

Becoming State of the Art: Research Brief No.1

Industry Shared Approaches

Aligning Literacy and Essential Skills with Economic Development

This is the first in a series of research briefs on **Becoming State of the Art**, a series that encourages innovation in the delivery of literacy and essential skills to achieve results that matter. The series seeks to explore the role literacy and essential skills can play in supporting local economic and workforce development.

This brief examines the concept of industry shared essential skills. **Industry shared** is an approach successfully being applied to workforce initiatives across the globe. This approach directly involves employers and service providers in the co-design and delivery of training in order to leverage employment opportunities for job-seekers with complex needs.

In order for Ontario to attract, retain and grow business, we not only need to raise the literacy and essential skill levels of individuals, but must also align the development and deployment of these skills to the needs of local industry. This in turn, will facilitate local economic development.

Over the past decade, employment and training service providers have grown to understand the need to expand relationships with employers and industry groups. Furthermore, successive governments have encouraged partnerships between industry and literacy groups – after all, given the importance of essential skills to both groups, there is a common interest. Yet, too often the relationships or partnerships are not entirely authentic in nature, leading to a lack of occupational-specific skills for program participants that would lead to better opportunities for job-seekers and employers.

The challenge is two-fold. On one hand, service providers may ask the legitimate question of whether the public system should fund specific occupational skills that are seen by some as the responsibility of an employer. On the other hand, employers often find the training system to be both complex and difficult to navigate. However, the convergence of emerging technologies, fiscal restraint and projected skills shortages make the importance of re-calibrating the needs of industry and potential employees with essential skills delivery all the more urgent.

Essential Skills Ontario has been thinking about how we can support and build on the skills of the 900,000 working-age Ontarians

without a high school diploma. We are aware that employers will only locate or expand operations when they are confident that appropriately-skilled individuals will be available when they need them. While some economists and labour market analysts see a bleak future for Ontarians without a high school diploma, this does not need to be the case. Industry, business associations and government economic development offices are seeing the importance of tapping into underutilized labour pools as a workforce strategy to overcome our projected labour shortages in the coming years. To capitalize on this economic imperative, we need to connect our employment and training services to industry needs. Most importantly, Ontario's businesses need individuals with industry-relevant skills to stay competitive.

Other jurisdictions have already shifted the focus of adult literacy and essential skills programs; elsewhere, literacy and essential skills programs are no longer a feeder system into other forms of institutional training. Rather, programs have moved towards a demand-side approach that is geared to the immediate labour market needs of employers. In the context of this paradigm shift, literacy and essential skills programs have become part of a competitive advantage in both attracting industry and supporting economic development while providing people with the appropriate skill sets needed for their labour market success.

How do we change this equation?

Charles Leadbeater, a leading authority on innovation and creativity and an advisor to the United Kingdom's Department of Education, notes that innovation in program design will come from merging elements from existing approaches into new and more effective forms, rather than an altogether 'new' idea (Leadbeater 2012). The notion of innovating social service delivery has been echoed by Diane Finley, the Minister for Human Resource and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC): "Certainly, complex and persistent social challenges remain despite the various approaches that all levels of government have undertaken... It's also clear that some of the conventional approaches to these problems have not always achieved the results we had hoped for" (Finley 2012). Can we achieve better labour force results through the combined efforts of business and training organizations? For Ontario, this is a promising concept.

Employers and industry associations are very familiar with the emerging technology and the impacts on occupations, while trainers and essential skills providers have the ability to understand training challenges and develop programming around that need. So what could an effective relationship look like?

Defining the Word **INDUSTRY**

An **industry** is the most specific component representing a group of enterprises that produce similar products or provide similar services.

An **industry sector** is a group of firms sharing some commonality, which may be the product, the inputs or the skill sets of employees.

An **industry cluster** is a geographical concentration of industries that gain performance advantages through co-location. Competitive advantage is gained by the interdependent connections to those enterprises that share input needs and provide complementary services, including logistics, consultants, education and training providers, financial institutions, professional associations and government agencies.

Table 1

There are a number of examples in Ontario and in other jurisdictions where the interests of industry and education have been married in a way that mutually benefits both business and job-seekers. There are two common and fundamental elements in systems that have shown demonstrable impacts. First, in these jurisdictions industry has played a central role in the planning, development and delivery of training. Second, in order to develop sustainable partnerships, governments in these regions have understood that both service providers and industry have to be given greater freedom and regional flexibility to design and deliver effective training. More succinctly, industry has become an equal partner in the training system and an industry shared approach has offered a targeted means for employment and training services to connect with specific industries and specific occupations.

What does an industry shared approach look like?

At a speech to the Economic Club of Canada, Glen Murray, the Ontario Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) spoke about how technological acceleration is blurring the lines between education and labour market participation. Minister Murray noted that "What is happening in the new economy is that

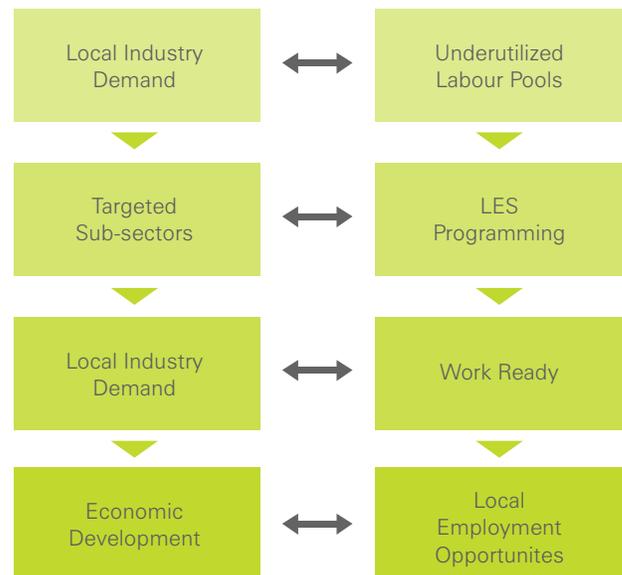
the wall is being erased between the classroom and the workplace” (Murray 2012). He is not alone in recognizing the integration of work and training. Various jurisdictions are responding to the challenge by reconstructing the focus of the employment and training system towards economic development. A closer examination of these models and their measures of success can help us think about what we want Ontario’s system to look like and what role literacy and essential skills might play in this system (see Diagram 1).

In the United States, this shift towards integrating essential skills with a vocational and/or an industry-oriented model is often described as a ‘Sectorial Strategy’. Indeed, most of the U.S. employment and training system is undergoing radical innovation. This revamped strategy for adult basic skills programming has shifted its objectives from an approach that focuses learners to additional educational credentials, towards a more strategic targeted approach that addresses and supports local and regional economic development.

The United Kingdom is re-engineering its training system (including literacy and language training) by means of the ‘Employer Ownership of Skills’ program that moves the focus of workforce training from institutional funding to industry-led funding. In Queensland Australia, the state-wide *Skill Plan* has set forth a range of actions that is dedicated to measuring employment needs, skilling and labour market development at the local level through demonstrated partnerships with industry groups. This plan has a particular focus on industry skills and providing

employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, which are explicitly tied to local labour demand. As examples of industry shared approaches, each of these systems is designed to fit the needs of industry, employers and potential workers who want to improve their skills and advance their careers.

Diagram 1: Literacy and Essential Skills (LES)



The *SkillWorks* initiative in Boston, Massachusetts is employing an industry shared approach. This five-year effort is focused on helping low-income individuals, especially those on social assistance, acquire the skills they need to improve labour force attachment. Like many similar initiatives, *SkillWorks* programs, which require genuine employer engagement and external evaluations of their project, has concluded the following:

Although most workforce development initiatives strive to promote employer engagement, in reality instances of such engagement are fairly rare. But the *SkillWorks* effort provides a variety of examples of true employer engagement, in which employers are working on an active, on-going basis with provider agencies and institutions of higher education to design curricula, assess participant candidates, evaluate progress, and refine interventions for both job seekers and incumbent workers.

SkillWorks engaged employers in sectors identified in the local economy with both immediate and longer-term needs focusing on entry-level healthcare, hospitality and related occupations. Comprised almost entirely of those on social assistance, the four pre-employment programs had a cumulative completion rate of 87% and employment rate of 78% in “target sector” jobs over the five years. Starting wage rates also showed significant benefit to the training received with averages of \$11-\$13 per hour – considerably higher than the then current Massachusetts minimum wage of \$7 per hour.

SKILLSWORKS, MASSACHUSETTS

Source: Hebert, Scott, Beth Segal, Devon Winey and Liana LoConte (2006). *SkillWorks Initiative: Year End Evaluation Report Year 2*. Abt Associates and Mt. Auburn Associates.

Industry shared essential skills training for non-high school graduates is becoming common in most developed countries, and its companion piece of *Career Pathways* is both lauded and replicated across many jurisdictions. In New Zealand, comparable case studies on a range of literacy and language programs fully indicate that shared industry practice combined with vocational skills and career pathways resulted in greater measurable increases in student persistence, progress and outcomes when compared to traditional approaches (New Zealand Department of Labour 2010).

Research from the *Hamilton Project*, a division of the Brookings Institute which produces innovative policy proposals on how to create a growing economy that benefits Americans, suggests that industry shared training is the most effective workforce development approach for non-high school graduates. This is because it directly coordinates training providers with employers and industry partners to ensure that program participants receive those skills that are in demand, and includes career-oriented counseling that steers trainees to the most valuable coursework (Hamilton Project 2011). These programs focus specifically on technical and vocational skills - and it is this emphasis that directly translates to better jobs and better wages for program participants. For example, a recent random-assignment study of an industry shared workforce development program shows significant positive impacts for program participants – most of whom are characterized as being hard-to-serve based on standard indicators. Program participants earned 18% more than control group members in the first year and more than 30% in the second year and were more likely to work. Most importantly, participants worked more consistently and in jobs that offered benefits (Public/Private Ventures 2010).

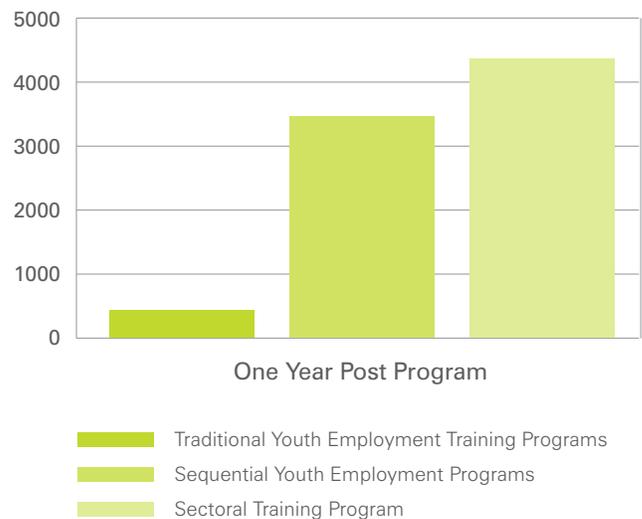
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PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES 2010

The final findings of the *Hamilton Project* are important not only to program participants but also to government, given the impetus to move underutilized labour pools receiving long-term income support into sustainable employment opportunities. This means more people can contribute as taxpayers while reducing employment insurance and long-term social assistance costs.

The outcomes of this research demonstrate that among the different programs currently in place in the United States, industry shared

Diagram 2:
Impact on Earnings One Year After Training



Source: The Hamilton Project (2011). Building America's Job Skills with Effective Workforce Programs: A Training Strategy to Raise Wages and Increase Work Opportunities. Pg. 16, CLASP

training produces the most significant impact on annual earnings. Closer to home in Hamilton, Ontario, the Canadian Steel Trade & Employment Congress (CSTEC) has implemented an industry shared approach that is serving the needs of both the industry and their workers. CSTEC is working to update the industry's understanding of essential skills to better align with new and emerging workplace realities. CSTEC has worked with employers, unions, education and training institutions, and governments to offer training courses designed in a format that can be applied to specific workplaces and cover four key areas of skill development: essential skills, foundation skills, general technical skills and steel industry-specific skills. CSTEC's training programs can serve as a template for how literacy and essential skills can work with local industry clusters. By incorporating essential skills and the right technical and industry-specific skills into a format that serves the needs and aspirations of both local employers and workers, programming can assist in both enterprise development and in improving client outcomes.

How do industry shared approaches work?

Industry shared approaches to workforce development aim to address the mismatch of supply and demand in labour markets. These approaches offer an opportunity to build on the current

literacy and essential skills models. Based on the considerable evidence to date, industry shared approaches are able to penetrate regional industry clusters and are applied or tailored to local and regional labour market needs. At a program level, they shift the focus from a traditional human capital supply-side education approach to a dual-customer employment and training focus that capitalizes on local industry demands while improving economic outcomes for job-seekers and employers alike. Industry shared approaches have an implicit understanding that the training system should act as a human resource management service wherein both trainees and employers are customers.

Given the positive data regarding participants' labour market success and the direct ties to economic development, most federal or state-funded projects in the United States now require the *explicit* participation of an employer or industry group in order to access training funds for participants with complex needs.

These elements of industry shared approaches to workforce development have the potential to address talent gaps by achieving three main goals simultaneously: (i) easing skill shortages by increasing workers' skills; (ii) improving productivity by targeting selected industry sub-sectors and occupational clusters; and (iii) enhancing regional competitiveness by supporting economic development by addressing local industry demands.

Several years ago, Lake Land College in Illinois launched a *Transportation Bridge Program* which helps students who have developmental reading and writing challenges succeed in obtaining a transportation certificate. Lake Land College worked in collaboration with John Deere to develop curriculum and hands-on activities which include paid internships. To create the bridge, Lake Land College contextualized the curriculum to include the actual technical materials from John Deere. The bridge course includes an introduction to the auto technology workplace, technical reading applications, Automotive Service Excellence Certification and the use of work-based scenarios to practice appropriate listening, reading and communication skills. Students in the course are assigned a project mentor from John Deere, with whom they are required to meet throughout the course to support their success.

LAKE LAND COLLEGE, ILLINOIS

Source: Strawn, Julie (2011). *Farther Faster: Six Promising Programs Show How Career Pathways Bridges Help Basic Skills Students Earn Credentials that Matter.*

When The Aspen Institute studied the success of industry sector-based approaches, four common principles that drove improved and sustained program outcomes for both industry and the vulnerable were identified:

- 1. Industry shared workforce initiatives must target a specific occupation or set of occupations within an industry, based on the potential that exists for providing employment opportunities in specific geographic communities.**
 - Target specific occupations that are entry-level/emerging middle-skilled.
 - Targeted occupations should be generally abundant and accessible to clients.
 - Training for specific occupations must be delivered in areas and communities where they are in demand.
 - Targeted occupations could potentially act as a ladder towards higher wage jobs in that particular industry.
- 2. Industry shared workforce initiatives must be engaged in and add value to the industry they target.**
 - Programming is agile and addresses the current needs of industry, specific occupational labour market demands and skills shortages.
 - Targets key regions and communities where opportunities are present.
 - Programming is delivered in a flexible and expedient manner which addresses the customers' needs.
- 3. Industry shared workforce initiatives must aspire to leverage employment opportunities for clients of literacy and essential skills programming, including those on social assistance/disadvantaged job seekers.**
 - Emphasis is placed on connecting clients with employment opportunities.
 - Programs uniquely combine meeting the workforce needs of industry and the additional supports needed for clients to succeed.
- 4. Industry shared workforce initiatives act as a lever to create systemic changes that benefit disadvantaged job seekers, specific industries and employers.**
 - Emphasis is placed not only on providing training, but also on creating innovative ways to collaborate with other parties – employers, consumers, community organizations, educational institutions and/or policy makers.
 - Help improve the systems that affect training, recruitment, hiring, job retention and promotion within an industry.
 - Inform policies in terms of employment and training.

The idea for developing an Artisan Baking Bridge at Moraine Park Technical College sprouted from discussions with an area employer, Festival Foods, who expressed interest in culinary training for its incumbent employees. Partnering with Festival Foods, and later with other local grocery stores, bakeries and restaurants, Moraine Park created the Baking Essentials Certificate, a one-semester program to serve a variety of student populations – including English Language Learners and Adult Basic Education students. The program blends occupational and basic skills education and includes extensive employer participation. Over 80% of students found employment in the industry and saw the combined elements of English and vocational skills as the primary contributor to their employment success.

MORAINÉ PARK TECHNICAL COLLEGE, WISCONSIN

Source: Center On Wisconsin Strategy (2011). Wisconsin Bridges Case Study: Artisan Baking/Culinary Bridge.

When business is provided with the opportunity to see the value in industry shared approaches to programming, they more readily engage in both program design and provide ongoing investment in current and future workers. This in turn supports the development of a more sustainable framework for employment and training services.

Industry shared practices and *Career Pathways* models in these other jurisdictions directly evolved from a number of adult basic education programs scattered across the United States. These programs saw the challenges their clients were facing in accessing employment and tried to do something different. Policy makers saw the results and now others have fully adopted this evidence-driven approach. Ontario's literacy and essential skills providers have a similar opportunity to move programming into a more effective labour market strategy.

What are the dividends for employers?

Recruitment and retention are facets often overlooked within employment and training systems. According to Anil Verma in his recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Working Paper, *Skills for Competitiveness: Country Report for Canada* “[m]ost of the Provincial funding spent on training is for ‘downside’ adjustment, i.e., to rehabilitate workers displaced by merger, closure, tech change or other disruptions. Monies

spent on upgrading skills of current employees, so-called ‘upside’ training, is much more limited in scope and in quality” (Verma 2012). One of his suggestions is for the province to work more closely with employers to understand what skills are in demand and bring about a better supply and demand skills match (Verma 2012). His suggestion is essentially an industry shared approach, one where local stakeholders have a shared responsibility for workforce and local economic development.

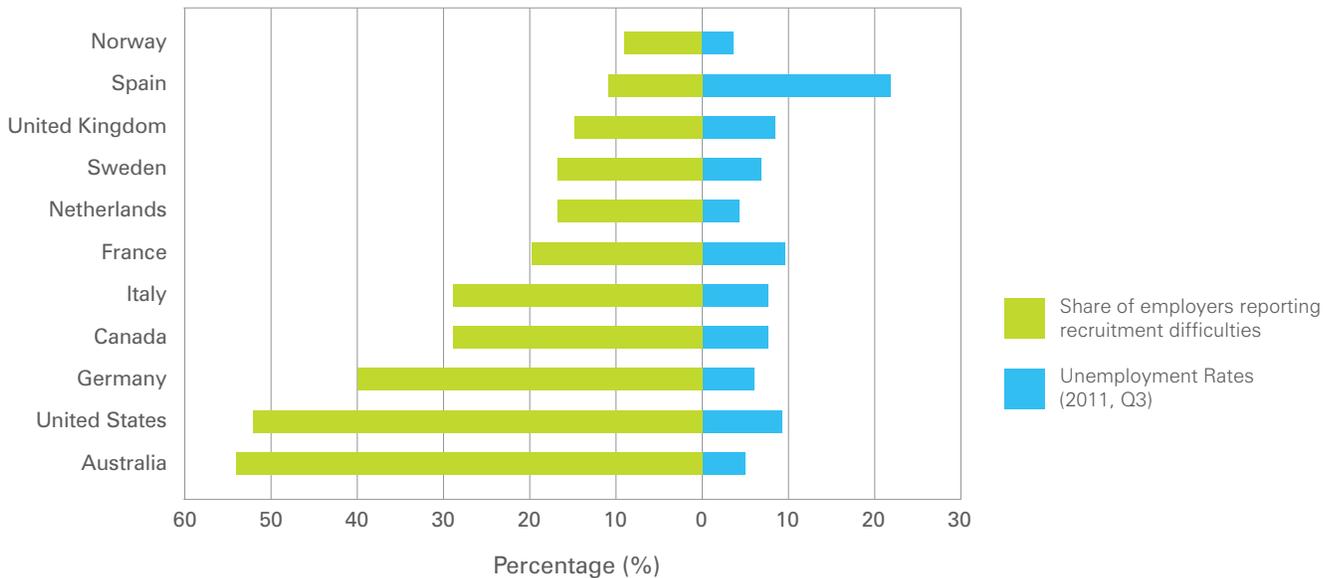
Across many jurisdictions local stakeholders are beginning to recognize the importance of skills and how they contribute to economic growth. Skills strategies and industry shared approaches to workforce development focus on building the right combination of skills – skills that industry needs, skills that can be utilized and skills that are needed to strengthen industry and community competitiveness. Another recent OECD paper, *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies* (2012) highlights the emerging challenges countries face in terms of employer skills shortages (see Diagram 3). The OECD advocates for developing strategic skills policies and investment in skills that transform lives and drive economies.

Many OECD countries are facing recruitment challenges and are recognizing that having a large pool of unemployed individuals does not necessarily imply that employers will be able to find appropriately skilled workers to fill their vacancies. To adapt to these emerging skills shortages, adjustments in the employment and training system need to consider emerging skill demands to meet employers' skills requirements. In addition to recruitment challenges, an Industry Canada study found that skills shortages have had a negative impact on the labour productivity of small and medium-sized firms in Canada (Tang and Wang 2005). By reorienting our employment and training system to focus more towards “upside” training and in-demand skills, we can align local employment and training programs with employer demand.

Can industry shared approaches work in Ontario?

A growing number of regional industries in Ontario are investing heavily in technology in order to attain higher levels of productivity. However, the promise of productivity increases from technological change assumes the ability of the labour force to incorporate those changes into everyday work practices. Indeed, in a knowledge-driven economy all levels of employment - including entry-level or ‘lower-skilled’ employment - require higher levels of literacy and essential skills. In a forthcoming discussion paper in the *Becoming*

Diagram 3: Share of Employers Reporting Recruitment Difficulties and Unemployment Rates: OECD Selected Countries 2010 and 2011



Source: OECD 2012

State of the Art series, Essential Skills Ontario will discuss the emerging demands and increasing skills requirements necessary at all levels in the labour market; these complex essential skills are becoming more necessary to successfully function in workplace environments that are steadily becoming more technologically advanced.

Programming in Ontario, including essential skills and second language programs, have made strong efforts to provide clients with essential skills that meet broad educational and learner-centered goals. This approach has resulted in the kinds of learning objectives, approaches, strategies, designs and exit points for clients that are geared towards further education or stronger community participation. Though employment as an objective is often stated, the curriculum design and partnerships tend to lean towards more traditional educational paths. This is generally framed as a 'supply-side intervention'.

The new *Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework* (OALCF) is an important initiative in strengthening client-driven goal-oriented pathways while increasing positive outcomes for literacy and essential skills participants. However, a gap between the OALCF content and the changing skills requirements of industry has yet to be fully explored. It has always been a struggle for educators to define a more comprehensive approach to job specifications and labour market requirements, which invariably leads to confusion between the *skills required to find a job* and the *skills required to work on the job*. Focusing learning towards specific industries and

occupational clusters may provide a clearer approach to defining and delivering industry-specific skills.

For literacy and essential skills programs and the students in these programs, this might mean that a student would first examine a potential career path before pursuing an educational or training goal path. A similar approach has been used in the Ministry of Education's Specialist High Skills Major program which lets students focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Such an approach will allow students to develop clearer sightlines to employment, wherein requirements will be understood, goals will be suitable and career aspirations will support growing industries in their community.

As our labour market changes, communities and employers may look to literacy and essential skills providers to play an increasing role in economic and workforce development. Adult literacy and essential skills programming may be asked to do more to support both participants and local industry. Perhaps we need to explicitly acknowledge that employers and industry are consumers of literacy and essential skills programming, in that they are looking toward the graduates of the learning process to meet their employment needs as much as students themselves.

Literacy and essential skills service providers are well-positioned to play a role in Ontario's labour force development strategy, but only if they share the responsibility and dividends with industry.

Traditional Approach To Literacy and Numeracy Development	Industry Shared Approaches To Literacy and Essential Skills
Focus on increasing foundational skills of program participants	Focus on solving problems faced by disadvantaged individuals and local industry
Transactional	Relational
Operates within existing funding systems	Works with funding systems and industry to improve workforce talent and employment rates
Distinct boundaries that are defined by organizational roles and practices	Flexible partnerships to solve problems and enhance value
Supply-side focus on human capital development	Local economic development orientation that aligns supply and demand

Table 2

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An industry shared and labour market-oriented approach can only be achieved with the support of both literacy and essential skills practitioners and key stakeholders in government. This support from governments need not solely be financial; it is about using existing funding to be more responsive to local skill needs.

A recent policy paper from Corporate Voices raised a number of important questions. They asked, “Where will our future workers come from? How will they get the skills and experience they need to thrive in the workplace in a knowledge driven economy?”(Corporate Voices for Working Families 2011). The authors also issue a challenge to workforce preparation programs to bridge the divide between what individuals have to offer and what industry requires. Essential Skills Ontario has heard the same apprehensions from employers and a diverse range of industry associations across Ontario.

According to the most recent Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC) report, *Top Ten Barriers to Competitiveness* (2012), the number one barrier effecting the growth and prosperity of

Canadian industry is our emerging labour market shortages. This report states that “the country falls short of addressing the current and future skills needs of the workplace ... As the labour market tightens, Canadian businesses must view every person as an opportunity to contribute to the workforce” (Canadian Chamber of Commerce 2012). We are entering an era where the skills of every potential Ontario worker will be needed. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) and the Mowat Centre have also recognized the need to sharpen our employment and training system. In their report, *Emerging Stronger: A Transformative Agenda for Ontario* (2012), the OCC describes the need to advance our existing employment and training systems:

Ontario’s education and training systems are not sufficiently targeted to address skills deficits or support emerging sectors of Ontario’s economy. The workforce training system does not adequately address the needs of employers ... Ontario should adopt a comprehensive, streamlined, client-centred workforce training model to ensure that all Ontarians can acquire the skills they need to compete in a dynamic, knowledge focused labour market. Ontario’s workforce training strategy must provide workers with opportunities to upgrade their skills through all stages of their career (Mowat Centre and Ontario Chamber of Commerce 2012).

Industry shared approaches offers a concrete step in addressing the issues articulated by both the Canadian and Ontario Chambers of Commerce. Indeed, industry shared approaches can address

some of the skills shortages in our province in a pragmatic manner that benefits both local industry and job-seekers. Given that our employment and training system is understandably struggling to keep up with the emerging realities of the modern economy, an industry shared approach is something worth considering and the literacy and essential skills system is a good – and necessary – place to start.

Moving towards industry shared approaches

Considering the projected demand for skilled workers, the emerging requirements of industry and the potential value that underutilized labour can add to our local economies, literacy and essential skills service providers, government and industry can make a concerted effort to work together to improve the content, delivery and outcomes of employment and training services through a shared and clear vision of what is possible. So, how can we bridge our efforts to bring about sustainable change? Several first steps are needed.

Industry can tell programs about the skills and workers they need to:

- Be active partners in planning, implementing, executing and evaluating local employment and training services.
- Support and transfer technological capacities to the employment and training field. Help literacy and essential skills programming understand the labour force requirements of industry.

Literacy and essential skills service providers can listen to industry associations and businesses:

- Literacy and essential skills programming can work with Workforce Planning Boards, Chambers of Commerce and Regional Economic Development offices to hone strategic employment needs and develop plans for employment and training providers to help meet those needs.
- Literacy and essential skills programming can view employers as consumers and beneficiaries of their services, complementing the commitment to program participants.
- Literacy and essential skills programming can work with employers and labour unions to gain an understanding of how they can integrate industry-specific technologies and their related skill sets into program design, curriculum and practices.
- Literacy and essential skills programming and can work with other employment service providers to plan and coordinate activities together to increasing the effectiveness of their work.

Governments can provide the mechanisms that allow programs to respond to what they are hearing:

- Explore funding structures that encourage, build and provide sustainable support to literacy and essential skills services that allow for authentic partnerships to develop and deliver innovative labour market solutions.
- Streamline services for employers by breaking down the artificial delineation between second language programs for adult newcomers and literacy and essential skills programming for adult Ontarians. Most employers focus on where an employee is going and not where they come from.
- Support demonstration projects where employers, labour unions and industry associations are partners in training; demonstration sites should include robust evaluation with an eye to replicating successful initiatives.

The data and evidence from other jurisdictions regarding industry shared is compelling. Literacy and essential skills programming, which has a long history of adapting to community needs, can play an important role in moving industry shared approaches forward in the province of Ontario. As opportunities for workers with low levels of educational attainment diminish, and as industry struggles to find its skilled workforce of the future, it is critical that we work together to deliver services in innovative ways that maximize resources and share investments to achieve better results and more sustainable outcomes for the province of Ontario.

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