

Michelle Murray,
Director of Operations, HIEC

Robert De Rubeis,
Education Liaison, HIEC

Welcome!
Spring 2026

STRN Provincial
Advisory Meeting

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions
- HIEC in Context
- STRN: Progress & Insights
- WIL Spotlight: Business + Higher Education Roundtable
- Industry Insights Panel
- Advisory Dialogue & Networking

HOUSEKEEPING

Make sure to grab some lunch!

Wi-Fi : Network: Toronto Congress Centre
Access Code: **STRN2026**

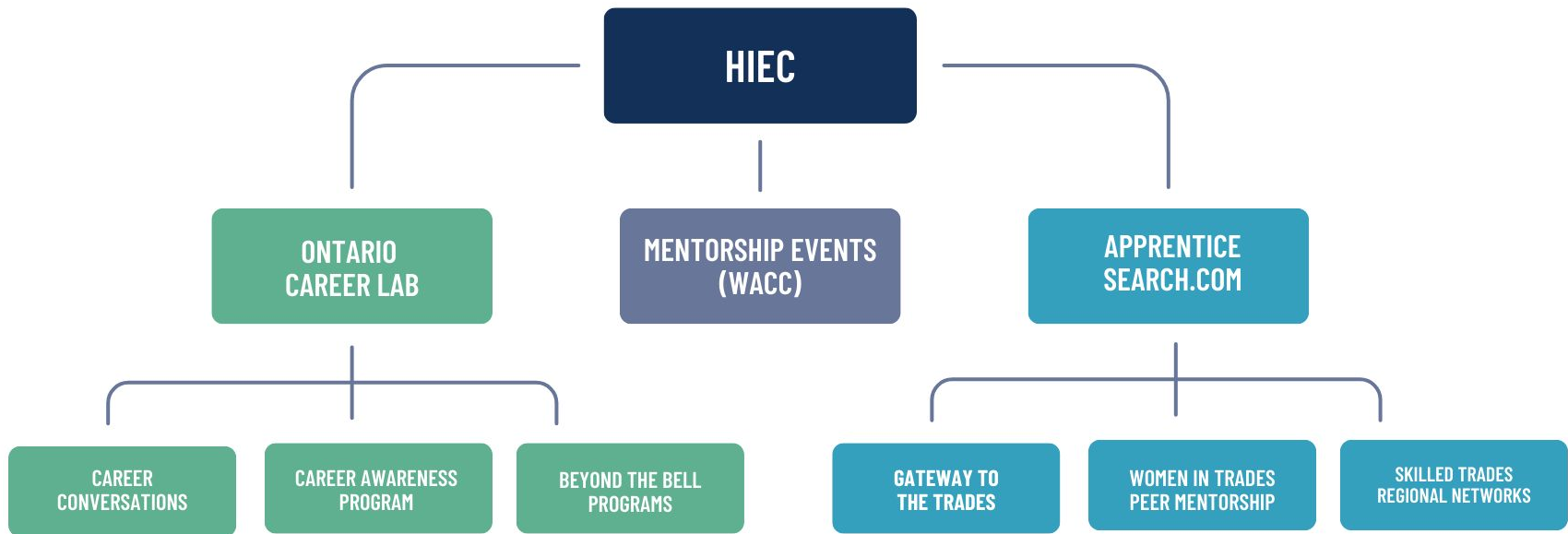
Washrooms : Down the stairs and to the left in the Shania Twain lobby

Recording in Progress: This session is being recorded for note-taking and documentation purposes only

About HIEC

Who We Are & What We Do

- 35 years of building connections between educators, employers, and youth
- Innovative not-for-profit industry-education council
- Focus areas: partnership, mentorship, and workforce development
- Delivers career awareness and development programming
- Facilitates meaningful experiential learning opportunities
- Hosts inspiring community mentorship events
- Operates The Ontario Career Lab and manages online communities focused on workforce development



Powered by:
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WHAT SKILLS ONTARIO DOES

Skills Ontario is building Ontario's skilled trades and technologies workforce. Skills Ontario enables and empowers all youth, including women and Indigenous youth, to consider a career in the skilled trades and technologies.

Engagement with students, teachers, parents, volunteers, employers, and mentors ensure its programs connect education, experience, and employment. Skills Ontario delivers in-school presentations across Ontario, host Canada's largest skills competition, run summer camps for skills development and connect students to employers.

Skills Ontario is focused on growth sectors such as construction and infrastructure, technology innovation, and hospitality services.





SKILLED TRADES REGIONAL NETWORKS

What Are Skilled Trades Regional Networks?

Skilled Trades Regional Networks (STRN)

Launched 2023–24

Strengthening partnerships between employers & school boards across Ontario to support skilled trades pathways.

Key Focus Areas:

- Expand experiential learning opportunities for secondary students
- Connect employers and educators
- Facilitate donations of tools, equipment, and resources
- Share and scale best practices

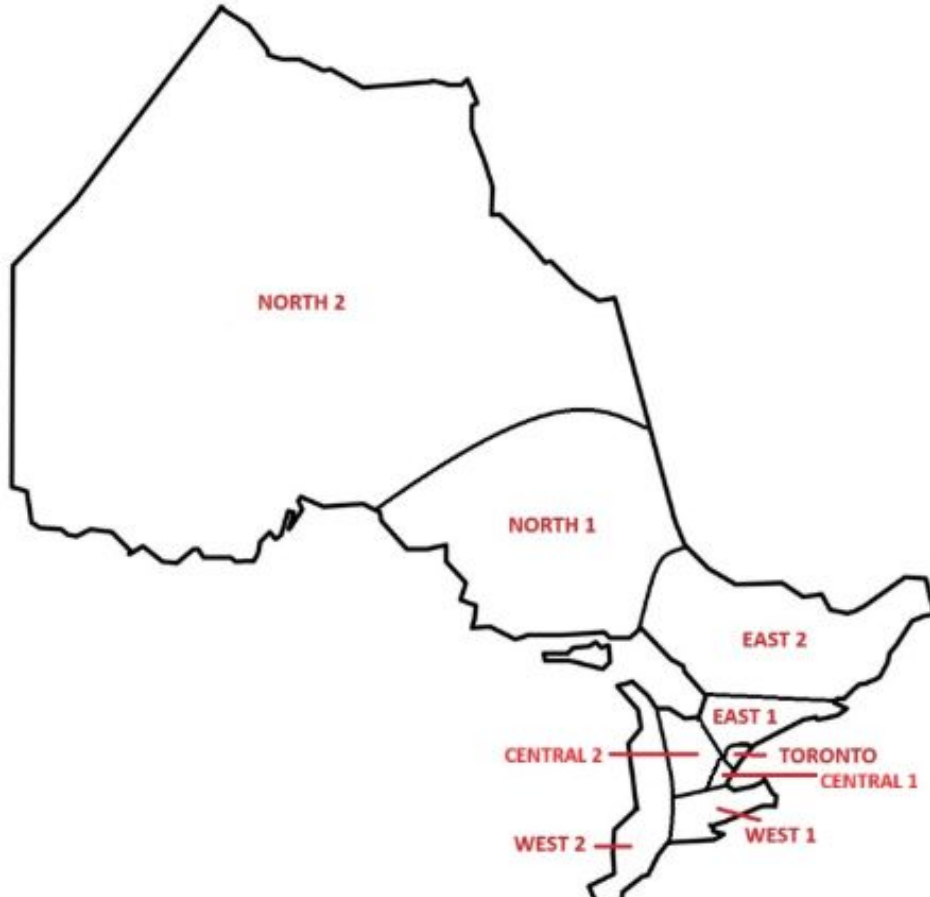
Impact: Stronger, more connected pathways for youth into the skilled trades

Skilled Trades Regional Networks

Key Activities (2025–26):

- Expand to 12 Regional Networks
- Lead Regional Meetings & Consultations
- Connect Educators & Employers for Experiential Learning
- Enhance STRN Website & Resources
- Build Industry Partnerships & Donations
- Strengthen Employer Networks

Expand to 12 Regional Networks



Network Expansion (2025–2026)

- Addition of a second Francophone network
- Establishment of a Provincial & Demonstration Schools network
- Division of the Central Region into two networks

Lead Regional Meetings & Consultations

What We Heard: Key Insights from Fall 2025 STRN Sessions:

- **Transportation is the top barrier** to student access
- **Attitude over aptitude:** soft skills drive success
- **Employers are willing**, but need simpler ways to engage
- **Low awareness** of trades pathways among students and parents
- **Educators need more support** to guide students toward trades
- **STRN plays a critical connector role** across the system

Bottom Line:

Address barriers, strengthen partnerships, and increase awareness to unlock skilled trades pathways at scale

Connect Educators & Employers for Experiential Learning

Impact to Date

- **2,500+** employers engaged (English & French)
- **500+** co-op placements (*and growing*)
- **600+** short-term experiential learning opportunities (*career talks, tours, etc.*)

Connect Educators & Employers for Experiential Learning

How It Works

1. **Submit an inquiry** through the STRN website
2. **Our team follows up** to understand your needs and confirm next steps
3. **We make the connection:**
 - Employers are connected with local schools
 - Educator requests are shared with relevant network employers
4. **Opportunities are coordinated** to support co-op and experiential learning

Enhance STRN Website & Resources

The STRN Website Provides:

- Clear information on STRN project
- Access to meetings, registration, and contacts
- Resources and updates from across the network
- Pathways for engagement and participation
- Bilingual access (English & French)



Enhance STRN Website & Resources



Enhance STRN Website & Resources



1 MIN READ

Trade Day Fridays – Made in Hamilton

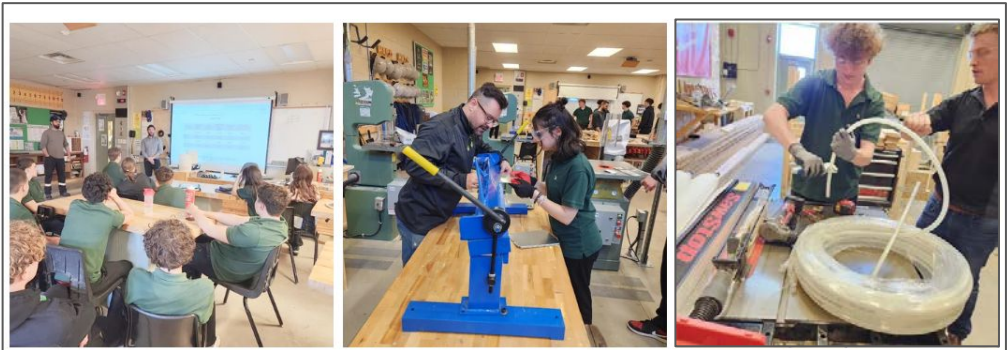
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The Skilled Trades Regional Networks is a collaborative project between the Ministry of Education, HIEC/ApprenticeSearch.com, and Skills Ontario...

1 MIN READ

Trade Day Fridays – Made in Hamilton

Updated on February 4, 2026



Enhance STRN Website & Resources

Capturing real-world success stories to support and inspire skilled trades engagement across Ontario.

Why it matters:

- Share what works
- Highlight successful partnerships
- Support system-wide learning

What's involved:

- Short interview
- Development of a shared case study



Share

Build Industry Partnerships & Donations

Year 3 Priorities:

- **Expand Access:** Equitable tools and equipment
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** Grow industry and donation pipelines
- **Increase Engagement:** In-kind support, mentorship, worksite experiences
- **Enhance Learning:** Modern tools and safety resources

How It Works

Employer expresses interest

→ Referred to Skills Ontario

Skills Ontario coordinates

→ Tracks donations and manages inventory

Matching & connection

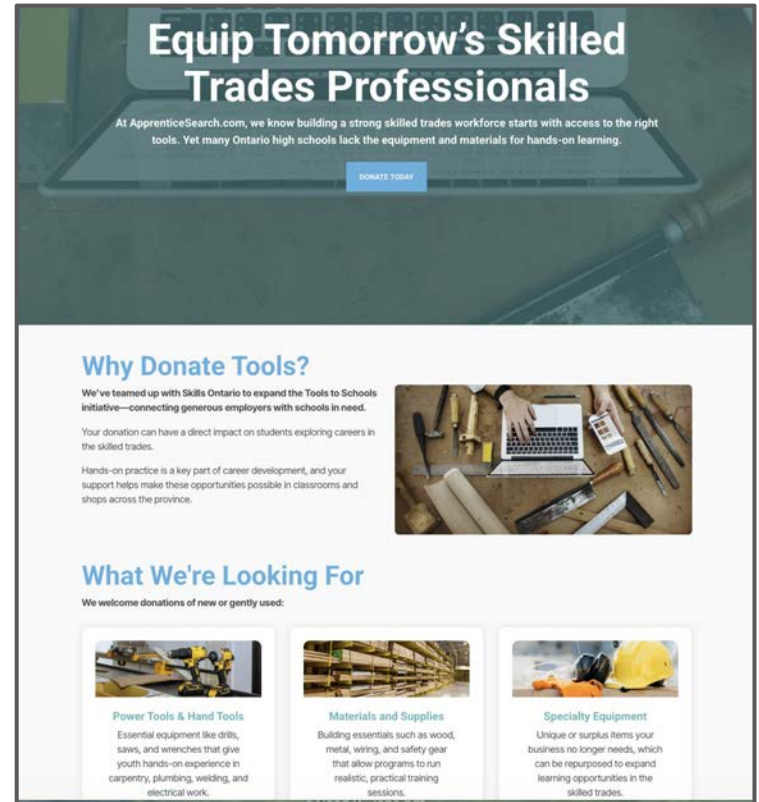
→ Aligns interested schools/boards with available donations

→ Facilitates introductions between employers and schools

Build Industry Partnerships & Donations

Employers can express interest in tool donations in the following locations:

- STRN web page
<https://strn.apprenticesearch.com/tool-donations>
- [Apprenticesearch.com](https://www.apprenticesearch.com) as part of the employer user registration



Equip Tomorrow's Skilled Trades Professionals

At Apprenticesearch.com, we know building a strong skilled trades workforce starts with access to the right tools. Yet many Ontario high schools lack the equipment and materials for hands-on learning.


[DONATE TODAY](#)

Why Donate Tools?

We've teamed up with Skills Ontario to expand the Tools to Schools initiative—connecting generous employers with schools in need.

Your donation can have a direct impact on students exploring careers in the skilled trades.

Hands-on practice is a key part of career development, and your support helps make these opportunities possible in classrooms and shops across the province.



What We're Looking For

We welcome donations of new or gently used:

- Power Tools & Hand Tools**
Essential equipment like drills, saws, and wrenches that give youth hands-on experience in carpentry, plumbing, welding, and electrical work.
- Materials and Supplies**
Building essentials such as wood, metal, wiring, and safety gear that allow programs to run realistic, practical training sessions.
- Specialty Equipment**
Unique or surplus items your business no longer needs, which can be repurposed to expand learning opportunities in the skilled trades.

Build Industry Partnerships & Donations

Tools for Schools – Impact & Momentum

- **130+ schools** requested donations
- **60+ employers engaged**, with outreach to **100+ partners**
- **150+ tools, equipment, and materials** delivered

Highlights

- **15 electronic training kits (Mohawk College)**
- **25 turbine blades (OPG)** now in active classroom use
- **HILTI partnership secured**, supporting up to **15 school boards**

Upcoming Donations:

Safety-Certified Ladders

- Donated during SOC, with certification by WSPS
- 3 school boards confirmed to receive equipment

DeWalt Tool Sets

- Distribution following Skills Canada National Competition
- Final quantities and school recipients to be confirmed

Strengthen Employer Networks



ENGLISH



FRENCH



LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT & PROVINCIAL SNAPSHOT

Spring Economic Update 2026

Building the Talent Pipeline

- 80K–100K new apprentices by 2030
- Early pathways from **K–12** → **postsecondary** → **apprenticeship**

Strengthening Employer Engagement

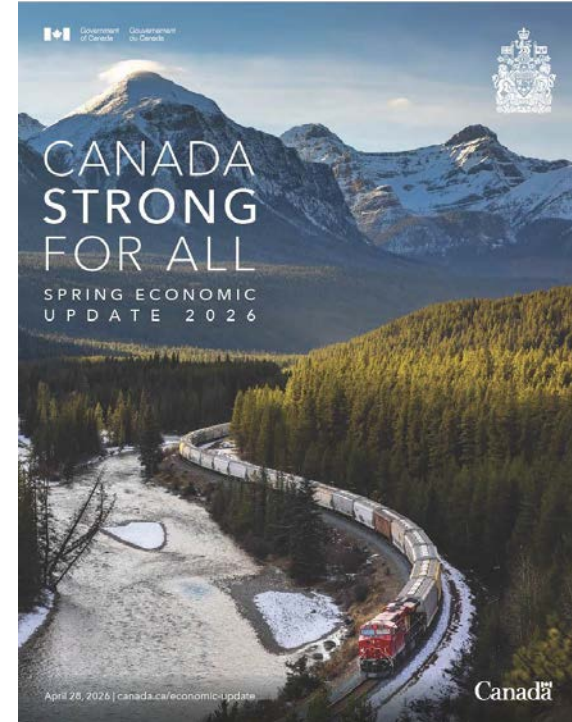
- Wage subsidies to support hiring apprentices
- Industry role in **co-designing training**

Improving Completion & Access

- Financial supports during training
- Focus on reducing barriers & attrition

Modernizing Training Systems

- Flexible, responsive apprenticeship models
- Aligning skills with **emerging industry needs**



Ontario Labour Market Snapshot

2026 ONTARIO ECONOMIC REPORT



Trades Demand Is Not Temporary

- **1 in 3 employers** report labour shortages
- Most acute in **trades-heavy** sectors
- **Skilled trades are central** to Ontario's economic future

Ontario Labour Market Snapshot

The Talent Gap

More Than a Pipeline Issue

- **58%** cite lack of skilled workers
- **56%** struggle with attraction/retention
- **42%** impacted by retirements

This is about awareness, readiness, and access

The Shift

Trades Are Becoming Tech-Enabled Careers

- Productivity is stagnating
- Tech adoption is uneven across workplaces

Students need more than technical skills:

- Digital literacy
- Adaptability
- Problem-solving

Ontario Labour Market Snapshot

Strong work is already happening – this room is proof of that! This is about moving from pockets of excellence to a system where this is the norm

Where the Gap Still Exists

- Students still experience **inconsistent access** → depends on school, program, or individual connections
- Exposure is often **episodic, not sustained** → powerful moments, but not always part of a **clear pathway**
- Employer engagement is strong, but often **transactional** → not always embedded into **ongoing learning experiences**

Ontario Career Lab: From Insight Into Action

If the challenge is exposure, timing, and connection – what's the simplest way to start?

- Give students a **real conversation with someone in the field**
- Do it **early, before decisions are made**
- Make it easy for employers to **get involved in a meaningful way**

A conversation can be the starting point – for both students and employers

We know not every employer can take a co-op student right away, but almost every employer can have a conversation!

Ontario Career Lab: From Insight Into Action

Skilled Trades Awareness & Engagement:

Career Conversations are effectively exposing students to skilled trades pathways.

Student surveys show:

- 47% of students spoke with a skilled trades Career Coach
- An additional 18% were unsure
- Nearly 50% students explicitly report engaging with a skilled trades Career Coach, while 'unsure' responses indicate that exposure may extend beyond what students clearly recognize.



Ontario Career Lab: From Insight Into Action

Influence on Career Consideration

When asked: *After participating in Career Conversations, are you more likely to consider a career in the skilled trades?"*

- 26% say "Yes"
- 41% say "Maybe"

Meaning → 67% are open to exploring skilled trades pathways

💡 Most students aren't opting out; they're in the decision-making phase

➔ **This is the moment where additional exposure matters most**



Ontario Career Lab: From Insight Into Action

Momentum Toward Action

Students are not only considering trades – they are showing intent to take next steps

Next steps include:

- Exploring skilled trades courses
- Continuing conversations with teachers, guidance, or family
- Learning more about in-school pathways (Co-op, SHSM, OYAP)

When asked about if they're considering taking one of those next steps, students were:

- **13%** extremely likely
- **30%** likely
- **34%** somewhat likely

Meaning → **77% show readiness to take a next step**

 **Interest is translating into early action**



MAKING THE CASE FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



**BUSINESS
+ HIGHER
EDUCATION**
ROUNDTABLE

WIL Spotlight: Business + Higher Education Roundtable

Andrew Bieler

Director, Research & Programs

Business + Higher Education Roundtable





INDUSTRY INSIGHTS PANEL

PANEL DISCUSSION



ISABEL DOPTA

Program Director
CareersNOW!, Food and Beverage
Ontario



**LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER
CHRIS ELLIOTT**

**CD, Commanding Officer, HMCS
Hunter, Strategic Outreach Officer,**
Royal Canadian Navy



EDDIE WALL

**Occupational Health & Safety
Instructor**
International Brotherhood of
Boilermakers Local 128



ADVISORY DIALOGUE & NETWORKING

Break Out Sessions – Table Discussions – Question 1

Theme:

Enhancing awareness and equitable access to skilled trades pathways and experiential learning

Discussion Questions:

Where are the biggest gaps between awareness of skilled trades careers and actual student participation in experiential learning?

What targeted strategies would improve access and participation, especially for underrepresented students?

Break Out Sessions – Table Discussions – Question 2

Theme:

Aligning experiential learning opportunities with the regional skilled trades workforce needs.

Discussion Questions:

How can experiential learning opportunities be better aligned with current and emerging regional labour market demands in the skilled trades?

Which sectors or trades offer the greatest opportunity for near-term impact, and how can education and industry collaborate to respond more quickly?

A workshop environment featuring a wooden workbench with a blue vise and a green vise. The background shows a wall with various tools hanging on it, including wrenches, pliers, and screwdrivers. A blue banner with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

GROUP SHARING & QUESTIONS



STRN PROJECT CONTACTS

Michelle Murray

Director of Operations, HIEC

mmurray@hiec.on.ca

Robert De Rubeis

Education Liaison, HIEC

rderubeis@hiec.on.ca



**BUSINESS
+ HIGHER
EDUCATION**
ROUNDTABLE

Building Canada's Workforce: WIL, Productivity, and the Future of the Trades

Andrew Bieler, Director of Partnerships & Development

andrew.bieler@bher.ca

BHER.ca

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The Business + Higher Education Roundtable

The Business + Higher Education Roundtable (BHER) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization with a membership of Canada's top companies and post secondary institutions.

BHER acts as a convenor and connector, bringing people together to create a thriving Canada where everyone has an opportunity to reach their potential.

Our Mission

To create opportunity
through collaboration.



Canada's nation building moment

We need **speed, scale, and execution** on major projects and initiatives to drive growth.

But:

- Productivity is lagging
- Canadians' wages are 8% below U.S. counterparts
- Our skilled workforce is misaligned with industry needs
 - Workforce capacity = binding constraint on billion-dollar projects across the Canadian economy
- Youth unemployment reached 15.6% in September 2025 (highest since 2010)
- Unemployment rates for racialized youth are even higher; e.g. the rate for Black youth is 23.2%

How can we re-engage young people in the economy and simultaneously tackle Canada's lagging productivity?



Demand Trends & Nation-Building

Rising Demand for Skilled Trades:

- STEM and the Trades pathways most clearly connect to high productivity industries
- 1.4M new trades workers are needed by 2033 to build homes, energy infrastructure and execute on nation-building projects
- Trades workforce is a crosscutting challenge: necessary to power our ambitions on AI, energy, defense, manufacturing, and major nation-building projects from Eigg Mountain Wind in Nova Scotia to Darlington New Nuclear in Ontario

In Demand Trades in Nuclear (Select)

- Ironworkers
- Steamfitters, pipefitters, and sprinkler system installers
- Sheet metal workers
- Heavy equipment operators



Demand Trends & Net-Zero

Net Zero Transition:

- Canada's transition to net-zero is also increasing and reshaping demand for skilled trades
- We need more young people pursuing careers across several in-demand trades that cut across major sectors
- Aligning the trades with net-zero means integrating new green skills into curriculum standards, climate literacy, and upskilling
- Choosing the trades is one way to align your career with sustainability and climate impact

In Demand Trades for Net-Zero Economy (Select)

- HVAC technicians
- Refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics
- Welders
- Industrial mechanics
- Millwrights, among others



WIL Benefits



Skilled Talent Pipeline

Access to skilled candidates with job ready skills can fill key roles, enhance retention, and reduce hiring costs.



Innovation

Students contribute ideas and innovations to their organization during their WIL.



Productivity

Valuable work at lower labour costs and more job readiness post-WIL.



Workforce development

WIL creates management and development opportunities for your current employees.



Spotlight: Sponsored Degrees

Sponsored degree/diploma programs are an emerging option in Canada's tech sector due to the benefits they provide to employers and students alike. York, Bow Valley College, Shopify and Carleton are among the organizations pursuing this model.

Challenges:

Canadian tech companies face declining budgets, fewer resources, and slower adoption of technologies compared to global counterparts. Technical skills gaps as well as DEI challenges related to pay and representation also impact their competitiveness.

WIL Solutions:

→ Work and study are often simultaneous, as opposed to alternating work and study terms in a co-op. This structure means long-term work experience throughout the program.

→ Employers have an ongoing relationship with the student for at least a year. Mentors are engaged throughout the program, as opposed to just a work term.

→ Sponsored degree/diploma programs help companies save recruitment costs and improve retention by utilizing PSI onboarding supports. Shopify's Dev Degree program boasts an impressive 90% conversion rate of students to FTE.



***“We look for and value non-traditional candidates. People coming from underrepresented groups, or a second career... We can create an opportunity for them to be in an environment that really does celebrate that diversity and uniqueness of perspective”
- ENGINEER***



What Makes WIL Work

- Sustained investment in people and capacity—not pilots—is what makes WIL stick and scale.
- Coordination: strong employer partnerships and system orchestration matter more than program design.
- Scale comes from alignment with real economic demand—growth sectors, not isolated opportunities.
- Simplicity and repeatability drive adoption: employers need low-friction, high-value pathways to participate.
- Menu of WIL options, from traditional to innovative WIL



WIL Reality Check

Objective:

- Explore and share expectations about how work works across generations.





WIL Design Principles

Open communication: clear expectations, defined roles, and ongoing feedback

Successful programs are designed for mutual benefit, creating value for both students and employers

Strong programs rely on partners and intermediaries to coordinate, support, and connect parties

And finally, it's about reducing barriers, whether that's sharing resources, collaborating across organizations, or low-friction models

Strong WIL doesn't just happen; it's intentionally designed, with communication at the center



BHER's WIL programs are preparing students for the job market

90%

of students are optimistic about achieving success in the workforce

89%

say they have the skills and experience to work towards their career goals

86%

say WIL helped prepare them for the workforce

And helping businesses succeed, adapt, and grow

85%

of employers say they have either hired or intend to hire students in the future

82%

say the WIL program was successful or very successful in meeting their needs

81%

report stronger post-secondary partnerships

"After completing the internship, my employer decided to hire me on for the rest of the summer outside of the program!"

– Commerce student, Concordia University



"We've had the opportunity to train people in our field and a chance to complete multiple high-priority projects that we didn't otherwise have the resources to pursue."

– Employer in the health research sector





**BUSINESS
+ HIGHER
EDUCATION**
ROUNDTABLE

Q & A



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