

# Literacy and Essential Skills in the Workplace: A Pan-Canadian Demonstration Project

Project Overview

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SOCIAL RESEARCH  
AND DEMONSTRATION  
CORPORATION

SOCIÉTÉ  
DE RECHERCHE  
SOCIALE APPLIQUÉE

# Policy Context

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- ▶ Increasing evidence of gaps in literacy and essential skills (LES) in the Canadian workforce
- ▶ At the same time, there is much anecdotal evidence on the effectiveness of LES training to address this
- ▶ However, in most industries investments of firms in workplace-based LES training remains low
- ▶ Sector Councils report fewer than 1 in 20 firms implement workplace essential skills

# Policy Context

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If the need is so great – why don't more firms invest in LES training?

- ▶ They don't speak the language of essential skills
- ▶ They don't think its their responsibility
- ▶ They think there might be better ways to address a performance gap – coping mechanism
- ▶ **Most reasons implicitly relate to the lack of a clear and credible link from LES gains to performance and business outcomes**

# Goals of the Study

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- ▶ **To measure the impacts of LES training** on workers and workplaces with the most reliable methods
- ▶ **To establish a clear business case** for LES training by measuring the returns to workers and firms
- ▶ **To understand the pattern of impacts** on different types of workers and firms
- ▶ **To understand the conditions** in which LES training can be most successful and strategically implemented

# Central Policy Questions

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## **Does workplace Literacy and Essential Skills training...**

- ...improve individual outcomes such as LES levels, self-confidence, further training success?
- ...lead to career advancement, wage growth?
- ...address job performance and business outcomes such as error rates and cost control, customer satisfaction and sales, or worker retention?
- ...lead to positive returns for individuals, firms, and governments, who make investments in LES training?

# Target Groups

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- ✓ **Employed individuals**
- ✓ **Skill level** – Workers with Essential Skills levels that correspond roughly to mid to upper level 2, 250–275
- ✓ **Skill Gap** – Occupations that require Level 3 according to the ES Profiles
- ▶ **Choice of sectors, firms, and occupations guided by –**
  - The nature of the intended program model under evaluation
  - Sector conditions that facilitate the implementation
  - Sector conditions that minimize risks to the evaluation

# Program Model – Challenge in Design

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- ▶ Approaches to LES training delivery can vary based on a number of conditions such as firm size
- ▶ We need a flexible but fairly consistent program model in order to conduct meaningful evaluation
- ▶ **Challenge** – can best practices be integrated in a model that is relevant to smaller firms while leveraging sectoral knowledge?

# Program Model Development

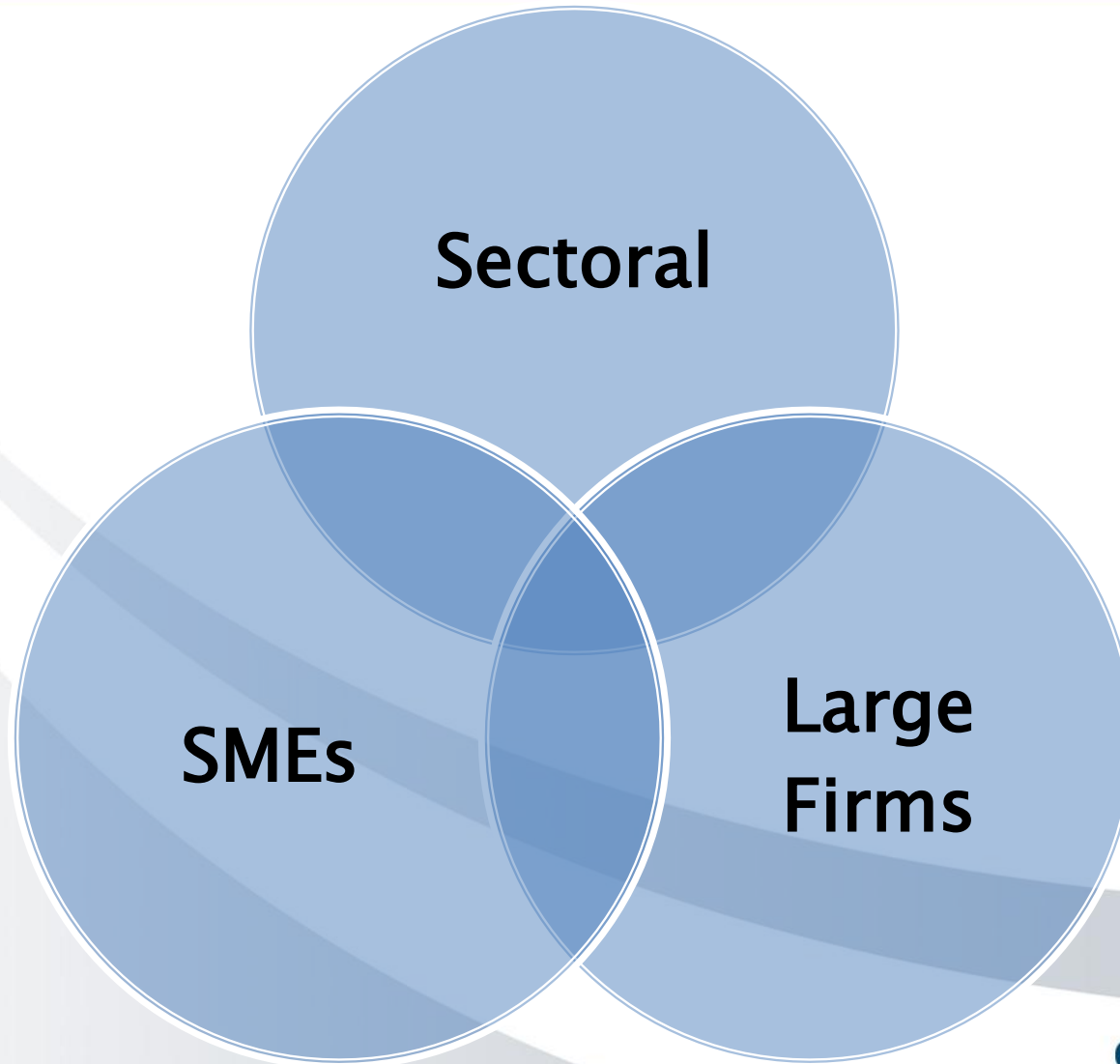
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- ▶ Identify existing program models
- ▶ Analyze models to identify promising features
  - Review several bodies of literature
  - Extensive consultations with LES workplace training practitioners across Canada
  - Participation in conferences, workshops, project meetings
- ▶ Develop draft program model
- ▶ Obtain feedback



# LES Training Models – In Practice

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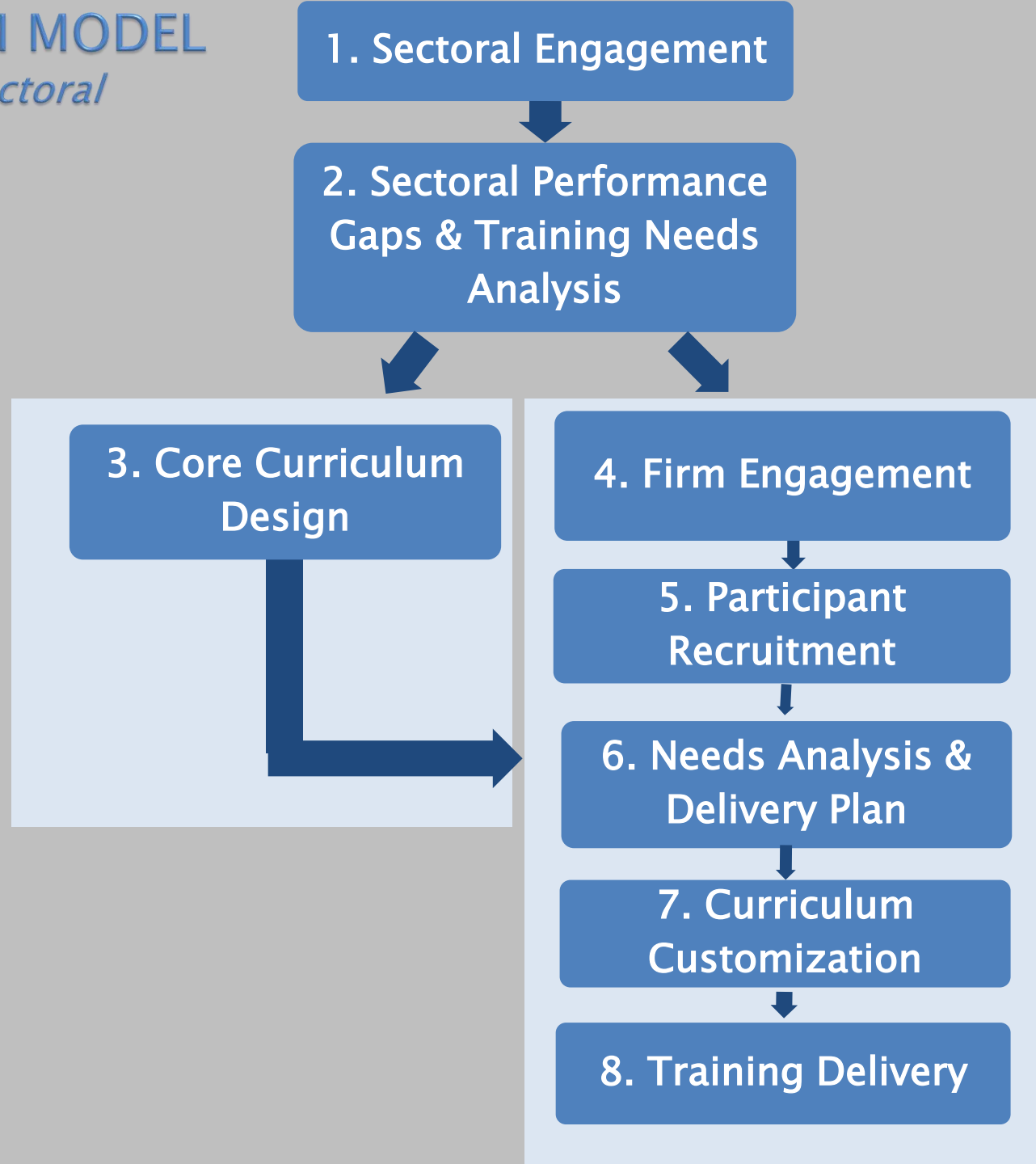
# Program Model – Common Principles

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- ▶ Partnerships
- ▶ Voluntary
- ▶ Alignment
- ▶ Learning strategies
- ▶ Customization
- ▶ Qualified providers
- ▶ Flexible delivery methods
- ▶ Release time

# THE PROGRAM MODEL

*SME model with sectoral leveraging*



# Sector Analysis and Engagement

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- ▶ Conducted a comprehensive analysis of sector conditions to understand risks to the implementation and evaluation
- ▶ Process involved consultations with 10 sector groups and compilation and analysis of wide ranging industry data
- ▶ ***Implementation feasibility*** – potential partners, existing capacity for service delivery, existence of job standards, career–pathways, and a potential business case
- ▶ ***Evaluation feasibility*** – number, size, and structure of firms and target occupations; homogeneity and stability of firms and workers; likely internal and external validity

# Why the Tourism Sector?

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- ▶ **Partnerships** – impressive national sector council and provincial HROs, receptive to project and partnership
- ▶ **Existing “infrastructure”** – many tools and well developed networks to support recruitment and service delivery
- ▶ **Standards and Certification** – existing job standards and certifications – we can build on performance validation
- ▶ **Potential Business Case**
  - LES gaps exist among workers in several key occupations
  - Low take-up and high fail rates in existing certification
  - LES curriculum will be a bridge in the existing “Career Journey”
  - Certification gives clear link to performance, business outcomes

# Why Accommodations in Tourism Sector?

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- ▶ **Internal Validity – Good conditions for success**
  - Large number of SMEs and workers in target occupations
  - Stable firms with desired structure – independent “flag” ops
  - Homogeneity is good relative to broader services sectors
  - Worker Stability – risk of exits lower than broader services
  
- ▶ **External Validity – Wide Applicability of Results**
  - Generalizable to most Tourism occupations and subsectors
  - Applicable to broader Retail Trade industry
  - Relevant to frontline positions in all broader Service sectors

# Evaluation Design

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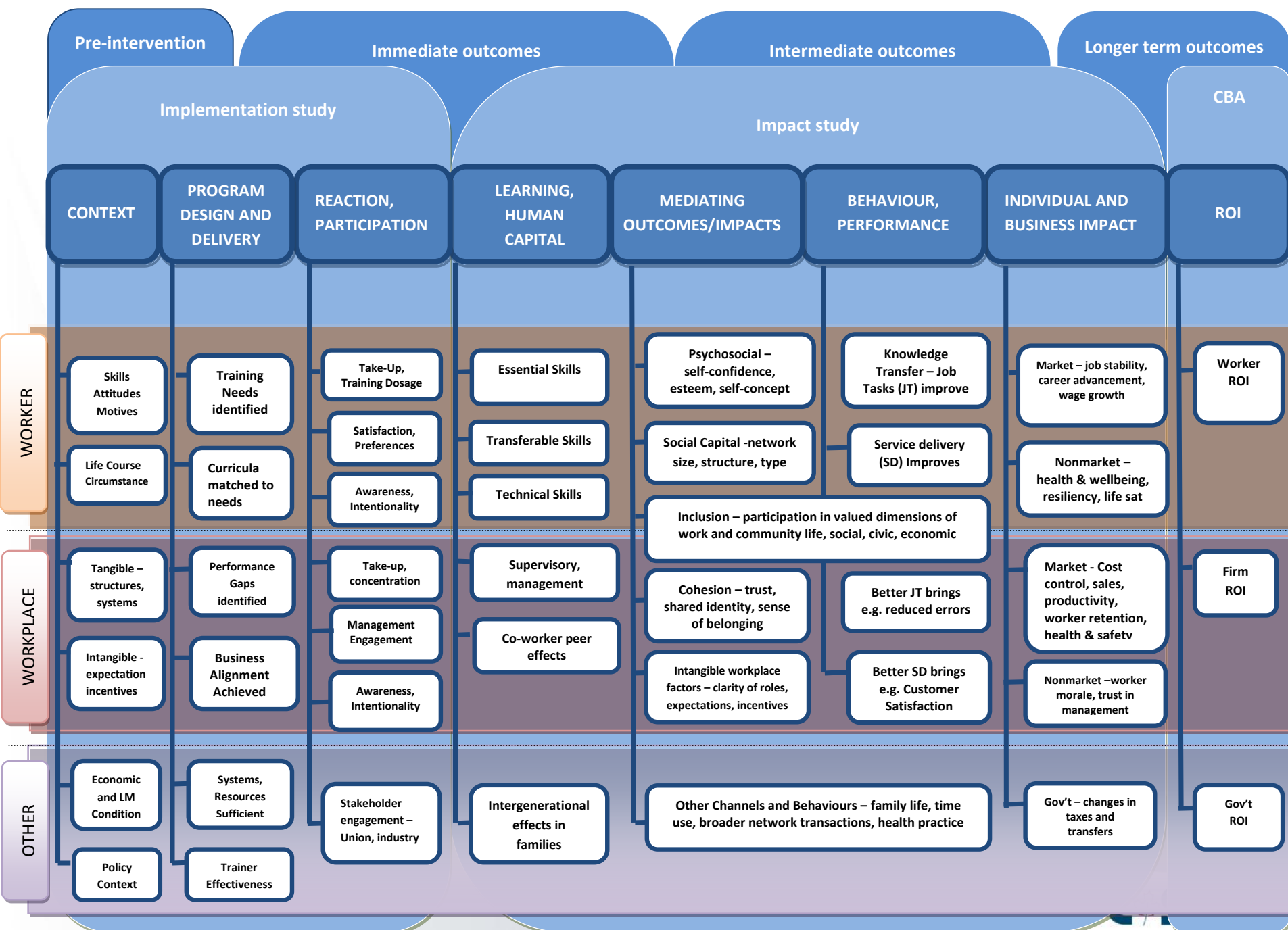
- **Randomized Control Trial (RCT)**
- **Unit of Assignment:** Establishments
- **Unit of Analysis:** Worker and Work Sites
- **Target Samples Sizes**
  - 800–1000 workers in 80–100 establishments*
  - Half will receive training – 400–500 workers*
  - Other Half serves as a Control Group*
- Should give sufficient power to detect impacts of 5–7 percentage points in most outcomes

# Evaluation Design

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- Evaluation includes three primary sub-studies: Implementation Research, Impact Study, and Cost-Benefit
- Will involve data collection pre-intervention, during the implementation, and post-intervention
- A draft framework has been developed through the literature review, sector analysis, and consultations
- Will be further refined through needs analyses in exemplar firms and stakeholder consultations





# Evaluation Design

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- **Implementation Research** – answers questions related to the influence of *context, delivery, and participation* on the size and pattern of impacts

**Context** – worker and workplace characteristics, broader economic/policy environment the model is implemented

**Design, Delivery** – implemented as planned (if not why not), systems/resources sufficient, curriculum/trainer effective

**Participation, Reaction** – take-up rates, “dosage”, participant stakeholder reaction (satisfaction, program knowledge)

# Evaluation Design

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- **Impact Study** – provides estimates of the size of effects of the LES intervention on outcomes of interest

**Learning** – LES levels and transferable skills the focus

**Mediating** – a range of variables linking learning with other outcomes including confidence, social capital, & cohesion

**Performance** – job task completion, service delivery, error rates, customer satisfaction

**Worker Impact** – job stability, further learning, wage growth, health and wellbeing

**Business Impact** – cost control (from reduced errors, service time), increased sales (from better up-selling, customer sat.)

# Important Intermediate Outcomes

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- Study is also seeking to understand *HOW* training improves the lives of workers and workplaces
- This includes both its direct outcomes and the important factors and AVENUES through which its effects are felt
- Several important intermediate outcomes will be explored including the role of and effects on:
  - Self confidence, self-esteem
  - Cohesion in the workplace and workers broader networks
  - Social Inclusion – activities in other valued dimensions of life
  - Social Capital – networks, supports

# Social Cohesion

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*Shared values and identify – a sense of belonging, and being associated with a community*

(Jenson, 1998)

- **Perceptions and attitudes** that individuals hold toward a community and their place in it
- Measures include *extent of trust*, *shared values* and *beliefs about collective* levels of engagement.
- While also associated with health and well being, cohesion in the workplace has been linked with employee morale and productivity (Helliwell, 2005, 2006)

# Social Inclusion

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*Access to and participation in valued dimensions of a community – economic, political, social , cultural*  
(Crawford, 2003)

- Literacy skills provide *access* to these valued dimensions
- *Participation* in them also provides further opportunities for use of skills, and skills development
- Inclusion and engagement with community is linked with employment stability, happiness, health and well being

# Social Capital

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*Resources that are accessible within social networks  
– supports that can be obtained from those you know*  
(Policy Research Initiative, 2005)

- **Bridging Social Capital** – networks that give access to resources that are useful for economic outcomes
  - employment, financial support
- **Bonding Social Capital** – networks that give access to supports of a personal nature
  - emotional support, household activities

# Social Capital – Network Structure

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*Density* – refers to the extent that individuals in a network know one another

*Homogeneity* – how similar individuals in a network are to one another on various demographic characteristics

- ▶ Less *dense*, less *homogeneous* networks are advantageous for leveraging skills and learning into employment (Woolcock, Narayan 2000)
- ▶ Also referred to as “**weak ties**”, or “**linking**” social capital, one of the main contributors to employment and career advancement (Granovetter 1974)



# Project Organization

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## Organized into three Service Delivery Teams

### ➤ Engagement Team

- Engage key stakeholders, gain union support, consult on design
- Recruit firms and workers

### ➤ Design and Education Team

- Conduct Training Needs Analysis for sector, in exemplar firms
- Design Core Curriculum
- Provide professional support to trainers

### ➤ Performance and Delivery Team

- Conduct Needs Analysis in all participating firms
- Customize Curricula, prepare Training Plans
- Deliver Training
- Support Evaluation Activities

# Project Organization

## Engagement Team

- National Strategy
- Coordination
- Provincial Engagement
- Recruitment of Firms and Workers

Canadian Tourism  
Human Resource  
Council

Saskatchewan  
STEC

Ontario  
OTEC

Newfoundland &  
Labrador  
HNL

New Brunswick  
TIANB

British Columbia  
go2 and Douglas  
College

## Design and Education Team

- Exemplar Firm study
- Curriculum Design
- Professional Support to Trainers

SkillPlan

## Performance and Delivery Team

- Organizational Needs Analysis
- Customization, Training Plans
- Training Delivery

- Exemplar Firm study
- Professional Support to Trainers
- Educator Network

Saskatchewan  
STEC

Ontario  
OTEC

Newfoundland &  
Labrador  
HNL

New Brunswick  
TIANB

British Columbia  
go2 and Douglas  
College

Douglas College

# Questions, Discussion

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