



ALBERTA WORKFORCE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

2020 Annual Report



It is estimated that a 1% increase in average literacy rates in Canada, over time, would increase the gross domestic product (GDP) by up to 3% and productivity by up to 5%.

Source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2021/05/launch-of-skills-for-success--003368.html>



The Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society (AWES) is a non-profit organization focused on training, research, and curriculum development. AWES specializes in developing customized essential skills training solutions for organizations, employers, and practitioners.

Mission

To provide integrated essential skills, language, and intercultural communication training solutions, generating returns at work, in the community, and society.

Vision

All adults have the essential skills they need to fully participate in the workplace, in their communities, and in their personal lives.

Message from the Executive Director

2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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(CLAC)

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Each year brings its own unique challenges and opportunities for growth, and 2020 was no exception. In a year of unprecedented change and uncertainty, we are proud of being able to adapt to the realities brought about by the global pandemic. We are thankful to our team, partners, clients, and program participants for their creativity, resilience, and innovation.

Throughout the year we presented at various conferences, engaged with the national essential skills community in new ways, and focused on perfecting new processes to deliver high-quality essential skills resources. We also kept busy as we launched two new projects, created and released our first gamified training resource, and developed an essential skills training course for career development practitioners across Canada.

We are grateful for all the support we have received this year and look forward to new opportunities and challenges the next year will bring.

Cindy Messaros

Executive Director

Projects

As we entered 2020, our Guided Pathways and Digitizing Workplace Resources projects were well under way, and we began development on two new projects: Building System Integration and Newcomers to the Trades.

Guided Pathways

Due to pandemic restrictions, we had to reconfigure our three-day face-to-face training concept into an online workshop. A four-module training program that could be delivered online was designed and developed with our instructional design partner, Monarch Innovative Design for Learning. It incorporates independent, small-group, and live activities and can be completed in four weeks. The first Guided Pathways training sessions began in May of 2021.

With our research partner, Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), we gathered information on the needs and wants of CDPs across Canada to help us shape and inform the design and content of training. A carefully selected advisory committee of nine exceptional individuals with various backgrounds and expertise in essential skills and career development offered additional guidance as we developed the online course.

An annotated guide of essential skills tools and resources was developed to assist career development counsellors with their clients. The guide is available at no cost to CDPs on the new Guided Pathways [website](#).

Digitizing Workplace Resources

Digitizing Workplace Resources began in 2019 with the goal of consolidating materials from previous AWES projects and recreating them in digital form. We teamed up with Trajectory IQ Software to explore digital formats, and with their expertise we designed Skills for Work, our first gamified training resource. The resource took a year to develop, and we released the pilot in the summer of 2020 after hosting a webinar with over 65 attendees.

The final product includes 18 courses that incorporate a range of activities. Skills for Work courses can be completed on any device at any time. From the release of the pilot until the end of the year, over 300 learners tried out the resource and provided invaluable data and feedback from which we made improvements to the courses. The final version of Skills for Work will be available for purchase in July 2021 at a nominal fee.



Newcomers to the Trades

Newcomers to the Trades is part of a multiprovincial project also taking place in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. This project provides language, essential skills, and workplace training in a contextualized environment, along with a work placement, to prepare participants for a successful career in the trades. The research component is testing whether teaching trades content with supported and contextualized language leads to better success in the trades and ultimately better job attachment.

After only two weeks of classroom learning, restrictions brought on by the pandemic shut down the classroom, and participants in this project had to move online and adjust to remote learning. We had to restructure our teaching model, activities, and participant supports to fit with an online format while still incorporating trades orientation and scaffolding curriculums. Curriculum developer Tyla Olsen joined the team to tutor participants in the new learn-from-home format. The model was further revised to best fit students' individual and group learning needs, and hours of study were reduced from 30 to 10 to accommodate the changes.

Participants took these challenges in stride and remotely completed their classroom-based learning along with the Intro to Scaffolding program and several safety tickets. To celebrate their hard work, participants attended a socially distanced graduation.

In the last four months of 2020, participants completed work placements with various organizations in Edmonton where they gained hands-on experience in a variety of industries such as maintenance and renovation, flooring, and scaffolding.



A participant in the Newcomers to the Trades project gains hands-on experience in renovation, demolition, and installation during his work placement.

After contextualized numeracy and language sessions, one student commented on fractions, saying "I could never do this before! I could never understand this."

By 2031, nearly half (46%) of Canadians aged 15 and older could be foreign-born, or could have at least one foreign-born parent, up from 39% in 2006.

Source: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-402-x/2011000/chap/imm/imm-eng.htm>

A 1% increase in ethnocultural diversity is associated with an average 2.4% increase in revenue and a 0.5% increase in workplace productivity.

<https://www.cigionline.org/publications/diversity-dividend-canadas-global-advantage>

Building System Integration

We joined forces with NorQuest College's Colbourne Institute for Inclusive Leadership to break down the silos that immigrants often learn within. Typically, immigrants first learn language, then employability skills, and then they finally learn about the Canadian workplace once they are working. Pertinent concepts like diversity and inclusion are not often directly addressed, and rarely integrated with the other skills. An integrated, community-minded approach will better integrate immigrants into the workplace.

This project incorporates diversity and inclusion, language, essential skills, and workplace culture with key workplace expectations such as how to show initiative or ask for accommodations into one framework.

Through 2020, resources were in planning and early development:

- 10 animated diversity and inclusion videos with a workplace focus incorporating language and essential skills development with accompanying digital workbooks
- 20 digital and PDF workbooks to accompany AWES' existing library of YouTube videos with concepts of diversity and inclusion layered in
- Updated WHMIS toolbox talks to help supervisors and managers deliver safety talks to immigrants
- Diversity and inclusion toolbox talks

Stakeholders were engaged in the materials development process:

- Surveys were conducted with three primary stakeholder groups: employers, career development practitioners, and adult learning instructors. The results of the survey revealed a need for more diversity and inclusion training and provided insight into the needs and expectations that each group has of newcomers. This served as the foundation for development of materials that are relevant and reflect the realities of each sector.
- A focus group was held with stakeholders from adult education, workplace settlement and career development, and industry to discuss topics like diversity and inclusion, hiring practices, and racism and discrimination. The focus group underscored the community-minded approach to materials development, gave stakeholders the opportunity to discuss their specific needs and challenges and find common ground, and revealed additional gaps in current newcomer integration practices. More focus groups are planned for 2021 in which participants will provide feedback on materials development.



Materials from the Newcomers to the Trades hands-on skills assessment. Learners measured, cut, and worked in groups to assemble materials to build a small scaffold.

Proposals

AWES continues to advance our mission and vision through submitting proposals focused on creating indirect service projects that test new approaches for delivering high-quality settlement services including leveraging technology, increasing employer and labour involvement, and building capacity.

Future Skills – Shock Proofing the Future

We submitted a proposal to work with organizations in the hospitality and tourism sectors – a sector severely affected by COVID-19. Inspired by our Working Faster, Working Safer model, we proposed to develop digitized content to support recovery in the sector with skills-based educational materials to prepare those joining or re-entering the sector in various occupations. Materials would include COVID-19 protocols as required by the industries, as well as concepts related to diversity and inclusion.

Essential Skills Renewal Framework

AWES was invited to respond to a request for proposal to launch the new Essential Skills Renewal framework along with 12 other agencies, including the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) who is leading the project.

Organizational highlights

Communications

We saw significant growth on our social media platforms in 2020. Our followers increased by over 20% on all platforms, and our engagement rates doubled. Our YouTube channel went from 143 subscribers to almost 500, the videos were shared by other organizations over 1,000 times, and our Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System [video](#) reached over 60,000 views!

In the fall, AWES had a feature article shared in the Career Development Association of Alberta's quarterly newsletter, Career Momentum, to discuss Guided Pathways and the upcoming training opportunity.

We also continued to engage with our audience by releasing a quarterly newsletter with updates and highlights, and we increased the use of our blog to once per month to communicate new ideas and exciting accomplishments.

Expansion

Allie Dennis joined our team as a consultant and project liaison. She works on multiple AWES projects and coordinates a variety of activities. Language and essential skills specialist Tyla Olsen joined AWES as a content developer and facilitator. Lina Wencel came on as our first communications coordinator after a successful internship.

Web-designer Taylor Sato was brought on board to create the new Guided Pathways website and maintain the AWES site. To facilitate development of the Moodle hub and online community for Guided Pathways along with Moodle updates to other AWES digital courses, Mustafa Mohammed joined the team as our Moodle designer.

Conferences and presentations

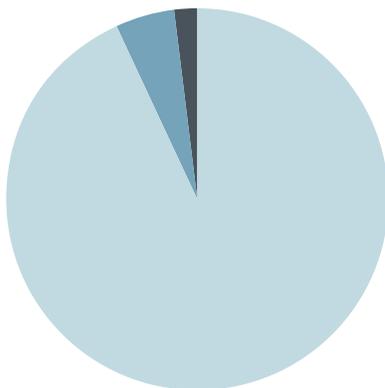
We had the pleasure of presenting at three conferences and hosting multiple webinars. Before the pandemic hit, we held the last in-person session of the year at Cannexus 2020. Later in the year we participated in the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) conference where we hosted two presentations. This was our first time joining a fully remote conference. To close out the year, we presented at the New Brunswick Career Development Association (NBCDA) conference.

To introduce and discuss Skills for Work, we also hosted two webinars which both had an incredible turn out.

Financial statements

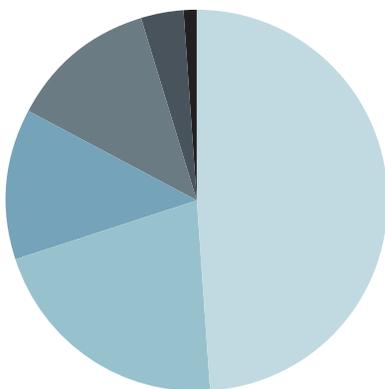
Please note: These statements only include up to March 31, 2020, as that is when AWES' fiscal year ended.

Revenue



● Government contracts	801,330
● Other contracts	40,630
● Other revenue:	
Goods and services tax rebates	7,840
Interest income	7,246
Miscellaneous	1,584
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	858,630

Expenses



● Guided Pathways Project	406,113
● Working Faster, Working Safer Project	173,519
● Newcomers to the Trades Project	105,659
● Digitizing Workplace Resources Project	104,175
● Fees for service	29,449
● Operations	8,747
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	827,662

Thank you to our partners

Action for Healthy Communities (AHC)
 Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL)
 Atlantic Human Services
 Bow Valley College
 Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)
 Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC)
 Community Adult Learning Programs (CALP)
 CompuSmart
 Data Angel
 Edmonton Construction Association (ECA)
 Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium (EMC)
 Ideal Contract Services
 Jardeg Construction Services
 Master 1 Flooring
 Monarch Innovative Design for Learning
 Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre (NLWIC)
 Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)
 NorQuest College
 Right at Home Housing Society
 Ryner Safety Incorporated
 SkillPlan
 Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC)
 S.U.C.C.E.S.S
 Trajectory IQ Software (TIQ)
 Tutela
 Urban Scaffolding

GOVERNMENT

Government of Canada

- Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC):
 Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills, the Office of
 Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES)

Government of Alberta

- Settlement, Integration and Language Projects

Government of New Brunswick

- Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

CONFERENCES

Cannexus
 New Brunswick Career Development Association (NBCDA)
 Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL)



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