



Jurisdictional Scan of Recruitment Strategies in Skilled Trades

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INTRODUCTION

Canada is currently facing a shortage of skilled trades workers, and it is anticipated nationally that the construction industry's hiring requirements from 2024 to 2033 are over 350,000 workers (BuildForce Canada, 2024, 9). New Brunswick is no exception to this anticipated shortage. Faced with the reality of reverse natural population growth, robust retirement levels, high demand for workers in other sectors, and a significant diversity imbalance, the impacts of worker shortages are already being felt across all skilled trade sectors such as construction, manufacturing, forestry, and the automotive/truck and transport industries. Having the oldest skilled trades workforce in the country, paired with the outmigration of many of our skilled trades workers to other provinces, New Brunswick needs to move forward with a solid skilled trades workforce development strategy that will enable them to weather the current demographic storm.

To support the establishment of such a strategy, this report, developed by the Construction Association of New Brunswick (CANB), employs a jurisdictional scan to investigate and identify what other provincial, federal, and international jurisdictions are doing to promote skilled trades and attract people to these invaluable roles. As a research method, a jurisdictional scan "systematically reviews how different regions or sectors tackle specific problems or opportunities" (Insight Specialty Consulting, 2024). The scan is a tool primarily used to identify promising practices and can inform decision-making processes and examine how problems have been framed and responded to in other jurisdictions (Kilian et. Al., 2016). By providing information on the available policy options, implementation strategies, and considerations, jurisdictional scans allow for broadened horizons during planning processes, informed decision-making, and greater understanding and anticipation of roadblocks (Insight Specialty Consulting, 2024). Further, the comparison aspect of such scans allows for the identification of common themes (Kilian et. Al., 2016). A jurisdictional scan is valuable for this particular research because CANB is trying to identify promising practices and associated approaches to address a wide-reaching challenge that has yet to receive a comprehensive systematic review. We do so here with the intention of highlighting what is working effectively and what is not. The literature

reviewed for this jurisdictional scan includes government and non-governmental reports, industry documents, and online media content.

The following report contains three sections. Section One identifies the landscape of the current construction labour situation in New Brunswick. Section Two identifies what the Canadian federal government, and other respective provincial governments, are doing to address labour shortages. Section Three will briefly examine both strategies that other countries, namely Australia, and the United Kingdom, have adopted to address their labour shortages. Canadian strategies which involve the recruitment of international workers will also be investigated as possible solutions to current shortages. With a thorough list of promising practices spanning from local, provincial, and international cohorts, CANB hopes to illuminate possible pathways for New Brunswick that may be applied to effectively address labor shortages.

SECTION I: NEW BRUNSWICK

Jobs in construction are in high demand in New Brunswick, with job openings expected to increase. Some of the province's largest cities, Moncton and Fredericton, grew faster than the average Canadian city in 2025 (Atlantic Economic Council, 2024). Further, Moncton was the second leader for employment growth in Atlantic Canada with 6% growth (Atlantic Economic Council, 2024). However, the available skilled labor force falls short of meeting the demand. According to Buildforce Canada, New Brunswick's 2024 construction vacancy rate is 4.3%, compared to 3.3% across all industries (Buildforce Canada B, 2024, p. 22). This gap is projected to widen as 28% of the current construction workforce, aged 55 and over, nears retirement (Buildforce Canada B, 2024, p. 23). To meet labor market needs, New Brunswick must increase recruitment through apprenticeships and by focusing on underrepresented groups.

Currently, only 4.2% of the construction workforce in New Brunswick are immigrants, compared to 7.7% across all industries (Buildforce Canada B, 2024, p. 24). Women make up less than 20% of the labor force in primary and construction industries in the Atlantic region, while Indigenous people account for 5% of employment (Atlantic Economic Council, 2024, p. 5-6). The Atlantic Economic Council also notes the underrepresentation of visible minorities in these fields (2024, p. 9).

A jurisdictional scan covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan by the CANB Skilled Trades Industry Project revealed a focus on youth pathways into skilled trades, with some programs also targeting women and Indigenous peoples. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Anti-Racism (AR) programs are in their early stages, while immigrants remain underrepresented in skilled trades. The Atlantic Economic Council identified that "primary industries and construction have the lowest proportions of immigrant workers" in Atlantic Canada (2024, p. 7). Additionally, there are fewer programs aimed at supporting persons with disabilities and Francophones. The scan suggests there is demand for improved collaboration and tailored regional programs, though more centralized supports and immigration strategies are still needed (Anderson, 2024, p. 11). The call for more centralized supports is echoed by industry members, who ask for more transparency and communication between the parties at play.

Support programs for skilled trades are delivered by a range of organizations, including non-profits, schools, governments, and trade unions, and funded by provincial and federal departments, industry associations, and user fees. Feedback from the four provinces emphasizes the need for more steady work opportunities, support for new entrants, and vocational teachers (Anderson, 2024, p. 11). The report recommends that New Brunswick implement a coordinated provincial program, informed by industry needs and delivered in both English and French, along with a common evaluation framework for program enhancements (Anderson, 2024, p. 21).

To address the construction labour shortage, there are several underrepresented groups that we can look to: Newcomers, women, youth, Indigenous peoples, Francophones and persons with disabilities. Below, we will outline current issues and initiatives in New Brunswick targeting each of these focal groups.

IMMIGRATION PATHWAY

Immigration as a workforce pathway has yet to be taken advantage of to its full potential, despite the significant population increase resulting from a growing Newcomer population. There are several issues creating challenges for both employers and potential (Newcomer) employees that contribute to this type of inaction. For employers, lack of clarity and no formal system to transfer international credentials to those recognized in Canada means that even if Newcomers have the required skills to perform a role, these skills are not formally recognized by our current hiring processes. For both employers and potential employees, language offers an additional challenge.

A recent Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada report finds that the “majority of newcomers report being able to speak English in a variety of real-world situations. Fewer newcomers report using French in the same situations” (2023, 14). Even for Newcomers who speak one of the two official languages of New Brunswick (English and French) the majority do not have enough grasp of either language to effectively function in a technical environment. Employment in the construction sector is not only difficult but can be dangerous, if individuals are not able to understand the safety rules and processes. In addition to language barriers, and perhaps compounded by them, both employers and workers can experience challenges associated with cultural issues as well. For Newcomers participating in trade exploration programs and education, conversations with employers highlighted that too many are not being paired with the

right trade match, and as a result both training seats and educator's time are at risk of being wasted. A history of misconceptions surrounding both immigration and construction labour may make these roles unappealing for newcomers. Even if they manage to fill these gaps, in some cases the environments may still be unwelcoming.

In terms of accessibility to employment and supports, the challenges are not only situated around employment advertising and ease of recruitment but are also evident when Newcomers are seeking services and supports to settle and be in a position to search for meaningful employment in the first place. In 2023, the IRCC found that much “could be done to improve awareness of settlement services, as 32% of survey respondents were not aware of the free services offered by IRCC's Settlement Program” (2023, 13).

At a provincial government level, there are available streams for immigrants looking to secure employment in the skilled trades, but they are severely underused. The Critical Worker Pilot is a five-year pilot program aiming to address critical labour shortages across different regions in the province. It is employer-driven, and therefore candidate applications are made through the participating employer, not interested candidates (Government of New Brunswick a, n.d.). The skilled worker stream of the New Brunswick Nominee Program gives additional points to candidates from the trades sector, and the Express Entry NB Priorities stream considers trades a priority sector (Government of New Brunswick b, 2024; Immigration NB, 2024). The Strategic Initiative Stream also gives priority access to the trades sector, as the selection is based on the needs of the New Brunswick labour market (Government of New Brunswick c, 2024). For skilled workers needing to sort out the transfer of credentials, the GNB PETL office has an Apprenticeship and Occupational Certification branch, now called Skilled Trades NB, to “assess certificates or licenses that are granted by a regulatory authority if they are in a trade or occupation that is similar in scope to any of the designated occupations in New Brunswick” (Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training Labour, n.d.).

From non-government organizations (NGOs), immigration serving programs tend to be more general employment support, however we are slowly starting to see skilled trades specific programs increase. The YMCA Southwestern New Brunswick offers sector specific employment

language training programs over a 12-week period at UNB. While their courses do not cover the construction sector yet, it has potential for expansion (YMCA, 2024).

The Multicultural Association of Fredericton (MCAF) runs a program called *Skills Launch* which allows participants to explore trade career options and gain local work experience (MCAF, 2024). Another initiative of promise is the NBCC Facilitating Access to Skills Talent (FAST) NB Program. This platform seeks to “fast track connecting employers with a skilled immigrant talent pool and help newcomers and potential new immigrants match their skills with trades career opportunities in New Brunswick” (NBCC, 2024). The platform assesses the current skills and experience of participants and can offer options and resources for training to fill any gaps. Assessments also include a “Prepare for Work, Play and Stay in New Brunswick” interactive training module to prepare newcomers for life in New Brunswick” which they recommend for all new family members to New Brunswick take (NBCC, 2024). In 2023, CANB Moncton worked with MCAF on a free program for Newcomers, providing training in intercultural skills (CANB Moncton, 2023). The program did not have the required uptake or funding to continue but could be considered again in the future. The Saint John Tool Library has also launched a program aimed at addressing the shortage of affordable housing in the city, along with labour shortages of construction workers, by providing rapid training to individuals facing challenges in housing and to employment. The program, called *Hammers 2 Homes*, will offer micro-credentials in residential construction and students who complete it will receive a certificate from the New Brunswick Community College Saint John campus. Modelled after Australia’s social housing employment program, the program’s directors hope it will “help connect graduates with small contractors that work on affordable housing projects as potential employers” (Mackinnon, 2024).

The CANB Skilled Trades Industry Project had several suggestions when examining the immigration pathway. The first suggestion is the development of an industry collaboration between GNB and Opportunities New Brunswick (ONB). Employers should work with the Workforce Development branch at ONB and, if eligible, apply for designation under the Atlantic Immigration Program. The collaboration could also establish a trade equivalency assessment to support certification and work experience from abroad. While this may require additional or

designated training spots for candidates with international experience or certifications, it would expand the demographic of recruits with much more ease than currently exists.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Unlike the immigration pathway, there are currently efforts to support Indigenous populations and recruit them into the construction labour work force. The program *First in Trades*, run by MAP Strategic Workforce Services, provides a provincial network and resource hub dedicated to promoting, supporting, and mentoring Indigenous apprentices. The hub provides services such as workforce support, resources to appropriate services, and community outreach opportunities. The *Skilled Trades Exploration Program* (STEP) works to increase participation of underrepresented groups in non-traditional skilled trades by registering new apprentices in NB apprenticeship system. STEP is working with Skilled Trades NB, Workplace Essential Skills (WES), and NBCC to develop a targeted program to explore skilled trades based on needs of labour market. Currently STEP involves a free 16-week training program including trades exploration, math upgrade, workplace essential skills, safety training, professional development, presentations by special guests, and employer site visits. Once training is completed, participants are matched with partnered employers.

WOMEN

There is also a growing recognition of the potential for women to help address labour gaps in the construction work force. The MAP Strategic Workforce Services initiative *New Boots: Progressing Women+ in Trades* is a provincial network and resource hub dedicated to promoting, supporting, and mentoring women+. The initiative is focused on sectors like construction, manufacturing, transportation, forestry, and service. They offer a myriad of services, including a network with tradeswomen, mentorship, resources/tools/referrals to essential services, assistance with workforce support (including job leads and resume building), and community outreach and involvement opportunities. Another program of note is one that was run by the greater Moncton based company, *SheBuilds*, and MAPS. This program was New Brunswick's first all-female carpentry course, which aimed to address "the need for skilled tradespeople, while creating more affordable housing, and empowering women to feel at home in

the construction industry” (SheBuilds, n.d.). Province-wide, the Office to Advance Women Apprentices NB was developed based on the successful model from Newfoundland & Labrador. The office serves to connect tradeswomen to employers, offer tradeswomen career services, employment supports, and networking opportunities, and also maintains a registry database to track services provided and apprenticeship numbers of tradeswomen (OAWA NB, 2024). Current research done by the CANB Skilled Trades Industry Project suggests that existing initiatives are scaled to provincial level in order to further these recruitment efforts.

YOUTH

Currently we are seeing the greatest amount of recruitment resources being aimed toward children and youth. This effort is particularly highlighted in the work of the Centre of Excellence: Skilled Trades & Manufacturing (COE). The centre was created via a collaboration between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) and numerous partners: including Post Secondary Education Training and Labor (PETL), Excellence Manufacturing Consortium, Government, CANB, NBCC, Opportunities New Brunswick, McCain, Malley Industries, Skills Canada, MAP Strategic Workforce Services, Atlantic Masonry Institute, New Brunswick Roofing Contractors Association Inc., and WorkSafeNB. Meant for students ages kindergarten through grade 12, this COE aims to enrich “the delivery of curriculum in many subject areas with content based on authentic practices, opportunities for experiential learning, remotely connecting learners and experts, and exploring current and emerging issues” (Centre of Excellence NB, 2022). The centre accomplishes these objectives by providing “interest-based personalized learning options”, demonstrating “labour market and post-secondary pathways”, acting “as a centre for sector-specific experiential learning opportunities”, and providing opportunities for “dual-credit and custom programs” (Centre of Excellence NB, 2022). The benefits of the services provided by this COE are many, as it enables “partners to engage across the education system more easily; builds on mutually beneficial goals of EECD and partners; provide[s a] collection point for information for families; [and] leverages power of networking to reduce gaps and duplication” (Centre of Excellence NB, 2022). The New Brunswick Roofing Contractors Association Inc. has expanded on giving youth exploratory opportunities with their roofing centre in Saint John. Available online with a video tour or in

person for a visit, the roofing centre is part of the association's effort to create more awareness about the roofing industry and fight common misconceptions about typical employees.

Another promising initiative focused on schools is the *Trades Future Alliance* created by New Brunswick's Building Trades Unions. The Trades Future Alliance is a fund provided to support the teaching of trades in local schools. It is "primarily intended to provide seed money for sustainable projects that will have a long-term impact on vocational programs" (New Brunswick Building Trade Unions). Any teacher or school representative may apply for a specific construction trade project provided by or in development by the school. The fund is primarily meant for middle and high school vocational programs. In 2024, the program had to close applications because of the sheer number of submissions, clearly indicating the demand for likeminded programs and resources. CANB's *Build for the Future Fund*, similar to the Trades Future Alliance, has been actively donating \$40 K for over 10 years. The clear need from schools for this funding of early skilled trades education highlights the lack of structured support available.

Skills Canada NB is also highly active in the province's schools. Their Try-a-Trade program is a signature Skills Competences trademarked event that has made a significant impact amongst youth. These events, which have seen over 10,000 students from both Anglophone and Francophone sectors, have not only introduced students to various trades but has also fostered a culture of collaboration. The success of these events is a promising sign for the future of skilled trades in New Brunswick, and further expansion of these events would see even greater potential for the province. In April of 2024, over 300 secondary and post-secondary students showcased their skills at the Skills Canada NB Provincial competitions held over two days at NBCC Moncton. The gold medal winners from the provincial competitions continued to the Skills Canada national competition and returned with three national medals. This is a testament to the talent and dedication of our youth.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Somewhat contested, the Government of Canada does not adhere to a single, universal definition of disability, there are several stronger perspectives that this work follows. The Accessible

Canada Act, passed in 2019, defines disability as an “impairment or functional limitation that reduces someone’s full involvement in society because of barriers they face” (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2025). To break it down further, disability itself is “an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions.

An *impairment* is a problem in body function or structure; an *activity limitation* is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a *participation restriction* is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations” (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2013). In relation to the workforce, the Employment Equity Act of 1995 defines Persons with Disabilities as “persons who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment and who a) b) consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or believe that a [sic] employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, and includes persons whose functional limitations owing to their impairment have been accommodated in their current job or workplace” (Defining Disability 2003, 15-16).

According to a report published in June 2024 by the provincial government, as of 2022, New Brunswick has the second highest rate of disability in Canada at 35.3% of the provincial population (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 2). The characteristics of these disabilities vary significantly, particularly by age group. Younger demographics see a prevalence of “developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and disabilities related to mental health” (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 3), whereas older individuals had higher umbers of disabilities “related to pain, mobility, flexibility, hearing, dexterity and seeing” (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 3). When it comes to the workforce, between May 2016 and May 2017, provincially there was an increase of participation of persons with a disability aged 25 to 64 by 7.5%, “New Brunswick’s increase represented the second largest increase among the provinces and territories” (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 10). As of 2021, it is estimated that 69.6% of individuals with a disability aged 25-63 in New Brunswick were either working or looking for work (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 9). Nationally, it is estimated that 42% of individuals with a disability aged 25 to 64 who are not currently employed do have work potential (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 10). As evident in the table below, 13% of

men with a disability aged 25 to 64 have an Apprenticeship and/or Trades education, and 5% of women with a disability aged 25 to 64 (Government of New Brunswick d, 2024, 8).

In New Brunswick, the primary source of programs are made available through the AvenueNB organization. Incorporated in 2022, AvenueNB is a non-profit organization whose mandate is to “manage the delivery of employment services for persons with a disability in New Brunswick through third-party specialized organizations” (AvenueNB Cooperative, n.d.). With long-term funding from the Government of New Brunswick through Workforce Development, AvenueNB supports its member agencies in offering services, support, and training to job seekers, as well as helping employers hire individuals with disabilities. One such member agency is AbilityNB, who offers the AccessibleNB program to New Brunswickers (AbilityNB a, 2025). AccessibleNB is a program of free services that are designed to help New Brunswick foster more accessible work environments. They do so by offering accessibility reviews for employer work sites and consultations. AbilityNB also offers the TransitionNB program, where Transition Panners work “one on one with youth under the age of 30 living with a mobility disability to reach education and career goals” (AbilityNB b, 2025).

Another organization, with local offices in Fredericton and Saint John, is Ready, Willing and Able (RWA), a national partnership of Inclusion Canada, the Autism Alliance of Canada, and their member organizations. With funding from the federal government, RWA is “designed to increase the labour force participation of people with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum” (Ready Willing & Able, 2024). RWA is focused on showing Canadian employers that the untapped workforce of working age adults with intellectual disabilities and/or on the autism

Highest Level of Education Among Population Aged 25 to 64 by Gender and Disability Status – New Brunswick – May 2021

	Men	Women	Total
Persons with a Disability			
Less than High School	17%	12%	14%
High School	33%	30%	31%
Post-Secondary	50%	58%	55%
Apprenticeship/Trades	13%	5%	8%
Other Certificate/Diploma	25%	33%	29%
Degree	13%	21%	17%
Persons without a Disability			
Less than High School	12%	6%	9%
High School	28%	25%	27%
Post-Secondary	60%	69%	64%
Apprenticeship/Trades	13%	4%	9%
Other Certificate/Diploma	25%	34%	30%
Degree	22%	31%	26%

spectrum “can help address current labour shortages while making businesses stronger, more diverse and more productive” (Ready Willing & Able, 2024). The organization does so by providing resources to employers including available research, individualized assistance to help increase inclusivity, assistance in identifying suitable candidates, training for current employees, and connections to community agencies who provide employment-related services and supports, amongst other services.

FRANCOPHONIE

There are very few programs specifically targeted at Francophones. Despite some provincial regions being Francophone-heavy, the language of choice on most construction job sites in New Brunswick is English. For those looking to receive funding from governments for programs targeting Francophones, particularly from the federal government, applications can be challenging as they are often required to have to prove the Francophone community is an underrepresented group. Place aux Compétences has developed the *Skills Link* program. This program aims to expand skilled workforce development, providing “an alternative for unemployed individuals, school dropouts or at-risk youth aged 16-30” (PAC NB). Lasting from 12 to 16 weeks, participants are paid for 30 hours a week and receive hands-on training in manufacturing or professional cooking, with lessons that focus on workplace safety and the essential skills required by employers. Participants then have the opportunity to work for an employer in their field of interest. The Skills Link program has been sponsored by Place aux Compétences since 2009 with various partners such as Service Canada, multiple school districts and schools, the Kent Community Inclusion Network, and the New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. The Masonry industry has also actively focused on recruiting members of the Francophone community. In 2019, the Atlantic Masonry Institute connected with school boards to develop a masonry high school program, paid with money from the institute (5 cents per block sold). The program takes 2 days to train shop teachers about masonry, who can then take it back to their classrooms and teach curriculum. This program currently exists in 10 Francophone high schools and 9 Anglophone schools.

In conclusion, Section 1 makes several things clear:

1. There is a significant and increasing need in the NB Skilled Trades labour market for more workers.
2. There are several demographics who can and should be specifically targeted for recruitment, namely women, Newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and youth. These groups offer much potential in terms of what they could offer to the industry. For the Francophone demographic, there are currently little to no accessible statistics on their involvement in the industry. What is clear is that most programs and resources offered are mostly in English, and not in French.
3. Programs and initiatives do exist in the province, but many are in their infancy, and there is room to improve. Tracking progress for all underrepresented groups is challenging however, as we do not have consistent and current numbers across demographics.
4. Programs and initiatives do exist in the province; however, many are still in their infancy and are not province wide. Others are underfunded with no potential to expand, and others have not seen success in attracting the groups they aim to service. Without an overarching skilled trades strategy from the provincial government, there are gaps in the programming.

In Section 2, both federal and other provincial/territorial efforts will be examined in order to highlight promising practices that may be beneficial to New Brunswick moving forward.

SECTION 2: CANADA

Across Canada, federal, provincial, and community efforts are being implemented to help solve the employment gap in the skilled trades. Existing programs target women, Indigenous peoples, Newcomers, youth, and promote general culture change. The following section will start by outlining federal initiatives and then identifies promising practices enacted in Canadian provinces and territories.

FEDERAL- GENERAL PROMISING PRACTICES

On a national level, the Canadian Construction Association (CCA) has developed the *Talent Fits Here* campaign, a national public awareness campaign meant to inspire a “new generation of workers” to explore careers in construction. The campaign challenges the stereotype of construction having “low pay and limited opportunity” careers (CCA, n.d.). Their website offers resources for training opportunities, exploring different industries, and connecting with local associations. It also showcases stories from different target groups outlining their successful experiences in the industry.

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF-FCA) has created several programs and resources. It is important to note their published guide for best recruitment and retention practices guides employers on how to better recruit and retain diverse groups, identifying the following 7 best practice strategies based on case studies:

1. “Build genuine relationships within and outside the company (focus on target groups, i.e. women’s groups, newcomer organizations, etc.)
2. Effective recruitment strategies: reaching out to local employment services, established relationships with trade schools/organizations, referral programs for new recruits, proper use of social media, targeted recruitment materials for different groups, create diverse interviewing team, provide inclusion training for all staff, use inclusive language, refrain from identifying too many requirements in the job posting or consider listing skills as “nice to have” (avoid scaring off potential applicants).

3. Hiring process: Flexibility with timing/venue, consideration of neuro diverse candidates, consider hybrid interview options, taking candidates on tours of company
4. Initial onboarding and training: pairing new person w/ mentor, comprehensive training program (w/ tips on what this training should include)
5. Implement a mentoring program
6. Structuring a mentorship program: volunteers from existing employees, provide training for mentors, create metrics for accountability
7. Support mentoring and positive role model relationships” (CAF-FCA, 2023, 7-11).

This best practices guide has been downloaded over 100 times from their website, and a “webinar series has been developed where stakeholders can join tradeswomen from various sectors across Canada for a discussion on effective recruitment and retention practices” (CAF-FCA, 2024, 6).

With funding from *Workplace Opportunities Removing Barriers to Equity* (WORBE), CAF-FCA has also developed “a guide with effective strategies for recruiting and retaining women and equity-priority groups in the skilled trades” (CAF-FCA, 2024, 6).

FEDERAL – TARGET GROUP: WOMEN

Beyond the efforts of CCA and CAF-FCA, several organizations specifically support women in the skilled trades *The Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades, and Technology* (CCWESTT) is a non-profit national coalition who advocates for a diverse and inclusive Canadian workforce. First begun in 1992, CCWESTT supports over 500,000 people in their network. Specifically for the trades, the coalition developed the *We Are Trades* project which “provides employers with actionable steps to establish a safe and inclusive workplace for women.... *We Are Trades* is designed to guide successful workplace change in three steps: Commit, Create and Sustain” (CCWESTT, n.d.).

Seeking similar goals as CCWESTT but with a specific focus on trades, *Women Building Futures* operates in several provinces to offer skills, training, and support services for women and gender-diverse individuals. In 2024, they announced a partnership with the Government of

Saskatchewan to support the *Journey to Trades* program, a pre-employment program helping women with the skills they need to begin careers in construction (Government of Saskatchewan, 2024). Originally founded in Alberta, the organization connects unemployed women and gender-diverse individuals, or those working multiple low paying jobs, to higher-paying careers in the trades. The organization helps “remove common barriers to financial independence. These barriers include employment training, access to affordable housing, academic and personal readiness, access to affordable childcare, and more” (Women Building Futures, 2024). In a similar vein, Electricity Human Resources Canada (EHRC) offers a Returnship Toolkit for employers, providing a guide to creating pathways for individuals seeking to re-enter the workforce after a period of absence due to child or elder care responsibilities (EHRC, 2022). Fair Trades Toolbox, started in Ontario by Red Seal Refrigeration Mechanic/Gas Fitter Brandi Ferenc, offers similar support to skilled-trades companies across North America with cultural assessment and action plans, onboarding programs, preparation checklists, and educator development support for journeypersons (Fair-Trades Toolbox, 2024).

Another national effort to support the recruitment and retention of women in the skilled trades is the *Supporting Women in Trade* (SWIT) initiative. This national strategy was developed by employers, labour representatives, educators, and equity representatives from multiple trades and regions to create sustainable and measurable change for women. This effort is being led by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF-FCA). Over 300 women apprentices and journeypersons identified action items for change at CAF-FCA’s *Supporting Women in Trades Conferences*. A National Task Force representing members from the apprenticeship community “identified strategic priorities based upon the feedback from the women apprentices and journeypersons and developed a Call to Action for Industry” (CAF-FCA, 2020). With the intention of increasing the proportion of women who work on the job, the strategy is made of the following four SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based) actions:

1. Create awareness of available tools and resources. Campaign for change.
2. **Policies must change.** Government, employers and unions must be accountable for diversity on projects. Provide incentives.
3. The time for action is now. Employers must lead the way through the hiring, training and support of women. **Recognize Champions.**

4. Plan for Change. Commit to **changing the ratio** of women to men on worksites.
Engage all staff (CAF-FCA, 2020).

FEDERAL – TARGET GROUP: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Similar to the CAF-FCA guide to best practices for recruitment and retention, CAF-FCA has also published a guide *Supporting Retention for Indigenous Peoples in the Skilled Trades*. This guide includes an outline of “barriers and best practices for Indigenous apprentices, focusing on skills development, mentoring, cultural understanding, partnerships, flexibility, connection to job opportunities, employment, and financial support” (CAF-FCAb, 2024, 12-13). In their conversations with Knowledge Holders, there is a heavy emphasis on Indigenous training and mentorship opportunities, and that program supports such as accessible transportation, equipment, housing, and food supports are especially important (CAF-FCAb, 2024, 22). The guide also provides the following roadmap to supporting Indigenous peoples from pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and trades careers:

1. Awareness - inspiring Indigenous peoples to pursue the trades.
2. Engagement - increase cultural inclusion and community participation.
3. Supports and Resources - provisions to meet participant needs and encourage individual success.
4. Retention - providing opportunities to grow (CAF-FCAb, 2024, 24).

FEDERAL – TARGET GROUP: NEWCOMERS

Currently, the Federal Skilled Trades Program provides opportunities for skilled workers who want to become permanent residents in Canada via express entry. Applicants must have at least 2 years of full-time work experience within 5 years before application and meet the job requirements set out in the National Occupation Classification. They must also have a valid full-time employment job offer for at least 1 year, or a certificate of qualification in the applicable skilled trade issued by a Canadian provincial, territorial, or federal authority. Minimum scores on language tests are also required (Government of Canada, 2024). Recent changes to the temporary foreign worker program will allow some applicants to enroll in apprenticeship programs without needing a study permit, as long as they have a valid work permit, a job offer from an eligible

construction occupation, and an apprenticeship agreement with an employer (Shank, 2025). For international students, the Post Graduate Work Permit for college graduates allows for students learning a skilled trade to apply for a temporary work permit (IRCC, 2024). However, current immigration policies and opportunities for Newcomers to access careers in the skilled trades require further development to address industry needs. In a BuildForce report on the impact of Canadian immigration policies on the construction industry, the research “recommends the adoption of a series of consensus principles by governments to ensure the construction sector can better access skilled workers from abroad in an effort to address projected shortages of skilled labour created by rising construction demands and changing demographics” (2024). Specifically, the report recommends that four reform principles be adopted by the government:

1. “Address educational bias in the Express Entry selection system.
 2. Better align federal and provincial immigration policies and increase transparency.
 3. Ensure industry involvement in labour market planning, analysis and recruitment.
 4. Support competencies-based skills assessments for foreign credential recognition”
- (Buildforce Canada c, 2024).

On a country-wide level, organizations like EHRC have programs such as the Welcoming Newcomer initiative, which provides funding and resources for employers to recruit and retain internationally trained workers, such as a wage subsidy of up to 50%, or \$10,000 maximum, for the cost of the first few months of onboarding (EHRC, 2025).

FEDERAL – TARGET GROUP: YOUTH

Youth are often the primary targets of apprenticeship initiatives and are therefore the target demographic of many CAF-FCA initiatives. Another promising program administered led Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work is the *Fostering Inclusion in Red Seal Trades* (FIRST) program. FIRST “is a nationwide government-sponsored program designed to break down barriers for persons with disabilities through training, testing and helping them secure employment” (CCRW, 2024). The program supports all Red Seal trades and provides tips for increasing awareness of the skills trades industry by visiting local high schools, supporting shop classes, running exploration activities, worksite tours and student workplace programs, and providing presentations for both students and adults interested in learning more. Furthermore,

organizations such as the Mechanical Contractors Association of Canada (MCAC) have begun to target younger demographics. With their newly published children’s book “Susie’s Shed”, MCAC is using children’s literature to engage with younger generations and their parents to help debunk myths surrounding the skilled trades.

Across the Canadian provinces and territories, efforts are being made by government, industry, and communities to address construction labour market needs. These programs range from general recruitment initiatives such as the Ontario Skills Development Fund (Government of Ontario, 2024), and the accelerated training programs in Quebec (CBC News, 2023). In Atlantic Canada, projects such as the *Atlantic Apprenticeship Harmonization Project*, works to streamline “apprenticeship training rules, processes, and standards and develop a common Information Technology (IT) system”. These efforts make it easier for individuals to begin careers in the trades and relocate across province in Atlantic Canada, if needed (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2023). The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) has also announced a contribution of \$210,000 through their Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI) program “to help grow the construction workforce in Atlantic Canada” (ACOA, 2024). This research seeks to focus, however, on efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented groups into the skilled trades. Below, several promising practices being enacted across the country are highlighted.

FEDERAL – TARGET GROUP: PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

On a more general, not construction-related, level, there are several organizations, campaigns and services on a federal level that exist for both job seekers with disabilities and employers looking to hire them. The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) works with “employment service providers, employers, community allies and stakeholders working toward employment inclusion of persons who experience disability” (CASE, 2025) CASE’ aim is to “facilitate full participation in the labour force by offering resources, expertise and support to service providers” (CASE, 2025). Their members receive sector-specific information, targeted network opportunities, significant discounts for learning events, best practices, a unified voice to decision makers, free advertising of job vacancies. Inclusion Canada, formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living, is a national federation for people with intellectual

disabilities and their families. The federation has over 300 local associations across 13 provincial and territorial member organizations (Inclusion Canada, 2025) The Canadian Centre for Responsible Work (CCRW) is a national not-for-profit that exists to promote and support meaningful and equitable employment of persons with disabilities. The organization runs a Disability Confidence program to support job seekers with all types of disabilities as well as businesses who wish to hire employees who have disabilities. CCRW states that individuals in Atlantic Canada have reported a higher percentage of disabilities compared to other regions, with notable barriers in the trades sector. Furthermore, almost 14% of the Red Seal Trade workforce identify as having a disability. To help businesses foster inclusive workplaces, CCRW has developed a Disability Confidence toolkit, which is a “comprehensive resource designed to help businesses foster inclusive workplaces. Offers tools and guidance on accommodations, built environment, recruitment, onboarding, communication, and performance management” (CCRW, n.d.). More specific services include the employment and settlement support services offered by the Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS) Society for immigrants with disabilities. Their support aims to “assist eligible clients to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment by overcoming barriers and challenges when entering the Canadian labor market” (PICS Society, 2024). The Open Door Group offers employer support services that include “employment pipeline, free short-term training, job assessments and pre-screening, job matching, job start support and post-hire engagement with both the employee and the employer” (Open Door Group, n.d.). For both candidates and employers, Job Ability Canada have developed an AI-driven virtual platform to showcase employment skills and post jobs (Jobs Ability Canada, 2025).

In addition to support services, national campaigns exist to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities. For example, from January 2024 to March 2024, the federal government ran a campaign called “Inclusive Workplaces”, with a goal to “raise awareness among employers that persons with disabilities are an important source of talent who can bring a broader range of experiences and skills in the workplace. By tapping into this labour pool, employers can address their employment needs and bring value to their workplaces” (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2024). Another example is that of the Hire for Talent Campaign, funded in part by the federal government and run by the Community Business Development Corporation based in Campbellton, New Brunswick. This campaign is a Canada-

wide awareness campaign aims to increase employer awareness about how people with disabilities are a talented part of the workforce and provides resources to help employers tap into this talent pool during their search for skilled workers (Restigouche CBDC Inc., 2023).

Delivered with 20 organizations from across Canada, this includes a free employer toolkit with informative tools about the skills that individuals with disabilities bring to workplace, along with “how-to” resources with practical tips and strategies. They have also developed a mapped network of service providers across Canada for both employers and job seekers to consult.

For the construction-related work force in particular, fewer resources exist. The federal government funds the Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy, whose mandate is to support a trades workforce that is “skilled, inclusive, certified and productive” (Employment and Social Development Canada b, 2024.). Amongst other equity-deserving groups, persons with disabilities seeking employment in the skilled trades are one of the demographics that the fund aims to help. CAF-FCA released a report in the fall of 2024 titled “Hiring, Training, and Retaining Apprentices with Disabilities”. The report lists three steps to success; educating oneself, seeking advice, and hiring, training, and retaining. The education step includes learning the business case for hiring those with disabilities, learning the rights that exist, and learning about possible accommodations that can be offered. Step two encourages employers to seek out organizations that exist to help, such as some of the organizations mentioned above. Step three then tells employers to not just stop at the research, but to act. This section outlines recommendations on how to create an inclusive hiring and training process, from the original job posting to retention (CAF-FCA c, 2024). Electricity Human Resources Canada furthers this mission with their EnAbling Change Toolkit, a collaboration project with the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (EHRC, 2023). The toolkit was developed with tools meant to “support employers in engaging with candidates with a disability so they may feel more included in the sector”, and all resources developed were done so in partnership with industry stakeholders (EHRC, 2023). EnAbling Change includes numerous resources, such as the “From Disability to Inclusion” toolkit, with resources and best practices on effective recruitment and retention includes. They also provide a Safe Space Disclosure Tool, an “anonymous and confidential survey designed for employees to provide feedback on workplace inclusion and accessibility” (EHRC, 2023).

THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – TARGET GROUP: WOMEN

There are currently programs and initiatives in many provinces across Canada focused on recruiting and retention of women the skilled trades.

Available supports range from centres dedicated to supporting women in the trades, to specialised educational opportunities. On the more general end of the spectrum, the BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCCWITT) provides essential services in the province by actively recruiting women and preparing them for a range of trades occupations within construction and the skilled trades industry. Their Skills Training services are delivered in both a hybrid cohort-based model and a one-on-one model. To ensure that learning does not stop with this training, participants are subsequently guided towards additional training, certifications, and apprenticeship programs to ensure a smooth, continuous pathway for women wanting to enhance their career progression (BCCWITT, 2024) The Western Joint Electrical Training society also have developed a Women in Trades (WIRED) initiative. With the goal of promoting gender diversity and inclusion within the skilled trades, the initiative includes gateway training workshops for women to explore, online learning platform and resources, as well as upgrade courses with gender-minority apprentices and red seal electricians getting priority (WJETS, 2025). Provinces such as Alberta and Nova Scotia have program supports for women apprentices in particular, aimed at incentivizing women to pursue their apprenticeship in the skilled trades (OAWA, 2024; Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, 2024).

Both provinces also run programs through local colleges. The Nova Scotia Community College runs *Women Unlimited*, “a free, 14-week pathway program that empowers diverse women to explore a range of trades and technology programs, pursue specialized post-secondary education, and find meaningful careers” (NSCC, 2024). In Alberta, women have several different organizations intended to ease their entrance into the trades. Both the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) run unique programs. NAIT provides financial resources and networking events for women pursuing trades careers through their program Women Leading and Building Canada’s Future (NAIT, n.d.). *emPower – Women in Trades* is run by Manpower Services Alberta in partnership with SAIT and teaches introductory skills to unemployed or marginally employed women looking to enter the skilled trades (SAIT, 2024). With a similar title, the Manitoba program “EmpowHer” began November 2023 and is run by the Manitoba Construction Sector Council (MCSC), as a “first-of-

its-kind multi-sector, collaborative project designed to prepare women for employment in the construction, film, or manufacturing industries in Manitoba” (MCSC a, 2024). The program ran as a 12-week internship for 45 women, each able to work within their respective sector. Those in construction were supported by Sherwin Williams and Purpose Construction. The MCSC also hosts annual women in trades conferences and employment workshops for their members (MCSC a, 2024). Their efforts are further supported by the organization Manitoba Women in Construction (MWC), who work to act as the advocacy voice for women in the Manitoba construction industry and provide career development and networking. In Ontario, events called “Jill of All Trades” (JOAT) have been run since 2014, providing “hands-on experiences to young women in grades 9-12 to introduce them to the possibilities of a career in the trades” (Jill of All Trades, 2025). Founded by Conestoga College, they also work with other colleges across Canada to deliver similar events.

More on the niche end of the support spectrum, there are a variety of strategies being adopted. Albertan programs span a variety of approaches and deliveries, with podcasts like “She Wears Work Boots” spotlighting success stories of women in construction (Spotify AB, 2024), and the career discovery expos delivered by *We Build A Dream* which highlight opportunities for female students interested in the skilled trades and STEM (Build a Dream, n.d.). Programs for specific trades such as pipefitting exist for women (United Association of Plumbers Pipefitters, 2024) and for specific regions such as Leduc County’s Construction Readiness & Access for Future Tradeswomen (Selections Career Support Services, 2022). In Ontario, the Centre for Skills Development runs a free specialised program for eligible low-income women looking to learn enhanced general carpentry. During twenty-two full weeks of training, women are provided with the tools and training to transition into careers in the construction industry (Centre for Skills Development, 2024). Additionally, the Ontario provincial government passed the “Working for Workers Five Act, 2024”, which includes measures requiring that “menstrual products be provided on larger construction sites and mandating that washrooms are clean and sanitary. The legislation, the first of its kind in Canada, would make the skilled trades more accessible to women and support women at work” (Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, 2024).

Quebec’s efforts to further the integration and retention of women in the construction industry have existed for over a decade. In 2013, a committee was established by the Association de la Construction du Quebec (ACQ) to develop a set of actions to address the issue. As a result of their findings, the *Programme pour la formation des femmes en entreprise* was created to train and support women on job sites. It is entirely funded by the construction industry workers training fund. The fund is meant to incentivise employers by allowing for financial compensation “equal to 30% of the salary of a woman employee benefiting from the program, up to \$10,000 and for a maximum of 52 weeks” (ACQ, n.d.). Moreover, 6 measures have been put in place to help boost women’s presence on construction jobs sites which lift some conditions on competency certificates for women graduates skilled trades programs; expand the journey person to apprentice ratio when the apprentices are female; grants preferential status to women in some cross-regional circumstances, and enables “women to be systematically referred to an employer when the latter submits a referral request” (ACQ, n.d.). As a result of their efforts to increase women working on construction sites, as of 2023, “7,480 women – 3.79% of the total workforce – were working on construction sites, and almost 10% of new workers in the industry were women” (Commission de la construction du Quebec, 2024).

THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – TARGET GROUP: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Initiatives focused on recruiting Indigenous peoples into the skilled trades exist in many different forms across the country. We see the most programs in British Columbia, where SkilledTradesBC prioritises engaging with the Indigenous demographic. After establishing an Indigenous Advisory Council in 2008, and a director of Truth and Reconciliation in 2022, the organization is working on the continuous implementation of their Provincial Indigenous Skills Training plan, “which focusses on creating a clear and sustainable path and opportunities for Indigenous peoples and their communities within B.C.’s trades training and apprenticeship system” (SkilledTradesBC, 2024). SkilledTradesBC runs several programs deliver skills development and employment programs across the province.

The Skilled Trades Employment Program (STEP) works to fill available apprenticeship positions by supporting program participants by “providing job search coaching and support, short-term certificates and soft skills training, job placements, and personal supports to ensure participants

are job ready” (SkilledTradesBC b, 2024). The K5T Community-Led Apprenticeship Development Program “consists of an introduction to Kitselas First Nation, Indigenous cultural competency, how the apprenticeship system works, and current labour market information. Participants complete in-house experiential Trades Sampler Programs to determine their interest in high demand trades in their area” and then continues to offer pre-employment support such as application coaching and safety training (K5T, 2023). The Trades Access Program is a 16–20-week pre-apprenticeship training program, during which participants are provided a customized work plan which is then housed in a database for potential employers to access (PGNAETA, 2024). Programs exist for specific trades, such as the heavy equipment operator program run by the Squamish Nation (Squamish Nation, 2024). Other programs help interested individuals experience several trades, such as the Trades Sampler program at Thompson Rivers University, which includes up to 6 different construction trades and provides “experiential learning, significant hands-on experiences, and an introduction to theory and math related to the specific trade” (Thomson Rivers University, n.d.).

Similar to the Indigenous Advisory Council in BC, the Nova Scotian Aboriginal Apprenticeship Advisory Committee works to advocate for Indigenous peoples to the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. The council holds an “an annual conference for frontline workers to support their knowledge of, and engagement with, the apprenticeship system. Native Employment Officers, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey School Advisors, NSCC Student Advisors, Indigenous Organizations, Pathway Consultants from the Department of Education and Apprenticeship staff, among others, come together to participate in workshops and activities and listen to guest speakers, panellists, and workshop facilitators” (Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency b, 2024).

Similarly, Alberta has several organizations working to advocate and recruit Indigenous peoples interested in the trades. For those already in the trades, the Alberta Indigenous Construction Career Centre (AICCC) works to connect Indigenous tradespeople to work opportunities (Norquest College, 2024). For those hoping to learn a trade, the Educational Partnership Foundation provides resources to Indigenous tradespeople who need funding (The Educational Partnership Foundation, 2024). Indigenous youth can also receive support from “Building Trades of Alberta – Path Forward” when seeking a career in the trades (Building Trades of Alberta,

2024). Trade Winds to Success is another Canadian non-profit that provides pre-trades training and support to Indigenous people in Alberta. Their intention is to help participants secure employment, journey person status and ultimately economic self-sufficiency (Trade Winds to Success, n.d.).

In Manitoba, similar to their efforts with women, the MCSC aims to recruit Indigenous people into the skilled trades. One initiative of significant interest is their efforts to deliver

“Project Specific training in remote Indigenous communities to support community employment on any local upcoming construction projects. Courses are industry-driven to address the skill gaps identified on local construction projects. Students are selected by the community; Instructors are most often Indigenous and wherever possible from the community where training is delivered” (MCSCb, 2024).

Indigenous youth in the province can further be supported by YouthBuild, which is administered by the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology. The institute delivers 2 programs, the first being an exploration to trades which offers “for-credit high school courses which include Woodworking, Construction Technology, Mathematics and English Language Arts at the Grade 12 level” (Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, 2016). Participants then take part in an 8-week work practicum and receive a Mature High School Diploma upon successful completion and graduation. The second program at apprentice level teaches students Level 1 Carpentry and includes a work practicum (Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, 2016).

In Nunavut, efforts are under way to recruit and retain Nunavut Inuit to the construction industry. In 2024, a partnership was announced between the Makigiaqta Inuit Training Corporation and NCC Development. Together, they will develop a \$4.9 million project in which funding is provided, over 6 years, to train Inuit as apprentices. The training will be offered in both Inuktitut and English and is open to 90 Inuit participants. According to the plan, “in the first year, the program will identify 10 people from each community to complete 10-week training introductory courses. Then, those people will move to practical on-site training as part of a mentorship program. Flaherty said “ideally, the program will prepare students to enter a trades program at Nunavut Arctic College” (CBC News, 2024).

THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – TARGET GROUP: NEWCOMERS

Initiatives intended to recruit Newcomers to Canada into the skilled trades are still in their infancy across the country, however we are beginning to see efforts being made in almost every province and territory.

The BC Construction Association (BCCA), with support from government funding, has developed an innovative approach called the Integrating Newcomers program. The program offers free, nationwide employment coaching services for skilled immigrants preparing to transition into careers in Canada's construction industry before relocating to the country. Newcomers are assigned a career coach who offers job hunting supports, skills and education assessments, and connections to provincial professional associations and authorities. Coaches also help suggest the “most relevant pre- and post-arrival settlement services you should access” (BC Construction Association, 2024).

In the recent past, the Ontario provincial government has also partnered with the non-profit YMCA/YWCA to invest in offering Newcomers supports to pursue careers in the skilled trades. In 2021, the government announced an investment of \$900,000 to connect 900 Newcomers across the province with jobs as “carpenters, electricians, plumbers, mechanics, welders, chefs, and other in-demand trades. Through the free, virtual workshops, Newcomers will receive the training and job connections needed to enter rewarding careers” (Newsroom Ontario, 2021). The Centre for Skills Development offers the free Skilled Trades Exploration for Newcomers program, also funded by the Ontario provincial government. This 8-week hybrid program offers an opportunity for Newcomers to explore which trade they might be best matched with (Centre for Skills Development b, 2024). For those interested in home renovations specifically, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada funds a free 10-week program through Skilled Trades and Language Training and Settlement Services (Centre for Skills Development c, 2024). Funding is also available through organizations like the Windmill Microlending Charity, with offices in Ontario, Alberta, Quebec, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Windmill offers microlending opportunities to skilled immigrants and refugees such as affordable loans for education and professional development along with career coaching and community hub resources (Windmill Microlending, 2024). For employers looking to recruit from the Newcomer demographic, WILL Employment Solutions based out of London, Ontario, are developing a Newcomer Talent Retention Network project, with their experts supporting employers through

six strategies: equitable and inclusive onboarding strategies, intercultural communication, equity and inclusion, human resources, immigration law, and community settlement (WILL Employment Solutions, 2022).

Newcomers already living in Alberta are able to receive support through both Lethbridge College and NAIT to pursue a career in the skilled trades. The Pathways to the Trades program in Lethbridge provides apprenticeship entry exam prep, labour market knowledge, and networking activities for new Canadians (Lethbridge Polytechnic, 2024). NAIT offers an accelerated trades entry program in partnership with the Albertan government, which includes a 3-year pre-apprenticeship program designed to reduce cultural, financial, and language barriers (Career Fair Canada, 2024).

In Manitoba, the main provider of recruitment programs for underrepresented groups, MCSC, offers support for Newcomers as well. Hosting mentorship opportunities for clients and counsellors at immigrating serving agencies allows for connections to be made between Newcomers and construction employment opportunities within the safe space of the supports given by immigration agencies (MCSC c, 2024).

In the Canadian North, programs for Newcomers are increasing rapidly as well. In 2024, the Northwest Territories Nominee Program surpassed its federally regulated annual nomination cap for the first time in its history (Government of Northwest Territories, 2024). An agreement was reached between the federal government and government of Yukon to “give new work permits to up to 215 temporary workers identified and supported by the Government of Yukon to continue working while they process their permanent residence applications under the Yukon Nominee Program” (IRCC c, 2024). This is in addition to the Yukon Community Program, which allows for employers to “offer a foreign worker a combination of jobs that add up to 1 full-time position”, giving flexibility to employers in Yukon communities (Government of Yukon, 2024).

The Atlantic Canadian provinces are also increasingly recognizing the value of recruiting newcomers to address skilled trades employment gaps. In 2024, members of Prince Edward Island’s construction industry travelled internationally, namely to England and Ireland, to recruit skilled workers at job fairs (CBC News b, 2024). In Nova Scotia, the province’s Apprenticeship Agency partners with the Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia to support

individuals with prior trade experience. Their Work-based Trades Practical Assessment program “provides an opportunity to have your trades skills assessed” through a three-month work experience with a trades employer, and then be placed in an apprenticeship and/or challenge for trade certification (Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency c, 2024). The Nova Scotia provincial government has also opened a new stream of their Provincial Nominee Program, the Critical Construction Worker Pilot. Aiming to broaden the pool of skilled workers in the province, it does not require a high school diploma, which is required by most other immigration streams (Government of Nova Scotia, 2023).

For Newcomers already pursuing careers in the skilled trades in Quebec, the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD) Construction Union offers support to workers, keeping them informed of their rights, and advocating for “legislate to regulate the employment of foreign workers on construction sites” (CSD Construction, 2024).

THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – TARGET GROUP: YOUTH

Programs and campaigns intended to win over youth entering the workforce to the skilled trades are underway across the country. Many of these programs offer either funding, work, or exploratory opportunities to discover what a career in the skilled trades would involve.

Funded by the Albertan government and distributed through Albertan Construction Associations, the Albertan Construction New Talent Grant Program offers employers wage subsidies of 50%, up to \$5,000, to hire current post-secondary students and recent graduates for “temporary work experience placements of at least 3 weeks in length which can take place at any time during the year. Placements can include engineers, technologists, accounting and finance, human resources, IT, logistics, procurement, safety, marketing, etc.” (Alberta Construction Association, 2024). For youth in Prince Edward Island looking for funding opportunities while exploring the trades,

Skills PEI offers the Youth Apprenticeship Award for those enrolled in the Youth Apprenticeship Program with at least 250 hours of work experience recorded. Students can apply for a \$1,000 youth apprenticeship award in their graduating year, which includes a \$500 bursary and \$500 tuition credit to Holland College (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2024).

In Manitoba, the MCSC runs the Trade Up Manitoba program, which is a “one-stop website for information on Manitoba’s construction industry. Offering in-depth looks at both apprenticeable trades, and non-apprenticeable careers within the province” (MCSC, 2023). The website includes many resources, such as a Teacher’s Corner where teachers can schedule presentations, access PowerPoint presentations and lesson plans and activities, safety guides, and career brochures. The Student’s Corner includes activities, challenges, and career development information. This one-stop shop strategy is evident in several provinces. In Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council (NSCSC) built a Trades Exhibition Hall to be experienced live. Developed by a partnership between industry and the province, the venue offers visitors a tangible construction experience. It features 14 different interactive exhibits and a variety of hands-on demonstrations, as well as opportunities to speak with “industry professionals at different stages of their careers” (Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council, 2024). For those who cannot physically visit the venue, a virtual tour is also available online. Following this strategy, an announcement was made in 2021 that the federal and provincial government of PEI would aid funding to “carry out renovations and upgrades to an existing facility and create a new construction industry training centre” (ACOA, 2021). Similarly, the Ontario Centre for Skills Development runs the Get In Gear program, which is a 6-week, full time, free skilled trades exploration program. The program allows youth to “engage in hands-on training in construction and manufacturing, working directly with tools and materials to gain practical, real-world experience. Additionally, [they] participate in workshops to explore various trades, meet industry professionals, and learn about different career paths within these fields” (Centre for Skills Development d, 2024). The Ontario Centre for Skills Development also offers their free Skilled Trades Assessment Readiness Program (STAR). Designed to help aspiring individuals prepare for apprenticeship assessments, the program helps significantly improve English and math skills necessary for a successful career in the trades and access is not limited only to youth (Centre for Skills Development e, 2024).

In the Northern provinces and territories, Skills Canada plays a significant role in reaching out to youth about the skilled trades. In Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories, Skills Canada chapters run information sessions about the apprenticeship process, hands on experiences, and guest speakers. Moreover, Skills Clubs are extracurricular programs run by volunteers who help participants experiment with different trades. In Yukon, Skills also holds the Yukon Territorial

Skills Competition. This is a multi-trade and technology skills competition that gives participants the potential opportunity to compete at the national skills competition (SkillsCompetences Canada Yukon, 2024). In Nunavut, Skills Nunavut holds events such as the national trades and technology week, trade show events, and intensive skills camps. They also hold a conference is held solely for young women hoping to explore the trades. As part of this conference, known as Arnauvugut, 30 youth were brought “from all three regions of Nunavut to Rankin Inlet to give them a chance to Try 5 different trades at Rankin Inlet’s trades school. The trades were Plumbing, Heavy Equipment Operator, Carpentry, Oil and Heating, and Electrical” (SkillsCompetences Canada Nunavut, n.d.).

In addition to the programming offered by Skills Northwest Territories, since 1995 the NWT government has also been running the Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) for high school students. The program provides students “interested in skilled trades with an opportunity to gain valuable work experience while completing their high school education and earning work experience credits. SNAP also provides employers with the opportunity to develop young workers in a designated trade, fill their own skill gaps, and re-invest in their home communities” (Government of Northwest Territories b, n.d.). The province also offers funding via the Trades and Occupation Wage Subsidy Program (TOWSP), which “can assist employers with offsetting the costs of hiring apprentices. An employer can receive a wage subsidy for up to 3,200 hours of work experience (a maximum of 1,600 hours per fiscal year) at a maximum of \$9.00 per hour, and \$16.00 for female apprentices in non-traditional trades” (Government of Northwest Territories c, n.d.).

THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – TARGET GROUP: PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Similar to what has been noted on the country-wide level, there are well-developed initiatives and organizations meant to help individuals with disabilities enter the workforce, however they do not tend to be specific to the construction related skilled trades. A few notable examples include the Ontario-based organization, Abilities to Work, who provides customized recruitment services and both web and built environment audits to businesses looking to hire job seekers with disabilities (Abilities to Work. n.d.). JVS Toronto also provides specialized disability and

inclusive employment programs. Their programs range from job readiness to employment and inclusion programs, along with an AI resource center meant to “to create meaningful employment, training and volunteer opportunities that develop work, life and social skills” (JVS Toronto, 2025). The programs at JVS are delivered by Community Participation Support Workers, Employment Counsellors, Workforce Specialists and Job Coaches, ensuring the proper knowledge and experience. Similar to initiatives we see for other equity groups, the Ontario provincial government helps fund programs like My Job Match, which was created for employers, job seekers with disabilities, and employment support professionals to track and match job opportunities (My Job Match, n.d.). In Manitoba, the Employment Preparation Centre is the largest employment training center in Winnipeg for individuals with disabilities. The Centre offers job readiness assessment services, employment services, and employment supports, including temporary on-site support to assist with on-the-job training (Manitoba Possible, n.d.). The province also has the Manitoba Supported Employment Network (MSEN), a “a professional network of individuals and organizations invested in employment and full community inclusion for people who live with a disability” (MSEN, 2025). In Alberta, Selections Career Support Services has developed the Get Ready in Trades (GRIT) exploration and development program for youth with disabilities. The program includes career planning, pre-apprenticeship training, pre=employment training, job shadowing, one-on-one consultations, and employment placement. For employers, they offer 8–12-week wage subsidy incentives (Selections Career Support Services b, 2022). In British Columbia, Skilled Trades BC has published their 2024-2027 Accessibility Plan in response to the Accessible British Columbia Act. Their plan prioritizes empowering employees to continuously learn and build an accessible and inclusive workplace culture, create and review policies, ensure equal access to information, and improve recruitment and employment processes by reducing barriers for candidates (SkilledTradesBC c, 2024, 12). Skilled Trades BC also collaborated with Community Living BC on a project that “research[ed], develop[ed], and design[ed] inclusive apprenticeship pathways for people with disabilities” (SRDC, 2024).

THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – OTHER

Beyond the specific parameters of each target group outlined above, a diversity of efforts is being made across the country to recruit and retain people to the skilled trades.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the provincial Construction Association (NCLA) has a virtual Centre of Excellence for their members, which offers the opportunity to advance professional standing and qualifications. Their Centre of Excellence (CoE) Education program helps members align skills “directly with those in the commercial & industrial construction industry” and “features a wide variety of education and training opportunities through live webinars and courses, as well as e-learning” (NCLA, 2021). Furthermore, the Canada-NL Job Grant Program allows for education with the CoE to have up to 2/3s covered.

There are initiatives targeting all underrepresented groups, such as the Trade Starters program which is operated by the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society in BC. This program provides pre-apprenticeship training to equity-deserving groups through a hybrid delivery that utilizes both cohort-based programming and individual case management (Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society, n.d.). In Alberta, Build Together Alberta aims to attract and train more individuals from underrepresented groups to the unionized skilled trades in the province (Building Trades of Alberta b, 2024). The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology also runs a free event series called “Next in Trades” that works to encourage people from all backgrounds and abilities to explore a potential career in the skilled trades (NAIT b, n.d.). In Nova Scotia, efforts are being made to support African Nova Scotians as well, which includes the Apprenticeship Agency working in partnership with the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs and the Black Business Initiative. They collaborate to deliver “apprenticeship Kick-start events that promote apprenticeship and skilled trades careers to youth and career seekers. Events include guest speakers, fun activities, and success stories told by apprentices and certified tradespersons” (Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency d, 2024).

In conclusion, efforts are underway across federal, provincial, and municipal levels to recruit and retain underrepresented groups by making the skilled trades industry more accessible, appealing, and supportive for starting and progressing in a career. While some programs are newer than others, it is encouraging that all target groups are included. Identifying the diverse strategies and actions being enacted in diverse jurisdiction provides the New Brunswick construction industry with the knowledge and ability to identify some generalizable and transferable promising practice while also finding inspiration for an improved future.

SECTION 3: INTERNATIONAL

The final section of this report outlines some promising practices from international governments and organizations and provides a brief scan of Canadian recruitment efforts in international countries. By offering some insight into what is being done globally, readers are given a more comprehensive picture of what options currently exist to respond to the employment gaps in skilled trades. The trends that we are seeing in the skilled trades and construction labour market are not isolated to Canada, but are prevalent in other countries. Below, a few promising practices from Australia and the United Kingdom that may be considered transferable to New Brunswick are outlined.

In Australia, where the construction industry is currently lacking 90,000 of its required workforce to meet government goals (Evelyn Manfield, 2024), programs generally seem to be targeting students and women. The Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has established a goal to improve existing *Vocational Education and Training* (VET) programs, where skilled trades training is situated, for secondary students. These VET programs enable secondary students to acquire workplace skills through nationally recognized, specialized training while still at school. The result is that participants gain credits towards both the VET qualifications and their educational certificate (The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2023). For women, the Australian Constructors Association (ACA) has partnered with the Government of New South Wales and their *Women in Construction Industry Innovation Program* to develop a program specifically targeted at attracting mid-career women to the construction industry. The initiative is meant to fund innovative ideas supporting the creation of inclusive workplace cultures, the attraction and retention of women, and the support of women in employment and leadership roles. The programme includes a public awareness campaign, an exploration website or women to learn about careers in construction, and opportunities to visit construction sites (Australian Constructors Association, 2024). This initiative is part of a larger effort set forth by the *Construction Industry Culture Taskforce*, made up of the ACA, the governments of New South Wales and Victoria, and workplace researchers. Focusing on changing the culture for women in particular, the Taskforce states that gender “is the initial priority in a journey towards deepening the diversity and sense of inclusion in the construction

sector that will also consider disability, ethnicity and age” (Construction Industry Culture Taskforce, 2024). This gender-focused strategy is seen in efforts from NGOs as well.

Empowered Women in Trades (EWIT) is an Australian social enterprise and charity whose mission is to “transform the trades industry by empowering women and non-binary people in skilled trades, whilst fostering a culture of inclusivity” (EWIT, 2024). As a social enterprise side, EWIT has developed innovative talent attraction programs to increase female and non-binary representation in skilled trades. Their immersive Trade Academy program offers both a virtual learning platform with pre-recorded content and live virtual days, hands-on practical training and opportunities to connect with mentors and industry professionals. Their Tools Skills Days offer the opportunity to participants to build confident handling basic tools used throughout the skilled trades. In all their educational programs, EWIT focuses on “positive psychology” in addition to “hands-on learning, industry insights, and career opportunities” (EWIT b, 2024). Acting as a charitable organization, EWIT supports vulnerable and disadvantaged women and non-binary people with their skilled trades career. The organization provides “comprehensive programs, coaching and resources to empower these women / non-binary and equip them with the necessary skills to thrive in the skilled trades. Additionally, [they] offer essential Personal Protection Equipment packs to ensure their safety on the job” (EWIT, 2024). EWIT’s focus on the psychological aspects of joining and staying in the trades is especially interesting when considering the greater objective of cultural change that is needed to reverse declining apprenticeship rates, and so their strategy is therefore a promising practice worthy of consideration.

In the United Kingdom, the shortage of skilled labour has led to the “creation of a new body with strategic oversight for the skills system” (Currie & Brown, 2024). A promising practice for those trying to simplify and amalgamate the resource options being offered to those looking to enter the skilled trades is the *Building People* network. Referred to as a “network of networks” for construction and the building environment, Building People seeks to “simplify access to careers opportunities for individuals and enable employers to widen talent pools, with a laser focus on under-representation and inclusion” (Building People, 2024). The skills hub provides resources

for individuals looking for employment, employers, and industry. The website provides individuals with valuable resources to advance their careers in the construction sector. It allows users to connect with organizations and career support services, access networks promoting inclusion and representation, and explore industry knowledge. Additionally, it offers information about webinars, conferences, networking events, job boards, work opportunities, and equity, diversity, and inclusion resources. This effort to limit redundancy and act as a library of supports is important for target groups such as Newcomers who are often inundated with information and could benefit from more simplified guidance.

A promising strategy seen in the United States is that of the Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) approach, facilitated by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The TPM approach is a “demand-driven strategy to create real career pathways for students and workers with talent pipelines aligned to dynamic business needs” (TPM Academy, 2024). The approach, which allows employers to take the lead, consists of six strategies based on best practices to follow, as outlined below:

“Strategy 1: Organize for Employer Leadership and Collaboration - Organize employers to identify the most promising opportunities for engagement around similar workforce needs.

Strategy 2: Project Critical Job Demand - Develop projections for job openings to determine with accuracy the type of talent and how much of it employers need.

Strategy 3: Align and Communicate Job Requirements - Create a shared language to better communicate competency, credentialing, and other hiring requirements of critical jobs in ways that allow employers to signal similarities and differences.

Strategy 4: Analyze Talent Supply - Identify where employers historically source their most qualified talent and analyze the capacity of those sources—as well as untapped talent sources—to meet projected demand.

Strategy 5: Build Talent Supply Chains - Build talent supply chains to create a positive return on investment for all partners.

Strategy 6: Engage in Continuous Improvement and Resiliency Planning - Use data from your talent supply chain to identify the most promising improvement opportunities to generate a better return on investment and plan for disruption to support a more agile talent pipeline” (TPM Academy b, 204).

With efforts such as the CANB 100-day challenge and the CANB Skilled Trades Consortium already accomplished, or underway, several of the TPM strategies have been already successfully attempted.

INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT

Several Canadian initiatives, led by both government and private companies, aim to recruit skilled workers from other countries on behalf of employers. During 2023 and 2024, the New Brunswick provincial government held live or virtual recruitment events in Brazil, France, Philippines, UK, Ireland, South Africa and Mauritius. While the French recruitment mission was for the health, finance, and education sectors, rather than for construction and skilled trades positions, the effort to recruit from a French speaking country is one that could be imitated for recruiting Francophones to the skilled trades as well. The 2023 recruitment mission to Sao Paulo, Brazil, is especially interesting and has been highlighted as a promising initiative by the recently published CANB 100 Days Challenge report, *Immigration Pathways into the Construction Workforce*. In an initiative piloted by Skilled Trades NB, in partnership with a leading vocational training center in Brazil, a credential recognition program has been developed to “establish a process where graduates from recognized international institutions automatically receive credits towards their apprenticeship. This simplifies the hiring and training process for employers and provides a more streamlined pathway for internationally trained workers to enter the workforce” (Pond-Deshpande Centre, 2024, 32). While work is still ongoing to determine exact credential transference requirements, once the pilot is complete, the program is intended to be expanded to other countries.

Employers are also going to private recruitment businesses to find international employees and ease the transition for those hired. For example, the *Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium* (EMC) has an international recruitment mission to help Canadian small and medium employers source and recruit foreign trained workers. Their work focuses on the recruitment, immigration, onboarding and integration of foreign employees. EMC's current focus is on employers primarily seeking "welders, machine operators, mechanics, and autobody technicians", and they provide practical testing for some trades as well (EMC Canada, 2024). As part of the process, the EMC team "will work with participant employers to provide services required to complete and submit the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) on behalf of the client, except the postings required under the LMIA process... EMC's team will also work with the successful candidate(s) to obtain all necessary immigration documents required for the candidate's successful entry to Canada" (EMC Canada, 2024). Equinox World is another example of a private international recruitment program for the skilled trades, with their team focused on recruitment from Mexico. Their team has offices in Montreal and Mexico, and handles everything from the legal concerns, to travel arrangements, to ongoing integration needs. They are specialized in recruiting for seasonal trades and other highly specialized needs. Thus far, Equinox World has supported over a hundred employers with the recruitment and integration of more than 800 workers (Equinox World, 2024).

The previous information highlights only a fraction of the current efforts being made to respond to the global trend of a diminishing skilled trades workforces. It is clear that there is an international recognition of the necessity to actively address the shortages in skilled trades labour, and a clear acknowledgement that certain groups have higher potential for recruitment. Women, youth and Newcomers or foreign workers are being recognized as key groups to attract in order to build workforce sustainability. Moving forward, it is important that New Brunswick stays aware of new initiatives and promising practices that could be integrated into the province's strategies. Moreover, the province must stay competitive in the recruiting process, since we are not alone in recognizing the need to hire newcomers.

CONCLUSION

In summary, New Brunswick is experiencing the same shortage of skilled trades workers that is currently affecting Canada and other regions worldwide. This shortage demands that a provincial, industry-led workforce development strategy is created to sustain the industry and meet building objectives. To begin the process of developing that strategy, this report has investigated and identified what is being done by other governments and NGOs to promote skilled trades and fill these employment gaps. With this list of promising practices spanning from local, provincial, and international cohorts, CANB hopes to illuminate possible pathways for New Brunswick to effectively address labor shortages.

Currently, within New Brunswick, existing programs generally focus on youth pathways into skilled trades, with some initiatives targeting women and Indigenous peoples, and fewer focused on Newcomers and Francophones. Existing programs for persons with disabilities are generalized for the full workforce, rather than being skilled trades specific. Programs tend to be region-specific and scattered, and they could provide more benefit to the industry if they were to be both expanded and centralized, limiting any redundancy of supports being offered. Furthermore, impact data from existing programs is inaccessible and limits our ability to track progress.

On a national level, there is a clear effort to promote public awareness of the skilled trades with the goal of changing the cultural characteristics typically attached to working in construction. Particularly for campaigns or programs targeting women, Indigenous peoples, and/or Newcomers, that raise awareness of opportunities within the skilled trades while also working to change cultural stereotypes about who is considered “welcome” has proven to be particularly important. However, current federal policies and opportunities require further development to sufficiently address industry needs to effectively support the immigration pathway to the skilled trades.

In other Canadian provinces and territories, the general trend is that more supports are being made available for women and youth, with some anomalies such as British Columbia, which has a wide variety of programs to support Indigenous peoples. For youth, many of these programs

offer either funding, work, or exploratory opportunities to discover what a career in the skilled trades would involve. While there are efforts to recruit Newcomers in most provinces, most are still in their infancy and require time to develop in order to see their full potential.

Globally, the need for new strategies to attract new demographics to the skilled trades is being recognized. Furthermore, Canadian efforts to recruit foreign workers to address specific labor market needs are becoming more intentional. However, this strategy requires adequate time, resources, and alignment with updated federal immigration policies in order to be effective. Overall, traditional methods of attracting people to and retaining them in the New Brunswick construction sector are not working, and systemic barriers are hindering current immigration efforts. As stated clearly in the November/December 2024 issue of ReNew Canada – The Infrastructure Magazine, the construction industry “can’t approach this with old methods” (18), but we need to expose new demographics to the fact that construction is “an incredible entrepreneurial opportunity for somebody who wants to go into business and build a career” (18).

NEXT STEPS

The information gathered in this report acts as a preliminary step to creating an impactful workforce development strategy. It is important to continue this work to ensure momentum. A possible next step could include identifying options for jointly designed programming that would consist of agreed upon targeted initiatives to support interest in, and access, to high-demand trades and to establish an agreed upon Talent Pipeline Management Strategy (TPMS).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The reality is there is a labor shortage facing New Brunswick. Increasing skills gaps, compounded by an aging workforce, outmigration, and limited participation from underrepresented groups such as women, Indigenous peoples, Newcomers, persons with disabilities, and Francophone populations as well as some negative perceptions of the skilled trades by youth exacerbates this problem.

Existing efforts from local and national jurisdictions, including the provision of programming and supports provide valuable starting points but often lack scale, coordination, and inclusivity to effectively and comprehensively address the province's unique challenges.

International lessons learned by examining different global initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of:

- proactive recruitment;
- centralized resources; and,
- strategic alignment between industry and government.

What is clear from the research is that we need a provincial-wide, industry-led skilled trades strategy. This strategy constitutes the primary goal of the consortium and is the purpose of the research. While there are existing efforts, the lack of unified approach has resulted in no overarching document delegating responsibility to stakeholders and outlining funding processes. This is why CANB has led the charge to develop a consortium based on successful council models that have proven results in other jurisdictions. We look forward to advancing this work alongside government, industry, and groups representing the five underrepresented populations. By working collaboratively to develop the province's first ever skilled trades strategic plan, we are intent on being a leader in Canada for the establishment of a skilled trades talent pipeline. The consortium is how we can get there.

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