

Empowering Canada's Workforce for a Sustainable Future

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) Community of Practice (CoP) is a pan-Canadian network for skills and workforce development stakeholders across diverse sectors and industries to connect, share, and learn from each other. As part of the CoP, Research Impact Canada, in collaboration with FSC, is hosting virtual themed Peer Learning Groups to facilitate an open discussion among peers in an informal shared space.

On September 13th, 2024, Research Impact Canada and the Future Skills Centre hosted a Peer Learning Group called Empowering Canada's Workforce for a Sustainable Future. The goal of the peer learning group was to facilitate an open discussion among participants in an informal and safe shared space.

In this session, we discussed skills and knowledge needed to equip Canada's workforce to thrive in the transition towards a net-zero economy. The session began with a presentation by Hem Dholakia, Senior Research Associate at the Smart Prosperity Institute, who shared key findings on the emerging opportunities within Canada's clean economy, with case study examples from the zero-emissions vehicles, plant-based protein, and mass timber industries.

Participants were then invited to join small breakout groups for free-flowing moderated discussions, responding to the question:

How have you/your organization navigated the challenges and opportunities in preparing the workforce for a sustainable, net-zero economy? Are there specific strategies, tools, or partnerships that have been particularly effective?

WHAT WE HEARD

Workforce development requires inclusive and intersectional approaches.

- Participants highlighted the importance of expanding the hiring pool to include diverse talent, not only in terms of ethnicity and gender but also age and socioeconomic backgrounds. Inclusive hiring practices should be paired with supportive infrastructure such as housing and child care to enable retention and growth within the workforce.

Collaborative efforts are essential for long-term success

- There was a strong emphasis on the need for cross-sectoral collaboration between organizations, industry leaders, and thought leaders focused on sustainable workforce development. Participants agreed that planning ahead and fostering partnerships across sectors are key to success in transitioning to a net-zero economy.

Investment in skills training and micro-credentials can bridge knowledge gaps

- Employers, not just educational institutions, must take an active role in developing their workforce by investing in sector-specific training, such as micro-credentials. This was seen as a potential way to bridge the skills gap in emerging industries like clean energy, agriculture, and construction, ensuring employees are equipped with the necessary technical and social-emotional skills.

Addressing the skills gap requires better alignment between education and industry

- Participants noted a disconnect between the skills graduates possess and the needs of employers, particularly in technical fields. Clearer communication and closer collaboration between post-secondary institutions and industry players are needed to design curricula that meet the evolving demands of a net-zero economy.

WHAT WE HEARD

The human element should be prioritized in policy and business strategies

- Beyond profit and efficiency, workforce development strategies should prioritize the human element, focusing on creating value-driven policies that consider employee well-being. Participants emphasized that policies should address not only the technical needs of the job market but also the social and emotional aspects of workforce participation, ensuring inclusive and equitable employment opportunities.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) and advisory boards are valuable tools for closing the skills gap

- Many participants pointed to WIL opportunities, such as internships and co-op placements, as crucial for equipping future workers with practical experience. Establishing local advisory boards to manage outreach and better align educational outcomes with industry needs was also suggested as a promising solution to address skills mismatches at the community level.

Bringing decision-makers together is key to driving policy change

- To create effective workforce development strategies, it's important to convene stakeholders from across the ecosystem, including policymakers, industry leaders, and education providers. Having decision-makers at the table was seen as essential for driving meaningful policy change and addressing the wider gaps in skills and workforce preparedness.

RESOURCE COMPILATION

[Skills Needs for Workers in the Growing Plant-Based Protein Industry in Manitoba and Saskatchewan](#)

These reports provide insight into the skills needs for workers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan's growing plant-based protein industry, especially around value-added agricultural manufacturing, and what steps can be taken by government, industry, and educational institutions to support workers.

- [Summary for Policymakers](#)
- [Ingredients for Growth](#)
- [Preparing for Plants](#)

[Skills Needs for Workers in British Columbia's Growing Mass Timber Industry](#)

These reports provide insight into the skills needs for workers in British Columbia's growing mass timber sector, and what steps can be taken by government, industry, and educational institutions to support workers and rural, resource-dependent communities.

- [Framing British Columbia's low-carbon future](#)
- [Making mass timber in Northern BC](#)
- [Skills needs for mass timber production and adoption in British Columbia](#)

[Skills Needs for Workers in Ontario's Growing Zero-Emissions Vehicles Sector](#)

These reports provide insight into skills needs for workers in Ontario's growing zero-emissions vehicles and battery manufacturing sectors, and what steps can be taken by government, industry, and educational institutions to support workers in this transition.

- [Skills needs for zero-emissions vehicle and battery manufacturing in Ontario](#)
- [Shifting Gears](#)
- [Future-proofing the automotive workforce](#)

RESOURCE COMPILATION

Careers in Energy

- A resource hub providing tools and information for careers in Canada's energy sector. They match information about the industry and labour market with the needs and interests of job seekers, employers, and industry stakeholders to ensure Canada has the skilled workforce required for a thriving energy sector today and tomorrow.

Indigenous Clean Energy

- A program supporting Indigenous leadership and workforce growth in clean energy. ICE supports Indigenous communities to be clean energy change agents through capacity-building, skills development, career training, and mentorship with high-quality and hands-on programming.

Forward Summit

- A conference that brings together the very best of Indigenous and non-Indigenous business & community leaders, and decision-makers from a variety of industries to collectively chart a new course into the future of leadership and innovation.

JOIN US!

To learn more and participate future Peer Learning Groups, check out our [website](#).