

BC Value-added Wood Products: Workforce Development Strategic Plan– Backgrounder

Context: British Columbia's value-added and advanced wood manufacturing sector is comprised of mostly small businesses employing 16,660 workers in more than 100 communities with most companies operating outside the lower mainland. Relevant occupations include drafting technologists and technicians, interior designers and decorators, technical sales specialists - wholesale trade, sales, and account representatives - wholesale trade (non-technical), other wood processing machine operators, woodworking machine operators, furniture and fixture assemblers and inspectors, other wood products assemblers and inspectors. The industry generated combined sales of \$5.1B in 2017 with annual growth of 10% from 2012-2017. In 2019, the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Rural development announced \$7.9 M in funding to grow international markets for advanced wood products made in BC and during the COVID-19 pandemic value-added forestry was designated an essential service.

Sector Labour Market Projects Phase One and Two: BC Wood, an industry-led not-for-profit trade association, has undertaken two Sector Labour Market Projects (SLMP) projects, including Sector Engagement Report (2017) and Labour Market Information Report (2018). BC Value-added Wood Products: Sector Engagement Report, was completed in July 2017 and identified initial workforce concerns facing the province's value-added sector over the following five years. BC Value-added Wood Products: Labour Market Information Report completed late 2018, presented the findings from the labour market information research to clarify, deepen and expand on the issues identified in the sector engagement project, and developed a fact-based set of opportunities for action.

The LMI report identified several challenges including: acute labour shortages faced by employers include multiple causes such as high competition for workers from the construction and forestry sectors and an aging workforce, with retirements likely being accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there is a lack of diversity in the sector, with low representation of women, immigrants, First Nations peoples and youth, with many generally unaware of career paths and advancement opportunities. Lastly, the report identified a lack of effective and available training and not enough graduates from institutional training programs at BC post-secondary institutions to meet demand. The 2018 report proposed opportunities to address the challenges related to nine priority occupations.

Phase Three: This project will bring together employers from across BC representing the value-added and advanced wood manufacturing sector to provide input and comment on their strategic priorities. Other related stakeholders such as post-secondary, career influencers, employees and persons in transition will also be included in the project activities. The engagement will focus on identifying actions and implementation strategies to raise awareness of the VAW industry, improve attraction, retention, and training opportunities to meet the needs of this important BC Industry Sector. An implementation sustainability and evaluation framework will also be produced to support the strategic direction. The project will run from through to July 2021 and culminate in a sector talent strategy.

Funding for this project comes through the Labour Market Partnership Funding provided by the Ministry of Advanced Education. BC Wood is leading the project along with a stakeholder advisory group. For more information contact Brian Hawrysh at BC Wood: bhawrysh@bcwood.com