



Muskoka Regional Workforce Development Strategy and Implementation Plan

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Executive Summary

The Muskoka regional workforce development strategy and implementation plan lays out the foundation for which the District, its partner municipalities, and related stakeholders can pursue a collaborative approach to attracting, retaining, and training the workforce Muskoka will require today and into the future.

The workforce issues facing the District of Muskoka stem from multiple external and internal factors. These include factors such as:

Access to Housing	Skills Training and Development	Transportation
Coordination and Leadership	Engagement Fatigue	Youth
Cost-of-Living	Supports for Newcomers	Apathy in the Workplace
Labour Supply	Job Quality and Work Environment	Service Delivery Challenges
Childcare	Mental Health	

These factors are complicated by a lower than average household income, a higher than average percentage of the population working in part-time and seasonal work, and an older than average population.

The strategy consists of three key goals designed to systemically address the unique and not-so-unique challenges and opportunities currently facing the workforce across the region. The goals are:

Strategic Goal 1: Provide the coordination and leadership required to facilitate, implement, and support initiatives related to workforce attraction, development, and retention.

Strategic Goal 2: Create the conditions to enable Muskoka to attract and retain workers within the regional municipalities.

Strategic Goal 3: Build the talent development pipeline within the region to support improved awareness, training, and skill development opportunities for regional employment opportunities.

While the strategy's objectives and actions are focused on the 5-year timeframe, the workforce issues facing Muskoka and the broader domestic economy are complex and it's likely fully accomplishing the goals, in particular goal 2 and 3, will take beyond 5 years, and should be considered aspirational. These would include things like improving the workforce-oriented housing supply and encouraging the next generation of Muskoka youth to pursue employment in Muskoka's key sectors, actions which will easily extend beyond the 5 years, but will continue to pose a significant barrier to workforce development in the future if left unactioned.

A key challenge worth noting facing the implementation of this strategy, is the allocation of appropriate resources. The success of the strategy is dependent on successful implementation of goal 1, to provide coordination and leadership, essentially to be the “lightning rod” that shares and sparks activities amongst and with partners that directly support workforce development. There is a rich ecosystem of workforce development partners both within and just beyond Muskoka’s borders that are eager to support and partner on the strategic goals and objectives that have been proposed that would benefit from alignment around common regional workforce goals and challenges. It is highly recommended to involve partners in the implementation of specific actions, as well as the overall strategy, to best leverage a broader suite of expertise, resources, and communication channels.

Performance measures have been proposed to help guide the measurement of the strategy’s impact and the progress. Measurement should focus on the overall impacts that actions are having (increased knowledge, connections, attraction, retention, participation, training, etc.) rather than outputs (number of events or partners, etc.). The progress and impact of the strategy does not fall on any one individual or role but will need to take into account the collective goals and direction of the stakeholder ecosystem, as well as shifting regional, national, and global economic, social, political, and technological trends. A shift in government policy here or abroad could have a significant impact on workforce in Muskoka and may require a course adjustment in tactics.

The remainder of the executive summary provides readers with a visual summary of the strategy’s goals, objectives, actions, high-level rationale, and considerations for measuring progress. This section is followed by the full workforce development strategy with timeline and potential partners identified, and then a discussion of key findings and considerations from the consultation and data collection processes. A more thorough review of background and consultation data can be found in the appendices. Additional considerations to assist with implementation can be found, by action, in Appendix D.

GOAL 1

Coordination and Leadership

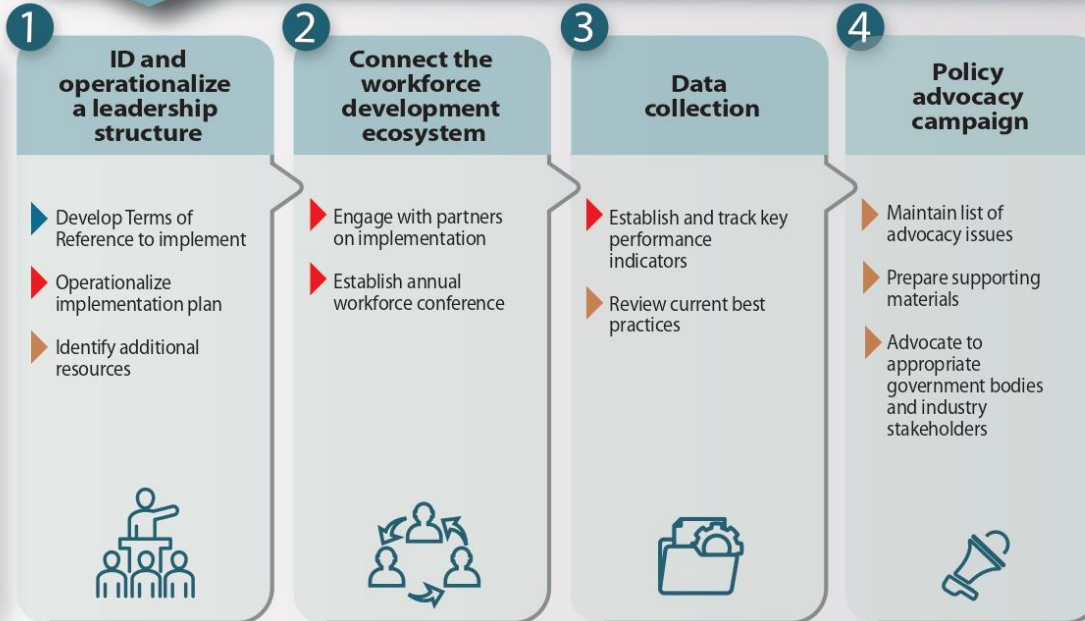


RATIONALE

- Workforce development efforts are happening, but in isolation.
- Stakeholders need a central point of regional coordination and leadership to enhance resources & partnerships.

OBJECTIVES

DELIVERY LEGEND: Immediate Short Mid. Long Ongoing



METRICS

Capacity for implementation, terms of reference developed and adhered to, number of partners actively engaged in implementation, partnership funding received to support implementation, total funding leveraged, advocacy campaign outcomes, attendance at annual conference, website visits, and best practices applied.

GOAL 2

Enhance conditions for workforce attraction and retention



RATIONALE

- Severe shortage of workforce-attainable housing, magnified by seasonality.
- Lack of awareness of regional workforce resources.
- Wage and work environment not aligned with employee needs.
- Communities lack cultural and entertainment options.

OBJECTIVES

DELIVERY LEGEND: ▶ Immediate ▶ Short ▶ Mid. ▶ Long ▶ Ongoing

1

Support reduction of housing shortage for workforce

- ▶ Attract and support diverse, attainable housing options
- ▶ Review existing housing development-related restrictions



2

Workforce attraction & retention related communications

- ▶ Central resource for residents + employer
- ▶ Brand Muskoka workforce efforts
- ▶ Marketing campaign
- ▶ Familiarization tours with target attraction markets



3

Give employers tools to support their workforce efforts

- ▶ Connect employers to resources, support, and knowledge
- ▶ Resources and support for employer-led initiatives
- ▶ Celebrate employer excellence



4

Inclusive, vibrant workplaces and communities

- ▶ Explore opportunity to establish Local Immigration Partnership
- ▶ Resources to hire individuals who face barriers
- ▶ Retail, service, and entertainment gap analysis
- ▶ Explore opportunities to support employment-related immigration processes



METRICS

Increase in working age residents, increase in affordable housing units (for workforce), increase in rental units, website traffic, employers are anecdotally better able to attract and retain employees (less annual shortfalls), more residents are finding employment, more residents with barriers are finding employment, gap analysis gaps are addressed, workplaces and community are welcoming to all workers.

GOAL 3

Build the talent pipeline in the region



RATIONALE

- Lack of awareness and interest in regional careers opportunities from youth.
- Increasing percentage of the labour force approaching retirement.
- Job seekers were not fully aware of regional opportunities.
- Job seekers found it challenging to connect with employers.

OBJECTIVES

DELIVERY LEGEND: Immediate Short Mid. Long Ongoing

1

Promote regional career pathways, opportunities, & employers

- Create targeted industry supported messaging
- Engage and educate key school officials and staff about regional career paths
- Network students with Muskoka employers



2

Development of new skills and training opportunities

- Widely accessible skills development training targeting industry needs



3

Engage residents in the workforce

- Regional job fairs that include career path information
- Improve connections between social service providers and employers



METRICS

Residents find jobs in the area, more barriered residents find employment, more youth pursue education in alignment with Muskoka's key sectors, employer training costs are reduced, employer training needs are met within the region, partnership time and investment leveraged.

Introduction

The District of Muskoka and its municipalities have been experiencing a deepening workforce crisis over the past number of years. Employers are struggling to fill vacant positions, housing is extremely scarce, the cost of living is rising, and those employed are finding it challenging to make ends meet. These conditions are limiting business competitiveness, making it challenging to bring new working age residents into the community, and ultimately leading to a more negative experience and attitude amongst the existing workforce.

While workforce development has been a key consideration for economic developers across Muskoka for some time, the development of a strategy will formalize and prioritize actions to support employers and residents on a regional basis. A comprehensive regional strategy will allow workforce partners to better address the root causes of the workforce shortage, centralize and obtain resources, and provide the coordination and leadership required for higher-order initiatives that could have an impact District-wide.

This workforce development strategy lays out a series of goals, objectives, actions, and specific tactics, as well as performance measures and metrics to provide regional economic development partners with a roadmap to attract, retain, and develop Muskoka's regional workforce in the short term, and to prepare the workforce for years to come. Following the strategy this report provides an overview of work that is already underway or completed, trends in the statistical and consultation data, and highlights best practices in similar jurisdictions that provide the context and insight required for the development of the strategy. Detailed statistical information and consultation themes can be found in the appendices. Additional considerations for implementation by action can be found in Appendix D.

Strategy Development Process

This strategy was developed through a comprehensive process that involved in-depth consultation and a deep examination of data, reports, and best practices related to workforce development, attraction, and retention in the Muskoka regional context. The process was overseen by a committee of municipal representatives from each of the six Muskoka Towns and Townships (Bracebridge, Georgian Bay, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Lake of Bays, Muskoka Lakes) and the District of Muskoka. It included a review of existing background research, strategies and reports and several methods of consultation including a survey, interviews, and in-depth discussions, culminating with a summit to introduce the strategy, validate the recommendations, and to get employers and stakeholders to think about how they can best leverage and support the strategy as it is implemented.

The survey was available for employers, residents, workers, and stakeholders to complete and it received 170 responses. In-depth interviews and discussions were conducted with 39 key workforce development stakeholders including local government officials, employment agencies, post-secondary institutions, literacy and essential skill organizations, and other key players in the workforce ecosystem. The study also involved small focus group discussions with 23 job seekers and working residents and 25 employers to better understand the nuances of the challenges being experienced first-hand and to test potential solutions. Job seeker and resident discussions focused on those who were unemployed or underemployed and/or facing barriers to entering the workforce. Employer discussions took place with key employment sectors in Muskoka, one for each of construction, building, and trades, manufacturing, main street retail and service, health and social services/government, and tourism. From these consultations, recommendations for goals, objectives, actions, specific tactics, and performance metrics were developed and reviewed by employers and stakeholders at a shared summit for additional insights on implementation and feasibility.

Muskoka Regional Workforce Development Strategy

The following section introduces the Regional Workforce Development Strategy, including goals, objectives, high level tactics, timelines, partnerships, and resources required for implementation. More detailed information relating to the implementation of specific tactics can be found in Appendix D.

To provide some definition to terminology and timeline in the strategy, note the definitions to the following terms:

- Workforce Coordinator: The proposed lead for implementation of the strategy as identified amongst the options above.
- Workforce Committee: The committee of regional economic development staff overseeing the strategy development, with a representative from each municipality including the District of Muskoka.
- Workforce Ecosystem: The list of workforce stakeholders identified under the Workforce Development Ecosystem section.
- Immediate: Implementation should begin once this strategy has been adopted by District Council (2024).
- Short: Late 2024 to the end of 2025
- Mid: 2026 to 2027
- Long: 2028 and beyond
- On-going: To be established and continued for an indefinite basis.

Strategic Goal 1: Provide the coordination and leadership required to facilitate, implement, and support initiatives related to workforce attraction, development, and retention.

Objective 1.1 Identify, operationalize, and resource a leadership and coordination structure.					
Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
1.1a	Discuss and explore the proposed coordination and leadership options to select the most appropriate model for implementation.	Workforce Committee	Workforce Ecosystem	Immediate	Staff time
1.1b	Create a Terms of Reference to govern an implementation structure that provides a fair voice for each municipality and the opportunity to engage new partners, voices, and resources.	Workforce Committee	Workforce Ecosystem	Immediate	Staff time
1.1c	Operationalize the preferred operating structure to begin formal implementation strategy.	Workforce Committee	Workforce Ecosystem	Short	Staff time
1.1d	Identify and apply for additional resources to support the implementation of the workforce development strategic plan.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee	On-going	Staff time

Objective 1.2: Establish a connected workforce development ecosystem to enable and enhance capacity, commitment, and engagement to implement the strategic goals in the long-term.

Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
1.2a	Establish an annual workforce conference to connect stakeholders and employers for networking, resources, and information sharing.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Workforce Ecosystem, Employers	Short	Staff time, budget for venue, refreshments, speakers, promotion

Objective 1.3: Work with partners to collect data on an on-going basis for trend identification, performance measurement, and to inform on-going implementation of this strategic plan.

1.3a	Confirm data collection tactics. Collect and analyze metrics annually, when possible. Adjust tactics as required.	Workforce Committee	Workforce Coordinator, Workforce Ecosystem	Short	Staff time, budget for specific data
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Objective 1.4: Undertake an advocacy campaign to highlight workforce needs and required policy solutions in the District of Muskoka.

Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
1.4a	Create a list of key workforce barriers that require support from different levels of government to address.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Workforce Ecosystem, Employers	On-going	Staff time
1.4b	Educate on the issues by preparing and supporting the preparation of advocacy materials to enable political officials across the Muskoka region to advocate on behalf of the workforce needs of the community.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Local and regional politicians, Workforce Ecosystem	On-going	Staff time
1.4c	Connect with regional, provincial, and national government bodies and other sector and industry stakeholders to advocate for the workforce needs of the Muskoka region	Local Politicians	Workforce Coordinator, Workforce Committee, Workforce Ecosystem	On-going	Staff time

Resource Permitting Actions					
Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
1.3	Undertake an annual scan of workforce best practices and local needs to identify opportunities to enhance or target programming. Share data with partners where relevant.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee	Mid	Staff time

Rationale for Goal 1

This goal, while elementary, will be critical to the successful implementation of this strategy and meaningful workforce development efforts going forward. Within the region there are efforts to tackle the workforce challenges by individual employers and stakeholders, but most are happening in isolation and are not regional in nature. Much of the consultation noted the desire and need to work together across stakeholder groups to address the challenge but noted that a central point of coordination and leadership for workforce development efforts was missing in the Muskoka region. Goal 1 lays out the foundation to establish a leadership structure and implement key regional coordination and leadership roles such as building connections between workforce stakeholders and employers, staying current on the needs of the employer community, funding opportunities, and best practices in workforce development, and playing a key role in advocating for employer and community needs to other levels of government. Completing these steps will create the functionality that is required at a regional level to coordinate and implement a regional workforce strategy.

Proposed performance measures for Goal 1 include: Capacity for implementation, terms of reference developed and adhered to, number of partners actively engaged in implementation, partnership funding received to support implementation, total funding leveraged, advocacy campaign outcomes, attendance at annual conference, website visits, best practices applied.

Strategic Goal 2: Create the conditions to enable Muskoka to attract and retain workers within the regional municipalities.

Objective 2.1: Support the reduction of the housing shortage for workers.					
	Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.1a	Work with the District Housing Manager and Municipal Councils to attract and support investment into diverse, attainable housing options. This should include exploring opportunities to partner with employers and the RTO12 Catalyst Housing project to offer workforce housing.	District Housing Manager, Workforce Coordinator	Municipal EDOs, Employers	Short	Staff time, budget for housing incentives, development, and administration
2.1b	Work with municipal planning departments to review existing restrictions on housing and enable more permissive attainable housing development.	Municipal EDOs	District Housing Manager, Workforce Coordinator	Short	Staff time

Objective 2.2: Undertake regional and external workforce attraction and retention marketing efforts.

	Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.2a	Create and maintain a standalone central online workforce attraction and retention resource to showcase living and working in the region, the Muskoka Job Board, success stories, communication about this strategy, and resources for job seekers, residents, employers, and stakeholders.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee	Mid	Staff time, budget, and/or IT capacity to develop and maintain website
2.2b	Establish a brand or tagline associated with workforce development and attraction efforts to ensure there is consistent messaging, and supports, resources, and initiatives that relate to workforce development in the region can be easily recognized.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee	Mid	Staff time, consultant
2.2c	Create a marketing campaign to promote the central website, brand, and strategy success stories within the region and in targeted other regions in Ontario, Canada, and globally.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee	Mid	Staff time, budget for marketing campaign

Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.2d	Undertake innovative familiarization tour opportunities to showcase the region to potential residents from target employment demographics (students, young families, newcomers).	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Muskoka Tourism, Post-Secondary, Newcomer Centres, Employers	Long	Staff time, budget for tours and related events/promotion

Objective 2.3: Provide employers with the tools, resources, and supports they need to enhance their workforce attraction and retention efforts.

Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.3a	Support the coordination and development of employer-led solutions to workforce development challenges such as training, transportation, culture development, attraction, and housing, including exploring the development and implementation of an 'employer workforce innovation fund'.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Employers, Workforce Ecosystem, Muskoka Futures, Simcoe Muskoka Skillforce	Mid	Staff time, budget for funding and promotion

	Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.3b	Organize virtual and in-person educational events to enhance employer understanding of (a) the resources available to support their workforce efforts in the region, the benefits of using them, and how to access them and (b) best practices around targeted topics of interest, opportunity or need to support their workforce efforts in the region.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Ecosystem, Muskoka Small Business Centre, Muskoka Futures, Employers	Short	Staff time, budget for venue, refreshments, speakers, promotion
2.3c	Create an employer awards and recognition program to celebrate employers who are doing a great job at keeping their staff happy and engaged.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Workforce Ecosystem	Long	Staff time, Budget to promote program and create awards

Objective 2.4: Support the development of inclusive, vibrant workplaces and communities that celebrate and support diversity in all its forms.

	Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.4a	Undertake local and regional retail, service, and entertainment gap analyses, with a special focus on youth, young adults, young families, and newcomers.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee	Mid	Staff time, budget for investment attraction activities
2.4b	Investigate starting a Local Immigration Partnership to serve as a coordinating body to attract the resources, supports, and partnerships to help new immigrants establish themselves in the Muskoka region.	District of Muskoka	Workforce Committee, Workforce Ecosystem	Immediate	Staff time
2.4c	Enhance employer access to resources that help them hire and retain employees that face additional barriers (mental health, disabilities, language, newcomer, mature workers etc.).	Workforce Coordinator	IDEA Advisory, SSM, Elizabeth Fry Society, Community Living, Ontario Works, Literacy and Essential Skill Providers, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program Coordinators	Mid	Staff time, budget for venue, refreshments, speakers, promotion

	Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.4d	Explore the possibility of providing more focused support to employers to assist with immigration processes such as the Labour Market Impact Assessment process to address the labour shortage. Implement if feasible.	Workforce Coordinator, Possible Local Immigration Partnership	Workforce Coordinator, Workforce Committee, Post-Secondary, Employers	Long	Staff time, new staff position or budget for immigration consultant, budget for promotion

Resource Permitting Actions

	Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.1	Improve community attitudes towards affordable housing development.	Municipal EDOs	District Housing Manager, Workforce Coordinator	Mid	Staff time, budget for marketing
2.4	Create engaging programming and experiences that generate a high quality of life and helps residents get to know and feel part of the community	Workforce Committee	Local Municipal Staff	Long	Staff time, budget for new program/event/attraction development

Action		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
2.4	Establish regional workforce related retention programming to help new employees better understand the region and find community.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Sector and Business Associations, Employers, Post Secondary, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program Coordinators	Long	Staff time, budget to support incentive development
2.4	Work with District of Muskoka staff to enhance the regional transit system to better meet the needs of the workforce and students. This should include connection to and between the Townships, as well as connections into Parry Sound and Simcoe County (Midland).	District of Muskoka	Workforce Coordinator, Workforce Committee, Post-Secondary, Employers	Mid	Staff time, budget for transit development and operation

Rationale for Goal 2

Goal 2 responds to employer and resident feedback to create the right conditions and environment in Muskoka to enable workforce attraction and retention. Employers are not able to effectively recruit and retain staff, first and foremost due to a lack of housing, but also due to a lack of understanding of the resources available to them, a lack of centralized information on the region (moving and living in Muskoka), communities that lack entertainment and cultural options, and in some cases a lack of motivation to be a quality employer. Job seekers expressed that wages and work environment were the two most important factors when selecting a job and the current employment marketplace was often not meeting their needs. Objectives under this goal focus on addressing the workforce housing crisis, promoting the region and opportunities within it, enabling employers to access the tools and resources

they need to implement workforce attraction and retention efforts and become an employer of choice, and improving communities to attract more working-age residents. Implementing this goal ensures that communities and employers have the tools and resources they require for successful workforce attraction and retention.

Most critical to note that workforce conditions cannot significantly improve until the mismatch between housing supply and affordability better aligns with workforce needs and income levels.

Proposed performance measures for goal 2 include: increase in working age residents, increase in affordable housing units (for workforce), increase in rental units, website traffic, employers are anecdotally better able to attract and retain employees (fewer annual shortfalls), more residents are finding employment, more residents with barriers are finding employment, retail, services, entertainment gaps are addressed, workplaces and community are welcoming to all workers.

Strategic Goal 3: Build the talent development pipeline within the region to support improved awareness, training, and skill development opportunities for regional employment opportunities

Objective 3.1: Promote regional career pathways, opportunities, and employers in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.

Actions		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
3.1a	Work with local industry to identify and create key messaging that targets a range of demographics to promote and educate about sector opportunities.	Workforce Coordinator	Employers, Skillforce, School Boards, Guidance Counsellors, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Coordinators	Short	Staff time, budget for convening costs, development of materials
3.1b	Connect with school boards and guidance counsellors to educate them on local opportunities and find opportunities to work with them to promote those opportunities to students.	Workforce Coordinator	School Boards, Guidance Counsellors, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Coordinators, Educators, Skillforce	Mid	Staff time, budget for events and speakers

Actions		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
3.1c	Create opportunities to familiarize and network high school and post-secondary students with Muskoka and its regional employers.	Workforce Coordinator	School Boards, Post Secondary, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program Coordinators, Skillforce, Employers	Long	Staff time, budget for events and refreshments

Objective 3.2 Support the development of new skills development and training opportunities in alignment with regional business needs.

Actions		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
3.2a	Explore and implement opportunities to promote, enhance access to, develop and/or deliver targeted programming for the region to address industry needs. This should be identified on an on-going basis with industry. Notable general needs at the moment include management training and customer service training.	Workforce Coordinator	Post Secondary, OTEC, RTO12, School Boards	Mid	Staff time, budget for technology, meeting space, training or transportation costs, program development, program delivery, and marketing

Objective 3.3: Engage more residents into the regional workforce.

Actions		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
3.3a	Offer local job fairs with a focus on showcasing the types of career paths available. Job fairs can have a specific target, either by sector or a focused demographic (i.e., seniors)	Workforce Coordinator	Employment Ontario Service Providers, Ontario Works, School Boards, Post Secondary, Employers, Skillforce	Short	Staff time, budget for events and refreshments
3.3b	Enhance connections between service providers and employers to provide comprehensive supports (food and housing assistance, literacy and upskilling, mental health and addictions) to more barriered job seekers.	Workforce Coordinator	SSM, Social, Economic, and Mental Health Support Organizations, Workforce Ecosystem	Short	Staff time, budget for material development, events, and refreshments

Resource Permitting Actions

Actions		Potential Lead	Potential Partners	Timeline	Potential Resource Requirements
3.1	Develop a youth camp to encourage youth to explore key employment sectors in the Muskoka region.	Workforce Coordinator	School Boards, Post Secondary, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program Coordinators, Skillforce, Employers	Long	Staff time, budget for program development and the cost of running a camp
3.2	Explore the feasibility of establishing a shared skills training and development facility for local business to utilize.	Workforce Coordinator	Workforce Committee, Workforce Ecosystem Stakeholders, Employers	Long	Staff time, budget for feasibility study and business plan, budget for centre development (significant)
3.3	Create a job seeker networking program and mentorship program.	Workforce Coordinator	Employment Ontario Service Providers, Ontario Works, Employers	Long	Staff time, budget for program development, operation, and promotion

Rationale for Goal 3

Goal 3 is focused on better connecting youth and residents to key employment sectors in the Muskoka region and their related training opportunities. Employers noted that youth do not seem interested in entering key employment sectors in Muskoka, while at the same time much of their workforce was heading into retirement age. Conversely, job seekers were not fully aware of the range of opportunities that existed in Muskoka and did not feel like they had the connections required to find the jobs they were qualified for. The objectives under this goal seek to better educate and connect youth, residents, and adult job seekers to regional employment opportunities and related training, enhance training opportunities available regionally, or access to those that are beyond region. The outcome will be an enhanced connection to and skillset for the existing workforce, and more youth from the region choosing to stay and work in Muskoka's key employment sectors.

Proposed performance measures for goal 3 include: residents find jobs in the area, more barriered residents find employment, more youth pursue education in alignment with Muskoka's key sectors, employer training costs are reduced, employer training needs are met within the region, partnership time and investment leveraged, employment needs in key employment sectors are reduced.

Setting the Context

Muskoka is a unique region in many ways. It has a significant population of seasonal residents, a very seasonal economy that creates instability in the labour market, and a large geography which poses a challenge to create service delivery models that are equitable and inclusive across the region. The following sections highlights the unique considerations in the Muskoka region focusing on resident demographics.

Who lives in Muskoka?

The District of Muskoka is based in Central Ontario and home to approximately 66,674 people across three towns, three townships, and two First Nations territories (2021). The District's population has grown rapidly in recent years, over 10% between 2016 and 2021. The median age of Muskoka's population is 52.8, almost 10 years older than Ontario's median of 41.6¹. Muskoka has a notably lower percentage of the population that are both youth and working age and a higher population of seniors compared to the province overall. This means there is a smaller workforce available to service the needs of a growing senior's population, and that ultimately highlights the need to attract and retain more working age adults and families into the area to retain a workforce into the future. At the same time, while immigration has increased slowly across Ontario over the years, it remains stagnant in Muskoka, with the region attracting only 475 new immigrants between 2011 and 2021².

Education

Approximately 60% of Muskoka's working age population has a post secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, including almost 30% with a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma, just over 20% with a bachelor's degree or higher, and almost 8% with an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma. Just over 30% of the working age population has only a high school diploma or equivalent, and almost 10% have no certificate, degree, or diploma. This is not necessarily a concern as many jobs within Muskoka do not require education beyond a high school level.

Seasonal Population

¹ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=ontario&DGUIDlist=2021A00033544,2021A000235&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

² <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=ontario&DGUIDlist=2021A00033544,2021A000235&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

Muskoka's second home population outnumbers permanent residents by a moderate margin with an estimated 81,452 seasonal residents in 2022 compared to 66,674 permanent (2021). In some areas, such as Georgian Bay, 82% of the population comes from this second-home population. According to a 2022 report by the District of Muskoka, 77% of second households earn over \$100,000 annually, compared to 28% of the permanent population pointing to a large, and anecdotally, growing disparity³.

Housing

Access to housing has been a contributing factor to workforce shortages across the country, but Muskoka's situation faces unique barriers. Approximately 60% of the total number of private dwellings are occupied by full time residents. This is significantly lower than the Province of Ontario as a whole, where approximately 93% of private dwellings were occupied by full time residents. This means that 40% of the housing stock is absorbed by residents who will not remain in the community on a year-round basis, and in some cases may only visit for a short time during the year. Another noted difference in Muskoka is access to the rental market. 82% of homes in the District are owner occupied versus the Ontario average of 68%. Lastly, there is a lack of diverse housing options with 82% of dwellings being single family homes compared to 54% on average in Ontario. Muskoka consistently lags on all other housing options except for other single-attached houses and moveable dwellings⁴. Anecdotally the short-term rental market, fuelled by Muskoka's reputation as a tourism destination, also plays a significant role in removing potential rental properties from the marketplace.

Who works in Muskoka?

Even employers admit that working in Muskoka can be a challenging environment. Sometimes the nature of the work involves a high level of physical exertion and long hours and other times employers struggle to provide their employees with a liveable number of hours through the off season. The largest sectors of employment in the region are the retail and accommodations and food services sectors, both of which are often noted for lower wages and part time work. Interestingly, the number of those working from home in Muskoka also increased significantly between 2016 and 2021, by 3,190 or 115% and those remaining at their usual place of work have decreased by 2,595 or 12.7%⁵.

³ <https://www.muskoka.on.ca/en/business-planning-development/Planning-Docs-Forms/2023-SHS-Final-Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=ontario&DGUIDlist=2021A00033544,2021A000235&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

⁵ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=ontario&DGUIDlist=2021A00033544,2021A000235&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

Households in Muskoka earn an average of \$108,000 annually, \$8,000 less than the average Ontario household. Over 50% of Muskoka’s population over 15 years of age has an income below \$30,000 per year, and on average there is a higher percentage of income earners employed on a part time basis (6% higher than Ontario overall). As of the 2021 Census, Muskoka also has a notably lower participation rate (57.8%) and employment rate (51.5%) than the rest of Province, yet also has a slightly lower unemployment rate (10.8%)⁶.

A much more in-depth profile of residents in Muskoka can be found in Appendix A.

Background Reports and Studies

As noted, the challenges Muskoka is experiencing related to workforce are not new and several reports, strategies, and studies have recognized and examined different aspects of the issue and provided recommendations. The following section briefly details the highlights of those reports, and a more detailed summary of background reports and information can be found in Appendix B.

Muskoka Employment Partnership Report

The Muskoka Employment Partnership report was led by the District of Muskoka and examined how employment trends and conditions were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Muskoka’s low wage workers were some of the hardest hit by provincial restrictions, and sectors that were impacted by provincial shut downs saw their workforce move to sectors where opportunities were more stable. The report also noted that while COVID-19 had a big impact on some of Muskoka’s key employment sectors, much of the dysfunction in the labour market existed before the pandemic. The report highlights some of the key anomalies facing the labour market such as low wages, poor job quality, a shrinking workforce, on-going labour shortages in various sectors, all further impacted by shortages in affordable housing and a lack of public transportation.

Key recommendations focused on improving conditions for workers and the development of workers for key employment sectors in the District of Muskoka including actions like exploring career pathway projects in the health-care sector, promote a living wage in Muskoka among Muskoka employers, and advocating for a rise in the hourly minimum wage to meet living wage standards in Muskoka.

⁶ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=ontario&DGUIDlist=2021A00033544,2021A000235&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

Catalyst Housing Report

The tourism sector in Muskoka has struggled to attract and retain a labour force for some years prior to COVID-19. In 2018, the Regional Tourism Organization (RTO12) identified that workforce shortages were a major concern for industry stakeholders and began developing a concept to address those concerns. This led to the development of a concept called the Catalyst Housing Project which intends to merge housing with training and skill development into a “work-integrated training and housing ecosystem” in return for working in the regional tourism/hospitality industry for a short-term period of 1-2 years. The Town of Huntsville recently partnered with RTO12 to undertake further research on workforce gaps specific to Huntsville related to implementing a pilot version of the Catalyst concept.

In preparing for the development of the concept, RTO12 undertook extensive research to qualify the workforce challenges facing the tourism sector and the results were stark. The tourism sector offered generally low wages, faced an aging population to recruit from, had low levels of youth engagement and retention stemming from negative perceptions of tourism careers, and had experienced a long-term loss of employment in the sector due to the impacts of COVID-19. Furthermore, housing was noted as unaffordable in Muskoka and access to rental units extremely challenging, yet in July of 2022, Airbnb listed 2,500 active home rentals across the RTO region, mostly single-family home, highlighting an additional challenge facing workforce recruitment efforts. In the 2022 Q2 Business Confidence Index Survey for the RTO12 catchment (Muskoka, Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, West Parry Sound, Port Loring – Restoule), it was calculated that the regional tourism industry was short 1,300 full-time and 4,600 part-time workers during the 2022 high season.

District Housing Action Plan

In 2020, the District of Muskoka authored a 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan to establish a framework for future growth and planning decisions on behalf of the District. Within the document, the District stated their intent to provide housing via a range of attainable housing options. The district defined attainable as:

- Adequate in condition (no major repairs needed)
- Appropriate in size (bedrooms appropriate for household)
- Affordable (costing less than 30% of before tax income)
- Access to Services (located in areas where common services are available), and;
- Available (a range of housing types).

The Plan includes four key objectives: driving the creation of new Attainable Housing, providing support & aligning services to improve housing stability for all, optimizing current housing assets, and partnering to create supports to address homelessness. To meet those objectives, the District proposed a series of key planning activities to undertake including,

- an examination of planning policy to identify, streamline, and prioritize the development of attainable housing,
- the identification and preparation of available and remediable properties,
- the development of attainable housing models for those sites, including exploring new housing models, and;
- the examination of the transportation connections and environmental sustainability required to ensure those new housing developments are successful and meet community need.

The Plan notes that housing for workforce remains a critical issue across the District, and the implementation of recommendations align in some areas to recommendations from this strategy. As a result, it will be important to ensure there is representation related to the implementation of the regional workforce strategy on the Housing Task Force, and vice versa in regional workforce planning initiatives and information sharing efforts.

Since the completion of the Plan a task force was developed to recommend implementation tactics and enhance understanding about the types of housing needed and the housing spectrum. COVID posed a significant number of challenges to implementation and convening, and the task force was put on hold, relaunching towards the end of 2023. This task force has confirmed the following short-term priorities to work on including additional residential units (secondary suites), municipal tools and incentives, and land trusts.

Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy

In addition to housing, childcare was often noted as a major barrier to entering or returning to the workforce in the region. To take targeted steps to address this, the District of Muskoka recently completed a Workforce Strategy for Early Childhood Education (ECE) focused around three primary goals, talent recruitment, talent retention, and the creation of a collaborative and quality ECE system.

While many of the objectives and actions related to specific aspects of the ECE sector, there are several general actions that align directly with the broader cross-sectoral workforce development recommendations contained within this strategy. To avoid confusion and the duplication of resources, it is strongly recommended that any staff person dedicated to the implantation of the ECE strategy work directly with the individual or group responsible for the implementation of this workforce strategy. ECE is a critical need in the region, but the implementation of the ECE workforce strategy should not supersede the needs and recommendations identified in

this strategy simply because it was completed first. Careful consideration must be given to the best way to advocate and deliver on regional, cross-sectoral workforce needs in tandem with this ECE strategy to maximize the impact of and resources allocated to both strategies. Most importantly, working collaboratively on implementation will reduce confusion and duplication in the marketplace.

Efforts that should be done collaboratively, or led by the implementation of this workforce strategy with input from the ECE staff lead include: outreach to school boards and post-secondary to promote career awareness and opportunities within the ECE sector, advocacy for funding and training, an annual employer survey, creation and promotion of regional marketing material, including a central website and any presence at trade and employment shows that are not sector specific, and the development of partnerships and learning opportunities that are not sector specific.

Regional Economic Development Strategies

Huntsville's Economic Development Strategic Plan identifies the Town as playing a key role in supporting workforce development. Through community consultation they identified several local challenges facing the workforce such as a low-paying jobs, limited local talent, seasonality, spousal employment, and lack of affordable housing. The strategy proposes to address this through several mechanisms that will align closely with recommendations in this strategy including building new partnerships, enhancing the community for all, addressing housing, attraction strategies, and new program development.

The Township of Muskoka Lakes, through their Economic Development Strategic Plan has also committed to improving workforce-related housing, supporting workforce development initiatives, and creating more liveable communities.

Key Industry Sectors in Muskoka

Compared to 2018, the Muskoka economy has largely recovered from major shifts related to the impacts of COVID-19 and most sectors are in a growth phase except for the transportation and warehousing sector which experienced a 23% decline and the real estate sector which experienced an 8% decline in employment. Muskoka's largest employment sector is the retail trade sector with 4,625 employees, followed by the construction industry with 3,507 employees, the accommodations and food services sector with 3,424 employees, the health care and social assistance sector with 3,386 employees, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector with 2,422 employees, the public administration sector with 2,093 employees, and the manufacturing sector with 2,091 employees. Amongst those, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector grew the fastest since 2018, by 97%, while the accommodations and food services sector stagnated, shrinking by 2%. Full insight into industry level changes in employment can be found in Table 1 below, with additional details located in Appendix A.

Table 1: Changes in Employment by Industry in Muskoka from 2018 to 2023 (Industry Table, Lightcast Q3 2023)

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 % Change	2023 Employment Concentration
11	Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	142	195	37%	0.54
21	Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	161	253	57%	0.70
22	Utilities	186	250	35%	1.12
23	Construction	2,736	3,507	28%	1.79
31-33	Manufacturing	1,629	2,091	28%	0.77
41	Wholesale trade	819	1,229	50%	0.87
44-45	Retail trade	4,190	4,625	10%	1.33
48-49	Transportation and warehousing	667	516	(23%)	0.36
51	Information and cultural industries	226	261	16%	0.39
52	Finance and insurance	401	661	65%	0.47
53	Real estate and rental and leasing	404	371	(8%)	0.76
54	Professional, scientific, and technical services	780	1,176	51%	0.57
55	Management of companies and enterprises	25	62	155%	0.29
56	Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	1,179	1,642	39%	1.13
61	Educational services	1,148	1,622	41%	0.66
62	Health care and social assistance	2,860	3,386	18%	0.87
71	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1,232	2,422	97%	4.76
72	Accommodation and food services	3,504	3,424	(2%)	1.53
81	Other services (except public administration)	966	966	(0%)	0.87
91	Public administration	2,078	2,093	1%	0.92
X0	Unclassified	477	530	11%	0.88

Future Industry Needs and Trends

To prepare for the workforce of the future we need to explore occupational and industry trends and outlooks. For the purposes of this strategy, both predictive occupational trend data and firsthand consultation information were examined to understand industry needs today and looking into the future. These needs can be used to inform the development and delivery of future training and

development material and to target education and promotion of key employment sectors and opportunities to youth and the community.

Fastest Growing Occupations

EMSI Lightcast⁷ Q3 2023 predictive occupational data was used to identify the fastest growing occupations between now and 2030. The top 10 fastest growing occupations are identified below and ordered by their anticipated increase in number of jobs.

- Sales and service support occupations (441 new positions, 11% increase)
- Sales and service representatives and other customer and personal services occupations (358 new positions, 12% increase)
- Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors in processing, manufacturing, and printing (333 new positions, 23% increase)
- Professional occupations in law, education, social, community, and government services (325 new positions, 18% increase)
- Retail sales and service supervisors and specialized occupations in sales and services (233 new positions, 15% increase)
- General Trades (230 new positions, 12% increase)
- Administrative occupations and transportation logistics occupations (177 new positions, 16% increase)
- Administrative and financial support and supply chain logistics occupations (175 new positions, 10% increase)
- Technical trades and transportation officers and controllers (171 new positions, 5% increase)
- Administrative and financial supervisors and specialized administrative occupations (143 new positions, 18% increase)

The reality is most of Muskoka's fastest occupations are expected to be in low wage and low skill positions. Consideration needs to be given as to how employers and the community can ensure that those employed in these occupations are able to maintain an acceptable quality of life in the face of high housing and transportation costs and a general rise in the cost of living.

Retail and Service Sector

The unique challenges facing the retail and service sector were defined by the seasonality of their business cycle. Their need for staff is impacted by customer demand that peaks in the summer and decreases significantly in the winter, albeit some parts of the sector experience a brief increase in business during the winter holiday season. As customer demand slows down many employers are forced to lay off part of their workforce although they do try to accommodate employees who want to stay employed when possible. In fact, most participants noted that they were currently overstaffed in low season and find it necessary to incur these additional

⁷ EMSI Lightcast is a Labour Market Analytics firm that provide Ontario specific labour market data and modelling products through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs.

labour costs to retain quality employees for their next high season. Given the significant increase in demand across the sector as high season approaches, competition for scarce talent is extremely high during peak season.

In terms of sector needs, in-demand skills included management and supervisory, customer service, common sense, social, sales, conflict resolution skills and health and safety training. Employers anticipated requiring general first aid, Smart Serve, and Safe Food Handling certifications.

Tourism Sector

COVID-19 had a major impact on the tourism sector, starting with a complete shut down of almost all tourism-related businesses and varying degrees of restrictive legislation to follow. As a result, many employees left to pursue employment in other, less impacted fields. The sector has been challenged to bring in new staff and as a result employers are turning to temporary foreign workers⁸ with increasing frequency and moderate success, although housing remains a significant challenge. There is also a strong interest in hiring co-op students, however, the co-op term does not align with the tourism sector's high season and students must return before the employers' peak demand is over. Offering consistent employment and hours is a challenge for the industry, as much of the work is seasonal and subject to consumer demand, which remains volatile. Employers must hire early in the season to ensure they can meet staffing needs during peak demand, but staff expect to start receiving full time hours in June and for example, June was very slow this year, so employees left because they were not receiving the hours they expected. This volatility poses a major challenge for employee retention.

The tourism sector occupations that were most in demand included housekeeping and culinary positions including line cooks, sous chefs, and chefs de partie. A shortage of office administrators, performers, and lifeguards was also noted. The skills that were most in demand included customer service, social, common sense, management, and supervisory skills. The sector has also struggled to attract and retain tradespeople to facilitate repairs and property maintenance. Hiring contractors to fulfill that role is very costly, and there can be a significant wait to get serviced.

Construction, Building, and Trades Sectors

The construction, building, and trades sectors are facing a significant knowledge and labour crunch as most of their workforce nears retirement. For many years youth did not enter the trades and there was, and in many cases still is, a stigma around the trades. Historically, guidance counsellors and parents were not supportive of promoting the trades. However, access to tradespeople will be

⁸ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/temporary-foreign-worker.html>

extremely competitive in the coming years and if staff cannot be found, it will simply drive-up costs and increase project length meaning employment in these sectors will be well-paying and in demand. Furthermore, employment in these sectors is not expected to be replaced by artificial intelligence in the foreseeable future.

It was also noted that the long hours associated with work in trades, construction and building sectors made it extremely difficult for those with childcare responsibilities to enter the trades because traditional daycare hours do not align with sector needs. As a result, women are significantly unrepresented in the trades, building and construction industries. Furthermore, employers noted that unfortunately the sector is considered unwelcoming to women and there is more that needs to be done to create a more inclusive and less misogynistic work environment.

Training employees and/or showcasing this sector to youth or others in the community can be challenging because it can be unsafe to let untrained people use complex and/or large pieces of equipment. Simulators were suggested as a potential training and education tool.

The most in demand occupations in the construction, building, and trades sector are water/sewer workers, heavy equipment operators, DZ drivers, diesel mechanics, and general tradespeople. It was noted that employers struggled to find staff who had strong leadership and soft skills.

Manufacturing Sector

The manufacturing sector indicated that their hiring demands had slowed down in recent months due to slowing market conditions, however this is not expected to persist. The biggest challenge facing the sector was that their current workforce is aging and retiring after many had been in the sector more than 30+ years resulting in a major loss of knowledge. Skilled and technical staff were considered harder to recruit and employers often had to look outside of Muskoka, whereas general labour was more readily available in the region.

The most in demand occupations in the manufacturing sector included general labourers, heavy equipment technicians, machinists, millwrights, marketers, accountants, management, and brewers. The most in-demand skills included technical skills for automation, robotics, and machinery, and an understanding of environmental and other regulations.

Health, Social, and Public Service Sectors

Those consulted in this sector felt that health, social and public service careers are not well promoted to elementary and high school students. The sector wants to do a better job creating awareness of employment opportunities in the field and giving youth a chance

to test them out to understand the significant emotional rewards these careers can offer. While there are several post-secondary programs that align with the needs of these sectors in the region, demand for health and social service students is very high and there are a limited number of students graduating, both regionally and across the province to support sector workforce needs.

The most in-demand occupations in the health, social, and public sectors included PSW and adult caretaking, ECE and child service worker, developmental service worker, doctors, nurses, and adjacent health care professionals, and public works. Customer service was considered essential for many of these roles. Employees also often require a wider skillset to deal with individuals who can be medically fragile or have behavioural challenges.

Key Consultation Themes

Through a thorough analysis of survey, interview, and small focus group discussion data, several key themes related to workforce attraction, retention, and development were identified. The following section provides details related to each theme.

Housing

Housing was the most significant issue facing workforce attraction, retention, and development across all forms of consultation by a significant margin. Many employers invested resources into recruitment, found many job seekers interested and willing to relocate, only to hear, those recruits had to turn down employment because they could not find housing. Muskoka's housing market is impacted by many seasonal residents and retirees who are occupying housing but not seeking employment, the significant presence and demand of short-term rentals, and an overall lack of diverse housing options, although it has been noted that this has been improving in recent years. As a result, current and potential residents struggle to find housing, and when it can be found the costs are not feasible for most who earn their income in Muskoka even when employed on a full-time basis. In addition to high housing costs, new residents were often not prepared for the high costs associated with hooking up utilities.

Some employers are now taking on the role of purchasing and subsidizing housing for their employees. Several of those consulted noted, however, that this can cause significant challenges for both parties as housing should not be tied to employment (i.e., staff ability to maintain employment in the long term, the employer's ability to provide it). Employers were interested in explored partnerships with government to offer housing to new employees transitioning into the region. Several employers also noted that they had tried to develop their own housing development proposals to meet their workforce needs, however existing policy and direction was not supportive of those concepts, and they were not allowed to move forward with their (i.e., portable living arrangements, tiny homes, etc.).

It should be noted that without appropriate, attainable housing options, workforce challenges will persist indefinitely, making this the most critical issue to address.

The District of Muskoka currently has a Manager of Housing Projects and has just re-established its housing task force that is focused on identifying funding and policy to enable future housing development in Muskoka. It is recommended that the task force include representation related to the implementation of this strategy on it, be it a dedicated workforce strategy lead or member of the regional EDO workforce committee.

Coordination and Leadership

Workforce development efforts are strengthened by maximizing partnership efforts where there is alignment around common goals. There are many different stakeholders in the workforce development ecosystem that are working in their own targeted way to address barriers to employment, workforce development, attraction, and retention, however, in Muskoka, this is not currently happening in a coordinated way. All stakeholders involved in the discussions expressed a desire in being involved in workforce initiatives but noted that currently there is no rallying or central connection point to support and enhance workforce development efforts at the regional scale. This was a consistent theme in discussions with organizations that were involved in workforce development efforts in other regions, primarily, neighbouring Simcoe County. Those initiatives would be spearheaded by the Simcoe County economic development office and engaged a broad range of workforce stakeholders across that region. Simcoe County brought the leadership, coordination, and background information on employer needs to support the work. Many of those stakeholders would like to be involved in work related to workforce development in Muskoka, however, they don't know where to start and who is the best person to connect with.

They also felt that there was the opportunity to provide a better platform to connect stakeholders across the workforce development ecosystem and to employers to both support the strategy implementation and achieve their own organizational goals.

Cost-of-Living

Employers, stakeholders, and job seekers/residents all noted the rapidly rising cost of living as a major concern when considering challenges facing the workforce in Muskoka. This was driven by the sentiment that even those who were earning at or above the living wage are now struggling to meet their basic housing and living needs, especially if they did not already own property in the region. Several employers recognized that they were not able to pay at or above the living wage while remaining competitive, and this was particularly true in the retail and low-skill service sectors. However, while many other factors play a role in job seeker

motivation and job satisfaction, wage remains the top priority and employers will need to offer a competitive wage and a good working environment to attract the best talent.

On the other hand, wage subsidy and replacement such as Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan, Ontario Works, and Ontario Disability Support Program no longer provide enough income for recipients to meet their basic needs. This is pushing many recipients to return to work, and some of those cases they are not ready or motivated to enter the workforce. In many cases additional supports to prepare for, find, and retain employment including for mental health will be required to ensure these residents can successfully transition back into the workplace.

Labour Supply

Muskoka's population is aging. Many employers are concerned that long term employees will retire, and they will lose a significant amount of skill and knowledge. The population in Muskoka is older than average, therefore Muskoka has a lower labour supply available than in other areas. This is further limited by the lack of attainable housing in the region. Many of those that are living here have become disengaged from the workforce due to mental health struggles, other barriers, or simply too much exposure to poor conditions and wages in the workplace. As a result, many employers do not have enough labour supply available, and they are now looking at ways to bring in new staff with the LMIA (Labour Market Impact Assessment) process and other immigration channels.

Childcare

There are not enough childcare spaces in Muskoka and many parents struggle to find a spot before they return to work. This is made more complex by the nature of employment available in Muskoka, which can feature long days or part time work that falls outside of the traditional hours that daycare is available. As a result, many parents, and women in particular, are not returning to work as they raise their children due to the lack of childcare spaces, even if they are interested in new employment and training opportunities. Employers have considered creating their own daycare facility and this concept would benefit from some support to coordinate and build partnerships amongst like minded employers.

While the Federal government has created a \$10/day childcare program to lower costs for parents, this has resulted in increased demand for spaces, in many cases increasing wait times for childcare across Muskoka. Despite this, the District of Muskoka has committed to creating an additional 373 day care spots for the region by 2026⁹10.

⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/child-daycare-funding-ontario-1.7085204>

¹⁰ <https://doppleronline.ca/huntsville/district-aiming-for-373-new-child-care-spaces-by-end-of-2026-through-federal-program/>

Skills Training and Development

Muskoka has a significant gap in skills training and development facilities. There is a history of educational facilities coming to and then exiting the region including the University of Waterloo, Nipissing University, and the Ontario Fire College. Today, only a small Georgian College campus exists in Bracebridge amongst a private, specialized colleges like Health and Safety Management College, which specializes in fire alarm technology, and a couple of first aid training organizations to fill the training and skills development gaps in the region. Currently, Georgian College's program offerings are limited at their Bracebridge campus (see Appendix F for more detail), however, they are interested in exploring how and where they can support further skills growth and development in the region. It was also noted that although there might be interest from students outside of the Muskoka region to attend classes at the Bracebridge campus, there were no real housing solutions in place to accommodate any additional interest.

Post-secondary institutions were not the only gap in regional skills training opportunities. Many employers spoke about sending their staff for industry-specific training outside of the region. They noted this was often costly, both for the training and accommodations during the training period with no guarantee the employee will stay for the longer term. Having training facilities, courses, and equipment that could be shared between employers would help lower the cost and enable more staff to receive needed training.

A satellite campus of Lakehead University, and two additional satellite campuses of Georgian College exist not far beyond Muskoka's borders and do service some of the key training gaps in the Muskoka employment marketplace. However, it is difficult for Muskoka students to attend classes on those campuses without their own transportation.

Engagement Fatigue

Employers and stakeholders expressed frustration with the number of times they had been consulted on issues relating to workforce development that resulted in minimal action. This will make it more challenging to engage employers in initial workforce strategy initiatives and for stakeholders to promote and engage with their members and clients to support strategy implementation. Stakeholders should be engaged in the implementation phase and there should be considerable focus on promoting strategy successes and opportunities to get involved.

Supports for Newcomers

While many survey respondents felt that Muskoka was a welcoming community, stakeholders noted that many new immigrants or foreign workers to the region still felt unwelcome and there was a general lack of support to help new individuals settle into the area, most notably a lack of English as a second language classes. Newcomers were also looking for cultural amenities that required them to travel to Toronto, such as food products, and connection to shared community on a cultural basis. Newcomers who required

support included both new immigrants and temporary foreign workers. Employers who were actively recruiting newcomers spent a significant amount of time helping them settle in the region, from finding housing to driving them for groceries and helping them register children for school and felt additional resources could be created to address this challenge.

Job Quality and Work Environment

More than ever, the wage and status (full time, part time, seasonal), and work environment are being considered when job seekers assess potential employment opportunities. Wage is still the number one feature job seekers consider when looking for a job, especially with the high cost of living in Muskoka. Job seekers also noted that it was much more difficult to ensure they could cover basic living costs when working part time, as often the hours were quite unpredictable, especially in the off season as seasonal demand reductions mean employers are able to offer significantly less hours to their employees, and the number of hours and employee receives can change from week to week. At the same time, there are still job seekers that are looking for part time work, such as more mature workers, those on a subsidized income, and youth.

Consultation revealed that the most desired feature of a workplace, after wage, was a positive work environment. This included things like a good manager/supervisor that took time to listen and explain things, appreciation for a job well done, a good team that was inclusive, a well planned and balanced workload, and opportunities to connect and bond with colleagues in a rewarding way. Features that contributed to a negative work environment included gossip, poor management skills, negative attitudes of management and team members, understaffing, and a high-pressure environment. Worth further consideration was a disconnect identified between owner/operator perceptions of their workplace (positive) and staff perceptions of the same workplace (negative).

Mental Health

Many employees and job seekers continue to struggle with mental health challenges partly stemming from the outcomes of COVID-19 and the increasing pressures of the cost of living. Anecdotally, mental health challenges and addiction are playing a larger role in taking working age residents out of the workforce in Muskoka, and today people are more willing to recognize those issues and seek accommodations in their workplace. Employers and service providers are playing a larger role in counselling those employees and clients facing barriers but have not received the appropriate training to do so, although the Service System Manager (SSM) has indicated there are resources available now. It was also noted that there was limited in-person mental health support available in Muskoka, particularly if someone is experiencing a crisis. Employers and stakeholders would benefit from better supports to assist them in removing barriers for residents and employees facing mental challenges to start or remain employed with them.

Transportation

Muskoka has a complex geography and public transportation is extremely limited, with the operation of a small transit system in Bracebridge, Huntsville, and the Corridor 11 Bus serving the Towns and connecting into Simcoe County. The Townships have no access to a transit system. This means that most employment opportunities outside of Bracebridge require reliable access to a vehicle. This can be costly for residents, especially with the number of low wage jobs. It was also noted that many youths are now delaying getting their drivers license, further reducing the labour pool, especially for part time workers. Even in Bracebridge residents complained of long wait times for public transit.

Several employers and job seekers mentioned experiences with trying to establish carpooling for their staff. However, staff experiences were not positive, and it was found to be costly, unreliable, and there was little interest/uptake. Several large employers offered shuttle services to their staff, but this was also a costly undertaking, and those staff members found the living experience somewhat isolating.

Youth

There is declining interest amongst youth to pursue Muskoka's key employment sectors. Employers felt that engaging students and youth in workforce was critical to the sustainability of the regional workforce and that currently youth were unaware of the types of opportunities Muskoka had available. Similarly, there was a perception that guidance counsellors and parents in Muskoka were not supportive in encouraging youth to follow education paths to Muskoka's key employment sectors. More needs to be done to showcase Muskoka's key employment sectors to youth, including the career laddering opportunities that are available in each sector. This could be done through in-class education, visits to employers, camps to explore the sectors, educational events, and informational and job fairs.

A shift in attitude was also noted amongst youth. This included difficulty leaving personal technology (cellphones) away during work shifts and an increased willingness to decline tasks that they believe go beyond the scope of their job.

Retaining youth and young families was also considered a challenge due to a lack of diverse activity options happening in the evenings and on weekends to keep them engaged.

Apathy in the Workplace

Employers noted a trend of increasing apathy towards the workplace and quality of work employees are willing to provide. Employers shared many examples of new employees not showing up for shifts or job seekers not showing up for interviews, and just

generally displaying more negative attitudes to working and the workplace. In some cases, a job that required one employee now needed two due to an overall slower pace of work.

Service Delivery Challenges

As a legacy of many reorganizations at the provincial and federal level, Muskoka lacks significant alignment between regions of stakeholder coverage (i.e., One school board services Muskoka and north of the region, the other Muskoka and south of the region, the Service System Manager (SSM) services Muskoka and east of region, while the Workforce Development Board (now Skillforce) services Muskoka and south (Simcoe County), federally Muskoka is considered part of Northern Ontario, whereas provincially it is part of the South). The lack of alignment can make it more challenging to bring stakeholders together for planning purposes as there may be competing priorities with other regions. The multitude of stakeholder jurisdictions can also make it challenging for local stakeholders and employers to navigate the workforce development ecosystem and understand who to reach out to for support and when.

The Workforce Development Ecosystem

It is important to note that Muskoka has historically been underserved in access to workforce development supports. Settlement services are non-existent, the District has been left out of cost share initiatives that would support regional training and development, and there is only one very small, satellite post-secondary institution based within the region to support training and development needs. This coupled with challenging housing, transportation, and workforce conditions mean that the ability to collaborate and coordinate within the workforce stakeholder environment is especially critical to fill the gaps. There are several stakeholders within and surrounding the Muskoka region that have a connection or direct role in the development, attraction, and retention of the regional workforce. Many of these stakeholders are already involved in workforce development efforts, whether it's through research, training, or attraction, yet most of these efforts are disconnected from the broader region, and in some cases the target audiences. Currently, employers and job seekers can be challenged to identify which resources are available to them and their staff to utilize to support the workforce, comprehensively, from job posting and search to mental health supports. Working with and uniting workforce development stakeholders to support the implementation of this strategy will be key to enabling the necessary capacity, engagement, and communication required for success.

The following section provides an overview of different stakeholders in the ecosystem, their current efforts to support workforce development, and their potential role in strategy implementation. It also includes some unique considerations for the Township of Georgian Bay, whose major service centres are based in Simcoe County.

Special considerations regarding Township of Georgian Bay

The Township of Georgian Bay is a bit of an anomaly in that its closest service and employment centres are located within Simcoe County (Midland), and its communities are somewhat isolated from other parts of Muskoka. Many residents drive to Midland, Orillia, and other parts of Simcoe County for employment, training, and supports to access employment, in addition to most of their regular retail and service needs. Employers in the Township also hire residents of Simcoe County to fill their available positions, however, due to the influence of the Simcoe County marketplace, they often must pay higher wages to remain competitive. It is also easier to work with employment agencies and schools for recruitment in the Midland area, as they are proximally much closer to the Township and service the region's residents. Within the Township there are no dedicated resources to support workforce development, and given the dispersed geography of the municipality, this gap could be filled by providing more virtual tools and resources. The potential to deliver services and training virtually could present a useful delivery method in the other Townships, who are off the more serviced Highway 11 corridor. Georgian Bay's proximity to Simcoe County might present an opportunity for additional partnerships and resources for the Township or the broader District as Simcoe County shares many similar partners to the District of Muskoka.

Workforce Development Ecosystem Stakeholders

Employers: Employers are at the heart of the workforce development ecosystem. They create, maintain, and advertise the available jobs. They are responsible for setting wages and creating the work environment and conditions. They often will provide staff with training to enhance their skill set and prepare them for new responsibilities and opportunities within their organizations. Employers will need to be engaged in the implementation of this strategy to support and benefit from the initiatives, including opportunities to enhance their workplace and culture. Employers also play a role in training the future workforce, particularly for those in the skilled trades. An example of this would be the Stevenson Plumbing Apprenticeship Program, where the company actively seeks our candidates to start and train as a red seal in the plumbing field.

Employees/Job Seekers/Resident Youth: The current and future workforce is also a key part of the ecosystem. Their attitude and motivations will determine the quality of work they put in and the type of careers they pursue. Influencing current residents to pursue careers with regional employers will be a key piece of this strategy.

Municipal Governments: Each lower tier municipality in Muskoka has a staff person with some level of responsibility for economic development which includes workforce development. As a united front, municipal economic development partners have come together to develop a focused job board for Muskoka to provide job seekers a single point of search within the region. Prior to that, many economic developers worked with their local Chambers of Commerce or Employment Ontario organizations to support

employers through different initiatives such as job fairs. Municipal economic development can play a key role in the strategy's implementation, providing local insight on employer needs, supporting the equitable coordination and promotion of strategy activities, and helping ensure their community has the infrastructure in place to attract and retain workforce to support employer and regional efforts.

The District of Muskoka does not currently have a dedicated economic development resource; however, it does have the mandate for the creation of one in its 2023 corporate strategic plan as well as the implementation of this strategic plan. With or without a dedicated resource, the District currently has several staff that should be engaged throughout the implementation of this workforce strategy. These include a manager of housing who has been tasked with implementing the updated 10-Year Housing Action plan for the District, a human services manager overseeing Ontario Works and children's services, including the implementation of the ECE recruitment strategy, and staff positions overseeing human resourcing for the health services sector and the District's long term care homes. Given the importance of housing to the workforce challenges experienced in Muskoka it is recommended that the manager of housing be regularly connected into the implementation of this strategy, particularly as it relates to housing. Other staff positions that relate to workforce could connect with the workforce strategy implementation committee on a regular basis to leverage new resources and partake in relevant events and opportunities to promote the region and sectoral opportunities based in the region. It will be important to avoid duplication between workforce development efforts and regular communication will be a must.

Employment Service Providers: There are three in Muskoka, YMCA, Agilec, and Employment North. These organizations deliver employment programs, supports, and resources on behalf of the Province of Ontario. They build relationships with employers to help place job seekers in positions that are the best fit. They also help prepare job seekers for the job search process and a new job. Depending on the case they can provide wage subsidy, as well as subsidize some of the costs associated with starting a new job (i.e., certain equipment or training requirements). They also administer Provincial funding for training programs, such as the Better Jobs Ontario program and can run specialized programming, such as a job finding club for seniors. Employment service providers can support employer and job seeker networking, learning, and skill development opportunities, and would benefit from additional promotion within the region. Their clients may benefit from better connection and support to social and mental health supports.

Literacy and Basic Skill Providers: There are three in Muskoka, Literacy Society of South Muskoka, Georgian College, and the YMCA. These programs help adults develop and apply communication, numeracy, interpersonal and digital skills to achieve their goals. Their program serves learners who have goals to successfully transition to employment, postsecondary, apprenticeship, secondary school, and increased independence. The program includes learners who may have a range of barriers to learning. They are a great tool to support those who are transitioning between jobs or those re-entering the workforce and who may require some upskilling. They can

provide one-on-one support and coaching to assist clients while in a job to ensure they are successful. Literacy and Basic Skill Providers should be considered as part of the comprehensive supports to ensure job seeker success, and to help upskill existing job seekers and employees.

Post-Secondary: There are 3 post secondary institutions that operate satellite campuses within or within a half hour drive from Muskoka including Georgian College, which has campuses in Bracebridge, Orillia, and Midland, Canadore College, which has a campus in Parry Sound, and Lakehead University which has a campus in Orillia. All three organizations expressed an interest in further exploring partnerships for learning and development, as well as supporting their students with access to employment in the Muskoka region, however, transportation remains a barrier to accessing any schooling beyond what is in a student's local community. Employers also noted their enthusiasm for working with cooperative education students from post-secondary institutions but indicated that their coop term and employer needs did not align, as students returned to school during peak employment needs. In Simcoe County, both Lakehead and Georgian College have been involved in career education, upskilling job seekers and the existing workforce, and networking and recruitment events, and post-secondary could be engaged in similar ways in the Muskoka region.

OYAP: The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) is specialized program in high schools that allows students to explore apprenticeship and consider careers in the skilled trades, starting in Grade 11 or Grade 12 through the cooperative education program. Consultation with a program coordinator indicated that this may soon be available starting in grade 10. Both the Trillium Lakelands District School Board and Simcoe Muskoka Catholic School Board have OYAP Coordinators and in the past the coordinator covering Simcoe and Muskoka had been involved in career development and promotional events. They were interested in additional opportunities to connect with students, partners, and guidance councillors to promote OYAP opportunities in the Muskoka region.

Apprenticeship should be regularly promoted to youth as part of the education on key employment sectors and future opportunities in the region. Employers noted that it was difficult to take on apprentices due to provincial restrictions and this could also be the focus of future advocacy efforts to ensure apprenticeship opportunities continue to exist in the community.

School Boards: The District of Muskoka is home to two school boards that service most of their students, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board and Simcoe Muskoka Catholic School Board. In other jurisdictions, school boards have assisted in organizing career related events and camps.

Regional Tourism Organization 12: A provincially funded tourism organization that has a focus on sector-based workforce development, among other initiatives. They are the developer and implementation body for the above-mentioned Catalyst housing project, they have created an employee award and recognition program, and offer customer service-related training on occasion for

employees in the sector. They also collect data from both employers and employees to gauge the state of the workforce. They should be considered a key partner for tourism related workforce initiatives and critical to engage in implementation of this strategy to ensure the tourism sector is fully aware of strategy initiatives. Consideration should be given as to how the District and workforce partners can support the implementation on the Catalyst Housing Project. To start, the Town of Huntsville has committed to working with RTO12 to pilot the initiative.

Other Training Partners: There are several industry associations and third-party trainers that offer different training opportunities across the province and in other jurisdictions and implementation partners can explore how they can support delivery of or access to those programs in the Muskoka region based on employer demand and need. One example of this is the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation which offers basic virtual training to hospitality staff. Other industries noted that they used OTEC customer service-related trainings for their non-hospitality staff as well. OTEC also hosts a workforce discussion group for employers in the hospitality sector. Another example is Landscape Ontario, which is about to begin delivering landscape and horticultural technician training in Muskoka in partnership with two regional employers. These are Red Seal trades, and the training is available to anyone in the community.

Business Associations: Business associations like the Chambers of Commerce (Chambers) and Business Improvement Areas (BIA) have long been willing and active partners in addressing workforce challenges for their members. Typically, they would provide information on available resources or support programs that were specific to their members, such as educational workshops. Along the same avenue, businesses associations will be best engaged to promote regional and local workforce development initiatives and opportunities to association members, or to partner with for local level virtual or in-person events. Chambers and BIAs can also play a role in supporting community development efforts, creating events and spaces that celebrate industry and its workforce.

Community Living: Is a non-profit organization that supports adults with developmental disabilities. Within their suite of services, they provide employment supports to their clients to help them find and keep a job. These include job coaches who work with the employer and client to ensure they are ready and supported throughout the position. They are available to support their clients in new positions for as long as required. Employers who have worked with placements from Community Living have been very satisfied. Community Living is constantly looking for new avenues to promote their services and ensure their clients find meaningful and engaging employment opportunities.

Business Development Partners: The District of Muskoka is home to several organizations that can support and promote effective human resource planning and education for new and growing organizations in the region, including the Muskoka Small Business

Enterprise Centre, Muskoka Futures, and the YWCA. These organizations can help new and existing employers locate central resources about recruitment, hiring, development, and retention, as well as play a role in supporting educational events and opportunities, and capturing information about employer needs from their clientele. Lastly, should partners explore the proposed recommendation for workforce-related fund for employers, one of these organizations may be ideally situated to implement it.

Service System Manager (SSM): An additional feature of the Muskoka region is the presence of the SSM through Fleming College, a central body to administer provincial funding related to workforce development. They administer funding for Muskoka's three Employment Ontario organizations (YMCA, Employment North, and Agilec), two Community Living organizations (South Muskoka and Huntsville), and three Literacy and Basic Skill providers (South Muskoka, Georgian College, and YMCA).

The SSM places significantly more emphasis on serving individuals who are at risk of longer-term unemployment. As a result, in Muskoka there is a much higher proportion of Employment Services clients who are in receipt of OW (three times that for Simcoe) or in receipt of ODSP (twice that of Simcoe). Due to the expanded emphasis on a more diverse clientele, the SSM now offers training to support organizations working with employees facing mental health barriers.

Social Service and Mental Health Partners: Muskoka is home to several organizations that support populations facing barriers and provide life stabilization and mental health supports. Employers and service providers have noted an increase in barriered job seekers re-entering the job market and these organizations can provide part of the meaningful comprehensive supports that more barriered clients may need to find and stay in employment. Many employers and service providers were looking for when and where to access specialized supports to support their workforce and clients. Ensuring these organizations are connected into the workforce ecosystem will be important to ensure the success of residents re-entering the job market. Examples of these organizations include Canadian Mental Health Association, Gravenhurst Against Poverty, Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions, YWCA, Catholic Family Services, community food banks, Muskoka Indigenous Friendship Centre, Elizabeth Fry Society, and the Gravenhurst Women's Centre, but this list is not exhaustive.

Implementation Considerations

As noted, capacity and leadership at the regional level will be essential to guide the successful implementation of this strategy. Recognizing that currently the capacity to lead the implementation of this strategy may be a challenge, this strategy proposes 3 models to consider utilizing to support the coordination and leadership required to implement this workforce strategy.

In all the options proposed below, one of the most critical factors will be identifying the right person to lead these initiatives. This is particularly important, as many stakeholders, employers included, have become disengaged in the workforce discussion. The coordinator or leader of these initiatives must be a(n):

- Leader
- Researcher
- Relationship Builder
- Facilitator
- Actioner

Based on consultations, the community is looking for a point of connection to develop and coordinate these workforce opportunities. In an ideal scenario, and to minimize the costs associated with the knowledge and capacity lost through turnover, this should be considered a senior position and compensated appropriately. Establishing relationships to facilitate a long term, easy, working partnerships will be key to successful implementation. This role would be best suited to an economic development-related staff position, as they would likely already be tasked to build relationships with the same stakeholders required to implement this strategy and to create promotional materials about the community/region, which are traditional roles in the field.

Option 1: The District takes the lead on implementation supported by the committee of regional EDOs, and regular check-ins with the employer and stakeholder community.

Opportunities:

- Workforce is a regional issue, and the District provides a natural platform to share and address regional issues.
- Regional EDOs can have a meaningful voice at the table to guide decision making and supporting implementation.
- Employers can provide on-the-ground feedback on the success and suitability of workforce strategy actions.
- On-going input can be collected from the employer and stakeholder community to guide efforts.

Challenges:

- The District does not currently have a staff person to manage the file and the appropriate resource would have to be specifically allocated for this.
- The District would be the sole employer of the staff person and that could cause potential challenges in terms of equality in providing direction and decision-making.
- Further relationship building is required.

Option 2: The current workforce committee continues and hires a dedicated resource to lead implementation and report to the group, informed by regular check-ins with employers and stakeholders.

Opportunities:

- A dedicated resource can coordinate and lead implementation.
- More capacity for workforce development is currently located at the Towns and Townships and they may be in a better position to oversee performance.
- Shared decision making could result in more buy in across the region from the beginning.
- On-going input can be collected from the employer and stakeholder community to guide efforts.

Challenges:

- There is currently no dedicated funding for a position like this and while a grant could provide additional support to establish the position, it is important partners consider budgeting for salary and expenses in the long term as continuity of the position will be critical.
- One organization would have to hold the contract for that position and that could cause potential challenges in terms of equality in providing direction and decision-making.

Option 3: The current workforce committee oversees implementation, informed by regular check-ins with employers and stakeholders.

Opportunities:

- Shared decision making could result in more buy in across the region from the beginning.
- On-going input can be collected from the employer and stakeholder community to guide efforts.

Challenges:

- There is a lack of capacity to implement currently, and most committee members are busy with their day-to-day tasks, let alone coordinating the implementation of this strategy.
- Lack of capacity means the time to implement the strategy and achieve outcomes will be extended.
- Committee may be unable to provide a central point of contact to coordinate and engage other partners from.

The size and structure of the regional EDO committee can be enhanced by including additional invested stakeholders to provide insights and support to guide implementation. However, the task of establishing the leadership structure will rest with the regional workforce committee in its current form.

SWOT Analysis

From the data analysis, clear strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats have emerged. The following charts provides an overview of the key elements of the SWOT that were identified. Leveraging regional strengths and addressing the weaknesses, or gaps within the community formed the basis for opportunity identification and ultimately the development of strategic goals, objectives, and actions.



Environmental Scan

The environmental scan also revealed a few additional features that are having an impact on the current workforce environment that have not yet been captured elsewhere in this report, including shifting demand in the workforce environment and employment mismatches.

Changing Workforce Environment: For several years, and peaking during COVID-19, many sectors in Muskoka struggled to find the labour they required. This hit a few industries, like tourism and food service especially hard. Today, demand is consistent but not as dire as during the peak of the COVID-19 regulatory era. As we shift further away from the regulatory regime that impacted workforce stability during COVID-19 and into a time of inflation and rising interest rates, this trend may continue as the economy cools off. Employers are now able to be more selective about the candidates they were hiring. At the same time, more job seekers are returning to the marketplace due to the rising cost of living and shrinking pool of opportunity, although this trend was slower in Muskoka than other regions.

Employment Mismatches: There were several scenarios during consultations that highlighted a disconnect between the employer and job seeker. Job seekers noted that they have the required qualifications and applied to an available job multiple times without getting hired, which the employer continued to advertise for the same position. Other employees said that they were requesting (and needing) more hours but were not receiving them at the same time their employer was actively engaged in a hiring campaign. Some of those same employers joined consultation and spoke about the challenges they were experiencing finding workers. While the scope of strategy development did not dig into the personal details of why someone was not hired, this scenario highlights a disconnect between the available (and in some cases, skilled) labour force and available positions and an opportunity to work through employment partners to help bridge the gap.

Best Practices in Workforce Development

An extensive amount of research went into the data collection and consultation phases to ensure the Muskoka context was prioritized in the development of the strategy. To ensure recommendations align with current industry best practices, as scan on key workforce development trends and current case studies was undertaken. The summary of key trends and case studies, included below was used to assess opportunities for Muskoka and determine which actions and tactics offer the best opportunity for success for workforce attraction, retention, and development efforts.

Workforce Attraction

Key Trends

Technology: The use of technology and specifically, the internet, in job search and recruitment has never been at a higher level. It is essential for communities to maintain a unique online presence to reach potential residents.

Storytelling: Storytelling strips away the marketing aspect of community promotion and instead focuses on the human story in a relatable way. Storytelling, related to employees' experiences living and working in the community, have become increasingly common.

Remote and Hybrid Work: The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work, and it's likely to continue as a trend. Regions that offer remote work opportunities can attract talent from anywhere. To prepare, regions need to ensure they have the appropriate digital infrastructure.

Quality of Life: People are increasingly valuing their quality of life. Areas with a strong emphasis on work-life balance, green spaces, and a vibrant cultural scene are more likely to attract a talented workforce.

Inclusive and Diverse Communities: Diverse and inclusive communities are an economic advantage. Places that actively foster diversity and inclusion are more attractive to a wide range of talent.

Affordable Housing: Housing affordability is a key factor for attracting talent. Regions that address housing issues and offer a range of affordable housing options will be more appealing to potential talent.

Mobility Options: Cities with efficient public transportation, bike-sharing programs, and walkability are more appealing to a workforce looking for convenient and sustainable mobility options.

Collaborative Workspaces: The availability of co-working spaces and collaborative work environments can attract remote workers and freelancers.

Case Studies

Case Study: Date my County – Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Counties (<https://whereontariobegan.ca/datemycountry/>)

Summary of the Case: Date my County was a promotional campaign for the SDG Counties that required applicants to submit a 1-minute video and 50-word essay about why they should win from rent or housing in the SDG region. The competition offered to pay

the winner \$1,500/month to live in the SDG area for 12 months. The money could be applied to renting or purchase, as determined by the winner. The intent is for the winner to also act as a brand ambassador for SDG, posting twice monthly blogs, vlogs, or photo collages to the county's website and social media. The main criteria for selecting a winner was someone who's passionate about the area, excited to explore, fits well with the community, and could act as an effective brand ambassador.

Outcome: The contest attracted positive national media coverage in places like CTV, the Toronto Star, and blogging websites/social media apps (MTLBLOG, BlogTO, Narcity). It received international attention with 177 applications received from as far away as Mexico, Iraq, and Hong Kong, although most were from the Greater Toronto and Montreal Areas. A winner was selected, a couple from Montreal, and updates have begun through SDG economic development's Facebook page. The posts have received 100s of views to date.

Implementation Notes:

- Foreign residents were not eligible however their interest could still provide an opportunity to follow up to promote the region and pathways to immigration.
- One of the drivers to create this contest was to promote the affordability of housing in SDG (33% less than Ontario average), however Muskoka would need to find a unique attribute(s) to focus in on to promote other than housing.
- This was a smaller region with less reach and brand recognition than Muskoka. With some coordination, it is anticipated that there is the potential to generate significantly higher interest and engagement.

Case Study: Move to Minto, Minto, Ontario (<https://www.movetominto.ca/>)

Summary of the Case: The Move to Minto brand development and promotional campaign was created to encourage new residents to relocate or return to the Town of Minto. The tagline "You Belong Here" was featured throughout the campaign to emphasize the importance of inclusivity, welcoming atmosphere, and the sense of belonging felt within the community. The campaign consisted of a 15-second and 2-minute long video showcasing highlights of the community, a visitor prospectus discussing the benefits of moving to Minto and profiling each of its unique experiences, and a website to showcase the community, tell stories from new and old residents in both video and print, and house all video and print content. The site also showcases employers, the industry make-up of the region, connects website visitors to job listings, and contains information about recreation and entertainment in the community. The videos were created by a local Minto business.

Outcome: Between May and August 2022 two-minute video attracted nearly 3,100 views and a condensed 15 second clip used in a Google campaign was viewed more than 43,000 times. This project was recognized with EDAC, EDCO and Communicator Awards.

Implementation Notes:

- Muskoka has many great assets to showcase in this sort of format, however, even with increased interest in moving to the region access to housing remains an issue.

Case Study: The Equity and Diversity Collective, City of Mississauga (<https://www.thefutureisunlimited.ca/industries/life-sciences/equity-and-diversity/>)

Summary of the Case: Led by the City of Mississauga, the Equity & Diversity Collaborative is a consortium of healthcare and life sciences companies dedicated to driving gender equity and diversity. The goal of the Collaborative is “to achieve gender parity (“50%”) and significant representation (“30%”) of other under-represented groups, including racialized persons, people living with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community at all levels of organizations and on board(s). Collaborative members commit to taking an active role in defining strategies, measuring performance, creating change, and inspiring others. The group meets on an ongoing basis with biannual workshops to discuss the environmental and systemic changes needed to accelerate change and drive more diverse hiring practices in the industry. The group has identified 3 key goals to work towards in the short to mid-term including improving job accessibility and ensuring a diverse candidate pool, reducing bias in the hiring process, and introducing a diversity review process into succession and promotion planning.

Outcome: 50% of Collaborative members diversified recruitment channels in their first year; 6 Collaborative companies completed bias training for between 50-100% of their workforce; 82% of Collaborative members surveyed reported receiving good or significant value from participation; and 50% of Collaborative members confirmed their work with the program has led their company to implement new programs or metrics to improve representation. In its first year, the Collaborative represented a total workforce of 4,300+ employees. In 2022, the Collaborative experienced a 20%+ growth in its workforce representation, with the addition of 4 new members bringing the total number of employees to 5,000+.

Implementation Notes:

- Mississauga is certainly a much larger business community and resident population than the District of Muskoka, but the principles of this Collaborative could be applied to any group of employers who want to commit to hiring a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce.

Workforce Retention

Key Trends

Employer of Choice: With the current hypercompetition for talent, employers will be required to offer better incentives to attract and retain their employees. These continue to include traditional considerations such as wage, benefits, professional development, employee recognition, and advancement opportunities, but also include some emerging areas such as:

- **Technology and Tools:** Providing employees with the latest technology and tools can enhance productivity and job satisfaction, especially in industries reliant on digital platforms.
- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Providing flexibility in work arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible hours, can help retain employees who value work-life balance.
- **Wellness Programs:** Health and wellness programs that focus on physical and mental well-being can reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.
- **Workplace Flexibility and Autonomy:** Allowing employees to have more control over how they work and make decisions can lead to increased job satisfaction and retention.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** EAPs provide support for personal and professional challenges, which can be essential in retaining employees facing difficult circumstances.
- **Family-Friendly Policies:** Offering family-friendly policies such as parental leave, on-site childcare, or flexible scheduling can make it easier for employees to balance work and family life.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives:** Fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace where all employees feel valued and respected can improve retention, as it creates a sense of belonging.
- **Mentorship and Coaching Programs:** Implementing mentorship and coaching programs can provide employees with guidance, support, and opportunities for career growth, which can enhance retention.

Welcoming Community: New residents are looking for opportunities that enhance their quality of life. Once based in a new community they want to feel welcome and included both at work and in the broader social fabric. Many communities are working to ensure they are ready to welcome and keep new residents, especially immigrants and students by having the right resources, supports, connections, and attitude in place.

Mental Health and Wellness: Recognizing the importance of mental health and well-being, workforce development may include programs to support the emotional and psychological needs of employees.

Case Studies

Case Study Title: Connector Program, Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission
(<https://www.investkelowna.com/connector/>)

Summary of the Case: The Connector Program is a formalized networking initiative designed to broaden a job seeker's (Connectee) network through 1:1 meetings with business leaders (Connector) in the community. It is a simple, effective, no-cost referral process that puts newcomers in touch with others, so they can connect to the workforce and settle successfully in the community. Connectors are people in the community who have large networks and are good at making introductions, while Connectees include immigrants, newcomers, post-secondary students/recent graduates, and trailing spouses. This enables new residents, students, and recent graduates the opportunity to create a local network in their respective industries, an easier path to employment, and a way to settle successfully in the area.

Outcome: An IEDC silver award-winning program, the Connector program was just established in late 2022. The collaborative and connected approach that should make it easier to settle in the region received mention in a Globe and Mail feature on Kelowna this spring.

Implementation Notes:

- Connectors were expected to meet with 2-3 connectees a year to share their knowledge and make 3 warm introductions for that connectee to 3 other contacts. Those contacts were then asked to also make three additional referrals on behalf of the connectee.
- Muskoka has many industry leaders in the region that could be tapped to support a similar initiative in the region.

Case Study Title: Workforce Connect Conference, County of Simcoe (<https://workinsimcoecounty.ca/2023-workforce-connect-conference/>)

Summary of the Case: Established in 2022, the County of Simcoe worked with the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, and the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board to develop the Workforce Connect Conference. The intent of this conference is to bring together business leaders, entrepreneurs, and human resource professionals across sectors including manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, and technology to learn, share advice, and discuss best practices related to building

and retaining their workforce. The event has traditionally taken place over 2 mornings, with the inaugural event being held in an entirely virtual format, and the 2023 conference including one in-person half day session and one virtual half day session.

Outcome: Both events had over 100 employers in attendance and provided easy-to-use tools and tips to assist employers with their day-to-day workforce development needs. Feedback from both events was positive.

Implementation Notes:

- Something similar could easily be undertaken in the Muskoka context focusing on employer-relevant issues. Skillforce Simcoe Muskoka (formerly the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board) has expressed an interest in exploring something similar in the Muskoka region.

Workforce Development

Key Trends

Reskilling and Upskilling: With rapid technological advancements, continuous learning and skill development are critical. Workforce development programs that focus on reskilling and upskilling workers in key and emerging industries will be important to meet future labour market needs.

Digital Literacy and Tech Skills: In an increasingly digital world, training programs that teach digital literacy and tech skills, including coding, data analysis, and cybersecurity, are in high demand.

Apprenticeships and On-the-Job Training: Apprenticeship programs and on-the-job training initiatives help bridge the gap between education and practical skills, making it easier for individuals to enter skilled trades and industries.

Lifelong Learning: Encouraging a culture of lifelong learning is essential. Workforce development should cater to workers of all ages and help them adapt to changing job market demands.

Soft Skills Training: Skills like communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence are increasingly valued. Workforce development programs that teach these soft skills are gaining importance.

Micro-credentials and Customized Training Programs: Tailoring training programs to the specific needs of industries and employers can lead to a more effective and efficient workforce.

Work-Based Learning: Programs that integrate classroom education with real-world work experience, such as internships and co-op opportunities, are highly effective in preparing individuals for the workforce.

Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborations between government, educational institutions, and businesses are becoming increasingly common in developing the skills needed for the local job market.

Industry 4.0 Skills: Preparing the workforce for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which involves technologies like artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), and automation, is a critical trend in workforce development.

Healthcare and Aging Population Needs: In regions with aging populations, workforce development programs may need to focus on healthcare and elder care skills to meet the growing demand.

Green and Sustainable Skills: As sustainability becomes a global priority, workforce development should include training for jobs related to renewable energy, green construction, and environmental management.

Remote Work Skills: Training programs that prepare workers for remote or hybrid work arrangements, including time management, virtual communication, and digital collaboration skills, are increasingly relevant.

Case Studies

Case Study Title: Rapid Skills Micro-Credentials Program, Barrie, Ontario (<https://www.georgiancollege.ca/corporate-training/training-areas/manufacturing-skill-trades/rapidskills/#micro-credentials>)

Summary of the Case: The City of Barrie, Georgian College, the County of Simcoe, and the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board, were successful in securing over \$1M in funding through the Skills Development Fund to address skills development and labour shortages within the manufacturing sector through the development of timely and industry-relevant micro-credential programs. The project aimed to increase the future manufacturing workforce and enable current and new employees to access skills training, including upskilling currently employed workers. These micro-credentials consisted of a mix of online modules and up to 96 hours of in-class training (most were between 30 and 40 hours). The program also addressed current labour supply challenges by offering pre-employment supports, including soft-skills and mental health supports together with a specific foundational manufacturing competency-based skills training for individuals seeking new employment or a career change. The program encouraged job seekers to consider the wide range of opportunities in the manufacturing sector and helped them prepare for job applications, interviews, and taking a job.

Outcome: Over 13 manufacturers supported the micro-credential development process and benefitted from employee learning opportunities. Micro-credential programs that were created included Fundamental Shop Skills, Precision Machining, CNC, Hydraulics and Pneumatics, Industrial Automation, Robotics, Quality Management, and Leadership in Manufacturing.

Implementation Notes:

- The program ran from summer 2022-2023, however the project partners were unsuccessful in a subsequent application for funding. Thus, Georgian College still retains the course material, but no partner to cover the cost of delivery at this time.
- This is a program that was developed and run locally, as a result of funding retained by partners. With the right leadership and another funding opportunity, Muskoka could pursue something similar related to the construction, manufacturing, or tourism sectors.

Case Study Title: PSW Micro-credential, Grey, and Bruce Counties

Summary of the Case: The PSW micro-credential program was created to address the significant shortage of labour required for long term care homes in the region. The program was targeted towards training people who were hired temporarily in long-term care homes during the pandemic to fill in for the shortage of nursing staff and personal support workers. Those who were unemployed could also utilize the program. Training was free of charge and included a 2-week paid work placement. The program was developed as a partnership between the YMCA, Georgian College, Grey County economic development, the local Adult Learning Centre, Grey, and Bruce counties, and 19 regional long-term care homes.

Outcome: The program received \$702,000 for 2021-2022 from the province's SkillsAdvance Ontario project and \$788,000 for 2022-2023 from the province's Skills Development Fund. Through the first phase of the program over 100 individuals were trained, and the second phase saw 50 additional individuals go through the program. 32 of the 41 new hires that had no prior experience in the healthcare field continued to work in healthcare full time upon completion of their placement.

Implementation Notes:

- The YMCA oversees program delivery, with the college providing training, the adult learning centre assisting and the counties and employers guiding the program. This highlights the critical importance of partnerships, coordination, and leadership to support program implementation.

Case Study Title: Girl Power STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) Camp, Ponca City, Oklahoma

Summary of the Case: Starting in 2015, the Ponca Works Authority worked with women local industry leaders to create a 1-week summer camp targeting grade 7 and 8 girls to increase their awareness and interest in STEM fields. Through the duration of the camp, the girls learn more about local STEM careers, master basic STEM skills, conduct site visits, and hear from girl bosses in the STEM fields to help get them excited about, and envision themselves in those professions.

Outcome: The program has continued to grow and now has a wait list every year.

Implementation Notes:

- It has been noted that women are not well-represented in many of the skilled trades in Muskoka, sometimes finding themselves unwelcome and out-of-place. Programs like this could encourage more women to enter the profession and enable them to be more represented in the skilled trade space.

APPENDIX A: Background Data on Demographics and Labour Market Trends

Understanding the District of Muskoka Labour Market

A Summary of Key Data from Statistics Canada 2021 Census of Population Profile ([Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - Muskoka, District municipality \(DM\) \[Census division\], Ontario;Ontario \[Province\] \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#))

Between 2016 and 2021 the District of Muskoka's population grew by 10% from 60,614 to 66,674. Throughout this time the Townships experienced more rapid growth than the Towns, led by the Township of Georgian Bay with a staggering 36.9% growth in population. The following table shows how each municipality has changed over the last Census period.

Table 2 Population Growth in Muskoka Communities 2016-2021

Community	Population (2016)	Population (2021)	% Change
District of Muskoka	60,614	66,674	10
Town of Huntsville	19,816	21,147	6.7
Town of Gravenhurst	12,311	13,157	6.9
Town of Bracebridge	16,010	17,305	8.1
Township of Muskoka Lakes	6,588	7,652	16.2
Township of Lake of Bays	3,167	3,759	18.7
Township of Georgian Bay	2,514	3,441	36.9

Approximately 12% of Muskoka's residents are between 0 and 14 years of age, 60% are between 15 and 64 years, and 28% are over 65. The percentage of those 65+ in the community increased from 25% in 2016. Those on the cusp of retirement, between ages 55 and 64 also make up almost 20% of the population highlighting the impending wave of retirements to come and the need to ensure Muskoka is attracting and retaining youth and young families.

Table 3 Population of Muskoka by Age in 2021

Age Group	Population	% of population
0 to 14 years	8,175	12.3
15 to 64 years	39,645	59.5
55 to 64 years	12,700	19.9
65 years and over	18,850	28.3
85 years and over	2,335	3.5

Approximately 2,655 individuals within the District of Muskoka identify as Indigenous, comprising just under 4% of the population, compared to 2.9% across the rest of the Province. Approximately, 5,180 individuals in the District of Muskoka identify as immigrants, a total of 7.8% of the population versus 29.6% of individuals across the province. 1,790 individuals identify as a visible minority, comprising 2.7% of the population versus 33.9% across the province. The following table highlights the immigration trends the District has experienced in relation to the province. While immigration has been increasing over the last decade in Ontario, most of those immigrants are not locating in Muskoka and immigration growth has remained largely stagnant since the early 90s.

Table 4 Immigration Trends in Muskoka compared to Ontario from 1980 to 2021

	Muskoka	Muskoka	Ontario	Ontario
Immigrants Total (based on arrival date)	5,180	% of Total	4,206,585	% of Total
Before 1980	3,060	60	860,305	21
1980 to 1990	720	13.9	506,195	12
1991 to 2000	460	8.9	852,765	20.3
2001 to 2010	470	9.1	941,630	22
2011 to 2021 (broken down below)	475	9.2	1,045,695	24.9
2011 to 2015	245		461,010	
2016 to 2021	230		584,680	

Income Statistics

In 2021, the median household income was \$83,000 compared to \$91,000 across Ontario and the average household income was \$108,000 compared to \$116,000 across Ontario. Muskoka is consistently lagging in income levels and the percentage of jobs that are full-year and full-time. The following chart compares Muskoka and Ontario income and employment statistics. Muskoka has approximately 6% less employment income recipients working full-year and full-time, and the equivalent more in part-year or part-time positions, versus the Province. Across both median and average incomes, Muskoka employment income recipients make consistently less money than their equivalents across the province, although that difference is less pronounced in the part-time or part-year categories.

Table 5 Income Statistics in Muskoka 2019

	Muskoka	Muskoka	Ontario	Ontario
Total - Employment income statistics in 2019 for the population aged 15 years and over in private households - 25% sample data	56,415		11,782,825	
Number of employment income recipients in 2019 who worked full-year full-time in 2020	15,755	51%	3,830,200	57%
Median employment income in 2019 for full-year full-time workers in 2020 (\$)	56,000		62,800	
Average employment income in 2019 for full-year full-time workers in 2020 (\$)	69,400		77,800	
Number of employment income recipients in 2019 who worked part-year or part-time in 2020 - 25% sample data	15,110	49%	2,925,680	43%
Median employment income in 2019 of those who worked part-year or part-time in 2020 (\$)	23,400		23,600	
Average employment income in 2019 of those who worked part-year or part-time in 2020 (\$)	33,920		34,640	

Nature of Employment

The 2021 Census of Population contained several data points regarding the nature of employment taking place in the District of Muskoka. The following table details labour force status in Muskoka versus the Province of Ontario. Muskoka has a notably lower

participation rate (-5%) and employment rate (-3.6%) than the rest of Province, yet also has a slightly lower unemployment rate (-1.3%).

Table 6 Employment and Unemployment Statistics for Muskoka 2021

	Muskoka	Ontario
Total - Population aged 15 years and over by labour force status - 25% sample data	56,415	11,782,820
In the labour force	32,595	7,399,200
Employed	29,065	6,492,895
Unemployed	3,530	906,310
Not in the labour force	23,820	4,383,620
Participation rate	57.8	62.8
Employment rate	51.5	55.1
Unemployment rate	10.8	12.2

The following table displays information about Muskoka and Ontario’s labour force over the age of 15 by class of worker. 64% of Muskoka’s labour force are in permanent positions compared to 70% across Ontario.

Table 7 Labour Force by Class of Worker in Muskoka 2021

	Muskoka	Ontario
Total - Labour force aged 15 years and over by class of worker including job permanency - 25% sample data	32,590	7,399,205
Class of worker - not applicable	585	212,505
All classes of workers	32,015	7,186,695
Employee	25,085	6,109,070
Permanent position	20,880	5,166,275
Temporary position	4,200	942,795
Fixed term (1 year or more)	985	324,250

Casual, seasonal, or short-term position (less than 1 year)	3,215	618,540
Self-employed	6,930	1,077,625

The following table displays the work activity of Muskoka population aged 15 years or above. The total population in that age category increased by 5,645, an increase of approximately 11% since 2016, while the number of individuals not working increased by an almost equivalent 5,015, an increase of approximately 28%. At the same time, those that worked over the previous year increased by 635, an increase of 1.9%. Thus, most new residents and/or youth that turned 15 between 2016 and 2021 are not entering or staying in the labour market.

Table 8 Population Over 15 by Work Activity in Muskoka 2021

	2016	2,021
Total - Population aged 15 years and over by work activity during the reference year - 25% sample data	50,765	56,410
Did not work	17,900	22,915
Worked	32,860	33,495
Worked full year full time	16,135	16,525
Worked part year and/or part time	16,720	16,975
Average weeks worked in reference year	41.7	40.4

Employment by Industry

The following table details Muskoka's total employment by industry sector in 2016 and 2021, according to 2-digit NAICS codes. Industries that have experienced the greatest losses include the accommodation and food services sector (-18.6%) and wholesale trade (-8.7). Sectors that have experienced the greatest gains included construction (17.7%), educational services (14.8%), finance and insurance (21.6%), other services (except public administration) (18.3%), public administration (12.2%), and administrative and support, waste management and remediation services (13.7%). Overall, the number of jobs increased by 2,070 between 2021 and 2016. We also examine the Analyst Labour Market data further in the report; however, the census provides an additional measure to triangulate data with over time.

Table 9 Employment by Industry (2-digit NAICS) in Muskoka 2016-2021

	2016	2021	Change
Total - Labour force aged 15 years and over by industry - Sectors - North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 2017 - 25% sample data	30,520	32,590	2,070
Industry - not applicable	390	585	195
All industries	30,130	32,015	1,885
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	295	375	80
21 Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	170	160	-10
22 Utilities	275	310	35
23 Construction	4,510	5,310	800
31-33 Manufacturing	1,720	1,845	125
41 Wholesale trade	745	680	-65
44-45 Retail trade	4,525	4,615	90
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	1,035	990	-45
51 Information and cultural industries	395	380	-15
52 Finance and insurance	625	760	135
53 Real estate and rental and leasing	815	865	50
54 Professional, scientific, and technical services	1,605	1,785	180
55 Management of companies and enterprises	0	40	40
56 Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	1,675	1,905	230
61 Educational services	1,590	1,825	235
62 Health care and social assistance	3,270	3,435	165
71 Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1,125	1,110	-15
72 Accommodation and food services	2,820	2,295	-525
81 Other services (except public administration)	1,200	1,420	220
91 Public administration	1,710	1,900	210

Muskoka's Housing Mix

Housing was frequently identified as key barrier to attracting workforce in Muskoka, thus it is important to understand the demographics of Muskoka's housing situation as well. Approximately 60% of the total number of private dwellings are occupied by full time residents. This is significantly lower than the Province of Ontario as a whole, where approximately 93% of private dwellings were occupied by full time residents. Furthermore, across Ontario approximately 68% of dwellings are owner occupied, versus 82% in the District of Muskoka. This means that Muskoka has less housing available for rent and 40% of their housing stock is only used for part of the year. The following chart breaks down the housing mix in the District versus Ontario averages.

Table 10 Occupied Private Dwellings by Structural Type in Muskoka versus Ontario 2021

	Muskoka	Muskoka	Ontario	Ontario
Total - Occupied private dwellings by structural type of dwelling - 100% data	28,575	%Total	5,491,200	% Total
Single-detached house	23,560	82	2,942,990	54
Semi-detached house	420	1.4	303,260	5.5
Row house	830	2.9	505,265	9.2
Apartment or flat in a duplex	665	2.3	181,030	3.2
Apartment in a building that has fewer than five storeys	2,390	8	548,785	10
Apartment in a building that has five or more storeys	280	1	984,665	18
Other single-attached house	185	0.6	10,220	0.2
Movable Dwelling	255	0.9	14,985	0.3

Contributing to housing challenges, a lack of diverse housing options is noted from the above. 82% of housing options are single family homes, compared to 54% on average in Ontario. Muskoka consistently lags on all other housing options apart from Other single-attached houses and moveable dwellings.

Commuting Patterns

Statistics Canada's census of Population also provides information on work styles and commuting patterns. The following table displays the work location for those in Muskoka who are employed and 15 years or older. What is notable is the number of those working from home has increased by 3,190 or 115% while those remaining at their usual place of work has decreased by 2,595 or 12.7%.

Table 11 Muskoka Place of Work Patterns 2016-2021

	2016	2021
Total - Place of work status for the employed labour force aged 15 years and over - 25% sample data		29,065
Worked at home	2,770	5,960
Worked outside Canada	105	50
No fixed workplace address	5,000	5,185
Usual place of work	20,465	17,870

The following table examines commuting destinations of those who are employed in Muskoka, comparing 2016 to 2021. Notably, commuting has decreased overall.

Table 12 Muskoka Commuting Patterns 2016-2021

	2016	2021
Total - Commuting destination for the employed labour force aged 15 years and over with a usual place of work - 25% sample data		17,865
Commute within census subdivision (CSD) of residence	11,915	10,610
Commute to a different census subdivision (CSD) within census division (CD) of residence	5,240	4,605
Commute to a different census subdivision (CSD) and census division (CD) within province or territory of residence	3,205	2,610
Commute to a different province or territory	100	45

The following table looks at the mode of commute used in Muskoka and how that has changed between 2016 and 2021. Again, there is a decrease across all forms of commuting. Also of note is that very few individuals utilize public transit to get to work.

	2016	2021
Total - Main mode of commuting for the employed labour force aged 15 years and over with a usual place of work or no fixed workplace address - 25% sample data		23,050
Car, truck, or van		21,350
Car, truck, or van - as a driver	21,610	19,780
Car, truck, or van - as a passenger	1,950	1,575
Public transit	225	85
Walked	1,310	1,060

Lastly, while it was noted above that public transit usage has decreased, access to transportation around the region has been noted as a major barrier. Partners should consider potential models to address transit gaps, and in that process, understanding commuting times and patterns will be important. The following table displays the typical time commuters are leaving to access their typical place of work.

Table 13 Time Leaving for Work for Employed Labour Force Over 15 Years, 2021

Total - Time leaving for work for the employed labour force aged 15 years and over with a usual place of work or no fixed workplace address - 25% sample data	23,050
Between 5 a.m. and 5:59 a.m.	1,275
Between 6 a.m. and 6:59 a.m.	4,005
Between 7 a.m. and 7:59 a.m.	7,395
Between 8 a.m. and 8:59 a.m.	5,365
Between 9 a.m. and 11:59 a.m.	2,770
Between 12 p.m. and 4:59 a.m.	2,245

Education Statistics

The following tables highlight educational data from the 2021 Census of Population for the District of Muskoka. The first table includes the total population's educational attainment for those above 15 years, while the second table includes the same data for the population aged 25-64. For the purposes of this discussion, the second table will be the focus. Approximately 60% of Muskoka's working age population has a post secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, including almost 30% with a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma, just over 20% with a bachelor's degree or higher, and almost 8% with an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma. Just over 30% of the working age population has only a high school diploma or equivalent, and almost 10% have no certificate, degree, or diploma. Considering consultation highlighted that many tradespeople were approaching retirement, the limited number of completed apprenticeships could be a concern and something strategy partners should actively work to improve.

Table 14 Educational Attainment, Total Population in Muskoka, 2021

Total - Highest certificate, diploma or degree for the population aged 15 years and over in private households	56,415	% of total
No certificate, diploma, or degree	8,285	14.7
High (secondary) school diploma or equivalency certificate	18,085	32.1
Postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree	30,040	53.2
<i>Postsecondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level</i>	18,775	33.3
<i>Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma</i>	4,100	7.3
<i>Non-apprenticeship trades certificate or diploma</i>	1,640	2.9
<i>Apprenticeship certificate</i>	2,455	4.4
<i>College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma</i>	13,710	24.3
<i>University certificate or diploma below bachelor level</i>	965	1.7
<i>Bachelor's degree or higher</i>	11,265	20.0

<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	7,985	14.1
<i>University certificate or diploma above bachelor level</i>	835	1.5
<i>Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or optometry</i>	330	.6
<i>Master's degree</i>	1,880	3.3
<i>Earned doctorate</i>	235	.4

Table 15 Education Attainment from Population 25 Years and Older in Muskoka in 2021

Total - Highest certificate, diploma or degree for the population aged 25 to 64 years in private households - 25% sample data	33,050	
No certificate, diploma, or degree	3,230	9.8
High (secondary) school diploma or equivalency certificate	10,295	31.1
Postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree	19,530	59.1
<i>Postsecondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level</i>	12,365	37.4
<i>Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma</i>	2,590	7.8
<i>Non-apprenticeship trades certificate or diploma</i>	1,030	3.1
<i>Apprenticeship certificate</i>	1,565	4.7
<i>College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma</i>	9,305	28.2
<i>University certificate or diploma below bachelor level</i>	470	1.4
Bachelor's degree or higher	7,170	21.7
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	5,270	15.9
<i>University certificate or diploma above bachelor level</i>	480	1.5

<i>Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or optometry</i>	175	.5
<i>Master's degree</i>	1,115	3.4
<i>Earned doctorate</i>	130	.4

EMSI Lightcast Analyst Data

In addition to a review of Census data, key data indicators from EMSI’s Lightcast program were examined. While the findings of the two-digit industry review and occupational data is included in the main report, the Industry information for the 3-digit NAICS can be found below. This chart highlights changes in employment by industry sector between 2018 and 2023, including providing the employment concentration ratio (location quotient) and average wages per job. While the following chart highlights sectors of significant growth (lighter or darker green) and decline (lighter or darker orange) there were few sectors that stood out for their growth patterns. Most sectors that grew or declined significantly were still fairly small, and their changes in workforce negligible. Of sectors with the most notable growth, one key employment sector did stand out, the amusement, gambling, and recreation industries sector grew by 1,189 staff, or 104%. This is already a sector Muskoka has strong workforce in, with 6.4 times the concentration of workers in the sector versus the province. While job growth is great, the average income earned in the sector is only \$36,212, so employers should focus on adding value to those employment opportunities. Another sector of growth worth noting was the plastics and rubber products manufacturing sector which grew by 75% or 128 employees. The sector is one of interest as its employment concentration is 1.62 time that of the province. Beyond this the chart also highlights sectors to watch – sectors that have grown significantly and having a more significant employment concentration than the province. These are highlighted in light blue/green.

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
111-112	Farms	81	126	45	56%	\$27,263	0.46
113	Forestry and logging	39	51	12	30%	\$55,807	1.14
114	Fishing, hunting, and trapping	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
115	Support activities for agriculture and forestry	22	19	(4)	(17%)	\$59,203	0.64
211	Oil and gas extraction	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
212	Mining and quarrying (except oil and gas)	151	238	87	58%	\$53,638	1.72
213	Support activities for mining, and oil and gas extraction	<10	15	Insf. Data	Insf. Data	\$46,643	0.11
221	Utilities	186	250	65	35%	\$95,632	1.12
236	Construction of buildings	817	1,097	279	34%	\$53,288	2.23
237	Heavy and civil engineering construction	361	346	(16)	(4%)	\$71,125	1.12
238	Specialty trade contractors	1,558	2,065	507	33%	\$56,505	1.79
311	Food manufacturing	107	123	16	15%	\$54,986	0.29
312	Beverage and tobacco product manufacturing	183	233	50	27%	\$35,791	2.33
313	Textile mills	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
314	Textile product mills	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
315	Clothing manufacturing	<10	0	Insf. Data	Insf. Data	\$0	0.00
316	Leather and allied product manufacturing	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
321	Wood product manufacturing	421	440	19	4%	\$60,788	2.71
322	Paper manufacturing	109	135	26	23%	\$70,846	1.61
323	Printing and related support activities	73	74	1	1%	\$40,528	1.00

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
324	Petroleum and coal product manufacturing	16	0	(16)	(100%)	\$0	0.00
325	Chemical manufacturing	15	54	39	269%	\$52,006	0.34
326	Plastics and rubber products manufacturing	171	299	128	75%	\$50,331	1.62
327	Non-metallic mineral product manufacturing	83	74	(9)	(11%)	\$45,690	0.85
331	Primary metal manufacturing	18	28	10	56%	\$76,588	0.28
332	Fabricated metal product manufacturing	47	88	42	89%	\$62,989	0.31
333	Machinery manufacturing	68	79	12	18%	\$49,571	0.32
334	Computer and electronic product manufacturing	30	36	5	18%	\$34,841	0.39
335	Electrical equipment, appliance, and component manufacturing	22	36	14	63%	\$91,444	0.55
336	Transportation equipment manufacturing	152	264	111	73%	\$48,492	0.76
337	Furniture and related product manufacturing	45	63	18	39%	\$61,174	0.55
339	Miscellaneous manufacturing	67	64	(3)	(5%)	\$60,617	0.63
411	Farm product merchant wholesalers	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
412	Petroleum and petroleum products merchant wholesalers	29	33	4	13%	\$43,719	1.27
413	Food, beverage, and tobacco merchant wholesalers	38	52	14	38%	\$73,760	0.24
414	Personal and household goods merchant wholesalers	46	44	(1)	(3%)	\$60,290	0.25
415	Motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories merchant wholesalers	105	148	43	41%	\$44,115	1.37
416	Building material and supplies merchant wholesalers	257	243	(14)	(6%)	\$73,394	1.02
417	Machinery, equipment and supplies merchant wholesalers	178	254	76	43%	\$89,332	0.63
418	Miscellaneous merchant wholesalers	161	453	292	182%	\$70,679	2.78
419	Business-to-business electronic markets, and agents and brokers	<10	<10	Insf. Data	Insf. Data	Insf. Data	0.04
441	Motor vehicle and parts dealers	484	526	41	9%	\$51,182	1.44
442	Furniture and home furnishings stores	200	235	34	17%	\$42,867	1.90
443	Electronics and appliance stores	48	43	(6)	(11%)	\$60,111	0.67

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
444	Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	658	753	95	14%	\$54,752	2.89
445	Food and beverage stores	1,136	1,034	(102)	(9%)	\$22,944	1.13
446	Health and personal care stores	305	409	104	34%	\$40,266	1.18
447	Gasoline stations	221	200	(20)	(9%)	\$29,818	1.44
448	Clothing and clothing accessories stores	220	181	(38)	(17%)	\$27,525	0.55
451	Sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores	109	105	(4)	(4%)	\$30,856	0.77
452	General merchandise stores	491	725	233	47%	\$27,788	1.59
453	Miscellaneous store retailers	207	220	13	6%	\$29,669	0.99
454	Non-store retailers	110	194	84	76%	\$39,402	1.85
481	Air transportation	13	14	0	2%	\$77,187	0.13
482	Rail transportation	11	41	31	290%	\$146,677	0.57
483	Water transportation	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
484	Truck transportation	132	129	(3)	(2%)	\$42,300	0.34
485	Transit and ground passenger transportation	266	79	(187)	(70%)	\$49,533	0.38
486	Pipeline transportation	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
487	Scenic and sightseeing transportation	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
488	Support activities for transportation	120	101	(19)	(16%)	\$63,798	0.46

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
491	Postal service	60	87	27	44%	\$46,344	0.61
492	Couriers and messengers	47	55	8	17%	\$48,980	0.41
493	Warehousing and storage	19	10	(9)	(46%)	\$53,182	0.08
511	Publishing industries	45	66	21	48%	\$94,305	0.45
512	Motion picture and sound recording industries	19	22	3	16%	\$49,918	0.16
515	Broadcasting (except internet)	19	25	6	32%	\$106,581	0.45
517	Telecommunications	97	96	(1)	(1%)	\$59,709	0.46
518	Data processing, hosting, and related services	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
519	Other information services	46	52	6	12%	\$27,019	0.89
521	Monetary authorities - central bank	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
522	Credit intermediation and related activities	196	294	98	50%	\$63,835	0.41
523	Securities, commodity contracts, and other financial investment and related activities	55	94	39	71%	\$78,968	0.41
524	Insurance carriers and related activities	150	272	122	81%	\$68,650	0.63
526	Funds and other financial vehicles	0	0	0	0%	\$0	0.00
531	Real estate	268	259	(9)	(3%)	\$88,943	0.70

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
532	Rental and leasing services	117	112	(5)	(4%)	\$58,859	1.06
533	Lessors of non-financial intangible assets (except copyrighted works)	19	0	(19)	(100%)	\$0	0.00
541	Professional, scientific, and technical services	780	1,176	396	51%	\$86,202	0.57
551	Management of companies and enterprises	25	62	38	155%	\$345,031	0.29
561	Administrative and support services	966	1,443	477	49%	\$48,967	1.07
562	Waste management and remediation services	213	199	(14)	(7%)	\$52,711	1.97
611	Educational services	1,148	1,622	474	41%	\$57,092	0.66
621	Ambulatory health care services	696	963	267	38%	\$61,712	0.82
622	Hospitals	749	823	73	10%	\$61,496	0.70
623	Nursing and residential care facilities	968	1,132	164	17%	\$41,157	1.36
624	Social assistance	447	468	21	5%	\$41,875	0.66
711	Performing arts, spectator sports and related industries	24	31	7	29%	\$30,590	0.32
712	Heritage institutions	61	55	(6)	(10%)	\$33,837	1.11
713	Amusement, gambling, and recreation industries	1,147	2,337	1,189	104%	\$36,212	6.40

NAICS	Description	2018 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2018 - 2023 Change	2018 - 2023 % Change	Avg. Wages Per Job	2023 Employment Concentration
721	Accommodation services	1,615	1,477	(138)	(9%)	\$31,462	4.60
722	Food services and drinking places	1,889	1,947	58	3%	\$19,459	1.02
811	Repair and maintenance	363	301	(62)	(17%)	\$60,511	0.93
812	Personal and laundry services	216	138	(77)	(36%)	\$29,609	0.51
813	Religious, grant-making, civic, and professional and similar organizations	360	508	148	41%	\$44,052	1.07
814	Private households	28	19	(9)	(31%)	\$36,292	0.40
911	Federal government public administration	557	605	48	9%	\$83,439	0.75
912	Provincial and territorial public administration	331	313	(18)	(5%)	\$90,973	0.55
913	Local, municipal, and regional public administration	1,143	1,079	(64)	(6%)	\$51,847	1.36
914	Aboriginal public administration	47	96	48	102%	\$42,700	0.83
X00	Unclassified	477	530	53	11%	\$62,099	0.88
		25,808	31,283	5,474	21%	\$51,166	

APPENDIX B: Summary of Background Reports and Strategies

This Appendix provides an overview of background reports and strategies that were reviewed to inform the Muskoka context and provide insight into existing research and action that is taking place in Muskoka. These include the Muskoka Employment Partnership Data Report, the Simcoe Muskoka Local Labour Market Report, Huntsville Economic Development Strategy, Muskoka Lakes Economic Development Strategy, RTO12's Catalyst Housing Project Research and their current business plan, Gravenhurst's wage and employer survey results, and the District of Muskoka's Housing Plan.

Muskoka Employment Partnership Data Report

The District's MEP included a project to identify and collect data to better understand the labour market both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following sections highlight key information from that report.

Demographics

Income levels, the community's ability to welcome and retain newcomers, and second homes all play a significant role in influencing Muskoka's labour market.

Income: Over 50% of Muskoka's working population has an income below \$30,000 per year. The three biggest income groups (+18,000) occur at the low-income end of the income scale.

Newcomers: Muskoka does not have a significant newcomer population. This may be due to the difficulties both new Canadians and internal migrants have difficulty finding affordable housing in Muskoka. Without attention to how Muskoka can welcome newcomers it will be difficult to grow Muskoka's labour force and thus increase economic growth.

Second Homes: In 2016, the permanent population of the District (60,599 in 2016) was outnumbered by Muskoka's second-home population (81,907 in 2016). In some areas, such as Georgian Bay, 87% of the population comes from this second-home population. The 55-64 age cohort make-up over 20% of this second-home population. According to a (2018) report by the District of Muskoka, 76% of second households earn over \$100,000 annually, compared to 28% of the permanent population.

Employment

The employment rate in Muskoka has declined from 61.1% in 2005 to 55.8% in 2016. The employment rate measures the % of those aged between 15 and 64 who are employed. This points to a less engaged workforce. Georgian Bay, Gravenhurst, and Muskoka Lakes experienced higher than Muskoka-average rates of unemployment. Lake of Bays has the lowest unemployment rate in the District.

Table 16 Muskoka, Unemployment Rate, 2016

Region	Unemployment Rate
Georgian Bay	8.4
Gravenhurst	8.3
Muskoka Lakes	7.2
Bracebridge	6.9
Huntsville	6.7
Lake of Bays	5.9

The Covid-19 economy-wide shutdown saw the total number of people employed in Muskoka-Kawarthas drop from 164,100 in February 2020 to 160,600 in April 2020. The District’s unemployment rate reached its peak in July 2020 at 11% but was anticipated to decrease in August 2020. Since then, it has decreased to historic lows as per the Local Labour Market Report produced by the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board. Although making up 16% of the economic region’s labour force,

Muskoka is over-represented in terms of numbers employed in the following industries (2-digit NAICS): construction, accommodation & food services, arts, entertainment & recreation and information & cultural industries, and finance & insurance and real estate & rental & leasing. This was problematic, as in the early stages of the Covid-19 shutdown the industries hardest-hit in terms of job losses were: Manufacturing (-5,100), Finance, Insurance & Real Estate (-2,600), and Business, Building & Other Services (-2,500). Tourism was particularly hard-hit, with job losses in (4-digit NAICS) retail trade (-2,600), real estate rentals (-4,100) and transit and sightseeing transportation (-2,600). In Muskoka, the Covid-19 economic shut-down had its most intense negative effect on those employed in accommodation & food services, arts, entertainment and recreation and culture and information, and business, building and other services. The majority of those who lost their jobs in these industries were low-paid and not able to work from home. Retail trade, accommodation and food services, and health care and social assistance account for almost 50% of total employment in Muskoka. The goods-producing sector – construction and manufacturing – accounts for just over 16% of total employment (below the provincial average). Muskoka has experienced a significant decline (almost 50%) in manufacturing employment since 2005.

A report prepared by Service Canada revealed that it was the 55+ age cohort who was most significantly affected by job losses due to the shutdown of the economy. 2 out of every 3 people who lost their jobs between February and April 2020 were in the 55+ segment of the labour force. This seemed to be unique due to demographic factors, with a higher number of people aged 55+ in the

region. However, it is also the case that the participation rate of older workers has been increasing across the province. In January 2020, the participation rate of older workers reached a historic peak at more than 38%.

The same report also discussed the large proportion of people in Muskoka-Kawarthas who are self-employed and earn less than \$25,000, who were likely to be negatively affected by the shut-down. Self-employment in Ontario reached an historic peak in early 2020 which was considered one indication of Ontario's increasingly dysfunctional labour market.

Dysfunction in the Labour Market

Prior to Covid-19, the District of Muskoka had an under-performing labour force. According to the Financial Accountancy Office of Ontario, two measures of an under-performing labour force are numbers of those employed part-time and number of those who are self-employed. The District of Muskoka has a higher rate of self-employment (14%) than the provincial average (11.3%), while the number of those employed part-time are estimated to be near 40%.

The MEP report noted that Covid-19 likely exacerbated existing dysfunctions within the labour market. A summary of some of the more obvious developments since March 2020 that were suggested included:

- Economic growth in Ontario was slowing prior to the pandemic and was forecast to decrease further in 2020-21 due to a moderation in labour force growth. Covid-19 reversed Ontario's economic growth (the first quarter of 2020 saw GDP drop by 2%) but it was anticipated prior weakening economic growth rates will make recovery harder and slower.
- It is likely that recovery in the regional Muskoka labour market has reached its peak. Jobs lost due to Covid-19 were not anticipated to reappear. Most of these jobs are low-income jobs in the accommodation and food services sector and retail trade. Muskoka has high rates of employment in both sectors.
- Muskoka has poor access, relative to other regions of Ontario, to fast and reliable broadband which will hamper economic recovery in the region during and post-Covid-19.
- The speed of economic recovery will be largely dependent on public policy. If austerity measures (reductions in program spending and balanced budgets) are introduced to tackle extra (federal and provincial) government spending that took place during 2020, as was done after the 2008-9 global recession, this will lead to a contraction in the economy and a much slower recovery. If more labour-market flexibility is encouraged by public policy this will also lead to higher levels of precarious employment. (The policy decisions of Ontario's new provincial government contributed to slower economic growth during 2019-20 due to new tax cuts and cuts in program spending).
- Rising rates of precarious employment, likely exacerbated by Covid-19, are a significant drag on economic growth and have a significant social cost. Precarious employment can be a social determinant of health.

- Retail sales and accommodation and food services are among the most vulnerable – according to the Conference Board of Canada – to automation. The economic crisis due to Covid-19 will likely speed-up automation in these sectors. Given the dependence of the Muskoka labour market on precisely these sectors, workforce development should re-imagine how these displaced workers could be transitioned into other sectors.
- The tourism sector was the hardest hit of Canada’s industry sectors. Roughly 500,000 jobs had been lost in the industry Canada-wide by August 2020. Projections by HR Tourism Canada are that the industry will not recover pre-Covid-19 levels of employment before late 2024 or early 2025.

The report included an extensive amount of data highlighting occupational trends within Muskoka and found that most top occupations within Muskoka were low-skill and low-wage jobs, typically requiring only a high school education.

The report noted that past recessions, such as the Great Recession of 2008-9, have involved a rise in unemployment which has persisted well-beyond any technical economic downturn. This was the case in Muskoka after 2008 (for e.g., the District’s Ontario Works caseload jumped from 599 in January 2007 to 931 in December 2011, an increase of 66.55%. In March 2019 the District’s Ontario Works caseload remained at 836). Any rise in unemployment could potentially result in the permanent disconnection between those without work and the labour market.

Lastly, the MEP report concluded with the sentiment that workforce development in Muskoka should concentrate on strengthening the labour market by providing better quality jobs. The report provided a number of recommendations to support this goal which are summarized below including:

- Focus on the development of skilled trades workers in the district with Georgian College and other educators, particularly in the trades of electrician, heating, refrigeration, and air-conditioning mechanic, early childhood educator, and heavy equipment operator.
- Explore with Muskoka manufacturers future workforce skill needs.
- Explore career pathway projects in the health-care sector.
- Promote a living wage in Muskoka among Muskoka employers.
- Advocate for a rise in the hourly minimum wage to meet living wage standards in Muskoka.
- Promote apprenticeship in Muskoka’s construction industry, specifically in the carpenter trade and landscape and horticultural trades.
- Promote awareness among employees and jobseekers in Muskoka about their rights under the Employment Standards Act.
- Promote in-demand, four-year degree occupations, and skilled trades occupations in the District’s high-schools.

- Support the SSM and Muskoka employment services providers with the provision of up-to-date labour market information on in-demand occupations.
- Advocate for decent jobs within all economic and workforce development settings.
- Promote “champions” among employers to encourage the improvement of business culture among employers in the District of Muskoka.

Simcoe Muskoka Local Labour Market Report

Simcoe Muskoka Skillforce conducts an annual survey and research project on the local labour market. The following section details their report from 2022, sharing key employment indicators from the region.

As of October 2022, unemployment in Muskoka-Kawartha region was below 3%, and notably lower than pre-pandemic levels. In the case of Muskoka, there was a much higher proportion of Employment Services clients who were in receipt of OW (three times that for Simcoe) or in receipt of ODSP (twice that of Simcoe). This is because the Service System Manager operating in the region places emphasis on serving more individuals who are at risk of longer-term unemployment.

Despite relatively large proportions of clients with higher levels of educational attainment the data suggests that these clients are often laid off from occupations which require lower levels of educational attainment and tend to slip a little further in terms of the profile of the jobs they eventually obtain. This is not a trend specific to Muskoka rather across the province.

Huntsville Economic Development Strategic Plan:

This strategic plan was created to guide the Town of Huntsville’s economic development efforts from 2022 to 2026. It provides insights into in local workforce and economic development challenges and opportunities and the Town’s strategy to address them. Huntsville has a permanent population of approximately 20,000 residents, that increases to 30,000 in its peak months from May to October due to its large seasonal resident population. The Town’s economy is primarily based around tourism and related industries such as recreation, services, and construction. The strategy focuses on addressing Huntsville’s desire to diversify to a broader economic base. Supporting the budget of the economic development department’s efforts is the development of a new Municipal Accommodation Tax program.

From a workforce perspective, four of the top five occupations in Huntsville were at or just above minimum wage. Those included retail salesperson (2019 – 452 jobs, \$13.94 median hourly wage), cashiers (2019- 238 jobs, \$13.62 median hourly wage), food counter attendants (2019- 264 jobs, \$14.29 median hourly wage), light duty cleaners (2019- 245 positions, \$15.74 median hourly

wage), and registered nurses (2019-171 positions, \$34.72 median hourly wage). The Town of Huntsville has a substantial and well-educated labour force that appears to be underutilized.

Key employment challenges were identified through stakeholder consultation and included:

- Lack of local talent for existing and new businesses.
- Lack of high paying jobs.
- Lack of year-round positions.
- Lack of jobs for spouses entering Huntsville.
- Due to shortages in employment, businesses have reduced working capacity to 80% by closing one to two days a week which has resulted in lower annual revenue.
- 20% of businesses in Muskoka are self-employed making \$15-\$20K/ year and not hiring. This is lower than the Provincial statistic of 14%.

Feedback was also collected regarding affordable housing, which is considered to have a key impact on labour supply and included:

- The lack of affordable housing makes it difficult for young families, professional talent, and small businesses to flourish in the area
- The consensus amongst those interviewed is that most blue-collar workers that are being recruited for jobs in existing establishments are unable to find affordable housing within the town which is either driving these potential hires to other communities or requires them to drive a distance to maintain a job. Even employees with \$100K salaried positions find it hard to secure affordable housing
- The demand is higher than supply; the town is limited in rental and lower income housing as well

The Town's mission focuses on supporting mechanisms for year-round prosperity and enabling sustainable growth. The Town's vision aspires to be a community that grows multigenerational families, within a hub of entrepreneurs and businesses offering rewarding jobs. These elements highlight the importance of being intentional and strategic regarding the types of jobs developed and sustained in

Within the four goals developed, two have clear linkages to workforce development, while the remaining goals contain elements that can be applied or considered in a workforce development context.

Within Goal 2: Encourage Community Development, while not explicitly focused on workforce, all the objectives can be linked back to workforce development including:

- Increase access to employment for equity deserving communities.
- Support community driven pilots that support local problems.
- Strengthen partnership with post-secondary institutions and not for profits.
- Create a hub for professionals and entrepreneurs for newcomers.
- Drive business recruitment and resident attraction strategies.
- Development of a comprehensive affordable housing strategy.

Goal 3: Support Workforce Development and Growth is clearly focused on workforce development. It proposes the following objectives:

- Development of institutional partnership to link educational institutions students to skilled trades training.
- Generate opportunities to highlight employers within the community to local and external job seekers.
- Generate opportunities to educate job seekers about local job opportunities and highlight incentives for growth.
- Provide opportunities for employers, individually or in groups, to invest in their workforce, with help from the government.

Goal 1 and 4 contain language around creating new resources and programs through partnership to meeting businesses needs, and testing and supporting novel business ideas.

Huntsville's Official Plan is also host to several themes that are supportive of workforce development. These themes include:

- Vibrant, caring, and welcoming community.
- Valuing a strong and resilient economy.
- Leveraging quality-of-life and place-making to attract innovative and creative knowledge-based companies.
- Reinforce the function of the historic downtown being the cultural heart and soul of the community.
- Retaining existing employment uses and protecting them from incompatible uses.
- Enabling expansion opportunities as well as setting aside sufficient lands for new employment uses.
- Encouraging more affordable housing and an efficient transportation system.

The strategy report also contained some further insights on Muskoka demographics, including that the core labour force (people between 20-59) accounts for 43% of the population, compared to 48% provincially. Young people, under the age of 15, only make up 12.6% of the population compared to 16.4% across the province. The median age in Muskoka is 51.3, compared to 41.3 across the

province and 34% of the population is over 60, compared to 23% provincially. Not only do these statistics highlight the eroding workforce potential of the region, but also the likely increase in staffing that will be required to care for the region's aging population.

Muskoka Lakes Economic Development Strategic Plan

Muskoka Lakes completed an economic development strategy in 2020. The strategy identified a key focus on several economic drivers including housing and workforce. To address these areas, the Township proposed a number of objectives including:

- Solutions to improve housing for temporary and year-round employees.
- Working with regional partners to assess the nature of workforce challenges and partake in initiatives to support workforce development.
- Attract business that provides year-round full-time employment.
- Ensure physical infrastructure in downtowns makes them an appealing place for residents and visitors to work, live and play in.
- An ambassador program that could eventually link back to workforce development.

RTO12 2023 – 2024 Draft Business and Operational Plan

Regional Tourism Organization 12's 23/24 operational plan provided insight into both recent industry insights, as well as actionable items, including two key projects, the Tourism Industry Catalyst Housing Project, and the related Tourism Co-Creation Lab. This section details the recent industry insights related to workforce, as well as key actionable items that related to workforce in relation to the RTO's operational plan.

In Spring of 2022 a survey of tourism operators was completed, and it identified that approximately 1,300 full-time and 4,600 part-time positions were available across the region at that time.

Through the Regional Data Hub operated by the RTO an employee sentiment survey was also undertaken in Fall 2022. This was to better understand employees' satisfaction in their roles and to identify issues that may improve workforce attraction and retention. The survey sample included 95 current workers, 75 past workers and 165 potential workers, and included the following insights:

- 72% of current workers said they are very satisfied with their job.
- 54% of current workers said they earn a living wage.

- Most current workers (66%) would recommend their employer to others; however, only 46% of current workers would recommend a job in the tourism sector (mostly because they don't consider the sector to provide a living wage).
- Good relations with co-workers, schedule flexibility and proximity of employment topped the list of things current and past workers liked MOST about their job.
- What current and past workers liked LEAST about their job pertained to finances: insufficient wages, the high cost of living, not earning a living wage and the lack of affordable housing.
- Less than a quarter of potential worker respondents indicated that they would re-locate for a job in tourism. This insight suggests a greater need to build the workforce from within in the region. It also coincides with a tourism operator insight, which suggested a main challenge to attracting workers is that there simply "aren't enough people in the region to work in tourism". It also confirms that, to attract more workers to the regional sector, additional value besides wages must be offered (e.g. housing).

Into 2024 the RTO is seeking to increase regional self-reliance to enable them to solve local challenges and increase revenue generation geared towards stabilizing and developing the tourism industry and identifying and implementing the creative and innovative solutions and partnerships to enable this. They are also looking to develop timely research and attract digital and technological innovation to the industry.

The RTO is planning several initiatives to support workforce development, including:

- On-going enhancements to the Regional Industry Job Board to promote but also engage in content marketing. This may involve highlighting individual properties in some cases, and improving the user experience so it is more engaging. High school and college/university students will be a key target audience.
- The adoption of the Big Applause Awards as an annual event with the intention of developing it out into an associated program of work-integrated learning objectives. Efforts will be made to increase regional high school participation.
- The development of regional industry-specific micro-credential training is a key focus after the launch of the Rural Tourism Certificate in 2022. It is now a requirement for educational institutes that want to partner with EE on work-integrated programs in the region ensure students/attendees complete the micro-credential modules before arrival.
- The operation of the "Explorers' Edge Co-Creation Lab" (CCL), a dynamic entity that allows the RTO to engage community members and to solicit the insights of technical experts from outside the industry to build programs. The CCL will support the

long-term success of and buy-in for multiple projects, while acting as a function of a broader communications effort and as a design thinking tool.

- Catalyst Housing: An integrated worker housing and training facility, discussed in detail below.

It was interesting to note that despite the regional job board receiving a high number of visitors, this did not translate into more hires.

The RTO's operational plan also included the following workforce related items:

- Educate workers on the region as career destination via the Rural Tourism Certificate micro-credential.
- Enhance Job Board performance and expand marketing tactics/investment for greater conversion.
- Develop and launch 2nd annual Big Applause Awards.
- Build work-integrated learning and training curriculum for the catalyst housing project.
- Create development team for the catalyst housing project.
- Build a "Neighbourhood Network" who will welcome new workers.
- Conduct ongoing, timely and region-centric industry research (employers, employees).
- They also discuss general promotion and education related to tourism as a career.

The RTO has a budget allocation for workforce development and training of \$231,000 to facilitate and support the attraction, development, and retention of a tourism workforce to enhance the visitor experience. Specific activities included:

- Develop the social enterprise business model for Catalyst Housing.
- Continue micro-credential, curriculum, and work-integrated learning development for the Catalyst Housing project.
- Launch community sessions to pitch the Catalyst Housing project.
- Conduct ongoing, timely and region-centric industry research (Regional Data Hub).
- Build targeted marketing program to attract and retain regional employees.

Catalyst Housing Project

In 2018-2019, Explorers' Edge undertook an initial "Catalyst Housing Concept Research & Articulation" study to determine if a new work-integrated training and housing ecosystem model, led by a Destination Development Organization, could address significant workforce challenges in the region. This project is RTO12's biggest priority for 2023-2026 operating years. The RTO feels that industry housing and training are both needed to attract, develop, and launch tourism professionals in our communities, particularly to fill the

lower-paying positions. The concept is exciting, innovative, and recognizes the gap between some of the sector’s lowest paying jobs and the cost-of-living. This section will detail some of the key insights that led to the development of the model, and the model itself.

The Catalyst Housing project identified a number of factors affecting attracting/retaining workers, including:

- Overall loss of workers because of the pandemic – mass exodus the industry has not recovered from.
- Negative perception of tourism as a viable career or for career development: considered precarious and low-paying work.
- Shelter-to-Income Ratio (STIR) for entry level jobs is greater than 30% (therefore those incomes are not viable for housing affordability).
- The estimated Living Wage for the region is \$18.55/hour with full time hours.
- Most entry level positions in tourism pay minimum wage (Spring 2022 Business Confidence Index: 20% pay less than \$15/hour, 55% pay \$15-20 hour).
- Market Basket Measure (MBM – a measurement to determine poverty levels) for populations in this area is \$42,531 (see “The Extent & Cost of Poverty Report in Muskoka – District of Muskoka, August 2022) meaning “50% of people in Muskoka had a total income below the MBM”.
- The Median Income for Muskoka is \$40,800 (2020 Statistics Canada Census).
- The Median Income for Individuals in West Parry Sound (multiple municipalities average) is \$40,032.
- The Median Income for Individuals in the Almaguin Highlands (multiple municipalities average) is \$34,800.
- Population in the catchment skews older.
- 55+ age group (make up big percentage of regional tourism workforce – see BCI Spring 2022) retiring or “aging out”.
- Lack of youth development and retention.
- Improved DEI needed to welcome out-of-area workers, students, and immigrants.

The Catalyst Housing project identified a number of factors affecting housing affordability in the region, including:

- The median price of a non-waterfront home in the catchment for September 2022 was \$552,000.
- The benchmark price according to the Home Price Index for single family homes was \$734,400 and for townhomes/row units it was \$640,800.
- For Q3 2022 (July to September) there were 2,500 active private home rentals on Airbnb, with 95% being entire home rentals.
- Not enough units for current homeowners to downsize and free up supply.
- Lack of attainable (vs. affordable) housing.

While the Province of Ontario recently announced a plan to encourage the building of new homes in Ontario, it was recognized that there will be a waiting period for those homes to be ready and no guarantee of attainable builds in the region, especially for low-paid tourism industry workers.

The proposed solution is the development of Catalyst Housing, a new housing model to meet regional sector needs, attract and develop workers, and build regional industry and community resiliency. This model, known internally as the Work-Integrated Training & Housing Ecosystem, is currently under development. The model will be adaptable and scalable depending on sub-regional needs and it is possible additional sectors could benefit from times of excess housing, including the health care and building trades industries. The business model for Catalyst Housing was completed in Q2 of 2023, and a potential submission to the Canadian Mortgage & Housing Corporation’s funding programs for housing innovation is being considered.

Figure 2 Evolution of the Catalyst Housing Concept



Gravenhurst Business Surveys

From 2019 to 2021 Gravenhurst conducted an annual survey of their business community. The 2021 survey revealed that workforce was the 2nd biggest challenge facing Gravenhurst businesses (after pandemic related challenges). 28% of respondents selected

workforce as their biggest issue, which was up from 16% in 2020 and 22% in 2019. In 2021, many businesses reported that they struggled to find new or qualified employees, citing that they would be able to expand or take on more work if they were able to increase their labour force. 90 employers indicated they were planning on hiring in 2022. At the time of the survey, employers indicated they had added 135 new jobs since 2021, most being in full time seasonal roles, and there were an estimated 121 permanent and 380 seasonal job vacancies currently.

Surveys indicated that seasonal jobs rebounded as public health restrictions lessened (in comparison to 2020). The construction sector reported the largest increases in employment since the start of the pandemic, while restaurants experienced the largest losses.

Gravenhurst Wage Survey

In 2022, the Town completed a wage survey focused on construction and skilled trades, hospitality and tourism, retail, and healthcare industries. The survey identified the lowest paid job as servers with an average wage of \$15.69, and the highest paid job as social workers with an average wage of \$38.00.

District Municipality of Muskoka 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020-2030

Given the strong link between housing and employee attraction, it was important to examine the District's Housing Plan. Understanding the District's role, vision, and commitment for housing is important to understanding where they fit in to the next steps related to workforce attraction and retention, as housing was identified as the most significant barrier facing Muskoka's workforce. This section will detail some of the key objectives and actions from the plan.

The District is focused on planning for the future. Some of the key planning activities that will be undertaken by the District to meet the objectives of the Plan are as follows:

- Work with Area Municipalities to undertake a comprehensive review of each Area.
- Municipality's zoning, by-laws and planning application processes and fees to identify opportunities to streamline and prioritize the development of attainable housing across the District.
- Expand the role of Area Champions on the Muskoka Housing Task Force to serve as local champions to guide and champion new attainable housing developments through the planning process and act as a consistent District liaison.
- Identify District owned properties that could support attainable housing development; ensure that the appropriate zoning and servicing is in place.

- Develop attainable housing models for District owned sites, including architectural renderings, financial models, and units. type/mix. This will enable the District to respond quickly to take advantage of any future funding programs or public-private partnership opportunities.
- Develop a strategy to acquire abandoned, vacant, and underutilized land for the purpose of new attainable housing developments or community service space.
- Develop an environmental sustainability strategy for the community housing buildings and encourage the creation of such a strategy for market and privately owned attainable housing buildings.
- Promote the expansion of transportation options within the District recognizing links between housing and employment opportunities.
- Explore new housing models, such as passive house and mixed tenure/mixed income models that promote creating self-sustaining attainable housing that has no need for ongoing operational subsidies.

The establishment of a 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan provides the foundation for planning and decision making. It identifies the objectives that the District wishes to achieve and the first few years of planned activities to meet those objectives. This plan also envisions a future where there is housing for everyone. At the completion of the plan, the District intends to achieve the following key outcomes:

- A broad range of housing options and housing forms are available in the District.
- 10 years of exceeding the current target of producing 20 new attainable housing units per year.
- The Muskoka Municipal Non-Profit Housing Corporation, under their new governance and operating structure, cuts the ribbon on their first new attainable housing development.
- Increased access to transitional housing for those in need, particularly youth.
- Increased economic investment by private developers and employers in the District.
- Reduced number of individuals living without shelter or at risk of homelessness on future Homelessness Enumerations.
- A decrease in the number of households on the Centralized Wait List and shorter wait times.
- Maximized opportunities to redevelop or intensify current community housing sites through the implementation of a comprehensive asset management plan.
- Improved coordination of services across departments and agencies making it easier for residents to get the housing, health, and support services they need.
- More individuals and families living in good quality, suitable housing.

- Renewed ability to offer attainable housing choices to employers and skilled professionals.
- Increased labour force participation due to improved opportunities to find attainable housing for employees in the District.

The ultimate measure of success will be healthy communities where there is economic prosperity and growth for everyone. This plan represents an aggressive approach to tackling housing and the District should be considered the lead for driving the development of new housing, including for workforce purposes.

APPENDIX C: Summary of Consultation Data

Key Survey Findings

Resident Survey

Seventy-six residents or employees in the Muskoka region completed the workforce development survey. This section details key highlights from the results geared towards understanding the needs and perspectives of residents and employees living and/or working in the region.

The top challenges respondents faced working in Muskoka:

1. My wages do not keep up with the cost of living (80%)
2. Mental Health (32%)
3. Finding Housing (29%)
4. Expected Hours of Work (29%)

The most important factor respondents consider while looking for a job (rank):

1. Salary - 2.80
2. Positive workplace culture (prioritizes the well-being of employees, offers support at all levels within the organization, and has policies in place that encourage respect, trust, empathy, and support) - 3.32
3. Flexible working hours - 4.54
4. Health care benefits - 4.57
5. Flexible (remote/hybrid) work arrangements - 5.03
6. Welcoming environment - 5.23
7. Appreciation for work well done - 5.44
8. Leadership opportunities - 6.32
9. Education and tuition benefits - 6.75

Other notable mentions:

- Commute distance (8 mentions)
- Pension (3 mentions)
- Childcare (2 mentions)

Top Factors Influencing Respondent's Decision to Live and Work in a Community:

1. Living in a Friendly, Welcoming Community (66.2%)
2. There are Well-Paying Jobs (54.4%) (Muskoka – 23.9%)
3. There is Housing for Purchase I can Afford (52.7%) (Muskoka – 9.9%)
4. There are Jobs in my Field (52.7%)
5. Living Close to Family and Friends (50%)
6. There are Recreation Opportunities (48.6%)

Factors Respondents Believe Muskoka Has:

1. There are Recreation Opportunities (66.2%)
2. Living in a Friendly, Welcoming Community (60.6%)
3. Living Close to Family and Friends (47.9%)
4. There are Jobs in my Field (40.8%)

Tools/Resources/Training That Would Assist with Finding a Job:

- Mentorship/internship to help retirees who want to re-enter, retool
- Additional education opportunities (post-secondary including virtual)
- Flexible working arrangements
 - Hybrid, remote, hours
- Age blindness
- Employee/Employer mixer
- Attainable Housing
- Opportunity to be hired in a single full-time position
- Continuing education
- Skills Development
 - Conference
 - Perhaps targeted (to seniors, to youth?)
- Pay to attend training
- Co-working

- Better working conditions – wage, benefits
- Free French courses
- Opportunities for career growth
- Financial support to get to and from work, for housing
- Anti-oppression training for those in the trades
- More women hired and trained in the trades
- More active transportation options
- More winter employment options

Other key findings

- 77.8% of respondents interested in further education and training if it improves their employment prospects
- Retiree is concerned about taking a job away from someone starting out

Employer Survey

Sixty-nine employer surveys were completed and provided insight on recruitment tactics, challenges, and occupations they struggled to fill.

- The average number of employees respondents had was 49.4.
- At the time of surveying, respondents identified an estimated 473 jobs that were going unfilled.

Top Recruitment Methods Used By Employers:

1. Online Job Boards (74.6%)
2. Through Personal Network (71.6%)
3. Referrals from Friends or Current Employees (68.7%)
4. Social Media Applications such as LinkedIn or Facebook (61.2%)
5. Own Website (55.2%)
6. Employment Centres (38.8%)

The Top Barriers to Attracting New Employees:

1. Housing (47 mentions)

2. Lack of supply (23 mentions) of skilled and qualified labour (13 mentions)
3. Wages (15 mentions)
4. Attitude (11 mentions)
5. Seasonality (8 mentions)
6. Getting to work (8 mentions)
7. Cost of Living/Inflationary pressures (6 mentions)

Occupations That Are Most Difficult to Fill

1. Food service – back of house (9 mentions)
2. Labourer (7 mentions)
3. Carpenter (5 mentions)
4. Nurse (4 mentions)
5. Housekeeping (4 mentions)
6. PSW (3 mentions)
7. Customer Service (3 mentions)

Top Solutions to Address Challenges in the Labour Market

- 1) Housing for Workforce (18 mentions)
 - a) 3D printed
 - b) Repurposing old government buildings
 - c) Alternate forms of housing
 - d) Rental and purchasing (some staff looking to buy in N Bay – not feasible)
- 2) Foreign recruitment (7 mentions)
- 3) Training (4 mentions)
 - a) Incentives
 - b) Locally available
 - c) Community spaces
 - d) On technology
- 4) Workforce Attraction (4 mentions)

- a) Marketing
- b) Online recruitment tool
- c) Career path education (retail)
- 5) Grant/subsidy (to offset wage costs) (3 mentions)
- 6) Out of province temporary workers (2 mentions)
- 7) Bonuses (2 mentions)
- 8) Internal training/Cross training (2 mentions)

Other Comment Respondent Themes

- Housing (9)
- Youth attraction/retention (3)
- Post-secondary (2)

Stakeholder Survey

Twenty-five stakeholders from Muskoka completed the stakeholder survey. The following section details key findings from stakeholder insights into the existing supports, challenges, and solutions facing workforce in the region.

Current Support for Workforce Development Efforts In and Around Muskoka

- Strategy Development
 - Long term care and early education sectors
- Research
- Affordable Housing Development
- Skills Training and Development
 - Completing GED
 - Train and educate students in in-demand fields
 - Health care, trades
 - Geared to current and future labour market (professional development, retraining, connections to employers)
 - Degree and non-degree programs/post-secondary programs
 - Apprenticeship training

- Soft Skills Solutions
- For entrepreneurs and small business owners
 - How to create a desirable environment for hiring
 - HR advice – company positioning, remuneration, benefits, general best practices education
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workshops
 - Online and in-person workshops through Ontario and Canada Chambers of Commerce, and when members (local business) offer relevant content
- Work-Integrated Learning, Innovation and Research
- Employment Services
 - Link to employers/Sourcing potential employment opportunities
 - Develop the skills to write a job application
 - Connections between employers, transportation, housing, and job seekers
 - Employment supports for individuals with developmental disabilities
 - In-school (post-secondary career services)
 - Career development/Identification of interests
 - One-on-one support
 - Job search assistance
 - Retention supports
 - Assistance for employers
 - To find and retain
- Attraction
 - Of international students
 - Helping international students looking to connect with communities and stay
 - Access to ESL + settlement supports (PSE outside of District)
 - Resident and worker attraction and retention campaigns
 - Direct shares of member (business) job postings
- Healthcare and Social Services
 - Food security
 - Pharmacy support

- Family social service supports
- Support to meet basic needs

Biggest Barriers to Addressing Workforce Issues

- Affordable housing
 - In-migration from urban areas/retirees are skewing the market beyond traditional seasonal challenges
 - Shortage
 - Short term accommodation as a perpetuator
 - Municipalities need to think outside of the box, explore more permissive policies, repurposing/developing land for attainable housing, incentivizing second suites and additional dwellings
- Skills Development
- Transportation
 - Between major centres
 - Accessible transit for people with disabilities
 - Many do not have access to their own vehicle or face other barriers to driving
- Seasonality
- Job Quality/Wage
 - Lack of full-time opportunities
 - Existing opportunities do not require high levels of education
 - Growth opportunities are limited
 - Compensation is not keeping pace with inflation
- Competition with Surrounding Regions
- Not a Welcoming Community
 - Challenging to find immigration-related services such as translation
 - Educational credentials and work experience are challenging to get recognized
 - Students don't see themselves reflected here (at all, or in a positive way)
 - No community welcome programs
- Cost of Living
- Access to Healthcare

- Including dental
- Complexity of Accessing Services
 - Many agencies that don't connect to share information/talk to one another
 - Many agencies and many different/unique requirements
- Small Youth Population
 - For tourism, seasonal and food service positions
 - Population is aging
 - Lots of youth out-migration
- Old School Thinking
 - Fear of hiring women/older workers for certain jobs (trades)
 - Generational barriers (for hiring and between existing workforce)
- Shift to Self-Employment
 - Lack of family friendly employers cause employees to chose to go out on their own as sub-contractors to provide desired flexibility
- Access to Funding
 - Province does not include us in Northern funding programs

Recommended Tools and Resources

- Housing
 - More
 - Attainable
 - Better policy to promote
 - Airbnb regulation and taxation
 - Houseshares
 - District purchase and allocation of land for housing
- Regional coordination and leadership
 - District should play a regional economic development role, undertake a strategy
 - Need to bring partners together
 - District and municipalities should coordinate

- Transportation
 - Better connections to employment
 - improved
- Advocacy
 - To provincial and federal governments
- Data
 - To communicate need of job seekers to employers, vice versa, and to communicate the needs of both to upper levels of government
 - Demographics for housing
- Collaboration
- Settlement services
 - ESL
 - Welcoming, culturally safe community
- Workshare programs
 - Formalize job sharing
- Employer education on best practices
 - Living wage, needs of employees, equity, diversity, and inclusion
 - Sharing best practices
 - Sourcing experts and running events
- Local training and education opportunities for the workforce
 - More local training opportunities
 - Upskilling opportunities for residents
- Childcare
- Marketing
 - Youth retention and attraction

How Can Stakeholders Help?

- Share information
 - Marketing external and data collection to share for internal planning

- Offer and promote education and workforce related initiatives
 - General information on best practices
 - On immigration and hiring international students
- Connect students to employers
- Provide leadership (District)
- Collaboration and planning support
- General support for implementation when and where needed

In-Person Consultation Theme Summary

The following section summarizes key points from discussions with job seekers and residents (workforce), employers, and stakeholders.

Workforce Consultation

What resources/supports/tools would assist in the job search/staying in a job?

- Preference towards in-person interaction when hiring
- Access to more training, particularly to help transition away from more physically demanding roles for mature workers or enter the trades for those that are looking to explore a new field
- Funding for training that is appropriate to the need of the community and job seeker – Better Jobs Ontario program leaves much to be desired
- A realistic and manageable workload (not high pressure, enough time to do the job properly)
- Flexibility for illness and in scheduling
- Awareness about resources to help with the job search process like the YMCA
- Follow up from employers when they don't move forward with the hiring process (customer service goes both ways)
- Information on available career paths within the region
- Job fairs
- More informal or formal networking at job fairs
- More opportunities for on-the-job training and apprenticeships
- Additional and more comprehensive supports to help those challenged with addictions and mental health challenges can re-enter the employment marketplace

- Better wages
- Positive, respectful work environment – no micromanagement, fun place to work
- Health benefits
- Appreciation for a job well done
- Incentives for retention
- Employer education on how best to appreciate employees/create a good working environment
- Networking groups for job seekers
- Networking for job seekers with employers – help getting a foot in the door
- Better, more career-oriented job opportunities – diversity beyond part time, low wage jobs
- Community Living job coaches are very helpful and if issues are experienced the employee can chat through them with the job coach
- More opportunities to communicate/ask questions at work
- More communication to facilitate better understanding of tasks at hand
- More team building, enhanced team environment
- Require additional time to understand the task at hand and ask questions – a lower pressure environment that enables learning
- Tools for success on the job (ex. How to calm screaming children)
- On the job recognition, appreciation and encouragement for a job well done
- Better connection to employers with a wider range of opportunities – job coaches are very helpful in making the connection
- Peer support mentors – a colleague on the floor to help with immediate challenges and questions
- Constructive feedback on how to improve
- Instill teamwork
- Find the best people for the job so they can do their job well
- Opportunities to learn new skills and try out different jobs
- Good pay
- Employers should have an open mind and consider how they can benefit from different skills and abilities
- World Education Service was helpful to do the credential assessment

What do job seekers like about Muskoka/working in Muskoka?

- Beautiful area, nice rural community
- Social aspect of teams when there is a good environment
- Earning an income
- Contributing to the community and making an impact
- District rental assistance and utilities assistance program
- It's an opportunity to connect, enjoy social connection
- Have fun
- Sense of purpose
- The work is interesting and challenging
- Show young people they can conquer their challenges
- Independence
- Giving back/caregiving
- Get paid
- Love working with kids
- Work can be a home away from home
- Accomplishment
- Love living in Muskoka close to friends and family, great amenities (Tim Hortons, recreation centre swimming pool)
- Friendly
- Small community – would not fit in in an urban area
- Great theatre
- Wildlife

The negative of working in Muskoka:

- Gossip about other employees (including neurodiverse employees)
- Management is often unqualified and not motivating/leading team
- Perception is you need to know someone to get hired

- Not having Canadian experience is a reason job seekers are hearing they did not get the job
- Perception that it would be easier to find a job elsewhere, like Alberta
- Hard work for minimal return and reward
- Interest in retraining but nothing available locally and preference toward in-person training due to barriers
- Funding is available for retraining but does not meet needs and career goals
- Seasonal layoffs disrupt income flow, make it challenging to remain committed to a single employer.
- Applicant selection via AI makes it challenging to get a foot in the door
- Employee was laid off for reporting abuse in a long-term care situation
- Significant effort (resumes) required to apply for jobs that require no skill (like stocking shelves)
- Pay for your own Christmas party at a minimum wage job with a poor work environment – this is not demonstrating employee appreciation or recognition
- Promised jobs and (more) hours which did not materialize
- Lots of negative work environments – people just show up to get paid and leave – people want to work somewhere they can feel excited about going to work
- Georgian Bay is very isolated – costly to access training, more connected to Midland/Simcoe County than Muskoka
- Lots of part time, seasonal, poorly paying jobs – not career oriented positions
- Hard to find out what is available, especially in terms of more career focused employment opportunities
- Transit is difficult and costly – often arrive an hour early or an hour late (Bracebridge)
- Night shifts are challenging and cause health consequence – headaches, overtired, easily frustrated
- Colleagues/management can be nice to your face and mean behind your back
- Lots of miscommunication taking place between staff
- Sometimes a high-pressure environment
- Dangerous leaving shift work at night (crime)

Challenges:

- Housing costs are extremely high – job seekers who were renting noted that should something change in their rental arrangement they would likely be pushed out of the region

- Mental health challenges – connecting with a therapist, finding the right medication can take time and disrupt consistent employment and performance at work.
- Mature workers are interested in opportunities however not as physically sound as they have been in the past and may not be able to undertake the same scope of tasks
- Winter weather + committing to driving to work during the winter driving season
- Apply through the online systems but it's very hard to get an actual interview, even though they have the skills required
- When on assistance, job seeker only wants to work part time, if they move to full time, they will no longer be reimbursed for transportation costs
- Employer charges significant housekeeping fee but that does not go to staff and as a result the client does not tip, assuming everything is covered through the fee
- Food service shut down during COVID made it hard to return
- Transportation can be challenging to access a job site if not in-town/the same town of residence
- Carpooling can be challenging – job seeker shared experience where person was charging 2 people \$150/week for pick up enroute on the highway, which was not feasible
- Access to childcare, including before and after school care which often limits one or more parents from working full time
- Lack of in-person mental health supports in the region
- Concerns around accessing support and the outcomes (forced short term commitment for mental health that could disrupt work)
- Lack of available health care in the region
- Cost of living is extremely high and hard to sustain a family on an income, especially with children
- Mental health – anxiety can make working challenging
- Mental health in the community – lots of hostility and addictions
- Shift work is very difficult with the wide range of hours

General notes:

- There is a mismatch between employers looking to hire and those seeking work. Job seekers feel they are qualified and applying multiple times but are not getting the job, while the employer continues to advertise.

- Lots of younger residents struggling with addictions at the moment, but with the right supports they would likely be interested in rejoining the job marketplace.

Employer Consultation

Additional Challenges Employers Noted

- Still have employees sick with COVID/other and missing work – we still need to take precautions
- Minimal financial support for hiring
- Housing
 - Market is heavily skewed towards long term renters over landlords, with many landlords now facing months of unpaid rent and long wait at the tribunal. No one wants to become a landlord right now.
 - Despite housing being such a big challenge, there is no interest in prefabricated homes in the region, and minimum building size requirements pose an additional barrier
- Transit
- Childcare
- Very expensive to bring training to Muskoka or send staff to access training
- Restrictions around training for Red Seal are too restrictive – some with a lot of experience could train an apprentice despite not having their Red Seal
- Utility start-up costs for new residents are very high – can we set up a fund (perhaps through fundraising in the community) to help new residents with those costs or eliminate them altogether (\$500 for water, \$200-300 for Lakeland Power)

Current/Future Skill Gaps Identified by Employers

- Water/sewer workers, heavy equipment operators, DZ drivers, diesel mechanics, leadership, soft skills training
- Women are not entering the trades – more needs to be done to normalize their participation in trades and encourage them to enter and explore the trades
- Youth are not interested in Muskoka’s key employment sectors
- In some sectors hiring has slowed down due to slowing market conditions, however this is not expected to persist
- General labourers with a positive attitude
- Food service, culinary, and housekeeping positions are in highest demand – including line cooks, sous chefs, and chefs de partie

- Brewers are a struggle to recruit as there is only one program to train
- Heavy equipment technician, machinist, millwrights, environmental regulations, technical skills for automation, robotics + machinery
- Marketing, accountants, management
- Worked to fill gaps through Fasttrac immigration process but process was difficult, employers had to pay for room and board, and in the end, they were unable to retain them because their community and culture was not here.
- General labour is needed but more available in Muskoka than skilled staff, which are harder to recruit
- PSW and adult caretaking
- ECE and child service worker
- Developmental service worker
- Public works
- Office administration
- Performers and creative staff
- Customer service, social, and common-sense skills – don't answer your phone at work, be on time, don't lick chocolate off your fingers when you are preparing food for guests
- Management and supervisory skills
- Lifeguards
- General first aid, Smart Serve, Safe Food Handling
- Sales
- Conflict resolution
- Health and safety

Emerging Trends + Technology That Will Impact the Workforce

- Automation was expected to reduce the need for labour and the labour required to operate the equipment. In some cases, the implementation of more automation will require more highly skilled labour, while others expect staff will not require additional training beyond the jobsite.
- Younger people are easier to recruit as they don't have an established family/career in another geography. There is the opportunity to develop and anchor them in the region

- Millennials and younger prefer to conduct all their recruitment activities in a virtual environment – some employers are willing to meet them there, others would pass on an individual who was challenged to join the employer for a face-to-face interview
- Work culture has changed, and many more employees are comfortable in identifying mental health barriers and requesting accommodations – great but a burden on employers
- Many young people are delaying getting their drivers license which makes it more challenging to move around the region to access employment
- Labour market is very competitive – if you don't offer a job quickly, candidates may accept another offer shortly after the interview
- Use of temporary foreign workers have been increasing but employers lack supports to go through the costly LMIA process. LMIA process is not great as it significantly limits what the workers can do in their role – often cross training, advancement, raises are not possible due to the prescriptive nature of the program
- As workforce shortages peaked there was a trend towards accepting anybody, simply a body to fill a vacancy, even if they were a poor performer. That trend is now reversing, and employers are choosing to be more selective.
- It is becoming easier to recruit high school students (1 employer)
- Out of COVID the quality of employees is not the same. There is less urgency than before. For example, a job that was once done by one person, now requires two

Role of Employers in Supporting Workforce Development Including Inclusivity

- Offer in-house training and development opportunities – develop own staff and training procedures
- Diversity training for staff – we need to make our organizations more welcoming, and in particular for the trades, training to make the workplace more welcoming to women
- Developing an in-house middle management training program to support engagement, retention, DEI training
 - Could be collaborative if there is enough commonality between training
- Showcase diversity in our hiring and training materials, in particular, to encourage more women to enter the trades
- Promote and educate in high school classes when possible
- We need to change our approach – have bigger outreach to job seekers and focus more on enabling an inclusive and diverse workplace, included working with those who may have mental health challenges, or face barriers to finding employment (i.e. criminal record)

- Increasingly turning to foreign workers to address labour shortage as they find those individuals are skilled, come ready to work and are happy to the opportunities
- One-on-one connection with staff to understand their needs and motivations and supporting/enabling those (more flexible hours, different rewards, etc.)
- Bought and rented a house – this is difficult because housing then becomes dependent on employment, and the complexity of the relationship as landlord/employer should employment end (had squatters)
- Soft skills program for management has been helpful through OTEC
- Tried to implement a carpooling program but it was unsuccessful – people wanted to maintain their independence
- Offer a fantastic workplace Christmas party
- Several employers have brought on employment lawyers/consultants/recruitment agencies to facilitate the LMIA process to attract temporary foreign workers to fill the gap
- Flexible and adaptable to the needs of employees (ex. Scheduling around school for those that have school-aged children)
- Employee shuttles
- Fair living wage employer
- Opportunities to earn additional income (through creating and running value add activities) and through customer referrals for other skill/side businesses
- Free lunch on days working, discounts on products
- Offer hands on training
- Bringing Landscape Ontario landscaping and horticultural technician program (a red seal trade) here to Muskoka. Landscape Ontario provides the training and it's all funded and supported by Landscape Ontario. The training is open to anyone who wants to a horticultural training program and employers get an incentive to send their staff to train (up to \$10,000 in income tax breaks)
- Peer to peer support and connection group
- Create a good social/fun environment so people like coming to work – facilitate the building of social connections so strong friendships/bonds can form
- Provide incentives to encourage employees to show initiative

Tools, Resources, and Supports That Would be Helpful

- Remove roadblocks to building housing for our workforce, including for tiny homes
- Drive/support the development of new housing geared to workforce – perhaps the District could act as the landlord in this case and employers could subsidize costs to provide transitional housing for new employees
- Equipment, such as training simulators (heavy equipment, snowplow operation) would be helpful as the equipment is very costly and likely more than one business could use and benefit from access to shared training space and equipment
- Supports for temporary foreign workers and new residents to Canada. There is no ESL support, no one to help them understand the logistics of living in Canada, like where to grocery shop or find essential items. The LMIA (Labour Market Impact Assessment) and Temporary Foreign Worker process is extremely complex, time consuming and expensive – the District could hire someone to support industry through the LMIA process
- Educate students starting in primary school about career opportunities and pathways in the region
- Funding/subsidy/incentive to support training, hiring, housing development for staff
- Take your kid to work – that’s how I learned
- Trades and technology camp for youth
- TV show/podcast/TikTok/Instagram campaign to educate youth here about opportunities in their backyard in an engaging way
- Advertising campaign on regional opportunities – showcasing diversity and lifestyle (once we have the right infrastructure in place)
- A fund that would support hiring a lawyer to support landlords through eviction cases
- Encourage and enable affordable home development on available land (\$400,000 – \$700,000 was considered affordable)
- Hire more staff at the District level to complete housing development review faster
- More information centralized onto the job board (events, resources for hiring, resources for looking for a job, information on career pathways, how to transition to a new career, information on living in the region, rental housing listings, etc.)
- More engagement of the retiree community to fill part time jobs – helping employers understand how to hire and engage them, and then building those connections through job fairs, information, and other means
- More education on how to create diversity and cultural inclusion, including sensitivity training
- Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot program
- Workforce oriented transportation or rideshare programs

- Carpool lots and infrastructure
- Connection to and information on mental health supports/resources for employees + employees
- Job fairs and recruitment events within the District
- Formalized job sharing for part time/seasonal positions to ensure those that want to remain employed full time can do so
- Need more local training opportunities, including post secondary
- Tuition reimbursement for rural students (advocacy)
- Wellness and recreation opportunities
- Partnering with community groups like Community Living, who provides extensive support to their clients to ensure success in the workplace
- Advocacy around coop scheduling to support industry needs
- More collaboration between employers to be flexible in scheduling + to share the regional workforce
- CFIB offers online courses that are good and quite reasonable

How to get the word out?

- Central location/hub to house all the information/resources in Muskoka – like the EMC model
- Informal meetings are already taking place – perhaps partnering with those organizations, as well as providing additional support
- Right now, there is little awareness of the full scope of resources and opportunities available to employers to support workforce development – the District could play a role in centralizing information and promotion of it
- Networking group for HR personnel
- Eliminate silos for sharing
- Create a central connection point that if an employer needs to know about something related to workforce there is someone who can direct them to the right place
- Annual/biannual/quarterly connection meeting with HR personnel to share information, develop solutions, network etc. with a preference to meeting in person
- Employers can provide a voice and direction on implementation of the strategy and supports that are needed
- Email, email, email
- Share success stories

- Existing events and avenues, such as Chamber After Hours
- Someone to take the lead – we need more connection with government workforce partners

Retail/Service Sector notes

- Seasonality makes it very challenging to retain employees, and to keep the best ones, often these employers are in the position of being overstaffed.
- Very competitive to get staff for the high season, due to the increase in hiring and those being hired expect to receive hours.
- Very much a seasonal sector, impacted by customer demand that peaks in the summer and decreases significantly in the winter.
- An additional challenge is to retain enough staff, hire on a short term enough basis, to operate through the brief seasonal increase of the winter holiday season.

Tourism Sector Notes

- COVID-19 had a huge impact on the industry, starting with a complete shut down of all tourism businesses, and as a result many sector employees left to pursue employment in other, less impacted fields.
- Sector has been really challenged to bring in new staff and as a result, fairly consistently employers are turning to temporary foreign workers with some success (albeit housing remains a significant challenge)
- There is an interest in hiring coop students, however, the coop term does not align with the sector's high season and students must return before the employer's peak demand is over
- Offering consistent employment and hours is a challenge for the industry, as much of the work is seasonal and in reality, subject to consumer demand, which remains volatile. Sometimes employers hire and bring on staff who expect to start receiving full time hours in June, however, this year June was very slow, so employees left because they were not receiving the hours. This cycle poses a major challenge for employee retention.
- Similarly, the sector has struggled to attract and retain tradespeople to facilitate repairs and property maintenance. Hiring contractors to fulfill that role is very costly, and there can be a significant wait to get serviced.

Township of Georgian Bay Notes

- Many residents drive to Midland, Orillia, and other parts of Simcoe County for employment, training, and supports to access employment, in addition for all their regular retail and service needs, which is very costly for residents and results in many leaving the Township for work.
- The township itself does not have dedicated resources to support workforce development, and given the dispersed geography of the municipality, this gap could be filled by providing more virtual tools and resources.
- Many employers in the Township also hire residents of Simcoe County to fill their available positions, however, as a result of the influence of the Simcoe County marketplace, they often must pay higher wages to remain competitive. It is also easier to work with employment agencies and schools for recruitment in the Midland area, as they are proximally much closer to the Township and service the region's residents.
- There is no transit in the municipality, and a G license is almost essential to access employment, which also further adds to cost of living pressures.
- Seasonal residents significantly outnumber permanent residents
- Employers would be interested in bringing on more and diverse employees (for examples, Community Living clients), but the challenge remains as to how to get them to the employer given the Township's geography as many of the support and coordinating organizations are not based in close proximity.

Manufacturing Sector Notes

- Worked to fill gaps through Fasttrac immigration process but process was difficult, employers had to pay for room and board, and in the end, we couldn't keep them because their community and culture was not here.
- General labour is needed but more available in Muskoka than skilled staff, which are harder to recruit
- Primary demographic is aging and retiring out after many have been in the sector more than 30+ years
- After a period of high demand for labour, some manufacturers are experiencing a downturn that they do not expect to continue

Construction/Trade Sector Notes

- Tradespeople, those who can oversee apprenticeships + support training new staff as well as those that have a host of knowledge and experience, are now aging out of the workforce

- For many years youth were not entering the trades, guidance counsellors were not promoting the trades, and parents were not supportive of youth entering + training in the trades
- Access to tradespeople will be extremely competitive in the coming years, and if we can't find the staff it will just drive-up costs and increase time
- There continues to be a stigma around working in the construction + trades sectors
- The long hours associated with work in trades, construction and building were not appropriate for those who required childcare, as even when available childcare hours did not cover workforce needs. This is a huge barrier for women to enter the trades.
- Women are significantly unrepresented in the trades, building and construction industries and the sector is traditionally considered unwelcoming to women. More needs to be done to create a more inclusive and less misogynistic work environment.
- Takes at least 5 years to train an apprentice, but trades are a lifetime of learning, so with retirement you will lose a large percentage of the best tradespeople
- Training and showcasing the industry, especially from a building and construction standpoint is challenging, because we cannot put untrained people (and youth) into complex and large pieces of equipment
- Trades are not expecting to be replaced by AI

Health, Social, and Public Service Sectors Notes

- Elementary school students get no exposure to the health care field beyond doctors and nurses – we need to do a better job creating awareness of the opportunities in the field and giving youth a chance to test them out
- Employees require a wider skillset to deal with individuals who can be medically fragile or have behavioural challenges
- Provides an opportunity for emotional reward
- Demand for health and social service students is high and there is a limited number graduating, both regionally and across the province
- Guidance counsellors are not promoting careers in public and social service

Stakeholder Consultation Key Themes

While the specifics of role and possible partnerships related to stakeholders are summarized in the Workforce Ecosystem section of the main report, this section provides an overview of the key themes that were discussed in interviews and small focus group discussions.

- **Location:** Muskoka is a beautiful place to live with picturesque towns and abundant recreational activities. Many people want to and enjoy living in the area and feel it is a generally welcoming and friendly community. Muskoka is also a more remote location, that is not easily accessed without a car, especially if based outside of the region.
- **Friendly, Welcoming Community:** Despite being a generally welcoming community, visible outsiders are at times unwelcome, whether through limited opportunity or outward acts of discrimination. This is also happening in the workplace. There are no services to support newcomers in the region, from helping them find housing and register for schools to receiving language support.
- **Housing:** The most frequent theme from consultation was a significant lack of attainable rental and sale housing. The cost of living, and in particular housing, no longer aligns with income levels in Muskoka.
- **Youth/Young Adults:** With an older than average population, and many of those currently employed in skilled fields like construction expected to retire soon, it's important to ensure there is continuity for that sector and attracting/building a younger workforce was considered a key way to achieve this. Stakeholders felt attraction and retention of youth and young families was critical.
- **Leadership:** There are many initiatives taking place to try and address workforce issues across the District, but they are taking place in isolation. Best practices are not being shared, sector initiatives are not extending beyond members, employers are testing solutions in isolation, and there are many partners aligned and interested in supporting workforce development. However, coordination, relationship-building, and leadership is currently limited.
- **Connection between Stakeholders and Employers:** Many organizations struggle to ensure employers are aware of their services and/or opportunities to work with their students or clients. They are looking for opportunities to connect with employers they wouldn't see at a traditional networking event to share their successes and resources.
- **Skills Development and Training:** Muskoka isn't home to many opportunities for job seekers and employees to improve their skills. It's very costly to travel or move to another community to access training.
- **Lacking Supports for Newcomers:** The Muskoka region lacks settlement services to support new residents or temporary workers. This includes support for English as a second language.

- **Seasonality:** The seasonality of many businesses creates challenging conditions to retain staff (and vice versa, retain employment). The seasonality also impacts the housing market, with a significant increase in demand for housing over the high season (summer).
- **Wages/Cost of Living:** Available wages do not align with basic living costs. Job seekers and residents are struggling to get by, and poverty is increasing.
- **Job Quality:** Many of the jobs in Muskoka a low wage and part time with limited opportunities for growth. This creates a challenging environment to motivate job seekers and the workforce and encourage youth to stay in region. Really need to focus on career laddering opportunities.
- **Mental Health:** More clients and employees are struggling with mental health challenges. Some stakeholders felt ill equipped to take on a larger role in supporting client mental health.
- **Eagerness to Support New Initiatives/Promote Resources:** Organizations are eager to support new workforce initiatives and promote their clients/services to employers.
- **Scaling back:** Many businesses have had to reduce their hours because of staff shortages. Some stakeholders suggested this was not a bad thing and perhaps businesses just needed to be strategic about it.
- **Lack of Transportation:** It is challenging for those without transportation to access employment. It is costly for service providers to cover transportation costs related to employment.
- **Attitude:** Employers are dealing with poor attitudes from staff. The quality of staff is not what it used to be.

APPENDIX D: Implementation Notes

Strategic Goal 1: Provide the coordination and leadership required to facilitate, implement, and support initiatives related to workforce attraction, development, and retention.

Objective 1.1 Identify, operationalize, and resource a leadership and coordination structure.

Action		Implementation Notes
1.1a	Discuss and explore the proposed coordination and leadership options to select the most appropriate model for implementation.	At this point there does not appear to be resources allocated for a dedicated resource to lead implementation. Critical to implementation will be determining a coordination and leadership structure to identify a lightning rod on which to build tactics from. Three potential models for operationalizing a leadership and coordination structure have been proposed to enable implementation.
1.1b	Create a Terms of Reference to govern an implementation structure that provides a fair voice for each municipality and the opportunity to engage new partners, voices, and resources.	The Terms of Reference will help enhance trust between partners going forward and ensure continuity for strategy implementation should staff level changes occur. It is recommended that the Terms of Reference be reviewed bi-annually to ensure they reflect the current needs and operating structures of the strategy implementation.
1.1c	Operationalize the preferred operating structure to begin formal implementation strategy.	As stated.
1.1d	Identify and apply for additional resources to support the implementation of the workforce development strategic plan.	While the partners of the workforce committee have all expressed intent to implement this workforce development strategy, at this stage it is unclear what overall resource commitment of each partner will be. In order to effectively budget for initiatives, it will be essential to discuss and finalize a resourcing plan between the partners. This will enable partners to understand their annual budget for initiatives and look for opportunities to leverage it with additional financial resources, whether funding a staff person or events.

Objective 1.2: Establish a connected workforce development ecosystem to enable and enhance capacity, commitment, and engagement to implement the strategic goals in the long-term.

Action	Implementation Notes
<p>1.2a Establish an annual workforce conference to connect stakeholders and employers for networking, resources, and information sharing.</p>	<p>The development of a conference that includes networking, best practice and case sharing, learning and knowledge exchange, as well as reporting and planning for further implementation of the strategy could support several key objectives within the workforce strategy. Stakeholders and employers both noted a desire to connect on a semi-regular basis to stay informed on workforce-related initiatives, network, and to share best practices. Employers noted that they were unaware of the range of resources available to them, and stakeholders were looking for the opportunity to connect with new employers (Chamber of Commerce networking events).</p>

Objective 1.3: Work with partners to collect data on an on-going basis for trend identification, performance measurement, and to inform on-going implementation of this strategic plan.

Action	Implementation Notes
<p>1.3a Confirm data collection tactics. Collect and analyze metrics annually, when possible. Adjust tactics as required.</p>	<p>There are a number of proposed performance metrics included in the strategy. At the outset of implementation, the workforce committee should reflect on which tactics they have the capacity to measure, if other partners are collecting relevant data, and how the committee will work together to collect and share measurement in an effective way. Prior to on-going annual measurement, the committee must first establish a baseline for each of the measurements.</p>

Objective 1.4: Undertake an advocacy campaign to highlight workforce needs and required policy solutions in the District of Muskoka.

Action	Implementation Notes
1.4a Create a list of key workforce barriers that require support from different levels of government to address.	Coordinator should be engaging with employers on a regular basis to understand and advocate for the biggest issues facing their workforce attraction, development, and retention efforts. This could be done at workforce-related events or through surveys. Current advocacy issues include affordable and diverse housing options (including local municipal housing restrictions), regional education options (including the Ontario Learn and Stay grant), regional transit, and immigration (Expanding North and Rural Immigration Pilot program settlement services in the region).
1.4b Educate on the issues by preparing and supporting the preparation of advocacy materials to enable political officials across the Muskoka region to advocate on behalf of the workforce needs of the community.	To enable action, local politicians and partners will require further information around the challenges to clearly articulate the issues employers are facing that cannot be resolved through staff-level action. The more politicians and partners that are advocating for similar changes, the higher the chance of success. Information notes about major barriers can be collected and circulated to local and District Councils and more detailed information can be prepared when councillors attend provincial or federal delegation opportunities.
1.4c Connect with regional, provincial, and national government bodies and other sector and industry stakeholders to advocate for the workforce needs of the Muskoka region	Regional politicians need to be using informational materials to regularly advocate on behalf of the workforce needs of the region. Muskoka is challenged by a comparatively isolated and poorly serviced geography that often falls outside of programming jurisdictions (i.e. Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, Eastern Ontario Development Fund initially), or lacks alignment between regions (i.e. One school board services Muskoka and north of the region, the other Muskoka and south of the region, the SSM services Muskoka and east of region, while the Workforce Development Board (now Skillforce) services Simcoe County and Muskoka). These complexities make it especially critical to highlight the unique needs and challenges of the region relating to workforce development and attraction, ways the strategy/committee are addressing it, and why change/support/resources are needed.

Resource Permitting Actions

Action	Implementation Notes
<p>1.3 Undertake an annual scan of workforce best practices and local needs to identify opportunities to enhance or target programming. Share data with partners where relevant.</p>	<p>Reviewing current best practice and local needs will enable the committee to ensure their initiatives are competitive and meeting employer needs. Local needs could be sourced from employers at workforce related events and/or through annual surveys. Workforce best practices could be identified through an annual scan of award winners from economic and social development agencies in Canada and internationally.</p>

Strategic Goal 2: Create the conditions to enable Muskoka to attract and retain workers within the regional municipalities.

Objective 2.1: Support the reduction of the housing shortage for workers.

Action	Implementation Notes
<p>2.1a Work with the District Housing Manager and Municipal Councils to attract and support investment into diverse, attainable housing options. This should include exploring opportunities to partner with employers and the RTO12 Catalyst Housing project to offer workforce housing.</p>	<p>The District of Muskoka has a manager of housing and has just restarted it's housing task force to move housing related projects into an implementation phase. This includes the exploration of a Community Land Trust and encouraging conversion of single home housing to include secondary suites. Additional incentives, such as a Community Improvement Program to support mid-sized attainable housing development, should be considered to help incent developers to build within the region (Muskoka Lakes has a program). Any tools or incentives created can be showcased in marketing materials and used to actively solicit interest from potential developers. It should be noted that employers have consistently been trying to find solutions on their own to the housing crisis and there is a desire to invest in solutions but at the same time, playing the role of a landlord for employees poses significant risk including potential complications if employment is terminated. The reality is the nature of Muskoka's economy, and its available housing stock will likely never naturally be in alignment. The housing market has significant dysfunction as a result</p>

		<p>of seasonal demand for employees and seasonal residents. The workforce coordinator must be a meaningful voice at the table to advocate for support for employer-led housing solutions. If Muskoka wants to continue to have a marketplace that provides basic goods, retail, and services to service the region, the housing crisis must be resolved. As the District already serves as a housing administrator (landlord) it would be a meaningful next step to explore if there were opportunities to partner with a group of employers to provide workforce-specific housing.</p>
2.1b	<p>Work with municipal planning departments to review existing restrictions on housing and enable more permissive attainable housing development.</p>	<p>Local municipalities must do more to enable more affordable and diverse housing options and it starts with their own backyard. Multiple employers noted that they had tried to develop feasible, affordable short and mid-term housing solutions only to be blocked by their local municipal councils. These included things like adding moveable homes (trailers) or tiny homes on a site. Employers hoped that Councils could be more permissive with allowing employers to develop different housing stock options on their own sites, or more broadly, within the community. It was also noted that short term rentals offer landlords an alternate to providing workforce-related housing that can be more profitable and less regulated (evictions are less of a concern). It would be worthwhile to explore additional restrictions or costs that could be included to encourage rental space development over short-term rentals.</p>

Objective 2.2: Undertake regional and external workforce attraction and retention marketing efforts.

Action	Implementation Notes
<p>2.2a Create and maintain a standalone central online workforce attraction and retention resource to showcase living and working in the region, the Muskoka Job Board, success stories, communication about this strategy, and resources for job seekers, residents, employers, and stakeholders.</p>	<p>Employers, job seekers and stakeholders all noted the value of having a central resource to house all things workforce development related and this central resource could serve a secondary purpose as a marketing tool to attract new working-age residents to the region. It is recommended that a separate workforce-related website be created for the District to be the central resource, and that the new Muskoka Job Board be housed within that site. The job board is currently part of the Venture Muskoka investment attraction website. In addition to the job board, the site could host information and success stories about living and working in the region including how to find housing, information on the resources and supports available to find jobs/employees, details of upcoming workforce-related events and trainings, and career information on major employment sectors within the region. Any media content created to support strategy implementation could be housed on the website to facilitate easy access for regional businesses (i.e. promotional or educational video content). Regular e-blast updates could be sent out that are short, easy to read, and feature upcoming events and successes to further strengthen communication efforts. Key stakeholders in the employment ecosystem should be encouraged to include a link to the website on their own website and avoid duplication.</p>
<p>2.2b Establish a brand or tagline associated with workforce development and attraction efforts to ensure there is consistent messaging, and supports, resources, and initiatives that relate to workforce development in the region can be easily recognized.</p>	<p>There are many players in the workforce development ecosystem and confusion exists even amongst stakeholders as to which door is the right one. Establishing a brand/tagline will help workforce partners and initiatives come together under a common, aligned identity to enable residents, employers, and stakeholders to easily identify regional workforce related initiatives. The brand or tagline should consider both a focus on regional marketing and also broader labour attraction efforts.</p>

2.2c	<p>Create a marketing campaign to promote the central website, brand, and strategy success stories within the region and in targeted other regions in Ontario, Canada, and globally.</p>	<p>For the website to have its desired impact, residents and job seekers need to know it exists and an intensive marketing campaign will be needed. Job seekers are based across all demographics and the marketing campaign should employ multiple channels (social media, radio, tax bill mail outs, local employment agencies, schools, the legion, etc.) and be targeted towards a range of demographics (youth/students, adults, seniors, newcomers, marginalized communities). Given the workforce attraction challenges presented by the lack of housing, marketing efforts related to workforce attraction, development, and retention should initially primarily focus on the existing workforce in the region. Once the website and brand are established, the marketing campaign should become more elaborate, creating and featuring stories from members of the workforce and employers about their experiences with employment and/or using resources within the region to find a job. This could be done through video, audio, and/or text formats. Similarly, Employers are regularly marketing their positions to try and attract new employees and they are using a range of tools such as standard job postings, participation in job fairs, and connection to post secondary institutions, however interested parties often turn them down due to a lack of housing. This highlights that meaningful progress should be made in addressing regional workforce housing shortages prior to undertaking any significant external marketing campaigns. Many employers thought government partners could play a greater role in supporting their efforts to attract new employees by providing and promoting information on living and working in the region and the central website could be used for exactly that. If 2.2c is successful, your local employers should have some awareness of an informational resource they can share with targeted employment leads, however there are several creative options to showcase the region to a broader Canadian and international workforce marketplace. These include contests, like the 'Date my County' best practice example or success stories in the form of video (that is social media ready) or podcast that will showcase employee/job seeker success stories and experiences. Project partners should also consider attending job fairs as a region in partnership with regional employers. This would be a value add to help employers offset the cost of attending job fairs and at the same time help get job seekers excited about the</p>
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		broader Muskoka region, amenities, and career options. Campaign materials should be targeted towards a range of demographics (youth/students, adults, seniors, newcomers, marginalized communities).
2.2d	Undertake innovative familiarization tour opportunities to showcase the region to potential residents from target employment demographics (students, young families, newcomers).	Organize tours to the Muskoka region to showcase quality of life and employers to potential future residents, including post-secondary students, young families, and newcomers. These could be organized in partnership with career centres of post-secondary institutions, newcomer centres, and/or through a partnership with employers wanting to undertake a recruitment campaign.

Objective 2.3: Provide employers with the tools, resources, and supports they need to enhance their workforce attraction and retention efforts.

Action		Implementation Notes
2.3a	Support the coordination and development of employer-led solutions to workforce development challenges such as training, transportation, culture development, attraction, and housing, including exploring the development and implementation of an 'employer workforce innovation fund'.	Many employers were already engaged in workforce attraction, development, and retention efforts of varying degrees of success, including housing and training projects. Most felt that they could manage the workforce challenges best themselves, with some level of financial support from government partners. Partners should explore the feasibility of creating a fund for employer-led workforce projects that encouraged innovative practices, partnership, and a regional workforce development lens. Successful projects should be identified, shared, and expanded as best practice examples. Given the nature of municipal bonusing regulations, it is likely a third party would be required to implement the funding and Muskoka Futures could be a possible partner in this. Determining this would be the first step, then funding would need to be allocated and specific program guidelines developed that align with regional workforce development goals. Lastly the fund would need to be promoted and administered. Employers were already connecting in informal ways to share information and best practices as well as partner together for things like job sharing. However, they struggled to find the capacity to maintain those efforts and, in many cases, they fizzled out as a result (i.e. quarterly HR professional meetings). Employers would benefit from coordination support to facilitate that

		information sharing and partnership development. This would primarily involve providing convening support (booking meetings/space) and facilitating participation in shared initiatives.
2.3b	Organize virtual and in-person educational events to enhance employer understanding of (a) the resources available to support their workforce efforts in the region, the benefits of using them, and how to access them and (b) best practices around targeted topics of interest, opportunity or need to support their workforce efforts in the region.	Employers were unaware of the resources that are available to them to assist with hiring. While some of this information could be housed online, employers and stakeholders wanted a chance to connect on a face-to-face basis to share information and network. These events could be combined with suggested informational events related to social, economic, and mental health stakeholders under 3.3c. Employers want information on current best practices to support workforce development on a topic specific basis. Experts and local best practices could be showcased to help employers understand how to individually improve their workforce attraction, retention, and development efforts. Sessions could be held in-person or virtually, but where possible, content should be recorded and be made available to regional employers virtually to suit their range of availabilities. Currently, employers are most interested in topics around diversity - how to create a more welcoming workplace for newcomers, women, mature workers, etc., as well as immigration for labour attraction purposes. From the job seeker perspective, many employers would also benefit from training and examples that showcase how to become an employer of choice.
2.3c	Create an employer awards and recognition program to celebrate employers who are doing a great job at keeping their staff happy and engaged.	As noted above, employers themselves were not identifying that they wanted or needed more information on becoming an employer of choice, however the anecdotal stories of job seekers indicate there is a significant amount of room for improvement in this area. Creating an awards and recognition program could help employers to pursue improving their workplace practices indirectly. In this case, being awarded or recognized for their workforce efforts can highlight why they are a great place to work and would serve as an additional marketing edge for employers in Muskoka's hypercompetitive environment for labour. The intent is that this would incent employers to improve their own practices to try and strive to receive an award or recognition so they will receive more/better applicants. It would also help create a more mainstream avenue for discussion around workplace culture and how

to improve it. Awards/recognitions could be celebrated at the annual workforce conference.

Objective 2.4: Support the development of inclusive, vibrant workplaces and communities that celebrate and support diversity in all its forms.

Action	Implementation Notes
<p>2.4a Undertake local and regional retail, service, and entertainment gap analyses, with a special focus on youth, young adults, young families, and newcomers.</p>	<p>Feedback from consultations indicated that Muskoka communities were lacking amenities in their communities, in particular relating to entertainment options but also retail and service. This was especially true when it came to access to non-traditional retail and service (like ethnic foods or specific supports for newcomers). A retail, service, and entertainment gap analysis would identify the most needed and attractive investment opportunities across the retail, service, and entertainment sectors to focus on investment attraction efforts on, with the ultimate goal of attracting and retaining more young working-age residents. Once completed, local economic development staff should include identified gaps in their investment attraction activities.</p>
<p>2.4b Investigate starting a Local Immigration Partnership to serve as a coordinating body to attract the resources, supports, and partnerships to help new immigrants establish themselves in the Muskoka region.</p>	<p>Many employers are working to bring in temporary and permanent labour from international locales, however it was consistently noted that Muskoka is not ready to welcome and support newcomers to Canada, meaning there is a lack of any official/funded settlement services (closest available is in Orillia), including ESL (although several organizations are fundraising to offer this), assistance and information on locating in the region (housing, utility start up costs, how to register for school, prepare for winter, etc.), and generally, although residents considered Muskoka a welcoming community, employers noted that those who were from outside of Canada can find it unfriendly and confusing. The Local Immigration Partnership should seek to work together with partners to identify the gaps more clearly in newcomer settlement services and community readiness for newcomers and create a plan to address them.</p>

2.4c	Enhance employer access to resources that help them hire and retain employees that face additional barriers (mental health, disabilities, language, newcomer, mature workers etc.).	<p>Many employers were interested but unsure of how to support and access employees from a range of backgrounds and abilities. Providing employers in the region with access to resources to support hiring and retention of more barriered populations and an opportunity to connect with organizations that serve those populations. Those organizations were interested in working with partners to connect with employers to share information on their great clients and the supports they can provide for hiring. This information can be shared through in-person events or video content on the proposed central website. There are also a number of virtual resources to support employer learning such as the World Education Services' Employer Playbook: Strategies for Immigrant Inclusion in Canadian Workplaces (available: https://knowledge.wes.org/canada-report-employer-playbook-strategies-for-immigrant-inclusion-in-canadian-workplaces.html) that could be housed on the proposed central website. In person and virtual resources could also be provided to help employers better understand how to work with diverse employees (age, gender, ethnicity, ability, etc.) and create inclusive workplaces. Create networking events to better connect diverse candidates (including by age, gender, ethnicity, ability, etc.) directly to employers to facilitate the hiring process.</p>
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2.4d	<p>Explore the possibility of providing more focused support to employers to assist with immigration processes such as the Labour Market Impact Assessment process to address the labour shortage. Implement if feasible.</p>	<p>As workforce shortages increased, a number of regional employers turned to temporary foreign workers and, to a lesser extent, recruiting new immigrants from international markets. Employers found the LMIA and permanent residence processes costly and complex and felt having a central resource to aid businesses through the LMIA/permanent residence process would relieve a significant burden of cost and process to enable better attraction and retention of international staff. Partners should better understand if there is enough demand from the region to justify having this service, and if they have the financial capacity to support hiring or contracting with an immigration resource to do this. Employers also struggled to settle new residents when they did arrive. An additional role or opportunity to support employers would be to have a centralized resource to support housing and settling into the community. It should be noted that while a Local Immigration Partnership is suggested as a potential lead for this action, the federal operational funding for those organizations is typically not allocated to support temporary foreign workers and partners should consider opportunities to address any shortfall in that area. Workforce demand has been slowing, so it will be important to thoroughly examine the need for this versus supporting the hiring of local candidates.</p>
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Resource Permitting Actions

Resource Permitting Actions	
Action	Implementation Notes
2.1	<p>Improve community attitudes towards affordable housing development.</p> <p>Once new policy levers or opportunities to develop affordable housing are created, an awareness campaign should champion the importance of diverse housing options and encourage existing residents to leverage new policy to develop housing. NIMBYism (Not-In-My-Backyard) towards housing development/solutions was noted by employers at both the resident and Council level.</p>
2.4	<p>Create engaging programming and experiences that generate a high quality of life and helps residents get to know and feel part of the community</p> <p>Building on 2.4a, once the analysis is completed, project partners should critically assess gaps in service and entertainment options to determine if any are an appropriate role for the municipality or it's partners to address versus attracting a private sector operator (i.e. community level programming). Municipal partners should work with their respective staff teams to fill the municipal-level gaps in programming and experiences.</p>
2.4	<p>Establish regional workforce related retention programming to help new employees better understand the region and find community.</p> <p>Employers noted that new employees to the region struggled to integrate into the community. An incentive program for new employees to the region could be established in partnership with regional employers to help showcase and celebrate the region to new residents. This could be in the form of free or reduced admission to key regional sites. Similarly, certain sectors had challenges recruiting certain demographics, for example women in the trades, construction, and building fields. Employers noted that more needed to be done to make the sector more welcoming and friendly to women, and one potential way to do this would be to create a woman in the trades professional networking group or association.</p>

2.4	<p>Work with District of Muskoka staff to enhance the regional transit system to better meet the needs of the workforce and students. This should include connection to and between the Townships, as well as connections into Parry Sound and Simcoe County (Midland).</p>	<p>As noted, public transit is not currently meeting the needs of the workforce and the Townships are particularly underserved. Further exploration is required to understand the models possible and public subsidy required to operate a functional public transit system in Muskoka. The transit system should ensure linkages across the region and into surrounding centres. This will both enable Muskoka to draw from an expanded labour pool, allow residents to access additional education and services, and open more employment opportunities up to residents of the Muskoka region, which may be less desirable for regional employers, but a net benefit for the workforce overall. Opportunities to subsidize a transit system through public-private partnership should be explored. The development of carpooling lots in the region was also suggested, but anecdotal evidence from employers and residents indicated that attempts to establish carpooling programs in the past have been unsuccessful.</p>
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Strategic Goal 3: Build the talent development pipeline within the region to support improved awareness, training, and skill development opportunities for regional employment opportunities

Objective 3.1: Promote regional career pathways, opportunities, and employers in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.

Actions		Implementation Notes
3.1a	Work with local industry to identify and create key messaging that targets a range of demographics to promote and educate about sector opportunities.	Employers identified that many youth are not pursuing careers in Muskoka's major employment sectors due to a lack of awareness and enthusiasm from educators and parents. Working with each of Muskoka's key sectors, develop engaging and appealing messaging and promotional materials to share with and encourage more youth in Muskoka to pursue key employment sectors within Muskoka.
3.1b	Connect with school boards and guidance counsellors to educate them on local opportunities and find opportunities to work with them to promote those opportunities to students.	Using the materials developed in 3.1a undertake an advocacy campaign to connect with school boards, guidance counsellors, and other career coaching-type roles in the District to educate them on future employment opportunities, including organizing events, tours and class talks to showcase key employment sectors in Muskoka and providing materials for them to share with students.

3.1c	<p>Create opportunities to familiarize and network high school and post-secondary students with Muskoka and its regional employers.</p>	<p>Lakehead University recently hosted a casual networking night between senior students and employers in the Orillia area. This event was very well received by both students and employers and the University would be interested in duplicating opportunities like this with Muskoka employers. Similar events could be held with other regional post secondary institutions, including Georgian College's Muskoka, Orillia, Barrie, and Midland campuses, and Canadore College's West Parry Sound Campus. Employers should be selected based on their needs related to programming offered at each school. Similarly, these sorts of events could be duplicated at the high school level with a more targeted focus on sharing information about career ladders in different key sectors across Muskoka. While these events could start on a regional basis and target neighbouring institutions, they could eventually expand to targeted school across Ontario or Canada, depending on need and programming.</p>
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Objective 3.2 Support the development of new skills development and training opportunities in alignment with regional business needs.

Actions	Implementation Notes
<p>3.2a Explore and implement opportunities to promote, enhance access to, develop and/or deliver targeted programming for the region to address industry needs. This should be identified on an on-going basis with industry. Notable general needs at the moment include management training and customer service training.</p>	<p>A number of regional and virtual educational and skills development programs linked to sectors of high need are available within the region surrounding Muskoka and listed in Appendix E. Many stakeholders noted that employers and residents were not aware of the training opportunities available locally and would benefit from support to promote these programs in the region. Additionally, since many of those programs are based just outside of Muskoka, people find it costly and challenging to access these programs due to a lack of effective transportation options. Where training gaps persist, there is the opportunity to build partnerships with educational partners to deliver training on a more local or virtual basis. Many employers are developing their own internal training courses, however, there is currently a generalized need for improved management and customer service skills. The needs of individual sectors are noted under the Future Industry Needs and Trends Section. Training requirements should be reviewed and regularly updated with employers, and where a shared demand exists, partners should explore opportunities to bring in or develop training. All three post-secondary institutions in the region expressed an interest in exploring where there are opportunities to expand programming into or to support the needs of Muskoka residents and employers. Considering the data and consultation themes there is the immediate opportunity to explore the development and delivery of more hospitality (particularly for culinary positions) and health care and social service training and skill development (a general need, from hospital staffing in all positions to local health care providers to long term care) and building related trades. Tactics under this action could also include targeted trainings, such as technology upgrading for seniors.</p>

Objective 3.3: Engage more residents into the regional workforce.

Actions	Implementation Notes
<p>3.3a Offer local job fairs with a focus on showcasing the types of career paths available. Job fairs can have a specific target, either by sector or a focused demographic (i.e., seniors)</p>	<p>Work with partners to host local job fairs, both informal, in the style noted above, and formal to showcase career opportunities and resources available to enhance skills and training to enter those fields. These can be separated by sector and/or targeted towards certain demographics (i.e. seniors, students, those with barriers, etc.) and/or upon completion of a training exercise (ex. once a year partners could offer an intensive customer service training program and graduates could attend a job fair for targeted customer service positions).</p>
<p>3.3b Enhance connections between service providers and employers to provide comprehensive supports (food and housing assistance, literacy and upskilling, mental health and addictions) to more barriered job seekers.</p>	<p>Both employers and service providers are taking on larger roles in accommodating and counselling employees/clients through social, economic, and mental health challenges. A first step to tackling this issue would be to provide an opportunity to share information on resources available. This could be through an informational fair (this could be tacked onto a job fair and include a set time for employers to explore the service providers) and/or the creation of a central service provider resource database. To support and serve more barriered clients, a comprehensive referral and support process could be developed amongst stakeholders to seamlessly connect between service providers for support and service to enter or re-enter the workforce. This should involve information sharing where possible to simplify the process for the client, as well as the development of a shared intake form that identifies the comprehensive supports a client might require from the start of the support process. Consideration should be given to how those clients could connect to events that would help them explore career pathways and the resources available to support them. The SSM has a significant mandate to help those on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Payment to re-enter the workforce and resources to support this.</p>

Resource Permitting Actions

Actions		Implementation Notes
3.1	Develop a youth camp to encourage youth to explore key employment sectors in the Muskoka region.	Creating engaging camp experiences to help Muskoka youth learn about and enjoy working in key employment sectors in Muskoka will be a meaningful tool in encouraging interest in pursuing a long-term career in the region. Partners and employers should be engaged to ensure the experience is relevant and meaningful to Muskoka's youth. This could be based off of the Girl Power STEM Camp that is featured in the best practices section.
3.2	Explore the feasibility of establishing a shared skills training and development facility for local business to utilize.	Employers noted there are minimal local training options and facilities, and often, for training, they are sending their staff out of Muskoka. Some employers, such as those in the construction, building, or heavy equipment industry, require costly training equipment that they do not need use frequently, for example heavy equipment operation simulation. Employers expressed an interest in a shared facility that could support both classroom and simulation training across a range of sectors. They anticipated that there was enough need that several employers could partner together, ideally with government or training partners, to share the cost and use of training equipment that could be housed in a central space. More work needs to be done assess the overall feasibility of the concept in the Muskoka marketplace to identify the specific types of equipment, training, costs, broader partnerships, mechanisms to ensure equitable access, and operating structures that could be utilized in a facility like this. This would involve much more extensive and targeted employer and stakeholder consultation than what was completed through the development of this strategy. This same facility could also be used to provide more basic training and skills development opportunities and showcase key sectors in the community to youth, students, and adult job seekers. Lastly, with the significant increase in those who work from home based in Muskoka, there may be the opportunity to explore co-working opportunities as well.

3.3	Create a job seeker networking program and mentorship program.	<p>An employment mismatch is happening between job seekers and employers, and seemingly qualified employees are being passed over without an interview for positions employers are struggling to fill. Amongst job seekers, there was a perception that the Muskoka hiring marketplace was very much about who you know, and if employers didn't know you, or a gossipy staff member didn't like you there was no chance to make a good impression. Two specific tactics are proposed to tackle this. The first is to create informal networking meet and greet events between job seekers/residents and employers to allow them a low-pressure opportunity to allow job seekers to introduce themselves in a neutral environment and employers to introduce their sector and the types of opportunities they have available to the broader community. This could also be useful to introduce existing job seekers to employment opportunities or fields they had not considered before. The second tactic is to duplicate the Best Practice case of the Okanagan Connector model, specifically for highly qualified candidates, which would enable new or newly unemployed but highly qualified residents to get an initial foot in the door with many potential regional employers.</p>
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