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# NWT Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Strategy 2017 – 2022

A Strategy to Improve the Training, Apprenticeship, Certification and Opportunities in Skilled Trades and Industrial Occupations in the Northwest Territories

Government of Northwest Territories



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# MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



It is with great pleasure that I present the Northwest Territories' *Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Strategy 2017-2022 (ATOC Strategy)*. This Strategy aligns with the *Skills 4 Success 10-Year Strategic Framework*, with a shared vision, goals and actions of building our workforce and diversifying our economy. This Strategy will outline how the GNWT will strengthen and improve the Apprenticeship and Occupation Certification system in the Northwest Territories, which will contribute to filling the gaps in our labour market.

The ATOC Strategy addresses the priorities of the 18th Legislative Assembly to take steps to close the skills gap by enhancing capacity-building programs for our youth and by expanding opportunities for postsecondary education, trades-oriented learning and northern educational institutions.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated in interviews and completed the online survey. Your input helped shape this document into a comprehensive strategy that will meet the needs of our stakeholders and will contribute to industry and skills development in the NWT.

The recent *NWT Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment* and the *NWT Jobs in Demand: 15-Year Forecast* features relevant and pertinent information on the current and projected labour market demands in the NWT for the next 15 years. Furthermore, these reports support the *Skills 4 Success 10-Year Strategic Framework*, which aims to improve employment success for NWT residents, close skills gaps and more effectively respond to employers' skills needs. The ATOC Strategy will contribute to developing a skilled workforce to build a strong and thriving northern economy where all northerners benefit.

The ATOC Strategy will strengthen the existing Apprenticeship and Occupation Certification program, with enhanced client focus, industry engagement and program administration. Over the next five years, the department will improve access to skilled trades training and certification, use labour market information to encourage community economic development, and enhance the employer and apprentice experience, while fostering a client-centred program philosophy.

Honourable Alfred Moses  
Minister of Education, Culture and Employment



# INTRODUCTION



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The NWT Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Strategy (ATOC Strategy) outlines how Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) plans to strengthen the existing apprenticeship and occupational certification program in the NWT and improve apprenticeship programs, skilled trades and industrial occupations certification programs. This Strategy will guide the work of the department to increase the numbers of NWT trainees, apprentices and journeypersons to meet needs of the NWT labour market.

The Strategy addresses the priorities of the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly and shares the goals of Education, Culture and Employment's *Skills 4 Success Strategic Framework*, which aims to improve employment success for NWT residents and more effectively respond to employers' skill needs. This Strategy, in keeping with the *Skills 4 Success Strategic Framework*, recognizes that life long learning and the quality of education and training outcomes are vitally important, and that more focus must be placed on developing a skilled workforce.

The Strategy will:

- Improve access to skilled trades and occupations training and certification.
- Improve the client experience by fostering a client-centred program philosophy.

- Improve the employer and apprenticeship experience by developing a sense of pride of belonging.
- Use Labour Market information to inform decision-making.
- Value and recognize the existing skills and knowledge of journeypersons who mentor, guide and train apprentices.
- Encourage community economic development by assisting skilled trades people to expand and enhance their business skills and to set up community-based businesses.

## The Strategy Development Process

This Strategy was developed with the advice of a variety of stakeholders who have an in-depth knowledge of apprenticeship and occupational certification. Significant consultations were undertaken with stakeholder organizations to help guide and coordinate apprenticeship training and certification. To support the consultation process, key subject areas were identified for stakeholder consideration, including both ongoing and new areas of focus. Using these subject areas to initiate discussion, stakeholders were engaged by personal and telephone interviews, as well as through an online survey.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION



## Vision

To have a responsive Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupation Certification (ATOC) Program that supports the development of a skilled and trained workforce in the NWT.

## Principles

As we strive to achieve the vision and goals of the apprenticeship and occupational certification program, we will build on what is working and reach for new levels of success. The following principles will guide the implementation of our actions:

- **Client-centred:** Improve the client experience by fostering a client-centred program approach with both apprentices and employers.
- **Relationship-based and industry focused:** The employer – apprentice relationship is at the heart of the trades training system. The employer is the primary trainer and beneficiary; therefore, the system must be industry focused.
- **Regionally and nationally aligned:** Build an effective working relationship with territorial and national partners to take advantage of efficiencies and participate fully in apprenticeship mobility and Red Seal Harmonization Initiatives.
- **Diverse and inclusive:** Focus on labour market needs, while embracing diversity and encouraging entry into a wider range of trades.
- **Decisions are based on sound evidence:** The best available research and experiential evidence from the field inform all decisions.
- **Flexible and accessible:** Identify and provide a wide variety of system supports and training for apprentices that will ensure success, including bridging programs and essential skills programming for potential apprentices.
- **Results focused and accountable:** Be accountable and transparent to all stakeholders for decisions, resource allocations, and performance – and establish standards and accountabilities for all participants.



# STRATEGIC LINKAGE TO THE SKILLS 4 SUCCESS INITIATIVE



This ATOC Strategy is closely connected with the *Skills 4 Success 10-Year Strategic Framework and Action Plan* and, therefore, had adopted and incorporated the Framework's four goals (while modifying the goal descriptors):

## ATOC Strategy Goals – A Framework for Success

### 1. Increase Skill Levels through Relevant Education and Training



Skills development and apprenticeship programming addresses labour market demands and builds long-term capacity.

### 3. Grow the NWT Workforce through Partnerships



NWT employers are able to recruit a capable workforce that expands and capitalizes on residents' skills, attracts newcomers to fill shortages, and retains people in the territory to contribute to the ongoing growth of the economy.

### 2. Bridge Education and Employment Gaps through Targeted Supports



NWT apprentices and employers access supports and incentives that are relevant, effective and aligned with territorial labour market needs.

### 4. Improve Decision-making with Relevant Labour Market Information



NWT residents, apprenticeship and territorial employers have easy access to relevant, accurate and timely labour market information to make informed career and business decisions.



# APPRENTICESHIP, TRADE AND OCCUPATION CERTIFICATION



## Overview

The NWT Apprenticeship, Trade and Occupational Certification (ATOC) Program trains and certifies individuals to industry driven and industry recognized standards. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), through the Labour Development and Standards Division and under the *Apprenticeship, Trade and Occupation Certification Act*, administers the ATOC Program. ECE supports the development, maintenance and delivery of designated trade and occupation training programs that contribute to the development of a skilled northern workforce. It provides for technical training and certification of all occupational trainees, apprentices and skilled trades persons in the NWT based on industry-determined standards.

The NWT Apprenticeship Program began in 1964 and has experienced a steady growth in the numbers of trades and occupations designated for training and certification. Currently in the NWT, there are over 400 men and women employed in 27 occupations and 53 trades, 30 of these trades are nationally recognized with Red Seal endorsement status.

Since the program's inception there have been approximately 4,700 individuals certified through the apprenticeship process and about 350 individuals certified through the occupational certification process.

Skilled trades and certified occupations typically require a combination of formal postsecondary education at a technical training institution as well as on-the-job training. On average, to achieve certification it takes three to four years, with an average of 32 weeks of post secondary education.

Technical training is offered at Aurora College in Fort Smith, NWT. As well, some training is available in Alberta.

## Apprenticeship, Trade and Occupation Certification Board

The Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupation Certification Board (ATOCB) is an industry-driven partnership that ensures a highly skilled workforce. To this end, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment appoints members to the Apprenticeship, Trade and Occupation Certification Board (ATOCB). The ATOCB provides advice and is the link between the department and industry, facilitating a strong partnership leading to qualified apprentices and a skilled workforce. The ATOCB's role is to develop and maintain linkages and relationships with industry groups.





## Benefits of the Apprenticeship, Trade and Occupation Certification Program

Apprenticeship is a unique form of education where apprentices not only learn skills in an academic setting, but also learn in a practical, work-based environment. Apprentices learn on the job, earning a wage while they contribute to the northern economy. Industry is the on-the-job trainer in the apprenticeship system and has been a crucial partner of training in the NWT.

Apprenticeship leads to a new generation of highly skilled and certified journeypersons who work in well-paying, mobile and satisfying careers. Apprenticeship is a proven, cost-effective model for workplace training in a trade or occupation. Job security and earning potential are high in skilled trades and technology fields. Skilled trade workers are in high demand in the NWT workforce. With rising tuition in colleges and universities, the concept of hands-on learning and “earning while learning” is very attractive to many young people in the NWT.



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# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



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Apprenticeship, trades and occupation certification is critical to the NWT's continued prosperity and competitiveness. This Strategy will help us to address the challenges of apprenticeship and occupation certification and ensure the mobility of the workforce in the NWT.

Alongside the many benefits of apprenticeship are a number of challenges to consider, as well as an equal number of opportunities. The challenges and opportunities below have informed the objectives and actions in this Strategy.

## THE MAIN CHALLENGES

### Shortage of Skilled Labour

Skilled trades and occupations shortages have emerged in the NWT, with a forecast ongoing high demand for trade workers. The shortage of skilled labour is becoming problematic for small and medium size enterprises. Increasing the number of skilled trades workers has quickly become a top priority for employers. The expected high demand for skilled trades workers represents a significant challenge for the territorial apprenticeship program.

The demand and competition for skilled workers will only intensify in the coming years with an aging workforce and people leaving the labour market in large numbers. The *Skills 4 Success Strategic Framework* identifies the need for education and training systems to keep pace with the changing dynamics of the labour market so that NWT residents, students and workers gain the skills required in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and labour market.

In many areas, the pursuit of college or university education is seen as the means to a successful career and less value may be placed on postsecondary education and training in skilled trades and occupations. Skilled trades and occupations are often not viewed as desirable professions and there can be difficulty attracting trainees and apprentices. This has contributed to a serious shortage of certified skilled workers.

Reduced numbers of apprenticeship registrations and completions, combined with the aging workforce, will contribute to the skilled labour scarcity in the near future. It is all the more important to have a robust and well-promoted apprenticeship and occupation certification system to increase registrations and completions in order to ensure an adequate supply of skilled labour for the NWT economy.





### NWT Job Forecast

Over the next 15 years, it is forecast there will be 28,500 to 36,700 job openings in the NWT, and of these 2,312 will be trades related job openings.

By 2030, the following trades are identified as those in immediate need of increased numbers:<sup>1</sup>

1. Carpenters
2. Electricians (except industrial and power system)
3. Automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics and mechanical repairers
4. Heavy-duty equipment mechanics
5. Plumbers
6. Welders and related machine operators
7. Construction millwrights and industrial mechanics
8. Aircraft mechanics and aircraft inspectors
9. Contractors and supervisors, heavy equipment operator crews
10. Contractors and supervisors, electrical trades and telecommunications occupations

### Increasing the Success of Female and Aboriginal Apprentices

There is a need to increase the participation and completion rates of targeted groups in apprenticeship and certification, including Aboriginal apprentices and female apprentices in non-traditional trades. In the NWT, 56% of apprentices are Aboriginal and 7.5% of apprentices are female. Forty percent of those who complete the apprenticeship program are Aboriginal.

There are a number of barriers to success experienced by Aboriginal and female apprentices. In order to alleviate these barriers, we must:

- Improve the general knowledge of the apprenticeship program among our partners.
- Increase awareness of the employment opportunities.
- Enhance employability skills and/or educational requirements.
- Encourage self-marketing skills so participants can connect and establish relationships with employers.
- Increase financial resources for those who wish to attend training.
- Provide supports required to attend training, i.e. childcare and transportation.
- Address cultural differences and remoteness to improve access to apprenticeships.

<sup>1</sup> Skills 4 Success, NWT Jobs in Demand, 15-Year Forecast. 2016.

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUED



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The Conference Board of Canada states that in anticipation of key job openings, an important focus for educators and employers will be on the NWT's Aboriginal youth and young adults. The large number of Aboriginal youth and young adults in the territory, and particularly in rural and remote areas where education and employment opportunities may be limited, presents a significant opportunity for educators and employers to work creatively and collaboratively with communities.<sup>2</sup>

## A Limited Availability and Experience of Journeypersons

For the NWT apprenticeship program to function well, there must be an adequate number of journeypersons. Currently, there is a limited availability of journeypersons in NWT communities. As well, journeypersons may lack the interest or business skills to set up and manage sustainable businesses.

Journeypersons, busy with their ongoing work demands, are challenged to hire and train apprentices. An important factor for apprenticeship success is good mentoring by the journeyperson and many journeypersons will need to develop this skill. Many journeypersons feel they are under prepared to mentor apprentices and some view the task as adding a burden and being time-consuming. Additionally, there are few incentives and resources available to support mentors and mentor training. The lack of journeypersons with enhanced mentoring skills is a barrier to employers' hiring of

apprentices. Providing employers with mentorship training skills will help them effectively coach and advise the apprentice and establish a professional relationship based on openness and respect.

## ATOC Program Administration

The territorial apprenticeship authority exists within the Labour Development and Standards Division in the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. The Director of Apprenticeship and supporting staff register apprenticeship contracts, develop, implement, schedule and monitor apprenticeship training, verify work experience and credentials of clients, administer examinations, issue provincial/territorial journeyperson certification, and issue Red Seal endorsements.

In the regions, Career Development Officers (CDOs) are responsible for the daily administration of the apprenticeship program and work directly with employers, apprentices and tradespersons.

The CDO's role is to facilitate the apprentice's pathway through the apprenticeship program from initial application to certification, providing informed client services to apprentices identified as requiring assistance, administering industry's examinations, and delivering trade certificates and transcripts. There is a need to review the process to improve efficiencies and improve outcomes for clients.

<sup>2</sup> GNWT. NWT Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2015.







## THE MAIN OPPORTUNITIES

### Industry Engagement and Development

As a work-based training and certification program, industry is an important partner in apprenticeship in the NWT. Employer participation is essential to apprenticeship, as on-the-job requirements comprise a minimum of 80% of the apprenticeship program. Building relationships with employers and increasing employer participation across all trade sectors is a key to future success of the apprenticeship and certification system.

Employers and employees provide advice to apprenticeship boards, government officials and agencies on training programs, including curriculum standards, the latest equipment available in the industry, and evolving trends in a particular trade. Continuing employer engagement is needed to build relationships with employers across all trade sectors and public entities. The opportunity is to develop more formal and efficient ways to engage and talk with industry and garner ongoing feedback.

### Connection with Schools

The school system has an important role to play in encouraging youth to explore careers in skilled trades and occupations. Negative public perception of the trades, among other factors, has kept youth participation marginal in the apprenticeship system such that most apprentices are currently over the age of 24.<sup>5</sup>

There are now two main programs in the NWT that encourage trades training in the high school system: Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) and Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses. SNAP is aimed at high school students in the NWT who are interested in pursuing a career in trades. CTS courses are designed to provide students with a variety of career related course choices that develop skills that can be applied in their daily lives, refine career-planning skills, develop technology related skills, and enhance employability skills.



<sup>5</sup> The Apprenticeship System in Canada, Trends and Issues, CSLS, 2005.

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUED



Many believe SNAP is important to a successful apprenticeship program and advocate continued and increased promotion and focus. Youth transitioning from school to the workforce are a significant source of labour supply for the NWT. It is expected that over the next 15 years, approximately 11,000 young people will be leaving the JK-12 system and entering postsecondary education, skills training and/or the job market. This means that the skill levels of these new labour market entrants will be critical to meeting the future labour demand of the NWT.<sup>6</sup>

Often education counselors and teachers do not focus on or promote skilled trades. There is a need to foster and enhance the connection that exists with the schools and find ways to encourage counselors and teachers to support trades training. First they must understand the value of trades and apprenticeship training.

More can be done to integrate apprenticeship training into secondary school programs or even into the early years of postsecondary education. A more extensive system of apprenticeship in the NWT would require close collaboration between high schools and employers, with improved counselling on apprenticeship and other career-oriented options by grade 10.

## Opportunity for an Innovative Apprenticeship Sponsorship Model

The NWT follows the traditional sponsorship arrangement where one employer employs and trains apprentices (one journeyman can train two apprentices). Currently, the employer assumes responsibility for all related administration of work experience hours and technical training. This model can present challenges, as the small and medium employers may not have the human resource capacity to hire and train an apprentice for the duration of their apprenticeship. Larger companies may have too many employees to manage and organize and the apprentice ends up in a narrow work role and doesn't learn the full scope of the trade. As well, when the employer no longer has work due to seasonal nature of the work or slow economy, the apprentice can be negatively affected. Alternative models of sponsorship are in place and working well in other jurisdictions in Canada. These alternative models will be explored to understand their applicability and relevance in the NWT.

<sup>6</sup> Skills 4 Success Strategic Framework, GNWT, 2016.







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## Client-centred Service

More focus on client-centred service will help ensure the needs of journeypersons and apprentices are met. A report from the Institute for Citizen-centred Service on NWT service<sup>7</sup> outlined the following expectations of service:

- Information available on website – To find information and services on its website in order to reduce online search time.
- Timeliness – To improve timeliness of the service delivery, both telephone service time and in-person service time.
- Problem resolution – Better access and prompt service needed to solve a problem, correct an error or deal with a complaint.

These expectations are consistent with the feedback from apprenticeship stakeholders during the consultations.



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<sup>7</sup> Citizens First 7 (CF7) – A report prepared for the Government of Northwest Territories.





# GOALS – A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS



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The *Skills 4 Success Strategic Framework* has identified four goals that offer practical, made in the NWT solutions aimed at closing education and employment gaps and addressing recruitment and retention challenges. This Strategy has adopted the *Skills 4 Success* goals. Objectives and key actions have been added under each goal to show how the ATOC program will be improved to meet these goal areas.



PROGRAMS

## 1. Increase Skill Levels through Relevant Education and Training

Innovative, effective and appropriate delivery of skills development and apprenticeship programming addresses labour market demands and builds long-term capacity.

### Objectives

1. Have high quality training and certification standards in the apprenticeship and industry training system, where supply meets demand.
2. Enhance the Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) participation to ensure its success and ongoing existence.

### Key Actions

- Work with Aurora College to examine the feasibility of delivering pre-apprenticeship programs and expanding existing technical training opportunities.
- Develop and implement a Mentorship Program for journeypersons so they may better support and mentor apprentices.
- Implement an improved training program for regional Career Development Officers.
- Communicate opportunities for employers to encourage hiring a SNAP apprentice.
- Work with employers to increase summer youth employment opportunities for SNAP students.
- Review and revise the Apprenticeship Training on the Job (ATOJ) program.





SUPPORTS

## 2. Bridge Education and Employment Gaps through Targeted Supports

NWT apprentices and employers have access to supports and incentives that are relevant, effective and aligned with territorial labour market needs.

### Objectives

1. Improve the overall apprenticeship completion rate through education and employment supports.
2. Increase the participation and completion rates of targeted groups in apprenticeship and certification, including women in non-traditional trades and Aboriginal apprentices.
3. Improve the journeyman experience by providing support for business skills development.
4. Enhance overall client-centred service by improving ATOC's operational and administrative efficiency so that it is responsive to clients and to the needs of the labour market.

### Key Actions

- Develop and implement an initiative that will increase the number of apprentices and trainees completing training programs.
- Develop and implement an initiative that will increase the number of women in the trades (apprentices) and occupations (trainees).
- Implement incentives to encourage employers to hire and train apprentices and trainees in the in-demand occupations (*Northwest Territories Labour Market Forecast and Needs Assessment*).
- Support journeyman's continued education and learning through programs such as the Blue Seal certification program.
- Review and improve the administration of the ATOC program to ensure it is responsive to clients, employers and the needs of the labour market.

# GOALS – A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS CONTINUED



## 3. Grow the NWT Workforce through Partnerships

NWT employers are able to recruit a capable workforce that expands and capitalizes on residents' skills, attracts newcomers to fill shortages and retains people in the territory to contribute to the ongoing growth of the economy.

### Objectives

1. Partner with educational institutions, training providers and employers to address upcoming skill shortages and respond to industry needs by having training available when industry needs it.
2. Develop and maintain linkages and relationships with employers and industry groups, with a more effective and efficient way to engage and talk with industry.
3. Work with industry to develop an improved model of apprentice sponsorship that will result in increased numbers of apprentices and engaged employers.
4. Ensure the accessibility of the apprenticeship and certification system for all NWT residents through the active promotion of the apprenticeship program.

### Key Actions

- Work with the Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupation Certification Board to improve linkages and communication with industry, educational institutions and training providers.
- Develop a comprehensive communication strategy that will:
  - build awareness of the apprenticeship and industry training system;
  - promote apprenticeship as first-choice careers for northerners, especially students and youth; and
  - raise the perception of professionalism of journeymen and instill a pride of belonging.
- Streamline the apprenticeship and trainee sponsorship process (innovative models of supervision, training and apprentice sponsorship).







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INFORMATION

## 4. Improve Decision-making with Relevant Labour Market Information

NWT residents, apprenticeship and territorial employers have easy access to relevant, accurate and timely labour market information to make informed career and business decisions.

### Objectives

1. Align the NWT apprenticeship training system with labour market demand so the apprenticeship training system responds to, and is relevant to, the needs of apprentices and employers.
2. Utilize labour market information to partner effectively with employers, training providers, communities, regional training partnerships.
3. Ensure that all decisions are based on sound evidence, using the best available research and experiential evidence from the field.

### Key Actions

- Collaborate with industry and government stakeholders to develop an understanding of specific labour market needs and to implement timely changes.
- Influence Pan-Canadian apprenticeship strategies through research, discussion and collaboration within the apprenticeship community across the country.



## NEXT STEPS



### An Approach to Performance Measurement

A performance measurement plan will be developed that aligns with the NWT ATOC Strategy 2017-2022. This performance measurement plan will include the creation of performance measures and indicators, and the implementation of an effective data management and information system to track and report on results. Performance measurement establishes a strong accountability structure between program areas/GNWT/ECE and the public. Performance measurement also provides a platform for the GNWT to identify and showcase successes in apprenticeship and training, and ultimately, will contribute to the continuous improvement of ATOC in the NWT.







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