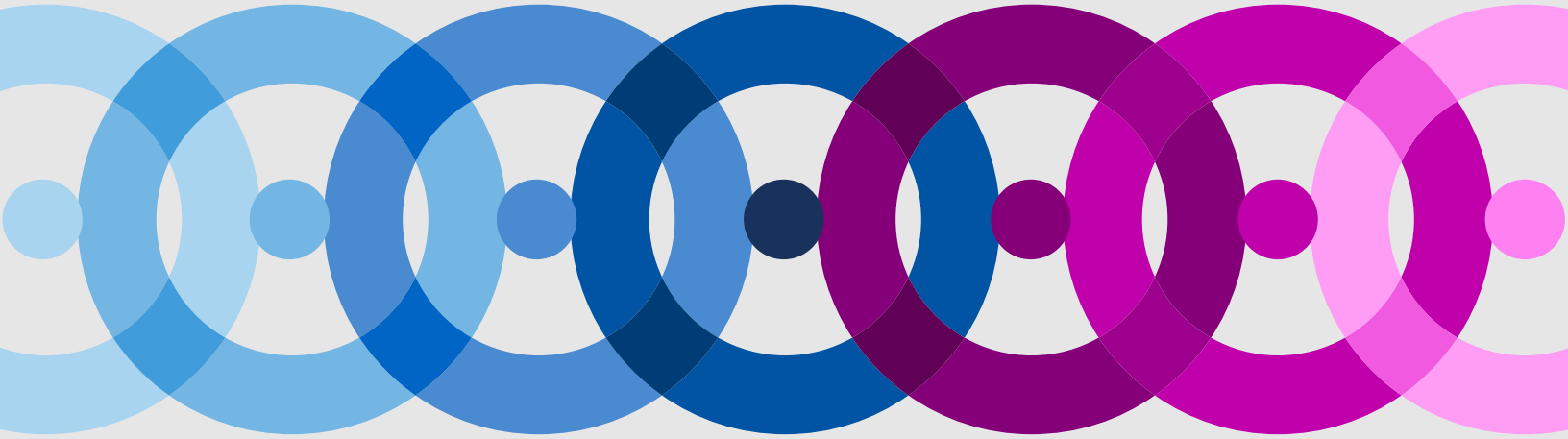

Supporting Mid-Career Transitions
An Emerging Playbook

By Karen Myers and Natalie Conte

April 2026

Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures

Blueprint

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Acknowledgements

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FSC 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 Signal49 Research, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Government of Canada's s Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

About Blueprint

Blueprint 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. We bring 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 FSC, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

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Introduction

Canada is in an era of profound labour market change. Some transitions are foreseeable, driven by decarbonization, automation, artificial intelligence, and demographic shifts. Others are more abrupt, shaped by pandemics, geopolitical instability, and changes in global trade relationships. Together, these forces are reshaping industries, occupations, and regional economies, creating uncertainty for workers, employers, and communities across the country.

Canada is responding to these pressures with renewed economic ambition to build infrastructure and industrial capacity at greater speed and scale. The federal government is advancing a vision of a One Canadian Economy, anchored in major nation-building projects intended to strengthen economic resilience, diversify markets, and expand domestic capacity. These efforts are expected to generate hundreds of thousands of jobs across the skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, housing, and technology.

This moment presents both risk and opportunity. Economic transformation can create high-quality, well-paid jobs and support long-term prosperity. Realizing these benefits, however, depends on having a workforce that is prepared to meet emerging demand. Workers affected by disruption will need clear pathways into new roles, often across sectors or regions, and employers will need timely access to skilled talent as projects and industries scale up.

Mid-career workers are central to this transition. In this playbook, we define mid-career workers as individuals between the ages of 35 and 54 who have substantial labour market attachment. They represent a large share of Canada's workforce and hold deep skills, experience, and institutional knowledge. However, many face constraints that make transitions more difficult.

Financial and family responsibilities can limit their ability to absorb income loss or pursue lengthy retraining, and their skills are often closely tied to specific occupations or technologies. As a result, mid-career workers may experience disruption acutely even as new opportunities emerge elsewhere in the economy, often requiring transitions across sectors, occupations, or regions.

Supporting successful transitions for mid-career workers is therefore critical. It is essential both to reducing the personal and social costs of labour market disruption and to ensuring that Canada's economic and industrial ambitions can be realized.

About the playbook

Blueprint developed this playbook by drawing on our work with the Future Skills Centre (FSC) and our broader experience supporting governments, employers, and community partners on workforce development and labour market transitions. It combines insights from Canadian and international research as well as learnings emerging from ongoing experimentation and practice.

The playbook provides a practical, evidence-informed framework for understanding and designing workforce development responses that support mid-career workers through disruption while connecting them to areas of emerging demand. Its central premise is that existing approaches, tools, and system arrangements were not designed with mid-career transitions in mind, and that responding effectively will require the development and use of new approaches, tools, and system building blocks. It is offered as a resource to support shared understanding, learning, and more coordinated action in a period of rapid labour market change.

At the same time, we recognize that there is no single transition pathway that works across all contexts. How pathways are designed and the extent to which they must be customized depends on the nature of the disruption. Key factors include whether disruption is sudden or emerges gradually; whether its impacts are concentrated in a particular community or sector or are more diffuse across the economy; and whether the disruption is of national strategic importance. These considerations shape decisions about when existing tools and supports should be leveraged and when tailored, place-, or sector-specific pathways and additional supports are required. This is especially important in Indigenous contexts, where workforce development initiatives are often led by Indigenous governments and organizations and must reflect community priorities, local labour market conditions, and Indigenous-led employment and training systems.

Rather than proposing a single program or policy solution, this playbook offers a structured, practice-informed framework that brings together these emerging building blocks coherently. It is designed to be adaptable across different types of disruption and applied at varying scales. It is intended to complement existing policies, programs, and initiatives, and supports shared understanding, learning, and coordination across the workforce development ecosystem.

.Inside this playbook

This playbook contains the following sections:

- **Why we developed this playbook:** This section outlines the problem we address. It examines why existing workforce development approaches often struggle to support mid-career workers, and how the playbook responds.
- **Pillar 1: System-level collaboration and design:** This section focuses on the system-level capabilities and processes that can support proactive labour adjustment.
- **Pillar 2: The service pathway:** This section presents an end-to-end service pathway for supporting mid-career workers through transitions and considers how it may vary depending on the nature of the disruption.
- **Pillar 3: Supporting infrastructure:** This section outlines the data, governance, and policy infrastructure required to enable effective implementation and scaling of service pathways.
- **Conclusion:** We conclude with key implications for policy and practice and identify options for moving forward.

Scope and focus of the playbook

This playbook outlines what is needed to support effective mid-career transitions, focusing on core system functions, service components, and enabling infrastructure, as well as key actors. It does not prescribe how responsibilities should be divided across levels of government, nor does it take a position on how pathways should be funded or who should pay. While these are critical policy decisions that will need to be addressed, our focus is on providing a design-ready framework that can inform these decisions by clarifying what must be in place for transitions to be effective at scale.

Why we developed this playbook

What problem are we trying to solve?

Canada's workforce development systems are under growing pressure. Labour market disruption is accelerating while economic transformation is creating new demand for skills across sectors and regions. For mid-career workers, these dynamics often collide. Workers whose jobs are affected by automation, decarbonization, trade shocks, or restructuring are being asked to adapt just as new opportunities are emerging elsewhere in the economy. The challenge is not only to help workers manage disruption, but also to enable timely transitions into roles in areas of emerging demand.

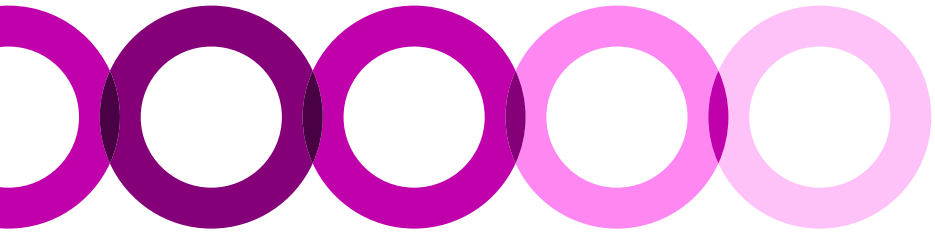
Mid-career workers are particularly exposed in this context. Many are deeply attached to their industries and occupations and bring significant experience and skills. At the same time, they often face constraints that make transitions difficult. Financial obligations, caregiving responsibilities, and the risks associated with retraining limit their ability to absorb income loss or pursue long periods of education. Yet most workforce and training systems continue to engage workers only after job loss. When support arrives late, options narrow, decisions are rushed, and outcomes are more uncertain for workers and employers alike.

Despite long-standing recognition of these challenges, workforce development approaches in Canada have not been designed to connect workers affected by disruption to jobs that advance broader economic, industrial, or environmental priorities. Although there are some notable well-established examples, such as the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET) and the Skills and Partnership Fund,[1] industry- and region-specific workforce development programs remain uncommon. Most programs are organized around specific populations or demographic groups.

These programs play an important role in expanding access and advancing equity. However, they are often not structured to align training and transition pathways with sectoral strategies, regional growth plans, or large-scale economic initiatives. They are also not designed to support mid-career workers who are currently employed but need to transition to new roles. As a result, many workers facing potential displacement or changing skill demands have limited access to structured pathways that enable them to retrain and move into emerging opportunities before job loss occurs.

As a result, workforce development, industrial strategy, and regional economic development efforts often operate in parallel rather than as an integrated system. Employer engagement is frequently episodic. Labour Market Information (LMI) is not consistently translated into pathway design. Training investments do not always reflect areas of greatest strategic need. In periods of rapid economic change, this fragmentation makes it difficult to respond effectively to labour shortages and labour displacement simultaneously. Workers are often left to navigate complex training, funding, and career decisions on their own under conditions of uncertainty and risk.

Importantly, recent federal initiatives signal growing recognition of the need to better align workforce development with economic transformation and sectoral priorities. New programs such as the Sectoral Workforce Innovation Fund and Workforce Alliances (see **Box 1** on p. 16 and **Box 2** on p. 17 for more detail) reflect groundbreaking efforts to strengthen Canada's workforce development ecosystem. Many of the ideas explored in this playbook are aligned with these initiatives, offering a framework for connecting them to coordinated systems-level approaches.



What are we learning from FSC-supported work?

Through its support for research, experimentation, and collaboration, the FSC created unique opportunities to learn how workforce systems respond to disruption. This work generated a set of insights that informed the design of this playbook.

1. **The gap between existing services and what mid-career workers need is large**—and larger than can typically be addressed within short, project-based funding windows. Most workforce systems engage individuals after job loss to support rapid reemployment. But mid-career workers navigating transitions face tighter time, financial, and risk constraints, requiring earlier, more flexible, and more sustained support. Supporting them effectively requires innovation at a scale that exceeds what can reasonably be achieved within two-year projects.
2. **Employer engagement is difficult to sustain within supply-side project models.** There is value in treating employers as early partners rather than late-stage stakeholders. However, dual-client approaches that serve both workers and employers require time, continuity, and demand-led planning: conditions that are difficult to establish and maintain through pilots alone.
3. **Clearly defined transition occupations are a critical planning anchor.** Skills analysis, LMI, and employer validation to identify viable and desirable transition roles creates a shared reference point for career guidance, training design, and employer alignment.
4. **Rapid reskilling is feasible, but quality depends on iteration and adaptability.** Accelerated training models are feasible. Creating high-quality programs requires curriculum refinement based on employer feedback and continuous adaptation to changing labour market conditions, underscoring the importance of test-learn-adapt cycles.
5. **Training alone is insufficient.** Workers need structured career navigation to assess options, understand timing and risk, and make informed decisions about training. Career navigation consistently emerged as a necessary precursor and complement to reskilling.
6. **Existing career services systems are not designed for mid-career transitions.** Even where frontline commitment is strong, practitioners often lack the tools, mandates, and system support required to serve experienced workers effectively. Innovation in this area is constrained by system design and delivery capacity.
7. **Scaling promising approaches requires enabling infrastructure and institutional pathways that do not yet exist.** Existing workforce systems were built for different purposes, primarily to support re-employment after job loss. They do not provide a clear pathway for institutionalizing anticipatory, end-to-end transition supports. At present, there are limited funding mechanisms or mandates for assembling these elements into a sustained, system-level approach.

FSC-supported work has generated valuable insights by testing key elements of effective transition support and fostering reflection across the workforce ecosystem. However, scaling support for mid-career transitions will require not only service and tool innovation, but also system-level changes to clarify roles, align incentives, and enable coordination, learning, and continuous improvement.

Why is a playbook needed now?

To respond to these needs, this playbook brings together what we are learning from FSC-supported experimentation, system experience, and Canadian and international research into a coherent framework that supports more proactive and coordinated responses to labour market disruption.

A playbook is particularly useful in the current context. Labour market needs can emerge quickly, leaving little time for new program design. Conditions can also shift rapidly, making it risky to invest in fixed or highly specialized solutions. Instead, we need a shared, design-ready framework that clarifies core components, roles, and sequencing that can be adapted across contexts.

The playbook is not prescriptive. It does not recommend specific policy choices or program designs. Rather, it is intended to encourage earlier engagement with workers and deeper collaboration across federal, provincial, municipal and Indigenous governments and employers, labour organizations, and training providers. It starts from the premise of the need for strong alignment between workforce development efforts and economic priorities. It offers practical insights and considerations that can inform design, implementation, and learning as governments and partners continue to strengthen workforce development approaches.

By articulating a coherent, end-to-end perspective on mid-career transitions, this playbook supports faster, more effective responses to disruption. In doing so, it seeks to help reduce the costs of labour market change for workers and communities while supporting the workforce needs of Canada's economic transformation.

An ecosystem supporting mid-career workers

This playbook is organized around three core pillars; together, they describe a future-state vision for an ecosystem that supports mid-career workers through disruption. The three pillars articulate what is required for a more anticipatory, integrated approach that aligns system-level planning and design, worker-facing services, and infrastructure to support transitions at scale. **Figure 1** provides a high-level overview of the pillars, which are explained in detail below.

Figure 1

Three core pillars of an ecosystem supporting mid-career workers

1. Pillar 1 focuses on system-level collaboration and design.

It emphasizes the upstream work required to anticipate disruption before workers are displaced, including convening multi-stakeholder collaboratives, conducting labour market surveillance using traditional and AI-enabled data, LMI collected through Indigenous-led approaches and Indigenous governments' own data infrastructure, and leading coordinated planning and design processes. At present, these functions are uneven and weakly connected: labour market intelligence is not consistently translated into shared priorities or delivery-ready transition pathways, and few mechanisms exist to coordinate actors across policy domains and orders of government. Strengthening this pillar creates the foundation for timely, targeted responses aligned with economic and industrial priorities.

2. Pillar 2 presents the end-to-end service pathway.

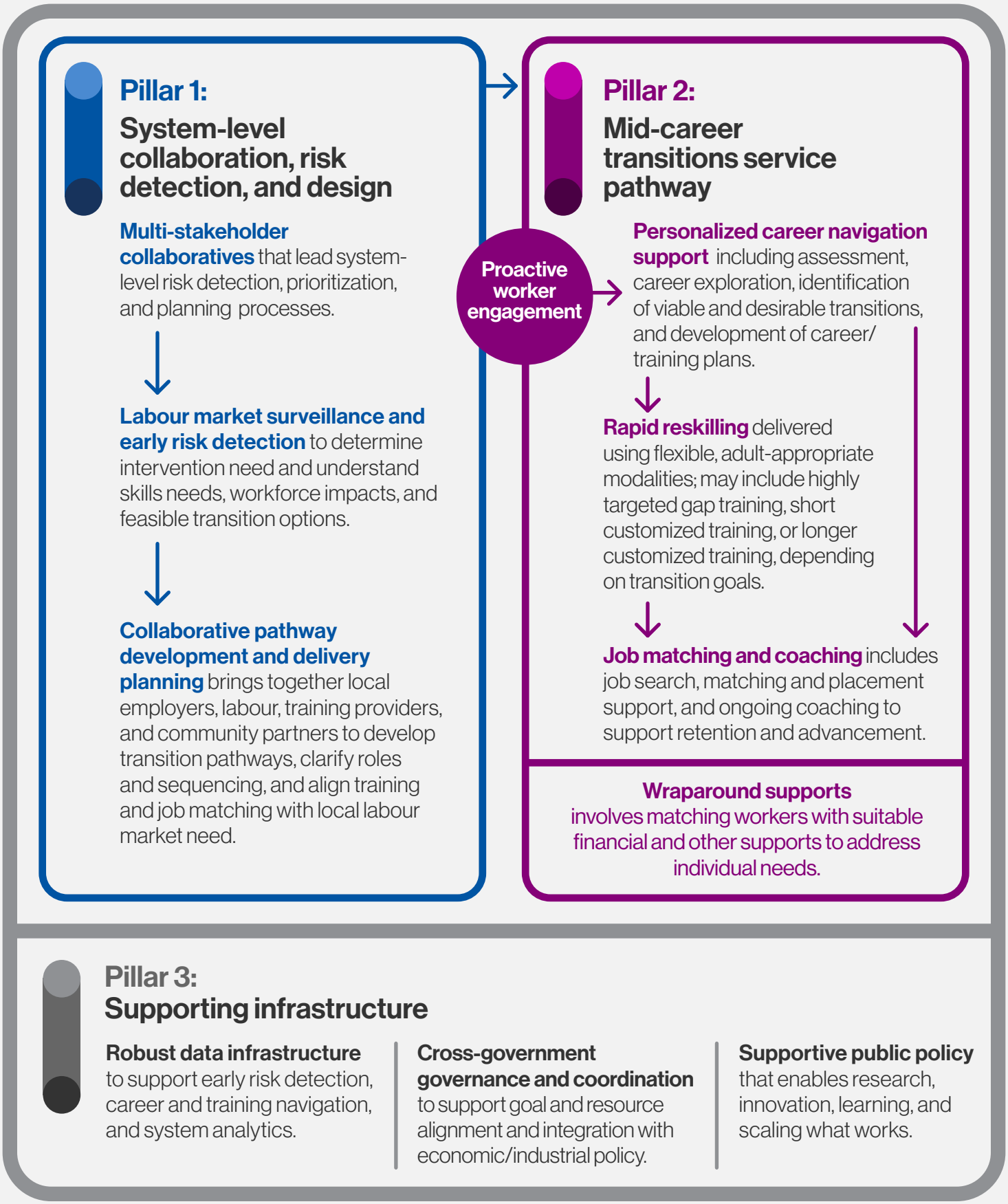
The service pathway emerges from the system-level planning and design work described in Pillar 1, translating those decisions into coordinated, worker-facing supports. In the current system, workers typically encounter disconnected services (i.e., career guidance, training, income supports, and employment services) that are rarely sequenced or integrated and that often become available only after job loss. This pillar responds to that fragmentation by outlining how proactive engagement, personalized career navigation, rapid upskilling, wraparound supports, and job matching and coaching can be delivered as a coherent pathway that supports informed, feasible transitions.

3. Pillar 3 addresses the enabling infrastructure required to build, sustain, and scale effective transition systems over time.

Data systems, governance arrangements, and learning mechanisms are insufficiently integrated to support early action, coordination across jurisdictions, or continuous improvement. This pillar highlights the infrastructure needed—robust data, cross-government coordination, and sustained support for research, innovation, and scaling—to ensure transition pathways are durable, adaptive, and capable of operating at scale.

Figure 2 on the next page offers a visual overview of the discrete stages within each pillar and how they are connected.

Figure 2
How the three pillars create a mid-career workforce development ecosystem



Pillar 1:
System-level collaboration and design

1. System planning and design through multi-stakeholder collaboratives

Effectively supporting mid-career workers through labour market disruption requires sustained collaboration between all orders of government, industry, labour, and training institutions. No single actor has sufficient visibility, authority, or capacity to anticipate labour market change, identify viable transition pathways, and design appropriate supports. Workforce development experts have long emphasized the need for more joined-up policy and delivery models, as well as intermediary structures, that can bridge workforce development, economic priorities, and service delivery.

This perspective is reflected in the Government of Canada's Building a Modern 21st Century Workforce discussion paper. It highlights the importance of aligning workforce strategies with changing economic priorities and fostering collaboration across workforce actors, employers, and training systems to prepare Canadians for growth in sectors shaped by technological change, decarbonization, and evolving industrial priorities.[2] Similar patterns are emerging in other jurisdictions. For example, recent U.S. research identifies a shift in federal and state approaches toward more sectoral strategies, catalyzed by large, sector-specific investments to better align workforce development with broader industrial goals.[3]

Multi-stakeholder collaboratives may be established in response to disruption that has already occurred, in anticipation of emerging risks, or to support workforce development in high-growth industries aligned with industrial and economic

priorities. Effective collaboratives require a trusted convener to organize employer partners and other stakeholders into a structured partnership, aggregate employer demand, facilitate employer validation of competencies and credentials, translate demand into clear talent supply requirements, identify workers' needs and existing resources and supports that can be leveraged, and support ongoing performance measurement and continuous improvement.[4]

Depending on the context, these collaboratives may be convened or led by different actors, including federal or provincial/territorial governments, regional economic development organizations, sector intermediaries, or other trusted conveners with the mandate and relationships to coordinate across workforce, industry, and training systems. In practice, this role is often played by an entity that has strong credibility with employers and analytical and coordination capabilities. The convener supports employers in organizing around a shared occupational focus area and in articulating a clear demand signal before pathway investment decisions are made.[5] In the context of place-based disruption where Indigenous Peoples are significantly impacted, an Indigenous-led convener may be best positioned for this role.

Collaboratives can play two closely linked roles:

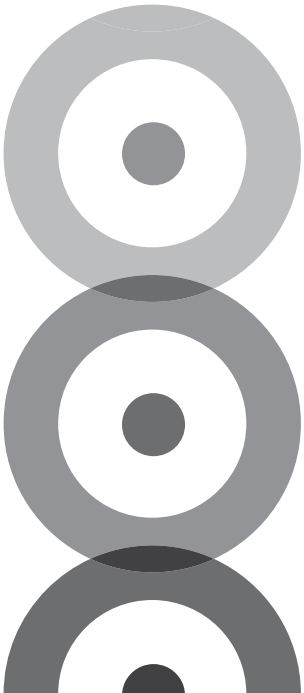
- **First, they can support ongoing labour market surveillance**, combining traditional LMI with employer intelligence, sectoral insight, and worker perspectives to develop a shared understanding of emerging risks and opportunities. This collective foresight is particularly important for major industrial transitions, such as those associated with the clean economy, housing construction, advanced manufacturing, and critical minerals, where labour demand is shaped by long-term public investment decisions and industrial policy objectives. Initiatives such as the Major Projects Office, Build Canada Homes, and the Sustainable Jobs Plan underscore the importance of anticipating workforce needs early and planning accordingly.
- **Second, collaboratives can provide a forum for designing transition pathways that are responsive to both industry requirements and worker needs.** In this role, collaboratives function as systems integrators that bridge existing infrastructure and local implementation, playing a critical coordination and intermediary role. Collaboratives can leverage broadly accessible tools, such as the Job Bank, training tax credits, and funds available through the Labour Market Transfer Agreements, and design new training or supports to fill gaps. We note that as the Canada Job Bank continues to be modernized, it may play an increasingly central role as a key transition tool. This coordination role enables the tailoring of outreach, sequencing, and complementary supports to local labour market conditions and sector-specific needs.

The EDGE UP initiative, supported by the FSC from 2019 to 2023, provides a compelling example of how place-based collaboratives can translate localized labour market intelligence into concrete action (see **Case Example 4** on p. 37). Calgary Economic Development played a central intermediary role, convening employers, industry associations, training providers, and displaced workers around a shared planning effort. Working with the Information and Communications Technology Council, the initiative combined skills-mapping analysis, employer surveys, and worker engagement to assess transferability

between occupations. This demonstrated that project management roles in the information technology sector shared a sufficient number of skills that are transferable to management roles in the oil and gas industry, making them viable transition options for workers affected by an industry downturn. Building on this insight, EDGE UP brought together a consortium of post-secondary institutions and training providers to co-design an employer-aligned training pathway grounded in local labour market conditions.

It is important to recognize, however, that building collaborative capacity at scale cannot be achieved through time-limited, project-based funding alone. While FSC-funded projects have played a valuable role in generating innovation, FSC-supported time-limited initiatives (often funded for one to two years). Building durable infrastructure and coordinating capacity for system-level workforce planning, however, requires longer-term and more sustained investment. Recent federal investments, such as the Workforce Alliances and the Sectoral Workforce Innovation Fund, signal growing recognition of the need for stronger collaborative capacity to address labour market disruption (see **Box 1**). The federal government has also already adopted longer-term funding approaches in other areas of workforce development; for example, the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program provides 10-year funding agreements to Indigenous service delivery organizations to support sustained workforce development capacity (see **Box 2**). Such approaches allow for moving from reactive, fragmented responses toward more anticipatory and integrated approaches to labour adjustment.

Figure 3 on p. 19 provides a visual overview of what is required for system planning and design through multi-stakeholder collaboratives.



Box 1

Workforce Alliances and the Sectoral Workforce Innovation Fund

The Government of Canada is investing $382 million over five years to establish Workforce Alliances alongside a new Sectoral Workforce Innovation Fund (SWIF).

Workforce Alliances will bring together employers, unions, and industry groups to collaboratively address urgent workforce challenges. They will focus on sectors experiencing pressure (e.g., auto parts, steel, aluminum) as well as those with strong growth potential (e.g., energy, critical minerals, advanced manufacturing). They will coordinate public and private investments, align skills development with sector needs, and support workforce strategies tied to economic priorities. They are also expected to work closely with other federal tools, including the Strategic Response Fund.

SWIF is a complementary, flexible, $50-million fund that will support sector- and region-specific, demand-driven projects to help employers recruit and retain the workforce they need. SWIF is designed to bridge gaps between workforce development, industrial strategy, and regional economic development. SWIF will implement priorities identified through Workforce Alliances. It will fund industry-led initiatives, using a cost-sharing model to promote employer leadership, broad sector buy-in, and sustainability beyond the life of public funding.

Together, Workforce Alliances and SWIF represent an emerging model of sector-led, collaborative, and adaptive workforce development, with potential to support the design, testing, and scaling of more coordinated transition pathways. Their emphasis on employer engagement, alignment with economic priorities, and integration across systems reflects several of the core principles advanced in this playbook.

Box 2

Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program

Canada's Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program supports Indigenous people in developing skills and accessing employment. Co-developed with Indigenous partners as a successor to the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), the program reflects a shift toward greater Indigenous leadership, flexibility, and responsiveness in workforce development.

Through ISET, over 120 Indigenous service delivery organizations across Canada receive long-term, stable funding (10-year agreements) to design and deliver employment and training services for First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban/non-affiliated Indigenous peoples. This sustained funding model enables organizations to move beyond short-term programming and invest in local workforce development infrastructure, partnerships, and service capacity over time.

ISET agreement holders are deeply embedded in their communities and play a central role in aligning workforce development with local economic priorities, project timelines, and regional labour market conditions. They often integrate training with wraparound supports and culturally appropriate services to facilitate participation and improve outcomes. They can also respond quickly to emerging opportunities and shifts in labour demand, helping to mobilize talent pipelines in ways that reflect community priorities and support sustainable economic development.

At the same time, ISET programming is primarily designed for unemployed or underemployed individuals, with limited focus on supporting employed, mid-career workers to transition into new roles or industries.

Photo: CIRA Indigenous Stock Images

Figure 3

Components of system-level collaboration and design

System-level risk detection, prioritization, and planning

1. Convening multi-stakeholder collaboratives

- Brings together governments, employers, labour organizations, industry bodies, and training providers to align workforce planning with economic priorities.
- Leads labour market surveillance and the planning and design of responses to disruption.
- Can be place-based, sector-based, or pan-Canadian, depending on the nature and scale of disruption.

2. Labour market surveillance and early risk detection

- Monitoring of LMI to identify emerging risks
- Integrates traditional and AI-enabled LMI with qualitative intelligence.
- Industry organizations and businesses provide insights on skills needs, workforce impacts, and feasible transition options.

3. Coordinated action: Collaborative pathway development and delivery planning

- Broader group of implicated employers, labour, training providers, and community partners are engaged to align pathway design with worker needs and labour market demand.
- Clarifies roles, sequencing, and handoffs across the service pathway to support coordinated delivery.
- Enables tailoring of pathways to place-based, sector-based, or skills-based disruptions while leveraging existing programs and infrastructure.
- Employers support alignment of training and credentials with workplace requirements and the design of worker recruitment, job matching, and placement functions of the pathway.

For significant disruptions (large-scale and/or economic priority), outputs may include:

List of viable and desirable transition occupations	Menu of rapid upskilling options	Financial and wraparound supports (that supplement existing system supports)

2. Early identification of risk

The approach to identifying and understanding labour market risk depends on the nature of the disruption. In some cases, disruption is sudden and visible, making the risk and need for intervention immediately apparent. For example, the recent imposition of U.S. tariffs targeting export-dependent Canadian industries is highly visible and generating significant public concern.[6] In such contexts, the primary challenge is responding quickly and coordinating action among key actors to mitigate impacts on workers and communities.

In other cases, disruption emerges more gradually, is diffuse, or affects specific occupations or skills rather than entire firms or sectors. For example, changes driven by automation, digitization, or AI, and shifting skill requirements within occupations, often unfold incrementally and unevenly. In these contexts, LMI and analytical tools play a central role in identifying emerging patterns, assessing potential impacts, and determining where proactive intervention is warranted. Where relevant, this analysis should also draw on data generated through Indigenous labour market information infrastructure and Indigenous-led data collection approaches to ensure First Nations, Inuit, and Métis labour market realities are appropriately reflected.

Recognizing these differences, multi-stakeholder collaboratives should adopt a context-driven approach. The following practices can be adjusted based on the nature of the disruption:

- **Use LMI and early warning indicators.** Combining traditional LMI with other sources, especially AI-enabled LMI, can help identify which occupations, regions, or sub-sectors warrant early engagement, and at what scale, while providing more timely and granular insight into evolving labour market conditions. Together with AI-enabled approaches, which integrate data from a wide range of sources, including private job portals, public job boards, recruitment platforms, and employer websites, collaboratives can surface emerging shifts in labour demand and skills requirements that may not yet be visible in traditional datasets.
- **Combine quantitative and qualitative intelligence to interpret risk and guide action.** Quantitative LMI alone does not typically explain why changes are occurring or how they are experienced on the ground. Qualitative inputs, such as employer intelligence, worker perspectives, and community-level insight are critical for interpreting trends, validating signals, and understanding distributional impacts. This intelligence can be drawn from industry associations, labour organizations, business roundtables, and training providers. For place-based disruptions, engagement with local stakeholders—including economic development organizations, key employers, employment and social service providers, Indigenous governments, and Indigenous service delivery organizations—can help identify localized dynamics and uneven effects.

3. Collaborative pathway development and delivery planning

Convening local and sectoral partners for pathway design

Once the need to act has been identified, collaboratives should engage a broader range of stakeholders to shape pathway development and lead delivery. This involves clarifying how different actors contribute at different stages of the pathway and ensuring sequencing and handoffs are coordinated rather than fragmented.

In geographically concentrated disruptions, this may involve deep, place-based collaboration to align training, supports, and economic development, including engagement with Indigenous local governments and Indigenous service delivery organizations where disruptions affect First Nations, Inuit, or Métis workers and communities. In sector-based disruptions, it may require coordination across regions to identify common skill needs and viable transition options. In skills-based disruptions, employers may be the primary conduit for insight into evolving job requirements, requiring close collaboration to identify future-oriented skills and appropriate upskilling strategies.

Internationally, structured employer-led models, such as the Talent Pipeline Management framework developed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, have formalized demand-driven approaches to workforce planning, including employer collaboratives, shared demand planning, and competency-based alignment with training providers. While developed in the U.S. context, these principles reinforce the importance of coordinated, employer-validated pathway design in responding to labour market disruption.

Identifying viable and desirable transition options

In cases of significant and well-defined disruption, pathway development may involve identifying a deliberate set of transition occupations for affected workers. Options should be informed by LMI and skills-mapping analysis that compare the skills profiles of affected workers with the requirements of in-demand occupations.

Collaboratives should consider two core dimensions: **viability** and **desirability**. Viable transition occupations are those that are in-demand in the regional labour market and have a reasonably close skills match to the disrupted occupations. Employer-validated competency requirements strengthen the assessment of viability by ensuring that proposed transitions align with real hiring standards and performance expectations within firms.[7] Applying this lens is particularly important in place-based disruptions, where labour market options may be limited and transition pathways must align with community economic conditions and development priorities.

Desirable pathways are those that align with workers' goals, preferred working conditions, and wage expectations, and are likely to remain resilient in the face of future technological or structural changes.

Designing efficient and feasible training pathways

Training pathways and specific training options must also be identified, or, where gaps exist, newly designed to support the proposed transitions. In some cases, existing training options may be insufficient or misaligned, requiring the development of new programs. This work should result in clear, pathway-level information on relevant credentials, training sequences, timelines, and delivery formats, providing a practical foundation for individual training decisions.

Training design should begin with employer-defined competency and credential requirements and work backward to align curriculum, instructional methods, assessment practices, and wraparound supports with those specifications.[8]

Training pathway design should prioritize efficiency, feasibility, and risk reduction for mid-career workers. Few can afford lengthy periods out of the labour market, making multi-year retraining unattractive unless clearly aligned with worker interests and labour market demand. Training should avoid duplication or re-teaching skills workers already possess through prior learning assessment and recognition. To reduce risk, training should lead to employer-recognized skills or credentials that signal clear labour market value, particularly in non-regulated occupations where employers rely on such signals to assess job readiness. When designed in this way, training is more likely to be seen by both workers and employers as a worthwhile investment of time and resources, offering tangible returns in the form of in-demand skills, professional networks, and hands-on application.

Aligning pathways with degrees of skills match

Transition pathways can be understood along a continuum based on skills alignment. Some transitions represent a close match, requiring only targeted gap training. Others are a moderate match, requiring short, customized training to help workers move into adjacent roles. Still others are a low match, requiring more substantial retraining and longer timelines. Distinguishing among these categories helps set realistic expectations, guide investment decisions, and tailor supports to worker needs.

Building in wraparound and financial supports

Finally, transition pathways may require additional financial and wraparound supports beyond those currently available. Reliance on Employment Insurance alone is insufficient, as EI is primarily available after job loss and excludes many workers. Proactive transition pathways require complementary supports, such as training stipends, income top-ups, childcare or transportation assistance, and other services that reduce barriers to participation and make transitions feasible before displacement occurs.

4. Employers as partners in transition planning and delivery

Evidence from workforce development research[9] suggests that disruption responses are likely to be more effective when employers are engaged early and throughout the design and delivery process. Early engagement allows time to understand emerging skill needs, anticipate workforce impacts, and identify feasible transition options before displacement occurs. Employer engagement is not a single activity but an ongoing contribution that can occur at different levels of the system and across multiple phases of the intervention.

- **At the system and sector levels,** employer engagement can support labour market surveillance and the identification of viable and desirable transition pathways aligned with real workforce demand. For example, the EDGE UP initiative engaged employers in the energy and technology sectors to validate transferable skills and confirm pathways from oil and gas roles into digital and technology-adjacent occupations, ensuring training was grounded in actual hiring requirements. Structured collaboration across firms can also allow projected hiring needs to be aggregated into a shared hiring plan, clarifying the scale, timing, and occupational focus of transition strategies.
- **At the firm or community level,** working with employers before layoffs occur makes it easier to reach affected workers, understand role-specific skill profiles, and assess opportunities for internal redeployment or supported transitions. The Upstream Employer Engagement project, an FSC-funded project with a large national retailer, illustrates this approach; early collaboration enabled proactive worker engagement, identification of internal and external transition pathways, and advance planning for training and career supports (see **Case Example 1** on p. 30).
- **Employers also play a critical role in shaping training design and delivery.** Across FSC-supported initiatives in the Scaling Up Skills Development portfolio—including Rogers Cybersecure Catalyst's CLIC program, NPower Canada's training programs, the Diversity Institute's Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT) program, Pier Labs' AspireAtlantic, and Mohawk College's Material Handling 2.0—employers were engaged in curriculum co-design, validation of skills and credential requirements (as roles were non-regulated), alignment with workplace realities, and support for work-integrated learning, job matching, and recruitment. This engagement improved the relevance and feasibility of training and strengthened alignment with regional and sectoral workforce needs (for more information on CLIC, see **Case Example 5** on p. 41).

Together, these examples demonstrate that employer engagement is most effective when embedded throughout planning, design, and delivery, rather than limited to end-stage hiring. Embedding employer engagement requires mechanisms that enable sustained participation in ways that align with employer capacity and incentives while ensuring worker needs and public objectives remain central.

Pillar 2:
The service pathway

Pillar 1 focuses on the system-level conditions and collaborative processes needed to identify risk, prioritize action, and design appropriate responses to labour market disruption. Pillar 2 builds on this work by establishing an end-to-end service pathway that results from those system-level design decisions and outlining what it takes to deliver that pathway in practice.

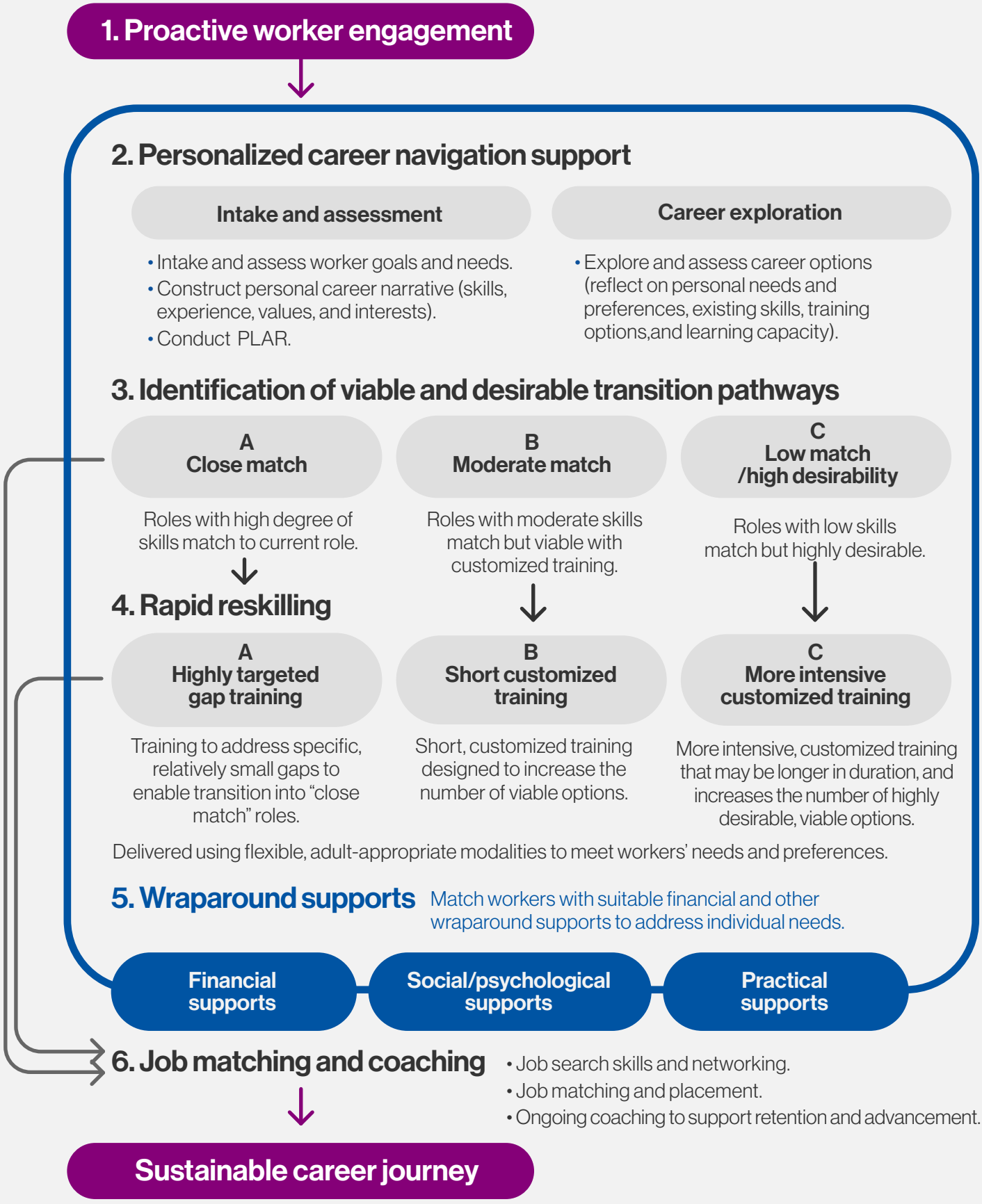
The model organizes key activities and delivery choices around six core components of a service pathway(mapped in **Figure 4** on the next page):

1	2	3	4	5	6
Proactive engagement of mid-career workers	Personalized career navigation support	Identification of viable and desirable transition pathways	Rapid upskilling	Wraparound supports	Job matching and coaching

Together, these features offer a **practical roadmap** of an **end-to-end pathway for mid-career workers** that articulates how a full set of supports can be aligned, even if delivered by multiple actors or programs.

Figure 4

A service model for supporting mid-career transitions



Tailoring the service pathway to different types of disruption

Drawing on learnings from FSC-funded projects and related research, this playbook identifies three broad types of labour market disruption: geographically concentrated (or place-based) disruption, sector-based disruption, and skills-related disruption. Each type is associated with distinct drivers, worker profiles, and delivery challenges, and therefore calls for different approaches to outreach, training, and support intensity. In the sections that follow, we highlight considerations for adapting each of the six service components to these different disruption contexts, where applicable. However, we note that this typology should be understood as a practical analytical tool to inform response design rather than as a comprehensive or mutually exclusive classification. Disruptions may span multiple categories, and additional forms of disruption may emerge over time. **Table 1** on the following page provides a description of each type of disruption along with causes, examples, and worker characteristics.

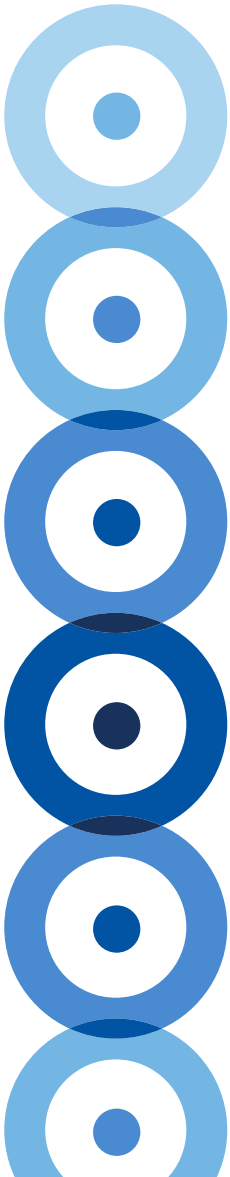


Table 1 | Three types of labour market disruption

Type	Geographically concentrated disruption	Sector-based disruption	Skills-related disruption
Description	Disruption to industries concentrated in specific communities that may have deep and wide-ranging impacts across the community.	Disruption to a sector that is not geographically concentrated.	Disruption to skills requirements across a range of sectors and occupations that may not lead to job loss but requires new skills.
Potential disruption causes	Green transitions, economic shocks (e.g., geopolitical events, shifts in trade relationships), and automation.	Automation, AI, regulation changes, cybersecurity threats, and demographic trends.	Automation, AI, and digitization.
Example sectors	Oil and gas, forestry, and automotive, with potential indirect impacts on supply chain industries (e.g., construction trades, transportation and logistics, and machinery suppliers).	Service sector occupations (e.g., retail, office administration, early childhood education, and healthcare).	Wide range of sectors and occupations.
Potential worker characteristics	• Heavy reliance on a single industry means disruptions can affect both household incomes and the broader local economy. • Workers often have specialized or physically demanding skills, limiting direct transfer to other occupations. • May require targeted reskilling or pathways into related roles. • Remote and rural regions, including many Indigenous communities, may face limited training infrastructure and mobility constraints. • Transitions should account for strong ties between industry, community identity, and generational employment. • Importance of locally accessible, culturally appropriate, and, where relevant, Indigenous-led workforce development approaches.	• Workers often have occupation-specific experience with potential to transfer to adjacent sectors, but require targeted reskilling. • In female-dominated sectors, caregiving responsibilities may affect ability to engage in longer-term training. • In lower- and middle-income sectors, limited financial flexibility may constrain participation in training. • Need for flexible training pathways and income supports.	• Workers may remain employed but face changing skill requirements within existing roles. • Transitions often involve skill upgrading or adaptation rather than occupational change. • Training should be modular, short-cycle, and compatible with ongoing employment.

1. Proactive engagement of mid-career workers

Evidence shows that most mid-career workers do not prepare in advance for labour market transitions, and many take no training or career-planning action in the year following a layoff.[10] This hesitancy is understandable. Canada's current systems largely place the burden on individuals to recognize risk, identify viable pathways, navigate complex training options, and absorb financial costs. As a result, engagement with career guidance and reskilling often occurs late, when options are narrower and decisions more constrained. For these reasons, proactive outreach to mid-career workers must be a defining feature of effective transition models.

At the same time, there is limited evidence on how best to encourage proactive engagement before disruption occurs. An FSC-funded research project that was part of the Mid-Career Transition project (see **Case Example 3** on p. 34) found that participants working in at-risk occupations reported similar levels of interest and motivation to change careers both before and after participating in a structured workshop on future planning and labour market trends. While the intervention increased awareness, it did not increase motivation to pursue a transition. Many participants instead described a 'wait-and-see' approach, preferring to delay action until their circumstances changed. This pattern is likely reinforced by a 'fail-first' system in which most supports become available only after job loss.

To address this gap, Blueprint and the FSC will launch a lab experiment in 2026 to better understand what could motivate mid-career workers to engage earlier with career guidance and reskilling. The findings may strengthen the evidence base and inform the design of more effective engagement strategies.

Building on this emerging evidence and drawing on behavioural insights from literature more broadly, we outline a set of promising approaches for proactive worker engagement below. These emphasize outreach that is proactive, tailored to context, and informed by behavioural insights rather than relying on passive or generic communications.

Use community networks, unions, and local organizations as trusted messengers.

Engagement is more likely to succeed when information and support are delivered through trusted intermediaries rather than unfamiliar actors. Employers, unions, community organizations, and Indigenous organizations, often have established relationships with workers and can serve as credible messengers, particularly in times of uncertainty or misinformation. Evidence from behavioural insights[11] research highlights the importance of source credibility and trust in shaping whether individuals attend to information and act. While much of this evidence comes from healthcare settings, the underlying principles are highly relevant to workforce transitions.

These considerations are especially important in place-based disruptions. In communities with a dominant industry, where employment often spans generations and contributes to local identity, economic change can be experienced as a threat not only to jobs but also to community cohesion. In such contexts, outreach efforts should prioritize trusted local messengers who can anchor engagement in the lived experience of the community.

Effective outreach should acknowledge local history and identity, clearly explain the drivers of change, and articulate a credible case for transition and

diversification. Presenting viable pathways into new roles helps frame change as an opportunity that can support longer-term economic resilience. Research on collective efficacy suggests that when community members see themselves as active participants in shaping their future, they are more likely to engage in collective problem-solving.[12] While this literature is often applied to neighbourhood safety and civic engagement, it offers useful insights for designing engagement strategies in communities facing labour market disruption.

Engage workers on timelines that align with the nature of the anticipated disruption.

The timing of proactive engagement should align with the nature, scale, and certainty of anticipated disruption. Engaging too early, before credible information or pathways are available, can heighten anxiety and erode trust. Waiting until disruption is imminent or has already occurred often means engaging workers in crisis, when they are more likely to prioritize rapid re-employment over skills development or longer-term transitions.

Where workforce impacts are foreseeable and tied to specific organizational decisions, earlier engagement can create valuable planning space. The Upstream Employer Engagement project (see Case Example 1 on the next page) illustrates this approach. In this case, proactive outreach began approximately six months in advance of anticipated workforce changes, allowing time for career navigation, pathway exploration, and preparation before disruption occurred.

The Layoff Aversion Program (LAP): Retooling Labour Adjustment in the Automotive Industry demonstrates how working upstream with employers and unions can support earlier identification of at-risk workers (see **Case Example 2** on p. 31). Through workplace needs assessments and collaboration with labour, LAP delivered short-term, customized upskilling aligned with emerging pressures such as automation, decarbonization, and trade-related shocks. This approach enabled workers to build relevant skills while still employed, reducing the likelihood of displacement and supporting smoother transitions over time.

Where disruption is diffuse, incremental, or uneven, clear intervention points are harder to identify. In these contexts, proactive engagement is less about responding to a single event and more about embedding ongoing career planning and skills development. Effective approaches may include periodic check-ins, regular skills assessments, and early exposure to career navigation and upskilling opportunities. This allows workers to explore options and build resilience over time without framing engagement around imminent job loss. As impacts become clearer, engagement can intensify, supporting a gradual shift from awareness-building to more targeted transition support.

Case example 1

Early engagement in the Upstream Employer Engagement project

This FSC-funded project involved a large national retailer and began by anticipating workforce risk through a structured analysis of how automation and new operating models would change the nature of work in targeted distribution centres and stores. This included reviewing industry and technology trends, validating emerging and declining roles with leadership, and using SkyHive's labour market intelligence to compare current role profiles with the skill requirements of future internal and external roles. This allowed the team to pinpoint which roles, and therefore which mid-career workers, were most likely to be affected before any displacement occurred. Early identification enabled employer-centred planning, including the development of future-focused role profiles, transition options, and learning pathways informed by detailed skills-matching and gap analysis. The design work also incorporated intentional, behaviourally informed engagement strategies for affected workers, such as future-of-work seminars, personalized career guidance, and supports built from user research to increase decision-making confidence and broaden employees' understanding of viable career paths. The project demonstrates how employers can design proactive disruption responses that combine early risk identification with thoughtful outreach to help workers navigate transitions with greater preparedness and agency.

Case example 2

Layoff Aversion Program (LAP): Retooling Labour Adjustment in the Automotive Industry

This proactive workforce adjustment initiative, led by the Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition (CSTEC), aims to avert or mitigate layoffs among industrial manufacturing workers facing disruption in Ontario's broader automotive industry. The program works directly with employers and unions to identify at-risk production workers and manufacturing plants, conduct workplace needs assessments, and deliver short-term, customized upskilling aligned with emerging regulatory, technological, and market pressures (e.g., automation, carbon reduction, tariffs, etc.).

Central to the model is early employer engagement and incumbent worker training, often using innovative methods such as AI-enabled and virtual reality training, to strengthen productivity, safety, and workforce resilience. Its dual goals are reducing permanent layoffs and supporting pathways into higher-skilled, more stable occupations, including apprenticeships and skilled trades.

Early findings from Malatest's evaluation suggest that employers viewed trained workers as valuable assets and, in some cases, supplemented program funding to extend training. Employers reported gains in productivity, safety, and workforce flexibility, and noted that training informed broader retention and resilience strategies. Workers reported increased confidence and capacity to take on new responsibilities, with some advancing into apprenticeships or promotions and others expanding their roles within existing jobs, indicating that adjustment can occur both within firms and through external transitions. At the same time, the project's short delivery window limited opportunities for longer-term training and constrained employers' ability to fully assess skills needs, leading some to rely on general or compliance-focused training.

2. Personalized career navigation support

Once workers are engaged, they require navigation support for complex and time-sensitive transition processes. Mid-career workers must interpret their skills in relation to labour market demand, assess transition options, understand training and financial implications, and make coordinated decisions about next steps. Amid disruption, workers often have limited time to do so, as few can afford extended periods out of the labour market. Without adequate support, they may move quickly into precarious employment, pursue training misaligned with future demand, or accept roles that underutilize their skills, with consequences for both individual outcomes and economic productivity.

At its core, career navigation for mid-career workers must help individuals:

- Translate their skills and experience into viable labour market options.
- Assess the feasibility and desirability of different transition occupations.
- Understand training requirements, timelines, and costs.
- Navigate income supports, financial assistance, and other wraparound services.
- Sequence decisions to align career goals, training choices, and job search efforts.

Drawing on our experience working with FSC-funded projects, and over a decade of engagement with Canada's workforce development systems, we have observed several components consistently emerging as central to high-quality career navigation.

Promising components of high-quality career navigation

Case-managed career guidance

Case-managed career guidance involves a dedicated professional coordinating services based on a worker's goals, skills, and circumstances. Effective case management helps workers identify suitable pathways, navigate a fragmented training market, and access poorly signposted supports. Key elements include:

- **A dedicated career coach or navigator** for each participant. Evidence from the Mid-Career Transitions project highlights the importance of expertise in working with experienced workers and the ability to use LMI effectively to support pathway identification (see **Case Example 3** on p. 34).
- **Upfront assessment** of skills, work experience, barriers, and career goals to ground planning in workers' lived realities.
- **Ongoing engagement**, including regular check-ins, structured planning conversations, and milestone tracking to maintain momentum and adapt plans as circumstances change.

Delivering this model effectively at scale requires sufficient capacity within the career development sector. While there is strong expertise across the system, many practitioners face constraints related to tools, training, time, and system supports—particularly when working with mid-career workers navigating complex transitions.

Effective delivery also depends on practitioners having the knowledge, skills, and supports required to engage with a broad range of worker contexts and lived experiences. This includes understanding how factors such as income constraints, caregiving responsibilities, cultural context, and prior experiences with education or employment systems shape decision-making. For Indigenous clients in particular, career navigation services must be delivered in culturally safe and responsive environments. This may include working with Indigenous-led organizations or practitioners, incorporating Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, and ensuring that service delivery approaches reflect community values and priorities.

Without this foundation, there is a risk that well-intentioned supports may be misaligned with workers' realities or inadvertently create additional barriers. Incorporating trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches is therefore essential to ensure that career navigation services are supportive, relevant, and do not cause harm.

Flexible and blended delivery formats

How career navigation is delivered matters, particularly for mid-career workers balancing employment, caregiving, and other responsibilities. Evidence from the Mid-Career Transitions project suggests that flexible and blended delivery formats can improve engagement and effectiveness by meeting workers where they are. Promising delivery approaches include:

- **One-on-one coaching**, which supports individualized exploration, trust-building, and tailored problem-solving.
- **Group-based sessions**, which allow workers to learn from peers, normalize uncertainty, and reduce isolation during transition planning.
- **Hybrid models** that combine individualized coaching with group workshops or peer sessions. Learnings from the Mid-Career Transitions project suggest this approach can strike an effective balance between personalization and peer support.
- **Flexible scheduling and delivery modes**, including virtual options, evening sessions, and asynchronous components, to accommodate workers who remain employed or have caregiving responsibilities.

Case example 3

The Mid-Career Transitions project

This project, delivered from 2023 to 2025 (and described in Blueprint's December 2024 Interim Report), tested two co-designed service models for mid-career workers, delivered by career development practitioners at Douglas College (BC) and the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (Manitoba).

Douglas College offered a structured, 12-week cohort program combining group workshops, self-directed tools, and optional one-on-one counselling. MITT provided a flexible, individualized model with coaching, optional workshops, and targeted resources. Despite different formats, both models blended guided and self-directed learning, individual and group supports, and iterative adaptation based on participant needs. Douglas College also integrated digital tools, including AI-enabled career pathway platforms.

Insights from the project suggest that pairing guided supports with self-directed activities and combining one-on-one counselling with group-based sessions create a more engaging and reassuring experience for participants. The mix allows workers to receive individualized attention while also benefiting from peer connection that helps counter isolation. Delivered by experienced career practitioners with expertise in serving mid-career workers, these supports helped participants build confidence, reduce anxiety, and gain clearer direction on the concrete next steps in their transition journey.

3. Identification of viable and desirable transition pathways

Mid-career retraining should lead to good, stable, and future-oriented jobs. This means avoiding industries that are vulnerable to repeated disruption, as well as precarious or survival jobs that can lead to declining living standards.

In some contexts, particularly where disruption affects large numbers of workers, system-level collaboratives may have already identified viable and desirable transition pathways and associated training options. In these cases, career development practitioners (CDPs) can help workers explore and assess these options, weighing trade-offs and determining fit.

In other contexts, such pathways may not exist or may only partially reflect a worker's circumstances. In these situations, career practitioners and workers must identify transition options together, drawing on LMI, local intelligence, and individual preferences and constraints. Career practitioners play a critical role in translating pathway-level information into personalized and feasible transition plans by helping workers understand what it would take to get to their target occupation given their circumstances, constraints, goals, and risk tolerance.

In some cases, viable transition pathways may involve moving across regions. Supporting these transitions requires attention to factors such as interprovincial mobility, credential recognition, housing availability, and impacts on workers' families and support networks. While relocation may offer access to high-quality opportunities, it will not be feasible for all workers. Career navigation should therefore help weigh trade-offs between local and non-local options and identify pathways that align with both labour market demand and individual circumstances.

Drawing on lessons from EDGE UP and the Upstream Employer Engagement project as well as our broader experience across Canada's workforce development ecosystem, we outline practices for selecting transition pathways.

Translating pathway options into individualized transition plans

Once transition options have been identified, practitioners can support workers by:

- **Developing individualized pathway maps** that link a worker's current role to one or more target occupations. These maps should outline required skills, credentials, and an efficient training sequence.
- **Assessing feasibility and risk**, including caregiving responsibilities, financial constraints, scheduling limitations, transportation barriers, tolerance for time out of the labour force, and, where relevant, the feasibility of relocation (e.g., housing availability, credential recognition, and impacts on family and support networks). This assessment should inform the selection of training location, formats and pacing, such as flexible schedules, multiple delivery modes (e.g., online, live, or self-directed), and shorter or more intensive training options.

Career navigation should be grounded in high-quality LMI and local job intelligence. Pathway options may need to be co-developed with workers using labour market evidence and individual priorities. This can include conventional sources, such as provincial and regional labour market reports, alongside AI-enabled labour market tools, such as the as SkyHive and FutureFit AI. These tools analyze large volumes

of job posting and skills data to identify transferable skills, adjacent occupations, credential requirements, and emerging demand. They can be used alongside professional judgment and local employer intelligence to support realistic transition decisions.

Supporting reflection on transition feasibility

Career practitioners can help workers reflect on key factors that shape transition suitability, including:

- **Worker characteristics, interests, and constraints:** Workers will have different values, interests, preferences, career goals, constraints and enabling factors. Age, gender, family and care-giving duties, and level of education may influence their priorities.
- **Skills transferability:** Displaced workers have a range of skills. While acquiring new skills is often necessary, many workers will already have the skills needed to perform in other sectors. Mapping and articulating these skills are key to streamlining pathways.
- **Duration and cost of retraining:** Not all workers want or need post-secondary or apprenticeship training. Many require shorter-duration, more flexible training options.

Identifying efficient and flexible training strategies

Practitioners can help workers identify opportunities to reduce training time, cost, and duplication, including:

- **Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)** to credit existing skills and avoid unnecessary retraining.
- **Modular training and micro-credentials**, particularly those aligned with employer-validated skill needs.
- **Essential and professional skills training**, including literacy, numeracy, digital skills, and sector-specific professional competencies.
- **Stackable and layered pathways** that allow workers to earn income while progressing through successive credentials.

Guardrails to prevent transitions into precarious work

Career practitioners provide strong guidance towards one, or both, of the following:

- **Jobs with pathways for career progression** (i.e., “ladders”).
- **Good quality, stable jobs**. Markers of quality include a living wage, benefits, and full-time permanent contracts.

While trade-offs may be unavoidable, particularly for workers exiting higher-paying occupations, CDPs can help workers weigh income expectations against job quality, retraining costs, time out of the labour force, and uncertainty about returns on training, supporting more deliberate and sustainable decisions.

Case example 4

EDGE UP: A place-based transition pathway

EDGE UP was a skills-training initiative to help mid-career oil and gas professionals in managerial roles transition into comparable positions in Calgary's growing information technology (IT) sector. Developed by Calgary Economic Development (CED) and the Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), the program responded to energy-sector restructuring using a place-based lens, aligning worker transitions with local labour-market demand.

Pathway identification and employer-aligned design

EDGE UP demonstrates how localized labour-market intelligence and employer engagement can be used to identify viable cross-sector transition options. CED and ICTC conducted detailed skills-mapping analysis to identify the competencies of oil and gas managers and assess their transferability to IT roles. This determined where skills overlapped and where targeted gap training was required, enabling the design of streamlined pathways that avoided unnecessary retraining. Employers broadly recognized the relevance of participants' prior experience, reinforcing the viability of the identified transitions.

Employer engagement was central to this process. CED and ICTC gathered input through surveys, interviews with HR professionals and industry leaders, and consultation with post-secondary partners. An employer advisory group validated findings and provided ongoing feedback. This engagement helped identify high-demand roles, including software development, data analytics, QA testing, and UX/UI design, and clarified the technical and soft skills employers prioritized. These insights informed pathway design and training content, strengthening labour-market alignment.

The program also surfaced important implementation constraints. Calgary's IT sector is dominated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), many of which lacked the capacity to offer internships, contribute to Capstone Projects, or provide structured on-the-job training. Some employers were also hesitant to hire through non-traditional pathways. These dynamics highlight the importance of designing transition programs that account for employer capacity and risk tolerance, particularly in SME-dominated sectors.

Rapid reskilling and training delivery

The program offered a concise, employment-focused course that did not require participants to take extended time out of the labour market. Training was delivered through a combination of virtual classes and self-directed modules, allowing participants to balance learning with work and caregiving responsibilities. Most components were delivered online, reducing travel and scheduling barriers and improving accessibility.

Before training, orientation sessions set realistic expectations about workload, employment prospects, and salary ranges in the IT sector. During the program, participants received a $1,400 stipend for 80 hours of work on a Capstone Project and had access to post-graduation "booster" courses in in-demand technical skills such as Python programming, Power BI and Azure, and machine learning.

Participants reported high program satisfaction and were likely to recommend it to others. Employment outcomes, however, were modest, influenced by broader economic conditions beyond the program's control, including weakened IT hiring and a resurgent oil and gas sector. This experience underscores the importance of building adaptability into transition programs and preparing strategies to pivot in response to changing economic conditions.

4. Rapid reskilling

The window between disruption and re-employment is critical. When delivered before or close to displacement, reskilling is more efficient and less costly than retraining after prolonged unemployment. We define rapid reskilling as targeted skills training that can be completed on significantly shorter timelines than traditional post-secondary programs, which often require learners to step away from the labour market for extended periods. These programs focus on a defined set of job-relevant skills aligned with specific occupations or roles, involve fewer instructional hours, and are designed to support near-term employment with minimal income disruption and time away from work.

Components of promising rapid-reskilling models

Based on lessons from FSC-funded projects, other FSC projects such as the IEN Career Pathway project (see **Case Example 6** on p. 42), as well as our broader experience across Canada's workforce development ecosystem, we identify three core elements of effective rapid-reskilling models.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

PLAR reduces training time and cost by identifying and recognizing the skills mid-career workers already possess. Effective PLAR approaches:

- **Validate existing skills and experience**, including tacit and experiential knowledge, so training can focus on genuine skills gaps.
- **Shorten training pathways** by helping workers bypass redundant modules, reducing both time out of the labour market and the psychological barriers associated with lengthy retraining.
- **Support motivation and self-efficacy** by framing training as building on existing expertise or adding complementary skills, rather than replacing prior experience.

Flexible, adult-appropriate modalities

Mid-career workers often face constraints related to work, caregiving, and other responsibilities. Training modalities that assume full-time participation over extended periods may therefore pose significant barriers. Evidence from FSC-funded projects points to several design practices that improve accessibility and effectiveness for this population:

- **Part-time schedules**, such as evening or weekend classes, which allow workers to continue earning income and manage other responsibilities. For example, a 40-hour course might be delivered over two evenings per week across several weeks.
- **Live, hybrid, or online instruction formats**, which can reduce barriers related to geography, transportation, and scheduling. Evidence from our ADaPT evaluation suggests that live, cohort-based online instruction produced stronger employment outcomes and higher participant satisfaction than self-directed formats. Similar findings emerged from Blueprint's evaluation of Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST), where cohort-based online delivery was associated with higher completion and satisfaction rates.

- **Short, intensive learning formats**, which concentrate instruction into brief periods of focused learning. For example, a 40-hour course delivered over five consecutive days may be effective when participants are not balancing ongoing employment.

Training delivery should be matched to context.

Where layoffs have already occurred, short and intensive programs may support faster re-entry into employment. Where disruption is anticipated but has not yet occurred, part-time or flexible models allow workers to upgrade skills while remaining employed.

Geography also matters. In rural and remote areas, distance from training infrastructure can limit access to in-person programs, making online delivery a practical alternative. However, remote learning is not equally effective or accessible for all populations. In many Indigenous and remote communities, limited or unreliable internet connectivity can make online delivery impractical unless there are targeted investments in infrastructure, improved broadband access, or subsidized satellite connections.

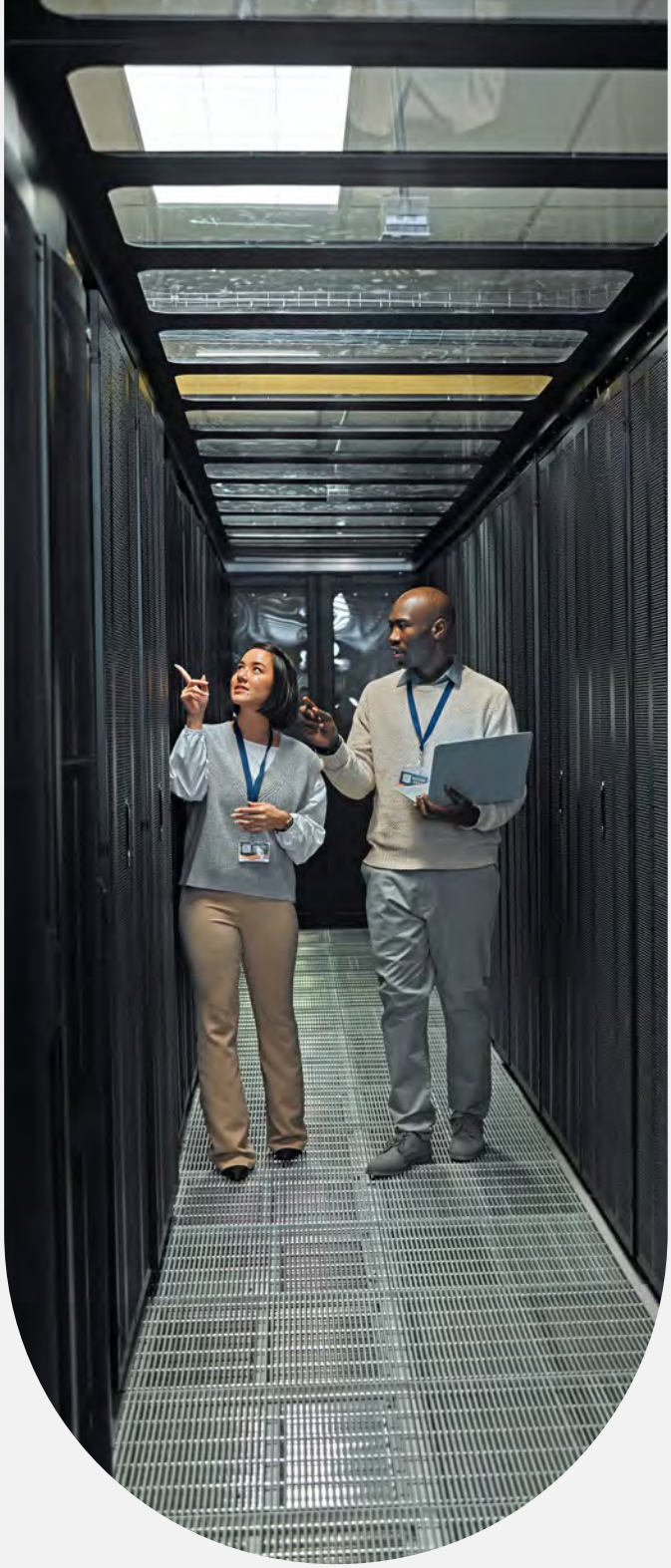
Additionally, where training requires hands-on or practical components, or where in-person, relationship-based learning is beneficial, community-facilitated delivery may be more appropriate. In some cases, particularly in remote communities, this may require establishing temporary local training facilities.

Case example 5

CLIC (Certifications for Leadership in Cybersecurity)

CLIC is a six-month, asynchronous, self-study program designed for learners new to cybersecurity, with a target audience of women and non-binary learners. The program is delivered through a strategic partnership between the Rogers Cybersecure Catalyst and the SANS Institute. Participants complete courses on security foundations, security essentials, and professional practices, led by industry experts, then take exams to earn two GIAC certifications: the Foundational Cybersecurity Technologies (GFACT) and the Security Essentials Certification (GSEC). Asynchronous training is supported by a study schedule, peer collaboration, and in-program supports, including weekly TA check-ins, study groups, practice tests, and the 'cyber range': an experiential learning course and simulated corporate environment. Learners receive job search support, on-demand career coaches, and access to a small pool of entry-level cybersecurity positions posted exclusively on an industry-curated internal job board.

Participants generally reported high satisfaction with the program and found the training useful in preparing for entry into cybersecurity roles. Feedback highlighted opportunities to strengthen delivery, including the addition of live instruction, more structured teaching assistant support, additional time focused on the GSEC, and deeper employer engagement in both training and job-matching components. Early employment outcomes were mixed and influenced by broader labour-market conditions; however, available evidence suggests the program supported movement toward cybersecurity-related roles and higher-quality employment for a subset of participants.



Case example 6

The IEN Career Pathway Program

Created by the Service Employees International Union in direct response to severe nursing shortages in Ontario, the Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) Career Pathway Program provides a targeted rapid-upskilling model to bring internationally trained nurses into the workforce more quickly. The program delivers end-to-end support, including assistance with immigration processes, credential evaluation, and financial aid, alongside a 12-week program designed to accelerate readiness for licensure. Participants receive focused exam preparation, English-language training aligned with CELBAN standards, and structured supports to strengthen workplace readiness and integration. Once licensed, graduates are connected to secure, unionized roles, creating a streamlined pathway that both expands the supply of qualified nurses and harnesses the skills and experience of internationally educated professionals. At the time of writing, formal evaluation results for the program are not yet available. Evidence on outcomes will emerge as implementation and assessment progress.

5. Wraparound supports

Many mid-career workers face challenges or constraints (financial, psychological, logistical, and familial) to training. Wraparound supports to address these barriers can increase training uptake and completion. Based on our experience with FSC-funded projects and a decade of work in the workforce development ecosystem, we can identify some broad areas of support for mid-career workers. Types of wraparound supports include the following.

Financial supports

Career practitioners should assess workers' financial needs, and where a need exists, match them to appropriate supports, such as:

- **Upfront funding for tuition and materials rather than reimbursement.** Some mid-career workers lack the financial flexibility to pay training costs in advance, a challenge exacerbated by rising living costs, including for housing and food. As a result, reimbursable supports, such as tax credits, can create significant access barriers. There may be opportunities to make the Canada Training Benefit more accessible by moving away from reliance on reimbursement toward upfront support).[13, 14, 15]
- **Support for living costs during training** when training requires that mid-career workers exit the labour market for long periods of time, especially given the cost-of-living crisis.

Social and psychological supports

For many mid-career workers, job loss causes or exacerbates social or psychological issues, such as:

- **Loss of identity**, both personal and community. This is an issue associated with geographically concentrated disruption. The loss of an industry with long-running roots in a community can create a profound sense of loss and can leave workers and communities feeling adrift and powerless.
- **Stress, anxiety, or low confidence**, which are closely associated with job loss. Workers may find themselves facing financial pressures, which can cause worry.
- **Fear of returning to school**, which may be a barrier to training for some workers, particularly those with negative past experiences of education..

CDPs can help alleviate these issues through the provision of career coaching (including techniques like motivational interviewing), referrals to mental-health resources, and group-based peer networks.

Practical supports

Workers may also have practical barriers to engaging in services or reskilling. Practitioners can help address these barriers by providing supports such as:

- **Transportation assistance**. Stipends for bus or train tickets or parking and gas can offset the cost of training for low-income workers.
- **Childcare**. This is a major barrier for mid-career workers. Offering childcare support can increase participation.
- **Digital access and equipment**, either by providing funding for the purchase of technology or loaning equipment; this can help offset the cost of participation.

6. Job matching and coaching

Workers often require additional supports to translate new skills into employment, navigate hiring processes in unfamiliar sectors, and sustain employment once placed. Without structured job-matching and coaching, workers may experience prolonged job search, accept roles that underutilize their skills, or exit new occupations prematurely.

For these reasons, transition pathways should extend beyond training to include job search preparation, employer engagement, and ongoing coaching that supports both retention and advancement.

Job search skills and professional networking

Mid-career workers often face job search challenges that differ from those of early-career workers, particularly when transitioning into new sectors or occupations. Career navigation services should provide targeted support to help workers:

- Translate prior experience and transferable skills into sector-appropriate resumes, cover letters, and online profiles.
- Prepare for interviews in new occupational contexts, including developing clear and credible career narratives that explain the transition.
- Build professional networks in unfamiliar industries through informational interviews, industry events, alumni networks, and employer-led engagement opportunities.

Group-based job search workshops, peer learning cohorts, and facilitated employer interactions can complement individualized coaching and reduce isolation during the transition process.

Job matching and placement support

Active job-matching functions can shorten time to employment and improve alignment between workers and available opportunities. Promising approaches include:

- Dedicated employer engagement to identify current and anticipated vacancies aligned with pathway occupations.
- Matching workers to opportunities based on verified skills, training completion, geographic constraints, and individual preferences.
- Supporting referrals, warm introductions, and coordinated recruitment processes in collaboration with employers, unions, and workforce intermediaries.

Where system-level collaboratives are already engaged with employers, job matching can be embedded directly into pathway design, ensuring closer alignment between training completion, hiring timelines, and labour demand.

Ongoing coaching to support retention and advancement

Post-placement coaching, even if time-limited, can improve retention outcomes and help ensure that transitions lead to stable, sustainable employment rather than short-term placements.

Transition support should not end at job placement. The early months in a new role are often a critical adjustment period, particularly for workers entering a new sector or workplace culture. Time-limited post-placement coaching can support:

- Problem-solving related to workplace expectations, performance feedback, and integration into new teams.
- Navigation of early challenges that might otherwise lead to job exit.
- Planning for progression within the new role or sector, including identifying skills to build and opportunities for advancement.

Pillar 3: Supporting infrastructure

Successfully implementing, continuously improving, adapting, and scaling programs and services requires a strong foundation based on three interconnected types of supportive infrastructure:

1
Robust data infrastructure

2
Cross-government engagement and coordination

3
Support for research, innovation, and scaling

Together, these elements function as the connective tissue that allows us to put the other two pillars into practice. **Figure 5** on the next page summarizes the three components of this supportive infrastructure.

Figure 5
Supportive infrastructure for an ecosystem supporting mid-career transitions

Pillar 3: Supporting infrastructure

1. Robust data infrastructure

Includes infrastructure needed to detect risks, inform service design, career decision-making, performance measurement, and improvement:

Early warning and activation
Supports detection of emerging labour market risks and signals when coordinated action is needed.

LMI for career navigation
Provides timely, granular insight to support high-quality career guidance and informed transition decisions.

Training information systems
Improves transparency on training options, quality, and labour market relevance to support better choices by workers and employers.

System analytics
Enables continuous learning, performance monitoring, and continuous improvement of transition policies and programs.

2. Cross-government governance and coordination

Federal–provincial–territorial coordination
Aligns roles, funding, and policy objectives across levels of government in a shared workforce system.

Integration with economic and industrial policy Connects workforce development efforts to regional, sectoral, and national economic priorities.

3. Public policy supportive of research, innovation, and scaling

Research and innovation
Invests in experimentation and evidence generation to inform effective labour adjustment.

System learning and knowledge exchange
Creates mechanisms for shared learning and continuous improvement.

Scaling and sustainability
Supports adaptation and scaling of promising models.

1. Robust data infrastructure

Robust data infrastructure underpins proactive and coordinated labour adjustment. This section outlines the key data capabilities needed to support both system-level action and individual career transitions.

LMI and early warning systems for system activation

Effective labour adjustment requires an early warning system capable of identifying emerging labour market disruption and signaling when proactive intervention may be warranted. Unlike traditional LMI, which is primarily descriptive and retrospective, an early warning system would support decision-making by determining when coordinated action is needed.

At present, we are unaware of a formal early warning system operating in this policy domain, either in Canada or internationally, that is explicitly designed to trigger pre-displacement, end-to-end transition supports for mid-career workers.[16] However, evidence from research on time-series forecasting methods suggests that combining conventional LMI with AI-enabled analytics can support earlier detection of emerging risks.[17] Such a system could integrate multiple data sources, such as employment trends, job vacancy data, firm-level signals, sector-specific intelligence, and major project information, and apply clearly defined thresholds indicating elevated risk of contraction or displacement. These thresholds could reduce uncertainty and provide governments, employers, training providers, and intermediaries with greater confidence to invest in early engagement, pathway development, and upskilling before job loss occurs.

Emerging analytical tools provide some insight into what relevant components could look like. For example, the European Union's Skills-OVATE platform uses AI to analyze online job vacancies in near real time, generating insights into changing occupational and skill demand. Although Skills-OVATE does not function as an early warning mechanism, it illustrates how near-real-time data could support more anticipatory approaches if paired with decision rules, governance arrangements, and links to funding and delivery mechanisms.

In addition to macro-level indicators, structured employer demand projections, aggregated across firms within priority sectors, could strengthen early warning capacity by clarifying anticipated hiring needs and emerging competency requirements before displacement occurs.

Exploring the feasibility of an early warning system, particularly one connected to governance processes and funding triggers, is an important opportunity moving forward. Given the scale and pace of anticipated labour market change, this area merits further exploration.

LMI for career navigation

High-quality, timely, and granular LMI is also essential. Advances in AI-enabled LMI offer new opportunities in this regard. By drawing on sources such as online job postings and employer websites, these tools can surface emerging skills requirements, credential expectations, and shifts in demand more quickly than conventional LMI systems. When used effectively, they can strengthen career conversations, improve alignment between training and labour market needs, and support more informed decision-making by workers.

LMI should also extend beyond information on local occupations and skills to include practical considerations that shape the feasibility of transitions. This includes information on job opportunities across regions, regulatory and licensing requirements for workers in regulated occupations (e.g., skilled trades, engineering, social services), and the availability of supports to help workers (and, where relevant, their families) relocate. Incorporating these elements can help ensure that transition pathways are not only viable in theory but achievable in practice.

Information on education and training programs

Workers, employers, and CDPs need clear, accessible information to navigate an increasingly complex and fragmented training marketplace. This is particularly important in the context of non-regulated occupations, where there are fewer formal standards governing training pathways and credential recognition. The rapid growth of non-traditional training options, including short-term credentials, private providers, and massive open online courses (MOOCs), has expanded choice but also introduced significant variation in quality, relevance, and outcomes. In the absence of consistent standards or transparent performance information, it can be difficult for individuals and CDPs to assess which programs are credible and aligned with labour market demand and for employers to interpret the value of unfamiliar credentials.

High-quality information should therefore go beyond basic program listings to include clear descriptions of skills and learning outcomes, evidence of labour market relevance, and quality indicators (such as completion rates, learner feedback/ratings, and employment outcomes). Access to this information can support more informed decision-making by workers, improve the quality of career navigation support, and help employers better understand and value a growing range of credentials.

System analytics

Robust system-level data are critical for designing, improving, and scaling effective policies and programs. This requires collecting reliable data on outcomes, implementation, iteration, and continuous improvement (FSC's shared outcomes framework is an example). Data systems should be designed to generate near real-time insights wherever feasible, enabling decision-makers to assess early signals of progress or challenge and to adjust or pivot programs, policies, or funding approaches as conditions evolve.

In addition to tracking participation and completion, analytics should monitor hiring, retention, wage progression, and career mobility outcomes. Linking training outputs to employer hiring and retention outcomes enables assessment of whether pathways are meeting articulated workforce demand.[18] At the same time, tracking worker-centred outcomes such as earnings growth, job quality, and stability ensures that transitions are delivering meaningful economic mobility. Where possible and appropriate, system analytics should also consider community-level impacts, including contributions to local labour market resilience and priority sector development. Taken together, these measures support iterative refinement of pathway design to ensure alignment with employer workforce needs, worker aspirations, and broader community economic objectives.

Building analytic capacity within organizations that produce or could produce relevant data enables

deeper insight into program effectiveness, unmet needs, and system-wide impact, benefiting funders, policymakers, and service providers across the ecosystem. Blueprint's FSC-funded Public Data Initiative and Results for Canada initiatives both contribute to this effort by strengthening data capacity and fostering evidence-driven decision-making across the workforce development ecosystem.

2. Cross-government governance and coordination

Career transition services for workers affected by disruption span multiple policy areas, including income supports, training, economic development, and innovation. In Canada, these responsibilities are shared across federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, making a shared understanding and coordinated approach essential and a critical foundation for helping workers navigate disruption and access coherent, connected supports.

3. Public policy that supports research, innovation, and scaling

To help workers and employers navigate ongoing disruption, Canada needs an integrated approach to research, experimentation, learning, testing, adapting, and scaling effective approaches. Many of the supports required for future labour adjustment do not exist and must be designed, tested, and refined over time. As the labour market continues to evolve, sustained investment in experimentation and evidence generation will be essential to ensure programs remain responsive, effective, and adaptable.

Knowledge sharing is also essential. A dedicated mechanism or space wherein stakeholders from across the country can share experiences and insights would help establish a community of practice. Over time, this would strengthen local capacity and contribute to greater resilience across regions. A structured approach to curating and updating resources could further accelerate learning. Expert input could play a valuable role in this process, supporting the refinement of an implementation blueprint and providing ongoing advice to stakeholders as conditions evolve.

Establishing such functions is a practical step that could increase capacity across the ecosystem. It would also enable stakeholders to adapt more quickly, support one another, and reduce unnecessary duplication of effort.

Conclusion

Mid-career transitions are central to Canada's ability to deliver on economic, industrial, and social priorities in a period of sustained disruption. Growth increasingly depends on experienced workers transitioning into new roles in new industries and occupations. Growth also depends on efficient systems that support their mobility, adaptability, and resilience over time.

This playbook shows that systems and services must be designed together. System-level coordination across governments, employers, labour organizations, training providers, and intermediaries creates conditions that make end-to-end transition pathways possible. Today's employment and training systems, which remain largely reactive, fragmented, and designed to help workers after job loss, are not well-suited to supporting proactive, mid-career transitions at scale.

The scale and complexity of current disruptions also require new system building blocks. Transition occupations, aligned reskilling pathways, and modern career navigation supports are increasingly essential to help workers move efficiently from declining roles into viable, future-oriented opportunities. These elements must be grounded in labour market realities, shaped by employer demand, and responsive to the diverse needs and constraints of mid-career workers.

Ultimately, the durability and reach of transition efforts depend on enabling infrastructure. Data systems that support early risk detection and informed career decision-making; governance arrangements that enable coordination across policy domains; and sustained investment in research, innovation, and learning all determine whether transition supports can adapt and scale over time.

Taken together, the pillars outlined in this playbook point toward a shift from reactive, fragmented responses to a more anticipatory and integrated approach to labour adjustment. Recent federal

actions signal not only recognition of these challenges, but a clear commitment to advancing more proactive, coordinated, and sector-driven workforce development approaches. Initiatives such as Workforce Alliances and the Sectoral Workforce Innovation Fund are positioned as critical mechanisms to align workforce development with economic transformation, strengthen employer leadership, and coordinate action across governments, sectors, and regions.

These initiatives create a timely and significant opportunity to move beyond reactive responses and begin building the systems required to anticipate disruption, design transition pathways in advance, and support workers before displacement occurs. They provide a concrete foundation for operationalizing and scaling many of the concepts outlined in this playbook, including employer-led pathway design, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and stronger alignment between skills development and emerging labour demand.

Seizing this moment will require aligning new investments with the collaborative structures, data capabilities, and service pathways described in this playbook—ensuring mid-career workers, and the economy as a whole, are better equipped to navigate disruption with confidence and security.

Endnotes

1 For example, through the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET), Indigenous partners have the ability to mobilize talent pipelines, respond to local and regional labour market shifts, and ensure that workforce development efforts align with community priorities and sustainability goals. The program was co-developed with Indigenous partners and provides long-term, stable funding ($2 billion over 10 years) to more than 120 Indigenous service delivery organizations across Canada. Through ISET, Indigenous organizations lead the design and delivery of employment and skills training strategies for Indigenous individuals. As community-embedded organizations, they align training with local priorities, rights, and economic opportunities to support the creation of sustainable jobs. Another example is the Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF), which fosters partnerships between Indigenous organizations, governments and industry to address specific labour market needs linked to economic opportunities at the local, regional, and national level (see Employment and Social Development Canada. (2023). *Technical report on the incremental impact of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program.* Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-skills-employment-training/reports/technical-incremental-impact.html; Employment and Social Development Canada. (2023, March 9). *Skills and partnership fund.* Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/skills-partnership.html)

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