



# Workforce Development Strategy for Central Alberta

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Prepared for:



Funded by:



# Workforce Development Strategy for Central Alberta

Prepared by MNP LLP

This report was funded by Community Futures Central Alberta. We are committed to working with our industry partners to address issues of importance to the labour market and economy in Alberta.

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# Executive Summary

Central Alberta faces a number of challenges with respect to attracting and retaining the skilled labour needed to support its transition to a more diversified economy. The strategies outlined in this report are centred on addressing the challenges and barriers identified through a survey and consultations with local stakeholders. Addressing those challenges requires collaboration between businesses, economic development organizations, and post-secondary institutions. The tables below outline the identified strategies and corresponding actions to enable implementation.

## Increase Collaboration

**Foster regional collaboration to enhance the labour pool within the region through creation of a Human Resource Working Group.**

<b>Rationale</b>	A recurring theme from the consultations was that small businesses lack capacity and need support in navigating the changing labour market. In some cases, they are unable to provide training to employees as they do not have the knowledge themselves while in other cases it is lack of capacity.  Creating a working group that brings employers together to share learnings and perspectives could identify shared training needs or challenges and support the development of action plans to address barriers and challenges.
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the medium to long term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a Human Resource Working Group for the region that focuses on providing tools and supports for small businesses, identifying program changes or development of new programs based on emerging business needs and providing recommendations to government. This could be done under the umbrella of the Central Alberta Economic Partnership ("CAEP") or another regional organization and the ABC Summit could provide a forum for identifying areas of focus and communicating with the broader business community.</li><li>• Work with regional businesses and organizations to identify the mandate and vision for the working group. This will foster collaboration between the stakeholders and encourage participation.</li><li>• To be effective, a dedicated resource should be identified to champion this. This resource would be responsible for developing an appropriate working group, coordinating collaboration, and ensuring follow through.</li><li>• Identify a funding mechanism to provide resources to support the initiative on an ongoing basis such as a subscription or a participation fee model for specific</li></ul>

	<p>services. For example, human resource services may be made available on a fee-for-service basis to businesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop success stories illustrating the value of collaboration to help overcome reluctance to participate.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	CAEP or other regional organization to lead creation.

**Increase collaboration with post-secondary institutions to support the provision of work-integrated learning for student and provide micro-credentialing and upskilling for employees.**

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Educational institutions play a crucial role in training the future workforce. Interviewees stated that there are gaps in existing skills which prove difficult to fill through internal training mechanisms and stakeholders reported that developing tailored courses is expensive and that the costs can be a barrier. By collaborating to identify skill gaps, employers may be able to work with post-secondary institutions to develop cost-effective training programs.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the short to medium term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate the collaborative efforts between education institutions and industry to develop programs focused on emerging technologies, managerial training and digital skills.</li> <li>• The collaboration should focus on facilitating the development of training programs and environments that simulate real-life working conditions.</li> <li>• Identify funding programs and/or models to support development of training to address common skill gaps.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	This could be coordinated by the Human Resource Working Group once established as part of the ABC Summit. In the interim business associations and industry could take the lead.

## Employer Training

### Develop Strategic Workforce Planning Training for Small Business

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Changes in the labour market mean that employers need to change their recruitment and retention strategies. From the perspective of a business, employer training can happen either through a program, or through private consultants offering this expertise. According to participants in the stakeholder session most business environments are savvy enough to have a good understanding of "the basics" but as the employment world evolves, support in effectively integrating new practices would be helpful.</p> <p>Stakeholders also indicated that small businesses have limited human resource capacity and many are too busy to attend structured training programs.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the medium to long term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CAEP should collaborate with business associations to identify a willing project champion who will engage potential participants and determine preferred modalities.</li><li>• Training should be targeted at the needs of small businesses and should be provided in a flexible and accessible format (e.g., short video modules).</li><li>• Inclusion of a change management component could help businesses that are reluctant to modify their practices overcome barriers.</li><li>• Piloting training with a small group of employers would allow it to be refined before being rolled out more generally.</li><li>• Tracking outcomes for employers who participate and having them share their experiences through short webinars or videos could help encourage participation.</li></ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	Collaboration between CAEP and business associations such as Chambers of Commerce. Once developed the training may be made available as part of the human resource services developed through the Human Resource Working Group.

## Support Development of a Diverse Workforce through Equity, Diversity and Inclusion ("EDI" Training).

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Under-represented groups are a potential labour pool that can be drawn upon to fill vacancies. There are a number of Indigenous communities in the region that have relatively young populations that are seeking employment opportunities.</p> <p>Providing education on the benefits and opportunities of workforce diversity to employers could help to address barriers and increase opportunities in the region for under-represented groups.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the short to medium term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<p>Build on the work of local immigration partnerships (e.g., Red Deer Local Immigration Partnership) to provide training to educate employers on EDI. Training should go beyond the benefits of EDI to include information on how employers can address barriers to employment for under-represented groups. Specific actions to support this include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with organizations such as local immigration partnerships that serve immigrants to identify barriers to employment and provide employers with information on barriers that may be addressed through accommodation (e.g., staggering start times to account for school schedules, lack of access to reliable transportation) and incorporate this into training.</li> <li>• Establish relationships with Indigenous communities and collaborate to identify opportunities to increase the representation of Indigenous Peoples in the Central Alberta workforce.</li> <li>• Provide information on how credentials can be tested or verified.</li> <li>• Compile case studies of businesses that have successfully increased the diversity of their workforces to illustrate the benefits in a tangible way.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	Business associations, local immigration partnerships and economic development agencies.

## Promote and Utilize Government Support

### Increase Utilization of Government Support and Training Programs for use in Upskilling and Reskilling Employees

<b>Rationale</b>	Employers that participated in the study reported high levels of awareness of government programs, but low levels of use. Participants who had accessed the Canada-Alberta Job Grant program reported mixed levels of satisfaction. For some the programs worked well, while other respondents reported eligibility requirements were a barrier to using the programs.  Stakeholders also indicated that identifying, navigating, and understanding the various programs can be overwhelming for many businesses.
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the short to medium term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify barriers to using government programs for businesses and develop appropriate supports (e.g., help completing applications). Business advisors such as accountants often provide information on programs to their clients and may be a good source of information on barriers faced by businesses to accessing programs.</li><li>Engage with government to advocate for changes to the programs where significant barriers are identified.</li><li>Develop an information hub to share information on programs and changes to programs. This would provide a central source that consolidates information on both federal and provincial government programs that could make it easier for employers and their advisors to identify and access appropriate funding programs. The central hub could feature short videos explaining the information requirements and application process for each program.</li><li>Create communication channels to share information with businesses.</li><li>Develop success stories highlighting how local businesses have successfully accessed programs.</li></ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	Collaboration between CAEP and business associations. Accountants and business advisors could be leveraged to develop informational videos describing the process and requirements for each program.

# 1 Introduction

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## Background and Purpose

The Central Alberta Economic Partnership Ltd. ("CAEP") is an economic development organization that supports economic growth through the provision of tools, resources, and training for its members. To support decision making with respect to workforce development and economic diversification of the Central Alberta region, CAEP identified the need for a comprehensive workforce development strategy.

CAEP engaged MNP LLP ("MNP") to undertake the workforce development strategy in two phases. In the first phase MNP developed a regional labour market overview to provide labour market intelligence and to inform decisions on workforce planning, training, and education programs to support existing and emerging sectors. The first phase was completed in fall 2020.

The second phase built on the findings of the regional labour market overview to create a workforce development strategy that provides industry, academia, and government with information on workforce availability, gaps, and identifies strategies to bridge these gaps; ultimately supporting the development, attraction and retention of a skilled and agile workforce that meets current and future business needs in Central Alberta. This report outlines the workforce development strategy informed by, and to be collaboratively implemented by employers, economic development agencies, and business associations across the region.

## Scope

The scope of the project encompassed:

- Gathering information and then identifying gaps in existing data and information;
- Conducting interviews with local stakeholders (primary research);
- Conducting a survey of local businesses, business associations, educational institutions, and government representatives (primary research);
- Analysing interviews, survey findings, and available data;
- Identifying availability of skills including workforce readiness, job specific and digital skills, labour market needs, skills gaps, and value-addition opportunities;
- Developing strategies to address gaps and leverage opportunities;
- Conducting a stakeholder engagement session to validate the strategies;
- Reviewing findings with CAEP; and,
- Identifying strategies and an action plan for the region.

## Limitations

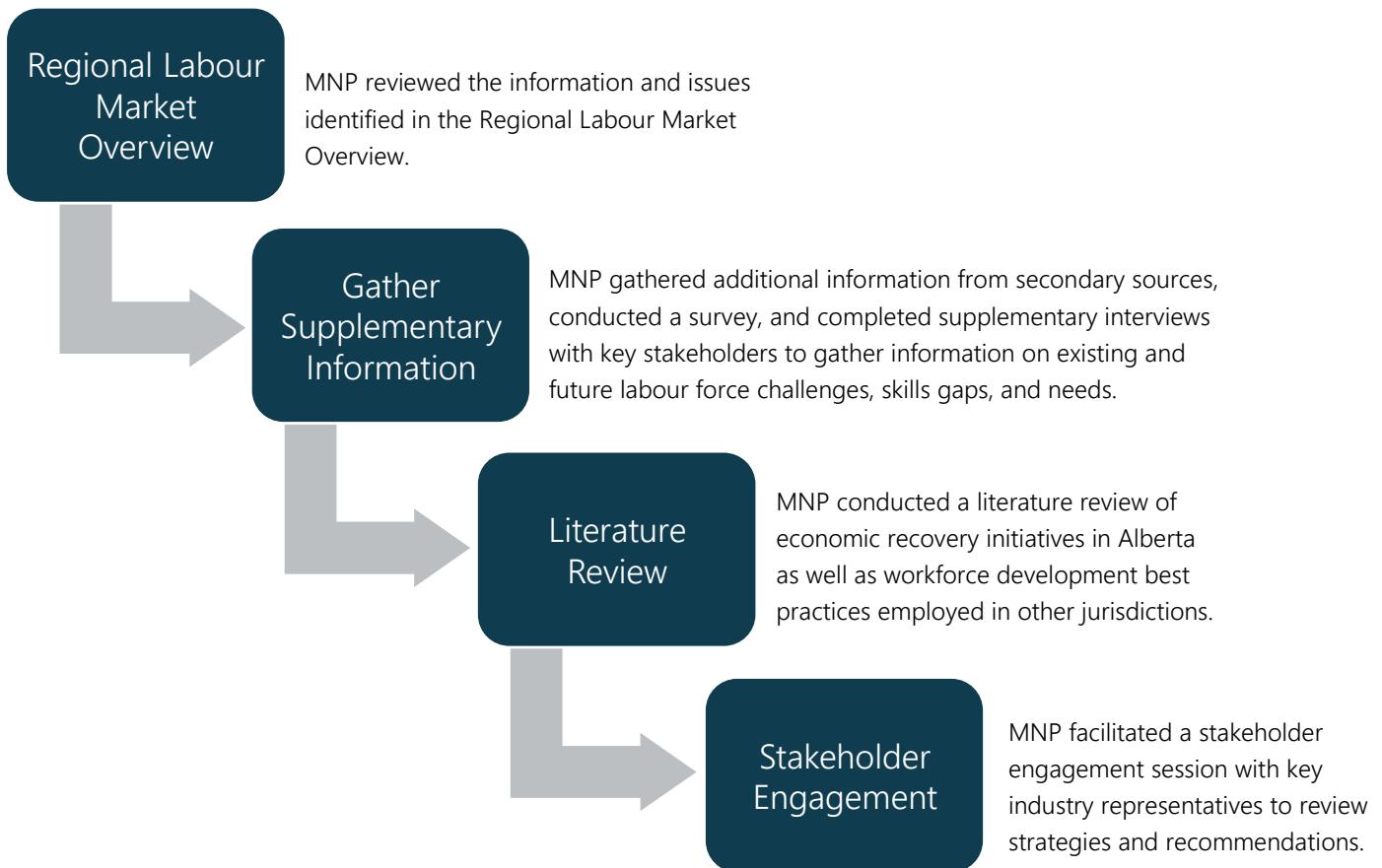
The report is provided for information purposes and is intended for general guidance only. It should not be regarded as comprehensive or a substitute for personalized, professional advice.

We have relied upon the completeness, accuracy and fair presentation of all information and data obtained from industry representatives and public sources. The accuracy and reliability of the findings and opinions expressed in the presentation are conditional upon the completeness, accuracy and fair presentation of the information underlying them. As a result, we caution readers not to rely upon any findings or opinions for business or investment purposes and disclaim any liability to any party who relies upon them as such.

Additionally, the findings and opinions expressed in the presentation constitute judgments as of the date of the presentation and are subject to change without notice. MNP is under no obligation to advise of any change brought to its attention which would alter those findings or opinions.

## 2 Approach

In preparing this report, MNP carried out the following activities:



## 3 Situational Analysis

### Industry Trends

While the oil and gas industry has historically been the economic backbone of the region and Alberta as a whole, Central Alberta has a strong economic base which includes agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation industries. Central Alberta's economic base combined with emerging industries including tourism, renewable energy, and information and communications technology<sup>1</sup> are well aligned with four of seven pillars in Alberta's Recovery Plan for diversifying its economy.<sup>2</sup> Growth in the region is expected to stimulate and boost supporting industries including construction, educational services, health care and social assistance, as well as professional, scientific and technical services.<sup>3</sup>

Central Alberta's geographic location, vast land rich in natural resources, and access to international markets provide an advantageous and competitive environment for attracting businesses, investment, and a skilled workforce. One of the region's key advantages is its post-secondary institutions, which work closely with local businesses and industries to support the region's training and workforce needs, but also advance research and development, and encourage technology and innovation to promote industry growth and competitiveness. Olds College has pioneered programs such as Brewmaster & Brewery Operations Management, Agricultural Management, Agriculture Technology Integration, and Agricultural Equipment Technician<sup>4</sup> in response to industry trends across the region. Additionally, Red Deer Polytechnic University continuously collaborates with industry to modify its program content and applicable re-skilling courses to optimize employment opportunities for its graduates.<sup>5</sup>

### Labour Market Trends

The downturn in the oil and gas sector has affected Central Alberta's economy and is creating a supply of labour that can be leveraged to meet the labour and skill sets required to support other industries. As major industries in the region continue to experience technological changes, there is growing demand for technical skills in the area of programming and software development, digital marketing, and

#### Declining Labour Supply

**Nearly all the baby boomers will have left the labour market by 2028.**

*Source: Alberta's Occupational Outlook*

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Alberta, Alberta's Recovery Plan. June 2020. Available here: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/27b15abd-0f96-4e6b-8ea5-8b0b4f2ec797/resource/0f6a4f8d-44d0-44a4-81e0-7bdfcb06f4b1/download/tbf-albertas-recovery-plan-2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> MNP, Regional Labour Market Overview. November 2020. Available here: [https://caepalberta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RegionalLabourMarketOverview\\_MNP\\_WEB-1.pdf](https://caepalberta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RegionalLabourMarketOverview_MNP_WEB-1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Olds College, Programs. Available here: <https://www.oldscollege.ca/programs/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> MNP Interview Findings.

brewing, as well as management skills in a variety of applications. Employment demands are typically centred around labour intensive occupations related to agriculture and manufacturing industries. These businesses have, and continue to, rely on the use of temporary foreign workers to fill the employment gap.

As the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic progresses employers across Canada are struggling to attract qualified candidates. According to research conducted by the Business Development Bank of Canada, 55 percent of businesses are struggling to hire workers and 26 percent are having difficulty retaining their workers.<sup>6</sup> A lack of candidates applying to job openings and lack of skills and experience were key challenges for hiring, while the desire for higher wages was the most commonly reported challenge for employee retention.<sup>7</sup> Although the causes of the labour shortage vary across regions and industries, the retirement of baby boomers is, and will be even more so, a significant factor overall.<sup>8</sup>

Other labour trends to consider include the advancement of technology and global digitalization.<sup>9</sup> The widespread adoption of remote work as a result of the pandemic has changed the geographic boundaries of labour markets. Workers in Central Alberta have access to opportunities in other regions of Canada without having to relocate, while businesses in Central Alberta are able to access talent from outside the region. Finally, changes in technology requirements and increased automation will require enhanced technical skills from the current and future labour force.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Business Development Bank of Canada , How to Adapt to the Labour Shortage Situation. September 2021. Available here: [https://www.bdc.ca/globalassets/digizuite/32075-study-labour-shortage.pdf?utm\\_campaign=Labour-Shortage-Study-2021--download--EN&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Eloqua](https://www.bdc.ca/globalassets/digizuite/32075-study-labour-shortage.pdf?utm_campaign=Labour-Shortage-Study-2021--download--EN&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Government of Alberta, Alberta's Occupational Outlook 2019 – 2028. October 2019. Available here: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/8987e228-9ffa-4a2e-9f79-a9b869df2ccb/resource/502659ff-47fb-4ce3-94db-6a0c2f1f722c/download/lbr-albertas-occupational-outlook-2019-2028.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report. 2018. Available here: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_2018.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> MNP interview findings.

## Indigenous Perspectives

Indigenous communities have relatively young populations; however, unemployment rates remain high due to various employment barriers. An interviewee noted that at the community level, entry level positions are lacking for Indigenous people to gain work experience. As a result, members are leaving the community for employment and capacity building opportunities, and many do not return to the community. Additionally, those living in Indigenous communities face additional barriers to education including pre-requisite requirements, availability, and cost of certain programs. According to an employment centre located within an Indigenous community in Central Alberta, most (unemployed) members are willing and actively seeking employment; however, they face a variety of barriers including access to reliable internet which limits their ability to undertake online training and access remote work opportunities. Access to transportation to and from the workplace is also a significant barrier as many Indigenous people do not have a drivers license and/or may not have access to a vehicle on a regular basis.

## Challenges for Central Alberta

Central Alberta has a long history of competing with larger centres for skilled and experienced talent. Several interview respondents noted that they have lost employees and potential candidates to urban centres such as Calgary and Edmonton because urban centres can offer more job opportunities for spouses, additional recreational activities, and/or more lucrative remuneration.<sup>11</sup> While the transition to virtual work environments creates opportunities for Central Alberta to recruit employees from outside the region, some employers in Central Alberta may be at a disadvantage since a large portion of Central Alberta is rural and several communities do not have access to broadband internet.<sup>12</sup> The Government of Canada and Government of Alberta are working towards bridging the digital divide between rural and urban areas by bringing high-speed internet to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. In addition to supporting a cost-sharing program between the provincial and federal governments,<sup>13</sup> programs such as the Universal Broadband Fund are in place to improve connectivity in underserved areas.<sup>14</sup> These ongoing upgrades to high-speed internet will provide residents in Central Alberta the option and ability to work remotely. This has the potential to encourage workers to remain in the region, rather than, for example, relocating to larger urban centers in order to accommodate a spouse's job prospects.

<sup>11</sup> MNP interview findings.

<sup>12</sup> MNP, Regional Labour Market Overview. November 2020. Available here: [https://caepalberta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RegionalLabourMarketOverview\\_MNP\\_WEB-1.pdf](https://caepalberta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RegionalLabourMarketOverview_MNP_WEB-1.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Government of Alberta, Alberta and Canada Bringing High-Speed Internet to Underserved Areas. Available here: <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-canada-bringing-high-speed-internet-underserved-areas.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Government of Canada, News Release: Universal Broadband Fund – Supported Projects Will Bring High-Speed Internet to Alberta Communities. March 2021. Available here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2021/03/universal-broadband-fund-supported-projects-will-bring-high-speed-internet-to-alberta-communities.html>

## Universal Broadband Fund

The Government of Canada is providing over **\$5.4 million in federal projects** with an additional investment of approximately \$3.7 million from TELUS. These projects are anticipated to help **connect 5,080 underserved households** to high-speed internet.

*Source: [Government of Canada, News Release. \(March 2021\)](#)*

## 4 Current and Future Labour Market Needs

To identify factors that affect the current and future labour market needs in Central Alberta, MNP reviewed labour market trends in Alberta and Canada and conducted interviews with local stakeholders. The key themes that emerged from the research and consultations include a lack of access to information regarding training and employment opportunities, a lack of skilled/experienced candidates, and the need for workforce diversity<sup>15</sup> within Central Alberta.

### Access to Information

When asked about labour attraction in Central Alberta, several interviewees noted that there is a lack of awareness of job opportunities available within the region. This poses a barrier as job seekers may not be expressly seeking out opportunities in the region resulting in few potential candidates. Representatives from a local employment centre stressed that many of their clients are not aware of the various types of job opportunities within the different industries nor are they aware of the training opportunities available to secure these jobs.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, awareness of remote work opportunities may further support job seekers who do not have access to reliable transportation.<sup>17</sup>

*"Increased engagement from industry to market various job and training opportunities would be very beneficial."*

- MNP Interviewee

<sup>15</sup> Workforce diversity refers to the individual characteristics of employees and may include age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical abilities, experience, and ideologies.

<sup>16</sup> MNP interview findings.

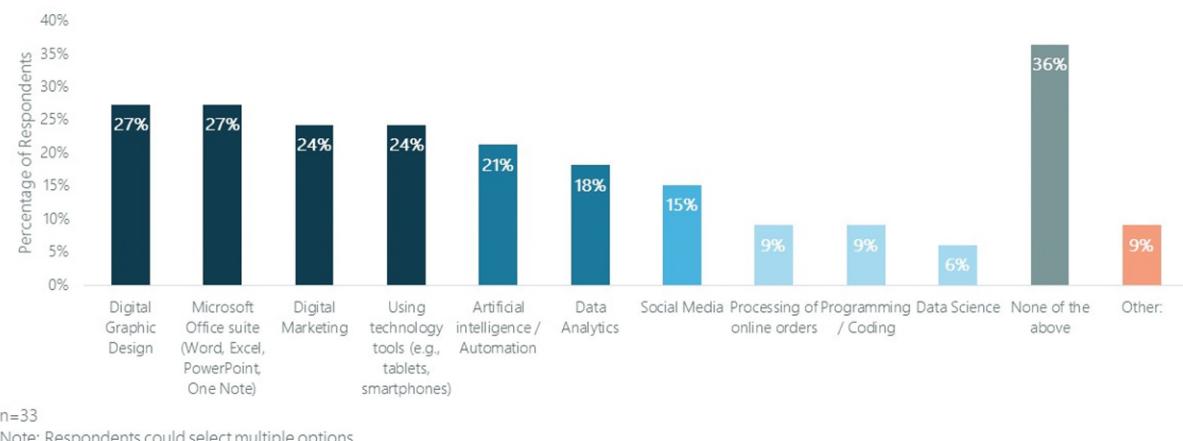
<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Skills Development

Discussions with stakeholders regarding labour needs centred around candidates and employees having a lack of digital skills and experience. During these consultations, MNP inquired about the types of experience or specific skills that are needed. Reflecting the shift towards global digitalization and emerging technology, the most common response across various industries was a lack of digital skills. This was also reflected in the results of the survey of businesses. When asked about challenges relating to their hiring experiences, the most common response was a lack of digital skills and experience among the candidates.<sup>18</sup>

The types of digital skills required varies by position and industry. Some interviewees noted that they require people with the ability to process online orders, use technology to complete online forms, and navigate social media for marketing purposes.<sup>19</sup> When asked the same question, 61 percent of survey respondents identified at least one type of digital skill to be lacking. The most common types of skills identified to be lacking include digital graphic design, Microsoft Office Suite, digital marketing, and use of technology tools.<sup>20</sup> Figure 1 shows the share of survey responses by type of digital skill lacking.

**Figure 1: Types of Digital Skill Lacking**



<sup>18</sup> MNP survey findings.

<sup>19</sup> MNP interview findings.

<sup>20</sup> MNP survey findings.

## Workforce Diversity

Changes in the labour market due to Canada's aging population and COVID-19 are resulting in labour shortages. To remain competitive businesses and employers will need to adjust their hiring practices to reflect the changing labour market, changing demographics, available talent and employee expectations. Key themes for successful workforce management that emerged from the primary and secondary research were that employers need to expand their pool of candidates through strategies such as:

- Marketing themselves as an employer of choice and articulating their purpose and goals.<sup>21</sup>
- Expanding diversity within their workforce and adjusting job requirements by identifying what skills can be trained on the job, and what skills need to be hired. Appropriate on-the-job training to support employee success may be less costly and more efficient in ensuring the workforce has the requisite skills for success than seeking out candidates with all of the required skills.
- Thoughtful and planned approaches to employee orientation and onboarding of new employees will help to reduce employee turnover while enhancing employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Consultations with stakeholders also noted that some businesses in Central Alberta may be reluctant to recruit new immigrants due to language barriers and cultural differences.<sup>22</sup> In some cases, employers are hesitant to trust certifications and credentials from other countries while in other cases, credentials are not recognized in Canada.<sup>23</sup>

## 5 Strategies

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The proposed strategies for workforce development in Central Alberta focus on the labour market needs outlined in Section 4 and incorporate key success factors identified during our review of best practices. The strategies were developed in consultation with CAEP and include suggestions gathered as part of the stakeholder engagement session.

### Employer Training

Changes in the labour market require employers to adapt their recruitment and retention strategies. When asked how much their organization would benefit from various types of employer training, survey respondents indicated that they would benefit most from best practice training related to employee attraction and retention. Approximately 81 percent of survey respondents indicated that their

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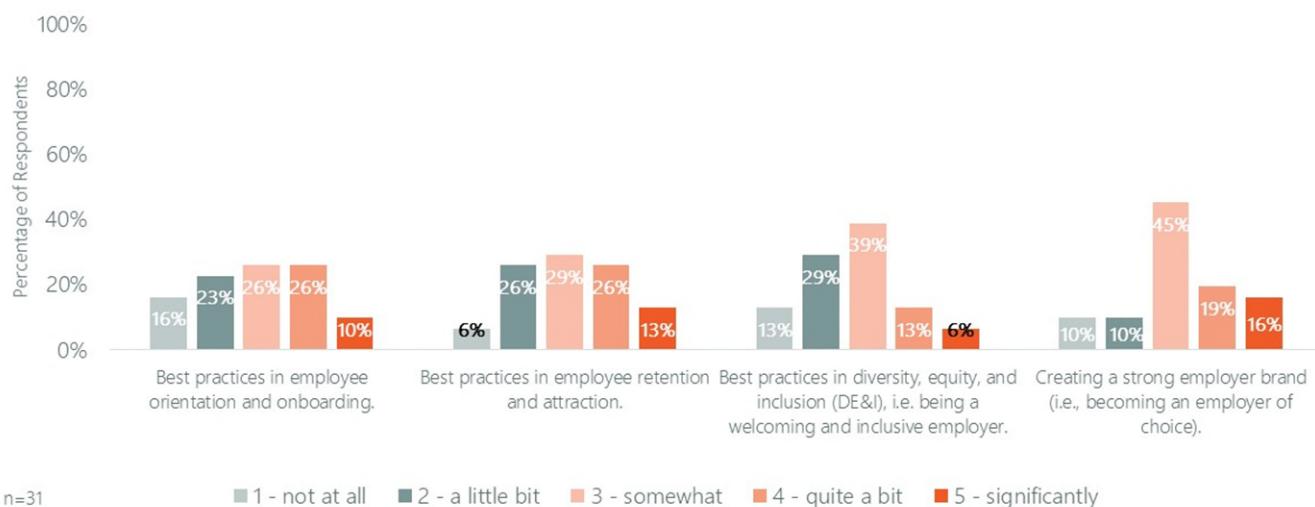
<sup>21</sup> MNP stakeholder findings.

<sup>22</sup> MNP interview findings.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

organization would, at most, somewhat benefit from best practice training in the area of diversity, equity and inclusion. Training related to creating a strong employer brand as well as employee orientation and onboarding received similar responses with roughly 35 percent of respondents indicating that their organization would benefit significantly from these types of training. Feedback also indicated that training opportunities should be provided in a flexible and easily accessible format such as electronic, video, or pre-recorded and delivered as one-to-two-hour modules.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 2: Scale of Benefits to Training for Organizations**



According to the Business Development Bank of Canada, labour shortages in Canada are not expected to improve within the next decade.<sup>25</sup> To help employers in Central Alberta remain competitive in current and future labour market conditions, the following strategies are recommended:

- **Education for employers related to the benefits of investing in employee development, on-the-job training, staff orientation (onboarding), and creating an 'employer' brand for the attraction of candidates and retention of employees.** Strategic workforce planning refers to the process of anticipating workforce needs and putting in place appropriate human resource strategies and practices to address the current and anticipated future labour market

conditions (as outlined in Section 4 Current and Future Labour Market Needs). It can include developing and upskilling the current workforce in addition to recruiting new employees. Strategies related to employee training are provided in Appendix A.

*"Employers need to adapt to the new generation that's coming up. We need to be more accommodating to employees in order to encourage retention and be accepting of all demographics."*

- MNP Interviewee

<sup>24</sup> MNP stakeholder engagement findings.

<sup>25</sup> Business Development Bank of Canada, Labour Shortage: Here to Stay, September 2018. Available here: [https://www.bdc.ca/en/documents/analysis\\_research/labour-shortage.pdf](https://www.bdc.ca/en/documents/analysis_research/labour-shortage.pdf)

Employers should enhance their recruitment, retention and training practices in a way that is responsive to the current labour conditions, while equipping themselves with modern human resource management practices to better respond to an increasingly diverse workforce.<sup>26</sup> In the 2018 edition of the Future of Jobs Report, the World Economic Forum highlights that companies need to understand that reskilling employees is both cost-effective and has significant mid- to long-term dividends, not only for the organization itself, but also has broader social benefits.<sup>27</sup>

- **Promote the benefits of building an inclusive and diverse workforce through equity, diversity, and inclusion training.** Committing to a workplace culture that reflects acceptance, openness, flexibility, and diversity can foster increased productivity, employee satisfaction, and help to empower the team.<sup>28</sup>

Successful implementation of cultural diversity within a workplace relies on participation and commitment at every level in the organization, including senior management.<sup>29</sup>

*"It is value-added for employers to consider diversifying their workplace."*

- MNP Interviewee

## Promote and Utilize Government Support

There are a number of government initiatives and programs in place to help businesses in Alberta build their workforce. Utilization of these programs would help accelerate employee training and workforce development. As such, the following strategies are focused on increasing awareness of, promoting, and utilizing government support programs:

### Canada-Alberta Job Grant

Funded by the Government of Canada through the Workforce Development Agreement, the Canada-Alberta Job Grant contributes up two-thirds of eligible costs associated with training for existing employees or up to 100 percent of training costs if hiring and training an unemployed Albertan. Certain employer and training eligibility requirements must be met.

Source: [Government of Alberta, Canada-Alberta Job Grant](#)

<sup>26</sup> Labour Market Information by Food Processing Skills Canada, At the Crossroad to Greatness: Key Insights & Labour Market Research About Canada's Food and Beverage Processing Industry. 2021. Available here: <https://fpsc-ctac.com/reports/>

<sup>27</sup> World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report. 2018. Available here: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_2018.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Forbes, The Benefits of Cultural Diversity in the Workplace. September 2019. Available here: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2019/09/13/the-benefits-of-cultural-diversity-in-the-workplace/?sh=64f6c82571c0>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

- **Increase awareness of government support and training programs to promote their utilization to enhance credentials, upskill or reskill employees.** Training programs such as the Canada-Alberta Job Grant cover eligible training costs to employers on behalf of their current or future employees. The MNP survey found that 81 percent of eligible employers were aware of the program, while only 33 percent of eligible employers have accessed it.<sup>30</sup> Other opportunities for government support include the various programs through Future Skills Centre,<sup>31</sup> Manpower Services (Alberta) Ltd.<sup>32</sup> and the Canada Training Benefit.<sup>33</sup>
- **Information sharing between various associations and Chambers about programs, strategies, and initiatives.** Development of an information hub for various businesses, industry associations, and Chambers to share information about current and upcoming government programs would help increase awareness and increase utilization of such programs; ultimately accelerating the training and development of required skills to fulfill labour needs in Central Alberta. Business associations and Chambers are well connected with local businesses and utilizing their networks and resources to promote various programs could reach a larger audience than is reached through relying on web marketing.<sup>34</sup>

## Increase Collaboration

Effective collaboration is a key factor in ensuring the success of workforce development. Collaborative initiatives between industry, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and government representatives can be scaled to achieve shared goals and address complex labour challenges. The following strategies are recommended to increase collaboration between stakeholders in Central Alberta:

- **Regional collaboration between employers to develop strategies to enhance the quantity and quality of the available labour pool within the region and to develop training programs – based on common skill needs.** By coming together to identify and pursue shared interests, workforce development partnerships can identify skill gaps and educational/training needs at the institutional, community and regional levels. Respective resources, assets, knowledge, and expertise could be leveraged through collaboration between employers to gain

*"Employer resources are difficult to locate as each level of government promotes its own programs. A central portal would make finding programs more efficient."*

*- Local Stakeholder*

<sup>30</sup> MNP survey findings.

<sup>31</sup> Future Skills Centre, Future Skills Centre Boosts Upskilling for New Technology in Key Economic Sectors with \$14 Million Investment. October 2021. Available here: <https://fsc-ccf.ca/engage/key-economic-sectors/>

<sup>32</sup> Government of Alberta, Employment and Training Services Directory. Available here: <https://www.alberta.ca/employment-training-services-directory.aspx>

<sup>33</sup> Government of Canada, The Canada Training Benefit. 2019. Available here: <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2019/docs/themes/good-jobs-de-bons-emplois-en.html>

<sup>34</sup> MNP stakeholder engagement findings.

perspective and identify complementary needs.<sup>35</sup> It is important to identify a 'champion' that will lead the collaboration and ensure follow through. This role could be fulfilled by industry associations, as business owners and employers often do not have the time, expertise, or knowledge of other industries.<sup>36</sup>

While emphasis is on industry to lead the collaboration, community involvement is also important in addressing the needs of employers and potential and current employees. Through consultations with stakeholders, MNP found that some job seekers in rural areas have challenges securing employment due to limited available transportation options.<sup>37</sup> Industry and communities could partner to develop action plans that address transportation issues that may be adversely affecting potential job candidates.

- **Increased collaboration with post-secondary institutions to identify, develop and deliver training programs targeted at enhancing and modernizing the skills and abilities of the labour pool. Training programs may benefit from the provision of practicums, work placements or internships to provide students with some real-life experience.** Industry and academia need to come together, along with government to develop quality training programs that are up to date with current and emerging industries and occupational needs. To achieve this, clear communication between industry and training providers is required to understand industry needs. An example of this type of collaboration is an initiative undertaken in Kelowna, BC by KF Aerospace and Okanagan College. Rather than recruiting employees from outside the region, KF Aerospace worked with Okanagan College to develop a training plan to produce enough graduates to fill the anticipated labour needs through 2027 (see text box).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Commonwealth Corporation, Partnerships: A Workforce Development Practitioner's Guide. 2013. Available here: [https://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/resources\\_2013-05-workforce-development-practitioners-guide.pdf](https://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/resources_2013-05-workforce-development-practitioners-guide.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> MNP stakeholder engagement findings.

<sup>37</sup> MNP interview findings.

<sup>38</sup> Government of BC, Workforce Development Partnership Reaching New Heights. Available here:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development/bc-ideas-exchange/success-stories/workforce-development/aerospace-workforce-development>

## Collaboration Between KF Aerospace and Okanagan College

In addition to monetary donations, KF Aerospace provides space in its corporate hangars for Okanagan College programming and a chrome Cessna 172 airplane for training use. This collaboration also enables Aircraft Maintenance Engineer students to learn alongside KF Aerospace technicians. Additional contributors to the success of this collaboration include:

- Industry Training Authority of BC - funding instructors for the new program.
- Aerospace Industries Association of Canada – investment of \$20,000 to support the program with tools and equipment.

Finally, the partnership worked together on a new marketing campaign, targeted social media ads, videos emphasizing KF Aerospace opportunities, and hosted joint open houses.

Source: [Government of BC, Workforce Development Partnership Reaching New Heights](#)

According to a survey completed by the Business Council of Canada, partnerships that develop co-op and internship programs are producing better quality graduates with real-life experience.<sup>39</sup> The Alberta Skills for Jobs Task Force strongly believes in the importance and value of work-integrated learning including co-op, internships, service learning, field placements, and apprenticeships. Work-integrated learning enhances education and helps improve technical and soft skills, essentially, helping prepare people for the workplace.<sup>40</sup> Successful programs not only provide more and better graduates but also provide employers with opportunities to upskill or re-skill their current employees through targeted micro credentialing programs. Furthermore, access to high schools to implement programs which combine education and work experience could help students with career planning.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Business Council of Canada, Investing in a Resilient Canadian Workforce. August 2020. Available here: <https://thebusinesscouncil.ca/report/investing-in-a-resilient-canadian-workforce/>

<sup>40</sup> Government of Alberta, Skills for Jobs Task Force Final Report. September 2020. Available here: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/6a07713a-5923-41e5-a8dc-74da7cf8edd2/resource/eddb322d-f211-4a27-9865-523b2f744e43/download/ae-skills-for-jobs-task-force-final-report-2020-09.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> MNP stakeholder findings.

## 6 Action Plan

The tables below outline the identified strategies and corresponding actions to enable implementation.

### Increase Collaboration

**Foster regional collaboration to enhance the labour pool within the region through creation of a Human Resource Working Group.**

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>A recurring theme from the consultations was that small businesses lack capacity and need support in navigating the changing labour market. In some cases, they are unable to provide training to employees as they do not have the knowledge themselves while in other cases it is lack of capacity.</p> <p>Creating a working group that brings employers together to share learnings and perspectives could identify shared training needs or challenges and support the development of action plans to address barriers and challenges.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the medium to long term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a Human Resource Working Group for the region that focuses on providing tools and supports for small businesses, identifying program changes or development of new programs based on emerging business needs and providing recommendations to government. This could be done under the umbrella of CAEP or another regional organization and the ABC Summit could provide a forum for identifying areas of focus and communicating with the broader business community.</li> <li>• Work with regional businesses and organizations to identify the mandate and vision for the working group. This will foster collaboration between the stakeholders and encourage participation.</li> <li>• To be effective, a dedicated resource should be identified to champion this. This resource would be responsible for developing an appropriate working group, coordinating collaboration, and ensuring follow through.</li> <li>• Identify a funding mechanism to provide resources to support the initiative on an ongoing basis such as a subscription or participation fee model for specific services. For example, human resource services may be made available on a fee-for-service basis to businesses.</li> <li>• Develop success stories illustrating the value of collaboration to help overcome reluctance to participate.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	CAEP or other regional organization to lead creation.

**Increase collaboration with post-secondary institutions to support the provision of work-integrated learning for student and provide micro-credentialing and upskilling for employees.**

<b>Rationale</b>	Educational institutions play a crucial role in training the future workforce. Interviewees stated that there are gaps in existing skills which prove difficult to fill through internal training mechanisms and stakeholders reported that developing tailored courses is expensive and that the costs can be a barrier. By collaborating to identify skill gaps, employers may be able to work with post-secondary institutions to develop cost-effective training programs.
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the short to medium term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Coordinate the collaborative efforts between education institutions and industry to develop programs focused on emerging technologies, managerial training and digital skills.</li><li>The collaboration should focus on facilitating the development of training programs and environments that simulate real-life working conditions.</li><li>Identify funding programs and/or models to support development of training to address common skill gaps.</li></ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	This could be coordinated by the Human Resource Working Group once established as part of the ABC Summit. In the interim business associations and industry could take the lead.

# Employer Training

## Develop Strategic Workforce Planning Training for Small Business

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Changes in the labour market mean that employers need to change their recruitment and retention strategies. From the perspective of a business, employer training can happen either through a program, or through private consultants offering this expertise. According to participants in the stakeholder session most business environments are savvy enough to have a good understanding of "the basics" but as the employment world evolves, support in effectively integrating new practices would be helpful.</p> <p>Stakeholders also indicated that small businesses have limited human resource capacity and many are too busy to attend structured training programs.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the medium to long term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>CAEP should collaborate with business associations to identify a willing project champion who will engage potential participants and determine preferred modalities.</li><li>Training should be targeted at the needs of small businesses and should be provided in a flexible and accessible format (e.g., short video modules).</li><li>Inclusion of a change management component could help businesses that are reluctant to modify their practices overcome barriers.</li><li>Piloting training with a small group of employers would allow it to be refined before being rolled out more generally.</li><li>Tracking outcomes for employers who participate and having them share their experiences through short webinars or videos could help encourage participation.</li></ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	Collaboration between CAEP and business associations such as Chambers of Commerce. Once developed the training may be made available as part of the human resource services developed through the Human Resource Working Group.

## Support Development of a Diverse Workforce through Equity, Diversity and Inclusion ("EDI" Training).

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Under-represented groups are a potential labour pool that can be drawn upon to fill vacancies. There are a number of Indigenous communities in the region that have relatively young populations that are seeking employment opportunities.</p> <p>Providing education on the benefits and opportunities of workforce diversity to employers could help to address barriers and increase opportunities in the region for under-represented groups.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the short to medium term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<p>Build on the work of local immigration partnerships (e.g., Red Deer Local Immigration Partnership) to provide training to educate employers on EDI. Training should go beyond the benefits of EDI to include information on how employers can address barriers to employment for under-represented groups. Specific actions to support this include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with organizations such as local immigration partnerships that serve immigrants to identify barriers to employment and provide employers with information on barriers that may be addressed through accommodation (e.g., staggering start times to account for school schedules, lack of access to reliable transportation) and incorporate this into training.</li> <li>• Establish relationships with Indigenous communities and collaborate to identify opportunities to increase the representation of Indigenous Peoples in the Central Alberta workforce.</li> <li>• Provide information on how credentials can be tested or verified.</li> <li>• Compile case studies of businesses that have successfully increased the diversity of their workforces to illustrate the benefits in a tangible way.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	Business associations, local immigration partnerships and economic development agencies.

## Promote and Utilize Government Support

### Increase Utilization of Government Support and Training Programs for use in Upskilling and Reskilling Employees

<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Employers that participated in the study reported high levels of awareness of government programs, but low levels of use. Participants who had accessed the Canada-Alberta Job Grant program reported mixed levels of satisfaction. For some the programs worked well, while other respondents reported eligibility requirements were a barrier to using the programs.</p> <p>Stakeholders also indicated that identifying, navigating, and understanding the various programs can be overwhelming for many businesses.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	This action would be undertaken over the short to medium term.
<b>Key Actions and Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify barriers to using government programs for businesses and develop appropriate supports (e.g., help completing applications). Business advisors such as accountants often provide information on programs to their clients and may be a good source of information on barriers faced by businesses to accessing programs.</li> <li>Engage with government to advocate for changes to the programs where significant barriers are identified.</li> <li>Develop an information hub to share information on programs and changes to programs. This would provide a central source that consolidates information on both federal and provincial government programs that could make it easier for employers and their advisors to identify and access appropriate funding programs. The central hub could feature short videos explaining the information requirements and application process for each program.</li> <li>Create communication channels to share information with businesses.</li> <li>Develop success stories highlighting how local businesses have successfully accessed programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	Collaboration between CAEP and business associations. Accountants and business advisors could be leveraged to develop informational videos describing the process and requirements for each program.

**Thank You**

The Workforce Development Strategy for Central Alberta was funded by Community Futures Central Alberta and was completed in collaboration with the Central Alberta Economic Partnership. We would like to thank all the interview, survey, and stakeholder engagement participants for sharing their experience and valuable insights. Information gathered from participants contributed to the overall development of the strategies.

# Appendix A: Strategies for Employee Training

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To help employees succeed in their respective roles and improve employee retention, the following strategies are recommended:

- **Employers to establish in-house training opportunities to support employees to success.** With employers struggling to find the candidates with the requisite skills, experience and abilities, it has become increasingly important to provide adequate orientation for new employees to ensure effective onboarding, and ongoing in-house training opportunities. In doing so, employers can train employees to ensure they have the required skills to be successful and meet the expectations of their roles.<sup>42</sup> For example, an Edmonton based software development company, Jobber, believes their employee development programs has helped them attract workers with in-demand skills.<sup>43</sup> At Jobber, employees have access to a career

*"Good mentors create a stronger workforce... they pass on years of knowledge."*

*- Skills for Jobs Task Force Final Report*

coach who will help them grow within their role with the company. Additionally, senior managers are evaluated in part on their quality of mentorship toward junior employees.<sup>44</sup> This strategy has helped them attract and retain the

key talent to enable the company's growth and ongoing success.

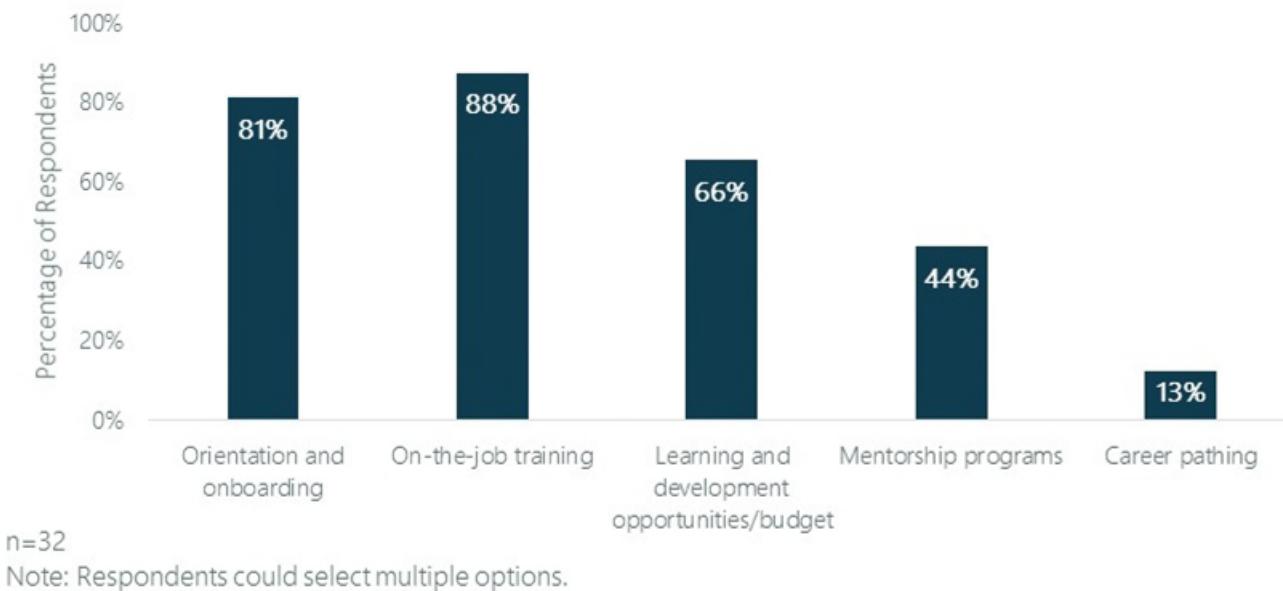
- **Work with employees to develop career paths within the organization to help them envision their future career progression.** When asked what type of employee training was provided, only 13 percent of survey respondents selected career pathing. Figure 3 illustrates the types of employee training provided.

<sup>42</sup> MNP interview findings.

<sup>43</sup> CBC News, The Priorities Have Shifted: Nearly Half of Canadian Firms Plan to Spend on Employee Training, Satisfaction. June 2019. Available here: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/canadian-companies-spend-employee-training-satisfaction-1.5189093>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Figure 3: Types of Employee Training Provided



Employees with clear career paths are typically more motivated to succeed in their role, are better prepared for career advancement, and are more likely to stay with their current employer.<sup>45</sup> Career planning can be documented in a formal manner through templates and competency maps that provide awareness of knowledge and skill requirements and specific steps required to advance within each role. Career pathing can also be achieved informally through open dialogue and ongoing conversations between the supervisor and the employee to gauge the employee's interests and aspirations.

Ongoing performance management and feedback should be used in conjunction with career planning to document achievements, current competencies and skill gaps, and any required development plans.

- **Cross training within an organization, across, or within departments can help improve team performance, enhance employee skill sets, and promote employee retention.** Businesses can encourage cross training to help individuals broaden their career development opportunities, expand their networks, access new work opportunities, and diversify their skillsets and knowledge bases. Cross training employees within an organization improves employee engagement, increases flexibility for scheduling, creates opportunities for career development, and improves team performance as employees have the opportunity to gain an understanding of other roles within the organization.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Society for Human Resource Management, Developing Employee Career Paths and Ladders. Available here: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/developingemployeecareerpathsandladders.aspx>

<sup>46</sup> Go2HR, Benefits of Cross Training. Available here: <https://www.go2hr.ca/training-education/benefits-of-cross-training>

# Appendix B: Data Sources

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This appendix summarizes participation in the primary research conducted for the report. Supplementary references are included in the footnotes throughout the report.

## Interviews

MNP conducted a total of 27 interviews between summer 2020 and fall 2021 to gather information industry labour needs specific to industries within Central Alberta.

## Online Survey

To validate and complement the information gathered during the interview consultations, an online survey of local stakeholders was conducted between September 21, 2021 and October 4, 2021. Information about the study and survey was distributed by CAEP to their distribution list to encourage participation in the study. The survey received 33 complete responses from 11 different industries.

## Stakeholder Engagement Session

To further validate and complement the information gathered from interviews and the survey, MNP facilitated a stakeholder engagement session with 15 participants. The stakeholder engagement session aimed to obtain meaningful perspectives from local stakeholders and identify strengths and potential barriers for the proposed strategies.

## Appendix C: About Us

### MNP

For over 60 years, MNP has proudly served and responded to the needs of clients in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Over this time, we have grown to more than 100 offices and 7,000 team members across Canada. In Alberta, this includes over 1,000 team members in 20 offices. Today, MNP is one of the largest and fastest growing business consulting and chartered accountancy firms in Canada.



#### About MNP's Economics and Research Practice

Economic and industry studies are carried out by MNP's Economics and Research practice. Based in Vancouver, the Economics and Research practice consists of a team of professionals that has a successful track record of assisting clients with a wide variety of financial and economic impact studies. Our work has encompassed a wide range of programs, industries, company operations and policy initiatives, and has helped clients with decision-making, communication of economic and financial contributions, documentation of the value of initiatives and activities, and development of public policy.

## Central Alberta Economic Partnership Ltd.

Central Alberta Economic Partnership Ltd. ("CAEP") is proud to be one of Alberta's nine Regional Economic Development Alliances. Founded in 1998, we have taken our place as a model for collaborative community economic development. More than this, we demonstrate the advantages of engaging diverse communities and bringing together people with diverse interests to support one another for the greater benefit of the region and province.

CAEP represents urban and rural municipalities, Indigenous governments, and associate members from industry, education, professional associations, and economic development organizations. Considering the needs of our members coupled with our strengths and capabilities as a partnership, CAEP is best positioned to empower Central Alberta communities by:

- **Influential Relationships:** We are catalysts for collaborative, community-minded relationships focused on advancing sustainable, regional development.
- **Knowledge-sharing and Resources:** We create, share, and foster knowledge-sharing and the use of economic development tools to ensure communities are enabled and supported to advance innovative practices and prosperity.
- **Capacity Building:** We create learning and training opportunities, lead research, and identify regional trends that enable communities – including their economic development professionals – to identify, pursue, and achieve economic development opportunities.
- **Reflecting Regional Interests:** We work to understand and reflect the collective and unique interests of our region and communities through sharing, promoting, and actively representing our opportunities, successes, and desired outcomes.

## Community Futures Central Alberta

Community Futures Central Alberta office is a non-profit organization that's dedicated to building an economically diverse future for the communities of our beautiful region.

Staffed by seasoned business professionals, and guided by a volunteer Board of Directors, we're more than just a business lender. With over 30 years of experience helping rural entrepreneurs grow and thrive as small business owners, we understand where you are now, and where you want to go in the future.

Our services for small businesses are designed to help Central Alberta residents start, grow, expand, franchise, or sell their business.

With a number of specialized business training programs, regular business networking events, and flexible business loans on offer, we're here to help you achieve your business goals.

Community Futures Central Alberta is funded by Western Economic Diversification Canada, as a part of the larger Community Futures organization. Community Futures of Canada has been supporting small business and rural economic diversification since 1986, and now has 267 offices across the country.



Wherever business takes you

MNP.ca