CONVERSATIONS TO CONNECTIONS

Insights and perspectives from the Canadian skills and workforce development community

Future Skills Centre / Centre des Compétences futures

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-looking research and collaboration center dedicated to preparing Canadians for career success. We believe that Canadians should be confident in the skills they possess to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we collaborate to rigorously identify, test, measure and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The CCF was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint and the Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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Research Impact Canada (RIC) a national leader in helping universities and other organizations create value and impact from knowledge. Through a focus on sharing best practices, co-developing resources, and delivering training in knowledge mobilization, RIC helps build institutional capacity to turn knowledge into action. We work with both academic and non-academic partners across a variety of organizations – including researchers, research administrative staff, academics, students, faculty, public sector leaders, and projects dedicated to skills development.

Report Highlights

The **Future Skills Centre (FSC)** is working to enhance Canada's skills training and workforce development ecosystem by creating a network of innovative partners who prepare Canadians for the future of work.

A crucial aspect of this mission involves establishing a pan-Canadian community of practice that serves the needs and guides a collective approach to workforce and skills development. To achieve this, the Conversations to Connections (C2C) initiative, led by Research Impact Canada in collaboration with FSC, directly engaged with practitioners in the sector across the country. C2C facilitated relationship building with practitioners and gathering of insights to incorporate the experiences and voices of practitioners into the foundation of the community of practice. By utilizing an evidence-based approach, C2C identified practitioner priorities and challenges, regional distinctions, and engagement preferences that can inform future activities and offerings for the community of practice.

Outreach and Evaluation Approach

The engagement process for the Conversations to Connections (C2C) initiative involved two phases. In Phase I (August - November 2022), FSC collaborators were contacted via email or telephone and offered the opportunity to engage in one-on-one conversations with the Research Impact Canada Community Engagement team. A total of 80 FSC practitioners were contacted, resulting in 48 conversations and a 60% response rate. Phase II (October 2022 - January 2023) focused on reaching new practitioners in the workforce and skills development sector across Canada. An environmental scan was conducted to provide 2,866 practitioners with the opportunity to participate in one-on-one or group conversations with RIC team members or to share their insights via an anonymous online survey. This phase resulted in 141 conversations and 135 completed surveys, representing a 10% response rate. In addition to reaching out to representatives across sector groups, outreach focused on diverse representation of roles within organizations to gather comprehensive insights and promote inclusivity in the community of practice.

Evaluation

One-on-one and group conversations with practitioners were documented, transcribed, and analyzed using Condens, combining quantitative data from surveys with qualitative analysis of conversation transcripts. Survey responses were compiled from Survey Monkey and analyzed using Condens. Coding of the transcripts was organized into groups and categories based on common ideas and conversation themes. Identified code patterns were used to interpret the collective data.

Demographics

Insights were gathered from a total of 276 practitioners from every province and territory across Canada. In terms of sector groups, 58% of respondents identified as employment and skills-training providers, followed by 36% from Business, Industry, and/or Labour Groups, and 10% as Researchers. Regarding the areas of work, the top three identified were employment and skills-training service organizations (39%), community and social service organizations (22%), and post-secondary institutions (9%). The participants encompassed various roles, with 32% in senior leadership, 26% in management, and 21% as workforce/skills training practitioners. Notably, 41% of all respondents were frontline workers as well as engagement from a diverse range of practitioners, including those supporting Francophones, rural and/or remote communities, Indigenous communities, and organizations focused on underserved communities such as women, newcomers, racialized populations, LGBTQ2iAS+ individuals, and people with disabilities.

Key Insights

Practitioners broadly expressed a desire for a centralized, open-access database of free knowledge products and resources in the skills and workforce development sector. They emphasized the need for a platform where they can access reputable resources, share successes, learn from lessons, connect with peers, and build partnerships. Practitioners highlighted the challenge of locating and accessing reliable, sector-specific resources and tools, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive "one stop shop" hub for sector professionals.

Core Challenges

Insights from practitioners highlighted four major challenges common across the sector that must be addressed and overcome to improve future workforce outcomes.

Funding models and policies

Practitioners frequently reported standard short funding cycles impacting project development and sustainability, and more consideration should be given to updating funding models to support longterm goals. Current funding streams and grant opportunities can be restrictive in scope, limiting innovative and responsive approaches to tackling meaningful challenges being experienced in communities.

Staff recruitment and retention

The sector is grappling with understaffing and the consequent loss of institutional knowledge. The main contributors to this issue are retirements, a high rate of turnover of practitioners and a general exodus from the sector. As a result, practitioners report overwhelming workloads and, in some cases, working multiple roles due to understaffing. These insights were shared with concerns of mental health and fears of burnout.

Supporting newcomers

Practitioners assisting newcomers in the workforce encounter obstacles like language barriers, cultural differences, and limited knowledge of immigration regulations. These challenges hinder the establishment of strong client relationships and labor market integration. Some practitioners have sought assistance from immigration consultants or partnered with non-profit organizations to address these issues. Despite the sector's willingness to support newcomers and foster connections with employers, negative perceptions and misconceptions persist regarding cultural differences and the talent pool of newcomers.

Supporting employers

Labor shortages in the country have shifted the dynamics between employers and workers, with employers needing to be more engaged in skills development. Practitioners recognize the importance of engaging with new employers, understanding their needs, re-evaluating hiring practices, and bridging the expectations gap. This presents an opportunity for closer partnership with local employers, but policy and funding barriers hinder practitioner support for these employers.

Significant Resource and Knowledge Gaps

Insights from practitioners highlighted five significant gaps in sector-specific resources and knowledge common across the sector that must be addressed and improved to better practitioners and learners outcomes.

Connectivity Gap

There is a need to address the universal connectivity gap among practitioners across provinces and territories. Bridging this gap is crucial as practitioners seek a better understanding of their peers' work and aim to break down silos in the sector, fostering stronger networks of collaboration.

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion Knowledge and Policy Gap

Practitioners identified a need for practical support in bridging cultural gaps and engaging with underserved populations, including newcomers. They emphasized the importance of standardized resources like DEAI training and accessible information on immigration policies and evaluating foreign credentials. Overall, there is a clear demand for additional resources to enhance practitioners' ability to support underserved populations effectively.

Data and Information Gap

Practitioners in the skills and workforce development sector face data and information gaps, including limited sharing of practical data, local labor market information, and financial barriers to data access. Sharing information is crucial for funding opportunities, program development, and fostering innovation. It improves efficiency, reduces redundancies, increases sector-wide awareness, and enables scaling of projects. Practitioners working with FSC also highlight knowledge gaps in project development tools, program evaluation guides, and resources for practical implementation.

Professional Development Training Gap

Practitioners in the skills and workforce development sector highlighted a gap in professional development training tools and resources for various roles. They emphasized the need for standardized resources, sector-specific training, onboarding resources, and career development opportunities. These practitioners expressed their passion for the sector and their desire for accessible resources to enhance job performance, increase staff retention, and facilitate career growth.

The (Practical) Tools Gap

The lack of openly accessible and easily shared practical tools and resources in the SWD sector hinders practitioners' ability to effectively support their work and meet organizational goals. To bridge this gap, practitioners require practical tools like toolkits, checklists, and action plans that can be easily shared and utilized. Additionally, they need guidance on effectively implementing these tools and the means to share innovative resources with others in the sector.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Engagement from central Canada and the Atlantic provinces was strong, but efforts are needed to increase participation from practitioners in the western provinces and northern territories.

Frontline workers showed a higher level of engagement through asynchronous methods, indicating a preference for resources like surveys. This should be considered when designing engagement strategies for this group.

Practitioners representing underserved communities expressed interest in engaging with the community of practice (CoP), and their specific needs should be taken into account when developing offerings.

Collaborations and partnerships were highly valued by practitioners and can be leveraged to benefit the CoP.

Practitioners utilized both in-person and online networking platforms to connect with others in the sector, with virtual networking strategies being crucial for practitioners in rural and remote regions.

Access to regional and local networks can enhance sector knowledge and practitioner engagement with the CoP.

Regular communication for relationship building is important to practitioners, informing the planning of engagement activities and community building.

The CoP can serve as a platform to connect practitioners with training opportunities, resources, and experts, particularly those supporting newcomers and Francophone practitioners.

Overall, the findings emphasize the need for diverse and inclusive offerings, a centralized resource database, access to relevant data, and support in building strong partnerships and collaborations. Practitioners are eager to actively contribute, share tools and resources, and collaborate with their peers within the CoP. The valuable insights and experiences gleaned from C2C have been assimilated and incorporated into comprehensive engagement strategies, resource dissemination, and meticulous event planning, all aimed at bolstering the productivity, fostering the professional growth of practitioners and supporting the collective evolution of the skills and workforce development ecosystem in Canada.

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Introduction

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is focused on strengthening Canada's skills training and workforce development ecosystem by fostering a network of innovative partners preparing Canadians for the future of work. Essential to its mission is a pan-Canadian community of practice shaping the framework for the way we collectively approach workforce and skills development in this country.

A successful community of practice must be curated to serve the needs and interests of practitioners and be beneficial to their day-to-day goals while promoting their engagement with peers. Consequently peer-to-peer activities, the development and sharing of knowledge products and facilitated learning opportunities should be informed by those needs and interests.

Conversations to Connections (C2C), spearheaded by Research Impact Canada in partnership with FSC, was designed to directly engage with practitioners across Canada. The relationship building and insight gathering objectives of C2C were intentionally developed in order to incorporate the experiences and voices of practitioners into the foundation of a community of practice serving their needs. Throughout C2C, a broad and diverse group of practitioners were provided the opportunity to share the successes as well as barriers and challenges organizations face within the workforce skills and training sector. They were also provided the space to share important sector topics and the types of resources and activities that would be beneficial to the work of their organization.

The evidence-based approach of connection building and information gathering performed throughout C2C provides outlines of practitioner priorities for community of practice engagement. The systematic approach of outreach and analyses of practitioner insights highlighted regional-specific distinctions, specific sector themes, and practitioner priorities for engagement that can be leveraged for future community of practice activities. Beyond building relationships with new and pre-existing CoP practitioners, these findings identify the types of network connections practitioners rely on for their work and who they would like to build connections with; the challenges and the gaps of knowledge they are facing in their work; what they value in a community of practice and how they would like to contribute to building the FSC community of practice.

Methodology

Environment Scan and Practitioner Outreach for Engagement

To gain practical insights from new practitioners from relevant groups within the workforce and skills development sector as well as from pre-existing collaborators from FSC's network, a multiphase approach to engagement was developed.

In Phase I (August – November 2022), the focus of outreach was on FSC collaborators based on contact information provided by FSC. These practitioners were contacted by email or telephone with information outlining the purpose and goals of the C2C initiative and were provided the opportunity to engage in a one-on-one conversation via ZOOM with a member of the Research Impact Canada Community Engagement team. To maintain uniformity between each conversation with practitioners, a conversation guide outlining the questions and the types of information to be gathered was used (Appendix 1. Conversations to Connections - Phase I: Conversation Guide, p. 36). Prior to one-on-one conversations, practitioners were informed of their anonymity regarding their contributions to the initiatives. A total of 80 FSC practitioners were contacted resulting in 48 one-on-one and group conversations, representing a 60% response rate.

Phase II of the initiative (October 2022 – January 2023) focused on outreach and engagement of new practitioners not already part of the FSC network.

A pan-Canadian lens was applied to identify organizations in the workforce and skills development sector representing at least one of the following practitioner groups:

Employment and Skills Training Providers	Researchers	Policy Makers	Business, Industry and Labour Groups
• assist individuals with their career development and job-seeking endeavors • offer guidance, assessments, and personalized career plans • actively establish connections between job seekers and employers • provide ongoing support and resources, ensuring clients' needs are met • oversee comprehensive training initiatives to enhance employability and skills	• research new technologies and approaches to enhance skills training methods • analyze the effectiveness of existing training programs and test innovative models to address current and the future of work • collaborate across the sector to identify areas for improvement and implement evidence-based recommendations for optimizing skills training and workforce development	• play direct roles in shaping policies and strategies directly impacting the skills and workforce development sector • analyze labor market trends, devise inclusive workforce development plans, and establish partnerships to foster economic growth, social equity, and a skilled workforce • role in allocating resources, including funding across the sector	• promote essential literacy and numeracy skills • collaborate with stakeholders to assess regional labor market needs and develop strategic initiatives • bridge the gap between industries and training providers, ensuring relevant and up-to-date training strategies • promote partnerships to foster a skilled workforce • advocate for workforce policy and foster employer engagement
Sample Audience Career counselors, job developers, case managers, program managers, frontline workers	**Sample Audience** Researchers at post-secondary institutions, non-profit organizations, think tanks, government, evaluation organizations.	**Sample Audience** Members of municipal, regional, provincial, territorial governments, governing members of indigenous communities.	**Sample Audience** Members of literacy groups, workforce planning boards, industry councils, chambers of commerce, unions.

Scoping the ecosystem across Canada required leveraging access to information from multiple sources in both English and French including individual networks and government directories. A systemic approach was applied to scan each region of every province and territory of the country. Overall, outreach was made to 2866 practitioners across all 10 provinces and 3 territories. Practitioners contacted were provided with a brief introduction of the partnership between FSC and Research Impact Canada and an overview of the FSC Community of Practice. In contrast to Phase I, practitioners identified in Phase II were provided with two distinct opportunities to contribute their insights to Conversations to Connections:

1. One-on-one conversation via ZOOM with a member of the Community Engagement team in their preferred language (English or French).

2. An anonymous, online survey available in English and French (Appendix 3. Conversation to Connections - Survey, p. 41). Upon completion of the survey, practitioners were presented with the additional opportunity to request direct engagement with a Community Engagement team member.

As with Phase I, a conversation guide outlining the questions and the types of information to be gathered to maintain uniformity between each conversation with practitioners was used (Appendix 2. Conversations to Connections - Phase II: Conversation Guide, p. 38). Prior to one-on-one conversations, practitioners completed a digital information and consent form and were informed of their anonymity regarding their contributions to the initiatives (Appendix 4: Information and Consent Form for Participation in Future Skills Centre Community of Practice Evaluation, p. 46).

Over the first weeks of outreach for Phase II, an over-representation of senior leadership and management roles of respondents was noted. This may have been due to the contact information for the organizations identified directed the outreach to these officials. To reach more diverse roles of practitioners, a concerted effort was made to identify the staff across the levels of each organization including frontline workers. This supported the purpose and intent of C2C to gain a comprehensive collection of insights and challenges as well as identify potential benefits and collaborative opportunities for an inclusive community of practice for the workforce and skills development sector.

Overall, outreach to non-FSC practitioners totaled 2866 and resulted in 141 one-on-one and group conversations as well as completion of 135 anonymous online surveys, representing 10% response rate.

Evaluation Approach

All one-on-one conversations were documented through note taking. No conversations with practitioners were audio or video recorded. Transcripts of notes were identified prior to analysis. Quantitative practitioner data and survey as well as qualitative analyses of conversation transcripts were performed using Condens analysis using a cloud-based software[1]. Qualitative codes were developed from conversation transcripts. Codes were grouped based on common ideas and topics and categorized based on the conversation themes. Identification of categories and patterns of data were used to understand and interpret the collective data from conversations.

Data from the survey responses was compiled from Survey Monkey and analyzed using Condens.

Considerations for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The representation of responding practitioners across various practitioner categories was assessed based on predetermined target measures aimed at ensuring inclusivity of participants.

[1] Condens analysis is a qualitative research method used to analyze data from interviews or other forms of qualitative data collection. To conduct a Condens analysis, the researcher starts by reading through the data and identifying initial codes or categories that stand out. These initial codes are then compared and refined to develop a set of categories that capture the key themes in the data. The researcher then creates a condensed description of each category, which summarizes the key features of that category in a few words. These condensed descriptions are used to develop a set of subcategories, which further refine and specify the meaning of the category. Finally, the researcher integrates these categories and subcategories into a theory or understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Overall, Condens analysis is a useful method for analyzing qualitative data and allows researchers to identify and organize patterns in the data, making it easier to understand and interpret qualitative data.

Demographics

In building an inclusive community of practice, C2C aimed to gain insights and hear the experiences of a comprehensive collection of practitioners from across every region in Canada.

Northern Territories

1% (n=3)

1% (n=3)

1% (n=4)

6% (n=18)

6% (n=17)

3% (n=9)

3% (n=9)

6% (n=17)

Pacific Region

54% (n=154)

6% (n=18)

2.5% (n=7)

3% (n=9)

3% (n=9)

Atlantic Region

Prairies Provinces

Central Canada
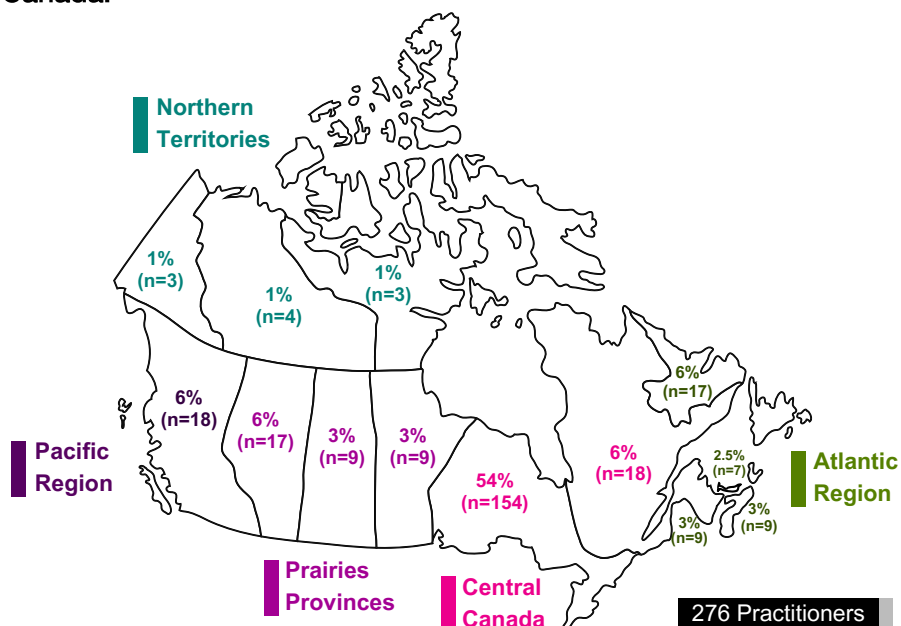
276 Practitioners

Demographics by Geography

All defined Community of Practice practitioner groups (see Methodology) were represented by C2C participants across each individual province and the territory of Canada. Based on the DEI considerations developed for the project, practitioners from the Atlantic provinces (NB, NS, NL, PE; 15%) and Central Canada (QC, ON; 60%) exceeded the targeted representation for these regions (5% and 55%, respectively). In contrast, there was a below target rate of response from practitioners in the Prairies (AB, SK, MB; 13% v 20%), West Coast (BC; 6% vs 10%) and the Northern Territories (YT, NT, NU; 3% vs 5%). Practitioners supporting rural and/or remote regions represented half of overall participants, well exceeding the project's DEI target.

Demographics by Practitioner Group

Practitioners identifying as policy makers (6% v 6%) and business, industry and/or labour groups (13% v 10%) were well-represented among total respondents while employment and skills training providers (58% v 70%) and researchers (10% v 14%) fell short of the targeted demographic representation.

Overall, 58% of practitioners identified as employment and skills training providers, 36% identified as business, industry and/or labour groups, 10% were researchers, 9% were education service providers and 6% were policy makers. Two practitioners from the sector could not be defined within one of these five practitioner groups.

Of note is the fact that the project was successful in engaging frontline employment and skills training providers beyond the targeted measure (41% v 30%). Frontline providers represented 54% of survey respondents and 28% of one-on-one conversations.

Demographics by Job Role and Area of Work

The top three job roles of responding practitioners were senior leadership (e.g. Executive Director, Director, Chief Executive Officer; 30.2%), management (e.g. Manager, Supervisor, Team Lead; 24.3%), and Workforce/Skills training practitioner (e.g., Career Counsellor, Instructor, Facilitator, Job Developer, Case Manager, Program/Project Coordinator; 19.4%)

The top three areas of work of responding practitioners were Employment and skills training service organizations (39%), Community and social service providers (21.1%) and post-secondary institutions (9%).

Job Roles of Responding Practitioners

Advisor / Consultant	2.6%	
Other	6.3%	
Administration	0.4%	
Workforce /Skills Training Practitioner	20.7%	
Technical Staff	0.4%	
Senior Leadership	32.1%	

25.8%	Management
1.5%	Communications
3.7%	Educator
0.4%	Human Resources
5.2%	Research / Policy
1.1%	Self-Employed / Business Owner

Area of Work of Responding Practitioners

Employment and Skills Training Service Organizations	Community and Social Service Organizations	Post-Secondary Institution	Government municipal, provincial, federal, indigenous
39.3%	22%	9.4%	7.2%

Demographics by Client Demographic

Francophone respondents made up 10% of total participants, with 6 one-on-one conversations and 22 surveys completed by francophone practitioners. Language preferences were not considered in the DEI targeted measures for the project. Of note that all respondents were from either Ontario or Quebec, with no representation from outside central Canada.

Indigenous supporting organizations represented 6.6% of total practitioners. These practitioners made up 8% of survey respondents and 5% of respondents participating in one-on-one conversations.
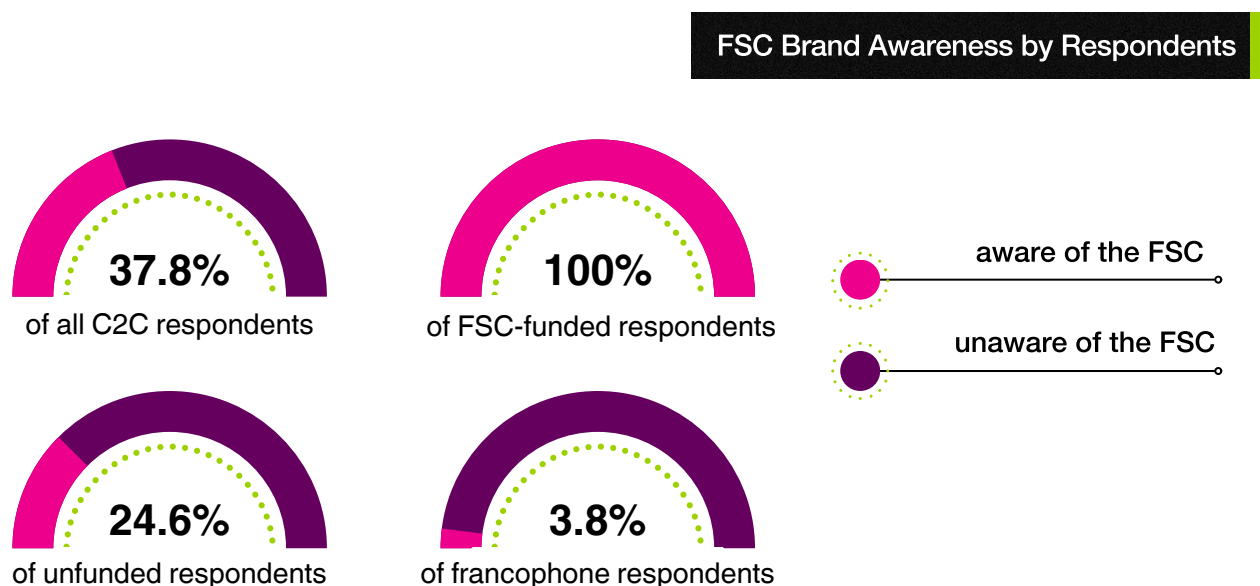
Overall, 14% practitioners reported serving newcomers while 16% reported serving youths. The number of practitioners reporting to support underserved communities was captured from 147 completed surveys: 11% serve women, 8% serve racialized communities, 7% serve persons with disabilities, and 7% serve the LGBTQ community. Practitioners reporting to support these communities and who participated in one-on-one conversations represent 11.3% of all conversations completed.

Awareness of the Future Skills Centre

Overall, 20% percent of respondents throughout the study noted that they were currently or had previously worked on an FSC funded project while 74% had never received funding from FSC and 6% stated that they were unsure about funding history with FSC.

Respondents were inquired about their awareness of FSC, encompassing factors such as name recognition, mission understanding, knowledge of activities, events, and funding opportunities. The results showed that an overall 37.8% of respondents were familiar with the FSC. Among those who had not previously received funding from FSC, only 24.6% were acquainted with the organization. Interestingly, the brand awareness rate was significantly lower at 3.8% among Francophone respondents.

The FSC funded project practitioners in Phase I, all reported being registered members of the Community of Practice platform (Magnet). Of the practitioners engaged in Phase II of the C2C project, 90% stated that they were not part of the FSC Community of Practice platform.

FSC Brand Awareness by Respondents

37.8%
of all C2C respondents

100%
of FSC-funded respondents

24.6%
of unfunded respondents

3.8%
of francophone respondents

aware of the FSC

unaware of the FSC

Summary of Practicable Insights

- Continue to build connections through engagement with practitioners from central Canada and the Atlantic provinces; inroads to be made for engagement in the western provinces and northern territories.

- Enhance FSC community engagement and involvement including implementing targeted promotional campaigns aimed at practitioners in the skills and workforce development sector nationwide.

- Engagement by frontline workers was significantly greater through asynchronous engagement (survey) compared to synchronous engagement. This suggests asynchronous resources may be preferred for this group of practitioners in the sector.

- Over a tenth of respondents represented underserved communities indicating that this sector is interested in engagement with the CoP. The needs of these distinct populations should be defined and considered in developing CoP offerings.

Collaborations and Partnerships

To better understand the landscape of existing partnerships and collaborations in the sector, practitioners were asked to share their experiences creating connections and working with networks of practitioners and community partners.

The majority of practitioners formed connections and partnerships with individuals, with organizations and with networks that had shared values, provided diversity of thought and experience and, most impactfully, shared a common mission. While the description of shared resources and collaborations reported mirrors those of a CoP, few practitioners referred to these types of networks using the term.

Practitioner Partners and Colloborators

Practitioners reported having partnerships and collaborations with a broad range of organizations specializing in varied skills and workforce development topics. The most reported connections were with community and social service organizations, economic development organizations, post-secondary institutions, secondary school boards, educational services including literacy and basic skills organizations, career development organizations, labour market researchers, chambers of commerce, local industry groups, local businesses (employers), and government agencies (municipal, provincial, and federal).

The collaborative relationships formed across the sector were aimed at supporting a diverse cross-section of the population: mid-career job seekers, unemployed persons, youth, newcomers and international students, students, francophones, self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs, persons with disabilities, job seekers with low literacy and essential skills gaps, indigenous communities, and equity-deserving groups.

Overall, practitioners serving rural and/or remote communities reported more local partnerships and collaborations compared to practitioners in urban areas. In contrast, those in urban areas reported more regional and provincial collaborations. Québec had the highest reported levels of regional and provincial collaborations compared to local collaborations than any other province and didn't report any connections outside of the province. Only 15% of survey respondents from across the country reported only pan-Canadian collaborations. This information was not collected from practitioners completing one-on-one conversations.

The networks and communities of practice having value to their work were shared by practitioners. The details about identified networks and communities of practice have been withheld to uphold the confidentiality policies and research ethics protecting individuals and sensitive data sources.

Benefits of Collaborations Across the Sector

Practitioners shared both general and specific examples of the benefits of partnerships and collaborations to their organizations. In general, practitioners listed knowledge sharing, information sharing, resources, ideation, shared funding, and service delivery as the advantages they experience through collaboration.

Information sharing allowed practitioners to increase awareness of their programs, projects, and events across the community to increase participation and recruitment. This information sharing also helped increase partner-based referrals to their programs. One way practitioners share information is through newsletters or email blasts to their network and/or being cross promoted through newsletters shared by their partners.

In addition to sharing information about their own organization, practitioners rely on partnership networks to grow their understanding of the types of services and organizations found in their local community, in the region and across their province. An increased awareness of offerings by the sector better informs practitioners of the resources available to better support their mission.

Practitioners most reported sharing of best practices as an advantage of working with partners. The topics ranged from service delivery, project development, evaluation, inclusive practices, engagement, and retention strategies, working with underserved populations, mental health supports and fundraising. Several practitioners reported wanting knowledge about lessons learned to grow as a sector rather than wasting time and money replicating failed strategies.

Collaborations provided practitioners with a broad range of resources to support organization staff and clients including professional development and training modules, certification for in-demand skills, mentorship programs, and labour market information (LMI). As a means of cost mitigation, partner organizations participate in mutually beneficial training for professional development and have shared staffing capacity for service delivery.

> 66 *Our partners share connection to industry practitioners and businesses, facilitating relationships with employers* 99

How Practitioners Grow Their Networks

The approaches taken by practitioners to create new connections and expand their network varied based on the goals of the outreach. Making connections in person was the preferred means for practitioners to meet and develop a new relationship. If an in-person meeting is not an option, practitioners use email or engage in online network platforms to seek connections. Virtual communication strategies are essential for practitioners serving rural or remote communities and lacking the ability to regularly network in person. Program advisory boards and existing organizational partnerships were reported as effective leads in expanding networks for collaborations. In the case of practitioners working with Indigenous communities, engagement of elders from the Indigenous communities being served support relationship building with new community members.

Best Practices for Strong Relationships

In addition to willingness to collaborate, openness and trust were essential to establishing strong relationships in which ideas, knowledge, expertise, and operational supports were to be shared. Practitioners valued regular communication for maintaining relationships. Regular meetings with partners and practitioners (in person or virtual), asynchronous communications (email or

messaging on networking platform) and being proactive in maintaining touch points were reported to be important in maintaining engagement between partners.

No network is homogenous, each is created based on the unique needs of the community. Practitioners supporting diverse communities have required new partners and members of their advisory boards to complete mandatory equity, diversity, and inclusion training. For some, this includes community-based cultural training to ensure that partners understand the people they are working to support as well as the barriers they are working to break down together. For organizations serving or seeking to serve Indigenous communities, practitioners are required to learn how to respectfully build relationships through Indigenous traditions and how to work outside of the conventional western construct of ownership.

Good partners equally support each other through various means including sharing service/project information, referring clients or project participants, shared resources, etc. However, practitioners noted that partnerships have dissolved when the benefits of a collaboration were unequal, with one partner contributing supports without receiving any contributions in return. A partnership agreement outlining the terms and expectations of a collaboration could help strengthen relationships and support sustainable collaborations.

> " *We all had different philosophies over multiple levels of government, but we worked together for the common goal.* "

Challenges of Growing Collaborative Partnerships

The main challenge practitioners reported is the time required to build the solid foundation needed to develop and maintain strong relationships. The capacity to connect regularly, contribute equally and support their partners is very time consuming for many who are in understaffed organizations. Virtual communication is the most time efficient means to connect, but establishing the trust needed for a growing connection is made more challenging when most interactions are carried out virtually.

Another concern voiced by practitioners who have worked in the sector for several years was the occasions of building a partnership to share ideas and resources only to have the partner(s) not contribute to the collaboration. The fear of ideas being stolen and the investment into building the relationship squandered causes hesitations and risks dissuading practitioners from joining networks. For these practitioners who did not see the value for themselves noted that such connections would be of benefit for those new to the sector to get access to resources and connect with people outside their organizations.

Some practitioners reported regional and organizational policy barriers restricting certain types of collaborations. A few others cited competitiveness (largely funding based) that prohibited their abilities to connect and share knowledge with other practitioners in the sector. One practitioner

working in a remote community emphasized that these barriers make them feel isolated within their own community of practice.

Summary of Practicable Insights

- Defined advantages of collaborations and partnerships valued by practitioners that can be provided to the CoP.

- In addition to in-person networking opportunities, practitioners indicated their engagement with various online network platforms to build connections across the sector.

- Virtual strategies for networking and collaboration are essential for organizations practicing in rural and/or remote regions of the country.

- Access to regional and local networks of practitioners would provide opportunities to increase sector knowledge while also increasing practitioner engagement with the CoP.

- Practitioners indicating a preference for regular communication for relationship building is a valuable insight in the planning of engagement activities and community building with the CoP.

- In response to insights shared, a monthly newsletter has been created by Research Impact Canada to provide subscribed practitioners with updates on upcoming CoP events, innovative programs, news, and practical resources. It also features stories of success and lessons learned from CoP member organizations from across the skills and workforce development sector.

- In response to the challenges regarding building partnerships and collaboration shared by practitioners, RIC has launched a Professional Development Toolbox Series webinar entitled "Collaborating for Success: Strategies for building strong workforce development partnerships" on February 28th, 2023. The recording of the webinar and the associated resources were published online and shared with the CoP in the newsletter.

Common Challenges

Most of the challenges reported by practitioners are categorized into 8 themes:

Funding

Barriers to access, bureaucratic constraints and lack of sustainability built into funding models represent the general challenges practitioners face regarding funding in the sector. For smaller organizations, barriers to simply accessing grants and funding opportunities can be prohibitive. One practitioner identified a paywall blocking access to grant opportunities while others reported a general lack of capacity (time, resources) for the consultation, access to quality research/data and level of program development required prior to qualifying to apply for funding. As a consequence, Communities are not being adequately served due to a general lack of accessibility to funding opportunities.

Practitioners that have successfully developed programs faced different challenges. Many of the funding streams and grant opportunities available in the sector were reported to be restrictive in scope, favoring 'in the box' thinking versus innovative projects and collaborations that more adequately meet their community's needs. One practitioner was concerned with what they saw as a trend where funders prioritized pre-existing training programs regardless of their effectiveness over funding the development and support of responsive training approaches. Other practitioners expressed the need for funders to expand the scope of funding, to consider less traditional, more holistic approaches that have been effective in practice. Another concern of this restrictive scope was that by financing duplications of service within a region, funders were driving unnecessary competition for clients and funding opportunities leading to barriers for collaboration and partnerships.

> 66 *Agencies and government pin groups against one another for funding when they would be better served by supporting collaborative grants [..] Funding available is typically strict in its scope and doesn't support organizations being innovative and 'drawing outside the lines' of what their organizations are supposed to do in terms of traditional methods.* 99

Short funding cycles were reported to be restrictive to the development and establishment of projects. The issues being addressed by funding are not temporary. They are typically deep-seeded issues that require time for projects to take root and impact their communities. Short cycles threaten the relationships built between the frontline workers and clients when services are abruptly terminated. Sustainability of funding to support the longevity of effective programing was suggested as a point of consideration in updating funding models. Stable funding would allow the sector to tackle more meaningful challenges within the workforce (i.e. high staff turnover, training capacity, and resources) and drive local business and industry development over a reasonable timeline.

Recruitment and Retention of Talent Within the Sector

Practitioners from across the country highlighted understaffing in their organizations as a challenge. The main reported reasons for understaffing are retirements, high rates of turnover due to short

contract/funding cycles, and workers exiting the sector. Along with the loss of workers, organizations are facing an on-going loss of institutional knowledge. One respondent shared "With the turnover and a lot of senior people in the sector leaving, the loss of knowledge is impacting the sector like crazy. When those people are gone, you no longer have that relationship history."

To fill the gaps, practitioners reported staff working multiple roles, having a continuously overflowing workload and a stress on their time. Organizations successful in hiring new staff reported having many offers declined or the new staff simply not reporting for duty. Those that have successfully recruited staff report a higher then precedented need for professional development for new hires causing additional strains on time and financial resources. A common recommendation from these practitioners were standardized processes for onboarding staff in the sector and mentorship programs that would support experienced workers imparting practical institutional knowledge.

> 66 *Staffing shortage, currently down 4 frontline staffers. Universal in the sector, reduces the capacity of our staff to work towards creating new programs or doing much professional development.* 99

Supporting Newcomers

While practitioners across the country are eager to engage with newcomers seeking a path into the workforce, a broad range of challenges face the sector. Practitioners working with diverse communities including newcomers reported challenges of virtual service delivery. In addition to language barriers, cultural differences in social cues and body language made it hard for frontline workers to build strong and trusting relationships with clients.

Beyond language barriers and the traditional barriers to employment, practitioners reported a general lack of expertise needed to help clients navigate the immigration system and regulations they are mandated to follow. Several practitioners reported hiring immigration consultants to have a better understanding of the legislation while others have formed partnerships with local non-profit immigration organizations for their expertise. A stronger knowledge foundation in immigration policies and laws will be needed as the sector continues to support the integration of newcomers into the labour market.

> 66 *Currently have a few consultants on retainer regarding immigration policies and laws. Would prefer to have dedicated staff as consultants do not have the time or resources to work with our clients and partners in a meaningful (one on one) manner.* 99

The readiness of the sector to support newcomers and create connections with employers has not always been matched by employers with negative perceptions toward the newcomer demographic. There are many misconceptions around the cultural differences and talent pool of newcomers being developed by the sector. A specified challenge was how to translate newcomers' credentials into skills recognized by employers looking to grow their workforce. The greater challenge of promoting social inclusion in local workforces will require sector

practitioners to continue to create meaningful partnerships, employers championing newcomers and positive community engagement.

Policy Barriers

Top-down policies from various levels of government are focused on service delivery quotas and checkbox reportable results with inconsistencies between those requested by various levels of government. These types of policies do not align with the goals of organizations within sectors and the needs of communities being served. They are also reported to compound workloads without additional compensation in a sector facing staffing shortages. One practitioner stated that policy makers "laid a framework with all the wrong metrics". Practitioners expressed a need for flexibility to allow curation of services based on the unique needs of the populations being supported. They are largely constrained by policy in how and what they can deliver by policies and/or operations agreements laid out by provincial governments.

> 66 *Data driven requirements of ministry reporting have compounded the workload with no additional compensation. For example, a 1-hour meeting with a new clients will mean 4 hours of reporting work.* 99

As boots on the ground, organizations consider themselves best positioned to be responsive to the needs of the local workforces and want more municipal and regional support in driving local workforce development policy initiatives. Practitioners working directly with representatives of the government felt their policy advocacy was productive. In contrast, those interacting indirectly felt their advocacy involved too many layers of political bureaucracy and lacked a structured communications process. If practitioners work collectively as a unified voice rather than as individual organizations, policy advocacy for the sector may be more impactful.

> 66 *No way to get feedback from policymakers on whether briefs are being read by the right people or even being delivered.* 99

Virtual Service Delivery & Client Recruitment and Retention

Virtual service delivery has become common place since the COVID-19 pandemic. The main advantages of virtual tools have been a more convenient means to meet with clients, especially those geographically distant or financially unable to commute. Frontline workers reported that virtual tools made their work convenient but were not the preferred methods for establishing connections and most effectively supporting their clients. They also reported several barriers for clients created by virtual service delivery such as limited access to current technology tools, unreliable digital infrastructure and gaps in the digital literacy needed to engage in virtual programming. This platform also prevented frontline workers from supporting programs focused on developing social and emotional skills.

Practitioners reported struggling with recruitment and retention of participants in training and employment support programs across the sector. Despite the expanded reach to participants through virtual tools and methods, infrastructure (internet connectivity, transportation), clients' vulnerable environments and accessibility issues remain barriers to participant engagement. Others shared that there is a lack of awareness of the services the sector provides for career development beyond helping with resumes and interview skills.

Role for Employers

Labour shortages across the country seem to have started the conversation of how employers should view their role in workforce development. Practitioners report that they are interested in engaging employers to rethink how industry does things such as hiring and skills training. Working to bridge the skills and expectations gap between job seekers and employers would help practitioners support the needs of both. However, it is an ongoing challenge to change the culture around the role industry needs to play in training for the skills demands they are facing. Practitioners report working with employers who are willing to learn and support the training needed to fill the gaps in their workforce with the required skills but there remains a lack of staffing and financial capacity in industry. Given the lack of capacity for this scale of training by the workforce and skills development sector, this challenge presents an opportunity for the sector to work more closely with employers.

> 66 *How do you make employers want something that they don't know would be good for them?* 99

Challenges by Province, Geography

Staff recruitment and retention challenges were reported across the country, predominantly in organizations working in rural and/or remote communities. These challenges were mostly highlighted by practitioners in Ontario, Québec, and the Atlantic provinces (NB, NS, PEI, NL).

Challenges presented by policy barriers were largely shared by practitioners working in British Columbia, the Prairie provinces (AB, SK, MB), and central Canada (Ontario and Québec). Few instances of policy-based challenges were reported in the Atlantic provinces.

Organizations supporting rural and/or remote communities reported unique infrastructure challenges. The capacity to deliver services online increased since the COVID-19 pandemic and have helped circumvent some of the transportation barriers faced by clients seeking in person training. However, practitioners reported continued lack of access to adequate technology, internet capacity, and poor network security for clients being supported. These were also barriers for access to staff professional development opportunities that could not always be accessed in person due to budgetary constraints. Fortunately, an increase in professional development opportunities made available virtually has helped ease some of these budgetary pressures over the past couple years.

Challenges of Francophone Practitioners

The lack of a centralized platform for French forward resources and professional development was a reported challenge and gap for francophone practitioners. Francophone practitioners reported challenges in accessing resources for professional development and service delivery for their French speaking clients. Due to lack of capacity to outsource development or stay current

with resources being shared among English facing networks, francophone practitioners reported requiring the use of staff time, and funding to develop current and relevant resources. The capacity to support this organization-based program development is limited by the time and expertise of the already overextended staff.

Summary of Practicable Insights

- The significant burden reported due to elevated levels of turnover could be supported through offerings centered around 1) organizational succession planning and the development of mentorship programs to re-enforce retention of institutional knowledge; and 2) supporting the development and/or access to standardized processes for onboarding staff.

- Recruitment challenges were most widely reported in rural and/or remote regions of central and Atlantic provinces, a consideration for future CoP offerings on this topic.

- In response to the reported mental health impacts of understaffing across sector, a CoP professional development toolbox webinar entitled "Creating a Culture of care: Addressing Mental Health in the Skills and Workforce Development Sector" was presented in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) on May 1, 2023. The associated resources of the webinar were published online for asynchronous access by practitioners.

- The CoP may serve as a community to connect practitioners with training opportunities, resources and experts in the sector working to support newcomers. Examples of potential offerings include providing networking opportunities and forums for discussion between experts and practitioners from across the country.

- Practitioners are eager to engage and support employers seeking to recruit, retain and train staff and would value strategies for best practices. They would also value resources on how to better engage with employers to promote social inclusion of newcomers and to help newcomers more readily integrate into local workforces.

- Practitioners reported a general lack of awareness of the services and expertise that they offer by the communities they serve, and seek innovative approaches to effectively communicate their offerings. The Professional Development Toolbox Series webinar entitled "Storytelling with purpose for impact" was developed in part to address this concern and was presented March 30th, 2023. The recording of the webinar and the associated resources were published online and shared with the CoP in the newsletter.

- Many of the common challenges shared by practitioners are founded on policies that cannot be directly addressed by the CoP. However, the CoP can support collaboration and collective work of practitioners by facilitating connections with policy experts and policy makers regarding concerns reflected across the sector.

- Francophone practitioners expressed an interest in the development of a network for francophone skills and workforce development practitioners across Canada to connect, learn, and collaborate with one another.

Knowledge and Resources Gaps

For most practitioners, the most cited missing element in the sector is a centralized, open-access database housing knowledge products and actionable research, a repository of training and learning resources, practical templates, and tools. Practitioners were interested in contributing to such as a repository with their own resources, best practices and case studies as means to grow the collective knowledge and support others within the sector. Practitioners repeatedly reported wanting a platform to share successes and lessons learned, with a forum to discuss experiences in curated groups of peers. An additional asset mentioned is a searchable directory of practitioners to facilitate relationship building and connect with others doing similar work.

Six common themes emerged regarding the other reported gaps in the sectors.

The Connectivity Gaps

The universal gap across all practitioners was the gap in connectivity with their peers across provincial and territorial boundaries. Efforts to bridge this gap would lead to:

- better understanding of practitioners across Canada
- breaking down existing silos within the sector
- building a stronger network of collaboration
- bridging gaps in sharing knowledge, innovative practices, and lessons learned
- greater opportunities for peer learning opportunities
- increase capacities and reduce redundancies

FSC collaborators are eager to connect with other practitioners across the sector, especially with other FSC project practitioners. Important to their willingness to engage is the development of an interactive 'matchmaking' process in which an individual would create connections with practitioners with shared research and project goals. The potential for this to be hosted on a platform that can facilitate relevant connections and connect members of the Community of Practice to networking activities may be an alternative means to engage practitioners.

> " *We want to know what is going on across the country? What projects and practices have been successful? What lessons have been learned that can be applied to our practice?* "

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Knowledge and Policy Gaps

The gap in diversity, equity, and inclusion knowledge was reported by practitioners who expressed wanting to better develop programming for underserved demographics, who want to be able to provide practical support to employers navigating cultural differences, and frontline workers and researchers working to build relationships with newcomers and underserved populations. Researchers and practitioners working in employment support services are also interested in welcoming the participation of Indigenous communities. However, they expressed uncertainties in how to build these partnerships constructively and respectfully.

In providing specific considerations, practitioners want practical DEI training resources designed for staff, for job seekers and for employers, with Truth and Reconciliation as a component of the

resources. In general, practitioners want more knowledge products and tools to better support newcomer integration into the workforce including:

- evaluation of credentials acquired outside of Canada and translation of skills.
- how to identify, prepare and support employers hiring and retaining newcomers.
- foundation building in a community to support newcomer inclusion.

Employment service providers working directly with newcomers voiced a need for more resources to better their understanding of immigration policies and the factors driving the policies for newcomers in the workforce development sector.

The Data and Information Gaps

The reported gaps in data and information were mentioned by nearly all practitioners but the themes that each group of practitioners identified varied. The theme that was reported across the sector was the need for more information sharing, especially case studies sharing the successes and failures being experienced across the sector. Such case studies can include successful practices, methodologies, and evaluation strategies as well as the challenges faced and (possibly) overcome along with lessons to be learned by other practitioners.

Labour market information was a challenge noted by practitioners working with or in smaller, rural, and remote communities. Not only is this data difficult to collect, access to much of the data can be behind paywalls. Some organizations that reported being able to access LMI data for their regions often face a significant amount of data suppression due to population size and distribution. This gap in information can be costly for economic development and researchers that require this information for access to funding and business development opportunities. For community-based employment services, lacking this information can make it challenging for program development and planning for the local workforce.

Practitioners who have worked on FSC-funded projects shared specific gaps in knowledge tools that would make their work more impactful:

- tools to support project development process at each stage including essential DEI considerations.
- practical guides to evaluations methodologies for projects.
- steps to assess the feasibility of scaling up projects.
- resources on how to scale projects efficiently and effectively.

The operations management and policy gaps

Practitioners holding senior leadership roles, primarily employment services providers, reported a significant gap in the resources and tools to support succession planning and the transfer of institutional knowledge in non-profit organizations. This was a concern given the rate of retirements within senior leadership roles within the sector being reported by respondents. Others highlighted the need for better training and tools to support operational management of non-profit organizations, specifically regarding financial and fund management.

The Professional Development Training Gaps

Employment service providers reported a gap in access to standardized training, onboarding resources and career development for a broad range of roles within their organizations. This is a significant gap given the rate of turnover across roles and the increased need for professional development resources reported by practitioners.

Frontline workers in the sector were among the majority of practitioners reporting the need for more mental health training to support their clients, their coworkers and themselves. Examples of topics shared include suicide prevention training, non-violent crisis intervention and de-escalation training. A greater awareness of the impacts of mental health issues on job training and employment is needed to develop best practices for quality of work.

Sector-specific training and network opportunities were requested by practitioners supporting apprenticeships into the trades, childcare, health care, and agriculture. Business and economic development practitioners reported a need for access to practical tools for entrepreneurs that would help support them from the ideation stage to being an operational entity.

For some of the practitioners citing a gap in professional development, lack of accessibility (financial) and issues with capacity were reported as a contributing factor.

The (Practical) Tools Gap

Practitioners were eager to share the types of tools and practices they are missing from their toolboxes; practical and applicable resources such as toolkits, checklists, action plans, user-friendly materials that are openly accessible. FSC project practitioners highlighted wanting the tools developed through their work or used to support the project development processes to be more readily accessible to practitioners across the sector [2]. More importantly, interactive guidance on how to effectively use these tools within the context of their work would make access to these tools more impactful.

> " *We created an online platform for this project which has lasted well after the funding has stopped. This is a great resource we would love to share with the larger community of practice.* "

[2] Standardized certifications are available in Alberta, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia for several roles at time of this report.

Summary of Practicable Insights

- A centralized database of resources available via an open-access digital domain for practitioners to connect with fellow practitioners, with experts, with knowledge and with learning opportunities was cited by nearly all respondents as a valuable component to a CoP.

- Practitioners value opportunities to connect and network with others from across the sector. They would also appreciate curated connections with practitioners having shared professional interests and goals.

- Several offerings for the CoP have been developed and/or are currently ongoing in response to the connectivity gap identified:

  - Themed Peer-Learning Group series: provide an opportunity for fellow skills and workforce development practitioners from across the skills and workforce development sector and industries to connect, share, and learn from each other.

  - Cohorts of Engagement: small, curated groups of practitioners from similar domains within the workforce and development sector connecting through facilitated synchronous and asynchronous engagement to share insights, lived experiences and to work towards breaking barriers faced in their work.

  - Ignite - Thematic Roundup events: Skills and workforce development practitioners connect with representatives of economic sectors to gain insights into innovative programs, share localized realities and provide an opportunity for peers to expand their network and engage with one and other across Canada.

- Practitioners identified a broad gap in available resources, training, and data to better support underserved communities. Efforts to close this gap may include better information sharing across the sector, potentially providing a centralized domain for practitioners to both contribute to, and gain knowledge from, other CoP members.

- Practitioners understand the value of relevant LMI and would benefit from a better understanding of where to find this data and how best to apply this data to their work.

- Given the high rate of turnover and loss of institutional knowledge across the sector, practitioners seek direction towards resources and relevant training opportunities for operations and financial management of non-profit organizations.

- Practitioners who have worked on FSC-funded projects want greater accessibility and guidance resources for knowledge tools that would increase the impact of their work. Practitioners who have not been funded by the FSC similarly expressed the lack practical tools specific to the needs of their work in the sector.

- A CoP Resource Hub curated to provide practical tools to help a broad range of practitioners is in development. The contents of this Resource Hub will be based on the insights and needs of practitioners with offerings expanding and evolving with the needs of the CoP.

Features Practitioners Value in a Community of Practice

Practitioners want a community of practice that provides an inclusive and accessible space for learning, for sharing ideas and experiences while also building relationships with their peers. With a solid foundation, the Community of Practice will drive engagement of practitioners across the sector to work collectively in creating innovative, evidence-based strategies for the sector to effectively prepare and support the future workforce. Unlike other networks, practitioners do not want this community of practice to be an exclusively virtual ecosystem. Practitioners want the opportunities to engage with their peers at in-person events and activities curated for members of the Community of Practice. A hybrid approach of activities further supports the vision of fostering an inclusive and accessible community of practice.

Opportunities for Relationship Building

Practitioners are eager for opportunities to network with peers, share experiences and develop ideas to be cross-pollinated across the sector. Opportunities for peer connections should be crafted to be inclusive and accessible to all practitioners within the sector. The need to break down existing silos and promote interconnectivity is important to practitioners.

Practitioners are also interested in curated connections by means of interactive engagement by a facilitator to foster relationships between peers who may share common visions, project goals, or have relevant resources to share. These curated connections may be one-on-one peer interactions or small groups of peers engaging with one another in space where exchange of information is beneficial to all participants. Peer-led learning activities and facilitated small peer group discussions would be beneficial for practitioners to connect around common goals and challenges.

Activities and Resources to Engage Practitioners

In addition to networking opportunities, practitioners recommend a broad range of offerings curated for the community of practice including:

- actionable research and publications
- Labour Market Information (LMI)
- FSC project reports, resources, and tools
- project planning and evaluation tools
- standardized learning modules
- client demographic-specific tools
- webinars and interactive learning groups
- best practices
- practitioner reporting on challenges, failures and lessons learned across the sector
- calendar of events from practitioners across the sector

In line with ensuring equitable access to all community of practice practitioners, an inclusive lens needs to be applied to all content, language and program design provided to practitioners. Access

to activities and resources should also strike a balance between asynchronous and synchronous formats, being mindful of geography.

Finally, several practitioners voiced that it would be beneficial to receive actionable information, added resources, and upcoming events by email in a timely manner to maintain engagement in the Community of Practice.

An Engaging Community of Practice Platform

Practitioners want a platform that is open access, easy to navigate, with relevant offerings valuable to their work. As part of these offerings, practitioners want to contribute relevant knowledge, tools, and resources they have developed to be accessibly shared with their peers.

A searchable directory of practitioner profiles and contact information would allow peers to create new connections outside of Community of Practice activities or facilitation according to the needs and timelines of practitioners. Additionally, a handful of practitioners voiced the potential benefits of regular touchpoints, and community engagement lead by an FSC facilitator with members participating on the virtual community of practice platform. Moreover, opportunities to communicate within small groups or a forum on the platform broadens the accessibility and inclusivity of peers unable to come together in person.

Summary of Practicable Insights

- Practitioners want a balanced CoP providing both synchronous and asynchronous virtual offerings as well as in-person opportunities to engage.
- The CoP should foster an inclusive and accessible space for all working to better the sector.
- Practitioners value opportunities to network and connect in a variety of forums in the goal of connecting with others having shared interests and challenges.
- Despite the range of activities highlighted, efforts must be made to ensure an equitable and inclusive approach is applied to all offerings (content, language, design, delivery).
- In response to practitioners wanting to receive timely actionable information about the offerings of the CoP, a monthly newsletter has been created to provide subscribed practitioners with updates on upcoming CoP events, innovative programs, news, and practical resources.
- Practitioners emphasized the benefits of having a digital, open-access platform to connect with fellow practitioners, with experts, with knowledge and with learning opportunities as well as being a touchpoint to engage with members of the FSC CoP team.

Potential Contributions by Practitioners to the Community of Practice

An essential feature of the community of practice is the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources relevant to the success and adaptability of the workforce and skills development ecosystem. Practitioners are eager to leverage their expertise and contribute resources, tools, and best practices to a community of practice alongside their peers to co-create a space for learning and discussion.

Practitioners offered to a variety of contribution types including:

- Facilitation of synchronous virtual events (i.e. webinars)
- Pre-recorded presentations
- Workshops and training modules
- Data sharing and knowledge products
- Tools and resources
- Cross-promotion of activities with their networks
- Information from networks and community of practices relevant to the sector

Practitioner groups shared a broad range of relevant resources and tools they would like to contribute. Researchers and FSC practitioners want to share relevant evidence-informed findings and tools generated to support practitioners across the workforce and skills development ecosystem. Bridging the gap that currently exists between these practitioner groups would mean promoting the practical application of innovative tools and approaches. This group of practitioners also expressed wanting to share practical tools for project development and evaluation, best practices, barriers, and lessons learned to support the work of their peers while also serving to prevent duplication of efforts.

> 66 *We have 5 years of knowledge and data collection—heavily leadership focused for BIPOC communities and women.* 99

> 66 *We recently had a 4-year project evaluated that began with a practitioner consultation that informed the work. The evaluator was impressed with this approach and said it could be used with other organizations doing similar projects. We want to be able to share stuff like this.* 99

The themes of contributions shared by the other practitioner groups overlap with the knowledge and resource gaps and the challenges summarized in this report. Examples of resources and tools topics included:

- Increasing community engagement and support for newcomers
- Recruitment and retention practices for clients
- Job matching strategies that are responsive to local economic needs
- Building programming responsive to workforce
- DEI best practices and toolkits to provide equitable support across demographics
- Accessing standardized training for staff
- Grants and fundraising
- Policy advocacy
- Practical human resources knowledge and tools
- Sharing practical experience, stories of success stories, roadblocks and lessons learned in the field
- Mental health and trauma informed support training for practitioners and clients

Summary of Practicable Insights

- Practitioners are eager to actively contribute to the CoP in several ways and consider the CoP as a space for co-creation, problem solving and learning from fellow CoP members.
- The CoP could serve as an impactful space for practitioners to share tools and resources such as those developed by FSC-funded projects.
- Several respondents highlighted their expertise regarding topics that have been identified as challenges or gaps by practitioners. These experts could be leveraged for future activities developed for the CoP.

Closing Remarks

A successful community of practice is tailored (in some cases co-created) to cater to practitioners' needs and interests, providing peer-to-peer activities, knowledge sharing, and facilitated learning opportunities. The Conversations to Connections (C2C) initiative successfully engaged practitioners across Canada, providing valuable insights and forming the foundation for the Future Skills Centre community of practice in the skills and workforce development ecosystem. Through an evidence-based approach, the gathered insights shed light on practitioner priorities, regional distinctions, and sector themes, informing future community activities.

As part of a successful community of practice, practitioners across Canada emphasized the value of a centralized database of resources for training and actionable research and insights from across the skills and workforce development sector, opportunities for networking and curated connections with peers.

Several themes emerged as practitioners across the country expressed their professional priorities and the needs of their communities. The most prominent common challenges shared related to funding, including barriers to accessing grants and funding opportunities, restrictive scopes that favor conventional approaches over innovative projects, and short funding cycles that hinder long-term impact. Barriers such as paywalls and lack of capacity further hinder practitioners' ability to qualify for funding. The need for sustainable funding models and expanded scopes that support collaboration, innovation, and address long-standing community issues were emphasized by many across the country. Long-term funding would enable practitioners to address critical workforce challenges, such as high staff turnover and limited training capacity, while driving local business and industry development.

Practitioners emphasized the significance of networking among peers in the skills and workforce development sector, in collaboration, and in developing virtual strategies to support underserved populations and remote communities. Effective communication strategies were recognized as crucial for promoting services and expertise, while practitioners sought connections with policy experts and policymakers to address sector concerns. Staff turnover emerged as a significant challenge, prompting the need for guidance and strategies in recruitment, retention, and training, including organizational succession planning, mentorship programs, and standardized training processes.

Practitioners in the workforce sector are enthusiastic about assisting newcomers in finding employment opportunities, but they face various challenges. One significant obstacle is the practitioners lack expertise in navigating immigration systems and regulations, prompting them to hire consultants or partner with non-profit immigration organizations to provide the necessary support. Overcoming negative employer perceptions and misconceptions about newcomers'

cultural differences and skills recognition poses another challenge, emphasizing the need for partnerships, employer advocacy, and community engagement to promote social inclusion in local workforces.

Organizations representing underserved populations are eager to share their experiences and build constructive partnerships to enhance the voices of their communities. In the case of Indigenous supporting organizations, they shared that Indigenous communities want to form a network to support each other's skills and economic development, to facilitate peer connections, learnings, and collaborations. The FSC community of practice is currently well positioned to provide support to the Indigenous practitioners leading the creation of this network and to learn from their activities.

These findings will be invaluable in informing future community activities, the further development of a centralized database of resources and peer networking opportunities. To maximize value in an open-access and inclusive space, practitioners expressed a need for practical tools, guidance resources, and a balanced mix of synchronous and asynchronous virtual offerings. Practitioners underscored the value of sector-aligned opportunities to gain knowledge and experience from the expertise of their peers while also expressing an eagerness to contribute, co-create, and problem-solve within the community of practice. The insights gathered from Conversations to Connections offer an evidence-based foundation for the strategic growth of the FSC community of practice. They have identified key challenges that will serve as the basis for future action planning as we continue to foster responsive collaboration and sustainable communication with professionals across the skills and workforce development community.

Appendix 1: Conversations to Connections - Phase I Conversation Guide

Conversations to Connections Primer for Practitioners:

Research Impact Canada is a pan-Canadian network dedicated to maximizing the impact of research for the public good and a leader in Knowledge Mobilization across Canada. We are working on behalf of the Future Skills Centre (FSC) to develop a CoP in the workforce and skills development space across Canada, which is why I am grateful you are able to speak with me today.

We are reaching out to practitioners, researchers, developers (as many people as we can working in this space) to understand the needs and what might be of value as we work to build a CoP that provides the opportunity to connect, share and learn across the workforce and skills development space.

We value the impact you and your organization play in the sector and want to hear your ideas about creating a CoP across Canada's workforce and skills development ecosystem.

Before we get started, do you have any questions for me?

Questions and Sub-questions for Discussion

1) Hoping we can chat about the nature of collaborations you have with other practitioners in the workforce and skills development ecosystem, whether locally, regionally, provincially, and/or across Canada. What do you find to be most effective when building partner relationships?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- Do you regularly engage with partners when building out projects?
- How do you incorporate collaboration into the projects' design?
- How do you ensure projects you work on address needs within the community?
- What strategies do you use to build community collaboration?
- Which strategies have been the most effective for you in your work?
- What are the challenges you experience with collaboratively designed projects?
- How do you engage with community organizations to ensure lessons learned are applied?

2) Next, I wanted to chat about what types of activities you find valuable in terms of assisting your work or professional development. CoP activities can take place in person, online, through collaborative research projects, or as a combination of web-based, written, and in-person activities. What will create value-add to your organization when participating in a Community of Practice for the workforce and skills development sector - what could your organization contribute to the CoP and what components and information in the CoP would benefit your organization and clients?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- What knowledge/resources/information would you add to the CoP that can benefit other practitioners in the CoP?
- How would you envision your organization adding value to the Community of Practice (ie. What would your inputs be?)
- What would you like to get out of a Community of Practice that would provide value to your organization and the clients you serve? (ie. What would your outputs be?)
- What format(s) would work best for the inputs and outputs indicated above (ie in-person events, speed networking, webinars, etc)
- How often would you like to connect with other members of the CoP (either in-person or 'live' online)?

3) Lastly, taking into consideration any shifts that may have happened due to the pandemic, I am hoping we can chat a little bit about how, if any, your interaction with clients & practitioners might have changed over the past 5 years or so? (Examples – programming, technology, types of clients)

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- In what ways have the skill sets changed for this industry (ie agriculture, retail automation) within the last 5 years?
- Have the clients you serve changed?
- Are programs you are offering no longer relevant?
- Are the programs you offer more relevant now than when they were created?

*If the project is developing a Tool that FSC wants us to ask about, ask to following questions. If not, skip to Wrap-up section.
  1) I also want to ask about the Tool you are developing as part of your project.
  2) Is the tool available/ready to be shared with the broader employment and training ecosystem?
  3) Who can best use this tool (ie who do they want to share it with?)

Conversations Wrap-up:
Would you be interested in having a follow-up conversation with us, after some of the ideas we discussed today have been implemented?

Do you have any last questions for me?

Closing Remarks:
Thank you for your time and conversation today. Please reach out to me afterwards with any other considerations from our time together today.

Appendix 2: Conversations to Connections - Phase II Conversation Guide

Conversations to Connections Primer Discussion:

Research Impact Canada is a pan-Canadian network dedicated to maximizing the impact of research for the public good. We are a leader in knowledge mobilization across Canada. We have been working on behalf of Future Skills Centre (FSC) to develop a Community of Practice (CoP) in the workforce and skills development space across Canada. We are refreshing their Community of Practice activities to focus on network connections, community building, peer learning and exchange, and access to experts, tools, and resources.

Are you familiar with FSC?

□Yes □No

- If yes,
  Have you participated in the FSC Community of Practice (including Refresh Activities such as Peer Learning Groups, Panelist Networking Events, UX Design, etc)?
  □Yes □No

- If yes,
  Are you a member of the CoP Platform?
  □Yes □No

Thank you for sharing.

I'll provide a bit more info about FSC Community of Practice before we go to the questions:

A Community of Practice is defined as a community of people (I.e., a network) who share a common interest, have a set of related goals, who come together to learn, share information to reach individual and group objectives.

FSC grounds their CoP around 3 themes connecting People 2 People, People 2 Knowledge, and People 2 Learning. Some activities will take place directly online on the CoP platform, while other activities will include events, workshops, peer learning groups and one-on-one conversations such as this one.

We are reaching out to practitioners, researchers, and practitioners to understand the needs and what might be of value as we work to build a Community of Practice.

We'd like to hear from you about what you would like to gain and contribute to a CoP. This could be access to online training, resources, and relevant news. Engaging with others in the industry across Canada and developing relationships for future collaborations.

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Experience with Skills Training Community of Practice

1) Do you have experience participating in a skills training community of practice?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- Tools - Did you get any tools that were helpful for your work from the CoP
- Knowledge - How do you share resources and information within your community or to the public? (Research reports, data, event outcomes, etc.)
- Best practices - Are there central themes/alignments that are integral to your organization and community
- Peer connections/networking - How has your organization successfully collaborated with local/regional workforce
- Professional development – how does your organization and/or community maintain continual learning
- Probe: Relevant events, webinars, workshops - What types of activities do you find create the most engagement in your community?
- Probe: Research with actionable tips and insight – How do you ensure that you're not reinventing the wheel, are there tips you would like to share that have been helpful in your organization?
- Probe: Professional development opportunities – What kinds of PD offerings are you most interested in?

Section 2: Challenges, Barriers Faced by Practitioners

1) What are common challenges that your organization is trying to tackle right now to develop and/or implement skills training and development programs /initiatives/ research/policies?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- Changes to service delivery
- Capacity concerns i.e. staffing, funding, resources
- Access to relevant tools i.e. relevant LMI
- Knowledge gap i.e. evaluation methods, LMI analysis, policy writing

2) Imagine your organization had all the resources and capacity needed to be successful - what goals would your organization be able to achieve?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- How do you envision the program/initiative/research/policies would look like?
- What kinds of tools would be most helpful for your organization?
- Are there any resources or supports that would be most beneficial?
- What kind of CoP collaboration(s) would be most helpful to your organization?

Section 3: Potential Benefits to, and Contributions from, your Organization to the CoP

1) The FSC is always wanting to learn from other CoPs and looking to expand its CoP. If you and/or your organization were to participate in the FSC Community of Practice, what would the benefit be from being part of the Community of Practice?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- Tools
- Knowledge
- Best practices
- Peer connections/networking
- Professional development
- Relevant events, webinars, workshops
- Research with actionable tips and insight
- Professional development opportunities what kinds of PD opportunities are you most interested in

2) If you and/or your organization were to participate in the FSC Community of Practice, how could you contribute?

Probes for information we are looking for in this question:
- Tools
- Knowledge
- Best practices
- Peer connections/networking
- Professional development
- Relevant events, webinars, workshops
- Research with actionable tips and insight
- Professional development opportunities what kinds of PD opportunities are you most interested in

Section 4: Conversation Wrap-Up Questions

1) Would you be interested in having a follow up conversation with us, after we've incorporated the insights from the C2C conversation into the CoP?

2) Would you be interested in connecting with other organizations that are doing similar work?

3) Do you have any last questions or insights you'd like to share?

Closing Remarks:
Thank you for your time and conversation today. Please reach out to me afterwards with any other considerations from our time together today.

Appendix 3: Conversations to Connections - Survey

Survey was made available in English and French using the Survey Monkey platform for the duration of Phase II.

Introduction: Conversations to Connections
We want to hear from you! Research Impact Canada (RIC), in partnership with the Future Skills Centre (FSC) wants to build a Community of Practice (CoP) from the ground up that is valuable for diverse practitioners across the workforce and skills development ecosystem. Part of that is learning from your organization: what do you need and want from the CoP? How does that look in practical terms? Learning which types and formats best support your work is the key to building meaningful engagement for all collaborators connected throughout the CoP, no matter where they live in Canada. This survey will take approximately 7-10 minutes to complete. Answering these questions is completely up to you. Whether or not you choose to answer the questions, and how you answer them, will not affect your participation in Future Skills Centre programs, funding, or activities. Individual survey responses will remain confidential. RIC will combine your responses with those of other participants, and findings will be shared at the group level with the FSC. You can review the Information and Consent Form for Participation in Future Skills Centre Community of Practice Evaluation here. At the end of the survey, there will be an option for you to set up a follow-up conversation with a member of the Research Impact Canada Team. If you would prefer to answer the survey question in French, please click hereto be redirected. If you have any questions about the survey, need support completing this survey, or would like an accessible or alternative format of the survey, please contact Trudy Button at Research Impact Canada at tbutton@yorku.ca.

Consent
Do you consent to doing this survey?
      □ Yes, I consent to take the survey
      □ No, I do not consent to take the survey

Section 1: Collaboration

We'd like to know if you have experience collaborating with workforce/skills development practitioners on programs/projects, or to share resources, best practices, and exchange knowledge.

1) What types of collaborations do you have the most experience with? Please select all that apply.
      □ Local (town, city)
      □ Regional (county, region)
      □ Provincial/Territorial
      □ Pan-Canadian (collaborations across multiple provinces and territories)
      □ Other (please describe)
      □ Not applicable

2) Please share examples of successful collaborations you have had with practitioners in the workforce/skills development ecosystem (locally, regionally, provincially, pan-Canadian).
[Text box provided]

Section 2: Community of Practice Activities

Community of Practice activities are focused on network connections, community building, peer learning and exchange, and access to experts, tools, and resources.

1) What would you like to gain from a workforce and skills development Community of Practice? Please select your top 3 choices.
□ Tools
□ Knowledge
□ Best practices
□ Peer connections/networking
□ Professional development
□ Relevant events, webinars, workshops
□ Research with actionable tips and insight
□ Other (please describe in text box provided)

2) What would your organization be able to contribute to a workforce and skills development Community of Practice? Please select your top three choices.
□ Tools
□ Knowledge
□ Best practices
□ Peer connections/networking
□ Professional development
□ Relevant events, webinars, workshops
□ Research with actionable tips and insight
□ Other (please describe in text box provided)

Section 3: Information About Respondent

The remaining short survey questions will ask about the type of work you do (e.g., your role, type of work, location of work). The information will be used to help the Research Impact Canada team better understand who is participating in the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice, so that offerings are relevant and beneficial for diverse practitioners.

1) Which of the following best describes your role:
□ Workforce/Skills training practitioner (e.g. Career Counsellor, Instructor, Facilitator, Job Developer, Case Manager, Program/Project Coordinator)
□ Educator (e.g. Teacher, Guidance Counsellor, Professor, Librarian, Childcare Worker)
□ Technical staff (e.g. Information Technology Specialist, Systems Administrator)
□ Self-employed/business owner
□ Administrative staff (e.g. Office Administrator, Executive Assistant)

□ Communications (e.g. Communications Specialist, Marketing Manager)

□ Management (e.g. Manager, Supervisor, Team Lead)

□ Senior Leadership (e.g. Recruiter, Human Resource Specialist)

□ Advisor/Consultant (e.g. Academic, Research, Policy, Business, Climate and Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility Advisors and Consultants)

□ Other (please describe in text box provided)

2) Which of the following best describes your area of work? Please select up to 2 areas of work that apply.

□ Employment and skills-training service organization

□ Community and social service organization

□ Government (i.e. municipal, provincial/territorial, federal)

□ Research/policy organization or think tank

□ Early childhood education

□ Public/private school or board

□ Post-secondary institution

□ Industry association/sector council

□ Chamber of commerce/board of trade

□ Media/communications

□ Health care services

□ Arts, entertainment, and recreation

□ Accommodation and food services

□ Retail/wholesale trade

□ Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting

□ Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction

□ Construction/manufacturing

□ Transportation and warehousing

□ Other private services (i.e., small, medium, large employer, enterprise, corporate business)

□ Other (please describe in text box provided)

3. Do you work frontline with clients to deliver employment/skills training services?
  □ Yes
  □ No

4. Which of the following best describes the clients you serve? Please select all that apply.
  □ Indigenous Peoples
  □ Women
  □ Racialized people
  □ 2SLGBTQ+ people
  □ Persons with disabilities
  □ Veterans
  □ Canadians living in rural, remote, and Northern communities
  □ Youth and early career (up to 35 years old)
  □ Mid-career workers (35-55 years old)

□ Older workers (55+ years old)

□ Entrepreneurs/small business owners

□ Apprentices

□ Newcomers, immigrants, and refugees

□ Oil and gas workers

□ People with essential skills gaps

□ People without post-secondary education

□ Support workers

□ Unemployed

□ Other (please specify in text box provided)

5. Select the province or territory in which you work:

□ Alberta
□ British Columbia
□ Manitoba
□ New Brunswick
□ Newfoundland and Labrador
□ Northwest Territories
□ Nova Scotia

□ Nunavut
□ Ontario
□ Prince Edward Island
□ Québec
□ Saskatchewan
□ Yukon

According to a report by the Government of Canada, rural and remote communities (including small towns) have a population of fewer than 10,000 people.
Rural communities have less than 50% of the population commuting to an urban location for work.

Remote communities either have no residents that commute to an urban location for work, or live/work in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik or Nunatsiavut.

6. Do you work and/or serve populations in rural or remote communities?

□ Yes
□ No
□ I'm not sure

7. What is your preferred working language? Please select all that apply.

□ English
□ French
□ Other (please describe in text box provided)

Section 4: Awareness of Future Skills Centre

1) Are you familiar with the Future Skills Centre's Community of Practice?
□ Yes
□ No
□ I'm not sure

2) Are you currently working on a project/program that is funded by the Future Skills Centre?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I previously worked on a Future Skills Centre funded program/project

☐ I'm not sure

Follow-up

We value your impact on the workforce and skills training ecosystem and want to hear more about your thoughts and ideas for the Future Skills Centre's Community of Practice activities.

Would you be open to a follow-up conversation with a member of the Research Impact Canada team to share your insights?

☐ Yes

☐ No

[If Yes] Please select how you would like us to follow up with you.

☐ Participate in a virtual one-on-one interview (e.g., Zoom, phone call)

☐ Participate in a virtual group discussion (e.g., focus group)

Virtual One-on-One Interview

If you would like to schedule a meeting to further discuss FSC's Community of Practice with a member of the RIC team in English, click here. [Link to Calendly C2C event scheduling page]

Virtual Group Discussion

Please provide your email address and we will be in touch to schedule a virtual group discussion. [Text box provided]

[If respondent indicates interest in a follow-up conversation with a RIC team member]

Please select the Province/Territory where you work. Please select all that apply.

☐ Alberta

☐ British Columbia

☐ Manitoba

☐ New Brunswick

☐ Newfoundland and Labrador

☐ Northwest Territories

☐ Nova Scotia

☐ Nunavut

☐ Ontario

☐ Prince Edward Island

☐ Québec

☐ Saskatchewan

☐ Yukon

Appendix 4: Information and Consent Form for Participation in Future Skills Centre Community of Practice Evaluation

Form shared electronically using Google Forms and submissions verified by the Community Engagement team prior to conducting one-on-one conversations with practitioners.

INFORMATION FORM

Who is conducting the interview/focus group and why?

Research Impact Canada, in partnership with the Future Skills Centre, is providing new offerings through the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice. The Research Impact Canada team would like to hear from you about your experience participating in and/or accessing FSC CoP activities, events, services, and offerings.

Why are you being invited to participate and what are the benefits?

The information will be used to help the Research Impact Canada team better understand who is participating in Future Skills Centre activities, events, services, and offerings, so that offerings are relevant and beneficial for diverse practitioners.

With your consent, Research Impact Canada's Community Engagement Team may also facilitate warm connections between yourself and other skills-training and workforce development practitioners to share ideas, best practices, tools, and resources.

What does participation entail?

The interview/focus group questions will ask about your experience participating in Future Skills Centre Community of Practice, and some demographic questions related to the type of work that you do.

As part of your participation, we are inviting you to meet with Research Impact Canada staff virtually, for a 20-30 minute interview or focus group via video conferencing (Zoom) or telephone, so that we can understand your experiences and perspectives in an environment in which you are most comfortable. Please note that we will be taking notes during the call to make sure that we have captured all of the information and insights that you share, so that we don't forget anything. Documenting this interview/focus group will allow us to share findings from you and other skills-training and workforce development practitioners as applicable.

Are there any risks to taking part?

We have designed our activities to minimize risk wherever possible. It's possible that some of the questions that you'll be asked during the interview/focus group may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any question(s) if talking about them makes you feel uncomfortable. You can also take a break or decide to stop taking part in the interview/focus group at any time.

Whether or not you choose to answer the questions, and how you answer them, will not affect your participation in Future Skills Centre programs, funding, or activities.

Who will have access to my information?

The Research Impact Canada team will ensure that your personal information and interview/focus group responses are confidential. Research Impact Canada will combine your responses with those of other practitioners, and findings will be aggregated/combined at the group level with the Future Skills Centre.

Any data about you that is shared with the Future Skills Centre will be de-identified. This means that Research Impact Canada staff will remove your name and other identifying information from the data set, so that the combined/aggregated responses do not contain any of your identifying information. Research Impact Canada will never share your personal information with the Future Skills Centre, or any other party. Your information will not be used for any other purpose than the evaluation.

What happens to my information after the interview is over?

Any interview notes, practitioner information, or documentation of activities completed as part of the evaluation will be collected, transferred, and destroyed securely. Electronic data with identifiable information (e.g., your name, email, demographic information) will be stored securely and protected by password, with access restricted to staff who need to see the data for the evaluation. Only Research Impact Canada staff will have access to data with identifiable information during the evaluation of the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice.

Data collected from the evaluation of the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice will be stored for one year after the end of the evaluation (September 30, 2023) and will be securely destroyed on September 30, 2024.

What are my rights?

Your participation in the evaluation of the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate will not affect your participation in Future Skills Centre programs, funding, or activities.

You can decide not to participate, to withdraw your participation at any time, and to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you withdraw your consent, your information and interview responses and any other data that you've shared will be destroyed immediately.

Who can I contact?

You have a right to request a copy of the personal information we hold about you. You may also ask that we update or correct your personal information. For more information about how we protect your personal information, to request access or correction to your personal information, or to withdraw your participation in the evaluation, please contact Research Impact Canada staff Trudy Button tbutton@yorku.ca or Bissy Waariyo bissyw@yorku.ca.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in an interview/focus group for evaluation purposes to improve Future Skills Centre Community of Practice activities,events, services, and offerings. In particular:

1. I acknowledge that I have reviewed and understood the information above. I understand that my participation in these interviews/focus groups, including providing my consent, is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.
2. I acknowledge I am aware of who to contact (listed above) in order to obtain more information or to end my participation in the interview/focus group.
3. I understand that my participation in the interviews/focus group will be documented via notetaking.
4. I acknowledge that Research Impact Canada may facilitate warm connections between myself and other skills-training and workforce development practitioners.
5. I understand that my name and identifying information will never be shared with anyone outside the Research Impact Canada team.
6. I understand that my decision to participate or not participate and the answers I give will not affect my participation in Future Skills Centre programs, funding, or activities.

Informed consent (Please check any of the boxes below which apply)
    □ I consent to participate in an interview/focus group for the evaluation.
    □ I do not consent to participate in an interview/focus group for the evaluation.

Provide Name (first and last)
  [text box on virtual form]

Provide Email
  [text box on virtual form]

Note:
Exemption granted to Research Impact Canada, York University, by the York University Research Ethics Board (REB) for participation in FSC of Practice Evaluation Activities. This exemption certifies that the research conducted by Research Impact Canada in this context is in compliance with the ethical standards and guidelines set forth by York University's REB.

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