

WorkBC Labour Market Partnership Project

FINAL REPORT

Vanderhoof & Fort St. James, British Columbia

January 5, 2026 – May 1, 2026

Employer Engagement Findings, Workforce Gaps, and Training Needs in Response to Regional Forestry Curtailments

This report presents findings from a Labour Market Partnership (LMP) project conducted to assess workforce challenges, training needs, and labour market impacts across Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. The project was developed in response to recent forestry curtailments and aims to support workforce transition, training alignment, and long-term regional economic stability.



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1. Executive Summary

The WorkBC Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Project was conducted between January 5, 2026, and May 1, 2026, to assess the impacts of forestry curtailments and broader labour market disruptions across Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, and surrounding areas.

Through employer engagement sessions and community career fairs, the project gathered real-time insights on workforce challenges, staffing shortages, training needs, and future labour demand.

This report identifies the workforce, training, and support requirements needed to support the transition of displaced workers, improve labour market participation, and strengthen the region's ability to meet both current and future labour demand.

The findings indicate that while employment opportunities exist across multiple sectors, the region is experiencing a complex labour market imbalance. Recent forestry curtailments have contributed to workforce displacement and elevated unemployment, while employers continue to face challenges filling available roles. These conditions are driven by a combination of skills gaps, limited access to training and certifications, and broader structural barriers. As a result, many individuals are not currently positioned to transition into available employment opportunities without targeted support and workforce development pathways.

Employers reported that workforce constraints are limiting the ability of some businesses to expand, particularly where staffing shortages persist. At the same time, growth is occurring in specific sectors, with organizations in mining, healthcare, social services, childcare, and community-based services actively preparing for expansion. In healthcare, social services, childcare, and community-based services, this includes the development and expansion of community-based and integrated service facilities. In mining and construction, major upcoming projects such as wind, pipeline, hydro, and mining developments are expected to significantly increase labour demand. These sector-specific expansions highlight both immediate pressures and the need to prepare the local workforce for future opportunities.

Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action across workforce development, training systems, and community supports. Progress will depend on improving access to training, strengthening transition pathways for displaced workers, and reducing structural barriers that limit workforce participation. Without targeted and sustained efforts, the region risks continued labour market imbalance, where unemployment and unfilled roles persist simultaneously, limiting long-term economic growth and workforce stability.

Several priority training areas identified through the project are already being explored through early partnership discussions, including heavy equipment operation, safety certifications, heavy-duty mechanic training, Applied Business Technology, and Early Childhood Education. These early actions demonstrate alignment between the project findings and emerging workforce development efforts, while also reinforcing the need for continued coordination to confirm delivery, funding, and access pathways.

2. Project Overview

2.1 Project Purpose and Rationale

The LMP Project was a structured employer engagement initiative designed to collect real-time labour market data and identify workforce needs across key sectors.

As outlined in the Project Description (Schedule A of the Shared Cost Agreement), employer engagement was used to assess how structural changes—particularly forestry curtailments—are impacting business operations and labour requirements in both the short and long term.

The project was initiated in response to significant workforce disruption caused by mill closures and curtailments, combined with a lack of reliable, localized labour market data.

These conditions have contributed to a growing disconnect between the available workforce, employer needs, and existing training pathways. The project was intended not only to assess labour market conditions, but to identify practical workforce development responses, including training priorities, transition pathways, and opportunities to better align workforce supply with employer demand.

2.2 Project Timeline

The project was conducted between January 5 and May 1, 2026. Employer engagement sessions took place between January and March, with additional sessions extending into March to accommodate availability and expanded sector participation. Community career fairs were held on April 21 in Vanderhoof and April 29 in Fort St. James.

2.3 Geographic Scope

The project focused on Vanderhoof and Fort St. James, including surrounding communities within the regional labour market.

2.4 Stakeholders and Participants

Engagement included employers across multiple sectors, along with representatives from School District 91, the College of New Caledonia, Northern Health, First Nations communities, municipal and economic development organizations, and provincial partners.

This range of participants ensured that findings reflect both employer-specific workforce needs and broader system-level challenges related to training access, service delivery, and workforce participation.

3. Methodology

Original Scope of Work

Core activities undertaken as part of this methodology included facilitating employer engagement sessions, conducting ongoing outreach, collaborating with training institutions and community organizations, and identifying workforce demand, skill gaps, and training priorities. These activities were designed to capture both immediate workforce challenges and emerging trends across sectors.

A qualitative, engagement-based approach was intentionally selected to capture experience-based insights from employers and stakeholders. This ensured that findings reflect current labour market conditions, rather than relying solely on historical or quantitative data sources that may not fully represent the rapidly evolving regional context.

Engagement and Data Collection Approach

Data collection was conducted through a combination of structured engagement sessions and ongoing outreach activities, allowing for both broad sector representation and more targeted input.

Between January and March 2026, multiple employer engagement sessions were conducted across key sectors, including forestry and industrial operations, healthcare and social services, business and retail, hospitality, and mining, in both Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. This cross-sector approach ensured that the project captured a comprehensive view of workforce conditions across the regional economy, while also reflecting community-specific perspectives, particularly within forestry and industrial sectors where local conditions and workforce dynamics may differ.

Engagement sessions brought together employers, training providers, Indigenous organizations, local government representatives, and community partners. Sessions were

guided by standardized discussion questions to ensure consistency across sectors, while still allowing for open dialogue and detailed, experience-based input.

Discussions were structured around several key workforce themes. These included:

- anticipated business growth and expansion plans, as well as operational changes
- current and anticipated staffing needs, workforce demand, and occupational gaps
- required training and certifications
- recruitment and retention challenges, as well as barriers to workforce participation

This structure ensured that both immediate workforce pressures and longer-term labour market considerations were captured.

In addition to formal engagement sessions, the project included ongoing outreach activities to strengthen participation and validate findings. These activities included one-on-one employer meetings, follow-up discussions, and participation in community meetings and advisory groups.

Together, these engagement methods supported relationship development, increased participation across sectors, and allowed for the validation of emerging themes. They also ensured that input was captured from employers who were unable to attend formal engagement sessions.

Additional Scope of Work and Activities Beyond Original Plan

While the project followed the original scope outlined in Schedule A, the methodology remained intentionally adaptive in order to respond to emerging priorities, stakeholder availability, and evolving labour market conditions.

As engagement progressed, several adjustments were made to strengthen the overall quality and representativeness of the data collected. Key adjustments included:

- the addition of a mining sector-specific engagement session to better understand workforce demand associated with current and upcoming projects
- expanded engagement with Indigenous communities, including direct discussions with First Nations and Indigenous service organizations
- increased one-on-one employer outreach to strengthen participation and validate findings across sectors
- adjustments to engagement timelines, with sessions extending into March to accommodate availability and broaden sector representation

- career fair planning and delivery took place later in the project period, resulting in greater emphasis being placed on employer consultation, relationship-building, and workforce planning activities during the engagement phase.

These adaptations ensured that the methodology remained responsive to local conditions and that findings reflect a broader and more representative range of perspectives across the region.

The project also included two community career fairs held in Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. These events provided an opportunity to bring together employers, service providers, community partners, and jobseekers in a public setting. While the career fairs were not intended to produce formal labour market findings in the same way as the employer engagement sessions, they supported broader project goals by strengthening local connections, increasing awareness of available employment and training opportunities, and creating space for employers and community members to connect directly.

Data Analysis and Use

Information collected through engagement sessions and outreach activities was documented through detailed meeting notes and analyzed by identifying recurring trends and common themes.

Data was reviewed across all engagement activities to identify key cross-sector patterns and recurring workforce themes. These included:

- recurring workforce challenges
- common training and certification needs
- cross-sector patterns and trends
- shared barriers to employment and retention

The analysis prioritized consistency across multiple sources, focusing on themes that emerged repeatedly across sectors rather than isolated feedback. This approach strengthened the reliability of findings by ensuring that conclusions were supported by multiple engagement activities and perspectives.

The use of cross-sector validation allowed the project to identify broader labour market trends, rather than limiting findings to sector-specific observations. As a result, the analysis reflects overarching workforce conditions across the region while still capturing sector-level nuance.

Limitations on Data Collection

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this project.

The methodology is primarily qualitative and does not provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of labour market trends or projections. While this approach provides valuable real-time insights, it may not capture the full statistical scope of workforce conditions.

Participation in engagement activities was dependent on employer availability and willingness to participate. As a result, some sectors, organizations, or perspectives may be underrepresented. The timing of engagement, conducted between January and March, may reflect seasonal workforce conditions in certain industries. In addition, labour market conditions in the region are continuously evolving, particularly in response to forestry curtailments and emerging industrial projects.

As a result, findings presented in this report reflect conditions observed during the engagement period and may shift over time.

Data Use and Confidentiality

All data collected through this project was used solely for the purposes of labour market analysis, workforce planning, and informing program and policy considerations within the scope of the LMP project.

Information collected through engagement sessions and outreach activities was used to identify overall trends, workforce challenges, and training priorities across sectors. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the engagement and how the information would be used to inform project reporting and workforce planning. While most engagement summaries documented participating organizations and discussion points, the final report presents findings at a broader level to reflect common themes across sectors and communities. This approach was intended to support transparency, informed participation, and respectful use of the information shared throughout the project.

4. Labour Market Context

4.1 Regional Economic Conditions

The Vanderhoof and Fort St. James region is characterized by a resource-based economy historically driven by forestry, with increasing diversification into mining, healthcare, and service-related industries. Recent economic shifts, including forestry curtailments and emerging development projects, have created a transitional labour market environment.

These changes are influencing employment patterns, workforce stability, and the overall structure of the regional economy.

4.2 Impact of Forestry Curtailments

Forestry curtailments and mill closures have had a significant and ongoing impact on the regional labour market, disrupting a sector that has historically been a primary source of employment in Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. These changes have resulted in workforce displacement, reduced economic stability, and shifts in labour supply dynamics across the region. While some displaced workers have transitioned into other sectors, employers noted that this transition is not occurring at a scale sufficient to meet demand. Barriers such as certification requirements, lack of transferable credentials, and limited access to retraining opportunities continue to prevent many individuals from successfully re-entering the workforce in new industries.

In addition, curtailments have contributed to the out-migration of workers seeking employment in other regions, further reducing the available local labour pool. WorkBC observations also indicate that some individuals have exited the workforce entirely or are not actively seeking employment, including individuals currently accessing Employment Insurance, which places additional strain on already limited workforce capacity.

The impacts of forestry curtailments extend beyond direct job loss, influencing broader economic conditions including reduced consumer activity, increased reliance on out-of-region labour, and heightened competition for skilled workers across sectors. As a result, while new employment opportunities are emerging, particularly in mining and healthcare, the local workforce is not currently positioned to fully absorb or respond to this demand without targeted workforce development and training interventions.

4.3 Emerging Industry Growth

At the same time, several sectors are experiencing or anticipating growth. Mining projects, healthcare expansion, and continued demand in trades and service industries are expected to increase labour demand over the next several years, with timelines varying by sector, project stage, funding, and implementation readiness. These developments are being driven by both ongoing operations and major upcoming projects, creating new employment opportunities across the region.

While this growth presents a significant opportunity, it also highlights the need for proactive workforce development, as the local workforce is not currently positioned to fully meet this demand without targeted training and support.

5. Key Findings (Cross-Sector Themes)

5.1 Workforce Readiness Gaps

Across all sectors, employers reported that many applicants lack foundational workplace skills, including communication, professionalism, and reliability. These gaps often present in areas such as attendance, time management, and the ability to work independently or as part of a team.

Limited hands-on experience was also identified as a key challenge, with many applicants entering the workforce without exposure to real work environments or clear expectations around job responsibilities. Employers noted that this contributes to difficulties in hiring, onboarding, and long-term retention.

5.2 Training and Certification Barriers

Employers consistently identified gaps between training programs and real job requirements. Many programs emphasize theoretical knowledge without providing sufficient practical or job-specific experience, resulting in candidates who are not fully prepared for workplace demands.

Access to training is also limited by factors such as program availability, cost, and geographic location. In several cases, required certifications are only available outside the region, creating additional barriers for individuals seeking to enter or transition within the workforce.

5.3 Retention Challenges

Retention remains a significant issue across sectors, particularly in entry-level and physically demanding roles. Employers reported high turnover rates, with some employees leaving shortly after being hired or trained.

This was often linked to mismatched expectations, the physical demands of certain roles, and limited long-term commitment. As a result, employers face ongoing costs related to recruitment and training, with reduced return on investment when employees do not remain in their roles.

5.4 Structural Barriers

Structural barriers continue to limit workforce participation across the region. Transportation challenges, including limited access to reliable vehicles and long travel distances, were frequently identified as barriers to both employment and training.

Limited childcare availability and housing constraints were also noted as factors affecting an individual's ability to enter or remain in the workforce. In addition, access to licensing and certification pathways remains a challenge, particularly where training is not locally available or requires travel outside the community.

6. Sector Findings

6.1 Trades, Forestry, Transportation, and Industrial Workforce

Employers across forestry, transportation, and industrial operations reported strong, current demand for Class 1 drivers, heavy equipment operators, heavy-duty mechanics, and related skilled trades. These roles are closely tied to practical experience and industry-specific working conditions, with employers emphasizing the importance of training that reflects real job environments, including bush road driving, winter conditions, equipment-specific operation, and safety requirements.

Training gaps are particularly evident in licensing and certification pathways, including Class 1 MELT, Class 3 licensing, First Aid, OFA2, S100, and other safety-related certifications. Employers noted that while applicants may express interest in these fields, many lack the hands-on exposure, confidence, or credentials required to move directly into employment.

Employers also emphasized the need for mentorship, apprenticeship-style learning, and earlier exposure to trades and industrial careers. These approaches were seen as important for building a stronger local workforce pipeline and improving long-term retention in sectors that continue to play a central role in the regional economy.

6.2 Healthcare and Social Services

Critical shortages exist across both healthcare and broader community-based service roles, including nurses, physicians, support workers, early childhood educators, and education assistants. Workforce demand in this sector extends beyond clinical care, with significant need for child and youth support workers, community support workers, and roles supporting individuals with diverse and complex needs.

Workforce growth in this sector is closely tied to training capacity, instructor availability, and access to certification pathways. Employers identified key training programs such as Early Childhood Education (ECE), the Health Care Access Program (HCAP), and Community and School Support (CASS) as critical to maintaining and expanding service delivery. There is also a growing need for specialized training related to specific client needs, including autism, FASD, and other developmental or behavioural supports.

In addition to clinical and support roles, administrative and basic digital skills were identified as essential across many organizations, supporting day-to-day operations and service coordination.

Workforce expansion is directly connected to service delivery needs, including childcare availability, education supports, and community-based programming. While some organizations are maintaining current operations, others have identified opportunities for future expansion, which remain dependent on the availability of trained staff and sustainable funding.

6.3 Business, Retail, and Administration

Employers identified ongoing demand for administrative and office support roles, including positions in bookkeeping, financial services, and customer-facing business operations. While opportunities exist, many applicants are not considered job-ready, particularly in areas such as professional communication, digital literacy, and basic office skills.

Training programs such as Applied Business Technology (ABT), bookkeeping, and customer service training were consistently identified as valuable for preparing individuals for these roles. The ABT program, previously offered through the College of New Caledonia, was highlighted as a strong foundation for administrative and workplace readiness skills. While no longer offered in its original format, elements of this training are being incorporated into newer business diploma programming.

Employers also noted that awareness of career pathways within this sector is limited, contributing to lower interest and reduced applicant pools. As a result, workforce challenges in this sector are primarily related to readiness, skill development, and awareness of long-term opportunities.

6.4 Hospitality and Service Industry

The hospitality and service sector continues to experience consistent demand for cooks, kitchen staff, housekeeping, and front-line service roles. Employers reported ongoing challenges related to reliability, attendance, and workforce readiness, particularly in entry-level positions.

There is strong interest in short-term, practical training programs that prepare individuals for immediate employment. Programs such as CNC's Camp Cook program were identified as valuable, as they provide hands-on experience while allowing employers to assess participant readiness and fit prior to hiring.

Many employers rely on in-house training; however, prior experience is still preferred for roles requiring independence, such as cooks and specialized service positions. The sector

also employs a high number of youth and students, with many front-line roles serving as entry-level or transitional positions.

As a result, workforce challenges in this sector are closely tied to immediate job readiness, access to practical training, and the ability to support individuals in transitioning into and maintaining employment.

6.5 Mining and Major Projects as Future Demand Drivers

Mining and major project development were identified as significant future demand drivers for the regional workforce. Employers and stakeholders noted that planned and anticipated projects in mining, construction, pipeline, hydro, and other resource-related areas are expected to increase demand for many of the same occupations already identified as priorities across trades, transportation, and industrial sectors.

This includes demand for heavy-duty mechanics, welders, electricians, millwrights, equipment operators, Class 1 drivers, general labourers, and other skilled or semi-skilled operational roles. As these projects advance, competition for qualified workers is expected to increase, placing additional pressure on an already limited local labour pool.

For this reason, mining and major projects should be understood less as a separate workforce category and more as a future labour demand pressure that reinforces the need for early training alignment. Preparing local workers in advance will be critical to ensuring that residents are positioned to access these opportunities, rather than relying heavily on out-of-region labour once hiring demand increases.

7. Workforce Demand and Training Needs

7.1 High-Demand Occupations

- Class 1 Drivers
- Heavy Equipment Operators
- Heavy Duty Mechanics
- Early Childhood Educators
- Health Care Assistants and Healthcare Support Workers
- Administrative and Office Support Workers
- Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), Registered Nurses (RNs), and other Healthcare Professionals

- Skilled Trades (Welders, Electricians, Millwrights)

7.2 Required Certifications and Training

Forestry, Transportation, and Industrial Sectors

- Class 1 MELT (region-specific conditions)
- Equipment-specific operator training
- Apprenticeship pathways
- First Aid / OFA2 (industry-required safety certification)

Healthcare and Social Services

- Early Childhood Education (ECE)
- Health Care Assistant (HCAP)
- Community and Social Service training
- Medical terminology and EMR certification
- Lab / Pharmacy Technician training pathways

Business and Administration

- Applied Business Technology (ABT)
- Bookkeeping and financial certifications
- Communication and customer service training

Hospitality, Retail, and Service Industry

- Food Safe certification (Level 1)
- Short-term cook and kitchen training programs (e.g., Camp Cook)
- Housekeeping and hospitality skills training
- Customer service and front-line service training

Cross-Sector

- Driver licensing (Class 5, 3, and 1)
- Safety certifications (e.g., S100, H2S, ATV/UTV)
- Basic workplace readiness and employability skills

8. Opportunities and Strategic Considerations

8.1 Workforce Transition Opportunities

There is significant opportunity to support the transition of displaced forestry workers and new labour market entrants into high-demand roles across trades, healthcare, administration, transportation, and resource-related sectors. Employers identified clear entry points into these sectors, particularly through roles such as support workers, Class 1 drivers, equipment operators, and administrative positions that can lead to long-term career pathways. These findings highlight the importance of creating accessible and progressive training pathways that support workforce entry, skill development, and long-term career advancement across sectors.

8.2 Training Alignment Opportunities

Aligning training programs more closely with employer needs presents a key opportunity to improve workforce readiness and reduce hiring risk. Employers consistently emphasized the value of hands-on, job-specific training that reflects real working conditions, particularly in sectors such as forestry, transportation, and mining. This points to a need for locally accessible, flexible training delivery models that are better aligned with regional industry requirements and evolving labour market conditions.

8.3 Employer Engagement Opportunities

Ongoing employer engagement remains critical to maintaining alignment between workforce supply and demand. Engagement activities conducted throughout the project demonstrated that employers are willing to participate in workforce development initiatives, particularly where programs align with their hiring needs and reduce training-related risks. This reinforces the importance of continued collaboration between employers, training providers, and community partners to support responsive program development and stronger workforce connections.

The career fairs held in Vanderhoof and Fort St. James further demonstrated the value of in-person employer and community engagement. While the primary labour market findings were gathered through the employer engagement sessions, the career fairs provided a useful opportunity to strengthen relationships, increase visibility of local employment opportunities, and support direct connections between businesses, service providers, and community members.

9. Recommendations and Early Implementation Planning

The recommendations below are organized by implementation timeframe and respond directly to the workforce challenges identified through employer and stakeholder engagement. Short-term recommendations focus on actions that can improve immediate access to employment, training, certification, and employer supports. Medium-term recommendations focus on expanding local training capacity and strengthening pathways between employers, training providers, and jobseekers. Long-term considerations address broader structural barriers that affect workforce participation, including transportation, childcare, housing, licensing, testing access, and community livability.

These recommendations should be understood as practical planning directions rather than completed outcomes. Some actions are already in early planning stages, while others will require further coordination with employers, training providers, Indigenous communities, local governments, WorkBC, and provincial partners to confirm feasibility, funding, delivery timelines, and participant access.

9.1 Training Priorities Identified Through Engagement

Employer and stakeholder engagement identified several priority training areas needed to support immediate workforce entry, long-term workforce development, and transition opportunities for displaced or underemployed workers. These priorities reflect recurring themes across sectors, including limited access to local training, certification barriers, lack of hands-on experience, and the need for training that is directly aligned with employer demand.

Key training priorities identified through the LMP project include heavy equipment operation, Class 1 MELT training, safety certifications, heavy-duty mechanic pathways, Applied Business Technology, Early Childhood Education, and other short-term practical training opportunities that support workforce readiness and employment entry.

These training priorities are directly connected to the workforce gaps identified throughout this report and reflect the need for training models that are accessible, locally relevant, and responsive to both current and emerging labour market demand. Some priorities are already being advanced through early partnership work; however, they remain included as recommendations because they were identified through the engagement process and still require continued coordination around delivery, funding, participant access, employer involvement, and long-term sustainability.

9.2 Early Implementation and Planning Actions Already Underway

While this report is intended to support future training alignment and workforce development planning, several training priorities identified through the LMP process are already being advanced through early partnership work. These training areas are being pursued based on coordination between the District of Vanderhoof, Chamber of Commerce, Ministry of Jobs and Economic Growth, College of New Caledonia, and WorkBC.

The following training areas have been identified as priorities and are currently in various stages of planning, discussion, or tentative scheduling.

Training areas in early planning or tentative scheduling include:

- Heavy Equipment Operator Training – training is being pursued, with tentative start dates of June 8 and August 10
- Safety Training – including Intermediate First Aid, H2S, and UTV training, with tentative delivery periods in mid-June, mid-July, and mid-August
- Heavy Duty Mechanic Training – training is being pursued, with a tentative training start date in September 2026
- Applied Business Technology – training is being pursued, with a tentative training start date in September 2026
- Early Childhood Education – training is being pursued, with a tentative training start date in January 2027

Additional training areas identified for future planning include:

- Class 1 MELT Training – identified as a priority through engagement, with no confirmed training dates or formal implementation discussions underway at this time

These priorities align with the occupations, certifications, and workforce barriers most frequently identified through engagement, particularly the need for locally accessible, practical training that can support entry into high-demand roles.

These actions should be understood as early implementation and planning steps rather than completed project outcomes. They demonstrate that the findings of the LMP project are already helping to inform practical training development and regional workforce planning. Continued coordination will be required to confirm delivery dates, funding pathways, participant eligibility, employer involvement, and local access considerations.

9.3 Short-Term Recommendations

Short-term recommendations should focus on actions that can be advanced through existing programs, employer outreach, and partner coordination. This includes increasing employer awareness of available supports such as Wage Subsidy, the Employer Training Grant (ETG), the Community Workforce Response Grant (CWRG), and other funding options that may reduce the financial risk of hiring, training, and retaining new workers.

WorkBC and partner organizations should continue direct employer outreach to identify businesses that may be ready to hire or train workers but require support with onboarding, wage costs, certification costs, or short-term training needs. This approach is particularly relevant for employers who expressed interest in hiring but identified training costs, retention risk, or lack of job-ready applicants as barriers.

Short-term training efforts should prioritize certifications and skills that allow individuals to move more quickly into available employment. This includes safety certifications, First Aid/OFA2, S100, H2S, Food Safe, customer service, basic workplace readiness, driver licensing preparation, and other entry-level requirements identified by employers. Where possible, these should be delivered locally or through short, flexible training models that reduce travel, cost, and scheduling barriers.

Retention should also be addressed at the front end of training and employment. Employers repeatedly noted that some workers enter roles without fully understanding the work environment, physical demands, or long-term expectations. To reduce this mismatch, short-term responses should include worksite tours, job-shadowing, mentorship, ride-along opportunities where appropriate, employer presentations, and clearer pre-employment orientation. These actions would help participants make more informed decisions before entering training or employment and may reduce turnover after employers invest in new workers.

9.4 Medium-Term Recommendations

Medium-term recommendations should focus on developing structured, locally relevant training pathways that are directly connected to employer demand. Rather than offering broad training without a clear employment connection, future training should be planned around confirmed workforce needs, employer participation, available funding, training provider capacity, and participant readiness.

Priority areas for medium-term development include heavy equipment operation, Class 1 MELT, heavy-duty mechanic pathways, Applied Business Technology, Early Childhood Education, and other sector-specific programs identified through engagement. For these training areas to be effective, partners should confirm the number of potential participants,

employer demand, required prerequisites, training costs, delivery location, equipment or facility needs, and whether employers are able to support job-shadowing, work placements, interviews, or hiring pathways after training.

Training models should also reflect the type of learning employers said is most useful. In forestry, transportation, industrial, and mining-related roles, employers emphasized hands-on experience, equipment-specific training, and exposure to real working conditions. For this reason, heavy equipment and Class 1 training should be designed to reflect local conditions where possible, including bush roads, winter conditions, equipment-specific operation, and realistic job expectations.

For business, retail, and administration roles, medium-term planning should focus on rebuilding access to practical office and administrative training. This may include Applied Business Technology-style programming, bookkeeping, digital skills, communication, customer service, and other workplace-readiness training that prepares participants for administrative and customer-facing roles.

For healthcare, social services, and childcare, medium-term planning should focus on training pathways that increase local service capacity. This includes Early Childhood Education, Health Care Assistant pathways, Community and School Support training, medical terminology, EMR/MOIS training, and other entry-level certifications that help individuals move into support roles. These pathways should be developed with employers and service providers so training is connected to actual staffing needs, not just general interest.

Partnerships between employers, training providers, Indigenous communities, local governments, WorkBC, and provincial partners will be required to move these priorities from recommendations into implementation. Continued coordination should focus on confirming which training options are feasible, which partners can support delivery, and which pathways have the strongest connection to employment outcomes.

9.5 Long-Term Considerations

Addressing structural barriers such as transportation, childcare, housing, access to licensing, and access to required testing services remains a priority for long-term workforce planning. These barriers affect both employment and access to training, and they cannot be resolved through training recommendations alone. Long-term workforce planning should include practical supports that help individuals access training, complete required certifications, and remain connected to employment opportunities once training is complete.

One area for continued development is a more coordinated approach to driver readiness and licensing. Employer feedback repeatedly identified driver licensing as a barrier to employment, particularly in sectors where Class 5, Class 3, or Class 1 licensing is required before workers can access job opportunities. A practical response could include working with local partners to identify individuals who are close to meeting licensing requirements, connecting them with WorkBC or other funding supports where eligible, and coordinating access to driver training, road test preparation, and licensing steps in a more structured way. This would help reduce the number of individuals who are interested in employment but unable to move forward because they are missing a basic licensing requirement.

Transportation barriers should also be considered as part of training and employment planning. In communities with limited or no public transit, individuals may be unable to attend training, testing, interviews, or employment even when opportunities are available. Future planning could explore whether transportation supports can be built into training cohorts, such as coordinated travel for participants attending regional training, employer-supported transportation for work placements, or partnerships with community organizations where transportation is already being provided. This would be especially important for training or employment opportunities located outside an individual's home community.

Access to required testing services is another practical barrier that should be addressed through local or regional coordination. Where possible, partners should explore opportunities to bring required testing services closer to the communities where workers live, including drug and alcohol testing, certification testing, and other employment-related assessments. When local delivery is not feasible, workforce planning should consider how participants will access testing in nearby centres, including transportation, scheduling, and cost barriers. This would help prevent individuals from losing employment opportunities simply because required testing is difficult to access.

Childcare barriers should be addressed in two ways: by helping parents access employment and training, and by increasing the number of trained childcare workers available in the region. Limited childcare prevents some individuals, particularly parents, from accepting work, attending training, or returning to the workforce. At the same time, childcare providers cannot expand services without enough qualified Early Childhood Educators. For this reason, continued support for ECE training should remain a priority, especially where employers have confirmed staffing needs. Workforce partners should also work with childcare providers, schools, local governments, and community organizations to identify where staffing shortages are limiting childcare spaces and where training cohorts could help increase local childcare capacity.

Housing and community livability concerns should remain connected to broader economic development and workforce attraction planning. While housing cannot be solved through the LMP project alone, employers and communities identified it as a factor that affects recruitment, retention, and the ability of workers to remain in the region. Continued coordination with local governments, Indigenous communities, employers, and provincial partners will be important to ensure workforce planning is not separated from the conditions that allow people to live, work, and stay in the community.

Where engagement identified barriers that do not have a single immediate solution, these should be treated as priorities for continued partner planning rather than finalized implementation actions. The role of the LMP findings is to clearly identify how these barriers affect workforce participation and to support future coordination between employers, training providers, local governments, Indigenous communities, service providers, WorkBC, and provincial partners. Continued planning should focus on determining which actions are feasible locally, which require regional coordination, and which require provincial or funding-level support.

10. Conclusion

The Labour Market Partnership Project highlights a regional labour market in transition, shaped by both workforce displacement and emerging opportunities across key sectors. While demand for workers continues to grow in trades, healthcare, administration, transportation, and resource development, the region's ability to respond will depend on improved access to relevant training, stronger workforce pathways, and coordinated support for individuals transitioning into new roles.

The findings provide a clear foundation for workforce planning by identifying practical training priorities, employer needs, and barriers affecting labour market participation. Early partnership discussions already underway show that these findings are beginning to inform regional workforce development efforts; however, continued coordination will be required to move from planning into confirmed delivery, funding, recruitment, and local access.

By maintaining collaboration between employers, training providers, WorkBC, Indigenous communities, local governments, and provincial partners, the region has an opportunity to better connect local workers to current and future employment opportunities. Sustained action will be essential to supporting long-term economic stability, workforce resilience, and stronger local labour market outcomes.