Labour Force Analysis and Attraction & Retention Strategy – Executive Summary
City of Abbotsford

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Definition of Terms

**Apprenticeship:** An apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and classroom learning. This form of training results in a skilled certification qualification. An apprenticeship relationship is usually administered by an employer. Employees are hired and trained through in-house on-the-job learning that are traditionally specific to a skilled trade, with periods of in-class training held throughout the apprenticeship.

**Angel investor:** An angel investor (also known as a business angel, informal investor, angel funder, private investor, or seed investor) is an affluent individual who provides capital for a business start-up, usually in exchange for convertible debt or ownership equity.

**Co-op:** A Cooperative program (Co-op) combines’ classroom education with practical, structured work experience. It differs from the apprenticeship as it is usually provided by an educational institution. A student can complete a number of co-op placements throughout the period of academic study and receive academic credit for each. A co-op can be either paid or unpaid depending on the type of program.

**Economic Development:** Economic development is the range of activities, policies, and programs of a state, region, or municipality used to “create conditions that enable long-run economic growth.” These activities often include investments in the “generation of new ideas, knowledge transfer, and infrastructure” and rely on cooperation between the public and private sectors. ¹

**Employability Skills:** The skills you need to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work—whether you work on your own or as a part of a team. Examples of Employability Skills include fundamental skills such as communication, personal management skills and teamwork skills.²

**Internship:** Traditionally, an intern receives on-the-job training in the workplace. Internships are usually completed as part of coursework and students receive credit towards final program completion. They can be completed full time or part time and can be paid or unpaid.

**Low-skill jobs:** Low-skill jobs are a segment of the workforce associated with a limited skill set or minimal economic value for the work performed. It is generally characterized by lower educational attainment, such as a high school diploma, GED or lack thereof, and typically results in smaller wages.

**Middle-Skill Jobs:** those that require more education and training than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree.³

**NAICS:** The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and

2 http://www.conferenceboard.ca/~/media/Files/Glossaries/employability-skills.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1#
3 https://www.hbs.edu/competitiveness/research/Pages/middle-skills.aspx
publishing statistical data related to the North American business economy⁴.

**NOC:** The National Occupational Classification (NOC) system is a federal statistical standard used by federal agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data⁵.

**Remote Workers:** Remote workers are those who work on a telecommuting basis, often from their homes or nowadays other location such as third spaces, coffee shops, incubators etc.

**Workforce Development:** Workforce development is the range of activities, policies, and programs used to “create, sustain, and retain a viable workforce” that can support current and future business and industry across a state, region, or municipality. This may include education and training, job matching, and employer engagement. It also involves the coordination of public- and private-sector efforts, providing individuals with career opportunities and supporting business and industry workforce needs.⁶

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1. Executive Summary

Change is constant in our connected world, with economies, global competitiveness and technology shifts contributing to the increasing worldwide demand for skilled and educated talent. The increasing need for employers to find qualified candidates has created a new dynamic in supply and demand alignment, raising talent as a major consideration for businesses. Communities are now finding themselves at the centre of these trends and acting as facilitators, driving strategic planning and increased collaboration with employers, workforce development organizations, and education and training institutions. Communities are recognizing the importance of being proactive and forward-thinking in supporting the talent needs of existing businesses and developing the skills that drive entrepreneurship and new business attraction. Success demands that economic and workforce development work together with the common goal of developing a competitive position to support the attraction and retention of a skilled, reliable and available talent pool.

The City of Abbotsford has chosen this time to proactively facilitate and support talent development, attraction, and retention, strengthening the labour market ecosystem. The goal is to ensure that Abbotsford has a talent pipeline that meets the current and future needs of its key economic sectors.

The approach used to develop the Abbotsford Labour Force Analysis and Strategy combined research and analysis of the current economic and workforce context in Abbotsford with a comprehensive consultation and engagement process. This consultation and engagement involved a range of stakeholders from Abbotsford and included employers, job-seekers, community organizations, municipal leaders, and sector associations. The insights, perspectives, and knowledge shared created a strong foundation that resulted in informed strategic directions and actions to implement those directions.

1.1.1 City of Abbotsford

Like many medium-sized cities in Canada, Abbotsford competes within its region for talent that has historically been attracted to larger centres within BC or even Canada. The extreme increase in the cost of housing within the region combined with the two largest generations in the workforce shifting, one to retirement the other into middle age has created a new dynamic. The importance of attracting and retaining a skilled, resilient workforce has perhaps never been of greater priority. While the significance of this effort may vary from one region or industry to another, competitive positioning and economic sustainability are significantly influenced by the ability of local businesses to access and retain talent, as and when needed. The outcome of this ability leads to implications and impact on the broader community and the municipality through the population, tax base, community diversity, and image, among other factors.

Supporting businesses to recruit employees regionally is a necessity given the mobility of talent in today’s global economy. The focus needs to be on accessing the right talent to align within the current and emerging economic sectors that drive the local economy; supporting the attraction and retention of entrepreneurs and helping employers utilize creative strategies to promote the benefits of life and work in Abbotsford.
1.1.2 Project Objective

To assist Abbotsford, MDB Insight has been retained to provide a Strategy that will support business in recruitment and retention of talent in Abbotsford. The overall goals of the project include:

- Provide a statistically sound labour market analysis informing current and projected supply and demand for Abbotsford
- Assess the size of the labour market including historical growth and workforce implications
- Provide resources that strengthen approaches to attract the right talent in a timely manner
- Inform and fuel a longer-term strategy to build and maintain engagement among those that need to be part of the talent alignment conversation – ensuring labour supply and demand alignment, so people and jobs are better matched
- Create a movement that is grounded in the success of local businesses to attract talent, retain talent, and share success stories that raise awareness, and peak interest of those looking to find satisfying work, and a lifestyle that Abbotsford has to offer.

1.1.3 Process

The approach used to conduct the analysis and inform the strategic plan combined research of the current economic context using both public and private (subscription) sources with a consultation and engagement process. This consultation and engagement involved a range of stakeholders from throughout Abbotsford and included employers, community organizations, municipal leaders, and sector associations. The insights, perspectives, and knowledge shared created a foundation that resulted in informed strategic directions and actions to advance solutions and drive impact. The approach followed a six-stage process as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Project Approach
1.2 Strategic Action Plan

This strategic action plan offers a “road map” to enable the region to respond to both challenges and opportunities that impact or influence the capacity to attract businesses and talent, retain existing businesses and talent, and to ensure that the region is being proactive to the needs of employers. This strategy is not to be seen as the only plan to achieve these goals; rather it should be considered in conjunction with current economic development plans, education strategies, and local, regional, and provincial government priorities.

Five key Strategic Priorities have emerged from the analysis. Supporting each of these are tactics designed to provide key directions to proactively address workforce challenges. It is recognized that relevant and similar initiatives may already be underway in Abbotsford and their presence in this strategy reinforces the relevancy of these initiatives and encourages expansion or extension to achieve increased impact.

Each strategic priority and the accompanying Actions are presented in brief below. A more detailed Action Plan can be found later in the full report.
Strategic Priority #1: Facilitate Collaboration between Business and Education/Training Providers

The need for increased communication and collaboration between the business community and education/training providers was a key, and consistent finding in research and consultation conducted. Employers are best positioned to identify and inform on the skills and knowledge they need to meet workforce requirements. Educators at both secondary and post-secondary level, as well as other local training providers, are a critical element in the development of a strong, relevant talent pipeline that supports sector demand. Articulating the required skills, knowledge and attitudes, and then promoting this to students, job seekers, and labour force participants, strengthens the capacity of the local labour market. Communicating to students the specific skills necessary for successful integration to the labour market and exposing the variety of job opportunities in the regional economy will serve to support students and job seekers make educated and informed career pathway decisions.

The opportunity to fuel a dialogue related to employability skills and how they can be integrated into curriculum and workplace learning will help address this “soft skills” gaps so often brought to the forefront by employers. Collaboration and communication between and among educators, trainers and industry is part of the longer-term solution to monitoring and responding to the changing talent needs of industry. Aligning employers and education providers in Abbotsford around a common goal is a critical step in better understanding what is needed to strengthen the city’s competitiveness.

Recommended Strategic Actions

▪ Facilitate communication between business and academia to support an understanding of current work opportunities and what skills are needed to succeed.

▪ Improve access to training services and initiatives.
Strategic Priority #2: Create an Ecosystem to support Labour Force Access to Opportunities

Stakeholders indicated some job seekers are unable to access opportunities due to barriers to employment in Abbotsford. A need for residents to have greater access to local opportunities was raised, influenced by the rising cost of housing and the dispersed nature of many job opportunities stakeholders. Creating a more supportive environment for employment includes improving transit and improving the affordability/access to housing and awareness of support programming.

Recommended Strategic Actions
- Support job seekers by reducing barriers to employment.
- Promote Local Growth Sectors and their Assets and Opportunities.

Strategic Priority #3: Enhance Opportunities for Experiential Learning

Employers expressed a disconnect between labour force alignment with job vacancy requirements. The development of internal training programs to fill the gaps in training is necessary to bridge the gap. Concurrently, there is a desire from stakeholders to highlight the value of experiential learning including; mentorships, apprenticeships, co-ops, and internships. Employers are an essential partner, working with educational institutions to maximize the hands-on experiential opportunities as a channel to expose students to the world of work, and to support specific skills training.

Students who have exposure to local employers through job experience opportunities can develop a base of knowledge that better prepares them to enter and be successful in the workforce. Encouraging employers to be more active in developing mentoring and experiential programs will help to grow the local talent pipeline. These programs can also create opportunities for the existing or transitional workforce to enhance their skills and improve their overall employability.

Recommended Strategic Actions
- Work with Training Providers and Businesses to improve experiential learning opportunities.
- Remain current on hiring needs and experiential learning opportunities.
Strategic Priority #4: Improve Access to Information

Information is key to the decision-making process for communities, individuals and businesses. Offering a central, easy to access repository of relevant labour market information will strengthen career exploration among residents and inform external talent of opportunities in Abbotsford. This includes data that showcases labour force participation, skills levels, as well as available jobs across all skill levels. Promoting employment opportunities within the region broadens the labour pool from which employers may choose to recruit and engages employers as a key source of labour market information. Understanding the requirements of employers for human capital guides local decisions around training, education programming, and the need for attraction and retention strategies.

Recommended Strategic Actions

- Promote the sharing of information to strengthen coordination and common messaging.
- Maintain a current view of labour market demand and local labour supply.
- Support Employer Recruitment and Retention strategies and practices.
- Understand who is leaving the community for work and why.

Strategic Priority #5: Promote Abbotsford as a Community of Choice.

Employers reaffirmed the difficulty of filling vacancies locally. Comments reflected a tight labour market in select key industries, emphasizing the need for increased efforts to attract talent to Abbotsford. Promoting the city and all it offers requires marketing not only on job boards or job fairs but through the promotion of Abbotsford as a community of choice. Collaboratively investing in marketing and investing in community development will support a broader awareness of the employment opportunities available and promote the city as a viable option to relocate.

Talent and business attraction from outside of the region requires a collaborative effort between community organizations, government and employers. Promote community assets that resonate with target audiences such as developing the quality of place, quality of life and the creation of cultural and tourism assets, as well as the availability of training, education, and quality jobs. Collaboratively investing in marketing and investing in community development will support the broader awareness of Abbotsford as a great place to live, work, and enjoy.

Recommended Strategic Actions

- Promote Abbotsford as a great place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Strategically Target Sectors in Attraction and Retention Strategies.
- Target Youth, Young Professionals, and Immigrants through attraction and retention.
Abbotsford Industry Highlights

Top Industries by Job Seekers
- Accommodation and Food Services: 824 Job Seekers
- Retail Trade: 456 Job Seekers
- Transportation and Warehousing: 270 Job Seekers

Top Industries by Job Postings
- Retail Trade: 1,020 Jobs Posted
- Educational Services: 533 Jobs Posted
- Manufacturing: 340 Jobs Posted

Highest Average Wage Industries
- Finance and Insurance: $30.96/HR
- Public Administration: $29.10/HR
- Health Care and Social Assistance: $25.91/HR

Top Industries by Employment 2016
- Retail Trade: 10.8%
- Manufacturing: 10%
- Health Care and Social Assistance: 9.9%

Top Occupations by Employment
- Sales and Service: 16,125 Jobs
- Trades; Transport and Equipment Operators and Related Occupations: 14,565 Jobs
- Business; Finance and Administration Occupations: 9,805 Jobs