



**Labour Market Strategy  
engagement  
Interim What We Heard**

**September 2025**



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# Background

The Government of Yukon is developing a new labour market strategy. This interim report outlines the data we have gathered so far. Through targeted engagement, we have deepened our understanding of labour force inequalities, high wage competition between the private and public sector, job vacancies and limited opportunities in communities outside Whitehorse, among other challenges.

These insights will help to shape a strategy that is practical, responsive and focused on supporting individuals, communities and businesses in achieving their labour market goals. We engaged with stakeholders and consulted with First Nations governments through targeted outreach – an important, though partial step in the process.

Participants have shared valuable feedback that helps establish a solid foundation for identifying the key issues and challenges in the labour market. This interim report provides an update for participants and the public on what we have learned to date. Our goal is to ensure that programs, investments and policies are aligned with the circumstances that people and organizations are navigating across the territory.

# Engagement process

## Purpose

The Yukon's labour market presents a mix of long-standing and emerging challenges that differ by region, sector and population. Through existing data and conversations with clients, we were already aware of a range of issues, such as labour force inequalities, high wage competition particularly between private sector and public sector, persistent job vacancies and limited employment opportunities in some communities. These challenges continue to evolve alongside the Yukon's shifting economic and social landscape.



This targeted engagement and consultation helped deepen our understanding by speaking directly to employers and those involved in the labour market service delivery. Their insights are helping to shape a strategy that is practical, responsive and focused on supporting individuals, communities and businesses in achieving their labour market goals.

## How we engaged

To support the development of a strategy grounded in lived realities, we connected with those who play a role in the labour market; employers, Yukon First Nations governments, and service providers. Each brought perspectives shaped by their unique roles, experiences and challenges.

## Engagement Methods

Over an 11-month period, beginning in July 2024, we engaged directly with targeted stakeholders and consulted with First Nation governments through 94 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups across target populations.

Our conversations were shaped by a set of five broad themes:



We approached interviews with a set of guiding questions to support comparability across conversations. Participants were encouraged to help guide the process, speaking freely about what mattered most to them. The goal was to listen, learn and better understand what's working, what is not and where more support may be needed.



Focus groups were similarly structured according to the key engagement themes, which helped to guide conversations among participants.

## How we reached out and who responded

### **Yukon First Nations governments**

The foundation for this engagement was our work with Yukon First Nations governments. On May 21, 2024, letters from then-Premier Pillai were sent to all 14 Yukon First Nations governments, announcing the consultation, underscoring the importance of meaningful consultation with First Nations governments and extending an invitation to share their priorities and perspectives.

In total, ten Yukon First Nations responded and four engaged in informal discussions. Formal interviews were held with representatives from six Yukon First Nations governments, including: Selkirk First Nation, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Liard First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

### **Employers**

We invited specific employers to take part in the engagement and also asked them to suggest other employers who might want to be involved. This approach helped us gather diverse perspectives from business within Whitehorse and Yukon communities, across industries and sectors, and businesses ranging in size from those employing a handful of Yukoners up to the territory's largest employers.

In total, we reached out to 99 employers, of which 65 participated in interviews. Up to four attempts were made to contact each potential participant by telephone, email or a combination of both. Interviews lasted an average of one-hour-and-three minutes.

Of the 34 businesses who did not participate, 24 did not respond; five responded but were not available to meet during the engagement and five declined to participate. Of those who declined to participate, one employer indicated they were not interested; three told us they did not hire staff and were therefore not impacted by labour market

challenges; and one had retired. There were 25 employers from Yukon communities, including Dawson, Faro, Carcross, Destruction Bay, Watson Lake, Mayo, Marsh Lake, Teslin, Haines Junction and Ross River. There were 40 employers from Whitehorse.

Employers included private sector businesses in retail, health care services, property management, tourism providers, transportation, First Nation Development Corporations, and non-profit cultural service providers, as well as chambers of commerce and industry organizations. Participants spanned industry sectors, contributing a fulsome view of the challenges and successes shaping the Yukon's labour market.



Industry Sector	Number of Employers
All	65
Accommodation and food services	7
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	2
Arts, entertainment and recreation	7
Construction	5
Finance and insurance	1
Health care and social assistance	7
Management of companies and enterprises; administrative and support services	5
Manufacturing	2
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	1
Other (except public administration)	7
Municipal government	3
Professional, scientific and technical services	4
Retail trade	9
Transportation and warehousing	3
Utilities: manufacturing	2

Figure 1: Number of employers interviewed by industry sector

In addition, we held one two-hour focus group on July 18, 2024, which brought together representatives from three organizations who represent Yukon employers, including: the Yukon First Nations Chamber of Commerce, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Industry Association.



## Service Providers

For service provider interviews, those with current labour market funding agreements or recent history in the delivery of information, services or supports to Yukon employers and workers were contacted by email.

Service provider participants included non-governmental organizations, private consultants and institutions.

In total, we interviewed 23 service providers offering labour market support, with interviews lasting an average of one hour 23 minutes.

On August 14, 2024, we held a full-day focus group, bringing together 31 participants across 20 stakeholder groups and organizations. Participants explored hiring practices and job-seeking strategies, key challenges affecting their service delivery and approaches to offering support within Yukon's rapidly changing labour market.

We are grateful to all who took the time to share their experiences, and we look forward to continuing to work together with those who are interested.

# What we heard

## 1. Employers key insights

### Recruitment, retention and barriers

Recruitment and retention challenges remain a concern for some employers we engaged, though experiences vary widely depending on the size of the business, sector and location.

*"We are not going to expand into something that we can't deliver with the boots on the ground."*

Some employers reported ongoing difficulties tied to specific job types, while others experienced fewer challenges or no challenges at all. Among those who did report difficulties,

some noted that staffing shortages had limited their ability to expand and, in a few cases, led to reduced operations.

For some, workforce challenges are viewed as part of the natural business cycle, with hiring decisions shaped by what is most optimal at a given time and influenced by various environmental factors. There were also observations that similar challenges tend to resurface over time.

Employers described a range of strategies to improve recruitment. Some recognized that application processes can act as a barrier and offered direct support to help candidates' complete applications and understand hiring requirements. Others worked to shorten

Among businesses reporting difficulty finding experienced or skilled staff, 8.7% identified housing as a barrier, citing that it was either too expensive or unavailable.

Yukon Business Survey 2023

hiring timelines to avoid losing qualified applicants. In some interviews, businesses highlighted the benefits of strong community connections in successfully hiring through local networks. Others expressed interest in adopting this approach but noted challenges in building or accessing similar networks. Some employers also implemented referral bonuses or created family stream processes to support recruitment.

In cases where local recruitment was challenging, some businesses turned to the Yukon Nominee Program (YNP) to fill labour gaps. Employers shared mixed perspectives on the program, acknowledging its value in addressing specific workforce needs, while raising concerns about its processes and long-term sustainability. Feedback on the YNP has been shared with the relevant program areas for consideration.

There was also interest in developing stronger recruitment pipelines through partnerships with post-secondary institutions. While some employers are already engaged in this work and spoke positively about the benefits, others expressed a desire to pursue similar partnerships but noted they currently lack the capacity to do so.

Housing was raised as a barrier to recruitment, particularly for attracting workers from outside the territory. Seasonal employers, especially during peak times in the spring and

summer, appeared to face additional challenges, even when trying to hire from within the Yukon.

Employers in rural and remote communities also noted that housing shortages were more pronounced, though the extent varied by location and season. Some businesses, within their means, have offered accommodation options ranging from apartments to campers to support their workforce needs. In addition to housing, employers pointed to the lack of other community infrastructure, such as recreation centres and reliable transportation, as factors that can limit their ability to attract workers. In interviews, credential recognition emerged as another hiring barrier, especially when trying to recruit skilled workers from within and outside of Canada. The challenge was especially prominent in the health and skilled trades occupations.

Employers expressed confidence in the competencies of certain applicants but found themselves navigating complex credentialing systems. Some supported candidates through the process but found it difficult to navigate and said they would not do it again. There were also cases where businesses believed candidates were well qualified, but lack of international pathways or additional practicum requirements became barriers, even in situations where employers felt they could close the skills gap internally through on-the-job training.

Regarding retention, it was acknowledged that not every role is viewed as a long-term commitment. Some positions are naturally seen as short-term or transitional and open conversations about how long a candidate intends to stay were described as helpful in setting realistic expectations, reducing uncertainty and fostering stronger working relationships. For some employers, high turnover is the norm and maintaining a steady pipeline of new hires has become part of their regular business planning.

Businesses in the Yukon reported taking a range of steps to address recruitment and retention challenges. The most common action across all years was raising wages, increasing from 12.4% of businesses in 2019 to 22.3% in 2023. Employers also extended their own work hours and those of existing employees. Over time, more businesses reported using flexible work arrangements, benefits, and training supports. Despite these efforts, 17.1% of businesses in 2023 said they did not take any specific steps to address staffing challenges.

Yukon Business Survey 2019, 2021, 2023

To improve retention, some businesses check in regularly with staff, formally or informally, to identify and address issues early. Others have redesigned roles to better align with employee skills and interests, creating clearer paths for advancement.

Interviewees also spoke about offering professional development supports such as training allowances to help staff grow within the company. However, there were concerns about investing in employee training only to lose staff shortly after, often to higher-paying opportunities in government.

Other examples included implementing additional benefits to support both recruitment and retention, such as mental health days, birthday leave and increased contributions. Some businesses described strengthening internal communication and shifting away from traditional “three-strike” rules to improve retention and a more supportive workplace culture.

Flexible and remote work options, including four-day work weeks in some cases have also been adopted to meet evolving employee expectations. Some employers indicated that performance bonuses, particularly when unexpected, were well received by employees. In a few cases, company-sponsored travel such as attending conferences or training was viewed as both a professional opportunity and a valued experience that contributed to retention. Some businesses are also focused on creating fun and engaging work environments by organizing casual events, team activities and encouraging friendly relationships between colleagues.

Some employers expressed interest in more collaborative approaches to hiring such as coordinating recruitment efforts, sharing access to a common labour pool or exchanging information about available workers. These models were seen as a way to reduce strain on individual employers, particularly in smaller communities or sectors where workforce shortages are persistent.

The ability to adopt these diverse approaches often depended on range of factors affecting employers’ day to day operations. Not all businesses have the capacity to implement new approaches, particularly when the perceived benefits are outweighed by the potential impacts on their operations.



## Workforce participation and inclusion

Some employers indicated that hiring decisions are based primarily on merit, with a focus on selecting the best candidate regardless of personal characteristics or backgrounds. Formal inclusion policies were less commonly referenced and some employers noted

| *“Everybody deserves a job; everybody deserves to work.”*

challenges integrating such policies into their hiring practices. However, there were also employers who actively prioritized inclusion, often because they had the resources, organizational capacity or corporate mandates to do so. This included some larger companies and organizations with development-oriented business arms, particularly in sectors where community impact and long-term workforce development are part of their operating focus.

In fall of 2024, nearly 135 Yukon job seekers reported that discrimination made it difficult to find work.

Yukon Employment and Skills Survey 2024

While equity and inclusion were not always cited as explicit hiring practices, several employers expressed a genuine interest in creating supportive and adaptable workplaces where a broad range of individuals could succeed. This often included being mindful of expectations, offering flexibility where possible and fostering respectful, accommodating

workplace cultures. Mentorship opportunities and one-on-one support were emphasized as ways to help those employees who may need additional support to adjust, build confidence or succeed in the workplace.

When staff had disabilities or faced other barriers, some employers adjusted work duties and schedules or provided additional supports to facilitate meaningful participation in the workplace. Others offered targeted training and transition plans to help employees build confidence and integrate smoothly into their roles. A few employers also highlighted the importance of training staff to better understand and respond to the diverse needs of clients and colleagues, including raising awareness about mental health, or incorporating cultural considerations. Some provided training on unconscious bias, particularly at the

management level. In certain cases, mental health supports were offered directly in the workplace, reflecting the value some employers place on overall employee well-being. These efforts often depended on the company's internal values and available resources.

Employers also identified systemic barriers that continue to limit workforce participation. These included a digital skills gap among older workers, limited culturally relevant employment options for equity-seeking groups and a mismatch between available jobs. Flexible work arrangements were seen as particularly helpful for older workers seeking part-time or highly adaptable schedules.

Some employers noted challenges connecting with youth. While they were open to providing on-the-job training and mentorship, they often struggled to reach young people or establish clear pathways for engagement. Employers emphasized the need for stronger community connections, better outreach and closer partnerships with schools

and training organizations to help youth prepare for and enter the workforce.

Yukoners aged 18 to 30 faced an unemployment rate of 9.5%, higher than the overall population.

Yukon Employment and Skills Survey 2024

Some employers discussed how they connect with service providers and review internal processes to improve inclusion. A few expressed a desire to better understand what supports exist to help them. Others questioned whether they might be missing opportunities

simply because they were unaware of the available resources.

Wage subsidies were also viewed as a useful tool for encouraging the hiring of marginalized individuals and managing the financial risks of onboarding new or transitional workers. However, success with these programs was often seen to depend on the employer's ability to provide adequate mentorship, wraparound supports and the lived realities of some individuals.

While many businesses are taking small but meaningful steps toward greater inclusion, ongoing challenges remain. Employers emphasized the importance of practical,



sustainable solutions that meet both business needs and the diverse realities of the Yukon's labour force.

### Future workforce trends: Technology and evolving work models

Employers shared a range of perspectives on how new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), automation and digital tools, are shaping the future of work. For many, AI was viewed as a useful tool to streamline operations by reducing repetitive or time-consuming tasks, allowing employees to focus on more specialized or high-value work.

Some employers reported actively experimenting with AI and other digital systems to improve workflows and increase overall efficiency, often adopting a "trial-and-error" approach to determine what works best for their operations. Several highlighted the importance of training employees in how to properly use AI tools, both to ensure effective implementation and to identify issues or limitations early in the process.

A few businesses noted that recent technology investments had already led to significant reductions in time spent on administrative tasks. Others were beginning to explore technologies, while remaining cautious about potential risks, especially in relation to recruitment practices and the need to retain human judgment in decision-making. There was general agreement that while AI can assist with tasks such as scanning applications or improving service delivery, it should complement, not replace the human element.

Not all employers shared the same level of comfort with emerging technologies. For some, particularly in smaller or community-focused businesses, digital transformation brought hesitation. This was especially the case when the impacts of automation might affect staff or create shifts in roles that could be disruptive. Concern was also raised about the longer-term impacts on rural and Indigenous communities, where technology adoption may outpace the ability of workers to reskill or adapt, potentially undermining efforts to build meaningful economic participation.

Employers emphasized the importance of allowing phased transitions when introducing new technologies, recognizing that adaptability varies among workers. Even among businesses actively pursuing technological innovation, many expressed a strong belief

that certain roles, particularly those involving relationship-building, cultural awareness or community service, will always require a human touch.

Access to reliable, affordable internet was highlighted as an important factor for successful digital adaptation. In some cases, lack of connectivity was a limiting factor in adopting remote work and even training opportunities.

On the topic of remote work, employers shared mixed experiences. Some acknowledged that offering flexible work arrangements had been helpful for retention, particularly among staff seeking work-life balance or those located outside of urban centres. However, others noted that remote work introduced challenges related to communication, team dynamics and management oversight, particularly for businesses that lacked prior experience or training in managing remote teams.

As the Yukon's labour market continues to evolve, employers expect that technology and digital tools will increasingly become part of day-to-day business. However, the pace and form of that adoption will depend on capacity and sector-specific needs.

## 2. Service providers key insights

Service providers are organizations whose mandate it is to provide services, information and support to Yukoners. This can mean an organization in the private sector, a non-governmental organization (NGO) or non-profit, educational institution and more. For services that strengthen the labour market, this can include providing assistance in gaining employment, training, adaptive supports or sector support and advocacy.

### Supporting clients toward workforce participation

Service providers we spoke with support individuals in their day-to-day lives across a wide range of circumstances, helping them navigate challenges while supporting their goals and aspirations.

While not all providers have a direct mandate focused on employment, many described how their services intersect with the labour market. Even those without employment-specific mandates noted that they assist with tasks outside their formal scope, such as helping people prepare for work or navigate pre-employment steps. These actions are

often rooted in the belief that, for many individuals, employment plays a key role in personal growth, stability and overall well-being.

Employment-related support varies across populations and spans multiple stages, including pre-employment, early career, job retention and post-employment support tailored to specific groups. Many service providers emphasized the importance of informal, flexible and individualized support, especially when working with people facing complex or overlapping challenges. A shared understanding was that individuals have diverse needs, even within organizations serving specific population groups.

Clients require different types of support depending on their life stage and circumstances. Some youth need help writing their first resume, mid-career individuals may be looking to upskill, and older workers may need digital literacy training.

Some providers offer one-on-one assistance to individuals who have never worked before or who are re-entering the workforce after a long absence due to caregiving, illness or personal hardship. For many of these individuals, rebuilding confidence and navigating a changed job market can be particularly challenging. Service providers repeatedly emphasized that helping clients build confidence, whether through coaching, mentoring or gradual exposure to new environments, was often a critical first step toward successful engagement.

Others focus on supporting people to stay employed by stabilizing their situations before a crisis leads to job loss. Some providers also deliver applied training and learning programs that help build foundational skills, support job retention and assist individuals in adjusting to the demands of work. In some cases, supports include mentorship or opportunities to re-engage through volunteering or peer guidance.

Various service providers stressed that successful participation in the labour force often depends on more than job readiness. It requires trust, stability and addressing broader life circumstances.

We also heard from service providers who have hired individuals who initially came to them for support. These individuals were integrated into specific roles within the organizations, depending on organizational capacity and workforce needs. In some

cases, these roles served as a stepping stone, helping individuals gain experience and transition into other employment opportunities.

*“If we're looking at the labour market from the barriers today, we're only going to go as far as tomorrow. We need to be looking at a year down the line and two years down the line because those barriers and those challenges aren't going to be the same.”*

Many providers shared success stories, describing how certain approaches meaningfully supported clients in achieving their labour market goals. At the same time, they highlighted persistent challenges, such as systemic barriers, program eligibility gaps and limited capacity, that affect their ability to support every client effectively.

### Bridging gaps between employers, programs and services

Service providers emphasized the importance of strengthening connections between their organizations, employers, governments and other service providers. While some of these relationships have developed naturally over time, there was strong interest in creating more deliberate and coordinated partnerships.

A recurring message was the need for service providers to better understand the needs of businesses to align their efforts with both current and future workforce demands. We heard examples of collaboration ranging from short-term coordination, such as aligning program timelines with hiring events or job fairs, to longer-term planning around training, recruitment and skill development.

For example, some providers suggested working with employers ahead of open houses to ensure clients were prepared with resumes and interview skills. These efforts were seen as critical for improving client readiness, which varied depending on individual circumstances.

Service providers also highlighted the importance of having insight into evolving industry needs. This helps them prepare clients more effectively and anticipate future labour market shifts.

Some organizations had already built these relationships, while others were still working to develop them. We also heard about employers who initially engaged but later stepped back due to internal capacity concerns.

Some providers advocated for more structured channels of engagement where employers could connect with service providers to ask questions, receive guidance on hiring incentives or accommodations, and learn about inclusive employment practices. These interactions were seen as important not only for immediate job placement but also for building mutual understanding about the realities faced by both job seekers and employers. Better collaboration was also viewed as a way to improve service design and delivery.

In addition to preparing job seekers, service providers noted their role in supporting employers with inclusive hiring. This included helping employers navigate accommodations, identify available resources or assist with making small workplace changes that could improve access and retention. While employers often consider bottom-line impacts, providers emphasized that even minor adjustments can support long-term success, especially when guided by knowledgeable service partners.

Several service providers spoke about the value of employer testimonials and shared success stories. When one employer sees a positive experience hiring through a service provider, it can encourage others to do the same. Inclusion awards or informal peer networks were also mentioned as tools to promote inclusive practices and build trust across sectors.

As we spoke with multiple service providers, we noticed that some of the innovative ideas or strategies they described were already being implemented by others elsewhere in the territory. This highlighted a gap in coordination and information-sharing between service providers. Strengthening horizontal connections could help reduce duplication, scale up promising practices and ensure that service providers are better equipped to support clients and engage with employers in a consistent and informed way.

Finally, providers underscored the importance of a stronger system-wide approach to sharing information, aligning timelines and identifying gaps in service delivery. More

coordinated planning between employers, programs and services was seen as key to supporting long-term workforce development and responding to the needs of both businesses and job seekers across the territory.

### Addressing systemic and individual barriers to participation

Service providers emphasized that participation in the labour market is shaped by a complex set of individual and systemic factors. Many clients they work with face challenges that go beyond employment readiness, including mental health needs, caregiving responsibilities, unstable housing, transportation gaps or limited access to consistent services. These conditions can affect a person's ability not only to seek and take on work but also to stay connected with the supports they need over time.

Providers noted that for some clients, the first step toward employment is simply reaching a point of personal stability. In these cases, the service provider's role involves creating safe and supportive conditions where individuals can regain structure in their lives. Establishing daily routines, reconnecting with community or exploring unfamiliar pathways were seen as essential steps before employment-related goals can be set or pursued.

Some individuals arrive at programs uncertain about their goals or unsure of what is possible, especially if they are entering the workforce for the first time, re-engaging after a long absence or managing immediate personal challenges. In these situations, service providers help individuals find direction and build confidence at a pace that aligns with their circumstances. This includes encouraging clients to reflect on their interests, develop a sense of purpose and gradually engage with new opportunities when they feel ready.

Service providers also identified structural and program-related barriers that influence participation. For example, clients receiving income assistance may be reluctant to pursue low-paying or short-term employment due to concerns about losing their benefits.

Others may face entry requirements, such as needing a driver's license or formal credential, that are difficult to meet in the short term. In some cases, these challenges are particularly acute for individuals rejoining the workforce after illness, caregiving or

personal hardship. Providers expressed interest in more transitional supports that allow individuals to explore employment while maintaining basic income and security.

For clients with disabilities, mental health conditions or complex life situations, ongoing support after job placement is often essential. Maintaining employment may require flexible arrangements, supportive workplace environments and the ability to reconnect with service providers as needed. In many cases, this support is important until the point where both the employee and the employer have adapted and are benefiting from the relationship. Even part-time or limited work hours were described as meaningful milestones toward long-term well-being, stability and participation.

Finally, service providers emphasized that addressing these barriers requires more than individualized support. In some cases, it calls for broader system-level changes that reflect the realities of those furthest from the labour market. Many providers are already extending their efforts beyond their formal mandates to meet client needs. However, they noted that greater coordination, stable funding and inclusive policy design are necessary to deliver lasting outcomes and ensure no one is left behind.

### Strengthening the system: Training, information, and long-term capacity

Service providers emphasized the importance of strengthening the broader system that supports workforce participation, noting that effective client service depends not only on frontline delivery but also on collaboration, alignment and clear roles across partners. This includes how programs are designed, how information is shared and whether funding and training systems are equipped to respond to changing needs.

A common theme was the need for more accessible, coordinated, and up-to-date information for clients, including both individuals and employers. Service providers often spend time navigating complex program landscapes both for themselves and their clients. Several suggested that a centralized inventory of available services, training programs, and funding supports would help reduce duplication and allow providers to more easily identify relevant pathways for individuals. This type of system-wide tool was seen as a way to improve consistency across the territory.

Training gaps were also highlighted. Service providers pointed to the need for more flexible, modular learning options, including short-term credentials and entry-level certifications that can help individuals re-enter the workforce or transition into in-demand sectors. While some of these options exist, providers noted that many training opportunities are still too rigid or inaccessible for clients managing multiple barriers. Strengthening partnerships with post-secondary institutions, sector councils and employers was seen as essential to better aligning training with actual labour market needs.

Funding was a persistent concern across conversations. Providers noted that short-term funding can limit their ability to plan for the long term, retain staff, or fully evaluate the impact of their work. Many expressed a desire for more stable and flexible funding models that would allow them to respond to emerging needs, test new approaches, and support long-term client outcomes beyond program end dates.

Evaluation and reporting requirements were also mentioned as an area for improvement. While providers understand the importance of accountability, many felt that current metrics do not fully capture the value of their work, especially when success involves building confidence, creating stability or supporting clients through complex transitions. Some recommended more inclusive evaluation frameworks that recognize both quantitative outcomes and qualitative progress.

Finally, providers underscored the need for continued system-wide collaboration. Whether through inter-agency working groups, joint planning tables or shared evaluation tools, there was strong interest in working more closely with governments, employers and other service providers. These relationships were viewed as critical to ensuring that the Yukon's labour market programs are responsive, coordinated and built to support both individuals and employers over the long term.



### 3. Yukon First Nations governments key insights

#### Centering First Nations perspectives in labour market development

First Nations participation must remain a priority in labour market development. Their perspectives should continue to shape policies and services. Sustained collaboration, not just during consultation but as an ongoing practice, will be key to ensuring programs remain aligned with what matters most to communities.

First Nations governments across the Yukon are deeply engaged in supporting their Citizens to participate in the workforce in ways that reflect personal, cultural and community values. Some also provide support to all community members, regardless of Indigenous identity. While each First Nation brings its own context and approach, conversations to date highlighted shared insights that can inform future programming and planning.

Governments described playing a multi-dimensional role in supporting their Citizens, one that extends beyond simply connecting individuals to employment. Participation may be rooted in physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being, and shaped by whether opportunities align with a person's values, goals, relationships and trust built throughout the process. At the same time, various factors influence how supports are delivered, and the challenges individuals face along their journey.

#### Barriers to participation and service delivery

While each community is unique, several First Nations government representatives we spoke with identified common barriers that affect both individual participation and the delivery of supports. Attendance in training programs, for example, was noted as a challenge influenced not only by personal readiness but also by external factors such as transportation, housing instability and caregiving responsibilities.

On the service delivery side, challenges included the cost of running programs, the administrative burden of meeting reporting requirements tied to funding and whether available opportunities feel attainable or meaningful to participants.



Limited access to training within some communities is linked to a range of factors, including program costs, the absence of instructors, limited equipment or space and in some cases, the additional challenges of remoteness. These barriers can make it difficult to offer consistent, community-based training and may require individuals to leave home to participate in training. This can be especially difficult when transportation, childcare, accommodation or other responsibilities create additional barriers.

These structural challenges are further shaped by individual circumstances. First Nations emphasized that issues such as addiction, mental health and low self-confidence, especially among youth can influence whether someone feels ready or able to engage. For some, past experiences of being judged or the weight of intergenerational trauma can impact their sense of belonging or connection to future opportunities. Limited access to stable housing, transportation or local amenities can also create barriers, both for individuals in the community and for Citizens who may wish to return home.

Broader systemic barriers, including reliance on seasonal or casual work, lack of year-round sustainable income, and concerns about losing access to benefits such as housing or social assistance can make participation decisions more complex. These barriers do not affect everyone the same way. While some individuals may face structural limitations, others may intentionally choose to work occasionally, earning enough to meet personal goals or sustain a lifestyle that aligns with their values. First Nations emphasized that success and participation can take many forms, and that programs and strategies need to acknowledge both the barriers that exist and the diverse ways people participate, contribute and thrive.

## Strengthening pathways

While challenges persist, many First Nations governments are delivering a wide range of services that support the well-being of their communities and are exploring new approaches to workforce development. Several communities emphasized the importance of holistic support models that recognize the interconnectedness of skill-building, wellness and community ties. Training is often approached not only with employment outcomes in mind but also as a way to support connection and support broader personal

development. This may include designing programs that feel welcoming and culturally grounded, using community-based elements that promote trust and participation.

Some governments are also working to increase the accessibility and appeal of training opportunities within their communities. This includes expanding capacity-building programs and offering supports such as transportation or meals to reduce barriers. It was noted that incentives can play an important role in encouraging continued participation. There is also growing interest in preparing local instructors to deliver training, supporting more consistent and community-rooted service delivery.

Efforts are also underway to improve access to data that can support program design and help better match individuals with relevant opportunities. At the same time, participants noted the importance of handling data with care, especially in small communities. Some of these system improvements may also help ease the reporting burdens associated with funding requirements. Some First Nations are developing or considering workforce development strategies to reflect local priorities. Youth were frequently identified as a central focus in these discussions.

Recruitment and mentorship also came up across conversations. One First Nation described adapting its approach to filling positions in ways that better reflect individual strengths and readiness, focusing more on matching people to specific tasks and responsibilities rather than relying solely on formal qualifications. These changes were still seen as supporting organizational needs while creating more accessible pathways for individuals. This approach prompted reflections on how larger institutions, including the Government of Yukon, might consider adjusting their own practices to improve alignment and access.

The importance of mentorship was consistently raised, with Elders, supervisors and other community leaders identified as playing a key role, particularly in supporting youth. At the same time, capacity challenges were noted. When staff are overextended, it can be difficult to provide consistent mentorship, and not all mentors feel prepared without support or training. Some participants emphasized that mentorship should be treated as a long-term commitment that adapts to different stages of an individual's journey.

There was also interest in improving collaboration and knowledge-sharing across First Nations, including sharing tools, approaches and lessons learned. Participants highlighted the importance of clear access to funding, with several noting that long-term strategies and workforce plans require adequate investment to succeed.

## Next steps

Insights from this targeted engagement and consultation will help inform the ongoing development of the Yukon's labour market strategy. The next phase will include:

- further analysis of key findings;
- additional research;
- identification of opportunities for program development; and
- continued collaboration.

Regular annual engagement and consultation with First Nations governments, employers, service providers and other stakeholders will remain central to shaping responsive, inclusive and community-informed approaches. This ongoing dialogue is crucial in deepening our understanding of the issues and challenges identified so far. The insights gathered from participants provide a strong foundation and future engagement and consultation will build on this to ensure the strategy effectively addresses the evolving needs of the labour market.

