



Canadian Apprenticeship Forum
Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage

Regional Roundtable Summary

Apprenticeship in NT: Challenges and Opportunities

Yellowknife, NT
September 20, 2016





Apprenticeship in NT: Challenges and Opportunities

Roundtable with Apprenticeship Stakeholders

On September 20, 2016, the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF-FCA) convened a half-day meeting with apprenticeship stakeholders in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The event was an opportunity to share employer-focused resources for engaging and retaining diverse tradespeople – tools developed by drawing on tips and strategies being employed across Canada and in a number of economic sectors. The meeting also brought together more than 30 stakeholders to discuss their unique apprenticeship challenges, supports that exist locally and opportunities to improve apprenticeship training in general. This report is a high-level summary of discussion at that meeting.

To begin the event, CAF-FCA delivered a brief presentation to introduce two new resources:

- *Hiring and Retaining Aboriginal Apprentices: An Action Plan for Employers*
- *Hiring and Training Women in the Skilled Trades: A Business Case for Employers*

Both documents include employer insights and strategies for creating a workplace open to and supportive of diversity. Participants weighed in on whether similar strategies are in use at workplaces in the Northwest Territories and the extent to which unique challenges are in play.

Apprentice Barriers

The first roundtable discussion question focused on apprentice barriers. Participants commented that roughly half of all newly registered apprentices are Indigenous, but that only about a third of those achieving certification are Aboriginal. The group discussed the challenges associated with offering employment hours, relevant on-the-job experience and technical training in proximity to the community. For those willing and able to leave their community for work and/or training, issues associated with housing and the ability to manage money were identified as barriers. While access to reliable childcare – both at home or away – is an issue for all apprentices, it remains a significant barrier to progression for women in the trades.

Education challenges were viewed as systemic. In some communities, educational access does not extend to Grade 12, impacting basic science and math competency required for success in the skilled trades. Awareness of trades careers may be marginal and there are few opportunities to promote opportunity in the schools. Once an apprentice is registered, access to technical training is not assured. While there are ongoing efforts to experiment with distance learning, this poses challenges for apprentices who are expected to work and study at the same time. There was a



perception that apprentices have difficulty grasping theoretical content under these conditions, leading to poor grades and a disinclination to continue training.

From a system perspective, some apprentices have limited access to apprenticeship offices due to hours of operation and training officer response times. Though financial supports are available from the territorial government to offset costs associated with attending school and living away from home, there were concerns that apprentices are either unaware of available support or considered supports inadequate to the full range of their needs.

Priority Areas for Action

The second discussion question asked participants to consider priority areas for action to encourage greater apprenticeship participation among women and Aboriginal peoples. In general, there was a sense that improvements to in-school promotion and opportunities for exposure to the trades are necessary. Making linkages between high school courses and career opportunities in the skilled trades was viewed as a way to keep learners focused on their education. Mentorship was seen as a key element to overcoming barriers, with the suggestion that there is an opportunity to link local tradespeople to students with an interest in pursuing a skilled trades career.

In considering retention, participants expressed the importance for employers to standardize wage rates, develop and enforce discrimination policies, and introduce gender and cultural sensitivity training. Systemic supports might include resources to prepare candidates for trade exams, including essential skills upgrading programs, test strategies and instruction around translating practical experience into written answers to exam questions.

With regard to attracting and retaining women in the trades, attendees spoke about the need for local efforts to identify interested women and provide training/supports to help them gain confidence and foundational competency. There was a perceived need to connect female apprentices with employers to ensure they have access to work experience in the early stages of their careers. Participants spoke to the importance of appropriately-sized equipment and clothing, which has safety implications and can be challenging to find in remote parts of the country. Employers should be encouraged to ensure bathroom and change facilities are adequate for both men and women, regardless of the make-up of their current workforce. Recognizing that retention would rely in large part on a woman's treatment in the workplace, attendees suggested that employers may need assistance when it comes to preparing their workplaces and the current workforce.



Priorities related to engaging Aboriginal tradespeople focused on supporting the development of life skills and financial literacy, as well as providing supports to overcome the culture shock that may accompany work and technical training outside of isolated, remote communities.

Participants agreed that better connections could be made between Indigenous apprentices and available employment, with incentives for working outside their communities when necessary. One group suggested that sharing the success stories and experiences of Aboriginal apprentices would be an effective way to promote the skilled trades to young people in remote communities, providing relatable role models.

Addressing Apprentice Concerns

When asked to consider the supports and/or assistance required to address the concerns and challenges raised by apprentices, the group identified several priorities. While individual needs vary, apprentices were viewed to regularly struggle with essential skills (i.e. math and science), managing family and financial expectations (i.e. childcare, housing) and communication with their mentor. These challenges stand to interfere with an apprentice's progression, ongoing employment and ability to successfully complete technical training.

Participants suggested apprenticeship officers have a role to play in identifying the unique challenges of individual apprentices and pointing them to available supports, such as educational grants and upgrading programs. A school program designed to build basic skills and competency might provide a pool of prospective apprentices from which employers can source talent and to which they can provide mentorship and hands-on experiences. One table suggested that apprentices should be invited to participate at meetings designed to better understand the challenges they are facing, ensuring programs and supports are relevant and responsive.

The group agreed financial supports and incentives would have value, from financial incentives when apprentices complete their training to loan forgiveness for journeypersons who remain in the North after completing their training. More generally, participants thought there would be value in sharing learning materials with apprentices prior to technical training and ensuring job security for their return. More educational resources to support mentors were seen as important to creating high-quality workplace training.

Stakeholder Actions

When asked what action stakeholders can take to support apprentices and/or the apprenticeship program, participants had a number of thoughts. It was suggested that employers spend more time mentoring youth while they are in school, providing information, acting as role models and establishing a better understanding of work in the skilled trades. Employers were also tapped to



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develop and enforce inclusive policies and procedures that support welcoming workplaces for diverse apprentices. Failure to be inclusive stands to undermine both recruitment and retention.

Government stakeholders were expected to ensure apprenticeship officers are available and well-informed about current resources to overcome common challenges apprentices experience. A forum with apprentices, where they are encouraged to identify concerns without their employers or apprenticeship officers present, could enhance understanding of the resources necessary. Government was also encouraged to ensure school programs include awareness of skilled trades careers, possibly by creating access for skilled tradespeople to interact with youth.

A number of organizations that offer specific types of support participated at this event, drawing attention to programs focused on preparing Aboriginal people for employment and supporting women in the trades. These groups often have programs or resources geared to helping employers tackle diversity challenges.

The group suggested there are opportunities for all stakeholders to advocate for apprenticeship and the resources/supports needed to make the program successful. This includes efforts to get involved with the apprenticeship board, generate awareness among youth and their parents, and clearly articulate the apprenticeship pathway.