

Research Synthesis Report

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Project Description

The primary objectives of the Fort St. John Employment Information Source (FSJ-EIS) are to help address local labour market issues and to assist employers and other stakeholders with the recruitment of workers for Fort St. John and area.

FSJ-EIS has been implemented to substantiate anecdotal information that local employers are experiencing difficulty hiring staff and to create strategies to collaboratively combat these shortages.

In partnership with Service Canada, the FSJ-EIS committee has initiated a Labour Market Partnership to:

- Collect and analyze data regarding local labour market conditions for all community employment sectors
- Determine factors influencing the Fort St. John labour market
- Identify current and future labour market trends
- Provide employers with information and tools to enhance their ability to recruit workers
- Develop collaborative strategies to address the identified labour market issues
- Communicate recommended strategies to employers and stakeholders

The partners of FSJ-EIS are the City of Fort St. John, Employment Connections, Enform, Fort St. John Chamber of Commerce, Northern Lights College, and T.R.A.D.E.S.

Purpose of Report

Ethix Consulting Ltd. signed an agreement with Employment Connections, the host agency for FSJ-EIS, in January 2007 to provide coordination to the project till December 30, 2007.

This report will:

- provide an overview of key information about the labour market
- summarize other reports relevant to employment issues in Fort St. John and area



- identify existing resources and barriers to assist with the implementation of strategies
- identify areas of collaboration with other labor market partnerships
- include potential strategies to address the needs that will have been identified by the community research.

Literature Review

This section is a summary of useful information that impacts attraction and retention of a workforce gathered from a review of the recent literature. As the focus narrows from national to local, less and less studies and reports are available.

National picture

The Canadian employment rate continues to grow. The Labour Force Survey results released in April 2007 indicate that it has reached its highest level in 31 years.

A review of the recent literature reveals an increasing focus on the issue of skills shortages. The main drivers are: an aging workforce, global competition, rapid pace of economy, technological and scientific change.

Median age of the Canadian population, presently at 38.8 is projected to grow to 44.3 by 2031. The average retirement age is 58. By October 2010, 44% of public servants would be eligible to walk off the door.

Our fertility rate of 1.5 is going the wrong way for population replacement (a rate of 2.1 is needed). This points to a need for greater immigration. Ontario is the recipient of most immigrants. Alberta and Manitoba are in an upward trend while BC is losing over time. Major sources of immigrants are: Asian/Pacific- 52.7%, Africa/Middle East- 18.8%, Europe/UK- 15.6%, South/Central America- 9.4%, USA- 3.5%. 73% of immigrants are from visible minority groups. This will change the face of Canada. The immigrant population is growing by 5.4% annually. By 2017, 21% of the population will be visible minorities (24% in Calgary, 49% in Vancouver and 51% in Toronto).

Four in ten adults have literacy skills below what is needed by the labour market. This is especially significant as there is a 33% growth in occupations that require upscale skills.



Employees are becoming more transient and free-wheeling. The voluntary turn over rate continues to grow, especially in critical positions where it grew by 29%. It is estimated that 55% of Canadians are open to look for opportunities and 15% are actively looking. The barriers to moving, however, have become greater. Two-income families are less willing to uproot both working partners to seek employment somewhere else. BC housing prices scare potential migrants from other provinces.

Hours worked in Canada grew on average by 1.5% annually from 2004 to 2005 due in part to large increases in the construction and retail trade industries as well as the finance and insurance sectors. These industries alone accounted for 44% of the growth in hours worked, equal to the creation of some 120,000 jobs annually (The Daily, November 22, 2006).

Key pools of talents remain untapped: foreign workers, Aboriginal population, people with disabilities and women. Skilled immigrants from other countries would help solve the problem, but the barriers are enormous and recruitment from overseas a challenge. *Diversity Magazine* reports that the population of working-age aboriginals in Canada will increase by 48% by 2016. People with disabilities make up the second largest group in Canada covered by the Employment Equity Act; women comprise the largest.

Too few organizations have developed workforce planning strategies. Internal practices and work force environments are not conducive to retaining staff. Many organizations report overall high stress levels, mental health concerns, and higher rates of absenteeism. Canadian organizations continue to under invest in training and development. There continues to be discrimination against age (very young and the older), race (4 times greater for visible minorities than the rest of the population), and gender. Six out of ten immigrants do not work in their occupation or field due to difficulty transferring qualifications, lack of Canadian work experience, and employers not living up to their promises.

Urban Futures Institute reports that 62% of Canada's private companies are already (2006) reporting that a lack of skilled labour is holding back their growth.

Results of a 2006 survey conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide with 380 private and public sector organizations indicate that Canadian companies in need of new talent will raise salaries by 3.5% next year to attract and keep skilled staff in a tight labour market. The salary increase would come on top of a higher than expected 3.6% average wage hike in the June 2005 to June 2006 period. Topping employers' short-term agenda is "recruiting key talent".

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre conducted the Viewpoints 2005 Survey on the Economy and Labour Market in October-November 2005 with 1,169 private and public sector managers and labour leaders. The Public Opinion Survey on Attitudes towards Canada's Skill Shortages was conducted by Viewpoints Research Ltd. in April 2006 and presents the perspectives of 876 Canadians. Combined key findings are:

- The general public is more reserved in judging the seriousness of skills shortages than private and public sector business and labour leaders- respondents in Alberta expressed the highest level of concerns.
- The trades were the top most occupation currently in shortage- except in Manitoba.
- The range of different occupational groups as being most in shortage, either currently or in the future included: professionals, frontline supervisors, senior managers and other managerial occupations.
- The general public was not especially troubled by the fact that young Canadians choose to go to university instead of undertaking apprenticeship and skilled trades training.



- “Soft skills” such as leadership, communication and team work were more likely to be perceived by managers and labour leaders as needing improvement.
- Literacy levels did not appear to emerge as a serious problem. However, labour leaders were concerned that an inaccurate picture of what new skills are needed may be a serious problem in meeting future labour and skills requirements.

Canadian hiring is expected to grow steadily in 2007 with the Organization for Economic Development predicting Canada’s economy will remain stable in spite of an economic slowdown in the United States. Currently, 45% of employers say they have job openings for which they can’t find qualified candidates. Although 44% of employers expect to add 10 or fewer employees in 2007, more than one in five expect to add more than 50 workers, and one in ten plans to hire more than 100 employees (HR Reporter, January 16, 2007).

A recent survey of Canadian undergraduates indicates that their top career goal is to find a balance between personal and professional life. 85.5% out of 851 respondents on a National Quality Institute poll indicated that work-life balance is a bigger issue within their organization than it was 5 years ago.

The Canadian Attitudes toward Learning Survey was conducted in 2006 by the Canadian Council of Learning with 5,000 adults. Results indicate that twice as many Canadians report taking work-related training to perform more effectively in their current jobs (69%) than they do to earn more money (32%) or get a better job (31%). Canadians who have not recently participated in work-related training report they have no need for further training (55%) that they are too busy with work (37%: more frequently reported by men) or are too busy with family (32%: more frequently reported by women). The cost of participating in work-related training is an important factor for people who want further training but are unable to get it. Canadians are more likely to participate in work-related training if they enjoyed their initial experiences with schooling, as are those who believe there is a strong relationship between education and success in life.

Provincial picture

The BC Labour Market Report, March 2007, cites the undated report Human Resource Strategy for British Columbia. By 2015, if every student currently enrolled from K to 12 graduated and found a job, they would fill only 74% of the upcoming job openings. The report identifies four key areas of best practices: enhancing recruiting, improving productivity, improving retention and building a long term HR plan.

In its inventory of programs, the provincial government groups its programs in four main categories:

- Increasing our workforce
- Fuelling skill development
- Matching skills to need
- Tools for long term planning

Expanding the provincial nominee program which streamlines immigration for investors and people with needed skills is a proposed solution. BC is working with the federal government to expand the current limit (2006) of 1,400 accepted a year. Some 33,000 landed immigrants arrive in BC each year, but many are not destined for the workforce, do not have immediately needed skills or will face



language or certification barriers that will prevent them from working in their field. A high proportion of professional and trades immigrants become disenchanted and decide to leave Canada after one year of underemployment here. BC programs do not do enough to serve the needs of immigrants.

The *People Talk* magazine, Summer 2006 issue, reports that BC has taken industry-knows-best approach to apprenticeship training. In 2006, the BC government committed \$400 million over the next four years to expand training opportunities, but it continues to be a challenge to decide what the market will need in the short and longer term. Industry and business are now taking the lead in setting training priorities. Colleges are contracted to supply the training. The number of people starting apprenticeships has soared from 14,000 in 2003 to 25,000 three years later. However, the number of people completing apprenticeships has fallen and the number of graduates with Red Seal certification, the national standard, has dropped by 50%. Alberta with a smaller population is producing three times as many graduates than we do. This is mainly because BC passed legislation in 2003 that allows for partial trades certification. There might be future challenges for partially trained workers. This indicates a need for availability and accessibility of mid-career training and the importance of people emerging from schools with the kind of core skills that let them adapt to a changing market place. Government can identify future skill shortages and create incentives to attract people to specific skills, such as forgiving student loans if they stay in the province.

The province cut funding for adult basic education, a tuition-free program for impoverished adults to improve their English skills and work on high school courses. The BC government made it illegal to collect social assistance while studying in this program, thereby forcing people to drop out or risk losing their income.

Education and work gap persists for aboriginal people. Despite significant increases in the number of educated aboriginal people, a gap between the schooling levels of aboriginal and non-aboriginals remains. First Nation people have difficulty obtaining work in mainstream society. Many prefer to work in an aboriginal community or organization. Only between 60 and 70% of aboriginals are eligible, able, and willing to work - well below the overall BC average. Unemployment rates remain significantly higher for aboriginal than non-aboriginals. BC needs a new provincial strategy for aboriginal programs.

Barriers to employment for people with disabilities are still prevalent. The government HR strategy report names only one program that specifically addresses people with disabilities: the Employment Program for Persons with Disabilities. It provides access to pre-employment services, planning and employment services, self-employment services, disability supports and assistive technology. The Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities launched *Workable Solutions: Taking Action on Employment for People with Disabilities* in December 2003. It promotes employment opportunities among BC's business community and introduced a new set of tools that includes an interactive job resource website (www.workablesolutions.ca). Only 44% of people with disabilities participate in the workforce compared to 72% of people without. They are 250% more likely to be unemployed.

Youth grad skills do not match employer needs. Many studies report that educational institutions still fall short in developing skills that employers demand.

For decades, the growing number of women in the labour force has been the primary source of increased labour supply for Canada's economy. While participation rates remain high, they have slowed in recent years for a number of reasons. Most of this slow down has been concentrated in the prairies and BC. Increase in their participation will be increasingly needed as our society copes





with the aging of the population in the coming decades. Several factors have influenced the decrease. The most striking gap is for women with at least one child under six years old - 69% compared to Quebec at 71.9%. This gap can be partly attributed to the availability and cost of childcare spaces. Mothers in the labour force in Quebec multiplied rapidly after its \$5 day universal care system. Education levels affect the trends of women's labour force participation. Post-secondary education was the lowest in Alberta and BC for young women. The resurgence of BC's resource sector has generated jobs in areas less suited to women who prefer white collar jobs and those with fewer hours. The female population aged 25 to 44 fell markedly in BC while older women 45 to 64 rose considerably. Participation rates of immigrant women are lower than women native-born (From a feature article in The Canadian Economic Observer, June 2006).

The Olympics crunch has put additional pressure on the construction sector. All of the new resulting projects added over 130,000 new jobs in an economy where there were already shortages. Services and retail will also see sharp shortfall in staffing by 2015. The food and beverage service industry is looking at nearly 5,957 unfilled jobs over the next nine years, while retail faces a deficit of 5,432 cashiers over the same period. Restaurants will scramble to find cooks and chefs to fill 2,006 kitchen positions, while stores struggle along with 2,728 vacant sales jobs. The province will be down 2,998 counter staff and kitchen help, 2,319 sales and service supervisors, 818 butchers and bakers, 201 upholsterers, tailors, shoe menders and jewelers. Many businesses are already cutting hours of operation and turning down business because they don't have the staff. Just two years ago, the problem was limited to skilled trades. Today, it cuts through the whole job spectrum. This will affect every aspect of the economy by driving up wages, burning out workers, curbing business deals, delaying projects and driving up costs. (People Talk, Winter 2006)

"Retail chains and fast food restaurants are offering high wages (up an average of 40% in from 2005 to 2006), flexible schedules, deluxe freebies like iPods, moving expenses and rent subsidies, cash bonuses and generous benefit packages. The challenge is to improve the image of trade work, beef up education and training and make the province a more attractive place for immigrants and working families." (quote from Arlene Keis, CEO of go2)

Labor shortages have become so acute that the subject dominates business conversations around the province from Fort St. John to Victoria.

Hewitt Associates 2006 Survey "Attracting and Retaining the New Workforce" reports that 76% of companies nationally stated that attraction or retention was a challenge, with 44% reporting that both were a concern. In BC, 47% of employers acknowledged having both attraction and retention problems, the third highest in the country behind Alberta (65%) and Quebec (58%). The survey collected information in six general categories:

Flexible work arrangements

As in the rest of the country, BC employers anticipate a tremendous jump-30%- in phased retirement programs over the next three years. Compressed work schedules and vacation buying are already more prevalent in BC than in other parts of Canada. By 2009, BC workers are also expected to have greater opportunities to take paid sabbaticals than those elsewhere in the country.



Virtual work arrangements

BC employers lead the country in providing some or all employees with opportunities to work from home part-time, assistance with home computer purchases and the provision of work cell phones and hand held data devices. BC organizations expect a 10% growth (from 30% to 40%) over the next three years in opportunities for some or all employees to work from home full-time.

Healthy work arrangements

On-site fitness facilities for some or all employees are more common in BC. Significant growth by 2009 is expected in wellness accounts (up 27%) and fitness memberships (up 37%)

Assistance with non-work tasks

Financial counseling for some or all employees is currently highest in BC. Eldercare support is also more prevalent in the province and adoption assistance

Opportunities for self-development

Employers in BC already provide considerable non-job-related continuing education support to some or all workers. In three years time, they anticipate a 10% increase in this area (from 47% to 57%)

Community-oriented work arrangements

Employers in BC do not provide matching gift contributions to charities as often as those in the country as a whole. However, they are now, and in the future, far more likely to provide some or all employees with unpaid time off for community and charitable activities.

Regional Picture

“From the Bookshelf to the Bottom Line”. Northern Economic Development Economic Forum Report. November 2005

A number of different studies have been conducted pointing to the need to develop a skilled workforce. The current shortage of skilled workers will hinder economic development. Recommendations to grow the skilled force include: supporting and challenging local training institutions in accessing and re-focusing funding for delivering training programs, supporting appropriate immigration policies, facilitating industry buy-in and assisting and accessing the First Nation expanding labour pool.

“The Connected North: Moving from Northern Strength to Northern Strength”. Report from the Northern BC Economic Vision & Strategic Project. April 2004

Small town characteristics of safe and familiar communities provide an ideal setting for recruiting both families and retirees. The northern pace and quality of life can be a foundation for economic



development around outdoor lifestyles. With the connectivity of the information age, northern communities are attractive economic and quality of life destinations for companies seeking to relocate from expensive and congested metropolitan areas.

Five key themes:

Landscape: intense land, nature, rugged and remote places

Northerners: independent, pride of culture, used to working hard, wide skill sets to meet northern needs

Communities: a less hectic pace of life, a non-commercial emphasis to community life, greater quality of life, a safe place for families

Economies: strong resource dependence, seasonal work opportunities, growing need for multiple jobs, vulnerability to global economic pressures, intimately linked with the seasons and the northern landscape

Respect: for culture and lifestyle, for the environment, long distances and the four seasons

Key aspects of change that need attention:

Aging population, youthful First Nation population, service reductions in particular health and education services, resource wealth that is draining out of the region

Assets:

Diversity, inclusivity, cooperation, friendly lifestyle, resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, safe and healthy communities, lack of urban congestion, affordable housing and commuting, the sense of community that comes from knowing that people are important, a “have” area of the province, opportunities for advancement

Recommendations:

- Education and training are key for capitalizing on changing opportunities
- Link youth opportunities in education and training with jobs with opportunities for advancement
- Develop marketing and branding that values northern BC’s characteristics
- Need a collective voice to increase the visibility
- Develop partnerships in decision-making within and between communities and sectors
- Recognize community assets and aspirations
- Have support mechanisms

“Northeast BC Oil & Gas Sector Employment Analysis”. North Peace Economic Development Commission.

The BC Input-Output Model indicates that 16,635 direct jobs and 44,935 total jobs were created by the northeast oil and gas sector in 2001. There appears to be leakage of approximately 37,000 total jobs and \$1.6 billion in employment income from the region’s oil and gas industry. There are numerous costs associated with this leakage including lost provincial income taxes, PST and corporate taxes, property taxes, economic diversification and community health and stability.

General economic development recommendations include:

- Prepare a provincial strategy for improving industry procurement and hiring practices
- Investigate non-resident worker tax program
- Help communities build business retention and development programs
- Support initiatives aimed at improving the provincial business climate



Fort St. John and Area

“Chamber of Commerce Labour Force Survey, 2004”

In July 2004, the Chamber of Commerce staff contacted 160 member businesses through phone and FAX. Of the 160 respondents, 37.5% said that their staffing levels were adequate during peak operating periods. The balance of 62.5% said they were ready to hire. Of the ready to hire, it was stated that a total of 456 employees were required. Of that sum, 336 are full-time and 120 are part-time positions. Where salaries were stated, 10 positions are for annual salaries averaging \$45,400 per year totaling \$454,000 for the year employed. 100 hourly employees are to earn an average of \$15.41 per hour or a total of \$3,205,280 for the year. The total annual salary deficit = \$3,659,280. There are 1,200 licensed businesses in Fort St. John. If one interpolates the earnings for these businesses based on the above formula, the annual deficit becomes \$27,444,600. The barriers to employ are varied; however, the common theme is that there are not enough skilled and trained and experienced workers to fill the position available. Some businesses expressed their disappointment at the quality of employees available in terms of commitment to the job, poor work ethic, and lack of reliability.

Population Aging- Research Project conducted by the UNBC Community development Institute in Fort St. John and Peace River Regional District- 2006

The growth of the local seniors’ population will be quite dramatic over the next decade. Most older workers wish to retire locally where they will have a strong network of family and friends. When they retire, most will be relatively healthy and will want to contribute to their community.

Description of Labour Force

Working force

Population by Age Group, Statistics Canada 2001		
Age group	Population	% distribution
Under 18 years	4,455	27.8%
18-34 years	5,095	31.8%
35-54 years	4,555	28.4%
55-74 years	1,480	9.2%
75 years and over	450	2.8%
Total- Age Groups	16,035	100%
% change 1996-2001	7%	



Median Age	29.3	
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Population and Dwelling Count	Fort St. John	BC
Population in 2006	17,402	4,113,487
Population in 2001	16,051	3,907,738
2001 to 2006 population change (%)	8.4	5.3
Total private dwellings	7,129	1,788,474
Private dwelling occupied by usual residents	6,874	1,642,715
Population density per square kilometers	765.4	4.4
Land area (square km)	22.74	924,815.43

Aboriginal Population, Statistics Canada 2001

- o All population: 15,940
- o Aboriginal identity population: 1,780

Immigration Characteristics, Statistics Canada 2001

- o All persons: 15,935
- o Foreign-born population: 900
- o Major visible minority groups: Filipino, black, Chinese, South Asia, Korean, Southeast Asia, Arab, Japanese

Labor Market Components, Statistics Canada 2005			
	Canada	BC	AB
Working Age Population (Thousands)	26,605	3,562	2,650
Jobs (Thousands)	16,459	2,159	1,842
Ratio Job/Population (%)	61.9	60.6	69.5
Fraction of Jobs in full-time (%)	78.0	75.6	78.3
Annual Average Hours			
Per Population 15+	1,075	1,030	1,277
Per Worker	1,830	1,800	1,970
Per Job	1,738	1,699	1,836
Per Full-Time Job	2,058	2,037	2,162

“There will be about one million job openings in BC in the next dozen years and we don’t have enough young British Columbians in the pipeline to fill these jobs. Immigration will play a vital role in filling the gap, so we must do everything we can to help immigrants integrate into the workforce so they can reach their potential”. “If Canada is to succeed in the global economy, we must ensure that the whole country has a capable workforce. It’s not just about skilled workers for the



*construction and the oil industries. This is about human resources in all areas of the economy.”
 Nixon, RBC President and CEO, May 2006*

Labor Force Indicators, Statistics Canada 2001	Fort St. John			BC		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Participation rate	77.9	86.5	68.6	65.2	70.7	59.9
Employment rate	70.7	78.5	62.5	59.6	64.3	55.1

Fort St. John, BC, Household Income, Statistics Canada 2001		
Total Households: 6,160		
Household Income Group	Number	% Distribution
Less than \$35,000	1,805	29.3%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	970	15.7%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1,410	22.9%
\$75,000 and over	1,970	32%

Fort St. John, BC, Workforce Education Attainment (25-64 years of age), Statistic Canada 2001		
Less than high school diploma	1,710	23.8%
High School Diploma only	945	13.1%
Some Post Secondary	860	12.0%
Post Secondary certificate/Diploma	2,890	40.2%
University Bachelor Degree	520	7.2%
University Graduate Degree/Certificate	265	3.7%

Employment projections

The estimated employment demand for the Northern Lights College region (from Pouce Coupe to the Yukon border) estimated at 34,708 for 2005 is projected to grow to 39,220 by 2010. This 3.1% increase is much above the provincial average of 2% and the highest of all college regions. Industries with the highest growth include: construction, oil and gas, health, professional business services and transportation. Occupation groups in demand with the highest growth include: health; trades, transportation and equipment operators; management; natural and applied sciences; business, finance and administrative; sales and service; social science, education, government service and religion; and art, culture, recreation and sport.



Community Infrastructure and Capacity

Key Interviews

A number of interviews were conducted with key organizations and services to:

- Build a database of services and supports available to employers
- Inform organizations about the project, receive their input and determine their potential role

Overall comments from interviews:

- All interviewees expressed a willingness to be part of the solution, especially if within their mandate. Some have indicated their resources and staffing might limit their ability to participate.
- Sense that community is frustrated by being “studied to death” while not seeing efforts translated into viable action.
- There is a need for increased communication among organizations that deliver employment services, local community based organizations and employers.
- Private training institutions have expressed concerns about the climate of competition that exists between them and Northern Lights College and Enform. They are willing to expand offerings to meet the needs of employers if economically sound to do so. Year round employment for instructors is also an issue.
- Many managers are uncomfortable with the hiring process due to lack of experience and training. Lack of time and capacity to deal with the increased HR workload are also impediments.

Aspirations

Training/Skills

- Need to increase skill level of job seekers.
- Ensure job seekers have better information about and understanding of the job market.
- Increase pre-employment training focusing on basic skills and work ethics.
- Need development and training for the pool of Aboriginal under utilized talent.
- Support willingness of service providers to design courses to meet the training requirements of today’s workplace
- Provide training to build capacity of existing businesses
- Too many people are just interested in getting tickets- need to impress workers to develop more long-term plans
- Better training to raise the level of expertise and skills in tourism/hospitality sector including need for national training standards. Each hotel has its own in house training program- effectiveness varies with capacity to support.
- Better marketing for Super Host (no provincial or community approach)- strong provincial messages
- Need practical component for ‘Serve It Right’ and ‘Food Safe’ programs.



- Link high school work experience program with workforce training in hospitality and employment opportunities- specific skill set and qualifications. Provide support and monitoring.
- Collaborate with the Society for Advancement for Excellence in Education
- Raise awareness about value of training.
- High school students need better training in Microsoft and typing skills
- Dual credit programs need a stronger focus on soft skills and work ethics
- More training in office procedures
- Offer versatile business courses as small to medium size office require administration assistants with training in every aspect of business and well rounded skills
- Increase intakes for Business Applied Technology program at Northern Lights College

Communication and Partnerships

- Collaboration of information that can be used by everyone in the community and people seeking information on relocating
- Develop a webpage database of relevant information
- Better communication and increased collaboration between private training institutions and Northern Lights College and Enform to expand local programming
- Increased networking and partnerships among various organizations
- Expand FSJ-EIS partnerships to Aboriginal organizations and District of Taylor
- Develop more partnerships with employers-willingness to meet the changing labour market demands
- Collaborate with go2 project
- Develop information package to address lack of job seekers' understanding of recruiting and hiring process, job knowledge and requirements. Unrealistic expectations around wages, benefits and readiness to access jobs.
- Continue to provide information about current labor market situation and requirements.
- Competition among the different sectors point to the need for collaboration and community approach
- Have a one-stop shop for employment in the community
- Agencies to work more cohesively to deliver programs
- Facilitate a two day trade show to showcase Aboriginal businesses, workshops on marketing and finances, cross-cultural training.
- Deliver a regional career & educational conference for employment agencies and employers
- Develop closer relationship with North Peace Senior Secondary School in order to provide career and employment information and services to students

Industry/Employers

- Address some of the main barriers to First Nation employment: transportation (distance to employment site, road conditions, access to vehicles and driver's licence), housing, and childcare.
- Engage First Nation communities in on-going federal and provincial projects
- Service sector needs to grow to meet the needs of major industry.
- Develop corporate policies that are more responsive to the economic realities of the communities



- Support businesses to take the time needed to build their company on a solid basis and avoid collapses when slowdowns occur.
- Increase Service Canada subsidies for youth employment. Re-instate summer student employment program.
- Increase employer understanding of HR practices. Need to build HR capacity.
- Raise awareness of businesses about the importance of understanding the needs of their employees other than paycheque.
- Work with employers to increase their participation in offering direct-entry apprenticeship opportunities. Most employers require ELTT from a post-secondary institution before they will hire. This can be a barrier for certain job seekers to participate. Many of the major employers have few if any apprentices. They strictly hire journey people, often those that have been trained by smaller employers.
- Increase capacity of smaller employers to take on apprentices and provide on the job training.
- Educate employers around challenging recruiting practices: difficulty to reach the person that has the authority to hire (hiring done from head office, no dedicated HR staff, and no HR policy). Some companies run on-going open-ended ads that can be misleading for job seekers. Other companies conduct orientation sessions and place individuals on a call list. This list is accessed on a needs basis. Some job seekers have completed orientation with several companies and wait to see who will call them first.
- Develop specific strategies to deal with worker shortage in hospitality sector
- Retail and hospitality industry needs be more creative to become employers of choice: provide a positive, professional and supportive working environment; show employees are valued and respected; prevent harassment from difficult clients; provide small but meaningful rewards; enforce performance standards; offer shifts that support work and life balance; instill pride in the job and company.
- Need to attract families to address office personnel shortage. Wages not high enough to maintain a certain lifestyle.
- Increasing automation and simplifying office procedures would improve efficiency of many businesses

Community

- Increase access to information about accommodation: some new qualified arrivals have had to leave the community because they could not find rental accommodation. Some are reduced to staying at the shelter (maximum stay of 30 days).
- Need increased community spirit, information about activities
- While men are very busy, many women are lonely and need social connections
- Revamp city website

Services

- Need a relocation service
- Need for a disability resource centre
- Need for settlement and employment services for immigrants
- Expand office hours of employment assistance services
- Need a retail directory
- Need community directory



Communication Tools

Using the right method of communication to deliver an effective message

Radio

Standard Radio:
101.5 The Bear
98.5 Energy FM
890 CJDC
Ph: 250. 785. 6634
Fax: 250. 785. 4544
Email: peacereception@sri.ca

Moose FM
Ph: 250. 787. 7100
Fax: 250. 263. 9749
Email: rbeerling@moosefm.ca

Television

CJDC – Dawson Creek
Email: peacereception@sri.ca
Ph: 250. 782. 3341
Fax: 250. 782. 3154

Newspapers

Northeast News
Email: design@nenews.ca
Ph.: 1. 877. 787. 7030
Fax: 250. 787. 7090

Alaska Highway News
Email: ahnews@awink.com
Ph: 250. 785. 5631
Fax: 250. 785. 3522

North Peace Express
Email: ahnews@awink.com
Ph: 250. 785. 5631
Fax: 250. 785. 3522



Community Websites

www.employmentconnections.bc.ca
www.fortstjohn.ca
www.fsjchamber.com
www.fsjnow.com
www.itnorth.ca
www.macenna.com
www.prn.bc.ca
www.districtoftaylor.com

Regional Websites

www.alphasafety.net
www.comunityfutures.biz
www.enform.ca
www.hellonorth.com
www.jobsearchonline.ca
www.mnbc.ca
www.nenas.org
www.aboriginalbusinesscentre.com
www.nlc.bc.ca
www.npedc.ca
www.northernopportunities.bc.ca
www.peaceriverrd.bc.ca
www.scitechnorth.bc.ca
www.tradeskillsbc.com
www.treaty8.bc.ca
www.unbc.ca/cdj

Community Newsletters

- Chamber of Commerce
- Northeast Aboriginal Business & Wellness Centre
- Northern Society of Oilfield Contractors and Service Firms
- Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association

Community Bulletin Job Boards

- Employment Connections
- North East Native Advancing Society
- Northern Lights College
- T.R.A.D.E.S.
- Visitor Information Centre

Resource Centres/Libraries



- Employment Connections
- Fort St. John Chamber of Commerce
- Fort St. John Library
- Metis BC Nation
- Northeast Aboriginal Business & Wellness Centre
- North East Native Advancing Society
- Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association
- Sci-Tech North
- T.R.A.D.E.S.
- Visitor Information Centre

Computer Access Points

- Employment Connections
- Fort St. John Library
- BC Government Agent
- Northeast Aboriginal Business & Wellness Centre
- North East Native Advancing Society
- T.R.A.D.E.S.
- Visitor Information Centre

Useful Resources

- Fort St. John Chamber of Commerce Relocation package
- City of Fort St. John Community Information Folder
- Finders & Keepers. Recruitment and Retention Strategies. Tool kit for employers.
www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop/listproducts.asp?





Assets

Local Training Institutions

- University of Northern British Columbia continues to expand its local programming in Fort St. John
- Northern Lights Community College has strong university transfer and trades programs and will be opening a new Centre for Excellence in 2007
- Enform, the training, certification and health and safety services arm of the upstream petroleum industry offers programs through partnerships with local institutions and training centres and through distance education
- School District 60 offers a number of career preparation courses including some level one technical trade training programs
- A number of organizations offer business development workshops and organize local conferences:
 - Community Futures
 - Northeast Aboriginal Business & Wellness Centre
 - North East Native Advancing Society
 - Sci-Tech North
- A number of private organizations offer specialized skill education:
 - Alpha Safety Ltd.
 - FOX PRO Transportation Industry Solutions
 - IT North
 - St. John Ambulance
 - Trojan Safety
- Labour groups have developed training expertise in an effort to keep their workforce productive: U.A. Local 170 Piping Industry Training Centre
- A number of community groups and volunteer organizations offer adult life learning programs

Employment Related Services

- Employment Connections
- Job Search on Line
- Job Wave
- Macenna Staffing Services
- Métis Provincial Council of BC- Métis Human Resources Development Agreement (MHRDA)
- North East Native Advancing Society
- North Peace Economic Development Commission
- T.R.A.D.E.S.
- Treaty 8 tribal Association



Community

- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Opportunities for leadership
- Opportunities for advancement
- High standard of living
- Great outdoor recreation
- Employment oriented
- Dynamic climate
- Young population
- Family friendly
- Willingness to be a community of choice

Challenges

Labour Force

- Demand far exceeds the local pool
- Male dominated Oil & Gas sector
- Footloose; money motivated
- Lack of experienced workers
- Lack of work essential skills

Industry Factors

- Negative perception of certain occupations as a viable career path
- High stress; rapid pace
- Long hours of work
- A lot of seasonal work
- Competition among employers
- O& G sector's practice of throwing money at the issue make it more difficult for other employment sectors to attract employees

Employer Factors

- Limited HR capability
- Many small employers
- Lack of staff training

Community Factors

- Perceived high cost of living
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of childcare spaces



- Lack of extended family network
- Not seen as environmentally friendly
- Lack of availability of health services
- Climate
- Location

Links with Other Projects

There are presently a number of projects and initiative whose goals and objectives are to address the present labour market shortages

BC Skill Force Initiative

The Community Futures Development Association of BC (CFDA) and the BC Chamber of Commerce combined efforts to investigate the issue of skill shortages and its impact on small business. They have consulted with businesses in six different economic regions of non-metropolitan BC including the northeast. 91 surveys were received from the Peace region and focus groups were held in Dawson Creek and Fort St. John. Recurring themes that have surfaced across the province:

Employer Labour Needs

- Approximately 50% of the employers stated they have vacant positions
- Employers are looking for both skilled and unskilled employees
- Employers are having to compromise by simply hiring any available workers they can find rather hiring people with the skills they want
- Competition between employers has driven-up wage costs
- Employers are having difficulty finding younger workers who are reliable and have appropriate skills, a positive attitude, and a good work ethic

Skills and Education

- The school system is not adequately preparing students for the work place
- Career and Personal Planning and other cooperative career education programs are useful
- Dialogue is needed between the school system and the business community
- Businesses need to increase their investment in internal training programs
- Financial support should be provided to help businesses train their employees
- First Nations communities need support for skill development programs targeted at early childhood

Attitudes

- Today's younger workers lack an appropriate workplace attitude
- There is a need to promote trades as a positive career option



- Employers are frustrated in their experiences with apprenticeship programs
- Substance abuse is a significant issue that is effecting the productivity of workers
- Employees expect higher wages and improved working conditions
- Today's younger workers are looking for life/work balance and quality of life
- The expectations of recent graduates regarding the type of work and pay level available to them are too high

Human Resource Strategies

- Small businesses have difficulty recruiting/training/retaining the right workers
- Employers don't have effective human resource strategies
- Partnerships between Aboriginal organizations and small businesses are needed
- Employee ownership or profit sharing programs need to be considered
- Employers need to create a positive work environment to retain employees
- It is difficult for small businesses to match the wages paid by bigger firms

Infrastructure:

- Employees need to have easier access to local apprenticeship training
- Delivery of trades training needs to become more flexible
- Lack of affordable housing is an issue in some areas
- Employers need assistance with immigration programs
- A better system is required to recognize and accredit immigrants' credential

Succession Planning:

- Most business owners are not thinking about succession planning
- Mentorship programs need to be established to help train younger, less skilled employees

Community Based Initiatives:

- Cooperation between rural communities is needed to promote the area to potential workers

Areas of collaboration

Identification of provincial issues, emerging themes and challenges will provide a context for our own research

Use of provincial data to inform our local employer survey

Review recommended actions for potential application to Fort St. John and area

Formation of a Regional Skills Advisory Council to facilitate consultation on labour and skills shortage issues between the business community, government, education/training institutions, and business service providers and play a key role in finding solutions to the skills shortage challenges.



Finding Workers for the Oil and Gas Service Sector

The Northern Society of Oilfield Contractors & Service Firms (NSOCSF) has entered into a Labour Market Partnership with six member companies to develop a Workforce Strategy with the objective of increasing its capacity to support their members recruiting and retaining workers in the oil and gas service sector in Northeast B.C. In addition to recruitment, the Workforce Strategy will seek opportunities to support their members in training, development, compensation, diversity, immigration and other areas that will aid in developing and sustaining a stable workforce.

Areas of collaboration

Working together to accomplish similar objectives such as identification of processes, strategies, tools and resources to assist businesses recruit workers and fulfill their labour market demands.

Increasing the Talent

The Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada (Petroleum HR Council) is carrying out pilot projects in two locations to test its *Increasing the Talent* toolkit, and to develop implementation processes and tools in support of the toolkit's application. On April 30 and May 1, 2007, the Project Working Group, under the leadership of Sci-Tech North, and the Project Consultants conducted a Needs Assessment for the *Increasing the Talent* pilot project in Fort St. John. The Needs Assessment was designed to meet the following objectives: provide the Working Group members with a brief overview and context for the project, including global talent shortage challenges; gather the Working Group's views regarding local petroleum sector's needs with respect to developing, attracting and retaining labour; meet with up to six employers to understand their challenges (and successes) with respect to the recruitment and retention of employees, and to start to identify potential solutions; identify and agree on key priorities to be addressed by the pilot project; and seek indications of interest from one or two employers as potential pilot organizations for the *Increasing the Talent* toolkit.

Some findings from 6 employer interviews include:

Occupations difficult to recruit:

Air hands, mechanics, medics, secretaries, sales people, 4th class power engineers, experienced workers of any kind.

Skills that are lacking:

Common sense, life skills, discipline, business management skills, business acumen, supervisory skills, computer skills, time management, driving ability



Issues around untapped talent:

Camps not set up for women; preconceived notions about the aboriginal population; difficulty recruiting foreign skilled workers or immigrants

Recruitment practices:

Some anticipatory hiring, employment agencies, mostly newspapers, some internet, a lot of word of mouth, job fairs, schools. Little screening over the phone. Poor response to newspaper ads might be due to the quality of ads such as not enough description and lack of branding. The effectiveness depends on what type of position/skills they are recruiting for.

Retention factors:

Competition from oil companies, ability to pay high wages, housing availability, lack of childcare, no formal process to evaluate staff, differential stipends to work here, community attractiveness: compared to Fort Mac Murray, high levels of drug & alcohol, industry culture, increased levels of absenteeism, increased levels of depression, family matters.

Tried solutions:

Keep work environment friendly, especially family friendly; engage and involve staff

Suggested Solutions:

Improved quality of life, flexible work schedule, encourage people to take time off, stress importance of orientation, strategic business planning, rewards and recognition, stable and year round employment. Need to create an attractive community, positive for families, more training spaces and programs- address deficits in certain skills, address child care shortage, need labour market information, must be a stellar company to attract retirees, introduce career options to youth early on, help new people to connect i.e. a buddy system, info on specific HR strategies.

Specific areas to be addressed in the near term could include:

- o Human resource management capabilities, such as workforce planning (projecting skill needs, numbers of employees, etc.) and other;
- o Performance management – being fully committed and meeting standards;
- o Attracting and retaining skilled women in the labour pool; and
- o Community welcome and openness, particularly to visible minorities and immigrants.

The group identified Impact on Family/Personal Life as a priority for the medium term, and Reputation of Industry as a priority for the long term.

Areas of collaboration

Sharing of information and data

Working together to accomplish similar objectives such as identification of processes, strategies, tools and resources to assist businesses recruit workers and fulfill their labour market demands.



Go2 Tourism Industry Project

Operating plan is in place for April 07 to March 08. Go2 will proceed with labor market studies in all regions across BC. Plan to start in the north in June 2007.

Areas of collaboration

Sharing of data including labor projections for tourism sector
Joint strategies for the tourism sector
Support and resources from GO 2

UNBC Community Development Institute (CDI)

Starting in the fall of 2007, the CDI will be undertaking a major research initiative looking at the Service Industry Sector in Northern BC. The project will seek to clearly define labour market issues, identify practical responses to addressing gaps in both the short and the long term. Four reports will be produced: identification of labor market issues, solutions for businesses, extracting the value of the service sector to local communities and northern BC population demographics

Areas of collaboration

Sharing of relevant data
Developing strategies on issues of common interest

Northern Opportunities

Northern Opportunities is an innovative northeastern BC partnership of the Fort Nelson, Peace River North, and Peace River South school districts, Northern Lights College, First Nations, industry and community with a common goal: to provide our young people with a seamless learning pathway from secondary school to post-secondary trades/technology training and careers.

Areas of collaboration

Dialog around career pathways for youth for occupations difficult to recruit

British Columbia Oil and Gas Education and Training Consortium

This consortium was created by the BC government in May 2004 to provide advice and recommendations to the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources regarding a comprehensive and coordinated approach to meeting the



education and training needs of the oil and gas industry and increase the number of British Columbians employed in the industry. Despite a range of recent initiatives intended to address the industry's labour needs, there are already growing gaps between labour supply and demand and reasons to believe that the situation will worsen. The consortium established four function-related working groups: exploration, drilling, production and education. Recommendations include the creation of a Centre for Excellence Board to oversee a provincial approach to oil and gas training. Other recommendations are:

Education, Training and Research

- Expand training programs to address immediate and emerging skills shortage
- Implement programs that orient students to and prepare prospective employees for careers in the oil and gas industry
- Enhance the alignment of K-12 and post-secondary education and training programs with industry practices to best meet industry needs
- Expand current initiatives to achieve an appropriate level of applied research programs including interdisciplinary research in geological and geochemical
- surveying, land use planning, biology and geoscience that address conditions and challenges found in BC;
- Strengthen arrangements among industry, educators, Aboriginal organizations and government for more effective engagement of Aboriginal peoples; and,
- Increase the level of common industry standards for trades training across jurisdictions.

Promotion, Recruitment and Retention

- Build awareness and understanding, at all ages, of the social and economic importance of the oil and gas industry in British Columbia;
- Encourage more British Columbians to seek out career opportunities in the oil and gas industry;
- Increase participation of immigrants by facilitating foreign credential recognition and providing more English as a Second Language training; and,
- Implement strategies that contribute to improved employee retention.

Other Related Non-training Policy Issues

- Develop new policies and programs to further encourage industry to reduce the seasonality of its activities and develop oil and gas resources in unexplored areas of the province
- Harmonize, where possible, across jurisdictions and Ministries, oil and gas industry-related policies and programs.

Areas of Collaboration

Communicate research results





Vanderhoof Community Labor Market Partnership

The Community Futures Development Corporation-Stuart Nechako led this project in 2006 to identify skilled labor shortages and develop human resource strategies to improve the labour market for employers and employees in the community. 220 employers completed a 30 questions written questionnaire. Major findings were:

- 36% of employers needed to adjust job requirements in the past year because of lack of qualified applicants
- A third had job vacancies remain unfilled for more than three months
- The biggest problem was the lack of qualified applicants.
- The largest difficulty is for trades and technical positions.
- Most felt that quality of life issues were not a huge problem for filling vacancies.
- Most employers tend to recruit locally; some hire from the rest of northern BC and a few recruit in the rest of BC or Canada.
- Retention was not cited as a big problem compared to recruitment, except maybe in the minimally skilled jobs.
- Most employees leave their jobs because they are recruited by other employers, wages and career changes.
- More than two thirds of employers did not do formal exit interviews to learn why employees leave.
- Supervisory and project management skills were considered inadequate by a high percentage of employers, followed by problem solving and technical skills.

List of Recommendations and Strategies

Industry and employers can address labor shortage issues through improving productivity and therefore reducing the demand on the workforce. Approaches could include: computerization, automation, business process redesign, job redesign, outsourcing, and workforce optimization. However, the goal of this project is to increase and build the workforce needed for Fort St. John and area.

Fort St. John and Area

Community Stakeholders

- Reinvigorate community image, aggressively promote lifestyle and benefits to target labour pool market
- Continue promoting Fort St. John and area to potential workers within Canada and other countries, especially in areas that are experiencing higher rates of unemployment
- Foster a network of support for human resources: mutual support, sharing lessons, problem solving
- Facilitate industry buy-in to grow a skilled force



- Develop a community plan for quality of life: housing, health and transportation needs, festival and event planning
- Increase support to recreational and environmental groups to engage “transients”
- Enhance community role in supporting new employees and meeting employee social needs i.e. “Welcome” and “Employee Experience” programs
- Assist access to the First Nation expanding labor pool

Industry/Employers

- Spend more effort to develop and implement effective HR strategies, be more creative and flexible in selecting and retaining employees, gear programs and policies to attract and retain the right talent, engage employees to reduce turnover and increase productivity
- Engage in accurate, upfront workforce planning: determine workforce requirements over the next five and even ten years; recognize gaps in the supply of internal and external talent and identify talent challenges going forward
- Become more familiar with the various recruitment and retention of qualified workers resources available and take advantage of the existing external sources of support: employment assistance programs, Aboriginal employment and training centres, federal and provincial programs
- Educate potential newcomers on the requirements and benefits of working in their industry
- Tap under utilized talent pool: Aboriginal, women, persons with disabilities, immigrants and mature workers
- Recruit foreign workers
- Promote a greater culture of diversity within their organization
- Develop youth strategies
 - Hook youth to potential careers through meaningful work experiences and part-time employment
 - Encourage more co-op placements and internships to increase the number of post- secondary students seeking work in the area
- Develop older worker retention strategies
- Work with industry/trade associations to ensure that the benefits programs small businesses have access to meet their needs and are competitive with the benefits packages offered by large industry
- Offer flexibility in work arrangements, hours, and benefits in employment offers to appeal to a wide range of employees
- Recognize investment value of conducting on the job training
- Recognize value of offering awards and incentives: bonuses, employee discounts programs for company merchandise
- Endeavor to provide a positive work environment
- Create programs that engage employees in a nurturing atmosphere, enhance the employees’ working experience and provide a work/life balance
- Work closely with local childcare providers and elementary schools
- Work more closely with educational institutions to ensure their training needs are met
- Explore collaborative training models and partnerships with industry associations
- Increase use of technology to increase efficiency
- Develop succession plan: identification of key areas and positions, identification of the skills and competencies that will be required for key areas and positions, knowledge transfer program, training program for promote-able employees in key areas and positions, incentives to retain key talents, mentorship program



- Enable workers to leave the organization while first capturing and transferring intellectual capital.

Regional

- Develop a regional recruitment strategy collaboratively with existing labor market initiatives
- Create apprenticeships and work placement opportunities
- Provide support to ensure apprentices reach journey person status
- Support and challenge local training institutions in accessing and re-focusing funding for delivering training programs
- Liaise with Industry Training Authority and ITOs re: our specific training needs
- Aggressively champion and promote careers and occupations difficult to recruit
- Work with industry/trade associations to ensure that the benefits programs small businesses have access to meet their needs and are competitive with the benefits packages offered by large industry

Provincial

- Lobby and advocate with government to develop progressive and effective tools to stimulate investment in training (implementation of tax credit already announced), develop services to assist businesses to create and implement effective succession plans
- More effective communication between small businesses and the Industry Training Authority about how they can participate in apprenticeship programs



Setting the Stage for Implementation

- Highlight benefits of project: provide reliable data and analysis so that community stakeholders can take action to improve the labour market situation
- Work with all other labour market partnerships to develop an integrated and collaborative approach to addressing identified needs and issues
- Involve all stakeholders
- Develop feasible strategies based on a solid understanding of the community capacity and evidence obtained from research
- Build upon existing resources and assets
- Adopt the Increasing the Talent conceptual model as a framework
- Promote importance of industry and employers of investing in the communities from which they draw the resource wealth
- Work cooperatively with the region on issues of common interest
- Position project with regional, provincial and national opportunities and possibilities
- Have a clear communication plan
- Support the process with a manageable and transparent implementation framework
- Ensure some results are immediately visible (within one year)
- Develop versatile tools that can be adapted to all employment sectors
- Develop tools in various formats so that they easily be utilized by employers with limited administrative, technical and/or HR capacity
- Stress that real progress will require a sustained effort



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Appendix

Key Interviews

- Alpha Safety
- Community Futures
- Employment Connections
- District of Taylor
- Fox Pro Transportation Industry Solutions Inc.
- Job Search On Line
- Local 170 Pipe Fitter and Welding Training Centre
- Macenna Staffing Services
- Métis BC Nation
- Multi-Culturalism Society
- Northeast Aboriginal Business & Wellness Centre
- North Peace Economic Development Commission
- Nova West
- Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association
- Phipps Employment Consulting
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- Treaty 8 Tribal Association