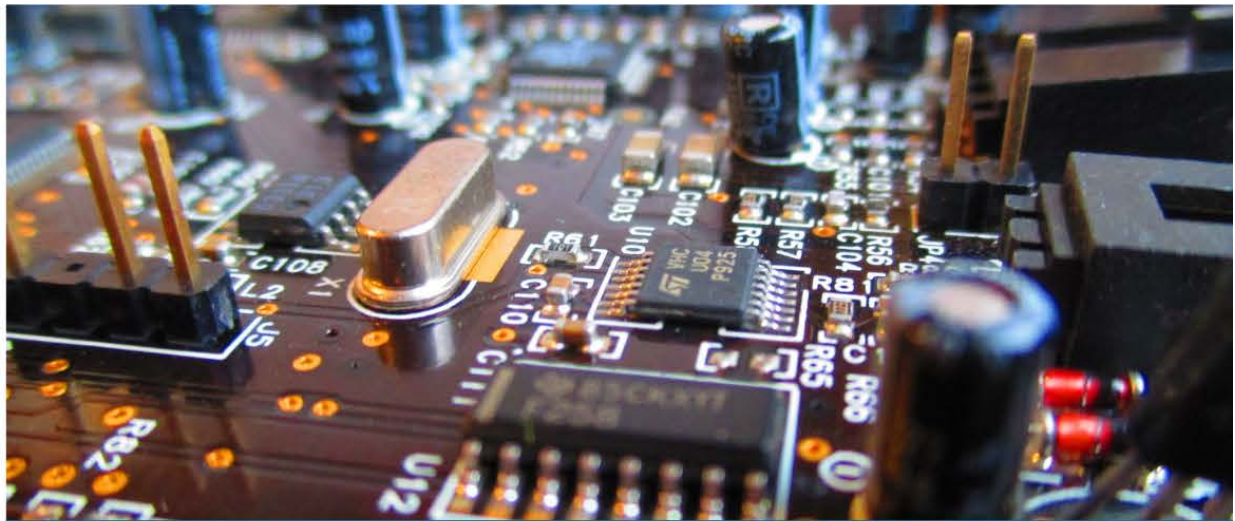


Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Final Strategy Draft



September 2020



Funded by:



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Glossary of Terms

AI: Artificial Intelligence

Apprenticeship: This form of training results in a skilled certification qualification, generally acquired through a combination of in-class and on-the-job learning

Co-op: A Cooperative program (Co-op) combines classroom education with practical, structured work experience. It differs from the apprenticeship as it is usually facilitated through an educational institution

Economic Development Officer (EDO): An employee that is responsible for planning, developing, coordinating, and implementing economic development policies, strategies, and initiatives that improve a community or region's economy

Employability Skills: Skills needed to enter, stay, and progress in the world of work. Examples of Employability Skills include essential skills such as communication, personal management skills, and teamwork skills

ESDC: Employment and Skills Development Canada

Internships: Internships are usually completed as part of the coursework, and students receive credit towards final program completion. They can be full time or part-time and can be paid or unpaid

LMI: Labour Market Information helps inform about the current job market in a geographic region, province, or nationally. It informs decisions by sharing information about jobs, companies, industries/sectors, wages, etc.

Micro-credentials: A single, shareable endorsement or attestation of a learner's achievement of specific knowledge, skills, or even competencies. Some micro-credentials utilize a badge system

NAICS: The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments to collect, analyze, and publish statistical data related to the economy

NOC: The National Occupational Classification (NOC) system is a federal statistical standard used by federal agencies to classify workers into occupational categories to collect, calculate, or disseminate data

SME: Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Study Area: For this study, the Southwest Alberta region (Study Area) is defined as the area spanning east of the BC border, south of Calgary, and west of Brooks.

Transferrable Skills: Transferable skills are skills you possess that are useful to employers across various jobs and industries. These might include skills like adaptability, organization, teamwork, or other qualities employers seek in strong candidates

Soft skills: The Collins English Dictionary defines soft skills as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive, flexible attitude

Workforce/Labour Force: People engaged in or available for work in the Study Area



Executive Summary

The Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Partnership is a stakeholder collaboration formed to help identify regional skills and competency gaps and explore ways to address them. The partnership comprises Lethbridge College, Alberta SouthWest, Economic Development Lethbridge, SouthGrow, Community Futures Alberta Southwest, Vulcan County, and Town of Taber.

The Regional Skills Study is designed to support greater alignment between job vacancies of local employers with those looking for work. For this study, the Southwest Alberta region is defined as the area spanning east of the BC border, south of Calgary, and west of Brooks.

The goal of this project is a strategy that offers tangible solutions to local and regional challenges related to the labour market, ensuring that resources are being best allocated and that efforts are coordinated for maximum results informed through:

- An understanding the technical and core competencies skills gaps in the region, the causes of those gaps and the impact they are having on economic activity
- Identifying methods employers use to address these gaps
- Identifying opportunities for underrepresented groups to fill these gaps with specific training and
- How employers, regional development agencies, post-secondary institutions, and other stakeholders cooperate to address the challenges.

This strategy has been created to support individual community and regional efforts that will ensure the Southwest Alberta Region has a productive and valued workforce to meet the needs of local employers and contribute to the local and regional economic competitiveness currently and into the future.

Methodology – Phased Approach

The project was delivered in three phases, each resulting in a report, with the phase 3 report being presented as the final strategy. Phase one included a full background review and situational analysis for the Study Area. The resulting report included labour supply and demand projections, definitions of the target sectors identified by the project team, the development of a lifestyle asset inventory, and an analysis of the education pipeline and graduation rates in the region.

The second phase of the project focused on community engagement, which collected a wide range of inputs from approximately 780 individuals within the Study Area. Activities included surveying the Study Areas business, job seeker communities (delivered in two phases due to COVID-19 interruptions), stakeholder interviews, and a series of 6 workshops focused on key stakeholder groups, primarily, industry and educators.

The third phase resulted in creating seven reports, each specifically for Southwest Alberta, SouthGrow, the City of Lethbridge, Town of Taber, Vulcan County, Fort MacLeod, and Cardston. These reports present the economic context and projections at a regional or community level reflecting which sectors are projected to grow, decline, and those that will require replacement workers due to economic growth and retirements. Collectively, these reports have supported the development of this final deliverable, the Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Strategic Plan. This report includes:

- Key findings and methodology of the project



- An updated workforce trends analysis
- A Regional Education Pipeline and Graduation Rates/Patterns skills matrix provides a projection of the number of graduates expected in the region, their skill levels, and compatibility with projected workforce requirements.
- The Strategic Directions and accompanying Action Plan presents regional and community-based initiatives. The action plan is tactical, offering specific initiatives that can be implemented and measured for impact over the life of the strategy.

Strategic Directions and Action Plan

The study and action plan outlines how the Southwest region will overcome challenges in meeting local talent demand and aligning its labour supply to local opportunities. The city of Lethbridge is a central education hub in Alberta that attracts many students and is known for its high-quality programming. However, retaining these graduates has been problematic due to lower wages, further fueling the employer's challenge to fill vacancies effectively.

Key Findings

Understanding Supply

Over the next five years, the Study Area is projected to need 8,374 new workers based on economic job growth and retirements. The majority of these gains will be in the city of Lethbridge. These results are based on Statistics Canada's historical trends in industries and occupations, as calculated by *metroeconomics*. The results do not reflect the most recent trends in layoffs and closures due to COVID-19, as the full impact is not yet realized. The population of the Study Area is expected to reach 250,136 by 2028, reflecting a total increase of 21% as compared to 2018. The growing population is a significant driver for services sectors' growth as it supports increased demand for services and local ability to respond.

While the region's educational institutions attract students from across Canada and internationally, education attainment in the Study Area does lag the province. There is a higher proportion of the population with no certificate, diploma, or degree (21% vs. 17%) and a lower proportion with a University certificate, diploma, or degree at a bachelor level or above (16% vs. 23%). This is relevant as many of the job postings tracked between March 1, 2019, to February 29, 2020, through the Vicinity Jobs Labour Demand Reporting System require at least a college diploma or certification.

Understanding Demand

Labour market demand is driven by business activity and investment, influencing the need for people to perform work to deliver a service or produce a product. Based on occupation projections looking out to 2025 in the Study Area, the highest in-demand occupations influenced by economic growth and retirements include:

- Managers in agriculture (426 jobs)
- Retail Sales Persons (275 jobs)
- Nurse aides, orderlies, and patient services associates (234 jobs)
- Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses (232 jobs) and



- Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related support occupations (210 jobs).

Through a sectoral lens, the highest labour demand is spread across sectors including:

- Health Care and Social Services (1,111 new jobs)
- Government (779 new jobs)
- Education (697 new jobs)
- Accommodation and Food Services (448) and
- Other Business Services (448).

It is noteworthy that Health Care and Social Services is identified as a top sector for projected job vacancies, with several of the higher demand occupations falling within this sector currently and looking out for five years.

It is also important to examine those sectors that have the largest share of businesses with employees. For Southwest Alberta, those include:

- Construction (947)
- Retail Trade (924)
- Agriculture forestry fishing and hunting (914)
- Health care and social assistance (651) and
- Other Services (646).

In addition to examining the occupation projections, further insight can be drawn from data analysis of business on-line job postings. This data reveals the actual recruitment for talent based on job vacancies and can be used as an additional data point between projections and talent recruitment. Between March 1, 2019, to February 29, 2020, a total of 9,190 job postings and 9,152 job seekers were recorded in the Study Area through the Vicinity Jobs Labour Supply and Demand Reporting System. Healthcare and social assistance was the industry sector with the highest number of job postings, while accommodation and food services recorded the most significant number of job seekers. The city of Lethbridge accounted for 72% of all job postings and 77% of job seekers, reflecting its position in the region as the largest employment area based on jobs and job seekers.

Understanding Workforce Challenges and Skills Gaps

Having a clear understanding of the region's labour supply and the demand positioned research and analysis to inform a skills gap analysis to identify common skills gaps and challenges for the Study Area.

Further exploration and examination were carried out through engagement with a wide range of stakeholders within the Study Area. The following section offers a synopsis of the findings, sources of validation, and emerging actions in response to the gaps and challenges. This insight, with knowledge of trends, sectorial labour needs, and with a focus on addressing skills gaps, formed the foundation of the Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Strategy. A strategy crafted to influence and inform planning and initiatives to address skills gaps, strengthen economic competitiveness, and support talent attraction and retention for the region and its municipalities over the coming years.



1.1 Knowledge and Action

The strategy is grounded in data and the local lived experiences of businesses and stakeholders, fueling the strategic priorities and actions. The framework in Figure 1 has been created to reflect on what has been learned, why it is relevant, and what needs to be done.

Figure 1: Knowledge and Action Framework Summary

Findings	Source of validation	Actions
Mismatch in skills between what employers want and what graduates possess, mainly regarding 'soft' skills.	Literature review, job seeker and employer survey, in-person interviews, and roundtable discussions.	Micro-credentialing, including standardized recognition of soft skills; consider best practice information sharing.
Labour force participants lack technology skills.	Literature review, secondary research, business survey, roundtable discussions.	Micro-credentialing technology upskilling that educates on essential tech (ex. manufacturing and agricultural equipment).
Access to experiential learning programming is not as easy as employers would like.	Employer surveys, roundtables, interviews.	Improve access to experiential learning for employers and students.
COVID-19 is impacting the local economy.	Literature review, secondary research, COVID-19 business, and job seeker survey.	Continue implementation of COVID-19 response services; respond to LMI needs to ensure current, relevant, and useful information is accessible.
Labour market, employer needs, and education pipeline data are not well understood, easily accessible, or consolidated for use.	Background analysis and secondary literature review. Employer surveys, interviews, talent pipeline analysis, and roundtable discussions.	Collaboration with education to gather graduate employment data, program uptake rates, and monitoring job posting boards (e.g., via Vicinity Jobs) to track industry needs and changes.
Ensuring equal access to workplace training and upskilling programs is more difficult in regional, remote, and lower socio-economic areas.	Secondary research and industry literature review, interviews, roundtable discussions.	Prioritizing online-based workshops and courses (e.g., graduate diplomas) that are accredited and tailored to rural/regional based needs.
Quality of life factors (e.g., affordable housing, community spaces, reliable transport, events) are vital to attracting and retaining talent.	Secondary research, internal expertise based on previous project experience and economic base analysis, roundtable discussions.	Continued promotion of the region and its communities. Collaboration with business, community intermediaries, and support organizations to support talent attraction.
The talent competition is increasing. Marketing strategies that are tailored to a specific audience are most effective.	Employer surveys, labour market supply, and demand analysis, and secondary market research.	Establish a promotion campaign advertising what it is like to live, work, and relax in Southwest Alberta. Consider working with a marketing or brand agency to develop and execute this common messaging.



Employers are responding to labour force gaps primarily by providing additional benefits or higher salaries limited professional training options.	Workforce development research, business survey results.	Educate businesses on best practices for training and development and increase the accessibility of online and in-person courses.
There is a mismatch of expectations between the workforce and businesses in wages, skills, and work environment.	Job Seeker Survey, Business Survey, Interviews, Roundtable discussions.	Enhance the availability of LMI for both job seekers and employers. Both groups are currently uninformed of each others' expectations and realities.
Job Seekers indicated a lack of suitable job opportunities, and businesses identified the availability of qualified candidates as a challenge.	Job Seeker Survey, Business survey, Roundtable discussions, Interviews.	Maximize promotion of local job opportunities, with clear identification of skills and work requirements.
Nearly half of businesses faced challenges in hiring/retaining staff.	Business survey, Roundtable discussions, Interviews.	Support business recruitment and retention practices.
The majority of businesses surveyed are not recruiting outside the region.	Business Survey.	Guide businesses on external recruitment to fill long-standing vacancies that are not attracting appropriate candidates locally.
Immigrants are facing barriers to employment in the region.	Employer surveys and roundtable discussions.	Improve access, awareness, and delivery of immigration services, including employer and local settlement services, best and promising practices.
ESL/Language and cultural barriers are impeding hiring immigrants.	Business survey, roundtables, interviews.	Increase awareness of immigrants as a labour source's support access and awareness of local services to connect employers and newcomers and immigrants; inform on cultural barriers and best practices.
Education providers face funding constraints.	Education Roundtable, Interviews.	Collaboration to pool resources, reduce costs through the use of technology, and encouraging employer investment.
Identified labour gaps and growing occupations are a mix of lower to middle-skilled occupations.	Business Survey, Interviews, Vicinity Jobs, Occupation Projections.	Improving access to under-utilized labour pools (Immigrants, Seniors, Students, Indigenous Peoples, Persons with Disabilities).
Businesses are offering higher wages, training, and more flexible work environments to attract labour.	Business survey, interviews, roundtables.	Enhancing business access to LMI, insight on changing workforce expectations, and present best practices in attracting and retaining talent.
Competition for lower-skilled labour is tight. Local entry-level positions do not pay well enough to attract workers from outside the area.	Interviews, Roundtables.	Reflect on career pathways, career lattice opportunities to demonstrate career progression to the middle and higher-skilled occupations.
Graduate retention in the region needs to be improved.	Interviews, Roundtables.	Promote entrepreneurship, business succession planning, and business expansion as a means to create employment opportunities.



1.2 Strategy Foundation – At a Glance

This summary presents a visualization of the strategic goals and objectives emerging as priorities through research and engagement. In total, there are four strategic pillars on which the strategy is upheld. Thirteen targeted objectives to advance these goals are recommended. Section 5 of this report will identify a series of tactical actions relevant to each objective to support local and regional implementation. Also reflected are the proposed timing for delivery defined as short (S – less than one year), medium (M – 2 to 3 years), and longer-term (L – 4 to 5 years). Relevance to local (L) or regional (R) implementation is also identified.

Pillar 1: Labour Market Information

Goal: Labour Market Information is accessible, current, relevant, and useful to support the decision-making process of businesses, job seekers, students, intermediaries, educators, and governments.

Objective 1: Develop a Comprehensive, Central and Current Labour Market System

Objective 2: Disseminate Relevant LMI to Inform Decisions and Promote Opportunity

Pillar 2: Talent Retention

Goal: Southwest Alberta has improved its retention of talent, including graduates and those active in the labour force.

Objective 3: Foster Work Integrated Learning

Objective 4: Create In-depth Awareness of Local Careers

Objective 5: Retain Graduates

Objective 6: Support Businesses Retention Efforts

Pillar 3: Skills Alignment

Goal: There is alignment between skills in demand and those being taught through local and regional training and education providers.

Objective 7: Develop Accessible Training Programs

Objective 8: Support Career Development and Upskilling

Objective 9: Support the Integration of the Immigrant Workforce

Objective 10: Embrace and Building Technology Capacity

Objective 11: Support the Development of Indigenous Talent

Pillar 4: Talent Attraction

Goal: Southwest Alberta is recognized as a welcoming community of communities that offer the desired quality of life and opportunities to prosper through its diverse economy and career options.

Objective 12: Promote Welcoming Communities

Objective 13: Foster Business Culture, Inclusiveness and Diversity



1.3 Identified Skills Challenges

The following is a visual representation of those skills that were identified through the data analysis of engagement findings as it related to the specific need for skills across four groupings, that being General/Soft Skills, Tools and Equipment, Technologies, and Specialized Skills. Through the identification of these groupings, the Study Area is positioned to undertake actions and initiatives that address these challenge areas, and to further strengthen the labour pool to meet the needs of local businesses. Such action will result in a great alignment of labour supply and demand to support local economic competitiveness and the area’s ability to retain talent to fill local vacancies.

General / Soft Skills	Tools and Equipment	Technologies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to Learn ▪ Interpersonal Skills ▪ Work Ethic ▪ Computer Literacy ▪ Communications Skills ▪ Time Management and Prioritization ▪ Teamwork ▪ Customer Service ▪ Sales/Service Skill ▪ Ability to communicate in English ▪ General Labour ▪ Critical thinking and problem-solving skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forklifts ▪ Power Tools ▪ Conveyors ▪ Boilers ▪ Skid steers ▪ Disposal units ▪ Lawnmowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical Skills (Comfort using machinery) ▪ Microsoft Office Suite ▪ Driver Licenses and Certification ▪ Adobe Suite (Photoshop) ▪ LEAN Manufacturing ▪ Computer Programming ▪ Robotics Expertise
Specialized Skills		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analytical Skills ▪ Budgeting ▪ Project Management ▪ Skilled Trades ▪ Report Writing ▪ Marketing ▪ Ability to operate agricultural equipment ▪ Data and statistical analysis ▪ Welding ▪ Purchasing ▪ Recruiting/Hiring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training/Teaching ▪ Maintain Equipment ▪ Maintain Financial Records ▪ Management/Leadership skills ▪ Inventory Management ▪ Food Service ▪ Electricians ▪ Carpentry Skills ▪ Accounting ▪ Culinary Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Millwrights ▪ Plumbing ▪ Engineering ▪ Safety Training ▪ Ability to operate construction equipment ▪ Heavy Equipment Technician ▪ Mechanics ▪ Animal Husbandry ▪ Graphic Design



2. Developing the Skills Study Action Plan

2.1 Introduction

Building a regional skills gap action plan responsive and results in local and regional impact is complex. It necessitates a strong understanding of local influences and regional context. Each community reflected in this plan will have varied abilities to advance the actions herein.

The comprehensive primary and secondary research to support this strategy is presented separately, in an accompanying technical report. An effort has been made to provide relevant content in this strategic plan report in a summarized format to support readability and to showcase the strategic goals, objectives, and tactical actions.

Presented in this section is:

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Outlines the approach used to gather information captured in the technical report and the rationale for employing each tool.
- **Stakeholder Consultation:** An explanation of the various stakeholder engagement techniques employed during the strategic planning process and relevant considerations.
- **Knowledge and Action Framework:** This presents a framework for distilling the various data and information points accumulated in the technical report into concrete ideas based on what we know and what needs to be done.
- **Strategic Pillars, Goals, Objectives, and Actions:** The strategic plan is presented for the region and offers recommendations, including a timeline for implementation and relevance at the local and regional level. Performance indicators are included to measure progress and impact.

This Action Plan is designed to accomplish the following:

Understand the technical and core competencies skills gaps in the region, the causes of those gaps and the impact they are having on economic activity.

Identify methods employers use to address these gaps,

Identify opportunities for underrepresented groups to fill these gaps with specific training

Demonstrate where employers, regional development agencies, post-secondary institutions, and other stakeholders can cooperate to address the challenges.



2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Various scales of analysis have been used to assess the region's existing labour market, demand projections, and anticipated labour market needs and skills gaps. Input has been gathered through data collection and engagement activities. A summary of each assessed component is presented in the following list, with detailed results available in the technical document:



Background document review and common themes matrix: Relevant strategic and policy documents from participating communities and the Region were assessed to understand critical and common themes summarized in the matrix.



Literature review and trends analysis: The literature review includes relevant industry publications, leading research related to issues surrounding workforce development, skills gaps, emerging skills and technology impacts, labour market planning, and talent attraction and retention in a globalized and evolving labour market.



Regional demographic profile: Statistics Canada data from various sources paints a portrait of the Region's social and economic composition, including population, housing, living, income, education, employment, industries and occupations, and business characteristics.



Labour market supply/demand labour market intelligence: Presentation of labour supply and demand data according to industry, occupation, top employer characteristics, and top job seeker characteristics obtained using the online job supply and demand analytics tool, Vicinity Jobs Labour Supply and Demand Reporting System.



Regional asset inventory and value proposition: A classification of assets into educational institutions, health care facilities, social services, cultural and recreational, and environmental asset categories to inform future talent and population attraction.



Supply and demand labour projections: A historical trend analysis to quantify which industries and occupations are expected to experience labour supply gaps through 2025.



Regional and local community labour market profiles: Seven reports have been developed individually for the Study Area, including Southwest Alberta, SouthGrow, The City of Lethbridge, Town of Taber, Vulcan County, Fort MacLeod, and Cardston. These reports tie in community-specific workforce supply and demand characteristics.



Education pipeline and graduation rates: An assessment of talent pipeline expectations based on historical graduation completion rates by CIP program for the Study Area.



Stakeholder Engagement and Consultations: A variety of stakeholder engagement activities conducted to understand workforce challenges, opportunities, solutions, and aspirations from local and regional perspectives.



2.3 Stakeholder Consultations

Stakeholder consultation is essential to understanding what the needs and perspectives of stakeholders are in the Study Area. It shapes the nuanced understanding of the region and assists in grounding elements of the strategic planning process. The following engagement and consultation activities have contributed to this initiative:



Regional Employer Survey Part One and Two: Employer surveys were completed in the Study Area through direct telephone interviews and supplemented with an online survey for flexible participation. The activity was interrupted due to the emergency measures in place due to COVID-19, resulting in a business shutdown. The survey activity was split into two timeframes to align with business closing and openings. Part one ran until mid-March, resulted in 309 completes. To achieve the goal of 400 total completes, the survey was relaunched in late May, resulting in an additional 95 completes, surpassing our goal. The part two survey was revised to include several COVID-19 specific questions to inform how the pandemic has influenced skills requirements. The surveys probed workforce demand, skills need, challenges, and immigration considerations.



Regional Jobseeker Survey Part One and Two: Similar to the regional employer survey, the launch of the job seeker survey was interrupted as a result of the emergency measures put in place due to COVID-19. The survey targeted job seekers that were unemployed, underemployed, or employed and looking for new opportunities. The survey was available through a web-based link and resulted in 56 online completes in Part 1, which launched in early March and closed in mid-March. For the relaunch in late May, the survey was revised to include additional questions focused on COVID-19 impacts. Part two resulted in 215 completes for a total of 271 completed surveys. The Southwest Alberta Skills Partnership organizations promoted the study broadly across the region to maximize awareness and engagement and offered a prize draw to encourage participation.



Industry Roundtables: To garner direct input from local industry representatives, three industry roundtables were conducted to focus on geography representation from SouthGrow, Southwest, and Lethbridge. Sessions were held via Zoom, with 35 participants across all three. Discussions informed on the labour market situation and talent pipeline in the region.



Key Informant Interviews: A total of 35 key informant interviews were completed with identified stakeholders throughout the region; these included educational representatives, businesses, immigration service providers, local government, and workforce service providers.



Education Roundtable: An education roundtable was conducted via Zoom to gather perspectives from education and training representatives on the labour market situation and talent pipeline in the region. A total of 12 individuals participated in this session.



Immigration Roundtables: Working in collaboration with Lethbridge Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) / Lethbridge Family Services, two roundtables were conducted via Zoom. The first session engaged immigrant-serving organizations and some local businesses to gather perspectives on immigrant integration to the workplace and the community. The second session engaged new immigrants to the region. A total of 20 individuals participated in these sessions.

The summary findings of the perceptions of those that contributed through the engagement activities follow. These observations reflect the most relevant views, perceptions, and opinions of the respondents with the full engagement reports provided in the technical reports.



3. Strategic Directions

This strategic plan is the culmination of all research, analysis, and community stakeholder input. While each pillar offers a series of objectives and tactical actions, they are designed to work in concert, each building on and influencing the overall impact towards addressing identified labour force challenges and skills gaps in the Study Area.

3.1.1 Pillar 1: Labour Market Information

Access to relevant and recent LMI is paramount to informed decision making. Regional service providers, residents, businesses, and academia all need to be current in their knowledge and understanding of what is happening in the labour market, both locally at the community level, regionally, and beyond. Keeping informed on provincial policies and their implications, economic shifts, employment and unemployment activity, employer hiring or downsizing, enrollments all support the identification of challenges, opportunities, trends, and priorities. Making this information available in a clear, concise, and useable manner expands knowledge to employers, job seekers, students, businesses, local intermediaries, and governments. It also supports opportunities for greater collaboration and collective efforts to prioritize and respond promptly.

It has been long identified in Canada that access to local labour market information is still challenging, even though our labour market intelligence (LMI) system is recognized as one of the best in the world¹.

In the Study Area, employer and job seeker needs and education pipeline data are not broadly understood, not easily accessible, or consolidated for easy access. Completed employer surveys, interviews, and the talent pipeline analysis all illustrated gaps.

The majority of job seekers surveyed indicated a lack of suitable job opportunities in the region. In contrast, nearly half of all businesses surveyed indicated a lack of suitable applicants. These perceptions indicate that a gap exists between supply and demand for labour that may be addressed through better LMI.

An essential aspect of this pillar is establishing a centralized, shared, and accessible platform for data that is currently being collected by the members of the partnership, or through established and credible organizations that focus on LMI collection and dissemination. One such organization is the newly formed Labour Market Information Council, which would serve as a great resource and potential link from a regional LMI site. The next step is collecting data to fill gaps, including alumni tracking, improving LMI literacy, job postings and relevant data that can be extracted, and simplifying the language and methods used to communicate skills proficiencies or deficits. Understand that different audiences, such as job seekers and employers, require a different approach than researchers, institutions, and government. It is not merely putting information on a website, instead of disseminating it in a manner that can be used.

There was a wide variety of perceptions of which skills existed and were needed in the workforce that clashed with available data. Stakeholders indicated they would like to have access to better information.

¹ Advisory Panel on Labour Market Information; Working Together to Build a Better Labour Market Information System for Canada Final Report, May 20, 2009;



3.1.2 Pillar 2: Talent Retention

Demand for talent, particularly specialized talent, is growing, locally, regionally, and worldwide. It is recognized that COVID 19 has slowed this demand in select geographies and sectors due to the economic fallout and business closures. However, to remain competitive in the battle for talent, it is necessary to remain vigilant and responsive to identified talent needs. Talent retention demands proactive and thoughtful consideration of targeted strategies that support an evidence-based understanding of what talent is needed, what talent is available and the influencing factors that support talent retention and skills development. Significant efforts will be necessary to ensure that local talent remains in the area, beginning with those who come to the region for education and migrants. As with business retention, there is a greater return on investment to keep workers in the area than attract new workers. The region is projected to see population growth over the coming years, which creates an opportunity to further build the available labour pool, through retention and attraction. The assets of the region can play a significant influencing role in that regard.

A significant component of retention is aligning the workforce with jobs available now and through sector growth into the future. This spans occupations across all skill levels, and all who chose to be active in the labour market. Communities can improve retention by improving access to reskilling, retraining, workplace integration, and workforce readiness services.

A survey conducted by Lethbridge College indicated that 6-months post-graduation, 51% of graduates were no longer living in the Lethbridge area. The local labour pool attracted to the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge College represents the most promising long-term pipeline of talent into the region. Efforts to integrate this population into the community and strengthen their exposure to life in Southwest Alberta may prove favourable and support retention.

Engaging broader community support to facilitate experiential learning prospects such as co-ops and internships to link graduates to local businesses is a prime opportunity. These may include maker spaces, familiarization tours, and hands-on learning at the secondary and post-secondary level, further exposing students with the community and providing local employers with the opportunity to interact with potential future employees.

Employers have indicated they want to participate in experiential learning, but they perceive the current programs as onerous. Educational institutions can benefit from understanding the barriers experienced by employers and students and strengthening the process to achieve positive outcomes. These efforts support talent retention.



3.1.3 Pillar 3: Skills Alignment

At the core of an aligned labour market is the need to ensure that those skills, competencies, and abilities that employers are seeking are present in the labour force. Where specific skills are absent, the role of local post-secondary and training providers is amplified. Talent readiness to enter the labour market, to transition within the labour market, and to remain current in skills, knowledge, and abilities support a community's competitiveness and attraction for both business and labour force participants. This benefits from a deep alignment between education and trainers and employers. Employers are best positioned to inform what skills they need and where the gap exists within the existing labour force. Educators are well-positioned to be responsive to these needs and create an opportunity for skills development and upskilling.

There has been a significant workforce shift over the last few decades wherein employers are less willing or able to train entry-level employees. A growing share of the responsibility for training falls to individuals, and educational institutions must be responsive. Combine this trend with the lower direct employment experience of recent graduates; it is not surprising the most commonly identified labour force gaps with new graduates was lack of experience. Based on the research, this was followed closely with the lack of soft skills.

A significant challenge identified by employers was the relatively slower pace that education institutions could adapt their programming to support the integration of newer technology. Given the recent rise in the use of technology to carry out business as a result of COVID, the importance of a responsive strategy to improve on technology use and technology learning rises in importance.

Preparing the next generation of Alberta workers starts with integrating work and learning. As automation erodes entry-level jobs, companies will expect students to mix higher-level technical and soft skills.² Addressing the skills gap ensures a focus is placed on the specificity for skills development, through responsive and flexible learning channels and credentialing.

One issue raised through interviews and workshop sessions was the lack of commonly understood terminology to describe soft skills and non-work skills experience. A component of this project has been developing skills profiles of top occupations projected to be in demand over the next five years. Building on these profiles, it would be helpful to continue to articulate the specific skills required and to ensure clear communication of this insight to those looking to develop or enhance their skills. These profiles lay the groundwork to develop career pathways, skills transferability, and employer identified skills needs. They may also inform on programming development, the introduction of micro-credentialing, or programming updates.

² <https://coppo.ca/>; accessed 8-31-2020



3.1.4 Pillar 4: Talent Attraction

A key factor impacting the ability of businesses to recruit talent successfully is the narrative and persona of the community and surrounding region. The Study Area, and particularly the smaller communities within, has recognized challenges to attracting residents, who are often active participants in the labour market. This amplifies the necessity of a reflective and common message that showcases the area and all it has to offer. A clearly stated value proposition supports consistent communication that can be utilized by local employers in the promotion of their business and their employment opportunities. Part of this message should showcase the success stories of those that have chosen the region and the assets that drew them to the area.

Communities are encouraged to utilize existing professional associations, established entrepreneurs, employment support organizations, and other networks to connect newcomers with those that call the region home. This is an essential aspect of promoting a welcoming community.

Documenting and sharing with employers' best practices in modernizing workplaces and adapting to the needs of the changing labour market reflects input received through the consultation process. This could include best practices addressing ESL/Language and cultural barriers, which were the most mentioned factors to businesses hiring immigrant workers. These businesses' best practices are critical as they were the most preferred method identified by employers on engaging with further immigration support information.

The Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) was viewed as a complementary program that helps build a connection between youth, educational institutions, and employers, providing the all-important on-the-job experience job seekers need explore career pathways. There were negative aspects of RAP (e.g., transportation challenges for apprentices, higher insurance costs for employers), but the benefits outweigh the burden.



4. Moving from Strategy Development to Action

This skills study has resulted in identifying common themes emerging through the data analysis and the engagement undertaken over the lifecycle of the project. It is this evidence that grounds the formation of a strategic plan to respond to the emerging priorities and advance Southwest Alberta towards a more balanced labour market. While the emphasis is placed on validating what skills gaps exist, and how that might be addressed, other priorities were also identified as requiring attention. In total, the strategy presents four independently important foundation pillars, and collectively they are necessary to achieve the desired goal, that being an aligned labour market.

In the regional strategy a series of thirteen objectives are offered as recommendations with tactical actions applied to support implementation and impact. Actions have been assigned a timeline that informs on which actions should move forward in the short (0-12 months), medium (2-3 years), and longer-term (4-5 years). Actions have also been identified as regional (R), local (L) or both and assigned an estimated cost \$ (0-\$5,000), \$\$ (\$5,001 -\$10,000 and \$\$\$ (\$10,001+). Again, it is important to take into consideration changes in the economy and the region, as this may shift timelines for implementation.

In its simplest form, this strategic plan addresses the disconnect between labour supply and labour demand. It articulates and informs on existing skills gaps and the vital role post-secondary institutions and local training providers can play in bridging this gap. For the region to remain competitive, a proactive, evidence-informed approach must be utilized to ensure the labour force is best positioned to contribute actively. This means employers can access talent with the skills necessary to perform services or create products, and job seekers recognize and respond to the assets that make Southwest Alberta a place they are happy to call home.

It is important to note that this must be fluid, as unforeseen circumstances will drive the necessity to review the strategy regularly to validate its relevance. Never has this been more evident than in current times, where COVID forced the shutdown of many local economies and shifted the tight labour market to one that saw record unemployment rates.



4.1 Pillar 1: Labour Market Information

Objective #1	Develop a Comprehensive, Central and Current Labour Market Information System	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #1	Support the development of or contribute to a regional/community business database to support future business outreach and engagement. (Business database developed through this initiative will be shared as a starting point).	✓			\$\$	L&R
Action #2	Establish a supported process to collect and analyze relevant enrollment and graduation data across all educational institutions to inform program planning, emerging trends, and maintain insight for the local talent pipeline. To support this initiative, it is recommended that an Education Roundtable be tasked with identifying relevant data points and follow-through.		✓		\$	R
Action #3	Conduct an annual/bi-annual business survey to monitor workforce challenges and employer talent needs. This information can be disseminated through the LMI website, infographics, and social media messaging to keep both labour supply and businesses informed. Example: www.niagararegion.ca/projects/employment-inventory/default.aspx		✓		\$\$	R
Action #4	Track metrics on businesses hiring new graduates, and co-op and internship programming and promote success stories. These metrics raise awareness and encourage businesses to engage with these programs and should be reported by employers and education institutions.		✓		\$	R
Action #5	Develop, maintain and promote local labour market information at the regional and community level to inform on critical data such as # of job postings, types of occupations in demand, employers who are hiring, skills and education levels in demand, etc. Example: www.worktrends.ca			✓	\$\$	L&R
Objective #2	Disseminate Relevant LMI to Inform Decisions and Promote Opportunity	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #6	Promote knowledge sharing with educators (targeting career classes), employers, and job seekers to highlight and build awareness of relevant	✓			\$	L&R



	economic and labour market activity. This may be facilitated through infographics, videos, or social media.					
Action #7	Develop a dedicated webpage on existing partner sites to present workforce development trends, demand, and policy changes; offer links to relevant and credible LMI sites such as LMIC, Statistics Canada, Conference Board of Canada. Enhance the inventory of information and services accessible through this new resource, explicitly highlighting specific demand sectors. Where possible, link these pages to maintain consistent messaging and updates.		✓		\$\$	L&R
Action #8	Develop/Share New and Existing training resource guides for job seekers and students that showcase career pathways to high demand occupations and local training options and micro-credentialing that support necessary skills and knowledge development and credentials. The guide should clearly outline the career paths, educational requirements, local training options, available resources, assistance, and potential grants.		✓		\$\$	L&R

4.1 Pillar 2: Talent Retention

Objective #3	Foster Work Integrated Learning	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #9	Support and enhance work-integrated learning opportunities such as co-ops and internships to strengthen graduate and local employer relations. This may begin with documenting all programming with a work integrated component, examining potential occupations common for each program; explore these occupations against projected growth occupations to promote opportunities for employment upon graduation.	✓			\$\$	R
Action #10	Continue to streamline processes for employers and students to participate in work integrated learning opportunities to maximize participation and improve participant experiences. This may help reduce steps, utilize technology to support access, and enhance customer (student and employer) satisfaction with the experience.	✓			\$	L&R
Action #11	Work with secondary schools to integrate practical shop classes that include job camps, job shadowing, guest speakers, pre-apprenticeship programs, and programs to showcase alternative learning pathways and career exploration opportunities.		✓			L



Action #12	Continue to engage local business associations and local businesses to promote and encourage experiential work term opportunities (internships, co-ops, apprenticeships) to increase participation and career awareness for local secondary and post-secondary students. This initiative will also support the integration of students new to the area into the community to expose them to life in the region.	✓					L&R
Action #13	Consider creating a welcome package bundle for students who relocate to the region for school. This package could include discounts for local services (e.g., community gyms, pools, etc.), local deals from businesses, and more. Collaboration with the business community to develop appropriate incentives is advised. Investigate creating a promotion campaign highlighting the package and sense of community across the region.	✓				\$	R
Objective #4	Create In-depth Awareness of Local Careers	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale	
		S	M	L	\$	L&R	
Action #14	Host "familiarization tours" with local businesses experiencing growth to expose faculty members, career counsellors, and administration from local educational institutions to local workplaces. These tours should be tailored to educators and foster education – business relations. This strengthens educators understanding of how workplaces have changed over time and promotes economic sectors in the region.		✓		\$	L	
Action #15	Work with businesses to elevate their status in the community by inviting educational providers, locals, and students to experience their workplaces through scheduled tours or career days. These open houses can forge stronger connections between academia and employers, promoting understanding of local opportunities.		✓		\$\$	L	
Action #16	Explore the establishment of a Speakers Bureau made available to educators who wish to invite local business representatives into the classroom to share career pathways and work experiences with students. This promotes the diversity of employment opportunities in the region and demonstrates the importance of education and experience in career advancement.		✓		\$\$	L&R	
Objective #5	Retain Graduates	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale	
		S	M	L	\$	L&R	
Action #17	Promote mentorship programming for businesses and educational institutions to foster graduate connections within the community, sectors or local business.	✓			\$	LR	



	This further supports knowledge exchange, career exploration, and skills development.					
Action #18	Develop and deliver training for employers to increase knowledge and share strategies for managing diverse and multi-generational workplaces.	✓			\$\$	L&R
Objective #6	Support Business Talent Retention Efforts	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #19	Continue to work with businesses to promote existing provincial and federal COVID-19 recovery initiatives to rehire workers.	✓			\$	L&R
Action #20	Collate best practice research on modernizing workplaces, staff retention techniques, and local good news stories and share these findings with local businesses to illustrate how they should adapt to retain talent. Key findings can be shared online via the workforce development microsite or through workshops.		✓		\$	L&R
Action #21	Support employers and employees in the transition to remote work through research of best and promising practices and review of broadband connectivity across the region to ensure it meets businesses and employee requirements. Example: WORKShift (see KPMG book - Workshift: Future-Proof Your Organization for the 21st Century)	✓			\$	R
Action #22	Explore the feasibility of a public-private recruitment coalition to formalize and share talent recruitment and retention strategies, align messaging and strengthen local talent alignment. Example: Greater Halifax Partnership Connector Program halifaxpartnership.com/how-we-help/grow-your-business/connect-to-talent/		✓		\$\$	L&R



4.2 Pillar 3: Skills Alignment

Objective #7	Develop Accessible Training Programs	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #23	Work with local education providers and the private sector to promote upskilling courses (e.g., the University of Lethbridge's Renewable Resource Management Courses, or courses available through the Collaborative Centre of Excellence (CCoE) in People Development at Lethbridge College) to help workers successfully transition into occupations that are in higher demand or sectors experiencing growth. Promote utilization of Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) to support student assessments to minimize separation from the workforce.	✓			\$	R
Action #24	Target development of micro-credentialing upskilling programs that educate on key technology (manufacturing and agricultural equipment) and LEAN manufacturing. These courses can range from beginner to advanced and should be developed in conjunction with local industries and educational institutions to ensure skills are relevant in the workplace.	✓			\$	R
Action #25	Foster increased on-line learning opportunities within credited and non-credit programming to maximize access and support varied learning styles among students and students in remote areas. This will further support learning through COVID recovery.	✓			\$\$	L&R
Action #26	Explore the expansion of the University of Lethbridge's THRIVE Professional Skills Program to support a wide-reaching workforce readiness program accessible to non-university students, including the general labour force population.	✓			\$\$	L
Objective #8	Support Career Development and Upskilling	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #27	Working with educational institutions investigate employers understanding of soft skills (employability skills) to ensure appropriate measures are being taken to build these skills among students at all levels of the education system. This may be achieved through the annual survey of employers to keep current with workforce-related issues and employer solutions.		✓		\$\$	L&R
Action #28	Develop a pilot project to support employability skills development among select students through a customized program designed to provide an in-class learning component and a work-integrated learning placement. Program outcomes should be measured to demonstrate pre and post-project results.		✓		\$\$\$	R



Action #29	Work with local education institutions to support dual credit programming between colleges and secondary schools through the development and dissemination of relevant information about occupations in high demand. Example: Ontario's Specialist High Skills Major programming (www.ontario.ca/page/specialist-high-skills-major#:~:text=The%20Specialist%20High%20Skills%20Major%20(%20SHSM%20)%20is%20a%20specialized%20program,Ministry%20of%20Education%20approved%20program)			✓	\$\$	L&R
Action #30	Support the development of deeper alignment between local school boards, colleges, and universities and employers, ensuring students, graduates, and teachers understand career paths and required skills. Consider the formation of a Talent Supply Table to foster regular discussions and information sharing.		✓		\$	L&R
Objective #9	Support the Integration of the Immigrant Workforce	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #31	Promote the immigrant labour pool as a significant source of labour, sharing local business success stories. This work would be carried out in collaboration with local immigrant service organizations.	✓			\$	L
Action #32	Connect businesses with immigrant services providers and support transitional employment programming for new immigrants that include ESL and cultural training.	✓			\$	L
Objective #10	Embrace and Build Technology Capacity	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #33	Improve the use of technology to streamline the process of accessing training for remote employers and students.		✓		\$\$	L&R
Action #34	Support the employer's capacity to hire and manage remote workers.	✓			\$	L&R
Objective #11	Support the Integration of Indigenous Talent	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #35	Work with Indigenous Governments and Economic Development Agencies to share LMI data and opportunities.	✓			\$\$	L&R
Action #36	Connect businesses with Indigenous service providers that support the development of welcoming workplaces.	✓			\$	L&R
Action #37	Improve Indigenous access to skills training and upskilling programming by specifically targeting/recruiting the Indigenous community and provide information on specific support programming available.	✓			\$	L&R



4.3 Pillar 4: Talent Attraction

Objective #11	Promote Welcoming Communities	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #34	<p>Develop and disseminate a unified brand that supports local and regional talent attraction and retention. Consider the information that highlights housing, education, lifestyle, affordability, diversity, etc.</p> <p>Resource to be used across organizations, local businesses, and stakeholder groups to promote the region with a standard message to strengthen and consistently reflect the local brand and welcoming nature.</p>		✓	✓	\$\$	R
Action #35	Continue economic development efforts on diversifying and growing the economy (e.g., renewable sector) to grow the overall number of jobs in the region. Focus on areas that create long term, meaningful employment opportunities.		✓		\$	L&R
Action #36	Create a targeted marketing campaign encouraging skilled workers to relocate to the region. Provide materials and support to businesses that are recruiting talent.		✓		\$\$	L&R
Action #37	Continue to work with local employers and employees who recently moved to the region and successfully promote their positive experiences via online and offline channels.		✓		\$	L
Objective #12	Foster Business Culture, Inclusiveness and Diversity	Priority Timing			Cost	Scale
		S	M	L	\$	L&R
Action #38	<p>Encourage businesses to promote corporate culture as a company benefit and a key consideration for potential employees. Focus on leveraging regional brand, local assets, employer perks, workplace culture, incentives, and inclusive practices.</p> <p>This may be in the form of an employer guide, webpage, or a publication that depicts the return on investment.</p>	✓			\$	L&R
Action #39	Document and share best and promising practices for employers to showcase tangible approaches to creating and adapting to a flexible workplace.		✓		\$	L&R



Action #40	Utilize on-line resources designed to guide stronger inclusiveness ³ , and share with employers to foster the concept of a "welcoming and inclusive workplace culture" among businesses to promote diversity in the workplace.		✓		\$\$	L&R
Action #41	Consider creating a welcome package bundle for workers who relocate to the region for work. This package could include discounts for local services (e.g., community gyms, pools, etc.), local deals from businesses, and more. Collaboration with the business community to develop appropriate incentives is advised. Investigate creating a promotion campaign highlighting the package and sense of community across the region.	✓			\$	L&R

Tools and Projects Active in the Region

Member of the Southwest Alberta Skills Partnership have identified tools and projects active in the region that support the objectives and actions.

- Lethbridge Brighter Together Brand: chooselethbridge.ca/userfile/file/Brighter%20Together%20Business%20Health%20Infographic.pdf
- Choose Lethbridge is currently working with: Career Transitions www.careersteps.ca/
- Choose Lethbridge is currently tracking graduate by program band: chooselethbridge.ca/?p=0&action=table&subaction=view&ID=1613

³ See for example: <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/0418/pages/6-steps-for-building-an-inclusive-workplace.aspx>; <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/diversity/2017/50-ideas-for-cultivating-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-workplace>



5. Key Findings

This section showcases relevant key findings emerging through the consultation and engagement process. These are included to provide context for the strategic recommendations and action plan.

5.1 Data

Population

The Study Area, formed by the communities of the Southwest Alberta Region and the SouthGrow Economic Development Region, has a population of approximately 206,271 people. The population of the Study Area is expected to reach 250,136 people by 2028, resulting in a total increase of 21% compared to 2018. This growth will be mostly driven by the growth projected to take place in the city of Lethbridge, which is recognized as the primary urban center within the region.

Key Target Sectors

The highest projected labour demand sectors are:

- Health Care and Social Services (1,111 new jobs)
- Government (779 new jobs)
- Education (697 new jobs)
- Accommodation and Food Services (448) and,
- Other Business Services (448).

It is noteworthy that Health Care and Social Services is identified as a top sector for projected job vacancies, with several of the higher demand occupations falling within this sector. This solidifies the sector as a critical employer to the region, currently looking out for five years.

The sectors that have the largest share of businesses with employees in the Study Area are:

- Construction (947)
- Retail Trade (924)
- Agriculture forestry, fishing and hunting (914)
- Health care and social assistance (651), and
- Other Services (646).

Most of the projected labour demand will be in the city of Lethbridge. Therefore, the projections for the Study Area will be closely linked to the city.

Educational Attainment

The Study Area has approximately 49% of people with a post-secondary diploma or degree, including apprenticeships; this percentage is lower than the provincial share at 55%. Southwest Alberta and the SouthGrow Region have similar shares of post-secondary attainment levels. Meanwhile, at the smaller community level, the Town of Cardston displays a higher share of the skilled labour force, similar to the province. The Town of Taber recorded the lowest percentage of the skilled labour force at 35%.

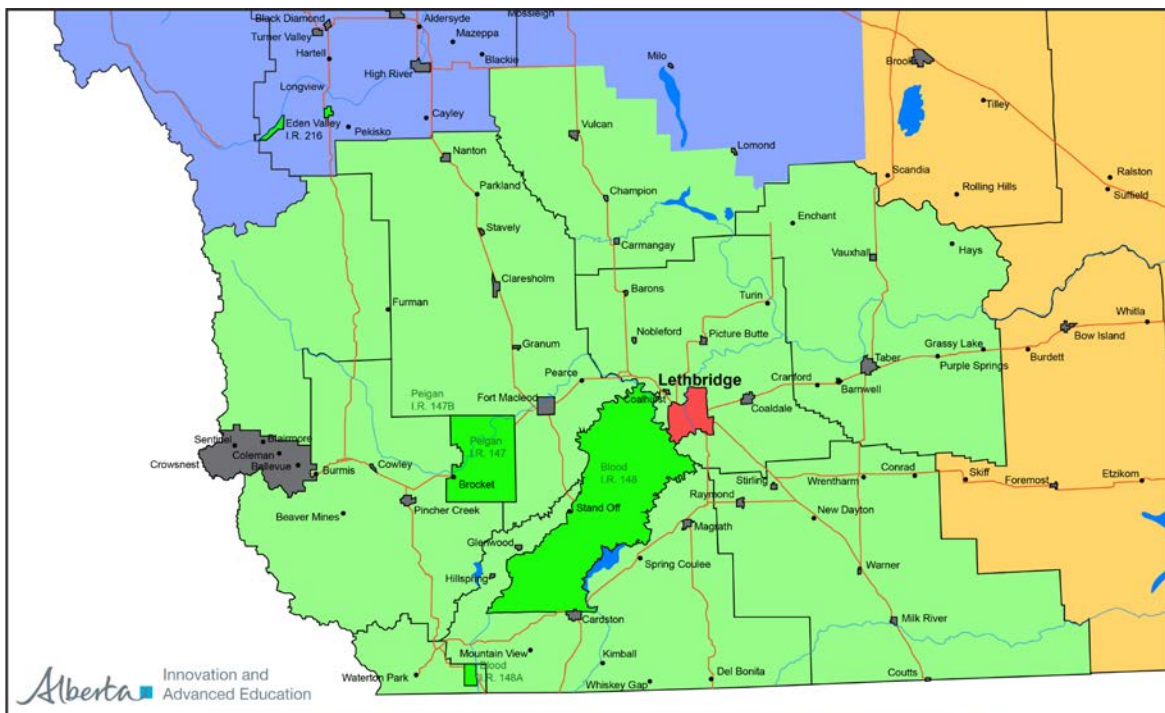


Talent Pipeline

In terms of post-secondary graduates, the data was divided between college graduates and university graduates to identify those individuals within the skill level A (university education) and B (college education). The Study Area attracts students attending post-secondary, resulting in a strong graduation pipeline from its two prominent post-secondary education institutions. It is important to note, however, that it is common for many of these graduates to exit the region upon graduation, with upwards of 50% leaving within six months.

The data presented below identifies individuals who completed a program at a public post-secondary institution in the Lethbridge Service Area (Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education designation for the area that includes Lethbridge College and Lethbridge University). These institutions include the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge College.

Figure 2: Lethbridge Service Area – Innovation and Advanced Education Alberta



Source: Alberta Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education



University Education

Most of the individuals who graduated from the University of Lethbridge between 2014 and 2019 obtained a degree in business, followed by languages, social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Figure 3: Estimates of numbers of graduates - University of Lethbridge (2014 to 2019)

Program Band	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	Total
Business	470	461	473	448	409	2,261
Education	239	245	252	226	249	1,211
Health Science	383	381	324	317	332	1,737
Languages, Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities	457	458	428	414	424	2,181
Legal & Security	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physical, Natural & Applied Sciences	235	242	251	266	266	1,260
Recreation	95	94	99	90	92	470
Trades & Technologists	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,879	1,881	1,827	1,761	1,772	9,120

Source: LERS Cubes

College Education

Most of the individuals who graduated from Lethbridge College between 2014 and 2019 obtained a diploma in trades and technologies, followed by health science, and legal and security.

Figure 4: Estimates of numbers of graduates – Lethbridge College (2014 to 2019)

Program Band	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	Total
Business	161	148	162	137	148	756
Education	12	21	38	47	39	157
Health Science	362	336	313	308	363	1,682
Languages, Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities	229	159	186	164	197	935
Legal & Security	200	144	211	220	302	1,077
Physical, Natural & Applied Sciences	183	181	192	212	239	1,007
Recreation	16	15	20	18	18	87
Trades & Technologists	393	396	378	361	312	1,840
Total	1,556	1,400	1,500	1,467	1,618	7,541

Source: LERS Cubes

Community Highlights

City of Lethbridge: The City of Lethbridge is the largest and fastest-growing centre in the Study Area and the hub of the region's educational institutions, healthcare, and social services. The city is in the SouthGrow region and has 53% of the total Study Area workforce as of 2018. The city had a population of 105,551 in 2017 is expected to grow to 22,718 residents by 2028. The city is projected to require 4,517 new workers by 2025, an increase of 10% compared to employment estimates in 2020. Due to the city's status as a regional hub, most of this projected growth will be healthcare and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and educational services.

Town of Taber: The Town of Taber is located in the SouthGrow region of the Study Area and has 4.4% of the region's total workforce as of 2018. The Town had a population of 8,903 in 2018 and is projected to grow by 701 residents by 2028. Due to data suppression, 4-digit NAICS and NOCS labour force projections for the Town of Taber are not available. Taber is projected to require 90 workers to meet employment demand. This represents an increase of 2% compared to the employment estimates in



2020. Most of this growth will be in transportation and warehousing, educational services, and arts, entertainment, and recreation.

Town of Cardston: The Town of Cardston is located in the Southwest region of the Study Area and has 1.5% of the region's total workforce as of 2018. The Town had a population of 3,731 in 2018 and is projected to grow by 14 residents by 2028. Due to data suppression, 4-digit NAICS and NOCS labour force projections for the Town of Cardston are not available. Cardston is projected to lose one net worker by 2025. This represents a decrease of 0.1% compared to the employment estimates in 2020. Most of the growth will take place in the transportation and warehousing, and educational services sectors. Meanwhile, most of the decrease will be seen in the utility sector.

Town of Fort MacLeod: The Town of Fort MacLeod is located in the Southwest region of the Study Area and has 1.3% of the region's total workforce as of 2018. The Town had a population of 3,026 in 2018 and is projected to decline by -8% losing 251 people by 2028. Due to data suppression, 4-digit NAICS and NOCS labour force projections for the Town of Fort MacLeod are not available. Fort MacLeod is projected to lose 17 net workers by 2025. This represents a decrease of 1% compared to the employment estimates in 2020. Most of the growth will take place in the educational services sector. Meanwhile, most of the decrease will be seen in retail trade.

Vulcan County: Vulcan County is located in the SouthGrow of the Study Area and has 2% of the region's total workforce as of 2018. The County has a population of 4,190 residents and is projected to add 226 residents by 2028. Due to data suppression, 4-digit NAICS and NOCS labour force projections for Vulcan County are not available. Vulcan County is projected to require ten workers to meet employment demand. This represents an increase of 1% compared to the employment estimates in 2020. Most of the net growth will take place in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting. Meanwhile, most of the decrease will be seen in wholesale trade.



5.2 Labour market supply/demand insight

The Vicinity Jobs Labour Supply and Demand Platform is an intelligence-gathering system that provides ongoing monitoring of online job postings with extensive quality assurance to analyze and compile each local job demand report. The Data Warehouse and Reporting Engine allow for the tracking of the on-line local job market within the province of Alberta. This technology permits the extraction of relevant information about each online job posting, including the following metrics:

- Job Location
- Employer and employer industry (NAICS)
- Occupational Category (NOCS)

All labour demand and labour supply data provided in the next section correspond to the job posting and job seekers profiles published between March 1, 2019, and February 29, 2020. This report presents data for the following geographies:

- SouthGrow Region (Alberta) SouthGrow Regional Initiative
- Southwest Alberta, SouthWest Alberta Regional Economic Development Alliance

5.2.1 Labour Demand and Supply by Skills

The figure below shows the top skills for demand and labour supply in the SouthGrow Region. Skill groups are divided into general/soft skills, specialized skills, technologies, and tools and equipment. The examination of skills by skill groups indicates considerable common skills in demand and available through labour supply. This induces that employers may access the necessary talent to meet at least some of their skills demand.

Figure 5: Top 5 skills by skill group – demand and supply, SouthGrow Region

Demand-based on job postings	Supply based on on-line profiles
General / Soft Skills	General / Soft Skills
Communication skills	Customer Service
Customer Service	Communication skills
Teamwork	Time Management
English language	Teamwork
Fast-paced Setting	Ability to Learn
Specialized Skills	Specialized Skills
Sales	Sales
Occupational Health and Safety	Office Administration
Budgeting	Accounting
Office Administration	Project Management
Analytical Skills	Inventory Management
Technologies	Technologies
Microsoft Office	Microsoft Office
Microsoft Excel	Microsoft Excel
Microsoft Word	Microsoft Word
Microsoft Outlook	Microsoft PowerPoint
Microsoft PowerPoint	Adobe Systems Adobe Photoshop
Tools and Equipment	Tools and Equipment
Forklifts	Forklifts



Power Tools	Power Tools
Conveyors	Boilers
Boilers	Skid steers
Disposal units	Lawnmowers

Source: Vicinity Jobs

The figure below shows the top skills for demand and supply in Southwest Alberta. Skill groups are divided into general/soft skills, specialized skills, technologies, and tools and equipment.

Figure 6: Top 5 skills by skill group – demand and supply, Southwest Alberta

Demand	Supply
General / Soft Skills	General / Soft Skills
Customer Service	Customer Service
Communication skills	Communication skills
Teamwork	Time Management
Fast-paced Setting	Teamwork
English language	Ability to Learn
Specialized Skills	Specialized Skills
Sales	Office Administration
Budgeting	Sales
Office Administration	Accounting
Accounting	Occupational Health and Safety
Risk Management	Inventory Management
Technologies	Technologies
Microsoft Office	Microsoft Office
Microsoft Excel	Microsoft Excel
Microsoft Word	Microsoft Word
Microsoft Outlook	Microsoft PowerPoint
Customer relationship management CRM software	Intuit QuickBooks
Tools and Equipment	Tools and Equipment
Forklifts	Forklifts
Diesel engines	Power Tools
Navigation equipment	Backhoes
Alarm systems	Excavators
Boilers	Lowboys

Source: Vicinity Jobs



5.3 Engagement Insights

Engagement activities were designed to encourage participants across Southwest Alberta to share their experiences and insights related to workforce issues and challenges, and gaps and opportunities that would improve the region's positioning in having a strong pipeline of talent. The comments in this section reflect the views, perceptions, and opinions as received. They have not been vetted for accuracy, instead reflect individual participant perspectives and viewpoints. Insights gathered, and conclusions drawn from the engagement and consultation activities reflect the collective responses. They should not be taken as generalizations about all employers or job seekers within the study area.

Employer Survey

- **COVID-19 has hampered business growth:** One of the core focuses of the second wave business survey was understanding the impacts and implications of COVID-19. Based on the responses, it is clear the pandemic has had a significant effect on local business productivity, growth, and employee retention.
- **During COVID-19, more employers temporary laid-off staff instead of terminating their contract:** Respondents indicated that 36% of temporarily laid-off their workforce compared to the 17% of respondents who indicated they terminated staff contracts. Furthermore, 35% of respondents stated that they re-hired back previously laid off staff. Overall, the data suggests that Federal and Provincial COVID-19 support programs such as the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) are proving effective at encouraging employee retention.
- **Businesses have been forced to adapt workplace policies in response to COVID-19:** Adapting to the pandemic was a core insight gathered from the survey with top mentioned responses including limiting employee travel (37%), shortening hours of operation (33%), and requiring employees to work from home (24%). Additionally, employers noted greater focus had been placed on supporting employees to complete professional development training (24%). Overall, nearly half of respondents felt that if the pandemic continues or worsens, it will be business as usual, and 22% mentioned potentially needing to lay off more staff.
- **Transitioning to a work from home model is gaining momentum:** As noted above, working from home has gained considerable traction for many employers during the pandemic, with nearly half (46%) of respondents indicating that 1 to 49 percent of their workforce can work from home. However, more progress must be made to completely transition jobs, with 12% of respondents indicating their whole workforce is digital.
- **Business satisfaction is still high for operating within Study Area:** 95% of respondents indicated they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with operating a business in the Southwest Alberta region.
- **Pre-COVID-19, the availability of qualified candidates and an ageing workforce/retirement were critical regional issues:** 62% of respondents indicating a lack of qualified candidates to be either a significant challenge or somewhat of a challenge and 22% regarding an ageing workforce.
- **Difficulties with labour attraction/retention remain critical indicators of an employer's likelihood of staying within the region:** A critical insight noted was that for over half of businesses (57%), difficulties with labour retention is either very likely or somewhat likely to impact their decision to remain operating in the region.



- **Before the pandemic, the availability of transportation and childcare was the least challenging issues:** 92% of respondents felt that availability of transportation was not a challenge or not much of a challenge, followed by 88% of respondents regarding the availability of childcare.
- **Nearly half of businesses are still considering hiring within the next 12 months and require skilled employees:** 48% indicated they are planning to hire within the year. The top two in-demand occupations mentioned were skilled trade (28%) and sales/service occupations (26%).
- **The highest priority workforce factors in Southwest Alberta were the availability of experienced workers, availability of a trained, local workforce, and marketing efforts describing the overall quality of life:** These factors received a high priority ranking and represented potential avenues for focus.

Job Seeker Survey

- **Implications of COVID-19:** 79% of respondents mentioned they would very likely or likely consider employment in occupations that would not have been considered in pre-COVID-19. Furthermore, 49% of respondents are temporarily or permanently laid off, and 16% have had their hours reduced.
- **Job seeker's current job status:** A large proportion of respondents are currently working in a clerical/administrative or a healthcare role, and 86% of them are making less than \$35 an hour.
- **Job seekers view the job market:** if respondents could work in any industry, 24% are not sure where they would like to work, but 25% would choose healthcare and social assistance, and 8% would choose agriculture. When looking at the job seekers' view of the job market, respondents often felt relevant educational programming and poor or fair jobs that match their skillset and opportunities to enhance their skill set.
- **Job seekers view the job search support system:** Respondents primarily use online job boards such as Indeed and Workopolis (82%) and social media (64%) for their job search. Many of them use job description information/occupational and skill profiles (59%) and wage rates and benefits (51%) to find relevant labour market information. Most respondents did not mention working with an employment service organization.
- **Job seekers view on skills, training, and local support:** A large portion of respondents feel access to opportunities and skills training would help them achieve full employment.



5.4 Key Informant Interview Insights

A total of 35 key informant interviews were completed with stakeholders in the region; they included educational representatives, businesses, immigration service providers, local government, and workforce service providers. These interviews were designed to identify skills gaps and better understand how to address workforce challenges. The key themes that emerged from the interviews are broken down by region and are as follows:

5.4.1 Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Interview Summary – Lethbridge

Employers Point of View on the Local Regional Skills Gap

Availability of Talent

The stakeholders interviewed had a wide diversity of opinions on the general availability and quality of talent. A significant number of interviewees mentioned large numbers of unskilled or lower-skilled workers are currently looking for work in the region and seem to be applying for jobs indiscriminately, creating challenges for the hiring staff of local businesses. Some firms that require more specialized skillsets identified difficulties in finding skilled and experienced professional-level staff in niche industries. Many of these individuals recognized the skill sets they are looking for are rarer in the region. There are not concentrations of firms doing similar work, thus creating fewer opportunities. These businesses often cited the importance of internships and co-op training, where they can develop the skills, they cannot find in the labour market.

New Generation of Workers

Some stakeholders also mentioned challenges related to a gap in understanding between employers and the new generation of workers, which leads to a concern around employee turnover and rising hiring and training costs. For example, millennials want more flexible hours and more input and decision-making ability in their work than the previous generation. Some firms also felt young people do not understand the growth that comes with a minimum wage role or a position where one works with their hands. It was noted that career exploration events at school would help young people make more informed career decisions, and HR consultants could help firms better understand the needs of their younger workers.

Wage Competition

Challenges around employers' ability to pay competitive wages were also expressed. Historically the city felt the impact of the wage war with the oil fields. However, even as this the economy shifts, some stakeholders mentioned, Southern Alberta still pays less than other parts of Alberta, which can be difficult for employers when negotiating wages with a talented candidate. On the other hand, one stakeholder feels local economic development does an excellent job attracting business and employees, and universities have contributed to growing technical talent within the community.



Job Seekers Point of View on the Local Regional Skills Gap

Quality of Employment Opportunities

The stakeholders interviewed had diverse opinions on the general quality of employment opportunities. Many stakeholders referenced the importance of a good match between the employment opportunity and the job seekers' skills and interests. For example, new projects are appearing in agriculture that require technical skills for higher-paid roles. On the other hand, many mid-level and senior-level professionals' roles, such as human resources management, are not in Lethbridge and larger cities such as Calgary.

Cultural Mismatch Between Youth's Desires and The Image of Lethbridge

Stakeholders mentioned that youth want to live and work in dynamic and amenity-rich communities to support their personal and professional goals. Many youths feel more opportunities with long-term earning potential in larger cities, and opportunities are limited in Lethbridge, which has a perception of an older rural city. This was mentioned alongside statements that there are fewer headquarters in Lethbridge relative to larger cities. It was suggested that organizations need to work with youth to encourage entrepreneurial thinking and help them understand the opportunities that they can create for themselves in this smaller community. Lethbridge could also improve its image by promoting rural opportunities, modernizing infrastructure, and strengthening relationships between stakeholders.

Gap Between Job Seeker Skills and Employer Expectations

Stakeholders mentioned those job seekers might find it challenging to find the job they want because they need more experience before obtaining the higher-level role and increased compensation that many young job-seekers desire. Many individuals also stressed the importance and expectation for job candidates to have soft skills, which are not always prevalent among job seekers. Communication skills are particularly crucial for a job seeker to communicate their previous experiences and vision for the future both verbally and orally to stand-out from the pool of candidates with the same formal education. Internships and co-ops and committees focused on developing interest and experience in the trades for high school students are opportunities currently taken advantage of in Lethbridge.

Wage Expectations

Job seekers are finding it hard to find a job that fits their wage expectancy. It was mentioned that Southwest Alberta's pace of business is slower than larger cities, and job seekers need to slow down the rate at which they want to advance their careers to match the pace of the city. This expectation may be correlated to high wages for relatively low-skilled roles seen in the oil fields relative to the lower wages that require more skills in Lethbridge.

Large Influx of Job Applications

A few interviewees mentioned that due to many applicants for most jobs that may or may not be qualified for the role, serious job seekers find it harder to stand out to prospective employers. One employer mentioned they help mitigate this challenge by inviting candidates to present their resumes personally to their physical workplace. Candidate profiles in Indeed and Monster and from Co-ops and internship programs are also helpful in finding these qualified job seekers.



Education and Training – Challenges and Opportunities

Challenge - Align Education and Training with Needs of Local Employers

The stakeholders interviewed had diverse opinions regarding education and local training gaps, depending on their sector. Compared to other regions in Southern Alberta, such as Medicine Hat, Lethbridge is an education hub with many agriculture programs not offered elsewhere and secure connections to the agriculture community. This alignment between local education/training and the needs of local employers brings young people to Lethbridge. On the other hand, some sectors require local education and training institutions to better aligning their offerings with the needs of local employers. For example, more focus could be dedicated to expanding training for the trades as millwright plumbers and other trades students currently have to leave the Region for training. Tech sector course content needs to stay up to date with trends in the sector. Gaps were noted in robotics, lean manufacturing, robotics specialization, and basic lean training. Stakeholders also expressed the need for educational institutions to teach students' softs skills to support their performance in the working world.

Challenge - Promoting Education in Sectors Requiring More Labour

Stakeholders mentioned that trades had seen fewer candidates interested in pursuing a long-term career, particularly in areas such as electricians and millwrights. It was noted that educational institutions could do a better job of promoting and creating awareness of the trades as a viable career option to attract higher-quality applicants to these roles.

Opportunity – Collaboration Between Businesses and Education/Training Institutions

The stakeholders interviewed mentioned the collaboration between businesses and education/training institutions has increased over time. There is more cooperation between high schools and post-secondary to encourage students to consider various careers. Employers mentioned they have continuous opportunities to present to students. Local business incubators also act as a link between educational institutions and businesses. Co-ops and internships were consistently mentioned as a great way to connect job seekers and employers. Networking events and job fairs were also mentioned.

Opportunity – Invest in Career Development at a Younger Age

A few stakeholders expressed the importance of youth developing an understanding of the relationship between skills and learning with work opportunities at a younger age. Stakeholders mentioned government funding could be used to incorporate career development starting at Kindergarten. Experiential learning could also be provided at a younger age to develop better expectations for the opportunities in the working world and understanding of the importance of skills and experience to be successful in their career.



5.4.2 Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Interview Summary – SouthGrow (Taber, Vulcan)

Employers Point of View on the Local Regional Skills Gap

Availability of Talent - Availability of talent is sector-specific.

Many workers are available for construction. One interviewee said construction is more organized in recruitment, bringing in labour from greater distances if needed, given the sector's temporary nature. Interviewees said construction has kept up with technology.

Cleaners and health care workers seem to be easy to source. Health care uses a charge-back method to pay for training if they do not stick with the employer who funded the courses.

If an employer is looking for specific skills, labour supply can be tighter, as some workers are less willing to venture into the region for work.

Local entry-level positions do not pay well enough to attract workers from outside the area. Urban centres attract skilled workers willing to drive the distance, creating a brain drain.

Training levels vary

Some concerns were expressed about a lack of literacy. There is a portion of the population that generally does not pursue high school education due to various cultural practices, which leads to a lower percentage of the population having completed a high school education and a lack of literacy.

There is not as much entry-level work with a broad range of learning opportunities, so young workers or those in transition cannot get foundational work experience skills.

Workers not learning specialized systems used on agricultural or construction equipment and trucks. Some farmers do not want expensive equipment damaged by an inexperienced worker. There were concerns expressed about a drop in digital literacy skills. Without those skills, one interviewee said, it's like being illiterate.

A disconnect between outside companies and local workers

One interviewee noted a disconnect between companies based in urban centres looking for workers locally, and not receiving the support they need, and not being able to identify local workers with the skill sets. As a result, there has been some local public opposition to the projects. Businesses complain that the commuter workers from out of town are not spending any money in the community other than lunch. Buy-local marketing campaigns have been attempted, but often shops and businesses are not open when residents want to purchase items.

Differing appetites for 'hard work.'

There is lots of work available for people willing to work in 'terrible conditions,' no experience required.

However, younger workers are not interested in manual-labour positions due to the nature of the work or the pay level. Younger workers don't possess the resilient work ethic that older workers do.



Some workers have become accustomed to high rates of pay and would instead perform a service job that manual labour if the income is similar. Workers are also not willing to put in extra time, arrive early, or stay late.

Low German Mennonites and foreign workers were identified as a source of manual labour, but employers need to be educated on cultural differences. Otherwise, it is difficult to attract workers to the area.

Job Seekers Point of View on the Local Regional Skills Gap

It's not what you know

Getting a job in the area depends on who you know. As a result, experienced newcomers and highly qualified individuals without local connections are working low-skilled jobs. Affluent individuals are scooping higher pays even though they are not as skilled because they know someone.

Wages are low

Even in less desirable, labour-intensive jobs, wage rates are low, resulting in less disposable income, multiple part-time jobs, and mental health issues. Workers are drawn to urban areas that pay better, resulting in a shrinking labour pool.

Communities are not welcoming

A better job needs to be done on acknowledging cultural differences for newcomers. Small towns are not as welcoming as they could be. Slow accreditation programs do not help and appear to benefit those already in the trade. The example of the qualified foreign dentist cleaning horse stalls highlights the perception that newcomers should be diminished and discounted before they are accepted in a community, a situation that needs to change.

Employers need to understand youth perspective

Employers are not creating jobs with growth potential; they are unwilling to confront the demands of a younger workforce that wants flexible work hours and little manual work. Some youth don't want to be saddled with a mortgage and the expense of owning a vehicle. As a result, local youth head to better-paying urban centres with more opportunities and the quality of life they desire and don't return.

Education and Training – Challenges and Opportunities

Challenge – Build a bridge between business and education

Those who work in the education and training realm, believed there are more opportunities for collaboration among various players, specifically businesses and trade associations. Among employers, opinions ranged from wishing educational institutions took business needs more seriously to outright dismissal of the education system – saying business should take care of their training and avoid the educational system. The answer is likely somewhere in the middle, but a more vital bridge needs to be built among the various players facing the challenges. Also, there could be more effective relations between levels of education, with one public education stakeholder complaining that post-secondary institutions do not spend enough time promoting their programs at the high school level. Business owners also felt students could be introduced to work experiences at a much younger age, but the system is not set up.



Challenge – Understanding and addressing attitudes of job-seekers and employers

Concerns were expressed about the gap between expectations of both employers and job seekers, with a grudging admission that business owners will need to shift their thinking more than those in the job market. Employers who embrace the realities of attitudes among job seekers, in general, are more apt to retain them for more extended periods. What motivated an employer to take a job when he or she was younger (stable job, income, settling down) might not be attractive to a potential young Canadian-born worker in today's society (seeking professional stimulation, advancement, gym pass, flex time). The good news is young newcomers from other countries, or other parts of Canada may share the mindset of employers – seeking stability, but willing to work hard. Again, employers will need to shift gears on how they attract and retain newcomers.

Opportunity – Enhance work experience programs

The Registered Apprenticeship Program was viewed as a complementary program that helps build a connection between youth, educational institutions, and employers, providing an all-important on-the-job experience for a job seeker and determining if they have a passion for the industry sector or not. There were negative aspects of RAP (e.g., transportation challenges for apprentices, higher insurance costs for employers), but the benefits outweigh the burden. A similar work experience program could be developed for new Canadians.

Opportunity – Employer input into training and employee recruitment

Post-secondary education institutions could enhance their relationships with local employers by listening to their concerns and addressing them. Lethbridge College's agricultural programs were highlighted as an excellent example for other industries and institutions to consider. Some worker recruitment and retention initiatives were praised, such as job fairs and competitions. Still, all could benefit from better communication between business, education, workforce agencies, economic development offices, and other stakeholders.



5.4.3 Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Interview Summary – Southwest (Cardston, Fort MacLeod)

Employers Point of View on the Local Regional Skills Gap

The economy in transition has a ripple effect

The loss of manufacturing jobs and the downturn in traditional oil and gas has been detrimental to associated service sectors, such as agri-food, IT, and others. As a result, some industries have moved out of province, so luring highly qualified employees back from further afield is very difficult.

Difficulty finding workers

Employers described the job market as tight, with a lack of qualified individuals to draw from. One established small business felt comfortable with the workers on staff but expressed concern that he had no training institution. A health care employer expressed concern about burn-out among existing workers due to the economies of scale of expanding services in a small community. One employer is interviewing international candidates from Toronto because graduates from nearby universities were "OK, not great."

Work ethic and training quality

Employers acknowledged a general lessening of work ethic among job seekers, although expressing concern that their employers are abusing some young people while other young people "act like King Tut." Another employer voiced concern about the quality of education and training students were receiving. There is more demand for job-seekers to have a degree or diploma, but even if they do have the papers, they are not necessarily ready to work.

Job Seekers Point of View on the Local Regional Skills Gap

Lack of full-time opportunities

People are working two or three part-time jobs to make ends meet, which empties the pool of qualified candidates.

Cost of training

Job-seekers are challenged to pursue the right education stream for full-time jobs, without going into debt with tuition. Education is costly, and many jobs require specific degrees or certificates that demand individual prerequisites. Job-seekers are concerned the jobs will be gone by the time they complete their training.

Quality of life is good, but...

Many students and job seekers from other parts of Canada like the area and want to stay, but the length of contracts and hours available is a limiting factor. Eventually, they need to move to a community where employers provide a much more stable income. Then they can consider buying a house or taking a loan, something they cannot do on part-time hours.

Education and Training – Challenges and Opportunities

Challenge – Education institutions disconnected from the business



Employers felt the education system is failing employers and job seekers in terms of a lack of career fairs, job placements, field trips to universities and colleges, and generally enhancing communication between those who train and those who employ. Some felt criteria and guidelines for programs developed by the education system do not meet the needs of employers.

Challenge – Who does what

Interviewees felt there were various solutions and opportunities to assist employers and job-seekers but seemed confused about who was responsible. A general lack of leadership, collaboration, and understanding of the next steps were evident.

Opportunity – On the job experience

Stakeholders felt the focus should be placed on trying to get new graduates as much as experience and opportunity as possible. Students should be provided on-the-job experience while they are still in school. Employers should be asked to provide input into these programs, so they see the graduate as employable when they are considered for a job.

Opportunity – Incentives for employers to hire full-time

Interviewees encouraged the government to find ways for employers to provide full-time jobs for job seekers instead of casual workers. Also, providing incentives and highlighting the benefits of living and working in rural Alberta could help draw more job-seekers.



5.5 Regional Skills Gap Analysis

The following figures depict workforce challenges and requirements in the region identified through stages of the project. The figures illustrate the challenges in General / Soft Skills, Specialized Skills, Technologies and Tools and Equipment and the sources through which they were identified. Rankings were determined through a weighted point system, Vicinity Jobs being allocated 3 points (3), Common Skills Matrix (2), Engagement Activities (1 for a mention in each activity for a possible total of 3), Trends (1). Key themes reiterated through these phases include the need to improve on soft skills (e.g., interpersonal skills), reducing the experience gap for new graduates entering the workforce, and providing more training and support to help individuals upskill. These can include introductory technology courses (e.g., Adobe Suite) or more specialized training for skilled trades and project management.

Figure 7: Identified Workforce Challenges: General / Soft Skills

General / Soft Skills					
Challenge Area	Engagement	Common Skills Matrix*	Trends	Vicinity Data	Points**
Ability to Learn	Business Survey, Interviews, Workshops	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Interpersonal Skills	Business Survey, Interviews, Workshops	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Work Ethic	Business Survey, Interviews, Workshops	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Computer Literacy	Business Survey, Workshops, Interviews	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Communications Skills	Business and Job Seeker Survey	Yes	Yes	Yes	8
Time Management and Prioritization	Business Survey	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Teamwork	Business Survey	N/A	Yes	Yes	5
Customer Service	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	Yes	4
Sales/Service Skills	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	Yes	4

*Technical Report: Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Skills Gaps Analysis, Common Skills Matrix ** Rankings were determined through a weighted point system Vicinity Jobs (3), Common Skills Matrix (2), Engagement Activities (1 for a mention in each activity for a possible total of 3), Trends (1).



Figure 8: Identified Workforce Challenges: Specialized Skills

Specialized Skills					
Challenge Area	Engagement	Common Skills Matrix*	Trends	Vicinity Data	Total**
Analytical Skills	Business Survey, Interviews, Workshops	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Budgeting	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	Yes	6
Project Management	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	Yes	6
Skilled Trades	Business Survey, Interviews	Yes	Yes	N/A	5
Report Writing	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	5
Marketing	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	5
Ability to operate agricultural equipment	Interviews	Yes	Yes	N/A	4
Training/Teaching	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	4
Maintain Equipment	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	Yes	4
Maintain Financial Records	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	Yes	4
Management/Leadership skills	Business Survey	Yes	Yes	N/A	4
Inventory Management	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Food Service	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	N/A	3
Electricians	Business Survey, Workshops	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Millwrights	Business Survey, Interviews	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Plumbing	Business Survey, Interviews	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Engineering	Business Survey, Workshops	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Safety Training	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Ability to operate construction equipment	Interviews	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Heavy Equipment Technician	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Mechanics	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Animal Husbandry	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	N/A	1
Graphic Design	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Carpentry Skills	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Accounting	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Culinary Skills	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Welding	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1

*Technical Report: Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Skills Gaps Analysis, Common Skills Matrix ** Rankings were determined through a weighted point system Vicinity Jobs (3), Common Skills Matrix (2), Engagement Activities (1 for a mention in each activity for a possible total of 3), Trends (1).



Figure 9: Identified Workforce Challenges: Technologies

Technologies					
Challenge Area	Engagement	Common Skills Matrix*	Trends	Vicinity Data	Total**
Technical Skills (Comfort using machinery)	Industry Sessions, Business Survey, Job Seeker Survey	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
General Labour	Business Survey, Workshops, Interviews	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Ability to communicate in English	Workshops, Business Survey	Yes	Yes	Yes	8
Microsoft Office Suite	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
Driver Licenses and Certification	Business Survey, Workshops, Interviews	Yes	Yes	N/A	6
Adobe Suite (Photoshop)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	4
LEAN Manufacturing	Workshops, Business Survey, Interviews	N/A	Yes	N/A	4
Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	3
Technical Skills (Comfort using machinery)	Industry Sessions, Business Survey, Job Seeker Survey	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Data and statistical analysis	Business Survey	Yes	N/A	N/A	3
Recruiting/Hiring	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	2
Purchasing	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	2
Computer Programming	Business Survey	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Robotics Expertise	Interviews	N/A	N/A	N/A	1

*Technical Report: Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Skills Gaps Analysis, Common Skills Matrix ** Rankings were determined through a weighted point system Vicinity Jobs (3), Common Skills Matrix (2), Engagement Activities (1 for a mention in each activity for a possible total of 3), Trends (1).



Figure 10: Identified Workforce Challenges: Tools and Equipment

Tools and Equipment					
Challenge Area	Engagement	Common Skills Matrix*	Trends	Vicinity Data	Total**
Forklifts	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Power Tools	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Conveyors	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Boilers	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Skid steers	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Disposal units	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3
Lawnmowers	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	3

*Technical Report: Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Skills Gaps Analysis, Common Skills Matrix ** Rankings were determined through a weighted point system Vicinity Jobs (3), Common Skills Matrix (2), Engagement Activities (1 for a mention in each activity for a possible total of 3), Trends (1)



6. Conclusion

The Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Partnership was formed to provide leadership and direction to address regional skills and competency gaps and explore strategic approaches to best position greater supply and demand alignment. The Partnership has recognized that local and regional competitiveness is significantly influenced by the business's ability to access the talent and skills needed to deliver products and services. In this ever-changing global environment, access to talent is no longer constrained by geography, rather ease of mobility and the speed at which technologies are transforming sectors, processes, and strategies are further influencing where talent works and lives. As a result of COVID-19, many communities are experiencing a slowdown or stall in the economy, while the labour force is seeing increased unemployment rates and displacement from the labour market. It is still unclear how long these disruptions will last, nor do we fully understand the implications and fall out. Communities that are being proactive and thinking longer-term will be best positioned to respond accordingly.

The convergence of workforce and economic development has also evolved in recent years. Recognition that a community's strongest asset is its talent pool is now guiding economic activity such as investment, site selection, and business expansion.⁴ Where once serviced land was the key driver for investment interest, today, this is being upstaged by the availability of talent and the capacity through which communities can support talent development. Southwest Alberta is strongly positioned in talent development, with its post-secondary institutions being an attractor of students pursuing post-secondary education. Additionally, the region offers significant benefits that influence the quality of life, a second key factor that influences the job seeker decision on where to live.

This strategy positions Southwest Alberta to be responsive and proactive to the opportunities that will influence the capacity and capability to not only build the talent needed to drive local competitiveness but to attract and retain the talent necessary to fill those difficult-to-fill vacancies. Through a collaborative and collective effort, the Southwest Alberta Regional Skills Study Partnership, with the inclusion of additional partners that may choose to come to the table, has the roadmap to forge ahead with a future-focused plan that will support its communities and the region as a whole.

⁴ <https://aboutdci.com/2018/03/episode-40-next-practices-site-selection-insights-site-selectors-guild/>; accessed 9-22-2020