

SKILLS4SUCCESS

“What We Heard”

Summary of Engagement on Draft Action Plan 2016-2020

July – August 2016



Department of Education, Culture and Employment





Background

Over a two year period, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) commissioned research in the NWT's future labour market needs, engaged with northerners across the NWT, and worked closely with an Advisory Group of key stakeholders regarding the jobs and the skills to fill them that will be needed in the future. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) led this effort and developed the Skills 4 Success 10-Year Strategic Framework (Framework), designed to ensure that adult and postsecondary education and training leads to northerners that are skilled and ready for the more than 25,000 jobs that are forecasted to be needed in the next 15 years in the NWT.

The Skills 4 Success Framework sets out the vision, goals and priorities of Skills 4 Success.

Stakeholder Engagement

With that Framework as the basis, ECE drafted actions, and returned to stakeholders and northerners to obtain input and feedback on the draft actions to support achieving the goals and priorities of Skills 4 Success.

Skills 4 Success reached out to educators, employers, recruiters, Aboriginal Governments through their Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy managers, employees, students and job seekers to provide input.

During the summer of 2016, two focus group meetings were held in each of the NWT's six regional centres:

- Fort Simpson
- Fort Smith
- Hay River
- Inuvik
- Norman Wells
- Yellowknife

Stakeholders were also encouraged to provide input through an online survey. Seventy (70) people attended the focus groups and 177 survey responses were received.

Through the focus groups and survey, stakeholders reviewed the proposed actions and provided feedback on the actions' strengths, gaps, opportunities and barriers.


Summary of Input

The following are the key themes heard in the focus groups and in the survey responses. ECE used this feedback to validate and further fine-tune the actions in the Action Plan.




Goal 1 – Programs: Increase skill levels through relevant education and training

- Maximize and strengthen existing postsecondary entities in the NWT, such as Aurora College and the Community Learning Centres, and use them to ensure residents can access training and education to prepare for jobs that will be in demand. The GNWT and postsecondary institutions need to work together to identify, build, and deliver programs that will equip a future northern workforce.
- Preparation for postsecondary training and career success begins in early childhood with positive parental support and promotion of education throughout a child's early years. Education renewal initiatives are vital to Skills 4 Success. Students need career pathing guidance early, combined with a quality grade 12 education. The focus within schools needs to include strong emphasis on career and educational planning, not just completion of graduation requirements. Students need to understand the many career options in middle school so that they can make wise course selections in high school. High school students need to understand the course and grade requirements to be eligible for the many different postsecondary programs and training that exists to avoid disappointment, wasted time, and having to repeat courses or upgrade to achieve higher marks to meet entrance criteria.
- Mentorship, coaching, and role models throughout a person's education can support career pathing, encourage completion of studies and help retain trained northerners in jobs.
- Skills 4 Success must integrate with the NWT's economic strategy. As the needs of the economy evolve, so too must programs for education and training to prepare a northern workforce and keep pace with changing labour market demands.
- Short-term postsecondary programs that develop job skills are needed in addition to long-term, multi-year study programs.
- Programs, such as certificate programs, need to be reviewed to ensure they meet the minimum job qualifications required by employers.
- The NWT's Apprenticeship Program needs to be improved to reduce barriers for employers and apprentices (for example consider travelling journeypersons to supervise apprenticeships in communities that lack journeypersons). Funding and support of apprenticeships, as well as mechanisms for journeyperson supervision can be improved to respond to NWT community realities.

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- Traditional knowledge and culture are integral to many NWT jobs such as tourism, education, environmental protection, among others. Traditional knowledge, culture and language are important aspects to be integrated into postsecondary program delivery.

Goal 2 – Supports: Bridge education and employment gaps through targeted supports

- Part of the support students need to remain in the North is to have job opportunities related to their field of study. Summer jobs, internships, co-op placements, and other similar opportunities could deliver this experience, as these opportunities could provide bridges to careers. This could involve providing incentives to employers to create these opportunities. Student/job matching could help provide students experience in their field prior to and after graduation from postsecondary studies. Additional support and effort should go into matching graduates with NWT jobs after graduation.
- In the North, networking helps connect skilled workers and new graduates with job opportunities and employers.
- Actions and incentives are needed to support retention. We need to keep our trained employees in the North. While some existing supports, like Student Financial Assistance, provide encouragement to study, there must also be incentives to stay and work in the North, and disincentives to leaving. The community is an important partner in retaining skilled workers.
- There are currently limitations on support to students taking certificate programs to prepare for in-demand occupations. Lack of funding may reduce the number of northerners who choose to pursue certificate programs.
- Student Financial Assistance helps students who have completed grade schooling in the NWT but does not help long-term northerners who did not complete their grade schooling in the North. This is a gap that could limit the number of long-term northerners who seek to retrain for jobs in demand.
- Workers who wish to pursue retraining or upgrading of skills face significant barriers, including family responsibilities and loss of income during schooling. Supports could reduce the risks associated with making the decision to enhance skills.
- Many residents require upgrading and other supports, such as life skills, in order to be able to pursue postsecondary training. Support for such first steps to postsecondary training and education is needed. Holistic “wrap around support”, that addresses mental, physical, spiritual, and community wellness can also help students to succeed in postsecondary studies, particularly when students must leave their community to study.

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- Many NWT residents in communities need access to childcare and holistic wellness supports in order to pursue training and employment opportunities, and to see a course of study through to completion.
 - Investments in infrastructure, such as technology infrastructure, would increase opportunities for online learning.

Goal 3 – NWT Workforce: Grow the NWT workforce through partnerships

- Continue to focus on eliminating overlap. Many stakeholders speak to students about career paths; have training and employment programs; and have important labour market information to share. Students and others are confused about where to go to access this information. In many cases they don't even know that the information exists. It is important for agencies to work together, use resources wisely and avoid duplication. Partners must become client-centered, not program-centered.
- All levels of government and many departments within the GNWT have a role in Skills 4 Success. Ideally, Skills 4 Success must be an all-government initiative which includes all Aboriginal, federal, territorial and municipal governments to be maximally effective.
- The private and not-for-profit sectors and territorial and regional industry sector organizations have a role to play too. They require skilled workers and should be included as part of the solution to build a stronger northern workforce and prepare NWT residents for a bright future. Many effective partnerships exist among these groups but much more could be done.
- Employers, schools, and postsecondary institutions need to partner more on career planning and information-sharing. Employers should partner with schools to talk about opportunities and employment skills; networking with employers should continue through postsecondary school. Connecting employers and students early creates insight, excitement, knowledge, and networks that will connect workers with jobs.
- Efforts to recruit southern workers needs to focus on communicating northern opportunities, and requires strong outreach.



Goal 4 – Information: Improve decision making with relevant labour market information

- The ability to easily access clear and understandable labour market information is very important to make good decisions. It is vitally important that information about future job opportunities and jobs in demand in the NWT get to youth in the school system. Teachers need to learn how to use this information and engage with students to enable students to make good decisions based on informed career and educational choices.
- Online access to information is important but it should also be made available in other ways, such as in writing, in person, through networking, in school and on radio. A resource person such as the Community Development Officer (CDO) should help those without access to a facility, with online information to access and understand the site's information.
- While it is important to make information available to those who seek it out, information must also be provided to those who are not aware that it exists. "People don't know what they don't know." This requires face-to-face meetings, workshops, and connecting with northerners where they gather, and through media that they already interact with to widely share important labour market information and its value in making good decisions for the future.
- Social media is an important tool for communicating with some target groups, and some communities use this as their "go to" resource for information. Such tools can provide specific information and direct stakeholders to the web portal for additional information. The internet provides many options to provide information in written, audio, and video formats and thereby respond to the preferences of a variety of stakeholders.

Closing Remarks

Participants in the engagement sessions and online survey were encouraged by the Skills 4 Success vision: "*NWT residents have the skills, knowledge and attitudes for employment success*". Taking a focused approach and working collaboratively among all NWT partners involved in education and training was voiced repeatedly.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment will use this feedback to finalize the Skills 4 Success Action Plan 2016-2020 and improve employment success for the people of the Northwest Territories.

For additional resources on Skills 4 Success, visit www.skills4success.ca