

***LOOKING FORWARD: WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE FORUM***

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**Vancouver, British Columbia**

**CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSION REPORT**

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Development**

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## 1. OVERVIEW

During the *Looking Forward: Workforce of the Future* Forum, facilitated 90-minute concurrent breakout sessions were held in the morning and afternoon. Each involved a broad cross-section of an average of 15-20 industry, supplier (employment service providers, educators, and representatives of labour force groups) and government representatives. Each part of the day involved four facilitated breakout sessions, each on one of the WorkBC strategic action areas. The first session combined two strategic action areas.

- Keep the Workforce We Have in BC and Develop the Skills of Our Existing Workers
- Increase the Labour Market Success for Aboriginal People
- Attract and Recruit New Workers
- Address Regional Skills Shortages

Participants in each concurrent session were asked the following questions regarding WorkBC:

- What is working well and should continue?
- What should be adjusted or modified and why?
- What is missing and should be added?
- Who should take the lead and other “how” details?

Participants received WorkBC material and attended a presentation of the Conference Board of Canada report, *The Future of Work: Confronting BC’s Labour Shortage Challenge*, before participating in two concurrent sessions. Before responding to these questions, facilitators briefly provided background on WorkBC and the specific WorkBC strategic action area.

While participants were asked to address the above four questions, the majority of time was spent on the first three. All breakout groups involved a high level of active engagement and participation by stakeholder participants.

Due to the interrelationship of the WorkBC strategic action areas, a degree of overlap will be reflected in the following summary. Also, to the extent possible, the Forum discussions and this summary focus almost exclusively on WorkBC initiatives and actions and gaps in them.

The rest of this report is organized according to the four breakout session topics, followed by short sections on themes that cut across all parts of WorkBC, as well as on stakeholder roles.

## 2. STRATEGIC ACTIONS: *Keep the workforce we have in BC and Develop the skills of our existing workers*

***WORKBC ACTION PLAN: “TO SUCCESSFULLY TAKE ON BC’S SKILLS SHORTAGE CHALLENGE, IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO JUST RECRUIT NEW WORKERS; WE ALSO NEED TO RETAIN OUR CURRENT WORKERS....IT’S EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO MAKE BETTER USE OF THE SKILLS AND TALENTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIANS WHO ARE IN THE LABOUR MARKET NOW.”***

### **2.1 What in WorkBC is working well and should continue?**

Participants in these sessions identified initiatives related to marketing, industry training, immigrants, and small businesses as positive elements of WorkBC.

They said the BC Government should continue investing in marketing campaigns to brand BC in other provinces and generate serious interest in employment possibilities in BC. These efforts could attract people not only to the public service in BC, but also to other workplaces in the province. Industry associations could build on this BC brand in their sector-specific recruitment campaigns.

Industry groups were positive about the work of the ITA, including high school apprenticeships, promotion of the trades, expansion of the variety of programs (including non-apprenticeship models) and tying funding of training to industry standards.

Participants also support ITA's Industry Training Organizations (ITOs) initiative. Ongoing support to ITOs is important to maintain close ties between industry and training institutions, and to reinforce the strategic investment of training dollars in alignment with industry needs. ITOs should emphasize a partnership of industry groups, education providers and government.

The Skills Connect program and the integration of ESL combined with work experience were also seen as positive initiatives. Ongoing support to SMEs in development of their HR skills should be also continued to help small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) address retention issues, as many lack human resource management capacity and need assistance to adapt HR tools.

## **2.2 What in WorkBC should be adjusted or modified and why?**

### **Existing Immigrants**

Participants identified the need for adjusting initiatives related to skilled immigrants in BC:

- Awareness needs to be heightened—particularly across the business community—that not all immigrants arrive with poor literacy skills. Assessment of language support requirements must be thoughtfully matched and immigrant candidates not overlooked because of assumptions that they lack adequate language ability.
- Skills Connect funding should have a broader focus and more flexibility. The current sector-specific focus means many skilled immigrants are missing the chance for good integration support. Flexibility in allocation of Skills Connect funding was recommended so the program can remain adaptable to rapid changes in the labour market.
- Efforts must be made to streamline review processes for faster recognition of the credentials of internationally trained workers, within a provincial strategy and clear credential services.
- Higher levels of investment in ESL training are needed and it needs to be better integrated into ongoing funding and programming of ESL initiatives, including investments in *higher* levels of ESL—Levels 4,5,6; as well as ESL for families of skilled immigrants.

### **Encouraging Employer Retentions Strategies**

Participants suggested that WorkBC should enable employers and employees to take certain actions and shift employers' awareness and approach to hiring and retention practices:

- Employers need to become more flexible in terms of work schedules; and employees need to be realistic in terms of what they expect in compensation and initial job responsibilities;
- Employers need to learn how to work with both "Generation Y" and older workers through flexible work arrangements;
- Employers need to create non-monetary incentives to recruit and retain workers; and,
- Employers need to increase use of mobile work arrangements so worker does not have to relocate (i.e. "fly in, fly out").

### **Enabling Training and Development**

Participants see the BC Training Tax Credit starting to work and recommended expanding it so credit also applies to non-apprentice forms of industry training. More assistance for and recognition of workplace training should be provided, including for basic training of new workers (e.g. workplace training bonus offered to employees) and for workplace essential skills.

Participants recommended WorkBC advise employers how to help employees advance to positions of higher skill (i.e. career development). Many workers in the 25-35 years of age group entered the labour market in jobs that could help them cope with high levels of student loans; but many of them do not see clear avenues to shift into more education and better training.

### **Persons with Disabilities**

Participants recognize that there is good support in community agencies for persons with disabilities, but say that there seems to be a disconnect between the human resource departments of large organizations, including municipal employers, and community support services.; and in turn, between the HR departments and the managers of other business units within the organization. The *10 X 10 Challenge* could be used to address this disconnect and encourage leadership on this issue.

### **Other Suggestions**

Some participants suggested:

- WorkBC should encourage employers to adapt benefit packages so they better reflect what current workers value most (i.e. flexible work schedules, child care benefits, training benefits);
- A program to enable BC graduates of post-secondary programs to pay down their student loan by a certain percentage by each year of work they complete with a BC employer; and,
- Greater investment in promoting non-traditional career paths in high school.

## **2.3 What is missing in WorkBC and should be added?**

Forum participants suggest that we need to shift from a mostly singular focus on skills training to also helping employers and others understand how important these issues of workplace intolerance, racism and lack of acceptance of differences are in attracting and retaining workers.

Participants felt immigrant worker integration (not just recruitment) initiatives and integration into communities are needed. Compared to the success BC is having in marketing employment and attracting new workers, participants see much less success in integrating skilled immigrants and other new workers well *into the* workplace. A better job of helping employers, co-workers and the new workers to facilitate this needs to be done. Perhaps WelcomeBC can help communities find solutions for integration at all levels into communities and regions in BC.

There is much discussion of “untapped resources”—women, Aboriginal persons, immigrants, persons with disabilities, etc.—without identifying the quantity of workers in these categories. This is information that needs to be identified and used to set priorities. Also, program funding should be based on industry demand *and* magnitude of untapped supply.

There needs to be more collaboration between business and government on literacy support. Industry association representatives noted that employers are taking literacy very seriously from a safety perspective now. Participants also noted that as BC’s total population and its workforce increase in size, literacy levels continue to drop—a trend needs that needs to be addressed.

### **3. STRATEGIC ACTION: Increase the labour market success for Aboriginal people**

**WORKBC ACTION PLAN:** “ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE THE FASTEST GROWING POPULATION GROUP IN OUR PROVINCE, WITH HALF OF ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN BC CURRENTLY UNDER THE AGE OF 25. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT LABOUR MARKET RESOURCE AVAILABLE TO EMPLOYERS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES.”

#### **3.1 What in WorkBC is working well and should continue?**

Industry representatives in particular were very supportive of partnership agreements between employers and Aboriginal organizations. Such agreements relate to two key actions of the WorkBC plan – collaborative training development and community planning assistance:

- The VanAsep Agreement was a model for training and employment for more than 400 Aboriginal people, benefiting individuals and employers; and the involvement of industry throughout the design, delivery and follow-up was key to its success;
- Impact Benefit Agreements were mentioned a number of times wherein benefits such as training, employment and money flow to First Nations while certainty of access and a local workforce makes business possible for the corporations;
- Joint ventures between First Nations businesses and traditional industry; and,
- Aboriginal-operated programming such as Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreements is more effective than traditionally delivered programming.

Two examples of positive WorkBC programs identified were the Aboriginal Internship Program and the success that has come from meaningful communication and adaptation to meet cultural and other needs of participants; and the Reclamation and Prospecting Program which appears to be working in the northeast in collaboration with Northwest Community College. Other related but distinct activities that participants noted as successes were:

- Job mentoring/coaching where a worker in industry (preferably an Aboriginal person) is matched with a trainee through their training and early work experience;
- Aboriginal role models such as college and high school instructors increase success rates in training and education;
- Mobile training that can enable access in smaller and more remote communities; and,
- The emergence of Aboriginal Tourism as a niche market is having profound influence on employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for Aboriginal people while creating new partnerships with the hospitality industry.

Collaboration was a consistent theme throughout the “successes”. Emphasis was placed on up-front planning and dialogue with capacity for flexibility and adaptation.

#### **3.2 What in WorkBC should be adjusted or modified and why?**

##### **Educating Employers and Partnerships**

Many participants commented that there is much greater knowledge and awareness of cultural differences now than in the past but that more must still be done to educate employers. The most common recommendation was educating industry and employers regarding working with Aboriginal groups. Most participants indicated they thought responsibility for this should rest with industry associations. Community Futures of BC has published an *Aboriginal Engagement Tool Kit* which is freely available from its website and could be good resource to assist in building relationships and

helping industry understand the benefits of such partnerships, including job creation, income, capacity-building, etc.

Another approach to this may be to have Aboriginal organizations invited to industry forums to provide information and education on working with First Nations and other Aboriginal groups. It may also require a coordinator to act as a point of contact for educating employers prior to their approaching particular groups or organizations.

In fostering partnerships, there was concern that employers do not know where and how to approach Aboriginal organizations because there is not an obvious point of contact, yet businesses want to deal with one window. It is important that employers generally understand that the establishment of relationships at a very early stage is key to successful partnerships.

### **Other Suggestions**

Some participants pointed to an apparent 'disconnect' or lack of coordination between levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal, Aboriginal) and across government (i.e. inter-ministry/inter-agency "silos") so that work with Aboriginal communities and individuals complicates any new arrangements.

When we assess success, especially for individuals, participants stressed the need to vary one's definition of what constitutes "success," particularly from the perspective of the beneficiary. This applies whether it is number of years to achieve high school graduation, outcomes of post-secondary education, or whether a job is the outcome of training.

In one group there was a sense that it is a myth that there are large groups of unemployed Aboriginal people just waiting for opportunities to work. It may be so in some communities but many have already identified and taken advantage of the opportunities presented by their location and their connection to resources. Competition for scarce Aboriginal workers exists in some areas. At the same time, Aboriginal people are not a single homogeneous group but are different depending on their ancestral culture, their levels of integration and a host of other factors. There cannot be one-size-fits-all solutions.

For many remote communities, their needs range from adequate clean drinking water and housing to health issues which must be addressed prior to or at the same time as employment and capacity-building. Locating training where the workers are combined with infrastructure development planned for many reserves in BC should create opportunities for skills development in the construction of homes, roads, water lines and other services.

### **3.3 What is missing in WorkBC and should be added?**

The Women's Mentorship Program should be expanded to support mentoring for all Aboriginal people entering the labour market. Such mentors are ideally other Aboriginal people already in the industries where the entrant has expressed an interest but could also be non-Aboriginal experienced workers educated to the culture and sensitivities of Aboriginal workers.

In addressing Aboriginal high school graduation, which many felt is an essential key action, there were suggestions that it is critical to find ways to engage parents and elders in the communities. Where there has been success in this regard, models should be documented and utilized. School Boards must take the lead here, and initiatives that support long-term education and career development versus short interventions or training courses are needed to have a lasting impact.

#### **4. STRATEGIC ACTION: *Attract and recruit new workers***

**WorkBC ACTION PLAN:** “WITH A STRONG ECONOMY AND SO MANY OF OUR PROVINCE’S CURRENT WORKERS REACHING RETIREMENT AGE OVER THE NEXT TWO DECADES, BC MUST TAKE A NEW APPROACH TO WORKER RECRUITMENT.”

##### **4.1 What in WorkBC is working well and should continue?**

The most frequent positive comments related to immigrant/foreign worker initiatives. Many industry participants commented on the expansion and increased response time in the Provincial Nominee Program. Several participants thought the Skills Connect program is working well; and government and supply group participants, in particular, were positive about increased funding for immigrant settlement programming.

Industry participants were positive about: the BC Government influencing federal immigration policies/programs and the opening up of immigration processes; improvements in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program; extending work permits to international students in private post-secondary institutions; promoting other international student initiatives; the MOUs with other countries; and international (and national) job fairs and other marketing.

Many participants were positive about the support of apprenticeship and ITA’s success in increasing industry training spaces, promoting and expanding such training among youth at the high school level, increasing trades awareness, and creating Industry Training Organizations. A senior education participant spoke positively about an improved relationship between the ITA and post-secondary institutions.

The expansion of post-secondary education spaces, including graduate program spaces and stronger linkages between K-12 and post-secondary education were also seen as important developments.

Some participants pointed to the Labour Market Development Agreement, the Labour Market Agreement, and the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement as positive measures because of resulting increased coordination and adherence to more consistent provincial standards and qualifications.

##### **4.2 What in WorkBC should be adjusted or modified and why?**

A general comment from a number of participants regarding the *recruiting new workers* component of WorkBC was that it almost exclusively focused on immigrants and foreign workers. Participants wanted to see more action on the attraction and recruitment of Aboriginal people, at-risk youth, persons with disabilities and women.

###### **Immigrants and Foreign Workers & Students**

Participants said new programs to support integration of skilled immigrants are great, but what has happened at the federal level to help boost immigration to Canada? These numbers need to rise, otherwise provincial support programs may be principally benefiting immigrants who are moving within the country while the size of the labour pool available to BC employers is still not appreciably changing.

Several immigrant/foreign worker-related adjustments were suggested by participants, most strongly by industry representatives:

- Strengthening connections between TFWP and PNP programs to facilitate the transition of temporary foreign workers to permanent immigrant status;
- Expanding the PNP and including in it a family immigration strategy to more fully take advantage of employment and recruitment opportunities;
- The Labour Market Opinion (LMO) process needs to be sped up, including for unskilled workers and the new E-LMO process, and representatives of immigrant-serving agencies flagged Family Class immigrants as a large group to tap into to complement the TFWP;
- The federal immigration process needs to be more streamlined and move away from less of a “gatekeeper” role; and with regard to the Skilled Worker category, it should increase the understanding of the rules among employers, workers and prospective immigrants;
- Efforts to retain international graduates should be increased to allow them to participate in post-secondary co-op education programs and stay in BC without requiring them to leave the country before applying for landed immigrant status.

Other immigrant-related suggestions were also offered. The WorkBC website should be enhanced by providing more “pathing” information for immigrants outside of Canada. The TFWP should be augmented by bringing spouses who could be utilized as workers. Supports for immigrants already here should be increased to ensure the full employment of existing immigrants. Employer awareness and linkages with immigrant settlement programs should be increased. Skills Connect should be expanded to other sectors and more participants, along with increased and better communication on how it works.

#### **Interprovincial/Labour Mobility**

Participants called for a more aggressive approach in dealing with professional regulations that result in removing barriers and improving labour mobility. A focus on improving inter-provincial labour mobility is important, and improving the speed of prior learning assessments and recognition of credentials earned by workers completing training in other provinces is essential action going forward. The protectionism of many professional groups and industry players must be challenged, as well as government regulation that limits labour mobility. Leadership must focus on “enabling, not gatekeeping.”

Action is needed on the inconsistency in inter-provincial labour mobility agreements. There is good inter-provincial mobility in trades and technologists positions but too much inconsistency in other professional areas: the professional regulation that differs from province to province needs to be addressed. There needs to be discussion around this at the Minister level. What has been addressed through Trade Investment and Labour Market Agreement (TILMA) between Alberta and British Columbia) has not yet gone far enough.

#### **Information**

Regarding information-related adjustments, participants suggested WorkBC should undertake more detailed research on labour market issues to help stakeholders with planning (e.g. data on cost of labour force attachment among under-represented groups; and wages, turnover, part-time employment of new entrants). They also flagged the importance of raising awareness of labour market information and issues in the public’s mind, to help them understand the impacts of skill shortages on the quality of life, and the difference between *skill* and *labour* shortages.

Participants suggested WorkBC should promote more flexible training models (i.e. not just classroom training) to increase student and employer access. More and better assessment tools are needed and WorkBC should look at the experiences of the European Union and Australia with qualifications frameworks to help individuals be clear on where they are and where they need to move to.

New research was suggested to help build awareness and inform strategy development:

- Why immigrants leave Canada so this can be communicated to employers, workers and the general public, and this information should be parceled with the business case for welcoming and integrating immigrants into our workplaces and communities; and,
- Why so many Canadians are living overseas – Survey these people and find out why they aren't working in Canada, what is keeping them in other countries, why they return, why they leave again (if they do).

Participants also suggested a more sustained approach to marketing WorkBC and its initiatives, particularly regarding national and international recruiting and the stronger, consistent promotion of the BC brand. Incrementally over time this will improve private sector capacity in such recruiting.

### **4.3 What is missing in WorkBC and should be added?**

A few specific things were identified by some participants as missing from and should be added to WorkBC:

- Helping employers with mentoring of and facilitating knowledge transfer to new employees, including young people, immigrants and others;
- There is no mention of co-operative education in WorkBC – this is an important source of experience for students, connections for education institutions and recruitment for employers; and,
- Practical strategies and tools to help employers improve productivity and to tie human resource activities to productivity improvement – what can SMEs be doing differently with the people they already employ.

## **5. STRATEGIC ACTION: *Address regional skills shortages***

***WORKBC ACTION PLAN: "WHILE EVERY REGION OF BC IS AFFECTED BY SKILLS SHORTAGES, THE ISSUES ARE DIFFERENT FROM ONE COMMUNITY TO ANOTHER. THE SPECIFIC WORKER SKILLS THAT ARE NEEDED, AND BEST WAYS OF OBTAINING THEM, VARY BY REGION."***

### **5.1 What in WorkBC is working well and should continue?**

Participants indicated that regional industry sector cooperation has been reinforced by WorkBC, including sector associations working with other employer groups to address regional recruitment and retention issues. They also pointed to a number of positive trades training examples that benefit regions, including technical training available regionally, mobile trades training units improving access in rural areas, and high school dual-credit training programs.

The creation of Regional Skills Councils was seen as a positive WorkBC-related initiative by many participants because they empowered especially non-urban communities to take responsibility and ownership of the labour force issues and create a mechanism for action. The Councils are also helping to identify regional priorities and involve local business and service agencies.

Participants also identified a number of immigrant-related WorkBC actions as having positive regional benefits, including recruitment of skilled foreign workers, innovation in attracting foreign workers in certain sectors by providing training that upgraded their skills and resulted in

employment within that sector, international students having more opportunities to stay and work, and the Working Holiday Visa Program providing a needed pool of workers for tourism industry.

Participants also identified a number of useful tools developed to assist in regional human resource management, including the four employer toolkits released June 19, 2008. They also thought WorkBC initiatives are building on successes of locally delivered training including increased regional training initiatives, increase co-op work experience options in regions in order to retain local students, and greater collaboration between employers and regional trainers.

## **5.2 What in WorkBC should be adjusted or modified and why?**

### **Regional Skills Councils**

Regarding Regional Skills Councils, participants suggested they need to have better connections with local service providers such as science councils and Aboriginal communities, and be housed under umbrella organizations such as chambers of commerce. More resources are needed for Councils for administration and project funding to move forward on actions. Participants also stressed the importance of sharing of information on the Council strategic plans and initiatives. Coordination between the councils is seen as essential in order to increase success by sharing its initiatives, avoiding unnecessary duplication. Also, Councils' representation should reflect a good mix between small/medium/large business, service providers, industry associations, and government.

### **Training and Education**

Participants suggested that ITA's regional role in trades promotion and delivery should include increased promotion of trades and Red Seal standards, improved completion rates, increased student supports and decreased course cancellations, and mobile trades training units that could be used beyond trades occupations.

Participants recommended a number of other training-related actions. Training programs often are too focused on one specific industry, and need for more diversity of training opportunities in rural communities. There is an underlying need to seek economies of scale in rural communities so that small businesses are able to afford costs of training. Regional training also needs to enable workers to pay more attention to their transferability of skills so they can respond to changes in economy demand/supply.

Other regional training-related measures that could be facilitated through WorkBC identified by participants are: the use of technology to deliver local training where the numbers are insufficient to offer it through conventional means; and having training that can be accessed in remote areas (e.g. web based training).

Participants suggested additional incentives are needed for post secondary education and that more co-op education is needed in rural locations to retain students in the region. They also called for WorkBC to encourage more collaboration between business and post-secondary institutions, and increased, varied workplace exposure for high school students, with employers using older workers as mentors to transfer knowledge to younger workers.

### **Immigration**

Participants indicated that international students need more opportunities in rural communities, including increased opportunities for post-secondary education and reduced isolation from the community with facilitated local work opportunities. Also, better support systems for immigrants in smaller communities need to be developed.

### **5.3 What is missing in WorkBC and should be added?**

Participants in this session suggested that WorkBC should help with regional strategies in addressing infrastructure challenges such as child care options for workers (e.g. Quebec model), affordable housing, reasonable transportation, and appropriate policing of trade certifications.

Participants suggested an immigration strategy that involves working with employers and regions to establish settlement committees and develop specific attraction strategies, perhaps through WelcomeBC. WorkBC needs to help regions be more proactive in immigrant attraction and retention strategies, and employers, also need help in connecting with regional Aboriginal groups to attract, retain and promote cultural awareness.

Some participants suggested the creation of local career planning centres (such as in Alberta and Ontario) to provide services for youth and high school students to plan and pursue a career path, including further training, job placement, transition, etc.

Other suggestions made by participants related to better regional coordination of educational supply to demand, the need for better and more coordinated regional labour market information, and recruitment marketing campaigns that focus on rural opportunities.

Finally, one of the critical issues in retaining existing workers is their desire not to lose their sense of *community*. With critical times in sectors like forestry, “what is keeping people where they are is their community.” There needs to be more focus on helping communities as a whole to identify where the job opportunities are and finding ways that people can bridge into further learning and new employment without necessarily leaving their communities.

## **6. ACROSS ALL *WorkBC* STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS**

***WORKBC ACTION PLAN: “THIS ACTION PLAN IS THE FIRST STEP IN OUR LONG-TERM STRATEGY TO ENSURE BC SUCCESSFULLY MANAGES SKILLS SHORTAGES AND THAT OUR WORKFORCE CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE PROVINCE’S GREATEST ASSETS. THIS ACTION PLAN WILL REDUCE BC’S CURRENT AND FUTURE SKILLED LABOUR SHORTAGES, AND LEAD TO AN ADDITIONAL \$8 BILLION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY ACROSS OUR PROVINCE OVER THE NEXT 10 TO 12 YEARS.”***

Generally, many participants thought WorkBC has raised awareness about labour force issues and the need to do something about them. They also felt that WorkBC reinforced more cross-sector collaboration and action. In particular, many industry participants applauded the government’s willingness to listen to and consult with industry.

There were a number of key themes identified by participants regarding necessary adjustments or additions related to *all* strategic action areas of WorkBC.

### **Having a clear vision and taking a more strategic approach**

An overriding theme from many participants was that WorkBC is an “action plan” and it does not reflect an overall strategy and vision – the various pieces are not integrated or strategically implemented to create a holistic approach and macro strategy. Further, a clear economic vision is needed behind the WorkBC action plan.

Related to the need for a strategic approach, a number of participants asked: What are the outcomes, what are the metrics of WorkBC? How do we measure success of WorkBC? Are the outcomes known and visible and are they worth investment? Performance measures for each

initiative should be identified, results tracked and publicly reported, including the details of success stories (“brag a little”) and specific best practices.

**More broadly communicating the need for behavior change**

Some participants felt government needs to get better at “telling the story.” They noted it is difficult to comment on what is working or not because they are not aware of most of the actions. The story that needs to be better told includes skills shortage impacts, why reliance on existing students and workers is not sufficient, degree of under-utilization of talent pools, why productivity improvement is critical, and the cost to quality of life without change in practices.

There needs to be more communication of the business case for behaviour change. To gain broader support with respect to hiring and developing the skills of under-utilized labour pools, we need to *quantify the cost of underutilization* of immigrant and other talent. For example, research that shows a \$5 billion annual loss to Canada’s economy for not recognizing the skills and under-utilizing the capability of skilled immigrants.

**Taking a more holistic approach to responding to workforce needs and solutions**

An overriding comment by participants was that WorkBC does not reflect a holistic approach in considering non-human resource initiatives that significantly affect human resource supply. These include affordable housing for workers, accessible transportation, child care and community infrastructure. The insufficient availability of these resources affect the ability of employers in many communities to attract and retain workers.

Some participants called for a provincial child care strategy to support needs of workers with families. The availability and nature of child care support is an issue that affects many people’s work decisions (i.e. whether they return to work, increase hours of work, where they will take jobs).

Participants identified a broad need for much more focus on social integration and called for dialogues and other activities that could help make every community a more welcoming place for new workers. For attraction success to translate into retention success, initiatives designed to heighten social cohesion are viewed as an essential element in workforce development. Economic vision, social cohesion, and quality of life vision have to be considered together.

**Engaging and supporting employers, particularly SMEs, to make necessary changes**

Participants called for WorkBC to pay special attention to engaging and increasing awareness of initiatives among SMEs, since they represent 98% of all businesses. There is a lack of awareness about the WorkBC actions, and SMEs need to understand what resources are out there. WorkBC needs to get information out there to educate SMEs in an active way.

Participants suggested while the Employer Toolkit is good, a missing piece is how does the kit get into employer’s hands? WorkBC needs to assess why small businesses are not taking advantage of available resources.

Participants suggested small business operators need a very simple roadmap. WorkBC could make more effective use of such resources through a SME-friendly web portal, which would be a much needed one-stop-shop for employer resources tools to get the information in the hands of the right people (employers and employees). The WorkBC website could fulfill this and should be made more interactive and have links with key business and industry groups and resources.

Participants identified the need for integrating WorkBC plan with the work of industry sector associations and other ministries. Business representatives noted significant work done in specific sectors on collaborative workforce development strategies, but concern was expressed that the WorkBC Action Plan does not appear to have embedded these industry-led strategies that have also been shaped collaboratively by business, labour, education and community.

Succession planning resources for business are also needed as there is a disconnect between the company owners' expectations and their succession plan. Businesses need to be connected with the next generation of entrepreneurs as there are huge opportunities for the younger generation, and they are not completely aware of this opportunity.

## 7. STAKEHOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

***"BC'S LABOUR MARKET IS MADE UP OF A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS, WITH UNIONS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT PLAYING A SUPPORTIVE ROLE. THESE ARE THE KEY PARTICIPANTS IN OUR LABOUR MARKET, AS WE DEVELOP SOLUTIONS TO MANAGE THE SKILLS SHORTAGE ISSUE."***

While *who* should be involved in WorkBC changes and *how* the changes should occur, were questions to be discussed in the breakout sessions, most participants did not have ample opportunity to discuss them. To the extent the sessions touched on roles, there was not clear agreement on who should do what. Generally, there was agreement of a shared role for government, industries and supply-side groups (i.e. social services, education and training, etc.) on WorkBC adjustments.

Overall, *leadership* was a key issue, including the willingness to speak out when difficult aspects must be challenged, not just when positive aims are being communicated.

There was general agreement that government should take a leadership role in *facilitating* a vision and a plan, then consult with and listen to labour market stakeholders. Industry, employers and communities need to exert leadership in *executing* these strategies and actions.

One group of participants identified inter-ministerial teams as essential to effective workforce development coordination. The Ministry responsible for WorkBC could be the lead ministry in initiating this cross-ministerial strategy development and action planning.

Some participants suggested local government involvement is a must, as it has been missing in collaborative planning and business-community-government dialogues. Local government needs to play a critical role in workforce development as community is what keeps workers in the region. A Toronto ("Hire An Immigrant") campaign was used as a good example of local government involvement.

As well as employers sharing leadership in workforce development, a group of participants stressed that employers should play a key role in the settlement process for immigrants, not just government or community service agencies. Participants also called for employers to take the lead on retention.

"Working together" was a theme in the *regional* session, including better collaboration between organizations, within and between sectors to recruit workers into regions. Business and social service groups need to work together, and government must show leadership. This will help to address broader issues such as daycare, affordable worker housing and transportation.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Collectively, the breakout groups reflected much enthusiasm around aspects of WorkBC initiatives including ITA programs and ITOs, expanding high school trades training and awareness, the Skills Connect program, the Provincial Nominee Program, immigrant settlement funding, creation of Regional Skills Councils, national and international marketing, influencing federal immigration policies/programs, expansion of post-secondary education spaces, new labour market agreements, increasing awareness about the challenges and solutions, and the WorkBC website.

As with most feedback forums, the critical part of the day was to hear from participants about what is not working and needs to be adjusted, what is missing, and who needs to do what.

The overriding feedback from participants was that WorkBC needs a vision and an overall strategic approach, accompanied by metrics or indicators of success for each strategic action area. Along with this, WorkBC needs to add value to or expand informational strategies including: increasing awareness of the business case for taking action on various workforce issues; clear branding and marketing in concert with industries and employers; and collection of data and research on particular issues.

Further, participants also wanted a more holistic approach that recognized workforce-related strategies will not be (as) effective without adequate child care, affordable housing, transportation, and community infrastructure and engagement.

Most discussion and suggestions focused on immigrants, temporary foreign workers and international students. Several suggestions were offered regarding immigrant integration, further streamlining and expanding successful programs (e.g. Skills Connect, PNP, etc.), more improvements in the TFWP process, expanding higher level ESL training, more flexible provisions for international students, and linkages across the immigrant/foreign worker/international student programs.

Partly in reaction to the strong focus on immigrants, a number of participants emphasized that WorkBC should not forget about or diminish the importance of members of other under-represented labour force groups such as Aboriginal people, at-risk youth, persons with disabilities, and women. Specific feedback was offered regarding each of these groups.

Another important theme in the feedback was ensuring that WorkBC provides adequate awareness-raising and tools and support for SMEs particularly regarding retention, skills development and mentoring. Part of the feedback emphasized the need to provide this as a simple clear “map” and in a “one-stop” form for SMEs.

In addition to being a strategy area and break out group unto itself, the importance of regionally sensitive strategies and initiatives through WorkBC was echoed throughout all breakout groups.

Also, literacy at all levels, lifelong learning, ITA initiatives, flexible training and co-operative education were all identified as important skill development priorities for WorkBC and our province.

Finally, while one breakout group in particular was able to focus directly on leadership roles in WorkBC initiatives, generally, the breakout group participants did not have the opportunity to fully discuss the “who” and “how” of adjusting WorkBC. Implicitly most participants see an important leadership role for government to set a vision and develop a plan in partnership with industry and supply-side stakeholders.