a solution to address the problem, present it to management, implement the solution). This helps illustrate the application of Problem Solving in the workplace. However, as a Panel member highlighted, this process can be time-consuming and challenging without buy-in from employers, learners, managers, and supervisors.

For supervisors, mentors, peers, community members: Enhance learning culture by promoting Skills for Success champions who can facilitate ongoing skills application and practice. Supervisors, mentors, peers, and community members can contribute to enhancing the culture of continuous and lifelong learning through practices such as the following:

▪ **Use the Skills for Success model to create actionable frameworks that support culturally sensitive and socially-just workplace mentorship and team building.** This includes the recognition at the management and supervisory levels of the need for cultural competency development to support diverse new and current employees. For example, the Disability Inclusive Employer Self-Assessment developed by Open Door Group and Presidents Group is a free tool that employers can use to become more inclusive. It aims to both assess current inclusion practices and highlight actions and resources needed to improve organizational culture more broadly.

> **Promising Practices for community members:**
>
> ▪ Use the Skills for Success model to create actionable frameworks that support culturally sensitive and socially-just workplace mentorship and team building.
>
> ▪ Establish programs, associations and opportunities for peer support and mentorship, particularly for underrepresented groups.
>
> ▪ Ensure community engagement is reciprocal and supports learning transfer among multiple groups.

▪ **Establish programs, associations and opportunities for peer support and mentorship, particularly for underrepresented groups.** Mentorship is often effective when community-based programs and frameworks are established to support mentor-mentee relations, meet the diverse needs of mentees, and address possible cultural, social, and organizational barriers that may limit the success of mentorship programs (e.g., time barriers, organizational culture and climate). Often participants in mentorship programs that are specific to the needs of underrepresented groups – such as the Black Professionals in Tech Network for racialized people, MentorAbility for people with disabilities, and Youth Assisting Youth for newcomers – are able to share specific experiences based on social location and background, and can expand social networks. These and other programs may also use the Skills for Success framework to consider the skills necessary to support a range of mentorship activities, such as Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity and Innovation.

▪ **Ensure community engagement is reciprocal and supports learning transfer among multiple groups.** On the one hand learning transfer involves a learner continuing to apply their skills in a new context; on the other hand, community members should also be provided opportunities to apply new skills to facilitate their own ongoing learning:

> *"Years ago, I developed [...] a storyboard approach [using] visual images showing each of the stages [of learning and employment]. That way you can have a reference point for someone to accomplish [...], training aids to help individuals [visualize] rather than just be told what to do by somebody else."* (Focus group participant, Independent Contractor)

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Overall, the Implementation Guidance aims to provide a starting point to inform and inspire future Skills for Success programming design, development, pilot-testing, implementation, and evaluation. As illustrated throughout this document, funders, training providers, employers, instructors, and community members such as supervisors and mentors have key roles to play in this ecosystem. There are opportunities – and needs – for partnership and collaboration across enactors to use Skills for Success training and assessment to contribute to Canada's broader goals of developing a skilled and resilient workforce. The overarching aim is to leverage Skills for Success to understand and train the skills needed for individuals to adapt to new technology, apply social-emotional skills in the workplace, and succeed in the 21st century labour market.

To reiterate, the Guiding Principles and Promising Practices aim to inform and inspire further discussions and initiatives around Skills for Success. Practices included in this document are intended to be examples illustrating the feasibility of the Principles as well as facilitating future programming innovations. At the time of writing this report, the Skills for Success model has just been launched for over a year, with early initiatives starting to be developed. New resources will be made available in the coming years, bolstering the level of support and applicable resources. For example, continued efforts to develop and validate training and assessment tools across all areas of the Skills for Success model will help advance implementation efforts.

Throughout the consultation process, SRDC has collected further input around concrete tools and resources that practitioners find most useful as immediate next steps in the implementation of Skills for Success. Below, we highlight both the key resources mentioned as well as the development of a community of practice where multiple enactor groups could support one another throughout the adoption and implementation of Skills for Success, as well as continued program and training transformation.

MOST REQUESTED RESOURCES

Throughout the consultation process, practitioners highlighted that Skills for Success builds on the Essential Skills framework and that many of the tools and resources created in the past remain valid. Indeed, the Skills for Success model represents a modernization of Essential Skills; and as such, it provides an opportunity to enhance and expand the tools and resources to make training and assessment more inclusive and responsive to labour market needs. Many raised the priority for professional development opportunities, especially for those familiar with the Essential Skills framework, to effectively transition to Skills for Success programming.

Particularly, practitioners emphasized the importance of the following key resources in the Essential Skills landscape and highlighted the need to adapt them to Skills for Success:

- Job profiles that include Skills for Success proficiencies aligning with existing classification systems such as the National Occupational Classifications (NOC).

- Descriptions of task complexity related to each skill in Skills for Success.

- Across all nine skills, validated descriptions of proficiency and assessment tools to measure skill levels among learners.

- Initiatives aimed at collecting insights from the perspective of workers themselves; for example, understanding their everyday skill use on the job in order to create authentic job profiles.

- The use of material verified by workers to develop meaningful and contextualized learning activities. For example, job profiles could be an accessible resource for career exploration activities, especially when job placement and job shadowing experiences are not possible (e.g., "day in the life" videos about specific occupations).

- A library of authentic workplace materials aligned with Skills for Success.

In general, participants who were part of this project expressed a need for support to better understand each of the skills, their components and subcomponents, and their linkages with job tasks and workplace contexts. Initiatives to collect such information could also encompass the collection of emerging success stories from employers, past learners, and other members of the skills training community.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Focus group participants and Panel members were enthusiastic about the idea of forming and joining a Skills for Success community of practice. This community could facilitate:

- A space to share resources and best practices; for example, the development of new training and in-class activities material.

- A group to provide insight and recommendations during the process of developing new resources; for example, assessments undergoing the process of psychometric or statistical validation could receive qualitative feedback from people with insight into inclusivity.

- An arena to share insight into skill needs; for example, employers could highlight nuances around the importance of social emotional skills in the job market.

Overall, a community of practice could be a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and mobilization among various enactor groups. With proper set-up and well-defined parameters of operation, it can become a powerful way for the skills and employment training sector to connect, share emerging success, and learn from one another. It can help facilitate further partnerships and collaboration, bringing the field together to coordinate and streamline efforts while minimizing duplication of work. As several focus group participants and Panel members shared, its scope can be broad to include not only practitioners focusing on employment outcomes but also practitioners serving clients with other community-based learning objectives. In the longer term, a community of practice can be the foundation for a central hub of information where key enactors in the ecosystem can continually access and update tools and resources to advance Skills for Success programming, contributing to the broader goal of helping Canadians participate and thrive in learning, work, and life.

APPENDIX A: ADVISORY PANEL

Table 11   Panel members

Organizations	Name
Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society	Tamara Jorgic
Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society	Cindy Messaros
BioTalent Canada	Patti Galbaith
Bow Valley College	Alisa Foreman
Bow Valley College	Wendy Magahay
Bow Valley College	Krista Medhurst
Douglas College	Danica Isherwood
Douglas College	Julia Lewis
Douglas College	Pam Tetarenko
Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium	Jean-Pierre Giroux
Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium	Carolyn Rasiuk
Food Processing Skills Canada	Jennefer Griffith
Food Processing Skills Canada	Deanna Zenger
Frontier College/United for Literacy	Angela Briscoe
Ontario Tourism Education Corporation	Adam Morrison
SkillPlan	Lee Lagan
SkillPlan	Lovey Sidhu

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP ORGANIZATIONS

Table 12   List of organizations in focus groups that provided consent to be named in report

Organizations	Practitioners serving and/or representing the voice of:					
	People with disabilities	Newcomers	LGBTQ2+	Indigenous People	Racialized Canadians	Employers
Abilities to Work Mississauga	✓					
Action for Healthy Communities (AHC)		✓				
Alberta Motor Transport Association		✓		✓		✓
AWES		✓		✓		✓
BC Cancer Agency			✓			
BC Centre for Ability (BCCFA)	✓					
Bow Valley Learning Council		✓		✓		
Canadian Ecotourism Services						✓
Canadian Mental Health Association	✓					
Centennial College		✓				✓
CLAC AB Training						✓
Colleges and Institutes Canada	✓	✓		✓		
Community Living BC	✓					

Organizations	Practitioners serving and/or representing the voice of:					
	People with disabilities	Newcomers	LGBTQ2+	Indigenous People	Racialized Canadians	Employers
Douglas College	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Frontier College		✓		✓	✓	
Go2HR						✓
Immigrant Employment Council BC		✓				
Inclusion Langley	✓					
LGBT+ Chamber			✓			
Neil Squire Society	✓					
NorQuest College	✓	✓				
OFE		✓				
OTEC						✓
PCL Construction						✓
PFLAG Surrey			✓			
posAbilities	✓					
QMUNITY			✓			
Richmond Society for Community Living	✓					
Tourism Ontario – Explorer's Edge RTO12						✓
Tourism Saskatchewan						✓
WorkBC Langley			✓			

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