



Case Study **September 2005**

The Ready-to-Work Program Opening Doors to the Tourism Industry

This case study looks at the impact and benefits that the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council's (CTHRC's) Ready-to-Work (RTW) program is having on owners and operators within Canada's tourism industry. It explores how the RTW program affects the capacity of organizations to maximize their human resource potential and attract skilled and knowledgeable new hires into the industry. It also considers the Keys to Success of the CTHRC's RTW program, and offers insights as to how this model might be replicated or adapted by other Sector Council programs.

Tourism is big business in Canada, accounting for approximately two per cent of Canada's total gross domestic product, or \$22.6 billion.¹ The sector's 164,000 businesses employ 1.67 million people, or 11 per cent of the Canadian workforce, in more than 400 occupations—from beverage servers, cooks and food counter attendants to housekeepers, kitchen helpers and wilderness tour guides.²

Tourism is predominately a people-oriented industry, where business success is measured in terms of customer satisfaction, enjoyment and safety. With approximately

280,000 new tourism-related jobs expected to be created in Canada over the next five years, it is of paramount importance that the sector attract, train and retain knowledgeable workers with the right mix of skills and attitudes.³

Tourism accounts for 2 per cent of Canada's GDP.

Since 1993, the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) has helped promote professionalism within the industry and address labour market issues—including shortages of new and skilled workers, high turnover rates, and the image of the sector.⁴ In collaboration with 10 provincial and territorial Tourism Educational Councils (TECs) the CTHRC has successfully implemented a range of tourism-related programs and services—including labour market information, training tools, occupational standards and certification, and career awareness initiatives—in all of the provinces and territories.⁵

This case study looks at one of the CTHRC's programs, Ready-to-Work (RTW)—a career awareness, skills development and transition to employment program—and the impact it has on the tourism industry in Canada, particularly on the burgeoning tourism industry and tourism-related businesses in Saskatoon.⁶ The RTW program combines pre-employment, entry-level skills training and career planning with workplace experience and on-the-job training. This study has three objectives:

1. To identify the economic and workplace-related impacts that the RTW program has on businesses within the tourism industry;
2. To identify the benefits that individuals gain by participating in the RTW program; and
3. To identify the Keys to Success of the RTW program, and offer insights as to how this skills development and learner transitions model might be replicated or adapted by other Sector Council programs.

The RTW program provides under-represented groups with opportunities to become productive members of society. Over the past decade, it has introduced more than 9,000 Canadians to careers in tourism.

Qualitative and quantitative data used in this study were gathered using a number of research techniques and tools, including a review of Sector Council, government and tourism literature, and a series of in-depth interviews and conversations with 16 tourism proprietors, managers and staff throughout the Saskatoon region. CTHRC and Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC) staff were also interviewed.⁷

THE READY-TO-WORK PROGRAM

Started in 1994 under the name Tourism Careers for Youth, the RTW program was initially designed to offer a transition from school to work for youths aged 18–29. Today, with the age cap removed, the national skills development program focuses primarily on non-traditional labour pools and under-represented groups, such as Aboriginals. By offering a blend of classroom and hands-on training, the RTW program has succeeded on a number of important learning and skills transitions fronts, including:

- Assisting businesses with the recruitment and job-readiness of entry-level tourism hires;

- Providing unemployed or under-employed individuals, including those without post-secondary education, Aboriginals, new immigrants and social assistance recipients, with the proper mix of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and experience required for a career in tourism; and
- Providing on-going support and mentoring to participants and graduates.

More than anything else, the RTW program provides under-represented groups, such as Aboriginals, with career options and an opportunity to be productive and active members of society. With a lot of hard work and dedication, the program is succeeding. Over the past decade, the RTW program has introduced more than 9,000 individuals to careers in tourism across Canada, the most popular occupations being front desk agent, food and beverage server, retail sales associate and housekeeping room attendant.

In 2003–2004, alone, close to 800 individuals participated in the RTW program: 85 per cent were between the ages of 18–29, while the remaining 15 per cent were older workers and career changers; 31 per cent, or 250 participants, were recipients of Employment Insurance (EI) or social assistance; and more than 25 per cent, or almost 200 participants, were Aboriginal.⁸

In 2003–2004, just over 200 tourism employers nationwide participated in the RTW program. More than 95 per cent said they would continue to participate and recommend it to other businesses—a true testament to the value of the RTW program.⁹

In Saskatchewan, approximately 1,600 people have graduated from the RTW program over the past 10 years—the equivalent of about 160 each year, although the number of graduates has been steadily increasing in recent years due to a growing awareness and interest in the program as well as corresponding growth in the province's tourism industry. Since it is a clear objective of the program to develop the non-traditional labour pool, it is not surprising that more than 90 per cent of participants in Saskatchewan are Aboriginal.¹⁰ One of the most significant benefits of this program to individual learners is that it offers a bridge to further learning and career development that most of them would not otherwise have.

The Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council

The Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) helps the tourism sector overcome short- and long-term human resource issues and challenges, such as shortages of new and skilled workers, an aging tourism workforce, high turnover rates and misconceptions about tourism jobs. It provides needed human resource information, services and training resources through its *emerit* tourism training brand.¹

The CTHRC works collaboratively with businesses, industry associations, provincial and territorial governments, tourism education councils, labour unions and the education system in every province and territory in Canada.² Specifically, the CTHRC:

- Promotes the variety of employment opportunities within the industry;
- Provides resources to help individuals obtain the necessary training and workplace experience needed to succeed; and
- Provides national recognition for the skills, knowledge and experience that individuals acquire.³

1 *emerit* is the brand behind all of the CTHRC's national products and programs. For more information on *emerit*, go to: www.emerit.ca.

2 National, provincial and territorial tourism industry associations have worked together since 1986 on national occupational standards and professional certification programs. Between 1987 and early 1993 they coordinated their efforts under the Tourism Industry Standards and Certification Committee (TISCC), which became the CTHRC in November 1993.

3 The CTHRC has established national standards for more than 50 occupations and has developed professional certification for 26 tourism occupations.

STEC AND CTHRC: WORKING TOGETHER

Since 1990, the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC)—a non-governmental, industry-driven organization—has promoted, coordinated and evaluated tourism industry standards, certifications, career awareness and training in the province. The STEC is the organization that delivers all CTHRC-sponsored programs and products in Saskatchewan. The symbiotic relationship between the CTHRC and the STEC ensures that national tourism human resource standards are being met in Saskatchewan, while acknowledging federal-provincial-territorial labour market development agreements and accommodating provincial guidelines and funding priorities.

The STEC works closely with regional and local tourism owners, operators, employees, educators, employment centres, tribal councils, band offices and others to keep on top of what occupations are in demand, and to promote the tourism industry and job opportunities available to interested individuals.

The RTW program is administered by the STEC and is carried out in partnership with numerous provincial and federal partners, including, for example: regional Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) offices and Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Centres (CSCEC) throughout the province; regional colleges such as Lakeland College-Lloydminster, Northwest Regional College-North Battleford, Parkland Regional College-Yorkton, Northlands College-La Ronge, Cypress Hills Regional College-Swift Current, and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST)-Saskatoon; Tribal Councils; and individual First Nations and Métis groups.¹¹

In any given year the STEC offers approximately nine RTW occupational-specific programs across the province. Each program runs for approximately 32 weeks (12 weeks of classroom and work-experience learning, and 40 hours of mentoring over the first six months of employment) and involves upwards of 15-20 participants per program.

RTW Participants Gain New Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes

Individuals who participate in the Saskatchewan RTW program gain:

1. Relevant entry-level career and transferable skills training using CTHRC's Tourism Essential Skills program—a foundation credential that combines the CTHRC's Entry Level Skills program, The Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ profile, and HRSDC's Essential Skills. The credential is awarded to those participants who successfully complete an exam and 30 hours of practical work experience.
2. Twelve weeks of training, including eight weeks of classroom learning and four weeks of occupation-specific, hands-on learning experience. Classroom learning includes: first aid/CPR; food safety; job search; office operations; professionalism; serve it right—responsible alcohol service; service best—customer service seminar; tourism awareness; transferable skills—e.g., communications, conflict resolution, stress management, budgeting, workplace etiquette, team building; and WHMIS—Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System. The hands-on learning practicum includes occupation-specific training in work-like settings.
3. Career planning to help decide how one's skills, knowledge and aptitudes can best be matched with long-term employment and career opportunities in the tourism industry.
4. Forty hours of mentoring and skills upgrading over the first six months of employment.
5. An opportunity to achieve national professional recognition in a wide range of occupations, after completing the required hours of workplace experience and passing a knowledge exam and test of workplace skills. The CTHRC has established national standards in more than 50 tourism occupations and professional certification in 26 occupations.

Because there is no province-wide delivery strategy currently in place in for the Saskatchewan RTW program, decisions to offer a course are influenced by three key factors: employer demand for a program; the availability of provincial and/or regional partners interested in offering the program (e.g., a regional college, a CSCEC, or a individual Band); and the interest of individuals in taking the RTW program and ultimately pursuing careers in tourism-related occupations. The STEC is constantly polling its key stakeholders, including business, government, employment centres, band councils and others in order to ensure that the RTW program is offered to the right people, by the right people and in the most appropriate locations.

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED SKILLS TRAINING

Individuals who graduate from the RTW program receive relevant, portable and nationally recognized skills training in tourism-related occupations and careers that are in demand. Although RTW participants are not guaranteed a job in the tourism industry upon graduation—they must go through a standard interview process like anyone else—they do hold a distinct advantage in that the skills and experiential knowledge acquired through the program puts them in good standing with employers.

As more and more employers become aware of the program and look for the RTW qualification as a minimal standard when hiring entry-level workers, the value of the program will continue to increase.

The value of the RTW program to employers rests in the skills, knowledge and attitudes that RTW graduates bring to the workplace:

- RTW graduates understand a great deal more about what it means to work in the tourism industry than the vast majority of others looking for work in the sector.
- RTW graduates know what tourism is all about, and understand the professionalism the industry requires.
- RTW graduates develop the employability and technical skills needed to succeed in the workplace, as well as the necessary attitudes and behaviours required to work effectively with customers and co-workers.
- RTW graduates acquire several weeks of occupation-specific training that is recognized nationally and embraced by employers.

IMPACT OF THE RTW PROGRAM

What makes the RTW program stand out in Saskatchewan, and across Canada for that matter, is its unwavering commitment to the successful integration of individuals into tourism-related jobs. The program succeeds when individuals succeed. Skills development initiatives are closely matched with the industry's labour market needs. Whereas other training programs are often more concerned with graduating as many individuals as possible—regardless of their learning outcomes or the demand for such graduates—the RTW program develops skilled, confident, employable and dependable workers who are sought-after and who quickly become productive members of a workplace.

RTW program graduates have a distinct advantage over other job applicants because of the skills and experiential knowledge they acquire through the program. They have a better understanding of the tourism industry.

A recent article in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* noted that Saskatoon's economy was booming, with employment growth estimated at 3.5 per cent for the rest of 2005. The biggest challenge facing Saskatoon, according to the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority (SREDA), is ensuring the labour pool expands quickly enough to meet the economic opportunities that are arriving at the city's doorstep.¹² The RTW program addresses this challenge head-on by offering employers a growing number of skilled and knowledgeable front-line tourism workers.

IMPACT ON BUSINESS

Employers resoundingly applaud the RTW program for a host of reasons, including the fact they are able to hire skilled entry-level individuals who come to their jobs ready to work, with an interest in the tourism industry and a positive, realistic outlook on their future career opportunities. Employers also reap significant savings in their training and recruitment costs by hiring RTW graduates with the occupation-specific training they need—which is not the norm for entry-level positions. Having access to such a pool of labour translates directly into more productive, professional, efficient employees.

A longer-term benefit of hiring RTW graduates is that employers are more likely to keep them on staff because of their professionalism and ability to work effectively. Likewise, RTW graduates are more likely to remain with an employer given their understanding and appreciation of the tourism industry and their job expectations as entry-level hires. This translates into lower employee turnover rates (which are notoriously high in many tourism-related occupations). As a result, workplace morale is enhanced and a sense of community among staff can be nurtured and grown—all helping to make a hotel, restaurant or pub a more enjoyable and pleasant atmosphere for clients and customers.

RECRUITING AND TRAINING COST SAVINGS

One major tourism employer in Saskatoon noted that it costs nothing to be a part of the RTW program. However, the benefits realized by the company were substantial. Employers save considerably on the recruiting of trained and skilled new hires.

As part of the learning program, RTW graduates are required to take a proactive approach to finding suitable employment opportunities. With the assistance of the STEC staff—who help with resumé writing, career development plans, and job-interview techniques—RTW graduates identify potential employment prospects that they are interested in, set up interviews, and sell their skills and knowledge base in interviews.

With zero recruiting costs, businesses are introduced to a pool of skilled, knowledgeable and professional entry-level tourism workers. One hotel manager noted that he no longer has to invest in recruitment advertising now that he is part of the RTW network—instead, he takes the money saved and uses it to upgrade employees' skills.

Many employers interviewed also noted that they save substantially by not having to invest in a wide range of entry-level training programs (e.g., the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System [WHMIS], first aid/CPR) that can cost upwards of \$500 a course per person. RTW graduates come to their jobs well-trained and well-prepared for work, and, as such, need far less on-the-job training—often saving an employer hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

Employers also save on indirect on-the-job training costs. Because RTW graduates come ready to work, they require less mentoring and coaching from co-workers. Current employees are therefore able to focus more of their attention on core responsibilities and spend less time on new hires. One employer noted that there is less need to double up on shifts when training new RTW hires—saving the hotel in staff wages. The General Manager of the Delta Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon noted that, taking all things into consideration (training costs, mentoring and job-shadowing costs, and potential lost productivity), his hotel is able to save between one and two months in training time and \$1,000–\$2,000 in direct and indirect training costs per new hire by employing RTW graduates.

The RTW program helps employers save money on recruiting skilled staff. Graduates are required to take a proactive approach to finding suitable jobs, and they come to their jobs fully trained.

At the Joey's Only Seafood Restaurant in Saskatoon, training costs are cut almost in half by hiring RTW graduates. Typically, a new employee at the restaurant receives approximately 40 hours of in-house training and mentoring before being able to work on his or her own. An RTW graduate, on the other hand, requires a maximum of only 15–20 hours of in-house training before going "solo." The math is simple, according to a manager at Joey's Only: paying the salaries of two staff to wait on one table cuts profits and productivity in half. The faster an employer can get employees working on their own and serving more customers, the better it is for business. The RTW program helps Joey's Only Restaurant get there faster.

PRODUCTIVITY GAINS

The RTW program significantly increases the baseline skills levels of all new entrants into the tourism industry. RTW graduates bring with them a strong work ethic, a good sense of responsibility, and a solid foundation in specific occupations. They are able to function independently and take on responsibilities and tasks faster than entry-level employees who are not RTW graduates. This leads to higher employer expectations for skilled and professional entry-level workers. Many employers noted that it is now standard practice for them to look for the RTW graduate status on a resumé.

The Delta Bessborough Hotel, for example, will interview RTW graduates before other candidates who do not have the same credentials. Joey's Only Seafood Restaurant also gives special hiring consideration to RTW graduates, because they are better equipped to be productive, reliable workers. One employer noted that RTW graduates are 50 per cent more productive than non-RTW graduates, shortly after being hired.

Many employers identify the RTW program as a good bridging initiative that connects them with Aboriginal people interested in pursuing careers in tourism. Given Saskatchewan's changing demographics, many employers consider this an important benefit.

IMPROVED RETENTION RATES

The retention rate of RTW graduates at the Delta Bessborough Hotel—where five RTW graduates are currently working—is 100 per cent. This is an exceptional figure, according to the hotel's General Manager, since staff turnover rates average 32–38 per cent throughout much of the tourism industry. As well, improved retention rates bring with them significant reductions in recruitment costs and correlated training costs.

Not having to be constantly replacing workers has a significant positive impact on the work culture of a business. With a core group of young, dedicated workers committed to their jobs and the industry, a real sense of camaraderie and cohesion begins to percolate throughout the ranks of a company. The results are that the working culture is enhanced, employees are more content, and the experience of customers is ultimately improved.

As is true in any skills and career development training program, not every RTW graduate goes on to a successful career in the tourism industry. Individuals may, for example, come to realize that the occupation they trained in is not something they want to be doing in the long term, or they may have other issues not related to the program that they have to deal with. Certainly this was the experience of a number of employers interviewed for this case study. However, their positive experiences with RTW graduates far outweigh their negative ones, and they are steadfast in their support for the program and the type of individual that comes through the training course.

In Saskatchewan, the RTW program has a job-placement success rate of 85 per cent, and a six-month job continuation rate of 75 per cent. A number of factors contribute to these high success and continuation rates, including:

- The program's initial screening and selection process, which uses the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES); and
- The importance the program places on developing an understanding and appreciation of what the tourism industry is about, and building employability skills such as teamwork, responsibility, positive attitudes, flexibility and communications.

Interestingly, one employer who hired a graduate as a front-desk agent soon realized that this person's real interest was in food and beverage serving. They knew that through the RTW training program they had hired an individual with a positive attitude, a strong work ethic, and a keen interest to learn and grow, so rather than letting the person go, they were willing to reposition her, with minimal retraining, for a career in food and beverage serving.

BECOMING AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

A recent Saskatchewan report on labour market trends indicates that the Registered Indian population in the province will represent nine per cent of the labour force by 2008 and 14 per cent by 2018.¹³ As well, by 2018, it is estimated that 22 per cent of people aged 15–24 entering the labour force for the first time are likely to be Registered Indians. Many employers in Saskatoon are aware of this changing demographic and are adjusting their hiring practices and policies accordingly in an effort to be recognized as "Aboriginal employers of choice." According to one employer, hiring Aboriginals is the right thing to do, and from a business point of view the only thing to do—especially in the Saskatoon market—given the makeup of the local labour supply. The majority of employers interviewed identified the RTW program as a good bridging initiative that connects employers with Aboriginal people interested in pursuing careers in the tourism industry. One employer credited the RTW program for increasing its Aboriginal employee ratio from zero per cent to eight per cent of staff.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES

The RTW program gives participants a great deal of confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Not only do most graduates go on to find work in the tourism industry—a number of those who complete their RTW testing and workplace experience requirements for professional certification continue with their studies in pursuit of a journeyman license in a trade at a community college. Two employees at one business, for example, have enrolled part-time at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST) to pursue professions as cooks while still working.

One employer noted that if the RTW program was not in place, many of the graduates and recent hires would probably not have even considered looking for work. According to the Manager of the Farm House Inn in St. Walburg, the program gives individuals confidence in themselves and an appreciation and understanding of work and job responsibility. As one employee working at the Delta Bessborough Hotel commented: “If it wasn’t for the RTW program, I wouldn’t be in the same situation that I am today. It has given me confidence, the skills and the training I needed to find work.”

Another employer noted that RTW graduates bring with them a professional work ethic and a commitment to their jobs that is having a positive impact on other employees who, in turn, take greater pride in their jobs, and in the reputation of their places of work. Ultimately, this translates into better customer service, improved satisfaction levels and hopefully, for the business, increased profits.

One far-reaching outcome of the program is that RTW graduates have a much better attitude about the importance and benefits of lifelong learning. They tend to want to learn more and do what they can to further improve their performance—with an understanding that through their efforts the doors may open to better job opportunities within the tourism industry. This personal work ethic, learned to a great extent through the curriculum and mentoring activities of the RTW program, leads to real personal performance and productivity gains, as individuals demonstrate responsibility and a sense of ownership in their day-to-day job tasks, occupations and careers.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Everyone who participates in the RTW program—including individuals, employers, program deliverers and administrators—shares a common interest in student success. When an individual is able to transition into a meaningful career in tourism, in large part on account of the RTW program, everyone benefits. Each of the main actors has an interest in ensuring the success of the program:

- Individuals invest upwards of 12 weeks of their time and effort into the learning program and, as such, have a vested interest in finding relevant employment upon completion of the training program.
- Employers who take on RTW graduates invest in their salaries, and, as such, want to get the best people for the position.

A far-reaching outcome of the RTW program has been an improved attitude among graduates towards the importance and benefits of lifelong learning.

- The STEC wants to see its graduates succeed by gaining employment. It also wants to know that the service it offers is valuable and important to tourism-related businesses throughout Saskatchewan.
- Finally, the STEC is motivated to see its students succeed with their careers in tourism because of how it is compensated for its training and mentoring activities. Using a tiered funding formula, STEC receives a small amount of funding when a participant completes the classroom training (25 per cent), an additional amount when a participant engages in tourism-related work (25 per cent), and the lion’s share after a participant has been in the workplace for six months (50 per cent).

A DEMAND-DRIVEN PROGRAM

Being predominately a demand-driven skills training and career development program, RTW is very flexible and adaptable in terms of where and to whom it is delivered. If there is enough interest in the program, the STEC will deliver an RTW program, in collaboration with a regional partner (e.g., a regional college, tribal council or individual band) in a remote community or to a specific employer anywhere in Saskatchewan.

THE RTW MODEL

In Saskatchewan, the RTW program consists of five distinct stages, all of which are extremely important to the overall success of the program. It is a model which can be replicated elsewhere, provided there are three factors in place: a dedicated and committed staff with an unrelenting focus on preparing at-risk and under-represented individuals for careers in the tourism industry; strong regional, provincial and federal partners; and the support and awareness of key tourism businesses and employers.

1. *Initial Contact, Recruitment and Orientation*

- The STEC identifies key stakeholders to support the RTW program—including businesses interested in hiring RTW graduates—and locations and delivery agents to offer the training program.
- The STEC then moves into a recruiting phase to find students interested in the RTW program by advertising in local and regional newspapers, going to employment centres, and promoting the program through its connections with tribal councils and First Nations bands.
- With enough interest in the program, the STEC provides a short orientation on the tourism industry and then tests possible candidates using the TOWES. Only those individuals with an aptitude and interest in tourism-related careers are offered entry into the 12-week program.

RTW program participants devote considerable effort and time to finding suitable job placements. They know they must sell their skills, knowledge and attitudes during job interviews.

2. *Classroom and Hands-on Training*

- Once selected for the program, students take eight weeks of classroom training in tourism essentials, as well as first aid/CPR, food safety, job search, office operations, professionalism, serve it right (responsible alcohol service, service best) a customer service seminar, tourism awareness, transferable skills, and WHMIS.

- Throughout the program, students are required to test and evaluate their learning using nationally recognized tests. At the end of the first eight weeks of the program, students must write and pass the tourism essentials exam, which provides them with a portion of their occupation-specific credential. As well, they are asked to write and pass a first aid/CPR test and the WHMIS test.
- The next four weeks of the program focus on occupation-specific training, based on national standards curricula, in numerous tourism-related occupations such as food and beverage server, front desk agent, housekeeping room attendant and kitchen helper.
- Depending upon the type of occupation-specific training required, the STEC will locate and use appropriate community-based resources (e.g., church basement kitchens for the kitchen helper occupation) to engage students in a hands-on learning practicum. The STEC literally begs and borrows to find the most appropriate learning spaces and places. One example is the partnership with City Park Collegiate where, in exchange for use of the kitchen space and setting up half of the cafeteria into an actual dining room, RTW provided the lunches for all of the students and instructors.
- Upon completion of the four weeks of occupational training, the STEC uses national exams to measure the specific occupational skills knowledge that participants have acquired. The actual occupational certification is not issued to participants at this time, as they must first be employed and acquire the hours of experience determined by the industry for the occupation they have chosen.

3. *Securing Job Opportunities through Career Placement Services and Communications*

- The RTW program is not a work placement model. Students must apply for and successfully secure a job. As well, they get paid on the first day of work.
- Participants take ownership in their learning and future careers by investing a great deal of effort and time in finding suitable employers and employment opportunities. RTW graduates know that they must sell their skills, knowledge and attitudes in a job interview. The STEC helps with this process by offering insights and assistance with résumé writing, interview techniques and

career development activities. Where necessary, the STEC will drive RTW graduates to their job interviews, or provide them with funding for public transit.

- Interestingly, given past successes and an appreciation of the program, many employers now come to the STEC looking to hire graduates (or at least interview them). This speaks volumes about the importance of keeping in close contact with employers and informing them about the program and the supply of skilled potential workers that it produces for the tourism industry.

4. *On-the-job Training and Mentoring Activities*

- RTW graduates who secure a work opportunity begin their careers in the tourism industry as paid employees. For the first six months they are given 40 hours of access to a STEC mentor, who helps them with any work-related challenges they face. The mentor also collaborates with the employer to make sure the RTW graduate is meeting expectations and to identify any areas for improvement.
- The STEC also offers tourism employers a train-the-trainer course to help them develop and implement their own training and skills development programs that meet industry standards and continue to build on the RTW program offering. Although this service is not mandatory, many employers are using and benefiting from it.

5. *Professional Certification Designation*

- RTW graduates are encouraged by the CTHRC, the STEC and employers to acquire professional certification within their specific occupations. The professional certification—issued by CTHRC through its *emerit* brand—is recognized across the country as the highest credential available to tourism industry professionals. RTW graduates can achieve professional certification upon mastering the required skills and meeting the standards of their profession in a practical job setting. Professional certification includes confirmation that the required industry experience has been completed, writing an examination proving their knowledge of the occupation, and an evaluation in a real-world setting to demonstrate their mastery of the practical performance skills.

PROGRAM COSTS AND FUNDING MODEL

It costs approximately \$5,000 to put an individual through the 32-week RTW program (including 12 weeks of classroom and experiential learning and 40 hours of career assistance and mentoring). The program more than pays for itself by getting at-risk and under-represented individuals off employment insurance and social assistance and into the workforce as productive citizens. It also serves the province and tourism industry well by building and maintaining a dependable, skilled and knowledgeable labour force, which is critical to the long-term sustainability of local, regional and provincial economies.

RTW graduates who secure jobs in tourism begin as paid employees. For the first six months, they have access to mentors who can help them with work-related challenges. Mentors also collaborate with employers to ensure graduates are meeting expectations.

The RTW program is funded primarily by the provincial and federal governments. The provincial and federal delivery partners pay for each component of the training as it occurs. In the simplest of terms, the classroom delivery and participant support is provided primarily through provincial partners (e.g., through Quick Skills and Bridging programs); federal funding supports the co-ordination and administrative activities of the RTW program. Additional support for at-risk and Aboriginal participants is also typically covered by HRSDC funding,¹⁴ as are stipends, child-care support, and the mentoring-coach activities.

Between 1994 and 1999, the RTW program was fully funded by HRSDC and delivered by the Tourism Education Councils (TECs) in their respective provinces and territories. After 1999, however, HRSDC provided less funding because the delivery of training moved from the federal level to the provincial/territorial level. Consequently, the provincial TECs had to develop new partnerships and assume a larger role in obtaining funding.¹⁵ Today, funding in Saskatchewan is typically split 50/50 between the provincial and federal governments.

RTW as a Model: Program Activities

The Ready-to-Work program offers a framework for success for other organizations as an entry-level skills development model. The key stages in its program are:

- Work with local organizations, social agencies, band councils and provincial and territorial governments to obtain funding to support pre-employment training activities.
- Recruit and select the right participants for the RTW program using the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES).
- Network and keep in contact with relevant and interested employers.
- Provide selected participants with an orientation on tourism careers.
- Provide pre-employment classroom training to all RTW program participants—tailored to the target groups and the province or territory offering the program.
- Provide pre-employment, hands-on learning experiences to all program participants.
- Assist participants in their career planning and match selected participants with employers.
- Assist employers to deliver additional workplace training by providing them with materials, including a train-the-trainer program for workplace supervisors.
- Monitor the progress and workplace training of all RTW program participants through 40 hours of mentoring services offered to all participants for six months after completing the 12-week classroom and hands-on training program.
- Provide nationally recognized professional certification to RTW program participants who acquire the necessary skills and experience.

This new training approach and funding arrangement have led to variations in the delivery of the RTW program across provinces and territories. Many TECs implement the program to best meet the needs of their regional industries and communities. As mentioned previously, in Saskatchewan there is a separate funding agreement in place for each project that the STEC runs, as no pan-provincial delivery strategy currently exists. Although this allows for a more tailored approach, it has also resulted in less focus on tourism and training and more focus on employability in general.¹⁶ If either the federal or provincial governments were to opt out of the RTW program, a careful review of services offered would be required. New partners would need to come to the table if the program were to continue to offer all of the services that it currently does.

Association of Canadian Community College (ACCC) Connection

The CTHRC works closely with the Association of Canadian Community College's (ACCC's) Tourism and Hospitality Affinity Group. This affinity group brings together individual colleges with an interest in tourism and hospitality to discuss common interests, ideas, challenges, best and worst practices, effective programs, advocacy concerns, and recent developments. On occasion this group also organizes joint activities to explore and promote their common tourism and hospitality interests.

The ACCC Tourism and Hospitality Affinity Group consists of 59 college members, including two colleges from Saskatchewan: Parkland Regional College; and Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST).

CONCLUSION

The CTHRC's Ready-to-Work program is a solid initiative that focuses its attention on getting under-represented and at-risk people into the workforce. Serving the needs of a predominately Aboriginal clientele in Saskatchewan, the STEC offers participants a 32-week program that covers the occupational skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to work and succeed within the tourism and hospitality industry. The program works because it focuses on achieving results that matter: getting people ready to work. Expectations of the RTW program are moderated by the success of individual graduates. The dedication and commitment of the STEC staff, accompanied by relevant and up-to-date learning materials and techniques and nationally recognized standards and certifications, makes for a complete and thorough program. The program is recognized, valued and highly regarded by the tourism industry.

Over the past 10 years, the RTW program has launched thousands of skilled and dedicated entry-level workers into the tourism industry—all of whom have had an immediate and often substantial impact on the bottom line of tourism-related businesses. They contribute directly to the productivity of hotels, pubs, restaurants and other workplaces, and through the training and skills acquired in the program, RTW graduates are able to save employers significant training dollars and recruitment costs.

Of particular importance to Saskatchewan, the RTW program introduces Aboriginals into the tourism workforce. Members of this under-used human resource pool might not otherwise have chosen tourism as a career option.

The RTW program gives many people a chance, perhaps their only chance, to become empowered, productive and employable citizens.

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- 1 All figures are for 2003. See www.cthrc.ca/eng/page.aspx?_id=about_us.htm.
 - 2 Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, *Everyone Tourism—Annual Report 2003-2004*. The Canadian tourism industry consists of a range of activities and sub-sectors including: accommodation; adventure tourism; attractions; events and conferences; food and beverage services; outdoor recreation; transportation; travel trade; and tourism services.
 - 3 Customized data run from: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, 2003, as cited on CTHRC's website: www.cthrc.ca/eng/page.aspx?_id=labour_market.htm.
 - 4 Together with its provincial and territorial partners, the CTHRC has developed a national network of human resource programs and activities for tourism-based skills development, enhancement and recognition. Programs and activities include: national occupational standards; training and career planning tools; and professional certification. For an in-depth look at the programs and services offered through the CTHRC and provincial tourism education organizations, go to: www.cthrc.ca.
 - 5 The provincial and territorial tourism education councils that collectively, along with industry, form the CTHRC include: Alberta's Training for Excellence Corporation (ATEC); Conseil québécois des ressources humaines en tourisme (CQRHT); go2 (British Columbia); Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador (HNL); Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC); Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC); Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC); Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick (TIANB); Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia Human Resource Council (TIANS); Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island (TIAPEI); and Yukon Tourism Education Council (YTEC).
 - 6 Between 1990 and 2000, for example, employment increased in the accommodation and food services industry by 31 per cent in Saskatchewan. See www.sasknetwork.ca/html/home/lmi/overviewdoc/section3.6htm.
 - 7 Between April and May 2005, interviews were conducted with tourism-related business owners, operators, managers and employees as well as CTHRC and STEC staff. A list of organizations participating in this study is provided at the end of the report.
 - 8 Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, *Everyone Tourism—Annual Report 2003-2004*. Available from the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council: www.cthrc.ca/eng.
 - 9 CTHRC, *Everyone Tourism*: www.cthrc.ca/eng.
 - 10 The STEC works closely with Band Offices, Tribal Councils and other employment and community centre facilities to identify and recruit individuals into the program. The RTW program is advertised in local and band newspapers, in community and band offices, and in employment centers.
 - 11 See www.stec.com/default.asp?page=33.
 - 12 Murray Lyons (bus. ed.), "City's economy booming—Saskatoon tops among medium-sized Canadian cities," *StarPhoenix*, p. D1. June 18, 2005.
 - 13 See www.sasknetwork.ca/html/home/lmi/overviewdoc/section5.4.htm.
 - 14 The Sector Council Program funds the administrative and coordination aspect of RTW; all other support listed comes from other HRSDC programs.
 - 15 SPR Associates Inc., *Evaluation of Tourism Careers for Youth: Phase III Final Report* (Ottawa: Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, March 2003), p. iii.
 - 16 SPR Associates Inc., *Evaluation of Tourism Careers for Youth: Phase III Final Report* (Ottawa: Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, March 2003), p. ii.

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The Ready-to-Work Program: Opening Doors to the Tourism Industry by *Douglas Watt*

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