

Renewing Apprenticeship: Innovative Approaches

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Summary

Canada's skilled workforce is in decline. The skilled trades labour force is not reproducing itself and this is a concern for policy makers, educators, unions and employers. (cf Boydell, K, 1999; CAW 2002; Dancey A, 2002; Gunderson, M., 2001, Sparks, R. 2002; Sussman, D. 2002). While in recent years there has been a great deal of research that examined the barriers to apprenticeship, (CAF, 2004), little has been published that provides insight into what is working, why and where.

In this study we describe new and innovative practices in the established and emerging trades. We identify and highlight approaches that are successfully attracting and retaining apprentices in Canada. We examine some promising practices that are renewing and reviving apprenticeship training.

We deliberately chose to highlight programs that are taking place far from the debates and deliberations about how to fix the apprenticeship system. The examples discussed in this paper are small, innovative approaches taken by unions, communities, immigrant-serving agencies and one province that are serving specific populations. They are:

1. The Carpenter's Local 27 Training Trust Fund partnership with Toronto Community Housing Corporation and the YMCA.
2. The Alberta Aboriginal Initiative "Think Trades" Project
3. The COSTI NeCTAR Project — Connecting Newcomers to the Trades
4. United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 247, www.transferableskills.ca

1. Introduction

This paper was prepared as part of the Restructuring Work and Labour in the New Economy Research Alliance at the Centre for Research in Work and Society, York University, Toronto, Canada. The work was done in response to a request for proposals to examine *promising and innovative approaches* to apprenticeship in Canada.

Canada's skilled workforce is in decline. Inadequate numbers of registrations and completions, combined with an aging workforce could result in skilled labour scarcity in the near future. The skilled trades labour force is not reproducing itself and this is a concern for policy makers, educators, unions and employers. Greater attention is now being devoted to address current and future shortages. Although the number of young people wanting to enter the trades is increasing, this will not close the gap in numbers. Greater efforts are needed in order to reach out to a broader audience of potential entrants and, more importantly, potential and current employers.

1.1 Objective

There has been extensive research into the obstacles currently confronting the apprenticeship system. The overall objective of this study was to identify new and innovative practices related to apprenticeship training in the established and emerging trades and to highlight lessons for other apprenticeship programs.

1.2 Methodology

A review was undertaken of recent reports and studies from 2000 to 2005. The literature was drawn from published studies and reports from national and provincial training bodies, provincial governments and unions. Sources included government web sites, sector councils, training organizations and public documents associated with skills shortage occupations, and apprenticeship training.

Structured telephone interviews were conducted with 9 key informants who were knowledgeable on the apprenticeship system. The interviews were intended to provide insights into current activities and proposed solutions.

Four profiles of organizations that are currently undertaking innovative approaches were examined as to strategies and programs for increasing apprenticeship training.

2. The Canadian Apprenticeship System

Although the Federal Government retains a role in promoting apprenticeship at the national level and in maintaining inter-provincial standards to ensure labour mobility, there is no national apprenticeship system in Canada. The system is fragmented and differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Responsibility for education and apprenticeship is a provincial and territorial responsibility. Educational structures and institutions have been developed to respond to the particular circumstances, geographical situation and historical heritages of the population they serve. (Stone 2005) This has resulted in a multiplicity of approaches to administering apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship training involves a contract between an apprentice and an employer, registered with the jurisdiction. There are currently 170 registered trades in Canada, each with specific standards and training requirements established by individual jurisdictions. In 45 of the 170 registered trades the provinces have agreed on inter-provincial standards. Candidates who meet those standards are granted a Red Seal and are allowed to work anywhere in Canada without additional training or a qualifying examination.

Since 1977 apprenticeship registration has grown at a respectable rate and has kept pace with other forms of post-secondary education, although it remains a small part of the post secondary education system (Sharpe 2005) The total registration in apprenticeship in 2002 was 234,500 representing 2.13 % of the labour force aged 15-44.

2.1 Trends and Issues

2.1.1 Demographics and Skills Shortages

There is a growing presence of older workers in the labour market. In 2005 the number of workers aged 55 years and older rose by 6.2% compared with a 0.7% for workers less than 55 years. The number of retirees is expected to exceed the number of new entrants sometime between 2011 and 2016.

Nowhere is this more apparent than among the skilled trades labour force.

- 45% of all steel tradespersons are expected to retire by 2006 (careersintrades.ca).
- 50,000 skilled metal trades people will be needed in the next five years. (Canadian Tooling and Machining Industry)
- It is estimated that the shortage of workers in Canada's construction industry is between 35,000 and 60,000. (Skills Canada)
- By 2007, more than 1/3 of jobs created in Canada will require a skilled trade designation or a college diploma. (Job Futures 2000, skillworks.com)

Unfortunately sufficient numbers are not being trained to replace those skilled tradespersons who will soon be retiring. Canada is beginning to experience the effects of a shortage of skilled trades that varies by region and trade. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has estimated that Ontario will face a shortage of about

100,000 skilled trades workers in the manufacturing sector over the next 15 years due to retirement. (OCC 2005) Cristina Selva, the Education Director of the Carpenters Local 27 Training Centre notes that the Greater Toronto Area alone will need 300-500 new carpenters in the next 10 years. If these workers are not replaced the provincial and federal governments could lose between \$1.2 billion and \$1.3 billion in combined taxation revenue.

2.1.2 Negative Perceptions Towards Apprenticeships and Trades

A negative perception of the trades is often cited as having a detrimental effect on apprenticeship registrations (Canadian Apprenticeship Board, 2004, 2006; interviews). Many young people and their parents view the skilled trades as a last resort option. The schools need to be more proactive in promoting the trades as a viable option.

If Canada is to maintain a skilled workforce, there has to be a way to reach these future entrants into the labour market. Currently negative public perception of the trades is seen to contributing to keeping to the low rate of youth participation in the apprenticeship system. (Sharpe, 2005, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum 2004)) The Rae Report (2005) recommended that apprenticeship be recognized as a postsecondary destination.

2.1.3 Lack of awareness and information

The educational system gives little importance to the trades. In the 10-year period where all the shops were shut down there's been little coordination between what's happening in the school, opportunities in the trades, and entry requirements to get into the trades. Seventy-two per cent of young people say their school guidance counselors have not encouraged skilled trades as a career option. (Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada) A recent survey found that 37% of young people ages 13-24 said their schools did not have readily available information on skilled trades. (CAF-FCA, 2005)

For those young people who may want to get into a trade, there are not enough programming vehicles. The school curriculum is often not connected to the entry requirements for the trades and occupations. Interviews with key informants emphasized that a lack of pre-apprenticeship programs makes it difficult for young people to transition into a trade.

There is a concern about the essential skills component and the math and sciences in the high schools. This is partially due to a lack of awareness of opportunities in the trades. For example according to the Director of the Carpenter's Local 27 Training Centre, recently in Ontario, the entire curriculum for elementary to high school was reorganized and, theoretically aligned to the trades requirements. But because there is no hands-on experience in the schools, there is no understanding of what is actually required for the trades. A class called "workplace" math theoretically for those interested in the trades had no relation to what is actually required for trades training. Clearly, there is both a lack of awareness and misinformation. The resurrection of programs such as Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) may help to improve the situation.

Interviews with key informants highlighted the misunderstanding of the apprenticeship system that currently exists. As one respondent stated "The bottom

line is that apprenticeship means a job.”

2.1.4 Costs of apprenticeships to individuals, employers and unions

A recent study revealed that less than two in ten employers (18%) currently employ apprentices.¹ Employers see apprenticeship training as a cost rather than an investment in their “bottom line”. Some employers expect to hire fully trained personnel at low entry-level wages. For individuals the costs of tuition and loss of income often serve as a disincentive. In the case of unions who run their own training centres, the cost of ensuring equipment meets current workplace practices can be expensive.

Governments ought to fund apprenticeship at the same level as they support colleges and universities. (Rae 2005) In some jurisdictions (Quebec) a training tax or levy supports employers investing in training. Many of the informants agreed that this has had a positive impact on training. Ontario recently instituted an apprenticeship tax credit to help employer’s invest.

2.1.5 High Rates of Attrition

Respondents emphasized that there is not really a problem in attracting people to the trades; the problem is in completion rates. (CAF 2004, interviews). The latest data would indicate that about one-half of the individuals who registered in apprenticeship programs complete their training. (The Daily, 2005) However it was suggested that the completion rates might in fact be higher than reported by Statistics Canada. The market for apprenticeship is primarily constrained by employer demand rather than the supply of potential apprentices. Employers are not currently providing apprentice opportunities. There is no shortage of interested applicants for apprenticeable trades; there is a shortage of employers with qualified journeypersons willing to train new apprentices.

2.1.6 Lack of national standards

Consistent standards and programming for pre-apprenticeship are needed. For example, the curriculum for apprenticeship training at the Carpenter’s Local 27 Training Centre is done according to provincial standards, but the test for the Certificate of Apprenticeship is done according to Red Seal standards. The result is 90% of apprentices don’t pass the test. Better co-ordination between provincial standards and the Red Seal requirements is necessary.

College programs do not necessarily conform to the completion standard of the trade. In some provinces there is not enough field staff to enforce compliance to training standards. A number of those interviewed for this study stated that employers are not always able to invest sufficient time or resources to meet training standards. One respondent suggested that employers should recognize the standard curriculum and should receive incentives accordingly.

2.1.7 Lack of integrating foreign-trained tradespeople

Although immigration is increasingly seen as a key strategy to increase Canada’s labour force there are not enough programs and supports to help newcomers access

the trades and professions. (CAF 2004) There is no systematic approach to recognizing neither credentials nor standardized model to assess qualifications. There is a need to incorporate PLAR into the assessment of foreign credentials. Bridging programs that can supplement an immigrants work credentials and experience would also help in the recognition and integration of foreign trained tradespersons. Many immigrants require programs that introduce them to workplace practices and culture.

2.1.8 Lack of participation of women

Overall female participation in apprenticeships has increased, it is increasingly concentrated in traditional areas of apprenticeship. Female registration share of total registration increased from 4.3 per cent in 1991 to 9.3 percent in 2002, the most recent figures. While the proportion of females in each trade group increased, female registration as a whole became increasingly concentrated in traditional areas as food and service trades. The share of female participation in non-traditional areas such as building construction, electrical and electronics, motor vehicle and heavy equipment fell. The participation of women in the building trades in 1973 was 3%. In 2003 the percentage of female apprentices in the building trades was 3%. (Sharpe 2005, WITT 2004)

A movement to train people for specific production sometimes undermines the traditional apprenticeable trades. This process deskills the trades and makes apprenticeship less appealing to women.

2.1.9 Parallel rather than integrated programs

While there are access routes and articulation agreements between colleges and universities these rarely exist for apprenticeship training. The situation has been described as “parallel tracks” in which apprenticeship runs alongside of other post-secondary training and educational options.

3. Innovative Practices

The following four examples illustrate new and innovative approaches to apprenticeship training in Canada.

3.1 Carpenters' Local 27 Training Centre

Background

The Carpenters' Local Union 27 Joint Apprenticeship & Training Trust Fund Inc. is a jointly trusted labour-management training centre located in Woodbridge, Ontario. It was established to serve the human resources development needs of both Local Union 27 membership and its over 800 signatory employers. The Training Trust Fund is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of labour representatives from Local 27 and the employer representatives from the General Contractors Section of the Toronto Construction Association.

Since its inception in 1986, the Training Trust Fund has offered an extensive variety of *pre-apprenticeship*, apprenticeship, *health and safety*, and *journey-worker* upgrading courses to thousands of students. The carpenters' apprenticeship system in Ontario's unionized construction sector is a model of employer/labour cooperation that is essential for the industry's future competitiveness and productivity.

The Training Trust Fund's state-of-the-art facilities consist of approximately 62,000 square feet of "hands-on" training and classroom areas that have been customized in accordance with the theoretical and practical requirements of the training programs.

In addition to its fully site-simulated carpentry shop, the Training Centre is equipped with 8 electronic classrooms, computer laboratory, woodworking machine shop, welding shop, and floor covering installer shop. The Centre offers pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training in general carpentry and upgrading in over 30 areas including AutoCAD, blueprint reading, framing, first Aid, WHIMS and others.

The Centre serves out-of-work carpenters, EI eligible trainees, high school and college age apprentices within the GTA.

Innovative Approaches

The Centre (TFF) has been involved in partnerships with other unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), and numerous community groups such as Native Child and Family Services, Eva's Initiatives, the University Settlement Recreation Centre and Scadding Court Community Centre. Local 27 also works with the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) and a number of school boards within the GTA to provide support to the General Carpentry OYAP program. Over 250 high school students have participated. The TFF commits significant resources to the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) program as it facilitates a seamless school-to-work transition for many students. The program allows students to obtain up to four high school credits and gain a head start on their apprenticeships.

The Training Centre partnered with several community organizations to assist youth-at-risk, the homeless and other disadvantaged individuals from across the Greater Metropolitan Toronto area to develop life and trade skills. One of the most innovative partnerships was the Pre-Apprenticeship Program with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, the Ontario government's Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and the YMCA. The goal of the program is to

stimulate economic development in low-income communities while providing youth from within those communities with long-term career opportunities. The program is based on an American Community Partnerships model designed to give disadvantaged youth living in community housing an opportunity to work with the contractors who are renovating the community housing. The youth are living and working in the community housing under renovation.

The pilot program began in July 2005 with 12 kids. During the first phase of the program, participants were provided with 2 weeks of intensive health and safety education as well as basic hand tool training at the Carpenters Local 27 Training Centre. In the second phase of the program, the participants moved on to job sites designated by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). For the remaining 8 weeks of the program, participants worked on renovating TCHC owned residential units in the Jane-Finch area. Wages were subsidized through the YMCA Employment Services and the TCHC. Training during phases 1 and 2 was funded by MTCU and delivered by the Carpenters Training Centre. Ten of the 12 participants graduated from the program and are now employed within the construction sector.

This pilot demonstrates a creative approach to simultaneously addressing skills shortages, social challenges and improving people's lives. The TTF used the experience to develop a new pre-apprenticeship program, CHOICE, which will be the same as the TCHC pilot in terms of length and scope. The number of participants will increase from 12 to 15 at risk youth.

CHOICE will begin March 2006 and conclude in May 2006. Participants will be paid \$11.00 per hour (\$7.75 will be subsidized by the YMCA, the remainder to be paid by TCHC). Upon completion of the program successful graduates will have the option of pursuing apprenticeships in the construction trades.

Challenges

1. Time to establish the program is quite lengthy

The Executive Director worked for many years to establish the pilot program in Toronto. Initial funding was provided on a short-term basis only. Although the pilot was successful, entirely new proposals had to be submitted in order to remount the program, rather than simply building on success and accepting a new group of participants. The funding and sustainability of creative approaches continues to be a challenge.

2. Insufficient transition

There are not enough programs available to assist youth in making the transition from no knowledge of the trades to entering an apprenticeship. There are no dependable pre-apprenticeship programs on offer on a consistent basis. There have been no new pre-apprenticeship and/or upgrading courses in Ontario since 1999 until quite recently.

Lessons Learned

1. Partnerships work

The Carpenters Local 27 Training Centre demonstrates that partnerships work. The union and employers working with community groups, local agencies and the federal and provincial government developed a number of creative and successful programs that have helped those most at risk to find meaningful employment.

2. Wages or wage subsidies are necessary

It is important to provide wages or wage subsidy during training. The Carpenters Local 27 Training Centre experience with youth at risk as well as with other disadvantaged groups demonstrates the need for wage subsidies during training.

3.2

UFCW Local 247, Transferable Skills Initiative/transferableskills.ca

Background

The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 247 represent more than 10,000 members employed in the food industry in the province of British Columbia.

This initiative stemmed from the union's concerns related to decreasing membership. To offset this trend, the UFCW started a training program for their members and other unemployed workers in 1989. The training centre offers holistic programs to assist workers on the job and to create a habit of lifelong learning.

The union's training school was originally attached to the meat cutters program. They created the first meat cutter apprenticeships and started the certification process. That led their director to develop a "Women in Non-Traditional Trades" program in the late 1980's.

At the same time, the union noted the need for programs for workers 45 and older who needed skills training, retraining or upgrading. There were no tools to help workers gain recognition of their prior learning and the experience they gained at work. In addition there were few community-based apprenticeship programs.

As a result of the union's involvement in apprenticeship, Local 247 started to develop community programs in the trades. These expanded into programs for youth interested in trades and became the precursor to the *Discovery to Apprenticeship Program*. This in turn led to the development of the transferable skills program, which is an online application at www.transferableskills.ca.

UFCW Local 247 currently operates employment centers in New Westminster, Burnaby, Prince George, Kelowna and Fort St. John. They also provide outreach programming and distance learning. The centers in New Westminster, Prince George, Kelowna and Fort St. John specialize in TRADES employment. Other programming includes career exploration in Apprenticeship and retail occupations and specialized employment services for workers who are over the age of 45.

Innovative Approaches

Since 2000 UFCW have been developing a unique profiling tool designed to identify workers' prior learning and experience in trades to respond to the drought of skilled labour in the trades in Canada. Staff of the training centre used their combined trades and apprenticeship expertise to design the Transferable Trade Skills (TTS) tool. TTS helps workers assess their trade skills, enabling them to transfer into compatible trades occupations or complete their trade's certification.

An Online Tool

Online Site, www.transferableskills.ca — The site was developed over the last 5 years. It grew out of discussions between UFCW and the aviation industry. The industry was experiencing a huge demand for training. At the same time there was a forestry skills training program for out-of-work forestry workers. Someone at UFCW put together the need for millwrights and metal fabrication workers in the aviation industry with the forestry-training program. Local 247 decided to focus on transferable skills across forestry and aviation.

The training curriculum was designed based on DACUM charts (curriculum development charts). The first step was to identify and establish standardized skills utilized in apprenticeship training maximizing the use of Red Seal information. The originators went through this information manually, an arduous task because there are 147 trades, each with its own curriculum. The group decided to computerize the work and developed an easy to use tool to assess people's transferable skills.

At the beginning the system remained in-house and was used to assess unemployed tradespeople as they came in the door. Eventually a program grew out of the aviation/forestry link to include new entrants and an exploration program. The intention is to be able to apply the tool across all trades and integrate essential skills into the application.

The interactive profiling tool builds a trade's portfolio of prior learning that identifies what percentage of completion an individual may have in a specific trade. The tool identifies what skills are needed in order to complete or achieve certification for particular trades. In addition, the tool can identify other trades in which the worker's current skills may apply, helping the individual understand how to transfer their skills from one trade to another.

Currently, a pilot of the tool with the Apprenticeship Board of Nova Scotia is underway. The plan is to do a 4-6 month test before launching the tool into the marketplace. A version of the Transferable TradeSkills without the essential skills piece is already available. Ideally the program hopes to provide skills recognition for trades training nationally.

Discovery to Apprenticeship

The UFCW Local 247 Training and Education Centre offers a trades exploration program to youth between the ages of 15-30 who are in need of assistance to overcome employment barriers. Participants must be out of school, unemployed and receiving EI benefits. The program offers a hands-on opportunity to try out various trades such as carpentry, painting and decorating, masonry trades, transportation and the metal/welding trades.

Challenges

Sustainability

Sustainability is the biggest issue. Currently the program is funded by government grants as a project and therefore cannot charge people.

Marketing

Several employment organizations have purchased the service and Local 247 is marketing it to employers. The Workplace Compensation Board (WCB) is very interested as are colleges across Canada in relation to their apprenticeship programs. Marketing the program across the country will make it sustainable but will take a long time. Local 247 is also working with Aboriginal groups who are able to make good use of the tool, especially in the north where there are good agreements with industry. This is also part of the sustainability plan for the tool.

Lessons Learned

The web site is very innovative and has been developed with the end user in mind. The tool was created to be worker-centered and take workers' skills and experience into consideration. An emphasis on diversity was incorporated at the onset.

This is a trades oriented program designed by tradespeople to help tradespeople. It has been tested and approved by trades' experts as an effective employment assistance tool. The transferability of skills and knowledge was an important component allowing individuals, employers and training institutions to assess the skills and competencies of those who wish to enter into a trade or to change trades. It builds on existing HRSDC workplace skills profiles, the National Occupation Classifications (NOC) and industry requirements.

3.3 The Newcomers Connecting to Trades Apprenticeship Resources (NeCTAR) Project

Background

The NeCTAR program is an initiative of COSTI, a not-for-profit multi-service organization in Toronto that primarily serves newcomers and immigrants. The NeCTAR Project is aimed at facilitating newcomers' access to Ontario's Apprenticeship Program. Through this public awareness and training project, user-friendly information materials have been developed and disseminated to internationally trained tradespeople.

Funding for NeCTAR was provided primarily through the Ontario government's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) in partnership with a consortium of agencies that serve immigrants. It was funded as a one-year pilot project and classified as a bridge-training program.

COSTI did a needs-assessment, an online survey and focus groups. A gap analysis was also conducted. The research indicated that a key barrier to newcomers accessing the trades and professions was lack of information and access to information and targeted service delivery.

Innovative Approaches

The mandate was to build capacity in community-based agencies that are serving newcomers and assist internationally trained tradespersons (ITT) to access employment and apprenticeship in the skilled trades. This is very different from one agency providing direct services to clients. The intention here was to enhance the capacity of the whole sector, rather than focus on enriching the expertise in only one agency.

The project includes training for front-line staff of community-based agencies to use with newcomer clients seeking employment and apprenticeship opportunities in the skilled trades. Over 200 staff at agencies have been trained using a train-the-trainer methodology.

To supplement the training, COSTI created a resource kit so that front-line workers can help newcomers access the trades, trade-specific resources and general resources. Agencies receive these tools and resources to help counsel or direct internationally trained and/or certified tradespeople. COSTI has created a number of resources with information about becoming an apprentice in specific trades including Construction, Maintenance Electrician, Millwrights, Automotive Service Technician, and Hairstylist. There is also information about the role of unions and workplace health and safety. A reference guide to apprenticeship and certification pathways for different trades is available as part of this project. Eventually, agencies will have resources to help the internationally trained tradesperson navigate through the training to the certification.

Challenges

Credential recognition for internationally trained tradespeople.

There's no standardized model used to assess qualifications. Obtaining documentation is very difficult, especially for refugees or those who may have been out of their country for an extended period of time. In the Toronto apprenticeship office there is a procedure to assess international qualifications, but in other regions of the province the process for assessing credentials is different. In other places, people can apply for temporary certification if they meet the assessment criteria and then go out to find employment. However, employers don't recognize the temporary certification because they see gaps in the training and they see risks in terms of health and safety. Some employers may

hire in any case, but actually getting a job remains an issue.

Testing

The practical written exam doesn't necessarily reflect the practical hands-on skills. The government's perspective is that it's the employers' responsibility to assess the hands-on capacities. There's no centralized assessment process like World Education Services (WES) for the trades. The local trade offices become familiar with the various countries' training systems and the demographics of newcomers in their community. For individual employers determining skills' equivalencies is a big challenge.

Access to Apprenticeship

Another challenge for newcomers is the process of applying for an apprenticeship. Newcomers may have a lot of experience and not be able to gain certification. There are two approaches; the Apprenticeship and Certification Act (ACA), which is competency-based gives employers some room to move apprentices forward more quickly. The other approach is an industry one that is time-based. In this system, the apprentice must work a certain number of hours under the supervision of a journeyperson in order to complete an apprenticeship.

Many newcomers are older and may have to do the General Education Diploma (GED) in addition to then enrolling in and completing an apprenticeship. Some employers are reluctant to invest in providing apprenticeship training to older workers. These workers then remain in low-skilled jobs.

In addition, many apprenticeship programs are targeted towards youth and are not appropriate for newcomers. In some places newcomers and/or immigrants are seen as an alternative labour supply. In the GTA they are the source of labour force growth. Ironically, all the apprenticeship incentives are targeted towards youth.

Lessons Learned

Recruiting newcomers is not a problem there may be some cultural issues where the trades may be seen as a less desirable occupation for some immigrant groups but given the anticipated shortages in the trades this may be overcome.

Building the capacity of the sector by creating and disseminating tools, resources and training has allowed many more newcomers access to services as well as enriching the ability of the individual agencies to serve clients.

It is important for government to play the role of regulator, but government should also work to harmonize curriculums with the certification exam.

3.4

ThinkTrades: Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project

Background

The Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project (AAAP) was established in 2001 in response to labour market and training needs. The project promotes apprenticeship and industry training to Aboriginal people, communities and organizations in Alberta. The project is a five-year pilot that has received funding of \$18.5 million from both the federal and provincial levels of government.

The objectives of the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship are:

- To assist Aboriginal people interested in learning a trade to become apprentices
- To assist Aboriginal people who enter apprenticeship training programs to complete the program
- To promote the hiring of Aboriginal apprentices to employers

The project sponsors include Aboriginal groups, industry, and educational organizations as well as federal and provincial governments. The Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project currently operates in five Alberta communities, Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, High Level, and Lethbridge.

The Project was designed to be 5 years in duration in order to take the first year apprentices in the Project through to the completion of their apprenticeship program.

It was anticipated that by the end of year 5 a minimum of 180 Aboriginal apprentices would participate in the project. They have more than exceeded their goal. They currently have 255 apprentices enrolled. In March of 2005, Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training issued a journeyman certificate to the first AAP apprentice to complete their apprenticeship program.

Innovative Approache

The Project includes an Employment Support Model that prepares Aboriginal apprentices for the workplace and supports them through their apprenticeship program. The model recognizes cultural differences and provides supports necessary to help candidates choose the right trade and complete the required training. The support mechanisms, which are built into the Employment Support Model, are key to ensuring the apprentices successfully complete their programs. The model includes mechanisms to:

- Identify candidates' essential skill shortages for the trades and direct them to approach resources to acquire the skills
- Refer Aboriginal apprenticeship candidates to employers for employment opportunities
- Prepare the workplace for Aboriginal apprentices
- Provide mentorship and peer support
- Resolve potential problems in the workplace
- Ensure Aboriginal apprentices are prepared for technical training
- Identify current and future industry employment opportunities

There is a Project Officer in each of the five communities of Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, High Level and Lethbridge where the program currently operates. The Project Officer promotes the project locally. Project officers provide information sessions for counselors in Aboriginal employment centres on apprenticeship programs, industry training and the opportunities in different trades. They also provide aboriginal awareness training for companies and their employees.

There is also a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) whose members are knowledgeable about local Aboriginal issues, the trades and apprenticeships and the workplace. Committee members understand Aboriginal culture and the difficulties Aboriginal apprentices may face in completing an apprentice program. The role of the CAC is to select potential candidates to participate in the project. A CAC member mentors the apprentices through the apprenticeship process. The committee then identifies industry employment opportunities. With assistance from local employment centres and the Project Officer, the AAAP Community Advisory Committee selects suitable candidates for employer interviews. Only those candidates with all the qualifications necessary to enter an apprenticeship program are referred for interviews.

Once an apprentice has been placed in a company, the project officers maintain regular contact with the apprentice, providing support to them in a variety of different ways. The project officers provide information to both the employer and the apprentices, coaching and trouble-shooting. If problems arise between the apprentice and the

employer, the strong relationship the Project Officer has helped to quickly resolve the issue and maintain employer participation in the program.

Challenges

Recruitment

The project had difficulty recruiting Project Officers in some communities because the funds budgeted for the positions were less attractive for people with journeyman certification. Competition from the oil and gas sector is very intense in Alberta and there are many opportunities available for journeypersons. There were particular challenges in implementing the program in the more rural parts of the province. The infrastructure is not there and few programs existed to prepare Aboriginal people to enter the Project.

There is more demand than supply. In Edmonton there are more employers approaching the project with apprenticeship opportunities than there are Aboriginal people ready to enter the positions. The Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Committee started to work with the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee to identify appropriate curriculum for Aboriginal people approved to participate in the project.

Lessons Learned

One size does not fit all. Each of the pilot locations is different demographically and provides a unique variety of challenges and opportunities. The project was also flexible to adapt and respond to emerging needs, often by bringing new partners to help on developing programs or utilizing existing resources.

This project demonstrated that promoting awareness and understanding of the trades could help create an interest in a trade. Working with Aboriginal employment centres and with First Nations and Metis organizations has increased awareness, understanding and interest in apprenticeship programs among young aboriginals.

The guidance and direction of a strong and focused steering committee is needed to steer the project. It will ensure the project remains focused on its goals and does not duplicate services offered by other organizations such as employment counseling and life skills training.

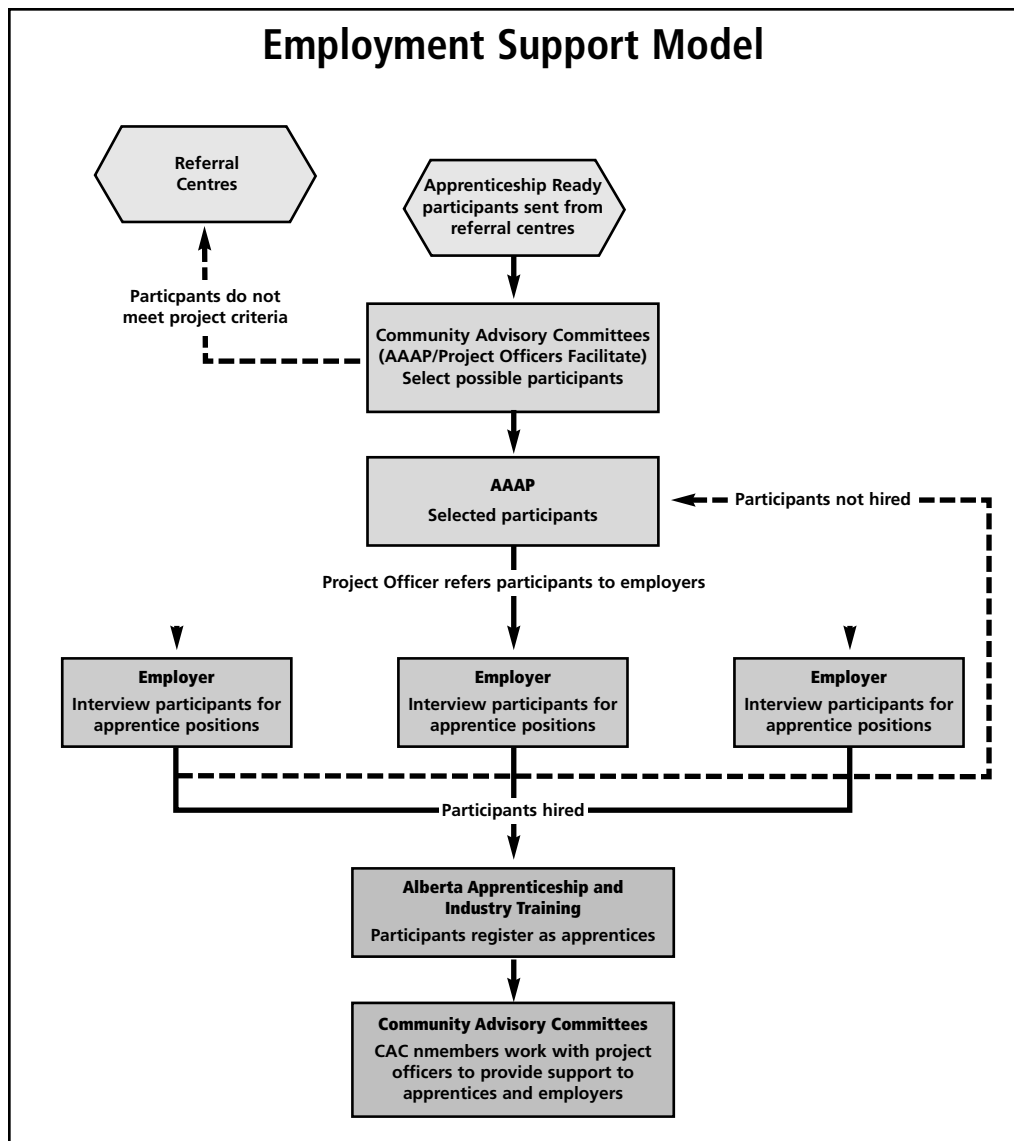
There has to be commitment from all the key partners — Aboriginal and Metis groups, industry, education, provincial government and the federal government

Community based project officers are an important component of the project. They allow the project to build strong working relationships with local employers and Aboriginal communities.

The ThinkTrades, Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project has been an overwhelming success and has served as a model. The lessons learned from the AAAP have been shared with other jurisdictions helping to reduce implementation time of similar projects. The concept has been adapted in British Columbia with the development of a project for apprentices and labourers. A second project in Saskatchewan — the Northern Neighbours Partnership for Jobs project has also benefited from the experience of the AAAP.

These 4 case studies demonstrate the importance of the following:

1. Bringing new groups into the apprenticeship system. The case studies were successful working with Aboriginals, out-of-school, unemployed youth, and immigrants and newcomers.
2. The importance of partnerships that are grounded in and reflect the community. In Alberta, First Nations and Metis groups who had no experience with



apprenticeship but saw the need for training for their people were the original sponsors. The Carpenters Local 27 partnered with one of the larger housing employers — Toronto Community Housing Corporation and the YMCA in their innovative partnership. The result is that 10 participants are now employed in construction and starting apprenticeships.

3. Long term funding is necessary to allow programs to work. A 5-year commitment in Alberta demonstrates the success. The Carpenters pilot with TCHC and the YMCA was very successful. Then the organization had to reinvent the project, resubmit the proposal and reorganize the partnership in order to mount the project again.
4. Sharing what works and what doesn't work cuts down on the time as shown by the experience of the Alberta Aboriginal project. That experience helped two other projects in BC and Saskatchewan become operational much faster.

¹ See *Employer Attitudes and Perceptions of Apprenticeship Study*, February 2006; a joint study by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum and Skills Canada.

4. Concluding Comments

Canada's changing demographics requires a new approach to apprenticeship training.

Employers, unions and training bodies have been consulted extensively as to their views on how to fix the apprenticeship system. In the consultations held on the CAF "Accessing and Completing Apprenticeships In Canada" report stakeholders across the country had very similar recommendations. The recommendations ranged from creating a national approach to apprenticeship, developing a coordinated system to recognize credentials, implementing articulation agreements between jurisdictions so that tradespeople could move and their skills and qualifications recognized, and harmonizing trades' curricula.

The challenge is to translate the recommendations into appropriate programs that meet the needs of all the stakeholders. The 4 profiles presented in this paper provide examples of innovative approaches that reach out to individuals and groups who previously may not have considered the trades as an option. Sadly, the innovation appears to be happening far from the deliberations on the future of apprenticeship.

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