

# Apprenticeship Training Program for Postal Workers

<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Provider</b>	Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and Canada Post Corporation (CPC)
<b>Location</b>	<a href="#">Canada</a>
<b>Highlights</b>	PROJECT SUMMARY: An apprenticeship training program that enables qualified employees to upgrade skills and access promotional opportunities. There are two training streams: industrial maintenance technicians and vehicle mechanics.
<b>Overview</b>	<p><b>HOW THE PROGRAM STARTED</b></p> <p>In 1995, CUPW and Canada Post Corporation (CPC) launched an apprenticeship training program for postal workers. It was the first collaboration of its sort in a 30-year relationship and continues to deliver benefits to both parties and current employees.</p> <p>The program evolved from the 1994 contract negotiations. CUPW members, especially those in the Technical Services Group, had become increasingly concerned with the escalating contracting out of their work and the absence of training opportunities. They wanted CUPW members to have the opportunity to apply for the skilled trades positions that were being awarded to private contractors and “off the street” applicants.</p> <p>CUPW crafted a bargaining strategy that focused on the company priority of modernization of its sortation equipment and the concomitant need to hire trained technical services personnel. The convergence of union and employer interest enabled the parties to reach agreement on the initiative. It included a sharing of formal authority for the program and union involvement in its development and implementation.</p> <p>The parties mandated the “Service Expansion and Workplace Development Committee” (SEWDC) to establish the program and to do so within one year of contract signing. Training would be composed of two streams: vehicle mechanics and industrial maintenance technicians. Both streams combine classroom and mentored on-the-job training. The classroom portion is delivered by community colleges (public post-secondary institutions) across the country. The on-the-job portion, which comprises the bulk of the training, takes place in Canada Post facilities. The program credits trainees for prior learning and work experience, and is delivered in French and English (Canada’s two official languages).</p> <p>The first training program was ready in 1996, meeting the ambitious timeline established in the contract. The first apprentice took up his position as Vehicle Mechanic Apprentice in the Canada Post garage in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Prior to that, he had been sorting mail in</p>

	<p>the Halifax Mail Processing Plant.</p>
<p><b>Issues Targeted</b></p>	<p><b>LOGISTICS</b></p> <p>The Industrial Maintenance Program works with three partners, all of which are integral to its success. These are: George Brown College (Toronto); British Columbia Institute of Technology, and Collège Édouard-Montpetit (Montreal). The Vehicle Mechanic Program partners with community colleges in Toronto, Ottawa, Halifax, Calgary, Windsor, Edmonton and Vancouver.</p> <p>Apprentice positions are open to any CUPW urban operations member. Admission is based on seniority with half of the positions targeted for women. Senior applicants are required to pass an aptitude test. The most senior applicants who pass the test are offered the positions.</p> <p>The industrial maintenance technicians training program consists of two levels. Both the three- and four-year programs include Pre-Course Learning Activities, In-School and Field Activities.</p> <p>The Vehicle Mechanic training is offered as a Red Seal Program and delivered in community colleges across the country. Red Seal is a federal program that allows qualified tradespeople to practise their trade anywhere in Canada.</p> <p>Program participants (both streams) learn a combination of the following trade skills: mechanical, electrical, electronics, pneumatics, computers, hydraulics, plant operations, vehicle repair and maintenance.</p>
<p><b>Key Features</b></p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES AND METHODS</b></p> <p>The joint goals of CUPW and the employer were stated as follows: to allow employees to recognize their potential and move to higher skilled positions; to enhance the capability and performance of the CPC maintenance function; to update core skills of existing employees; to assist and encourage skill and knowledge upgrades including new technology; to provide visible recognition for the occupation and competencies of industrial maintenance technicians; to contribute to the development of the skills of the national workforce; to open opportunities for non-traditional entrants.</p> <p>The Service Expansion and Workplace Development Committee is responsible for job creation projects and training. The collective agreement gives the union and management equal representation and equal decision-making authority in the committee, as well as equal control over its funds. The monies accrue from contractually obligated deposits from</p>

	<p>the corporation.</p> <p>A National Apprenticeship Coordinator works for the joint committee. Selected by the union from the Technical Services Group, the coordinator is responsible for all program operations and is supported by structures that include sponsors, plant coordinators and superintendents. The sponsors provide their expertise and experience. Trainees observe, practise and demonstrate new skills in their presence. The sponsors give feedback and sign off on learning objectives as warranted.</p> <p>Members and management had various opportunities for input on design and delivery of the industrial maintenance technicians' program. A joint process, facilitated by Humber College (Toronto), enabled members and management representatives from plants across the country to identify the skills and knowledge required by technicians in the workplace. Trainee evaluations are ongoing and provide guidance and rich information.</p> <p>Despite the joint committee's formula of equal formal authority and workload, and the strong outcomes to date, the union currently shoulders most of the responsibility for the program and is viewed as the program leader.</p>
<p><b>Key Results</b></p>	<p><b>BENEFITS</b></p> <p>Substantial gains have accrued to the employer as a result of the Apprenticeship Training Program: technicians versed in the latest technology and knowledge; a strong commitment of graduates to remain in the job for which they were trained; improved employee morale as workers see new job and training opportunities; improved productivity; better safety performance as a result of training.</p> <p>For the trainees, the benefits are also significant. Upon completion, a guaranteed job as a mechanic or maintenance technician, a job that pays the highest postal worker wage; training in portable technical skills that can be used in other industries; certification by a recognized post-secondary educational institution that will be recognized by other employers. Moreover, the program pays the trainees a regular salary and all expenses, including childcare, if necessary, throughout the training period, which is four to five years. As well, workers accrue all the entitlements they would gain in their regular positions, such as seniority, pension benefits, vacation leave, sick leave, and union representation.</p> <p>Project objectives and effectiveness were also based on equity goals. Significant progress in hiring women had been made in numerous functions such as letter carriers, wicket clerks and sortation workers. However, prior to the launch of this program, there were only 2 women out of 900 technical service employees. The union secured Canada Post agreement that half of the apprentice positions open to employees not already working in technical services would be offered to women, on the basis of seniority and test results.</p>

	<p><b>IMPACTS OF PROGRAM AND PRACTICES</b></p> <p>Overall, trainees have earned extremely high marks in the college part of the program and performed very well on the job. Their college marks are even more remarkable because most participants have been out of school for many years. The colleges have consistently commended the trainees for their skill development and knowledge outcomes, both of which have enabled them to think critically about the tasks and functions associated with the new position. Students' renewed capabilities in learning how to learn serve them well in all aspects of their lives.</p> <p><b>EQUITY GOALS AND OUTCOMES</b></p> <p>The union employed numerous innovative approaches to achieve its equity objective of 50% women in apprenticeship positions. In 1999, it succeeded in negotiating the following language into the collective agreement: "The Committee shall make a particular effort to encourage women to apply for admission to apprenticeship programs and training programs." (Article 40.21). It also negotiated two gender-based seniority lists to overcome the problem of women's lower seniority that blocked their access to the program. This was a major step for the union with respect to the principle of seniority as it had never departed from a single seniority list. However, despite these measures and periodic union outreach initiatives, women's participation in the program remained minimal until 2007. In that intake, women filled half of the apprentice positions (13 out of 26).</p>
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<b>Sectors</b>	<p><a href="#">Support Services</a></p>
<b>Projects</b>	<p><a href="#">Union-Led Work-Related Learning</a></p>
<b>Sponsors</b>	<p><a href="#">Business: large (500+)</a> <a href="#">Trade Union, Labour federation or Labour-affiliated Group</a></p>
<b>Target Audiences</b>	<p><a href="#">Apprentices</a> <a href="#">Workers</a></p>
<b>Challenges</b>	<p><b>SUCESSES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p>Program results have been impressive. Since its inception, approximately 300 workers have graduated and most are working at their new Canada Post jobs. Management, despite its ambivalent participation, has acknowledged the value of the curriculum and the benefits of the program on the work floor. The union is particularly pleased about the</p>

	<p>opportunities that the program brings to members to enter skilled trades jobs, or to upgrade their abilities if they are already in the trades group. These opportunities simply did not exist prior to the advent of the program.</p> <p>Despite the leading edge practices adopted by the union, gender equity goals remain elusive, but attempts to reach specific targets yielded rich experience and information for the union. CUPW has a strong commitment to the goals it set and hopes to put supplementary supports in place that include introductory trades courses – bridging programs – that will enable women to familiarize themselves with both the jobs and the course, with women graduates acting as co-instructors. CUPW also publicizes its anti-harassment policies to ensure all members the best learning environment possible. These and numerous other strategies are under discussion and are hoped to be put in place before the next courses roll out.</p>
<p><b>Sources</b></p>	<p>FURTHER REFERENCES</p> <p>“Apprenticeship Training in the Canadian Post Office: The Union’s View of the Union’s Idea,” John Macdonald, Research Specialist, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, presented at the Second International Conference on Training, Employability and Employment, Monash University in conjunction with the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management at Leeds University Business School, September 2005.  <a href="http://www.cupw.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/5263/la_id/1.htm">http://www.cupw.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/5263/la_id/1.htm</a></p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<p>WHAT’S NEXT</p> <p>The current intake finishes in the summer of 2011. The September 2011 intake is on hold until a major review is finalized and the curriculum is updated. CPC has conveyed its concerns with respect to the costs and length of both streams The union reports that the corporation’s lack of timely response is delaying intake of new apprentices. CUPW has identified the need for a new program on high-end electronics that it will seek to incorporate into the training. Current training targets the middle range of technical skill but new equipment and adaptations require technicians with higher skill levels. A surge of anticipated retirements is creating both opportunities and challenges for the union, and for the program in general. Most of the vacancies will occur in Montreal and Toronto. Even now, Toronto has 20 technical vacancies which the employer has been unable to fill, even from the outside. This clearly demonstrates the need for more apprentices and programs. However, Canada Post is examining ways that it can reduce the number of equipment-containing plants (and the jobs in them) by consolidating mail processing. Achieving a successful outcome to this as well as expanding the highly valued training programs are top priorities for the union.</p>