In June 2022, career service professionals from British Columbia gathered virtually for a Community Roundtable to discuss employer engagement and how to demonstrate the value of career development and career development professionals (CDPs). The event presented an opportunity for CDPs to reflect on the recruitment and retention challenges raised by employers through CERIC's National Business Survey, and to discuss potential solutions.

Hosted by CERIC and ASPECT BC, the Community Roundtable brought together 52 attendees to discuss five themes across different breakout rooms: Challenges for Canadian Businesses, Recruitment, Skills Gap, Soft Skills and Professional / Career Development.

In addition to participating in live discussions, participants also captured their thoughts on these themes by contributing comments to the collaborative web platform Padlet, which serves as a virtual, real-time bulletin board. This document summarizes the written feedback provided by participants for each thematic discussion.

Note: The summaries below do not represent the positions or opinions of CERIC or ASPECT BC.

Theme #1: Challenges for Canadian Businesses

Discussions for this topic were centred around the following questions:
- What ideas, experiences or best practices can you share to address the disconnect between employers and young workers?
- How can career professionals deal with the costly challenge of employee turnover?
- What adjustments have you made in the way you approach employers to help them understand career development services? What do you wish employers knew about career development services?

Key discussion points

Pain Points		**Compensation:** Wages are too low. If employers can't afford to pay staff, they should consider if their business is viable. **Young worker preferences:** Clients are "pickier" about what they're looking for and are showing less interest in entry-level opportunities. Some are "ghosting" employers. They are more interested in online work (to avoid long commutes) and want their employer to reflect their values. They have diverse interests and hone their skills independently. They are less interested in travelling for work. **Employer rigidity and biases:** Businesses are learning the hard way that they need to shed traditional/outdated viewpoints and be more flexible. Gender non-conforming young people are struggling to find work.

		Employers are asking for experience for junior roles, but young workers have a range in educational backgrounds. • **CDP capacity:** Employment services lack capacity and structure to increase service provision to employers. • **Support mental health and well-being:** Mental health is more of a concern for employers to consider for their youth applicants. These candidates want work-life balance and for mental health to be a consideration. Youth have also missed out on developing social and life skills.

Possibilities and Practical Tips		• **Understand employer needs:** In the current labour market, employers are more open to working with CDPs. Career professionals need to meet employers where they're at to showcase their value, including by speaking their language, showing genuine interest in their work, having a dedicated staff member assigned to employer outreach and/or creating opportunities to meet (e.g. attending meetings, job fairs). Career services can facilitate conversations with employers about what is and is not working. They can also proactively communicate the free services they offer to support employers. Shifting from a client/jobseeker placement focus, CDPs should ask employers what their challenges are and collaborate to help them problem solve. • **Coach and inform:** Employers need education and training on best practices for job descriptions (including values, job perks, wages and perks) and how to be creative in recruitment. They can offer workshops, roundtables and training resources for employers (e.g. monthly WorkBC employer presentations on wage subsidies). CDPs can help employers understand what employee/jobseeker expectations are. They can also connect employers with their local chamber of commerce to help address business challenges. • **Recruitment strategy:** CDPs can help employers evaluate their job postings and hiring processes and implement best practices for inclusivity. Questions to consider: Who does the employer identify as young workers? Is the job description inclusive of the demographic employers are targeting? Does the target audience see themselves in the job ad? How is the employer marketing the posting or reaching potential candidates outside of their community? CDPs can help employers strategize ways to reach potential applicants, such as offering hiring events through WorkBC or connecting them to immigration services. Employers are showing willingness to train people who don't have the required skills but have the right attitude or who demonstrate aptitude for the role. Need to go back to basics in teaching young workers essential skills. • **Applicant incentives:** Employers struggling to hire need to consider what perks they can offer and advertise in job postings. For instance, they may be able to provide transportation services or subsidies, or provide accommodation to ensure location is not an issue for candidates. Wage subsidies have been very successful during pandemic. Employers can look to competitors to see what incentives they are offering.

- **Interviews:** Interview questions should be designed based on organizational strategy while also capturing what potential employees are looking for.
- **Tackle bias:** CDPs can offer training on unconscious bias to help employers be more flexible and unpack traditional viewpoints.
- **Client supports:** By taking a client-centred approach to services, CDPs can identify jobseeker needs and potential barriers and better understand how to help them navigate the labour market.
- **Career readiness:** Employers need to build relationships with young people, including engaging high school students by participating in events such as panel discussions to help them identify a career path. Employers are recruiting directly from post-secondary institutions and need to use strategic marketing to reach their target audience. CDPs can support students in developing career management and essential skills such as networking, engaging virtually, in-person communication and social expectations. They can create opportunities to bring employers and youth together.
- **Employee retention and succession:** Employers need to consider strategies for retaining employees including: conducting employee surveys; incorporating employee feedback in management decisions; considering employees' strategies goals; investing in professional development and career growth; offering mental health supports and accommodations for people with disabilities; and demonstrating flexibility. Employees are more likely to stay if they are treated well. Employers can also plan for their future needs by creating a database of employee competencies and engaging in succession planning.

Resources		
		- [BC Tech's Digital Lift internship program](#) supports underrepresented individuals to gain paid work experience in tech roles. - The [SmartMove](#) pilot program – delivered by Small Business BC and Immigrant Services Society of BC, with funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada – helps newcomers across British Columbia get a job through its AI interview simulation program and competency matching. - Marketing is available through WorkBC that can support targeted groups.

Theme #2: Recruitment

Discussions for this topic were centred around the following questions:
- What can CDPs do to help employers find the best/customized recruitment strategies, encourage employers to try new solutions and ask for CDPs help with the recruitment process? What advice do you have for employers for identifying and attracting staff?
- In what areas have you been successful in promoting underrepresented students or clients to employers? What approaches have you used?
- What adjustments have you made in the way you approach employers to help them understand career development services? What do you wish employers knew about career development services?

Key discussion points:

Pain Points	
	• **Stigma:** Employers perceive that clients using employment services aren't the best candidates based on assumptions that they aren't good enough to find work themselves. This compounds with misconceptions about people with disabilities. • **Job postings:** Problems with job postings include use of jargon, lack of specificity, not selling the organization, not making it accessible for all jobseekers and using creative (rather than clear) job titles. • **Turning inward:** Job developers' key challenge is that employers are reluctant to look outside of their organization/network for talent and candidates are losing out to internal referrals.

Possibilities and Practical Tips	
	• **Build relationships:** Employment services can serve as a source of connection for employers, building partnerships on funded projects and collaborating with other agencies. They can market the partnerships they have with specialized support organizations as well as associations. To build relationships with employers, CDPs have to find out their needs and demonstrate that their jobseekers can meet them. They can invite employers to networking events. • **Showcase value:** Educate employers on the costs for hiring and training staff, as well as lost productivity during turnover, to highlight importance of services employment organizations offer. Training and wage subsidies offer a financial incentive to support hiring; however, CDPs should also remind employers that they will not recommend candidates they do not think would be successful. CDPs can outline the training and services provided to jobseekers to ensure they are prepared (e.g. First Aid). They can emphasize that services can continue through employee onboarding. Employment services could highlight success stories of local employers and clients (e.g. through a newsletter).

- **Employer supports:** Employer services should outline employer services and provide employer resources on their websites. CDPs can highlight value-added services for employers such as free job posting services, support in writing effective job postings, onboarding recommendations, inclusive hiring practices, etc. They may offer free professional development sessions for employers. Employment agencies could introduce an Employer Engagement Specialist position to offer dedicated support to businesses.
- **Highlight jobseeker needs:** Employment services can survey jobseekers and share data with employers to help them understand what jobseekers are looking for and demonstrate how recruitment approaches need to shift. They can follow up with resources/professional development to support these changes. CDPs can help employers understand changes in jobseeker priorities due to COVID.
- **Hiring best practices:** Encourage employers to be flexible in their recruitment and hiring processes. They need to consider the client's perspective in the recruiting process and use good relationship management to ensure candidates can envision themselves growing and succeeding in a job. Employers should engage with potential workers early and often through available services. They should write job descriptions that match the recruitment level; entry-level positions should have entry-level skills requirements (e.g. "developing" versus "excellent").
- **EDI:** CDPs can coach employers on the needs of equity-deserving employees (e.g. assistive technology, accommodations) as well as the supports that are available to them (e.g. services, funding resources). They can explain the shifts that are required to move from traditional, exclusionary hiring practices to accessible and inclusive recruitment. To support recruitment of Indigenous candidates, employment services could offer an orientation event with an Indigenous panel on recruiting from Indigenous communities and recognizing transferable skills in cultural roles.
- **Supporting young talent:** Shift from career services to career education. Career services can act as liaison between students and employers and demystify expectations on both sides. CDPs can host virtual recruitment and information sessions providing employers with opportunity to share with staff and clients who their company is, what they look for, how they screen resumes, etc. Employers can cultivate and connect with young talent by offering informational interviews with industry professionals and experiential learning opportunities (e.g. co-op, job shadow, internship). Employers can support the career development of young employees through training, mentorship and supporting the development of career management skills.
- **Organizational policies:** To appeal to jobseekers and create a positive culture for employees, employers could consider offering cultural leave (or more flexibility around statutory holidays); being flexible around employee life roles (e.g. by changing sick leave to family leave or offering flexible scheduling); and providing a living wage.

| *Resources* | • [Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion](#) – aims to help employers and others effectively address the full picture of diversity, equity and inclusion within the workplace
• [WorkBC Wage Subsidy](#). WorkBC organizes information sessions for employers. |

Theme #3: Skills Gap

Discussions for this topic were centred around the following questions:
- What is the CDP's role in helping to equip prospective employees with the right skills, so that the reported skills gap shrinks dramatically?
- Who, between job seekers and employers, is the most responsible for closing the skills gap, and what can CDPs do to help employers and employees in achieving this?
- What adjustments have you made in the way you approach employers to help them understand career development services? What do you wish employers knew about career development services?

Key discussion points

| *Pain Points* | • **Rural challenges:** Rural communities sometimes struggle with skills gaps and it can be difficult for individuals to access programs as well as transportation to attend.
• **Skills-awareness gap:** Some jobseekers lack knowledge of their own skills or struggle with confidence. Employers may also show lack of skills awareness – for instance, by telling older workers that they are overqualified.
• **LMI:** Understanding the labour market is complex, and in careers with varied skill requirements, jobseekers don't always know if they need more training. Clients may have goals that are not in high demand in the labour market or have limited and competitive roles (e.g. video game tester).
• **Understanding services:** Employers need to understand the difference between career development services and human resources, and where their needs lie in each.
• **Recruiting practices:** Employers ask for large numbers of applicants to consider for niche positions. Hiring challenges are sometimes misattributed to applicants when there are issues with the job posting. Employers who don't accept resume drop-offs but rely on online |

		assessments could be creating barriers for applicants with disabilities or those who may be qualified but not strong at these types of assessments. • **Talent development:** Employers are not offering early-stage practicums as an investment in the higher-skilled workforce.

Possibilities and Practical Tips		• **LMI:** CDPs need to be comfortable using labour market data, as well as support jobseekers to increase their knowledge of the labour market and develop ability to research skills needs. • **Skills awareness:** CDPs can use skills assessments to help clients get an accurate picture of their skills. They can also help jobseekers develop the vocabulary to describe and market their skills and connect their past experience to prospective jobs. • **Role of CDPs:** Now is an important time to be working with employers – to view them as a client and to be aware of their business needs. CDPs can bridge the perspective gap between employers and jobseekers and help both parties develop more realistic expectations. They can encourage employers to consider clients who are interested in working for them and explain how they are helping set clients up for success. • **Employer expectations and practices:** Employers should recognize that a lot of the skills they're looking for can be learned on the job. They should expect that new hires will need a lot of training and shadowing. Employers need to be more flexible and consider how they will adapt to different learning styles (e.g. using a work experience instead of traditional recruitment processes to evaluate candidates). • **Developing future workers:** Need to examine how career education is funded and when it should start. Some post-secondary institutions are embedding career decision-making in all programs. Some have relationships with employers who are looking for highly skilled, niche graduates to create the capacity to build their skillsets.

Theme #4: Soft Skills

Discussions for this topic were centred around the following questions:
- What role do you think CDPs should play? How can CDPs help better prepare clients to develop or demonstrate their soft skills?
- How can CDPs educate employers on the increasing value of soft skills and even support them with soft skills training for existing employees?
- What adjustments have you made in the way you approach employers to help them understand career development services? What do you wish employers knew about career development services?

Key discussion points

Pain Points		• **Prove it:** Hard for candidates to prove their soft skills to a potential employer, as there is no specialized soft skills testing or standardized assessment tool. • **Lack of clarity:** There is confusion in the sector and among employers about the definition of soft skills.

Possibilities and Practical Tips		• **Skills awareness:** CDPs can work with clients to help them identify the soft skills they possess and which are a match with their target jobs. They should emphasize that talking about soft skills is not seen as bragging by employers, but is essential for communicating their suitability for the role. Students in co-op should be encouraged to leverage feedback from employers to help them define and understand the importance of their soft skills. • **Top requirements:** CDPs can share labour market information with clients that highlights in-demand soft skills (e.g. reliability, work ethic, communication). • **Employer opportunities:** If the candidate is a good fit with an employer's culture, they might be able to train for other skills. CDPs can help employers understand the importance and potential of clients' soft skills. • **CDP supports:** Work BC providers can offer job maintenance services and short-term training to employers to foster sustainable client outcomes. WorkBC is attending trade shows and chamber of commerce events in smaller BC communities to let employers know about the services available to support them.

Theme #5: Professional / Career Development

Discussions for this topic were centred around the following questions:
- The majority of employers agree it's their responsibility to provide career management programs, but only a minority actually do so. What do you think could explain that? Where do you see CDPs have a role in bridging this gap?
- How can CDPs help employers assess their employees' needs in terms of career management programs?
- What adjustments have you made in the way you approach employers to help them understand career development services? What do you wish employers knew about

Key discussion points

Pain Points		**Employer concerns:** Employers are concerned that employees will leave after they have invested in training. They also worry that supporting the development of their employees will take time away from crucial work. **Field awareness:** The words "career development" are not common in the business community. Do CDPs need to educate employers on what career development is or change the way they describe their work?

Possibilities and Practical Tips		**Translate the language:** CDPs need to brand themselves using language that will resonate with employers (e.g. strategic planner versus career guidance professional). Think like a business person and connect career development to talent language. **Demonstrate impact:** CDPs need to use data/metrics to demonstrate their credibility to employers and illustrate how career development can impact their bottom line. They need to tell stories of success and explain why career development matters. CDPs can demonstrate their credibility by explaining their credentials and experience to employers. **Employer needs:** CDPs need to assess what problem the employer is having and how career development can address that challenge. Recruitment and engagement are priorities for employers. **Foundational knowledge:** To help integrate career development into organizations, build on what the employer is already motivated to do and advocate for career development within their existing activities. Help employers examine top talent and leverage knowledge about why they are performing well to support employee career development. **Career management programs:** CDPs can help employers assess their employees' career management needs. Connecting career development to corporate values and mission will engage people who are in alignment with these priorities and encourage them to stay. Understanding employees' values can help employers tap into their motivations and guide future training and development. Career development programs should be

		applied consistently across the organization – not just provided to those who raise their hand or ask for career support. Having joint training for senior leaders and staff humanizes leaders.