

## What We Heard: Nelson & Area Business Walk

### Addressing Rural Labour Shortages

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MARGARETTE SANTOS & JONNAH RONQUILLO

#### BACKGROUND

The goal of the Addressing Rural Labour Shortages project is to examine strategies to address workforce shortages in rural communities, with particular attention to attraction and retention. Nelson and Area is one of the project's case studies. As part of this research, we took a business walk approach, visiting and calling businesses within the NAEDP region and asking them a small number of questions focused on workforce issues and opportunities. We invited 37 businesses to participate, 25 from Nelson and 12 from the surrounding area. Of those businesses invited, 26 agreed to participate, 19 in Nelson and 7 in surrounding area. This document summarizes their responses.

#### RESULTS

##### Current Staff Shortages

Of the participating businesses just over half (14/26) said they were experiencing staff shortages or facing other workforce challenges. These businesses currently facing staff shortages predominantly belong to the retail and food and beverage, hospitality/hotel accommodations and the retail sector.

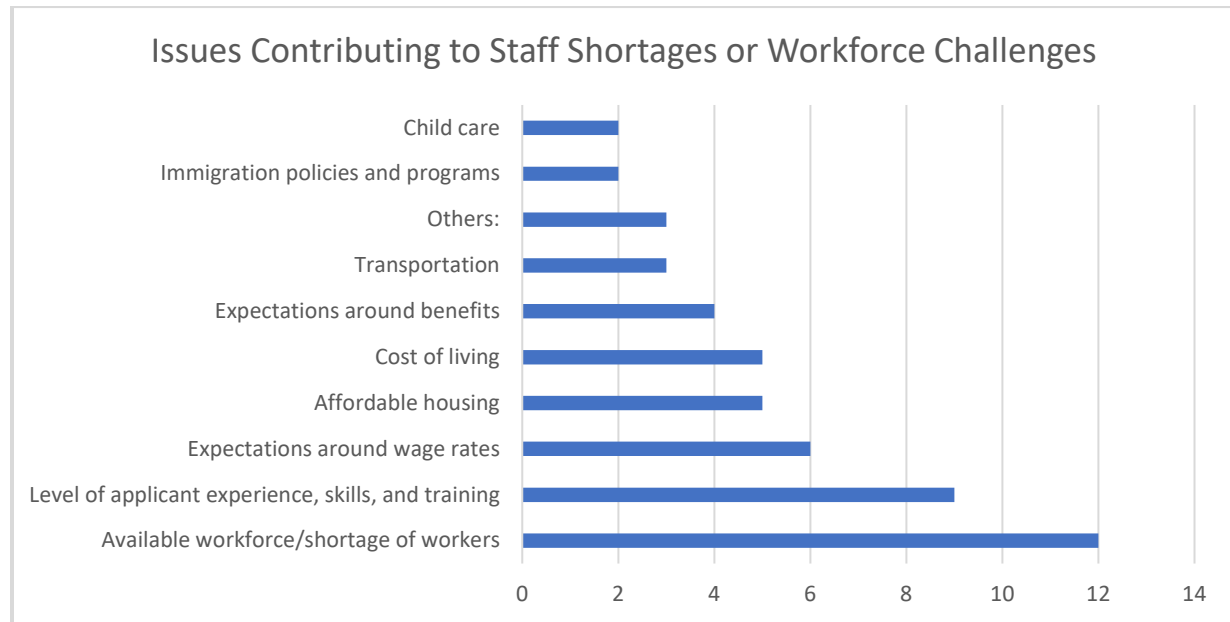
##### Effective Recruitment and Retention Strategies

To ensure a strong and committed team, the 12 businesses that indicated they were not experiencing staff shortages highlighted the steps they have taken to avoid staff shortages and related workforce issues. These strategies collectively contribute to the business's success in preventing staff shortages and workforce challenges. In order of prominence, effective business strategies identified by participants included:

- **Recruitment:** When it comes to bringing new people on board, businesses pointed to their recruitment strategies as being successful. This included making sure to post job openings on specific online platforms like Indeed, aiming to reach the right kind of candidates. Some encourage referrals from current employees and friends to suggest good fits for the team. Others noted partnerships with Selkirk College that gives them access to up-and-coming talent and help these individuals develop their skills.
- **Retention and Incentives:** These comments focused on retaining staff in the long-term keeping employees engaged and motivated. This included offering competitive pay, benefits, and other incentives such as staff meals and staff housing. Also included were recognizing hard work with yearly performance bonuses.
- **Communication and Engagement:** Building strong communication and connections were also reflected in the comments, including having yearly review chats and feedback sessions to make sure everyone's on the same page and feeling heard. Comments also reflected open communication channels, making it easy for the team to share their thoughts and ideas.
- **Work Environment:** Creating a positive work environment was reflected in some responses. These comments included things like flexibility in their management style and valuing individual input. Comments pointed to managing workloads thoughtfully to ensure a good balance between productivity and well-being, including flexible schedules and part-time choices.

### Identifying Contributing Factors to Staff Shortages and Workforce Challenges

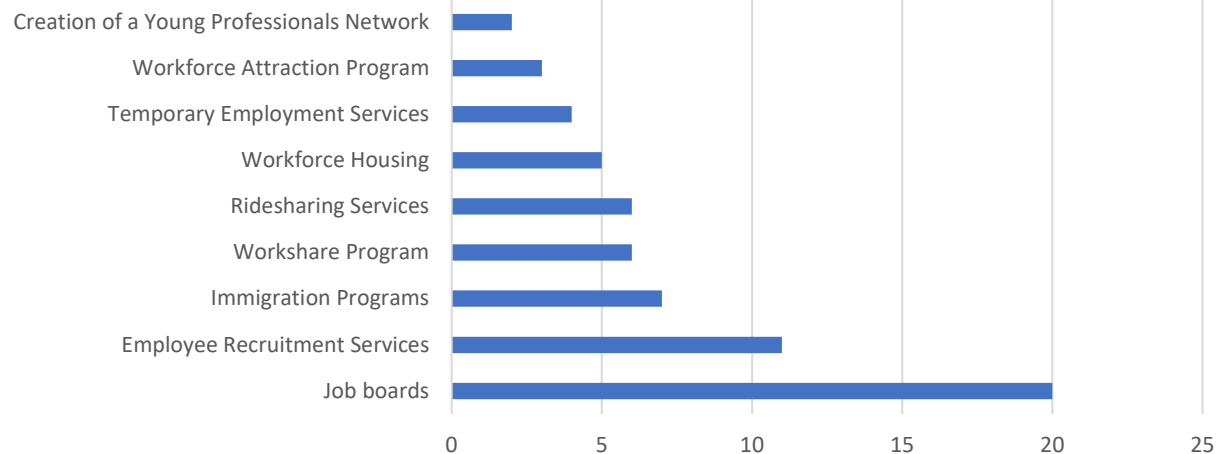
For the 14 businesses who were experiencing staff shortages we asked them to select the issues from a list that were contributing to their staff shortages. The following graph illustrates the responses. The top issue identified by respondents as the main issue contributing to staff shortages or workforce challenges was the availability of workforce/shortage of workers (24%). This was followed by the level of applicant experience, skills, and training (18%), expectations around wages (12%), housing (10%), and cost of living (10%). Other identified challenges included perspectives on willingness to work, demographics (e.g., retirement), and seasonality of work.



### Exploring Promising Solutions for Workforce Challenges

Based on our research, we identified a list of potential solutions to workforce challenges. We asked all 26 participating businesses which of the identified solutions were of interest to them. The following graph shows the results. Most of the respondents (31%) identified the use of existing job boards (e.g., KCDS, Indeed) as the top potential solution for workforce challenges, followed by recruitment services (17%), immigration programs (e.g., RNIP) (11%), and workshare programs (e.g., employee sharing between businesses) (9%). Businesses were also asked about other potential solutions they have thought of. Responses provided included promoting trade careers to younger generations, utilizing social media and job boards for recruitment, offering gratuities and referral incentives, implementing workshare programs between related companies, addressing housing concerns, engaging local community groups for referrals, and avoiding temporary hiring in favor of consistent staff training and traditional hiring methods.

## Identified Potential Solutions to Workforce Challenges



### SUMMARY

The Addressing Rural Labour Shortages project focuses on rural workforce shortages, with Nelson and Area as a case study. **Of the invited businesses, 14 face staff shortages, mainly in the retail and food/hospitality sectors, while 12 boast long-tenured workforces.** To counter this, proactive strategies include competitive incentives, thoughtful recruitment, flexible work environments, and effective communication practices. This underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach in maintaining a motivated and thriving workforce.

**A majority (23%) highlighted workforce availability/shortages as the main contributor to staff challenges, followed by applicant skills (16%) and affordable housing (14%).** Other concerns include wage expectations, living costs, benefits, immigration, transportation, and childcare. **Most respondents (31%) leaned towards job boards as the main solution, followed by employee recruitment (17%), immigration programs (11%), and workshare options (9%).** Other ideas on the list encompass housing, ridesharing, temporary employment, attraction programs, and setting up a Young Professionals Network.

### THANK YOU

We wanted to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the willingness of businesses to share their knowledge and experiences. And we are truly appreciative of the time and effort they dedicated to our discussion. Their input will undoubtedly play a significant role in helping us gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Thank you once again for their collaboration and support. We look forward to continuing our partnership and exploring opportunities for mutual growth in the future.