

Career development services and skills development programs: Gaps, innovations, and opportunities

Final report

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Executive summary

Background

This report presents findings from a series of consultations with provincial representatives and Canadian providers of Career Development Services (CDS) and Skills Development (SD) programs. The project was coordinated by the Federal Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) Career Development Services Working Group (CDSWG). With funding from the pan-Canadian Innovation Fund, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) engaged the Social Research Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to conduct a series of consultations with providers of CDS and SD training programs in Canada.

The need for these consultations grew out of an earlier project, Learning and Active Employment Programs (LAEP).¹ One of the goals of LAEP was to conduct a comprehensive review of the training literature. The project led to the development of a conceptual framework (Palameta et al., 2010b)² for understanding the factors that influence success with training programs among unemployed adults. This framework was then “applied” through a series of international consultations largely, in the US and UK, which led to the identification of a number of key knowledge gaps and innovative practices in meeting the needs of lower skilled unemployed adults (Myers et al., 2010).³

While Canadian research and program evaluations were reviewed as part of the findings, the LAEP project did not include similar consultations with Canadian provinces and training providers. In fact, few studies to date have explored how service delivery practices vary across Canadian jurisdictions and how these differences may affect client outcomes. Program evaluations of services delivered under Canadian Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA) indicate there is a high degree of heterogeneity in participant outcomes across Canadian jurisdictions — however, little analysis of how these differences arise has been undertaken to date (Palameta et al., 2010b).⁴

In addition, there is little information on how Canadian service delivery has adapted to respond to emerging needs; specifically, there is little research on gaps in service delivery, promising approaches, and opportunities to test these approaches for improving client outcomes. In light of changing labour markets and evolving client needs, understanding what works, when, and for whom in the provision of CDS and SD is important for achieving positive client outcomes and for promoting the adaptability of the Canadian labour force more generally.

¹ Palameta, B., Myers, K., Gyarmati, D., and Voyer, J. (2010). *Learning and Active Employment Programs*. Social Research and Demonstration Corporation.

² Palameta, B., Myers, K., Gyarmati, D., and Voyer, J. (2010b). *Understanding Training Program Effectiveness: A Conceptual Framework*. Social Research and Demonstration Corporation.

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Objectives

This report presents findings from consultations with Canadian provinces, CDS practitioners, and SD providers. The purpose of the project is to investigate existing gaps in how the needs of lower skilled unemployed Canadians are being met with respect to the delivery of CDS or SD services in participating provinces. At the same time, we hope to elucidate particularly promising approaches that can be shared across provinces, with the ultimate aim of proposing a set of options for future research projects that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) may wish to pursue.

In this respect, the project has three broad objectives, which shaped the scope of the Canadian consultations. Each has several possible areas for more focused inquiry:

- **Identify needs of unemployed lower skilled Canadians** — What kinds of individual needs and barriers should CDS and SD programs be seeking to address in order to effectively support positive labour market transitions? Do many have literacy or foundational skills needs? Do many require unique kinds of support for life course circumstances, notably, those with multiple barriers?
- **Identify promising approaches and effective practices in the Canadian context** — What are some of the promising approaches, designs, and delivery practices that are effectively meeting the needs of lower-skilled unemployed Canadian adults? Are the innovations observed internationally also present in Canadian jurisdictions, such as sectoral approaches, bridging programs, or pathways models?
- **Identify gaps and opportunities** — Given the answers to the first two sets of questions, what are the major gaps in the current process of providing CDS and SD services? Are client needs appropriately assessed? Are clients suitably referred? Are CDS and SD services provided in ways that are fully responsive to client needs with adequate supports? Are they equally responsive to needs of employers and the labour market?

In these respects, what types of innovative options might HRSDC explore further?

Methodology

SRDC conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with employment and career counsellors, training providers and selected experts from Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and British Columbia. Participants were selected based on a set of criteria that included: have extensive experience in the provision of CDS involvement in some aspect of the Skills Development program; offer a full range of services to a wide range of clients; and offer programs that are funded by multiple funding streams. In all three provinces, participants represented a mix of urban and rural regions.

SRDC researchers analyzed data to identify emerging themes across provinces as well as key areas of divergence, focusing on three key areas: identifying the needs of CDS clients, identifying gaps in program design and delivery, and identifying the features of promising practices or innovative ideas.

Results

Context

- Governance, Public Policy, and Service Delivery

The following table summarizes each province's career development and training context.

Province	Lead Ministry/ Ministries for Career Development and Training	LMDA/LMA agreements	Service Delivery		Recent and Current Policy/Program Changes
			CDS Services	Training	
Nova Scotia	<p>Learning Branch, Ministry of Labour and Advanced Education is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment Nova Scotia ▪ Adult Education ▪ Labour Market Partnerships ▪ Skills Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LMDA signed in 2008 ▪ LMA signed in 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Third-party contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mainly Nova Scotia Community College, and some private institutions 	
Manitoba	<p>Labour Market Skills Division, Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment Manitoba ▪ Industry and Workforce Development ▪ Apprenticeship Manitoba <p>Ministry of Advanced Education and Literacy responsible for PSE and adult learning (adult literacy, Mature Student Diploma, GED)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LMDA signed in 1997 ▪ LMA signed in 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mainly Employment Manitoba, with few third-party contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mix of public and private education and training institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implemented Career Development Strategy in 2009, a cross-ministerial policy framework to facilitate and coordinate development of labour market and lifelong learning programs and services.
British Columbia	<p>Ministry of Social Development is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment & Labour Market Services ▪ Income assistance ▪ Disability assistance ▪ Mental health and addiction services coordination <p>Ministry of Advanced Education responsible for PSE and adult education (basic skills, vocational, ESL)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LMDA signed in 2008 ▪ LMA signed in 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Third-party contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mix of public and private education and training institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launching a restructured system of Employment Programs in April 2011

Services and clients

All provinces offer career development programs and services that include the following features: intake and assessment; employment counselling and job search services; career development counselling; financial assistance for skills development programs; labour market transition services such as job placement programs; self-directed services such as online labour market information; case management services; and supports.

Participants in all three provinces stated that they serve a wide range of clients with various needs. While many clients are considered “easy to serve,” a substantial proportion of clients have multiple barriers to employment. A common theme reported across the three provinces is that clients’ needs can be quite complex and include a combination of skills gaps, life circumstances, and non-cognitive barriers.

Perceived gaps in CDS and SD

Intake, assessment, and employment counselling gaps

Practitioners emphasized the importance of assessment in the career development process as a key element for ensuring a proper fit between clients’ needs and the services and supports that they are eligible to access. However, practitioners also reported that assessment tools are sometimes inaccurate predictors of employment readiness, narrow in their focus, and inappropriate for certain client groups. Moreover, practitioners indicated that even if assessment tools were optimal, clients may still be unable to access programs and services required to meet identified needs. According to practitioners this gap would persist due to a combination of factors including narrow program eligibility rules and ‘short-sighted’ program objectives that emphasize the shortest route to employment.

Career development program gaps

There was general agreement among practitioners that the career counselling process is important for working with clients to map out pathways that are appropriate to clients’ interests, goals, skills, and capabilities. However, most of the practitioners we spoke to reported that they are constrained in their ability to effectively serve clients due in part to funding formulas that restrict the proportion of clients that can access more intensive CDS services tailored to specific needs, such as clients with lower literacy and Essential Skills levels.

Skills development and training gaps

Practitioners identified a number of gaps in this phase of the process including a general lack of access to timely and sufficient training funds; the quality, flexibility, and availability of training options; and the lack of clear pathways among the myriad adult education options.

Labour market transition gaps

A major theme across all three provinces was the notion that program rules make it difficult for practitioners to meaningfully engage with employers. Practitioners see a need for more connections

with employers in order to better identify current and upcoming employment opportunities; increase employer awareness about programs such as wage subsidy programs; and promote the benefits of hiring clients. Practitioners also expressed the need for retention programs and services once a client is employed to help ensure that they do not cycle back into the system. Finally, practitioners report a lack of programs that offer both skills development and work experience, which is a concern given the increasing proportion of clients who need to change occupations and/or change industries and who do not have contacts and networks in the new industry that would facilitate the job search process.

Promising ideas and approaches

Intake, assessment, and employment counselling

- **Assessment as a comprehensive but flexible process** — Assessment conceptualized as a holistic process rather than a tool, and that can be tailored to the specific situations of individual clients by drawing on a comprehensive set of tools and practices (e.g., transferable skills, prior learning, informal assessment, comprehensive approaches that cover a broad range of employability factors, etc.).
- **Matching based on need** — Referring clients based on their needs, and not being limited by (seemingly arbitrary) narrow program eligibility requirements or local availability as a means to improve the match between clients and the services and supports they receive.
- **Partnering and pooling of resources** — Consortium or partnership-based approaches to CDS that pool resources, standardize the referral process, coordinate service delivery, and share knowledge and expertise across providers in a region as a means to facilitate more responsive and consistent service delivery.
- **Investment focus** — Referring clients to programs that take a human capital, investment approach focused on ensuring that clients have the skills and experience to succeed in a knowledge economy.

Career development programs

- **Multi-pronged approach** — Options that draw on and connect three key aspects of career development services: 1) in-depth understanding of the labour market (connections to employers, knowledge of which sectors have better-paying jobs); 2) knowledge of education and training system (a good sense of what kinds of training programs can lead people to a better advancement trajectory); and 3) ability to motivate clients facing multiple challenges.
- **Comprehensive set of CDS options** — Offering a menu of CDS options to which clients could be referred, depending on their specific circumstances. A comprehensive menu would include intensive services for clients with multiple barriers; Web-based approaches for clients who can use services independently; and transferable skills approaches, for individuals with low Essential Skills or who are switching industries/sectors.

Skills development

- **Learning pathways composed of a range of flexible training options** — Training solutions that are tailored to client needs and interests and that aim to:

- Eliminate the trade-off between short-term training courses and longer-term certificate/diploma/degree programs by allowing clients to apply credits from completed courses to a formal educational program if desired;
 - Offer a variety of training options that range in terms of focus, length, delivery modes, schedules, and whether a credential is offered;
 - Offer programs with multiple entry and exit points (e.g., module-based programs).
- **Training options that integrate several areas of learning** — Various forms of integrated training such as combining academic upgrading or Essential skills training with diploma courses, combining industry certification training with Essential Skills training, or adding a workplace training component.
 - **Training tailored to an adult audience** — Options that accommodate adult life circumstances, have relevant and meaningful learning goals, have many opportunities to engage in real-life, occupation-specific example or simulations, and which provide instruction from industry-experienced, trained instructors.

Labour market transition services

- **Dual customer approach** — Initiatives that allow CDS practitioners to play a brokering role between the demand and supply sides of the local labour market by addressing the needs of both individual workers/clients and employers.
- **Work experience** — Combining work experience opportunities with skills development options (e.g., Skills Development with Targeted Wage Subsidy). Other related promising practices include workplace mentoring, and networking events and activities.
- **Retention supports** — Offering supports to employers to help retain workers with various needs, and extending supports and services to clients with special needs even after employment. Retention supports are critical to helping people with disabilities or other special needs to obtain and retain employment in a competitive environment.

Conclusions and recommendations

Respondents in our study have identified a large number of programs or practices that they believed were working well in their jurisdiction. Notably, a range of partnership models in the delivery of CDS and SD programs were observed in all jurisdictions. Innovative collaborative approaches have been observed in both the planning and delivery of services including provider committees, co-location, and delivery consortiums. Findings also suggest that other components of the innovative approaches observed in international settings are also present in Canadian jurisdictions. Elements of sectoral approaches were observed where industry is engaged along with other stakeholders in attempting to align educational opportunities with labour market needs. Some of the principles of the career pathways approach are also be found in existing delivery models including the design of some modular offerings with flexible entry and exit points. However, jurisdictions differ considerably in this respect and no province has implemented fully developed pathways models.

At the same time, many respondents also identified gaps in services where the needs of clients were not being fully addressed. In other cases, respondents expressed uncertainty about whether client needs were being fully met or not, directly suggesting the need for further evidence about what works best. Gaps in the assessment and referral process were noted, with much uncertainty about whether existing tools sufficiently capture the range of client needs, or whether they are even suitable for all client groups. Associated gaps in the planning and delivery of CDS and SD were also expressed, with concern over the suitability of referrals and whether available offerings are fully meeting client needs.

Drawing on these findings SRDC has identified five broadly defined potential options for further research. Tests of these approaches would provide significant evidence about what works best throughout the range of client services. Option 1 addresses knowledge gaps about what works in the assessment and referral process through process-driven assessment that meets a full range of client needs. Options 2 and 3 address how the planning and delivery of CDS can be better organized through collaborative partnerships and comprehensive delivery models. Options 4 and 5 then address how the planning and delivery of SD training programs are best undertaken including an emphasis on sectoral partnerships and pathways delivery models.

Option 1: A customized, flexible approach to assessment

Investigate assessment processes for predictive validity, implementation feasibility, and added value of improved matches between interventions and individual clients' needs. There are at least three types of assessment processes that can be tested:

- **Comprehensive assessment processes** — Assessment processes that consider a range of factors affecting employment readiness including: skills, intention, motivation, expectations, self-efficacy, coping capacity, disabilities, structural barriers, and personal circumstances.
- **Transferable skills processes** — Assessment processes that use the transferable skills approach.
- **Psychosocial assessment processes** — Assessment processes that focus on the psychological factors of learning (e.g., intentions, motivation, and expectations; learning styles; ability to set and achieve goals; and the ability to reflect on oneself and on what has been learned).

Option 2: A collaborative approach to CDS planning

Investigate the effects of a selected collaborative approach in a number of key areas, including whether it increases the quality and quantity of services and provides better matches to client and employer needs. There are at least three possible approaches to test:

- a) **Community CDS service provider committees** — Committees or networks that bring together client stakeholders and aim to promote referrals among member agencies, coordinate service delivery, gain input from employers, and share knowledge and expertise.
- b) **Co-location** — Multiple services for diverse groups of clients are offered at a single location, with an aim to increasing access to services and wrap-around supports.
- c) **Career development consortiums** — Regional consortiums that include membership of employment services providers, training providers, local employers and other stakeholders, and that take a dual

focus by addressing the needs of clients, employers and other stakeholders, and aligning educational opportunities with economic development objectives.

Option 3: A comprehensive set of CDS interventions based on client need

Investigate whether a significant proportion of clients, including “easy to serve” clients, may improve employment outcomes if they receive tailored career development services including assistance researching labour market opportunities, identifying career goals, and determining which training programs can lead to a better advancement trajectory. This option could also investigate whether an additional number of clients would benefit from more comprehensive assistance that would enable them to overcome multiple barriers such as skills gaps, financial pressures, lack of supports, and mental health challenges.

Option 4: Test a collaborative approach to training provision

Investigate the benefits of a collaborative approach to training provision for individuals and/or communities, and the cost implications for government. There are at least two approaches that can be tested within this option:

- **Program Advisory Committees** — Advisory committees comprised of college faculty, administrators and industry representatives. These committees could be present in each educational institution and could recommend training programs to be offered in the institution in response to local employer/industry needs. CDS clients could then receive funding to take these programs.
- **Regional consortiums** — Training providers could form a regional consortium to identify local client and employer needs, coordinate their training options, pool their resources and allocate funds. The consortium could receive one lump-sum of public funds, and use a streamlined data collection and reporting process. For further coordination, the consortium of skills development providers could partner with employment service providers for referral purposes or to co-sponsor clients for specific, skills-based training programs.

Option 5: A pathways approach to skills development that offers a comprehensive suite of flexible, customized training options

Test the benefits of a training system that offers learning pathways between adult education and formal college diploma and certificate programs; that facilitates the design and delivery of a range of short term and longer term training programs targeted to different client groups based the needs identified in the assessment process; offers flexibilities in terms of the mode of delivery; and integrates various components to traditional training programs such as an LES or academic upgrading component.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

This report presents findings from a series of consultations with provincial representatives and Canadian providers of Career Development Services (CDS) and Skills Development (SD) programs. The project was coordinated by the Federal Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) Career Development Services Working Group (CDSWG). With funding from the pan-Canadian Innovation Fund, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) engaged the Social Research Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to conduct a series of consultations with providers of CDS and SD training programs in Canada.

The need for these consultations grew out of an earlier project, Learning and Active Employment Programs (LAEP).⁵ One of the goals of LAEP was to conduct a comprehensive review of the training literature. The project led to the development of a conceptual framework (Palameta et al., 2010b)⁶ for understanding the factors that influence success with training programs among unemployed adults. This framework was then “applied” through a series of international consultations largely, in the US and UK, which led to the identification of a number of key knowledge gaps and innovative practices in meeting the needs of lower skilled unemployed adults (Myers et al., 2010).⁷

While Canadian research and program evaluations were reviewed as part of the findings, the LAEP project did not include similar consultations with Canadian provinces and training providers. In fact, few studies to date have explored how service delivery practices vary across Canadian jurisdictions and how these differences may affect client outcomes. Program evaluations of services delivered under Canadian Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA) indicate there is a high degree of heterogeneity in participant outcomes across Canadian jurisdictions — however, little analysis of how these differences arise has been undertaken to date (Palameta et al., 2010b).⁸

In addition, there is little information on how Canadian service delivery has adapted to respond to emerging needs; specifically, there is little research on gaps in service delivery, promising approaches, and opportunities to test these approaches for improving client outcomes. In light of changing labour markets and evolving client needs, understanding what works, when, and for whom in the provision of CDS and SD is important for achieving positive client outcomes and for promoting the adaptability of the Canadian labour force more generally.

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Innovative practices in international settings — A starting point

Findings from the international consultations completed as part of the LAEP project provide an initial model for thinking about possible innovative practices in Canadian jurisdictions. Figure 1 highlights five distinct innovative approaches to supporting skills development and labour market transitions for lower skilled adults that were identified through consultations with practitioners and training providers in the US and UK (Myers et al., 2010).

Background research and pre-interviews with provincial representatives completed in preparation for the current project have confirmed the presence of at least some relevant features of these approaches in Canada including sectoral, bridging programs, and some elements of pathways models. However, the extent of their innovation in Canadian provinces, and the potential capacity for their full implementation, is yet to be explored.

Figure 1 Five approaches to skills development for adults with low education and/or skills

1. Workforce Intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Convener” organizations that take a ‘dual customer’ approach to employment and training services addressing the needs of both workers and employers
2. Sectoral approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings together employers and other stakeholders in a specific region and industry to align educational opportunities with economic development objectives
3. LES embedded in career exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and essential skills training is embedded in short term career exploration and preparation program
4. Bridge programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and essential skills training is delivered in the context of occupation-specific training
5. Career pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected modularized training and support services that enable individuals to get jobs in specific industries and advance to higher levels of education and work

Knowledge gaps related to CDS and SD programs

The LAEP study also provided a conceptual framework for thinking about some of the factors that influence training outcomes, and ultimately, labour market transitions of unemployed adults with lower skills. Furthermore, it identified a particular series of knowledge gaps within this framework, where evidence about what works in CDS and training is lacking.

In this framework, individual outcomes of a training program would result from a dynamic interplay between *individual* and *structural* forces. Individual factors include **competencies** (such as general cognitive abilities and foundational skills), **preferences** (such as patience and risk aversion) and

personal circumstances (such as those arising from life course and family dynamics). Structural factors are organized around **economic** influences (such as business cycles, and occupational skills demand), the **policy environment** (such as employment insurance, financial aid), and the **institutional factors** (such as the program design, delivery partnerships, and governance). The interaction of these individual and structural factors creates either enabling or impeding conditions for training and a successful labour market transition.

Knowledge gaps in these areas can be further explored in a Canadian context through the consultations with provincial representatives and CDS and SD practitioners. Pre-interviews conducted in participating provinces in preparation for the current project suggest that some factors may be of particular relevance to Canadian jurisdictions and could benefit from further investigation. For instance, individual factors related to competencies, notably the role of foundational skills, and of certain life course circumstances among clients with multi-barriers, are important areas for further investigation. How responsive CDS and SD programs are in different provinces to these kinds of needs of lower skilled unemployed Canadians is an open question. Some jurisdictions may benefit from the innovations of others in this respect.

Similarly, economic, policy, and institutional factors in the delivery of CDS and SD services likely play an important role in determining the outcomes of clients, and in explaining differences across provinces. For instance, beyond the obvious relevance of macroeconomic conditions, outcomes likely depend on how responsive policies and programs are to the needs of local labour markets. Provinces can have vastly different labour market conditions, with varying occupational demands, which can be targeted differently by local institutions. Existing research emphasizes a strong role for both industry and local employers in shaping the design and delivery of regional training programs (Myers et al., 2010). The goal is to align services with the needs of the local labour market to ensure that skills obtained are for in-demand occupations. Again, provinces can differ in how they implement services and achieve alignment with local labour market needs — and can ultimately benefit from further knowledge sharing in this respect.

1.2 Objectives

This report presents findings from consultations with Canadian provinces, CDS practitioners, and SD providers. The purpose of the project is to investigate existing gaps in how the needs of lower skilled unemployed Canadians are being met with respect to the delivery of CDS or SD services in participating provinces. At the same time, we hope to elucidate particularly promising approaches that can be shared across provinces, with the ultimate aim of proposing a set of options for future research projects that Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) may wish to pursue.

In this respect, the project has three broad objectives, which shaped the scope of the Canadian consultations. Each has several possible areas for more focused inquiry:

- **Identify needs of unemployed lower skilled Canadians** — What kinds of individual needs and barriers should CDS and SD programs be seeking to address in order to effectively support positive labour market transitions? Do many have literacy or foundational skills needs? Do many require unique kinds of support for life course circumstances, notably, those with multiple barriers?

- **Identify promising approaches and effective practices in the Canadian context** — What are some of the promising approaches, designs, and delivery practices that are effectively meeting the needs of lower-skilled unemployed Canadian adults? Are the innovations observed internationally also present in Canadian jurisdictions, such as sectoral approaches, bridging programs, or pathways models?
- **Identify gaps and opportunities** — Given the answers to the first two sets of questions, what are the major gaps in the current process of providing CDS and SD services? Are client needs appropriately assessed? Are clients suitably referred? Are CDS and SD services provided in ways that are fully responsive to client needs with adequate supports? Are they equally responsive to needs of employers and the labour market?

In these respects, what types of innovative options might HRSDC explore further?

2. Methodology

2.1 Field research — In-depth interviews and focus groups

SRDC conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups with employment/career counsellors, training providers and selected experts in three provinces between December 2010 and February 2011. (Protocols for the focus groups and interviews are found in Appendices B and C, respectively). Two SRDC researchers were present at each focus group and most interviews; generally, one researcher facilitated the discussion and the other took detailed notes. Interviews typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. Focus group sessions were two to three hours long. Participants were reimbursed all travel costs to and from the focus groups.

2.2 Selection

Three provinces agreed to participate in the consultations: Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and British Columbia. Within each province, SRDC sought to maximize diversity of provider type, clientele, and geographic location. An effort was made in each province to select participants according to the criteria shown below:

- Has extensive experience providing either employment/career counselling services or delivering training to unemployed Canadians, especially those with low education and/or skills;
- Is involved with Skills Development, either as a case manager, through a counselling service that provides assistance with training plan development; or as a training provider;
- Offers a full range of services from assessment to training plan preparation, to labour market transition services;
- Offers services to a wide range of client types;
- Offers programs that are funded from multiple funding streams (to allow us to compare employment training services offered to EI clients versus services offered to other types of clients such as social assistance recipients or individuals that are not attached to any government program).

The process of identifying CDS and training providers who met the selection criteria was slightly different in each province. In Nova Scotia, researchers worked with the provincial representative from the CDSWG. Invitations were sent to three networks of CDS service providers. Each network then selected two to three providers to represent the group. From these providers, 17 individuals participated in the focus groups, primarily those holding manager or career counsellor positions. Focus groups were held in Halifax and Sydney, and participants represented services in most areas of the mainland and Cape Breton Island. SRDC researchers also conducted three interviews with four representatives from Nova Scotia's largest public training provider as well as with one from a private training institution.

In Manitoba, most CDS services are provided directly by the province through Employment Manitoba (EMB). Consultation with EMB staff in all part of the province was a specific goal of the consultations in

that province. As such, the CDSWG representative worked closely with EMB managers in each administrative region (i.e., Winnipeg, the North, and rural region) to identify EMB staff who met the selection criteria and invite them to the focus groups. Focus groups were held in Winnipeg, The Pas, and Portage La Prairie. Participants included program managers, project officers, career counsellors and employment assistance providers from 15 of the 17 EMB offices.

The CDSWG representative also worked with staff of the Manitoba Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade to identify and invite leaders and strategic thinkers among third-party CDS and training providers to participate in the consultations. Individuals from three third-party CDS providers and from three of the largest public training providers in Manitoba were interviewed. Three senior staff members from EMB and Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade identified as experts in the field of CDS were also interviewed.

In British Columbia, provincial representatives requested that SRDC take the lead in the invitation process. Using a list provided by provincial representatives as a starting point, SRDC researchers engaged with leaders in the field to identify providers with strong reputations for expertise, innovation and strategic thinking. Invitations were directed to CEOs and executive directors. Focus groups were held in New Westminster and Kelowna, with representation from Vancouver, Victoria, Burnaby, Hope, Abbotsford, Kelowna, Vernon, Penticton and the East Kootenay. A total of 18 participants took part in the focus groups, representing 12 service providers, one umbrella organization, and two colleges.

2.3 Data analysis

Our organizing framework for analyzing the data generated by the interviews and focus groups was based on the broad topic areas used in the lines of questioning (i.e., learner or client needs, barriers to learning and employment, gaps in training and CDS delivery, and promising practices). Drawing on the extensive notes taken during each of the interviews and focus groups, these categories were used to organize the main points from each discussion and generate a summary. This process usually took place immediately after the discussion, and involved both researchers who had been present, to optimize validity. When required, researchers verified the accuracy of the notes with the audio-recordings.

In the same way, the summaries of all the interviews and focus groups held in each province were analyzed together, and the key points and themes were identified in a provincial summary. All the researchers then worked as a team to analyze provincial summaries and identify emerging themes across provinces as well as key areas of divergence.

At this point in the analysis, it became clear that the fundamental features of the CDS process (i.e., intake and assessment, employment counselling, skills development and training, and labour market transition) were evident in service delivery across all participating provinces, and that this process would provide a useful, policy-relevant, over-arching framework in which to present the main findings of the project. Consistent with the goals and scope of the research project, the final analysis focused on identifying the key themes within each of these service elements in terms of, gaps in program design and delivery and promising practices or innovative ideas.

Since most of the data were derived from group discussions that involved a number of participants in different roles (e.g., employment counsellors, project officers, centre managers), we were limited in our ability to quantify certain opinions or themes with precision, or to analyze these by specific role type. That said, we have generally distinguished the perspectives of training providers, CDS practitioners, and key informants/experts. As is common in qualitative research, we have also tried to portray the relative weight of a given theme using qualifiers such as “a few,” “several,” “many,” etc., and where possible, to identify whether certain themes were evident in one or more provinces, and widely shared or expressed by a few participants.

3. Findings

The consultation findings are divided into three broad sections: first, we discuss the relevant policy context related to the governance and delivery of CDS and training provision in each province. Second, we describe our findings related to current gaps in the design and delivery of CDS and skills development programs. Finally, we present a summary of promising program features that were identified by program participants in all three provinces.

3.1 Context

Lead ministries

In Nova Scotia, responsibility for labour market and employment programs rests with Employment Nova Scotia, a branch of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. A labour market agreement devolving responsibility for employment benefits and support measures (EBSM) from the federal government to Nova Scotia was signed in 2008 and implemented in July 2009. Given this recent devolution, CDS providers noted that much of the focus of activity over the past year and a half has been on building administrative infrastructure, such as the government's online system for managing employment contracts.

In Manitoba, labour market and employment programs are the responsibility of Employment Manitoba, a branch of the Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. Responsibility for employment benefits and support measures (EBSM) was devolved from the federal government to Manitoba in 1998, making it one of the first provinces to undergo this transition. In addition to developing policy for employment programs and supports, the department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade is also responsible for developing industry and trade policy. The department of Advanced Education and Literacy is responsible for developing post-secondary education and adult learning policy (e.g., adult literacy, Mature Student Diploma and GED).

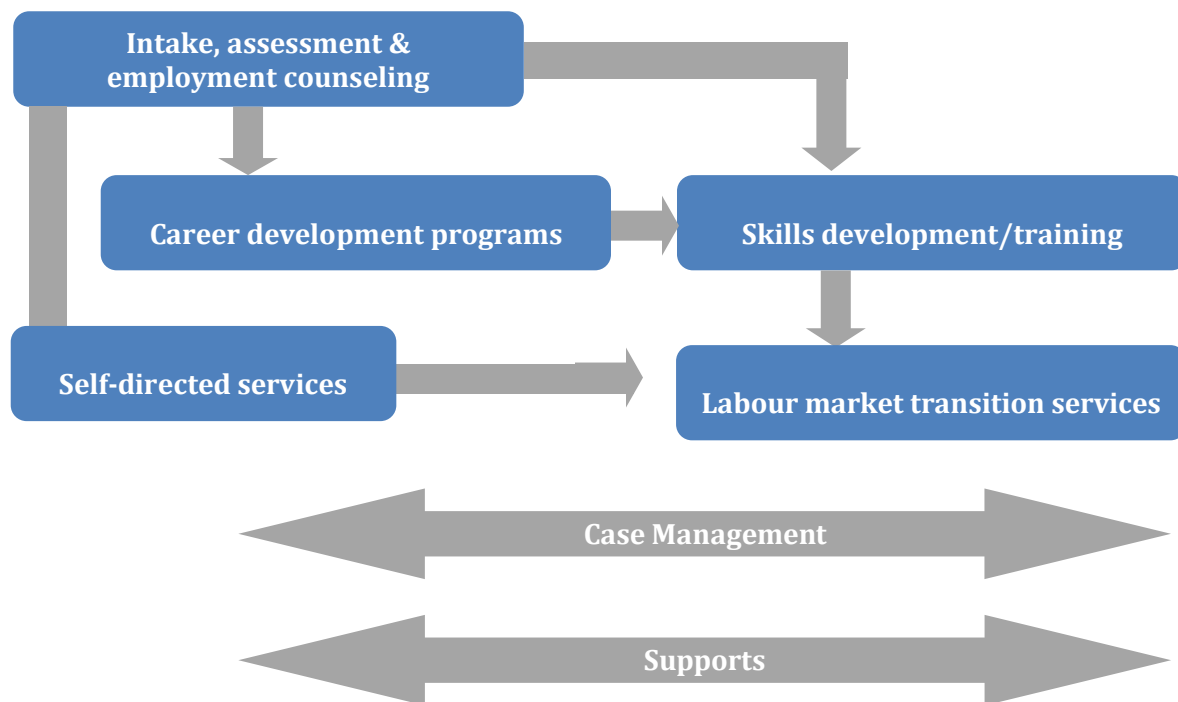
In British Columbia, the Ministry of Social Development develops employment and labour market services. This ministry is also responsible for the provision of income assistance, disability assistance and the coordination of mental health and addiction services. Similar to Nova Scotia, the devolution of labour market programs occurred recently, in 2008. The Ministry of Advanced Education is responsible for the development of post-secondary education policy and employment training policy and programs, including apprenticeship and industry training initiatives, training for special groups (e.g., Aboriginal people, at-risk youth), workplace training, and training for occupations in strategic sectors (e.g., oil and gas, health).

Service delivery

All three provinces offer career development services and programs that include the following features: intake and assessment; employment assistance and job search services; labour market information; career counselling; financial assistance for training/skills development programs; and labour market transition services such as job placement programs.

The way in which these services are provided and by whom can vary substantially both within and across provinces. For example, some services can be self-directed (e.g., using on-line sources of labour market information or a job bank without any staff assistance) or provided by CDS staff to varying degrees of intensity, even on an itinerant basis, as in remote communities. Services can be provided by staff of provincial employment offices (sometimes in Resource Centres co-located with Service Canada) or contracted out to third-party non-profit or for-profit providers. Regardless, the fundamental elements and the process or phases of CDA delivery remains fairly constant, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 2 Phases of the career development process



In Nova Scotia, career development services are entirely contracted out to third-party providers, with Employment Nova Scotia serving as the contract manager and funding provider. Third party providers offer a range of general services such as those identified above. Specialized services are available for women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and African Nova Scotians.

In terms of training, Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) is the sole public training provider in the province, and provides the bulk of publicly funded skills development training. The college was created in April 1996, with the purpose of centralizing administration, coordinating funding, and removing program duplication. NSCC has 13 campuses across the province that offer a wide array of course options and will also create courses to meet a specific local need. As an “Access Institution,” NSCC is open to all students regardless of grade level; most campuses also offer CDS services to students and the broader community. Some of NSCC’s more specialized training courses are also offered by private training providers, such as for truck driving, computer programming, etc.

In Manitoba, CDS are provided directly by Employment Manitoba as well as by non-profit, third-party providers. Practitioners indicated that roughly 80 per cent of clients access CDS services through Employment Manitoba directly, and 20 per cent access services through third-party providers. Training in Manitoba is provided by three main public colleges, several smaller colleges and technical institutes, a small number of private career colleges, and three universities.

In British Columbia, CDS are delivered by third-party contracted providers, with the Ministry of Social Development serving as the funding provider and contract manager for providers of services falling under the federal-provincial labour market agreement. Training is provided by BC's 25 publicly funded post-secondary institutions: 11 universities, 11 colleges, and three institutes offering a variety of specialized programs. There are currently 17 private and out-of-province public institutions offering degree programs in B.C. Provincial legislation requires that private and out-of-province public institutions must be authorized by the province to deliver degree programs. There are also more than 400 private career training institutions in BC. Private career training institutions are self-regulated under the Private Career Training Institutions Act.

Recent major policy or program changes

Manitoba

In addition to the length of time since devolution, there are a few noteworthy changes to CDS policy or programs that have been recently implemented or are currently underway in the provinces we consulted. The first is the recent (2009) implementation of Manitoba's Career Development Strategy, a policy framework spanning several departments, including Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade; Education; Advanced Education and Literacy; Justice; Labour and Immigration; Family Services and Consumer Affairs; Healthy Living, Youth, and Seniors; and Civil Service Commission. The goal of the strategy is to facilitate and coordinate the development and maintenance of an effective, coherent, and comprehensive set of programs and services that support labour market needs and lifelong learning. The strategy calls for multi-departmental coordination, stakeholder consultation, and alignment with and enhancement of existing government strategies that include a career development component.

The set of career development programs delivered through educational institutions, community organizations and employers in Manitoba aims to enhance workforce development, promote entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable employment options, support individual work and life goals, and use exemplary practices or pilot projects. During consultations, practitioners highlighted specific aspects of this strategy, including initiatives to build awareness and promote engagement in intentional career planning at the individual and employer level; the Career Development Gateway, which provides single-window access to career development resources and information on career development programs and services; Manitoba Career Week; the Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners; and the development of a Career Practitioner Certificate through the Canadian Career Development Foundation and the University of Winnipeg.

The second noteworthy change — also in Manitoba — was the decision in 2006 to allow people who were considered underemployed to quit their jobs in order access Skills Development training and other supports that had previously been restricted to those who were unemployed. According to

several Employment Manitoba staff members, this decision to allow “authorized quits” had a huge impact on service delivery, dramatically increasing the demand for services and shifting the clientele to low-income earners/the working poor (compared to the unemployed).⁹

British Columbia

The third noteworthy change is in British Columbia, where the government is currently redesigning its employment programs. More than a shift in policy orientation, this restructuring is expected to result in major changes to the provision of CDS in that province. The new Employment Program, to be launched on April 1, 2011, will feature a one-stop model for all BC residents who are eligible to work in Canada and seeking employment. The program will offer a range of integrated employment and labour market supports and services. All of the services provided within the existing employment programs will be delivered through the Employment Program of British Columbia by way of Employment Services Centres (ESCs).

To take into account the variation in costs to deliver employment services to clients with differing needs and levels of readiness, the BC Ministry of Social Development has developed an approach to grouping clients by tiers based on assessed readiness for employment. General services (e.g., self-serve services, case management, and community and employer linkages) will be provided at the ESCs, with exceptions for specialized populations who may need alternative means of accessing services. Contractors are to leverage existing infrastructure, resources and service providers within the community in order to provide the full range of services. Contractors are encouraged to partner and form a network of service providers to achieve this.

Nova Scotia

As in British Columbia, CDS providers in Nova Scotia were reacting to a recent decision to reduce funding for CDS services in that province right at the time our consultations took place. This almost certainly heightened the general sense of frustration among CDS practitioners about the challenges they faced providing appropriate levels of service to clients. Nevertheless, we heard much less about requiring increased resources than about having more flexibility to do this effectively, as will be described in subsequent sections.

Labour market contexts

Virtually all the CDS practitioners we consulted made reference to the increased demand for their services and the challenges of helping clients achieve successful employment outcomes in the context of the recent recession and current economic downturn. Fewer jobs, increased unemployment, out-migration, and fierce competition for available job openings were common themes in this respect, both at a provincial level and within more local labour markets. As one might expect, each of the three provinces has significant regional diversity in their labour markets. During consultations, differences were identified in all provinces between urban and outlying or rural areas, especially in relation to the

⁹ Authorized quits have since been disallowed in Manitoba, in January 2011.

number of job opportunities available and the disproportionate impact of plant and business closures. In addition to these general challenges, participants described those which were more specific to their particular province and/or region below.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia, for example, has the fourth highest unemployment rate in the country (approximately nine per cent), though it is lower than in previous decades as the province moves away from seasonal industries. In particular, Nova Scotia has seen significant sector-wide losses in fishing and mining, as well as localized contractions in the forestry and oil and gas industries. In general, agriculture, manufacturing, utilities, and services have been growth sectors; participants particularly noted tourism, education, health care, and government as providing the most opportunities for clients, though this varied regionally — providers in some communities indicated a saturation of the market for health care aid jobs, for instance, despite the continued popularity of these jobs among the EAS clientele. In the Sydney focus group, call centres were identified as the only option in some communities for people with low levels of literacy or education. The trucking sector was noted by one training provider to still have high demand, but gaps persist because of decreased interest in the profession from prospective learners (especially young people), due to the demanding lifestyle.

During consultations in Nova Scotia, we also heard that in some outlying areas, available jobs tend to be either low-paying or highly specialized (e.g., in oil and gas companies), so that even people with postsecondary education qualifications are experiencing difficulty securing employment. A number of EAS providers, especially those from Cape Breton and outlying communities, also indicated that their areas were experiencing significant outmigration to Halifax and to the western provinces (i.e., Alberta and Saskatchewan), especially by those in skilled trades and trucking. Out-migration of younger skilled workers is a particular concern given the rapidly increasing proportion of seniors in the population. Nova Scotia also has the highest rate of disability in Canada (approximately 20 per cent).

Manitoba

In the past few years, Manitoba has experienced steady economic growth and low unemployment; as of March 2011, the unemployment rate was five and a half per cent, the second lowest in the country. As one key informant told us, the province as a whole has a diversified economy (based on agriculture, resource industries, and government), which has helped shield it from the full impacts of the economic downturn. However, certain industries such as mining, forestry, and manufacturing have been affected (e.g., by weak commodity prices and/or reduced demands for products and services), resulting in some companies cutting back on production or downsizing. While the subsequent layoffs occurred in Winnipeg as well as in rural and northern Manitoba, those communities outside the provincial capital have felt a disproportionate impact, since many are dependent upon one or two major employers or sectors. As many participants told us, while the provincial economy and that of Winnipeg may itself be diversified, this is not true of local labour markets, which can be vulnerable to rapid changes.

The specificity of specific labour markets also means that the population of certain communities — and consequently, the clientele of CDS services — can vary quite a lot from one location to another. Our consultations in Manitoba revealed a number of instances in which industries or employers had

targeted recruitment to specific groups such as immigrants and Aboriginal people, sometimes in collaboration with government agencies. With the largest population of Aboriginal people in Canada, meeting the needs of this clientele — whether through general CDS services or specific community development projects — was often discussed during consultations in Manitoba.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, nearly 80 per cent of jobs are located in the Lower Mainland (61 per cent) and Vancouver Island (17 per cent) areas. About 11 per cent work in Thompson/Okanagan—the region around Kamloops, Kelowna and Penticton. Cariboo, Kootenay, North Coast & Nechako, and Northeast each employ a relatively small percentage of the province's workers (11 per cent). Clients made note of this regional variation in job opportunities and reported that it was an issue for the development of rural and northern regions, which were experiencing outmigration among skilled youth seeking employment in the Lower Mainland.

Until recently, BC's unemployment rate was on a downward trajectory, as the labour market experienced a long period of steady growth. The unemployment rate fell to a 30-year low of 4 per cent in March 2007, and the average for the year was a mere 4.2 per cent. The unemployment rate began to increase in 2008, and reached 8.3 per cent by October 2009.¹⁰ At the time of consultation (February 2011), the unemployment rate in BC was 8.8 per cent.¹¹ BC has the highest unemployment rate of the western provinces.

Workers in goods-producing industries face a significantly higher likelihood of being unemployed than those with jobs in the service sector. This is especially true during economic downturns, since goods-producing industries tend to cut back on their production when markets are weak.¹² Workers in forestry, logging, fishing, hunting, and trapping are more likely to be unemployed than are other BC workers. As a result of the recent downturn, the unemployment rate has been rising in some manufacturing industries as well.¹³

The northern and interior regions of the province, where many of the mineral and forest resources are located, are most reliant on goods production as a source of employment.¹⁴ Providers in these areas reported that the reliance of communities on these sectors made workers increasingly vulnerable to high levels of unemployment.

¹⁰ Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and BC Stats, *A Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market*, 2010. http://www.guidetobceconomy.org/Library/GTBCE_2010.pdf.

¹¹ BC Stats, *Labour Force Statistics February 2011*, 2011. <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/pubs/lfs/lfs1102.pdf>.

¹² Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and BC Stats, *A Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market*, 2010. http://www.guidetobceconomy.org/Library/GTBCE_2010.pdf.

¹³ Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and BC Stats, *A Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market*, 2010. http://www.guidetobceconomy.org/Library/GTBCE_2010.pdf.

¹⁴ Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and BC Stats, *A Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market*, 2010. http://www.guidetobceconomy.org/Library/GTBCE_2010.pdf.

Clients

The above mentioned characteristics of the provincial and local labour markets have implications for the clientele of CDS services in the three provinces we visited. Depending on their location, for example, some employment resource centres (and training providers) serve a much higher proportion of immigrants, often a specific sub-group of immigrants from one country or region. Those in large urban centres generally serve a more diverse clientele, though this also often includes larger numbers of people who are homeless or chronically unemployed, than would be seen in smaller or more rural centres.

There were also some provincial differences in CDS clientele, though these no doubt reflected the perspectives of consultation participants than any actual population differences. In Nova Scotia, for instance, we heard much more than in the other two provinces about older workers with low levels of education and essential skills who had been displaced from fishing and mining and now had few opportunities. We also heard more about the needs of youth, African Nova Scotians, and people with disabilities, since we consulted with CDS providers who provided specialized services to these populations. In Manitoba, participants described the clientele of each resource centre as being quite specific to the population of the local community; the common element was the generally high proportion of Aboriginal clients.

In British Columbia, all providers reported serving a mixed client population in terms of demographics and service needs (except for one provider that served immigrants only). This is likely due in part to the fact that we aimed to consult mainly with providers that served a broad range of clients and provided a broad range of services (not specialized services). Providers located in rural areas tended to emphasize issues with displaced workers from the goods producing sector, which is not surprising given the fact that declining industries in the goods sector are concentrated in rural areas. They also highlighted issues related to the outmigration of skilled youth in these areas, which is also not unexpected since most jobs in BC are located in the lower mainland.

In general, however, focus group participants in all three provinces stated that they are serving a wider range of clients compared to previous years. This was attributed to both the general downturn in the economy, as well as to specific labour market changes such as out-migration. According to CDS practitioners, while many clients are generally able to use basic services independently, substantial numbers are deemed to have multiple barriers to employment and require more intensive services. A common theme reported across the three provinces is that the needs of multi-barriered clients can be quite complex, with clients facing multifaceted problems that often include a combination of skills gaps, structural barriers (e.g., racism, poverty), life circumstances (e.g., age, family responsibilities), disabilities, and other, non-cognitive barriers. Groups of clients that practitioners identified as facing multiple barriers include:

- Long-tenured, displaced workers with education at the high school level or less who need to change careers or industries but lack the skills, knowledge, experience and/or credentials;
- Long-tenured immigrant workers who are displaced and who are in need of a career change, but who lack official language skills (since oral communication was not a main requirement of their old job), as well as essential skills and new technical skills;

- Recent immigrants who are highly educated but lack official language skills, soft skills (i.e., familiarity with Canadian culture), and Canadian work experience, and whose credentials are not recognized by Canadian employers;
- Youth at risk who need academic upgrading (e.g., to obtain secondary credentials), technical training, and essential skills training to improve employability. Many of these also have low levels of financial literacy and/or may be in debt;
- Aboriginal people who may face a variety of structural barriers including the inter-generational effects of residential schools, and who require culturally appropriate services and supports;
- Victims of violence or abuse who need significant emotional and practical supports (e.g., affordable housing, legal services, and counselling);
- Clients with mental health issues, including addiction problems;
- Clients with disabilities (including physical, mental or learning disabilities) who may require specialized assessment of their needs, as well as accommodations or other supports to obtain and retain employment;
- Clients with a criminal record. Among the many implications for employment for this group is the fact that they are unable to obtain insurance (e.g., for cross-border truck driving), or be bonded, a requirement for many jobs in retail, security, etc.;
- Long-term social assistance recipients who face a variety of challenges persisting in career counselling, skills development and the pursuit of employment, including discrimination.

The complexity of needs and barriers faced by these clients groups has a number of implications for effective delivery of CDS services, particularly in terms of resources. These implications are outlined in more detail in the next section, particularly under *Intake and Assessment*, below.

3.2 Perceived gaps in CDS and skills development

Practitioners in all three provinces identified significant gaps in all phases of the CDS process and SD programs. While some of the gaps identified were specific to each province or a specific region, in general we found considerable agreement about core gaps in programs and services for unemployed Canadians. Given the research objective of identifying promising areas for further research, we focus primarily on gaps that were identified by at least a significant proportion of practitioners. While some gaps cut across the entire process, most of the gaps are associated with a particular phase of the CDS process or SD program. The following is a summary of major gaps identified.

Intake and assessment

CDS practitioners in all three provinces emphasized the importance of assessment in the career development process as a key element for ensuring a proper “fit” between clients’ needs and the services and supports for which they are eligible. However, practitioners reported that the assessment tools in current use may be inaccurate predictors of employment readiness, narrow in focus, rigid in their application, and inappropriate for certain client groups. Moreover, practitioners indicated that

even if assessment tools were optimal, the range of training and support options is increasingly limited. Eligibility rules can be rigid and complex, and program objectives are often narrow and short-sighted.

As a result, many clients have difficulty accessing appropriate services and supports that can meet their individual and often complex needs. Some practitioners also reported that with changing clientele, their roles as service providers have become increasingly complex, and they lack the training or resources to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. We describe these gaps in further detail below.

Lack of evidence-based practice

During consultations, key informant experts, CDS practitioners, and training providers all underscored the importance of employability assessment as being “fundamental” to effective employment/career counselling — “like the foundation of a house” — and especially to ensuring that training and support options are appropriate to client needs. However, practitioners also asserted that there is a striking lack of knowledge or evidence about which assessment processes, practices, and tools work best for which clients. Literacy and essential skills (LES) assessment is perceived to be of particular importance since it has implications for all subsequent stages of CDS: counselling, training, and employment transitions. But even for these foundational skills, there is no clear consensus on the ability of current tools to determine learner readiness.

No clear line of responsibility

Despite agreement on the importance of LES assessment, there also appears to be no clear line of responsibility for this element among CDS or training providers in any province. This has resulted in a patchwork of LES assessment processes with many clients receiving no LES assessment at all prior to training or employment. Some clients are only assessed if the training provider suspects a skills gap in light of client difficulty during training. As a result, we heard that some training providers are increasingly drawn to conducting their own ad hoc LES assessments as a way of supporting student success, particularly where a high school diploma or GED is viewed as an unreliable indicator of skill level.

Narrow assessment criteria

Many CDS practitioners indicated they are often constrained in their approach to assessing employability, and specifically, that their current assessments do not adequately assess the myriad of factors that can affect clients’ interest in career and skills development, and their ability to obtain and retain employment. These factors can include both personal and systemic challenges a client may be facing, as well as their confidence, motivation and capabilities to address these challenges. For instance, some practitioners expressed a need for assessments that do a better job at assessing the psychological factors of learning, such as client’s intentions, motivation, and expectations; learning styles; ability to set and achieve goals; and the ability to reflect on oneself and one’s learning.

Similarly, practitioners expressed a need to go beyond a narrow definition of employability to explore issues in other life domains that may significantly affect employability, such as mental health and addictions problems, as well as more structural issues such as poverty, racism, disability, etc. These issues were seen as highly relevant to employability assessment. Even though interventions to address

such barriers are beyond the scope of CDS delivery, practitioners said this more comprehensive and holistic approach to assessment could help them rationalize arrangements with other community service providers to deliver wrap-around supports. This in turn was seen as potentially helping to address situations in which practitioners felt pressured to refer clients to employment who were not yet “job-ready,” thereby increasing the likelihood of employment failure for the client and damaging relations with the employer.

Assessment tools not appropriate for some groups

Several CDS practitioners and training providers — especially in Manitoba and British Columbia — reported that current assessment tools are not culturally appropriate for specific client groups such as Aboriginal people and immigrants. Similarly, CDS practitioners in all provinces remarked that many tools are not amenable for use with clients with low literacy levels or with language barriers. For instance, some clients with multiple and complex needs require longer, more in-depth assessment than that usually provided in CDS. Clients with lower levels of literacy and essential skills in particular may find current assessment tools too language-based and therefore intimidating or impossible to complete without assistance, and so opt out of the process. Other clients who have had negative experiences with formal learning may not respond well to formal assessment. Still others may find these tools are not culturally appropriate and therefore find that their skills, experience, and prior learning are not adequately assessed.

CDS practitioners in all provinces stated that there is a need to use informal and less obtrusive assessment techniques for these groups. For clients who may have literacy or essential skills barriers, practitioners cited examples of ways that they tailor assessments such as completing the assessment orally with the client, or administering a shorter version of the instrument (other approaches are described under promising practices). However, a few practitioners reported that it can be difficult to identify LES gaps at intake, so clients are sometimes left to disclose these gaps themselves, if in fact, they are even aware of them. Moreover, while alternative and more appropriate assessment tools might be available, these can present considerable financial or logistical challenges, including licensing fees or test locations located in urban centres only.

Lack of access to specialized assessment

A less prevalent but important theme concerned problems accessing specialized psycho-educational assessment. Several CDS practitioners in Nova Scotia — both those serving the general public and those serving specialized groups — as well as in Manitoba said they regularly encountered clients who appeared to have an underlying condition (e.g., a learning disability) that affected that person’s ability to learn or work, and subsequently, to stay employed. However, high cost (in some areas, as much as \$2,000) and lengthy wait times for professional psycho-educational assessment meant that they were only able to refer a small portion of clients in need. One CDS provider in Nova Scotia remarked that her budget only permitted about ten of these assessments per year, but that she could easily refer many times that number.

By implication, this lack of access meant that neither the clients nor their service providers had the information they needed to understand and address the clients’ needs appropriately. Moreover, since a

diagnosis of disability is often required to obtain special supports and services (including aids and accommodations in the workplace or at school), clients were blocked from obtaining the supports for which they might be eligible and which could enhance their employability.

Career development services

There was general agreement among all CDS practitioners that the career counselling process is critically important for working with clients to map out career pathways that are appropriate to clients' interests, goals, skills and capabilities. However, consultations revealed challenges related to the emphasis and scope of the career counselling component in their work, relevant training, and the increasing demand for more comprehensive career development services than the system currently allows. A need for more service delivery options to meet client needs was also identified. The sections below describe the gaps in further depth.

CDS funding is not keeping pace with demand

CDS practitioners in all three provinces reported that in the context of a rapidly changing labour market where individuals increasingly need to upgrade their skills and/or change career paths, a greater proportion of clients require career guidance and assistance. Moreover, the economic downturn and labour market adjustments are perceived to have resulted in many displaced workers with lower levels of literacy and essential skills whose employment opportunities are now much reduced. Together with program changes that extend eligibility for some services to specialized client groups (e.g., clients on social assistance, the under-employed, immigrants, etc.), practitioners report that a growing proportion of clients require more intensive case management and counselling than there is the time and resources to provide.

According to most CDS practitioners, funding models have not kept pace with these changes and in many jurisdictions are, in fact, moving in the opposite direction by restricting funding for employment assistance and career development services. These constraints, along with increased demand for services from the above-mentioned client groups have meant that, according to some practitioners, some elements of service delivery have been compromised. In some cases, this has meant a diminished focus on client follow-up; in others, considerable delays for clients to access employment counselling, with some clients waiting between four to six weeks before their first appointment with a counsellor. Several practitioners in one focus group said they suspected that some clients in need of employment counselling were not being referred at all, given the high demand and delays they were experiencing at the time.

Scope of services is often broad and complex

A related issue identified by all CDS practitioners is that the scope of the assessment and employment counselling process has broadened and become more complex in conjunction with the changes in clientele. Practitioners described having to adopt different roles when assisting clients to meet different needs; as more clients presented with multiple and complex needs, several practitioners felt their role was shifting away from determining eligibility and managing program funds, towards more intensive employment counselling. This was particularly true in Manitoba, where social assistance recipients and

low-income earners had recently become eligible for support. As one career counsellor there said, “*Now we’re being asked to be social workers.*”

Not everyone made the distinction between employment counselling and interviewing clients to determine eligibility for funding, and not everyone was uncomfortable having more emphasis on counselling; in fact, several practitioners and key informant experts indicated that it was important to get back to these “basics.” As one key informant put it, “*There needs to be a more consistent approach to employment counselling, and working as a guide through the career decision-making process,*” both within her province and among provinces too. Other practitioners welcomed a broader role; a couple of practitioners were eager to find ways to meet emerging needs, such as providing budgeting workshops to enhance clients’ financial literacy.

The problem is that regardless of their opinions on the issue, many practitioners indicated they did not feel equipped to do more intensive counselling effectively, either because they lacked the training and experience, or the time and resources. CDS Practitioners also told us that it was difficult for them to maintain an awareness of current and future labour market needs, stay up to speed on educational opportunities, while acting as a motivational coach and financial manager at the same time.

Mismatch between needs and program options

A common theme across the provinces was a general concern with the eligibility requirements of CDS services and supports. Both CDS practitioners and training providers perceived them as highly complex and rigid, causing a mismatch between client needs and the services and supports to which they may have access. Because program objectives tend to be narrowly defined, clients are often referred to options based on factors other than need:

- *Eligibility* — What clients are eligible for often depends on the particular funding stream through which they entered the system (e.g., EI, Social Assistance, and other targeted initiatives). This creates significant gaps, such as non-EI-eligible clients not being able to participate in programs from which they could benefit. CDS practitioners reported that clients were frustrated; “*...they don’t see how they’re any different than the previous client who came in,*” yet because of their particular circumstances or demographic characteristics, they cannot access a similar program or service. A few training providers echoed this view, saying that learners were equally confused and frustrated when they learned that other students received different supports. In addition, inconsistencies in processes for community service referrals across and even within employment service sites was also noted, which practitioners attributed in part to the complexity of the eligibility rules.
- *Availability* — Because program frameworks tend to focus on the funding stream through which clients enter the system rather than on client needs, the availability of programs in the community may not match local needs. What is available appears to be somewhat arbitrary and often depends significantly on where clients happen to live. This was cited as an issue particularly in rural and northern areas. Since CDS services are funded per client, rural and northern areas with smaller populations receive less funding to allow for the economies of scale required to support infrastructure and operations required to adequately serve clients. Practitioners also cited instances of program cancellations in these areas because they could not recruit the prescribed critical mass of participants. In some cases, enough clients were interested in participating but by the time the programs were approved (often several

months later) clients had already moved on (usually to low-wage employment) and were no longer available or eligible to participate. Moreover, practitioners report that the funds available for each client are often not enough to address the unique barriers of clients in these areas, such as the need to travel greater distances between services and employment, and the expense or lack of public transit.

- *Objectives* — We heard from many CDS practitioners and training providers in all provinces that performance frameworks are biased toward short-term employment objectives versus career development and learning. The funding formula for CDS is such that employment centres are rewarded for getting clients on the shortest route to employment. Learning on the job can be effective for people with lower levels of literacy and essential skills who have neither the inclination or financial means to follow a traditional pathway of academic upgrading combined with vocational training and employability skills development. However, it is important to ensure these clients are not directed into low-wage, dead-end jobs simply because that is the easiest path. Moreover, a focus on employment at the expense of skills and career development may not allow sufficient time to fully assess and address clients' various barriers, which may in turn result in them cycling back into the system after experiencing failure in the labour market.

Lack of specific program options

CDS practitioners also identified a lack of a comprehensive set of career planning options to meet a range of client needs including:

- **Up-to-date information on labour markets and training options** — Practitioners reported a lack of options to help guide individuals who are seeking to explore career options in the context of what jobs are in demand in the local labour market and the educational pathways available to obtaining these jobs. Many practitioners reported a gap in the quality of labour market information available to the employment counsellors, hindering their ability to provide sound advice to clients. In one province, in-demand occupations are determined by regionally-based networks, annual business/strategic planning. While some information is available through federal labour market bulletins, clients and employment counsellors in this province must do their own labour market research to justify training requests. Some practitioners reported difficulty in understanding and keeping track of the myriad of highly targeted options, such as the federally-funded Tuition Assistance Program for forestry workers experiencing a temporary lay-off of three months or more.
- **Options for clients with Essential Skills gaps** — Standard career exploration processes (e.g., navigating LMI; assessing personal interests, strengths, and weaknesses; and developing skills inventories) were reported to be especially difficult for clients with Essential Skills gaps as they assume a certain degree of self-direction on the part of the client and an ability to navigate and synthesize complex information. As such, CDS practitioners indicated a need for more career development services options that accommodate the needs of individuals with various Essential Skills gaps.
- **Options that build on transferable skills** — Practitioners identified a lack of options that use an Essential Skills approach to help clients identify existing skills that are transferable to new careers, and that can identify strategies to close gaps in areas where weaknesses are identified. While some programs like this currently exist, they do not appear to be in not common practice.

- **Intensive options for multi-barriered clients** — Many practitioners expressed the strong opinion that there is a lack of appropriate interventions for clients with multiple barriers, such as long-term social assistance recipients and clients with mental health issues. In particular, there are reported to be few options available to help clients who are neither “job-ready” nor ready for a major life change, at least not without intensive supports. Practitioners highlighted that clients are at different stages of employment readiness and therefore require different services and supports to help them address personal and structural challenges.
- **Special client groups** — Practitioners identified a number of gaps in terms of the appropriateness of CDS options for specific client groups. For instance, some practitioners identified the need for more peer-assisted models of CDS with people with disabilities and Aboriginal clients. Similarly, a collaborative, community-development approach was seen as having been particularly effective in First Nations communities. A number of practitioners also perceived a gap in services and supports for youth. For instance, some practitioners reported a lack of services and supports that are customized to at-risk youth with a variety of barriers such as financial barriers, family responsibilities, or previous contact with the justice system.

Lack of supports

A common theme across provinces was an identified lack of comprehensive supports to enable clients to overcome barriers and participate in CDS options, including child care and transportation subsidies, as well as longer-term supports for clients with multiple barriers. Some clients need short-term or one-time supports for workplace materials or emergency childcare support, but there are few means of meeting these needs. In general, practitioners also reported that non-EI clients are often not eligible for any such supports at all.

Lack of flexible delivery options

Finally, several CDS practitioners reported gaps in the way programs and services are delivered. The key message was that one delivery mode will not suit all; some clients will respond best in a group setting while other clients would benefit from Web-based options. Some clients can serve themselves with minimal guidance, while many others would be best served by participating in sequential activities guided by a trained practitioner.

Skills development

Gaps in the skills development/training phase of the CDS process centred around the general lack of client access to timely and sufficient training funds; the questionable quality, flexibility, and availability of training options; the gap between career development services and adult education; and the lack of clear pathways between the myriad adult education options. These gaps are described further below.

Disconnect between adult education and career development services

The gap between career development services and training programs was a common theme among CDS practitioners and training providers in all provinces. Various forms of adult education — including adult basic skills, upgrading, and diploma programs — are often disconnected from employment

services, which can make it difficult for practitioners to know where to refer clients or if in fact the services even exist in their community.

Lack of high quality short-term programs

Many CDS practitioners also reported a lack of access to high quality, short-term programs that are tailored to individual skills gaps and the needs of local employers. Currently, short-term programs are often perceived to be of low quality that put clients on “*pathways to nowhere*,” and are often not eligible for supports. For clients with multiple barriers, such as low levels of literacy and essential skills and technical skills, short interventions (e.g., five months or less) are perceived by funding providers to be generally ineffective in that skills gains are often less than expected and clients are not often employment ready upon completion.

On the other hand, some CDS practitioners reported that short-term interventions may be useful for specific client groups seeking employment in certain industries. Practitioners reported a lack of *timely* access to particular types of short-term and “micro” courses, such as very short certification courses (e.g., food handler certificate, First Aid courses), software training courses, and customized training courses for skilled tradespersons. Lack of access may occur either because the client was not eligible, or the course was not approved by the funding provider in a timely fashion. This was seen by practitioners as problematic because at times, these short programs and courses may be all that is required in order for the client to obtain employment or participate in further training, or they may be part of a client’s longer-term career development plan.

Lack of flexible training pathways

Some CDS practitioners and training providers in each province reported a lack of flexibility in training systems to accommodate adult audiences who must manage competing priorities of education, employment, and family responsibilities. Current training systems tend to isolate skills upgrading programs from formal college diploma or certification programs, which can make it difficult for students to progress to the next higher level of education, and costly in terms of lost wages and tuition costs. While there are exceptions, training provision also tends to still be delivered in a traditional fashion in terms of course timelines/duration and class hours, making it difficult for adults to combine work and school and/or enter, exit and re-enter their program as family and work responsibilities allow.

Gap between eligibility requirements and local availability

Many CDS practitioners and training providers in all three provinces perceived a mismatch between available local training programs and prescribed Skills Development funding criteria (e.g., minimum number of weeks; maximum training dollar amounts). For instance, some CDS practitioners reported difficulty in getting approvals in time to get the minimum number of people to run a training intervention in more rural areas, which resulted in delays and in some instances, training cancellations. Key informant experts, too, decried the fact that decisions about funding training plans are often made by those who are quite removed from the community context and not knowledgeable about client and community needs. According to training providers, delays in training approvals can also mean that

clients do not end up registering for training, or that they drop out because they cannot make tuition payments; those who continue in their program without knowing if their training has been approved must deal with debilitating stress.

Some CDS practitioners also reported local disparities in access to training funds for short-term programs. In one province, providers in some areas appear to have the flexibility to approve “micro” courses while this is not the case in other areas; other provinces did not have this flexibility at all. Practitioners perceived this as a gap in providers’ ability to assist clients in a manner commensurate with client needs.

Quality assurance and relevance

A particularly troubling finding from our consultations in all three provinces relates to reports of questionable training from both public and private sector training providers. Several CDS practitioners and key informant experts noted instances in which training providers had offered training credentials or certificates that were not recognized by employers in the industry — either they were missing important elements of the recognized certification or were for non-existent occupations. A couple of practitioners noted examples of learners with disabilities who had been awarded “certificates of completion” following two years of training, but only afterward did the learners realize this was not equivalent to a credential or qualification recognized by employers. According to one provider, these graduates “*don’t have the skills that the employers are asking for but the system pushes them through.*” A related issue reported to us was that some clients were participating in distance learning for academic upgrading by non-accredited schools.

In two provinces, some training providers and CDS practitioners also expressed concern about an increase in sub-standard training programs, particularly those that lack linkages with industry to ensure relevant curriculum, and in which curriculum is delivered by instructors with insufficient experience in the field. This was linked to other concerns expressed by CDS practitioners and key informant experts about training that was not seen to be relevant to community needs, such as training in low-demand or saturated occupations.

Training supports

With respect to training supports, both CDS and training providers reported gaps in terms of eligibility and in the approval process. Both groups reported that the funding cap and maximum training period allowed under Skills Development does not cover the actual amount of time and expense it typically takes to complete the sequence of training activities required to train for new occupations (i.e., LES/upgrading followed by technical/occupational training). This may require clients to take on a greater share of the financial burden in order to complete their training. While a couple of practitioners said they believed that having the learner commit financially to his or her training generally resulted in better outcomes, most felt the learner contribution should be nominal and in keeping with clients’ financial circumstances. However, several providers reported that even a nominal contribution could be problematic for clients with poor credit histories and/or low financial literacy who may be more likely to assume loans or other forms of personal credit, creating unsustainable financial situations.

Moreover, non-EI clients are often not eligible for any financial supports to training. The result, according to practitioners, may be an increasing disparity between clients who are easier to serve and clients with greater needs, since the easy-to-serve can fund their own training and subsequently move into employment, while the clients who have needs but are ineligible for supports must fund their own training. This deters participation in CDS and training among clients with greater needs, and can result in these clients becoming particularly hard to serve.

Labour market transition

Lack of connection to employers

A major theme across all three provinces was the notion that program rules make it difficult for CDS practitioners to meaningfully engage with employers. Program rules often state that CDS providers are not able to provide services to employers; however, many practitioners reported that they would be able to improve client outcomes if they were able to forge stronger connections with employers. Practitioners saw a need for more connections with employers in order to better identify current and upcoming employment opportunities; increase employer awareness about programs such as wage subsidy programs; promote the benefits of hiring CDS clients; educate employers on promising recruitment practices for hiring individuals with Essential Skills gaps; and how to effectively address the needs of employees with various barriers.

The restriction against providing services to employers was identified as leading to missed opportunities to engage employers and leverage job opportunities. This was reported to be particularly the case in small communities, where CDS providers are “*the ones [employers] go to.*” Practitioners also reported that employer involvement in strategies and programs targeting individuals with barriers has been negatively affected by a lack of awareness of the programs (e.g., Targeted Wage Subsidy) and by the perception among employers of a heavy “bureaucratic load” associated with participation.

Lack of work experience

Another gap identified by CDS practitioners is that most programs allow either skills development or work experience but not both. This was a concern to providers because many clients are changing industries, but do not have contacts and networks in the new industry that would facilitate the job search process. While newer approaches such as mentorships and networking may be useful, these approaches were not seen to be accommodated in current funding models.

Lack of retention supports

Finally, CDS practitioners in all provinces identified a lack of supports to help newly re-employed individuals stay employed and continue to build skills that increase resiliency in the labour market. Providers reported a two-fold need: 1) to support recently employed clients with certain barriers such as mental health needs or cultural barriers, and 2) to educate and support employers on how best to support employees with particular needs. Practitioners gave examples of instances when employers would report to the CDS provider with concerns about the client they had hired, or when an immigrant client left employment because the employer demonstrated cultural insensitivity. Practitioners

perceived a need to provide services and supports to employers so that they can better accommodate the needs of CDS clients with a variety of barriers such as skills gaps, mental health issues, disability, or cultural differences.

3.3 Promising practices and approaches

During consultations, we heard about numerous approaches, tools, practices, and programs that participants believed would improve employment outcomes for clients. Some of the approaches were emerging practices, while others were tools and programs currently in practice in a specific context but which could be developed, extended, or adapted for wider audiences. Others still were ideas from other jurisdictions. Rather than provide an exhaustive list of practices, we present the key themes and common features among the suggested approaches. This list of features of promising approaches identified by Canadian CDS practitioners and training providers can be compared with the list of features identified in the international consultations conducted in 2010. The list can also be used to prioritize options for further research.

Intake and assessment

CDS practitioners in all three provinces stated that the most promising approaches conceptualized assessment as a *process* rather than a tool. To be effective, practitioners reported that they need to be able to tailor this process to the specific situations and needs of individual clients by drawing on a comprehensive set of approaches, tools, and practices.

A strengths-based approach

Several CDS practitioners and experts said they thought focusing on clients' assets, strengths, and potential was much more effective than the traditional approach to assessment, which is based primarily on identifying needs, gaps, and barriers. This was felt to be particularly true for clients with significant challenges to employment and those who have had negative experiences with testing and formal learning. In this approach, counsellors work with clients to reflect upon past work, education, volunteer and life experiences to highlight clients' skills, especially in relation to HRSDC's Essential Skills framework. Counsellors then work with clients to demonstrate how these skills can be applied to a variety of types of employment. Portfolios with examples or descriptions of previous work or skills demonstrated are sometimes created. Practitioners stated that this strengths-based approach can change how clients view their abilities and their beliefs about what kinds of work they are capable of and interested in doing.

One form of this approach, called Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), has been increasingly used in Manitoba, where it is being piloted or adopted for use within post-secondary institutions, adult learning and employment centres, and some industry associations and regulatory bodies. It has also been incorporated into Aboriginal education and training strategies.

A transferable skills approach

Similar to a strengths-based approach, this approach involves identifying the fundamental skills related to a specific job and looking at other contexts and jobs in which these may be applied. It can be applied

to essential, academic, or technical skills. One group of practitioners in Manitoba reported using this approach to help workers determine what training they needed to transition from one industry to another (e.g., heavy equipment operations in forestry compared to mining). It may also be useful when assisting Aboriginal clients or immigrants who are uncertain about how their skills fit with the needs of the Canadian labour market.

More comprehensive assessment

For clients with multiple barriers, CDS practitioners identified the need for more comprehensive assessment and counselling methods that can capture a wider range of barriers and factors affecting employment readiness. This comprehensive approach can involve identifying issues in broader life domains than just employment, and their “spillover” effects or barriers to employment (e.g., family responsibilities, housing issues, transportation, etc.). It can also involve looking at issues in more depth to understand the extent of need and what supports might be required (e.g., for addictions). In this respect, it can include access to specialized psycho-educational assessments to determine specific conditions or disabilities and their impact on learning and employability.

More comprehensive assessment can also mean a more informed and sensitive approach to identifying the impact that disabilities and other systemic barriers such as discrimination have on employment, as well as the accommodations and supports that might help address these. For instance, practitioners in all provinces reported that some clients appear highly unmotivated and unwilling to look for work or attempt training, and that this can be particularly challenging for both the client and provider to overcome. According to practitioners, however, this lack of motivation can sometimes mask a lack of self-confidence or low self-esteem, cultural differences, or inter-generational effects of poverty and discrimination. Practitioners indicated that a comprehensive approach to assessment would help CDS providers understand this behaviour more clearly, and be able to provide or refer to the most appropriate and effective interventions.

Our consultations identified several interesting approaches to comprehensive assessment, particularly by CDS practitioners working with disabled clients (e.g., in Nova Scotia). One approach was the Stages of Change model, also called the Employment Readiness model. Based on the Transtheoretical model (TMM) of health behaviour change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992),¹⁵ the Stages of Change model views positive change as gradual and progressive rather than dramatic, and recognizes it is not always a linear process. This approach underlies the career counselling provided by a non-profit EAS provider in Manitoba, and was evaluated in a study of 3,000 participants, 60 per cent of whom were Aboriginal people. The goal of the project was to help individuals overcome their ambivalence towards looking for, obtaining, and retaining meaningful employment. The study reported that using this approach helped participants obtain meaningful employment more quickly and remain steadily employed. The study also reported positive effects for those prepared for a change, which is considered to be due to the fact that even the most prepared can have a setback in their motivation. Overall, the

¹⁵ Prochaska, J.O., DiClemente, C.C., & Norcross, J.C. (1992). In search of how people change: Applications to addictive behaviours. *American Psychologist*, 47(9), p. 1102-1114.

study reported a 25 per cent decrease in participants being released from programming, a 34 per cent increase in first time employed numbers, and a 48 per cent increase in 6-month employment retention.

More flexible assessment

Our consultations revealed that significant effort was being made in each of the provinces — particularly in conjunction with employers, sector councils, and some training providers — to find the most effective standardized skills assessment tools. For example, we heard that many employers in Nova Scotia and Manitoba now conduct their own assessment of essential skills using measures such as the TOWES, the CATC, the AMES, etc.

However, there were also some CDS practitioners and training providers in each province who said they felt this trend was somewhat misguided. One training provider in Manitoba, for example, said he thought the tests done through his own institution were better at identifying learners who would do well in their chosen program, rather than those who might need support, which from his perspective, ought to be the goal.

In the same vein, several CDS practitioners said they were taking a more flexible approach to the assessment of clients' needs, including narrative assessment through questions, stories, and dialogue rather than written exercises. Other informal approaches included self-assessment, the portfolio approach mentioned earlier, and facilitated assessment, such as by breaking the format of skills testing into smaller blocks of time over a longer period and providing supports (e.g., a facilitator, pre-test “refresher” training, or “break-out” rooms for those dealing with test anxiety). According to the practitioners and experts to whom we spoke, these approaches were much more effective at engaging people with low levels of literacy and essential skills, and those who have had negative experiences with testing and formal education. One key informant in Manitoba told us that using these methods with chronically unemployed, long-term social assistance recipients had enabled 95 per cent of attendees to persist through the week-long assessment process, and higher than expected rates of transition to employment or further training.

Career development programs

A multi-pronged approach

While some CDS practitioners emphasized one aspect of career development programs over another, taken together, practitioner input suggests that career development counsellors would need the following in order to be most effective:

1. An in-depth understanding of the local, provincial and national labour markets (that is, connections to employers, knowledge of which sectors have better-paying jobs);
2. Knowledge of the education and training system (i.e., a good sense of what kinds of training programs can lead people to a better advancement trajectory); and
3. Excellent assessment and counselling skills, including an ability to support and motivate clients facing multiple or complex challenges.

Other factors external to CDS but which practitioners also identified as essential for client success included a robust and diversified local economy (there have to be jobs for people to go to), a variety of accessible, relevant, and stable training options, and community-based resources, infrastructure (e.g., affordable housing, transportation, and child care), and support services to address particular needs.

Flexible delivery of CDS

Similar to the assessment stage, CDS practitioners in all provinces eschewed a one-size-fits-all model of career development service delivery in favour of a menu of options to which clients could be referred to depending on their specific needs and circumstances. A comprehensive menu would include intensive services for clients with multiple barriers; Web-based approaches for clients who can use services independently; and group approaches, where appropriate.

For clients with complex underlying barriers to employment, change is often a gradual and progressive process, so there is a need for longer-term, intensive CDS options that can accommodate this gradual process, such as employment case management options based on the Stages of Change Model. One former provincial program in British Columbia that was offered to Income Assistance recipients experiencing long-term unemployment may fit this model: it offered up to 10 months of intensive services and emphasized a variety of life skills and specific skills, and fostering connections between clients and members of the community. According to one CDS practitioner, 53 per cent of clients maintained employment for four years after the program, and a return of \$22 million was estimated for the community in which the evaluation took place. Another notable program is for individuals who are unable to achieve financial independence because of specific barriers to employment. Although not an employment program, it includes features that practitioners deemed promising: in-depth assessment, one-to-one supports and referral/navigation throughout the program, personal counselling, life skills development, supports and services from external community organizations, and follow-up services for six months following completion.

For clients who can handle more self-directed support, some CDS practitioners expressed support for more online options, such as interactive Web-based tools that provide career information and individual activities to unemployed or under-employed clients. Promising features of web-based services that were identified include accurate, up-to-date, targeted career related content addressing the learning and development goal of the individual; learning strategies for engaging with the information and applying it to one's personal context and developmental processes; and a process for individuals to engage in interactive communication with CDS counsellors.

Finally, providers viewed transferable skills approaches to CDS as promising approaches to helping clients identify career paths that allow clients to build upon current strengths. We heard several examples of this approach across all three provinces. For instance, one college in British Columbia provides a skills exploration program for unemployed individuals that offers a flexible, three phased approach that clients can enter and exit based on need. The program includes: pre- and post-program skills assessment, skills exploration and portfolio development, job search and next steps planning. Upon completion, students are referred back to their case manager.

Matching based on need

CDS practitioners in all three provinces stated that programs would maximize effectiveness if they were able to refer clients based on needs and not be limited by (seemingly arbitrary) program eligibility requirements or local availability. In particular, practitioners stated that clients should be able to participate in CDS programs regardless of EI status.

Partnering and pooling of resources

Partnership was a dominant theme of our consultations across all three provinces. CD providers were clear that the only way they could begin to address the employability needs of clients with low LES or other complex needs was to partner with community-based organizations such as Adult Learning Centres, Literacy Networks, mental health agencies and other social service providers. Training providers too, talked about how they worked in partnership with employers and industry to ensure their training offerings were relevant. Finally, key informant experts echoed the views of groups, underlining the importance of collaboration among employment service providers, training institutions, employers and industry groups (e.g., sector councils), labour, and community organizations. This kind of collaborative, community development approach was seen as critical to the success of projects for specialized client groups, particularly in rural and remote regions where needs could be quite specific and employment and training options limited.

Practitioners in all three provinces cited a partnership-based approach to CDS delivery. One example is coordinated employment supports, whereby regular career counselling is provided by an employment resource centre, but pre-employment supports (e.g., résumé writing, interview coaching) are contracted out to a community-based provider. More intensive counselling supports for clients with disabilities or special needs may also be contracted out. Depending on the extent of a client's need, comprehensive, "wrap-around" supports may also be arranged, whereby several community-based organizations coordinate provision of the required social services. In some cases, co-locating services (e.g., employment services and literacy providers) has been a helpful way to coordinate services, making referrals easier and more efficient and reducing stigma for clients.

Another promising approach to partnership goes further, pooling financial resources across providers in a region. CDS practitioners in Nova Scotia pointed to the Community Coordinator model used by both generic and specialized employment service providers in that province. With this approach, an "envelope" of training support dollars is provided to one community agency to run specific training; this designated Community Coordinator agency is then responsible for working with other local employment support providers to select appropriate clients. In this way, decisions about approving training plans are kept at the local level and resources are shared, helping to address the problem of access and uneven program availability.

A similar example is the Collaborative Partnership Network (CPN), also in Nova Scotia. The CPN is a formal network of 10 non-profit organizations that share responsibility for the provision of a continuum of employment services to individuals with disabilities, including connecting them with employers. Members compile their expertise and best practices, including assessment tools, intake processes and career counselling techniques to determine which ones fit the specific needs of people

with disabilities. With only one staff, it has a de-centralized organizational model; its projects are coordinated by the member organizations themselves, who organize themselves in four regional clusters. Each cluster collaborates on proposals for special projects, and once funded the cluster of CPN agencies then uses a Community Coordinator model to implement the project. In addition to localized decision-making, a distinct advantage, according to representatives, is the flexibility of the funding model, since the network can move funds to the partnering agencies as required.

Another example of this model comes from British Columbia, where a group of 15 colleges have collaborated with local CDS providers and employers to create a continuing education system that is responsive to local CDS clients' and employer needs. Called the BC Labour Market Consortium (LMC), it has a single point of funding intake, contract management and data collection and reporting, with local flexibility to offer programs that are responsive to local needs. A formative evaluation of the BC LMC reports that this approach is cost-effective; promotes standardization and consistency in data collection and reporting, while still allowing for local autonomy to ensure specific needs of the various communities are met. The consortium approach also allows for needs-based allocation of funds, encourages partnerships and collaboration as well as sharing ideas and curriculum across providers and regions, and can produce economies of scale and increase program productivity.

Investment focus

There was consensus among CDS practitioners and training providers in all three provinces that client outcomes would be improved if they could refer clients to programs that took a human capital investment approach that focused on ensuring clients had skills and experience to succeed in a knowledge economy. This is in contrast to a more traditional approach that focuses on putting clients on the shortest route to employment and without consideration of whether clients simply recycle back into the system.

Skills development

A range of training options

CDS practitioners and training providers generally expressed a need for a broader range of training options in terms of the focus, length, delivery mode, schedule, in order to be able to find training solutions that matched clients' needs and interests. Practitioners were also enthusiastic about approaches that eliminated the trade-off between short-term training courses and longer-term certificate/diploma/degree programs by allowing clients to apply credits from completed courses to a formal educational program if desired. Essentially, practitioners supported the idea that clients should be able to pursue their career goals incrementally, with minimal burden, and in ways that were responsive to individual career ambitions.

Training tailored to an adult audience

Many CDS practitioners argued that training options customized to the needs of adult learners and which accommodate adult life circumstances, such as work and family life, are more likely to yield positive outcomes than regular college courses. While most training providers said they offered on-line

and distance learning, a few said they were starting to offer more training in evenings and on weekends. One training provider we spoke to pointed out that her institution was in the midst of building on-site housing and a child care facility that would be open to both students and the general public.

Training programs offering multiple entry points were identified as promising, including module-based programs in which students have the option of taking all four modules consecutively or only those that apply to them, with a certificate being issued upon successful completion of each module. One example currently offered in Manitoba is the Construction Technology program at Red River College. The full four-year program grants students a Bachelor of Technology degree, but there are three additional exit points; each year provides students with a stand-alone, industry-recognized certificate or diploma. However, we were cautioned that such courses can pose their own challenges, both to learners who have to put in additional hours to master a broad skill set at each level, and to the training institution, in updating curriculum for the entire program to keep it relevant to industry needs.

Some providers noted the importance of making instructional design and delivery appropriate for learners with low LES by making the process informative and concrete, with an abundance of opportunities to engage in real-life, occupation-specific example or simulations, facilitated by access to appropriate equipment as appropriate. Practitioners also highlighted the need for relevant and meaningful learning goals, as well as instruction from trained instructors with experience in the relevant industry.

Training options that integrate several areas of learning

Another theme that emerged from our consultations with CDS practitioners and training providers as well as key informant experts is that of integrating different types of training, such as combining academic upgrading or essential skills training with diploma courses, industry-specific training with Essential Skills training, or adding a workplace training component to either academic learning or technical training. These were usually custom-designed technical and essential skills projects developed in collaboration between training providers and sector councils or industry associations and which in some cases also offered work experience, and well as occupational programs that offered high school credits and incorporated literacy benchmarks.

Several promising practices were identified that incorporated pre-employment training and on-the-job experience with established pathways to LES training and academic upgrading when and if required. For instance, practitioners in one province identified an occupational training program that included up to eight weeks of unpaid workplace training, incorporated training in workplace essential skills, and the option of combining it with LES and academic upgrading. Another example was a program available in some Aboriginal communities that was developed and delivered in partnership with industry and ratified by the sector skills council. This was a customizable program that integrates literacy and essential skills, academic upgrading, employability skills, and workplace training, and was four to six month in duration. These programs were seen as an important way of addressing employers' concerns that employability and LES skills gaps were a higher priority than technical training, some of which could be provided on the job.

Labour market transitions

Dual customer approach

Many CDS practitioners and several training providers in each province were interested in developing initiatives that aimed at addressing the needs of both workers/individuals and employers while playing the middle ground between the demand and supply sides of the labour market. Many stated that they often acted informally as brokers, linking employers, service providers and other key institutions; this was considered a key way to identify and/or create employment opportunities for clients. Several reported that employers are generally unaware of the programs and supports that are available to them. Going beyond existing programs, practitioners expressed a pressing need and an interest in educating employers to help them enhance the quality of employment opportunities for job seekers; they believed this would appeal to employers because it would help improve their competitiveness.

CDS practitioners gave several examples of this dual-customer approach. For instance, it is used by the member agencies of the Collaborative Partnership Networks in Nova Scotia for people with disabilities. Many agencies provide job coaching and retention supports, and the CPN has a Maintenance Counsellor: an individual assigned to a client and involves visiting employer, discussing employee needs with employer, maintaining contact with clients on a weekly or monthly basis. A similar approach is taken in some sector councils to assist specific client groups, such as creating the role of Aboriginal Liaison Officer responsible for working with employers to encourage the employment of Aboriginal workers. In addition, Employment Manitoba staff said they often participated with local industries or employers in Workforce Adjustment Committees, which were struck when downsizing or closures were planned. Their purpose is to best plan for the effective transition of workers to other jobs, employers, or sectors.

Work experience

Most CDS practitioners and training providers also underscored that a key element of the transition to employment is combining work experience with skills development or training (e.g., Skills Development with Targeted Wage Subsidy). Clients often need support gaining work experience in the occupation/industry for which they received training. Other related promising practices include workplace mentoring, and networking events and activities.

Retention supports

Many CDS practitioners and training providers expressed a desire to be able to offer supports to employers for managing clients with various needs, and extending supports and services to clients with special needs even after the client has obtained employment. Programs for specialized client groups such as youth, immigrants, and people with disabilities have found this to be an essential ingredient of success, and CDS providers said they would like to have the flexibility to offer this service to clients who would not otherwise be eligible for such support.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Respondents in our study have identified a large number of programs or practices that they believed were working well in their jurisdiction. Notably, a range of partnership models in the delivery of CDS and SD programs were observed in all jurisdictions. Innovative collaborative approaches have been observed in both the planning and delivery of services including provider committees, co-location, and delivery consortiums. Findings also suggest that other components of the innovative approaches observed in international settings are also present in Canadian jurisdictions. Elements of sectoral approaches were observed where industry is engaged along with other stakeholders in attempting to align educational opportunities with labour market needs. Some of the principles of the career pathways approach are also found in existing delivery models including the design of some modular offerings with flexible entry and exit points. However, jurisdictions differ considerably in this respect and no province has implemented fully developed pathways models.

At the same time, many respondents also identified gaps in services where the needs of clients were not being fully addressed. In other cases, respondents expressed uncertainty about whether client needs were being fully met or not, directly suggesting the need for further evidence about what works best. Gaps in the assessment and referral process were noted, with much uncertainty about whether existing tools sufficiently capture the range of client needs, or whether they are even suitable for all client groups. Associated gaps in the planning and delivery of CDS and SD were also expressed, with concern over the suitability of referrals and whether available offerings are fully meeting client needs.

Drawing on these findings SRDC has identified five broadly defined potential options for further research. Tests of these approaches would provide significant evidence about what works best throughout the range of client services. Option 1 addresses knowledge gaps about what works in the assessment and referral process through process-driven assessment that meets a full range of client needs. Options 2 and 3 address how the planning and delivery of CDS can be better organized through collaborative partnerships and comprehensive delivery models. Options 4 and 5 then address how the planning and delivery of SD training programs are best undertaken including an emphasis on sectoral partnerships and pathways delivery models.

Option 1: A customized, flexible approach to assessment

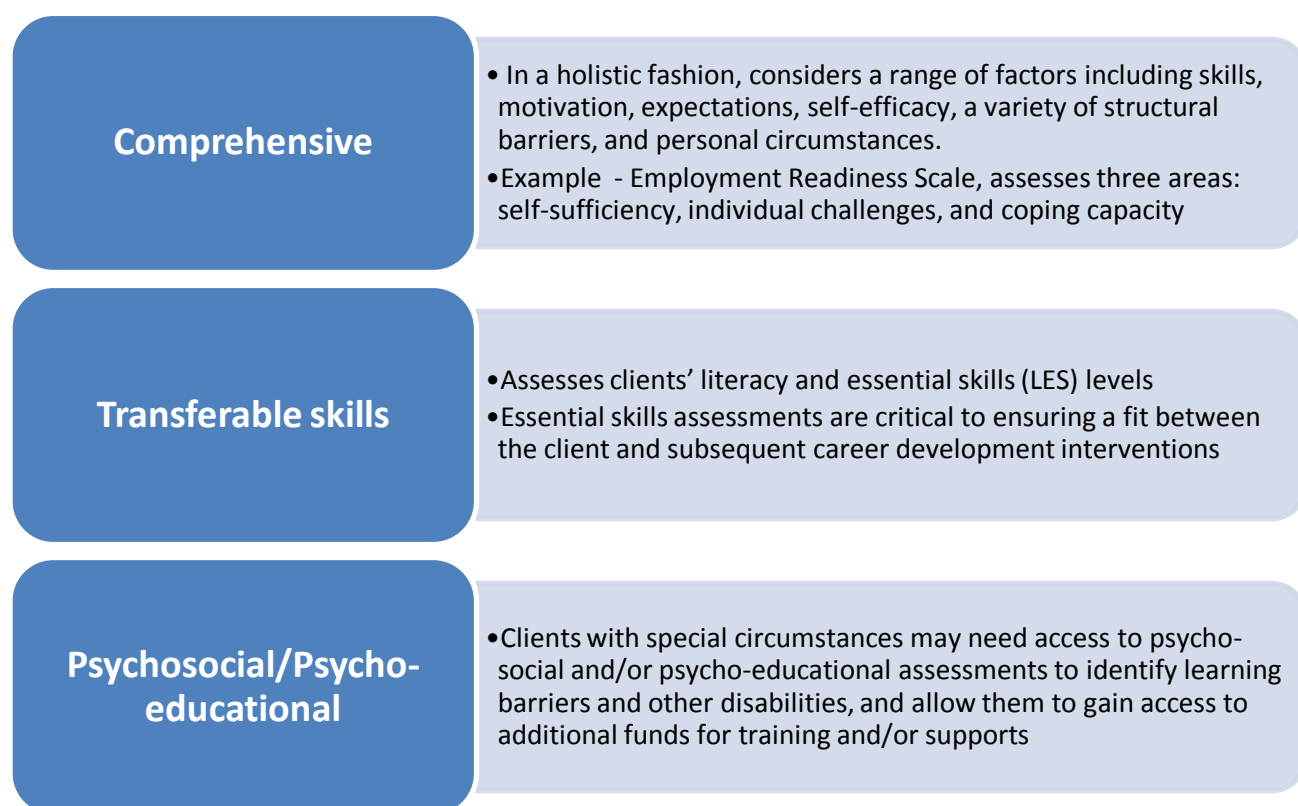
Investigate a comprehensive but flexible assessment process that would be tailored to individual client needs. A demonstration could evaluate this approach for predictive validity, implementation feasibility, and added value of improved matches between interventions and individual clients' needs. While the set of assessment tools would need to be developed through further consultations, our initial research suggests that there are at least three types of assessment tools that would need to be included in such an approach. Figure 3 provides a brief description of each of these types of assessments.

Rationale

Most practitioners underscored the importance of assessment done well, but there are significant gaps in terms of evidence about which practices and tools work best with which client groups. Practitioners in all three provinces stated that the most promising approaches conceptualized assessment as a

process rather than a tool. To be effective, practitioners indicated a need to be able to tailor this process to the specific situations of individual clients by drawing on a comprehensive set of tools and practices. By testing a customized, flexible approach to assessment, HRSDC could advance the knowledge base about which assessment practices work best and for whom.

Figure 3 A set of assessment tools to meet a range of client circumstances



Option 2: A partnership approach to CDS planning

Investigate the extent to which a partnership approach to CDS planning improves the quality and quantity of services and provides better matches to client and employer needs. Practitioners identified three distinct partnership approaches that could be tested: community CDS provider committees; co-location; and career development consortiums. The degree of implementation effort will vary among these three approaches and may be thought of as increasing along a continuum, as shown in Figure 4 below.

- a) **Community CDS provider committees** — A relatively simple approach could be to test the use of local CDS service provider committees or networks that bring together client stakeholders. These committees would aim to promote referrals between member agencies, coordinate service availability, gain input from employers, and share knowledge and expertise.

This is an approach currently used by the Collaborative Partnership Network (CPN) in Nova Scotia, and has been identified as a promising approach by practitioners.

- b) **Co-location** — Another option is to test the use of co-location of services. In this approach, multiple services for diverse groups of clients are offered at a single location, with an aim to increasing access to services and wrap-around supports.

Some providers noted the importance of co-location of employment assistance services with other community or education services, both for the reduced stigma attached to accessing the employment centre and also for the potential access to wrap-around supports already in place within these other services.

- c) **Career development consortiums** — A more ambitious option is to test the use of regional consortiums. These consortiums would include membership of employment services providers, training providers, local employers and other stakeholders, and would take a dual customer focus by addressing the needs of clients, employers and other stakeholders, and aligning educational opportunities with economic development objectives. Similar to the approach adopted by BC Labour Market Consortium, each consortium could have a single point of funding intake, contract management and data collection and reporting, with local flexibility to offer programs that are responsive to local needs (see Figure 5).

A formative evaluation of the BC LMC reports that this approach is cost-effective; it promotes standardization and consistency in data collection and reporting, while at the same time allowing for local autonomy to ensure the specific needs of the various communities are met; allows for needs-based allocation of funds; the development of a single program delivery plan can encourage partnerships and collaboration as well as the sharing of ideas and curriculum across providers and regions; and it can produce economies of scale and increase program productivity.

Figure 4 A continuum of approaches to coordinating planning across a community

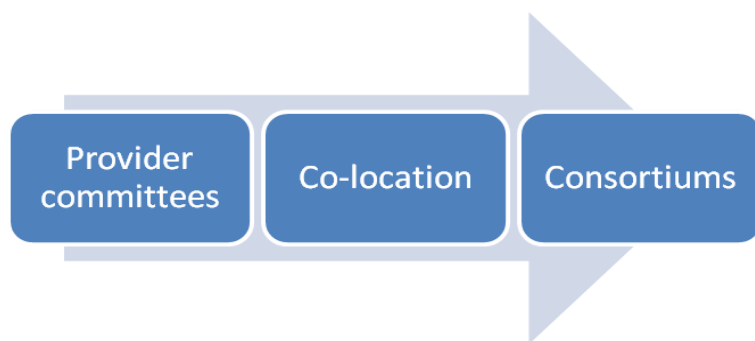
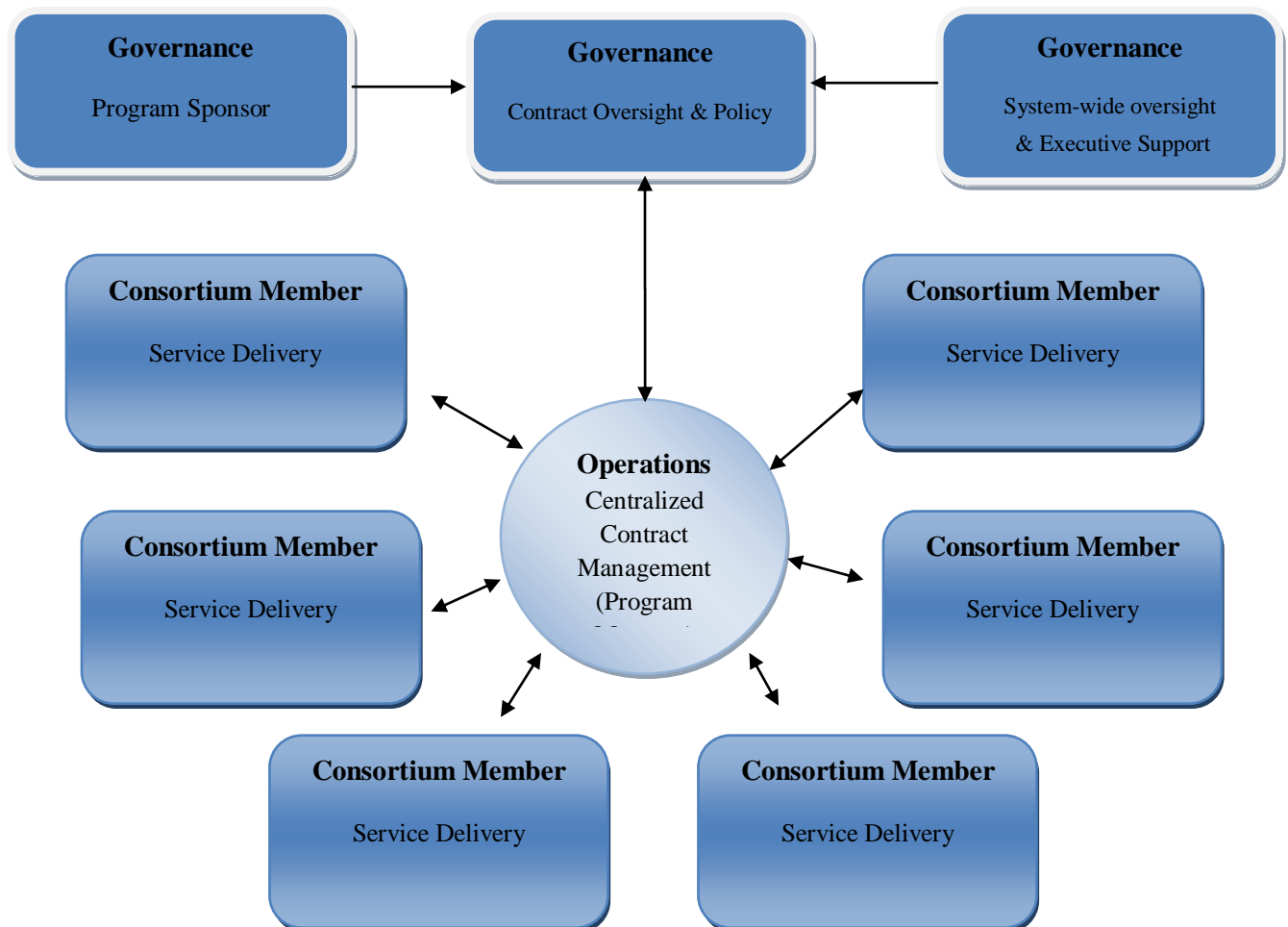


Figure 5 Organizational structure of a consortium approach to CDS planning and delivery



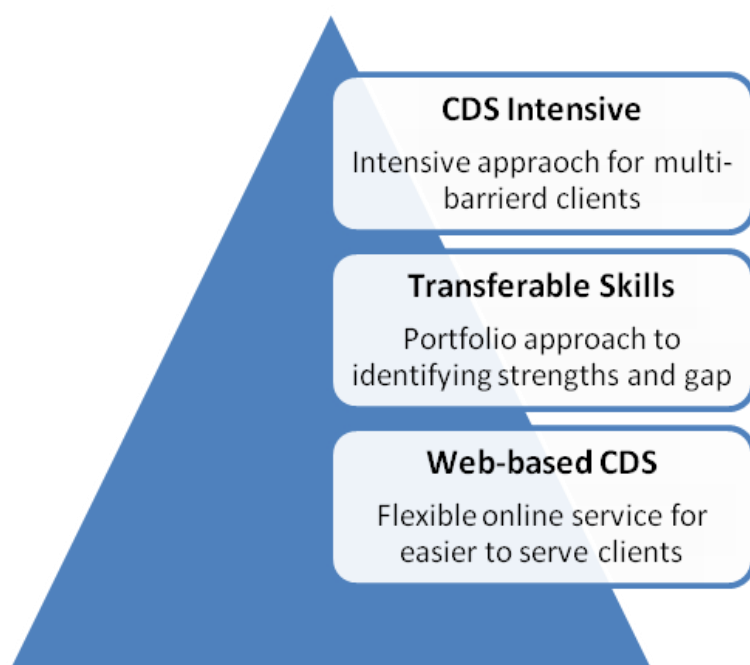
Rationale

Practitioners in all three provinces reported that what is available often depends on where clients live rather than what is needed in the community. Practitioners also noted inconsistent referral processes in across and even within delivery sites. Practitioners identified a collaborative, needs-based planning approach involving partnerships among CDS service providers, related service agencies, and employers as a solution for a perceived lack of awareness, coordination, integration of services and supports, and responsive to local communities. By testing collaborative approaches to CDS planning, HRSDC can contribute to the knowledge base about the effectiveness of collaborative planning approaches in addressing these issues.

Option 3: A comprehensive set of CDS interventions based on client need

Investigate the premise that a significant proportion of clients, even those considered self-directed would improve their employment outcomes if they were eligible to participate in high quality, career development programs. This option could test a set of career exploration and preparation programs that range in terms of intensity and depth depending on client needs. The menu of interventions would need to be developed through further consultations, but would include: less intensive career development services, including assistance with researching labour market opportunities, identifying career goals, and determining which training programs could lead to a better advancement trajectory; and more comprehensive services, including assistance to overcome multiple barriers such as skills gaps, financial pressures, lack of supports, and mental health challenges. Clients would be referred to one of these options based on the results a comprehensive assessment. Figure 6 shows an example of a menu of CDS interventions.

Figure 6 A set of career development programs to meet a range of client needs



In this model, self-serve clients would receive less intensive services such as Web-based services. This could be modeled after CareerMotion, which tested the effectiveness of an interactive Web-based tool designed by BC career counsellors to provide career information and individual activities to unemployed or under-employed post-secondary graduates. Services could include: accurate, up-to-date, targeted career related content addressing the learning and development goal of the individual; learning strategies for engaging with the information and applying it to one's personal context and developmental processes; process for individuals and career practitioners to engage in interactive communication with CDS counsellors.

Clients in need of practitioner-guided services could participate in transferable skills activities using HRSDC's Essential Skills framework. Counsellors would work with clients to reflect upon past work, volunteer and life experiences to highlight clients' skills. Counsellors would then work with clients to demonstrate how these skills can be applied in a variety of types of employment and create transferable skills portfolios.

Clients facing multiple and/or complex barriers to employment would participate in intensive services, which could include: a mix of workshops and one-on-one support that would address psycho-social barrier, matching career goals to labour market needs; identifying transferable skills and action planning; referral to training providers; personal counselling and life skills development, referrals to external specialized services and supports; and work placements. This approach would also likely require wraparound supports, including income, childcare, and transportation supports.

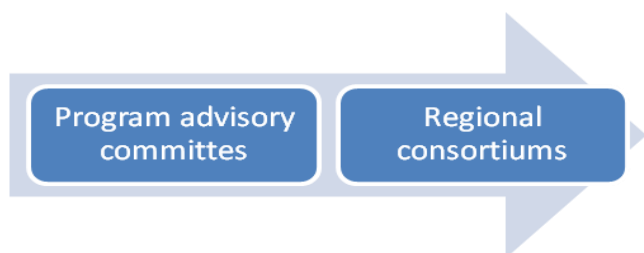
Rationale

In the context of a rapidly changing labour market where individuals increasingly need to retrain or upgrade their skills, the optimal path toward advancement is often complicated and may be difficult to navigate on one's own, even for clients who are labelled as "self-directed." Practitioners in all three provinces stated that individuals increasingly need guided support as they gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to manage their learning, work and transitions in order to maximize their labour market potential, and would be best served if they had access to programs as needed. By examining a needs-based model offering a comprehensive menu of CDS interventions, HRSDC could test this premise. The province of Ontario has already moved in this direction, and the British Columbia is currently considering a similar approach.

Option 4: A partnership approach to training provision

Investigate the extent to which a partnership approach to training provision would better achieve a number of objectives including increasing provider capacity, better alignment between educational opportunities and local labour market needs, and better integration of career counselling services with training provision. Practitioners identified at least two different partnership approaches. One less intensive approach would be to test the added value of advisory committees comprised of college faculty, administrators and industry representatives. A more intensive approach would be to test the added value of regional consortiums of training providers *and* CDS providers that would identify local client and employer needs, coordinate their training options, pool their resources and allocate funds.

Figure 7 A continuum of partnership approaches for designing and delivering training



- **Program Advisory Committees** — One option is to test the use of program advisory committees comprised of college faculty, administrators and industry representatives. These committees could be present in each educational institution and could recommend training programs to be offered in the institution in response to local employer/industry needs. CDS clients could then receive funding to take these programs.
- **Regional consortiums** — A more intensive approach would be to test regional consortiums of training providers and CDS providers, which would aim to identify local client and employer needs, coordinate their training options, pool their resources and allocate funds. The consortium could receive one lump-sum of public funds, and use a streamlined data collection and reporting process. For further coordination, the consortium of skills development providers could partner with employment service providers for referral purposes or to co-sponsor clients for specific, skills-based training programs. Partnerships of this sort have the potential to leverage additional training funds for unemployed individuals, and increase service capacity at the community level.

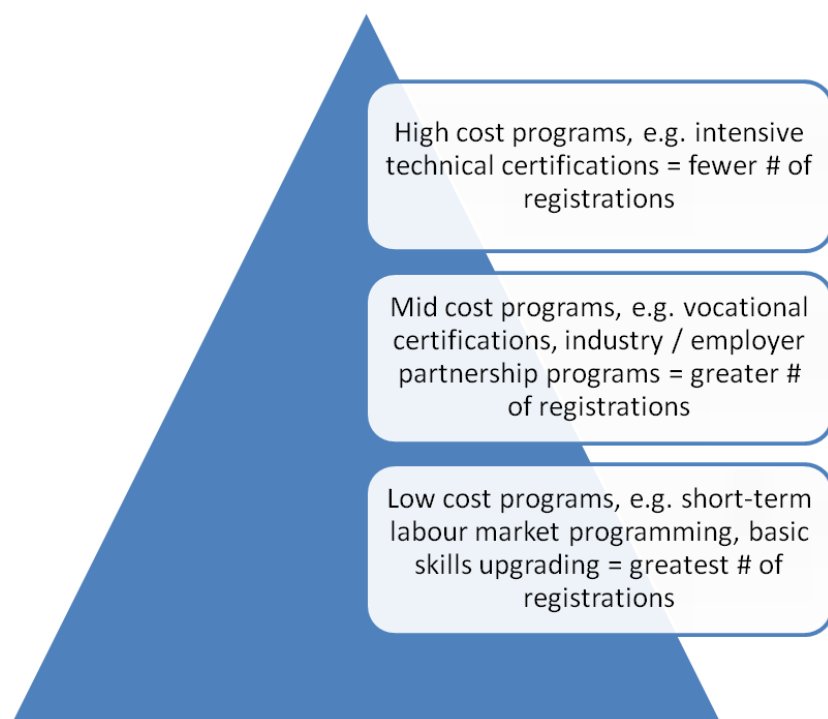
Rationale

Providers perceive a mismatch between available local training programs and prescribed Skills Development funding criteria (e.g., minimum number of weeks; maximum training dollar amounts), as well as a disparity between client needs and local availability. Partnership approaches that involved educational, employment services and employer representatives were identified as a promising way to address these access and availability issues.

Option 5: A pathways approach to skills development that offers a comprehensive suite of flexible, customized training options

Investigate a program that facilitated the design and delivery of a career pathways approach to training in a carefully selected set of key occupations that are in high demand in the local labour market. In this approach, colleges would develop and provide flexible occupational training for these occupations in the form of modular courses that offer industry-recognized credentials in the shortest possible time, while also putting individuals on an educational pathway that allows them to return to further education as circumstances permit. Students would have access to sector-specific career ladders that are linked to a sequence of modular educational opportunities and connected to support services that enable individuals to get jobs in these occupations and advance to higher levels of education and work (see Figure 8).

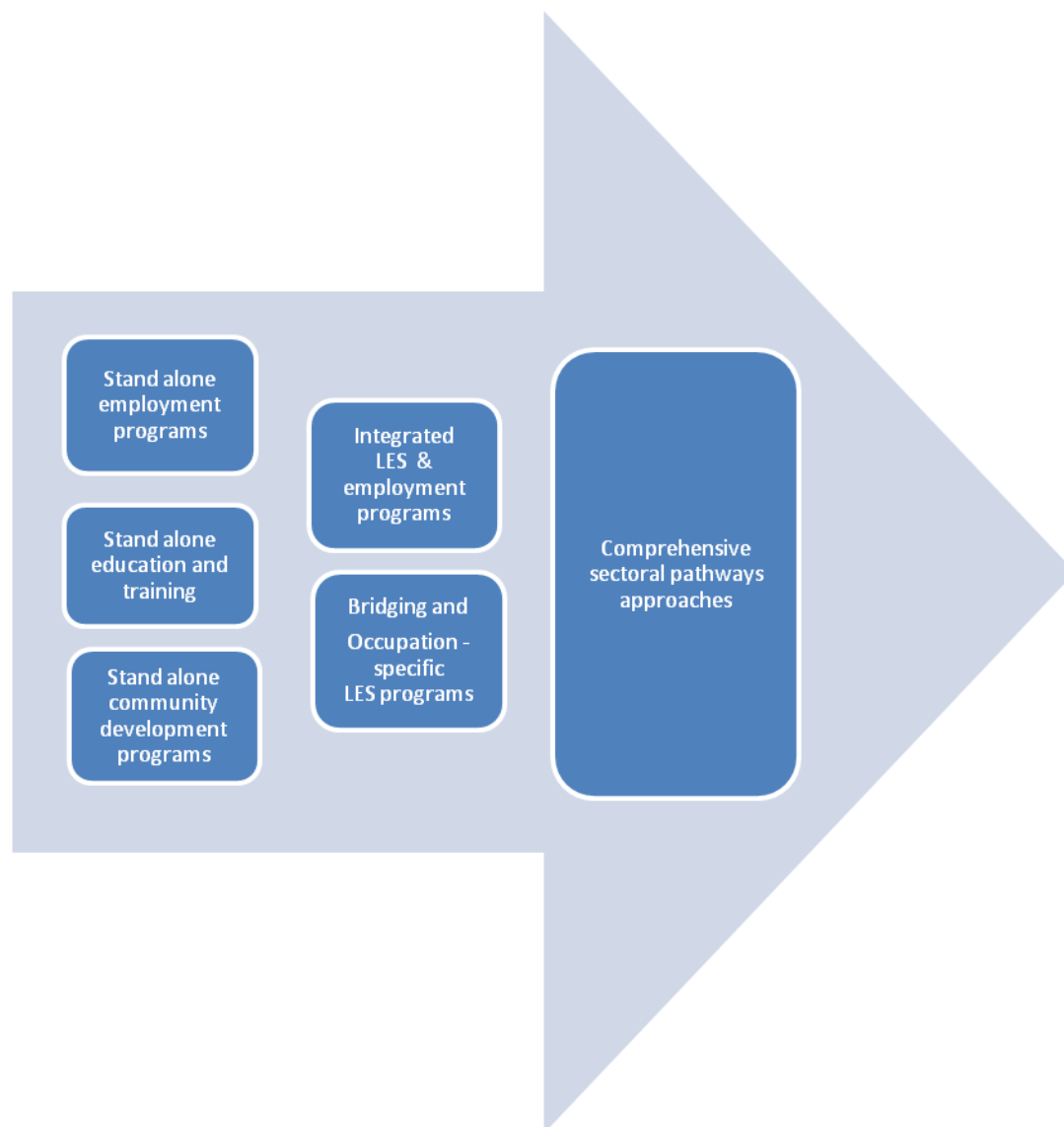
Figure 8 A pathways approach to skills development



Colleges would work with employers in the selected industry or industrial sector to organize work into a clear, promotional ladder based on skill level, and educators would then design smaller, sequential chunks of learning that match those ladderized jobs and present easier-to-attain educational goals for workers. Each Career Pathway step would result in a credential that has meaning in the educational sphere and the employment sphere, at least across an industry in a given region. This approach would also provide visual roadmaps depicting the coursework, competencies, skill requirements, and credentials needed for a series of related occupations in an industry sector. To accommodate learners with lower skills, Literacy and Essential Skills training would be embedded in the first level of the educational pathway. It would also include career lattices that identify multiple entry and exits points and potential lateral and vertical movement within an occupation or career cluster linked to occupational labour market data. Finally, students would have access to wraparound supports such as academic counselling, referral to community resources, and childcare.

Within this pathways framework, students would have access to a continuum of short-term and longer-term training programs targeted to different client groups based the needs identified in the assessment process, including: intensive, technical training; vocational industry training; and basic skills upgrading (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 A continuum of integrated and comprehensive pathways approaches



The demonstration could also test the benefits for certain client groups of integrating various components to traditional training programs, such as: integrating an LES component with vocational or industry certification courses; integrating a “soft” skills training component focused on developing communication, problem-solving and interpersonal skills for the workplace; integrating academic upgrading with technical training; and integrating language instruction with any program from basic skills to technical certification programs. The addition of a work placement component may also be tested.

Rationale

Testing a pathways approach to skills development would respond to the increasing recognition that less educated adults often need foundational skills training before they can enter and successfully complete occupational training or re-training programs. In addition, pathways projects respond to the growing consensus that most traditional occupational and technical diploma programs are not well-suited or responsive to the needs of working age adults.

The BC Labour Market Consortium is currently in the process of implementing a career pathways approach. Not only was this approach reported as promising among our participants, but also the career pathways approach is widely recognized as the leading approach to occupational training for adults across the United States. The approach is being studied, piloted, and implemented in several US states. While there are numerous case study and anecdotal accounts, there are no rigorous evaluations to date.

Appendix A: List of participants

Nova Scotia

YMCA of Cape Breton
New Waterford Resource Centre
North Victoria Employment Support
Career Development Inverness Richmond
Northside Employment and Resource Centre
Employability Partnership
East Novability Society for Disabled Persons
Richmond Community Literacy Network
African Nova Scotian Employment Centre
Employment Solutions Society
FutureWorx
Career Connections
Job Resource Centre (PeopleWorx)
Opportunity Place
Eastlink
Teamwork Cooperative
Nova Scotia Community College
Commercial Safety College

Manitoba

Employment Manitoba — Portage la Prairie, Beausejour, Steinbach, Gimli, Selkirk, Thompson, Flin Flon, The Pas, Dauphin, Brandon, Northeast Winnipeg, Southwest Winnipeg, and Southwest Winnipeg centres
Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training, and Trade (ETT)
Regional Employment Resource Centre, Russell, MB
Selkirk Friendship Centre
Osborne Village Resource Centre, Winnipeg, MB

Assiniboine Community College

Red River College

University College of the North

British Columbia

ASPECT

Bowman Employment Services

CBD Network Inc.

Community Futures of North Okanagan

Douglas College Training Group

ETHOS Career Management Group

Free Rein Associates Ltd.

Myert Corps Inc.

Okanagan College

South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services

Steele O'Neil and Associates

Sunshine Coast Employment Centre

Training Innovations

YMCA-YWCA of the Central Okanagan

YWCA Vancouver

Appendix B: Focus group protocol

1. By way of introductions, please start off by telling us two or three things about your organization that make it unique (e.g., where you're located, who you serve, what services you provide).
2. What is the client profile of your organization? What proportion are clients with lower levels of education and/or basic skills? Have there been changes to your clientele over the past few years? (If a specialized clientele) why did you choose to focus on this particular clientele?
3. What are some of the unique features of the local labour market where your organization is located? Has this changed over the past couple of years? How does this affect the services your organization provides?
4. What learning barriers do your clients typically face? To what extent does a lack of literacy and essential skills pose barriers to unemployed adults at your organization? What are some of the other needs clients present?
5. Most EAS/CDS providers provide a mix of assessment, information, return-to work planning, case management, and referral. Are there key features of these services that are unique or done differently at your organization? How have you adapted or tailored these service elements to meet the needs of low-skilled, unemployed adults?
6. As a service provider, what practices have you found to be particularly effective for delivering EAS/CDS services to unemployed low-skilled adults?
7. What practices do you find most contribute to the success of these clients in terms of re-entering the labour market?
8. In your opinion, what are some of the gaps in service delivery across the region or province, in terms of employment assistance or career developments services for low-skilled, unemployed adults? What are some of the changes needed in this area?
9. What are some of the most promising ideas or practices you know of to meet the employment or career development needs of low-skilled unemployed adults? Have you heard of any practices or work being done in other areas that you think might work here?
10. Based on your own work, is there an innovative idea you'd like to try out in terms of providing employment assistance/career development services to low-skilled, unemployed adults? If you could introduce one or two innovative ideas into the provision of services for this group — either at your own organization or at a broader, systems level — what would they be? What potential change would be most exciting to see?

Appendix C: Training provider interview protocol

Topic areas and sample questions

Learner needs

- What is the student profile for your institution? Have there been changes in the student profile over the past few years? What proportion of students would be unemployed adults with low skills and/or low levels of education?
- How would unemployed adults who want to develop their skills to re-enter the job market connect with your institution? Who would they be referred to, and what services would they receive?
- What are the various training options available to unemployed adults through your institution? What programs are most popular and why? Who takes what type of training and why?
- How does your institution respond to changing local economic and labour market conditions (e.g., older and displaced workers, immigrant workers, local conditions)? How has the provision of training changed to meet these needs? How do you remain responsive to unique or changing needs?

Barriers to learning and employment

- What learning barriers do unemployed adult students clients typically face? To what extent does a lack of literacy and essential skills pose barriers to unemployed adult students at your institution?
- How does your institution address these barriers? Do you have special programs, services, or supports available to help unemployed adult students? If so, please describe. If not, why not?

Gaps in training delivery

- Are unemployed adult students receiving adequate supports to address any barriers and benefit fully from their training? (literacy or foundational skills training, financial assistance, support for other personal or family constraints)
- What else do unemployed adult students need in terms of supports to benefit from training and move into employment? What are the gaps? (E.g., further assessment, counselling, or facilitation.) What other obstacles are there, and what would it take to overcome these?

Promising practice

- As a training institution, what practices have you found to be particularly effective in delivering training to unemployed, low-skilled adults?
- What practices do you find most contribute to the success of these learners in terms of re-entering the labour market?

- What are some of the most promising ideas or practices you know of to meeting the training needs of low-skilled, unemployed adults? Have you heard of any practices or work being done in other areas of Canada that you think might work here?
- Based on your own work, is there an innovative idea you'd like to try out in terms of the provision of training to low-skilled, unemployed adults? If you could introduce one or two innovative ideas into the provision of training to this group, either at the broader systems level or within your institution, what would it be? What potential change would be most exciting to see?