



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 14

*A core product of the
Employability Skills
Forum, National
Business and
Education Centre*

Program
Partnership

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Name of Program
*CAREERS: Next
Generation Foundation's
Employability Skills
Development Program*

Skills Developed

- Academic
- Personal Management
- Teamwork

Developing secondary school students' and recent graduates' employability skills

CAREERS: THE NEXT GENERATION FOUNDATION

Enhancing Community Capacity to Develop Skills

BY JAMES PRICE

August 1998

CAREERS: The Next Generation Foundation is enhancing the capacity of communities to develop the generic employability skills and employment prospects of their youth.

Overview

CAREERS: The Next Generation Foundation partners business, education, government and labour to mobilize grassroots community action to develop employability skills. More specifically, it helps Alberta communities design, develop and implement applied workplace learning programs that enhance young people's employability and career prospects. CAREERS: The Next Generation Foundation was officially established as a charitable organization in the spring of 1997 and builds on the success of a three-year pilot project in Alberta.

The CAREERS Foundation has generated a new vision for the future of learning in Alberta that integrates worksite and classroom learning, actively making the workplace an extension of the classroom.

The CAREERS Foundation employs a small core of permanent staff supplemented by a significant number of persons seconded from its business partners, including Syncrude Canada Ltd., NOVA Corporation,

Alberta Power, Suncor Inc. Oil Sands Group, Alberta Pacific Forest Industries and Weyerhaeuser. Foundation secondees help educators to recruit and train employers for participation in off-campus education programs and conduct career workshops for students. The CAREERS Foundation has thereby developed expertise in delivering applied learning programs, developing local workforces and building local communities. It is now a valued source of information and implementation expertise for communities interested in establishing employability skills development and applied learning programs.

Objectives

- Enhance the employability of Alberta youth by establishing community-based applied workplace learning programs.
- Develop strong, motivated communities, focused on skills development and educational issues.
- Improve business and industry competitiveness by developing a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

Groups Served

- Alberta high school students and recent graduates, employers, educators, government and labour.

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NBEC Mission

We help business and education leaders work collaboratively to promote the development of a learning society that will prepare Canada's young people for a changing world.

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Activities

As a catalyst for mobilizing grassroots community action, the CAREERS Foundation has four principal thrusts:

1. Building Community Teams

The CAREERS Foundation builds community teams focused on employability skills development by establishing practical links between schools and local employers. CAREERS project directors typically do not know people in the communities in which they work. They are therefore removed from community politics and can play an objective third-party role in initiating dialogue and encouraging co-operation.

Specifically, project directors:

- meet with local education leaders to emphasize the CAREERS Foundation's vision of enhancing youth employability skills, work experience and applied learning,
- work with educators to determine program needs and priorities,
- identify and recruit key employers for participation, and
- convene and preside over initial meetings of committed employers and education representatives.

Community teams direct community action; work with community people, who take ownership of their projects; and coordinate the deployment of community resources. The CAREERS Foundation cannot and does not finance the projects, which are funded and run by the communities themselves. Necessity is a virtue: the CAREERS Foundation firmly believes it is better for communities to operate their own programs from the beginning using CAREERS-assisted community teams. Over time, community teams normally evolve into more formal steering committees or partnership councils.

For many communities, CAREERS Foundation-organized meetings bring local educators and employers together for the first time to discuss skills and educational issues. Often there are no precedents for business and education

discussing their mutual interests in developing students' employability skills and adapting curricula to ease the school-to-work transition. Employers are concerned about education because of their perception that students lack essential employability skills; educators, for their part, complain that employers never tell them what they want. Once it has begun, communities tend to welcome the new dialogue and appreciate the focused approach to engaging employers and educators in meaningful and tangible co-operation.

2. Recruiting Employers

The CAREERS Foundation assists schools and school jurisdictions in securing co-operative education positions for students. Project directors make presentations to industry groups and business associations, use established business contacts to network in the community and make intensive "cold calls" to employers.

As an industry-led organization, the Foundation is well positioned to identify and recruit employer champions. For example, since 1994 the Foundation has increased the number of employers participating in Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program in Calgary and Edmonton from less than a dozen to nearly 450.

**3. Facilitating Idea Sharing and
Community Networking**

The CAREERS Foundation reduces the probability of reinventing the wheel by acting as a knowledge broker, sharing ideas and success stories with participating communities.

Project directors apply lessons learned from implementing programs in one community to the development of programs in others. For example, the Co-op PLUS program (a co-operative apprenticeship program for high school graduates, which was developed and tested in Fort McMurray) has since applied that model in nearly a dozen other communities. At the same time, Tech Prep, an applied learning program developed in

The Employability Skills Forum Mission

We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

This study was made possible through funding by members of the Employability Skills Forum.

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Red Deer, is now being implemented in Fort McMurray and elsewhere.

The CAREERS Foundation assists communities with program evaluation and quality control. For example, it has developed a comprehensive student evaluation process and employer coaching and mentoring program.

The Foundation's newsletter, *The Next*, and www.nextgen.org Web site focus on showcasing community activity and highlighting best practices. These communications tools are responsive to the information needs of community participants.

4. Providing Career Education and Public Awareness

The CAREERS Foundation helps high school students decide on careers by communicating career and workforce-related information to them and by helping them with career planning. Project directors work with educators to deliver workshops on career opportunities in the trades, technologies and other skilled occupations. These workshops focus on developing employability skills and participating in applied learning.

School counsellors and work experience co-ordinators welcome the authoritative insights offered by project directors. And secondees lend significant credibility to the delivery of key employability messages. Further, the CAREERS Foundation increases community awareness of these issues through strategic participation in government and business committees, conference attendance and public presentations. The CAREERS Foundation is now expanding its trades and technologies model to a wide range of occupational paths.

Resources Required

The CAREERS Foundation's annual cash operating budget is \$750,000, which it uses to conduct workshops for 10,000 high school students per year. Overall funding is a partnership between industry (65 per cent) and the provincial government (35 per cent). Key budget items include:

- professional services salaries for Foundation manager and project directors (three to four persons full-time),
- travel costs associated with community implementation and support activities (about \$20,000 per person),
- office rent, equipment, administrative support, accounting, insurance, and
- printing, publicity, newsletter, Web site, marketing and communication tools (\$80,000 to \$120,000).

The Foundation's non-cash or in-kind resources are significant and include:

- industry-sponsored secondees (4 to 10 project directors), including salary and travel expenses,
- volunteer time of the Board of Directors, Advisory Council and community steering committees, and
- employer contributions for student salaries (varies by program) estimated at \$10 million.

Achievements/Outcomes

The CAREERS Foundation has:

- been instrumental in initiating and establishing active programs in 26 communities across Alberta,
- created co-op education positions for some 800 high school students and recent graduates,
- conducted workshops on career decision making and employability skills with more than 20,000 high school students, and
- recruited more than 450 employers who have created co-op education positions and invested \$10 million in these positions.

Benefits

Youth

- Take charge of their own career development.
- Gain work experience that helps them to get jobs.
- Benefit from opening up new pathways to education and employment.
- Benefit from new jobs created and paid for by employers.

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Our grateful thanks to our interviewees and to others who provided comment, including:

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Tom Nisbet*

Educators

- Take on new leadership roles in their communities supported by employers.
- Gain partners who help them develop their students' employability skills.

Employers

- Gain recognition and shape curricula by actively participating in youth and community development.
- Identify potential future employees.

Innovation

The CAREERS Foundation bridges the public policy issues surrounding classroom learning and the workplace issues facing industry. It has actively engaged diverse stakeholders from business, education, government and labour in a common vision for the future of applied learning and employability skills development in the province. Operating on a provincial scale is significant because it sets a direction for provincial education policy development—provincial education departments are able to see the widespread and powerful impact of the partnerships on improving school-to-work transitions by developing students' employability skills.

Provincial education departments and teachers are key players in curriculum development and implementation, while employers are key players in providing students with workplace learning opportunities and mentoring. Industry leadership has provided the necessary leverage and resources to significantly mobilize employer support and commitment. The intensive and creative use of industry secondees as

community change agents and facilitators has enabled the CAREERS Foundation to recruit employers and significantly increase their contribution to education, youth and workforce development.

Keys to Success

- Obtaining employer commitment via industry leadership.
- Mobilizing community support through industry-sponsored secondees.
- Identifying and recruiting stakeholder champions in business, education, government and labour.
- Developing appropriate workplace curricula with the co-operation of provincial education departments.

Greatest Challenges

In its early stages, community change is fragile and requires considerable nurturing by CAREERS Foundation project directors: not all stakeholders respond immediately with enthusiasm. Permanent change in community processes and values takes considerable time. Specific challenges occur when:

- employers are reluctant to add new positions when they have just downsized,
- educators are concerned about business motives and about the financial and human resource impacts on educators,
- parents believe classroom-based learning and a university education are best for their children,
- schools allocate limited resources to work experience programs, and
- project directors do not appreciate that communities must ultimately determine their own program priorities and timing.

NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Best Practices in Assessing and Developing Employability Skills—20 Case Studies (Sept. 98)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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