

NORTHEAST REGIONAL LABOUR MARKET STRATEGY



Northern Lights
College

Canada



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Labour Market Development Agreement.*

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Executive summary

The economy of Northeast British Columbia fluctuates. Natural resource industries such as oil and gas, mining, and forestry drive employment in the region, reflected in the high share of employment linked to the goods-producing sectors, and in trades and trades-related occupations. With limited economic diversification, as these sectors go, so goes the region. When these sectors are booming, jobs are plentiful and high wages and ample business opportunities make the Northeast hum. When the resource cycle inevitably turns down, steep drops in employment hurt many. The years from 2014 have been challenging for many individuals and entire communities. In 2017 and 2018, the consumer bankruptcy rate was the highest in the province.

Declining energy and coal prices since 2014 have led to numerous layoffs in the mining and oil and gas sectors. BC Hydro's Site C Clean Energy Project construction near Fort St. John and other infrastructure projects increased construction employment during this period, somewhat offsetting these job losses. Improvements in the price of metallurgic coal led to the reopening of two mines in 2016 and one in 2018. In 2018 TransCanada¹ announced that its \$6-billion Coastal GasLink pipeline (transporting natural gas from Groundbirch to Kitimat) would proceed, resulting in the creation of thousands of direct and indirect jobs through the 2020s and beyond. In December 2019, TC Energy announced pipe-laying would begin in the summer of 2020. Nonetheless, business incorporations declined between 2013 and 2018, as the economic downturn drove away residents and affected business prospects. Further, in 2019 the forestry industry went into crisis as the result of US softwood tariffs, lower US lumber prices and the lack of fiber supply in many areas. Sawmills and pulp mills experienced temporary production curtailments and some permanent closures, resulting in unpaid time off or job loss for hundreds of Northeast workers.

Other challenges are related to workforce demographics and the levels of education in the population. The Northeast has many workers in key occupations who will be retiring in the next five years. The challenge is that for some occupations in the trades and professions, a disconnect exists between the needs of employers and the existing labour pool within the Northeast. Almost 50 per cent of individuals between the ages of 15 and 64 have only a high school diploma or no formal qualification at all. Many Indigenous peoples are not participating to the fullest extent possible in the regional economy. Much more can be done at the local level to train and upgrade the existing labour pool.

Strategy development

After successfully leading a similar exercise in 2012, Northern Lights College decided to update a regional labour market strategy intended to align existing regional training to employment opportunities in 2020 and the years beyond. The college obtained funding from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, convened a project steering committee, and engaged consultants to carry out the update of the Strategy.

Strategy is based on data and statistics resulting from project activities carried out from April to November 2019. Consultants developed occupational projections and produced background research on labour force topics. They also interviewed 125 people throughout the Northeast and elsewhere, and conducted surveys and focus groups to obtain views on training gaps and issues. This document summarizes key findings emerging from the primary and secondary research. More extensive detail is available in background documents prepared for the Strategy.

Occupational demand outlook to 2028

British Columbia is undergoing unprecedented activity in large-scale construction projects. They include the \$10.7-billion BC Hydro Site C Clean Energy Project near Fort St. John, the \$40-billion LNG Canada liquefied natural gas plant in Kitimat, and one to two major pipeline projects that will likely be constructed by 2025, one starting in Groundbirch. In a 2016 analysis, Petro LMI forecast employment of 3,300 workers for pipeline construction at the peak of activity in year three.

Overall, the 2018 British Columbia Labour Force Market Outlook estimates a shortage of 15,500 workers in Northeast BC to 2028. Retirements drive approximately three quarters of this shortage. Only 27 per cent of the jobs to be filled are due to economic growth.

This report provides projections of job openings by occupational group between 2018 and 2028. Many of these occupations are trades and vocational related. Ample opportunities will also be available for individuals seeking careers in trucking, healthcare, education, business administration, and other non-trades and construction related fields.

Workforce and training challenges and issues

Some of the major themes that emerged through interviews, surveys, and focus groups include:

Leverage existing relationships, programs, and networks

Organizations in the Northeast have already built strong relationships and successful programs for training and skills upgrading. Further activities should build off of this foundation.

More skills upgrading and pre-employment training

Some potential workers from the region require significant basic educational upgrading and training in employment readiness and financial literacy. Interviewees raised this issue repeatedly, reflecting the large number of people in the Northeast who lack even a high school diploma.

Transportation barriers

This issue came up repeatedly. Spread out communities combined with long, tough winters can make travel for training hard and expensive. The lack of a driver's license and access to a vehicle prevents individuals from taking training and many jobs.

Mental health

For some people in the Northeast, pressing social, addiction, and mental health issues negatively affect their lives and leave them unprepared or unable to participate in training activities or the

workforce. Resource jobs have helped many, but a work camp lifestyle has led in some cases to family and community stresses. In some towns, layoffs and long-term joblessness have created tremendous hardship. Resources to address these mental health issues are in short supply.

Inability to recruit qualified entry-level and highly skilled technical workers

Small businesses can have difficulties finding suitable candidates for entry-level retail and restaurant jobs. Other employers have challenges finding candidates with highly technical skills needed for occupations like instrumentation and other skilled trades. Professional firms in accounting and law struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Need for economic diversification

Some interviewees called for initiatives to diversify the economy away from sole dependence on natural resource extraction and processing industries. These included strengthening the opportunities for producing value-added agricultural products, as well as exploring opportunities in technology industries.

Summary goals and actions

The Northeast Regional Labour Market Strategy Steering Committee developed objectives and recommendations that they believe are focused, practical, and achievable. They are based on the evidence collected through research activities, from the Northeast and elsewhere.

Summary of objectives and recommendations

Objective 1: Ensure the labour market information is widely distributed, to promote and support the hiring and retention of workers within and from outside the Northeast

- Recommendation 1.1** Develop print marketing materials and a social media strategy to communicate information on occupations in demand in Northeast BC.
- Recommendation 1.2** Convene a one-day regional meeting for adult training organizations and schools to share program information and discuss ways to effectively communicate labour market information.
- Recommendation 1.3** Develop a worker and family recruitment website to attract skilled workers and their families from outside the Northeast region.

Objective 2: Reduce barriers to workforce participation and increase supports, particularly among the under-employed, Indigenous people, and under-represented groups.

- Recommendation 2.1** Explore tie-ins and education, and training-related funding opportunities with the BC Mental Health Strategy.
- Recommendation 2.2** Develop or obtain and modify, and deliver a community training course Camp Life for Workers and their Families.
- Recommendation 2.3** Convene a one-day conference on a regional approach to taking action on driver's license issues.
- Recommendation 2.4** Update and deliver the successful Pathways to Success program to help individuals with multiple barriers find long-term jobs.
- Recommendation 2.5** Adapt and deliver a training program on financial literacy for Indigenous learners and other individuals who are interested and in need.
- Recommendation 2.6** Broaden the use of industry liaisons or mentors to help post-secondary learners and new employees more successfully transition to industry jobs.

Objective 3: Address current community and industry skill and training needs.

- Recommendation 3.1** Develop custom, first-level leadership training for employers.
- Recommendation 3.2** Explore economic revitalization possibilities in Fort Nelson through a guest speaker series.
- Recommendation 3.3** Obtain funding for and develop truck driver training programs based on the new BC curriculum for drivers operating on public roads. Develop retraining programs for experienced truck drivers as new regulations take effect.
- Recommendation 3.4** Develop a centre of distance education excellence in Northeast BC.
- Recommendation 3.5** Explore the development of a certified Introduction to Heavy Equipment Operations program.
- Recommendation 3.6** Explore offering new trades training programs that meet current and future needs of the natural gas and clean tech industries.
- Recommendation 3.7** Carry out a labour market study focused on the agricultural sector. Also explore developing an applied research program in climate change and its effects on regional agriculture.
- Recommendation 3.8** Develop a workshop on business management for contract individual workers.

Objective 4: Encourage regional economic diversification and innovation and prepare for future trends.

- Recommendation 4.1** Create a Northeast regional technology innovation centre.
- Recommendation 4.2** Explore opportunities available through the Capacity Building Program of the Digital Technology Supercluster Strategy 2018-23.

The years to 2028 will have their share of business and workforce challenges and opportunities. This Regional Labour Market Strategy provides a potential action plan to help address them. By considering training issues and taking action, leaders in the Northeast can help ensure that economic growth translates into long-term jobs, stronger businesses, and ultimately better and healthier lives for many.



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1. Introduction and background to the report

Major development in Northeast British Columbia will contribute significantly to overall economic growth in the province over the next two decades. In the longer term, strong demand from international markets for minerals, coal, and liquefied natural gas (LNG) will likely continue, which could sustain a prolonged period of economic growth and construction.

Even without new major projects, the Northeast region will have many new job openings to 2028, driven primarily by increasing waves of retirements, across sectors. In fact, almost 75 per cent of new jobs openings will arise because of older workers leaving the labour force.

To address regional training needs, the Northeast Regional Skills Training Plan was released in 2012 under the provincial government's BC Jobs Plan. It provided an occupational demand forecast and made recommendations to help improve training so that local people could fill local jobs. The recommendations from that report were largely unimplemented.

In 2019, a disconnect remains between the existing labour pool and the needs of major industry, social, health, and educational service organizations for entry-level and skilled labour. Many youth, older workers, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples were still not participating to the fullest extent possible in the formal economy. Employers in retail and restaurants continued to resort to employing international students from Northern Lights College, hiring Canadians from outside the region, seeking temporary foreign workers, or automating tasks that once provided entry level-jobs. While there will likely still be a need for specialized, highly skilled temporary workers in the future, more can be done at the local level to train the existing labour pool to fill many of these jobs.

This Northeast Regional Labour Market Strategy updates, deepens, and expands upon the research carried out for the 2012 Training Plan. The project objectives were to identify changes in the labour market and strategies that will be required as the province, industries, training providers and local communities move forward. The consultants were to base their recommendations on a detailed understanding of the labour market strategies specific to the Northeast British Columbia industries, communities, and its people. To achieve this goal, they carried out seven months of quantitative and qualitative research activities, with most interviews taking place face-to-face in communities throughout the region.

1.1 Project timeline and activities

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| March to April 2019 | <p>Project start-up and hiring of consultants</p> <p>NLC established the Steering Committee for the project and engaged Murray Slezak of Impact Resolutions to serve as co-chair. It then engaged Ingenia Consulting to serve as the lead consultants for the project.</p> |
| April to June 2019 | <p>Labour market research and projections</p> <p>Ingenia conducted secondary research to develop an overview of the Northeast population and labour force, which included specific data on the Northeast Indigenous population. It also prepared labour market projections, using British Columbia's Labour Market Outlook 2018 and a report on the natural gas sector produced by Petro LMI in 2016. Ingenia identified key economic drivers, analyzed labour demand from these activities, and identified the skills and training required to fill employment demand.</p> |
| April to August 2019 | <p>Supplemental secondary research</p> <p>Ingenia prepared four background research papers related to mining automation, industry and education partnerships, commercial driver training, and distance education practices for Indigenous learners.</p> |
| May to November 2019 | <p>Community research</p> <p>Ingenia carried out 118 interviews with employers, unions, training providers, social service agencies, schools, First Nations, Métis, and local, regional, and provincial government representatives, collecting the data to help inform recommendations. Ninety per cent of the interviews took place face to face during visits throughout the Northeast and Northwest. Ingenia also conducted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys with students at seven high schools throughout the region, receiving 228 responses. • Two focus groups with unemployed individuals. • Six presentations about the project to business groups and high school classes. • Murray Slezak of Impact Resolutions interviewed representatives from seven of the First Nations communities that form part of Treaty 8. |

October 2019

Draft recommendations and review

Draft recommendations were presented to the Steering Committee at a one-day working session. Comments were collected and incorporated.

Community meetings

NLC and the research team held community meetings in Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, and Fort St. John, seeking comments on the draft recommendations.

**November 2019 to
January 2020**

Final report

The Steering Committee reviewed and revised the final report.

This report provides a high-level overview and synthesis of the findings from the extensive research and analysis carried out. It begins by examining the results of the labour market quantitative analysis and then discusses some of the barriers to delivering workforce training in the Northeast. The next section reports on the findings of the qualitative research gathered during interviews, focus groups, and high school surveys. The document ends with recommendations that could address the issues uncovered.



2. A Northeast regional portrait: population, education, and labour market outlook

This section summarizes quantitative labour market research carried out in support of the development of the Labour Market Strategy.

2.1 Population characteristics

Understanding population characteristics is necessary when developing a regional labour market strategy. The tables and charts that follow summarize some key indicators and statistics related to the Northeast's population base.

As shown in Table 1 below:

- Men make up 51 per cent of the population in the Northeast while women make up the majority of the population in the province.
- At 16.3, the percentage of Indigenous peoples in the Northeast exceeds the provincial average of 5.9 per cent. However, the percentage of immigrants, at 8.3 per cent, is about a third of the provincial average of 28.3 per cent.

Table 1. Northeast British Columbia population characteristics

| Characteristic | BC | Northeast |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Population (2016) | 4,648,055 | 68,335 |
| Percentage of total BC | 100% | 1.05% |
| Population growth (2011–2016) | 5.6% | 4.1% |
| Population density per square kilometre | 5.0 | 0.3 |
| Male | 49% | 51% |
| Female | 51% | 49% |
| Indigenous peoples (percentage of population) | 5.9% | 16.3% |
| Immigrants (percentage of population) | 28.3% | 8.3% |
| Immigrant arrivals 2011–16 (percentage of total BC) | –/– | 0.05% |

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2016

Compared to the province as a whole, Northeast British Columbia has a younger population, particularly children under the age of 14, (21 per cent versus the provincial average of 15 per cent) and those 65 and over (10 per cent versus 18 per cent in British Columbia). See Table 2 below for further details.

Table 2. Age demographics in Northeast British Columbia, 2016

| Age range (Percentage of population) | BC | Northeast |
|---|-----|-----------|
| 0–14 | 15% | 21% |
| 15–24 | 12% | 13% |
| 25–34 | 13% | 17% |
| 35–49 | 20% | 20% |
| 50–64 | 22% | 19% |
| 65+ | 18% | 10% |

Source: Census Profile, 2016 Census

2.2 Education levels in the Northeast population

After analyzing indicators of future demand and supply of labour in Northeast British Columbia, a risk exists that the region will fall short of realizing the full employment benefits that regional economic activity could bring.²

Part of the challenge for the Northeast may be related to education levels in the labour force. As Table 3 shows, the region has a higher number of people with apprenticeship, technical, or trades certificates compared to the average for British Columbia (16 per cent versus nine per cent). It also has a larger proportion of people aged 25 to 64 with no certificate of any kind, including high school graduation (18 per cent versus 10 per cent for the province). At a time when increasing automation may lead to job losses and a requirement for a more highly skilled workforce, only 12 per cent of those 25 to 64 years olds in the Northeast have a degree at the bachelor level or above, compared to an average of 30 per cent for British Columbia.

Table 3. Education levels in Northeast British Columbia, 2011 and 2016

| Educational attainment | 2011 | | | | 2016 | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | BC | | Northeast | | BC | | Northeast | |
| | 15-24 years | 25-64 years |
| No certificate, diploma, or degree | 33% | 10% | 44% | 19% | 32% | 10% | 42% | 18% |
| High school diploma or equivalent | 44% | 25% | 38% | 28% | 47% | 26% | 35% | 32% |
| Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma | 5% | 11% | 8% | 19% | 4% | 9% | 9% | 16% |
| College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma | 8% | 20% | 8% | 21% | 7% | 21% | 10% | 20% |
| University certificate or diploma below bachelor | 4% | 6% | 1% | 3% | 2% | 4% | 3% | 3% |
| University certificate, diploma, or degree at bachelor level or above | 7% | 27% | 2% | 12% | 8% | 30% | 4% | 12% |

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey and 2016 Census Profile

In addition, high school completion rates for all students have fluctuated, but they generally have been near or slightly below provincial averages. For Indigenous students in the Northeast, however, completion rates have not followed the provincial trend higher, and in some years were in the 45 per cent range or below.

Table 4. Six-year high school completion rates, 2011–16 Peace River North

| Six-year completion rate (percentage of students) | 2011–12 | 2012–13 | 2013–14 | 2014–15 | 2015–16 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total - students | 68.5 | 71.0 | 66.5 | 67.6 | 68.4 |
| Female | 70.0 | 75.0 | 70.7 | 68.7 | 67.5 |
| Male | 66.8 | 67.2 | 62.3 | 66.4 | 69.2 |
| Indigenous peoples | 47.4 | 43.8 | 33.8 | 54.9 | 44 |
| English language learners | 53.8 | 52.2 | 39.5 | 50.2 | 53.6 |
| Special needs | 41.7 | 30.5 | 41.0 | 33.9 | 41.2 |

Table 5. Six-year high school completion rates, 2011-16 Peace River South

| Six-year completion rate (percentage of students) | 2011–12 | 2012–13 | 2013–14 | 2014–15 | 2015–16 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total – students | 76.2 | 72.7 | 74.0 | 77.6 | 82.6 |
| Female | 77.3 | 72.4 | 81.8 | 85.3 | 88.3 |
| Male | 75.2 | 73.0 | 67.7 | 70.0 | 77.9 |
| Indigenous peoples | 58.4 | 59.2 | 61.8 | 68.4 | 77.5 |
| English language learners | 49.8 | 43.3 | 51.7 | 62.8 | 48.5 |
| Special needs | 59.1 | 53.7 | 57.4 | 47.5 | 55.7 |

Table 6. Six-year high school completion rates, 2011–16 British Columbia

| Six-year completion rate (percentage of students) | 2011–12 | 2012–13 | 2013–14 | 2014–15 | 2015–16 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total - students | 81.8 | 83.6 | 84.2 | 83.9 | 83.6 |
| Female | 83.9 | 85.4 | 86.4 | 86.0 | 85.8 |
| Male | 79.7 | 81.9 | 82.1 | 81.9 | 81.4 |
| Indigenous peoples | 56.4 | 59.4 | 61.6 | 63.0 | 63.8 |
| English language Learners | 83.3 | 86.1 | 86.6 | 86.2 | 87.1 |
| Special needs | 55.6 | 58.7 | 62.2 | 65.9 | 67 |

Source: British Columbia Ministry of Education

2.3 Labour market outlook for the Northeast region 2018–28

British Columbia is undergoing unprecedented activity in large-scale construction projects, which includes the \$10.7-billion BC Hydro Site C Clean Energy Project, the \$40-billion LNG Canada liquefied natural gas plant in Kitimat, and one to two major pipeline projects that will likely be constructed by 2025.

The 2018 British Columbia Labour Force Market Outlook estimates a shortage of 15,500 workers in Northeast BC to 2028. Approximately three quarters of this shortage is driven by retirements and only 27 per cent of the jobs are due to economic growth. Other forecasts also show an increased demand for labour, either in British Columbia generally or in the Northeast in particular. These include:

- In a 2016 analysis, Petro LMI forecasts employment of 5,240 workers for the on-site construction of an LNG facility and 3,300 for pipeline construction at the peak of activity in year three. This projection is based on construction of a large two train plant and pipeline.³
- LNG Canada expects that approximately between 11,400 and 16,200 workers will be employed during the construction of the plant and pipelines, and an additional 300 to 450 permanent jobs will be created to operate the facility in Kitimat. Once constructed, the operations are expected to create another 10,800 to 15,200 indirect jobs, nearly double the indirect jobs created during construction.
- Buildforce BC expects only 4,700 provincial new-entrant workers to join the construction labour force from 2019–21, leaving a gap of 13,400 workers that must be recruited from outside the local non-residential labour force. Shortages will occur in the early years of the major projects from economic expansion (2019–23), and in later years due to worker retirements (2024–28).
- BC Hydro’s Site C Clean Energy Project expects to create 13,000 person years of employment during the construction. As the project ramps up, BC Hydro may need to look outside the Northeast region to meet its labour requirements.
- Northern Health reports that difficult-to-fill professions in the Northeast include registered nurses, health care assistants, and LPNs. These occupations had over 20 per cent vacancies in the Northeast in May 2019.

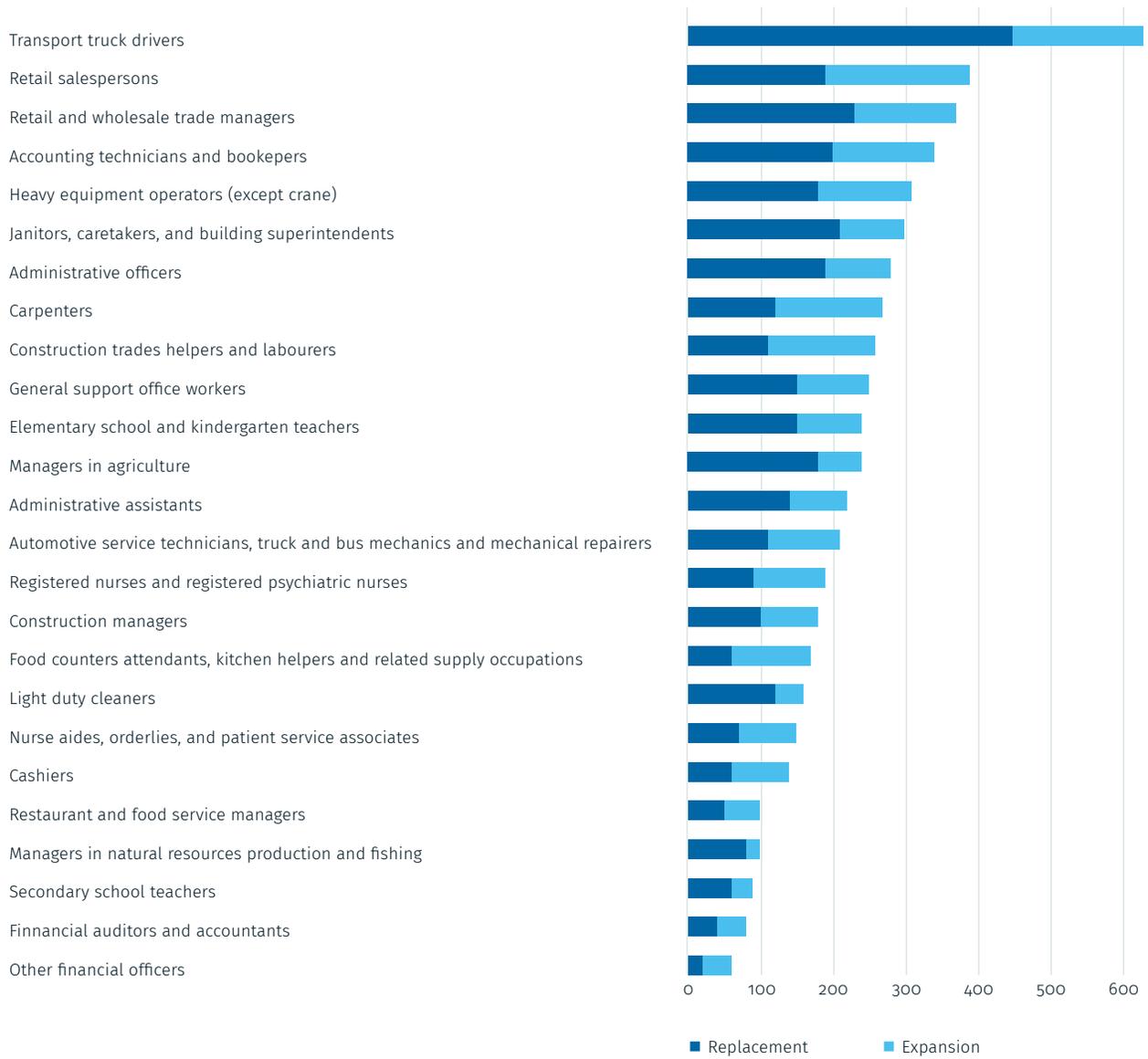
Forestry, logging, and lumber manufacturing employment at risk

Companies in forestry, logging, and lumber manufacturing in the Northeast face numerous challenges. Logging has slowed as the majority of timber affected by the pine beetle has been harvested. With fewer logs available, sawmills have consolidated, reduced shifts, or closed entirely, leading to job losses. Companies are continuing to look to automation and other technologies to increase productivity and contain costs. All of these factors have decreased their need for workers. The imposition of softwood tariffs by the United States in 2017 is also creating significant uncertainty, as is a proposed caribou protection plan announced in 2019. With all these headwinds, regional employment in logging, forestry, and lumber manufacturing may decline in the short term. In the summer of 2019, for example, sawmills, OSB plants, and pulp mills in the Northeast either reduced shifts, shut down for several months, or closed permanently.

Occupations in demand

For the Northeast, the BC government forecasts that mining, oil and gas extraction, and nursing and residential care facilities will have the greatest employment growth to 2028. Figure 1, “Job openings Northeast BC 2018–28 by occupation” ranks occupations by the number of job openings that will become available. Transport truck drivers lead the list, and trades will also have numerous job openings, mainly due to retirements. Equally important, many other occupations outside of these sectors will need new workers. Job seekers do not have to choose a trade to be able to find a good career in the Northeast. Those interested in retail, finance, healthcare, education, and management will also find many positions available.

Figure 1. Job openings in Northeast BC 2018–28 by occupation



Source: British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2018 Edition

Key findings and questions arising from the labour market information review

Given the findings, below are some questions NLC could consider for its longer-term labour market strategy for Northeast British Columbia.

Balancing short-term construction needs with long-term regional requirements

NLC may have the opportunity to be a premiere training centre for a new generation of workers to meet short-term labour demand for construction. As importantly, longer-term training needs exist to meet vacancies from a retiring workforce. To what extent does NLC focus on training to meet the immediate needs of the construction industry?

Target audience for training

Who is the target market for NLC's offerings? Will it be the local population in the Northeast or all of northern BC? Underrepresented people in the trades labour force such as Indigenous peoples, women, and immigrants? Others?

Short or long term

Does NLC focus on industry-specific requirements or skills and training that will prepare workers for most jobs of the future? Or does it focus on long-term industry needs or offer skills required for future jobs (using AI and technology), or both?

Regional scope

Does NLC have the potential and, if so, the desire to be the training centre for Northern BC or all of British Columbia in certain occupations?

Program design and delivery

Distance learning courses? Short bursts of experiential learning? Video gaming, virtual reality? How does NLC customize for people learning on the job and those who desire upgrading? How does it allow for flexibility so individuals can train when and how they want to maximize the success rate in the shortest amount of time?

3. Considerations and context for a labour market strategy

This section explores systemic and structural social, educational, and infrastructure issues in the Northeast that make providing effective workforce training more difficult than in many other regions of the province. It also discusses economic factors that have an impact on training availability and success. Respondents in interviews for this Strategy often mentioned many of these challenges.

3.1 Educational and social issues

Difficulties hiring teachers

In many high schools across the Northeast, teacher recruitment and retention is problematic and can be particularly acute in the more rural and remote communities. These places can have fewer economic opportunities, which may mean a teacher's spouse or partner has difficulties finding work in the same area. Likewise, social opportunities are often less prevalent than in urban areas, leading many teachers from outside the area fearing isolation. These same issues make it harder to recruit school administrators, which can exacerbate staffing problems since teachers want strong leaders to support them.

In the Northeast, these perennial staffing difficulties mean that on occasion no one with subject expertise is available to teach a course, so the school does not offer it. In some high schools the consultants visited, professionals, parents, and young people with no formal teaching qualifications (but a university degree) were instructing senior-level classes. The Alaska Highway Consortium on Teacher Education is a joint teacher education program offered by Simon Fraser University, Northern Lights College, school districts 59, 60, and 81, and local teacher associations. The program is meant to help address the teacher challenge, offering local people with degrees a path to formal teacher accreditation. Nonetheless, gaps remain.

High school students are meant to acquire the foundational knowledge in math, English, and sciences necessary for post-secondary academic and trades studies. For whatever reason, some students graduate with low-level skills, at times at a primary school level. Their lack of knowledge forces post-secondary institutions or other training organizations to try to remediate gaps before the learner can proceed with additional training and education. Sometimes this retraining can take a year or more, even with students fresh out of high school.

These results cannot solely be laid at the feet of schools, however. As educators commented in interviews, for some youngsters, school can be a refuge from a difficult home life. Families may be grappling with poverty, violence, addiction, or other mental health issues. Dealing with chaos and continual upheaval in their personal lives, some students struggle with schoolwork or miss many days. In such circumstances, schools and teachers can only do so much for them. To change this situation, a shared responsibility model must be employed, where students take responsibility for

their decisions with support from family, educators, and the community to select the best learning path for each student.

Potential workers lacking foundational skills

Some potential workers require significant upgrading or training in employment readiness, financial literacy, and essential skills (reading and numeracy) before they can take a job. Innovative interventions are critical with this group since many have had negative experiences with the traditional education system. With direct, individual, and targeted assistance, they will likely have more success in transitioning to occupational training or directly to employment.

These programs are effective, but individualized mentoring and tutoring is far more expensive than traditional training where 12 to 16 people follow the same program at a group pace. Securing funding for these longer-term, individualized programs can be daunting.

Since 2008, high school graduation rates have varied considerably across the Northeast. In some school districts, graduation rates for Indigenous students have sometimes dipped below 45 per cent. With this ongoing choppiness in basic educational attainment, the expensive and time-consuming task of upgrading low-skilled workers in the Northeast will remain for the foreseeable future.

Disincentives to pursuing post-secondary or trades training

High school administrators in some towns noted that the lure of well-paid labouring jobs in mining and wood products discouraged some students from furthering their studies. Youths aged 17 or 18 might start at wage of \$25 to 35 per hour performing part-time clean-up or labouring duties.

Upon graduation from high school, some students see no need to pursue post-secondary or trades training. A common misconception is that owning a truck is good and their life will be fine. Whatever the future of automation, potential for resource downturns and layoffs, or lack of in-house training for higher-skilled positions, the young people who choose this career path will ultimately experience financial difficulties later in life.

In later years, lower-skilled workers may want to upgrade their skills, but are caught in a financial trap. They may have children to support and a mortgage to pay, so they are unable to afford the costs that come with returning to college or university or starting an apprenticeship as a mature student.

Unmet mental health needs

Addictions and fractured relationships within the family unit and community are significant barriers to successful learning and employment. In many communities, a proportion of the population suffers from depression and anxiety or substance use. Youth and adults may lack personal confidence and are intimidated by the thought of taking training (for fear of failing), leaving their communities for work, or engaging in new activities. In some towns or communities, stress as the result of joblessness means increasing incidents of spousal abuse and family violence being reported to social service agencies. The strain of having one or two parents away on rotating work-camp schedules can also take a toll on relationships. A BC Coroner's office report released in July 2019, *Suicide Deaths in BC*,

revealed that in the Northeast, the suicide rate increased from 24.8 per 100,000 people in 2014 to 26.8 in 2017. This rate of 26.8 was the highest in the province.⁴

A major issue for many in the Northeast is limited access to mental health counselors and substance issues treatment centres. Formal after-care programs and supports within many communities are non-existent. The professionals who are available are at risk of burnout, as some must travel long distances to visit clients in remote communities. In addition, as outlined in the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*⁵, a great need exists for accessible and culturally appropriate health, mental health, and addictions services for Indigenous women.

Limited daycare and eldercare

The lack of daycare and eldercare options for families, particularly single parents, can be problematic. In August 2018, the Union of BC Municipalities released a report, *Child Care Needs in Small, Rural and Remote Communities in BC*.⁶ The findings were based on surveys of residents in small communities, including Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Pouce Coupe, the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (Fort Nelson) and Tumbler Ridge. The report notes that 92 per cent of respondents had difficulties finding quality, affordable, and accessible childcare. Major issues were the availability of spaces and providers in the communities (53 per cent of responses), followed by the lack of qualified staff in communities (15 per cent). Sometimes care is available, but so expensive that it makes more financial sense in the short term to stay home than take a job or pursue training. In other cases, daycares cannot meet the needs of shift workers, or those who work non-traditional hours, standard requirements for many jobs in the Northeast. From an Indigenous perspective, the need for responsive, accountable, and culturally appropriate child and family services can be especially acute.

On eldercare, according to data from Statistics Canada, nearly half the population has cared for an aging, ill, or disabled family member or friend at some point. More than half of Canadian caregivers nursed a loved one for more than four years, and many of them faced substantial out-of-pocket expenses while struggling in their careers: 43 per cent missed work, 15 per cent cut down their hours, and 10 per cent passed up a promotion or a new job, according to Statistics Canada. Women particularly face this challenge, since more of the daily tasks of giving care still fall to them.⁷ As health advances allow seniors with chronic illnesses to live longer, respite care remains costly and inconsistent, and more patients prefer aging at home, the burden placed on family caregivers will only grow.

Impact of poverty

Northeast educators expressed concerns about increasing numbers of hungry students, in light of layoffs and long-term joblessness experienced in many communities. Even with free workforce training, individuals may have no money for transportation, nutritious lunches, or required work clothing. Others are unable to take training without additional subsidies, since they have families with children and limited savings to see them through periods without paid work. Training organizations often fund workers to obtain various workplace certifications (“tickets”). Some unemployed people are unable to afford their renewal. For Indigenous people in the region, there is a pressing need to

address disproportionate rates of poverty and for women specifically.

No driver's licenses

This issue came up repeatedly in interviews. The lack of a driver's license stops some individuals from accessing training and jobs. Many construction firms, for example, will require proof of a valid unrestricted driver's license before they will even consider hiring someone. On some mine sites, a driver's license is required of all employees. Sometimes individuals are unable to read well enough to pass the written test or may have multiple unpaid fines on their record. Others may not have a vehicle is available to practice on. Transportation issues mean that many workers prefer local training as it is time-consuming and costly for them to arrange travel to outside facilities.

Community shuttle buses and vans, in the eyes of many, are only a partial answer to transportation issues. They believe driver's licenses for working people are essential. Possessing a basic license could also eventually lead some to jobs in trucking, an occupation in the Northeast with ongoing shortages.

3.2 Infrastructure issues

Geographically dispersed population with limited transportation options

The sheer size of the Northeast region makes it tough to service in many ways, including delivering post-secondary education. Travel by vehicle from NLC's Fort Nelson campus to its campus in Dease Lake can take over 10 hours, while a trip to Fort St. John to Fort Nelson can take four. In 2019, government-subsidized bus service between Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, and Fort St. John was limited to one roundtrip per week and between Dawson Creek and Fort St. John to two roundtrips per week.

In many instances, learners wanting to travel to the major campuses at Dawson Creek (where NLC's Trades Centre is located) and Fort St. John must have their own vehicle, carpool or hitchhike. The lack of shuttles and other public options can pose a significant barrier to Indigenous women, whose only travel option might be hitchhiking on remote highways, with all of its inherent dangers.

Some BC colleges use mobile trades training trailers to offer introductory courses in remote communities. In 2019, NLC had no such equipment. The North East Native Advancing Society (NENAS) has mobile trades training trailers that could be shared between the two organizations. Even if a trailer were available, the college would still face the sometimes onerous task of securing a qualified instructors willing to live away from home or commute for potentially weeks or months at a time.

Limited connectivity in smaller communities

Fiber optic connections to communities can bring significant benefits, improving the delivery of health, safety, and social services and fostering economic development, environmental protection, and infrastructure development. High-speed internet service in homes (not just in community centres and libraries) is a boon for educators. The technology enables two-way interactive virtual video conferencing systems, which allows for engaging distance learning opportunities. Learners can take a range of courses from instructors and experts unable to visit

their communities on a daily basis. Those educators living in remote locations have access to online programs that encourage them to continue their professional development and thus further student learning opportunities in their classrooms.

In March 2019, the federal and provincial governments announced funding of \$50 million to expand high-speed internet service to approximately 200 rural and Indigenous communities, including Dease Lake. This investment in infrastructure will bring benefits over time. In the meantime, Dease Lake will continue without cell phone coverage, and in smaller communities like Atlin or Kelly Lake, learners will keep paying expensive satellite internet bills or doing online homework in community centres.



4. Voices from the region: additional comments from community-based research

As part of developing the Strategy, the consultants carried out 125 interviews throughout the Northeast region and in other parts of British Columbia between April and November 2019. Participants represented business, labour, Indigenous peoples, non-profits, local and provincial governments, educators, immigrant serving agencies, and social service agencies.

The majority of interviews took place face-to-face in the Northeast and Northwest, Atlin, Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Dease Lake, Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, and Tumbler Ridge. The consultants visited First Nations communities including Blueberry River, Doig River, Fort Nelson, Halfway River, Kelly Lake Cree, Prophet River, Saulteau, Tahltan, Taku River Tlingit, and West Moberly. Interviews were carried out with Métis organizations in Fort. St. John and Chetwynd. The consultants conducted two focus groups with unemployed individuals and distributed surveys at seven high schools, collecting 228 responses. NLC also held community meetings in Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, and Fort St. John for the purpose of soliciting comments on an early draft of the Strategy recommendations.

The purpose of these community activities was to obtain additional information on training gaps and solicit views on education and labour force-related issues to supplement the quantitative data. Many of the comments highlighted systemic training barriers already covered in the previous section. This section focuses on additional points raised, some of them reflecting circumstances at the time of the study, some persistent.

4.1 Issues raised in meetings and interviews

Joblessness and its impacts in some communities

With the collapse of oil and gas prices in 2014, the community of Fort Nelson faced major unemployment and business closures. At the time of interviews in 2019, the Regional Municipality had developed an economic plan to move forward with plans for a new mill, based on the region's Community Forest. In late 2019, no new industry was in place. Other communities were dealing with layoffs from mill closures. Layoffs continued in the oil and gas sector, in the well-drilling and servicing sub-sectors, with no relief predicted for some years, even with the LNG expansion in the Northwest.

Fort Nelson school administrators noted additional difficulties, with a noticeable increase of special needs students arriving at schools after the start of the school year, as families from outside the region moved into the town in search of lower rent. With funding levels set in September, schools scrambled to meet their needs.

Inability to recruit locally for certain occupations

While some communities reported high rates of unemployment, companies and organizations validated much of the quantitative occupational projections, noting shortages of:

- Truck drivers
- Heavy equipment operators
- Heavy duty mechanics, in general and especially those with specialization in farm equipment (raised in 2012)
- Health care personal in many occupations
- Teachers
- Certified bookkeepers, particularly those who understand the differences in provincial tax regulations.

In addition, instrumentation firms reported an inability to recruit instrumentation technicians and apprentices, as they did during interviews for the 2012 version of this Strategy. Even for individuals who had completed their technical qualifications, companies complained of them as frequently being “certified, but not qualified” with limited practical and hands-on experience. Professional firms remarked on the difficulties they had recruiting and retaining lawyers and accountants.

Considering the impact of automation on training needs

A key challenge for post-secondary institutions will be to equip students for the emerging economy of machine learning, artificial intelligence, and data analytics. As background research for this Strategy demonstrated, technical training institutions will need to revamp their curricula and provide students with skills to work in environments where they regularly interact with robots and other highly automated equipment. The research also revealed that rural areas dependent on resource extraction and manufacturing could be especially at risk from automation.

A need to diversify the economy

Some interviewees lamented the boom-and-bust nature of the regional economy and called for more efforts to diversify it. Ideas included:

- Developing more added-value agricultural products and researching the impact of climate change on the local agricultural economy.
- Exploring options to develop a regional technology centre. The centre could develop innovations to be used in natural resource industries and also look to incubate new businesses in the technology field.
- Examining ways to build a stronger tourism sector.

Students who have not mastered skills

Without proper means to establish levels of educational competence, employers and training organizations struggle to gauge the ability of prospective workers and learners to learn new skills or absorb training. It is problematic for some if schools advance students to the next grade when they have not learned and mastered the full curriculum for the previous grade. Interviewees argued that if overall educational quality is to improve in the Northeast, students without passing grades must not be pushed forward into the more advanced classes and potentially graduate with minimal literacy and numeracy skills. That process only aggravates their frustration at being unable to comprehend new, more advanced material and leads to difficulties when taking further training or in the workplace.

Few educational role models

As the educational statistics discussed in Section 2 show, in 2016, half of the Northeast population aged 15 to 64 had only a high school education or no formal qualification whatsoever. Many learners who take post-secondary or trades training have no role models or informal mentors who can help them overcome initial difficulties or answer questions. In interviews, some Indigenous respondents commented that their community needs more positive role models and most notably for male students as there were few male high school graduates within their community.

Need for more workplace diversity training

As workforces change and companies hire more women, Indigenous peoples, and recent immigrants, respondents saw the need for more diversity and inclusion training to take place. Interviewees felt that a better understanding of cultural norms in different communities could increase understanding and decrease tension in the workplace.

Need for Gender-based Analysis Plus Analysis⁸

GBA+ analysis needs to be integrated throughout the life cycle of education, training and employment policies, plans, and programs. Governments, provincial educators, trainers, and employers need to challenge GBA+ assumptions. They must put the lived experiences of diverse peoples to examine the potential impacts (both intended and unintended) and opportunities of a policy, plan, program, or other initiative on diverse groups of people, taking into account gender and other identity factors. The plus (+) symbol indicates that gender-based analysis goes beyond considerations of sex and gender to include a range of intersectional identity characteristics. These include: Age, culture, education, ethnicity, family status, geography (Northern, remote, rural, urban), indigenous heritage, language, mental or physical disability, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, and status

Rights of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA⁹ people

Educators and education authorities need to educate and provide awareness to the public about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and about the issues and root causes of violence they experience. Curriculum development and programming should be done in partnership with Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Furthermore, employers and resource-extraction and development projects should consider the safety and security, and include provisions that address the impacts of projects on the safety and security,

of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. Provisions must also be made to ensure that Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people equitably benefit from the projects, at all stages of project planning, assessment, implementation, management, and monitoring.

4.2 Results from student surveys

Youth retention is critical to ensuring the long-term economic vitality of rural Canada. Limited services in rural communities and greater access to learning and employment opportunities in cities have drawn young people to Canada's metropolitan areas. In fact, the population of youth aged 15 to 19 in rural Canada declined by 10 per cent between 2011 and 2016¹⁰. When young people finish training at Canada's colleges and universities, they are less likely to seek employment opportunities in rural communities, where the population of youth aged 24 to 29 has grown just three per cent between 2011 and 2016. Hence, retaining and also attracting more young and talented workers will be essential to the future of the Northeast.

To enhance the value of the Strategy, the consultants decided to explore youth retention in the region in a preliminary way. They distributed surveys in seven high schools throughout the Northeast and Northwest, primarily to students in grades 11 and 12. They received 228 responses, which highlighted the following:

- Upon graduation, 57 per cent of respondents said they planned to take post-secondary training, while 25 per cent planned to pursue an apprenticeship. The vast majority hoped to attend colleges or universities in northern British Columbia or Alberta.
- To find information on their own about a prospective occupation, the most popular sources of information were 1) the Internet (78 per cent selected this option), family and friends (71 per cent), and career counselor or teacher (49 per cent).
- Students emphasized hands-on, face-to-face activities as being the best way for employers to provide them with information about occupations. Their most frequent recommendation was for employers to come to the school to present during class time, followed by holding career fairs and providing them with on-site visits to workplaces.
- Many students suggested that post-secondary institutions advise them of the advantages to graduating, going to university, and trades training versus the disadvantages of failing to graduate or only obtaining a high school diploma.
- When asked if they thought they could have a good career living in the Northeast, 53 per cent of students said yes, seven per cent said no, and 40 per cent were unsure.

5. A Northeast regional labour market strategy: objectives and actions

By its nature, a strategy needs to focus on areas for improvement in education, training options, and programs. The Northeast, it should be noted, has many fine existing workplace programs and services offered by high schools, Northern Lights College, and private and non-profit training organizations like WorkBC and NENAS. Internal company training programs can also be first-rate. As one example of a home-grown success, many interviewees cited Northern Opportunities¹¹ as an excellent program that has led many students to successful careers in the trades. The recommendations that follow are meant to build upon and enhance the solid foundation already existing in the Northeast region.

This section outlines four goals and associated actions for the Northeast Regional Labour Market Strategy. They are based largely on the evidence collected through research activities described in previous sections of this document.

The recommendations are followed by ideas related to possible funders and potential implementers. Listing these organizations in this document is not meant to exclude others from moving forward with the recommendation. As for the timeframe listed under each recommendation, dates provided are suggestions as to when research on exploring the possibility of implementing the recommendation might begin. Some recommendations might begin sooner, others later, and others never, as economic circumstances and workforce training needs change in the Northeast.

Objective 1

Ensure the labour market information is widely distributed, to promote and support the hiring and retention of workers within and from outside the Northeast.

This goal and its actions are to help address the future shortages of qualified workers in the region, particularly for high-demand occupations. In addition, the actions are to help parents, school officials, and job seekers better understand future job opportunities in the region, which go beyond trades openings.

Recommendation 1.1

Develop print marketing materials and a social media strategy to communicate information on occupations in demand in Northeast BC.

Details

a) Create print marketing materials containing labour market information on occupations in demand in Northeast BC, required training and job expectations for distribution through workplace training organizations. Source of information would be labour market information developed through an NLC study and other relevant reports.

For trades, include an explanation of pre-requisites and essential skills required for each trade. Also provide a realistic overview of trades' requirements.

Consider materials that specifically target women and Indigenous peoples, who are vastly underrepresented in trades occupations. Work with a literacy educator to have material written for Grade 5 reading levels.

b) Develop a social media marketing strategy to use social media tools (Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.) to distribute relevant labour market information. Make information engaging and interactive so users feel the need to get involved, thereby creating content of their own and building a self-sustaining flow of information.

Need Addressing: Alerting residents to the career opportunities available in the Northeast, as well as the education and training required to obtain them. Also providing information in a friendly format for learners, parents, and job seekers.

Target audience

Parents and guardians, adult job seekers, youth not in work and training organizations.

Potential funders
(cash or in-kind)

LMP follow up (sharing of labour market and human resources information).

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| Potential implementers | School districts, workforce trainers, NLC |
| Timeframe | By December 2020 |
| Recommendation 1.2 | Convene a one-day regional meeting for adult training organizations and schools to share program information and discuss ways to effectively communicate labour market information. |
| Details | <p>Develop a one-day conference or workshop on effectively communicating Northeast labour market information to mixed audiences and inspiring participants. Topics could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth review and discussion of NELMS LMI • Future forecast for major project activity • Career path websites such as Petro LMI's Careers in Oil and Gas and sites for other sectors • Using social media to effectively communicate with young people and job seekers • Current programs each organization offers, to reduce overlap and duplication and encourage program use <p>Hold the workshop on a bi-annual basis, with topics changing as required.</p> <p>Need addressing: Making sure that up-to-date LMI is distributed widely, using communication formats best suited to the target audience. Increase networks and ties of workforce trainers and educators in the Northeast.</p> |
| Target audience | WorkBC locations, high school career counselors, Indigenous education coordinators, other training organizations |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | LMP follow up (strengthening partnerships to improve the coordination of labour market and human resource activities). |
| Potential implementers | NLC in conjunction with ITA, workforce trainers, Indigenous communities and school districts, NENAS. |
| Timeframe | By spring 2020 |
| Recommendation 1.3 | Develop a worker and family recruitment website to attract skilled workers and their families from outside the Northeast region. |
| Details | a) Develop a business and worker recruitment website for the Northeast region, modeled after other portals such as: |

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| Details | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moveup Prince George • Bay of Quinte (Ontario) Welcome Portal • Durham (Ontario) Immigration Portal <p>b) Develop a comprehensive marketing and attraction plan to increase skilled labour forces to fill local employment needs and to attract entrepreneurs.</p> <p>c) Explore opportunities related to a federal government immigration program announced in January 2020. The plan is to give local communities, chambers of commerce and labour councils a say in the selection of immigrants, helping them match newcomers with labour needs in various communities. At least 5,000 new spaces are expected to be created for the program.</p> <p>Need addressing: Make certain that potential workers from outside the Northeast are aware of the long-term career opportunities the region offers. Attract Canadian and international entrepreneurs to fill business needs as owners retire. Lower Mainland residents, residents of small to medium sized towns across Canada, immigrants.</p> |
| Target audience | Lower Mainland residents, residents of small to medium sized towns across Canada, immigrants. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Northern Development Initiatives Trust (up to \$20,000 matching cash contribution), municipalities, regional government, LMP follow up (promoting and/or supporting the hiring and retention of workers), local industry. |
| Potential implementers | Regional economic development officers, Chambers of Commerce, immigrant serving agencies, Tourism BC. |
| Timeframe | To be determined. |

Objective 2

Reduce barriers to workforce participation and increase supports, particularly among the under-employed, Indigenous people, and under-represented groups.

This objective is intended to address some of the social and personal issues which prevent individuals from fully participating in workforce training and employment. Some recommendations are to help families adjust to changes as individuals become employed and make good wages.

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| Recommendation 2.1 | Explore tie-ins and education, and training-related funding opportunities with the BC Mental Health Strategy. |
| Details | <p>Explore potential tie ins and leverage education and training funds related to the BC Mental Health Strategy announced in June 2019: <i>A Pathway to Hope: Better access to mental health and addictions care</i>. Linkages with priorities may position communities to apply for funding and support under the Mental Health Strategy.</p> <p>Need addressing: Issues like family dysfunction, violence, poverty, mental health issues, and addictions exist in Indigenous and other communities and are underlying factors that hinder an individual's ability to succeed in training and employment.</p> |
| Target audience | Youth and adults living with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, addictions, etc. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Northern Health, Ministries of Mental Health and Addictions, Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, First Nations Health Authority, Northern Lights College, employers. |
| Potential implementers | Indigenous organizations, community mental health organizations, Northern Health. |
| Timeframe | To be determined when BC Government completes the Strategy |
| Recommendation 2.2 | Develop or obtain and modify, and deliver a community classroom training course, <i>Camp Life for Workers and Their Families</i>. |
| Details | <p>Develop or obtain and modify, and deliver a community classroom training course, <i>Camp Life for Workers and Their Families</i>, in conjunction with regional employers that use work camps. Possible topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living in camp |

- Details**
- Adjustments in home life and community support required
 - Communications skills (interpersonal, dealing with conflict)
 - Childcare issues
 - Mental health issues
 - Financial literacy for camp workers and their families
 - Community mental health supports and dealing with crisis
 - Tools and tips for developing a family support network
 - Support and advice available in camps and from employers to help address issues

An excellent resource for in-person classes would be the guidebooks and videos found at the website BC Workcamp Survival Guide (workcampsurvivalguide.ca).

Need addressing: For some workers in the Northeast, camp life is new and has introduced challenges for families, schools, and communities. The increasing prevalence of camp work as a permanent career reality can be hard on family relationships and can make community development difficult. Since camps will continue to be a reality for many construction and ongoing projects, a need exists to strengthen individual, family, and community skills in adapting to this way of life.

- Target audience** Camp workers and their families, community social workers, teachers and health professionals, camp companies and owners.
- Potential funders (cash or in-kind)** Resource and camp provider companies (ATCO, for example, has a community investment program), BC Hydro Site C, financial institutions, NENAS, MNBC, BC government, LMP follow-up (supporting the development of curriculum based on sector HR needs).
- Potential implementers** Employers, unions, interested local community, NENAS, MNBC, NLC.
- Timeframe** 2021

Recommendation 2.3 **Convene a one-day conference on a regional approach to taking action on driver's license issues.**

- Details** Convene a one-day conference on driver's license issues. Invitees could include representatives of Indigenous organizations, training organizations, BC Construction Association, resource and construction

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| Details | <p>companies, RCMP, Superintendent of Motor Vehicles, ICBC, school districts, and others to discuss the current situation and hear from other rural regions that have taken steps to address the issue through private company initiatives or other actors.</p> <p>The goals of the day would be to have 1) a frank discussion of the issue and 2) to create a coalition of regional partners to overcome barriers over the long term.</p> <p>Need addressing: Many construction and resource companies in the region require a valid driver's license as a job prerequisite. Even with access to driver training programs, individuals often lack access to a vehicle in which to acquire their needed practice hours. Indigenous communities raised this DL issue repeatedly during interviews. In researching for this project, the consultants reviewed a report from 1976 outlining concerns related to driver's licenses similar to those described in 2019. A fresh, more comprehensive, regional approach may be needed to root out this perennial labour market barrier.</p> |
| Target audience | Interested Indigenous organizations and communities, employers. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Ministry of Advanced Education, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Attorney General, resource and construction companies and associations, ICBC, RCMP, NENAS and MNBC. |
| Potential implementers | Interested Indigenous communities and organizations, ICBC, Attorney General, other parties. |
| Timeframe | 2021 |

Recommendation 2.4 **Update and deliver the successful Pathways to Success program to help individuals with multiple barriers find long-term jobs.**

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| Details | <p>Update, adapt, and repeat the successful Pathways to Success program, carried out in Terrace and Prince Rupert, BC, in 2013–15 with \$1.2M in sponsorship from BG Canada, LNG Canada, Pacific NorthWest LNG, and the provincial government. A goal of the program was to link people directly from training to jobs that were waiting for them, a training to employment strategy.</p> <p>Pathways is a six-month employment readiness and job development program that involves classroom instruction on essential skills: refresher numeracy, literacy, and computers, as well as job-specific, industry-recognized credentials in areas such as occupational first aid, fire suppression, and construction safety training. Individuals also receive</p> |
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Details

extensive one-on-one mentorship, counseling and support, and life-skills training.

Two important components of the program are job development and employment support. Job development involves a separate organization working directly with prospective employers to inform them about the Pathways program and develop employment opportunities. Participants are assisted in matching employment opportunities to their interests and are then helped through the recruitment process and during the early stages of their time in a company.

In the Northwest, Pathways worked with six First Nation communities. Of the 192 participants, 144 successfully obtained employment; their average age was almost 40. Most of the jobs were full-time permanent in the industrial sector—construction, natural resources, and transportation—with others in retail and administration.

In November 2019, WorkBC Fort St. John began offering an essential skills, upgrading, and employment training program to 10 participants. This project provided training, work experience, and employer incentives to find employment. The program gave participants training and skills related to security, hospitality and customer service, or skilled labourer positions, and a living stipend to attend.

Target audience

Individuals seeking work in construction at Site C and along the pipeline route to Northwest BC.

Potential funders (cash or in-kind)

Provincial government, interested companies, WorkBC, NENAS and MNBC.

Potential implementers

Job-placement organizations, interested employers, WorkBC, NENAS, MNBC

Timeframe

2020–21

Recommendation 2.5**Adapt and deliver a training program on financial literacy for Indigenous learners and other individuals who are interested and in need.**

Work with the Seventh Generations Education Institute (SGEI) in Ontario, the Martin Family Initiative, and ABC Life Literacy Canada to obtain access to the revised version of their pilot course on financial literacy for Indigenous people. This program provides information and tools to help adults manage their personal finances and gain the confidence they need to make better financial decisions.

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| Details | <p>The pilot program in 2019 included approximately 20 hours of in-class programming on topics such as budgeting, banking, credit, and debt management. The course was delivered by SGEI’s instructors. Instructors received specialized training, and then delivered the program as part of the Institute’s Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills Program. The pilot partners intend to offer to the program to other Indigenous communities and educational organizations.</p> <p>Need addressing: In interviews with First Nation communities, interviewees mentioned the need for improved financial management skills for some individuals. NLC could work with interested Indigenous communities in the Northeast to adapt the SGEI program to local needs. In addition, there were a number of suggestions that a similar course would be of significant benefit to the non-indigenous population as well.</p> |
| Target audience | Indigenous individuals and non-Indigenous people who are interested and in need of this training. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Martin Family Initiative, LMP follow up (curriculum development and piloting), local financial institutions. |
| Potential implementers | NENAS, MNBC, interested Indigenous communities, NLC. |
| Timeframe | 2021 |

Recommendation 2.6 **Broaden the use of industry liaisons or mentors to help post-secondary learners and new employees more successfully transition to industry jobs.**

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| Details | <p>Help post-secondary and other learners transition to jobs through greater use of industry liaisons and making efforts to increase awareness of existing liaisons. The liaison can be instrumental in ensuring post-secondary and workforce training is relevant and meets industry needs. Liaisons can also help select and support suitable candidates and assist them as they start a new job. For example, liaisons can help learners complete online employment applications and prepare for interviews. The liaisons could work with employers to overcome biases and set up and support job shadows, internships, and program practicums. The liaison could also help employers increase retention of recently hired graduates, through encouragement, by providing examples of enhanced site orientations, buddy-systems and other actions that help recent graduates adjust to employment more successfully.</p> <p>The School of Exploration and Mining at Coast Mountain College, and the BC</p> |
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| Details | <p>Aboriginal Mine Training Authority had good success with this model at the post-secondary level.</p> <p>Need addressing: Barriers and challenges in transition to employment. Lack of clarity on employment requirements, overcoming employer biases, assisting in orientation, and adjustment to the work site. Requests were made to ensure learning and employment support was available until the individual determined it was no longer required.</p> |
| Target audience | Employers and learners. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | NLC, industry employers, BC AEST work-integrated learning funding. Employment and Social Development Canada's Indigenous Skills and Employment Training. |
| Potential implementers | WorkBC, NENAS, MNBC and other employment agencies, NLC, industry employers. |
| Timeframe | 2023 |

Objective 3

Address current community and industry skills and training needs.

Training and skills upgrading are important activities for ensuring the Northeast's labour force is ready to take advantage of opportunities created through retirements and major project activity. This objective addresses some of the most pressing occupational and sector needs identified through quantitative research and employer and community interviews.

Recommendation 3.1

Develop custom, first-level leadership training for employers.

Details

In partnership with interested businesses and organizations, develop or facilitate access to an existing face-to-face supervisory essentials and leadership program, offered at businesses and organizations' on-site locations. Content could include:

- Transitioning from a colleague to a supervisory position
- Computer skills (e.g. spreadsheets, word processing)
- Communications, influencing, negotiation, presentation skills
- Human resources and performance management
- Diversity and inclusion with specific emphasis on Indigenous people and gender, intercultural skills
- Role playing with video taping
- Basic project management skills

Need addressing: In interviews, industrial firms identified the need for more training for new supervisors and leaders and offered examples where institutions from outside the Northeast provided it to them. NLC currently offers an online, self-directed supervisory skills course developed by BuildForce for the construction industry. The proposed course would be custom-built or contracted in partnership with a training firm and be conducted face-to-face at employer premises. NLC could potentially ladder week-long modules into a certificate.

Target audience

Workers moving to supervisory positions.

Potential funders (cash or in-kind)

LMP follow up (curriculum development), interested companies.

Potential implementers

NLC in conjunction with employers and Indigenous organizations.

Timeframe

To be determined.

Recommendation 3.2 Explore economic revitalization possibilities in Fort Nelson through a guest speaker series.

Details

Develop a workshop series with BC, Canadian and international speakers from rural communities that have redeveloped and changed from depending entirely on natural resource industries to other economic drivers.

Need addressing: Fort Nelson is facing a difficult economic transition. To help the town address these issues, this series would provide new ideas from other towns and regions that have successfully transitioned their economies.

Target audience

Businesses, Fort Nelson area residents.

Potential funders (cash or in-kind)

BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, NLC Continuing Education, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, local businesses.

Potential implementers

Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, Fort Nelson First Nation, Chamber of Commerce, NLC, others.

Timeframe

Fall 2020

Recommendation 3.3 Obtain funding for and develop truck driver training programs based on the new BC curriculum for drivers operating on public roads. Develop retraining programs for experienced truck drivers as new regulations take effect.

Details

a) Emulating and modifying successful programs by the YWCA in Vancouver (2019, 2020) and Douglas College (2018, 2019), develop a tuition-free ICBC Class 1 Commercial Driver's License with Air Brakes program that includes essential skills upgrading, WHMIS, St. John Ambulance First Aid, TDG, and H2S Alive. Use the new Class 1 driver curriculum the BC government is developing, and enhance it with Northeast-specific content. Partner with a private truck training company to deliver the behind-the-wheel training.

The program developer could consider offering this free course to women, Indigenous people, or newcomers to Canada, using targeted provincial government funding and grants.

Need addressing: The Northeast is facing a severe shortage of truck drivers, which is likely to continue into the future. This program would enable graduates to obtain well-paying positions that are in high-demand.

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| Details | <p>b) Develop programs for the retraining of truckers and school bus drivers when the British Columbia government announces its new Class 1 and 2 driver training program and regulations.</p> <p>Need addressing: Established commercial drivers will need to update their theory and pass a road test and will benefit from local training options.</p> |
| Target audience | Individuals currently receiving or have received Employment Insurance benefits in the previous 60 months and existing licensed drivers. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Community and Employer Partnerships program, interested trucking and truck training companies, NENAS, MNBC, WorkBC, interested Indigenous communities. |
| Potential implementers | Interested organizations in conjunction with a local private sector trucking trainer, WorkBC, NENAS, Northern BC Trucker's Association, trucking company. |
| Timeframe | 2021 |

Recommendation 3.4 **Develop a centre of distance education excellence in Northeast BC.**

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| Details | <p>Develop a centre of distance education excellence in Northeast BC that would provide training in using distance education techniques effectively, whatever the content of the course. Potential participants in programs could include training centre on-site facilitators, secondary school teachers, and post-secondary instructors. The centre could conduct research on leading practices for providing workforce training at a distance.</p> <p>As a possible partnership, the centre could work closely with Athabasca University's (AU) Centre for Distance Education. AU offers courses to train distance educators as well as degree programs in distance education. Many opportunities for successful collaboration could be explored.</p> <p>As part of its mandate, the centre could also work with federal, provincial, municipal, and Indigenous governments which are striving to broaden internet access to benefit learning (and access to training) as well as increasing connectivity options for community members working away from home.</p> <p>Need addressing: In interviews, particularly in Indigenous communities, concerns were expressed about the availability and quality of distance education courses, and the availability of trained, on-site facilitators to help students taking courses. Many high school and adult learners in rural areas lack access or funding for transportation to larger centres and face other barriers to leaving their home communities. Some Northeast high</p> |
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| Details | schools are facing shortages of qualified teachers, or some students are unable to take certain courses because numbers are too limited at their school. Well-designed courses employing the latest techniques for teaching at a distance could help overcome these problems. Training for on-site facilitators could also be beneficial |
| Target audience | Post-secondary and continuing education learners, high school teachers, on-site facilitators at Indigenous training centres. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Northern Development Connecting British Columbia Program, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Connect to Innovate Program, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. |
| Potential implementers | School Districts, Indigenous training centres, internet communications companies, post-secondary institutions. |
| Timeframe | 2022 |

Recommendation 3.5 **Explore the development of a certified Introduction to Heavy Equipment Operations program.**

Details Explore the development of an affordable NLC certificate program (and program pilot) for entry-level heavy equipment operators (HEO). Potential students could be those involved in School District 60's Project Heavy Duty program.

The program could include content from ITA's construction craft worker curriculum (so learners acquire skills for labourers, another high demand occupation), and HEO specific content (e.g. general principles of operations of selected pieces of equipment, preventative maintenance, and soil stability). Students would spend limited hours on equipment lent to NLC by employers recruited as program partners. The program would include a practicum and prepare learners to take an entry-level position at an employer that uses HEOs.

Need addressing: In industry interviews, the shortage of HEOs came up repeatedly. The quantitative labour market information also indicated shortages in the years ahead. Many employers, however, want only to hire workers with considerable experience on machines (minimum 1,000 hours, according to some). In 2019, many job seekers took specialized HEO courses costing up to \$30,000, expecting to be hired as full-time HEO operators upon completion. With insufficient hours, companies were reluctant to employ them in that position.

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| Details | This proposed NLC program would be lower in cost. It would prepare learners to take entry-level jobs at HEO employers, thus conforming with industry practices when hiring inexperienced operators. In their first months, individuals might be tasked with cleaning and maintaining equipment. Over time, the employer might then have them move pieces of equipment for short periods in a low risk environment and gradually provide additional company training so that workers could eventually become full-time HEO operators. |
| Target audience | Employers facing shortages of HEOs, learners. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, (curriculum development and sponsoring of pilot program), interested employers. |
| Potential implementers | NLC, construction, road building, pipeline, resource and other employers in need of HEOs, Independent Contractors and Businesses Association, CLAC, other unions, School District 60. |
| Timeframe | To be determined. |

Recommendation 3.6 Explore offering new trades training programs that meet current and future needs of the natural gas and clean tech industries.

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| Details | <p>a) Explore establishing an instrumentation technician or apprenticeship program at NLC. BCIT and Thompson Rivers University offer instrumentation programs and it may be of benefit to exchange ideas with them. Seek curriculum from Alberta or other institutional providers who specialize in training for the current instrumentation needs of the oil and gas sector and future needs of the clean tech sector and increased automation within multiple sectors.</p> <p>Need addressing: In focus groups conducted by ITA in spring 2019 and in interviews for this project, employers raised the need for electricians with knowledge of instrumentation and instrumentation apprentices and said graduates with these skills could immediately find work. In 2019, many learners from the Northeast were going to Alberta to acquire training.</p> <p>b) Explore offering the delivery of a power line technician training program in Northeast BC.</p> <p>Need addressing: In August 2019, the BC government signed a memorandum of understanding with the federal government to commit to powering BC's natural gas and liquefied natural gas sectors in the Peace Region with clean electricity as a move toward the province meeting its</p> |
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Details

climate change objectives. Electrification projects worth \$680 million will be funded. As electrification proceeds, more workers will be needed to maintain these expanded networks.

c) Explore developing a natural gas compression technician or apprenticeship program. These technicians install, commission, maintain, and repair natural gas compression equipment used to gather, store, and transmit natural gas.

Need addressing: During interviews, employers identified this area as a need. Alberta offers this program on an apprenticeship basis.

Target audience

Adults and youth interested in careers in these sectors.

**Potential funders
(cash or in-kind)**

- a) ITA, instrumentation employers.
- b) ITA, electrical transmission company, power line contractors.
- c) ITA, oil and gas companies and employers.

Potential implementers

Post-secondary education institution, relevant employers (depending on sector).

Timeframe

2022

Recommendation 3.7

Carry out a labour market study focused on the agricultural sector. Also explore developing an applied research program in climate change and its effects on regional agriculture.

Details

Carry out a labour market study focused on the agricultural sector in Northeast BC. This study would follow a similar process to the Northeast Regional Labour Market Strategy, with a focus on the training and skills needed in the agricultural sector.

According to *Farmer 4.0*, a 2019 report by RBC, Canadian farmers are at the intersection of a demographic and technological revolution. By 2025, one in four farmers will be 65 or older, with 110,000 expected to retire in the coming decade. Meanwhile, fewer young people than ever are entering agriculture. *Farmer 4.0* analyzed the emergence of advanced technologies across a range of agricultural sub-sectors and found they will change the skills needed over the decade by farms, and greenhouses.

Need addressing: By conducting a thorough analysis of the skill needs of the Northeast agricultural sector, the region will be better placed to provide or partner to provide the training needed to keep the sector viable and competitive.

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| Target audience | Farmers and ranchers in the Northeast. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | BC Government's LMP program (sector human resources strategy development) . |
| Potential implementers | NLC with local farms, producer associations, equipment dealers, interested municipalities . |
| Timeframe | 2021–22 |

Recommendation 3.8 Develop a workshop on business management for individual contract workers.

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| Details | <p>Develop a workshop on business management for contract workers offered in evenings or on weekends. This course could provide guidance on tax requirements, bookkeeping essentials, safety needs, insurance requirements, personal financial essentials, and other basic entrepreneurial information. The course might be promoted through WorkBC, Chambers of Commerce, Community Futures, and other organizations.</p> <p>Need addressing: Some resource workers prefer to operate as individuals, hiring out their services on a daily basis. Many lack knowledge of taxation and other requirements of small business and some have ended up with significant tax bills and encountered other difficulties.</p> |
| Target audience | Individual contract workers. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | To be determined. |
| Potential implementers | To be determined. |
| Timeframe | 2021 |

Objective 4

Encourage regional economic diversification and innovation and prepare for future trends.

These recommendations respond to calls for greater economic diversification in the Northeast.

Recommendation 4.1

Create a Northeast regional technology innovation centre.

Details

Building on successful models in Nelson, Kelowna, and North Okanagan, develop a technology innovation centre. The purpose of the centre would be to offer a space to deliver business development supports and skills-training programs, taking business ideas from the start-up phase, to incorporation, growth, and exports. It could also be a community-building facility, with events and activities. The purpose is to be a catalyst and a conduit to connect people and businesses to support they need.

The tech centre could also support:

- Coding boot camps and other short-term technology training, offered by private firms
- Development of a tech club with interested entrepreneurs to meet monthly to hear presenters discuss topics like artificial intelligence, innovations in ag-tech, other relevant topics and mentoring
- Development of satellite centres around Northeast British Columbia, including in First Nations communities

Need addressing: With the requirement for technological innovation across industries, the centre could assist and help grow start-up tech companies. These firms could support local industries and create new, well-paying job opportunities for Northeast residents. The tech centre could also increase the numbers of tech-savvy workers for local companies, even those not directly in the tech field.

Target audience

Entrepreneurs, students, Indigenous peoples.

Potential funders (cash or in-kind)

Western Economic Diversification, interested municipalities.

Potential implementers

Interested organizations, Indigenous communities, municipalities, NLC.

Timeframe

2020

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| Recommendation 4.2 | Explore opportunities available through the Capacity Building Program of the Digital Technology Supercluster strategy. |
| Details | <p>Explore the potential opportunities resulting from the Capacity Building Pilot Program for the federal and provincial Digital Technology Supercluster strategy.</p> <p>The Capacity Building Program aims to develop a diverse pool of digital talent to ensure a workforce prepared for the jobs of tomorrow with a focus on improving the inclusion and participation of Indigenous people, underrepresented groups, and women. A potential project could be related to developing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous talent for the future workforce and to support Indigenous enterprises • Industry-relevant secondary, post-secondary and/or post-graduate expertise in digital innovation <p>Need addressing: Strengthening the capacity and abilities of Northeast residents in digital technologies and increasing the possibilities for local businesses in this field.</p> |
| Target audience | Youth, adults interested in technology careers. |
| Potential funders (cash or in-kind) | Digital Technology Supercluster, Capacity Building Pilot Program, Ministry of Jobs, Trades and Technology. |
| Potential implementers | Depends on project pursued. |
| Timeframe | 2021 |



6. Next steps

With the final report complete, the following activities could take place:

- **Holding a conference on labour market issues in the Northeast** – In April 2020, NLC planned to hold a conference on regional labour market issues.
- **Moving forward on selected recommendations of interest** – As it fits with their interests, capacity and availability of funding, various organizations in the Northeast could consider moving forward with one or more recommendations on a timeframe suitable for them.

7. Conclusion

The Northeast region has created a record of collaboration and cooperation on many issues, including workforce development. This Regional Labour Market Strategy builds upon this success.

Many Northeast workers in 2020 will be retiring within five to 10 years. Planning for regional labour market needs began in 2012 and this current Strategy could be reviewed and refreshed in the years ahead. As research for this Strategy demonstrated, hundreds of well-paying, interesting jobs will be available to educated people in Northeast BC. Business opportunities will also be at hand for individuals with the appropriate skills and knowledge. The region's workforce must be prepared.

The Steering Committee believes that the Regional Labour Market Strategy is a solid situational analysis and provides valuable information for individuals, communities, training providers and industry. Used thoughtfully and with ongoing industry and community validation, it could help align existing training programs in the Northeast to meet employment opportunities; it might also enable training providers to find new ways to address gaps. The goals and actions outlined with the Strategy, however, are only a start. Others might be developed in the years ahead as circumstances change and new workforce needs emerge.

The next opportunity is for Northeast organizations to consider implementing Strategy recommendations of interest. Those that have been involved in the Strategy development might seek to build momentum and encourage others to become involved. They would need to secure funding for recommendations, implement pilot programs, evaluate, adjust and then start again.

The years to 2028 and beyond will have their share of business and workforce challenges and opportunities. This Labour Market Strategy provides a potential tool that might address them. Using it, leaders in workforce development could undertake activities that might help economic growth in the region to translate into better jobs, stronger businesses and ultimately richer and healthier lives for the residents of Northeast British Columbia.



8. References

1 TC Energy as of May 3, 2019.

2 To prepare this report, Ingenia Consulting used data from Statistics Canada, the BC government, PetroLMI, BuildForce, BC Hydro and Northern Health. The consultants focused on data specific to the Northeast region and to various sectors within it, to present a more detailed portrait. Data for individual municipalities was unavailable.

3 LNG plants normally use two trains of compressors running in parallel. This design costs more, but it provides better balanced production. Running two trains also eliminates the risk of shutdown in case one of the trains requires unplanned service operations. A larger LNG plant would use four trains.

4 Available at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/suicide.pdf>

5 Available at https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Executive_Summary.pdf

6 Available at https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Library/Policy~Topics/Health~and~Social~Development/UBCM_CCCABC%20Child%20Care%20Needs%20in%20Small%20Rural%20and%20Remote%20Communities%20August%202018_FINAL.pdf

7 The Globe and Mail, “With a Looming Age Crisis, who is helping the Caregivers?” April 19, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-with-a-looming-aging-crisis-who-is-helping-the-caregivers/>

8 GBA+ is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The “plus” in GBA+ acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences.

9 Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual.

10 From the report “Rural Changes/National Opportunities”, available at <https://fcm.ca/sites/default/files/documents/resources/report/rural-challenges-national-opportunities.pdf>

11 Northern Opportunities is an innovative northeastern BC partnership of the Fort Nelson, Peace River North, and Peace River South school districts, Northern Lights College, First Nations, and industry with a common goal: to provide young people with a seamless learning pathway from secondary school to post secondary training. Programs combine high school, college studies and work-based training enabling participants to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and advanced credit in post secondary and/or industry certification.

