

Employment and skills expertise

Workforce development, adult learning, and skill development comprise one of SRDC's core areas of expertise. We have completed close to 100 such projects, spanning all regions of the country and touching all significant client groups, service delivery systems, and program funders.

Our expertise in skills development and, particularly capacity building, has been enhanced by our operation of the BC Centre for Employment Excellence (<http://www.cfeebc.org/>). The Centre serves as the research and knowledge hub for the province's employment service providers. It also helps service providers to engage with community organizations, employers and funding agencies to develop and test service innovations.

The key to SRDC's success in skills development projects is the ability to combine high-level research skills with a boots-on-the-ground approach to program development and implementation. Field work is essential to learning potential program participants' needs, the local context in which those needs will be addressed and the capacity required to deliver the corresponding programs.

Our programs have addressed the needs of participants across the work-readiness spectrum. While skills development is often the focus, overcoming barriers like housing and transportation can also be the subject of interventions. Similarly, remote locations and small labour markets can present challenges that require much different approaches than those that might be more effective in urban centres. SRDC has experience in these areas, and has successfully developed the capacity among service providers to participate in program experiments and deliver evidence-based services.

Essentials Skills Training in the Workplace

UPSKILL: Essentials to Excel – Literacy and Essential Skills in the Workplace

A large-scale demonstration project that rigorously measured the impacts of literacy and essential skills – LES – training in the workplace. The project used a random assignment design to provide the most reliable measures of the impacts of LES training on workers skills, their job performance, and other outcomes relevant to workers and firm-level objectives. Approximately 80-100 firms and 1,200 workers participated, half of whom received training; the other half served as a control group. The study documented positive returns on investments in essentials skills training for employees, employers and government funding organizations.

Start-end date: February 2010 – February 2014

Sponsor: Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, ESDC

Evaluation of Social Finance Pilots

SRDC is conducting an evaluation of two pilot projects for Essential Skills training based on performance-based funding models. The Skilling UP pilot is led by Alberta Workforce Essential Skills, providing workplace essential skills training to lower-skilled workers in the manufacturing sector. Employers pay up-front for the training, and are reimbursed up to 50% of their investment

if their workers achieve targeted skill gains. The second project is a social impact bond, in which private investors pay up-front for essential skills training for low-skilled unemployed persons, and are repaid their capital plus interest if participants achieve skill gains. Colleges and Institutes Canada is the intermediary for this Essential Skills Social Finance social impact bond, with three College delivery partners: Douglas College, Confederation College, and Sask Polytech. In addition to serving as proof-of-concept of the implementation of the two models, the pilot evaluations are measuring a range of outcomes of interest including skill gains, and indicators of employability and performance measurement.

Start-end date: January 2014 – December 2018

Sponsor: Employment and Social Development Canada

Essentials Skills Training – Unemployed / Pre-Employment

The Foundations Pilot Project

Foundations was a three-year initiative led by the Training Group at Douglas College, British Columbia. It tested: a) whether a skill assessment and upgrading program delivery model targeted specifically to meet the needs of low-skilled job seekers could be successfully implemented across several sites nationally, and b) what impacts the program had on outcomes like participation in college-level training, employment, and labour market advancement. Approximately 500 job seekers were recruited, half of whom were randomly assigned to receive program services while the other half served as a control group. The study included an evaluation framework and research design, as well as implementation, impact, and cost-benefit analyses.

Start-end date: July 2013 – June 2016

Sponsor: Training Group at Douglas College

Skills Bridge essential skills pilot project in BC

Skills Bridge offered Essential Skills training with the aim of ensuring that participants in academic, trades training, and apprenticeship programs emerge fully ready for employment. The pilot project was an outcome evaluation of a system of Essential Skills coaching at three sites – Douglas College, North Island College, and SkillPlan. The performance measures include Essential Skills learning gains, student engagement, and grades. The study developed an evaluation framework and survey instruments, and included a cost-effectiveness analysis. Implementation of Skills Bridge at the three pilot sites informed a larger consortium of educational institutions implementing Essential Skills training for their students. SRDC is a research partner in the pilot project funded by the participating colleges and industry training institutions.

Start-end date: September 2013 – April 2014

Sponsor: DataAngel Policy Research Inc.

Workplace Training

Improving productivity through mentorship: A National Demonstration Project

According to BuildForce Canada's construction sector forecast, the industry is estimated to lose 250,000 skilled tradespeople to retirements over the next decade. This is leading to a dramatic need for rapid skills development of younger workers, placing significant pressure on training capacity in the sector. This is not simply a challenge for the apprenticeship system, but also for employers, unions, and current supervisors and journeypersons who are responsible for the large majority of skills development through mentorship. At the same time, many journeymen and apprentices are not adequately prepared for mentorship as they have gaps in key underlying Essential Skills of communication, working with others, and problem-solving.

This project involves the development, implementation, and evaluation of an enhanced mentorship training model for Canada's construction and maintenance sector. It is being implemented as a pan-Canadian demonstration project in all regions of the country with up to 1,200 skilled tradesworkers and up to 80 contractors in four of Canada's skilled trades. The research design includes a randomized control trial to measure the effects of the mentorship training model on the skills and performance of apprentices and journeymen as well as business outcomes of participating firms. The study will also include a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to measure the returns on training investments. The project is being managed by BuildForce Canada in partnership with SkillPlan and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC).

Start-end date: June 2017 – May 2021

Sponsor: BuildForce Canada with funding from the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, ESDC

Evaluation of the Indigenous Communities Public Works Project

The Indigenous Communities Public Works Project is an innovative demand-driven approach to workforce development in First Nations communities. The initiative was designed with the aim of strengthening employment opportunities for unemployed or underemployed Indigenous individuals. It also aims to provide communities with the local expertise needed to address their public works and community infrastructure needs. The project builds on a unique partnership model that includes diverse cross-sector partners. The lead organization is Okanagan Training and Development Council, the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy agreement holder for six member bands in the Okanagan service area. The other two partners are Westbank First Nation, a self-governing nation in Kelowna and ASTTBC, a not-for-profit, provincial professional association/regulator established in 1958. SRDC has been commissioned to conduct a proof of concept to show how the pilot plays out in the real world and if it is feasible and viable for wider implementation and evaluation.

Start-end date: September 2017 – July 2019

Sponsors: Okanagan Training and Development Council + anonymous donor

Advancing Towards Employment

Micro-credentials for Adult Literacy Learners Evaluation Plan

Digital open micro-credentials are an innovative way to capture and communicate what an individual knows and can demonstrate. They can be used to demonstrate the breadth of learning, from something quite simple, like attendance at a conference or workshop, to demonstrating more in-depth employment related skills such as those related to trades. Decoda Literacy Solutions recently adopted the digital badge micro-credential system for use with adult literacy programs. In this project, literacy and essential skill badges (micro-credentials) were provided for adults who participate in community-based literacy and essential skills programs, which typically do not have transcripts and certificates to identify learning. The use of a micro-credential system allows program providers to show incremental growth in the literacy and essential skill development of individual program participants. It is an innovative approach to improving educational access and program completion rates for adult learners, as well as increasing support as they move to further education and employment. A developmental evaluation approach was used to investigate whether the program met its goals of establishing a credentialing system for adult literacy, as well as learning the ways in which the badges were accepted and used by employment system stakeholders.

Start-end date: May 2017 – November 2017

Sponsor: Decoda Literacy Solutions

The Role of Employment Social Enterprises in Supporting Transitioning Youth

The BC Centre for Employment Excellence and its partner, the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, are conducting a demonstration project to evaluate the role of Employment Social Enterprises (ESEs) in supporting the labour market transitions of youth facing barriers to developing their career potential. The project partners with local social entrepreneurs, employment service providers and employers to generate work placements in new or existing ESEs that focus on employing barriered youth, giving youth participants the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and skill development that is in line with local labour market opportunities. This project is designed to fill a gap in knowledge with regard to understanding the role that transitional placements in ESEs can play in improving employment outcomes for at-risk youth.

Start-end date: February 2016 – December 2017

Sponsor: British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation

Employment Services Innovations

Strengthening Business to Achieve Higher Performance Project

A pilot project to develop a prototype model for non-profits in the employment service sector to support business process management – BPM. The ultimate goal of this project was to strengthen business process capabilities within non-profit organizations in the employment services sector,

which should lead to better services for clients and better outcomes. The project also aimed to develop resources that may be used to implement this model, an evaluation strategy to accompany the model and an implementation plan for a pilot project that can be tested in order to determine its impact on process efficiency, productivity and client outcomes from BPM. This project was managed by the BC Centre for Employment Excellence, a division of SRDC.

Start-end date: September 2014 – May 2015

Sponsor: British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation

Pay for Success

A pilot project designed to develop and test an innovative performance-based approach to funding Essential Skills service delivery in the provinces of Manitoba and Nova Scotia. This pilot project was the first Canadian test of a “pay for success” model for Essential Skills delivery. The model is intended to stimulate innovation in service delivery, encourage a community of practice for delivery of Essential Skills services, and improve longer-term employment outcomes for under-represented groups in the labour force.

Start-end date: September 2013 – June 2017

Sponsor: Workplace Education Manitoba

Job Entry Manitoba (JEM)

The project examined the development and implementation of the new Job Entry Manitoba — JEM — program, a key component of Manitoba’s training-to-employment service support continuum. The project also identified key outcomes and measurement approaches to support the building of a data collection system and tools. The evaluation addressed standard implementation questions such as how does the JEM model work in practice? It also aimed to systematically understand how the implementation of JEM influences provider practices in both intended and unintended ways. More fundamentally, it assessed how well the program enabled service providers to better meet the needs of their target population.

Start-end date: November 2012 – December 2013

Sponsor: Workplace Education Manitoba

Remote and Small Market Workforce Development

An Innovative Cluster Training Model for New Brunswick Small Business

Development and pilot testing of a multi-level, cluster-based training model for small businesses lacking the capacity for traditional workplace training approaches. The project documented best practices in cluster training and refined existing needs assessments and evaluation tools for pooled small business delivery. The new model was pilot tested with 11 firms and 26 employees in 2 clusters. SRDC led the evaluation in partnership with the Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick with funding from New Brunswick’s Department of Post-secondary Education Training and Labour.

Start-end date: July 2016 – April 2017

Sponsor: Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick

Evaluation of the Northern Skills Training Pilot Initiative

This project evaluated the Northern Skills Training Pilot, an essential skills training initiative aimed at up-skilling low-skilled unionized employed workers in the forestry and mining sectors in three northern regions of British Columbia. At the start of the evaluation, the initiative involved approximately 300 participants, but this number increased to nearly 600 during the evaluation. The evaluation determined (a) the extent to which targeted workers received and responded to the employer outreach activities and making applications to the program, (b) whether the essential skills training was delivered as expected, and (c) whether the essential skill levels of program participants increased following engagement with the NST Pilot services.

Start-end date: October 2012 – June 2013

Sponsor: B.C. Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training

Digital Essential Skills Online Training in Rural Small Businesses

SRDC participated in this project to develop, implement, and evaluate an online digital skills assessment and training program intended to increase the digital skills of rural small businesses and their employees, as well as the capacity of businesses to increase these skills. The training was piloted in 10 small businesses, 2 in each of 5 rural communities across Canada, with up to 100 employees participating. SRDC designed skills assessment, employer and employee surveys, and interview protocols and analyzed the data, in order to evaluate the implementation of the digital skills assessment and training tools and to measure the effects of the training on rural small businesses and their employees.

Start-end date: October 2012 – February 2016

Sponsor: Restigouche Community Business Development Corporation

Addressing Complex Barriers to Employment

Alleviating Homelessness: Work Integration Social Enterprises Research

This project being led by the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) in partnership with SRDC and Social Enterprise Toronto (SET) will provide a longitudinal assessment of the effectiveness of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) and compare them with other interventions for people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. The first study of its kind in the Greater Toronto Area, the project will identify the impact of WISEs on both hard and soft outcomes including employment and housing stabilization, as well as the returns for government investment in these types of WISEs. Finally, it will identify effective practices to maximize impacts for several models of training under varying circumstances. As evaluation partner, SRDC will be responsible for leading the measurement of the impact and effectiveness of WISEs on social and labour market outcomes for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, using a quasi-

experimental study. An additional objective is to build the capacity of participating WISE to measure their social outcomes using professionally-designed research tools.

Start-end date: June 2017 – March 2022

Sponsor: Canadian Community Economic Development Network

The Employment Navigator Pilot Project

The project involves new cross-systems partnerships working collectively to improve employment opportunities for individuals in supportive housing. The proposed model is a new approach that pairs two distinct evidence-based approaches in housing and employment — Housing First and Customized Employment. The approaches place an "employment navigator" in the supportive housing location to link housing with Customized Employment and other employment services for tenants who are in stable and permanent housing. This is consistent with an underlying principle behind Housing First, which is that people are better able to move forward once housing is stable. The project will operate in two residences in Vancouver's downtown eastside. The evaluation strategy involves both implementation research and case studies. The BC Centre for Employment Excellence is partnering with the Lookout Emergency Aid Society and the Open Door Group to develop and implement this project.

Start-end date: October 2015 – September 2018

Sponsor: British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation



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