

Youth Workforce Development

KNOWLEDGE BRIEF



A skilled and engaged labour force is critical¹⁻³. Workforce Development is a broad umbrella with every sector having an important role to play. If you consider workforce development broadly it includes any actions related to education, training, and skills development, such as Kindergarten to grade 12 education, post-secondary education, professional job training, placements/apprenticeships, career advancement, lifelong learning, and everything in between³⁻⁷.

'Workforce' is defined as those preparing to enter or currently within the workforce, those currently outside the workforce, those who are unemployed, and those who are disadvantaged or marginalized. Youth can fit across this spectrum.

Under the workforce development umbrella is the engagement of key actors from schools to employers to economic development actors to local government, as well as the required supports and resources (e.g., financial resources, information, etc.). Workforce development includes or links to community engagement, learning enrichment, skills building, career development, attraction, retention, and many more.

Collaboration is critical to workforce development – including collaboration within and across sectors⁸⁻¹³. While collaboration can be challenging⁴, workforce development is both broad enough and complex enough that a single initiative or single actor is not enough to affect real change.

Workforce development must also be contextually appropriate – there is no one size fits all solution and the nuances of different places should inform local actions^{1,3,5,6}. The more partners are involved, the more information can go into designing programs.

When it comes to youth, workforce development is closely intertwined with community engagement, training, skills development, attraction, and retention. Reinforcing the point regarding collaboration, much of the related literature points to initiatives involving youth as requiring a collaborative, multi-partner approach¹⁴⁻²⁰. Learning is a partnership including: youth, parents, teachers, employers, and the surrounding community²¹.

The education sector is increasingly seen as a key part of building the workforce¹². This is seen in many examples, such as partnerships between employers

and community colleges, as well as building links between education, business, and industry¹².

Other youth specific strategies emphasize the need to ensure youth are aware of career opportunities – something the Province of New Brunswick specifically notes as requiring collaboration between government and educational institutions²².

However, while many post-secondary institutions are active participants in workforce development, the K-12 education system in Canada has untapped potential⁴. Examples from other places demonstrate ideas and areas for development. For example, the rural community of Alta, Norway has a program where elementary schools are given information on business creation and the role of the private sector in the community, as well as initial skills building in the business sector²³.

In secondary school students are encouraged to gain business skills through practical experience with a youth enterprise program²³. In another example, Purdue's Research Park hosts an Entrepreneurship Academy, providing math, science, and technology based skills and experience to high school students²⁴.

When it comes to youth and workforce development there is a need to consider:

- I. retention
- II. training
- III. engagement
- IV. existing examples and lessons learned both at home and away.

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