



Futureworx's [Employability Skills Assessment Tool \(ESAT\)](#) is one such innovation: a web-based platform designed to help jobseekers understand, assess, and improve their SES. Unlike traditional assessments, ESAT helps participants build self-awareness, receive feedback, and track their growth over time. For staff, it offers a consistent language and method for supporting SES development. Since 2014, ESAT has been implemented in diverse training settings across Canada, including community-based employment programs and colleges, to support employment outcomes and personal development.

Executive summary: ESAT Phase 3 Final Report

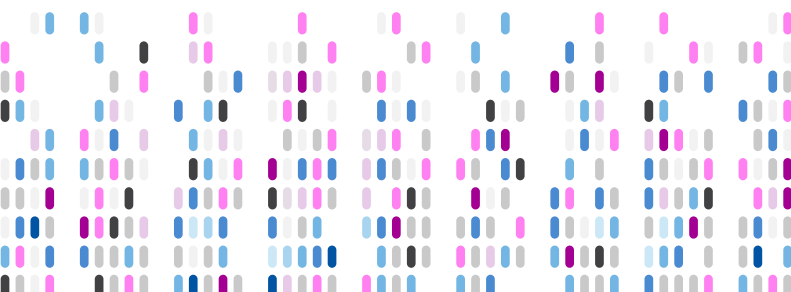
Social and emotional skills (SES) — skills like adaptability, accountability, and confidence — are increasingly critical to employability, learning, and life. As a result, workforce development programs are investing in tools that can assess and build these capabilities.

ESAT and the Scaling Up Skills Development portfolio

In 2020, **Futureworx** partnered with the [Future Skills Centre \(FSC\)](#) and [Blueprint](#) to conduct an early evaluation of ESAT, offering insights for improving and expanding across workforce development organizations.

In 2021, Futureworx received further funding from the FSC for Blueprint to generate evidence on ESAT's scaling potential as part of the [Scaling Up Skills Development](#) portfolio. Building on our [Interim Report](#) (2024), our [Final Report](#) (April 2025) analyzed ESAT across 15 delivery organizations, 60 programs, and 85 cohorts. Using administrative data, ESAT platform data, and surveys and interviews with participants and staff — gathered from September 2021 to May 2024 — the report provided results on ESAT's effectiveness, adaptability to various contexts, and the steps required to transition it to a validated tool for SES measurement.

Our investigation found that ESAT was well-received by both participants and staff; can be adapted to different settings and program types; and supported improved feedback, reflection, and goal-setting practices.





About this report

This Phase 3 *Final Report* builds on our past four years of evidence generation and sets the stage for a rigorous impact evaluation through a randomized controlled trial (RCT). We do so by providing a clear theory of change that maps how ESAT is expected

to help participants grow; a set of evidence-informed design options for implementing a strong and feasible RCT; and recommendations to guide partners and funders as they prepare for large-scale testing.

ESAT theory of change

ESAT's theory of change illustrates how the tool is expected to create impact through the following **activities**:

- Staff receive training to embed SES concepts into programming.
- Participants complete assessments and engage in structured feedback cycles.
- Participants and staff develop a shared language, deepen reflection, and focus on SES improvement.

Over time, these changes are expected to lead to **short- and longer-term outcomes**. For **staff**, **short-term outcomes** include greater confidence in teaching and supporting SES development and the ability to give clearer, more meaningful feedback using common terms and participant input. For **participants**, this means they better understand their own SES—what they are good at and where they can improve; they engage in new behaviours that help them grow; and they strengthen their SES and start using those skills beyond the program, including in job settings.

As participants grow their SES over the **longer term**, we expect them to have better experiences at work, including finding and keeping jobs and earning more; a stronger sense of wellbeing and belonging; and greater involvement in their communities.



“ESAT helps participants better understand their skills, try out new behaviours, and apply those skills beyond the program—including in real-world job settings.”

Toward a rigorous evaluation: Why an RCT?

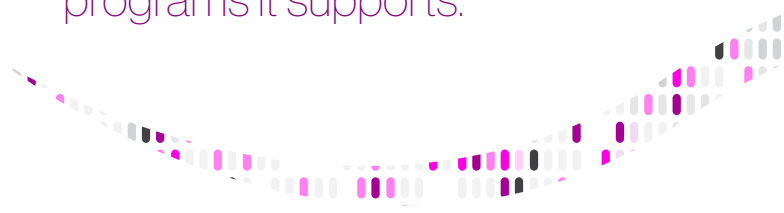
To credibly answer whether ESAT directly causes improvements in SES, job outcomes, or overall wellbeing, a more robust test is needed. An RCT would allow us to test our theory of change by isolating ESAT's effects from those of the broader training programs it supports; it would compare outcomes between similar individuals who do and do not receive ESAT.

Our report identifies the key elements of a successful trial, including tool refinement, consistent delivery, randomization approach, outcome measurement, and sample size.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen the tool before testing.

We recommend refining ESAT's validity and reliability before launching an RCT. While Phase 2 data indicated a solid foundation, further improvements can increase the accuracy of SES assessments and help ensure the tool is measuring what it intends to. This includes iterative testing of

“An RCT would provide rigorous evidence of ESAT's impact—separating its effects from those of the programs it supports.”



ESAT content; strengthening inter-item reliability; and revalidating the behavioural indicators linked to each of ESAT's nine core skills. Improving these aspects before the trial will increase the power of the study and support more meaningful interpretation of results.

Recommendation 2: Deliver ESAT using the revised seven-part implementation model.

Phase 2 analysis found a link between fidelity to Futureworx's six original guidelines and participant satisfaction. Programs that followed the guidelines closely had satisfaction rates **19 percentage points** higher than those that did not, with each one-point increase on the six-point fidelity scale corresponding to a **12%** increase in satisfaction.

However, few programs were able to meet all six guidelines due to practical constraints. In response, Futureworx developed a more feasible seven-part model that maintains fidelity while supporting flexibility. We recommend applying this revised model in the RCT to ensure consistent, high-quality delivery.

Recommendation 3: Choose one setting and program type for the RCT.

An RCT can be run in any suitable program or setting, but once selected, it should be conducted within that single setting and type only. While ESAT has shown high participant satisfaction and

effectiveness across different contexts, running the RCT in just one reduces variability from unrelated factors and makes it easier to attribute outcomes directly to the tool.

Recommendation 4: Use instructor-level randomization to assign participants.

To isolate the impact of ESAT while minimizing contamination between groups, we recommend instructor-level randomization. In this approach, each instructor either delivers ESAT or does not, ensuring participants within each instructor's cohort receive a consistent experience. This approach is

more appropriate than individual- or cohort-level randomization. While instructor-level randomization method requires a larger sample to account for variation across instructors, it provides the clearest test of ESAT's impact on both participants and staff.

Recommendation 5: Match similar groups before randomization to reduce bias.

When using instructor-level randomization, collect participant data (e.g., age, gender, and employment status) before randomization and use it to match similar groups. Each matched pair could then be randomly assigned to either the ESAT or control

group. This matching process will help ensure the groups are as similar as possible before the trial begins, reducing bias and making the results of the RCT fairer and more reliable.

Recommendation 6: Measure outcomes using survey and administrative data.

To test the theory of change effectively, we recommend a four-part measurement strategy:

- **Short-term participant outcomes** (e.g., SES self-awareness, behaviour change, job readiness, etc.) should be assessed using participant surveys and ESAT platform data at baseline, program exit, and follow-up points.
- **Long-term outcomes** (e.g., employment, earnings, job quality, wellbeing, etc.) should be captured using linked administrative data, such as Statistics Canada records. This approach reduces participant burden and minimizes data

loss due to attrition.

- **Equity of access and outcomes** should be monitored using socio-demographic data, enabling analysis across different population groups.
- **Instructor outcomes** (e.g., confidence teaching SES, ability to give effective feedback etc.) should be measured through self-assessment surveys and participant feedback.

This integrated measurement strategy supports a robust, multi-layered analysis of impact.

Recommendation 7: Recruit approximately 4,882 participants and 40 instructors.

Assuming instructor-level randomization and a modest effect size (a **4.5 percentage point** increase in employment), the RCT should include **4,882** participants (**2,441** in the ESAT group and **2,441** in the control group) and **40** instructors

(**20** in each group). This sample size reflects standard thresholds for statistical power (**80%**) and significance (**$p < 0.05$**), with a **27%** increase to account for instructor-level clustering.

Recommendation 8: Implement the RCT across multiple service delivery organizations.

Sample size and instructor numbers are both justified and feasible, but only if multiple service providers participate. No single organization is likely to meet these thresholds alone. To support

consistency, all providers involved in the RCT should deliver the same standardized ESAT-integrated program.

Looking ahead

ESAT has a clearly articulated theory of change, a flexible delivery model, and promising early evidence of usability and perceived value across diverse settings. This report outlines the key design elements and practical considerations for conducting a rigorous RCT to assess ESAT's impact. While the decision to pursue an RCT rests with Futureworx and its partners, the recommendations provided here offer a foundation for doing so in a way that is methodologically sound and feasible within real-world constraints.

Acknowledgements

About the Future Skills Centre

The [Future Skills Centre](#) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's [Future Skills Program](#).

About Blueprint

[Blueprint](#) is a nonprofit that helps leaders use data and evidence to tackle complex public policy challenges across Canada.

We partner with government, community, philanthropic, and industry leaders to strengthen public systems and deliver better outcomes. Our team brings together policy analysts, evaluators, economists, data scientists, and implementation experts—people who know how to turn insight into action. Our work is grounded in deep subject-matter expertise, rigorous methods, and a real-world understanding of how systems operate and evolve. More than just an advisor, we're also partners in change. We provide key support at every stage of the policy and program lifecycle: from early strategy and design to implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

About Futureworx

[Futureworx](#) is a social purpose organization that develops and delivers innovative employment tools and training and provides outstanding services that support people on their work and personal journeys. Futureworx Society is a charitable organization based in Nova Scotia, whose purpose, since its inception in 1984, has been to help individuals facing employment barriers overcome their obstacles and reach their full potential, both in their community and in the workplace. Today, Futureworx is a leader in developing and delivering innovative employment tools and training, always with a wholistic view that incorporates social and emotional skills or 'soft' skills development. As a high-growth and innovative organization, Futureworx delivers services in every county of Nova Scotia and every Canadian province and works with partners across Canada and around the globe.



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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



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